

Richard McBrien, outspoken liberal theologian and Notre Dame scholar, dies at 78
by [David Gibson](#) in the [March 4, 2015](#) issue

Richard McBrien, 78, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame and liberal commentator, died January 25. He had been in poor health for several years.

McBrien joined Notre Dame in 1980 and became a standout for the theology department. In media punditry and a weekly column that ran in some diocesan newspapers, McBrien argued for the ordination of women, optional celibacy, and birth control, among other things.

“At his peak in the 1980s and ’90s, it is arguable that McBrien had a higher media profile than anyone in the Catholic church other than Pope John Paul II,” wrote the National Catholic Reporter, where McBrien was a regular contributor. “He was . . . knowledgeable, able to express complex ideas in digestible sound bites, and utterly unafraid of controversy.”

McBrien wrote 25 books, among them *Catholicism*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Lives of the Popes*.

McBrien was born in 1936 and grew up in West Hartford, Connecticut. He was ordained in 1962 and went to Rome to study for a doctorate in theology at Gregorian University.

In a 2008 interview with the *Boston Globe*, McBrien was asked why he never left the church over his differences with official teaching.

“I have affirmation from so many good people,” he said. “I feel that I have a responsibility to them to continue working at it and doing the best I can.” —Religion News Service

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