



HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Chairman Jim Jordan

HOW THE BIDEN-WRAY FBI MANUFACTURED A FALSE NARRATIVE OF CATHOLIC AMERICANS AS VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

Interim Staff Report

Committee on the Judiciary

U.S. House of Representatives



July 22, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the beginning of the 118th Congress, the Committee has conducted oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) issuance of a memorandum that derisively labeled traditional Catholics as "racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists."¹ The memorandum, dated January 23, 2023, and originating from the FBI's Richmond Field Office, used a manufactured narrative to insert federal law-enforcement agents into places of worship.² The memorandum revealed that the FBI utilized at least one undercover agent, who sought to use local religious organizations as "new avenues for tripwire and source development" and that the FBI had already begun to interview members of a Catholic church's clergy and leadership.³

Last Congress, the Committee and Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government conducted extensive oversight of the FBI's anti-Catholic memorandum. From testimony and limited documents, the Committee determined that there was no legitimate basis for the memorandum to insert federal law enforcement into Catholic houses of worship.⁴ Among other things, the Committee found that FBI staff could not define the term "radical-traditionalist Catholic," the FBI had interviewed a Catholic priest and choir director as part of the memorandum, and the FBI misrepresented how many employees accessed the memorandum before it was removed from FBI systems. As a result of the Committee's oversight, the FBI updated its policy and changed its approval process for intelligence products discussing religious liberties.

Because the FBI under then-Director Christopher Wray did not fully cooperate with the Committee's request, the Committee reissued a subpoena to the FBI on February 24, 2025.⁵ Under the new leadership of Director Kash Patel, the FBI has cooperated considerably with the Committee's oversight, and has produced over 1,300 pages of additional documents related to the Richmond memorandum that Director Wray's FBI did not disclose. These documents show that the FBI put more federal law-enforcement resources into surveilling Catholics than previously known. Among other things, the new documents show that:

- Despite testimony to the contrary from the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Richmond Field Office, the FBI took significant investigative steps based on content in the Richmond memorandum, including initiating a separate investigation into a Catholic clergy member.⁶ The FBI's Richmond Field Office interviewed a priest affiliated with a

¹ Fed. Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Dep't of Justice, Domain Perspective, Interest of Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremist in Radical-Traditionalist Catholic Ideology Almost Certain Presents New Mitigation Opportunities (Jan. 23, 2023) (on file with the Comm.) [hereinafter Richmond Memorandum].

² *Id.*

³ *Id.* at 2.

⁴ See STAFF OF H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY AND SELECT SUBCOMM. ON THE WEAPONIZATION OF THE FED. GOV'T OF THE H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY, 118TH CONG., THE FBI'S BREACH OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: THE WEAPONIZATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGAINST CATHOLIC AMERICANS (Comm. Print Dec. 4, 2023) [hereinafter H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY CATHOLIC MEMORANDUM REPORT].

⁵ Subpoena from Hon. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary et. al., to Hon. Kash Patel, Dir., Fed. Bureau of Investigation (Feb. 24, 2025) [hereinafter Subpoena to Patel FBI].

⁶ Transcribed Interview with Stanley Meador, Special Agent in Charge, Rich. Field Off., Fed. Bureau of Investigation at 57-58 (Aug. 24, 2023) (on file with the Comm.) [hereinafter Meador Interview].

local Catholic church to discuss a subject under investigation whose case served as the basis for the Richmond memorandum. However, after the priest declined to share information about the subject, the FBI surveilled the priest and opened an investigative assessment into him.⁷

- In its investigation, the FBI attempted to violate the priest-penitent privilege on the faulty reasoning that the Richmond subject under investigation seeking spiritual guidance had not been baptized or completed catechism.⁸
- Contrary to assertions that the Richmond memorandum was an isolated incident, internal FBI documents used derogatory terms like “radical traditionalist catholic” or “Radical-Traditionalist Catholic” between 2009 and 2023. An FBI internal database contained at least 13 documents, including the Richmond memorandum, that used these terms—all of which cited the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).⁹
- The Richmond memorandum relied on radical open-source material, including but not limited to information from the SPLC, as support for the FBI’s focus on “radical traditionalist Catholics” and “racially motivated violent extremists.”
- The FBI’s Richmond Field Office coordinated with the Louisville Field Office and the London Legat Office¹⁰ to gather further evidence about the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) and a priest affiliated with SSPX.¹¹

These new findings make it apparent that the FBI under President Biden and Director Wray withheld key information responsive to the Committee’s oversight. The Committee remains committed to conducting oversight of the Biden-Harris Administration’s abuse of federal law-enforcement resources against Catholic Americans. As the Trump Administration and Director Patel continue to provide transparency about the law-enforcement abuses of the Biden-Harris Administration, the Committee will continue its oversight to inform legislative reforms to protect American’s religious liberties from government overreach.

⁷ FBI-HJC119-DP-000617 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

⁸ See Richmond Memorandum, *supra* note 1.

⁹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000491 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000492 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰ A “legat office,” or a legal attaché, is an FBI office located in another country. The legat office referenced above is located in London, England. *International Offices*, FBI, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/international-offices> (last visited June 27, 2025).

¹¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000616 (on file with the Comm.).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Table of Contents	3
Background	4
I. Under Director Wray, the FBI took investigative action based on First Amendment- protected activity and targeted Catholic Americans.	7
II. The FBI's Richmond Field Office relied on several radical anti-religious materials while creating the Richmond memorandum.	15
III. The FBI Headquarters knew about the Richmond memorandum before it was approved and even aided in drafting a proposed public-facing product.	21
Conclusion	25

BACKGROUND

Under former Director Wray’s tenure, the FBI targeted Americans for simply practicing their religion. On January 23, 2023, the FBI’s Richmond Field Office issued a memorandum that linked “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists” (RMVEs) with a “radical-traditionalist Catholic” (RTC) ideology.¹² The memorandum cited biased and partisan sources to support its assessment, which resulted in federal law-enforcement agents being inserted into places of worship,¹³ and even proposed further opportunities for the FBI to infiltrate Catholic churches as a form of “threat mitigation.”¹⁴ The FBI document even highlighted certain public policy issues, including mainstream conservative views about immigration, affirmative action, and life issues, that the FBI asserted would “catalyz[e]” RTC adherents.¹⁵ At a hearing before the Committee, Director Wray minimized the Richmond memorandum, testifying that it was a “single product by a single field office, which as soon as I found out about it I was aghast and ordered it withdrawn from FBI systems.”¹⁶

Following widespread criticism about the memorandum, the FBI withdrew the memorandum and blamed local agents and employees in the Richmond Field Office for its creation and dissemination. On February 9, 2023, the FBI released a public statement to supplement its retraction of the memorandum from FBI systems:

While our standard practice is to not comment on specific intelligence products, this particular field office product—disseminated only within the FBI—regarding racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism does not meet the exacting standards of the FBI. Upon learning of the document, FBI Headquarters quickly began taking action to remove the document from FBI systems and conduct a review of the basis for the document. The FBI is committed to sound analytic tradecraft and to investigating and preventing acts of violence and other crimes while upholding the constitutional rights of all Americans and will never conduct investigative activities or open an investigation based solely on First Amendment protected activity.¹⁷

In February and March 2023, the Committee and Select Subcommittee requested several categories of documents and information from the FBI relating to the memorandum, and the FBI made several rolling productions to the Committee in response to its request. However, the FBI’s response was insufficient, leading the Committee to issue a subpoena on April 10, 2023, for the

¹² See Richmond Memorandum, *supra* note 1.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: Hearing Before the H. Comm. On the Judiciary, 118th Cong. 43 (2023) (statement of Christopher A. Wray, Dir., Fed. Bureau of Investigation) (on file with the Comm.) [hereinafter Director Wray’s Hearing Testimony].

¹⁷ Tyler Arnold & Joe Bukuras, *FBI retracts leaked document orchestrating investigation of Catholics*, CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY (Feb. 9, 2023).

material.¹⁸ Through its oversight, the Committee and Select Subcommittee obtained 571 heavily redacted documents from the Biden-Wray FBI and testimony that showed the FBI relied on at least one undercover agent to develop the memorandum, and that the FBI even proposed developing sources among the Catholic clergy and church leadership, including at the Diocese of Richmond and other “mainline parishes.”¹⁹ In fact, at the time of the memorandum’s release, the FBI had already interviewed a priest and choir director affiliated with a Catholic church in Richmond, Virginia.²⁰ Most concerning, the intelligence analysts who drafted the Richmond memorandum coordinated with FBI Headquarters to convert elements of the memorandum into an external, public-facing document highlighting the threats of “radical” Catholics.²¹ As a result of the Committee’s investigation, the FBI updated its policy and heightened the approval process for intelligence products implicating religious liberties.²²

On December 4, 2023, the Committee and Select Subcommittee published a report revealing details about the Biden-Wray FBI’s categorization of certain Catholic Americans as potential domestic terrorists.²³ The Committee found that there was no legitimate law-enforcement basis to insert federal law enforcement into Catholic churches.²⁴ The Committee also discovered that the basis for the memorandum relied on a single investigation in the Richmond Field Office’s area of responsibility in which the subject “self-described” as a “radical-traditionalist Catholic.”²⁵ According to the FBI’s own internal review of the memorandum, investigators found that many FBI employees could not even define the meaning of “radical-traditionalist Catholic” when preparing, editing, or reviewing the memorandum.²⁶ Yet, two supervisory analysts and the field office’s top lawyer approved the memorandum and it became the basis for an FBI-wide memorandum warning about the dangers of “radical” Catholics.²⁷

Following the report, the Committee continued to engage with the Biden-Wray FBI regarding documents that the FBI possessed responsive to the subpoena that were not produced to the Committee. For example, the memorandum included an “Opportunities” section with language suggesting that the FBI relied on information derived from at least one undercover employee, who sought to use local religious organizations as “new tripwire and source development.”²⁸ Yet, the Committee did not receive information regarding the extent to which the FBI developed sources within religious organizations to inform on the activities occurring at places of worship. In addition, whistleblower testimony confirmed that the FBI distributed the memorandum to field offices across the country. However, productions to the Committee did not

¹⁸ Subpoena from Hon. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Hon. Christopher A. Wray, Dir., Fed. Bureau of Investigation (Apr. 10, 2023).

¹⁹ See Richmond Memorandum, *supra* note 1.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Inspection Div., Fed. Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Dep’t of Justice, *Strategic Review Report: Richmond Field Office – Domain Perspective Strategic Review* (2023) (on file with the Comm.) [hereinafter Strategic Review Report].

²² *Id.*

²³ See H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY CATHOLIC MEMORANDUM REPORT, *supra* note 4.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ See Strategic Review Report, *supra* note 21.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ See Richmond Memorandum.

²⁸ *Id.*

include documents or communications regarding the dissemination of the memorandum. Finally, the FBI failed to produce information regarding open-sources, FBI case files, and liaison and local law-enforcement reporting used to create the memorandum—all of which were responsive to the Committee’s subpoena.

Following his nomination as FBI Director, Kash Patel prioritized efforts to rehabilitate the FBI by “ensuring that the FBI operates with the openness necessary to rebuild trust by simply replying to lawmakers.”²⁹ With Director Patel’s commitment of transparency, on February 24, 2025, the Committee reissued its subpoena for documents and information necessary for its oversight in the 119th Congress.³⁰ Since then, the FBI has produced 1,322 pages of documents to the Committee and it continues to make productions on a rolling basis. Not only do these documents reveal new information about the origins and depth of federal law-enforcement resources used to create the memorandum, but they also highlight how the Biden-Wray FBI grossly impeded the Committee’s oversight by withholding hundreds of pages of documents and claiming to have “permanently deleted” all information related to the memorandum.³¹

²⁹ Kash Patel, Opinion, *How I’ll Rebuild Public Trust in the FBI*, WALL ST. J. (Jan. 29, 2025).

³⁰ See Subpoena to Patel FBI, *supra* note 5.

³¹ See Strategic Review Report, *supra* note 21.

I. Under Director Wray, the FBI took investigative action based on First Amendment-protected activity and targeted Catholic Americans.

New evidence shows that the FBI took investigative action on the content of the Richmond memorandum, despite assertions from the FBI to the contrary. On February 9, 2023, the FBI released a public statement declaring that the FBI “will never conduct investigative activities or open an investigation based solely on First Amendment protected activities.”³² Several months later, on August 24, 2023, Stanley Meador, the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the FBI’s Richmond Field Office, who is currently on administrative leave, testified to the Committee that the FBI did not take any investigative steps based on the memorandum and that the FBI does not target Catholics.³³ He testified:

Q. As far as you know, did the FBI ever take any investigative steps whatsoever based on the domain perspective that we’ve discussed here today?

