

Dominican Contributions to Bioethics in the USA:
Benedict Ashley (b. 1915)
and Kevin O'Rourke (b. 1927)

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In his book, *The Birth of Bioethics*,¹ Al Jonsen describes the proceedings of a conference held to mark the thirtieth anniversary of a discipline that emerged in the USA in the early 1960s. Invited to the conference were representatives from the fields of philosophy, theology, law and medicine – the disciplines that combined to form the burgeoning new field – and honoured as ‘pioneers’ were those whose publications were listed in the first edition of *The Bibliography of Bioethics*.² Kevin O'Rourke was among these early contributors to the new discipline, the only priest listed among the 48 participants who gathered at the University of Washington in Seattle in September 1992.³ But he was not the only Catholic, nor the only Dominican, to pioneer the discipline. With formal training in canon law and moral theology, he represented a tradition with far deeper roots and centuries of moral reflection on medicine and health care. As John Hass has written in the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, ‘There are few other religious communities that have reflected so long and so systematically on the ethical issues touching on health care and medicine as has the Catholic’.⁴ It was the wisdom of this tradition that Kevin O'Rourke and Benedict Ashley would bring to the critical problems facing Catholic health care in the USA during the final quarter of the twentieth century.

Benedict Ashley and Kevin O'Rourke are friars of the Central Province of U.S. Dominicans. They have collaborated on five editions of *Health Care Ethics: A Theological Analysis*,⁵ a manual written for Catholic health care professionals in medical schools and hospitals; and three editions of textbook versions of this material prepared for use by students in colleges and universities, *Ethics of Health Care*.⁶ Separately, over more than 30 years, each has made significant contributions to moral reflection at the busily travelled intersection of medicine, law, public policy and health care.