

# *Rethinking Bella Dodd and Infiltration of the Catholic Priesthood*

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Dr. Bella Dodd, the famous one-time Communist lawyer who reverted to the Catholic Faith of her youth, has been the subject of much discussion over the past few decades. She is said to have planted 1,100 to 1,200 men into the Catholic seminary system. These men would then rise up the clerical ranks and work to destroy the Catholic Church from within. A talk given by Dodd in 1961 has recently surfaced that sheds some light on this subject of infiltration and the Catholic Church.

## *1961 Detroit Lecture of Bella Dodd*

For the past several years, Dr. Mary Nicholas of Maine has been engaged in very extensive and impressive *original* research on Bella Dodd.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Nicholas sent to me one of the pieces of her research: an audio file of a lecture that Dodd gave in Detroit on September 1, 1961. With Nicholas' permission, I made it available on my YouTube channel on November 27, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The recording is about an hour and a half long and divided into two parts: Dodd's lecture and a question-and-answer period following the lecture. It contains some very astounding information straight from Dodd herself that is very worthwhile to hear in its entirety. For our purposes, Dodd remarks upon Communism and the Catholic priesthood.

Beginning at the 1:13:11 mark of the video, the following question is posed to Dodd, "Have you ever met Communists among the Catholic clergy and if so, were these people ever exposed?" Her answer was quite astonishing:

I never met a Ca-, uh, Communist, uh, who was, uh, a member of the Catholic clergy. Now I say that, not because I'm a Catholic. Because I *was* familiar with a number of the young ministers in the Protestant, uh, among the Protestant clergy. God bless some of them. They wanted so much to do good. The Communist Party used to raise money to send them to seminaries, which would last maybe for one year, two years. And, uh, then they'd come back and preach the social doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Now, I never had met anyone in the Ca-, uh, among the Catholic clergy. That doesn't mean that they may not be [Communist]! My feeling is that, uh, the long years of [*slight pause*] preparation required for the Catholic clergy may *deter*, uh, the Communist Party line as to putting people in.

Bella Dodd's statement appears to run contrary to what many believed about her for many years. Is it possible to reconcile this belief with what Dodd herself stated in 1961? Let us seek to address this question, beginning with a modest presentation of how the popular belief about Dodd and infiltration developed. From there, we shall then examine all of the available facts with a critical eye and discuss some possible answers.

## *Historical Background*

The present essay is restricted to five particular areas of interest from the year 2000 to the present: 1) *Christian Order* journal, 2) *The Latin Mass Magazine*, 3) *Crisis Magazine*, and 4) *International News Analysis—Today*. The fifth area concerns various developments from the year 2003 to the present. Taking each area in chronological order, what we shall discover are some very

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. [Episode #208](#) of "The Patrick Coffin Show." See also [Episode #209](#) which presents a talk from Bella Dodd in Omaha, Nebraska given on May 10, 1962 (given to Coffin by Dr. Nicholas).

<sup>2</sup> Bella Dodd 1961 [Detroit Lecture](#).

<sup>3</sup> [See also House of Representatives, [Hearing Before the Committee of Un-American Activities](#) (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 2278ff.]

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intriguing stories, many of which appear to be historically accurate. Others, however, require further verification or can be rejected outright.

## **A) *Christian Order Journal* (2000)**

The British publication *Christian Order* wrote about Bella Dodd's placing men in the Catholic seminaries. In its November, 2000 issue, the journal published an article entitled "The Greatest Conspiracy" and listed "The Editor" (Rod Pead) as the author.<sup>4</sup> At least in its online version, the article does not provide citations and was not designed to have a scholarly presentation. It begins by referencing a "social chit-chat" between Pead and an unnamed Jesuit about "word of mouth histories of Communist infiltration of the Jesuits."

From there, Pead broadens the focus of the article to reference "inexplicable levels of corruption, negligence and indifference within Western episcopates." He follows up this discussion with that of the infiltration of the Catholic priesthood. Douglas Hyde, a former Communist who became a Catholic but later left the Church, is referenced (though not sourced) as having stated that "in the 1930s the Communist leadership issued a worldwide directive about infiltrating the Catholic Church." This statement is an editorial paraphrase.

Pead then cites Bella Dodd: "In the 1930s we put eleven hundred men into the priesthood in order to destroy the Church from within." An editorial comment is added to this statement: "The idea was for these men to be ordained and progress to positions of influence and authority as Monsignors and Bishops." No identities are revealed.

Pead continued on to attribute another statement to Dodd, prefaced by an editorial remark about Vatican II: "A dozen years before Vatican II she stated that: 'Right now they are in the highest places in the Church' - where they were working to bring about change in order to weaken the Church's effectiveness against Communism. She also said that these changes would be so drastic that 'you will not recognise the Catholic Church.'"

Pead then provides some remarks about Dodd and her involvement with this infiltration. He claims that, as a Communist, "part of [Dodd's] brief was to encourage young radicals (not always card-carrying Communists) to enter Catholic seminaries." He gives the figure of "nearly 1,000 such youngsters" who Dodd encouraged "to infiltrate the seminaries and religious orders." Immediately after this claim, Pead cites a lengthy and impressive remark from an unnamed monk about his experience attending an unspecified lecture by Dodd in the early 1950s:

I listened to that woman for four hours and she had my hair standing on end. Everything she said has been fulfilled to the letter. You would think she was the world's greatest prophet, but she was no prophet. She was merely exposing the step-by-step battle plan of Communist subversion of the Catholic Church. She explained that of all the world's religions, the Catholic Church was the only one feared by the Communists, for it was its only effective opponent. The whole idea was to destroy, not the institution of the Church, but rather the Faith of the people, and even use the institution of the Church, if possible, to destroy the Faith through the promotion of a pseudo-religion: something that resembled Catholicism but was not the real thing. Once the Faith was destroyed, she explained that there would be a guilt complex

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<sup>4</sup> "[The Greatest Conspiracy](#)" article; See also its reproduction on [Free Republic](#). Rod Pead has been the editor of *Christian Order* since the death of its founder, Fr. Paul Crane, S.J. (†1997).

