

PRAISE FOR *THE DEVIL* AND *BELLA DODD*:

“From Communism to Catholicism—and even politics—Bella Dodd lived an incredible life, and one lived against the odds. Mary Nicholas and Paul Kengor bring to life her walk from the dark side to the sunny path of faith in a Cold War saga of redemption that remains timely and provocative today.”

—John Gizzi, White House Correspondent, *Newsmax*

“I couldn’t put this book down. It seems timelier than ever as socialism continues to spread in our country and throughout our institutions. But more than anything, it is a beautiful testament to the peace and love offered not by ideologies but by Christ and his Church.”

—Carrie Gress, Author of *The Anti-Mary Exposed*

“With impeccable research and riveting prose, readers of this book are introduced to the life of Bella Dodd, a former member of the Communist Party’s national executive committee, and a woman who spent much of her time in the Party trying to weaken the Catholic Church from within. Mary Nicholas and Paul Kengor are a perfect team for this task as Nicholas has devoted much of her professional life to gathering and analyzing original data on Dodd, and no one understands the evil threat of Marxism and communism better than Kengor. Using years of research, coupled with Freedom of Information requests for formerly unpublished material on Dodd, Nicholas and Kengor expose the evil agenda of communists in America—and Dodd’s malevolent role in it all. Dodd herself acknowledged that their most important demonic goal was to destroy the faith of the Catholic people by promoting a pseudo-religion of ‘social justice’ that looked like Catholicism but clearly was not. Nicholas and Kengor expose the many ways in which Bella Dodd appeared to be truly a ‘lost soul.’ But more importantly, this inspirational book reveals that even the wicked can be saved, as Dodd was saved through divine intervention and the support of the Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.”

—Anne Hendershott, Professor, Franciscan University of Steubenville

“Bella Dodd is a seminal figure of the Cold War, a brave American woman who fearlessly battled against atheistic communism. She should not be forgotten. Finally, thanks to this work, she won’t be.”

—Sebastian Gorka, PhD, *Newsmax* Host and former Deputy Assistant and Strategist to the President

“Through the fascinating life of Bella Dodd, Kengor and Nicholas offer readers a uniquely intimate window into the lure and trap of a demonic ideology. It is a gripping read. Far more than just historically valuable, this book is essential reading today, unmasking much of what led us here, and pointing to the real and robust hope that should animate us still.”

—Noelle Mering, Author of *Awake, Not Woke*

“Paul Kengor and his newly discovered co-author, Dr. Mary Nicholas, have produced a tour-de-force analysis of the enigmatic former communist Bella Dodd. A thorough study of her writings and testimonies, along with in-depth interviews with people who knew Dodd, *The Devil and Bella Dodd* provides careful answers to important questions. Did Bella Dodd really place over 1,000 communist spies in Catholic seminaries? You’ll have to read this fine book to find out!”

—Jennifer Roback Morse, Founder and President, The Ruth Institute

“If you’ve surveyed the wreckage from Marx’s hellish ideas in *The Devil and Karl Marx*, you won’t want to miss the storyline of escape and redemption in *The Devil and Bella Dodd*. Written by Mary Nicholas and Paul Kengor, this new biography of Dodd is formidable. In a world with much misinformation about Dodd, Nicholas and Kengor have rigorously researched their subject, allowing them to speak persuasively on questions as thorny as the possible communist infiltration of the Catholic priesthood. Masterfully analyzed, *The Devil and Bella Dodd* is a powerful book about what happens when pernicious ideas grip a soul—and what happens when grace snatches her back.”

—Julia Meloni, Author of *The St. Gallen Mafia*

“There is nothing hidden that will not come to light. But hidden things may fester a long while, as Bella Dodd proved after her reversion to the Catholic Church by revealing the extent of the communist conspiracy in America that she had helped to spread. Mary Nicholas and the prolific Paul Kengor have performed a great service by shining a new and delightful light on this remarkable woman.”

—Michael Knowles, *The Daily Wire*

THE DEVIL AND BELLA DODD

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**ONE WOMAN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST
COMMUNISM AND HER REDEMPTION**

**MARY A. NICHOLAS, MD
AND PAUL KENGOR, PHD**

**TAN BOOKS
GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA**

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This book is dedicated to the men and women who had the courage to leave the Communist Party; to those who had the courage to write about their odysseys; to the dedicated congressional committees that investigated the Communist Party; and to the publishers who had the courage to publish their stories.

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“Step by step, I retreated from God and went forth to meet the world, the flesh, and the devil. . . . I’d join the devil himself. . . . There is no doubt that I traveled with him at my side and that he extorted a great price for his company.”

—*Bella Dodd*, *Roads to Rome*¹

INTRODUCTION

This book is about conversion and recovery, about hope and redemption. It is about overcoming evil, about looking for a flicker of faith beyond the cold walls of a school of darkness. It is about one person's dramatic break from what fellow ex-communists called "the god that failed." That god was no angel. It was a fallen angel.

It is the story of a clever organizer who lived in a false utopian dream and, hearing faint rumblings in the dark, finally awoke and jumped up. No, none of it was true—what she saw, what they said. Their faux reality was a nightmare. It was always nighttime in their world. And morning never came. Her life changed drastically. She had finally put all the pieces together and had to tell others the truth. Describing it was the next part of her journey, draining the lies and hatred from herself. She had to tell her country and the world.

