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Catholic University honors Ambassador Thomas Melady

Jerry Filteau | Mar. 15, 2011 NCR Today

WASHINGTON ? The Catholic University of America March 14 honored an alumnus and former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, Thomas P. Melady, for a lifetime of achievement in service to his church, his country and the academic world.

The university's Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies presented Melady with it first Bishop John Keane medallion, which bears the Latin inscription, "Academia, patria, ecclesia" ? "Academia, country, church." It is intended to be awarded annually from now on.

When CUA was formed in 1989, Keane was its first rector, or president, and is credited with setting the university on the path of Pope Leo XIII's program of new engagement of the church with the modern world.

Melady, 84, graduated from Duquesne University in 1950 and earned his master's and doctoral degrees from Catholic University in the 1950s. After teaching stints at St. John's University and Fordham University in New York, from 1969 to 1973 he was U.S. ambassador first to Burundi and then to Uganda.

He was president of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., 1976-86, and after serving under Reagan in the Department of Education, he became ambassador to the Holy See, 1989-93.

In recent years he has been a professor and senior diplomat in residence at The Institute of World Politics in Washington.

Three cardinals, CUA President John Garvey and a wide range of other leading Catholic figures in academic, research, social justice, international affairs and other fields were among the 150-plus people attending the award dinner, which featured a speech by the current U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, Miguel Diaz.

Diaz, a theologian who taught at St. John's University in Minnesota before his ambassadorial appointment, focused on the common good and the role that religion in international relations diplomacy in religions can play in achieving that.

"The common good offers a way to affirm unity within a social body, even while retaining particularity, diversity, and above all interdependence," he said.

He argued that political systems need to recognize the important role of religion in human life and respect the diverse religions.

For world religions, he said, there is a need to respect the role of diplomacy, of talking out differences, as a model for their own teaching and practices.

He cited the Vatican, which has diplomatic relations with nearly all nations and international bodies, as an example of how religions can use diplomacy to promote the common good around the globe.

"Diplomacy not only benefits right speech about the nature of the common good, but more specifically right actions that advance the common good," he said. "in the pursuit of right actions, the engagement of religious leaders is indispensable."

Diaz's talk was the second annual Dean Hoge Lecture sponsored by the CUA Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies, formerly known as the Life Cycle Institute.

Hoge, who died in 2008, was a leading sociologist of religion who taught at Catholic University for 30 years and headed the institute from 1999 to 2004. He was noted for his many empirical studies of U.S. Catholics, especially of seminarians and priests.

NCR senior correspondent John L. Allen Jr, writes more on Diaz's talk can be found here: Religion and diplomacy: **Why Jerusalem and Athens need each other** [1].

[Jerry Filteau is NCR Washington correspondent.]

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