A. No.

Q. Was that ever the intention?

A. No.

Q. Does the FBI target Catholics?

A. No.³⁴

However, new documents show that the FBI and SAC Meador may have misled the Committee and the public about the extent of the Richmond Field Office’s involvement in investigating Catholic Americans. Documents show that the FBI opened a separate investigation into the same priest who FBI agents in Richmond had interviewed for the memorandum.³⁵ In order to obtain information about these clergy members and their church’s organization, the FBI’s Richmond Field Office coordinated with the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division at Headquarters, the FBI’s Louisville Field Office and the FBI’s London Office. This information reveals that the FBI’s investigation into Catholic Americans was more widespread than initially expected—even extending overseas to international law-enforcement partners.

A. The FBI opened an investigation into the priest who was interviewed for the Richmond memorandum.

Last Congress, a whistleblower revealed to the Committee that the FBI interviewed a priest and choir director of an SSPX-affiliated church in Richmond, Virginia—both of whom had

³² Tyler Arnold & Joe Bukuras, *FBI retracts leaked document orchestrating investigation of Catholics*, CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY (Feb. 9, 2023).

³³ Meador Interview at 57-58.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ FBI-HJC119-DP-000616 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

“no prior reporting history with FBI Richmond.”³⁶ The new documents produced under Director Patel’s leadership confirm the whistleblower’s testimony and provide more insight into the FBI’s interactions with the priest and the investigative steps that the FBI took following the interview.

The new documents detail the interactions between the FBI and a Richmond-area priest in or around January 2023. Specifically, in an email dated January 4, 2023, an FBI employee in the Richmond Field Office described to his colleagues and the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division (CTD) at FBI Headquarters how the priest “became very uncomfortable” when he asked him specific questions about one of his parishioners.³⁷ According to the email, the FBI did not consider the subject’s communications with his priest to be privileged because the subject had not “been baptized,” nor had he “completed his catechism.”³⁸ The priest-penitent privilege rightly protects communications between a clergy member and an individual seeking spiritual guidance—it is not dependent on the individual achieving certain milestones in his or her spiritual life.³⁹ The privilege protects confidential communications regardless of whether a person is baptized or has “completed his catechism.”⁴⁰ Failing to recognize this, the FBI employee wrote:

During the course of our investigation into [the Richmond subject, he] was attending [redacted]—[Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX)]. After [the subject’s] arrest, T[ask] F[orce] O[fficer] [redacted] and I attempted to interview [the priest] regarding his interactions with [the subject]. Since [the subject] has not completed his catechism or been baptized in the church his communication with [the priest is] not considered privileged. However, upon asking [the priest] questions about [the subject’s] desires and plans to commit violence, [the priest] became very uncomfortable and started incoherently stuttering. He requested to speak with the church[’]s leadership and attorneys before continu[ing] to provide any more information. Since then, [the priest] has refused to speak with us any further, but has continued to speak with [the subject] while in prison, and even attempted to visit him.⁴¹

³⁶ See Richmond Memorandum, *supra* note 1; See also H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY CATHOLIC MEMORANDUM REPORT.

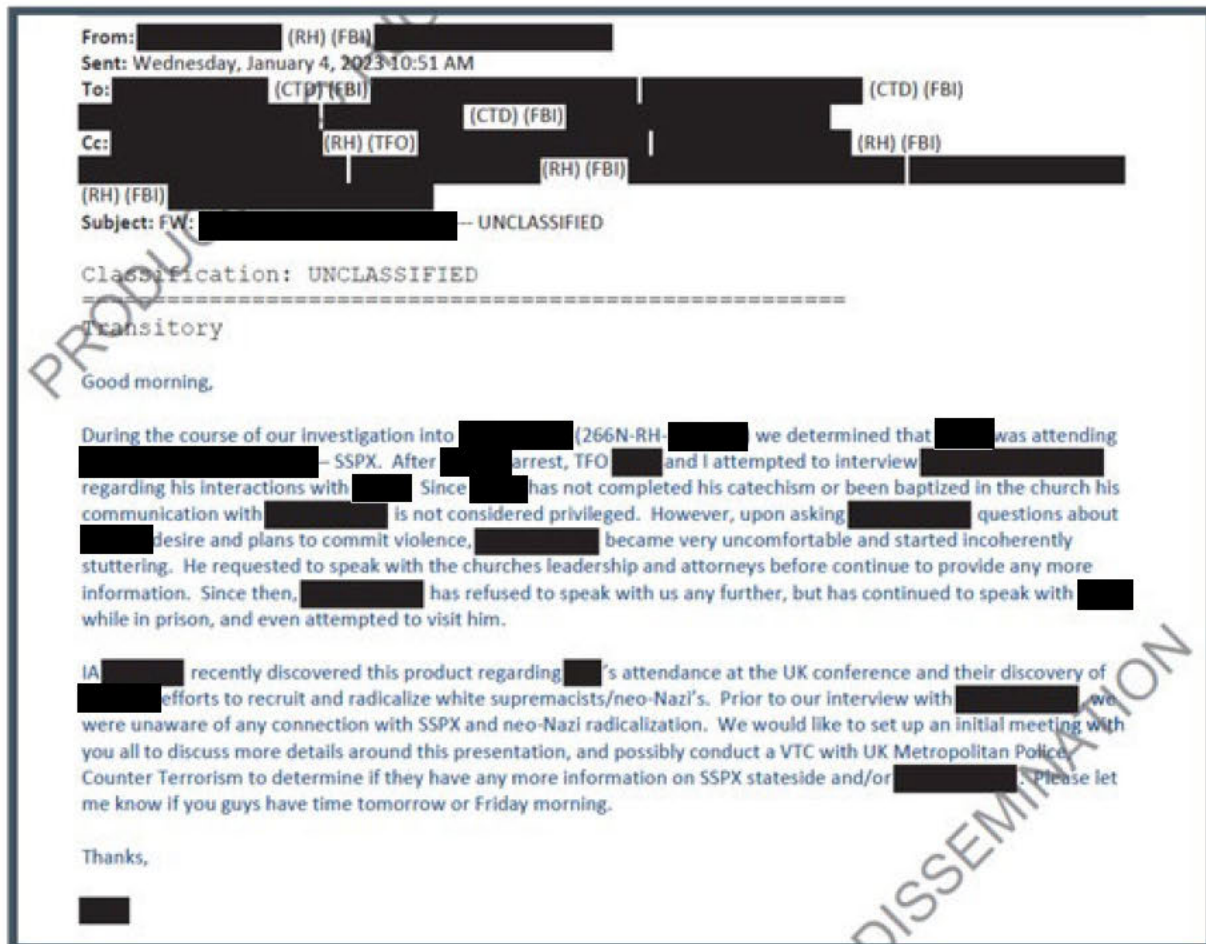
³⁷ FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

³⁸ FBI-HJC119-DP-000617 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

³⁹ *Trammel v. U.S.*, 445 U.S. 40 (1980) (“The priest-penitent privilege recognizes the human need to disclose to a spiritual counselor, in total and absolute confidence, what are believed to be flawed acts or thoughts and to receive priestly consolation and guidance in return”).

⁴⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000617 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

⁴¹ *Id.*



Not only did the Richmond Field Office relay this information about the priest to the FBI's CTD, but it also reached out to employees of the Louisville Field Office.⁴² On January 6, 2023, a Richmond Field Office employee emailed two employees in the Louisville Field Office regarding the investigation into the Richmond subject and its attempt to interview the priest.⁴³ In the email, the Richmond Field Office employee stated, "FBI Richmond attempted to interview the priest . . . who was not cooperative. Additionally, he has been to see [the Richmond subject] six times in jail. Richmond is opening a Guardian^[44] on [the priest]"⁴⁵ On the same day, an intelligence analyst from the Louisville Field Office responded, writing: "I don't recall ever coming across these names or organization before. The best way to address this is to send Guardians on [redacted]."⁴⁶ Although the email is not clear about the nature of the Louisville Field Office's involvement in the investigation—potentially the Louisville Field Office had some existing investigative information relating to SSPX or the subject—the result of the interaction was that the FBI's Richmond Field Office opened a formal investigative assessment on the Richmond-area priest.

⁴² FBI-HJC119-DP-000616 (on file with the Comm.).

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ A "guardian" is an assessment to determine whether a full investigation is warranted.

⁴⁵ FBI-HJC119-DP-000616 (on file with the Comm.).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

Now that the FBI's Richmond Field Office opened a guardian assessment on the priest, employees in that office began to examine the priest's ordination history. On January 6, 2023, an email thread between several employees in the Richmond Field Office highlighted their interest in investigating the priest. The email stated:

It looks like [the priest] was ordained on [redacted] at the [redacted] and assigned to the Archdiocese of Covington (I am 99% certain that this [redacted] is the same one we identify in the [Richmond memorandum] and is located in our A[rea] O[f] R[esponsibility] in [redacted], Virginia; this is the only SSPX seminary in the United States per the SSPX website). According to the SSPX website, [the priest] celebrated his first mass on 7 January 2022 at the [redacted]. He celebrated his first Mass outside the Seminary on 30 January 2022 in [redacted], New York, with his next Mass outside the Seminary listed as the one in [redacted], California on 27 February 2022.⁴⁷

[redacted] (RH) (FBI)

From: [redacted] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Friday, January 6, 2023 3:24 PM
To: [redacted] (RH) (FBI); [redacted] (RH) (FBI)
Cc: [redacted] (RH) (FBI); [redacted] (RH) (TFO); [redacted] (RH) (FBI); [redacted] (RH) (FBI)
Subject: RE: [redacted] --- UNCLASSIFIED//FGI GBR//LES

RMTRUserProp: Short-Term Use Email (Transitory)
SentinelCaseId: Short-Term Use Email (Transitory)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FGI GBR//LES
=====

Transitory

(U) LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE: The information marked (U//LES) in this document is the property of FBI and may be distributed within the Federal Government (and its contractors), US intelligence, law enforcement, public safety or protection officials and individuals with a need to know. Distribution beyond these entities without FBI authorization is prohibited. Precautions should be taken to ensure this information is stored and/or destroyed in a manner that precludes unauthorized access. Information bearing the LES caveat may not be used in legal proceedings without first receiving authorization from the originating agency. Recipients are prohibited from subsequently posting the information marked LES on a website or an unclassified network.

Just FYI - Based on my research, the highlighted from the original email below is slightly inaccurate/incomplete. It looks like [redacted] was ordained on [redacted] at the [redacted] and assigned to the Archdiocese of Covington (I am 99% certain that this [redacted] is the same one we identify in the DP and is located in our AOR in [redacted] Virginia; this is the only SSPX seminary in the United States per the SSPX website). According to the SSPX website, [redacted] celebrated his first Mass on [redacted] (technically, the website says [redacted], but all indications are that this is a typo) at the [redacted]. He celebrated his first Mass outside the Seminary on [redacted] in [redacted] New York, with his next Mass outside the Seminary listed as the one in [redacted] California on [redacted].

[redacted]

⁴⁷ FBI-HJC119-DP-000640 (on file with the Comm.). See also FBI-HJC119-DP-000558 (on file with the Comm.).

This new information demonstrates that the FBI not only used its federal law-enforcement resources to surveil certain Catholic Americans, but it also used these resources to investigate a clergy member. From information made available to the Committee, there appeared to be no legitimate law-enforcement purpose for investigating this priest. This new information suggests that the FBI's religious liberty abuses were more widespread than the FBI initially admitted and led the public to believe.

B. The FBI extended its investigative efforts into the church and its priest overseas to an FBI office in London, England.

In testimony to the Committee, Director Wray portrayed the Richmond memorandum as an isolated incident emanating from one FBI field office.⁴⁸ In addition, during his transcribed interview with the Committee, the head of the FBI's Richmond Field Office, Stanley Meador, insisted that there was no coordinated investigative effort to surveil Catholic Americans.⁴⁹ However, internal FBI documents show coordination among several field offices, including FBI's Portland Field Office and Milwaukee Field Office, into the development and dissemination of the Richmond memorandum.⁵⁰ New documents, produced by the FBI under Director Patel's leadership, reveal additional outreach from the FBI's Richmond Field Office to the Louisville Field Office and to the FBI's London Office, where agents sought a meeting with London's Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command to gather further evidence about SSPX and the priest.⁵¹ This outreach included coordinated surveillance of a priest who the FBI interviewed as a part of the Richmond memorandum.

On January 4, 2023, a Richmond Field Office employee emailed colleagues inquiring further about SSPX.⁵² This correspondence occurred a few days after intelligence analysts from the Richmond Field Office had begun coordinating with the FBI's Counterterrorism Division's (CTD) to draft an external product known as a Strategic Perspective Executive Analytic Report (SPEAR).⁵³ The January 4 email, which was sent to several employees at FBI Headquarters, explained that the priest in Richmond was attending a conference in the United Kingdom and inquired about the possibility of setting up a "[Video Teleconferencing Call (VTC)] with UK Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism [Command] to determine if they have any more information on SSPX stateside and/or [the priest]."⁵⁴

The same day, a Richmond Field Office employee followed up on the email thread, writing: "Just as a follow up, I found the product below last week when I was searching Sentinel related to SSPX. I shot it to [redacted] as we are drafting a joint product together on RMVE's interest in rad-trad ideology."⁵⁵ The next day, January 5, 2023, a CTD Supervisory Special Agent from the Richmond Field Office, sent an email to the FBI's London Office noting that "[r]eports

⁴⁸ Director Wray's Hearing Testimony, *supra* note 16.

