

John Courtney Murray Award Citation
Terrence W. Tilley
June 9, 2012

The professors in our Society may sometimes distinguish between teacher-scholar types like themselves, always on the side of the angels, and colleagues who live their professional lives as academic administrators, who, at least in the judgment of the professors, are thought to be singing in another, and sometimes more dissonant, angelic choir. Our honoree, throughout his career and in his very person, has managed to dash any sense of difference or hierarchy in this metaphorical angelic community, and has done so through the exercise of his remarkable talents as a teacher, a scholar, and an administrator.

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on April 19, 1947, our honoree grew up in that city and in Phoenix, Arizona. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of San Francisco in 1970 and his Ph.D. at the Graduate Theological Union in 1976. As early as his high school years, he developed an interest in the creative intersection of theology and philosophy, an interest that matured in his later studies and that now has taken shape in ten books – two of which were supported by major fellowship grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities – more than sixty articles, and dozens of conference presentations. For our honoree, philosophy is not just a flighty conversation partner, useful here and there to meet theology's interpretive needs, but an endeavor that requires professional mastery and engagement in order to offer reason's rich resources to the service of faith. In this regard, our honoree has shown himself to be a most imaginative Catholic thinker, especially concerned to highlight the pragmatic dimensions of belief and practice often overlooked by theologians who approach the Catholic tradition philosophically only by appeal to metaphysics or through the history of ideas. Thus, his books on such topics as the nature of faith, the path of Christian discipleship, the workings of tradition, the prudential character of wisdom, and the limitations of theodicy all bring a distinctively American philosophical resonance to the Catholic appreciation for the unity of *fides et ratio*. Ever concerned about the theological encounter between the epistemological question of how reason knows and the ecclesial question of how faith believes and acts, his career-long work continues to make an important contribution to theology's traditional task of faith seeking understanding.

The administrative accomplishments of our honoree have not just fostered the professors, students, and programs he has served but have contributed as well to the good flourishing of Catholic theology in our historical moment. After appointments at Georgetown University, St. Michael's College, and Florida State University, he came to the University of Dayton in 1996 as department Chair. He made a significant contribution to the founding of Dayton's doctoral program in Theology and served as Director of that program from 1999 to 2003. In 2006 he arrived at the Rose Hill Campus of Fordham University as

Professor of Theology and Department Chair, and in that capacity continues to lead Fordham's excellent program, since 2010 as the first holder of the Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. Chair in Catholic Theology. We can only be grateful to him for leading us too – first as a CTSA Board member from 1995 to 1997 and then as our President in 2008-09. Other professional societies have recognized his talent for “practical wisdom.” He served as President of the College Theology Society from 1996 to 1998, and has served this past year as President of the Society for Philosophy of Religion.

While noting these and, if this genre and time allowed, so many more professional accomplishments, we cannot overlook the personal, which, in light of eternity, will likely shine forth all the more. Our honoree has been married for forty-two years to Maureen, one of our very best historians of early Christianity, and they are the proud parents of two daughters, Elena and Christine, and the justifiably doting grandparents of Jacqueline. Our honoree is fond of observing that “theology is a team sport.” No doubt, that insight issues to some degree from his marriage to Maureen since he has been known to state what is certainly the irrefutable fact: “I know more about Late Antique North African Christianity than any theologian I know.” Our honoree also is an opera buff, a devotion that has found expression in his own past endeavors as a liturgical cantor and choir member. The title of our honoree's doctoral dissertation was “On Being Tentative in Theology.” Evidently, theology and song are very different things, since those of us who have shared his pew at our convention liturgies know there is nothing tentative about his singing. And, throughout his career, there has been nothing at all tentative about his love of theology, his scholarly energy, and his steadfast leadership in so many venues of the academy.

In recognition of his extraordinary gifts, his record of theological accomplishment, and his dedicated service, the Catholic Theological Society of America presents its highest honor, the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology, to Terrence W. Tilley.