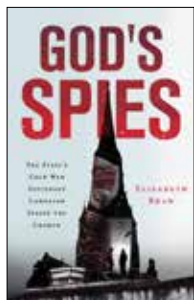
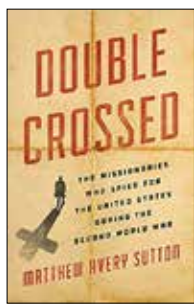


# Books and Missiology

*Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War*, by Matthew Avery Sutton, (New York: Basic Books, 2019), x + 401 pp.

*God's Spies: The Stasi's Cold War Espionage Campaign inside the Church*, by Elisabeth Braw (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), xxiv + 277 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



From whence comes the fodder to assuage the appetite of Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan is a matter of indifference to him; he is not overly delicate as to what he consumes. Or as the title of John Le Carré's 1974 novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* reminds, spies and double agents come in diverse stripes and hues. Ceaselessly creeping and snooping, they are well-nigh ubiquitous. When circumstances are propitious, they can even be found wearing clerical collars and living in manses. Some teach in theological institutions, occupy high ecclesiastical positions, or gain luster—and cover—serving on the mission field. Indeed, the greater the spread between appearance and intended role the more useful a spymaster may find a potential

spy to be. From the spiritual or theological side of the equation, there are many ways to align—or misalign—missionary engagements and those of the state. Outright spying is but one of the more egregious possibilities.

Matthew Avery Sutton's *Double Crossed* is far from subtle in approach. Just in case readers might miss the message of the book's subtitle, *The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War*, the publishers have placed on the book jacket an image of a professional, possibly clerical,

man looking northeast, facing away from the viewer. Ahead is bright sunlight; behind him stretches his shadow transformed into an elongated cross. The cross behind me, the dawning of a bold new day before me, indeed.<sup>1</sup>

Sutton does not merely tip his hand; he spreads it out broadly in his Introduction, though he tries there and at various other places throughout the book to pose the issue as a question yet to be decided: Will they? Won't they? Read on, dear reader, read on. Can the tensions between being a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ and playing a clandestine role of deceiving, killing, conniving, and betraying trust dwell together in one heart? Is reconciliation possible? Sutton finds a clue in an extensive assassination plot devised by missionary spy William Eddy. Sutton writes that World War II

seemingly changed everything for religious activists turned spies like Eddy. Or maybe it didn't. Maybe assassinating those who did the devil's handiwork represented the logical culmination of their sense of global Christian mission, how they planned to bring peace and charity back to earth. If they hoped to restart their religious work after the war, they first had to defeat the evil that blocked their path. Perhaps for Eddy and dozens of other holy spies, serving a secretive, clandestine US wartime agency tasked with defeating German and Italian fascism and Japanese militarism was another way, maybe the best way, to serve the very same Jesus they sought to emulate as missionaries.<sup>2</sup>

But lest the story be over before it begins—for it begs for moral tension to be sustained—he helpfully appends, “They were never quite sure.”<sup>3</sup> Chatter of this sort is idle trifling. Such statements dangle a pseudo-suspense that seems to promise a theologically risqué exposé, but the book fails to deliver on that titillation. It is much more a relation of what *he* did, then what *they* did, followed by brief bits about the missionary spies' post clandestine years, capped by a sum up, than it is either an exposé or a plumbing of the anguished souls of the spies.

Of the four male missionaries whose stories are told over the course of the book—William Eddy, the scion of a missionary family whose service in Lebanon and the Middle East ran generations deep; John Birch, a lone wolf missionary/guerilla band leader serving in China who became the eponym of the later John Birch Society; Stephen B. L. Penrose Jr., a mid-level US mission society administrator with foreign contacts; and Stewart Herman Jr., the US pastor of the American Church in Berlin at the war's beginning—Eddy seems to be the most deeply marked by moral misgivings. Serve Jesus by killing the enemies of the United States by all means possible? “We

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deserve to go to hell when we die,' he later lamented. 'It is still an open question, . . . whether an operator in OSS or in CIA can ever again become a wholly honorable man.'<sup>4</sup>