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introduced into the Church. . . . to label the “Church of the past” as being oppressive, authoritarian, full of prejudices, arrogant in claiming to be the sole possessor of truth, and responsible for the divisions of religious bodies throughout the centuries. This would be necessary in order to shame Church leaders into an “openness to the world,” and to a more flexible attitude toward all religions and philosophies. The Communists would then exploit this openness in order to undermine the Church.

In summary then, Pead alleges that there was a worldwide directive in the 1930s from Communist leadership ordering the infiltration of the Catholic Church. This assertion is then followed up with remarks attributed to Bella Dodd about 1,100 men being put into the priesthood with the express purpose of destroying “the Church from within.” After some editorializing, Dodd is again attributed as having said that these infiltrators were “right now [working] in the highest places in the Church” and that the Catholic Church would be unrecognizable.

In terms of the article’s construction, the alleged paraphrase of Douglas Hyde is the foundation for the remarks attributed to Dodd. There was a directive ordering the infiltration. How this directive was carried out is answered by the attributions to Dodd. Pead builds this structure around the figure of the 1,100 men that, he claims of Dodd, “we put” into the priesthood with the purpose “to destroy the Church from within.”

It is here that Pead’s presentation becomes somewhat confusing. At first, he insinuates that all 1,100 men were ordained. We see this beginning with the statement, “In the 1930s we put eleven hundred men into the priesthood in order to destroy the Church from within.” Pead followed this up with the following statement: “Right now they are in the highest places in the Church.” In the very next paragraph, however, he then states that Bella Dodd “was to encourage young radicals (not always card-carrying Communists) to enter Catholic seminaries. She alone had encouraged nearly 1,000 such youngsters to infiltrate the seminaries and religious orders!”

It is not clear if Pead is presenting two separate actions. First, he points out that 1,100 men went “into the priesthood.” This sounds like 1,100 men were ordained as Catholic priests. But then he states in the next paragraph that Bella Dodd’s job was to “encourage young radicals . . . to enter Catholic seminaries” and that “She alone had encouraged nearly 1,000 such youngsters to infiltrate the seminaries and religious orders.” To encourage people to enter seminaries and religious orders is not necessarily the same thing as saying that these “nearly 1,000” youngsters went “into the priesthood” (i.e. became priests).

Pead’s change of the number of people is also disconcerting. First, the number is 1,100 and then changes to “nearly 1,000.” Why does his language change to say “nearly 1,000” when that number was, in fact, *over* 1,000? It invites speculation as to whether the group of 1,000 (or so) is the same group as the 1,100. If they are the same, why would Pead low-ball the number? Doing so undermines his argument.

In whatever manner this confusion is clarified, we can, for our purposes, make one note about the claim of 1,100 men going into the priesthood: seminaries were involved at some point. We can make this presumption because in a normal trajectory, no one is ordained a Catholic priest without first going through seminary training. What is questionable, however, is to presume that *all* 1,100 men were ordained. Pead makes this presumption when he connects the number of men and the claim that Dodd said, “Right now they are in the highest places in the Church.”

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Let us also make two other important observations. First, nowhere is it said *where* these 1,100 men were located. Was Dodd speaking about 1,100 men within the United States, or was she speaking *internationally*? Second, nowhere in any of the statements that the Editor attributed to Dodd is it said that the 1,100 men were card-carrying Communists. In fact, speaking of the “nearly 1,000 young radicals,” Pead is explicit to describe them as “not always card-carrying Communists.”<sup>5</sup>

So, we are presented with a distinction between those who are card-carrying Communists vs. those who are simply “young radicals.” In this latter group, they would likely be people who shared similar ideologies or sympathies with the Party but not actual members. The degree of their involvement would differ in accordance with their interests and goals.<sup>6</sup> At least *some* of them might have been “nonparty Bolsheviks.” This term was used by Bella Dodd herself in her testimony before the U.S. Senate subcommittee in 1952 and she defined it as “a person who was not a member of the party, but who attended all of the meetings and who was given assignments.”<sup>7</sup>

Following on the heels of this discussion is the quote from the “unnamed monk.” An old web site entitled *Traditional Catholic Mass*, claimed that the monk was Br. Joseph Natale of New Jersey but no authority is cited for this association.<sup>8</sup> Concerning Natale, not much is known about him in the public forum and what *is* known shows that he was a very controversial figure.<sup>9</sup> He died in 1995 and so we do not know for sure if he is the “unnamed monk” and where he made the statement.

If we take the statement at face value, we must make an important observation. The text does *not* state that Bella Dodd told her audience about men she put into the Catholic seminary system. Rather, it talks about the overall “step-by-step battle plan of Communist subversion of the Catholic Church.” In other words, the unnamed monk does not tell us *how* the “battle plan” was initiated and/or carried out. He tells of their intentions. For this reason, it seems to explain why Pead placed the quote after the Douglas Hyde and Bella Dodd attributions. It gives the appearance of supporting them.

Unfortunately, the article’s overall lack of sourcing presents problems. We simply cannot verify the statements attributed to Dodd and others. Furthermore, there is some confusion in the points made that also negatively impacts our understanding. Editorializing is also present as well as a reliance upon oral histories. Such histories are not inherently wrong, but must be taken with some caution owing to problems of distortion that can arise. What impact this article had upon subsequent discussions is not known with precision<sup>10</sup>, but it does set a tone for what followed it.

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<sup>5</sup> In her testimony of November 16, 1953 to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Dodd made some interesting remarks about having a membership card. She indicates that there may not be that much of a difference, depending upon the person’s devotion to the party. See [Hearing Before the Committee of Un-American Activities House of Representatives](#) (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 2887-2888. She makes a similar remark between the 36:00 to 38:00 mark in her Detroit lecture.

<sup>6</sup> How they may have gotten involved is also partly answered by some testimony by Bella Dodd. She testified in 1950 that “The cooperation of nonparty members was solicited either by discussion or persuasion” (State Department Employee Loyalty Investigation, [Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate](#) [Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1950], 637).

<sup>7</sup> Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, [Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws](#) (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), 3. Hereafter *Committee* followed by page number.

