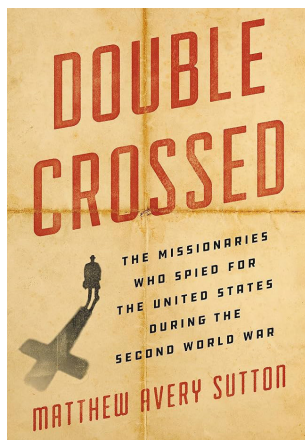


Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War

By Matthew Avery Sutton. Basic Books of Hachette Book Group, New York, 2019. 350 pages.

Reviewed by William “Bill” in the Arabian Gulf



Bill has served in the Middle East for forty years, mostly as a tentmaker in the Arabian Gulf. Besides his day job, his family befriends Gulf locals, sharing Christ, reaching out through intentional hospitality, building up local believers, and encouraging expatriate churches to reach out to locals.



Can a missionary serve his God and country as a spy? *Double Crossed* is a well-researched book telling a story seldom told. After a brief introduction to the beginning of America’s first civilian, overseas intelligence organization shortly before World War II, the book follows the experiences of four men involved in the organization’s development in Germany, North Africa, the Middle East, and China.

After teasing the tensions between serving God as a missionary and a spy, the book looks at the pre-war period from the perspective of Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). Preparing for war, he recruited William “Wild Bill” Donovan, a devoted Catholic, lawyer, and Republican politician, to gather information overseas for what came to

be known as the Office of Special Services (OSS), America's first overseas civilian intelligence organization and precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Both men saw America's struggle for democracy as a struggle for freedom for Christianity and so appealed to Christians to support the war. Donovan considered Christian religious workers as assets in his overseas endeavors (whether resident overseas or networked with Christians worldwide) and kept this information a closely guarded secret. The book shows how the OSS developed through four men.

The first example is Stewart Herman, Jr., a theology student in Strasburg, who became the pastor of an American church in Berlin. Later he translated for the US embassy with diplomatic cover until Americans had to leave Germany. His knowledge of Germany and network of German confessing church pastors proved invaluable when he joined the OSS and worked from London for central Europe, which included Germany. After the war, he worked for the new World Council of Churches in Geneva, traveled throughout Europe, reconciled German church leaders, and reported to the OSS.

In the second example, William Eddy distinguished himself in military intelligence during World War I in France. His grandparents founded the American University of Beirut (AUB) and his father was a missionary there. Eddy taught literature at the American University of Cairo and later became president of a Christian university in the US. As World War II approached, he volunteered for naval intelligence and was sent to Cairo as a naval attaché to gather information and network with local leaders using his Arabic and knowledge of the culture and the Qur'an. He was then sent to Morocco to prepare the way for the allied invasion of North Africa by developing a network of locals prepared to kill and sabotage. One of the OSS's most effective leaders, Eddy was later appointed over the entire Mediterranean and then the US ambassador in Saudi Arabia. From the North African perspective, he was loyally serving their best interests—freedom from expansive totalitarian powers.

The third person is John Birch, the son of a missionary and born in India, who was a fundamentalist Baptist missionary. He served briefly in India and then in China, where he planted churches among the Chinese while Japan was invading China. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought the US into the war, his financial support lines were cut off. He became a tentmaker by volunteering for the US Army Air Force, calling in air attacks, rescuing downed pilots, gathering information on Japanese troop movements, and helping Chinese and American officials share intelligence, all while continuing his missionary work. Helping the Americans fight the Japanese was not a problem from the Chinese viewpoint.

The fourth personality is Stephen Penrose, Jr. His father, Penrose, Sr., was a home missionary to American Indians, then a pastor, and finally the president of Whitman College. Penrose, Jr. taught science and math at AUB, got his PhD in philosophy, and then moved to New York to supervise the Near East College Association, the support group for the AUB, and mission schools in the Eastern Mediterranean. After Pearl Harbor, he inquired about serving his country, and was hired by the OSS. Having recruited and sent out missionaries, Penrose, Jr. now did the same for the OSS. Mission executives asked him for government help for missionaries traveling overseas. He helped them and in return confidentially selected missionaries to provide information and sometimes more. Later, Penrose, Jr. moved to Cairo to oversee OSS operations in the Middle East (and eventually in Greece and the Balkans), along with supervision of others previously at AUB. In the last part of the war, he oversaw Europe and the Middle East.

After the war, President Truman disbanded FDR's controversial OSS. He moved the operational parts under Penrose, Jr. in the military and the analytical parts under Eddy in the State Department. America continued thinking of itself as a "city on a hill," standing against atheistic communism and seeking to spread Christianity and freedom throughout the world. Isolationism was out and a more expansive foreign policy was in.

