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A Dissonant Mission: Stephen Neill, Amy Carmichael, and Missionary Conflict in South India

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*1A Dissonant Mission:
Stephen Neill, Amy Carmichael, and Missionary Conflict in South India*
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Summary: In 1924, eminent Church historian and missiologist Stephen Neill began his career as a missionary to south India under the supervision of the celebrated Amy Carmichael. What seemed like a match made in heaven resulted in a bitter parting of ways. How could such a promising mission partnership go so wrong? This paper draws upon primary research in order to examine this intriguing case study of conflict in the mission field. The paper will also introduce questions and implications that arise from the study of this incident. The paper is comprised of two components. We will first unpack the incident, and then assess some of the larger historical and missiological implications that arise from the study, particularly within the context of world Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

The eminent twentieth-century scholar Stephen Neill had no intentions of being a professor in Germany, Kenya, or at Oxford. His ambitions were set on being a missionary in south India. That is where he wanted to serve, and that is where he expected to remain. Through several interpersonal conflicts, bouts of illness, and controversial encounters in the mission field however, Neill's colleagues came to see that he was probably better suited for a life of scholarship in the West. Neill was an extraordinarily gifted man; everyone who knew him describes him in the most laudatory of terms when it comes to his intellectual acumen. He was also prone to contention, however. Even Neill was aware of this, tracing it to his Irish temperament. This temperament was both a blessing and bane. While his peripatetic career was at times frustrating for him, it was also highly resilient, leading him to new opportunities.

Stephen Neill was born in Edinburgh on December 31, 1900, the last day of the 19th century, a fact he loved to point out. His birth took place while his parents were on furlough

from medical-missionary work in India. Neill's parents moved around quite a lot. Neill finally found some sense of settlement when he began attending Dean Close School in Cheltenham, England, in 1912. He graduated in 1919 and moved to Cambridge where he attended Trinity College. He was a stellar student. It was common knowledge that if Stephen Neill competed for a scholarship of some sort, there was no point in applying. Neill graduated as a Fellow of Trinity College in 1924 and surprised everybody by deciding to take up missionary work to India. It was expected that he would settle into Cambridge and take up the life of a scholar. Neill served as a missionary to India between the years of 1924 and 1944. His next major position was in Geneva working with the World Council of Churches, wearing various hats, until 1961. In that year he took up a professorship at the University of Hamburg. In 1969 he left Germany and moved to Nairobi, Kenya, where he began a Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. After five years in Africa he moved back to England, settling at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, until his death in 1984.

Students of missions owe a great debt to Stephen Neill. After his abrupt dismissal from India in 1944, he went on to become one of the doyens of the world Christian movement through his copious books, ubiquitous lectureships all over the world, and his statesmanlike reputation acquired later in his career. Some of Neill's writings have stood the test of time remarkably well, such as his New Testament criticism, ecumenical and interreligious contributions, histories of Anglicanism and Christianity in India, and of course his important body of work on Christian missions. Had Neill's career remained in India, it is doubtful he would have become the comprehensive scholar that he did.

There are two major crises that occurred during Neill's years in India (1924-1944). The

second one, which changed his career, concerns how and why Neill was dismissed from the Tinnevely bishopric in 1944. It is a complicated affair which deserves its own telling. This presentation, however, deals with the first: a little-known rift that occurred between Neill and the celebrated Amy Carmichael in 1924-25.

In 1924, Neill left Cambridge and began his missionary career at Carmichael's Dohnavur compound in South India. What began as an immensely talented partnership ended in disaster and a hostile parting of ways. Both Neill and Carmichael were strongly independent, obstinate personalities. The dissonance that arose between them makes for a fascinating case study of conflict in the mission field. Why tell this story? Perhaps it is better to let bygones be bygones? It is by engaging difficult situations that we are able to get a sense of the complexity— theological, political, interpersonal—of a missionary case study. Philip Jenkins, in his popular *The Next Christendom*, warns against the “missionary stereotype,” with all its anti-colonial baggage.¹¹ There is considerable value, however, both theoretical and practical, in understanding the nuances.

