

## Chapter Four

### An Educator in South India: 1928-39

Neill worked as an educator in South India for eleven years. He began with a very short period of service (1928-29) at the Union Christian College in Alwaye, Travancore. Then, he went out on a second itinerancy campaign (1929-30) in the northern part of the Tinnevely diocese. This was followed by work as Warden of the Nazareth Seminary in Tinnevely from 1930 to 1939. This chapter also addresses Neill's role in the formation of the Church of South India, an important ecumenical initiative that occupied South India's Christians for years. Neill's reputation in South India grew during these years, evidenced in several calls for him to become bishop.

#### Educator at Alwaye

Neill left Britain for India on 12 August 1928.<sup>1</sup> He was not looking forward to his new post in the town of Alwaye (nowadays known as Aluva) as it was not Tinnevely, it was not Tamil-speaking<sup>2</sup> and he did not care for the humidity of the area. Alwaye is located in the Travancore and Cochin region

1. Neill to Wigram, 12 August 1928, CMS/G2 I5/ O1928/45, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
2. In *God's Apprentice*, pp. 109, 112, Neill remarks, 'I was aware of a strong instinctive dislike of the idea of going there. . . . I got to the point at which I could speak [Malayalam – the language of the region] fairly fluently, and could read intelligibly, but I never got to the point at which I could preach without an interpreter.' (pp. 109, 112)

in southwest India, in present-day Kerala.<sup>3</sup> Neill had been to Alwaye before for the baptism of his goddaughter and godson: Mary and Michael Holland, the twin children of Willy Holland.<sup>4</sup> However, Holland had moved to Agra to take up his new position as Principal of St John's College in Agra and Neill was to be his successor as Principal of Union Christian College. Neill arrived to Alwaye on 17 September 1928.<sup>5</sup> Two young Oxford scholars had just arrived to help with the college and Neill developed good relations with them. Unfortunately, Neill just did not like the job from day one.<sup>6</sup> He claimed that most of the 333 students<sup>7</sup> would only memorise rather than think critically about the material. He wrote, 'students just scrape through'.<sup>8</sup> Only about half of the students and fewer than half of the lecturers were Christians. This occasionally caused conflict between Hindus and Christians in the college. On two occasions, Neill wrote to the CMS about this.<sup>9</sup> In addition to being disappointed in the students, Neill was frustrated by the lack of conversions that had occurred in the area:

Christianity appears to them simply as a matter of birth and politics, and it is very hard to get them to face seriously its religious claims. I am afraid, the attitude of many of the Christians supports their point of view; quite a number of the ablest Christian students think that Christianity is better for simple people, and Hinduism better philosophically. The extent to which our Christian students are undermined by the propaganda of theosophy is alarming.<sup>10</sup>

For one who was at heart a missionary, this proved to be a significant drawback. Alwaye was not nearly as open to Christianity as Neill had expected. Nearly half of the area was Muslim and the villages were virtually untouched by Christian missions. Neill maintained hope but witnessed

3. Malcolm Muggeridge served at the Alwaye Union Christian College for three years early in his career. He discussed that part of his life at length in his autobiography, *Chronicles of Wasted Time – Number 1: The Green Stick*, Chapter 3, 'Twilight of Empire'. Muggeridge does not mention Stephen Neill in that context, however.
4. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 109.
5. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
6. The discussion of Neill's time in Alwaye is in *God's Apprentice*, pp. 109-15.
7. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. See also Wigram to Neill, 7 March 1929, CMS/G2 I5/L4, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
10. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

no baptisms.<sup>11</sup> During the time that Neill was at Alwaye, he turned his mind towards the book he had previously agreed to write while he was in England. A mere three months after arriving at this post in Travancore, Neill was already discussing 'at length a proposal that he should have leave of absence from Alwaye for a time in order to write a book on Indian villages for the United Council for Missionary Education'.<sup>12</sup> On 15 January 1929 the CMS India Committee approved Neill's request.<sup>13</sup>

However, the CMS Secretary, E.F.E. Wigram, had reservations about Neill's leave of absence. In one letter he described Neill as 'a sort of non-regulation man'.<sup>14</sup> Wigram wrote to Neill on 24 January 1929, explaining he had reservations about a poor precedent being set. First, books were almost always written during regular furlough or during ordinary 'hill leave', that time when the missionaries headed to the mountains during the very hot season. Neill was proposing to write the book during active duty. Second, 'It was realized that in most . . . cases the writer had probably already spent a good long time abroad, whereas you have undertaken the book after comparatively small actual experience.'<sup>15</sup> Third, Wigram was concerned that Neill might 'be tackling the subject in a way which would be over the heads of the majority of those for whom the book is to be written'.<sup>16</sup>

Neill eventually got his way, replying on 12 February 1929 to thank the committee for permission to take a leave of absence in order to write.<sup>17</sup>

Neill claimed to have written the book 'under the strain of College work'.<sup>18</sup> First published in May 1930, it was already on its third impression by January 1931.<sup>19</sup> He chose as its title, *Out of Bondage: Christ and the Indian Villager*.

11. Ibid.

12. Neill to Wigram, 5 November 1928 and 18 December 1928, CMS/G2 I5/O1929/7, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham. In these letters Neill expressed his desire to have a break in order to write his book.

13. Wigram, 'Resolution of India Committee of 15 January 1929', CMS/G2 I5/L4, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

14. Wigram to Rev. W.S. Hunt, 24 January 1929, CMS/G2 I5/L4, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

15. Wigram to Neill, 24 January 1929, CMS/G2 I5/L4, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

16. Ibid.

17. Neill to Wigram, 12 February 1929, CMS/G2 I5/O1929/17, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

18. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

19. See Neill, *Out of Bondage*. The Foreword to the book was written by E.A.L. Moore, the bishop of Travancore and Cochin diocese. It is interesting that Neill submitted a 60,000- word draft, but the press cut it to 35,000 words, showing that the book could have been a lot more substantive than it eventually was.

In this book Neill gave a picture of Indian life. He provided a vivid introduction to the history of India, both religious, social and political. He covered topics such as Indian houses, the terrain, crime, the Indians' penchant for travelling around their country and the caste system. The majority of the book was devoted to explaining Indian beliefs and practices and the need for the Gospel to penetrate this religion of shrines, idol-worship, spiritualism, dark and rhythmic music and strong belief in magic. In the book, Neill was quick to point out the great philanthropic contributions of Christians to the health of the Indian people, the plentiful schools and the penetration of the ignorance of typical Indian worship by the great gospel of Christ.

Neill was sympathetic to Hinduism's contributions as well, albeit when they exhibited teachings similar to Christianity such as confronting idol-worship. This early book showcases Neill's knowledge of the Hindu pantheon, discussing various gods and how individuals relate to them. One of his concerns was the poverty and despair among the villagers. He wrote, 'The three great hindrances to prosperity, which the villager himself can largely overcome, *if he will*, are disease, drink and debt.'<sup>20</sup>

Neill also discussed the reluctance of educated Indians to engage in manual labour. Furthermore, while the tendency of Indians to beg seemed somewhat honourable in their own eyes, Neill clearly did not share this view.<sup>21</sup>

The book concluded with a lengthy discussion of the desperate need for Christian missions in India. Neill provided stories that challenged his readers with the fact that Christianity needed greater investment if it was going to deal effectively with the many problems in India. Neill cautioned that the Indians who converted to Christianity were often under intense persecution and would in many cases require adoption by a Christian community, as they would become outcasts within their own. A section at the end of the book provides an early insight into Neill's missionary fervour: 'What is the Church's task in India to-day?'<sup>22</sup> Neill answered with a series of six discussions:

- (1) The steady and systematic occupation of all the unoccupied areas within the next thirty years.
- (2) The development of all work on Indian lines and the making over of control to the Indian Church at the earliest possible moment.

20. Neill, *Out of Bondage*, p. 62 (Neill's italics).

21. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

- (3) An intensive campaign over thirty years to remove the evil of illiteracy in the Church.
- (4) The missionary must come determined to make the land of his adoption his home.
- (5) The missionary must lay aside before he comes every trace of racial prejudice and pride.
- (6) Those who come to India must come knowing clearly what they have come to do, and what it is that they have to give to India.<sup>23</sup>

Neill was always of the opinion that India needed more from England: more missionaries, more financial commitment, more literature. In his 1929-30 Annual Letter to the CMS, he wrote, 'the College should never be left without European help'.<sup>24</sup> However, he also believed that the Indians would have to play the decisive role if the conversion of the subcontinent were to become a reality.

