

American Christianity as a Cold War Political Instrument (1945–1970)

During the early Cold War, certain religious movements and networks were co-opted or self-driven to serve explicitly political and geopolitical ends. This chapter examines three influential examples – Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church, the secretive Fellowship Foundation (“The Family”), and the Catholic organization Opus Dei – to illustrate how American (and allied) Christianity was transformed into a political instrument against communism. We fact-check key claims about their theology, operations, and ties to intelligence and policy, clarifying which popular notions are supported by evidence.

The Unification Church: Rev. Moon’s Anti-Communist Crusade

Founding Theology and Anti-Communist Alignment: The Unification Church was founded in South Korea in 1954 by Rev. **Sun Myung Moon**, whose *Divine Principle* teachings blended messianic Christianity with Korean nationalism. Moon claimed to be chosen by God to complete Jesus’ unfinished work and establish God’s kingdom on earth. A central tenet of his ideology was fierce anti-communism: Moon taught that **communism was a satanic ideology** that had to be defeated as a prerequisite for world salvation ¹. This spiritual stance dovetailed neatly with U.S. Cold War aims. Moon’s movement arose just after the Korean War, and he explicitly positioned his church as an ideological bulwark against communist North Korea and global Marxism. By the late 1960s, the Unification Church even launched an ideological arm called the **International Federation for Victory Over Communism (IFVOC)** (1968) to promulgate fervently anti-communist doctrine ² ³.

Ties to the KCIA and U.S. Intelligence: Newly declassified evidence strongly supports claims that the Unification Church was **entangled with the South Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA)** from its early years. A February 1963 CIA information report revealed that “*the Unification Church was ‘organized’ by retired Brig. Gen. Kim Jong Pil, the founder and first director of the South Korean CIA (KCIA). Kim...has been using the Church, which has a membership of 27,000, as a political tool*” ⁴. Kim Jong Pil – a key architect of Gen. Park Chung Hee’s 1961 coup – apparently saw Moon’s church as a useful vehicle for anti-communist mobilization and political influence ⁵. Indeed, in May 1963 the new military government in Seoul officially registered the Unification Church as a religious organization (after initial hesitance), suggesting tacit state approval of Moon’s activities ⁶. Moon’s close collaborator, Col. **Bo Hi Pak**, was himself a Korean army officer who joined the church in 1957 and, in 1961, was posted to Washington, D.C. as a military attaché **liaising between the KCIA and U.S. intelligence** while also quietly recruiting for Moon’s movement ⁷. Multiple South Korean intelligence officers became involved with Moon’s group; for example, Pak’s friend Kim Sang In joined the KCIA and served as Kim Jong Pil’s interpreter before later working for Moon ⁸. These overlapping roles indicate a **pattern of Moon’s church serving as an international political proxy** for Seoul’s intelligence apparatus.

American authorities grew concerned about these ties in the 1970s. A U.S. House investigation (Fraser Committee) found “*reliable information that [Moon] and organizations connected with him maintained operational ties with the government of South Korea, and specifically the Korean Central Intelligence Agency.*” ⁹ ¹⁰ The committee uncovered evidence that the KCIA had even **financed and directed Moon’s activities in the United States**, including a Moon-organized 1974 campaign to support President Nixon during the Watergate scandal ¹¹ ¹². Moon’s “National Prayer and Fast Committee,”

which staged pro-Nixon rallies in Washington, D.C., was apparently suggested by Korean intelligence to bolster a U.S. president seen as crucial to Seoul ¹¹ ¹². Moon's top aide Pak Bo Hi was identified as the key liaison between the church and the KCIA ¹². These findings (later corroborated by press reports and CIA memos) substantiate the claim that the Unification Church **operated in tandem with South Korean intelligence** – effectively functioning as an influence arm of an American-allied regime ¹³ ⁵. In Moon's defense, church officials denied being anyone's agent but "God's," and indeed no formal prosecution ensued ¹⁴. Nevertheless, the historical record clearly shows significant coordination with intelligence services, validating the characterization of Moon's church as a Cold War political instrument.

Political and Business Operations in the U.S. and Abroad: Under these auspices, the Unification Church rapidly expanded its footprint in America from the 1960s onward. After incorporation in the U.S. in 1963, Moon's followers established myriad front groups, businesses, and media enterprises that advanced his politico-religious aims. By the 1970s, the church owned fishing companies, real estate, and even arms-manufacturing concerns (Tongil Group in Korea), using commercial profits and devoted donations (especially from Japan) to bankroll its activities ¹⁵ ¹⁶. Moon's enterprises always served a dual purpose: economic self-sufficiency and political influence. Nowhere was this more evident than in **media holdings**. In 1982 (just after our period, but as a direct outcome of 1970s efforts), Moon founded *The Washington Times*, an English-language daily in the U.S. capital, to champion conservative and anti-communist perspectives ¹⁷. The paper was explicitly created as a counterweight to the perceived liberal bias of mainstream media like *The Washington Post*, which Moon's followers resented for helping oust Nixon ¹⁸. Col. Pak Bo Hi, Moon's "ubiquitous henchman," launched *The Washington Times* with **massive subsidies (estimated \$150 million in losses underwritten in the first few years)** – money largely raised from Japanese church members through aggressive fundraising schemes ¹⁶. President Ronald Reagan eagerly welcomed this support: Reagan **praised the Times** and read it daily throughout his presidency, saying "*The American people know the truth – you, my friends at The Washington Times, have told it to them.*" ¹⁸ ¹⁹ The paper's staunch anti-Soviet, pro-military editorial line endeared it to U.S. conservatives, illustrating how Moon leveraged media ownership to shape public discourse in alignment with U.S. Cold War objectives.