Historically, the Neill-Carmichael clash is useful for investigating precisely how conflict could play out in the mission field. We are able to observe how the conflict arose, how it was dealt with, and ultimately reflect on its significance both then and now. In Neill's case, the conflict and break with Carmichael led him to other things such as itinerant missionary work, teaching in colleges, and eventually becoming bishop of one of the more important Anglican dioceses in Asia. Carmichael, in her own impressive way, was able to turn the clash into a lesson in personal piety and devotion to God. She learned from the experience, and took steps

1 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), Chapter Three, “Missionaries and Prophets.”

to ensure it never happened at her compound again. While both of these capable, dedicated missionaries were able to recover and move on from this difficult chapter, it is important to note that the scars remained with them to the end.

NEILL TRAVELS TO SOUTH INDIA

Stephen Neill boarded the *S. S. Warwickshire* and departed Victoria station, England on November 22, 1924, feeling “very forlorn and lonely.” His brother Henry was running after him, bidding a final farewell.²² He was heading to south India to join his parents, who were already working with Carmichael at Dohnavur. Travelling with a couple of missionaries and several he described as “fairly rough types,” Neill remembered playing a form of bowling known as “skittles” and passing through the Suez Canal. On the Red Sea he came down with a fever that lasted all the way to Colombo, Ceylon, followed by a night trip to Tuticorin, on the southeastern coast of India. After an “excruciatingly uncomfortable Ford eight-seater” drive to Tinnevely Junction, came a final three mile bullock-cart ride to Dohnavur.³³

South Indian missions were having moderate success at Neill’s arrival. The nearby Telugu Mission had seen its Christian population almost double from 45,000 in 1918 to 80,000 in 1924.⁴⁴ A few from the upper classes were expressing interest in Christianity. While not nearly as impressive, the Tinnevely region did see a modest gain of 15 percent between 1913

2 Stephen Neill, *God’s Apprentice* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), p. 78-79. “Bibby” is a British shipping company begun in 1807 by the Bibby family and based in Liverpool.

3 Neill, *God’s Apprentice*, p. 80.

4 *Annual Report of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, 1923-4* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1924), p. 34.

and 1924, coming predominately from the lower classes.⁵⁵ Tinnevelly's Christian population boom had occurred decades earlier, and by Neill's time the Christian infrastructure and network was considerable. Neill was entering into a bustling context for missionary activity. His parents would welcome him and make the transition easier. Everything seemed to be coming together for the eager missionary neophyte.

THE MISSION AT DOHNAVUR

The history of the Dohnavur mission goes back to a German CMS (Church Missionary Society) man named C.T.E. Rhenius who was in south India from 1820-1838.⁶⁶ Rhenius renamed the area in honour of a pious and wealthy Prussian benefactor named Count Dohna of Schlodin who had donated the funds to build a mission.⁷⁷

Throughout the 19th century, several CMS missionaries came and went with variable success until the arrival of a fiery preacher named Thomas Walker who served the Dohnavur mission from 1900 to 1912. "Walker of Tinnevelly" was known in south India as a great missionary and communicator to the people, as he spoke Tamil fluently. It was Walker who lured Amy Carmichael to the area by offering to teach her this difficult language. In 1900 he managed to persuade her to remain in Dohnavur, which remained her home, without furlough, until her death in 1951.⁸⁸

5 Ibid., p. 49.

6 For a history of the Dohnavur Fellowship, see Amy Carmichael, *Gold Cord, The Story of a Fellowship* (London: SPCK, 1932).