⁴⁹ Meador Interview at 87.

⁵⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000603 (on file with the Comm.).

⁵¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000616 (on file with the Comm.).

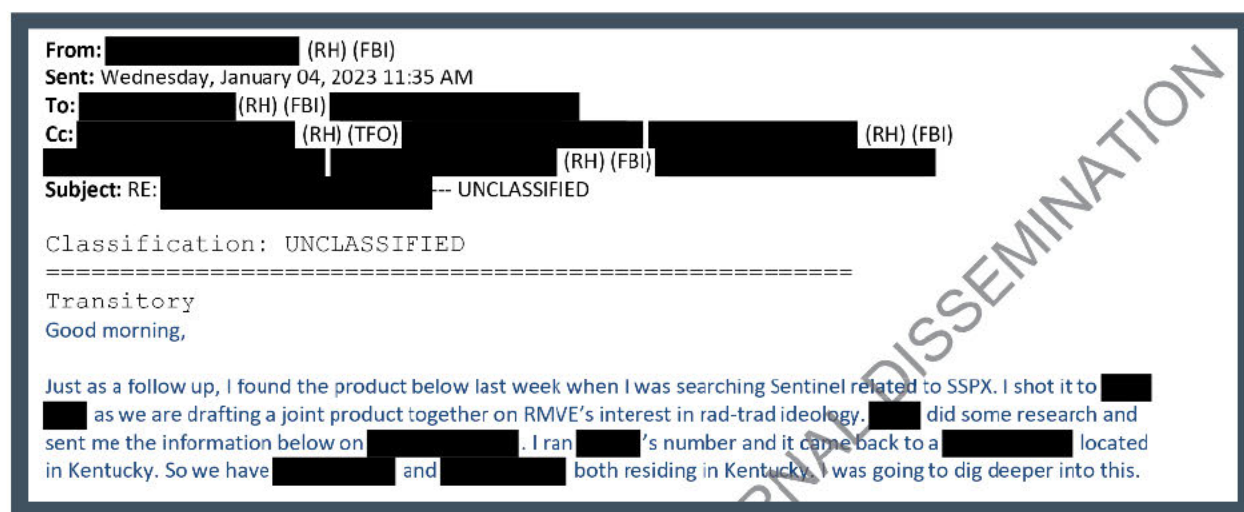
⁵² FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

⁵³ FBI-HJC119-DP-000074 (on file with the Comm.); *See also* Strategic Review Report, *supra* note 21.

⁵⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000618 (on file with the Comm.).

⁵⁵ FBI-HJC119-DP-000617 (on file with the Comm.).

have indicated that [the priest] is scheduled to visit with [the Richmond subject] in jail tomorrow (January 6, 2023)”⁵⁶



On the same day, an employee from the FBI's London Office replied to the email explaining that they would be happy to help, but they needed a Foreign Dissemination Request (FDR).⁵⁷ The FDR would provide background on the case and explain why the Richmond Field Office wanted to obtain information from the London Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command.⁵⁸ In order to acquire information on the priest in an expediated fashion, CTD sought to bypass the FDR request, which is the normal process for engaging with a foreign law-enforcement entity.⁵⁹ An employee in the FBI's London Office pushed back on CTD, insisting that the Richmond Field Office follow the formal process to request the meeting.⁶⁰

On January 9, 2023, an employee from the Richmond Field Office responded to employees in CTD and the FBI's Louisville Field Office explaining that they would like to set up a call to talk about the investigation and "coordinate next steps."⁶¹ The employee went on to explain that the Richmond Field Office is in contact with "the Brits . . . who will have more information on [SSPX's] recruitment platform."⁶² Subsequent documents show that a Skype meeting occurred between the FBI's Richmond Field Office, Louisville Field Office, and CTD on January 10, 2023.⁶³ These email communications demonstrate the Richmond Field Office's urgency and persistence in trying to get more information about the priest so that it could initiate a larger investigation. Even more concerning, it shows—contrary to the denials of the Biden-Wray FBI—that FBI Headquarters was aiding in the Richmond Field Office's attempts to surveil and investigate a member of the Catholic clergy.

⁵⁷ FBI-HJC119-DP-000632 (on file with the Comm.).

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

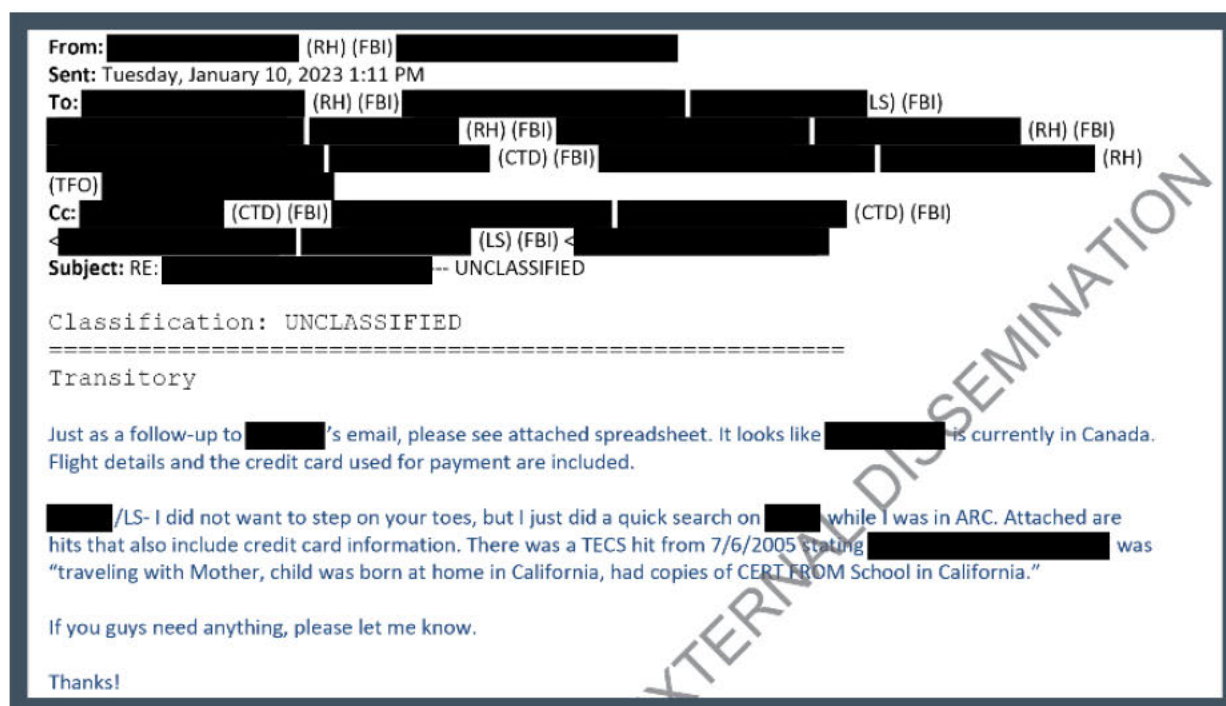
⁶⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000631 (on file with the Comm.).

⁶¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000629 (on file with the Comm.).

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ FBI-HJC119-DP-000627 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000629 (on file with the Comm.).

Following the Skype meeting, the employees from the Richmond Field Office continued to email employees in both the Louisville Field Office and CTD about the priest's current location, travel plans, and credit card information. On January 10, 2023, a Richmond Field Office employee sent an email to several Louisville Field Office employees and the CTD stating, "[the priest] will be traveling to the UK Jan 20th – 30th"⁶⁴ Another employee from the Richmond Field Office followed up with the email indicating that he found the priest's current location. The employee wrote, "please see the attached spreadsheet. It looks like [the priest] is currently in Canada. Flight details and the credit card used for the payment are included."⁶⁵ The employee further wrote, "[Redacted]/[Louisville] – I did not want to step on your toes, but I just did a quick search on [the priest] while I was in ARC."⁶⁶ Attached are hits that include credit card information."⁶⁷



On January 10, 2023, following the Richmond Field Office's meeting with the Louisville Field Office and CTD, a Supervisory Special Agent from CTD reached out to the FBI's London Office, requesting again to meet with London Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command.⁶⁸ Shortly thereafter, on January 12, 2023, a Richmond Field Office employee wrote to the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Operation Section stating, "the FDR has been signed on our end. Given [the priest's] travel on January 20, can you all push this FDR, so we can coordinate a

⁶⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000625 (on file with the Comm.).

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ ARC refers to the Airlines Reporting Corporation, which "manages the world's most comprehensive air transaction data." Am. Reporting Corp., The Intelligence Behind Air Travel, https://www2.arccorp.com/about-us/arc-data/?utm_source=footer-link. Federal law enforcement use ARC data in criminal investigations. See Press Release, Am. Reporting Corp., ARC Helps Secret Service Shut Down Credit Card Fraud Ring (Nov. 12, 2019).

⁶⁷ FBI-HJC119-DP-000625 (on file with the Comm.).

⁶⁸ FBI-HJC119-DP-000624 (on file with the Comm.).

meeting for next week? Given the Holiday Monday I don't want to delay this any further, as . . . next week is our only opportunity to get in[formation] from . . . the UK before [the priest's] travel.”⁶⁹ On the same day, CTD approved the FDR.⁷⁰ On January 18, 2023, the FBI's London Office responded to the Richmond Field Office's inquiry, confirming it was available for a call the following day and asked “who is traveling to the UK on January 20th?”⁷¹ The Richmond Field Office employee stated, “(the priest) is traveling on 1/20.”⁷²

These internal documents show that the FBI went to great lengths in an expediated manner to gather intelligence about the Richmond-area priest and the SSPX organization from the FBI's London Office. Contrary to assertions from Director Wray and the head of the Richmond Field Office, the FBI collaborated extensively among field offices and FBI Headquarters—and even international law-enforcement partners—to take investigative steps relating to topics referenced in the Richmond memorandum.

* * *

It is unconscionable that the FBI during the Biden Administration took significant investigative action on the same priest who was referenced in the Richmond memorandum. The FBI expanded its scope from investigating a single subject under investigation, who served as the basis for the Richmond memorandum, to shifting its focus on a clergy member. The shift was due to another preexisting FBI memorandum in FBI systems that warned about SSPX's efforts to “recruit and radicalize white supremacists.” The FBI dismissed the priest's reluctance about violating confidences, baselessly writing them off because the subject had not been baptized. The FBI's Richmond Field Office coordinated with the Louisville Field Office and the London Office to surveil the priest, sharing details about his travel plans and financial information.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000623 (on file with the Comm.).

⁷¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000620 (on file with the Comm.).

⁷² *Id.*

II. The FBI's Richmond Field Office relied on several radical anti-religious materials while creating the Richmond memorandum.

The FBI relied on many sources while preparing the Richmond memorandum—many of which spewed radical, left-leaning ideology from anti-religious organizations, including the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and *Salon*.⁷³ In response to Director Patel's mandate for a more accountable FBI, the Committee has received eight "[o]pen source articles obtained as part of product research" that influenced the direction of the Richmond memorandum.⁷⁴ Critically, some of these articles contained notations and highlights indicating an anti-Catholic bias made by an Richmond Field Office employee while drafting the memorandum.⁷⁵ The FBI used the open-source material to target specific churches, highlighting parishes connected to "traditional" Catholic beliefs.⁷⁶ These documents reveal that FBI went astray from its duty to produce "sound analytic tradecraft"⁷⁷ and allowed its investigations to be influenced by politically biased and anti-Catholic open-source material.

A. The FBI under the leadership of Director Wray relied on articles that depicted Catholics as white nationalists.

The FBI disclosed eight different open-source articles that FBI analysts cited and used to research information for the Richmond memorandum. These articles and notations made by an FBI employee strongly suggest that employees working on the memorandum were implicitly biased against Catholic Americans. Titles of some of the articles cited include: "The Catholic Church Has a Visible White-Power Faction,"⁷⁸ "Catholics are leaders and even founders of the most dangerous neo-Nazi groups in existence,"⁷⁹ "How Extremist Gun Culture is Trying to Co-opt the Rosary,"⁸⁰ "White Nationalists Get Religion: On the Far-Right Fringe, Catholics and Racists Forge a Movement,"⁸¹ and "Traditional Catholics and White Nationalist 'Gropers' Forge a New Far-Right Youth Movement."⁸² The documents contained several passages of highlighting that reflect a negative attitude towards pro-life individuals and Catholics.⁸³ For example, one highlighted portion stated "yet the convergence within Christian nationalism is cemented in common causes such as hostility toward abortion-rights advocates."⁸⁴ In other words, the FBI

⁷³ FBI-HJC119-DP-000821 (on file with the Comm.); FBI-HJC119-DP-000823 (on file with the Comm.).

⁷⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000812 (on file with the Comm.).

⁷⁵ FBI-HJC119-DP-000833 (on file with the Comm.); FBI-HJC119-DP-000823 (on file with the Comm.); FBI-HJC119-DP-000839 (on file with the Comm.). The documents were produced to the Committee with these notions and highlighting; however, it is not readily apparent who applied them.

