News



Jesuit Fr. Roger Haight received the highest honor from the Catholic Theological Society of America at its June 8-11 convention in Milwaukee. (Catholic Theological Society of America/Paul Schutz)



by Heidi Schlumpf

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Jesuit Fr. Roger Haight, who had been censured by the Vatican and ordered to stop teaching and writing on Christology in the early 2000s, was honored with the highest honor from the Catholic Theological Society of America at its June 8-11 convention in Milwaukee.

In presenting the annual John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Theological Achievement, CTSA President Jesuit Fr. Francis X. Clooney said Haight "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," Clooney said at the June 10 banquet. "With typical understatement and modesty — yet equal resolve — he became a leader in the theological community and among us especially in the CTSA."



Jesuit Fr. Roger Haight, left, and Fr. Francis X. Clooney, president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, are pictured June 10 in Milwaukee. Clooney presented Haight with the annual John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Theological Achievement. (Paul Schutz/Catholic Theological Society of America)

Haight, currently a visiting professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York, is the author of many foundational theological texts. But it was his 1999 *Jesus Symbol of God* (Orbis) that attracted the attention of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2004, then headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. As NCR previously reported, "the book offers a positive theological reading of non-Christian religions and savior figures," and earned a first-place prize from the

Catholic Publishing Association in 1999.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's notification cited "serious doctrinal errors" in the book and barred Haight from teaching Catholic theology. The CDF later also barred him from teaching and writing on theological subjects. Haight then turned to more historically and spiritually centered topics. His most recent book is *The Nature of Theology: Challenges, Frameworks, Basic Beliefs* (Orbis, 2022).

A member since 1975, Haight also served as president of the CTSA in 1994-5, during the organization's 50th anniversary, and gave the homily for the virtual celebration of the CTSA's 75th anniversary in 2020. He has taught at graduate schools of theology in Chicago, Toronto and Cambridge, Massachusetts, before moving to Union in New York. He has been a visiting professor at schools in Pune, India; Lima, Peru; Nairobi, Kenya; Paris, France; and Manila, Philippines.

Born in New Jersey, Haight has a bachelor's and master's degree from Berchmans College in the Philippines, a bachelor's of sacred theology from Woodstock College in Maryland, and a doctorate from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. In 2005, he received the U of C Divinity School's Alumnus of the Year award.

Clooney described Haight as "a dedicated and insightful teacher" and "a guide and mentor to students at all levels — many of whom speak of him as " 'the best teacher I ever had.' "

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In accepting the award, Haight noted that he may be the last theologian to receive the award who actually knew John Courtney Murray, adding that "I went to his high school or he went to mine." Haight also was a student of Murray's at Woodstock College in the 1960s.

"He was an extraordinary man," Haight said of the Jesuit priest and scholar known for his work on religious freedom. Murray died in 1967.

"He was an astonishingly kind and personable fellow. If you looked at him in pictures and saw him at a podium, you would think of him as distant and distinguished," Haight said. "But when you got in an elevator to go up a couple of floors, he knew everyone's name in the whole seminary."



Susan Bigelow Reynolds is pictured with the Catherine Mowry LaCugna Award for best theological essay by a new scholar. (Paul Schutz/Catholic Theological Society of America)

Haight thanked the members of the CTSA, saying he's just one of many colleagues who are "slugging it out in the classroom and doing research." He added: "You're my kind of people."

The Catholic Theological Society of America also honored Susan Bigelow Reynolds, assistant professor of Catholic Studies at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University at Atlanta, with the Catherine Mowry LaCugna Award for best theological essay by a new scholar.

Reynolds' essay " 'I Will Surely Have You Deported': Undocumenting Clergy Sexual Abuse in Immigrant Communities," was cited as being "meticulously researched and narrated in journalistic detail."

"The essay exposes a widespread pattern in which predatory priests intentionally targeted victims from undocumented families, while bishops systematically concealed and perpetuated the abuse by treating immigrant communities as dumping grounds for abusive clergy," said Reid B. Locklin of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto, standing in for award committee chair Christopher Pramuk of Regis University in Denver.

Earlier at the convention, the CTSA's Women's Consultation in Constructive Theology recognized Cecilia González-Andrieu, professor of theology and theological aesthetics at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, with the 2023 Ann O'Hara Graff Award for her role as a public theologian and mentor, especially to undocumented students.

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