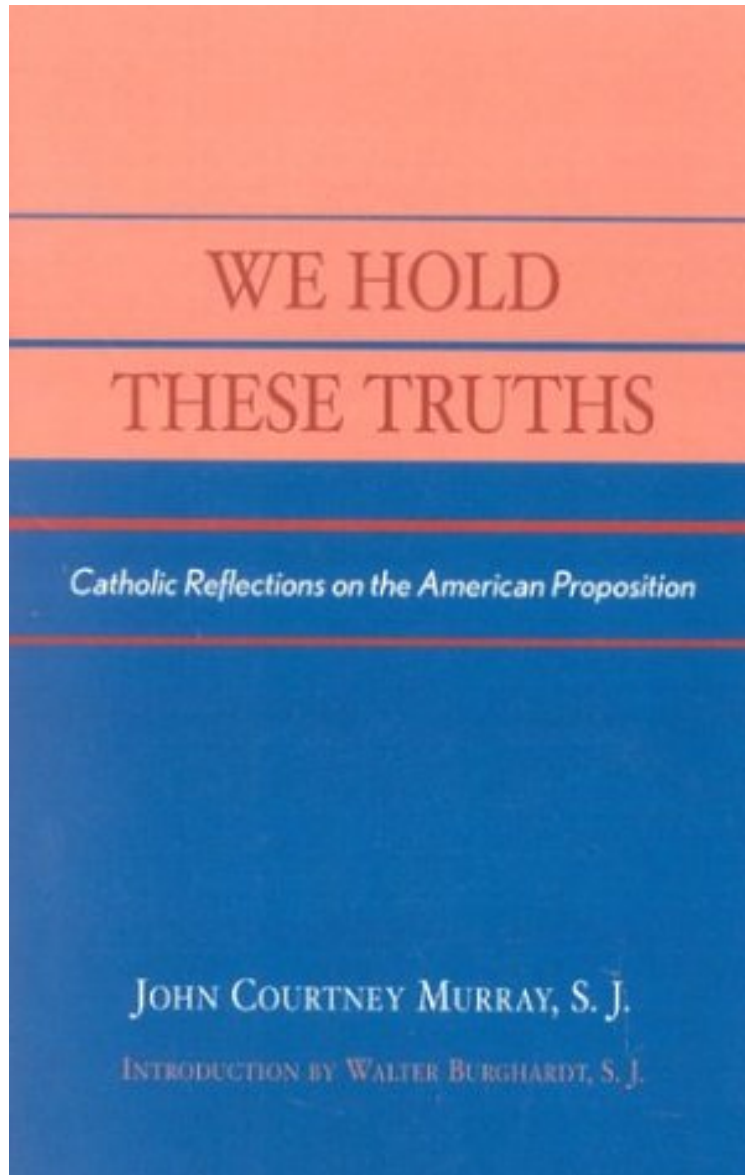


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We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition

John Courtney Murray

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John Courtney Murray : We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. We Hold These TruthsBy Josh GoodeWilliam F. Buckley Jr. could

write much better than me, so I'm going to borrow a portion of his review (which I entirely agree with): "Fr. Murray deals in his book with many questions, political and philosophical, ranging all over the lot, touching deeply on censorship, humanism, foreign policy, and other subjects. The first section, perhaps the most striking, is addressed to the recurring question: what does America stand for? WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS, he reminds an inattentive public who, alas, if they hold these truths, do not know they do. These truths, he says, are the patrimony of America. The Founders established a republic on the presumption of a natural law the rudiments of which are intelligible to all rational men (ut in pluribus), the refinements of which our Lords Spiritual (the learned and conscientious elite) must elaborate for us. Evil times have overtaken us. The natural law, which is indestructible, exists, but we do not acknowledge it, and hence fail to elaborate a public consensus based on it. The consensus is probably still there, in the interstices of our mind, and the natural law continues to govern our soundest instincts and emotions. But during the last century we got way behind, we were dazed by the shock troops of epistemological relativism and still are... We have failed to elaborate the consensus, admit its essential place in intelligible society, lavish upon it the kind of attention needed to rebuff the assault on the very idea of America. We are left with nothing substantive to believe in. The consensus proper to American liberal society is purely procedural. It involves no agreement on the premises and purposes of political life and legal institutions; it is solely an agreement with regard to the method of making decisions and getting things done, whatever the things may be. The substance of American society is our "democratic institutions," conceived as purely formal categories. These institutions have no content; they are simply channels through which any kind of content may flow. In the end, the only life-or-death question for American society is that it should live or die under punctilious regard for correct democratic procedures. That is not enough, obviously. And everyone appears to agree that is not enough, as witness the aching search for National Objectives." The book is divided into three parts. Part One is titled "The American Proposition", and Buckley is spot on that the first portion is "perhaps the most striking." In this section Murray takes us through a brief, though very helpful and impressively done, sketch of the role of government as viewed by the ancient philosophers through the major movements leading up to the founding of America. I think any student of history (philosophical, cultural or American) will find this section particularly engaging. These essays reflect, better than any other portion of the book, the great depth of Murray's thought. They are very rich and it is highly probable that a person would reap considerable fruit from revisiting them again and again. In the second part of the book, "Four Unfinished Arguments", Murray deals with issues that anyone at all interested in modern American politics would find fascinating. Here he discusses issues facing education (especially Catholic education and its struggles with the state), censorship and the advantages/disadvantages to the American approach to law, Christianity and humanism, and what the future holds. Part three is titled "The Uses of Doctrine." I found this portion of the book least engaging - not because of anything to do with Murray's writing or the ideas he offers, which are quite good - largely because it dealt with issues of foreign relations, the role of the military and the threats we face due to the increasingly grave threat of mass destruction that our technological advances has created (more specifically, rival powers having this potential and how to address the problem) which is something that, though I acknowledge is of grave importance, lies outside my scope of interest. Overall, this is an excellent work and the book I've found most helpful in helping me engage the ideas of America's Founding Fathers through a Catholic lense.

The publication of this book was a significant event in the history of modern American thought. In it, one of the country's most distinguished theologians discusses in depth and breadth the major political and social issues that press upon us with an urgency that will not permit the evasion of desultory debate or the luxury of deferred decision. The response of the free world to the Soviet challenge, the demands of our religious pluralism, the relevance of natural-law thinking to our modern dilemmas these and other areas are treated with a clarity of thought and sharpness of expression equal to their gravity. Aware only as the trained mind can be of the relevance of the past to the present, Father John Courtney Murray pleads, in effect, for a recovery of our roots, not only in the shaping thought of the Founding Fathers, but in the older tradition of the West, to which our Fathers themselves were heirs. The return to the past he advocates is not to be nostalgic but creative the kind of return that is the very formula for civilizational rebirth. His concern is always with the present, and his knowledge of the present is the fruit of broad reading and wide intellectual experience. Whether he is discussing the intellectual setting of the First Amendment, the vexed question of tax support for Catholic schools, or the morality of modern war, one discerns immediately the grain of reality that runs through the work of Father Murray.

About the Author Father Courtney Murray was one of America's foremost theologians. Born in New York City in 1904, he held degrees from Boston College, Woodstock College, and the Gregorian University in Rome, where he received his doctorate in theology. He was professor of theology at Woodstock College and editor of Theological Studies for over twenty-five years.