

COLUMNISTS

A tribute to ailing Father McCormick

On June 22 Father Richard McCormick, SJ, John A. O'Brien Professor Emeritus of Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame, suffered a major stroke during carotid artery surgery in South Bend, Ind. The stroke has left him paralyzed on his left side, but has not affected his power of speech nor his mental awareness.

Less than two weeks before the surgery, Father McCormick had participated in a widely reported, public discussion of the limits of theological dissent with fellow Jesuit Avery Dulles at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Miami.

This week's column is by way of a tribute, however inadequate, to one of the Catholic Church's greatest theologians, who happens also to be a very close friend. Indeed, I am proud to have brought him to Notre Dame in 1986, while I was chair of the Department of Theology, with the full and enthusiastic support of Father Theodore Hesburgh, CSC, then president of the university.

Father McCormick was born on Oct. 3, 1922, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1940. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1953 and received his doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 1957.

Before coming to Notre Dame, he was



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

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theology

the Rose F. Kennedy Professor of Christian Ethics at Georgetown University's Kennedy Institute of Ethics, and research associate at the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington.

During his long and distinguished career, Father McCormick has written and edited some 20 books, including *Notes on Moral Theology*, a collection of his highly influential reviews of the literature in moral theology, which appeared regularly in the Jesuit quarterly *Theological Studies* between 1965 and 1984.

He has also edited, with Father Charles Curran, 10 volumes of *Readings in Moral Theology*, the latest of which is entitled, *John Paul II and Moral Theology*. An eleventh volume will appear in early fall, *The Historical Development of Fundamental Moral Theology in the United States*. The series is published by Paulist Press.

Father McCormick is a past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and winner of its Cardinal Spellman Award in 1969 as "Outstanding Theologian of the Year." In 1988 the Hastings Center conferred on him the Henry Knowles Beecher Award for "lifetime contributions to ethics and the life sciences." In 1995 he received the University of Notre Dame's Reinhold Niebuhr Award for the promotion of justice, and the Catholic Book Club's Champion Award.

Father McCormick is one of a handful of Catholic theologians who have placed their scholarship at the service of a wider public. He is quoted regularly in the secular and Catholic press, and has appeared frequently on such national television programs as "Meet the Press."

He has been in constant demand as a lecturer, especially for medical and health-care audiences, given his reputation as a world-class expert in medical and bio-ethics. Father McCormick's interest in medicine can undoubtedly be traced back to the example and influence of his father, the late Edward J. McCormick, MD, who served as president of the American Medical Association.

All of the forgoing, however, is of a purely factual nature — the sort of material one uses for purposes of introduc-

tion before a lecture. They do not begin to capture the warm person or the faithful Jesuit priest to whom they refer.

Although Richard McCormick is one of the most dedicated and accomplished Catholic theologians of this century, he is also a humble, self-effacing human being with simple human interests.

He enjoys watching all types of sports on television. Golf has always been one of his favorites, probably because he himself golfed a lot in his younger days and coached a golf team years ago at Saint Ignatius High School in Cleveland. He is also a dedicated fan of the Chicago Bulls — so dedicated, in fact, that he continued to watch them faithfully even this year, without Michael Jordan, Scotty Pippen, and coach Phil Jackson. Of course, he has been there in Notre Dame's stadium on most Saturdays — right on the 50-yard line — when the football team is at home.

Father McCormick has a whole host of friends from all walks of life — the celebrated and the ordinary alike — for whom he has been a wise and generous counselor, and an unfailing source of encouragement and support.

They are with him now, wishing him a full and speedy recovery.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

We are intricately tied to all creation

Summer is the season that affords many of us a chance to enjoy and appreciate nature. Some of us take vacations to scenic sights or increase our participation in outdoor activities. Some of us plant gardens and enjoy the beauty and productivity that accompany this hobby. We can all appreciate the produce of our region and the sunshine and warmth.

This seasonal experience can serve to remind us of the importance of our care for the ecology. In fact, increasing attention in religious and ethical literature is devoted to the ecology. My own exposure in the past to Catholic moral thought practically ignored any mention of a duty we may have to care for the environment. Today our children are way ahead of us in understanding the seriousness of issues dealing with the balance of nature and the interdependence among all species living on this planet — including the human species!

In fact, Catholic moral theology has been rather poky about taking up this issue. In 1986 Sean McDonagh commented in his book *To Care for the Earth* that "the Catholic Church's voice on the ecological crisis has been muted." While we can find references to ecological aware-



BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

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ness in official church documents from 1971, it wasn't until 1990 that the first papal document devoted exclusively to the environment appeared: Pope John Paul II's message for the World Day of Peace.

In this document, the pope expands on his earlier teaching emphasizing human solidarity, and extends the notion of solidarity to the biological systems and species that support human life. Pope John Paul acknowledges that as we have enjoyed so much productivity from modern progress, we have, in the process, also done much harm to the ecosystems required for the common good.

Theologically, several tensions ac-

company our emerging awareness of the issue of the ecology of our planet. For example, there has been criticism within the theological community of some "creation" theology and spirituality branches. This criticism is generally directed at the perception that some of this thinking romanticizes nature and denies its destructive power. Catholic moral theology tries to balance between recognizing that creation is indeed "very good," while respecting the need for redemption and healing that affects all creation.

Another area of tension involves the place accorded to human beings in the earth's systems. In the past our theologians have treated human beings as too dominant over and too separated from the rest of nature. We have even used the biblical accounts of creation to defend this separation. This is particularly true of Genesis 1:26, which speaks of human "domination over" other species. We have, in practice and in theory, understood human beings as superior to other forms of life in a way that has falsely emphasized our independence from nature. We have justified our destructive exploitation of other forms of life and the ecosystems that actually allow us to

live and flourish. The "domination" that we have promoted has actually led to the partial destruction of systems that can actually bring us life.

In an effort to correct this one-sided emphasis, increasing numbers of moral theologians today are stressing unity between human beings and other species. Pope John Paul II himself speaks of the solidarity and mutuality that must exist between human beings and nature.

Still, Catholic moral theologians recognize that while we need to correct the earlier distorted emphasis, we need also to account for the uniqueness of human persons as spiritual beings. We alone are capable of reflection, of appreciating goodness and value, of ordering the goods we experience, of self-determination through freedom of choice, of moral activity that entails seeking the good.

Our concern to maintain a sufficiently nuanced approach to our interdependence with nature will increase in the years ahead. For now, let's offer a word of praise for the intricacy of creation.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.



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