⁷⁶ FBI-HJC119-DP-000865 (on file with the Comm.).

⁷⁷ *Analytic Outreach*, INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY DIRECTIVE 205, (Aug. 28, 2013). ("Analytic... tradecraft are the means by which we [the FBI] ensure integrity, objectivity, and rigor in our intelligence work...") *Director Wray's Remarks at the Intelligence and National Security Alliance Leadership Breakfast*, FBI PRESS RELEASE, (Feb. 29, 2024), <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches-and-testimony/director-wray-s-remarks-at-the-intelligence-and-national-security-alliance-leadership-breakfast>.

⁷⁸ FBI-HJC119-DP-000823 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000826 (on file with the Comm.).

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000827 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000834 (on file with the Comm.).

⁸¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000835 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000846 (on file with the Comm.).

⁸² FBI-HJC119-DP-000847 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000864 (on file with the Comm.).

⁸³ FBI-HJC119-DP-000823 – FBI-HJC119-DP-000864 (on file with the Comm.).

⁸⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000833 (on file with the Comm.).

analysts who developed the Richmond memorandum relied on literature with an inherent prejudice against people of faith and those with widely-held, deeply personal views of the sanctity of life.

Magazine / Politics / Racial Justice

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS A VISIBLE WHITE-POWER FACTION

Once persecuted by the Ku Klux Klan, some Catholics now embrace the most extreme forms of racial hatred.

BY ERIC MARTIN

ADULT RATING

CRISIS

Editors' Note: As a matter of editorial policy, *Sightings* does not grant take-down requests from outside parties. In the case of "Harboring A Culture of Hate" by Eric Martin, *Sightings* then-editor-in-chief and then-president Jim Wallis felt the correction below called into question the entire substance of the article and made the decision on July 28 to take down the article from *Sightings* website. You can read past statements on that decision [here](#). *Sightings* believes that the significant conversation this article has generated, along with the decision to remove the article, should be conducted as part of an open and transparent public conversation. For that reason, on Aug. 14, *Sightings* reinstated the article with the correction below.

Aug. 14, 2020, 5:42 p.m. **Correction:** An earlier version of this article claimed that the writers of the document *Open Wide Our Hearts to The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, developed by the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), were silent on the six main symbols of racism: *swastikas*, *Confederate flags*, and *nooses*. This is not true. The final language of *Open Wide Our Hearts* includes the sentence: "The re-appearance of symbols of hatred, such as *nooses* and *swastikas* in public spaces, is a tragic indicator of rising racial and ethnic animus." The document did not condemn these symbols, but did address them. The past document does not address *Confederate flags*. We apologize for this error and thank readers at the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Charities USA for pointing it out.

WHEN THE U.S. Catholic bishops gathered to draft a document on race in the wake of the 2017 white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Va., Bishop Anthony Taylor of Little Rock, Ark., submitted an amendment to condemn the imagery of *swastikas*, *Confederate flags*, and *nooses*. The U.S. bishops deliberated and voted to reject it.

The document, "Open Wide Our Hearts," was billed as "a pastoral letter against racism," making its writers' inability to adopt the amendment condemning these famously extreme symbols of racism a curious omission. The bishops explained themselves by arguing that *swastikas* and *nooses* were already "widely recognized signs of hatred," which would seem to make them all the easier to condemn. (Interestingly, they endorsed this logic when issuing their only condemnation, against violence toward police.) As for the *Confederate flag*, "some still claim it as a sign of heritage," they argued.

While this logic undeniably hand-waves the history of slavery, murderous opposition to civil rights, and violence such as the 2015 shooting at a Black church in Charleston, S.C., as a

CATHOLICS ARE LEADERS AND EVEN FOUNDERS OF THE MOST DANGEROUS NEO-NAZI GROUPS IN EXISTENCE.

PHOTO: JAMES

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FBI-HJC119-DP-000823

1/5

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS A VISIBLE WHITE-POWER FACTION

CATHOLICS ARE LEADERS AND EVEN FOUNDERS OF THE MOST DANGEROUS NEO-NAZI GROUPS IN EXISTENCE.

12/12/2022, 09:36

The Extremist Our Culture Trying to Co-opt the Rosary - The Herald

How Extremist Groups Co-opt the Rosary

Why are sacramental beads suddenly

By Daniel Patterson

Daniel K. Williams: This really is a different pro-life movement

Some doctrinal differences and divisions remain. Many radical-traditional Catholic men maintain the hard-line position that other forms of Christianity are heretical, and hold that Catholics alone adhere to the one true Church. Christian nationalism's nativism and its predilection for "Great Replacement" theory alienate some radical-traditional Catholics who are not white or who were not born in the United States, and deep veins of anti-Catholicism persist among far-right Protestants.

Yet the convergence within Christian nationalism is cemented in common causes such as hostility toward abortion-rights advocates. The pro-choice protests that followed the leaked early draft of the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, led to a profusion of social-media posts on the far right fantasizing about killing activists, and such forums responded to Pride month this year with extremist homophobic and transphobic "groomer" discourse. Rad-trad networks are also involved in organizing rosary-branded events that involve weapons training.

<https://www.theherald.com/news/2022/08/radical-traditional-catholic-christian-rosary-weapons/>

FBI-HJC119-DP-000833

7/11

Yet the convergence within Christian nationalism is cemented in common causes such as hostility toward abortion-rights advocates.

B. Director Wray’s FBI relied on the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) to inform its intelligence products more than once.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is a far-left, anti-religion group that focuses on labeling conservative leaning groups as “hate” groups.⁸⁵ The SPLC keeps lists of these so-called “hate groups,” tracks these groups’ activities, and investigates them.⁸⁶ Multiple reports, from various sources, note that the SPLC is biased and is motivated to delegitimize mainstream conservative organizations.⁸⁷ When Stanley Meador, the head of the FBI’s Richmond Field Office, testified before the Committee, he claimed that “the SPLC was used to offer perspective, but wasn’t officially cited as a, quote/unquote, ‘source’ in the document.”⁸⁸ However, documents provided to the Committee show that the SPLC was, in fact, listed as a “source” to support content in the memorandum.⁸⁹ Furthermore, it is evident that the FBI relied on articles published by the SPLC, which list many Catholic organizations as “hate groups.”⁹⁰ The SPLC’s view of so-called “hate” groups includes organizations like Catholic Family News and Catholic Family Ministries.⁹¹

According to information obtained by the Committee, on February 8, 2023, after the Richmond memorandum became public, the FBI’s CTD conducted an inquiry on how much the FBI, as an agency, had relied on the SPLC as a source for past investigations.⁹² This inquiry revealed that the FBI cited the SPLC in at least “13 additional documents and 5 attachments that included the term, ‘radical traditional catholic’ or ‘Radical-Traditionalist Catholic.’”⁹³ In addition, according to this analysis, a majority of the sources used by the Richmond Field Office were at least eight years old, with the earliest documents dated in 2009.⁹⁴ One document, dated July 9, 2009, from the FBI’s Indianapolis Field Office “serialized a Domestic Threat Assessment, which cited the SPLC as identifying sixteen ‘hate groups’ active in their domain, to include two ‘radical traditionalist catholic’ groups.”⁹⁵

⁸⁵ *Setting the Record Straight*, ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM, (last accessed May 5, 2025), <https://adflegal.org/setting-the-record-straight/>.

⁸⁶ *Hate Map*, THE SOUTHERN LAW POVERTY CENTER, (last accessed May 5, 2025), https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map/?hm_year=2023&hm_state=VA.

⁸⁷ Leonardo Blair, *Group behind 'hate map' is 'morally bankrupt': Christian conservatives call out corruption, hypocrisy*, CHRISTIAN POST, (Apr. 2, 2019); Press Release, Grassley & Lankford Demand FBI Stop Using Biased Nonprofit as Source for Investigations (Oct. 12, 2023).

⁸⁸ Meador Interview at 90.

⁸⁹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000607 (on file with the Comm.).

⁹⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000821 (on file with the Comm.).

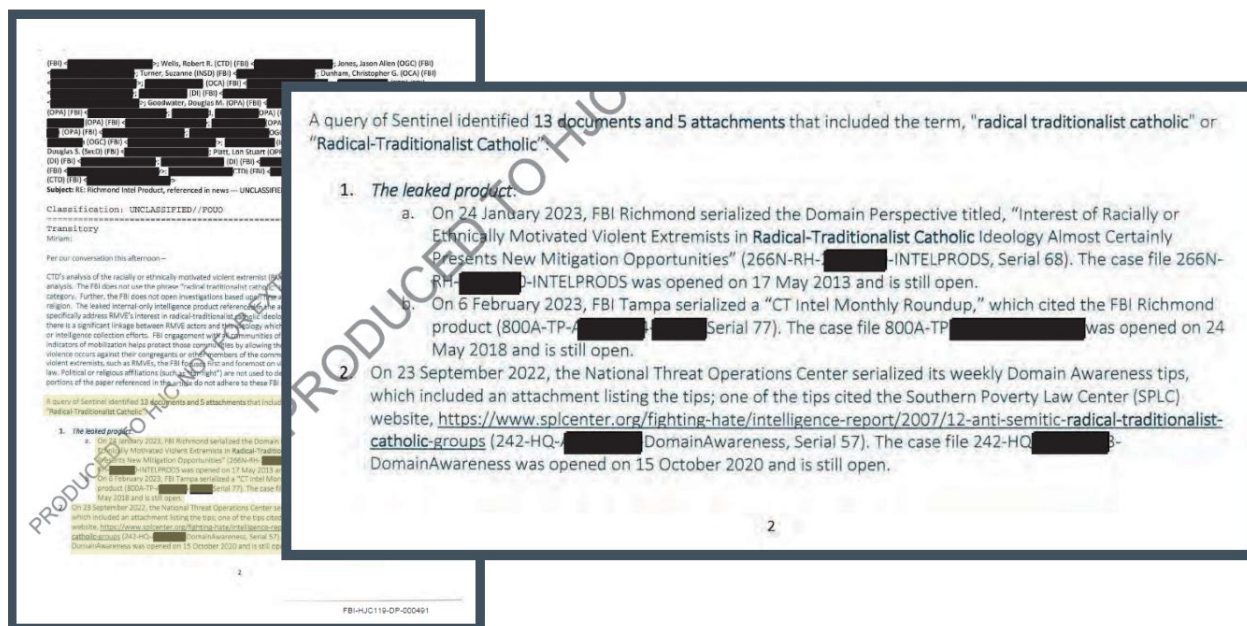
⁹¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000822 (on file with the Comm.).

⁹² FBI-HJC119-DP-000491 (on file with the Comm.).

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000492 (on file with the Comm.).

⁹⁵ *Id.*



The FBI should never have relied on far-left political organizations like the SPLC as an authority to support a law-enforcement matter. The FBI’s Inspection Division, which is responsible for overseeing the Bureau and ensuring that it adheres to its policies and procedures, conducted an internal review after the FBI retracted the Richmond memorandum from FBI systems.⁹⁶ The FBI’s Inspection Division issued a report about its internal review dated April 2023,⁹⁷ but did not communicate its findings to the Committee until August 22, 2023.⁹⁸ The Inspection Division found that all employees involved in drafting, reviewing, and approving the memorandum violated both FBI standards and analytic tradecraft standards set by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence,⁹⁹ and as a result, “admonished” all employees associated with the memorandum.¹⁰⁰ After the FBI’s Inspection Division released its findings on the Richmond memorandum, the FBI updated its policy to critically examine the use of “third-party sources” in intelligence products for “access, reliability, bias, and other factors affecting the credibility of all sources cited in analytic products.”¹⁰¹

C. The FBI’s Richmond Field Office held a briefing for its colleagues on “radical traditional Catholics” further revealing its anti-Catholic bias.

Internal FBI documents show that throughout the FBI’s Richmond Field Office’s drafting process for the Richmond memorandum, FBI employees believed without evidence that mainstream Catholic churches could serve as a pipeline to violent extremist behavior. In one working draft of the memorandum, an employee from the Richmond Field Office suggested that

⁹⁶ See Strategic Review Report, *supra* note 21.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ Briefing between Comm. Staff, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, and Staff, Fed. Bureau of Investigation (Aug. 22, 2023).

