

Cardinals issue statements on convent controversy

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — While a high-ranking Vatican official defended Pope John Paul II's silence on the convent controversy at Auschwitz, Poland, the nation's leading churchman lashed out against Jewish critics of the convent.

Pope John Paul II cannot be accused of "duplicity regarding Jews" for not publicly intervening to remove the Carmelite convent from the ex-Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz, said Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

The pope has a strong record of opposing anti-Semitism and being sensitive to Jewish feelings, said the cardinal, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

At an Aug. 26 Vatican news conference, Cardinal Etchegaray said the Polish-born pope has not become involved because he "respects local churches" and is "especially respectful of the local church from which he comes."

Meanwhile, Cardinal Jozef Glomp of Gneizno and Warsaw, lashed out at Jewish critics of the convent, accusing them of be-

ing anti-Polish.

Cardinal Glomp said Aug. 26 that if there were no anti-Polish feelings, "there would be no anti-Semitism in our country."

"Have there been animosities and adventures against Jews in Poland? Yes, there have. Have there been Jews in Poland, businessmen, who neglected and detested Poles? Yes," said Cardinal Glomp.

Cardinal Glomp said some Jews even collaborated with the Nazis when they occupied Poland.

He called for dialogue on the convent issue, saying the nuns symbolize Polish feelings about Auschwitz.

"The Carmelite nuns living beside the camp site in Oswiecim (the Polish word for Auschwitz) wanted and want to be a symbol of the human solidarity which covers the living and the dead," the cardinal said.

"Can't you see, dear Jews, that acting against them offends the feelings of the Poles and our sovereignty?" he added.

Cardinal Glomp also said he thought seven New York Jews who attacked the convent in July intended to harm the nuns. The Jews were beaten by Polish workers at the convent.

Two days after the cardinal spoke, Kal-

man Sultanik, a vice president of the New York-based World Jewish Congress, called the remarks "grotesque and hate-filled." He said they revealed that "an ugly vein of anti-Semitism runs through the Polish church."

Practically all of the criticisms of the Carmelite convent have come from Israel and Jewish groups outside Poland.

Cardinal Etchegaray, meanwhile, expressed confidence that the controversy, sparked by international Jewish criticism of the convent at the site where 2.5 million Jews were killed during World War II, would be solved at the local level.

"It is not just, it is not true" to speak of "the silence of the pope" in a negative way, he said.

"No one tells the pope what he should say or do as pastor of the universal church," he added.

Polish Jews numbered 3.5 million at the start of World War II. About 3 million were killed during the Holocaust. Today, only several thousand Jews live in Poland.

Cardinal Etchegaray spoke at a news conference presenting two papal documents commemorating the 50th anniversary of the start of World War II. He noted that the documents contain strong criticism of the Nazi persecution and extermination of millions of Jews.

One of the documents, an apostolic letter, criticized the "planned barbarism which was unleashed against the Jewish people."

Jewish criticisms of the convent have increased since February when a deadline agreed upon by nine European Jewish leaders and nine European Catholic leaders

expired without the Carmelite nuns being moved from their site.

Among the Catholic leaders signing the agreement was Cardinal Franciszek Macharski of Krakow, Poland, the archdiocese in which Auschwitz is located. But Cardinal Macharski recently said he was suspending efforts to move the nuns because of the mounting Jewish protests.

On Aug. 18, Cardinal Franz Konig, retired archbishop of Vienna, Austria, called for "wisdom and restraint" by those concerned about the convent situation.

Speaking in West Berlin at the close of the Pax Christi International Seminar on the Christian-Jewish Dialogue, Cardinal Konig, international president of Pax Christi, appealed to "our Jewish friends not to doubt the sincerity of the motives of the church." He said the Carmelites at Auschwitz "want to repent for the terrible things done to all the victims" at the camp.

However, Cardinal Konig asked Polish Catholics "to be more sensitive to the feelings of the Jewish people."