From his letters, it is evident that Neill gave considerable thought to education in India. He wrote an article in 1929, 'Missionaries and the Vernacular', that discussed some of the concerns that he would elaborate upon in the following year.<sup>25</sup> This article begins with Neill considering his experiences in studying Hinduism, which occupied the majority of his recent time in Cambridge. Then he proceeded to argue why Western scholars of Hinduism will never be plentiful and why there is not a need for many of them. His argument rests on the fact that in South India only a tiny percentage of the people actually understand Sanskrit. Modern translations are the medium through which literate Indians learn the Hindu classics.

The article then moves to its primary consideration: missionaries and the vernacular. Neill argued that missionaries needed to learn the vernacular of their people. For example, when teaching Indians, something that might take twenty minutes or more to explain in English, due largely to their imperfect understanding, could be quickly explained in their own language. Neill wrote, 'Let us get rid, once for all, of the pernicious idea that Indian students would rather talk English.' Indians, like Europeans, will always prefer their mother tongue.

It was not surprising when Neill's colleagues began to enquire as to his future status at Alwaye. Neill realised this was not a long-term situation for him, and he was never fond of Kerala.<sup>26</sup> Indian languages, particularly in

23. Ibid., pp. 129-36.

24. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

25. Neill, 'Missionaries and the Vernacular', pp. 598-603.

26. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 114.

the South, are very difficult to learn. Over the mountains, in Tamil Nadu, Neill had taken great pains to become a fluent speaker. Even with his great linguistic gifts, Malayalam would require a lot of work before he could be considered fluent. On this, he wrote, 'I have been very much hampered at every turn by my ignorance of the vernacular; although Malayalam is very much like Tamil.'<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Neill's friends were in Tamil country and that was pulling him. He made the decision to leave when Willy Holland, the former principal, recruited Brian Crowley and his wife to take charge of the work in Alwaye.<sup>28</sup> Holland was by now at his new post in Agra. Neill wrote: 'If there had been any great urgency of need, I would have stayed, but . . . [when] Brian Crowley . . . arrived with his admirable wife Eileen, they at once took the students to their hearts, made a home for them . . . and conferred innumerable benefits on the life of the College.'<sup>29</sup>

Upon leaving Alwaye, Neill reasoned, 'I think the greatest service I ever rendered Alwaye College was in leaving it.'<sup>30</sup>

CMS Secretary E.F.E. Wigram knew that Neill had been itching to get out of Alwaye, but he had no place in mind for Neill to go. He urged Neill to talk with the bishop of Tinnevely about his return to that diocese.<sup>31</sup> Neill and the new bishop, F.J. Western, decided that Neill should return to the itinerancy work he had been doing prior to his furlough in Cambridge.<sup>32</sup>

Neill left Alwaye in September of 1929 and returned to Tamil country. The conclusion of his 1929-30 Annual Letter to the CMS summarises his attitude, 'I look forward to rejoining the Tinnevely diocese in September, and shall rejoice to be speaking Tamil again.'<sup>33</sup>

### Another Itinerancy Campaign

From September 1929 to June 1930 Neill worked in the northern part of the Tinnevely diocese again as a leader of an evangelistic band, with eleven men under his supervision.<sup>34</sup> The men were required to serve for a year as evangelists, which was to be the final chapter of their three-year

27. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

28. Wigram to Rev. W. S. Hunt, 24 January 1929, CMS/G2 I5/L4, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

29. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 115.

30. Ibid.

31. Wigram to Neill, 7 March 1929.

32. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 116.

33. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1929-30, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

34. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 115-18.

theological training course. Neill was able to select the location and he chose Sachiapuram in northern Tinnevely (modern Satchiyapuram in Tamil Nadu), where the missionary Thomas Gajetan Ragland had served in the 1840s and 1850s.

The band's schedule was as rigid as it was the first time Neill had led an itinerancy. Twenty days a month were spent in the remote villages. The other ten days were spent at Sachiapuram, from where Neill would send the men out to gather the children for teaching. Following the practice of Stanley Jones, Neill would lecture to the educated Hindus and Muslims. This was Neill's passion, taking the Christian message to remote areas. It tugged at Neill's emotions when he rode his bicycle out to the villages to ask if they knew anything of the Christian gospel. Their reply was normally, 'Yes, years ago Christians used to come round here, and talk to us; they were very good people, and used to give us very good advice, to do good and not to do evil; but for a good many years we have not seen them.'<sup>35</sup>

At some point near the end of this period, a church council was held at Sachiapuram. The bishop attended and told Neill he needed him at Nazareth in the South to serve at the theological school. Neill was reluctant to go. In his Annual Letter to the CMS of 1930-31, he wrote, 'I came to Nazareth on June 10, 1930. I cannot pretend that I was very willing to come. It meant leaving the North of the Diocese, of the terrible needs of which I have written before.'<sup>36</sup> However, Neill trusted Bishop Western to make the right decision, while commenting on the common trend to disrupt the work in the north to accommodate the well-Christianized South:

This is what had always happened. As soon as any attempt had been made to get active work going again in the north, the south would exercise its pull, and in general the pull of the south would prevail. I had no wish at all to exchange the way I was living for the far more comfortable conditions of the south. It had been my aim to sink myself deeper and deeper into the Tamil language, and into a knowledge and understanding of Hinduism and the Hindu way of life, and so to qualify myself to be an effective witness for Christ to the educated and high-caste Hindu; I had no wish to become a missionary to Christians. Least of all did I wish to settle down in an old mission-station where, as in Nazareth, the gospel had been proclaimed for more than a hundred years and where everyone was at least in name a Christian.

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35. Ibid., p. 117.

36. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

On the other hand, though always an adventurer at heart, I have always believed that the voice of the Church is a voice to which the Christian must listen with the most careful attention. . . . If the Church thought that the training of the ordained ministry was the task which at the moment I was best qualified to carry out, probably I ought to set that considered opinion above my own desires.<sup>37</sup>

Given Neill's questionable health, his emotional struggles and his frequent exhaustion, North India was not ideal for him in the long run; the conditions were too harsh for him.<sup>38</sup>

### Educator at Nazareth

Nazareth's history begins in 1796. It was originally a land grant for Christians who had been cast out of their villages. When Neill arrived to live there in 1930, it was a village of about 2,000 inhabitants, who were all Christian and, due to British influence, who enjoyed a rather high level of prosperity for South India.<sup>39</sup> Neill described his new context:

Nazareth has always been the centre of many mission activities. There was a high school and training school for girls. . . . There was a middle school for boys. . . . There was the largest mission hospital in the diocese. . . . There was an industrial school, . . . a large church . . . [and] sandwiched on a narrow strip of ground between the hospital and the industrial school, the Seminary over which I was to preside – a two-storeyed building with a classroom below and a chapel above, a shabby side room . . . and a street of ten small houses.<sup>40</sup>

37. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 118.

38. In *God's Apprentice*, it is clear that Neill's life was plagued by health problems and emotional struggles, such as depression (pp. 9, 44-46), insomnia (pp. 9, 44), a 'fierce temper, the outward expression of so many inward frustrations' (p. 36), sciatica (pain in the sciatic nerve, p. 39), anxiety (p. 43), eye problems (p. 43), rashes ('eczema', p. 44), frequent fevers (pp. 74, 79, 167), exhaustion (pp. 131, 197, 206), a 'septic throat' (p. 164) and dysentery (p. 206). Those who knew Neill were aware of his ill-health. In the Foreword to *God's Apprentice*, p. 7, C.F.D. Moule shows he was familiar with Neill's precarious health. Cragg and Chadwick knew of Neill's constant health problems, commenting, 'Behind the scenes his health was still troublesome'; Cragg and Chadwick, 'Stephen Charles Neill, 1900-1984', p. 608.

39. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 119.

40. *Ibid.*, 119-20. The seminary was established in 1819. See Constance M.



Early on, Neill pressed the CMS for the seminary to move; he felt the facility was no longer conducive. His wish was not granted until 1937, nearly the end of his time there.

The seminary building was dilapidated; it had been closed for two years prior to Neill's arrival in 1930. Neill had to start nearly from scratch. He had to create a curriculum, organise his staff and recruit students. Neill had two teaching colleagues who had been training catechists. One he described as 'already past the retiring age'. The other was a young 'fiery nationalist, temperamental and over-sensitive. . . . [H]e had been thrust into a position for which his gifts and his knowledge were grossly inadequate.'<sup>41</sup> The first term drew only ten students. Neill's description of the students is unflattering:

It is not easy to make them see the advantages of an intellectual approach of any subject connected to religion. What they would like to have would be an endless series of devotional studies of the Bible, with copious notes, which would afford material for endless sermons after they are ordained. I think after a year's work we are beginning to get over that difficulty; but they are still constitutionally incapable, partly from inherited conservatism, partly from lack of background, to profit much from the critical approach to the study of the Bible.<sup>42</sup>

Neill's curriculum was heavy on church history and biblical studies.<sup>43</sup> He began with the ecumenical movement that was in full swing at the time and

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Millington, *Led by the Spirit: A Biography of Bishop Arthur Michael Hollis, Onetime Anglican Bishop of Madras, and Later First Moderator of the C.S.I.* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1996), p. 13.

41. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 120-21.

42. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

43. Stephen Neill, 'A Curriculum for a Theological School', a paper written for *The National Christian Council Review* (May 1933), pp. 1-9. This article can also be obtained under the title of the article with the following publishing information, Mysore: Wesley House Press and Publishing House, 1933. In this important article Neill proposed the following nine subjects for the programme he would supervise: 1. The Old Testament; 2. The New Testament; 3. Church History; 4. Christian Doctrine; 5. Christian Worship; 6. Greek; 7. Tamil; 8. Non-Christian Religions; and 9. Pastoralia, which Neill defined, pp. 8-9, as 'a carpet bag into which to stuff all the remains of subjects of which we think the students should know something, . . . Christian Ethics, . . . Church Accounts, Church Law, Marriage, Moral Hygiene, Preaching, Religious Education, Practical Problems of Christian Work, Systems of Church Government, History and Constitution of Individual Churches, and Problems of Church Re-union'.

moved backwards to the Early Church. Neill's approach to Bible study was most unconventional for the students. He wanted to study 'critically', while the students were in no way familiar with this approach. They viewed the Bible as 'the absolutely reliable source of knowledge on every conceivable subject'.<sup>44</sup> Neill wrote, 'I knew that all our students would be dyed-in-the-wool fundamentalists . . . because they had never been told anything else.'<sup>45</sup> He felt Hebrew and Greek should not be required and only the most gifted students attempted these languages. All, however, were required to engage upon 'an elementary study of the Greek manuscripts'.<sup>46</sup>

Neill required his students to be bilingual. If lectures were in English, the examinations would be in Tamil and, if the lectures were in Tamil, the examinations would be in English. The students resented this, feeling 'that they were being very badly treated'.<sup>47</sup>

While critical study was foundational for the syllabus, the practical dimension was equally significant. Frequently Neill would take the students on evangelistic campaigns and to missionary conferences.<sup>48</sup> He also matched the students with local pastors as mentors.<sup>49</sup> It was important for Neill that the students overcome their lacklustre interest in the non-Christians of the area. Neill was determined that the students must be equipped to convert Hindus. This proved problematic as almost all of the students' families had been Christian for four or five generations; they knew next to nothing about Hinduism. Neill was also insistent that daily quiet time be a regular part of the course.

Neill's relations with the students were 'very stiff'.<sup>50</sup> This was due largely to the traditional teacher-student relationship, but certainly also had

44. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p 121.

45. Ibid. In Neill's article, 'A Curriculum for a Theological School', p. 3, he wrote that many of the students were suspicious of his approach to the Bible and some of them had their faith shaken to the core by the critical approach.

46. Eleanor Jackson's personal collection, p. 208.

47. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p 121.

48. In his Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham, Neill recorded that students went to Coonoor for a Sunday School training course, to a Student Christian Association Camp for Tamils and to Alwaye to attend a Mar Thoma Church convention. In October 1933 he spoke at a CEZMS conference on 'India To-day and To-morrow'. This address was published in the CEZMS journal, *Here and There with the CEZMS*, November 1933, pp. 215-17. Neill wrote an encouraging article to the CEZMS in the same journal the following month, entitled 'Consecrated – Satisfied', December 1933, pp. 245-46.

49. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 122. Neill took it upon himself to be pastor 'in sole charge' of the Nazareth parish. However, this arrangement lasted only two years.

50. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

something to do with Neill's disposition. However, Neill was most pleased when surrounded by young men. He remarked 'the contact with boys has given me a new lease of life'.<sup>51</sup> An ambivalent tendency begun at Dohnavur, continued during his itinerancy days and persisted throughout Neill's career: he maintained authoritative yet intimate relations with the young men with whom he was entrusted. His teacher at Cambridge, Alexander Nairne, who edited Neill's commentary on John, remarked in the Preface to that book, '[This book] is written for plain men and, especially, for boys, with whom Mr. Neill has a rare sympathy.'<sup>52</sup>

Neill's responsibilities in the seminary were manifold and demanding.<sup>53</sup> There were times that he gave thirteen lectures a week on topics such as Greek, Old Testament, Religions of India and Church History. The library was insufficient for teachers and students alike, prompting Neill to pursue a grant from the Warren Trust for the purchase of books. There was no secretarial help, so Neill took charge of all accounts and correspondence.

In addition to his work at the seminary, Neill was pastor of the church in Nazareth, he was in charge of a nearby Art Industrial School for training craftsmen<sup>54</sup> and he took bi-monthly trips in order to supervise the work of the nearby Megnanapuram High School. Neill was careful to 'keep an eye on everything, and to see that the quality of the work keeps up'.<sup>55</sup> He was most anxious for the arrival of an SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) man named Michael Hollis who eventually became a cornerstone of missionary work in South India. Neill was well aware that Hollis would offer a significant addition to the work as he had been a fellow and chaplain of Hereford College, Oxford.

During Neill's first year at Nazareth, he had to spend considerable time dealing with problems of immorality. He was particularly bothered by the many couples who were 'living in sin'.<sup>56</sup> The reasons for this behaviour were various. For example, some of the elderly couples had begun to live together after their original spouses died and they were ashamed to attempt remarriage through the Church. Others could not afford the four rupees required for a wedding fee. Neill consulted the bishop and temporarily banned those unlawfully coupled, yet the bans would be lifted as soon as they submitted to a proper Christian ceremony.

51. Ibid.

52. Alexander Nairne, Preface, in Neill, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. vii.

53. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 132-33.

54. The Industrial School trained men to make 'beautiful rosewood furniture'. See Millington, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 13.

55. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

56. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p 123.

Another problem with which Neill had to deal was a leading Christian man who maintained a 'toddy shop', a makeshift liquor store, in the churchyard.<sup>57</sup> Neill's second year saw the arrival of Reverend A.P. Randle, who had worked at Tinnevely before taking a lengthy period away.<sup>58</sup> He was a welcome addition; however, Neill was *most* pleased by the arrival of Michael Hollis from Oxford. Neill's annual letters to the CMS are usually written with a frustration evident in the many complaints of overwork and unsatisfactory conditions, necessity for more help and disappointment at the slow progress in all areas. However, Neill's Annual Letter to the CMS of 1932-33 shows exuberance: 'Far and away the most important event has been the arrival of Hollis. He has a good academic view, and seven years of teaching theology in Oxford; so really for a little corner like this, we are not badly staffed.'<sup>59</sup> Neill's positive outlook in his annual letters continued until Hollis' departure for furlough in 1936. When Neill heard that Hollis would not be coming back to India because his wife had had a miscarriage, Neill wrote:

When I heard the news, I felt just for a moment that I could not possibly face the work without him. Even now I feel like a man who has lost his right arm. I do not know whether the CMS has ever realized how extraordinarily fortunate it was in having associated in this work a man of such intellectual distinction, deep evangelical conviction, and spiritual power.<sup>60</sup>

Michael Hollis had a 'Tractarian' background which initially caused Neill some concern,<sup>61</sup> but his intense focus on the conversion of Hindus

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57. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
58. Little is known of Rev. Randle outside the scant information revealed about him in Neill's annual letters to the CMS. Neill recorded Randle taking two furloughs in 1932 and 1937. It is also known that he was something of a 'buildings expert' according to Neill, meaning he knew what it would take to move the seminary to a new location and how the new building should be constructed to suit the needs of the students and educators. Based on a comment by Neill in his Annual Letter to the CMS, 1931-32, it seems to be the case that Randle was an SPG missionary.
59. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1932-33, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
60. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1937-38, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
61. Neill's initial concern about Hollis would have been common for one of Evangelical, and CMS, sympathies. The 'Tractarian' movement is also known as the 'Anglo-Catholic' or 'Oxford' movement, based on the influence of John Henry Newman. Neill wrote on this movement in his widely read work, *Anglicanism*, 4th edn, pp. 254-61, 267-69.

impressed Neill greatly. They shared a house for a short time until Hollis' marriage in 1935.<sup>62</sup> Neill helped Hollis by doing most of the lecturing at the seminary while Hollis learned Tamil.<sup>63</sup> They were an excellent match: highly competent intellectuals with a strong missionary zeal. Millington writes: 'It was a remarkable occurrence that on the staff of this small rural theological college in South India, two such able men as Stephen Neill and Michael Hollis should serve at the same time. . . . These two academics must have provided a welcome stimulus for each other.'<sup>64</sup>

There were differences between the two men, however. Hollis was eager for unity among the various denominations and mission societies in the area; Neill was more reticent.<sup>65</sup> Hollis was more congenial with the students. Hollis' biographer writes:

He admired Neill's scholarship and his fluency in Tamil but recognised his defects. Writing to England he said he got on excellently with Neill, who 'doesn't realise how autocratic he is with Indians and cannot conceal how much abler he is.' Neill was a colourful character but perhaps not always the easiest person with whom to work.<sup>66</sup>

Hollis must have been of an extraordinary character. Neill consistently wrote of him in high regard in his annual letters to the CMS.<sup>67</sup>

Neill departed India for his second leave of absence on 18 April 1933.<sup>68</sup> He was out of the country for just over a year.<sup>69</sup> He spent his time in England at Trinity Hall, Cambridge and St Peter's Hall, Oxford.<sup>70</sup> It proved

62. Millington, *Led by the Spirit*, pp. 14, 37-39.

63. Neill wrote that he was lecturing twelve times a week in the seminary. See Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1932-33, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

64. Millington, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 13.

65. See Millington, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 34, and Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 139.

