



Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland

Bishop Emeritus

Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Reflections on the Passing of John Cardinal O'Connor

January 15, 1920 ~ May 3, 2000
of the Archdiocese of New York

My Dear Friends:

Cardinal O'Connor had a strong voice and a warm heart. He articulated the teaching of the Church with a fierce tenaciousness while at the same time embracing his opponents with a genuine pastoral concern. He never allowed his disdain for the sin to overwhelm his love for the sinner.

His enigmatic and civilized approach to some of the great moral issues of our time often perplexed his friends and exasperated his enemies. The former sometimes thought he was too quick to grasp the microphone while the fringe groups of the latter, to their shame, vented their frustration by attacking his person and desecrating his cathedral. It would be incorrect to think that he did not suffer from these displays of pique but his self-deprecating humor often won him more friends as it exposed the infantile hostility of those who felt he had no right to express the teachings of the Church he served so well.

In another age and place, he might have ended up like John the Baptist, Thomas Becket or Oscar Romero, but this is America and John O'Connor was an American who expressed a deep love for his country by highlighting its considerable achievements while admitting its shortcomings. Here was a man who devoted about thirty years of his vigorous life to the service of his country as a Navy Chaplain and from his experience devoted further years to the crafting of the Bishops' landmark document on nuclear deterrence.

In a city plagued by all the ills associated with the deterioration of the urban core -- including poverty, ethnic unrest, distrust of emigrants, crime, the drug culture, inadequate medical services and much more -- Cardinal O'Connor summed up the long-term solution in one word, education. He shamelessly badgered his friends and corporate New York to provide scholarships for his urban schools as he saw in them the last best hope for children to believe in the promise of a better future.

The Cardinal gave substance to his convictions by backing them up with practical action. For those women contemplating abortion, he provided whatever was necessary to bring their babies to term. If a social issue was not getting the attention he felt it deserved, he established an office or a community to address the need. His sensitivity to anti-Catholicism prompted him to reach out a friendly hand to other groups, especially the Jews, who have often been the victims of religious prejudice.

In many ways, Cardinal O'Connor was the American version of Pope John Paul II. They were cut from the same cloth. They were good friends. The Cardinal was certainly ranked among

the Holy Father's top five American advisors. Almost the same age, it was no surprise that the Pope turned down the Cardinal's mandated submission of his retirement five years ago.

New York has lost a dedicated spiritual leader. The Catholic Church in the United States has lost one of its champions. The Holy Father has one less friend with whom he can discuss the lonely burden of his office. At 8:05 pm on Wednesday, May 3, 2000, John Cardinal O'Connor celebrated a new birthday, the beginning of his eternal life.

May this sailor-bishop experience a smooth sailing on his final voyage to the everlasting shore, where in God's providence, Christ will welcome him home.

Raymond J. Boland, D.D.

May 4, 2000