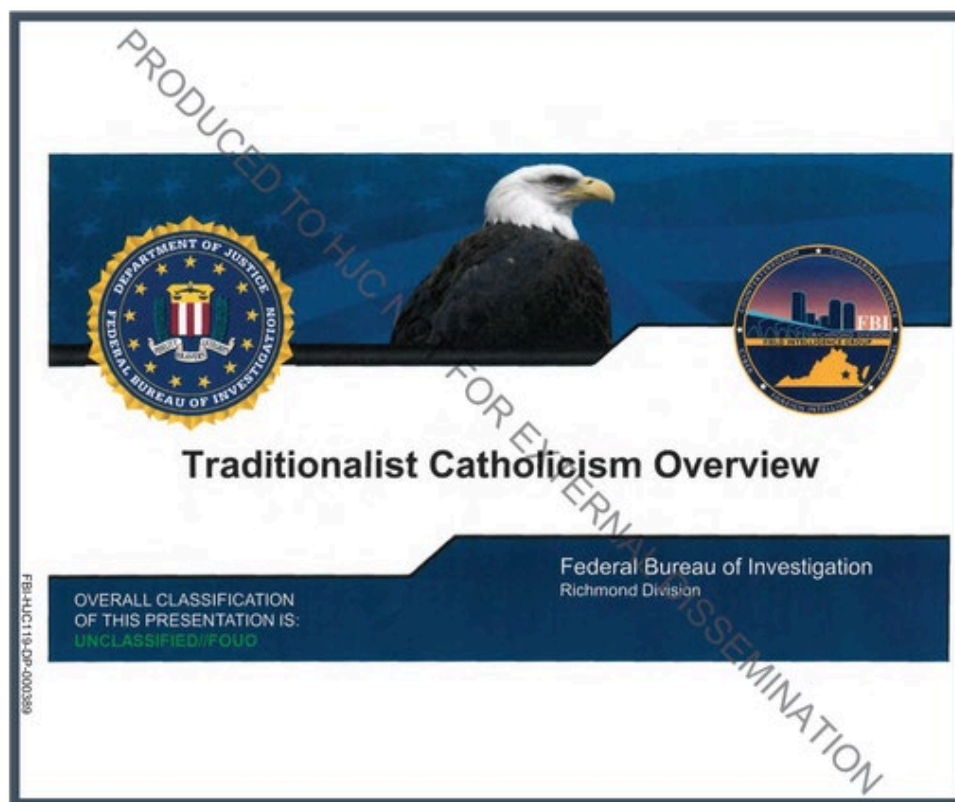
⁹⁹ FBI-HJC118-DP-000302 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰⁰ FBI-HJC118-DP-000295 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰¹ FBI-HJC118-DP-000310 (on file with the Comm.).

the “Opportunities” section of the memorandum should include information regarding how, “It seems like a lot of RTC [radical-traditionalist Catholic] actors begin in regular parishes before branching into traditionalist communities, and there is a chance someone will notice mobilization actors.”¹⁰² The FBI seems to have considered Catholic churches as a potential hot spot for radicalization and viewed investigating Catholic churches as an “opportunity.”

An FBI presentation, created by the Richmond Field Office, reinforced the Bureau’s belief that Catholic churches could serve as a pipeline to radical behavior. On January 20, 2023, an intelligence analyst from the Richmond Field Office asked a colleague to review slides he had created for a briefing titled “Traditionalist Catholicism Overview,” that included an official slide listing “Traditional Latin Mass practices,” “Conservative family values/roles,” and “tendency toward isolationism” as the “Core Ideology and Beliefs” of traditional Catholics.¹⁰³ A following slide, titled “A Step Further,” explained that adherents to “radical-traditionalist Catholicism (RTC)” have “hardline positions on abortion, LGBTQ matters, and interreligious dialogue.”¹⁰⁴ In an official document, the FBI stated that an American’s strong pro-life belief or opinions on LGBTQ matters amount to a “radical” ideology.¹⁰⁵



¹⁰² FBI-HJC119-DP-000671 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰³ FBI-HJC119-DP-000389 (on file with the Comm.); FBI-HJC119-DP-000395 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000397 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*



Core Ideology and Beliefs



Core Concepts

- Traditional Latin Mass (AKA Tridentine Rite), practices
- Conservative family values/roles
- Rejection of modernity
- "Discontinuity and Disrupture"
- Tendency toward isolationism



Traditional Latin Mass (TLM)

UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

FBI-HJC119-DP-000395



A Step Further



Radical-Traditionalist Catholicism (RTC)

- Belief that mainline Catholicism is "illegitimate"
- Hardline positions on abortion, LGBTQ matters, interreligious dialogue
- Eschatological/apocalyptic overtones
- Rigid fundamentalism/integralism
- Undertone of anti-Semitism



UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

FBI-HJC119-DP-000397

III. The FBI Headquarters knew about the Richmond memorandum before it was approved and even aided in drafting a proposed public-facing product.

In testimony before the Committee, Director Wray distanced FBI leadership from the Richmond memorandum and dismissed it as “a single product” by a single, rogue field office.¹⁰⁶ Documents received by the Committee contradict this statement and reveal that FBI Headquarters knew early on about the Richmond Field Office’s investigation into traditional Catholic Americans and even aided in the drafting of an external product, known as a Strategic Perspective Executive Analytic Report (SPEAR), about the topic.

Documents and communications received by the Committee in the 118th Congress made it clear that FBI Headquarters was involved with the Richmond Field Office’s investigation of “Radical Traditional Catholics.”¹⁰⁷ However, new email communications revealed the extent of the involvement.¹⁰⁸ These internal FBI documents show that the Richmond Field Office wanted its investigation into “radical traditional Catholics” to have a “national application.”¹⁰⁹ To effectuate that goal, the Richmond Field Office sought support from FBI Headquarters.

On December 16, 2022, less than a month after the Richmond Field Office began drafting the Richmond memorandum in late November 2022,¹¹⁰ a Richmond Field Office employee emailed a colleague to ask if FBI Headquarters would co-author a SPEAR on “radical, traditional Catholics RMVE.”¹¹¹ The email stated that converting the Richmond memorandum into an external product would be “more bang for our buck and a wider audience.”¹¹² The colleague replied that it was a “brilliant idea” and promised to reach out to the Domestic Terrorism Intelligence Analyst at FBI Headquarters.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ See Director Wray’s Hearing Testimony, *supra* note 16.

¹⁰⁷ See H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY CATHOLIC MEMORANDUM REPORT, *supra* note 4.

¹⁰⁸ FBI-HJC119-DP-000568 (on file with the Comm.).

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ FBI-HJC119-DP-000763 (on file with the Comm.).

¹¹¹ FBI-HJC119-DP-000568 (on file with the Comm.).

¹¹² *Id.*

¹¹³ *Id.*



During the early stages of drafting the SPEAR, the FBI's Richmond Field Office relied on the SPLC as a source but decided to remove it from the document because "the SPEAR was intended for external dissemination."¹¹⁴ In other words, the FBI decided not to use SPLC as a source on the SPEAR only after recognizing the public nature of the document, signifying some degree of recognition that a reliance on the SPLC would be inappropriate for public dissemination.

On December 21, 2022, an employee from the Richmond Field Office stated, "If [Headquarters] or the [Supervisory Intelligence Analysts] think we need more, we can always go in [to the document] and add some of the more colorful language."¹¹⁵ This email clearly shows that the Richmond Field Office, from the early stages of the investigation, intended to share the memorandum with Headquarters so that it could review the intelligence product and offer feedback.

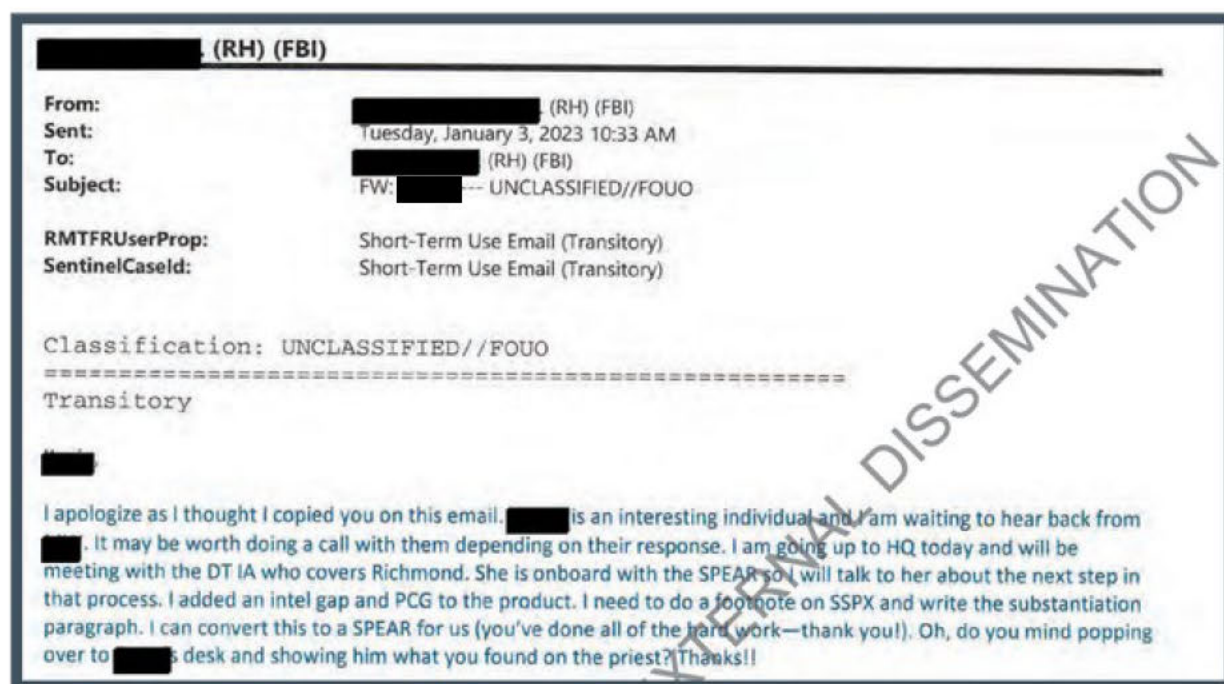
An additional email communication received by the Committee show that an employee from the Richmond Field Office met with an Intelligence Analyst in the Domestic Terrorism Operations Division at FBI Headquarters to discuss a potential SPEAR concerning "radical traditional Catholics" on January 3, 2023.¹¹⁶ The author of this email explained that an analyst at

¹¹⁴ FBI-HJC119-DP-000637 (on file with the Comm.).

¹¹⁵ FBI-HJC119-DP-000566 (on file with the Comm.).

¹¹⁶ FBI-HJC119-DP-000562 (on file with the Comm.).

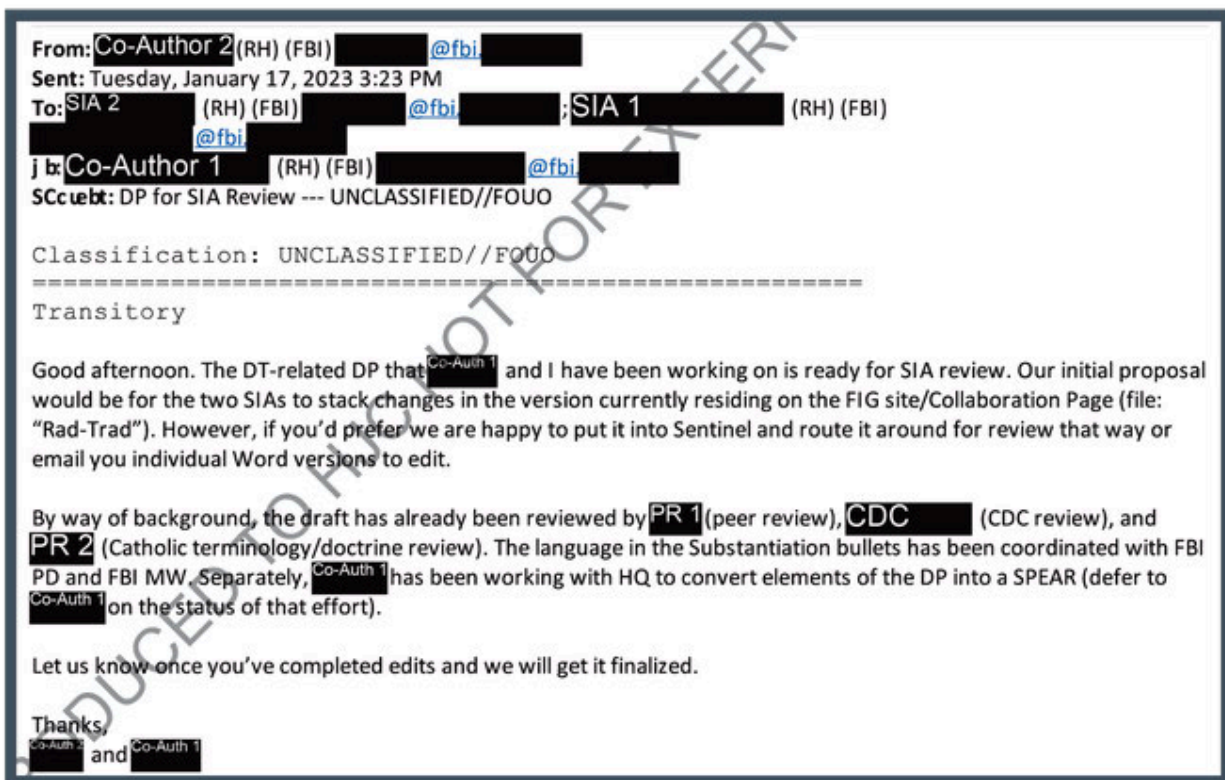
Headquarters was aware the SPEAR and planned to discuss the “next step” to take on the SPEAR at a meeting at Headquarters.¹¹⁷



Work on the external product continued for at least another two weeks. On January 17, 2023, internal email communications between employees of the FBI’s Richmond Field Office revealed that they were “working with [Headquarters] to convert elements of the [Richmond memorandum] into a SPEAR.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Id.*

¹¹⁸ FBI-HJC119-DP-000074 (on file with the Comm.).