<sup>8</sup> [Traditional Catholic Mass](#) web site.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87-89. See also this [biography](#) of Natale.

<sup>10</sup> For an example of the article’s influence, see Christopher Ferrara, “[The Prophecy of Bella Dodd](#).” *Fatima Perspectives*, #235. *The Fatima Center* (2002).

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## **B) *The Latin Mass Magazine* (2001)**

Several months after the *Christian Order* article appeared, the publication *The Latin Mass Magazine* published an interview with the famous Catholic philosopher Dr. Alice von Hildebrand.<sup>11</sup> The interview was entitled “Present at the Demolition” and published in the magazine’s Summer, 2001 issue. During the interview, Dr. von Hildebrand made a statement about the Church being infiltrated. This prompted the interviewer to tell her: “You realize, of course, Doctor, that as soon as you mention this idea of infiltration, there will be those who roll their eyes in exasperation and remark, ‘Not another conspiracy theory!’” She responded as follows:

I can only tell you what I know. It is a matter of public record, for instance, that Bella Dodd, the ex-Communist who reconverted to the Church, openly spoke of the Communist Party’s deliberate infiltration of agents into the seminaries. She told my husband and me that when she was an active party member, she had dealt with no fewer than four cardinals within the Vatican “who were working for us.”

Dr. Alice von Hildebrand’s remark was important for a couple of reasons. First, both she and her husband Dietrich actually knew Bella Dodd. Second, given the fame and personal prestige of the von Hildebrands, what Alice says has merit and weight. For these reasons, people would be more inclined to take seriously the claim that Bella Dodd was involved in the Communist infiltration of the Catholic Church and/or its seminaries.

Dr. von Hildebrand presents two claims. The first claim is that Bella Dodd “openly spoke of the Communist Party’s deliberate infiltration of agents into the seminaries.” She prefaced the remark by saying that it is a “matter of public record” but *where* this record can be found is not given. Dr. von Hildebrand goes on to make a second claim: Dodd privately told the von Hildebrands that she “dealt with no fewer than four cardinals” that were working for Communism within the Vatican. This last claim is noteworthy, not only because it is a new and bold assertion, but also because it is a personal witness and not easily argued at face value given the good reputation of Dr. von Hildebrand. We can, however, make some observations.

In both claims, Dr. von Hildebrand does not make an important specification. She does not state whether the “agents” who infiltrated the seminaries or the four cardinals were card-carrying members of the Communist party or nonparty Bolsheviks. Regarding the cardinals, Dr. von Hildebrand only states that Dodd had “dealt with” them and that she told the von Hildebrands that these cardinals “were working for us.” These things say little about the cardinals’ exact association with Communism. Also unaddressed is whether these cardinals were among the men Dodd is said to have put into the seminaries.

Dr. von Hildebrand had more to say about Bella Dodd and the Communist infiltration of the Catholic Church in subsequent years. From here on, she became one of the claim’s primary proponents in the public forum.

## **C) Letter to the Editor of *Crisis Magazine* (2003)**

In 2002, writer Sandra Miesel wrote an article for *Crisis Magazine* that was entitled “Swinging at Windmills: A Close Look at Catholic Conspiracy Theories” and was published in December,

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<sup>11</sup> [The Latin Mass Magazine](#) web site.

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2002.<sup>12</sup> In this article, Miesel made the following very short reference to Bella Dodd: “Dodd implausibly claimed to have sent a thousand young men into American seminaries, but she also insisted that the Communist Party of the U.S.A. secretly took its orders from American capitalists.”

Dr. Alice von Hildebrand read Miesel’s article and issued a response. This response was published as a letter to the editor of *Crisis Magazine* entitled “A Final Swing” and was published in April, 2003.<sup>13</sup> There were several matters addressed by Dr. von Hildebrand, but here is what she wrote pertaining to Bella Dodd:

More serious is the brief reference that Miesel makes to Bella Dodd. It is clear from the content of her article that Miesel never met Dodd personally. I knew her and can call her a friend. After dedicating 21 years of her life to the Enemy, she was so shattered when her eyes opened that she wanted to devote the years left to her to penance and to join the most severe penitential order. She turned for advice and help to Bishop Fulton Sheen. She opened her heart to him, went to confession, and put herself under his guidance. He became her spiritual director and gave her the order to remain in the world and open the eyes of Americans to the deadly poison of Communism, its atheism, its hatred of God and the Church. She lectured extensively. It was at one of her talks that my husband and I made her acquaintance. We immediately perceived that she was an exceptional person: her intelligence, her sincerity, her humility, and her desire to make good for the harm that she had done.

Dodd visited us in New Rochelle, New York. I recall that one day my husband—who had become increasingly worried about what was dubbed “the spirit of Vatican II”—said to her, “Bella, at times I wonder whether the Church has not been infiltrated.” I can solemnly testify that she answered, “Dear professor, you fear it; I know it. When I was a fanatic Communist, I was in close contact with four cardinals in the Vatican working for us. They are still very active today.” My husband jumped in his seat and said, “My nephew is German ambassador at the Holy See. Who are they?” Bella Dodd refused to answer: Bishop Sheen had not allowed her to reveal their names.

As long as Bella Dodd lived, she remained in close contact with Bishop Sheen. He knew what she was revealing in her numerous lectures and never tried to curb her or to challenge what she was saying, but he did not allow her to reveal names. The Roman Catholic Church rightly fears scandals.

In a talk that Dodd gave in Orange, California, she told a packed auditorium that in the 1920s Stalin ordered his subordinates to try to infiltrate Catholic seminaries. Dodd was appointed to faithfully follow this directive, and given her extraordinary charism to persuade people, she claimed publicly that she alone was responsible for the infiltration of hundreds of Judases in Catholic seminaries: “Young men who had neither faith nor morals” was the way she put it. It seems legitimate at this point to wonder whether some of the horrendous sexual scandals that have rocked the Church in the United States are not to be traced back to Bella Dodd’s efficiency.

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<sup>12</sup> [Crisis Magazine](#) December, 2002 Feature.