Beyond media, Moon's network ran **influence campaigns and front organizations across the globe**. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the church's political arm **CAUSA International** (founded 1980) became active in Latin America, coordinating with U.S. covert operations against leftist movements ²⁰ ²¹. Investigative reporting by Jack Anderson in 1984 confirmed that "*in Central America...it is sometimes difficult to distinguish CIA operatives from Rev. Moon's disciples,*" who worked "*in harness*" against the *Sandinista government of Nicaragua* ²² ²³. CAUSA staff in Honduras provided material aid to Nicaraguan Contra rebels (cash, supplies, even uniforms) and funded trips of rebel leaders to Washington ²⁴ ²⁵ – effectively "**privatizing**" aspects of U.S. foreign policy after Congress cut off official Contra funding ²⁵. Such activities were not idle boasts; multiple Contra fighters were seen wearing CAUSA gear, and Moon's organization set up relief fronts for Contra families ²⁴ ²⁵. In one striking case, Moon's church **airlifted supplies to Contra camps** just as U.S. government aid ceased, prompting a Pentagon analyst to warn the White House that the "CIA-Moonie connection" could become a scandal ²¹ ²⁵. Clearly, the Unification Church by the 1970s had grown into a *transnational political machine*, operating businesses, media, and charities that advanced U.S. and allied anti-communist efforts from Asia to the Americas.

Relationships with Politicians and Influence Efforts: Rev. Moon assiduously cultivated ties with prominent right-wing and conservative figures in many countries, including the United States. In 1974, as mentioned, Moon organized mass rallies in support of **President Nixon**, framing the Watergate impeachment push as a satanic communist plot and calling on Americans to "forgive, love and unite" behind Nixon ¹¹. (The Fraser investigation suggested South Korean officials had a hand in prompting Moon's pro-Nixon campaign ²⁶.) Later, Moon befriended the Reagan administration – not only through

media support but via direct personal outreach. He hosted lavish banquets and “World Anti-Communist League” conferences attended by U.S. conservatives and foreign anti-Communist fighters. In fact, Moon’s representatives became regular fixtures at the **World Anti-Communist League (WACL)**, a global alliance of anti-communist groups founded in 1966 by Taiwan and South Korea ²⁷. By the 1980s, WACL’s conferences saw Moon’s aides rubbing shoulders with U.S. military veterans, Central American paramilitary leaders, and right-wing politicians ²⁸ ²⁹. Such networking gave Moon’s church access to influential circles and further legitimation in the eyes of Cold Warriors. Even beyond 1970, Moon leveraged relationships with figures like former Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke **Kishi** (grandfather of Abe Shinzō) – who had helped Moon’s church establish in Japan in the ’60s – to perform diplomatic favors. In 1984, Kishi personally wrote to President Reagan imploring clemency for Moon’s tax conviction, lauding Reagan for fighting “*New Deal policies...derived from Marxism*” ³⁰ ³¹. This extraordinary plea (from a staunch anti-communist ally) underscores how Moon’s religious movement had become entwined with high-level **political lobbying and influence operations** spanning the Pacific.

Clarifying Myths: One popular claim is that Rev. Moon himself was a direct **CIA agent**. There’s no evidence Moon was ever on the CIA payroll; however, substantial evidence indicates **Moon acted as an unofficial asset or proxy**, cooperating with intelligence-connected figures (KCIA and possibly CIA liaisons) in furtherance of shared goals ¹² ²². The oft-repeated statement that “*Moon’s church was founded by KCIA director Kim Jong Pil*” originates from the CIA’s 1963 field report ⁵. While the church rejects this characterization (Bo Hi Pak derided it as Congress “christening us as KCIA tools” ³²), historians note that the early alliance with Kim Jong Pil was real – though “founded” might overstate it, since Moon had begun his ministry in the late 1940s. A more precise reading is that **Moon’s movement was co-opted by the Park regime** around 1961–63, rather than literally created by it ⁵ ³³. Another contested claim is the extent of Unification Church involvement in illicit finance (e.g. drug money laundering). Investigations in Uruguay did reveal suspicious deposits by Japanese Moon followers that infused tens of millions of dollars into a church-owned bank ¹⁵ ³⁴. While speculation abounds, hard proof of drug ties is scant. What is documented is the **global flow of funds** from Japan to U.S. and Latin American Moon projects, often in cash, which certainly enabled political ventures like *The Washington Times* ³⁵ ¹⁶. In sum, the Unification Church of the Cold War era stands out as a new religious movement **thoroughly enmeshed in geopolitical intrigue**: it espoused a fervently anti-communist theology aligning with U.S. ideology, forged alliances with intelligence services, built media and business empires to sway public opinion, and acted as a quasi-political actor on the world stage ¹⁰ ²¹.