The irony is that FBI Headquarters promptly distanced itself from the Richmond memorandum after it became public to widespread criticism. While testifying before the Committee, Director Wray assured the Committee that this memorandum “was a single product by a single field office”—referring to the Richmond Field Office.¹¹⁹ The FBI never acknowledged, until Director Patel produced documents to the Committee, that Director Wray’s Headquarters tacitly approved of the content in the Richmond memorandum by agreeing to develop an external product that would have denigrated Catholic Americans and unfairly characterized them as potential terrorists.

¹¹⁹ See Director Wray’s Hearing Testimony, *supra* note 16.

CONCLUSION

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, the FBI disrespected and potentially violated the Constitutionally protected religious liberties of faithful Americans. Throughout the Committee's oversight in the 118th Congress, the Biden-Harris Administration refused to provide relevant information to the Committee. The FBI's internal review of the memorandum omitted key facts about the failures that led to the development of the Richmond memorandum, including that the FBI took concrete investigative action relating to the memorandum, used several biased and anti-religious sources in several official documents, and the Richmond Field Office coordinated with other FBI components in the U.S. and London. This information only came to light because of Director Patel's commitment to transparency and accountability, and the Committee's persistence in bringing these facts forward.

The American people depend on the FBI to enforce the laws of our nation and help preserve our freedoms. Director Patel has committed to use the investigative power of the FBI to provide Congress with the information needed to "hold those accountable who violated the sacred trust placed in them at the FBI."¹²⁰ The Committee will continue to conduct fact-based oversight to inform legislative reforms necessary to protect the religious liberties of American citizens.

¹²⁰ *Confirmation Hearing on the Nomination of Hon. Kash Patel to be Dir. of the Fed. Bureau of Investigation: Before the S. Comm. on the Judiciary*, 119th Cong. (2025) (statement of Hon. Kash Patel).

INDEX OF EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT NUMBER	BATES NUMBER
1	FBI-HJC119-DP-000617 - FBI-HJC119-DP-000618
2	FBI-HJC119-DP-000640
3	FBI-HJC119-DP-000617
4	FBI-HJC119-DP-000625
5	FBI-HJC119-DP-000823 - FBI-HJC119-DP-000826
6	FBI-HJC119-DP-000827 - FBI-HJC119-DP-000834
7	FBI-HJC119-DP-000491
8	FBI-HJC119-DP-000389
9	FBI-HJC119-DP-000395
10	FBI-HJC119-DP-000397
11	FBI-HJC119-DP-000568
12	FBI-HJC119-DP-000562
13	FBI-HJC119-DP-000074

Thanks so much for your assistance.

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Wednesday, January 04, 2023 11:35 AM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Cc: [REDACTED] (RH) (TFO) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Subject: [REDACTED] --- UNCLASSIFIED

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Transitory

Good morning,

Just as a follow up, I found the product below last week when I was searching Sentine related o SSPX. I shot it to [REDACTED] as we are drafting a joint product together on RMVE's interest in rad-trad ideology. [REDACTED] did some research and sent me the information below on [REDACTED]. I ran [REDACTED]'s number and it came back to a [REDACTED] located in Kentucky. So we have [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both residing in Kentucky. I was going to dig deeper into this.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Wednesday, January 4, 2023 10:51 AM
To: [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI)
Cc: [REDACTED] (RH) (TFO) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Subject: FW: [REDACTED]

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
=====

Transitory

Good morning,

During the course of our investigation into [REDACTED] (266N-RH-[REDACTED]) we determined that [REDACTED] was attending [REDACTED] - SSPX. After [REDACTED] arrest, TFO [REDACTED] and I attempted to interview [REDACTED] regarding his interactions with [REDACTED]. Since [REDACTED] has not completed his catechism or been baptized in the church his

communication with [REDACTED] is not considered privileged. However, upon asking [REDACTED] questions about [REDACTED] desire and plans to commit violence, [REDACTED] became very uncomfortable and started incoherently stuttering. He requested to speak with the churches leadership and attorneys before continue to provide any more information. Since then, [REDACTED] has refused to speak with us any further, but has continued to speak with [REDACTED] while in prison, and even attempted to visit him.

IA [REDACTED] recently discovered this product regarding [REDACTED]'s attendance at the UK conference and their discovery of [REDACTED] efforts to recruit and radicalize white supremacists/neo-Nazi's. Prior to our interview with [REDACTED], we were unaware of any connection with SSPX and neo-Nazi radicalization. We would like to set up an initial meeting with you all to discuss more details around this presentation, and possibly conduct a VTC with UK Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism to determine if they have any more information on SSPX stateside and/or [REDACTED]. Please let me know if you guys have time tomorrow or Friday morning.

Thanks,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (TFO) [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, January 04, 2023 10:16 AM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
[REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED]
(RH) (FBI) [REDACTED]
Subject: [REDACTED] --- UNCLASSIFIED

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

=====

I think this is the Intel product [REDACTED] mentioned to [REDACTED].

Interesting. Make sure to look at the powerpoint on [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//LES

[REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Friday, January 6, 2023 3:24 PM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI); [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Cc: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI); [REDACTED] (RH) (TFO); [REDACTED]
(RH) (FBI); [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Subject: RE: [REDACTED] --- UNCLASSIFIED//FGI GBR//LES

RMTRUserProp: Short-Term Use Email (Transitory)
SentinelCaseId: Short-Term Use Email (Transitory)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FGI GBR//LES
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Just FYI - Based on my research, the highlighted from the original email below is slightly inaccurate/incomplete. It looks like [REDACTED] o was ordained on [REDACTED] and assigned to the Archdiocese of Covington (I am 99% certain that this [REDACTED] is the same one we identify in the DP and is located in our AOR in [REDACTED] Virginia; this is the only SSPX seminary in the United States per the SSPX website). According to the SSPX website, [REDACTED] celebrated his first Mass on [REDACTED] (technically, the website says [REDACTED], but all indications are that this is a typo) a. the [REDACTED]. He celebrated his first Mass outside the Seminary on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED], with his next Mass outside the Seminary listed as the one in [REDACTED], California on [REDACTED].

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, January 6, 2023 1:43 PM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) <[REDACTED]> [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Subject: FW: [REDACTED] -- UNCLASSIFIED//FGI GBR//LES

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FGI GBR//LES
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Subject: [REDACTED] --- UNCLASSIFIED

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
=====

Transitory

Good morning,

Just as a follow up, I found the product below last week when I was searching Sentine related o SSPX. I shot it to [REDACTED] as we are drafting a joint product together on RMVE's interest in rad-trad ideology. [REDACTED] did some research and sent me the information below on [REDACTED]. I ran [REDACTED]'s number and it came back to a [REDACTED] located in Kentucky. So we have [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both residing in Kentucky. I was going to dig deeper into this.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Wednesday, January 4, 2023 10:51 AM
To: [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI)
Cc: [REDACTED] (RH) (TFO) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Subject: FW: [REDACTED]

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
=====

Transitory

Good morning,

During the course of our investigation into [REDACTED] (266N-RH-[REDACTED]) we determined that [REDACTED] was attending [REDACTED] - SSPX. After [REDACTED] arrest, TFO [REDACTED] and I attempted to interview [REDACTED] regarding his interactions with [REDACTED]. Since [REDACTED] has not completed his catechism or been baptized in the church his

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2023 1:11 PM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED] (LS) (FBI)
[REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
[REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) [REDACTED] (RH)
(TFO)
Cc: [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI)
<[REDACTED] (LS) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: [REDACTED] --- UNCLASSIFIED

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
=====

Transitory

Just as a follow-up to [REDACTED]'s email, please see attached spreadsheet. It looks like [REDACTED] currently in Canada. Flight details and the credit card used for payment are included.

[REDACTED]/LS- I did not want to step on your toes, but I just did a quick search on [REDACTED] while I was in ARC. Attached are hits that also include credit card information. There was a TECS hit from 7/6/2005 stating [REDACTED] was "traveling with Mother, child was born at home in California, had copies of CERT FROM School in California."

If you guys need anything, please let me know.

Thanks!

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2023 11:17 AM
To: [REDACTED] (LS) (FBI) [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI)
[REDACTED] (RH) (TFO) [REDACTED] (RH)
(FBI)
Cc: [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI)
[REDACTED] (LS) (FBI)
Subject: [REDACTED]

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
=====

Transitory

For everyone's awareness, according to the [REDACTED] Website – [REDACTED] will be traveling to the UK Jan 20th – 30th, says more details will follow on the website.

[REDACTED]
Tactical Specialist
Domestic Terrorism Squad 14
Joint Terrorism Task Force
Richmond Division
Desk [REDACTED]
Cell [REDACTED]

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS A VISIBLE WHITE-POWER FACTION

Once persecuted by the Ku Klux Klan, some Catholics now embrace the most extreme forms of racial hatred.

BY ERIC MARTIN

AUGUST 2020

SHARE

Editors' Note: As a matter of editorial policy, *Sojourners* does not grant take-down requests from outside parties. In the case of "Harboring A Culture of Hate" by Eric Martin, *Sojourners* then-editor-in-chief and then-president Jim Wallis felt the correction below called into question the entire substance of the article and made the decision on July 28 to take down the article from *Sojourners* website. You can read past statements on that decision [here](#). *Sojourners* believes that the significant conversation this article has generated, along with the decision to remove the article, should be conducted as part of an open and transparent public conversation. For that reason, on Aug. 14, *Sojourners* reinstated the article with the correction below.

Aug. 14, 2020, 5:02 p.m. Correction: An earlier version of this article claimed that the writers of the document *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, developed by the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), were silent on three extreme symbols of racism: swastikas, Confederate flags, and nooses. This is not true. The final language of *Open Wide Our Hearts* includes the sentence "The re-appearance of symbols of hatred, such as nooses and swastikas in public spaces, is a tragic indicator of rising racial and ethnic animus." The document did not condemn these symbols, but did address them. The final document does not address Confederate flags. We apologize for this error and thank readers at the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Charities USA for pointing it out.

WHEN THE U.S. Catholic bishops gathered to draft a document on race in the wake of the 2017 white terrorist rally in Charlottesville, Va., Bishop Anthony Taylor of Little Rock, Ark., submitted an amendment to condemn the imagery of swastikas, Confederate flags, and nooses. The U.S. bishops deliberated and voted to reject it.

The document, "Open Wide Our Hearts," was billed as "a pastoral letter against racism," making its writers' inability to adopt the amendment condemning three famously extreme symbols of racism a curious one. The bishops explained themselves by arguing that swastikas and nooses were already "widely recognized signs of hatred," which would seem to make them all the easier to condemn. (Interestingly, they eschewed this logic when issuing their only condemnation, against violence toward police.) As for the Confederate flag, "some still claim it as a sign of heritage," they argued.

While this logic indefensibly hand-waves the history of slavery, murderous opposition to civil rights, and violence such as the 2015 shooting at a Black church in Charleston, S.C., as a



Michael Heimbach, far left, a white nationalist who grew up Catholic, was featured speaker at a neo-Nazi rally in Knoxville, Tenn. / Photograph by Mike Bellame

**CATHOLICS ARE LEADERS
AND EVEN FOUNDERS OF
THE MOST DANGEROUS NEO-
NAZI GROUPS IN EXISTENCE.**

TWEET THIS

AFTER CHARLOTTESVILLE,

asking what's so wrong with white supremacy and white nationalism, King, who is Catholic, has also displayed a Confederate flag on his congressional desk. The quite obvious meaning of the flag's presence on the desk of King, who represents a district in Iowa until January, is apparently lost on the bishops, given their claims about "Southern" heritage.

The decision to avoid condemning swastikas, nooses, and Confederate flags would be troubling under any circumstances. But this moral failure is compounded by the fact that Catholics are among the most integral groups that rally behind these symbols. From the highest reaches of government to the lowest depths of social media, many members of hate groups and politicians who model their talking points are part of the bishops' flock. Catholics not only contributed to the platform for the so-called alt-righters who terrorized Charlottesville and killed Heather Heyer but are leaders and even founders of the most dangerous neo-Nazi groups in existence.

The Catholic Church, once persecuted by the Ku Klux Klan, today has a visible white-power faction. As long as the bishops actively refuse to condemn its banners, they give white supremacists space to embrace their anti-Black and anti-Semitic work free of religious dissonance.