<sup>13</sup> [Crisis Magazine](#) Letters to the Editor (April, 2003). See also [Crisis Magazine](#) Letters to the Editor (February, 2003).

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With a sleight of hand, Miesel dismisses the whole thing as being “implausible.” End of discussion.<sup>14</sup>

In the statement given above, Dr. von Hildebrand reiterates her two claims and add many new details. After explaining how she and her husband befriended Dodd, Dr. von Hildebrand first discusses the story about the four cardinals.<sup>15</sup> She attributes a further statement to Dodd about the cardinals that was not in the 2001 interview, “They are still very active today.” She further adds that Archbishop Fulton Sheen forbade Dodd from revealing the names of these cardinals, although she provides no substantiation for this claim. It is supported *only* by her good reputation.

We note that at first, Dr. von Hildebrand speaks to a more general notion of infiltration through her husband’s initial statement, “Bella, at times I wonder whether the Church has not been infiltrated.” Von Hildebrand states that Bella replied that she “knows” this infiltration is fact because she had “close contact” with four cardinals when she was a “fanatic Communist.” This description of when Dodd was a “fanatic Communist” is an important time indicator.

Although she worked with Communists prior as a nonparty Bolshevik, Dodd only consented to become a literal “card-carrying” Communist in 1943. She was expelled in 1949 after a period of doubt.<sup>16</sup> Exactly when Dodd was a “fanatic Communist” is not clear. If we take, however, the timeframe of her being a card-carrying member as a guide, then we have a period of 1943 to about 1947. This estimation is more secure with the fact that in her 2001 interview, Dr. von Hildebrand specified Dodd’s involvement with the cardinals was when she was “an active party member.”

Dr. von Hildebrand does not claim in her reply to Miesel that the four cardinals were among the men Dodd had put into the seminaries/priesthood. If we go by the years of 1943-1947 for Dodd’s involvement with Communism, it’s implausible that even one of these cardinals was among the men that Dodd allegedly put into the priesthood. If, as Dr. von Hildebrand later asserts in her reply, orders came from Stalin in the 1920s for the infiltration of the Catholic clergy, then some difficulties arise with the timeline.

Stalin took over from Lenin beginning in 1924, so that is the earliest possible date that Stalin (on his own authority) could have issued such orders. For a man influenced by Communism (as a card-carrying member, a nonparty Bolshevik or just friendly to the cause) to become a priest, he would enter a seminary and get ordained after about 7 years of training. If this happened in 1924, he’d be ordained around 1931. That leaves him roughly about 7-15 years to rise from priest to cardinal and somehow be connected to Dodd.

For not one but *four men* to rise through the clerical ranks that fast would be meteoric and historic. The Catholic Church is not in the habit of advancing clerics in such a fashion. We can reasonably observe, therefore, that if we take von Hildebrand’s testimony at face value, these four

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<sup>14</sup> To this point, Miesel’s response was very direct, “As for Bella Dodd’s story of sending more than a thousand men into American seminaries, that would have required chatting up approximately one youth per week and corrupting them so permanently that they stuck with the Party after ordination. It’s convenient that she was forbidden to name names—not even private communications to Rome? Were those four cardinals collaborating in religion or politics? Clerics make useful idiots.”

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Alice von Hildebrand specified in her book *Memoirs of a Happy Failure* (Charlotte, North Carolina: St. Benedict Press, 2014) that it was in the Fall of 1965 or 1966 that she and her husband met Bella Dodd (82).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bella Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York, New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1954), 159, 199, 207-220. See also [Committee](#), 25 and 27.

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cardinals must have already been in the clerical state *before* their association with Dodd. When they committed to Communism (to whatever degree) admits of some debate.

Continuing along, there is new information in the latter part of Dr. von Hildebrand's response: a talk that Bella Dodd gave in Orange, California. It is within this context that Dr. von Hildebrand references Dodd's personal involvement with infiltrating seminaries and the orders from Stalin. She says that Dodd "was appointed to faithfully follow this directive." *When* this appointment was given to Dodd is not stated by Dr. von Hildebrand. It could not have been in 1924.

In that year, Dodd was then twenty years old, and, according to her autobiography, *School of Darkness*, she was not then involved with the Communist party. That came later, in 1932, after her introduction to the Communist leader Earl Browder.<sup>17</sup> We can safely observe, then, that Dr. von Hildebrand may have intended her statement to mean that Dodd was *later* appointed to the task of infiltrating seminaries *after* her commitment to Communism in whatever degree.

Lastly, Dr. von Hildebrand claims that Dodd herself "claimed publicly that she alone was responsible for the infiltration of hundreds of Judases in Catholic seminaries: 'Young men who had neither faith nor morals' was the way she put it." The phrase directly attributed to Dodd about the *quality* of these people is new. It does, however, comport with the description of "young radicals" in the *Christian Order* article that we saw earlier.

Alice von Hildebrand's reply to Miesel reiterates her two claims from her 2001 interview: the four cardinals working for Communism and Dodd's work with infiltrating seminaries. They are separate assertions, albeit related, and must be treated as such. We also note that Dr. von Hildebrand does not mention her source for the California talk in her response to Miesel. That information would be revealed, in part, a few months later.

### **D) International News Analysis—Today (2003)**

On July 28, 2003, Toby Westerman, the editor and publisher for the online web site *International News Analysis—Today*, published an article entitled "Infiltration of the Catholic Church?"<sup>18</sup> The key to this article was an affidavit provided to him by Dr. Alice von Hildebrand about Dodd's talk in Orange County, California. The affidavit itself, however, was not from von Hildebrand. It was from a couple in Texas, Johnine and Paul Leininger, that was witnessed before Margie Kresta, a notary public for the state of Texas (County of Lavaca) on March 28, 2002.

In their affidavit, the Leiningers attested that they attended "a large public meeting in Orange County, California in the 1960's." They state that those gathered at the talk "had come to hear a former Communist Party official give an exposé of the infiltration of the Communist Party into every facet of American life." The Leiningers specify that Dodd "spoke of her years as an undercover and open 'card-carrying' member of the Communist Party." In other words, when she was a nonparty Bolshevik and after.