Hers was a struggle with the Communist Party,² with comrades, with the media, but ultimately with herself. Because she learned acutely that, in the end, communism is more than a crime against a country; it is a crime against the soul, the human spirit itself. It is a battle against the supernatural dimension of man, the spiritual element that makes each of us most human in the eyes and image of God—the God that does not fail. Sadly, communism totally rejected this belief in God, as it was a philosophy of pure materialism. Being trapped in communism, like being trapped in quicksand, makes extrication seem impossible, unless there is a helping hand to save you.

This book is about a woman named Bella Dodd.

Courageously, Bella reached into her inner self, the very depths of her soul, and changed course. The title of her autobiography alone, *School of Darkness*, captures the depth of the pit that is communism.

Her book—and this one too—describes the struggles, suffering, fear, and pain as she fought against the lies, deceit, propaganda, violence, and darkness of the Communist Party—dedicated to a system of absolute evil—to expose the truth even at the cost of her life if necessary.

From that evil, she would ultimately flee. She would cry for release from the depth of her heart and her deepest convictions. She needed the Church of her youth for the break, for the courage and the zeal to smash and even to unmask an atheistic criminal conspiracy operating on a global level. When Bella was asked if she could name and unmask the leader of this conspiracy, she put it succinctly and starkly: “I would have to say and have to identify that person as Lucifer.”³

Bella came to that chilling realization so intimately. She saw how the devil drew in disciples to the communist movement by varied means. When a friend told Bella frankly that she was a communist, Bella shrugged: “I’m not afraid of labels. I’d join the devil himself to fight fascism.”⁴ That was a terrible excuse. One most certainly need not join the devil to fight fascism, or for any reason. Only later did Bella feel the full blow of this blasphemy, conceding: “Blasphemously, I would add, ‘I’ll join the devil himself if he is going in my direction.’ There is no doubt that I traveled with him at my side and that he extorted a great price for his company.”⁵

Many opened that door to the dark side and the devil’s company, including many raised as Christians. Fulton Sheen, who lent Bella a hand as she struggled to pull out of the quicksand, flagged that danger. “He knew that a nominal Christian with a memory of the Cross can easily be twisted to the purposes of evil by men who masquerade as saviors,” wrote Bella in *School of Darkness*. “Communist leaders achieve their greatest strength and cleverest snare when they use the will to goodness of their members.”⁶

But a snare it is. Whatever it takes to capture a soul.

She would regrettably concede that she had once aggressively engaged in mass deception and manipulation on behalf of an ideology that her Church described at the time as a “Satanic scourge” enflamed

by the “sons of darkness.”⁷ She eventually climbed out by carrying her cross through that cold night.

In Bella’s unique case, that dark “school” that titled her memoir had special meaning related to her distinct work. Bella Dodd was the Communist Party’s chief organizer of public-school teachers—the teachers’ unions, the “education front.” She in fact organized for the Party on many fronts, with more than one layer of infiltration. She lied and deceived.

And yet, Bella fought and beat the devil.

The devil, of course, has made many appearances in many titles, including stories, plays, and books, from *The Devil and Daniel Webster* to *The Devil and the White City* to *The Devil and Karl Marx* and more. In Bella’s life, the Devil appeared in a form he has assumed for many decades, as the handmaiden of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Bella Dodd did not engage with or even write about the devil in the way that others, like Karl Marx, did. Her story, unlike Marx’s, is redemptive. Hers is a story of an inspiring Catholic convert who beat the demon of atheistic communism. She escaped the clutches of this diabolical system. Her agonizing sense of oppression under communism, only to come to the Church on her knees through the assistance of one of the greatest religious leaders of the twentieth century, one Fulton Sheen, is a wonderful story of reconciliation and redemption.

Bringing Communist Victory to America

Born in 1904, she came to New York by way of Italy. She came blessed with a pretty name, Maria Assunta Isabella Visono.⁸ But she was brought into something ugly in the very country where her parents brought her for better things.

She was drawn to a particular location in lower New York City, 50 East Thirteenth Street, headquarters of Communist Party USA (CPUSA), which was committed to what founders such as William Z. Foster and Earl Browder called a “Soviet America.” Or as poet

Langston Hughes put it, “Put one more ‘S’ in the USA to make it Soviet. The USA when we take control will be the USSA.”⁹ That was the way of CPUSA. And Bella Dodd made her way to the doors of the tawdry building that transmitted orders back and forth from the Soviet Comintern (Communist International) headquarters in Moscow to the United States.

In testifying to Congress, Manning Johnson, one of Bella’s ex-comrades, described the basic and fundamental purpose of the Communist Party: “the complete destruction of the American Government and establishment of a soviet system of government in America. The system, of course, in America that we had planned and envisioned is a dictatorship of the proletariat in the transition from socialism to world communism.” What would this entail? Johnson did not mince words: “This was based upon the complete liquidation of all forces of opposition, that is, the owners of industry, the heads of government, in fact, everyone in the whole political, economic, and social life who could be identified with the capitalist class. Those professionals who would not go along with us would go to concentration camps. The most rabid would be liquidated. The banks would be confiscated: the whole capital system, from top to bottom, would be destroyed. The Army and Navy would be liquidated and new armed forces would be created.”¹⁰

Johnson’s dire description should surprise no one, and it certainly did not surprise Bella Dodd. Communists behaved brutally wherever they took power. Stalin invoked Lenin: “The scientific concept of dictatorship means nothing more nor less than unrestricted power, absolutely unimpeded by laws or regulations . . . based on force and not on law.”¹¹

That was what members of Communist Party USA in the Stalin era (Bella’s era) signed up for. New members swore a loyalty oath: “I pledge myself to rally the masses to defend the Soviet Union, the land of victorious socialism. I pledge myself to remain at all times a vigilant and firm defender of the Leninist line of the party, the only line that ensures the triumph of Soviet Power in the United States.” This

particular oath was issued in 1935, during the heart of Stalin's Great Purge that annihilated tens of millions.¹²

This unflagging allegiance to the Bolsheviks was the mission of American communists who joined the Party. It was printed on their membership cards. They carried it with them. Bella carried it with her. They did not question the Party or the Kremlin, from which the Party took its orders.