As communism became a more clear “enemy” of the Christian West, the need for a foreign intelligence service emerged. The author points out the dangers of the optimism of the liberal ecumenists, Eddy and probably also Penrose, Jr., who helped form the CIA without any limits to its independence. He speculates that if Birch was involved, his keen awareness of man’s sinfulness would have resulted in checks and balances. The author says this in the context of the abuses of the CIA in Latin America and elsewhere, sometimes working against democratically-elected leaders.

In the 1970s, a growing controversy emerged over the CIA’s use of clergy and missionaries. Christians who objected spoke out; those who accepted it did not. After the war, ecumenists tended to work in humanitarian charities, while evangelicals were the ones who worked as missionaries, put at risk by the CIA. Oregon senator Mark Hatfield, an evangelical, spoke out strongly against this CIA tactic, and when the CIA Director and the President did not take action, he brought the campaign to Congress and the public.

When George H. W. Bush (later president) became CIA Director in 1976, his first action, to defuse the controversy, was instituting a policy which satisfied Senator Hatfield, but had enough loopholes to allow the CIA to quietly continue doing what it wanted. The author notes that the world today differs from the World War II era, and it should no longer be necessary to use missionaries as spies.

Evaluation and Practitioner’s Angle

Some may find the book slow-moving, but those interested in history will find it fascinating. It is not a Christian book by and for evangelicals, but history for a general audience. The author does explain the various Protestant groups as well as the faith and doubts of the four men who are profiled. The author identifies more with the three mainline liberal Christian examples who sought to build the kingdom of God on earth, than with Birch, the fundamentalist Baptist who believed in Christ’s

imminent return and the need to urgently preach the gospel. The author considers Birch an extremist, although the core of his beliefs are historic Christian teachings (79, 80, 192, 193).

Who is a missionary? Is it a tentmaker who works in another profession, a vocational missionary, or just an active Christian? Only one of the four men was a missionary; three were in the US when they volunteered to serve their country as war loomed. In my opinion, none of them “double crossed” those among whom were living among. Instead, they helped by opposing tyranny through serving the USA. Shouldn’t we seek the welfare of the people we live among?

What is a spy? Is sharing information spying? International spying requires skills that few have. Historically, missionaries were among the few Americans who knew distant parts of the world and their people. Mixing missionary work and spying increases the missionary risk of danger, but the risk is there regardless. Who else speaks the local language and travels into remote areas besides spies and missionaries? When are risks worth taking? Spying and tentmaking have similarities: both have a job as a cover for other work. If one can wear two hats, can one wear three hats in times of crisis (sharing the gospel, employment, and spying) for the common good?

Locals are often suspicious of foreign identity and actions. In the poorer Arab countries, locals wonder why a Westerner is resident among them and what is his source of income. Locals question any business which cannot support an employee’s lifestyle. They may understand the foreigner as an employee of a non-governmental organization (NGO) who is there to do good and have external funding.

In contrast, the Arabian Gulf employs many foreigners, so tentmakers in real jobs are normal. As an example, one Gulf tentmaker wanted to start a ministry for local children, and wisely, first approached local community leaders. They didn’t understand why he wanted to do this. What was his motivation and hidden agenda? He said that God told him to come and care for locals. This explanation made sense to them,

so they agreed. This illustrates how we should be open about being believers in Christ, attracting to us those who are open, rather than hiding it and then springing the unexpected on them. In a religious society, we should leave our Western secularism behind and exemplify our faith's impact on daily life by praying for people and highlighting what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Perhaps being considered a missionary is safer than being considered a spy. Militiamen in Lebanon once apprehended an American because he spoke Arabic. What expatriates speak the local language? They believed he was a spy or military. After talking with him, they realized he was harmless, only a missionary, so they let him go. Most of us flee from being thought a missionary, but sometimes it can help!

However, is deception always sinful? In *The Ethics of Smuggling*, Brother Andrew discussed biblical teaching about deceiving opponents of God's work by hiding the truth without lying. One scriptural example is when God tells Samuel to anoint David. Samuel fears Saul, and so God tells him to say he is going there to make a sacrifice, a deception without lying (1 Samuel 16:1–3).

Perhaps we might also connect this to the "just war" doctrine, which applies to the World War II setting of *Double Crossed*. This doctrine is defined as a government-directed force that is biblically authorized and even required. The author shows little awareness of these Christian teachings until late in the book when he refers to a Dutch churchman who was the first head of the World Council of Churches and an OSS informant. The clergyman "embraced Niebuhr's Christian realist philosophy, recognizing that states must sometimes use force to secure peace" (289).

What can we learn from this book? It is hard to say. We know that real change only comes through believing the good news. Even so, we seek to bless and protect in this world. We look to the Lord for his direction and seek to glorify Christ in everything we do. We may find ourselves serving in unexpected ways "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

But our days are different than those detailed in *Double Crossed*. Besides ease of travel and proliferation of information, many others besides missionaries are now available for spying.

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