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A Tribute to the Late Dr. John Bergin

by

Dr. Joe Santamaria

The author is the secretary of the Thomas More Centre, Victoria, Australia. The following originally appeared in The Thomas More Centre Bulletin, December, 1995.

Jack Bergin was well known to many Australian doctors and to the pro-life movement around the world. He was a keynote speaker at the first conference held by St. Vincent's Bioethics Centre at Mannix College in 1985. He was commissioned to present a paper on the nature and role of the Catholic Physician which proved to be a most illuminating study. He submitted the paper for publication to the *Linacre Quarterly*, the journal of the American Federation of Catholic Physicians. It eventually won the annual prize for the best article published that year in the journal.

In a way, that paper and that award summed up the life and person of Jack Bergin. He was born in Stratford, New Zealand in 1921, studied medicine at the Otago University and graduated in 1943. He served with the N.Z. Medical Corps in the Middle East, Italy and Japan. He married Lorna Stark in 1947 and did postgraduate studies in neurology in London. He returned to New Zealand where in 1956 he was appointed head of neurology at the Wellington Hospital. There he developed a modern neurological department with neuroradiology, neurophysiology and neurosurgery. His reputation as an outstanding neurologist spread throughout the country and the neighbouring Pacific Islands.

At the same time, he was active in the life of the Catholic Church. He was an active member of the Catholic Doctors' Guild of Ss Luke, Comas and Damian and served as its Master. He was a main organiser of their national conferences and for many years was the Oceania delegate to the International Federation of Catholic Doctors. He and his wife Lorna were appointed by Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Council for the Family in 1982, partly in recognition no doubt that they had a strong family structure with eight children. I remember having dinner with them one Sunday night when the scripture readings for the day were reflected upon at the end of the meal.

He played an important role in the development of the pro-life movement in New Zealand and was consulted by his Australian counterparts when a similar

body was formed across the Tasman. Eventually in 1990, he was awarded a papal knighthood of the Order of St. Gregory the Great.

He was deeply interested in medical ethics, an interest that he sustained throughout his life. He read widely in this field, contributed to medical conferences and international meetings on bioethics, well before the science was given the name of bioethics. He foresaw the problems that the Catholic Church would face in the field of ethics and with his colleagues set about training Catholic doctors for the future.

And through all of this Jack was a humble and warm-hearted friend to all, deeply understanding of the frailties of human nature and generous in the debates of his day. He was a Catholic physician of outstanding achievement, a husband and a father worthy of the highest respect and one mourned by all who knew him. He died in Wellington on July 12, 1995 after a long illness with cancer.

The Thomas More Centre sends its deepest sympathies to Lorna, his wife and to the members of the family.
