



Cardinal Lustiger, Controversial Figure in Jewish-Christian Relations, Dies in Paris

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Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, one of the most colorful and controversial figures in Jewish-Christian relations in modern times, died in Paris on August 5, 2007, at age 80. Born in 1926 to a Polish Jewish family that had relocated to France, he was sheltered by a Catholic family during the German occupation of France, and formally converted to Christianity at age 14. He subsequently became a priest, a bishop, and eventually the Archbishop of Paris, a position in which he served for 24 years. He was considered a close confidant of the late Pope John Paul II.

Cardinal Lustiger remained proud of his Jewish roots and claimed an identity as both a Jew and a Christian, a position that was criticized by a number of Jewish authorities. The Cardinal stated: "For me, the vocation of Israel is bringing light to the nations. That is my hope, and I believe that Christianity is the means for achieving it." He believed that Christianity has erred whenever it has strayed from its Jewish root. Following a March 2006 address in Washington, he said, "It is impossible for a Christian to be a Christian ... without the Jewish people."

Cardinal Lustiger's mother was deported to Auschwitz in 1942 and perished there, while his father survived the war. In the controversy decades later over the establishment of a convent of Carmelite nuns near the Auschwitz death camp, Cardinal Lustiger proved responsive to Jewish sensibilities and was instrumental in working out a plan to move the convent. Rabbi James Rudin, veteran American leader in interreligious relations, in commenting on Cardinal Lustiger's life and death, noted that Lustiger was a foe of all forms of anti-Semitism, and played an important role during the process that culminated in the Vatican's full diplomatic recognition of the State of Israel in 1994. "Lustiger," Rudin added, "was fully aware of the ambivalent and ambiguous role he occupied on the world stage. He often remarked that he symbolically carried a crucifix and a yellow Star of David."

France bade farewell to Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger on Friday, August 10, 2007 in a ceremony that mixed prayers from his Jewish roots with the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. A cousin of the late archbishop of Paris, Arno Lustiger, read the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, at the start of the ceremony outside Notre Dame Cathedral in central Paris. Another family relation, Jonas Moses-Lustiger, read Psalm 113 in Hebrew and French, a psalm of special significance to both Jews and Catholics.

Franklin Sherman with Silvia Kot

Rabbi A. James Rudin, "The Inner War of a Cardinal" (

The Jewish Week

, New York)