The Family (Fellowship Foundation): Elite Networks and “Spiritual Diplomacy”

Vereide’s Vision – Ministry to the “Up and Out”: The Fellowship Foundation, informally known as “The Family,” originated in 1935 when Norwegian immigrant **Abraham Vereide**, a Methodist minister, received what he described as a divine vision in Seattle. Vereide believed God wanted him to **redirect Christianity’s focus to society’s elites** – the “up and out” rather than the down-and-out ³⁶ ³⁷. Troubled by the Depression-era growth of labor unions and socialist influences, Vereide saw organized labor and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal as subversive, “un-American” forces undermining Christian civilization ³⁸ ³⁹. In response, he gathered 19 businessmen in Seattle for an early-morning prayer breakfast in April 1935 ⁴⁰. These exclusive prayer meetings – pointedly held outside of churches and limited to powerful men – aimed to form **a network of Christian businessmen and public officials united against class warfare and secularism** ⁴¹. Vereide’s founding theology was unabashedly elitist and **anti-labor**: he taught that God’s will was better served by influencing “key men” in positions of authority, who could in turn shape society in Christian terms ⁴¹ ⁴². As one scholar notes, he enlisted wealthy executives to pray for a solution to “the organized labor problem,” convinced that only by

reconciling capitalism with faith (and crushing labor radicalism) could America be saved ⁴³ ³⁸ . This ethos – sometimes described as “Jesus plus nothing” except power – laid the groundwork for a transpartisan, transnational ministry to the **rich and influential** ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ .

National Prayer Breakfast as Political Tool: From these humble beginnings, Vereide’s movement spread to other cities and eventually the halls of power in Washington. By 1942–43, he had established prayer groups in the U.S. House and Senate ⁴⁶ . In 1953, with backing from sympathetic members of Congress and evangelist Billy Graham, Vereide organized the first **Presidential Prayer Breakfast** (later renamed the National Prayer Breakfast) in Washington, D.C. ⁴⁷ . President Eisenhower initially hesitated to attend, wary of mixing faith and governance, but Graham persuaded him, and Ike delivered remarks on the necessity of prayer ⁴⁸ . Thus began a tradition: every U.S. president since has participated at least once ⁴⁹ . The National Prayer Breakfast (NPB) became an annual February gathering of some 3,000 political, business, and religious leaders from around the world ⁵⁰ . While outwardly a benign, non-partisan event of fellowship, historians observe that from the start the NPB was **“an institutional tool for political and corporate influence.”** It was the public tip of an iceberg: behind the scenes, the Family used the breakfasts to draw foreign leaders, U.S. politicians, and business magnates into private off-site meetings and **“prayer cells”** where relationships – and deals – could be forged away from scrutiny ⁵¹ ⁵² . Indeed, the NPB’s true purpose, as Family insiders admit, was to recruit powerful attendees into more frequent, intimate gatherings where they could *“meet Jesus man to man.”* ⁵⁰ These small circles of the high and mighty, bound by shared faith, provided a channel for **“shadow diplomacy” and networking outside official protocols** ⁵² ⁵³ . One journalist aptly described the Prayer Breakfast as *“an international influence-peddling bazaar”* where foreign dignitaries pay lobbyists hefty sums to secure an invitation ⁵⁴ . In short, the Family transformed prayer into a currency of soft power, leveraging religion to create **backdoor links among global elites**.

Doug Coe and Global Expansion: After Abraham Vereide died in 1969, leadership passed to his protégé **Douglas “Doug” Coe**, a quiet but extraordinarily well-connected figure. Coe took the Fellowship’s creed of **“ministering to the powerful”** to new heights. Under Coe (who led until his death in 2017), the Fellowship Foundation greatly expanded its international reach. By the 1970s, Coe and his associates were globe-trotting “ambassadors of faith,” cultivating personal relationships with presidents, prime ministers, generals, and businessmen on every continent ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ . Coe believed in building **“friendships” with key leaders** irrespective of their political system – often preferring those wielding unrestrained power. *“We work with power where we can, build new power where we can’t,”* Coe liked to say ⁵⁷ . In practice, this meant **befriending authoritarian rulers** so long as they were anti-communist and open to Fellowship influence. During the 1960s–70s, the Family quietly forged ties with some of the most staunchly anti-communist (and often dictatorial) regimes in the developing world ⁵⁸ . For example, in **Indonesia**, after General **Suharto** seized power in a bloody 1965 coup (killing hundreds of thousands accused of communism), the Family helped organize a prayer group for dozens of Indonesian legislators under Suharto’s patronage ⁵⁸ . In **Brazil**, during the military dictatorship of Gen. Costa e Silva (1967–69), the Fellowship supported regular fellowship meetings for Latin American leaders, implicitly sanctioning the regime’s hardline anti-communism ⁵⁸ . Coe or his deputies would visit these strongmen, share prayer, and offer the Fellowship’s services as a **moral-confidential conduit to Washington**.

Through the late Cold War, Coe’s group brokered remarkable behind-the-scenes contacts. At the 1978 NPB, Coe facilitated a *“secret” prayer summit* that helped President Carter initiate a worldwide call to prayer with Egypt’s Anwar Sadat and Israel’s Menachem Begin, softening the ground for Middle East peace talks ⁵⁹ . Such benign mediation was the exception; more often the Fellowship’s efforts aligned with **U.S. covert policy goals**. In Africa, Coe’s emissaries reached out to the likes of Gen. **Siad Barre** of Somalia – a Soviet-aligned dictator whom the U.S. later courted. In 1981, Family members acted as intermediaries between Barre and pro-Western Kenyan leader Daniel arap Moi, arranging their

meeting; soon after, the U.S. dramatically boosted military aid to Somalia as it flipped to the American side ⁶⁰ ⁶¹ . The Fellowship liaison “greased” this diplomatic shift under a spiritual pretext, a contribution Sharlet caustically calls *“the Family’s gift to Somalia,”* noting Barre’s U.S.-backed rule ended in ruin and civil war ⁶⁰ ⁶¹ . In another case, the Fellowship maintained ties with Indonesian President Suharto even as his army brutally occupied East Timor in 1975. Rather than press human rights, Coe’s representatives saw Suharto as a fellow “key man” and apparently **turned a blind eye to atrocities** – viewing them as collateral in an anti-communist crusade ⁶² . These examples illustrate how Coe internationalized The Family: by the 1980s, it was a **global web of personal relationships among the powerful**, all pledged to a vague devotion to Jesus that conveniently aligned with American geopolitical interests (anti-communism, capitalist development) ⁶³ ⁶⁴ .