American Party members did not question the Soviet leadership. The Party was treated as an infallible authority. "None of us desires or is able to dispute the will of the Party," stated Leon Trotsky, one of the troika (along with Lenin and Stalin) that founded the Soviet state. "Clearly, the Party is always right. . . . We can only be right with and by the Party."¹³ The esteemed diplomat and scholar George F. Kennan described this as the "infallibility of the Kremlin," explaining: "The Soviet concept of power requires that the Party leadership remain in theory the sole repository of truth. . . . The leadership of the Communist Party is therefore always right."¹⁴ Their only guiding force was themselves and their Marxism-Leninism. That was what they answered to. That was their god; this was their faith. Ronald Reagan called it "that religion of theirs, which is Marxism-Leninism."¹⁵

In his "Evil Empire" speech, Reagan quoted Whittaker Chambers, who declared that Marxism-Leninism is actually the second oldest faith, first proclaimed in the Garden of Eden with the words of temptation, "Ye shall be as gods." The West could rise to answer that challenge of the serpent, affirmed Chambers, "but only provided that its faith in God and the freedom He enjoins is as great as communism's faith in Man."¹⁶

Bella Dodd, too, reached for that faith in God for answers, which trumped the false faith of communism. In fact, the full title of her memoirs, *School of Darkness: The record of a life and of a conflict between two faiths*, bears witness to her struggle among these two conflicting faiths.

Once she made her way into the light, Bella heralded the dangers ahead for the country that her mother and father had brought her to. And yet, compelling and courageous as her testimony to Congress had been, she has received scant attention from historians. This book seeks to right that wrong.

More Benign Labels

This is the first biography of Bella Dodd, over a half century after her death in 1969 and very public life. She was a household name at one time, one of the most high-profile Americans to leave the Party and communist lifestyle—akin to a female version of Whittaker Chambers. One modern observer lists Dodd and Chambers (as well as another key convert to Catholicism from communism, Louis Budenz) as the leading “apostates” from communism.¹⁷ To borrow from the title of Chambers’ memoir, *Witness*, they became witnesses, including to the truth of the Christian faith.

There were others, of course, as well as brave leaders of Congress, who recognized the dangers. They recognized it in the campaigns that bored into the school systems, the churches, the unions, and within various communities. The difficulty in recognizing the strategy in the United States is the fact that Lenin’s violent revolution proceeded to a large degree under the guise of other forms. There was what Ronald Reagan described as “creeping socialism.” There was also Fabian socialism, a passive but still relentless revolution of “boring from within.” Fittingly, the official coat of arms for the Fabian Society is a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

And for the record, socialism is, according to Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the final transitional step to communism. In his definitive work on the subject, *The State and Revolution*, Vladimir Lenin, in his chapter titled “The Transition from Capitalism to Communism,” quoted Marx and Engels: “And this brings us to the question of the scientific distinction between socialism and communism. What is usually

called socialism was termed by Marx the ‘first,’ or lower, phase of communist society. Insofar as the means of production becomes common property, the word ‘communism’ is also applicable here, providing we do not forget that this is not complete communism.”¹⁸ Socialism leads to communism.

Bella Dodd certainly understood that. Nonetheless, like many communists who operated under deception, she was careful not to openly admit the deception to liberals and progressives. Once no longer a deceiver, she frequently shared with the world a quote from her boss, Alexander Trachtenberg, later identified by Whittaker Chambers as the “head of the GPU” in the United States—that is, the notorious Soviet military police.¹⁹ “Trachtenberg once said to me,” recalled Dodd in her memoirs, “that when communism came to America it would come under the label of ‘progressive democracy.’ ‘It will come,’ he added, ‘in labels acceptable to the American people.’”²⁰

These were benign labels like progressive, liberal, and democracy. She repeated this in slightly more detail in a speech in Utica, New York, in May 1961, where she said that Trachtenberg had told her in New York at the 1944 Communist Party national convention: “When we get ready to take the United States, we will not take it under the label of communism; we will not take it under the label of socialism. These labels are unpleasant to the American people, and have been speared too much. We will take the United States under labels we have made very lovable; we will take it under liberalism, under progressivism, under democracy. But take it we will.”²¹

Again, wolves in sheep’s clothing. Wolves operating in the cover of night.

Communism would march forward in the darkness, operating under other labels. It would find new forms of entry. When the economics/class-based revolution of Marx and Engels failed, a new breed of twentieth-century communist would turn to the “conveyor belts” of culture. Such became the destructive influence of the Frankfurt School²² and the Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, a founder of the Italian Communist Party.

