

# THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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## NEWS RELEASE

(Note: This release is predated for Saturday, January 7, 2006.)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 7—Reverend Dr. Stephen Schloesser, S.J., the current occupant of the LoSchiavo Chair in Catholic Social Thought in the Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought in the University of San Francisco and an associate professor of history in Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, received the American Catholic Historical Association's John Gilmary Shea Prize today for his book *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1939*, which was published by the University of Toronto Press in 2005. The chairman of the committee of judges, Professor Mary Elizabeth Brown of Marymount Manhattan College, announced the decision at the Association's eighty-sixth annual meeting, which opened here yesterday.

In presenting the award of \$750 to the author, Professor Brown said that the committee had read thirty books published between July 1, 2004, and June 30, 2005, and ranging in time from the early Church to the present. She then read the following citation:

[*Jazz Age Catholicism*] considers the important subject of the Church's engagement with the modern world. The Church had engaged the world before (e.g., Pope Pius IX's "Syllabus of Errors, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*). In this particular engagement, the stakes were high. World War I called into question whether the "civilized world" was truly that. With the advantage of hindsight, the danger is clear: absent a coherent ideology and a faith in society's workings, people could turn to totalitarian ideologies that promised security. One engaging feature of *Jazz-Age Catholicism* is that it demonstrates that an intellectual life can be a strenuous one.

*Jazz-Age Catholicism* is structured primarily around a study of the work of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain. Their chief contribution was to develop a method by which the Church engaged the modern world. The method they outlined amounted to a theory of history in which the Church conveyed the eternal forms that operated on the material world in any given place and time, including the technology, events, arts, and thoughts of the mid-twentieth century. The theories the Maritains outlined were exemplified in the

creative works of the artist Georges Rouault, the novelist Georges Bernanos, and the composer Charles Tournemire. This structure makes for an accessible narrative.

The centerpiece of Schloesser's research was his close reading of his subjects' unpublished and published writings to retrace their intellectual developments. He placed this intellectual development in the context of its time, with wider reading in the publications of the time. He then placed his study in the context of other scholars' work, which required still wider reading in twentieth-century history and in religious studies. The result is that *Jazz Age Catholicism* is a useful book for historians of France, of intellectual life, and of the twentieth century, and also for those who study theology and those seeking a case study of how good minds tackle the great questions.

The prize is named in memory of the famous historian of American Catholicism John Gilmary Shea (1824-1892) and is partially funded by a bequest of the late Reverend Dr. John Whitney Evans of the College of Saint Scholastica, Duluth, Minnesota. It is given each year to the American or Canadian author who, in the opinion of the committee, has made the most original and significant contribution to the historiography of the Catholic Church in the form of a book published during the previous twelve-month period ending June 30.

The Committee on the John Gilmary Shea Prize is composed of three mature scholars who represent different fields of history. This year they were Professor Brown for American history, Professor Maureen C. Miller of the University of California at Berkeley for medieval history, and Reverend Dr. Charles J. T. Talar of the University of Saint Thomas, Saint Mary's Seminary, Houston, for modern European history.

Stephen R. Schloesser was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on August 15, 1958. He received the B.A. degree in philosophy from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, in 1980 and in the same year entered the Society of Jesus. He was awarded the M.Div. degree from the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1991 and was ordained a priest in the following year. He earned the Ph.D. degree in history and humanities from Stanford University in 1999. Since that year he has taught at Boston College and has been an adjunct associate professor of church history in the Weston Jesuit School of Theology. He has also done advanced organ studies. He has received numerous grants and fellowships. Father Schloesser has two books forthcoming, viz., "Messiaen's Mystical Visions of Amen" and "Catholicism Confronts Modernity: Identity, Memory, Forgetting." He has also published several scholarly articles and book reviews and has delivered many scholarly oral presentations at conferences and meetings of professional organizations in the United States and in Europe.