7 The People of Dohnavur to The Home Secretary, CMS, Touring the Tinnevelly Diocese, 1 February 1947, Tinnevelly box 1, Special Collections, Bishops College, Kolkata, India. See also Frank Houghton, *Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur* (Dohnavur, Tirunelveli, Kattabomman District: The Dohnavur Fellowship, 1953). (pp. 130f)

8 See Amy Carmichael, *This One Thing: The Story of Walker of Tinnevelly* (London: Oliphants Ltd., 1916). Amy never left India from November 9th, 1895 until her death on January 18, 1951. See also Frank Houghton, *Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur* (Dohnavur, Tirunelveli,

AMY CARMICHAEL, “AMMA”

Amy Beatrice Carmichael was born in Northern Ireland in 1867. She was the eldest of seven in a well-to-do, devout Presbyterian family.⁹⁹ As a girl, Amy was schooled at a Wesleyan Methodist boarding house in Yorkshire.¹⁰¹⁰ Her father died in 1885 causing her to spend some of her late teen years and early 20s in the care of a Quaker, Robert Wilson, one of the founders of the Keswick Convention—an evangelical movement that spawned revivals all over the world.¹¹¹¹ Amy attended several Keswick gatherings as a young woman. She wrote that these experiences, “. . . intensified her thirst for winning persons to Christ.”¹²¹² In 1892 she was sent out as the first Keswick missionary to Japan. She served there only briefly and decided to return to England on grounds of ill health.

In 1895 Carmichael went back to Asia, but this time to south India. It was there she met “Walker of Tinnevely.” He convinced her to come to Tinnevely to learn Tamil from him and to help with his work in training Indian divinity students. While there she discovered the practice of temple prostitution taking place. It was there she began rescuing these young girls—and it was to become her life’s work. One biographer wrote, “The overwhelming desire to save the children became a fire in her bones.”¹³¹³ In 1901, Carmichael began the work with four

Kattabomman District: The Dohnavur Fellowship, 1953), p. 90.

9 Amy had four brothers and two sisters. See D. Aurthur Jeyakumar, “Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur 1867-1951” (*Indian Church History Review*, 36:1 (2002)), pp. 5-11.

10 Amy schooled there at least until 1883. See Jeyakumar, p. 6.

11 The Keswick Convention is a movement founded in 1875 that promotes “Scriptural holiness.” See John Pollock, *The Keswick Story: The Authorized History of the Keswick Convention* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), and Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1952).

12 Jeyakumar, p. 6.

13 See Elizabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael* (Grand

abandoned children in her care. For the rest of her life, the children referred to her as “Amma,” Tamil for “Mother.”

Carmichael’s work was difficult and often tragic. For example, disaster struck in 1907 when she was vacationing in the mountains. During her absence, ten babies contracted a particularly violent kind of dysentery and died.¹⁴¹⁴ In spite of overcrowded conditions and disease, the babies continued to come.

Amy was in serious need of help; however, she was highly selective. The volunteers came, but, Amy would quickly turn them away when she discovered any hint of “unholy living” as she called it. It was becoming clear that Amy Carmichael’s mission was different than the compromising missions elsewhere. Her mission had the highest of principles. And she was willing to fight for that, regardless of the cost.

Carmichael’s insulated, puritanical approach began to gain enemies. Her austerity was particularly obvious when it came to discipline. She used several methods such as putting quinine or ink on the rebellious tongue, hanging a sign that said “LIE” around the neck of the offender for half the day, and of course the strap was commonplace. But what was most noteworthy about Carmichael’s discipline was the overtly religious tone. She often recounted Scripture while doling out punishment, in particular Isaiah 53, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” On at least one occasion she beat her own arm instead of the guilty child in order to teach the principles of Jesus’ suffering for our transgressions. Inevitably, these stories contributed to the Carmichael persona.

Until January 14, 1918, Carmichael’s work at Dohnavur had been almost exclusively

Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), p. 171.

14 Elliot, p. 195; Houghton, pp. 161-162.

with girls. On that day, the first boy arrived.¹⁵¹⁵ It was the boys ministry that brought Stephen Neill to the Carmichael compound.