The Leiningers also remarked upon the "methods [Dodd] detailed" in order to accomplish their goals. They said that these methods, "required dedicated Communist Party members (and other idealists who would inadvertently be willing conduits) to be 'planted' in every social, political and religious aspect of American life." The Leiningers then provide an example that, presumably, came from Dodd:

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<sup>17</sup> Dodd, 3, 63ff. See also [Committee](#), 3. In a [separate volume](#), the March 10, 1953 session of this Committee also has some helpful information (pages 512-513, 517-518).

<sup>18</sup> Toby Westerman, "[Infiltration of the Catholic Church?](#)" *International News Analysis—Today* (July 28, 2003).

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“The agenda of a labor, communications or teachers’ union...could be controlled by putting key people where carefully planned objectives would be implemented on unsuspecting collaborators.”

We can see that Dodd’s talk was not exclusively about infiltration of the Catholic priesthood. She *did* remark, according to the Leiningers, on the subject. They numbered three specific claims in the affidavit, the first two of which pertain directly to the infiltration of the Catholic Church:

1. In the 1920’s and 1930’s, directives were sent from Moscow to all Communist Party organizations. In order to destroy the Catholic Church from within, party members were to be planted in seminaries and within diocesan organizations. Dr. Dodd said, “I, MYSELF, PUT SOME 1,200 MEN IN CATHOLIC SEMINARIES.”
2. Dr. Dodd also detailed the influence being implemented in the Vatican itself by Cardinals who were members of the Communist Party. She said she knew the truth of her statement because “I KNOW WHO MY CONTACTS WERE!” She also told of the high Communist officials in the United States who operated out of Rockefeller Center in New York: again, her “contacts!”
3. Dr. Dodd also elaborated on the success of the infiltration of labor unions and teacher unions. She spoke of placing some 1,300 teachers and 1,500 principals in the education system from grade school to university levels.<sup>19</sup>

We see consistency in these statements with the information that we have seen thus far. First, they are in harmony with the earlier distinction between card-carrying members of the Communist Party and nonparty Bolsheviks. The Leiningers specifically use the term “idealists” to describe the latter in sharp distinction to “dedicated Communist Party members.” The purpose of these “idealists” was to be “planted” in “key” positions and “inadvertently be willing conduits” for “carefully planned objectives” that “would be implemented on unsuspecting collaborators.” In other words, they would co-opt these “unsuspecting collaborators.”

The Leiningers attest that Dodd remarked upon directives from Moscow to infiltrate the Catholic Church. To this end, seminaries and diocesan organizations are specified.<sup>20</sup> Dodd is directly quoted as having stated that she herself put 1,200 men into seminaries. The Leiningers state, in harmony with Alice von Hildebrand, that there were cardinals in the Vatican working for Communism. The Leiningers specify that Dodd stated she knew who her “contacts” were. Whether this means she knew them directly or indirectly is not specified, or if she had ever met them in person.

Interestingly, the Leiningers also provide some further specifications that were not clear in previous statements. They specified that it was “party members” who “were to be planted in seminaries and within diocesan organizations.” That’s much more descriptive than the nonparty Bolsheviks or “idealists.” They also do the same for the claim of the cardinals working in the Vatican. The Leiningers do not specify *four* cardinals; they state that Dodd “detailed the influence” of cardinals “who were members of the Communist Party.”

There is also some inconsistency. The Leiningers do *not* state that Dodd had said that she “alone” was responsible for the infiltration of the seminaries. Contrary to Dr. Alice von Hildebrand’s earlier assertion, the Leiningers quote Dodd as having said, “I, myself, put some 1,200 men in Catholic seminaries.” Did Dodd intend the word “myself” as a simple reflexive pronoun

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. [Committee](#), 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Westerman’s article identifies the infiltration of Catholic organizations (the Holy Name Society in particular).

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or that she “alone” accomplished what she claimed? We also see the difference in the number of men. The *Christian Order* article gave the figure of 1,100, yet the Leiningers claim Dodd said it was closer to 1,200.

The Leiningers also add that the “directives from Moscow” concerning the infiltration were not just in the 1920s, but also the 1930s. So, there is some question about the timeline concerning when these orders were said to be given. Westerman writes about the Soviet plan known as “Outstretched Hand” and how this operation was part of the infiltration strategy. To this end, he cites Herbert Romerstein and his book *The Venona Secrets*, based upon research into the Communist archives in Moscow.<sup>21</sup> Westerman does not provide an official year.

Bella Dodd herself testified to the fact of Communism working with religious groups. In her testimony before the U.S. Senate subcommittee on September 9, 1952, she was asked by Senator Homer Ferguson (Michigan) the following question: “Do you think that communism requires a person to surrender his religion and take, as a substitute, communism?” Dodd replied as follows:

There is no doubt that the Marxist-Leninist principles are completely materialistic and, therefore, against anything which has to do with God or religion.

At different times in the history of the Communist Party, they emphasized the fact that it was possible for you to be religious and, at the same time, Communist. But those were the periods in which they were trying to win over larger numbers of, let’s say, Catholic trade-unionists, Catholic workers, and so forth and so on. Those were the periods which were called the periods of extending the hand of communism to the people in the religious groups.

What you did was to say substantially this: ‘These men have a blind spot. They believe in God, but we Communists know that there is no God. But in order to get them to work with us, we will work with them on a minimum program.’

As a matter of fact, even when you were in the Communist Party, the Communist Party from time to time established committees like the—there was a committee on Catholics for Human Rights, which consisted of Communists who had been Catholics, whose purpose it was to work with mass organizations which had a large number of Catholics.

Substantially, Marxism-Leninism denies that there is any soul: that there is any after life; that there is any God. That is part and parcel of the entire theory.<sup>22</sup>

Later, Senator Ferguson followed up this discussion with a further question: “You stated in the beginning that they sometimes compromise with religion.... Now, do they [Communists] ever temporize with one of their principles in order to gain their end?” Dodd responded, “No. This whole question of using ministers or using men of religion to help in many of their causes is just in order to win over more people who are entrenched in the religious life.”<sup>23</sup>

Returning to the Leiningers’ affidavit, it makes further statements that largely pertain to the Leiningers’ interpretation of Dodd’s lecture. I encourage people to read the affidavit in its entirety. It was published either around or shortly after Westerman’s article was published. The copy was

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<sup>21</sup> Herbert Romerstein and Eric Breindel, *The Venona Secrets: Exposing Soviet Espionage and America’s Traitors* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2000).

