

# “THE CATHOLIC SPY”

Jonathan Pollard is serving time for spying for Israel. He happens to be Jewish. Robert Hanssen is accused of spying for the Soviet Union and is awaiting trial. He happens to be Catholic. But from the vantage of the media, “happens to be” applies only to Pollard: Hanssen is fast-becoming known as “the Catholic spy.”

Never have we seen such a media fixation on any person accused of a crime whose religion bears absolutely no relation to his status than Robert Hanssen. From the way his Catholicity has been hyped, it would be entirely understandable if unreflective persons concluded that Hanssen’s religion partly explained his alleged wrongdoing. Yet it is supposed to be Hanssen who is on trial, not his religion.

Take, for example, *Newsweek*, a magazine that we have rarely complained about (by contrast, we have often complained about *Time*). Its March 5 story spoke of Hanssen’s affiliation with “a powerful and secretive Roman Catholic order, Opus Dei.” Regarding his need for money, the article says Hanssen “may have worried about tuition payments for his six Catholic-school-educated children.” Moreover, we learn that someone who knew him in the past thought of him as someone “who looked liked an altar boy.” Meaning what we have no idea.

Hanssen, the piece continues, is a convert who “became an ardent Catholic.” After mentioning Hanssen’s involvement in Opus Dei again, it offers that “fellow Catholics sometimes find Opus Dei members to be a little spooky and holier-than-thou.”

It was not surprising, then, that in the letters that followed the article, some would object to *Newsweek*’s obsession with Hanssen’s religion. But it is also true that the article brought out the worst in some people. Consider what Lars

Straeter of Dortmund, Germany, said.

“What I found more disturbing than the news story that there was another spy in the FBI,” writes Straeter, “was finding out how strong an influence the notorious Opus Dei has on the FBI and its members. It’s disgusting that FBI Director Louis Freeh is affiliated with this deeply antidemocratic organization.” He then unloaded with this gem: “Why complain about Robert Hanssen’s spying for the KGB if the FBI’s headquarters is in the pope’s hands?”

Imagine the reaction if someone said that because a Jewish person (Jonathan Pollard) works for the U.S. Navy while spying for Israel that it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Navy is in the hands of “the Jews.” Furthermore, imagine the reaction if this were submitted to *Newsweek* for publication. Is there anyone who doubts that it would never see the light of day?

Just as it is wrong to dub Pollard “a Jewish spy,” it is wrong to tag Hanssen “a Catholic spy.” Yet in today’s milieu, only the former strikes the media as being unfair. Which is why we have our work cut out for ourselves.