To this day Dohnavur is functional and successful. The compound has expanded and supports an impressive array of ministries: a large orphan's home, a hospital,¹⁶¹⁶ a home for handicapped children, a fibre-work cottage industry pavilion, a co-ed English-medium boarding school, a publishing firm, a "Sisters of the Common Life" convent,¹⁷¹⁷ and others.¹⁸¹⁸ Carmichael's legacy continues, primarily through her writings; she produced about 35 books during her life, some of them selling very well.

Opinions of Amy Carmichael vary. On the one hand, she was described by the missionary Sherwood Eddy as "the most Christlike character I ever met," and on the other hand she could come across stern and autocratic.¹⁹¹⁹

Carmichael was very protective of her mission and went to extremes to keep worldly ideas out. She was distrustful of others and managed to create a group perspective that was completely lacking in self-criticism. On one occasion Carmichael ran over a missionary while riding on her horse. She reflected on the incident, "I did not mean to, he wouldn't get out of the

15 Elliot, p. 246; Houghton, p. 219.

16 According to the Dohnavur Fellowship official brochure, the hospital assists 60,000 outpatients per year and 1800 in-patients per year. It contains a dental clinic that assists 9000 patients per year and has a clinic for leprosy patients. "Dohnavur Fellowship," Brochure, Dohnavur Fellowship, Dohnavur, India.

17 The nuns run the entire Dohnavur Fellowship today.

18 "Dohnavur Fellowship," Brochure. Jeyakumar writes that the legal formation of Dohnavur Fellowship was not official until 1926, and is not listed as government registered until 1927.

19 Ruth Tucker, "Biography as Missiology: Mining the Lives of Missionaries for Cross-Cultural Effectiveness" in *Missiology: An International Review* 27:4 (October 1999), pp. 429-440. See p. 431 for the quotation.

way and one can't stop short in mid-gallop."²⁰

While the enormous amount of charity that poured forth from the Fellowship is obvious, one cannot help but be perplexed by the profoundly insulated atmosphere of Dohnavur. It has been suggested that this may have come from Carmichael's sheltered childhood. Historian Ruth Tucker wrote the following about Carmichael:

There is some question as to whether the most elementary facts of life had ever been explained to Amy Carmichael. A missionary who worked with her many years later insisted that Amy not only did not then know the truth about sex, but never learned. ... It is clear enough that her Victorian mind refused to admit thoughts which were so unpleasant and certainly unnecessary.²¹

One Indian scholar pointed out that the girls raised up in the Dohnavur Fellowship are often criticized for being overly attached to the mission. Unrelenting on the issue of celibacy, they struggle to adjust once they reach adulthood and leave the compound. Carmichael strongly discouraged marriage for "her girls." For Carmichael, missionary work was a life of self-sacrifice, without furlough—she never had one in 55 years.

STEPHEN NEILL ARRIVES

At the time of Neill's arrival in 1924, Carmichael was 57 years old and had led Dohnavur for about 23 years. His initiation was a wet one as he arrived during the monsoon. Nevertheless, Neill immediately fell in love with the area. At the time, many different people

20 Tucker, p. 435.

21 Elliot, pp. 270, 297.

were coming and going at the Dohnavur compound.²²²² But the Neills brought a new level of respectability that had not been there before. Both of the senior Neills were distinguished, educated people—both of them being physicians. Their son, twenty-four year old Stephen, had been awarded with a Trinity College Fellowship, a rare accomplishment indeed. And when Neill turned his back on the scholarly life, it not only caused astonishment—most notably to Neill’s classmate Malcolm Muggeridge—it also attracted the attention of people who figured this Keswick-style mission was “an eccentric backwater.”²³²³

Upon arrival, Stephen’s first goal was to learn Tamil. Most Indians there spoke English, and the missionary institutions of the region were often English-medium. Neill however wanted to speak the local language. Giving us a glimpse of his approach, he wrote,

