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Bad Ideas

New Revelations of Pope as CIA Spook: A Fitting Christmas Present

by M A Shaikh

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Technology

New revelations, from the horse's mouth, linking the Pope to the CIA and US foreign policy during the cold war confirm allegations, first made in a 1996 book but dismissed as wild by commentators, that 'his holiness' was locked in an anti-communist alliance with American intelligence - an alliance Muslims are justified to conclude is now chiefly directed against them, given that Islam has since replaced communism as the west's principal enemy.

The revelations, which come in a BBC documentary, are made by such unassailable insiders as general Vernon Walters, former CIA deputy director, and Richard Allen, president Reagan's national security adviser, among others. Walters describes how Pope John Paul II was roped in as CIA and white house operative, while Allen hails the collaboration between the Catholic Church's leader and the genocidal global imperial power as 'the greatest secret alliance of modern times.'

The film, Rivals for Paradise, recently shown by BBC television as an Everyman documentary, is not confined to the current Pope, tracing, as it does, the history of relations between the Vatican and the Kremlin from the beginning of the communist revolution in Russia to the present day. It also deals with certain shady transactions between the Vatican and Hitler and Mussolini, which were billed at the time as an anti-communist pact but in fact served to secure the Catholic Church's silence over the invasions of Poland and the slaughter of Jews there by the Nazis.

The muck unearthed by the documentary's researchers surprised even its producer, Paul Sapin, a non-Catholic, who apparently used to believe the Vatican to be a non-political, non-secular organization. 'I was surprised at how political over the years the Vatican has been,' he said in a newspaper interview. 'What kept disturbing me was that this very religious institution has such a complex political profile. I was shocked at how secular were their interests and pursuits.'

Our readers, unlike Sapin, will not find the Vatican's political agenda surprising. The paper has throughout the years highlighted the Christian Church's efforts to fight Islam, not only as a faith but also as a political force, and to back up western imperial strategies and policies in Muslim countries. The crusading visits to Southern Sudan by both the Pope and the British archbishop George Carey, which seek to support Uncle Sam's determination to secure the secession of South Sudan to form a belt of Christian States across Central Africa, is a case in point.

The claim that Church and State are kept totally separate in Christian countries is a mere myth, if not a disinformation designed to delude Muslim elites into resisting the introduction of Islamic revolutions in their countries. In Britain, the claim is even theoretically untrue, as the queen is the head of the Anglican Church as well as head of State.

The film certainly shows that the Catholic Church has been enmeshed in the political games of the period it covers. It opens by exposing, for the first time, that shortly after the Russian Revolution Pope Benedict XV despatched two archbishops to negotiate secretly with Lenin. Then it goes on to deal at length with the Vatican's anti-communist treaties with Hitler and Mussolini. The then Pope Pius XII felt too compromised to object when Hitler invaded Poland, which was not communist at the time.

More startling, however, is the exposure of how closely the current Pope collaborated with president Ronald Reagan, not only in fighting communism globally but also in defusing opposition to Reagan's costly star war defence programme by Church leaders.

Richard Allen explains how Reagan was first alerted to the usefulness of Pope Paul's popularity to US foreign policy strategies. According to Allen, the two of them - before Reagan became president - were watching television in Santa Barbara (California) and an item on the Pope's first visit to Poland appeared. The people's enthusiastic reception of the Pontiff (himself a Pole) convinced Reagan that they were ready to challenge communism.

Under president Carter, the CIA was already supplying striking Polish workers with photocopiers, video cameras, underground radio broadcasting equipment and even devices to help them break into official broadcasts. When Reagan took over as president, the process was immediately stepped up.

According to Vernon Walters, previous US presidents were content to contain the Soviet Union - unlike Reagan who dreamed up the Star Wars programme to emboil Moscow in a costly counter defence plan that would destroy its economy. But the plan was vulnerable to criticism on grounds of cost and fear of a new arms race, and the Reagan administration was anxious to prevent any attack from Church leaders, especially the Pope, who had condemned the arms race earlier.

The president then sent the CIA chief to make the Pope Star Wars- friendly. 'It was one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life, briefing the Pope,' Walters says. 'I would like to think that it had some success. He did not criticise our defence programmes and that was all we wanted.'

But that was not all. Pope Paul acted to water down the text of a document on Star Wars by US bishops, and to censor a highly damaging report by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, whose members he had hand-picked.

When at a later stage Reagan demanded that he discipline priests who supported liberation theology - which resisted US hegemony there - the Pope quickly complied, visiting Nicaragua and publicly humiliating Ernesto Cardinale, a priest and cabinet minister. At Managua, he also shouted at a congregation chanting 'peace, peace' to shut up.

These startling revelations by the BBC film confirm those made in a book published in late 1996. A biography of the Pope by Carl Bernstein, of the Watergate scandal fame, reveals the details of how the sinister alliance between a ruthless superpower and the head of the Catholic Church was first constructed to combat communism and then expanded to fight 'terrorism' in Central America and Muslim countries.

When the book was first published, its revelations were discounted by commentators. With confirmation coming from the horse's mouth they cannot now be brushed aside. The film and the book should serve as an eye-opener to 'moderate' Muslims who believe the separation of Church and State as an ideal to be copied, and

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