

THE JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED THEOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENT

The person we honor today grew up in Brooklyn, with a mother who worked as a stenographer and administrator, and a father who trod the same stomping grounds as Kojak in his role as commanding officer of the Manhattan South Homicide division. The oldest of five children, our awardee was raised in Thomas Aquinas parish and went on to Holy Family High School in Huntington, Long Island. During years studying philosophy the awardee sported very long hair, and was nicknamed “the Infant of Prague.” Working as a high school teacher for a time, the awardee received a different nickname, that of “Sparky,” which our awardee assured me was “a reference to a dog.” During this time our awardee developed an interest in becoming a community organizer, and worked on migrant camps in upstate New York, in East Buffalo and in Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, work that our honoree loved and found formative in the process of becoming “a good ethicist and networker.”

The person the Catholic Theological Society of America honors this year with the John Courtney Murray Award is a giant in advancing a global agenda for theological inquiry. This person’s achievement combines depth of scholarship, a commitment to open inquiry and a flair for theological entrepreneurship that is unmatched in our times. In honoring this person the Society takes a step forward in recognizing much of what the future holds for the work of theological and ethical scholarship, north and south of the Equator.

Our awardee did undergraduate work at Fordham University, and went on to complete an M.Div. at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and an S.T.L. and an S.T.D. from the Gregorian University. During a long and distinguished career teaching at Weston Jesuit School of Theology and Boston College, our awardee has directed some 35 doctoral dissertations and served on the committee of as many more, and authored, edited or co-edited 24 volumes, and four that are “forthcoming.” In more recent years the awardee has also led the way in exploring the ethics of university culture and organization. Today he holds the Canisius Chair at Boston College, where he also serves as Director of the Jesuit Institute.

These are all stellar achievements, but if we were to single out one extraordinary accomplishment, it would surely be the founding and shepherding of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. For more than a decade our awardee has led this organization in exploring new avenues of pluralistic dialogue in the interactions of theology and ethics, holding multiple international conferences around the world, and providing scholarships to further the end of overcoming the old hegemony of the northern hemisphere over ethical and theological inquiry. For all his achievements, most of all for leading ethical and theological dialogue beyond old patterns and opening up new avenues in which other than Eurocentric wisdom plays a larger and larger role, the Catholic Theological Society of America is delighted to bestow the John Courtney Award for distinguished theological achievement on James Keenan of the Society of Jesus.