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CARDINAL SPELLMAN: 'THE AMERICAN POPE'
BY RICK HAMPSON
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A new biography portrays Cardinal Francis Spellman as "a Renaissance-style prince of the Catholic Church" who lied to a pope, helped the FBI and CIA, wielded power over patronage and opposed John F. Kennedy's presidency.

Spellman, archbishop of New York from 1939 until his death in 1967, is described as a secular power broker in "The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman," by John Cooney, released Friday.

The book's treatment of Spellman's reported homosexuality differs from galley proofs printed for reviewers earlier this year. Although "numerous priests ... took his homosexuality for granted," the question is "irresolvable," it concludes.

Cooney said Friday the galley proofs described Spellman as a homosexual whose sex life "was a source of profound shame and embarrassment to many priests." But after a controversy over the source of Cooney's material, that conclusion and other details were omitted from the book.

Two men who claimed to have had sex with Spellman would not allow their names to be used, and other sources who did speak on the record said they had only second-hand reports of the cardinal's alleged homosexuality, he said.

The manuscript was changed at the direction of the publisher, New York Times Books.

"We feel we have a responsibility not to publish damaging allegations which cannot be substantiated or which are based on hearsay," company President Joseph Consolino told The New York Times.

In the final edition, the biography reports that "many felt _ and continue to feel _ that Spellman the public moralist may well have been a contradiction of the man of flesh."

But "others ... have steadfastly dismissed such claims" and the resulting debate would "deflect attention from his words and deeds."

The current archbishop of New York, John J. O'Connor, has said that to practice homosexuality is a sin, and has refused to stipulate that the archdiocese does not discriminate against homosexuals in hiring.

Joe Zwilling, a spokesman for the archdiocese, said it would have no comment on the book.

Monsignor Eugene V. Clark, who was Spellman's secretary, said "it is not true that he was a homosexual, and what's more, there were not widely circulated rumors that he was one."

Cooney said he drew from sources such as Spellman's diary and FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, and interviewed priests and politicians who knew or worked with the cardinal.

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He quotes Dave Powers, a Kennedy aide, recalling being asked by Kennedy in 1960, "Why is Spellman against me?"

Powers said he answered, "Spellman is the most powerful Catholic in the country. When you become president, you will be."

During the tenure of New York Mayor William O'Dwyer, Spellman was involved "in the selection of judges and politically appointed city officials as well as nominees for elected offices," according to the book.

Julius Epstein, an aide to Gov. Herbert Lehman, is quoted as saying, "If there were several qualified candidates for a job, and one of them was close to Spellman, he got the job." Former Mayor Abraham Beame said, "If (Spellman) didn't like any of the candidates, he said so."

In 1953 an FBI memo referred to Spellman, who admired Sen. Joseph McCarthy's anti-communism, trying "to eventually bring about the election of McCarthy as president."

The book also says intelligence agencies routinely turned to Spellman for information and that "often, (the FBI) had Spellman and his priests gather political intelligence."

In 1957, it says, Spellman demanded that Bishop Fulton Sheen, director of the office of the Propagation of the Faith, pay him hundreds of thousands of dollars for surplus food the government had turned over to the cardinal.

Sheen refused and succeeded in having the matter brought before Pope Pius XII, whom Spellman allegedly told he had paid for the food and deserved to be reimbursed. The book does not make clear whether Spellman claimed to have paid for the food out of personal or archdiocesan funds.

When a check with Washington discredited his claim, "the Pope was apoplectic," it reports. "Spellman had committed an unpardonable offense. Not only had he tried to con Sheen out of the money, but he had also lied to the pope. ... (Spellman) was wounded immeasurably at the Vatican."