Gramsci recognized that the revolutionary Marxism of Stalin would not work in Western societies, which acknowledged individual rights and faith in the Creator. His goal is famously described as a “long march through the institutions” before socialism and relativism would be victorious.²³ That march continues to this day, well into the twenty-first century, where modern Marxists and even “democratic socialists” have turned not to farms and factories but matters of race and gender and whatever else works for them. The Marxism of these cultural revolutionaries like Gramsci and the Frankfurt School was nicely characterized by Cal-Berkeley professor Martin Malia as “Marxism without the Proletariat.” It was Marxism applied to culture and even to sexuality, married to Freudianism—“Freudian-Marxism,” of all things.²⁴

The Communist Party of Bella Dodd’s day recruited many intellectually gifted young women from the United States, a country that, as Chambers pointed out, was built on traditions of freedom and opportunity antithetical to the revolutionary struggles of Europe.²⁵ Yet, this idealistic person and future Party member heeded the communist call to replace injustices and hardships and the country’s constitutional ways of resolving problems with its utopian solution. Hers was an early springtime enchantment: hands-on organizing experience and rising to a leadership role in the Party, followed by a bitter Moscow winter with much soul searching, a recognition of the stark deadliness of the communist revolution and finally leaving disillusioned.

Bella took the path of a hardened Bolshevik, what well-known ex-communist Frank Meyer called an “honorary title” for “which no higher praise exists in the Communist movement. . . . It is spoken with baited and admiring breath and it is a living and operative factor in the lives of the cadre.”²⁶ Much better, she instead became an “ex-communist,” eloquently described by Whittaker Chambers: “By ex-Communist, I mean a man who knew clearly why he became a Communist, who served Communism devotedly and knew why he served it, who broke with Communism unconditionally and knew why he broke with it.”²⁷

The reasons why people are lured to socialism or communism are as varied as the individuals. Called upon often by legislative committees, Bella testified about communism at length, each statement becoming part of the historical record; she left a gripping testament of her personal journey. Each testimony was a display of tremendous courage, exposing herself to character assassination, loneliness, ridicule and civil suits, uncertainty or inability to earn a living, and personal danger. Chambers described this loneliness after his break with the Communist Party as “annihilating,” something only an ex-communist could understand.²⁸

Dodd echoed those thoughts wholeheartedly.

Learning and Loving to Hate

This total self-surrender to the Party and the Kremlin meant that Communist Party members in the United States learned to hate when the Soviet Comintern ordained it, and as communists commanded.²⁹

A defining characteristic of communism is hate. The Party expressed that hate both verbally and by its actions of murder, violence, and even deliberate starvation in countries like the Ukraine. Maxim Gorky actually penned a tribute to hate: “A genuine, sincere revolutionary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics must feel conscious, active, heroic hatred for his vile enemy. Our right to hate him has been well enough substantiated and justified. And equally well, equally thoroughly justified is our hatred towards all indifferent, lazy, vulgar persons and other ugly creatures who still live and tumble about in our country.” This was pure Bolshevik hatred: “Our revolutionary, proletarian hatred for those who create misery and suffering of the people, must counter the brutal, selfish, sick hatred of the world capitalists, rotting from obesity, sentenced to death by history.”³⁰

Vile words, but all too typical. The founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin, put it concisely: “Hatred is truly the ‘beginning of all wisdom,’ the basis of any socialist and communist movement and of its

success.”³¹ As stated by Harvard professor Dr. Richard Pipes, editor of the Lenin letters, quoting one of Lenin’s collaborators (Peter Struve), “the principle feature of Lenin’s personality was hatred.”³²

Lenin especially hated religion. “There can be nothing more abominable than religion,” scowled Lenin.³³ Marxist-Leninist atheistic ideology was the fount of this hatred. The atheism is foundational. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn recorded in *The Gulag Archipelago*, “Within the philosophical system of Marx and Lenin . . . hatred of God is the principal driving force.”³⁴

Bishop Fulton Sheen felt that Marxist hate. It was a hatred of God Himself. “Marx was not first a Communist and then an atheist,” noted Sheen. “He was first an atheist, then a Communist. Communism was merely the political expression of his atheism. As he hated God, so would he hate those who would own property.”³⁵

The Catholic Church felt this hate. Pope Pius XI’s 1937 encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* called communism a “pernicious” ideology “replete with hate.” Even Dorothy Day’s *Catholic Worker*, often criticized by conservative Catholics for being soft on socialism, smelled the venom: “We Christians love Communists as human beings and potential fellows in Christ’s Mystical Body,” her publication stated in a September 1938 open letter to CPUSA head Earl Browder—Bella Dodd’s Party boss. “Yet, you Communists hate capitalists as well as capitalism. We love men, hate their sins. You hate sinners against the ‘Party Line.’”³⁶

For the communist, hate was central.

After she left the Party, Bella Dodd recognized how this hate “was what distinguished me as a full-fledged Communist.” She only later learned to love, as she broke free from communist hate. “I had to drain the hate and frenzy from my system.”³⁷

Of course, hating for a communist meant lying for communism. Lenin preached the “morality” of lying, so long as it furthered class interests. “We do not believe in an eternal morality,” he explained in his famous October 1920 speech elucidating “communist ethics.” “Communist morality is based on the struggle for the consolidation

and completion of communism.” This, too, meant rejecting God, as Lenin there again affirmed without equivocation: “We do not believe in God.”³⁸

As a teacher who was a member of the Communist Party, Bella Dodd was expected to lie, which made her uncomfortable in the classroom. “I think a teacher should have high ethical standards,” she noted in Senate testimony, “and here again a Communist fails because, as we all know, the Communist organization definitely advocates lying if it will accomplish their purpose.”³⁹

Communism, as Vaclav Havel noted and experienced intensely, is the culture of the lie. Examples can be seen throughout this book of lies emanating from the Communist Party. Solzhenitsyn emphasized this in his remarkable essay, “Live Not By Lies.” The Communist Party needed the lie. How could you tell the comrades that what they were doing would result in massive starvation, including of little children, or putting a prisoner on the train to Siberia for almost certain death?