It was also highly questionable that such a person could ever serve as a missionary again. The director of the Office of Strategic Services, William "Wild Bill" Donovan, "ensured that the stories of the OSS's godly spooks remained top secret," doing so in league with the missionary spies themselves.<sup>5</sup> After all,

they did what they did because they needed the United States to win the war in order to guarantee their freedom to work around the globe. But they did not want to bring any attention to their wartime actions. If native peoples knew that some missionaries had worked as government spies, how could they ever trust the ones who insisted they were only doing the Lord's work? They couldn't.<sup>6</sup>

He states, "As a result, the wartime stories of Wild Bill's religious operatives have remained almost entirely hidden." Then he adds in true exposé style, "Until now."<sup>7</sup>

### *Clarifying Priorities?*

The entanglement and at times entwinement of Christian mission from the United States with US foreign policy is too well known to detain us at this point. (Such entanglement and entwinement are hardly unique to the United States. It is characteristic of empire to spread its tentacles everywhere and to coopt religious sentiments and motivations to *its* own purposes.) Sutton's rhetorical question, "If native peoples knew that some missionaries had worked as government spies, how could they ever trust the ones who insisted they were only doing the Lord's work?" and his answer, "They couldn't," are spot on. That point could be developed at length. But when he claims to be *the* unveiler of this great secret, he overreaches. He provides considerable information on four particular OSS missionary operatives, more than I knew, but he is not the first to write about missionary connections with the OSS. See, for example, *Protestants Abroad*, by David Hollinger.<sup>8</sup>

In his final chapter, Sutton reviews concerns and forebodings that missionaries and church leaders have had about mixing gospel and espionage or missionaries for CIA purposes, but he is clear on two points:

American leaders—political and religious—embarked on a crusade to remake the rest of the world in their image. God, they believed, expected no less from his chosen people and his chosen land. The integration of ecumenical Christian ideas of religious freedom with advocacy for an aggressive, interventionist American foreign policy, forged in the embers of the war, echoed throughout the speeches and policies of just about every president since FDR. Victory over Japan and Germany seemingly demonstrated that God had anointed the United States to use its military and economic might to establish peace, security, and religious freedom for all.<sup>9</sup>

For its part, the CIA continued to recruit "missionaries and other religious activists for clandestine work. The CIA also created fake religious groups."<sup>10</sup> As a result, "by the early 1970s, missionaries were regularly suspected of working for the US government."<sup>11</sup> Over the final third of the twentieth century, the CIA promulgated some at least nominal safeguards on its recruitment of missionaries and the impersonation of US missionaries as "cover" for its agents. Sutton concludes that during World War II, the OSS needed the skills, local knowledge, and linguistic capabilities that only missionaries possessed. Today a larger pool of non-missionaries with such capabilities is available. "We can," he writes,

be grateful that during World War II, American missionaries carried dung bombs and poison pills with their Bibles, and some even hatched assassination plots. We can also be grateful that today, they shouldn't have to.<sup>12</sup>

Wall of separation between church and state, indeed. The flexible phrase "shouldn't have to" leaves room for discretionary judgment, and whether to exercise that judgment lies all on the side of the government and military. It leaves an exceedingly wide opening for summons to service to be issued and for mounting a claim that a missionary obligation exists to put Christ on hold while tending to the demands of Mars. When the chips are down, missionaries are still on tap, available to be drawn into service of a higher cause: Lay aside the cause of Jesus Christ and serve the State. If you can encompass both, probably fine; but if not, don't forget which has the higher priority and deserves your all.

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### *Looking Deeper*

In *God's Spies*, by Elisabeth Braw, the same contest between the things that are God's and the things that are Caesar's exists—it overarches everything—but the terrain shifts markedly.<sup>13</sup> For one thing, the setting for *God's Spies* lies on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and behind the Iron Curtain. By drawing on archives and interviews, Braw interrogates the role that ecclesiastical espionage played during the brief life span of the German Democratic Republic (GDR; commonly referred to as East Germany). For another thing, the spies in the two books looked in diametrically opposite directions. The OSS and CIA enlisted US missionaries to monitor and undermine the power of its foes *over there*; the objects of espionage were external to the country. The objective of the Stasi, the GDR's secret police, in contrast, was to spy on and control its own people.

