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Stephen Neill: some aspects of a Theological Legacy

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In an earlier article in *Anvil* I tried to show how Max Warren and Stephen Neill belonged to a significant group of Anglican evangelicals, who stood between the conservatives and the liberals and preferred to be thought of as evangelicals without any prefix.[1] Since Stephen Neill's death we have had two general appreciations of his life and work, one from equally distinguished writers and fellow members of the British Academy as himself and a helpful general assessment from Christopher Lamb. We wait in hope for the publication of his autobiography.[2] Here the intention is to notice some of the theological and missiological inheritance left to us by a great scholar, writer, teacher and missionary.

Conversion

One of the themes to which Stephen Neill returned throughout his life and which he believed to be sadly neglected both in the Anglican world and in the context of the World Council of Churches was the Christian experience of conversion, and its significance. His autobiography reveals that he himself underwent a conversion experience as a school-boy at Dean Close school in his early teens. It was during one Holy Week, when he himself was convalescing. He described how, as he reflected on the truth of the atonement, he went to bed one day unconverted but the next day came into an overwhelming sense of God present in his life through Christ. Although brought up in a devoutly evangelical home, it was to this conversion experience that he looked as the beginning of his conscious Christian life, the deep knowledge that he was 'in Christ'. He expressed himself as sorry for the 'once born'.[3] As he reflected on the profundity of an

1 T. E. Yates, 'Evangelicalism without Hyphens: Max Warren, the Tradition and Theology of Mission' *Anvil,* vol. 2, no 3 (1985) pp 231-245. Cf. the short appreciation of Stephen Neill in *Anvil,* vol. 1, no. 3 (1984) pp 198-9; S. C. Neill, *Anglicanism* pp 400-401.

2 A. K. Cragg and W. O. Chadwick, 'Stephen Charles Neill 1900-1984' in *Proceedings of the British Academy,* vol. LXXI (1985), pp 603-614: this is available separately from 20 Cornwall Terrace, London at £3.50 sterling. C. Lamb 'The Legacy of Stephen Neill' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* vol. 11, no. 2 (April 1987) pp 62-66.

3 Autobiographical MS pp 60-61. I must express my gratitude here to the Revd Charles Neill, as literary executor to his uncle, for allowing Christopher Lamb and myself access to this MS towards our two articles

experience too easily, in his view, dismissed as an adolescent phenomenon by the unknowing, he wrote in his fiftieth year: 'for those who can look back on some recognisable experience of conversion in their own lives, this is so much more important than anything else that they find it very difficult to take seriously any type of Christian living from which this experience is eliminated'.[1] Nevertheless, he was the first to admit that aspects of the 'old man' remained. He deplored his own 'fierce temper', which continued to plague him after conversion: a rootless childhood and an inability to share what he was learning may have contributed to the problem in so gifted a child. His understanding of Christ as the Truth of God, what some call 'the absoluteness of Christian faith', though he himself was wary of the phrase, of Christ's uniqueness and universal significance, lay in this discovery of Christ in conversion. However open he might be to the treasures hidden in alternative religious traditions, the truth lay for him, as for St Paul, in that overwhelming experience of God in Christ, the reality of which never left him.

Although he might have modified the way in which he expressed himself in later works, he expressed this sense of the finality of Christ in his little book, *The Christian's God* (1954), the first in a series for World Christian Books aimed to educate Christians of the younger churches of which he was general editor: 'since Christ is "the Truth" we shall not expect to find in those other religions truth which we do not already know. But to look at those other religions will help us to raise important questions in our minds as also to widen our sympathies'.[2] This insistence on Christ as the Truth of God runs like a silver thread through all his theological and missiological enterprise. In another of these small books *What is Man?* (1960) he tried to express something of the mystery of conversion and its relation to baptism in the New Testament. 'If there is a real death, what is it that has died? It is I myself. It is that self, which, in its pride, has organised itself in independence of God and in rebellion against Him. And does it want to die? It clings to life with the fury of despair. It is prepared to go to any lengths, to make any kind of compromise with God, if only it can be let off dying. That is why it is so hard to be converted; that is why we must never lightly use the expression: "faith in Jesus Christ". It is always literally a matter of life and death'.[3] One is reminded of Bonnhoeffer's words that when Christ calls a man he calls him to come and die. Yet Neill was aware that the 'dying' went on long after conversion: 'this paradox of complete discontinuity, and yet of real continuity of being, is familar in any