"If prayer at a particular place is offensive to the whole community, why not say this prayer a few hundred meters further away?" he asked, referring to the planned interfaith center several hundred yards from the current convent.

"Prayers can be said anywhere," he said. "Should a prayer become less pleasing to God if it were for some time to be said in a provisional building?"

Cardinal Konig also said the 1987 Geneva agreement must be implemented.

"The impression should not be created that Catholics do not keep their word," he said.

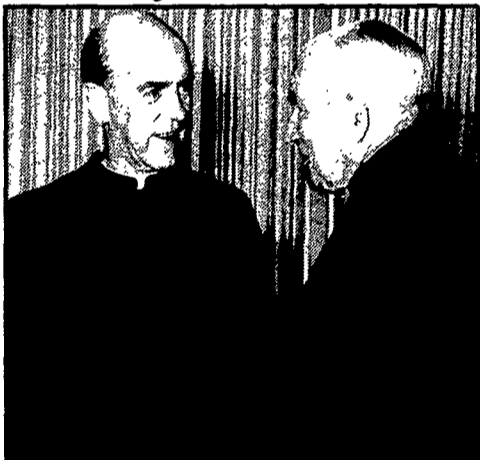
Basilian Cardinal Flahiff dies at order's St. Michael's College

TORONTO (CNS) — Cardinal George B. Flahiff, CSB, archbishop of Winnipeg from 1961 to 1982, died of natural causes in Toronto Aug. 22.

The 83-year-old cardinal had lived at St. Michael's College, Toronto, since his retirement in 1982.

Cardinal Flahiff, who served as president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1963 to 1965, was a participant in the Second Vatican Council. During and after the council, he served on commissions dealing with religious life.

The cardinal had served as superior general of the Basilian Fathers from 1954 until he was named archbishop of Winnipeg seven years later. From 1934 to 1954, he was a professor of medieval history at St. Michael's College.



Courier file photo

Cardinal George B. Flahiff talked with Bishop James E. Kearney during a 1967 meeting.

He was one of the first Canadian bishops to raise the issue of re-examining the role of women in the church and was a strong believer in the pope working with bishops to make decisions.

A memorial Mass was scheduled for Aug. 28 in Toronto.

On Aug. 30, his body was to lie in state at St. Mary's Cathedral in Winnipeg. A

funeral Mass was scheduled for the following morning at the cathedral, followed by burial in Winnipeg.

"Cardinal Flahiff was able to see Christ in all people: his students, his fellow priests, and the people of Winnipeg," said Archbishop Adam J. Exner of Winnipeg. "I will miss him."

Pope John Paul II sent a telegram of condolences in which he praised the late cardinal as a "man of faith" who gave tireless service to the church.

"His many years of devoted service as a laborer in the Lord's vineyard earned him profound respect as a caring and untiring pastor," the pope said in the telegram to Archbishop Exner.

Appointed to head the Winnipeg See in 1961, Archbishop Flahiff participated in all sessions of Vatican II.

In May 1967, two years after the council ended, Archbishop Flahiff said confusion in the church, criticized by many, "is not an evil, but a sign of growth."

"Many of the customs and practices of the church are no longer relevant, but even impede the true spirit of Christianity," he said. "Thus, the church is no longer fundamentalist in the interpretation of the holy Scriptures; birth control, now under study by a papal commission, is another typical issue."

In December 1967, Pope Paul VI named Archbishop Flahiff a member of the Congregation for Religious when, for the first time, its membership was extended to include seven bishops from various parts of the world.

He represented the Canadian bishops at synods of bishops in Rome in 1967 and 1971. He also represented Canada at the inter-American Catholic bishops' conferences in Mexico in 1971 and in Brazil in 1973.

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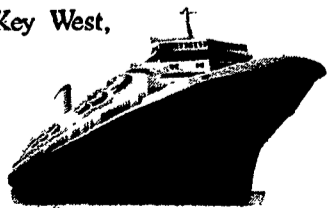
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