Though her book is shorter, Braw's investigation probes more deeply into the moral challenges posed by ecclesiastical entry into espionage, than does Sutton's. Questions raised include: Who spied on whom? How were spies recruited? These potential spies knew that they were being asked to play a pedestrian role; they were not destined to become movers and shakers, say on a par with William Eddy, so what motivated them to spy on fellow clergy? The money, ingenuity, and person-power the government of the GDR invested in clandestine surveillance was considerable. What did the GDR seek to achieve in return? How well did the project succeed? Then a question Braw addresses, but not exactly in the way that I phrase it here: Not everyone collaborated; why, at considerable risk and cost to themselves, did some resist the advances of the spymasters while seemingly everyone else was on the take? Finally, I would ask: Are there lessons from ecclesiastical derring-do under the thumb of the Stasi that missionaries today might take to heart?

the harsh measures the Soviets used against the church. The church, however, could easily harbor or generate pools of resistance, and it did not dare to be too lax for fear of incurring the wrath of the USSR. On the other side, overly harsh measures against the church would cause the GDR to lose face and standing in the West, where the GDR wanted to cultivate a favorable image for its brand of socialism. It also wished to maintain countenance with international church convocations and organizations as venues for disseminating propaganda. How was a totalitarian socialist society to impose its yoke upon the church? The solution the GDR embraced was to create a special branch within the Stasi, Department XX/4, dedicated to cultivating ecclesiastical spies, that is, members of the clergy, theological professors, and church leaders who would submit reports on the views, opinions, activities, aspirations, weaknesses, and moral lapses of their colleagues, congregations, and parishioners.

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Pastors reported on other pastors . . . Seemingly everybody  
collaborated and spied on everybody else.**

*God's Spies* covers roughly the period from the rise of the Iron Curtain to the fall of the Berlin Wall and a bit beyond. In its effort to spy on its own people, the GDR did not stint on human resources. For a mere 16 million or so population, the Stasi directly employed 91,000 agents supplemented by some 170,000 informants. That comes out to something like one out of every sixty persons in the country was engaged, willingly or by being dragooned, in surveillance of colleagues, family, friends, and neighbors. The intent was to achieve total social control of the populace, by monitoring speech and channeling action. By the time the Berlin Wall came down, the Stasi had 111 kilometers (69 miles) of files prying on individual lives. Color and vibrancy were stripped away, and life froze into a gray pall. The movie ran backward and monochrome ruled.

***Special Treatment for the Clergy***

The church and its clergy, however, posed a special challenge. Institutionally the church had a weight and gravitas that might be harnessed, but that could ill simply be extinguished. The weight of history—this was the land of Luther after all—garnered the church a degree of latitude not accorded other sectors of society. The GDR tried to dance between two millstones. On the one side it did not want to impose

Who spied on whom? Theology professors informed on their students and their colleagues; students on each other and their professors. Pastors reported on other pastors, and church administrators transmitted information on church programs and plans. Seemingly everybody collaborated and spied on everybody else. The information that was collected flowed upward to central repositories, but the system worked in the other direction as well. It served as a conduit for pushing state and party line messages down and outward for dissemination through church organs and events. Did the GDR want to polish its image in the eyes of its Soviet overlords? There were ways to insinuate criticisms of, say, the United States into the speeches and minutes of international church convocations. Such messages could be entrusted to "reliable" church dignitaries who were then granted special permission to travel abroad. Tit for tat, quid pro quo. Presently a statement would appear among the reports of this or that august assembly's resolutions and addresses.

If you are going to eschew harsh methods, how does one go about enticing a person of the cloth to betray fellow church leaders? How does one gain informers' compliance? Department XX/4 did so largely, it seems, through observation

and cultivation of weaknesses. “Handlers” would immerse themselves in information about potential recruits.

Where does he live? What sort of work does he do? What sort of connections does he have? Does he have a family? What are his interests, opinions, preferences? How is his marriage going? What sorts of things would he like to have or achieve?<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, pressure was part of the toolkit; hints might be dropped: *You might want to reconsider and decide to work with us. If you do not, information about this or that indiscretion—which you know about and so do we, but your wife does not—may become public.* But severe pressure was likely to be held in reserve. More often cultivation of an informant took the form of granting favors, such as, *You have a son that you would like to see admitted to a prestigious university? Maybe we can help. Or, You would like a promotion within the church administration? Or to teach in the university? Maybe we can help.*