<sup>22</sup> [Committee](#), 27-28. See also Dodd’s April 25, 1950 testimony before the [Subcommittee](#) for the State Department Employee Loyalty Committee, pages 657-658.

<sup>23</sup> [Committee](#), 29-30.

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dark and somewhat difficult to read.<sup>24</sup> I visited Johnine in 2015 and she provided me with a clearer copy of the affidavit.<sup>25</sup> Due to a long-standing friendship between the Leiningers and the von Hildebrands, Alice von Hildebrand was able to obtain a copy of the affidavit.<sup>26</sup>

## **E) From 2003 to 2020**

After Westerman's article, claims that Communists infiltrated Catholic seminaries and/or the priesthood continued to be passed around in various Catholic circles.<sup>27</sup> The matter regrettably became fodder for conspiracy theories in some areas and took on a life of its own without much critical analysis.<sup>28</sup> For example, some later Internet sources misunderstood the Leiningers' affidavit. They claimed that *Bella Dodd* made the affidavit and that it was *witnessed* by the Leiningers.<sup>29</sup> Some even claimed that Bella Dodd spoke to Congress about placing 1,200 men into Catholic seminaries, although no known record of such a testimony has ever been produced.<sup>30</sup>

The matter arose again in 2016 in an article for *Catholic News Agency* by Dr. Alice von Hildebrand entitled "Recalling a Hero."<sup>31</sup> Among other things, she reiterates her belief that the Church and the seminary system was infiltrated and that "evil men" had infiltrated the Vatican. Presumably, this latter remark was a reference to the four cardinals. Two years later, the matter came back with some force after the revelation of sex abuse perpetrated by Theodore Cardinal McCarrick and the publication of the famous "Testimony" of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. People once again began to ask questions about the origins of clerical sex abuse.<sup>32</sup> The 2019 publication, and subsequent popularity, of Dr. Taylor Marshall's book *Infiltration* also raised awareness of the matter.<sup>33</sup>

### *Summary of Information*

From the evidence we have seen, it is clear that for many people, Bella Dodd made statements pursuant to the infiltration of Catholic seminaries. This infiltration was ordered by Communist authorities who wanted to destroy the Catholic Church from within. These authorities ordered their people to send men into the Catholic seminaries in order to subvert the Church. Bella Dodd became a reference point for this belief as she openly admitted, according to witness testimony, her involvement in the infiltration. We treat this specific belief as separate, though related, to the claim of four cardinals working in the Vatican for Communism.

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<sup>24</sup> Darker copy of the Leiningers' [affidavit](#).

<sup>25</sup> Cleaner copy of the Leiningers' [affidavit](#).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Leininger [died](#) in 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Fr. Mitch Pacwa, without referencing the story of Bella Dodd, discussed the Communists' infiltration in an episode of his *EWTN* program [Threshold of Faith](#) on June 30, 2015 (around the 52:20 mark).

<sup>28</sup> One such example is found in Dr. Taylor Marshall's book *Infiltration* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2019). His analysis of the stories surrounding Dodd is extremely uncritical and even admits false information. For more on this, see the link in footnote 33 to my review of his book.

<sup>29</sup> For one example, see [Abbey Roads](#) web site (July, 2018). See also Jerald James, *The Last Warnings: The Year 2017 and Thereafter* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2017), 66-67.

<sup>30</sup> Eleonore Villarrubia, "[Bella Dodd—From Communist to Catholic](#)." *Catholicism* (August 31, 2010). See also Michael Voris, "[Infiltration!](#)" *Church Militant* (January 29, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Alice von Hildebrand, "[Recalling a Hero](#)." *Catholic News Agency* (April 13, 2016). See also her January [interview](#) with Michael Voris of *Church Militant*.

<sup>32</sup> Iban Thranholm "[Catholic abuse crisis is likely no accident](#)." *Life Site News* (September 17, 2018). Dr. Robert Moynihan, "[Letter #48, 2018: 'Some Enemy has done this'](#)." *Inside the Vatican* (September 1, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Symonds, "[Review of Dr. Taylor Marshall's Infiltration](#)." (May, 2020).

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The authority for the two specific claims of the 1,200 infiltrators and the four cardinals rests not upon any *documented* statements from Dodd directly. They have rested upon the witness of others, namely Alice von Hildebrand and the Leiningers, who claim that they heard Dodd make verbal statements. This state of affairs changed with the publication of Dodd's 1961 Detroit lecture and her statement that she "never met a Communist who was a member of the Catholic clergy." It appears to contradict what has heretofore been claimed about Bella Dodd.

What are we to make of this apparent contradiction between what Dodd herself has stated from what Alice von Hildebrand and the Leiningers have claimed? Now that we have gone over the historical developments and examined the claims, let us begin to try and make sense of everything.

### *Making Sense of Matters*

First, let us recall Dodd's statement during her 1961 lecture in Detroit as I quoted at the beginning of this essay. An astute observer should note that Dodd does *not* deny Communists exist among the Catholic clergy. She stated that she "never met" one but at the same time, also acknowledges "that doesn't mean that they may not be [Communist]." She follows up with the thought that the long years of training in a seminary is a *deterrent* (but not *impossible*) for Communists. It is noteworthy that Dodd follows up her observations with this thought about seminary formation. It is a potential indicator that she was aware that infiltration of seminaries was a possibility.

We should also consider the possibility that Dodd may have made a mental reservation when she said that she "had never met a Communist who was a member of the Catholic clergy." If the claim is that she put 1,200 men into the seminaries, these men were not yet clergymen. She may have had contact with these men at the beginning (i.e., prior to ordination), but afterward, at least some may have been ordained, and she might not have had contact with them. Therefore, she can say with honesty that she "never met" someone who was a Communist and a member of the clergy.

