

Announcement of Cardinal John J. O'Connor's death by Saint John Paul II

With a deep sense of personal loss, I have received the news of the death of Cardinal John J. O'Connor, and I offer my prayerful condolences to you, the Auxiliary Bishops and the priests, religious and laity of the Archdiocese of New York. With gratitude to God for the Cardinal's many years of dedicated and courageous witness to the Gospel as chaplain in the Armed Forces, as Bishop of Scranton and as Archbishop of New York, I join you in commending this faithful servant of the Church to our heavenly Father's eternal love. As a deeply spiritual man, a warm and zealous Pastor, an effective teacher of the faith and a vigorous defender of human life, Cardinal O'Connor modeled his own life and ministry on the figure of the Good Shepherd who to the end "gives his life for the flock". Through the years he has been of great support to me in the service of the universal Church, he worked tirelessly to build better ecumenical and interreligious relations, and for Catholics and other Christians and men and women of good will throughout the world he was a source of inspiration in serving God in our less fortunate brothers and sisters. To the Cardinal's family and to all who mourn him in the hope of the resurrection, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of consolation and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Paul II - 4 May 2000

Obituary - *L'Osservatore Romano*

John Joseph O'Connor was born on 15 January 1920 in Philadelphia, USA. He attended West Catholic School for Boys before entering St Charles Borromeo Seminary in Overbrook. After completing his philosophical and theological studies, he was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia on 15 December 1945.

For seven years he taught at St James High School and earned master's degrees in advanced ethics at Villanova University, Pennsylvania, and in clinical psychology at the Catholic University of America, Washington. He later earned a doctorate in political science at Georgetown University, Washington.

Answering a call for more chaplains during the Korean conflict, in 1952 he entered the U.S. Navy and served on vessels in the Atlantic, Caribbean and Mediterranean, and onshore in Quantico, Barstow, Okinawa and Vietnam. In 1958 he earned the Legion of Merit for developing a moral leadership program and was awarded the same honor again in 1965 for his service as a chaplain in Việt Nam. He was the author of *Because of You*, a training manual, *Principles and Problems of Naval Leadership*, and *The Naval Officer and the Human Person*, works based on his many years of experience as a chaplain and counselor. In 1972 he was appointed chief chaplain of the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, and in 1975 became the U.S. Navy's chief of chaplains. He retired from military service in 1979 with the rank of rear admiral.

On 18 April 1979 Pope John Paul II appointed him titular Bishop of Cursola and ordained him on 27 May in St Peter's Basilica. While Auxiliary of the Military Ordinariate, he was able to put his background in ethics and military policy to good use as a member of the committee, headed by then-Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin, that drafted the U.S. Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*.

On 6 May 1983 he was appointed Bishop of Scranton, but his ministry there was destined to be short, for on 26 January 1984 he was named Archbishop of New York following the death, due

to cancer, of Cardinal Terence Cooke. On 25 May 1985 the Holy Father created him a Cardinal, giving him the Title of Sts John and Paul.

Never battle-shy, Cardinal O'Connor became a staunch spokesman for the right to life both in New York and on the national scene. From 1989 to 1992 he chaired the Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities and initiated a public information campaign to improve understanding of the Church's teaching on the right to life. He publicly challenged Catholic politicians who would not oppose permissive U.S. abortion laws, while pledging at the same time to use the resources of the Archdiocese to help any woman considering abortion to carry her baby to term.

Cardinal O'Connor regularly celebrated daily and Sunday Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral. In 1985 he confirmed 33 disabled young people at the cathedral, initiating what became an annual practice. Out of concern for AIDS patients he started several health-care programs for them in the Archdiocese and he hosted various rallies for young people. He was a strong advocate of Catholic-Jewish relations, often speaking on the subject and receiving awards from the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee.

Since 1984 he headed the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, a papal agency for humanitarian aid based in New York, and worked zealously for peace in the Middle East, where he traveled several times and met various religious and political leaders. In 1989 he helped draft a U.S. Bishops' statement advocating a Palestinian homeland.

Cardinal O'Connor served as a President Delegate at the 1994 Synod of Bishops on consecrated life and actively promoted religious life in his own Archdiocese, where he encouraged the formation of three new communities: the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal and the Sisters of Life. The last community is devoted to the defense of life against abortion and euthanasia.

In the Roman Curia, the Cardinal served as a member of the Secretariat of State's Council of Cardinals and Bishops, the Congregations for Oriental Churches, Bishops and the Evangelization of Peoples, the Councils for the Family, the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, and the Supervisory Commission of Cardinals for the Institute for Religious Works.

In August 1999 he underwent surgery to remove a brain tumor. He later returned to celebrating Sunday Mass in the cathedral but curtailed his public appearances. On 10 February of this year, he had his last private audience with the Holy Father. Earlier this year he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor bestowed in the United States. Cardinal O'Connor once said that he would have been satisfied to be a parish priest or a teacher, adding: "What I would like my epitaph to say is simply that "He was a good priest".

He is survived by two sisters and a brother.