Many who became informants wanted much less, medical care for a spouse, permission for a trip abroad, an article of Western goods, a symbolic pat on the back. Some wanted and received substantial sums of money and fast cars or prestigious positions, but on the whole the impression left is of the small-scale venality and pettiness of God’s spies. Reverend personages sold their birthright by betraying their brothers and sisters’ trust for much less than a bowl of porridge: good cigars, a car tire (hard to obtain in the GDR), a lamp from the West, a theological book, permission to travel to a spa, a capitalist washing machine. Oftentimes what Department XX/4 handlers had to offer informants was a listening ear. “I wouldn’t have poured my heart out to you if I didn’t know that you would have sympathy for my problems, . . . Apart from you there’s no one I can talk to.”<sup>15</sup>

If so many were weak, did all pastors and ecclesiastics comply with overtures from Department XX/4? By no means. Some pastors informed recruiters that they would report their approaches to their bishops. Some bishops shielded ordinary pastors by remonstrating with the Department XX/4 directly. Some stood forthrightly on principle:

“Please don’t take it personally, but I want absolutely nothing to do with the institution you represent,” a brave pastor named Heinrich Rathke told [two recruiters] when they explained the nature of their visit.<sup>16</sup>

Maybe it was grudging respect, maybe it was because other pickings were so plentiful and so easy, but it seems that those who stood on principle or strongly objected were largely bypassed. Does this mean that things were easy in the GDR or that the decision of whether to collaborate or not bore few consequences? Not at all. Reprisals could take many forms. One might be reassigned, demoted, or one’s children might be denied access to education, for example. One outspoken GDR

pastor became the intended victim of a rare assassination attempt by the Department XX/4. The stories of Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass and Roman Catholic Tomáš Halík come from elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc, Hungary and the then Czechoslovakia, respectively, but they are instructive accounts of the weight that official ecclesiastical repression could bring to bear, including harassment, removal from office, and imprisonment.<sup>17</sup>

### *Awash in “Information”*

When the GDR collapsed, the Stasi had files on roughly every fourth person in the country—and two million others in West Germany. The information that Department XX/4 as a subbranch gathered was itself voluminous. Some of this information was consequential for the GDR’s purposes of propaganda and control, but much was file cabinet fodder. For the personnel of Department XX/4, what mattered most was the quantity of records collected, not the value of what they turned in. Everybody knew that the Stasi was gathering information, and for some of the GDR’s purposes having that knowledge dragging at the back of people’s minds was enough. When people felt the weight of watching eyes and listening ears, they muted their inclinations to express dissent. The existence of ecclesiastical informers ensured that that weight was felt within the churches as well. But it was not enough. At the end of the 1980s, when the time came to slough off the detritus of the GDR regime, the church played a vital role in the movement toward liberation. How could that be? Not surprisingly, a liturgy that includes memories of exodus and anticipation of resurrection proved able to spark, or at least to provide support for, a desire for emancipation. With its small degree of autonomy, the church provided a space where anticipations of change could be nurtured. In it, likeminded persons, who could not meet in the same manner elsewhere, could share hope—despite the busy unceasing efforts of Department XX/4 in amassing and filing informants’ reports.

Exodus, anyone? The church had a lock on that story, and people flocked to the church during the years of Stasi oppression in a way that fell off starkly when the bands of restraint were broken. After the fall of the GDR, East German church attendance dropped sharply to 4 percent of the population. This precipitous decline gives evidence of the extent to which the church had been a vehicle of resistance. When the GDR collapsed, that function of the church was no longer needed in the same way, and attendance fell away. But when the collapse came, it came as a surprise to the Stasi, to Department XX/4, and to the government. So, the question arises, how could the Stasi and Department XX/4 have failed so utterly? They were supposed to be the government’s antenna. They had been collecting data assiduously, so why were they, their superiors, and the government itself taken unawares?

By way of explanation, Braw advances a comparison to the way the CIA works in the United States.

Department XX/4 was good at doing what the CIA's Clandestine Service does, that is, assembling the intelligence. Disastrously, however, it lacked skills on the Directorate of Intelligence side, where the enormous quantities of information of vastly varying quality collected by spies are turned into a meaningful picture.

Add to that the fact that

while many pastor spies may have been prolific, by and large they were not particularly effective. If the selfishly motivated [pastor] agents understood the larger meaning of what they were reporting, most of them didn't bother explaining it to their masters.<sup>18</sup>

So, Department XX/4 lacked the vision or staff to integrate the data they collected, but even if they had made the attempt, the data that they had collected from nonprofessional snoops and snitches was of dubious quality and would likely have produced meager low-grade intelligence anyway.

