

**APPENDIX IV:  
JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY AWARD CITATION**

*for*  
STEPHEN B. BEVANS, S.V.D.  
*Catholic Theological Union*  
*Chicago, Illinois*

¡Les deseo a cada uno de ustedes lo mejor esta noche! I wish each of you the best this evening! My great joy tonight is to recognize the colleague whom CTSA honors this year with the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology.

Our honoree was born in Baltimore on July 14, 1944, of Welsh and Irish ancestry. From County Clare, Ireland, his mother's forebearers immigrated to the United States in the 1820s. His father's Welsh forebearers immigrated here in the seventeenth century, some four centuries ago and settled in Maryland. As a child he grew up in Baltimore and Washington, DC. However, when he was thirteen, his family moved to Riverside, California where he attended high school at Divine Word Seminary. He holds a B.A. in English Literature from Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa; an S.T.B. and an S.T.L. from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and a Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Notre Dame, where he studied with Thomas O'Meara, O.P.

During the time of his studies in Rome, he was ordained a Roman Catholic priest. Prior to beginning his Ph.D. program at the University of Notre Dame, our honoree spent eight years teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at the Immaculate Conception Major Seminary in the Philippines. Throughout his life, his teaching and many publications have transformed how missiology, contextual theology, and a global perspective are understood. He has taught at institutions around the globe; directed or served on many dissertation committees; served as editor for a number of prestigious journals; and served on several international commissions. In 1986, he began his long and celebrated work as an assistant professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where, in 1998, he was appointed the Louis J. Lusbetak, S.V.D. Professor of Mission and Culture, a position he held until 2015 when he retired and became professor emeritus. Over the course of his illustrious career, he has remained a dedicated member of the CTSA, delivering a plenary address at the 2001 convention, and serving as a board member from 2007 to 2009.

**Missiology** has been the bedrock of our honoree's work since he was in his twenties and began his life-long commitment to the Society for the Divine Word, the world's largest Roman Catholic order with a focus on missionary work. In 1972, three days after he arrived in the Philippines to begin teaching, a colleague and another

S.V.D. professor, Leonardo Mercado, mentioned that he was in the middle of writing his dissertation on Filipino philosophy. Mercado then asked a most consequential question: “Do you plan to teach *theology* to the Filipino students, or, do you plan to teach *Filipino* theology?” “Theology” implying Roman theology or “Filipino theology.”<sup>1</sup> For this newcomer to the Philippines, this question was deeply agitational.

In the following months, our honoree’s reaction was to learn the local dialect, and to read “a good bit” of Philippine history and literature as well as the Filipino theology that was available in the 1970s. He then offered a course in Filipino theology to ten interested students. By necessity, they—professor and students alike—read and searched together. Many years later, in the acknowledgments of his 2009 book, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, our honoree wrote,

I need to acknowledge the patience, the wisdom, the enthusiasm, and even the misgivings and disagreements with my students throughout the last thirty-five years. When the legendary Casey Stengel of the New York Yankees was congratulated for winning yet another World Series in the 1950s he is said to have remarked: “I couldn’t have done it without the players.” I have similar sentiments in regard to my students, and this is why this book is dedicated to them.<sup>2</sup>

Overtime the original question took root, and so began a lifetime quest to more deeply understand **contextual theology**. Left behind was the default of taking an assumed acontextual Catholic theology and merely imparting it to those situated in a different context. Rather, he came to a more reflective understanding of what *catholicity* means in our tradition, a recognition that God’s grace and the movement of the Holy Spirit are present within contexts other than our own. In the early 1970s, this was still a radical idea.

This award’s namesake, John Courtney Murray, S.J., in his own time, was deeply concerned with the United States’ drift away from its religious roots, away from the more spiritual underpinnings of this democratic republic and, consequently, the nation’s movement toward a vacuous materialism. Murray believed this trajectory was not only inconsistent with the Roman Catholic tradition but also, over time, would deeply undermine the nation’s democratic institutions. He drove the development of a public theology directed at reforming American society.

Our honoree’s legacy resonates with Murray’s instincts by encouraging attention to the contextuality of *all* theological discourse. Yet, our honoree goes further by encouraging the expansion of theology’s horizons to include the diverse populations of the globe. The result being a reforming dynamic in the way we do theology by embracing a **global perspective**. In his words, he invites theologians to know

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, “Becoming a Global Theologian: A Personal Journey,” in *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue: Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans, SVD*, ed. Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 249.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), xv.

their own context, but also to try to expand that context and avoid the blinders that their context provides by “listening to all the voices” themselves. In this way they will be introduced to doing a truly *catholic* theology in quite another sense. . . . They will learn how to be faithful to their own particular culture, gender, generation, national identity while at the same time expanding their understanding beyond their own particularity to embrace, learn from, and even challenge other ways of thinking and expression. . . . Theology today, I firmly believe, must be done in this global perspective. It *must* be contextual; but it must also be in dialogue, open to the other, ready to change, ready to challenge, ready to enrich and be enriched.<sup>3</sup>

For well over three decades, the Catholic Press Association has repeatedly awarded his publications. And, as they are released, his many books have been consistently recognized by the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* as among their “best books on mission.” Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan coedited a festschrift in his honor titled, *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue* (2018).

In 2021, he was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Society of Missiology. And very recently, the Association of Catholic Publishers awarded his newest book, *Community of Missionary Disciples: The Continuing Creation of the Church*, first prize in the category of best books in theology in 2024.

With great joy and deep gratitude for the rich legacy bestowed to us, here tonight, in the Pacific Northwest city of Portland, the Catholic Theological Society of America confers the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology on Stephen B. Bevans, of the Society of the Divine Word.

*Presented by the President of the Catholic Theological Society of America*  
NANCY PINEDA-MADRID  
*Loyola Marymount University*  
*Los Angeles, California*  
*June 14, 2025*

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<sup>3</sup> Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 5, italics in the original.