Dodd's statement also seems to question Alice von Hildebrand's claim (supported by the Leiningers) that Dodd had "contact" with the four cardinals, while at the same time asserting that she "never met a Communist who was a member of the Catholic clergy." We also noted earlier that Alice von Hildebrand did not state that Dodd had physically met the four cardinals.<sup>34</sup> While these statements seem, on their face, to be contradictory, it is just barely possible to reconcile them. This is suggested, when listening to the recording, by Dodd's pauses throughout, almost as if she was thinking carefully about what to say and being deliberate in her choice of words.

As a trained lawyer, Dodd knew well to be careful about what remarks could or could not be made in the public forum. She noted this very point in another lecture that she gave in Omaha, Nebraska on May 14, 1962. In speaking about the identity of a publisher, Dodd stated: "I'm not going to mention the man's name publicly because I'm a lawyer and I don't want to get sued in a libel suit. Because even though I'm telling the truth, a libel suit is an expensive thing to defend. If you want his name privately, nobody around, I'll tell you his name."<sup>35</sup> It is clear, then, that Dodd was more comfortable revealing seemingly more sensitive information in private settings.

What about the 1,200 or so men that Dodd allegedly put into the seminaries? It would be beyond reasonable to state that Dodd did not know and meet with at least *some* of these men. The

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<sup>34</sup> This interpretation would have to be weighed against Dodd's own usage of the term "contacts" (Cf. Dodd, 52, 67, 74, 96, 97, 122, 123, 164, 172, 201, 210, 212, 230, and 234).

<sup>35</sup> See the earlier cited Episode #209 of "The Patrick Coffin Show" around the 47:38 mark.

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force of the testimonies from von Hildebrand and the Leiningers, as well as the sheer number itself, leave no room to doubt such a personal association. To this thought, we would do well to return to Dodd's last statement in her Detroit lecture about the long years of preparation.

If Dodd could state publicly that she never met a Communist who was a Catholic cleric, does that mean that any man she helped to put into the seminary did not, in fact, get ordained? Or, if a man she helped get into the seminary *did* get ordained, did the seminary training convert him from Communism? We saw in the *Christian Order* article that all of these men presumably were ordained and started to work towards the Church's destruction. That is, however, not a foregone conclusion. Dodd's Detroit lecture indicates that the number of *actual* infiltrators might have been comparatively smaller than what was previously envisioned.

Let us also consider the distinction between a nonparty Bolshevik and a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. The two groups, we saw, were not exactly the same even if they have some association with one another and in various degrees. Dodd is said to have put 1,100 or 1,200 men into the seminaries, but were they card-carrying members of the Communist Party or were they nonparty Bolsheviks? If it was the latter, then Dodd can answer exactly as she did in her Detroit lecture: "I never met a Communist who was a member of the Catholic clergy."

If we make this last distinction, what about the Leiningers' precise claim that it was "party members" who "were to be planted in seminaries and within diocesan organizations?" Would our present distinction be a contradiction of the Leiningers' claim? Not necessarily. The Leiningers did not specify exactly *how* this planting took place.

Earlier in their affidavit, the Leiningers said that part of the Communist plan of infiltrating organizations was to have "key people" controlling the "agenda" that was to be "implemented on unsuspecting collaborators." Seminarians are not "key people" in strategically-placed positions of power. Rather, the *formators* in a seminary have that kind of influence. If a priest or even a bishop had become a Communist and enjoyed one of these positions, then the Leiningers' claim is intact. First-hand testimony from Bella Dodd herself supports this observation.

On September 9, 1952, Dodd explained to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee how the general idea of Communism's influence worked. In the context of the subject of education, Dodd was asked by Senator Homer Ferguson, "You mentioned that you think there were about 1,500 Communist teachers in the United States. Now, we have thousands of teachers. What influence could 1,500 teachers have among the many thousands?" Dodd responded as follows:

As a matter of fact, you have over a million teachers in America, and, by and large, your schools are not manned by Communists. The Communist influence is important only where it is strategically placed, and no Communist is ever satisfied with remaining in a position of inferiority. He seeks a strategic position.

If you had Communists in these schools of education, that is a very strategic position because not only are they affecting the philosophy of education but they are also teaching other teachers, who, in turn, are teaching the pupils.

If you have one Communist teacher in the school of education, and he teaches, let's say, 300 teachers, who then go out all over the United States, that is a strategic position.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> [Committee](#), 18.

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Dodd's testimony, while about education, seems applicable to the subject of the infiltration of the Church. One does not need to have 1,200 card-carrying Communists studying for the Catholic priesthood in order to cause damage later to the Church. All that would be necessary are a few *strategically-placed* Communists within the seminary system who could exercise their influence upon unsuspecting men (especially seminarians themselves). Now, if some of these men were "young radicals" or nonparty Bolsheviks or just simple "idealists," then that influence would be strongly asserted over them. The strategically-placed Communist would find such men and use them to work his agenda.

This interpretation may seem far-fetched, but is supported by Dodd's September 9, 1952 testimony. She spoke about how a Communist "was dedicated to building a unit" that "consists of a minimum of three people." She continued, "If you found two or three or four or five people, then you attached yourself to those [people], and you began to work on them day after day after day. You socialized with them, you made it your business to socialize with them. You made it your business to take them to lunch. And then you weeded out those who were not possible and those who were possible." Once the commitment was made, the unit became established.<sup>37</sup>

How might this system look within a seminary? Strategically-placed Communists might be able to accept men into the seminaries who are unfit for the priesthood but who might serve the ends of Communism. The Communist could also protect these seminarians should any suspicion be cast upon them. They could also teach bad theology, philosophy or pastoral practices in an effort to "disorient" the seminarian from Catholic orthodoxy and orthopraxy. After their ordination, these men would go out and influence others not necessarily with the Faith of the Catholic Church, but with a secular mindset they learned in seminary.

