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An intriguing tale of espionage in Spain

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PAPA SPY: LOVE, FAITH, AND BETRAYAL IN WARTIME SPAIN
By Jimmy Burns
Published by Walker & Company, $26

Get Burns! It?s World War II. The German spy chief in Spain, Hans Lazaar, was trying to outmaneuver him. Kim Philby, a Soviet mole in Britain?s MI6, was trying to entrap him as a traitor by having a female spy seduce him, and an anti-Catholic cabal in the London Foreign Office was seeking to have him recalled.

This was the bushy-eyebrowed bon vivant Tom Burns in wartime Madrid, Spain, a quarter-century before he became the editor of the London-based Catholic weekly *The Tablet* from 1967 to 1982.

Burns, tall, commanding and droll of manner, was a spy. A Franco-supporting member of the British Embassy in wartime Madrid, he developed extensive Catholic connections and influence within the Spanish government, in line with the Allies? desire to keep Spain neutral, and despite the overwhelming numbers of German spies and influence peddlers -- with whom Burns had to compete -- who wanted head of state Gen. Francisco Franco to sign on with Hitler.

That?s the nutshell version of this highly detailed account by his son, Jimmy Burns, a well-known *Financial Times* journalist and author who also has a Spanish-language following. For Tom Burns did not just spy in Spain, he fell in love there, too, wooing and wedding Mabel Marañón.

For a U.S. audience, the initial value of *Papa Spy* is that I can think of no other book that tells an intriguing biographical tale and gives a year-by-year account of World War II Spain -- a generally neglected segment of wartime Europe?s history -- while delving into Franco?s fascist Spain in its Catholic dimension. All too often our knowledge of Spain is limited to the two sides of the late-1930s Civil War, Hemingway versus Franco, Gregory Peck in ?For Whom the Bell Tolls,? and Pablo Picasso?s ?Guernica.?

This book has a remarkable photograph of Tom Burns taken in Spain in 1941-- he could be mistaken for Peck.

British anti-Catholicism -- ?the anti-Semitism of the intelligentsia? -- is portrayed in stark relief. Influential elements in the British Foreign Office were anti-Catholic by nature, but their view of Burns was equally aggravated by such English Catholic writers as Hilaire Belloc and Evelyn Waugh, who had ardently and publicly supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Burns took the Catholic side, too, but didn?t make a show of it. He had many Spanish Catholic friends, not least Pablo Merry del Val, secretary to the Spanish ambassador to Britain, the Duke of Alba. Tom and Pablo were school chums at the Jesuits? Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, England. Pablo?s brother, Raphael, was cardinal secretary of state to Pope Pius XI.

Philby was one of the infamous quartet of traitors working for Moscow (Guy Burgess, Donald Duart Maclean and Anthony Blunt were the others). Acting on orders from his masters, Philby unsuccessfully tried everything to pry Burns out of Madrid, and the Foreign Office was not an unwilling ally.

Defending Burns was his boss in Madrid, the crusty, fussy Ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare. Hoare, who had served in the highest reaches of previous British governments, would not hear a word against his press attaché-cum-spy. Winston Churchill, who sent Hoare to Madrid, said the ambassador was ?descended from a long line of maiden aunts.? Hoare was convinced Spain could easily side with Hitler. Heinrich Himmler, the führer?s No. 2, implementer of the Holocaust, during a Spanish visit was blessed by the monks of El Escorial monastery.

When war ended, it was Hoare who praised Burns? work; the Foreign Office maintained its posture. Britain is often quick to recognize wartime heroism; Burns? work and risk-taking was acknowledged belatedly and parsimoniously.

Tom Burns was born in Chile to a Scottish businessman and an English/Basque Chilean mother. After his education, he was lured into publishing (his uncle ran Burns & Oates) by Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward, where Burns became a notable success at attracting important authors to the newly established Sheed & Ward. He returned to publishing after the war, before becoming an outstanding editor of *The Tablet*. Personally and politically conservative -- though not in church matters -- Burns, when Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae*, which prolonged the ban on artificial contraception use by married couples, wrote the ever-memorable headline, ?Neither Gaudium nor Spes.?

Jimmy Burns has written an excellent book, complex, even a little complicated and repetitive at times, but well worth its length, its price and its weight. Did the British female spy ordered to seduce Burns succeed? The answer is on page 210.

[Arthur Jones is *NCR*?s books editor.]

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