

The Roman Catholic Church

Although the CIA began as a mostly Protestant organization, Roman Catholics quickly came to dominate the new covert-action wing in 1948. All were staunchly conservative, fiercely anti-communist and socially elite. Just a few of the many Catholic operatives included future CIA directors William Colby, William Casey, and John McCone. Another well-known personality from this period was William F. Buckley, Jr., editor of the *National Review* and gadfly host of TV's *Firing Line*. Buckley, it turns out, served as a CIA agent in Mexico City, and his experiences there served as fodder for his *Blackford Oakes* spy novels.

There were several reasons for this influx of Catholic elites. First, Wisner (himself a Wall Street lawyer) had an extensive and glamorous circle of friends to recruit from. Second, Italy was in constant crisis in the 1940s, both during World War II and after. Throughout this troubled period, the American intelligence community's greatest ally in Italy was the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church, of course, is one of the most anti-communist organizations in the world. The Marxist doctrine of atheism threatens Catholic theology, and its equality threatens the Church's strict tradition of hierarchy and authoritarianism. When Hitler invaded Communist Russia, the Vatican openly approved. Jesuit Michael Serafian wrote: "It cannot be denied that [Pope] Pius XII's closest advisors for some time regarded Hitler's armoured divisions as the right hand of God." (11)

But Hitler persecuted Catholics as well, and ultimately drove the Church to the Americans. In 1943, the Vatican reached a secret agreement with OSS Chief Donovan — himself a devout Catholic — to let the Holy See become the center of Allied spy operations in Italy. Donovan considered the Church to be one of his prize intelligence assets, given its global power, membership and contacts. He cultivated this alliance by sending America's most prestigious Catholics to the Vatican to establish rapport and forge an alliance.

After the war, half of Europe lay under Communist control, and the Italian communist party threatened to win the 1948 elections. The prospect of communism ruling over the heart of Catholicism terrified the Vatican. Once again, American intelligence gathered their most prestigious Catholics to strengthen ties

with the Vatican. Because this was the first mission of the new covert action division, the American Catholic agents acquired positions of power early on, and would dominate covert operations for the rest of the Cold War.

At a public level, the U.S. government sunk \$350 million in social and military aid into Italy to sway the vote. On a secret level, Wisner spent \$10 million in black budget funds to steal the elections. This included disseminating propaganda, beating up left-wing politicians, intimidating voters and disrupting leftist parties. The dirty tricks worked — the Communists lost, and the Catholic Americans' success permanently secured their power within the CIA.

The Knights of Malta (12)

The Roman Catholic Church did not forget the American agents who had saved them from both Nazism and Communism. It rewarded them by making them Knights of Malta, or members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM).

SMOM is one of the oldest and most elite religious orders in the Catholic Church. Until recently, it limited its membership to Italians and foreign heads of state. In 1927, however, an exception was made for the United States, given its emerging status as a world power. SMOM opened an American branch, awarding knighthood or damehood to several American Catholic business tycoons. This group was so conservative that one, John Raskob, the Chairman of General Motors, actually became involved in an aborted military plot to remove Franklin Roosevelt from the White House. SMOM has also been embarrassed by knighting or giving awards to countless people who later turned out to be Nazi war criminals. This is the sort of culture that thrives within the leadership of SMOM.

Officially, the Knights of Malta are a global charity organization. But beginning in the 1940s, knighthood was granted to countless CIA agents, and the organization has become a front for intelligence operations. SMOM is ideal for this kind of activity, because it is recognized as the world's only landless sovereignty, and members enjoy diplomatic immunity. This allows agents and supplies to pass through customs without interference from the host country. Such privileges enabled the Knights of Malta to become a major supplier of "humanitarian aid" to the Contras during their war in the 1980s.

A partial list of the Knights and Dames of Malta reads like a Who's Who of American Catholicism:

- **William Casey** – CIA Director.
- **John McCone** – CIA Director.
- **William Colby** – CIA Director.
- **William Donovan** – OSS Director. Donovan was given an especially prestigious form of knighthood that has only been given to a hundred other men in history.
- **Frank Shakespeare** – Director of such propaganda organizations as the U.S. Information Agency, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Also executive vice-president of CBS-TV and vice-chairman of RKO General Inc. He is currently chairman of the board of trustees at the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank.
- **William Simon** – Treasury Secretary under President Nixon. In the private sector, he has become one of America's 400 richest individuals by working in international finance. Today he is the President of the John M. Olin Foundation, a major funder of right-wing think tanks.
- **William F. Buckley, Jr.** – CIA agent, conservative pundit and mass media personality.
- **James Buckley** – William's brother, head of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.
- **Clare Boothe Luce** - The grand dame of the Cold War was also a Dame of Malta. She was a popular playwright and the wife of the publishing tycoon Henry Luce, who cofounded *Time* magazine.
- **Francis X Stankard** - CEO of the international division of Chase Manhattan Bank, a Rockefeller institution. (Nelson Rockefeller was also a major CIA figure.)
- **John Farrell** – President, U.S. Steel
- **Lee Iacocca** – Chairman, General Motors
- **William S. Schreyer** – Chairman, Merrill Lynch.
- **Richard R. Shinn** – Chairman, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.
- **Joseph Kennedy** – Founder of the Kennedy empire.
- **Baron Hilton** – Owner, Hilton Hotel chain.
- **Patrick J. Frawley Jr.** – Heir, Schick razor fortune. Frawley is a famous funder of right-wing Catholic causes, such as the Christian Anti-Communist

Crusade.

- **Ralph Abplanalp** - Aerosol magnate.
- **Martin F. Shea** - Executive vice president of Morgan Guaranty Trust.
- **Joseph Brennan** - Chairman of the executive committee of the Emigrant Savings Bank of New York.
- **J. Peter Grace** – President, W.R. Grace Company. He was a key figure in *Operation Paperclip*, which brought Nazi scientists and spies to the U.S. Many were war criminals whose atrocities were excused in their service to the CIA.
- **Thomas Bolan** – Of Saxe, Bacon and Bolan, the law firm of Senator McCarthy's deceased aide Roy Cohn.
- **Bowie Kuhn** – Baseball Comissioner
- **Cardinal John O'Connor** – Extreme right-wing leader among American Catholics, and fervent abortion opponent.
- **Cardinal Francis Spellman** – The "American Pope" was at one time the most powerful Catholic in America, an arch-conservative and a rabid anti-communist.
- **Cardinal Bernard Law** - One of the highest-ranking conservatives in the American church.
- **Alexander Haig** – Secretary of State under President Reagan.
- **Admiral James D. Watkins** – Hard-line chief of naval operations under President Reagan.
- **Jeremy Denton** – Senator (R-Al).
- **Pete Domenici** – Senator (R-New Mexico).
- **Walter J. Hickel** - Governor of Alaska and secretary of the interior.

When this group gets together, obviously, the topics are spying, business and politics.

The CIA has also used other religious and charity organizations as fronts. For example, John F. Kennedy -- another anticommunist Roman Catholic who greatly expanded covert operations -- created the U.S. Peace Corps to serve as cover for CIA operatives. The CIA has also made extensive use of missionaries, with the blessings of many right-wing, anticommunist Christian denominations.