### *Missionary Lessons?*

If missionary lessons from the era of the Stasi are to be sought, missionaries serving in "difficult access" countries might consider the experience of couriers of Bibles and Christian literature through the GDR. The literature conduits ultimately intended to run all the way through the Eastern Bloc to destinations in the USSR where the Bibles would be delivered and distributed. The difference between intent and achievement presents dismal reading. For starters, Department XX/4 infiltrated their lines of communication and transport. Donors in the West put up the money to print Bibles, tracts, and other materials and to transport them. Volunteers set out on arduous journeys in vehicles with built-in secret compartments loaded with Bibles, etc. The secret police monitored their progress. Some they arrested. Some they let deliver their Bibles and tracts, then arrested the recipients. Sometimes they allowed the Bibles and literature to fall into the hands of supposed middlemen who then resold them on the black market at a markup. Some they destroyed or burned. Some they stuck in storage buildings, where they remained locked up. When the Berlin Wall fell, Department XX/4 had 30,000 Bibles tucked away in a basement.

If there is a lesson in all this, it is that those seeking to operate "under the radar" of the intelligence apparatus of a police state face daunting challenges and scant prospects of success. One part of what Amy Peterson records in her memoir, *Dangerous Territory*, is that the consequences can be far reaching, personally and for those to whom one is seeking to bring gospel light.<sup>19</sup> Once one has embarked on the path of subterfuge, clean hands are hard to come by again. Maybe there is a better way. Rick Love, co-founder of Peace Catalyst, seems to have come to think so.<sup>20</sup> The apostle Paul insisted that the matters

related to the gospel "were not done in a corner." (Acts 26:26). Jesus before Annas spoke in a similar vein: "I have spoken publicly to the world. . . . I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said. They know what I said" (John 18:20–21). Is there a lesson there?

### *After the Wall Fell*

The author of *God's Spies*, Elisabeth Braw, grew up in Lund as the daughter of a Swedish theology professor. One of the GDR's ecclesiastical spies on whom she reports—not known at that time to be an informer—would visit their home, bringing along unsuspecting East German church leaders. Views expressed freely in this "secure" setting became content for the informer's reports to his handlers. She is now a research fellow and director of the Modern Deterrence Project at Britain's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Her solid prior experience as a journalist shows to advantage in this excellently assembled and well-written account. In addition to research in the Stasi/Department XX/4 files, she was able to conduct interviews with a number of significant persons who figure in her account. Of special importance is the insight brought by her repeated visits with Colonel Wiegand, Department XX/4's overseer.

## Those seeking to operate "under the radar" of the intelligence apparatus of a police state face daunting challenges and scant prospects of success.

From an impoverished background and an early conversion to the promise of the GDR, Wiegand remained a true believer even after the fall of the Wall and German reunification. "He seems troubled," writes Braw, "by the question of where Communism went wrong. 'The idea [of Communism] was good, but it was poorly executed.'"<sup>21</sup> He sought to master the church and to undermine its potential for subverting the GDR, but he did not viciously despise the church. "I never condemned religion. . . . I remain an atheist through and through. I accept the church and appreciate some of its teaching, but I'm an atheist."<sup>22</sup>

His wife is more ardent.

Despite a devout upbringing, Gerda Wiegand no longer believes in God. If God exists, she asks, why do all these bad things happen in the world? . . . How can she be a Christian when priests abuse children, she asks . . . But [her husband] interjects. "These priests who abuse children are just tumors. . . . You can't dismiss the whole church on account of them." Then he adds: "You can't blame God for the bad things that people do." Colonel Wiegand, the man whose mission was to undermine the church, is defending it.

He is the honorable opponent according credit where due to his adversary. He acted on the principles he embraced in his youth and remained steadfast in them. He

met more than his fair share of debased and opportunist clerics, the kind who could make the most devout Christian question the virtues of religion. Yet somehow he's not cynical about the Christian faith.<sup>23</sup>

It was Wiegand who decided the fate of the 30,000 Bibles left in the hands of Department XX/4 after the GDR collapsed. What should be done with them? Should they be destroyed? Colonel Wiegand, head of Department XX/4, refused permission and eventually had them shipped on to Russia, their originally intended destination. So, did the Bible couriers triumph in the end?

