

Cardinal Cooke's Influence Extended beyond the Church



While touring a founding hospital in New York in 1976, the cardinal stops to tie a shoe for a youngster in need of assistance.

From NC News Service

Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York was one of the best-known and influential members of the American hierarchy both inside and outside the church.

Since 1968 he headed both the Archdiocese of New York, one of the largest in the country, and the even larger Military Vicariate, the worldwide See whose members include American Catholics in the armed forces and their dependents.

Those two jobs gave him responsibility for the care of 3.9 million souls: 1.8 million in the archdiocese, which includes three New York City boroughs and seven upstate counties, and 2.1 million U.S. Catholics on military bases around the globe. (Since World War I the archbishop of New York automatically has been appointed head of the military See.)

Outside the church he was a friend of presidents and politicians. He met on several occasions with Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan, and also served on governmental advisory bodies. Just a month before doctors revealed his leukemia in August 1983 he turned down a seat on Reagan's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America headed by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

A month after the archdiocese announced that the cardinal was suffering from leukemia he was visited Sept. 25 at his New York residence by President and Mrs. Reagan. The president was in New York to speak at the United Nations.

During his years in the hierarchy, Cardinal Cooke also campaigned for peace in war-torn Lebanon and against abortion and pornography.

Though he was not a member of the committee which

drafted the U.S. bishops' 1983 pastoral letter on war and peace, his views on the document were closely watched, particularly because of his responsibility for the pastoral care of American military personnel.

In November 1982 as the bishops were considering the pastoral's second draft Cardinal Cooke said the document as then written had great potential "for seriously dividing our church and our nation."

He said consultations within his archdiocese and within the Military Vicariate showed divisions among Catholics on such basic issues in the pastoral as the possession and use of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence.

After the pastoral was approved overwhelmingly in May 1983 he urged Catholics in the military to study the entire document. While acknowledging that the pastoral raised moral questions for military personnel, he said it also reaffirmed the military's role of defending peace and justice.

His position as archbishop of New York also thrust Cardinal Cooke, whose parents were born in Ireland, into the middle of the Irish question.

When an Irish Republican Army supporter, Michael Flannery, was chosen grand marshal of the 1983 St. Patrick's Day parade, Cardinal Cooke showed his disapproval of IRA tactics by remaining absent from the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral as Flannery walked past.

Two years earlier, after the deaths of IRA hunger strikers Bobby Sands and Francis Hughes, Cardinal Cooke appealed to the remaining hunger strikers to give up their fasts and urged the British government to abandon its "inflexible attitude" toward a political solution to the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

Elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1969 when he was only 48, Cardinal Cooke was a participant in the two papal conclaves of 1978 which elected Popes John Paul I and John Paul II.

At a press conference in the Vatican prior to the conclave which elected John Paul I, Cardinal Cooke said he thought the church needed "another saint" to succeed Pope Paul VI.

In 1975, Cardinal Cooke became chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities. In that capacity, he spoke out repeatedly about the church's mission to protect human life at every stage of its existence.

While he was suffering from leukemia he issued a letter to New York parishioners Oct. 9 saying that life is "no less beautiful when it is accompanied by illness or weakness, hunger or poverty, mental or physical handicaps, loneliness or old age."

In June 1976, Cardinal Cooke said the U.S. bishops were counting on public education to result eventually in political action against abortion, including some form of constitutional amendment. "If we can educate people to the fact that abortion is destruction of human life, then they will want to do something to stop it," he said.

He also criticized the position on abortion of Jimmy Carter, then the leading contender for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Carter had said he personally opposed abortion and federal funding of it, but also did not support a constitutional amendment to limit abortion.

In 1981 Cardinal Cooke helped lead the U.S. bishops' endorsement of a constitutional amendment on abortion sponsored by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). It marked the first time that the bishops had endorsed specific wording for a constitutional amendment.

But it also led to a controversy within the pro-life movement over tactics and goals. Critics of the Hatch amendment, which would have permitted the federal and state governments to enact new abortion restrictions, said the proposal did not go far enough in protecting the unborn.

Cardinal Cooke at a Senate hearing in 1981 said one benefit of the Hatch amendment was that it would return the issue to the legislative process where the American people could form a consensus on the issue rather than have the matter decided in the federal courts.