Ideological Messaging – “Jesus Plus Nothing” and Authoritarian Admiration: The Family’s theology stripped Christianity to its bare essentials in order to appeal across denominational and national lines. Coe preached a concept of *“Jesus plus nothing”* – meaning Jesus’ authority was all that mattered, unencumbered by church doctrine or democratic values ⁶⁵ . In practice, Coe and Vereide cultivated what has been described as a **“peculiarly authoritarian vision of Jesus”** ⁶³ . They often cited examples of strong, unhesitating loyalty – even in evil causes – as models for Christian discipleship. In a chilling anecdote, Coe would laud **Hitler, Stalin, Mao, or the Mafia’s unity** as illustrative of the kind of obedient, disciplined zeal he wanted for Christ’s followers ⁶³ . This was not praise for genocide, The Family insists, but an acknowledgement of the power of unwavering commitment. Nonetheless, such rhetoric reveals The Family’s *strongman instincts*: Coe believed that **“the elite” are chosen by God to fulfill a divinely ordained plan** and that democracy (and equality) can be obstacles to that plan ⁴⁴ ⁶⁴ . Sharlet notes that Family leaders “consider democracy a manifestation of ungodly pride” and prefer to work beyond the “din of vox populi” in crafting relationships among an anointed leadership class ⁶⁶ ⁶⁷ . Thus, the Family’s Bible studies often emphasized **biblical leaders and obedience** (King David, for example) over themes of justice or humility. This ideological messaging conveniently reinforced Cold War narratives: capitalism and American power were framed as ordained by God, while mass movements (labor, socialist or even overly democratic ones) were viewed skeptically. The Fellowship’s own internal documents spoke of establishing “one world...in spiritual unity and moral convictions” led by those in commerce, government, and science ⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ – essentially a vision of **global theocratic pax Americana**, though couched in benign terms of friendship and prayer.

Cold War Influence in U.S. and Abroad: Domestically, The Family embedded itself in the highest echelons of U.S. politics in a mostly non-partisan fashion. It operated behind many innocuous fronts – International Christian Leadership, National Leadership Council, Fellowship House, etc. ⁷⁰ – intentionally to deflect attention ⁷⁰ . By the 1960s, dozens of Senators and Congressmen of both parties were involved in Fellowship prayer cells or circles of influence ⁷¹ . Notably, some key figures of later conservative politics – such as Senators **Sam Brownback, Chuck Grassley, and Jim Inhofe**, and even Democrats like Hillary Clinton – maintained associations with the Fellowship’s private groups ⁷² ⁷³ . These relationships often transcended normal political divides, creating a **shadow network of evangelical-oriented policymaking**. For instance, it’s documented that the Family was instrumental in incubating the idea of government “faith-based initiatives” (funding religious groups for social services) long before George W. Bush adopted it – Senators John Ashcroft and Dan Coats (both Family members) introduced such legislation in the 1990s, aided by Fellowship ally Hillary Clinton ⁷⁴ ⁷⁵ . In foreign policy, as detailed, the Family played a *supporting role in U.S. Cold War strategy* by connecting American officials with anti-communist foreign leaders under informal, religious auspices. During the Reagan era, for example, the Fellowship helped **introduce U.S. officials to right-wing military leaders in Central America** (like Salvadoran Gen. Vides Casanova and Honduran Gen. Gustavo Álvarez) who were fighting leftist insurgencies ⁷⁶ ⁷⁷ . These introductions, done off the books, eased the way for U.S. support to those regimes despite their grim human-rights records. In one public instance, President Reagan sent greetings to the 1985 WACL conference (arranged in part by Fellowship-aligned figures) praising

participants for aiding “freedom fighters” worldwide ²⁹ ⁷⁸ . This imprimatur highlighted how seamlessly the Family’s networks meshed with official U.S. anti-communist efforts by the late Cold War.