For the communist, the hate and death also meant a lack of peace; it meant war and conflict.

“Marxism-Leninism states that you can’t achieve peace as long as there is a capitalist country left,” Bella Dodd explained in her US Senate testimony in March 1953. “In other words, war and revolution are going to be the fate of man until the Communists have taken over the entire world.”⁴⁰ This, she noted, is what the American Communist Party believed and followed.

And in fact, Bella was merely echoing Lenin. “We live not only in a state but in a system of states,” noted Lenin in March 1919 to the Eighth Party Congress, where he launched the Soviet Comintern, “and the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with the imperialist states for an extended period is unthinkable. In the end either one or the other will conquer. And before this result, a series of horrible conflicts between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states is unavoidable.”⁴¹

Horrible conflicts. Plenty of them. Bella saw them. “I was face to face with brutality, cynicism,” she told the US Senate. There in the Communist Party, “I actually saw the things which are abhorrent not only to decent people but to anyone who has feelings for his fellowman.”⁴²

It eventually had the benefit of driving her away.

An Enormous Source of (Classified) Information

Bella Dodd is a person that most modern Americans have not heard of, although there are numerous documents and videos on the internet about her, some true, some dubious. Yet, as the highest female Communist Party official in the United States at one time, she was a very influential figure tasked with mass organization and infiltration. She was brilliant and charismatic, attracting many to herself and her cause. During the height of the communist movement and the start of America’s lengthy battle with communism, in the 1930s and 1940s, you could say she was a willful agent of Moscow. She was a dutiful foot soldier.

And yet, Bella Dodd became even more prominent as an ex-communist. The degree to which that was the case is evident today in the likewise remarkable story of her FBI file, the contents of which are being shared here in this book for the first time.

Incredibly, Bella’s huge FBI file remained classified for over a half century after her death. One of us (Paul Kengor) began the process of filing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests in January 2019 for the release of her file. That process began a long period of waiting, with repeated appeals to the federal government submitted by our colleague Bill Marshall of Judicial Watch.⁴³ The subsequent inaction and delays were very unusual. “I’m wondering what possible reason the bureau could have for withholding it for so long,” puzzled Marshall. “The only thing I can think is that she revealed shocking information about communist infiltration that could impact very important, still

living people, or people who are somehow iconic figures (probably on the left) in American life.”⁴⁴

At long last, portions of that file began being released in March 2021. The first batch was 250 pages in length, of which 9 pages were withheld by the FBI. Several more batches followed, including one released April 1 that traversed another 250 pages (19 withheld), a 500-pager on May 1, another in June that covered 197 pages, and another in July that ran about a dozen pages. In all, we received several batches of what the FBI’s Freedom of Information-Privacy Acts Section lists as a 1,281-page file for Bella V. Dodd, one of the longest that we have ever seen among FBI files of Cold War figures.

Revelations from that file will be shared throughout this book. For here in this introduction, a few brief points are worth underscoring from the outset:

Particularly striking, though not a surprise to those knowledgeable about the history of American communism, is that Bella Dodd’s FBI file shows that she was placed on the federal government’s Security Index, which meant that she could be immediately detained or arrested in the event of a national emergency, such as a war breaking out between the United States and USSR.⁴⁵ That kind of listing applied to people of Bella’s level of impact in the Party. She was no minor member.

Bella’s file attests to that influence at great length, from her work organizing “many hundreds” (actually, over a thousand) of teachers who were Party members into a “secret underground operation,” to her work as New York State Communist Party Legislative Director helping her comrades attempt to capture “the entire American Labor Party throughout the state,” to her testifying to Congress about her Party work toward “infiltration into important positions of public opinion, education, labor, Congress and congressional committees.”⁴⁶

The FBI was struck by Bella’s rapid ascent up the ranks. An October 6, 1944 report by the FBI’s large New York City office noted that Dodd had become no less than chairman of a “very important

meeting” held that week in New York by the Communist Political Association,⁴⁷ where general secretary Earl Browder addressed approximately 150 trade union leaders.⁴⁸ Throughout the file, Dodd’s voluminous efforts for the Party are chronicled at length.

Bella became a major source of information. By the early 1950s, according to the FBI, her code name during the McCarthy hearings was “the Falcon.” This bird of prey had soared to heights that few ex-communists ascended to. Swift, powerful, and proud, she was not to be deterred on the witness stand. At the same time, publicly, Bella was always extremely discreet about what she said, often noting that she was a lawyer and thus extremely sensitive to and knowledgeable about the possibility of libel suits, which, she noted, could be extremely expensive and cost-prohibitive even when the truth was on your side.⁴⁹

Even then, the material that we received as researchers from Bella’s FBI files is, frustratingly, the mere tip of an iceberg that we cannot wrap our arms around. The 1,281 pages of material from this woman designated by the federal government as “an anticommunist informer from 1952–1969” were a scant glimpse of what was collected. For instance, the March 1, 2021 FBI cover letter on the first batch of released files states that Bella is referenced in hundreds of FBI files that are now stored at the National Archives. To begin trying to track those down requires navigating a winding maze of file numbers, each of which would require direct requests and visits to the National Archives and Records Administration. The task is overwhelming.

