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High-level fake

Have you heard about Virgilio Scattolini, the Italian the United States hired to spy on the Vatican during World War II?

Scattolini gave the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of today's Central Intelligence Agency, transcripts of secret meetings between Pope Pius XII and German and Japanese envoys.

He provided detailed reports of meetings the Pope had with church leaders. Scattolini told Washington of peace feelers from Japan, of civil unrest in war-torn Germany, of Russian dealings with Japan.

His reports were read with great interest by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by President Roosevelt, by President Truman.

Only one thing wrong with them:

They were fakes.

Scattolini was supposed to be working closely with Vatican secretary of state Msgr. Giovanni Battista — who became Pope Paul VI. The OSS paid Scattolini \$500 a month for information. Another Italian collected the spy's data, translated it and sent it to Washington.

Scattolini, who apparently was never contacted in person by any U.S. agent, tripped himself up by reporting on a meeting between American and Japanese ambassadors. The meeting never took place.

Neither Roosevelt nor Truman ever knew that the Scattolini ma-

terial was faked. The spy, though, was kept on the payroll until the end of World War II. He sold bogus reports to other nations after the war.

The OSS dispatched two agents to bury its Scattolini file on a Maryland farm in about 1945. The material moldered there until one of the agents dug it up in 1960 as a condition of being hired by the CIA.

The affair was uncovered by a Jesuit historian named Robert Graham who is researching the Vatican role in World War II. He got wind of the Scattolini file and used the Freedom of Information Act to make it public.

Father Graham says it is incredible that the OSS, the Joint Chiefs, two presidents were taken in by such a sham.

It isn't that incredible, really.

Our World War II leaders were all little boys once. Little boys have always liked to read spy stories and play spy games. Little boys grow up to be big boys. Unfortunately, many never get over their fascination with secret agents and spy stories.

Viewed in that light, the Scattolini episode, or industrial espionage or Watergate-style spying is not incredible, merely a last, logical vestige of childhood.

It is unsettling, though, to wonder what kind of spy games are being played today. And how many decisions are based on information from Virgilio Scattolini still on the payroll?