"No cultural Christians allowed"

WHILE THE PROBLEM starts at the top, it is impossible to ignore how it has manifested on the streets. In 2017, an alliance of the KKK, neo-Nazis, and the alt-right did much of their planning for the Unite the Right rally in chat rooms that have since been made public by the media outlet Unicorn Riot. One of the more popular chat rooms was designated specifically for Catholics to explore the connections between their church and the rally. "No cultural Christians allowed," its heading read. It was reserved for "dedicated" Catholics only and named after Nicholas J. Fuentes, a Catholic member of the neo-Nazi group Identity Evropa. Fuentes is an online influencer with 90,000 followers on social media; he was present at Charlottesville. Across all servers, more than 14,000 posts related to Catholicism were released in the aftermath of the event, and an early post captures their spirit: "I'm baptized Catholic [and] ready for a crusade."

Here Catholics discussed everything from their favorite saints to their thoughts on Pope Urban II. They talked of "how to defend proper Catholicism" and shared links to the *Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter*. They saluted "Sieg heil!" to each other. They went from joking about the murder of Heather Heyer, the anti-racist activist who was run over in Charlottesville by a neo-Nazi, to singing "Ave Maria" together. They discussed the merits of *Mein Kampf*, identified themselves as "Charles Coughlin Roman Catholics" (after the 1930s Catholic radio demagogue), encouraged genocide against Jews, advertised the anti-Semitic podcast *The Daily Shoah*, and confessed their allegiance to what they call the "14 words": "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

Augustus Sol Invictus grew up Catholic. Matthew Heimbach was raised in a Catholic family and eventually switched to the Orthodox Church. Both have been identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center as "major players from the 'Unite the Right' rally." Faith Goldy—a Catholic who wrote for *The Catholic Register* and was banned from Facebook for participating in a neo-Nazi podcast on the most prominent Nazi website, recited the "14 words" online, and advocated white secession from the U.S.—reported on the rally from the ground. Fuentes posted on Facebook, "What an incredible rally here in Charlottesville," and added that "a tidal wave of white identity is coming," "the fire rises," and "you will not replace us," echoing the anti-Jewish chants in the torchlit rally from the night before, in which attendees stood behind the very symbols the bishops refused to condemn, posting pictures of nooses online and brandishing swastikas and Confederate flags on the streets.

"The most hard-core collection"

AFTER CHARLOTTESVILLE, CATHOLICS have continued to be in the vanguard of neo-Nazi violence. In 2018, Rinaldo Nazarro formed a terrorist training group, modeled after al Qaeda, called *The Base*. Nazarro, who has fled to Russia, was raised in a family of dedicated Catholics, attended an elite Catholic prep school in New Jersey and Villanova University, and continued teaching Catholicism in his parish in Pennsylvania. He is a member of the

CONTINUED TO BE IN THE VANGUARD OF NEO-NAZI VIOLENCE.

[TWEET THIS](#)

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
HARBORS A CULTURE
SUFFICIENTLY FRIENDLY TO
WHITE NATIONALISM THAT
PEOPLE CAN COMFORTABLY
EMBRACE BOTH THE FAITH
AND THE MOST EXTREME
FORMS OF RACIAL HATRED.

[TWEET THIS](#)

+ priestly saints

what you started,” and he told an infiltrator that “This will be the most hard-core collection of pro-white individuals in the world.” The Base calls for a race war and an all-white Pacific Northwest homeland, plans violence against Jews and Black people, organizes military training camps, builds explosive devices, and pushes for “accelerationist” tactics that seek to usher in catastrophic societal collapse.

Another of the most extreme neo-Nazi organizations today is Atomwaffen Division, whose logo is from the infamous German SS paramilitary. The group’s influences include Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson, and its aim is the violent overthrow of the government by guerrilla tactics. Atomwaffen’s most well-known murder occurred in January 2018. Samuel Woodward, who came “from a devoutly Catholic family” and as a student drew Confederate flags in art class, was charged with stabbing a 19-year-old gay, Jewish college student, Blaze Bernstein, 20 times and hiding Bernstein’s body in an Orange County, Calif. park. Woodward had traveled with an Atomwaffen division leader for a summer, helped organize members in Southern California, trained in weaponry and outdoor survival skills, and posed with other Atomwaffen members while making Nazi salutes. He spoke openly about his Catholic faith on social media and attended Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church in Newport Beach, including after the murder. When police arrested him, they found more than 100 pieces of Nazi, anti-gay, and hate group content on his phone. Judging by other Atomwaffen members, including former Catholic Devon Arthurs, charged with two murders, and the Telegram user who goes by “Catholicwaffen,” Woodward is not alone in representing both his church and perhaps the most lethal neo-Nazi group in the country.

Well-dressed Catholic nationalism

THE PROBLEM IS not just in shadowy corners of the internet or terrorist attacks; it appears more respectably in business suits and government appointments. One of the alt-right’s biggest political influences is former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, communications director under Ronald Reagan. He and fellow Catholic Joe Sobran served as inspiration for a blog referred to as “the alt-right’s favorite philosophy instructor,” and his comments on immigration and questioning the Holocaust are the type of kinder, gentler white nationalism that provides oxygen for the more obvious forms. Buchanan has claimed that Jews hold the “real power” in the U.S., that not as many died in the Holocaust as reported, and that “this has been a country built, basically, by white folks.” When an interviewer suggested that white people had held power in the U.S. for years, Buchanan bristled. “I don’t know where you grew up,” he retorted. “I grew up in a Catholic ghetto.”

Before the alt-right showed its colors in Charlottesville, the two most prominent writers for the movement’s unofficial website, Breitbart News, were both Catholic. In 2016, Breitbart’s former executive chair Steve Bannon called the site “a platform for the alt-right.” Bannon takes his religion seriously, according to those close to him, and when he listed the six books that most influenced him, the list included the classics *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. He has also aligned himself with American Renaissance, a eugenicist think tank expounding the scientific inferiority of Black people, and helped fellow Catholic Katie McHugh get “deeper and deeper into the world of white nationalism,” as she put it. After she retweeted an American Nazi Party member multiple times and posted, “Let’s make Mecca into a strip mall!” Bannon not only shielded her from punishment but later made her producer of his radio show.

Bannon oversaw the rise of his most well-known writer at Breitbart, the Catholic Milo Yiannopoulos, who would become famous for leading a harassment campaign against Black actress Leslie Jones that included unprintable slurs. Yiannopoulos has worked closely with American Renaissance, compared Black Lives Matter participants to “petulant children,” and was filmed singing karaoke with friends giving Nazi salutes. He also calls himself a “Catholic theocrat” and claims that Catholicism is the very basis of a good and true society. “Catholicism is the idea, the West is the practice,” he told an interviewer. Making his thinly veiled racist language explicit, he bragged of white people, “We invented all the good shit.”

Donald Trump hired Bannon to be his chief strategist, welcoming the alt-right movement into the highest circles of power. He tapped another Catholic, Kellyanne Conway, to be his campaign manager and later his presidential counselor. Conway calls Catholicism the

you that nobody likes this policy," Conway said on *Meet the Press*, but she said family separation was justified because "it is a crime to enter this country illegally." Conway sought to use her Catholicism as a shield against criticism while stripping Central American children from their families.

The cost of refusing to speak

THE THREAT IS not that white nationalists will take over the Catholic Church. The threat is that the Catholic Church harbors a culture sufficiently friendly to white nationalism that people can comfortably embrace both the faith and the most extreme forms of racial hatred. As long as Catholics can be found in neo-Nazi groups, as long as Atomwaffen members can dub themselves Catholicwaffen or receive Communion after murdering Jewish people, something in the church itself poses a concrete danger to Jews and people of color.

But more serious than foot soldiers are the Kellyanne Conways of the world, who help shape communal thought in ways that make radical white supremacy so pervasive as to turn invisible. Conway, in particular, models the kind of vapid anti-logic based on, in her own words, "alternative facts" that closely mirrors the taunting disdain of the alt-right when they deflect threats as attempts at humor and shed every argument or principle standing in the way of white power.

And yet, there will be more Kellyanne Conways and Steve Bannons as long as the U.S. bishops leave religious space open for them. They did just that by refusing to approve the amendment that clearly condemned swastikas, Confederate flags, and nooses, the three most potent symbols of white terrorism in the U.S. In doing so, neo-Nazis have more leeway to believe their white supremacist actions are done not in spite of Catholicism but in harmony with it.

Thankfully, Catholic social teaching springs up elsewhere. The faithful can read theologians such as M. Shawn Copeland and Bryan Massingale or follow the Black Catholic Theological Symposium. They can turn to Catholic activists among the civil rights and Black Power movements such as Father George Clements and the Black Unity Masses he sparked, as well as Diane Nash, who led the second wave of the Freedom Rides after the first was bombed by whites and began a two-year jail sentence for her witness while pregnant. They might even look across the 2017 Unite the Right rally's police barricades to see Dr. Jalane Schmidt, founder of the Charlottesville Black Lives Matter chapter and public historian, who since the rally has given public lectures about the real history behind Confederate imagery. Until the bishops join one of her downtown walking tours, it is in Schmidt and people like her that Catholics can find their anti-racist leaders.

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IDEAS

How Extremist Gun Culture Is Trying to Co-opt the Rosary

Why are sacramental beads suddenly showing up next to AR-15s online?

By Daniel Panneton



Getty

AUGUST 14, 2022

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Just as the AR-15 rifle has become a sacred object for Christian nationalists in general, the rosary has acquired a militaristic meaning for radical-traditional (or “rad trad”) Catholics. On this extremist fringe, rosary beads have been woven into a conspiratorial politics and absolutist gun culture. These armed radical traditionalists have taken up a spiritual notion that the rosary can be a weapon in the fight against evil and turned it into something dangerously literal.

Their social-media pages are saturated with images of rosaries draped over firearms, warriors in prayer, *Deus Vult* (“God wills it”) crusader memes, and exhortations for men to rise up and become Church Militants. Influencers on platforms such as Instagram share posts referencing “everyday carry” and “gat check” (*gat* is slang for “firearm”) that include soldiers’ “battle beads,” handguns, and assault rifles. One artist

posts illustrations of his favorite Catholic saints, clergy, and influencers toting AR-15-style rifles labeled *SANCTUM ROSARIUM* alongside violently homophobic screeds that are celebrated by social-media accounts with thousands of followers.

The theologian and historian Massimo Faggioli has described a network of conservative Catholic bloggers and commentary organizations as a “Catholic cyber-militia” that actively campaigns against LGBTQ acceptance in the Church. These radical rosary-as-weapon memes represent a social-media diffusion of such messaging, and they work to integrate ultraconservative Catholicism with other aspects of online far-right culture. The phenomenon might be tempting to dismiss as mere trolling or merchandising, and ironical provocations based on traditionalist Catholic symbols do exist, but the far right’s constellations of violent, racist, and homophobic online milieus are well documented for providing a pathway to radicalization and real-world terrorist attacks.

The rosary—in these hands—is anything but holy. But for millions of believers, the beads, which provide an aide-mémoire for a sequence of devotional prayers, are a widely recognized symbol of Catholicism and a source of strength. And many take genuine sustenance from Catholic theology’s concept of the Church Militant and the tradition of regarding the rosary as a weapon against Satan. As Pope Francis said in a 2020 address, “There is no path to holiness ... without spiritual combat,” and Francis is only one of many Church officials who have endorsed the idea of the rosary as an armament in that fight.

Ryan Busse: The rifle that ruined America

In mainstream Catholicism, the rosary-as-weapon is not an intrinsically harmful interpretation of the sacramental, and this symbolism has a long history. In the 1930s and '40s, the ultramontane Catholic student publication *Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique* regularly used the concept to rally the faithful. But the modern radical-traditionalist Catholic movement—which generally rejects the Second Vatican Council's reforms—is far outside the majority opinion in the Roman Catholic Church in America. Many prominent American Catholic bishops advocate for gun control, and after the Uvalde school shooting, Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, lamented the way some Americans “sacralize death's instruments.”

RECOMMENDED READING

The Miseducation of the American Boy

PEGGY ORENSTEIN

When a DNA Test Reveals Your Daughter Is Not Your Biological Child

SARAH ZHANG

Alexa, Should We Trust You?

JUDITH SHULEVITZ

Militia culture, a fetishism of Western civilization, and masculinist anxieties have become mainstays of the far right in the U.S.—and rad-trad Catholics have now taken up residence in this company. Their social-media accounts commonly promote accelerationist and survivalist content, along with combat-medical and tactical

training, as well as memes depicting balaclava-clad gunmen that draw on the “terrorwave” or “warcore” aesthetic that is popular in far-right circles.

Like such networks, radical-traditional Catholics sustain their own cottage industry of goods and services that reinforces the radicalization. Rosaries are common among the merchandise on offer—some made of cartridge casings, and complete with gun-metal-finish crucifixes. One Catholic online store, which describes itself as “dedicated to offering battle-ready products and manuals to ‘stand firm against the tactics of the devil’” (a New Testament reference), sells replicas of the rosaries issued to American soldiers during the First World War as “combat rosaries.” Discerning consumers can also buy a “concealed carry” permit for their combat rosary and a sacramental storage box resembling an ammunition can. In 2016, the pontifical Swiss Guard accepted a donation of combat rosaries; during a ceremony at the Vatican, their commander described the gift as “the most powerful weapon that exists on the market.”