“I personally have never seen so many FBI files associated with one individual,” observes Bill Marshall, a veteran of FOIA-FBI requests. “I suspect you’re correct, that Bella was an enormous source of information. She probably appeared in many because she herself was such a powerful, well-connected communist, but probably also because she was diming out fellow Communists after she saw the light.”⁵⁰

Hundreds of files. One senses that all of these files on Bella, and thus a written record of what she knew, will never get reviewed nor fully presented. Testimony to that was a statement entered into the official

Congressional Record at the time of Bella's death by Congressman John Rarick: "Bella Dodd spent the rest of her life combatting the evil forces working for the destruction of the United States," stated Rep. Rarick. "She testified before Senate and House committees and gave information to the F.B.I. Much of her testimony was given in executive hearings and has never been made public. Some of this testimony was so damning to important figures that even the stenographic notes have disappeared. In open hearings she was warned again and again not to mention names, so careful were the legislators to protect the 'innocent.'"⁵¹

One wonders to what extent Bella's information on infiltration of Catholic seminaries might have appeared in those statements. Somewhere in those files might be the smoking gun on such tantalizing questions.

Infiltration and Infiltration

Once she broke from the Party and went public, Bella Dodd noted how the entire Party and its apparatus lived in fear that ex-communists like herself would testify and "begin to unravel the whole conspiracy."⁵²

Bella's chief area of infiltration in that conspiracy was education. It was what she openly testified to during many hours in congressional hearings. The Party charged her with leadership on that front. Given her dazzling accomplishments in secretly infiltrating the teachers' union, the Party would not have hesitated to go to her for infiltration of other organizations.

The conspiracy of infiltration was multipronged, operating on many fronts. It was not a "conspiracy theory" but a real conspiracy to infiltrate US society, including the Catholic Church. That infiltration has been written about elsewhere, and usually without proper care and reliability. One of us wrote about it at length in his book *The Devil and Karl Marx*. Readers of that book were surprised to see that the longest section was not on the person of Marx but instead the

extraordinary actions by the communist movement in the twentieth century to infiltrate churches worldwide, including in America, and especially non-Catholic denominations.⁵³ Some American Protestant churches were targeted aggressively, and with tragic success. The same was true, albeit even worse, for the Russian Orthodox Church. The Catholic Church was certainly not exempt from the effort, with everything from undercover thrusts by the Party to open public campaigns sugarcoated as olive branches, such as Earl Browder's infamous "outstretched hand" offered to Catholics.⁵⁴

And why wouldn't the Church be in communists' crosshairs? Communists had a special hatred for the Catholic Church.

Bella Dodd's reported comments about her role in helping to infiltrate the Catholic Church in America with over a thousand "communist men" can be found all over the internet. And again, much if not most of the writing is scant in reliable documentation. It is, frankly, a mess. Here in this book, we have taken particular care to report what Bella both did say and did not say. Our primary interest in pursuing her FBI file was precisely in search of documentation for information regarding that alleged infiltration. We have been sorry to see, at least so far, that confirming information in her FBI file still has not been released. That is not a surprise. Of all the infiltration and deception that Bella Dodd dealt with in her flirtation with the devil of communism, this was the most pernicious. It remains the most sensitive. As we shall share, her confessor, Fulton Sheen, advised her to be extremely careful, if not to the point of silence, regarding the details of this infiltration. We were told that Sheen told Bella Dodd not to share names of any corrupted clergy.

Nonetheless, Bella and many priests alike were painfully aware of the Party's desire for infiltration. She recalled the words of Father Keller of The Christophers, the Catholic group with the apt motto, "It's better to light a candle than curse the darkness." She said to Keller: "You're forming The Christophers organization. Why don't you establish a national organization so everybody can join?" Keller looked her

in the eye and said, “Bella, you should know better. In three months, they would infiltrate it, and either they would paralyze it or smear it, make it impossible for us to do anything.”

Bella unhesitatingly agreed with Father Keller. She noted that communists were “the best infiltrators that God ever created.”⁵⁵

That is a bracing statement on these extraordinary deceivers, but with one crucial theological caveat: Though God created people, He does not create infiltrators. That is the devil’s work. And besides, communists deny God the Creator.

Bella Dodd’s explosive claim of a direct communist infiltration of Catholic seminaries was spoken to publicly by (among others) Bella’s confessor at the time, Fulton Sheen—the man who brought her into the Church—and by Bella’s close friend, Dr. Alice von Hildebrand, who passed away at age ninety-eight as this book was being finished.

During a dramatic talk in a church in Rome, Sheen’s remarks were so explosive that the *New York Times* reported them on the front page of its April 28, 1952 edition under the headline “Sheen in Rome Says Red Agents Tried to Infiltrate the Priesthood.” The article reported: “American Communists were under secret orders in 1936 to infiltrate the Roman Catholic priesthood, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen said today.” The fifty-seven-year-old auxiliary bishop of New York spoke to what was described as an “overflowing congregation” in the American Catholic Church of Santa Susanna. “This was the beginning of the planting of forces of evil communism within the religious communities to destroy them from within,” stated Sheen. “A call for volunteers to enter religious orders and make the great sacrifices of the life of a seminarian was made at a secret Red meeting in a large [American] city.”

