



In memoriam Charles N.R. McCoy (1911-1984)

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IN MEMORIAM CHARLES N. R. McCOY (1911–1984)

Born in Brooklyn, New York, on August 7, 1911, Charles McCoy spent much of his early life in Albany, New York. He was awarded the A.B., *magna cum laude*, by Dartmouth College in 1932 and the Ph.D. in 1938 by the University of Chicago where he worked under Jerome Kerwin on *The Law Relating to Public Inland Waters* (University of Chicago, 1940). He was awarded another Ph.D., this time in Political Philosophy — *summa cum laude*, by Laval University, Quebec, in 1951. Ordained a priest in The Archdiocese of St. Paul (Minnesota), Fr. McCoy taught at The College of St. Thomas from 1941 to 1947 when he was named Associate Professor at St. Louis University. He was invited to teach at The Catholic University of America in 1953 and designated Ordinary Professor of Politics in 1955, serving as Politics Department Head until 1963. He then moved to Santa Clara University as Professor of Political Science and continued to lecture at Stanford University where he had spent his sabbatical in 1960-61. He retired in 1976, continuing to live in Santa Clara until his death.

In the course of his career Fr. McCoy wrote a limited number of carefully researched articles on the history of political thought. These appeared principally in the *American Political Science Review* and *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*. He contributed essays on St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas to the *History of Political Thought* edited by Strauss and Cropsey. His principal work, *The Structure of Political Thought*, appeared in 1963 and affirms the cumulative nature of social and political thinking — the incremental growth of more adequate and refined conceptions of the human community in its wholeness, of the subtle interrelations of personality and symbol, environment and culture — the impossibility of separating behavior and value, theory and practice. For Charles McCoy “the thread of tradition” was the “clue of Ariadne to lead us out of the labyrinth.”

As a scholar Fr. McCoy opposed specialization “divorced from the civil art”, the study of behavior patterns apart from an undergirding moral philosophy. His colleagues and students remember him as a gentle man, retiring, almost shy-yet a remarkable teacher in graduate seminars and in informal discussions with the undergraduate honors students whom he monitored. He was a devoted priest, a scholar, a teacher whose high standards helped form the present generation.

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