In our family it is taken for granted that wherever you are you learn the language of the people. . . . I made up my mind that I would learn Tamil or die. I nearly did both, but by a narrow margin both I and the Tamil survived.²⁴²⁴

Neill’s teachers were a high-caste man and a Tamil grammar written by Reverend George Pope. He studied with his teacher twice daily, from 7:30 to 9:00 am and from 3:00 to 4:30 pm.²⁵²⁵ Six months later he was speaking Tamil, a herculean accomplishment. Neill’s intellect may have proven a threat to Carmichael, who struggled to learn this notoriously difficult language. Neill preached his first Tamil sermon exactly nine months after his arrival in India. Of this occasion,

22 Houghton wrote, “The nineteen-twenties were years of rapid expansion. . . . the Light that shone in Dohnavur . . . and was attracting men and women to it.” (p. 257)

23 Elliot, p. 267.

24 Neill, *God’s Apprentice*, p. 87.

25 Ibid., p. 88.

Neill wrote, "... My text was Galatians 5:22, and I kept going for twenty minutes."²⁶²⁶

Neill took over the work with the boys when he arrived. He played sports with them such as barefoot soccer and hockey, much to the chagrin of Carmichael.²⁷²⁷ He taught Bible lessons as well as the regular school curriculum. All seemed to be coming together perfectly. These intellectual, respectable people could lend credibility to Dohnavur. Deep spirituality combined with the important gifts the Neill family could offer was a match made in heaven.

It was not long before Carmichael began to have suspicions about the Neill family, convincing herself that they were wanting to do a take-over of her mission. Carmichael began to get hypercritical of the Neills and their methods. She accused Dr. Charles of being too popular with the girls at Dohnavur. On one occasion she became livid when she noticed her policy of strict separation between boys and girls was being watered-down by the Neills. According to two current administrators of Dohnavur that I interviewed, the Neills "... didn't realize that in Indian culture boys and girls have to be brought up separately. Amy had to be careful not to offend the surrounding Indian people in the villages. Even today they are separated."²⁸²⁸ Exasperated, Carmichael proposed that Stephen take a few of the boys elsewhere and "... bring them up outside of Dohnavur; but he refused the offer."²⁹²⁹ Whatever the details of the disagreement, it led to a strained and tense situation indeed.

Things only got worse. Carmichael was increasingly disturbed, writing in her journal, "A dreadful time of distress never such known here before. I am beginning to sink. Lord save

26 Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 93. It is a well-known fact among the Tinnevelly Christians that Stephen Neill learned Tamil extraordinarily quickly and became a master of the language.

27 Elliot, p. 268.

28 Miss Carunia and D. Rajamanian, interview by author, transcribed and approved by interviewee, Palayamkottai, 17 February 2003.

29 Ibid.

me.”³⁰³⁰ The night of May 30, 1925, would prove particularly painful for Carmichael as she characterized it “The most painful night of my life.”³¹³¹ That night she decided the elder Neills would have to leave, which they soon did.

About six months later during a prayer meeting Carmichael set her sights on Stephen. On November 28 she wrote in her diary, “One of the very saddest nights of my life,”³²³² and the next day, “...the severance took place.”³³³³ Reluctantly, Carmichael had finally decided that Stephen would also have to go, which he soon did.³⁴³⁴

What could possibly have happened to cause such strong feelings? The explanation that there was a difference of opinion on how to raise boys does not seem to justify such a sensational result. There are two major issues involved here. First, Neill had just come out of Cambridge and had exposed some of his liberal education to the Dohnavur community. The Preface to his first book, published in 1925, the precise year of his row with Carmichael, alludes to this. In that Preface he indicated that some of the arguments in his book could cause problems with