To the best of our knowledge, this was the first and only time that Sheen publicly spoke of such an infiltration. Sheen did not divulge his source. Tellingly, however, his revelation just happened to come less than three weeks after he baptized and heard the confession of Bella Dodd (April 7, 1952), after months of giving her personal instruction in entering the Church.⁵⁶

Alice von Hildebrand, the acclaimed author and philosopher, repeatedly testified to Bella's claims of infiltrating the Church, including in an interview for this book. Bella admitted to doing so in a public talk in Orange, California, in the 1960s, at which she told an audience of six to eight hundred that she had personally helped to recruit 1,100 men to enter seminaries. (A notarized testimony from two witnesses present at Bella's talk is quoted in this book.)

These details, of course, will be explored in the pages ahead.

Deception and Deception

The infiltration, of course, depended on deception.

Aside from the question of whether a thousand communist men were slipped into seminaries, there is no question that socialism slid under many a parish door. It was always repackaged in some more palatable form, with those benign words like "social justice" and even "democracy." "They always use the word 'democracy,'" Bella said of American communists in Senate testimony.⁵⁷ Yes, always.

The Catholic Church warned of this deception. In 1937, as Bella was organizing a communist infiltration of the New York teachers' union, the Church released its most scathing indictment of communism, the encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*: "In the beginning, Communism showed itself for what it was in all its perversity, but very soon it realized that it was thus alienating people," stated Pope Pius XI. "It has therefore changed its tactics [by] hiding its real designs behind ideas that are in themselves good and attractive." The encyclical noted that by using "various names that do not suggest Communism . . . they try perfidiously to worm their way even into professedly Catholic and religious organizations . . . they invite Catholics to collaborate with them in the realm of so-called humanitarianism and charity; and at times make proposals that are in perfect harmony with the Christian spirit and doctrine of the Church." Since God is love,

and Christianity is a religion of love and not hate, it is diametrically opposed to Communism.

But whatever the deception, the devil is in the details. Pius XI explicitly warned: “Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever.”

Whether in theory or practice, the Church has always rejected Communism on account of its errors, notably: its atheistic materialism, its doctrine and practice of class-war, its denial of the rights and liberties of the human person, including the natural right to possess some measure of private property. Quite remarkably, the Vatican issued a lengthy statement condemning communism in 1846, two years before the *Communist Manifesto* was even published. In November 1846, Pope Pius IX released *Qui Pluribus*, affirming that communism would “utterly destroy the rights, property, and possessions of all men, and even society itself.” It was a “dark design” of “men in the clothing of sheep, while inwardly ravening wolves.” Communists “make men fly in terror from all practice of religion, and they cut down and dismember the sheep of the Lord.” The writings of communists teach “sinning,” “widespread disgusting infection,” are “filled with deceit and cunning,” and “spread pestilential doctrines everywhere and deprave the minds especially of the imprudent, occasioning great losses for religion.”

“As a result of this filthy medley of errors,” *Qui Pluribus* warned, “we see . . . morals deteriorated, Christ’s most holy religion despised, the majesty of divine worship rejected, the power of this Apostolic See plundered, the authority of the Church attacked and reduced to base slavery, the rights of bishops trampled on, the sanctity of marriage infringed.”⁵⁸

Yes, even marriage. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote emphatically: “Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.”⁵⁹ Bella Dodd painfully experienced that edict among her comrades. “The bourgeois family as a social unit was to be made obsolete,” she explained. In

March 1943, as she gave herself totally to the Party, she longed for family life. "I often talked of adopting children," she wrote with a heavy heart in her memoirs. "But the comrades dissuaded me."⁶⁰ In later testimony to the US Senate, after she broke with the Party, Dodd said that "Communism is an all-embracing philosophy which embraces everything you do, which determines the kind of marriage you have, your relations with your children, your relationship to your community, your relationship with your profession."⁶¹

And yet, many misled Catholics fell for the more "benign labels" that Bella Dodd warned about, such as "socialism," as if that was milder and better than communism. Here, too, the Church knew better from the outset. In 1849, Pius IX issued another encyclical, *Nostis Et Nobiscum*, which referred to both socialism and communism as "wicked theories," "perverted theories," "perverted teachings," and "pernicious fictions."

All popes warned of this. On December 28, 1878, Pius IX's successor, Pope Leo XIII, the *Rerum Novarum* pontiff, started the first year of his twenty-five-year-long papacy with another stark Church warning on both socialism and communism. It was called *Quod Apostolici Muneris* (On Socialism), which warned: "We speak of that sect of men who, under various and almost barbarous names, are called socialists, communists, or nihilists, and who, spread over all the world, and bound together by a wicked confederacy." These men "leave nothing untouched." They even go so far as to seek to "debase the natural union of man and woman, held sacred even among barbarous peoples; and its bond, by which the family is chiefly held together."

So many such statements issued forth from the Magisterium. One more worth noting was Pope Pius XI's seminal 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which stated emphatically: "Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist."

And yet, many Catholics were roped in nonetheless. We saw in the 1970s the embrace of Marxist-influenced liberation theology. We see

it still today. More recently, in July 2019, the Jesuit-flagship *America* magazine published a stunning article titled “The Catholic Case for Communism.” The author, Dean Dettloff, is a Catholic—*America’s* Toronto correspondent—and a member of the Communist Party of Canada. Jesuit priest Matt Malone, the magazine’s editor in chief, provided a companion essay justifying *America’s* reason for publishing this unapologetically pro-communist piece. In truth, there is no justification for such a piece in a Catholic publication.

