

IN MEMORIAM: DONALD J. D'ELIA (1933 – 2009)

A fearless champion of the Catholic Faith on and off campus, Professor Donald J. D'Elia, Ph.D., was a founding member of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. In 2003, the Society conferred upon him the Pope Pius XI award for his outstanding scholarly contributions to building up Catholic social science. When presenting the award, Dr. Stephen M. Krason, Society president, said, "Dr. Donald J. D'Elia is one of the preeminent Catholic historians and historians of the Founding Era in the United States today. We are pleased to bestow upon him long overdue recognition for his accomplishments."

Dr. D'Elia was a dedicated professor for forty years at the State University of New York at New Paltz, N.Y., in addition to teaching at Penn State, Bloomsburg State University, Marist College, and the Graduate School of New York University.

D'Elia's book, *Dr. Benjamin Rush: Philosopher of the American Revolution*, published by the American Philosophical Society in 1974, is a standard in the field of American Revolution scholarship. The book was described as "magnificent" in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and was cited for its importance by the Institute for Early American History and Culture in its *Bicentennial Bibliography of the American Revolution* (1976). The Library of the History of Ideas has selected his work as among the "best of the essays on the American Enlightenment" to have appeared in the prestigious *Journal of the History of Ideas*. He also authored *The Spirits of '76: A Catholic Inquiry* (1983), which examined the lives and thought of some of the leading U.S. Founding Fathers from a Catholic perspective. He published many historical articles and articles on Catholic themes.

Dr. D'Elia collaborated on several projects with other members of the Society. With Krason, he co-edited *We Hold These Truths and More: Further Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (1993), a collection of articles reflecting on the thought of Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J. With Dr. Patrick Foley, he co-edited *The Catholic As Historian* (2006). He, Dr. Joseph A. Varacalli, and Dr. Salvatore J. LaGumina were three of the co-editors of *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans* (1999). He contributed to *The Italian-American Experience: An Encyclopedia* (2000), among whose co-editors were Varacalli, LaGumina, and Dr. Frank J. Cavaoli. He contributed to the Society's *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science, and Social Policy* (2007). Also, he contributed an essay on Thomas Fitzsimons, one of the few Catholic Founding Fathers, in Krason's anthology, *Catholic Makers of America* (1993, 2006).

D'Elia was a member of the Society's Board of Directors for many years and also served as co-chairman of its Board of Advisors. He headed a Society chapter in the Mid-Hudson Valley, N. Y. Krason called D'Elia "a long-time, close friend of both mine and the SCSS's other co-founder, Dr. Joseph Varacalli. Don had been active in many ways in helping to build the SCSS, especially in our formative first decade, and helped me in many ways."

D'Elia was cited by New York Governor Mario Cuomo in 1984, for his "many years of dedicated service to the humanities." He was listed in *Marquis Who's Who in America* (East), *Who's Who Among Italian Americans*, *American Catholic Who's Who*, and other reference works.

Dr. D'Elia's greatest human treasures were his wife of fifty-two years, Margaret, and their four children and five grandchildren. A native of Jersey City, N. J., he studied at The Citadel, Rutgers University, and Penn State, where he earned his Ph.D. He served in the United States Army Reserves from 1951 to 1961, reaching the rank of First Lieutenant.

A daily communicant, Dr. D'Elia was a Secular Franciscan, a member of the Knights of Columbus, and a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. George A. Morton, Society member and member of the SUNY-New Paltz College Council (1997-2004), credits "Don's countless prayers and words of encouragement for significant improvements in student life and academic standards at the college. His public witness to the Catholic Faith was inspiring for students, faculty, staff, and council members. We trust that we have gained another friend in Heaven."