

# French Cardinal Lustiger dies

VATICAN CITY – Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the Jewish-born former archbishop of Paris who defended the right of believers to have a say in public debates, died at the age of 80.

He had been the voice of French Catholics for nearly a quarter-century and spoke out against anti-Semitism, as well as promoted Catholic dialogue with Jews and with the nation's growing Muslim community.

He died Aug. 5 in Paris after a long illness. The funeral was to be held Aug. 10 at the French capital's Notre Dame Cathedral. Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington, was to represent the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Cardinal Lustiger's death leaves the College of Cardinals with 182 members, of whom 105 are under the age of 80 and therefore are eligible to vote in a conclave.

Pope Benedict XVI called the cardinal a "perceptive intellectual" and "passionate pastor" who "put his gifts at the service of the faith" in order to bring the Gospel to all aspects of life and society.

In a telegram sent to Archbishop Andre Vingt-Trois of Paris, the pope said Cardinal Lustiger was a "great figure of the church in France."

The late cardinal was "a man of faith and dialogue," the pope said, praising his generous commitment to "fostering ever more fraternal relations between Christians and Jews."

The cardinal, who converted to Catholicism from Judaism as a teenager, was the Vatican representative at the 2005 commemoration in Poland of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where his Jewish mother died. The first time he visited Auschwitz was in 1983, when he accompanied Pope John Paul II there.

During the January 2005 commemoration, Cardinal Lustiger said, "The silence of Auschwitz-Birkenau's victims impels us to uphold and order the upholding of the dignity of each human being."

In May 2006, the cardinal accompanied Pope Benedict to Auschwitz and described the visit as "one of the most important moments" of his life.

Although some Jewish leaders and Holocaust survivors thought the pope's remarks at the former concentration camp were problematic, Cardinal Lustiger said he had

found them appropriate.

"As a priest, Christian, Jew and son who lost a mother, I think the pope's words were deep, truthful and sincere," Cardinal Lustiger told Polish TV. "They were exactly what should be said in this place, where we witnessed history being made today."

At a March 2006 talk at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the cardinal said the Holocaust was "human, rational decisions made by human, rational beings."

To remember the Holocaust and ensure that nothing like it was ever repeated, he said that "moral conscience must become educated" so that people "identify good with life and evil with death."

The cardinal worked hard to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. In October 1998, the New York-based Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding gave him its "Nostra Aetate" award, named for the Second Vatican Council's declaration on relations with other religions.

The previous year, the French bishops issued a five-page declaration confessing that "the church of France failed in her mission as teacher of consciences" by remaining silent while Jews were persecuted in Nazi-occupied France during World War II. Cardinal Lustiger was one of the principal figures to present the document at a ceremony near a former Nazi deportation point for French Jews in a Paris suburb.

Never shy about discussing his Jewish past - he once told reporters he still considered himself to be a Jew and had a "dual affiliation" - Cardinal Lustiger received considerable media attention, which he used to promote interfaith dialogue. During a question-and-answer session following his March 2006 address in Washington, he said, "It is impossible for a Christian to be a Christian ... without the Jewish people."

Christians and Jews are connected by God and loved by God, he said. "What Christians believe, they got through the Jews," he said.

Known as a gregarious and outspoken church leader, he was a leading voice for French Catholics.

More than once, the cardinal defended the French bishops' practice of weighing in on national political matters, explaining in a 1987 interview that the Catholic Church in France has a right to use its "substantial moral credit" in public affairs.

The cardinal repeatedly expressed concern for apparent changes in French society's values.

He defended church-state separation at a time when France was debating whether to ban religious symbols, including head scarves worn by Muslim women, large Christian crosses and Jewish skullcaps, in public schools.

In September 2003, he urged a government commission not to “disturb a fragile balance” between church and state by allowing religious symbols at schools.

Born in Paris Sept. 17, 1926, to Polish Jews who had emigrated to France, he was given the name Aaron. His family did not practice its faith, but paid for its Jewish identity with the loss of several members during the Holocaust.

The cardinal was spared, however, because a Catholic family in Orleans, France, sheltered him and his sister during the war. In 1940, at age 14, he was baptized and took the name Jean-Marie.

He became the bishop of Orleans nearly 40 years later and was named archbishop of Paris in 1981.

Both appointments surprised French Catholics. Cardinal Lustiger said in a later interview that after he was named to Orleans in 1980, he wrote the pope and suggested he might have made a mistake by elevating a parish priest with Jewish heritage to the head of a diocese.

But the pope would hear none of it. Eventually the two church leaders came to express very similar opinions on issues ranging from the value of prayer to the failures of communism.

Pope John Paul made him a cardinal in 1983.

The French cardinal wrote or edited at least 20 books and was a member of Vatican agencies that deal with bishops, clergy, religious life and Eastern churches.

In 1996, Cardinal Lustiger was received into the French Academy, whose members comprise the country’s literary elite. Membership in the academy, established in 1635, is considered as great an honor as holding a high-ranking government post.

Upon his election to the institution, Cardinal Lustiger said he intended to use his title to draw attention to modern ethical and moral questions, including the problem of supreme evil raised by the Holocaust.