For Wiegand, honoring a commitment, keeping a promise, and standing by one's word were important. Numbers of former ecclesiastical spies whom he could easily have betrayed at great gain to himself were spared because of his steadfast refusal to do so. He kept his word. For that among other reasons, it might be tempting to call him, the spymaster, the only honorable man in this dismal record of spy and counterspy within the GDR, but that would not be correct. There are as well the pastors and bishops who paid a cost for refusing to collaborate, who spoke up within the limits of their circumstances and capabilities, who spurned the opportunity, by becoming informers, to make life just a little less gray and a little less monotonous for themselves and their families, who saw doors to educational opportunities closed in the face of their children, yet stood firm on their principles. Hail to them and blessed be their memory.<sup>24</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War* (New York: Basic Books, 2019). Sutton is the Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professor of History, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington. He is the author of several previous books on evangelicalism in the United States, including *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Sutton, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Sutton, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sutton, 5. The acronym OSS stands for the Office of Strategic Services and CIA for the Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>5</sup> Sutton, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Sutton, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Sutton, 4.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017); reviewed in *IJFM*, 35:2 (Summer 2018): 90–98.

<sup>9</sup> Sutton, 338.

<sup>10</sup> Sutton, 339.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton, 341. See David Stoll, *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1982), who, in touring Latin America, seems quite unable not to find a missionary in the employ of the CIA lurking behind every bush.

<sup>12</sup> Sutton, 347.

<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Braw, *God's Spies: The Stasi's Cold War Espionage Campaign inside the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Braw, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Braw, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Braw, 47.

<sup>17</sup> László G. Terray, *He Could Not Do Otherwise: Bishop Lajos Ordass, 1901–1978*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Tomáš Halík, *From the Underground Church to Freedom*, trans. Gerald Turner (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Braw, xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> Amy Peterson, *Dangerous Territory: My Misguided Quest to Save the World* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Jayson Casper, "The Redemption of Interfaith Dialogue: Three Evangelicals Wrestle with Faithful Witness in Conversations with Muslims," *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/july-august/interfaith-dialogue-muslims-evangelicals-cumming-love-shenk.html?share=UXmsfYxjIln3PuvcVIBh6xT01qTKhur+>.

<sup>21</sup> Braw, 257.

<sup>22</sup> Braw, 264.

<sup>23</sup> Braw, 264.

<sup>24</sup> When Anne Applebaum interviewed Marianne Birthler recently, she broached the subject of why people within the GDR became collaborators. Birthler, a youth pastor and resistance leader within the GDR who after Germany's reunification served for ten years as overseer of the Stasi records, had no patience for the topic. "Almost everyone was a collaborator; 99 percent of East Germans collaborated. If they weren't working with the Stasi, then they were working with the party, or with the system more generally. Much more interesting—and far harder to explain—was the genuinely mysterious question of 'why people went against the regime.'"

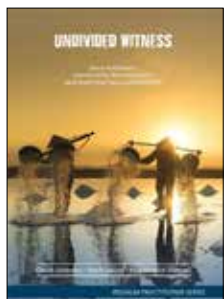
Of interest, also, are the steps of hope that Birthler offers, steps that can lead people to extricate themselves from being collaborators by default. "Just as people can adapt to corruption or immorality, she told me, they can slowly learn to object as well. The choice to become a dissident can easily be the result of 'a number of small decisions that you take'—to absent yourself from the May Day parade, for example, or not to sing the words of the party hymn. And then, one day, you find yourself irrevocably on the other side. Often, this process involves role models. You see people whom you admire, and you want to be like them. It can even be 'selfish.' 'You want to do something for yourself,' Birthler said, 'to respect yourself.'"

Applebaum's whole essay, published in the July/August 2020 print issue of *The Atlantic*, merits close reading. It can also be found online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/07/trumps-collaborators/612250/>.



*Undivided Witness: Jesus Followers, Community Development, and Least-Reached Communities*, edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020), x + 184 pp.

—Reviewed by Jakobus Dirksen



**I** am ready to die for the Lord but would not die for just installing tube wells.” This is how one of my colleagues in a Christian development organisation in a closed country viewed his daily work. Proclamation of the good news had top priority. To him providing clean drinking water was little more than a way to get a visa.

