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New York Times features late cardinal's Jewish ancestry

by Tom Gallagher

NCR Today

The New York Times has an interesting story about the late Cardinal John O'Connor's Jewish heritage:

In his 16 years as the Catholic Church's top official in New York, Cardinal John Joseph O'Connor was a staunch friend and defender of the Jewish people.

He spoke often about what he had seen at Dachau as a Navy chaplain. He used his platform as head of the Archdiocese of New York to support Soviet Jewry, and played a role in the Vatican's recognition of the state of Israel. Mayor Edward I. Koch, a Bronx-born Jew who worked closely with the cardinal, proclaimed that he loved him "like a brother."

Yet there was something Cardinal O'Connor apparently never knew: His mother was born a Jew, the daughter of a rabbi.

"The basic fact is, my mother was Jewish," said Mary O'Connor Ward-Donagan, the cardinal's 87-year-old sister. Observing the Jewish matrilineal tradition, she added, "That means my two brothers were Jewish, my sister was Jewish and I am Jewish. Of that I am very proud."

Read the full story.

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