66. Millington, *Led by the Spirit*, pp. 34-35.

67. The only criticism Neill ever offered regarding Hollis was that 'he appears to be incapable of preaching about anything except justification by faith'. See Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1935-36, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

68. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1933-34, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

69. In the Preface to *Builders of the Indian Church: Present Problems in the Light of the Past* (London: Edinburgh, 1934), Neill wrote that he was still at Oxford in April 1934.

70. In *God's Apprentice*, p. 131, Neill stated that initially he went to Cambridge but was asked to go to Oxford to speak at an Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian

a productive time for Neill as he wrote and published three books and one article. The first book, *Annals of an Indian Parish*,<sup>71</sup> is essentially a collection of excerpts from his diary regarding his work as pastor of the Nazareth area churches. Details of Neill's daily schedule are provided. He discussed topics as diverse as the challenge of getting a good night's sleep to the endless quarrelling among Indian Christians. Neill provides an overview of his situation as a missionary in the book:

The Church is a small island in a vast ocean of Hinduism. The village Christian is at all times breathing in through every pore non-Christian superstitions, non-Christian ideals, non-Christian standards, which corrupt and destroy the life that is within him. . . . Parish work in India is like pushing a heavy stone up a steep hill. The moment pressure is slackened, the stone begins to run down hill. Harm done by one year of neglect can hardly be repaired by ten years of labour.<sup>72</sup>

It appears from this quotation that Neill may have been anticipating an abysmal state of affairs upon his return to India and, indeed, this turned out to be the case. Upon his return to Nazareth he wrote, 'Naturally, everything had rather gone to pieces.'<sup>73</sup>

The second work Neill produced during his Oxford break was a pamphlet entitled *The Remaking of Men in India*.<sup>74</sup> This is a specialised study of mass conversions in India and the problems involved both for the converts as well as the missionaries looking after them. Mass conversions usually took place among the lowest castes. The 'remaking' referred to in the title shows Neill's belief that the Indians must be taught how to change. For example, Neill argued that they must move out of their conditions of 'extreme squalor' and 'learn to come clean to church . . . [as] cleanliness comes next to godliness'.<sup>75</sup> In this pamphlet, Neill also argued against the injustices of the caste system. Neill commented that the lowest castes *viewed themselves* as untouchables, something that was very difficult for them to

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Union meeting and remained for the rest of his leave.

71. Stephen Neill, *Annals of an Indian Parish* (London: CMS, 1934). The inspiration for this 70-page volume came after friends in England read Neill's records of his parish work, prompting him to make them available in permanent form. See the Foreword to that work.

72. *Ibid.*, p. x.

73. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1934-35, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

74. Stephen Neill, *The Remaking of Men in India* (London: CMS, 1934).

75. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

overcome. Neill's solution was to send missionaries to them. However, the question of who would take on this sort of work and who would support it financially presented serious problems for Neill. The pamphlet concludes with a call for 'India's conversion':

Early Church history shows us clearly that the Gospel tends to begin in the lower strata of society; it is indeed a message of life for the poor and the oppressed; but it tends to work upwards from below. I believe that this might happen also in India. . . . This caste movement is too new for us to speak of it in detail, but once the stream has begun to flow there is no reason why it should not grow into a mighty river. If it develops, . . . it will be the greatest event in the history of the Church in India. . . . It is a challenge to the great Churches to come to our help now in the day of God's opportunity, before it is called too late, in order that the Church may go forward to conquests on a far greater scale, and with the assurance that God is with her in all her warfare until the very end.<sup>76</sup>

The third work during his Cambridge-Oxford break, *Builders of the Indian Church*, was a great success.<sup>77</sup> According to Neill, 'For years it was the main text-book on Indian Church history in almost all the theological seminaries in India.'<sup>78</sup> *Builders of the Indian Church* was initially intended to be a larger history of Christianity in India but had to be cut short due to 'ceaseless demands' on his time.<sup>79</sup> Comprised of 160 pages, this book is a condensed history of Christianity in India from the early traditions of St Thomas to 1932. Neill admitted in the Preface that a more comprehensive history would have to wait.<sup>80</sup> The final chapter of the book emphasises Neill's belief that the mission era in India had produced many fruits and must continue. He concludes the book by asking the question, 'Does the Church in India still need and want the help of missionaries from the

76. Ibid., pp. 13-15.

77. By January 1938, four years after it was first published, this book was on its third impression.

78. Eleanor Jackson's personal collection, p. 230.

79. See the Preface to Neill, *Builders of the Indian Church*.

80. Neill would finally pursue his goal of a much larger history of Christianity in the last few years of his life. His death cut short his projected three-volume *A History of Christianity in India*, allowing for only the first two volumes that together covered the beginnings to 1858. Indian Christians hold to the belief that St. Thomas, one of Jesus's twelve apostles, brought Christianity to India in the year AD 52.



West?’ His answer is a resounding yes: ‘the western missionary is still the indispensable pioneer. . . . [He] is a gift of immense value to his Indian fellow-workers.’<sup>81</sup>

The final work Neill produced during his leave of absence was a contribution to a book edited by Joe Oldham and entitled *The Modern Missionary*.<sup>82</sup> The opportunity to be associated with a name like Oldham was an honour for Neill. His chapter is entitled ‘Rural Work in India’. In it, he discusses the state of Christianity in the villages of India and how the missionaries minister to the villagers.

By mid-1934 Neill was back in India, pressing the CMS for a new building from which to operate the seminary, ‘our accommodation is ridiculously defective, and we could not possibly stay on in Nazareth for another year’.<sup>83</sup> Two factors stood in the way: first, the often difficult relations between the CMS and the SPG, which would handicap the much-needed fundraising; and, second, the dire financial state of the diocese. Initially, Neill suggested that the seminary merge with another one nearby, the United Theological Seminary at Pasumalai near Madras. However, this idea was defeated in late 1936 by the Pastoral Work Committee. The largely Indian membership of the committee preferred a site outside Nazareth and this carried the day. Neill reacted strongly to the decision:

I can find no words to express my regret at this decision, and at the shameful methods by which it was reached. The little Nazareth clique managed, as usual, to lead the whole diocese by the nose and to get their own project carried. . . . Indians must work out their own salvation and we do not interfere, but often we are sufferers by the result. Anyhow a decision is a decision, and we have got now to try and give the diocese the best Seminary we can in a situation and on a site which are wholly unsuitable for the purpose.<sup>84</sup>

81. Neill, *Builders of the Indian Church*, pp. 150-52.

82. Joe Oldham, ed., *The Modern Missionary: A Study of the Human Factor in the Missionary Enterprise in the Light of Present-Day Conditions* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1935). Oldham was one of the most well-known figures of the Ecumenical Movement and was long-time Secretary of the International Missionary Council. See Oldham’s biography by Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

83. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1935-36, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

84. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1936-37, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.



Neill's own words reveal a striking personality trait. When he made a decision on a matter, he could not tolerate dissension and thus he fell into conflict with others. Neill's harsh words towards the committee's 'shameful methods' reveal his need to demonise his opposition ('the little Nazareth clique'). Neill's opinions were often inflexible.

Nevertheless, the SPG donated Rs. 30,000 for thirty acres of land and the new buildings<sup>85</sup> and the CMS contributed Rs. 16,000 and by June 1937 the seminary had been successfully relocated. The new name given to the seminary was 'Tirumaraiyur' or, in English, 'the village of holy revelation'.<sup>86</sup> There had been some nominal growth as there were by then 23 students training for ministry.