1 S. C. Neill 'Conversion' in *SJT* vol. 3, no. 4 (Dec. 1950), p 352. This article appeared fifty years to the month after his birth. The writer of this article would add his testimony to Neill's assessment of conversion, as he writes it in the fortieth year since his own.

2 *The Christian's God,* pp 20-21. The author, unless otherwise specified, is Neill.

3 *What is Man?,* p 41.

experience of conversion. I have the immense advantage of having been definitely converted and therefore can speak from inner experience of this mystery. I have not the smallest doubt that through conversion I became a new man in Christ and that it was literally true that all things became new through Him. And yet I remained distressingly myself. The completely ungovernable temper which was the nightmare of my boyhood remained, though now in an entirely different way under control, as a part of my make-up, as a recurring problem or as something that has to be watched over even now . . . The old man has become new and yet it is the old which has become new and not something else which has taken the place of the old'.[1] With this understanding of conversion as a *metanoia,* which was 'revolutionary, indeed catastrophic'[2] with its sense of discontinuity with all that went before, went this due recognition of the continuity of human life. These insights, which are present in his analysis of conversion, are of considerable importance if we are to understand his view of Christ's entry into history or Christ's advent into another religious tradition, where, as we shall see, Neill saw him as both destroyer and fulfiller. The sense of the catastrophic, the revolutionary, the new which Christ brings, not least through the resurrection, is central: and yet with this is the recognition that this happens in the continuity of human life which we call history or tradition. The integration of these two in a single vision is of great importance to the understanding of Stephen Neill.

The insistence on the importance of conversion was a reiterated theme throughout his life. As a young man, he addressed Anglican evangelicals assembled at Cheltenham on the subject in 1922. The editor of *The Churchman* wrote: 'Nothing could have been finer than the address of Mr Stephen Neill (Trinity College, Cambridge) . . . Mr Neill deeply moved the conference by his frank description of the theological apathy he finds among his contemporaries, which he attributes to . . . the (1914-18) war. He is convinced that immediate experience of Christ as our Saviour through belief in the Atonement is the greatest need of our age. Modern preachers do not preach with conviction and are disturbed by all kinds of ideas as to what criticism has discovered. Personal conversion is necessary if we are to preach conversion. Only one who has been redeemed by Christ and sanctified by his Holy Spirit can manifest the sainthood that must be shown to a world in search of reality'[3]. Later, in his days in India as warden of a theological college in Tinnevelly in 1934 he set himself to solve the difficult problem of the relation of conversion to baptism: 'conversion is essentially self-giving: it is centred in God . . . the possibility of instantaneous conversion, that the worst sinner who turns to God through faith in Christ does at that moment receive pardon for all his sins and new life . . . is

1 Review article 'The Problem of Communication' *SJT,* vol. 1, no. 1, (June 1948), p 95.
2 'Conversion' *Expository Times* vol. 89, no. 7 (April 1978), p 205.
3 *The Churchman* vol. 36, no. 1, NS (July 1922), pp 224-225.

more than the sacramental regeneration of baptism, in that it is the conscious acceptance of the will of God and therefore makes actual, though not necessarily consciously experienced, the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost'.[1] In addition to the article already quoted from the *Scottish Journal of Theology* in 1950, with its profound analysis of conversion as primarily affecting the will but with due place for the emotions, he wrote again in the *Expository Times* on the same subject in 1978, complaining that 'in some Christian circles the word "conversion" seems to be regarded almost as a dirty word'.[2] William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* was in some respects misleading. A new William James was needed, not least to analyse the conversions of those who had been adherents of other faiths: 'here it must be stressed that such conversions are of interest chiefly when the convert has been a strongly convinced adherent of the other faith and yields only with reluctance and even agony to what he has come to be convinced are the higher claims of Jesus Christ. James of course knew something of American missionary work abroad but . . . a great deal of evidence now before us was simply not available 75 years ago'. A start had been made by M. Jarrett-Kerr's *Patterns of Christian Acceptance* (1972) but 'an immense work of sifting, sorting and classification remains to be done. As converts have been won from every known form of religion and every level of culture, if the work is well done the results are likely to be most illuminating'.[3]

