

Rupert Murdoch, papal knight

By [John Dart](#)

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As British authorities look into the cellphone hacking scandal surrounding the global media empire of Rupert Murdoch, questions [have reappeared](#) about the 1998 award of a papal knighthood to Murdoch--and how his family may have used its riches to appear in a favorable light with the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Murdoch's selection for the honorary knighthood--the highest honor the pope can bestow on laypeople--upset many people at the time. Murdoch's News Corp. was long known for sensationalist tabloid newspapers and titillating programs on the Fox Network.

The ceremony was celebrated by Cardinal Roger Mahony in a suburban Los Angeles parish, and I [covered it](#) for the *Los Angeles Times*. Later reports said that Murdoch contributed \$10 million toward building the Los Angeles archdiocese's large downtown cathedral, dubbed Taj Mahony by many.

Those given the title of Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great ranged from generous donors to tireless volunteers. Honorees were to be people of "unblemished character" who contributed to society and/or Catholic institutions. "You are examples of good peer pressure, positive influences on society and culture," said Mahony to some 60 inductees.

Murdoch attended, sitting in a section of the pews well-distanced from reporters. His then-wife Anna, a Catholic, was one of a dozen women named Dames of St. Gregory. She told me her husband grew up in the Anglican Church in Australia but would occasionally attend mass with her at a Beverly Hills parish.

Two other non-Catholic honorees stayed away from the hoopla: comedian Bob Hope and entertainment executive Roy Disney. But

veteran actor Ricardo Montalban was sitting in a front pew. He frequently appeared at Catholic charitable affairs during his long film and television career. Four years before, Montalban underwent a spinal cord operation. Using a walker, he still betrayed the pain of sitting down and rising in the church.

But he was all smiles to everyone who greeted him. "This is probably my greatest honor," he said of the unanticipated award. "It's a wonderful gift, medicine from God."