Around the time the seminary was being relocated, Neill was invited to give a series of lectures at the Kodaikanal Missionary Conference. Neill wrote that his audience consisted of about 200 missionaries.<sup>87</sup> He gave a series of lectures on the second half of the Apostles' Creed. There must have been a positive reception; Neill stated that afterwards 'they clamoured to have the lectures published'<sup>88</sup> and, indeed, they were, in 1940, as *Beliefs*.<sup>89</sup> A few years after that Conference, in 1941, Neill was again the keynote speaker at Kodaikanal and spoke on the first half of the Apostles' Creed. These were later published as *Foundation Beliefs*.<sup>90</sup>

#### A Context of War

'All the time the [international] political horizon was growing darker,' Neill wrote. 'We were unaware at the time of all the disasters that Hitler was cooking up for the world.'<sup>91</sup> Neill was always a voracious reader. Weekly, he received *The Spectator*, the *New Statesman* and *The Manchester Guardian*. He wrote, 'I reckoned that, if I had time to read

85. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1937-38, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

86. Ibid.

87. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1936-37, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

88. Ibid.

89. Stephen Neill, *Beliefs: Lectures Delivered at the Kodaikanal Missionary Conference, 1937* (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1940).

90. Stephen Neill, *Foundation Beliefs* (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1948). Timothy Yates describes the printed lectures as 'Two golden books on the Christian creed, compiled from addresses given to missionaries. . . . [They] deserve to be reprinted'; Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, p. 144.

91. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 147.

all three, I would know pretty well what was going on everywhere in the world.<sup>92</sup> Gradually, Neill began to realise what was happening in Germany.

Several months before the war broke out, a German friend made Neill promise that Neill would come to visit him when the internment camps came into being.<sup>93</sup> Neill was caught off guard by the request. However, his friend's fears were not without substance. A letter of 3 August 1939 addressed to the National Christian Council in Nagpur reads: 'For the present it must be assumed that missionaries of enemy nationality would, on the outbreak of war, be immediately removed and detained, pending repatriation or such other action as may, in the interests of security, be found advisable.'<sup>94</sup> A month later, the internment camps were in operation.<sup>95</sup>

92. Eleanor Jackson's personal collection, p. 264. Neill's writings show a familiarity with issues unrelated to Christian missions. In his autobiography, Neill often went off on tangents describing things as various as the Spanish Civil War, the US stock market crash of 1929 and his cover-to-cover reading of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* on a train ride. When travelling by train Neill always took the cheapest class.
93. Eleanor Jackson's personal collection, p. 266. For missionaries, internment camps were an unfortunate reality during both world wars, as Christians struggled with tension between loyalties to faith and to country. The phenomenon is usually referred to as 'orphaned missions', as the missionaries had to leave their mission stations for the camps. In 1939 1,700 German missionaries in Asia and Africa were cut off from their home support. Generally, after a brief internment and investigation by the governing (usually British) body, missionaries were released, albeit without support. After the beginning of the German *Blitzkrieg*, the invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and France in 1940, most continental European Protestant mission points became orphaned. US mission organisations were extremely generous in assuming financial responsibility for many of the orphaned mission points in Asia and Africa; North American churches covered 90 per cent of total expenses. There is an excellent article in Neill, Anderson and Goodwin, eds, *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission*, entitled 'Orphaned Missions', that deals with this topic. See also the important *World Christian Community in Action: World War II and Orphaned Missions* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1949) by K.S. Latourette and W. Richey Hogg. Similar things happened in World War I. See Richard V. Pierard, 'Shaking the Foundations: World War I, the Western Allies, and German Protestant Missions', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 22, no. 1 (January 1998), pp. 13-19.
94. E. Conran-Smith to P.Z. Hodge, National Christian Council, Nagpur, 3 August 1939, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College. 'Enemy' in this case referred to Germany, as German Lutherans had a long history of mission work in India.
95. Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September. Poland surrendered to Germany on 27 September.

The bishop of Nasik wrote a letter to the Metropolitan of India, describing the camps favourably: 'I went into the Camp last Friday. . . They seem to be very comfortable there; but naturally they were eager to get let out.'<sup>96</sup> Although not oppressive, the camps did have rules, for example, no books or papers were to be admitted without heavy scrutiny. Before long, the internees were freed and family internment camps were established for those who for one reason or another continued to be incarcerated.<sup>97</sup> For example, a letter from the bishop of Nasik to Metropolitan Westcott, said that 'ten [internees] out of thirty-five had been let out' after they declared themselves 'anti-Nazi'.<sup>98</sup> Another letter discusses German nuns, having initially been required to report to the police station daily, now being permitted to report weekly.<sup>99</sup> Neill concurred that the internment camps were at least tolerable, 'If one has to be in captivity, it would be hard to imagine a more agreeable prison.'<sup>100</sup>

While there was undoubtedly a certain amount of unease, the mission work in South India continued. Neill summarises the climate at the time: 'It must not be supposed that we spent all our time brooding over our anxieties. For the greater part of the time we were able to go on unhindered with our work, though never with quite the same spontaneity that there had been over ten years earlier.'<sup>101</sup>

The CMS continually made it clear that missionaries were workers not for governments but for God. On 4 August 1939, the General Secretary of the CMS, William Wilson Cash, sent out a four-page letter marked 'Strictly Confidential' that advised the missionaries on the impending emergency.<sup>102</sup> The letter began by pointing out that the CMS was not a

96. Bishop of Nasik to Metropolitan Westcott, 23 November 1939, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College. Westcott went to great lengths to help the German missionaries in the camps. In one letter he wrote to a German friend in the camps, assuring him that he was trying to get him released; Westcott to J. Stosch, 26 September 1939, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College.
97. R.B. Manikam, Secretary, National Christian Council, 'Report of an Interview with Government of India', 24 April 1942, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College.
98. Bishop of Nasik to Metropolitan Westcott, 26 December 1939, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College.
99. Bishop of Nasik to Metropolitan Westcott, 23 November 1939, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College.
100. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 174. The next chapter discusses Neill's years as bishop (1939-44). Issues involving World War II will be discussed there as well.
101. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 147.
102. William Wilson Cash to 'Fellow-Missionary', 4 August 1939, Westcott Papers, Bishops Box 4, Special Collections, Bishop's College.

political organisation; it existed for 'the interests of the whole Kingdom of God'. Wilson Cash then urged each missionary to 'stick to his job as far as he possibly can'. He argued that those who had been ordained were not to become combatants, and, furthermore, lay missionaries were to 'relinquish their missionary work' if they chose to become combatants.

### Neill and the Formation of the Church of South India

One event that occurred during Neill's time as Warden of the Nazareth Seminary would, in Neill's words, 'transform me from a private into a public figure'.<sup>103</sup> The Bishop of Tinnevely asked Neill to represent the diocese at the General Council of the Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon. Meetings were held every three years in various cities across India. Neill was chosen as Clerical Secretary, a post which put him in touch with the influential leaders of the day. He served in this capacity for ten years and was 'continuously at the heart of things; little passed in the affairs of the Church that did not at one time or another come under my notice'.<sup>104</sup>

By far the most important subject that came before the committee was church union in South India. Discussions had been ongoing since 1919.<sup>105</sup> The first draft on the proposal was released in 1929. For many complicated reasons, the Church of South India (CSI) would not become a reality until the seventh draft was formally accepted in 1947.<sup>106</sup>

If discussions surrounding church union in South India had been discrete in the early years, the draft of 1929 made it a public issue. Many pamphlets were written to explain the situation, to condemn the proposal

103. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 133. The year was 1935, p. 134.

104. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 135.

105. The year 1919 is significant because this is the year of the 'Tranquebar Manifesto', the document drawn up by a group of about 30 mostly Indian ministers who had met to discuss Indian ministry and missions. The document is highly ecumenical. It begins, 'We believe that union is the will of God', quoted in Stephen Neill, *Brothers of the Faith* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 62. Neill called this 'A master work', Eleanor Jackson's personal collection, p. 240. See also Bengt Sundkler, *Church of South India: The Movement Towards Union, 1900-1947* (Greenwich, CT: The Seabury Press, 1954). Sundkler's work is the recognised authority on the history of the CSI.

