

Clergy Wary of CIA

By Marjorie Hyer
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"Come back in three days," the nun, supervisor of the little Chilean school, told the American priest.

The priest, a missionary of the Maryknoll order, was seeking answers to usually inoffensive school census-type questions for Chilean Roman Catholic bishops.

When he returned three days later, the nun was apologetic. "I am sorry, but the teachers and the parents of the children have told me not to answer your questions," she said.

"They think you are from the CIA."

That was in 1971, two years before the Chilean government of the late Salvador Allende—Latin America's first popularly elected Marxist president—was toppled from power and three years before President Ford denied any U.S. role in the coup but acknowledged and defended covert activities by the Central Intelligence Agency in Chile.

"The climate of suspicion is very real in Latin America," said the priest, Charles Curry, now based in Washington, D.C., as he recalled the 1971 encounter.

Far from being a CIA operative, Father Curry now spends much of his time trying to deal with problems of CIA relationship to churches. He is a leader of an ad hoc coalition of Protestant and Catholic mission groups.

The CIA's relations with church groups is one of the areas that Sen. Frank Church's (D-Idaho) committee on intelligence expects to look into "in due course," committee spokesman Spencer Davis said last week.

The churches' problems with the CIA fall into several categories: use of mission programs as a conduit for CIA funds; use of missionaries, with or without their knowledge, as intelligence sources, and what Father Curry calls "harassment" of missionaries in the field.

The last category usually involves social reform projects undertaken by progressive missionaries in countries controlled by political regimes that church leaders view as repressive but which are friendly to the United States.

A current complaint—one Father Curry referred to

Church's committee—involves a situation in Bolivia.

In May, Ambassador William P. Stedman Jr. canceled a scheduled discussion with about 50 Maryknoll missionaries in Cochabamba when the missionaries objected to the presence of another U.S. embassy official who accompanied the ambassador.

The missionaries were convinced that the second man, John LaMazza, listed on the embassy roster as a labor official, was a CIA agent.

LaMazza had been named as a CIA collaborator in a document circulated earlier in Bolivian church circles. The document, which allegedly originated within the Bolivian government, outlined a suggested plan of attack against progressive forces in the Roman Catholic Church.

The document stated that the CIA was involved in the plan to arrest and discredit progressive clergy by promising to "provide full information on certain priests, especially those from the U.S.A." The document called LaMazza "very helpful" in this operation.

"The CIA's collaboration with foreign governments in repressing their own people is highly questionable in itself," Father Curry told Sen. Church in requesting the Senate committee to investigate.

"But because our government's mission in foreign countries is charged with protecting the security and interests of American citizens there, the CIA's action directed against those very American citizens is doubly questionable," he said.

Church sources estimate there are more than 42,000 Americans, Protestant and Catholic, serving as missionaries in other countries.

John Marks, former State Department intelligence officer who coauthored "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence," has charged that since its beginning in 1947, the CIA has used religious leaders as information sources.

"A lot of people are willing to cooperate," said the Rev. William Wiplfner of New York, who heads the Latin American working group of the National Council of Churches. "You can't damn the CIA for talking to anybody who's willing."

As early as 1967, the National Council of Churches, whose membership includes most of the main Protestant and orthodox denominations, formally frowned on such conversations.

The Rev. Dr. David M. Stowe, then the council's overseas mission boss, last week took from his files a copy of a policy statement that said, in part, that "as a



DR. DAVID M. STOWE
 ... cites '67 policy

matter of policy," NCC disapproved of staff members "reporting to CIA agents or entering into any other involvement with the CIA."

Dr. Stowe, mission executive for the United Church of Christ, said the statement was "circulated to member denominations" of the NCC but as far as he knows, none adopted it.

Early last month, representatives of nearly a score of Protestant and Catholic groups came together at Father Curry's invitation to explore a possible "code of ethics" for missionaries in dealing with the CIA.

Church mission leaders queried last week about encounters with the CIA were reluctant to talk. But conversations confirmed that CIA approaches were not uncommon.

The experience of Missionary A., appears to be typical:

Mr. A. has been back in a U.S. city about a week when he received a phone call and was asked to come downtown to "discuss something."

The caller, who said he was with "the government," said it had something to do with Country X, the Latin American nation where Mr. and Mrs. A. had served for a number of years.

At the designated address downtown, behind an unmarked door, Mr. A. was ushered into the office of a man who said he was from the CIA.

"As you know, there's an American corporation in your community (in Country X) and we're very concerned about what's happening down there," the CIA agent began.

The CIA agent, Mr. A. recalled, "had a folder in front of him with my name on it, and it was quite full. He also assured me he was a member of my denomination and casually mentioned the names of former associates of mine—ministers here in the States."

Mr. A. said he refused to inform on the people in

Approaches

Country X who had been his parishioners.

A few weeks later, the family moved to another city. One evening, a woman who said she was a CIA agent called on Mr. and Mrs. A seeking information about Country X. She, too, was rebuffed.

John Marks believes that such CIA practices could be "stopped in a week" if U.S. church leaders strongly spoke out against it.

Rev. Dr. Eugene Stockwell, overseas mission head of the National Council of Churches, disagrees.

"I don't think the CIA will be that responsive to any statement we make," he said.

Father Curry has raised the question of "legislation to prohibit the CIA from operating in a covert way . . . so that any contact they make must be made public."

In the long run, however, he believes that the "education" of missionaries might be more effective.

"It's important to know what the CIA is doing, to be more knowledgeable about what they are up to" so missionaries can be more discreet, he said.

In the past, the CIA has funded church programs individuals viewed as furthering U.S. policy.

One example is the Rev. Roger Vekemans, a Belgian sociologist sent by the Jesuit General, worldwide head of the order, to Chile in 1957 to help stop the advancing Marxist tide of Allende.

Father Vekemans developed a network of cultural and social agencies aimed at strengthening the Christian Democratic Party and destroying the effectiveness of the Marxists.

By 1963, Vekemans Center for the Economic and Social Development of Latin America controlled allocations of \$25 million a year, he told an interviewer.

Of that amount, \$5 million came from the International Development Foundation, an agency revealed in 1967 to be wholly subsidized by the CIA.

Father Vekemans' operation is detailed in a David E. Mutchler's "The Church as a Political Factor in Latin America."

Although the book was published in 1971, an account of the CIA funding of the Jesuit was largely ignored until the recent flurry of interest in the CIA.

Thomas Quigley, Latin America expert for the U.S. Catholic Conference, believes that the days of such practices are over.

"I don't think that kind of large funding is around anymore," he said.

Despite their reluctance to talk about their encounters with the CIA, religious leaders are keeping a careful watch on probes into the agency.

In October, after President Ford defended covert CIA activities in Chile, angry representatives of 16 Catholic and Protestant mission agencies sent him an open letter.

Calling his defense of the CIA "immoral," they charged that "CIA covert actions in the Third World frequently support undemocratic governments which trample on the rights of their own people . . ."

"Gangster methods undermine world order and promote widespread hatred of the United States," they said.

Though the ad hoc coalition of Protestant and Catholic mission groups, Father Curry said he expected to "keep a collective eye" on the situation and to remain alert for abuses "now that we have a new consciousness of the problem, now that we know what the CIA is up to."