30 Houghton, p. 260; Elliot, p. 268. According to Elliot, things escalated when Neill referred to Carmichael’s informants as “spies.” (Elliot, p. 268) Houghton presented a much more dignified description of the whole situation, which he refers to as “the severance.” (Houghton, p. 260) In Houghton’s version, Carmichael remained above the fray, constantly praying through her distress. Elliot presents a more volatile situation with descriptions such as, “Amy was in a state of anguish over Stephen.” (Elliot, p. 268)

31 Houghton, p. 260; Elliot, p. 269.

32 Houghton, p. 260; Elliot, p. 270.

33 Houghton, p. 260.

34 In Neill’s correspondence, he did not formally disassociate himself from Dohnavur until January of 1926. It was this severance which led to Neill’s joining the CMS. See CMS Secretary E. F. E. Wigram to Neill, 7 January 1926, CMS/G2 I10/L1, CMS archives, Special Collections, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England. “My dear Neill ... I do not think that I am betraying Miss Bradshaw’s confidence in mentioning that it is from her that I have just heard that you are not likely to remain much longer at Dohnavur, but, as I understand, have still every intention of serving India at least for some time to come. I want, therefore, at once to get in touch with you to see whether it may not be possible for you to throw in your lot with the CMS and come to the rescue in one or other of our great fields of opportunity.”

people unfamiliar with current trends in biblical criticism.

However, according to the Dohnavur rendition of the story, Neill “. . . couldn’t believe some of the miracles that the Lord Jesus did.”³⁵³⁵ Carmichael’s chief biographer wrote, “. . . [Neill’s] writings were perhaps not always in theological harmony with her beliefs.”³⁶³⁶ The end result was that Carmichael decided to establish a code of “Principles” in 1926, shortly after the Neills left. Included among these “Principles” was that the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired and historically reliable.³⁷³⁷

A second problem was the accusation that Neill was “temperamentally unsuited to the situation.”³⁸³⁸ Quoting Carmichael’s biographer,

Neill was known to have given way to several violent explosions of temper during which he beat some of Amma’s boys, yet in his opinion some of the punishments customarily used in Dohnavur, which he did not name, were “rather severe.”³⁹³⁹

This was not out of character for Neill. Throughout his life, he was known to have a particular zeal for corporeal punishment. No doubt his disciplinary methods were inherited from his own schooling, of which he described at length. It was equally the case however that Carmichael could be quite aggressive herself. Truth to be told, corporeal discipline was not uncommon in

35 Miss Carunia and D. Rajamanian, interview by author, transcribed and approved by interviewee, Palayamkottai, 17 February 2003.

36 Elliot, pp. 269-270.

37 Houghton, p. 270. Elliot goes further here. She provides a fascinating paragraph that just might clarify the incident, “Dohnavur was a long way from Cambridge. Working under Amy Carmichael was at best difficult for him (he remembered his first meeting with her as ‘an impression of power’). Apart from her oracular mystique, she had been influenced, he believed, by strong Plymouth Brethren nonconformism, a bitter pill for an Anglican to swallow. She made veiled reference later to this time when ‘English worship services became impossible because—no, I must not embark on the reasons.’” (p. 269)

38 Elliot, p. 269.

39 Ibid.

the 1920s in the British colonies.

Nearly a year later, Carmichael was still reeling from the encounter. She wrote to a friend, “I long over him still, miss him and want him and long to be one in affection. The stab is not even beginning to skin over. It’s just red raw.”⁴⁰ One of her journal entries reads, “Poor, poor Stephen, it was his spoiling mother and the silly Christian public chiefly. My heart is all one ache for him.”⁴¹ One of the hagiographical biographies of Carmichael had this to say: “Satan may have gained a temporary advantage” in Neill. The biographer is quick to point out that Carmichael prayed for Neill to the very end of her life.⁴²

Neill and Carmichael had temperaments destined to clash. At one earlier point when Neill felt he could not handle any more, he wrote a letter of resignation, but threw it away when his mother convinced him that the boys with whom he was working would be devastated if he left.⁴³ Had it not been for his parents, he most certainly would have left Dohnavur earlier than he did. Nevertheless, things never would pan out between Neill and Carmichael. Years later, while reflecting on that tumultuous period at Dohnavur, Neill recorded,

Some of the experiences of my first year in India were so excessively painful that by January 1926 the darkness was complete. During that first year, fellow Christians had brought into my life such darkness and suffering that it took me many years to recover from the injuries, and the scars are still there.