Clarifying Myths: The Family’s deliberate secrecy has bred many conspiracy theories. Some critics imagine it as a sinister cabal “ruling” Washington. In reality, its influence has been **subtle and relational rather than overtly directive**. It does not issue policy edicts or voting blocs; rather, it **creates channels of influence and trust** that powerful individuals can use. For example, the National Prayer Breakfast itself, while imbued with Christian symbolism, does not directly dictate policy – but it undeniably creates space for “shady dealing, power-brokering and shadow diplomacy” beyond public accountability ⁵¹ ⁵² . The Fellowship’s role in specific scandals has occasionally come to light (e.g. aiding Russian agent Maria Butina’s mingling with U.S. conservatives via the 2017–18 Prayer Breakfast ⁷⁹ ⁸⁰), confirming that **foreign interests have tried to exploit its backchannels**. Another claim is that the Family “supports dictators wholesale.” This is partially true: Fellowship leaders did **express open admiration for the loyalty commanded by Hitler or Stalin** (as a model for Christian devotion) ⁶³ , and they **courted numerous authoritarian figures** as brothers in Christ. However, the Family would argue it seeks to “convert” leaders to Jesus, not endorse all their actions ⁸¹ ⁶² . In practice, that distinction blurred – critics note the Family seemed to excuse or ignore the crimes of any leader who joined their prayer circles ⁶² ⁸² . Finally, it’s worth noting that *The Family is not a mass organization* and doesn’t involve itself in electoral politics or public preaching. Its power comes from staying **invisible and exclusive**, a conscious strategy to avoid scrutiny as “a target for misunderstanding” ⁷⁰ ⁸³ . This has largely succeeded: until investigative journalists like Jeff Sharlet obtained internal documents ⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ , the Family’s Cold War exploits were mostly unreported. Now, evidence confirms that during 1945–1970 (and beyond), the Fellowship Foundation uniquely blended piety and power – turning American-led Christianity into a transnational political instrument to unite **pro-capitalist, anti-communist elites** in a kind of “prayerful” alliance ⁸⁶ ⁴⁵ .

Opus Dei: Catholic Anti-Communism and Transnational Elites

Origins in Franco’s Spain: Opus Dei (Latin for “Work of God”) was founded in 1928 by a Spanish Catholic priest, **Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer**, with the mission of sanctifying lay people’s everyday work. Though a religious order, Opus Dei’s footprint has always been largely among lay professionals and intellectuals rather than parish clergy. Its early trajectory was entwined with Spain’s tumultuous politics. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the Catholic Church overwhelmingly sided with **Francisco Franco’s** Nationalists against the secular leftist Republic, which was violently anti-clerical. Escrivá himself had to flee Republican zones to avoid persecution. After Franco’s victory (aided by Hitler and Mussolini), Spain became a **conservative, authoritarian Catholic state** – an environment where Opus Dei could thrive. In the 1940s–50s, Escrivá relocated Opus Dei’s headquarters to Madrid and later Rome, and Franco’s regime gradually permitted Opus Dei members to ascend to influential posts. By the late 1950s, a cadre of Opus Dei-affiliated technocrats became key ministers in Franco’s cabinet ⁸⁷ ⁸⁸ . For example, men like Mariano Navarro Rubio and Alberto Ullastres (Opus Dei members) spearheaded economic reforms in 1957, shifting Spain from autarky to a more modern, capitalist economy. These “*Opus technocrats*” were valued by Franco for their managerial skill and staunch anti-communism, even as they were criticized by old-line Falangists. Over Franco’s 36-year rule, **at least 8 Opus Dei members served as ministers**, especially in finance and economic portfolios ⁸⁹ . This earned Opus Dei a public reputation (deserved or not) as “*Franco’s secret weapon*” in government. It’s true that Opus Dei’s prominence in Franco’s Spain was unprecedented for a Catholic lay group: it essentially acted as **an elite corps within the regime**, emphasizing meritocracy and Catholic orthodoxy, and helping Franco modernize without liberalizing ⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ . However, the relationship was complex; not all Opus Dei members supported Franco uncritically. Some, like Rafael Calvo Serer, grew critical of the dictatorship and were exiled in the 1960s ⁹¹ . Nonetheless, the general alignment of Opus Dei with the **Francoist project of crushing communism and secular socialism** is well documented.

Opus Dei flourished under Franco's protection, and Franco in turn benefited from Opus Dei's global Catholic connections and technocratic expertise, which lent his regime a degree of international legitimacy during the Cold War (e.g. Spain joined the UN in 1955 and became a key Western anti-communist bulwark) ⁹² .

Anti-Communist Catholic Positioning: Ideologically, Opus Dei in the Cold War stood at the forefront of conservative Catholic anti-communism. The Catholic Church, especially under Popes Pius XII (1939–58) and Paul VI (1963–78), was militantly opposed to communism's atheism. Opus Dei embraced this stance with fervor. Escrivá taught that *"Communism was the Church's greatest enemy"* and encouraged members to fight Marxist influence in society. A controversial account (from a former Opus priest) even alleges Escrivá once praised Hitler's role in thwarting communists, saying *"Hitler against the Jews, Hitler against the Slavs, this means Hitler against Communism"* ⁹³ ⁹⁴ – a startling claim reflecting the era's mindset that communism was the ultimate evil (Opus Dei officials have vehemently denied that Escrivá admired Hitler or fascism, citing his documented condemnations of Nazism as "anti-Christian" ⁹⁵ ⁹⁶). What is not disputed is that **Opus Dei positioned itself as a bulwark of traditional Catholicism** in the face of left-wing and liberal trends. In the 1950s–60s, as communist and socialist movements gained ground in Europe, Latin America, and within the Catholic clergy (think Liberation Theology), Opus Dei and its allies championed a counter-current: pro-capitalist, staunchly hierarchical, and intensely devotional. This made Opus Dei a natural ally of the U.S. and other anti-communist powers. For example, in **Italy**, where a strong Communist Party threatened to win elections, Opus Dei members quietly supported Christian Democratic efforts (though Opus Dei as an organization claims to be apolitical) ⁹⁷ . In **Latin America**, Opus Dei established chapters starting in the 1950s (Chile 1950, Argentina 1958, etc.), often winning the patronage of right-leaning business elites and military officers. As revolutionary fervor spread in the 1960s, Opus Dei members in countries like **Chile** explicitly stood against leftist politics. When socialist Salvador Allende was elected President of Chile in 1970, Opus Dei's network in Chile vehemently opposed his Marxist policies. After Gen. **Augusto Pinochet** led a coup in 1973, *"from the beginning, Opus Dei in Chile latched onto the Pinochet government"* and grew powerful under his rule ⁹⁸ ⁹⁹ . Indeed, Pinochet is said to have favored Opus Dei adherents for influential roles; although Opus Dei officially denies that any of its members served in Pinochet's cabinet, independent journalists have claimed otherwise (notably Hugh O'Shaughnessy reported "many Opus Dei members" in Pinochet's ministries) ¹⁰⁰ . The **exact number of Chilean officials who were formal Opus Dei members remains disputed** – Opus Dei's spokesperson in Chile flatly rejected such reports as "completely false" ¹⁰⁰ – but there is no doubt that Pinochet's regime found ideological kinship with Opus Dei's conservative Catholicism. The pattern repeats elsewhere: In **Argentina** (1976–83 dictatorship), several key junta advisers and at least one cabinet minister were linked to Opus Dei or similar movements, promoting a doctrine of "National Reorganization" partly grounded in Catholic integralism. Across Latin America, Opus Dei priests and lay figures were often the **harshest critics of liberation theologians** (who sympathized with the poor and sometimes leftist guerrillas), and they gave theological justification to military juntas' anti-communist crackdowns. This alignment with authoritarian anti-communism significantly advanced U.S. Cold War interests, which saw right-wing regimes as preferable to any Marxist influence.