Nothing would have delighted Bishop Neill more than that this gap in modern research should catch the eye of some scholar who would devote himself to this subject. It was a need to which he returned frequently towards the end of his life: 'what is it that the contemporary convert has found in Jesus Christ' he wrote in 1984 'that drives him to face exclusion, obloquy, peril, isolation, entrance into an alien world which he often finds cold and unwelcoming? Why is it that he so rarely speaks of his former religion as a preparation for the gospel and much more often as a hindrance . . . from which he has escaped with great joy? Many (converts) would answer precisely that they have found here a *salvation* such as they have not found anywhere else and that therefore they must run to receive it, whatever may be the cost'.[4]

Christ and the approach to other faiths

Stephen Neill's main work on the subject of other faiths was the Moorhouse lectures delivered in Australia in 1960 and published as *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (1961): the sub-title was 'the Christian dialogue with other religions'. After a second edition in the 1970's, a re-

1 *The Churchman* vol. 48, no. 3 (July 1934), p 181.
2 Art. cit., *Expository Times,* p 205 note 8.
3 *Ibid.,* p 207.
4 M. Green (ed.), *The Truth of God Incarnate,* p 86 and Bishop Neill in conversation to the writer.

written version of it appeared as *Crises of Belief* (1944). The range of reading and erudition displayed is astonishing and not less so when one investigates the other big books, *The Intepretation of the New Testament* (1964) and *The Church and Christian Union* (1968) where equally wide fields of study, with often little overlap, have been digested and elegantly displayed. Neill advocated the way of dialogue. With his background in the Greek classics, he reminded intending participants in inter-faith dialogue that Plato had shown that the object of Socratic dialogue was that truth should emerge. Such dialogue needed to be rigorous and uncompromising: 'we are to enter into this for us alien world as far as may be to understand it as it is understood by those who live within it, not to score points off them or to criticize, but to go as far with them as it is possible to go – and only then to consider whether there may not be a whole dimension in Christian faith of which the partner in the dialogue is unaware but to which perhaps he may be introduced . . . nor is there any guarantee that it will lead to the conversion of the other party'. Enrichment will follow as the participant has to rethink his own faith, use terms familiar to others and be faithful to his own body of truth.[1]

Like Hendrik Kraemer, Neill was aware that all religions, as all individual lives, are totalities: 'every religion exists as a totality: any particular article of faith is influenced by every other article . . . Consequently, in any attempt at fusion, each of the bodies which is brought into the alleged unity is bound to suffer a radical transformation and to become something very different from what it was before'.[2] It is a point which Lesslie Newbigin has illustrated well in *The Open Secret* by showing that Peter, as well as Cornelius, was changed by the encounter in Acts 10.[3] What happens however when Christ himself confronts another religious system? Here the position is similar to that experienced in conversion, when he confronts the totality of an individual's life. For evey individual brings to conversion his inheritance and culture, family tradition and formation, an inheritance to which Christ is both judge and Fulfiller. For some of this inheritance Christ means death, for some a new and resurrection life. In applying this principle to the inheritance of Judaism, Neill gave a highly stimulating and, to my knowledge, originally expressed contribution to the debate about continuity and discontinuity: it is quoted here with no apology for its length: 'we believe in Christ as the fulfiller of all things. But (we must) . . . raise the question whether he must not first come as the destroyer before he can be the fulfiller, whether the only way in which he can fulfil human aspirations is first to reduce them to ashes? . . . Moses and Elijah have died. And yet Moses and Elijah and still alive for us, they are a continuing part of the inheritance that has come to us through patriarchs,

1 *The Church and Christian Union*, p. 182-3. Cf. *Concise Dictionary of World Mission* hereafter cited as *Concise* art. 'Dialogue' pp 165-166.