The cardinal was a strong backer of traditional church teaching on other moral issues as well.

In 1968 when Pope Paul issued the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" reaffirming the church's opposition to artificial birth control, the then Archbishop Cooke sent a cablegram supporting the document to the pope. In a pastoral letter a few days later, the archbishop said the encyclical calls for "loyal adherence."

Ten years later, in May 1978, at a symposium on natural family planning, Cardinal Cooke said that though scholars, commentators and the public continued to reject "Humanae Vitae," in a century it would be seen that Pope Paul's courage in issuing it had "preserved the teaching of the church for the good of all mankind."

And in January 1976 the cardinal praised the Vatican declaration on sexual morality, saying, "We find the authentic interpretation of the church proclaiming and reaffirming the fundamental principles of Christian sexual morality."

As U.S. military vicar and as president of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, a position to which he first was elected in 1968, Cardinal Cooke traveled the globe. At the height of the Vietnam War he made annual Christmas visits to U.S. servicemen overseas. In doing so he was following a tradition established by his predecessor, Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, who made 16 such Christmas trips.

His leadership of the Near East aid organization also made him aware of the turmoil in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon.

In 1980 after a six-day visit to Lebanon, Cardinal Cooke said the key to settling that country's domestic problems was finding a homeland for the Palestinians. And in 1982, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon he and Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, president of the U.S. bishops, issued a joint statement calling for an immediate ceasefire and

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Praise from Pope, President Reagan

By NC News Service

Pope John Paul II and other church and government leaders from throughout the world paid tribute to Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York after he died Oct. 6 of leukemia at age 62.

The morning of Cardinal Cooke's death, Pope John Paul II cabled his condolences to the Archdiocese of New York.

"His charity and apostolic zeal have been an example to us all," the pope said of Cardinal Cooke. "I thank God for his dedicated ministry and pray that the example of devotion to the Church may inspire the faithful for years to come."

President Reagan called the cardinal "a saintly man and a great spiritual leader" in a statement released by the White House. "All his life, Terence James Cooke inspired us with his personal holiness, his dedication to his church, his devotion to his

flock," the statement read.

"The world has rarely seen a more moving display of the three cardinal virtues than in the faith, hope and love with which Cardinal Cooke confronted and conquered death," President Reagan's statement continued.

President and Mrs. Reagan visited Cardinal Cooke at his residence less than two weeks before his death.

American Cardinal William Baum, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Education and a friend of Cardinal Cooke, said the cardinal "never lost his kindness, his balance, nor his joyous, hopeful approach to all problems."

The cardinal's "greatness became even more apparent" in the last days before his death, when he "accepted his suffering joyfully and serenely because he saw in these sufferings a way of being more perfectly united with his crucified Lord,"

Cardinal Baum said.

The president of the American Jewish Committee, Howard I. Friedman, said that even in his final illness Cardinal Cooke "remained a true pastor for his flock and a model of gentle and faithful humility."

Calling him "a stalwart in the universal struggle for human rights," Friedman commended Cardinal Cooke's work on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

Bishop John R. McGann of the neighboring diocese of Rockville Centre, said, "We have lost a brother, a faithful and zealous priest and bishop, and valued collaborator in the life of the church."

Bishop McGann called Cardinal Cooke "a tireless champion of the sanctity and dignity of human life, a strong supporter of Catholic education and a person very much committed to serving the needs of all God's people, particularly the pastoral

concerns of racial and ethnic minority groups."

Virgil Dechant, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, of which Cardinal Cooke was a member and chaplain to the New York State Council, said the cardinal was "completely at peace with God's holy will" in life as well as death.

The cardinal was "ever-sollicitous for the order as a whole and of his brother Knights as individuals," Dechant said.

Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, who had known Cardinal Cooke for 30 years, called him "a humble servant of Christ and his church" and a "gentle, modest and effective religious leader."

Cardinal Krol commended Cardinal Cooke for "his patience and courage, and his acceptance of God's will" in the face of death.



Part of the cardinal's duties early in his religious career included working with the CYO in New York. This photograph was taken in 1952 in Yankee Stadium when CYO members presented Phil Rizzuto with a trophy as the Yankee's most popular player.