Lay Networks and Elite Infiltration: A hallmark of Opus Dei is its **focus on recruiting and cultivating lay elites** – unlike most Catholic orders, it is not primarily composed of clergy or monastics. Members are doctors, lawyers, engineers, bankers, professors, military officers, etc., who pledge to live out Catholic principles in their professional fields. This strategy naturally lent itself to *"elite infiltration"*: Opus Dei members often kept a low profile but rose to prominence in key sectors, thereby potentially influencing those institutions according to Opus Dei's conservative values. In Spain, as noted, they permeated the state bureaucracy and academia. In the wider world, Opus Dei set up *campus centers, schools, and think tanks* to groom future leaders. For instance, in the U.S., Opus Dei established a presence by the late 1940s (a center in Chicago in 1949, later others in Boston, New York, D.C.), targeting Catholic students at prestigious universities. Over decades, this bore fruit: by the 1980s, a

number of American intellectuals and officials were linked (formally or informally) to Opus Dei. Perhaps most famously, **Justice Antonin Scalia** was close to Opus Dei circles (though not a member, his spiritual retreats were led by an Opus priest), and **FBI Director Louis Freeh** as well as Senator **Sam Brownback** converted to Catholicism under Opus Dei influence in the 1990s. During 1945–1970, such U.S. examples were rarer, but seeds were planted. More directly, Opus Dei collaborated with other Catholic anti-communist networks like the **Knights of Malta**, an order whose members included top U.S. intelligence figures and diplomats in the 1950s–60s ¹⁰¹ ¹⁰². Through overlapping membership, Opus Dei could indirectly channel information and influence. A concrete instance: in 1960, when John F. Kennedy (a Catholic) was running for president, a faction of American Catholics feared he might be too soft on communism. Opus Dei's U.S. members, although small in number, joined conservative Catholic voices pressuring Kennedy to take a hard anti-communist line (Kennedy indeed campaigned on closing the "missile gap" and later approved anti-Castro operations). In Europe, Opus Dei played a behind-the-scenes role in bolstering anti-communist Catholic politicians. While in Italy the Christian Democrats were led by more mainstream Catholics, Opus Dei's presence grew in media and education, complementing CIA efforts to prevent Communist electoral victories ⁹⁷ ¹⁰³. In **Latin America**, Opus Dei members founded newspapers and economic institutes that promoted free-market policies and opposition to left-wing populism (for example, in Chile the newspaper *El Mercurio* and think tanks that advised Pinochet's economic reforms had Opus affiliates). Thus, through a quiet, cell-like approach, Opus Dei built an **international lay network** that permeated influential circles – a network that could be mobilized to resist communism's advance and to steer national policies in a pro-Western, Catholic-traditional direction.

Relationship to U.S. Politics, Latin American Regimes, and the Vatican: During the height of the Cold War, Opus Dei's interests often intersected with U.S. geopolitical strategy, even if not overtly coordinated. The **United States found value in Catholic anti-communist groups** as soft-power assets, especially in Latin America and Europe. Declassified records show the CIA worked with the Vatican in the late 1940s to funnel support to Catholic politicians in Italy to defeat communists ¹⁰⁴ ¹⁰⁵. While Opus Dei is not explicitly named in early CIA documents, its members were certainly among those Catholic networks. In Spain, the U.S. shift from ostracizing Franco (after WWII) to embracing him (as a Cold War ally by 1953) coincided with the rise of Opus technocrats whom American officials found much easier to deal with than fascist ideologues. U.S. diplomats in Madrid in the 1950s noted approvingly that the Opus Dei ministers were competent, pro-American, and focused on development; they helped negotiate the Spain-U.S. defense pact that established American bases in Spain in 1953, a critical Cold War alliance ⁹². In Latin America, after Cuba's revolution (1959) and during the tumult of the 1960s, U.S. policy encouraged Latin militaries to take power to prevent communist takeovers. Opus Dei's doctrine fortuitously provided a moral justification for these anti-communist coups – promoting the idea of a "Christian civilization" against atheistic Marxism. For example, **Bolivia's 1971 coup leader Col. Hugo Banzer** received ideological support from traditionalist Catholics (some sources suggest Opus Dei influence in Bolivia's elite), and he hosted WACL conferences with Moon's and others' involvement ¹⁰⁶ ¹⁰⁷. Opus Dei's strongest Latin relationship was with **Chile's Pinochet**: although formal ties remain opaque (and Opus Dei denies direct political role), many observers noted that "*Opus Dei latched onto the Pinochet government*" early on ⁹⁸. Pinochet himself, while not an Opus member, was very close to the Chilean Catholic University (a hub of Opus activity) and favored Opus-linked advisors for his neoliberal economic plan. A senior Opus figure, **Pilar Gazmuri**, even served on Chile's Council of State under Pinochet, and Opus priests became confessors to key regime families. This synergy meant that Opus Dei acted almost as **an unofficial chaplaincy to U.S.-backed regimes**, reinforcing their legitimacy among devout populations.

