Francis Joseph Spellman, Cardinal Biography

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Contents

Francis Joseph Spellman, Cardinal Biography.....1

Contents.....2

Biography.....3

Biography

Cardinal Francis Joseph Spellman (1889-1967), archbishop of New York, was for 25 years the best-known and most influential leader of American Catholicism.

Francis Joseph Spellman was born in Whitman, Mass., on May 4, 1889. Educated at Fordham College in New York and the North American College in Rome, he was ordained in 1916 and served for 2 years as a curate at All Saints Church in Roxbury. In 1922 he was appointed vice-chancellor of the Boston archdiocese, and he served on the editorial staff of the diocesan paper, the *Pilot*. From 1925 to 1932 he was attached to the Secretariat of State in Rome and then was appointed auxiliary bishop to Cardinal William O'Connell of Boston.

During his years in Rome, Spellman was a close friend of Eugenio Pacelli, papal secretary of state, who became Pope Pius XII in 1939. That year the new pope appointed Spellman archbishop of New York. In 1946 Spellman became a member of the College of Cardinals, and in following years he was regarded as the most powerful and influential leader of the Catholic hierarchy in the United States. His public friendship with President Franklin Roosevelt added to his fame and prestige.

An active, vigorous leader and a talented administrator, Spellman was also a highly successful fund raiser. During his tenure as New York's archbishop, he vastly expanded the diocese's system of hospitals, orphanages, schools, and charitable agencies, undertaking new construction totaling over $500 million. As bishop for the U.S. Armed Forces, he traveled widely to visit American troops around the world and to oversee the work of Catholic chaplains. He supported a strong American foreign policy and frequently warned against the danger of communism. His activities in support of public aid for parochial schools and his militant opposition to birth control, pornography, and communism embroiled him in numerous controversies, as did his actions forbidding Catholics to see certain motion pictures. Toward the end of his life his strong support for American participation in the Vietnam War aroused militant opposition within and without the Church.

In addition to his enormous pastoral and administrative work, Cardinal Spellman wrote several volumes of poetry and a novel, *The Foundling* (1951), which was a national best seller. He died in New York City on Dec. 2, 1967.