106. There were five Churches involved in the union: Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Reformed Christians, British Methodists and Anglicans. Such a union would not occur in the West until the United Church of Canada was formed in 1925 by 70 per cent of the country's Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists. However, the Church of South India had episcopal representation, something with which the United Church of Canada did not have to deal.

or to herald the ecumenical progress.<sup>107</sup> One such pamphlet found a wide audience: *Why South India Churches Are Considering Union*.<sup>108</sup> The authors claimed that they were simply informing their readers about the situation. They thought it a terrible idea:

hoever in England thinks of the South India United Church should chiefly keep in mind not big town congregations, but groups of humble, rather ignorant village folk gathered in mud-and-thatched sheds, for most of whom denominational questions are completely out of range. . . . Denomination in India is mostly a question of chance and geography, and not primarily of conviction.<sup>109</sup>

In contrast, those mainly British committee members who were involved with the union negotiations were described favourably, 'the proceedings of its Councils are conducted with decorum and reasonable efficiency'.<sup>110</sup> The authors continued their attack, explaining that Indians were entirely clueless about the history of the Church, thus they were bound to have no opinion on the matter of union whatsoever. One gets the striking sense that the united church movement in South India was more about Europeans healing their historical divisions than about Indian Christians negotiating a church for their future. For example, another pamphlet posed the question, 'Is the Scheme the expression of a desire of Indians for Union and have they had a share in working out this Scheme?'<sup>111</sup> The author's conclusion is very telling:

It must be frankly admitted that inasmuch as the denominational differences among us have arisen largely because of European and American history, it is not strange that the movement to remove

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107. Writing fifteen years later, Bishop A.T.P. Williams commented, 'The Scheme for Church Union in South India has already stirred a vigorous pamphleteering activity. . . . The subject is difficult and good men do not agree: it is therefore inevitable that most of the writing should be controversial.' See A.T.P. Williams, *Church Union in South India – A Reply to Mr. T.S. Eliot's 'Reunion by Destruction'* (London: SCM Press, 1944), p. 3.

108. Joseph Muir, G.E. Phillips, E.J. Palmer and W.J. Noble, *Why South India Churches Are Considering Union* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929).

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

111. *What About Church Union? Should the South India United Church Accept the Proposed Scheme of Union?* (Pasumalai: A.M. Lenox Press, 1933), p. 3. This pamphlet was issued under the authority of the South Indian United Church Committee on Union.

these divisions should have come originally from those who feel the sins of their forefathers rather than from the Indians whose forefathers had no part in these divisions.<sup>112</sup>

Stephen Neill was one who knew better than this. He knew that the entire process was begun by Indians but was quickly taken over by the Europeans. Later, in 1948, one year after the CSI was established, Neill would reflect:

Since almost all those who met at Tranquebar [in 1919] and published the memorandum that set the whole process in motion were Indians, some have believed that the union movement grew spontaneously out of the consciousness of the Indian Church. . . . Since most of the negotiators were non-Indians, others have felt that this movement was one in which the Indian Church was not very much interested, and which was being imposed on it, in a form based on western experiences and far too complicated for India to understand, by missionaries from the West. There is some truth in both contentions.<sup>113</sup>

By 1932 negotiations had stalled over to the issue of episcopal ordination, an obstacle that would take fifteen years to resolve. The Presbyterians wanted a church government 'composed of ministers together with lay representatives'.<sup>114</sup> However, the episcopacy was an issue they would have to concede if there was to be church union at all.

Accepting an episcopal structure was even more alien to Congregational Christians. They preferred autonomy, whereby each congregation stood as its own authority. In the final years of negotiations, Congregationalists began to accept the inevitability of an episcopal arrangement. Sundkler recorded that, increasingly, Congregationalists were coming round to

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112. *What About Church Union?*, p. 3. In reality church unity was every bit as much an Indian matter and many Indians were involved. Sundkler, *Church of South India*, p. 185, writes, '[Bishop] Azariah . . . was regarded, and indeed regarded himself, as the outstanding leader of South Indian church union.' Neill was equally aware of Azariah's contribution to union in south India. In *Brothers of the Faith*, Neill devoted an entire chapter to him, 'Bishop Azariah and the Call to Church Union'. This book is somewhat of an Ecumenical Hall of Fame, as Neill discussed eleven of the greatest leaders of the modern ecumenical movement: J. Mott, N. Soederblom, C. Brent, Azariah, Germanos, W. Temple, W. Paton, H. Kraemer, D. Bonhoeffer, D.T. Niles and John XXIII. On the Joint Committee was another distinguished Indian, A.J. Appasamy, an Oxford University DPhil.

113. Stephen Neill, *The Cross Over Asia* (London: Canterbury Press, 1948), p. 145.

114. *What About Church Union?*, p. 9.

the reality that, 'As fellowship increases, freedom must to a certain extent decrease.'<sup>115</sup> The Congregationalists clashed frequently with the Anglicans during the negotiations; however, most were committed to unity above all else.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, the chief reason that it took so long to establish the Church of South India was the obvious clash on the issue of the episcopate, which came up repeatedly and stultified the negotiations. Of the fifteen bishops who were appointed to the new CSI in 1947, three were from Congregationalist backgrounds, eight from Anglican, one from Presbyterian and three from Methodist.<sup>117</sup>

The Anglicans would not budge at all on this position because of the Church's claim to apostolic succession.<sup>118</sup> The solution to this paralysing dilemma was proposed by Bishop Western, Neill's predecessor in the bishopric of Tinnevely, in a remarkable document, known to those involved as 'The Pledge'. It was edited several times before finally enabling the negotiations to move beyond the impasse at which they had stalled. The statement is quoted here in full:

The uniting churches therefore pledge themselves and fully trust each other that the united church will at all times be careful not to allow any overriding of conscience either by church authorities or by majorities, and that it will not in any of its administrative acts knowingly transgress the long-established traditions of any of the churches from which it has been formed. Neither forms of worship or ritual, nor a ministry, to which they have not been accustomed or to which they conscientiously object, will be imposed upon any congregation; and no arrangements with regard to these matters will knowingly be made, either generally or in particular cases, which would either offend the conscientious convictions of persons directly concerned, or which would hinder the development of complete unity within the united church or imperil its progress towards union with other churches.<sup>119</sup>

115. Sundkler, *Church of South India*, p. 222.

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-87.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

118. The pamphlet *What About Church Union?* clarifies here, p. 11: "Apostolic succession" is that doctrine . . . which defines episcopacy as having a special grace bestowed upon the apostles by Christ Himself and transmitted by the apostles to the first bishops and from them to other bishops in direct succession from Christ even to the present day. That grace enables bishops to ordain men and to give them authority to celebrate the sacraments. Without that grace no man can be ordained or validly celebrate the Holy Communion.'

119. Sundkler, *Church of South India*, p. 259.



Stephen Neill later commented on the significance of this union, 'for the first time since the Reformation episcopal and non-episcopal Churches have become one, and a new type of Church has come into being, for which there is no earlier precedent'.<sup>120</sup> The end result was that the Church of South India (CSI) became an episcopal church, part of the Anglican Communion.

The formation of the CSI was watched closely by Christians around the world, particularly Anglicans.<sup>121</sup> T.S. Eliot, the poet and a well-known conservative Anglo-Catholic, joined the donnybrook with a pamphlet containing the barbed title, 'Reunion By Destruction'.<sup>122</sup> Like most critics, Eliot's misgivings revolved around the issue of apostolic succession:

belief in the doctrine [of apostolic succession] is a belief that is binding on the whole Church. The situation is intolerable; unless his mind is as confused as those of the framers of the Scheme, he must either withdraw from that Church or recant. . . . [I]t is part of a fatal crack which runs through the Constitution . . . from top to bottom.<sup>123</sup>

Eliot's publication was one of many pamphlets, however his celebrity beckoned a reply from the then bishop of Durham, A.T.P. Williams, in a publication entitled *Church Union in South India: A Reply to Mr. T. S. Eliot's 'Reunion by Destruction'*. Williams' conclusion was that views like Eliot's would ruin hope of church unions anywhere but particularly in South India.

Stephen Neill was in the thick of all this. His intellectual gifts were useful for such a diverse gathering: several denominations, various countries involved, different theologies at work. Nevertheless, he was very much an Anglican. Bengt Sundkler records, 'Stephen Neill, a member of the Joint Committee from 1935 onwards . . . stated the Anglican standpoint with brilliant lucidity and had a capacity to understand other traditions which was of particular value.'<sup>124</sup>

120. Neill, *Anglicanism*, p. 379.

121. Stephen Neill wrote, 'The little group of men and women which met year by year in South India knew that they were like performers in the ring, lighted up by powerful searchlights, their every movement watched by a vast and unseen cloud of witnesses in every country of the world'; Stephen Neill, *Towards Church Union (1937-1952)* (London: SCM, 1952), p. 96.

122. T.S. Eliot, *Reunion by Destruction: Reflections on a Scheme for Church Union in South India: Addressed to the Laity* (London: Council for the Defence of Church Principles, 1943).

123. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

124. Sundkler, p. 184.



Neill was not part of the inauguration of the CSI; he departed India in 1944.<sup>125</sup> However, he continued to voice his opinions on the matter. He was propelled to the centre of the maelstrom in 1947, the year the union occurred. By that year, Neill was lecturing at Cambridge and was an assistant bishop to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Neill corresponded with several people about the union that year and was clearly resistant to it in its current form. In one letter Neill recorded that, upon hearing what the final draft for union consisted of, he was 'simply horrified'. Clearly, the changeover in the Joint Committee had had an impact on the success of the union. Neill wrote that, when he was a part of the Committee, they:

never even contemplated the possibility of such a radical separation of the new Church from the Anglican Communion. . . . It seems to me that we are drifting into a very serious and dangerous situation, and that matters of this kind must be cleared up before the new Church comes into existence. It is not clear to me what steps can, or should be taken at this point, but unless action is taken, we may find ourselves faced with a *fait accompli*.<sup>126</sup>

Neill was even encouraged to use his close proximity to the Archbishop to put the brakes on South Indian union. On 23 May 1947, one 'Max' wrote to Neill:

What both Milford [Campbell] and I feel is that you as Assistant Bishop to the Archbishop should apprise him of the situation . . . [which] really is the most preposterous action. . . . I hope you will feel that you can get the Archbishop's ear about it sometime before you have to go to Canada.<sup>127</sup>

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125. The union negotiations moved much faster after the stalwarts were removed from the process. This is one of the ironies of the history of the CSI; many of the great men who worked for decades for unity were only allowed to see that promised land from afar. Bishop Western (Neill's predecessor in the Tinnevely bishopric) left India in 1938. Bishop Waller (also a former Tinnevely bishop) died in 1942. The Metropolitan of India, Burma and Ceylon, Foss Westcott, died in 1949, having retired from active service in 1945. Bishop Azariah, the great voice of the Indians, died on 1 January 1945. The war years saw several others exit the negotiation process. See Sundkler, *Church of South India*, Chapter 13, 'The Beginning of the End', which begins with a discussion of the turnover on the Joint Committee.
126. Neill to 'My dear Max', 17 May 1947, CMS/G/Y/12/3/1, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham. Almost certainly, this 'Max' is Max Warren, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society from 1942-62.
127. 'Max' to Neill, 23 May 1947, CMS/G/Y/12/3/1, CMS Archives, University of

Neill replied the following day, 'I think the right action is that they should demand immediately a special session of the General Council to clear up these matters before the Union takes place.' He commented on his attempts to reach the Archbishop: 'I was at Lambeth Palace yesterday, and tried to see the Archbishop, but two other Bishops got in front of me, and I had to come away.' Neill then wrote that he would try to see the Archbishop in a week's time.<sup>128</sup>

Apparently, Neill did get the Archbishop's attention, for in short order a widely read publication from the Archbishop was released entitled, *The South India Church: An Open Letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Bishop Stephen Neill*.<sup>129</sup> The Foreword explains the Archbishop's intent: 'As will be seen, this letter has been written from a detached and judicial point of view, and is designed to deal objectively with certain matters about which misunderstandings are frequent, in the hope that fears which spring from those misunderstandings may be allayed thereby.'<sup>130</sup> After explaining the union in some detail, it concluded, 'I hope that I have helped by this review to clarify the situation and to remove some uncertainties.'<sup>131</sup>

Neill was conflicted about the union in South India. He was attracted to the ecumenical dimensions but found it disconcerting in places. There were many on the Joint Committee who agreed with him. In retrospect, it is clear that, without the departure of those fiercely loyal to their denominations and creeds, such as Neill, the CSI never would have become a reality.

The history of the formation of the CSI was a topic that Neill returned to repeatedly throughout his writings. In no fewer than thirteen publications he discussed the event. In his 1948 book, His attitude toward the union can be seen as early as 1948, in his book, *The Cross Over Asia*. In that book, Neill describes his feelings on arriving at Madras, his first time back in India since his abrupt departure in 1944:

Then I remembered almost with a shock that since I came away another great change had taken place. This is no longer an Anglican Church, it is a Church of South India. . . . For ten years I was engaged in the negotiations, long and sometimes wearisome. . . . At

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Birmingham.

128. Letter from Neill to 'Max', 24 May 1947, CMS/G/Y/12/3/1, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

129. The Archbishop of Canterbury, *The South India Church: An Open Letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Bishop Stephen Neill* (Westminster: The Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly, July 1947).

130. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

131. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

times it seemed that the effort was hopeless and had better be given up. . . . Every source of information open to me confirmed . . . that the inauguration of the new Church . . . gave . . . the feeling of deliverance and rebirth into a new life. . . . It seems to be agreed that a good start has been made. . . . Nevertheless I could sense deep anxiety in the formerly Anglican part of the church. . . . Criticisms of the scheme have been loud and severe. Utterances have been made suggesting that the Anglicans joining the new Church have lost entirely their previous status as Anglicans, and, so far from having gained a wider unity, have lost their part in the world-wide fellowship to which they had previously belonged. What is the truth of the matter? . . . In a few weeks we shall know.<sup>132</sup>

By 1950, Neill was giving approval to the union in unequivocal terms:<sup>133</sup>

After pondering the matter deeply for some years, I have come to the conclusion . . . that the Scheme of Church Union in South India, in spite of all its defects, is the best in all the world, since it alone faces with full frankness the facts of four centuries of division, and proposes a plan to overcome them. . . . I now believe that this is the plan which should everywhere be followed, when the division between episcopal and non-episcopal Churches is to be overcome, and that this method alone can lead in the end to full and unquestioned unity.<sup>134</sup>

Twenty years after the CSI had been formed, Neill was still thinking about it:

The Church of South India has been in existence for nearly twenty years, and its plan has proved itself to be at least workable, though, as we have recognized, not without certain internal and external difficulties. . . . The Church of South India was a monument to . . . ecumenical ideals. . . . Whatever misgivings there may have been, the infant Church soon gave ample indication of health and vigour.<sup>135</sup>

132. Neill, *The Cross Over Asia*, pp. 139, 144-47. 'In a few weeks' refers to the Lambeth conference of Anglican bishops that was to take place.

133. Neill delivered the 1950 CMS James Long lectures. These were published in 1952 in an important book by Neill, *Christian Partnership* (Gateshead: Northumberland Press).

134. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

135. Stephen Neill, *The Church and Christian Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 365, 403.

Neill was a champion of ecumenism all his life. However, his ecumenism was tempered with a realistic understanding of theological difficulties between Churches. The early negotiators of the CSI were actually *too realistic* in their understandings of theological differences. What was needed to overcome the barriers to union in South India was *idealism*. Unsurprisingly, nearly the entire generation who began the South India negotiations had to either die or move out of India before unity finally occurred.

### Neill, the CMS and the SPG

It is not surprising that, when Stephen Neill first became interested in affiliating himself with a missionary society, he chose the Church Missionary Society over the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. There were clear differences between the two at that time in India. Susan Harper summarises:

Both [CMS and SPG] were voluntary societies for missions to non-Christians: the CMS expressed the ‘low-church’ Evangelical side of Anglican spirituality and the SPG expressed the ‘high-church’ Anglo-Catholic side. They worked side by side in Tinnevely, where, despite their common evangelistic goals, they often fell prey to disagreements and rivalries. Thus, their growing congregations tended to identify themselves as ‘CMS Christians’ or ‘SPG Christians’.<sup>136</sup>

There were various historical reasons for this division that had existed since the late eighteenth century.<sup>137</sup>

The CMS was founded in 1799 by Evangelicals from the Church of England.<sup>138</sup> As it grew, ‘it attracted to itself almost all the “low Church” or Evangelical support for missions in the Church of England, leaving the SPG to be supported almost entirely by high churchmen’.<sup>139</sup> The result was that in South India one could discern whether a particular region was associated with the SPG or the CMS simply by attending a church service.

136. Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 11-12.

137. M.E. Gibbs summarises these historical reasons well in *The Anglican Church in India, 1600-1970* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1972), pp. 45-47. See also Grafe, *History of Christianity in India: Vol. IV, Part 2*, pp. 44-45.

