

John Courtney Murray Citation
Orlando O. Espín
June 11, 2016

This year's John Courtney Murray Award recipient was born on January 25, 1947, the third of four children, who at the age of 14 arrived in the United States. After receiving an undergraduate degree in philosophy and a master's degree in theology, our awardee pursued and received a doctoral degree in Systematic and Practical Theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1984 with a dissertation exploring evangelization and intercultural dialogue between practitioners of Caribbean Catholicism and the Yoruba religion. This dissertation anticipated what would be abiding research avenues throughout our scholar's subsequent career.

Author of many books and over 300 essays in theology that have appeared in U.S., European, and Latin American professional journals, our honoree is recognized as a pioneer who has broken new theological ground in areas that include tradition and traditioning, culture and intercultural communication, the sense of the faithful, popular religious expressions, and popular Catholicism in particular. Strikingly, this scholar's attention, one might say devotion, to encountering popular religious traditions and cultures and local communities is also a hallmark of Pope Francis's papacy. In real ways, our honoree's theological work has prepared many scholars to appreciate Francis's engagement with local communities of faith in post-colonial contexts, and the pope's challenge to theologians to do the same.

Over decades of scholarship, teaching, and dedication to communal engagement, this theologian has wrestled with problems associated with the historical and contemporary legacies of colonization, slavery, racism, and prejudice against LGBT

persons. Along with an award-winning dictionary of theology and religious studies, our honoree is the distinguished editor and co-editor of essential sources in Latino/a theology covering systematic theology, theology of traditions, ecumenical Hispanic/Latino theology, and culminating in the monumental resource *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*. For these many achievements our colleague has been awarded an honorary doctoral degree from Catholic Theological Union and has received honors and recognition across the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as in Europe, and especially in Germany and Austria. The author's most recent book was the occasion for four days of papers and discussion at the University of Münster by scholars from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece.

This pioneer and leader in the field of Latino/a theology is one of the founders of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, serving twice as president, and the founding editor of the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*. In these roles our awardee has played a central part in promoting the highest scholarly standards for Hispanic/Latino Theology, and has encouraged and mentored the writing careers of numerous scholars.

It is very rare to have someone inspired to experiment, in collaboration with others, with creating a theological culture. Besides advancing the study of indigenous popular religious cultures among Catholics and adherents of other religious traditions, and the role of cultures and intercultural dynamics in the traditioning process, our awardee has also contributed to the creation of an intercultural model and style of doing theology that is deeply engaged and collaboratively involved with a community of theologians and local communities of accountability, in which the work of theology

belongs to and arises from the community. This is a truly groundbreaking achievement, one that bears comparing and contrasting with classic historical precedents that include the work of Marie Dominique Chenu at la Saulchoir, Johann Sebastian Drey at The University of Tübingen, and the medieval model of the university developed in Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, and Salamanca.

In recognition of these and numerous other contributions to the academy, church, and wider communities, it is my honor to present the 2016 John Courtney Murray Award to professor of systematic theology and religious studies, and founder and director of the interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Latino/a Catholicism at the University of San Diego, Orlando O. Espín.