One scholar who knew Neill well remarked, “Whatever happened there hurt him so deeply that he could never mention it.”⁴⁴

Whether Neill and Carmichael ever patched things up is unclear. What is known is that

40 Elliot, p. 270.

41 Ibid.

42 Houghton, p. 270.

43 Neill, *God’s Apprentice*, p. 94.

44 Jocelyn Murray to Eleanor Jackson, 21 June 1992, Eleanor Jackson’s personal collection.

when Neill was elected Bishop about 15 years later, Carmichael abruptly severed her mission's connection to the diocese. Neither did she allow Bishop Neill to come to Dohnavur to Confirm candidates, as bishops routinely do.

Neill visited Dohnavur for the last time in 1974, well after Carmichael's death. According to interviews with two current Dohnavur administrators, he spent the day there, slowly walking around the grounds. He spoke few words. He quietly entered the prayer chapel and bowed his head for some time.

HISTORICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

As we assess this incident and explore the wider implications, we are left asking, "What was at the root of a conflict that could cause such deep damage among highly committed Christian people?" Was it Neill's "spoiling mother" as Carmichael put it? Was it his intellectual prowess? After all, he was a Fellow of Cambridge, an author at the age of 25, and learned an extremely difficult language in a matter of months. Perhaps it was his familiarity with New Testament criticism and modern scholarship that bred resentment? Neill's explosive temper, of which he was well aware, was certainly part of the puzzle. His penchant for corporeal punishment surfaced again in India in 1944 and was at the heart of his dismissal from the See of Tinnevely, despite the fact his conduct could not be considered terribly aberrant at the time.

And what about Carmichael? She had, after all, built up quite an impressive mission on her charisma, abilities, and unflinching drive to save children. She was not about to allow the Neills to orchestrate a "take-over." Influenced by the Keswick piety as she was, it is

understandable that Neill's textual criticism and Cambridge Fellowship would have been grounds for suspicion. One can also witness clear differences of opinion when it came to cultural issues, such as whether or not boys and girls should interact. On a deeper level, it is fair to say that despite Amy Carmichael's impressive piety and tender heart, she could be exacting, dictatorial, even insolent when it came to defending her principles. Perhaps Neill and Carmichael were two peas in a pod—strikingly similar in their dealings with people.

Whatever the case, Carmichael felt the only solution to their troubles was separation, and in January of 1926 Neill's year of service at Dohnavur ended. After the split, Neill joined the CMS and embarked on a notable teaching career and eventually became an extremely popular Anglican bishop. To this day, the Tirunelveli diocese considers Stephen Neill's bishopric one of the best.

But let us for a moment reflect upon the wider implications of this episode in the larger framework of Christian history today. Scholars of Christianity are increasingly coming to terms with what has been called the "southern shift" in Christianity. The statistics reveal that currently, over 60% of the world's Christians live in the global south. These new demographics are changing the nature of Christian studies. Many Western Christians, even today, are taken off-guard when faced with these new realities. And it is stirring great interest in the study of Christian missions. How did we get to this point? The answer to that question is found in the grand missionary enterprise begun around the time Luther's Reformation was taking off. In fact, several scholars are arguing that the world Christian missionary movement will, long term, have at least as much, and perhaps more, significance for the future of Christianity than did the Reformation itself.