“How could I be a communist when I am a devout Catholic?” a friend once heard Bella Dodd innocently ask on her road to Marxism.⁶² Somehow, it happened. And she was not—and is still not—alone.

Socialism and communism have somehow managed to find supporters in a Church that once condemned these ideologies as “wicked theories.” Bella Dodd would not be surprised. She became one of them.

Bella’s Role in the Conspiracy

Bella Dodd was described as a woman of medium height and build, with grayish-black hair and brown eyes, who walked with a slight limp because of an artificial limb.⁶³ She was also described as charismatic, brilliant, energetic, and precocious from her earliest days arriving as a child in America. Her story, recounted in these pages, is not that of a simple woman who naively fell for the Communist Party line. Rather, her story is woven into the tale of a revolt launched in the early twentieth century against the world, the family, the school, the Catholic Church, and human nature itself.

Lenin and Stalin initiated an ideological war, one that seeped into numerous facets of western society through the cultural debasements imposed on our youth. Bella not only saw it coming; she helped facilitate it by spearheading the teachers’ front. Years later, she harbored deep regrets and would endeavor to warn the world. She was especially concerned about how communists were manipulating children through the educational system.

“There is no doubt in my mind that the Communists will use the schools and every other educational medium,” she told the US Senate. “They will use every educational medium . . . from the nursery school to the universities.” They wanted children. “The youth are a very special target of the Communists,” she told senators in open hearings. “They want youth because the youth are the government of tomorrow. . . . They want to indoctrinate and teach the people with whom they will take over tomorrow.” Hence, the teachers, said Dodd, “were used on many different fronts” by the Party, both underground and above ground. This was fundamental, she said, “to establish a Soviet America,” the designation used by CPUSA leaders to describe their new Comintern-directed country upon their “victory in America.”⁶⁴

Dodd became very disillusioned at the tentacles of this very real and very insidious literal “conspiracy.” She could only take so much. But before she could leave the Party, her comrades expelled her in June 1949. In fact, it was June 19, 1949, to be exact.⁶⁵ A new birth-date, of sorts.

The revolution begun by Lenin and Stalin was deadly. The Harvard University Press volume *The Black Book of Communism* estimated that communism produced over a one hundred million deaths in the twentieth century (a conservative estimate).⁶⁶ And still somehow, communism is not widely condemned nor its crimes well known in our schools today. The sabotaging of the school system itself helps explain that. As popular commentator Jordan Peterson has noted, this unprecedented death and destruction is not widespread knowledge among students in the West, “And the reason I believe is that the communist system had extensive networks of admirers in the West, especially among intellectuals, and still, in fact, does.” To Peterson, this absence represented “the absolute rot of the education system.”⁶⁷

Bella Dodd was responsible for an unhealthy portion of that rot in education that metastasized throughout the wider culture. Using striking metaphors, perhaps appropriate giving communism’s killing capacity, she stated: “If I send you a machinegun and tell you it is a

baby carriage, and I send it to you wheel by wheel and nut by nut and you do not know until you have assembled the thing that it is a machinegun and not a baby carriage, that is exactly what has happened to this country. We are being sold machineguns without knowing it is machineguns.”⁶⁸

This description vividly describes what took place during the Cold War and still occurs in culture wars of the West. Americans, focused on baby carriages, and brainwashed into believing that “they all lived happily ever after,” simply could not imagine the deadly deception. After all, who could be against baby carriages?

That is how propaganda works. “The Communist cause is highly geared to propaganda,” Bella testified to Congress. “They understood it even better than Dr. [Joseph] Goebbels did. Propaganda is the most effective weapon in the hands of the Communists in beclouding the minds of American people.”⁶⁹

Bella Dodd, though long gone, having died over a half century ago, helped bequeath today’s post-modern, neo-Marxist world, a civilization both anti-Christian and anti-human. That is a sad legacy. But she also sought to make amends and to bequeath a better world. Her life took a happier course, toward faith, hope, and love. Finding God was key. “When did I really get myself completely separated?” she answered candidly to senators. “When I found myself a new philosophy of life, when I found something that I could believe. . . . I had to come to a belief in God in order really to achieve a reintegration of myself as a person.”⁷⁰

The “specter of communism,” as Marx and Engels described it in the opening line of their *Manifesto*, one which they said all the powers of Europe, including the pope, hastened to “exorcise,” had once filled a vacuum in Bella’s heart. But as Saint Augustine said, there is a *God-shaped* vacuum in each of our hearts. Only God can fill it—not the specter of communism, not what the Church described as a “satanic” specter. “If you don’t believe in God,” said Bella to the senators, “there

is a vacuum there, and where the vacuum is, the others will step in to take over.”⁷¹

God intervened in Bella’s life, and with the help of Venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen and grace, she reverted to the faith of her childhood and turned into an unexpected heroine and a model for us today. Here was an Italian immigrant, a little girl who arrived brimming with promise and innocence, who became a passionate Communist Party leader, and then eagerly sought faith and redemption.

We will show what made Bella Dodd choose communism over family ties, a professorship, country, and friendship, and then why she changed and looked for reconciliation. This is a woman who renounced the cold School of Darkness and re-embraced the warm light of the Catholic faith. Here, at long last, is her story.