

of other philosophers. This imbalance is slightly attenuated by the introduction of subsequent important figures previous to their more detailed presentation. Moreover, presenting the impact of non-Western philosophy on Christianity would have greatly enriched the topic of the book.

While the synthesis of ideas is well done, contributing to the book's legibility, the fact that there are no headings or subheadings represents a major layout drawback. There are two empty lines (pp. 223 and 240) that appear to function as divisions of the text, and a question that appears to function as a heading (p. 247). Notes are rarely used, in an attempt to make the book easier to read but impeding the reader from finding the sources of the presented ideas. Moreover, the suggested reading list at the end of the book is not thoroughly updated.

Overall, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* is a useful book for those in need of a handy introduction to the impact of Western philosophy upon Western theology. The book can be used as a textbook by professors introducing Western philosophy to their theology students. It needs to be supplemented with a reading of primary sources and with a presentation of the impact non-Western philosophy had on Christian theology.

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God's Spies: The Stasi's Cold War Espionage Campaign inside the Church, by Elisabeth Braw. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019. 277 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7525-9. Hardcover US\$25.00.

Elisabeth Braw is a journalist with Swedish roots. Although she may seem less qualified to write about East German history, she has strong connections with the topic and the characters of the book. In spite of narrating a multi-thread story, the author paints an accurate picture of what it meant to be a priest or pastor or religion/theology professor in communist East Germany.

Joining her grandfather, from whom she inherited the passion for journalism, Braw visited East Germany in 1988, a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Fascinated by the differences between her home country, Sweden, and East Germany, she decides to explore a strange connection her father had with one of his theology professors. The main source of information for her research was interviews, through which she created an oral history. One of those interviewed was the very head of the Stasi's Department XX/4 (the department in charge of spying churches and their leaders) for the last

eleven years before the fall of communism in East Germany. In fact, this was the first multi-parts interview that the Stasi's leading officer agreed to offer. Most other interviews came from informers themselves or from those who directly interacted with them.

The second main source of information for her research was the Stasi document archive. To research a 1.7 million file archive for relevant information is an enormous task. However, the reconstruction of church history and its relationship with the communist secret police is very accurate. The oral sources and the written ones coincide. In fact, the narrative of the book flows so well that one may question if the story is not embellished to resemble a Hollywood story—this is where the journalism style of the author shapes so well the story. Having spent hundreds of hours in another communist secret police archive in Romania myself, I can testify that this book, although it may seem to be a good fictional story, is based on scholarly research. The same journalistic honesty in search for the truth forced the author to look for discrepancies in the stories, but she was not able to find any.

The book documents how the Stasi's Department XX/4 approached theological seminary students, in parallel with their professors and Lutheran pastors. The officers became handlers not only of information provided by the agents, but also of the agents' lives. The strategy was clear: if they could groom the future church leaders and corrupt the academics, they would control the church and its future and mission. Recruitment techniques are described in detail in the book, showing the patience the Stasi demonstrated in developing the control mechanism. The future agents were initially scared into collaborating with the Stasi, but later the strategy changed and agents were substantially compensated for their collaboration. Some of the perks offered to the agents included bigger houses, expensive gifts, all-inclusive vacations to foreign countries, and so on. Subsequently, one of the student agents was sent as a spy to the University of Lund in Sweden, where he later became a professor and coordinator for the doctoral dissertation of Braw's father.

The infiltration of theological seminaries was not enough to control church activities in East Germany, so the Stasi used its priest agents to infiltrate the international bodies and organizations to which the Lutheran Church in East Germany belonged. Some of the participants to international conferences received specific assignments and reports were sent promptly to Department XX/4. Other agents were asked to report on how East Germany was depicted in foreign press.

However, international church activities included "Bible Mules," organizations and individuals who illegally brought Bibles, magazines, and other media across the iron curtain. Church informers were infiltrated within the Bible-distribution networks and some of these networks have been neutralized or tightly controlled. The disguise of the agents was so

credible that for a long time Bible-sending organizations had no idea that their efforts were thwarted by the Stasi.

Braw reconstitutes spying history from her sources in a very skillful way that sometimes raises questions about her credibility. Additional footnotes and source information would have been welcome, even necessary, in order to build more confidence in her story. However, in spite of following the life threads of only a handful of agents and handlers, Braw manages to document in detail the major strategy and success of the Stasi's Department XX/4 in controlling and making the Lutheran Church dependent on communist aims for a long period of time.

God's Spies is a must-read for those working in academic circles in order to understand the real meaning of academic freedom and the many forms of control they may not be aware of. The book is also an eye opener for theological seminary students who could learn to detect the mechanisms used by certain institutions and people in grooming those in leadership positions. *God's Spies* could also be extremely beneficial for organizations working in restricted access countries, especially those under communist regimes, in order to learn how to detect and avoid infiltration among their ranks.

Although *God's Spies* is not an academic book, it carefully exegetes the context of church life in its complex aspects under oppressive regimes. After a reading of this book, the text of the Scripture may take new meanings in the real historical context of the latter half of the twentieth century that could encourage the readers to return to the biblical stories to rediscover their much larger contexts. *God's Spies* is a non-academic book that places academic and church life in its real context. I commend Eerdmans publishers for including *God's Spies* in their publishing vision.

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American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism, by Matthew Avery Sutton. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014. xiv + 374 pp. + 85 pp. abbr., notes, acknowledgements, index.

Matthew Avery Sutton (b. 1975), Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professor at Washington State University (Pullman, WA), offers a fresh perspective on fundamentalism with his innovative research. Using social history methodology, he integrates race, gender, and social class issues in a