138. See Ward and Stanley, *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, p. 1.

139. Gibbs, *The Anglican Church in India, 1600-1970*, p. 46.

Neill was aware of these differences; his annual letters between 1929 and 1938 demonstrate this. His comments on the SPG and CMS illustrate that, while the two societies often worked conjointly, their relations remained frosty. For example, in Neill's Annual Letter to the CMS, 1933-34, he wrote about the Nazareth Seminary, where he was teaching at the time:

Some of the SPG clergy are not at all content on having a CMS man in charge of the Seminary; and feel that the students are not being trained on the old SPG lines. This, of course, is quite true, and Hollis would heartily join with me in saying 'A very good thing too'. But it is as well to remember the task of bringing the CMS and SPG together; the diocese is only beginning, and is very far from having been successfully accomplished.<sup>140</sup>

Neill often compared the CMS with the SPG. Generally, in these cases, he would point to the superiority of the SPG, calling on his superiors in the CMS to step it up in certain aspects of the mission work. For example, in Neill's 1935-36 Annual Letter to the CMS, he wrote the following:

I have now lived and worked for four years in an SPG station. This is not agreeable to me; and it is made more painful by the evident contract between the optimism, activity and progress which prevail in the SPG part of the diocese, and the discouragement, decay and collapse, which are manifest almost at every point of the CMS area. It appears to me that the SPG is superior to us in building, equipment, staffing organization and finance. We did once make the claim that we were far ahead of them in the spiritual life; I believe that this is still just true; but how long it will continue to be so, I do not know.<sup>141</sup>

Neill often made comparisons between the two, especially when he needed help in his work. On one occasion, he wrote: 'From the SPG, as usual, we have received more than twice as much help as from the CMS.'<sup>142</sup>

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140. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1933-34, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

141. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1935-36, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

142. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1938-39, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

Neill's allegiance to the CMS came largely out of his evangelical commitments, and he wanted to increase the evangelical character of the Tinnevely diocese: 'it has to be recognised that the Evangelical witness is still weak in the diocese'.<sup>143</sup> As bishop, Neill tried to change this.

### Inklings of a Bishopric

It is uncommon that a man in his early thirties should be considered for a bishopric; yet that is what happened in 1933 when Neill was asked to consider accepting a bishopric in Western China. Only 32 years old at the time, an astonishingly young age for a bishop, Neill consulted his father on the matter and eventually declined.<sup>144</sup> Between 1933 and 1937 Neill received several invitations to serve as bishop in Rangoon (Myanmar/Burma), Mombasa (Kenya), Nagpur (near Bombay) and Colombo (Ceylon/Sri Lanka).<sup>145</sup>

In 1937 the General Secretary of the CMS wrote to the Archdeacon of the Travancore diocese, where Neill had served for a year while teaching in Alwaye, to suggest four possible candidates for that bishopric.<sup>146</sup> First on the list was an Indian listed as 'Archdeacon Jacob'. The CMS felt it was time to start appointing Indian bishops because of the tremendous success of Bishop Samuel Azariah in the Dornakal diocese. Neill's name was number two. George Selwyn, Neill's successor at Tinnevely, was fourth. Neill did not want to leave Tinnevely. In addition, he had no desire to move back to Kerala. He wanted to stay in the Tamil-speaking area, where he was fluent in the language. The General Secretary learned of Neill's desire to remain in Tamil Nadu and wrote: 'I know how important the Nazareth College is, but I cannot think that it is really as critically important as the diocese of Travancore. . . . I do hope you will not turn it down if the offer is made to you.'<sup>147</sup> Neill's mind was made up, however.<sup>148</sup>

While flattered by these prospects, Tinnevely was home for Neill. He had poured himself into that place, knew the language and understood the

143. Neill to 'Geoff', 27 October 1943, CMS/G/AP7, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

144. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, pp. 153-54.

145. Neill, Annual Letters to the CMS, 1937-38 and 1938-39, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

146. General Secretary to Archdeacon Benjamin, 22 April 1937, CMS/G/Y/I5/3, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

147. General Secretary to Neill, 7 July 1937, CMS/G/Y/I5/3, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

148. Similarly, George Selwyn, Neill's successor as bishop of Tinnevely, refused the Travancore bishopric when asked.

work of the Church there. If he were to become a bishop, then Tinnevely is where he would serve. Neill recounts: 'Having had three mitres almost firmly placed upon my head and three others dangled not far from my nose, . . . I had come to the conclusion that my permanent state in the Church of Christ was that of presbyter. But then, as so often, the utterly unexpected happened.'<sup>149</sup> The story of Neill's rise to the Tinnevely bishopric is told in the following chapter.

Neill worked hard as an educator in South India. He wrote, 'For eight and a half years theological teaching was my daily and hourly concern. The work was heavy and toilsome.'<sup>150</sup> He accomplished much during that time. He restored respectability to a fledgling seminary, he helped to produce dozens of Indian clergymen and he relocated the seminary to a better location. Seminary work was not his sole focus in those years, however. He helped with Megnanapuram High School and played a critical role in obtaining a new building for the school.<sup>151</sup> He kept the itinerancy campaigns alive, particularly in the north where evidence of the Church was thin on the ground. He published several books that were well received by the Christian public. He had taken a leadership role in the ecumenical discussions taking place. He was able to speak as well in Tamil as in English. The promoters of any large event related to the Church in India were almost certain to hope to put Neill's talent to use.<sup>152</sup> It is in this context that the famous Tambaram International Missionary Conference (IMC) of 1938 should be discussed.<sup>153</sup>

Neill had already accepted the bishopric of Tinnevely, although he had not been consecrated, by the time the Tambaram Conference took place in December 1938.<sup>154</sup> At the time, this was 'The most widely representative meeting of the World Mission of the Christian Faith ever held.'<sup>155</sup> There

149. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 154.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

151. Neill, Annual Letter to the CMS, 1937-38, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

152. In 1937 Neill was invited by the Tuticorin Church to give a series of lectures to non-Christians. This brought him great delight as his opportunities to speak to non-Christians were few and far between during his years at the seminary. The lectures were in Tamil for the most part and the audience was around 400 educated Indians. See his Annual Letter to the CMS, 1938-39, CMS/G2 AL, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham, and *God's Apprentice*, pp. 148-49.

153. Tambaram is located about eighteen miles south of Madras. Historical documents refer to the event as the 'Tambaram Conference' and the 'Madras Conference' interchangeably. The location of the conference was at the Madras Christian College in Tambaram.

154. The 1938 conference was originally to be held in China but the Japanese invasion thwarted the plans.

155. Stephen Neill, 'Madras', *Here and There with the CEZMS*, February 1939, p. 26.





Anglican Delegates at the famous 1938 Tambaram conference.  
Neill in bottom row, second from right.

were 470 delegates present from 67 countries. Some of the more prominent figures on the world church scene were present, such as Bishop Azariah, historian Kenneth Scott Latourette, German missiologist Walter Freytag, Hendrick Kraemer and Professor H.H. Farmer of Cambridge. Perhaps the most notable presence was the great statesman of Christian missions, Dr John Mott, who presided and gave the opening address.<sup>156</sup> Mott was the leading figure at the first of these conferences in 1910 held in Edinburgh, the point at which most scholars agree the modern ecumenical movement was born. His authority and respectability in the worldwide church made him the natural choice to head the conference. By all accounts, John Mott knew how to chair a conference. Neill was amazed at the man's 'undiminished powers . . . he had a head start on everyone else'.<sup>157</sup> After the conference, Neill wrote a long letter to Dr Mott, essentially explaining his opinion that, 'Tambaram abundantly justified itself'.<sup>158</sup>

Neill received a personal invitation from William Paton, the organiser of the conference, to serve as chairman of the session 'On the Training of the Ministry'. This was the largest session at the conference and the

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Neill wrote, 'This was the most international gathering held up to that point in the entire history of the Christian Church'; See Eleanor Jackson's personal collection, p. 276. The second IMC conference took place at Jerusalem in 1928. Tambaram was the third and most eagerly anticipated.

156. Neill, 'Madras', p. 26. Mott's assistant during the conference was William Paton, the eminent Scottish missionary.
157. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 150.
158. Neill to Dr John Mott, 8 January 1939, RG 45, Box 51, Folder 1138, John Mott Papers, Special Collections, Day Missions Library, Divinity School, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Neill also discussed the conference in *God's Apprentice*, pp. 149-53.



diversity was extraordinary. When it came time to begin, Neill requested that the Lord's Prayer be said, each man in his own language. Neill recorded that there were 48 distinct forms of speech praying in unison.<sup>159</sup>

Years later Neill reflected on his role in that momentous gathering: 'Tambaram meant for me a rather sudden move from obscurity into a certain prominence in the affairs of the Church.'<sup>160</sup> Neill was now regarded as one of the world's foremost leaders in the burgeoning movement of ecumenical Christianity.

Neill's star was rising. His gifts were increasingly being recognised by the wider Church and, when the bishopric opened in his beloved Tinnevely, he knew it was a task he must take up.

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159. Neill, *God's Apprentice*, p. 152.

160. *Ibid.*, p. 153.