2 *The Church and Christian Union*, p 171-2.

3 J. E. L. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, pp 65-67.

prophets, apostle, martyrs. But this is so only because we can now look back at them Christologically, we see them as part of that historical preparation which found its culmination in the Christ. It is in his light that they are enlightened; they have died to their own proper being; they are alive for us only because they have risen in the resurrection of the Christ . . . should we perhaps proceed (to the 'Nay' first). We have recognised this in our own personal experience of passing from death to life. The judgment of Christ has been passed on anything that we were before we knew Him: and yet the identity and continuity of our personal life has been maintained. Every religious system is as much an articulated unity as an individual human life. Each one, in its autonomy, in its own self-realisation, is so far in rebellion against God and so far under judgment. But this need not be the last word. As in the case of Judaism, we can learn to read these other religions Christologically, to look upon them from the vantage point of the gospel'[1]

It is to be expected from what has been written to date that Neill would have no truck with an Arnold Toynbee and his suggestion that the Judaeo-Christian tradition should purge itself of exclusive-mindedness and the claim to be unique as a 'sinful state of mind': 'this is surely a very odd piece of argumentation. If Christianity is purged of something that is intrinsic to itself, it will be transformed into something wholly other than itself . . . what underlies Professor Toynbee's argument appears to be a curious inability to distinguish between two quite different things, the human arrogance and intolerance which are unable to conceive the possibility that they may themselves be wrong and the awful and necessary intolerance of truth itself'.[2] Neill showed himself sensitive to the prevailing relativism of the pluralist world of the 1980's and continued to set against it the 'awful and necessary intolerance of truth itself'. Although it was attractive, it was inadequate for Will Herberg in *Protestant, Catholic and Jew* to call for the end to talk of conversion as a stage of aggression in religion now past[3], nor could Neill agree with Reinhold Niebuhr that the Jew should be left in his own traditions 'to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage'. If we do this 'have we not yielded to the relativism which is so popular to-day? The Christian is a Christian because he believes that to have encountered God in Jesus Christ as *the* word of God is an experience entirely different from any other kind of experience. This being so he cannot do otherwise than desire, not to impose his conviction on others, but to share with all men, Jew and Gentile alike, the unique experience which is his life'.[4] Neill showed his sympathy with the Christian Jew who had said to him that to deny the Jew the opportunity to respond to Christ was an act of anti-semitism.[5] With his Jewish friends, 'however humbly', in the cause of theological truth the Christian is bound to raise the question that 'Jesus

1 *Creative Tension* pp 28-29.
2 Ibid., pp 11-12.
3 *The Church and Christian Union,* p 170.
4 *Crises of Belief,* pp 42-44.
5 Ibid., p 42 note 9.

either is the Messiah of the Jews or he is not'.[1] With the Hindu, tempted to accept Christ as another figure in a syncretist pantheon, the Christian could not neglect that conversion involves joining a community: 'if Christianity meant simply the adoption of good and new ideas about God and man this (remaining within Hinduism) would be a simple and acceptable solution . . . but this falls very far short of what the Christian understands by 'conversion' . . . (which) involves commitment to a particular Person. On this follows self-dedication to a particular manner of life, in which every detail must be organised in relation to the central loyalty. Such a life can be lived fully only within a community of which every member is ideally inspired by equal loyalty to the divine Head. Thus we come to appreciate that the church . . . is not an appendage to the Gospel but an integral part of it'.[2] He recalled Gandhi's friend, C. F. Andrews, who despite Ghandi's disapproval of the Christian appeal for conversion and despite his deep respect for Ghandi, had stated that 'conversion is necessarily present in any religion which claims to be the truth'.[3] Pluralism cannot be allowed to 'exclude altogether the question of truth'[4]

