



## **Reject Government Espionage Outreach**

Bob Klamser, CCI Executive Director

Last week an online publication, The Intercept, published a story titled “The Pentagon’s Missionary Spies – U.S. Military Used Christian NGO as Front for North Korea Espionage”.<sup>1</sup> The short version of the story: Since 2004, the Pentagon had used an evangelical NGO – a missionary organization – as a front to conduct espionage in North Korea. According to the story, this missionary organization was funded in large part by the Defense Department. The story and subsequent interviews of the reporter indicate that this NGO manipulated unsuspecting missionaries and resources from other sending agencies to help collect and report intelligence back to the U.S. government. The story also reports that most of the employees and staff of the organization had no idea they were working for a “false front” entity.

Although The Intercept is a publication giving priority to publicizing information obtained from Edward Snowden, other media outlets have picked up this n story. CNN’s Jake Tapper devoted more than 5 minutes to the story, including an interview with The Intercept’s primary reporter.<sup>2</sup> It is unlikely that this story will simply go away...

As someone who has devoted more than 30 years of ministry to trying to increase safety and security for missionaries, their organizations, and for their work in the field; I am appalled at this revelation. As one who, during the recent review of U.S. policy towards hostages, supported greater partnership between sending agencies and the U.S. government; I am appalled that the U.S. government even considered such a strategy, much less became an instigator. And I am appalled that any person in a position of leadership of any faith-based organization could condone, much less empower, such an inappropriate alliance.

As Christians, we are indeed called upon to “submit to governing authorities”.<sup>3</sup> I believe there is ample justification for Christians to serve throughout government, including in the military. However, I can find absolutely no Biblical authority for Christians to act covertly as spies and agents of government while posing as pastors or missionaries or faith-based humanitarian workers. In fact, such actions are contrary to the entirety of the message of Christ and to His instruction of how we are to behave as we fulfill the Great Commission: “ ... I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.”<sup>4</sup> (The N.I.V. translates “... innocent as doves”)

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2015/10/26/pentagon-missionary-spies-christian-ngo-front-for-north-korea-espionage/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/27/politics/pentagon-christian-charity-north-korea/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Romans 13:1 (New Living Translation)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:16 (New Living Translation)

Spies posing as missionaries, or missionaries acting as spies, are not shrewd (“wise” in the King James Version), or harmless or innocent. Robert Baer, a former CIA officer and current CNN analyst, said in commenting on The Intercept story: “...this puts at risk all Christian missionary groups across the world who work in hostile areas – they’re going to be called spies ... yeah, it puts them at risk absolutely.” And, “... the real thing is these operations never work. I’ve been involved in these going back to the 70’s and they just don’t work ... I think we put these missionaries at risk for no possible gain.”<sup>5</sup>

The issue of missionaries being used by the U.S. government for spying and gathering intelligence (for the government) is not new. In 1977 a concerted effort by both religious groups and civil liberties groups pushed back against U.S. practices of using missionaries and the clergy for intelligence gathering purposes. The outcome was an internal CIA regulation that prohibited this kind of activity. However, it is important to understand that the 1977 rule was only that – an agency rule; not a law. And, it only applied to one of the many U.S. agencies that gather intelligence overseas.

The issue arose again within the U.S. government in 1996. In testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, leading evangelicals articulated clearly the risks and dangers associated with this practice. Dr. Don Argue, while testifying as President of the National Association of Evangelicals read a statement signed by the National Association of Evangelicals, the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association, the Association of Christian Schools International, Youth With a Mission, Wycliffe Bible Translators, the U.S. Catholic Mission Association, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and Maryknoll Sisters; in which Dr. Argue described the use of missionaries and clergy to gather intelligence for the government as “unethical and immoral”. He also testified that such practices “would jeopardize all missionaries, church, relief, community development and refugee assistance workers ministering in politically sensitive areas as well as those with whom they work.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. John Orme, then Executive Director of the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association, continued to testify in the same hearing: “Regrettably, terrorism and hostage-taking have become everyday concerns for foreign missionary personnel and their families. It is in this context that today’s religious worker must attempt to minister effectively without becoming involved in the affairs of governments. In this context, trust and confidence are indispensable in any ministry relationship. Church leaders both in the United States and abroad have the right to expect that their religious workers speak only in the name of God and that mutual confidence not be tainted by intelligence gathering, be it by innocent cooperation, by being a conduit for funds and, much less, by manipulation.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/27/politics/pentagon-christian-charity-north-korea/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> “CIA’s use of Journalists and Clergy in Intelligence Operations”, The Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, One Hundred Fourth Congress; July 17, 1996; pps. 29-30

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg. 31

During the same hearing Sister Claudette LaVerdierre, then President of the Maryknoll Sisters Congregation, testified: “The policy (allowing the CIA to use missionaries as sources) puts missionaries like ourselves and also the people with whom we work at great risk. Just as serious, it undermines the credibility of church personnel and destroys the trust which is so essential to our ministry with poor people and oppressed peoples everywhere. Without that basis of trust, our whole ministry is seriously undermined and jeopardized.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Rev. Rodney Page, then Director of the Church World Service and Witness Unit, also testified: “The mere public perception that a few U.S. missionaries and religious workers might be gathering information secretly for the Government undermines the trust of all workers that (they) need to develop with the communities they serve in order to carry out their ministries.”<sup>9</sup>

As one who has participated in over 100 hostage negotiations for kidnapped missionaries, I can testify that in many of these cases the claim that the missionaries were “spies” is a major part of the kidnapper’s agenda and rhetoric.

Perhaps the most insidious component of activities such as those described in The Intercept article is that the fallout – the risks and dangers – extend to the entire missions community. Consequences of the foolish and unwise actions of a few are imputed to the rest. It is one thing to seek thrilling and risky behavior for one’s personal reasons. It is inexcusable to do so when that behavior endangers others.

There should not be a line between missionary activity and acting as a spy for the government – there should be a deep, wide impassable chasm. There simply is no reason that justifies missionaries (no matter what term we use to describe ourselves) acting as spies or agents of a government and no reason that justifies the government co-opting missionaries to act in those roles. Our mission – to go and make disciples – is both clear and unchanging.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg. 32

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 34