

The John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Theological Achievement

The colleague whom the CTSA honors this year with the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Theological Achievement has for over half a century contributed significantly to theology and to the life and well-being of the Church and God's people. Well before "public theology" became a watchword, our honoree set about rethinking the language of faith in the contemporary world. With typical understatement and modesty — yet equal resolve — he became a leader in the theological community and among us especially in the CTSA.

Our honoree was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, attended parochial school in Caldwell, New Jersey, and then Xavier High School in Manhattan. There followed a BA (1960) and an MA in Philosophy (1961) from Berchmans College, Philippines, and some practical experience teaching in the Philippines.

He then earned an STB from Woodstock College, Maryland (1967), when that school was at the height of its academic fame. Then came a Ph. D. in Theology from the prestigious Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1973. Later on, in 2005, he was the recipient of that Divinity School's "Alumnus of the Year" award.

In a long career he has taught for extended periods of time at graduate schools of theology in Chicago, Toronto, Cambridge, MA and since 2004 at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He has also lived out the global dimension of theology as a visiting professor: in Pune, India; Lima, Peru; Nairobi, Kenya; Paris, France; and Manila, Philippines.

Major publications in the first decade of his career include several foundational books: *The Experience and Language of Grace* (1979); *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (1985); and *The Dynamics of Theology* (1990). His best-known book is a work in Christology which attracted attention world-wide — including even in Rome — and was awarded the Catholic Publishing Association First Prize for Theology in 1999. Even today it is found on countless course reading lists.

In the decade following that momentous book he turned to more historically centered publications, including three volumes of *Christian Community in History*

(2004-08) as well as *The Future of Christology* (2003). He focused then on more contemporary versions of what was at once partly fundamental and partly interconfessional theology: *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius* (2012), *Spirituality Seeking Theology* (2014), and *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers* (2016).

There was still more to come from his prolific pen: *Faith and Evolution: A Grace-Filled Naturalism* (2019) and, just a few months ago, *The Nature of Theology: Challenges, Frameworks, Basic Beliefs* (2022), reprising and renewing themes from earlier years.

Recognized from the beginning of his long career as a dedicated and insightful teacher, in every context our awardee has been appreciated as a guide and mentor to students at all levels – many of whom speak of him as “the best teacher I ever had.”

It was entirely fitting then that we honor the theologian who was President of the CTSA in 1994-5 and gave the Presidential Address for the 50th anniversary of the Society in 1995 in New York City. He likewise graced us with the homily for our virtual celebration of our 75th anniversary in 2020.

And so it is with pride and gratitude tonight, here in Milwaukee, that the Catholic Theological Society of America is exceedingly happy to confer the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Theological Achievement on Roger David Haight, S.J.