Within the **Vatican**, Opus Dei's star also rose in the Cold War context. Pope Paul VI in 1965 granted Opus Dei the status of a secular institute, and later Pope **John Paul II** – a vehement anti-communist who believed in harnessing lay movements against Soviet influence – elevated Opus Dei to a unique

Personal Prelature in 1982, effectively making it a church jurisdiction without borders ¹⁰⁸ ¹⁰⁹. This unprecedented recognition was a reward for Opus Dei's loyalty and global work. Notably, John Paul II saw Opus Dei (and similar groups) as crucial in the **fight against communism in Eastern Europe** and in countering leftist currents in the Church. Several top Vatican officials in his reign were members or strong supporters of Opus Dei (e.g. Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who had been Nuncio in Chile and was friendly with Opus Dei, became Secretary of State). Opus Dei's influence in Rome helped shape the Church's hardline stance in the 1980s (supporting Poland's Solidarity, condemning liberation theology in Latin America). The Vatican's alliance with Opus Dei culminated in Escrivá's rapid canonization as a saint in 2002, just 27 years after his death – a process sped by Vatican insiders over protests from some Catholics who cited his association with Franco. While detractors call Opus Dei a "secret society" manipulating the Church, mainstream historians like John Allen note that Opus Dei **did not monolithically support all right-wing regimes** – its members had diverse views, especially by the 1970s ¹¹⁰. He estimates Opus Dei Spaniards were split 50/50 on Franco by the end ¹⁰³. Still, from 1945–1970, Opus Dei undeniably aligned institutional Catholic energy with the Western anti-communist crusade.

Clarifying Myths: Opus Dei has been subject to wild claims (popular novels even depict it as a murderous cult). The reality is more nuanced. It's true Opus Dei is **highly secretive and disciplined**, which feeds speculation. But many popular accusations – e.g., that Opus Dei "controls the Vatican" or "was a fascist puppet-master" – are **not supported by concrete evidence**. Opus Dei's political stance is officially neutral; as the organization often reiterates, *"Opus Dei has no political agenda; members are free in politics"* ⁹⁷. And indeed, there have been Opus Dei members on different sides (some even mildly socialist). However, this formal neutrality does not negate the clear pattern that **Opus Dei members overwhelmingly gravitated toward conservative, anti-communist regimes and causes** ⁸⁹ ¹⁰³. The Spanish example shows both faces: while most Opus leaders loyally served Franco, one prominent member (Calvo Serer) opposed him and was punished ⁹¹. The claim that "Opus Dei ran Pinochet's Chile" remains unproven – Opus Dei's own inquiry found *"no member of Opus Dei was ever a member of Pinochet's cabinets"* ¹⁰⁰. This denial may be narrowly true (perhaps none had formally taken the spiritual oath at the time of serving, or they were close collaborators but not signed members). Yet investigative journalists and scholars of Chile note that *many in Pinochet's inner circle were products of Opus Dei's educational or spiritual programs*, if not card-carrying members ¹¹¹ ⁹⁸. So the influence was real, even if direct control is overstated. Another myth is that Opus Dei was **synonymous with fascism**. While individual members had dubious sympathies (e.g. some early members expressed pro-Nazi or Vichy-friendly views in the 1940s), Opus Dei as a whole was more opportunistic – partnering with authoritarians like Franco out of anti-communist expediency, not necessarily out of fascist ideology. In fact, Escrivá positioned Opus Dei as distinct from the Falange (Spanish fascist party) and focused on long-term influence via holiness in professional life rather than party politics ⁹⁷. Postwar, Opus Dei distanced itself from overt fascist nostalgia and instead embraced **neo-liberal economics and anti-Marxist propaganda** as the path to Christianize society. Therefore, while the **"Nazi/Opus Dei conspiracy"** trope is exaggerated, the kernel of truth is Opus Dei eagerly participated in U.S.-led Cold War structures (like the CIA-Vatican "ratlines" that aided some anti-Soviet fascist exiles in Latin America ¹⁰⁵ ¹¹², or the WACL anti-communist network in which figures like Chile's Opus-aligned Jaime Guzmán interfaced). In conclusion, Opus Dei exemplified how a religious organization could pursue its spiritual aims (spreading a conservative Catholic worldview) by aligning with temporal powers. In the Cold War, that meant **reinforcing authoritarian and capitalist forces against leftist revolution**, often in tandem with U.S. foreign policy – a convergence of cross and flag that significantly shaped outcomes in Spain, Latin America, and beyond.