Concerning the strategically-placed Communist, such a man might himself attain some prestige and be promoted to higher office, such as the episcopate. In that case, he would hold *tremendous* power within a diocese. If he was a respected man on the national scene, he could hold considerable influence within a national episcopal conference through influencing policy and practice. In either case, what we see developing is a self-referential system. It springs up, grows and expands the influence of bad ideas and practices, the consequences of which would be disastrous within the life of the Church wherever this negative influence extends.

These considerations, however, are a little further down the road than our present focus of making sense of Bella Dodd's remarks in her Detroit lecture. Let us return to that focus.

From what we have seen thus far, it is apparent that Dodd was not comfortable publicly talking in her Detroit lecture about Catholic clerics who were Communists. Why, then, would she feel comfortable doing so some years later in Orange County, California?<sup>38</sup> In order for us to answer this question, it seems best to recall the fact that we are addressing two specific claims: that Bella Dodd encouraged or put men into Catholic seminaries and that there were four cardinals working for Communism at the Vatican. The first claim can be excluded from our consideration here.

Recall that the question posed to Dodd was if she had met a Communist who was a member of the Catholic clergy and if they were ever exposed.<sup>39</sup> If Dodd only encouraged men to go *into* the seminaries, then they were not clergymen at the time of her association with them. Moreover,

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<sup>37</sup> [Committee](#), 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> We can exclude from this question remarks made *privately* to Alice and Dietrich von Hildebrand.

<sup>39</sup> Nowhere in her answer did Dodd address the second part of the question.

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it is not established that they were even Communists. Thus, the question does not touch upon Dodd's encouragement and she could answer accordingly.

Concerning the matter of the four cardinals, the question posed to Dodd would be germane to her association with them. There is, however, the unresolved matter of whether or not Dodd had ever physically met the four cardinals—putting aside for the moment the possibility they may have never existed in the first place. Had she met them in person and still answered that she had never met a Communist who was a Catholic clergyman, then that makes her statement much harder to understand. If she had never physically met them, then there is no real difficulty.

Suppose, however, that Dodd had met them. Could one reconcile what she said in Detroit with the fact of her having met them? It is possible to understand differently the sense of Dodd's remark. She may have been referring to how a *true* Catholic cleric cannot *actually* be a Communist (or, for that matter, any kind of socialist) at the same time. The terms are mutually exclusive, making a person one or the other but not both.

Pope Pius XI famously declared in his 1931 Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, "No one can simultaneously be a good Catholic and a true socialist."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Dodd made use of this distinction in her mind to formulate her answer? In accordance then with the *precise question* posed to her, Dodd could have answered the way that she did and still not be beholden to reveal the fact of her knowledge about the four cardinals. In other contexts, she might have done so for other reasons.

Consider as well that the Leiningers do not give a date for Dodd's talk in Orange County. Dodd died in 1969. If this talk occurred near the end of her life, perhaps Dodd knew her death was approaching? Perhaps she realized that her past discretion was no longer necessary and decided to be frank? Based upon currently insufficient documentation, this, too, can only be a hypothesis.

On a completely separate note, I would like to offer some thoughts about Bella Dodd's silence in the public forum about the identities of the four cardinals. Outside of her being a lawyer and, in consequence, her professional necessity for public discretion, there are some spiritual factors to consider regarding her claims or those ascribed to her. Alice von Hildebrand revealed that Archbishop Sheen had forbidden Dodd to reveal the names of the four cardinals. In the Catholic tradition, there is something to be said for obedience to one's spiritual director. Also, consider Dr. von Hildebrand's revelation about Dodd wanting to live a penitential life.<sup>41</sup> Dodd may have obeyed Sheen's mandate as an act of penance.

In that light, one cannot help but wonder if Dodd was living a life of heroic virtue. She was a gifted speaker and yet forced by Sheen's alleged mandate to deny that fact of her person and character. Dodd could have "spilled the beans" and done a lot of good for the Church by identifying the cardinals. That she would not act upon such a good could be an indication that there was a higher good or aim that she had in mind. Her contrition, as well as her desire for penance and mortification, would be enough to explain her silence.

Lastly, Sheen may have forbidden Dodd from *publicly* identifying these cardinals, but that does not mean that *private* communications were not made. Sheen had his own Vatican contacts and a good relationship with Pope Pius XII, so it is possible that such communications took place.

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<sup>40</sup> "Nemo potest simul catholicus probus esse et veri nominis socialista." Pope Pius XI Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 23 [1931], 216).

<sup>41</sup> For more on Bella Dodd's repentance, see [Committee](#), 18-19.

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We are, however, still too close to the events of this era of history and the documentation is not yet available to historians and researchers. It shall remain, for the time being, an open question.

## *Conclusion*

Bella Dodd's newly-restored remarks from her 1961 Detroit lecture present a challenge for Catholics who believe that Bella Dodd helped to infiltrate Catholic seminaries. The challenge forces them to look at underlying presumptions, as well as take a highly critical view towards the sources. Those sources have largely rested upon the good reputation of Alice von Hildebrand, herself a titan in Catholic life and thought. Truth, however, is above a person's reputation.

The facts, as they presently stand, indicate that the claims of Dr. Alice von Hildebrand and her friends Johnine and Paul Leininger are not necessarily *contradicted* by Dodd's 1961 Detroit lecture. We must, however, reconsider how we think about the matter. The best way to do this is by informing ourselves of the facts and understanding the larger historical picture while acknowledging that there is much yet to be discovered.

Even more than half a century after her death, Bella Dodd remains a relatively obscure person. She lived a tremendous life and yet the known facts about her are few. Much work remains to be done to help people understand, to the extent possible, the valid realities of her life and person. I am encouraged by the efforts of Dr. Mary Nicholas in this regard. Until, however, such a time arrives when more is known about Dodd and she is better understood, interested persons would be wise to exercise caution and discretion when making assessments in her regard.

## **Bella Dodd Documents:**

[\*School of Darkness\*](#) (1954)

[\*A Call to Action\*](#) (November, 1963)

## **Bella Dodd Testimonies Before Congress:**

[April 25, 1950](#)

[September 8 and 9, 1952](#)

[March 10, 1953](#)

[May 4, 1953](#)

[November 16, 1953](#)

[August 13, 1954](#) (page 645)

[June 14, 1956](#)