*Undivided Witness* challenges that bifurcation of life. The authors, Christian professionals pressing for a more holistic view of mission, “present ten key principles linking community development and the emergence of vibrant communities of Jesus followers among the ‘least reached.’” The three editors are practitioners of Integral Mission. David Greenlee (PhD) is Operation Mobilisation’s Director of Missiological Research and Evaluation. Mark Galpin (PhD) has thirty years’ experience in community development in South Asia and Africa, and serves as the Postgraduate Programme Leader at All Nations Christian College. Paul Bendor-Samuel (MD) is Executive Director of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and formerly the International Director of Interserve.

Alongside the editors, the nine authors, including three women, have hands-on experience in living out this integral witness in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and South, Central and Southeast Asia. Most of the authors have a link of some kind with Operation Mobilisation, but professionally their expertise ranges over a number of different development specialities. These include community and public health care, education, consulting and project management, creation care, agriculture and rural development, disability, poverty and justice issues, missiology, refugees, the homeless, and human trafficking.

Together these authors weave kingdom theology and development practice into a single piece of cloth. Each writer, from a different angle, shows why and how proclamation and sound community development contribute to what they call “vibrant communities of Jesus followers” (VCJF). Their

examples do not come from locations where Christians abound. No, this approach, and the examples shared, arise among those referred to in evangelical mission as the “least reached.”

The book punctuates a half century tradition of books written since the Lausanne Congress (1974) when C. René Padilla called us to reunite what had been rent asunder a half a century earlier: word and deed. These authors do reunite the two, building on the best of community development principles, as well as on the latest theological insights. They show how the key principles in both disciplines can overlap. The book reads like a 2020 update on a kaleidoscope of earlier contributions.

This book’s attempt to reunite assumes a dilemma, a divided witness, which they explain as follows:

In practice, a number of mission organisations focusing on evangelism and church planting among the least reached have included aspects of community development in their work, though often not as a mainstream activity. Meanwhile, those organisations focused on community development have often found that their work with communities leads to people coming to faith in Jesus Christ and, at times, the emergence of fledgling churches. While this has happened in practice, and is a phenomenon familiar to practitioners, rarely have missiologists explored the overlap between these domains. Indeed, often the respective disciplines of church planting and community development have been treated as being in tension or competition with each other rather than as areas of potential fruitful synergy with many principles of good practice in common. (2–3)

They introduce three domains of mission endeavour that need to find an integral space, a place of convergence and integration. In the introduction, Galpin and Greenlee summarize this conceptual space as follows:

The contributors to this book address this gap by exploring the conceptual and practical intersection between community development, the least reached, and the emergence of vibrant, growing churches or “communities of Jesus followers” that we refer to as the “Community Development Least Reached” (CDLR) space.” (3)

They begin their analysis with an explanation of their ten key principles for this intersection—this gap or conceptual space—they call Community Development Least Reached (CDLR). These principles provide the framework for the book, and a chapter is dedicated to an explanation and evaluation of each principle. Also included are three reflections which discuss themes linking the main points.

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In my opinion, the main strength of the book is that it combines the theoretical with the practical. It argues that what Alan Kreider claimed about Christians in the first three centuries is still true: faith lived out in the radically changed behaviour of the followers of Jesus is what draws people to Him.<sup>1</sup>

The first-hand stories about how each of the principles has worked out in practice are gems. Some you may never forget, but for me, two stories stand out, both examples of the negative impact of doing divided witness. Rizalina (Sally) Ababa writes:

Some years ago, I helped a friend establish a foundation to aid scavengers and street children in one city in Mindanao, southern Philippines. As their projects began to thrive, my friend started on a path of believing in and following Jesus. Over time, though, he became discouraged by the attitudes he encountered. "When I think of Jesus Christ and reflect on his teaching, what he did and how he lived his life, he is the closest thing I can picture of God and anything spiritual," he told me. "However, I dislike church leaders and pastors; they are not in touch with realities. I am giving up on Christianity; I cannot be a Christian." (43)

The second vignette comes from Gabriel (Gabby) Markus who in chapter five recalls:

One day, someone flew to Greece with an intention to "evangelise" the refugees but with limited understanding of the situation (or desire to inquire). She had only a short time to "serve God" before returning to her normal life. After a few days of distributing Bibles and other Christian literature in the camp, she returned to her country satisfied that her mission was completed. A few days later, the evangelical churches received a letter from the government informing them that they were no longer allowed to work in any refugee camp. Despite being the first respondents to help, they were henceforth banned. Additionally, several refugees who were seen with the Bibles and Christian literature were stabbed and hospitalised. (56–57)

What an indictment! How sad if our good intentions and "mission" result in the very opposite of what we hoped for.