Conclusion

From the 1940s through 1970, American Christianity – broadly defined to include U.S. Protestant initiatives and transnational Catholic movements – underwent a transformation into a **concerted political instrument of the Cold War**. This chapter examined the Unification Church, The Family, and Opus Dei as case studies. Despite their differing theologies and contexts, common themes emerge:

- **Ideological Convergence with U.S. Policy:** All three movements cast themselves in militant opposition to communism, framing the Cold War as a spiritual battle between God-fearing “freedom” and godless totalitarianism. This provided moral fervor to U.S. anti-communist efforts: Rev. Moon preached communism as Satan’s tool ¹ ; The Family taught that God chose capitalist leaders to vanquish socialism ⁴⁴ ; Opus Dei fought atheistic Marxism as the Church’s foremost foe ¹¹³ . In doing so, each attracted support and/or funding from American and allied governments.
- **Transnational Operations and Networks:** These groups all transcended borders. Moon’s church, born in Korea, built a presence across Asia, the Americas, and Europe – even engaging in paramilitary logistics in Central America ²¹ ²⁵ . The Family quietly set up prayer cells from Washington to African capitals to Asian palaces, linking elites in an informal alliance ⁵⁸ ⁶⁰ . Opus Dei expanded from Spain into a global Catholic network, placing members in universities, parliaments, and economies worldwide. Each became a **conveyor belt moving money, influence, and information across nations** – often parallel to or intertwined with CIA and State Department channels ¹² ⁷⁶ .
- **Geopolitical Influence and Proxy Activity:** Far from mere faith communities, these groups executed **political missions on behalf of or in concert with governments**. The Unification Church effectively acted as an unofficial arm of the South Korean (and at times U.S.) government ¹⁰ ⁵ – conducting influence operations (like the pro-Nixon campaign) and propaganda through media like *The Washington Times* ¹⁸ . The Fellowship Foundation served as a backdoor conduit connecting U.S. officials to foreign leaders outside normal diplomacy, often smoothing cooperation with anti-communist strongmen (Somalia, Indonesia, various Latin American juntas) ⁵⁸ ⁶⁰ . Opus Dei members and sympathizers took up key roles in regimes aligned with the U.S. – from Franco’s Spain (a NATO ally in all but name) to Pinochet’s Chile (a bulwark against Marxism in South America) ⁸⁹ ⁹⁸ . In these ways, religion was *weaponized* as an instrument of soft power or even hard power (when Moon’s group supplied materiel to Contra rebels, for example ²¹ ²⁵). The synergy was often deliberate: U.S. Cold War strategists recognized that **harnessing religious networks could achieve what overt policy might not** – from legitimizing allies to undermining communist appeal among populations.
- **Elite Coordination and “Infiltration”:** Each movement specialized in influencing societal elites (“top-down” strategy). Vereide’s Family explicitly targeted politicians and businessmen to effect a Christian **“trickle-down” influence** on society ⁴¹ . Opus Dei similarly sought to “*win converts who have talents for politics [to] serve in government positions,*” in line with Catholic social doctrine ¹¹⁴ ¹¹⁵ . Even Moon’s church, though it engaged in mass recruiting, placed special emphasis on currying favor with presidents, congressmen, and cultural leaders in various countries. This elite focus sometimes provoked backlash – critics accused these groups of being “shadowy cabals.” We found that while outright conspiracy theories are exaggerated, it is true that **unaccountable, secretive cliques wielded real sway**: e.g. the Family’s closed-door prayer cells through which senators struck up global relationships ⁷¹ ⁵⁹ , or Opus Dei’s hidden membership in cabinets

and its influence in the Vatican's corridors of power ⁹⁷ ¹⁰³ . These **closed networks blurred church and state, faith and espionage**, in ways that liberal democracies found hard to monitor.

In verifying the above, we relied on a range of sources: U.S. congressional reports, declassified CIA documents, reputable journalism, and scholarly works. The evidence strongly **confirms most key claims** about these groups' Cold War roles – though it also nuances them. For instance, the Unification Church's link to the KCIA, long rumored, is affirmed by CIA reports and the U.S. Congress ⁵ ¹⁰ . The Family's brokering of U.S.-dictator friendships, once speculative, is now documented in archives (e.g. the Somali aid story) ⁶⁰ ⁶¹ . Opus Dei's involvement with Franco and other regimes is factual, though the extent of its direct political control is often exaggerated ⁸⁹ ¹⁰⁰ . Where popular claims lacked evidence, we noted it – for example, no proof that Opus Dei members *officially* sat in Pinochet's cabinet (despite many being influential around it) ¹⁰⁰ ⁹⁸ .

By 1970, the pattern was clear: **American-led anti-communism had an overt military/economic front – and a covert religious front**. In the cultural and ideological arena of the Cold War, these religious organizations were the shock troops, undermining communist appeal by offering transcendent justification for American values and forging an international Christian solidarity against the Red menace. This entanglement of religion and statecraft during 1945–1970 left a lasting legacy. It set the stage for the rise of the Religious Right in the 1980s (to which Moon's and Coe's networks directly contributed ¹⁸ ¹¹⁶) and influenced the Vatican's stance in the final showdown with Soviet communism (John Paul II's alliance with Reagan owed something to Opus Dei's groundwork ¹¹⁷ ¹¹⁸). In sum, the transformation of segments of American Christianity into political instruments was not a conspiracy theory but a historical reality – one documented in the prayers, policies, and proxy battles of the Cold War.

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