The militarism also glorifies a warrior mentality and notions of manliness and male strength. This conflation of the masculine and the military is rooted in wider anxieties about Catholic manhood—the idea that it is in crisis has some currency among senior Church figures and lay organizations. In 2015, Bishop Thomas Olmsted of Phoenix issued an apostolic exhortation calling for a renewal of traditional conceptions of Catholic masculinity titled “Into the Breach,” which led the Knights of Columbus, an influential fraternal order, to produce a video series promoting Olmsted’s ideas. But among radical-traditional Catholic men, such concerns take an extremist turn, rooted in fantasies of violently defending one’s family and church from marauders.

Juliette Kayyem: A ‘lone-wolf’ shooter has an online pack

The rosary-as-weapon also gives rad-trad Catholic men both a distinctive signifier within Christian nationalism and a sort of membership pass to the movement. As the sociologists Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry note in *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, Catholics used to be regarded as enemies by Christian nationalists, and anti-Catholic nativism runs deep in American history. Today, Catholics are a growing contingent of Christian nationalism.

Helping unite these former rivals is a quasi-theological doctrine of what Perry and another sociologist, Philip S. Gorski, have called “righteous violence” against political enemies regarded as demonic or satanic, be they secularists, progressives, or Jews. The hostility toward liberalism and secularism inherent in traditionalist Catholicism is also pronounced within Christian nationalist circles. No longer stigmatized by evangelical nationalists, Catholic imagery now blends freely with staple alt-right memes that romanticize ancient Rome or idealize the traditional patriarchal family.

Daniel K. Williams: This really is a different pro-life movement

Some doctrinal differences and divisions remain. Many radical-traditional Catholic men maintain the hard-line position that other forms of Christianity are heretical, and hold that Catholics alone adhere to the one true Church. Christian nationalism’s nativism and its predilection for “Great Replacement” theory alienate some radical-traditional Catholics who are not white or who were not born in the United States, and deep veins of anti-Catholicism persist among far-right Protestants.

Yet the convergence within Christian nationalism is cemented in common causes such as hostility toward abortion-rights advocates. The pro-choice protests that followed

Daniel K. Williams: This really is a different pro-life movement

Some doctrinal differences and divisions remain. Many radical-traditional Catholic men maintain the hard-line position that other forms of Christianity are heretical, and hold that Catholics alone adhere to the one true Church. Christian nationalism's nativism and its predilection for "Great Replacement" theory alienate some radical-traditional Catholics who are not white or who were not born in the United States, and deep veins of anti-Catholicism persist among far-right Protestants.

Yet the convergence within Christian nationalism is cemented in common causes such as hostility toward abortion-rights advocates. The pro-choice protests that followed the leaked early draft of the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, led to a profusion of social-media posts on the far right fantasizing about killing activists, and such forums responded to Pride month this year with extremist homophobic and transphobic "groomer" discourse. Rad-trad networks are also involved in organizing rosary-branded events that involve weapons training.

Catholics are taught to love and forgive their enemies, that to do otherwise is a sin. But the extremist understanding of spiritual warfare overrides that command. To do battle with Satan—whose influence in the world is, according to Catholic demonology, real and menacing—is to deploy violence for deliverance and redemption. The “battle beads” culture of spiritual warfare permits radical-traditional Catholics literally to demonize their political opponents and regard the use of armed force against them as sanctified. The sacramental rosary isn’t just a spiritual weapon but one that comes with physical ammunition.

Daniel Panneton is a writer based in Toronto, Canada.

 Twitter

(FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Wells, Robert R. (CTD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Jones, Jason Allen (OGC) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Turner, Suzanne (INSD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Dunham, Christopher G. (OCA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (OCA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (DI) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Milhoan, Catherine L. (OPA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Goodwater, Douglas M. (OPA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (OPA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (OPA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (OPA) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (OGC) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (OGC) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (InTO) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Beidler, Douglas S. (SecD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Platt, Lon Stuart (OPR) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Byron, Pamela (DI) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (DI) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; Hardiman, Kellie M. (CTD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >; [REDACTED] (CTD) (FBI) < [REDACTED] >

Subject: RE: Richmond Intel Product, referenced in news --- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

Transitory

Miriam:

Per our conversation this afternoon –

CTD's analysis of the racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist (RMVE) threat does not align with FBI Richmond's analysis. The FBI does not use the phrase "radical traditionalist catholic" to define any domestic terrorism threat category. Further, the FBI does not open investigations based upon first amendment protected activities, such as religion. The leaked internal-only intelligence product referenced in the article is the only finished intelligence product to specifically address RMVE's interest in radical-traditionalist catholic ideology of which we are aware. CTD does not assess there is a significant linkage between RMVE actors and this ideology which would necessitate further FBI interest, analysis, or intelligence collection efforts. FBI engagement with all communities of faith to provide educational materials on indicators of mobilization helps protect those communities by allowing them to recognize potential violent actors before violence occurs against their congregants or other members of the community. When describing ideologically-motivated violent extremists, such as RMVEs, the FBI focuses first and foremost on violence, criminal activity and violation of federal law. Political or religious affiliations (such as "far-right") are not used to describe or identify violent extremists. Some portions of the paper referenced in the article do not adhere to these FBI standards.

A query of Sentinel identified 13 documents and 5 attachments that included the term, "radical traditionalist catholic" or "Radical-Traditionalist Catholic".

1. *The leaked product.*

- a. On 24 January 2023, FBI Richmond serialized the Domain Perspective titled, "Interest of Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists in Radical-Traditionalist Catholic Ideology Almost Certainly Presents New Mitigation Opportunities" (266N-RH-[REDACTED]-INTELPRODS, Serial 68). The case file 266N-RH-[REDACTED]-INTELPRODS was opened on 17 May 2013 and is still open.
- b. On 6 February 2023, FBI Tampa serialized a "CT Intel Monthly Roundup," which cited the FBI Richmond product (800A-TP-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED] Serial 77). The case file 800A-TP-[REDACTED] was opened on 24 May 2018 and is still open.

2. On 23 September 2022, the National Threat Operations Center serialized its weekly Domain Awareness tips, which included an attachment listing the tips; one of the tips cited the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) website, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2007/12-anti-semitic-radical-traditionalist-catholic-groups> (242-HQ-[REDACTED] DomainAwareness, Serial 57). The case file 242-HQ-[REDACTED] DomainAwareness was opened on 15 October 2020 and is still open.



Traditionalist Catholicism Overview

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Richmond Division

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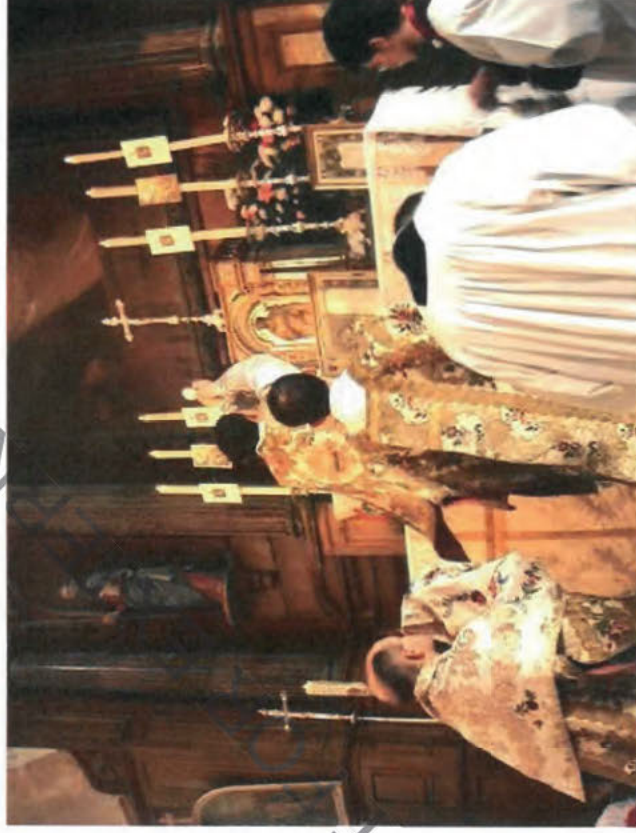
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Core Ideology and Beliefs



Core Concepts

- Traditional Latin Mass (AKA Tridentine Rite), practices
- Conservative family values/roles
- Rejection of modernity
- "Discontinuity and Disrupture"
- Tendency toward isolationism



Traditional Latin Mass (TLM)

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A Step Further



Radical-Traditionalist Catholicism (RTC)

- Belief that mainline Catholicism is "illegitimate"
- Hardline positions on abortion, LGBTQ matters, interreligious dialogue
- Eschatological/apocalyptic overtones
- Rigid fundamentalism/integralism
- Undertone of anti-Semitism



UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

[REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Monday, December 19, 2022 8:30 AM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Subject: RE: DP - SPEAR --- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
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I think that is a brilliant idea. [REDACTED] left the Bureau, but I will reach out to the DT IA.

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, December 16, 2022 4:33 PM
To: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Subject: DP - SPEAR --- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
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Transitory

Good late Friday afternoon! I was just spit-balling over here with [REDACTED] and got to thinking – how do you think [REDACTED]/HQ would feel about co-authoring a SPEAR on this rad-trad Catholic/RMVE topic? Seems like something with national application. We could probably knock out the DP since a lot of it is already done and then possibly convert to a SPEAR – more bang for our buck and a wider audience. What say you?

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Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
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[REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Tuesday, January 3, 2023 10:33 AM
To: [REDACTED] (FBI)
Subject: FW: [REDACTED] -- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

RMTRUserProp: Short-Term Use Email (Transitory)
SentinelCaseId: Short-Term Use Email (Transitory)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
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Transitory

[REDACTED]

I apologize as I thought I copied you on this email. [REDACTED] is an interesting individual and I am waiting to hear back from [REDACTED]. It may be worth doing a call with them depending on their response. I am going up to HQ today and will be meeting with the DT IA who covers Richmond. She is onboard with the SPEAR so I will talk to her about the next step in that process. I added an intel gap and PCG to the product. I need to do a footnote on SSPX and write the substantiation paragraph. I can convert this to a SPEAR for us (you've done all of the hard work—thank you!). Oh, do you mind popping over to [REDACTED]'s desk and showing him what you found on the priest? Thanks!!

From: [REDACTED] (RH) (FBI)
Sent: Friday, December 30, 2022 12:16 PM
To: [REDACTED] (MW) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Cc: [REDACTED] (MW) (FBI) <[REDACTED]>
Subject: [REDACTED] -- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
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Transitory

Good afternoon,

My coworker and I are drafting an Intelligence Note related to the interest of RMVEs in Radical-Traditionalist Catholic ideology. Our subject, [REDACTED] prompted our interest in exploring this topic. On 11/13, [REDACTED] (Gab account @ [REDACTED]) was arrested and a search was executed at his residence. Molotov cocktails, 3D printed pistol frames, firearm components including handgun components, ammo, and a non-specific target list was found at his residence among other things. We do not know how far along in the attack planning process he was at this time or if he was collaborating with others. CART and OTD are still working to get into his computer. [REDACTED] had attended [REDACTED] of Saint Pius X (SSPX) Chapel for approximately seven months and participated in three or four catechism classes as part of the process to become baptized. In [REDACTED]'s extensive anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQ, and racist postings on social media platform, [REDACTED] claimed he was a "radical traditional Catholic Clerical Fascist."

I have been doing some queries to look into other RMVE subjects who adhere to rad-trad ideology and I read that [REDACTED] had attended [REDACTED] located in [REDACTED] California for over a

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Transitory

From: SIA 2 (RH) (FBI) @fbi
Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2023 3:25 PM
To: Co-Author 2 (RH) (FBI) @fbi; SIA 1 (RH) (FBI) @fbi
j b: Co-Author 1 (RH) (FBI) @fbi
Subject: RE: DP for SIA Review --- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

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Thanks Co-Author 2 Can you shoot me a Word copy and I'll make edits then send on to SIA 1 next? That way, they'll still be stacked in one document for you all.

Thanks,
SIA 2

From: Co-Author 2 (RH) (FBI) @fbi
Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2023 3:23 PM
To: SIA 2 (RH) (FBI) @fbi; SIA 1 (RH) (FBI) @fbi
j b: Co-Author 1 (RH) (FBI) @fbi
Subject: DP for SIA Review --- UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
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Transitory

Good afternoon. The DT-related DP that Co-Author 1 and I have been working on is ready for SIA review. Our initial proposal would be for the two SIAs to stack changes in the version currently residing on the FIG site/Collaboration Page (file: "Rad-Trad"). However, if you're happy to put it into Sentinel and route it around for review that way or email you individual Word versions to edit.

By way of background, the draft has already been reviewed by PR 1 (peer review), CDC (CDC review), and PR 2 (Catholic terminology/doctrine review). The language in the Substantiation bullets has been coordinated with FBI PD and FBI MW. Separately, Co-Author 1 has been working with HQ to convert elements of the DP into a SPEAR (defer to Co-Author 1 on the status of that effort).

Let us know once you've completed edits and we will get it finalized.

Thanks,
Co-Author 2 and Co-Author 1

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