Christ and History

Lesslie Newbigin had judged that Stephen Neill was at heart a historian. He saw himself as primarily a New Testament scholar.[5] The two are not mutually exclusive, for Neill himself emphasised his own background in the study of ancient history and his approval of those, like F. C. Baur, who made the New Testament part of church history. He wrote: 'it was part of my good fortune to be trained in the austere atmosphere of the Cambridge school of ancient history'[6] and he passed severe strictures on those new Testament scholars, of whom he regarded Bornkamm to be one, who came to New Testament studies without training in historical method.[7] His own historical writings were massive achievements: *Anglicanism* (1958) ('of all

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1 Ibid., p 42 note 9.
2 *Crises of Belief,* p 121.
3 Green, op. cit., p 84. Notice here too Neill's insistence on the Church and ecclesiology as of prime importance in Christian mission: 'the problem of mission cannot be discussed *in abstracto;* it becomes intelligible only as the mission of the Church. Given a satisfactory ecclesiology . . . the answer to all the main problems arising out of Christian mission should be ready to hand. Where no clear doctrine of the Church is held it is not surprising that the missionary problems present themselves as insoluble' *Church and Christian Union,* p 319.
4 Ibid., p.170.
5 Bishop Newbigin privately to the writer. For Neill's self-assessment see the video tapes entitled 'How I changed my mind in mission' in the possession of Dr G. H. Anderson, Overseas Ministries Centre, New Haven, Connecticut.
6 Green, op. cit., p 76.
7 *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (hereafter *Interpretation*) p 279.

my books the easiest one to write'[1]) *A History of Christian Missions* (1964), *A History of Christianity in India* (1984-1985). Here we concentrate on his view of history and its importance in theology. For the Christ who has confronted him in conversion, the Christ with whom the alternative religious traditions had to deal as the truth, who acted as both destroyer and fulfiller, was also the Christ who had broken into the continuum of human life with revolutionary and catastrophic effects in the totality of history, God's new creation.

'He who says "Jesus" says also history'[2] Neill wrote in one of his last essays and he added: 'when Paul uses the simple Jewish name "Jesus" as he does five times in 2 Cor. 4:7-15 he is consciously turning back precisely to that earthly life and to the historical events from which the Christian faith cannot be separated'.[3] In his role as New Testament scholar and notably in his Firth lectures *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (1964), Neill grappled with the radical historical scepticism of Bultmann and others in relation to the historical Jesus, who, he wrote, 'would reduce Jesus of Nazareth, in the brilliant phrase of the Italian scholar Giovanni Miegge, to the mathematical point which has position but no magnitude'.[4] The fact that we are dependent upon the 'recollections of those who had known him' does not mean that Jesus 'is entirely lost in the mists of history. We may not be able to see him quite as clearly as we should like. But to see him, as we must, through the eyes of others does not mean that we cannot see him at all'.[5] Historians had to be pressed for an account which 'saved the phenomena' and so accounted adequately for the stream of history which flowed from the advent of Jesus. While it is 'certain that a great deal in Jesus Christ will always remain mysterious to us; it is equally certain that the figure which stands behind the Christian movement is greater than either Hitler or Napoleon. That is the way in which history happens; and it can happen in no other way'.[6] It was the fault of a F. C. Baur that he did not allow sufficiently for the *personal* element in history. Once again relativism is the danger. 'If history is no more than the self-realization of the idea according to the laws of an immanent necessity . . . the Christian faith ceases to have anything more than relative significance'.[7] The unique intervention calls for a unique response. But for Neill this uniqueness was historical and empirical.[8] Where Troeltsch was reported to have said, in

1 Autobiography MS p 594 (or MS 11 p 24).
2 Green, op. cit., p 71.
3 *Idem.*
4 *The Supremacy of Jesus,* p 14.
5 Ibid., p 15.
6 *Interpretation,* p 19.
7 Ibid., p 28.
8 Neill never tired of emphasising the 'unique and unrepeatable' nature of history (cf. *Christian Faith and other Faiths,* 1st edn. pp 8, 17; *Christian Faith Today,* pp 18-19; Green op. cit. pp 72-73). He also pointed to the openness of the historian, as against the philosopher, to the unique and unexpected: 'it is time we learned to think historically: the historian, unlike the philosopher, is prepared to believe in the exceptional', *Expository Times,* vol. 76, no. 1, p 25.

1896, that the whole world was tottering on account of the appeal to the historical in biblical research, Neill's attitude was very different: 'the historian will throw up his cap to the ceiling with joy at being liberated from the pseudo-certainties of metaphysics and of dogmatic theology into the freedom of his own realm of empirism and probability'[1]

The historicity of the resurrection is central to Jesus' uniqueness. Neill took issue with Karl Barth over Barth's dismissal of 1 Cor. 15 as a cardinal piece of documentary evidence for the resurrection. In general, Neill believed that Barth and others had leaned too heavily towards a non-historical Christ.[2] Like Max Warren, he was suspicious of the divorce between salvation history *(Heilsgeschichte)* and other history *(Historie)* in the continental theologians. He pointed to St Luke, for whom both strands are the 'same history; each from a different point of view is the story of God's providential government of the nations, all of which he holds in the hollow of his hand'.[3] He asked pertinently of this distinction between 'significant' and 'insignificant' history, as expounded by Bultmann: 'can anything become historically significant if it did not first actually happen?'.[4] Further, in Neill's view, Bultmann radically misunderstood the nature of the gospel of the resurrection. For, in the preaching of the risen Christ, the hearer is *'not* just (confronting) a new understanding of ourselves' in 'what is essentially an old universe' but 'a universe which through the resurrection of Jesus Christ has become wholly new'.[5] History since Pentecost is 'the scene of the new mighty acts of God in history . . . the forward march of God among the nations as God . . . gathers out from all the nations a people acceptable to himself',[6] This in turn meant that the missionary movement of the church, which he viewed correctly as grossly underestimated by professional academic historians, was in fact 'the great creative force in human history'.[7] The missionary has an importance and significance which has again been gravely underestimated[8] for there is a real sense that it is not until the gospel is preached in a particular nation or culture that history in the strict sense begins: 'the missionary is engaged the whole time in making history, divine history'.[9] As with an individual life, up to the advent of Christ there is a natural succession of events: but for Neill as for Paul, when Christ enters in 'all things become new', there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:21) and something 'catastrophic and revolutionary' has entered in so that nothing can be the same again. 'Theologically history is important. If we believe that in Jesus Christ God did finally and

1 Green, op. cit., p 74.
2 *Interpretation,* p 209 note 2.
3 Ibid., pp 267-268.
4 Ibid., pp 233-235.
5 'Theology 1939-64', *Expository Times,* vol. 76, no. 1 (Oct. 1964), p 25.
6 *Interpretation* p 268.
7 *The Church and Christian Union,* p 94.
8 *Interpretation,* p 268.
9 Ibid., pp 268-275.

definitively intervene in the world of men, we are committed to the view that history is the chosen sphere of his working and that therefore history, all history, including the history of you and me to-day, is related to the process of revelation'.[1] History at large and our personal history have become significant when they interact with the activity of God in Christ.

Neill realised both the importance and the limitations of history in relation to Christian faith. He was well aware that to say all this 'is not for a moment to suggest that the certainties of faith can be made to rest on the contingencies of history'.[2] Greater information about Jesus would not establish 'a single grain of faith'. But the converse idea was not true: 'historical research cannot establish faith but in certain circumstances it could destroy it', if it could be established, for example, that Jesus never existed at all.[3] Again, Neill was well aware of the tension, expressed classically by Troeltsch, between the demands of detachment and objectivity and the commitment of faith held simultaneously in the same person. Again he quoted Miegge with approval on this issue: 'by standing firm in this tension; by bringing day by day the results of our labours as historians into confrontation with the intuitions of our faith; without allowing these historical results, from which the element of the transcendent is systematically excluded, to blot out for us the vision of that world of certainties and of higher values which is the concern of faith and from which alone history can derive its significance and values; and without on the one hand allowing this higher significance, as a too facile explanation, surreptitiously to take the place of the labour of historical research. This attitude is no more than the adaptation to the terms of our daily work of our faith in Christ, who is truly God and truly man – that is, of our faith in the incarnation. It may well be said that the incarnation is the ruling principle from which the Christian understanding of history is derived'.[4] Certainly, 'historical christology' and 'christological history' were marks of Stephen Neill's work as theologian and historian; and it was an important part of his remarkable achievement to integrate the two in his own vision, while, in his historical work, retaining a high degree of objectivity and detachment, which the necessary compression of this article has been in danger of under-emphasising.

Conclusion

Although Stephen Neill never formally brought these strands of his thought into a synthesis it may be legitimate to attempt a general intepreta-

1 Ibid., p 290.

2 *The Church and Christian Union,* p 130. Cf. Neill on Lessing's comment that the 'contingent truths of history cannot serve as proof for the unchanging truths of the intellect' in *Crises of Belief,* pp.113-114. Christian thinkers had been 'bewitched' into viewing Chritianity as a religion of ideas by this dictum.

3 *The Church and Christian Union,* p 130.

4 G. Miegge, *Visible and Invisible* tr. by S. C. Neill, pp 100-101 and quoted in *The Church and Christian Union,* pp 98-99. For Troeltsch accessibly expressed see the essay 'The Place of Christianity among the World Religions' in J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite, *Christianity and other Religions,* pp 11-31.

tion at this point. Every life, every religion, even history itself can be viewed as a totality. Into this totality Christ has appeared, bringing with him God's new creation. Neill himself, in his conversion, had experienced that rebirth, the element of the wholly new which breaks into the continuum of natural life with the in-coming of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The old, however, remains. In his coming and in his continuing presence, Christ acts as destroyer and fulfiller, passing judgment in individual lives and in the great world of religious traditions, on all that cannot bear the light because, in Johannine language, the 'deeds are evil': but, equally, with the inherited traditions that the individual brings with him to conversion, whether for Christians or for those from non-Christian cultures, Christ acts as fulfiller of all that is good and true. The base is judged and destroyed: the lovely and that of good report finds in him its fulfilment. In regard to history, for Neill there is a real renewal of the whole world order by God's action in Christ, a break in continuity, radical, revolutionary, 'catastrophic'. The old persists but it is viewed by us, like Moses and Elijah, from the vantage point of the new order. This in turn sets new priorities for the historian and gives a new importance to the spread of the gospel of new life among the nations. It gives great significance to the missionary, as the bearer of the seed of a new and significant history, linked to the purposive and redemptive activity of God. One cannot believe that someone with so high a view of the Greek classics thereby intended them for a historical limbo: but they too, the Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato and Aristotle of his quotations are subject to the same radically renewed vision since Christ and the resurrection; and their significance, so real to Neill himself, comes from those aspects of the truth which they contain which is risen in Christ.

Like St Paul, Stephen Neill found the truth of God through conversion to Christ. Like Paul, he devoted his intellectual life to 'bringing every thought into captivity to Christ'. (2 Cor. 10:5) This involved him in immense erudition in various fields of intellectual activity. It is also involved, as the autobiography indicates, great turmoil, very great physical and psychological difficulties which led him at times to the brink of suicide via insomnia and depression, the kind of personal cost known often to the superbly gifted and creative but outside the ken of many more ordinary mortals.[1] He has left us overwhelmingly in his debt. The whole of his amazing *corpus* of study and writing was directed to the cause of truth and this truth he expected to exalt the Christ whom he had discovered in young life to be the Truth. Any short article must be wholly inadequate to convey the wealth of his theological legacy, let alone the elegance and lucidity and lightness of touch with which it is conveyed. This will have done its part if it encourages a new generation of Christian thinkers, not least among evangelical Anglicans, to enter into the riches of the inheritance bequeathed to us.

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1 Autobiographical MS pp 85-98.