Lamin Sanneh is one of the scholars of missions history who is emphasizing the “Changing Face of Christianity,” and the central role of the missionaries in this entire shift in religious demographic. And while Sanneh is quick to point out that the missionaries are not chiefly responsible for the tremendous growth of Christianity in the southern hemisphere—that honor rests squarely on the shoulders of the thousands of local, unnamed evangelists of whom we know virtually nothing—he is equally persistent in pointing out that the missionaries were clearly the detonators in these seismic changes.⁴⁵⁴⁵

Today, missions studies is attempting to emphasize the role of the indigenous in the spread of the faith in the global south. However, without understanding the “detonators”—Western missionaries—and their methods, tactics, social assumptions, theologies, and, yes, conflicts, we will misunderstand how this transplantation of Christianity ever occurred, and what *forms* of Christianity were transplanted.

Anglican Archbishop William Temple famously stated in 1943 that the global Church was “the great new fact of our time.” Indeed he was well ahead of his time in realizing that new fact. Thus, it is supremely important for scholars to understand just exactly how this “great new fact” came about. We have a long way to go in getting our heads around the great Western missionary enterprise along with all of its implications for the future of world Christianity. Understanding this historical epoch will help us to prepare for new problems as well, such as the cultural imperialism that often accompanied the missionary endeavor. The fact of the matter is that Western missionaries inevitably took their culture with them. On one hand, this is an obvious, unavoidable thing to do. On the other hand however, there are important implications

45 Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter, *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford: University Press, 2005).

involved in coming to terms with this. Andrew Walls has argued that herein lies the very crux of the future of Christianity, *How do we cope with a “post-Christian West” and a “post-Western Christianity.”* Walls argues that Christians have always struggled with this problem.⁴⁶⁴⁶

The genius of Christianity has always been its adaptability. Christianity has a long and successful record of cross-pollinating with other cultures, assimilating itself into the very fiber of an alternate worldview. Bible translation is a good example illustrating the extent to which Christians have gone in order to assimilate the faith into foreign contexts. There are currently 2238 different translations of the Bible, New Testament, or at least a gospel, in the world today.⁴⁷⁴⁷

Thus, Neill and Carmichael were two stalwarts of the Christian faith who faithfully served as two links in a long chain. Both of them had tremendously successful ministries that reached, and continue to reach, thousands of people. Neill’s legacy in south India is obvious, notably in the recently erected “Bishop Stephen Neill Study and Research Centre” in Palayamkottai. So, too, does Carmichael’s legacy live on in the tremendous ministries offered by the Dohnavur Fellowship. Both of them also have important literary legacies that continue to be a source of inspiration and scholarship.

Historians and missiologists would do well to continue exploring how and why this “southern shift” has occurred. The lessons that can be learned are immense. The Neill/Carmichael conflict touches on many issues of relevance today. I recently came across an article that was deploring the fact that many of the best and brightest of Japan’s Christians are

46 See a good discussion of Walls’ argument in Mark Laing, “The Changing Face of Mission,” in *Missiology* 34:2 (April 2006), pp. 165-177.

47 David Barrett, Todd Johnson, and Peter Crossing, “Missiometrics 2007,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31:1 (Jan. 2007), pp. 25-32.

going abroad and becoming experts in German theology and issues of higher criticism, only further isolating themselves from their own cultural context. Neill was criticized by Carmichael along these very same lines.

Today, there are slightly more missionaries being sent from the “non-Western” lands than from “Western” ones. This pattern will only increase as the global south continues to claim the lion’s share of the planet’s Christians. Stories such as the one told today are helpful in determining how missionaries must adapt, avoid unnecessary conflict, and separate the gospel message from the cultural chaff. Western missionaries are often criticized for not fully understanding the difference. On the other hand, we have to be cautious here in our fear of conflict, as conflict often leads to new movements, reformations, even large-scale re-energizations of the faith. In other words, we should refrain from condemning mission conflict outright, as one never knows what may emerge out of the clash. For Christian missionaries, the lesson to be learned here is *how* to have conflict—even conflict which leads to separation—without the accompanying acrimony which threatens to leave life-long scars as in the case of Neill and Carmichael.