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**JOHN R. CAVANAGH, M.D.**  
**Eulogy Delivered at His Funeral**

St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, D.C.

Eulogy Delivered by Warren T. Reich, S.T.D.  
Professor of Bioethics  
Georgetown University

Welcome to the liturgical celebration of the completion of the wonderful life of John R. Cavanagh and of the commencement of his eternal life.

I am honored to have been invited by Dr. Cavanagh and his family to speak on behalf of the family and of the medical, academic, and Catholic communities which he so generously enriched.

The marvelous thing about a Catholic funeral is that, in addition to celebrating an entry into a new life, it gives us groping, grieving survivors an opportunity to reflect on the virtues of a loved one and to be uplifted and carried forward by the impact those virtues have had on all of us.

All people are people of virtue; but the character and virtues of Dr. Cavanagh are enormously complex. He was solemn, but he was witty. He was a dignified doctor, but never pompous. He couldn't stand

pompous people. He was serious, but often full of mischief. He was a famous physician and scholar, but always a humble learner. He could be very scientific and exact, but he was also warm and loving.

So where do we, the family and friends of Dr. Cavanagh, start? First, we begin at the most important of all virtues, his devotion to his family. He dedicated one of his most famous books, *Fundamental Marriage Counseling*, "To My Wife and the Three Graces." His lovely wife, Peggy, predeceased him; we pray for her today in joyful remembrance. We extend to his three daughters — our dear friends Tricia, Judy, and Toni — and to their families, our affection and compassion. To Dr. Cavanagh's brother, Edgar, and to his sister, Mary, (both present) and to their families, we also extend our sympathy. Dr. Cavanagh never ceased to be extraordinarily solicitous about his family, even the extended family he created.

A second virtue was his curing and serving of others. In a world that increasingly regards medical service as a commodity to be marketed, Dr. Cavanagh was unusual in his lifelong care even for the patients who no longer required his service.

A third virtue was his dedication to learning and teaching. He must have had an intense love for the human mind and spirit. My own colleagues at the Medical School of Georgetown University remember and appreciate his outstanding role as medical student, fellow, and faculty member in that institution.

After moving into psychiatry during the Second World War, Dr. Cavanagh dedicated himself as much to teaching and publishing as to healing. My colleagues in the theological community were the fortunate recipients of his training. For more than 30 years as a lecturer at Catholic University he delighted in instructing seminarians, whose environment was almost exclusively religious, about the facts of marriage, love, sexuality, honeymoons, contraception, sterilization, and the like. In doing that, he was without question an innovator wielding a far-reaching influence, for until then no layman from a non-theological science had ever instructed the Catholic clergy as he had. A telegram received from Dr. Edmund Pellegrino, current president of Catholic University, expresses deep appreciation for that service.

As his teaching role progressed in the Catholic community, he was responsible for many firsts. He was the first Roman Catholic scholar in modern times to sponsor a significant conference exploring the morality and psychology of homosexuality. His conference on "Marriage in the Light of Vatican II" was the first major forum for exchanging ideas about Christian marriage in a time of social and theological searching.

For Dr. Cavanagh, the search for truth never ended, for he was never afraid of a new idea. Thus, an additional virtue was his role of leadership. His public leadership activities are well documented; less well known was his private leadership. He encouraged many future

leaders to take first steps in careers of service in the scientific, academic, and religious communities. He provided crucial leadership of the local and national medical communities. In a telegram just received from the current president of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, Dr. John Coughlin said that Cavanagh's "kind tutoring" and "gentle wit" will be missed.

A fifth virtue which permeated his entire life was his devotion to the Church, symbolized in part by papal and other honors. Probably the most historically significant service he rendered the Church was his role as a member of the Papal Commission on Family, Population and Birth Problems. His intellectual courage in espousing that Commission's majority view and the energy he invested in subsequent discussions in the Church, could only have been born of his deep devotion to the Roman Catholic Church. Like many great scientists and philosophers throughout history, Cavanagh struggled with the Church because he loved her and wanted to influence her.

Finally, there is the virtue of the good death. One of Dr. Cavanagh's most famous essays — written long before the current interest in "death with dignity" — was titled "Bene Mori: The Right to a Dignified Death." He practiced the virtue he described so well: *bene mori*, to die well. It is good that one who gave himself so unstintingly to the work of curing others and assisting others in their psychological and moral growth finally permitted his own mind to meet his own heart. Family and friends also met his heart at the end in ways they had not experienced earlier. That kind of virtue — to die and to live with a heart of loving benevolence — is the greatest Christian virtue of all.

It is now time for all of us who were tied into the life of Dr. John Cavanagh — family, friends, fellow professionals, fellow believers, patients and others — to celebrate a Eucharist around the table of the Lord, and through this event to project ourselves into the peace and community of love for one another.

#### NFCPG TELEGRAM

*The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds expresses deepest regrets to the family and friends of Dr. John Cavanagh. Our fraternal prayers go for the repose of his soul. Dr. Cavanagh was president of the Federation in 1974-75, an outstanding Catholic physician and leader who exemplified for us all many Christian virtues. His gentle wit and his kind tutoring will be missed.*

— John P. Coughlin

*President, National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds*