

Dyron B. Daughrity, *A Worldly Christian: The Life and Times of Stephen Neill* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2021), pp. x + 401. ISBN 978-0-7188-9585-3 (paperback).

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It is well known that *The Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) and subsequent Anglican theology and spirituality contains two foundational yet contrasting themes. One is a strong emphasis on the need to ‘acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness . . . provoking most justly [God’s] wrath and indignation against us’. This requires regular confession and acts of penance. The other is an emphasis on the grace of God, a grace which wonderfully saves us despite our fallen and sinful nature. This biblical insight, found in Christian tradition and especially promoted by the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century, is central to the BCP and Anglicanism. Both themes need to be held together, as in the collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent: ‘Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ But what happens when the second theme recedes into the background and all the emphasis is laid on the first?

The subject of this biography, Bishop Stephen Neill, offers a salutary answer to this question. It also provides lessons in how not to manage safeguarding by the church at large. First of all it is important to acknowledge Neill’s gifts and achievements. Many of those who have written about him have highlighted his brilliance as a multi-lingual speaker, administrator, researcher and writer, a figure with a number of best-selling publications on mission history to his name, as well as his *Anglicanism* of 1958, which came out in four editions between then and 1982. He was, in fact, the author of around 60 books and numerous articles. This informative and well-referenced biography by Dyron B. Daughrity tells the story of the life behind this prodigious industry, which also included serving as a bishop in South India, helping to create the united Church of South India, working for the World Council of Churches and then academic posts in Hamburg and Nairobi before retiring to Oxford.

What is noticeable is that its pages return again and again to what Bishop Richard Holloway called ‘the mystery’ of Stephen Neill, his thorn in the flesh which, in fact, was a thorn he inflicted on others and never openly acknowledged himself, a sadism expressed through beatings of young and sometimes older men under his pastoral care. This shocking side to Neill was first publicly revealed by Holloway in 1991 and is now well known. Daughrity lays out the evidence through extensive quotations from correspondence and interviews. Neill becomes a kind of anti-hero as the book works its way through his long and varied career, showing cover-ups by others as well as the pain of those who were his victims. It reveals that Neill believed he had the right to inflict these beatings because they were required punishments for sins committed by his victims. He would encourage his victims to confess their sins to him in private and then would announce that it was necessary for punishment to take place as penance. In other words, a fixation on the first theme mentioned above, on ‘deserving to be punished’ had ejected any sense that it is God and not the confessor who forgives and sanctifies without punishment. Such a one-sided

approach then opened the door to Neill's sadism. The tragedy in all this was that he was impervious to help from others, which included being sacked from his position as diocesan bishop and of receiving advice from colleagues. His sadism was, it seems, congenital and those who continued to employ him later in life failed to take appropriate action to remove opportunities for its continued expression.

Daughrity has put us all in his debt by pulling together many sources and extensive evidence on the achievements and failures of Neil's life. Building on the earlier work of Eleanor Jackson, this book is now an indispensable source on that life. Furthermore, as churches across the world take safeguarding more and more seriously, this biography, as mentioned, offers lessons in ways of handling and *not* handling the perpetrators of abuse.

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