Dyron B. Daughrity
*Bishop Stephen Neill: From Edinburgh to South India*
Peter Lang
New York, N. Y.
2008
$77.95 (U.S.) Hardcover

Dyron Daughrity considers Bishop Stephen Neill to be “one of the most important figures on the world Christian scene during the twentieth century.” In his recently published historical biography, *Bishop Stephen Neill: From Edinburgh to South India*, Daughrity tells the story of a missionary who helped lead the church in India through some difficult times.

*Bishop Stephen Neill* is a detailed, humane, and balanced account of a person committed to Christian missions, ecumenism, and the conversion of souls. Daughrity focuses on the story of Neill’s early years in life and ministry. He outlines Neill’s upbringing and education. We read about Neill’s parents and the many different communities in which he lived. We also read about the different schools he attended.

Daughrity reflects on how Neill’s early years affected his later decisions and actions. All did not go well for the young scholar and Daughrity uses words like “unstable” to describe this difficult phase. Neill moved around a lot in life and this could have been a
contributing factor in some of the things that happened in the early stages of his adult life and ministry.

Daughrity also provides historical information that is helpful in placing Bishop Neill in his proper context. He names the changes happening in world missions during Neill’s early years. He discusses colonialism and the relationship between missionaries and the political world in which they lived and worked. He offers a broad outline of how India’s move towards independence from Great Britain affected the life and work of the church and Bishop Neill, in particular.

One of the words that are frequently repeated in this book is “conflict”. Daughrity’s thesis is built around this one term. There is conflict in his personal and professional relationships. There is conflict in the world around him. There is conflict in the depths of his very being. Daughrity summarizes all of this when he writes, “Neill’s life was a conflicted life, marked by a conflicted childhood and youth, a conflicted faith, a conflicted diocese in south India, and conflicted time” (p. 247).

Daughrity approaches this somewhat difficult story in a balanced and sensitive way. Neill’s inner turmoil contributed to some serious happenings in his life. This turmoil helped sever a relationship with missionary Amy Carmichael and it helped end his work as the Bishop of Tinnevelly.

Daughrity doesn’t dance around the challenges and struggles Neill experienced in his life. Anyone telling a story like this has to walk a fine line and Daughrity effectively manages this in Bishop Neill. Neill is portrayed as being neither a saint nor a sinner. While not everyone will agree on whether or not certain topics need to be brought to light, Daughrity finds a middle road where we can focus on learning more about the life of a human being committed to serving Christ. He names the issues and problems but also respects Neill’s positive accomplishments. While Neill was forced out of his mission work he did make contributions to the life and work of the growing church in India that cannot be ignored.
Daughrity writes in a clear, accessible way. This is a good book for any student, church leader, or lay person interested in learning more about the history of world missions. It’s a helpful resource for anyone wanting to know more about the demands and issues faced by leaders and workers in front line ministry. People currently involved in or considering a commitment to world missions would learn a lot from this book.

Mike Jones
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