This book answers these sad experiences with some very positive principles and perspectives. Greenlee's contribution in chapter two on how people enter the kingdom I found particularly relevant for his intended audience. He refers to Paul Hiebert's insightful framework of set-theory (bounded-sets, centered-sets, and fussy-sets) as a helpful way of seeing reality and adjusting our expectations to it. (35–36)

In chapter six Robert Sluka makes a strong case for creation care. Among the helpful things he suggests is a fresh re-focusing of our Lord's mission commission. He suggests, "Perhaps we should use Mark's version of the Great Commission—to preach the good news to all *creation*—rather than Matthew's." (92)

Writing on the seventh principle, Mark Galpin addresses the tension between what restrictive governments allow and do not allow:

One helpful distinction to avoid this dilution of our witness is to distinguish between the restrictions placed on the organisation, and those placed on individuals working for the organisation.... Our approach was to clarify that, while restrictions placed on our organisation meant that we would not have any programmed evangelistic activities, they as individuals not only had a basic human right to manifest their own faith (Article 18 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights) but that as Christians they had a biblical responsibility to do this. A key verse for us was: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15)." (102)

Galpin also has a very practical suggestion on how to move forward for leaders of Christian organisations in restricted contexts:

While contextual challenges and the danger of implicit coercive messages often make the inclusion of formal programmatic approaches to evangelism with our community development unwise, the equipping of our staff and partners to "give a reason for the hope that is within them... with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15) is a critical component of transformational community development in least-reached settings. Incorporating the profoundly biblical concept of "blessing" into both our community development work and into the discipleship and training of our staff and leaders of the emerging churches is important in ensuring that we and they are faithful to the call to "be a blessing" and to sustain the process of transformation. (106)

In the Epilogue, Paul Bendor-Samuel sums up all the principles and lessons learned in a succinct statement: "our need [is] to listen closely... to see clearly... to ask humbly." (163–165)

**"I dislike church leaders and pastors;  
they are not in touch with realities.  
I am giving up on Christianity;  
I cannot be a Christian." (43)**

The authors have made a strong case for "undivided witness." Is there more they could have done or that could have been said? I would like to make three suggestions.

Although there are hints at the need to deal with structural reasons for poverty and injustice (28), there is little substance contribution. Maybe they have assumed that structural transformation will follow if there are truly vibrant communities of followers of Jesus. Sadly, the case of the evangelical church



in the Global North suggests otherwise. There is nothing automatic here. I wonder if a broader selection of authors (not all OM-linked) might have brought in a greater emphasis on structural—a systemic treatment—of poverty and injustice.

Secondly, the book uses the word “balance” a lot to describe how proclamation and demonstration are related (26). This takes us back to that unhelpful, and historically unevangelical, division of what the gospel is meant to be. The writers themselves present real-life examples numerous times of how, if there were a distinction, it is often one of timing. Usually demonstration comes earlier in the process and proclamation follows in due course. When it comes to the various elements of Christian witness, I see more use for the word “blending” than “balancing.”

Finally, and probably most fundamentally, I see the book as completely within the current mission paradigm described by Bosch as “mission in the wake of enlightenment.”<sup>2</sup> As such, the witness envisaged is still riding the wave of modernisation and “progress” as defined by the West. The link between community development (a grassroots component of modernisation) and witness is therefore logical. But what do we do now with that wave coming to an end? What if we need to transcend mission as we have known it for the last few centuries?<sup>3</sup>

*Undivided Witness* is a must read for those believers and their churches who say they are committed to “Integral Mission,” but who may not fully understand what that means. As Melba Padilla Maggay writes in the book’s endorsements:

Many churches now fly the flag of “Integral Mission,” but often this simply means moving into poor communities and using community development or some such intervention as a platform for evangelism. Mission groups and development organisations in hard places find themselves in tension between “church planting” and the demands of “Kingdom witness.” This book is a good start in exploring from the ground up the paradigm shifts needed so that community engagement becomes truly missional.

This book is also a must read for young, evangelical Christians who feel uneasy about the tension they sense between demonstration and proclamation of the good news. Furthermore, mission leaders who were brought up with the idea that proclamation had top priority may also benefit from the book. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), chapter 9.

<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (IVP Academic, 2017).

### Suggested Reading List

- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
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