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Editorial

William Carey-Our Contemporary

A great deal of missionary folk lore has grown up around the figure of William Carey. A year-long programme of celebrations in India by churches and agencies will reach its climax on the 11–13 November 1993 in Calcutta and Serampore, with the bicentenary of Carey's unauthorised arrival in Calcutta. He is called 'the father of modern missions', despite the fact that other pioneers had preceded him in India and in other countries. Catholic missionaries had been pioneering missions since the Counter Reformation. The weaknesses of Carey the man are glossed over—his autocratic spirit that drove his younger missionary colleagues to resign and form their own group in Calcutta, and led to the frustrations of the Home Board of The Baptist Missionary Society over Carey's unwillingness to be accountable for his work, finances and institutions. Carey gave little time to his sons and appears to have been insensitive to the needs of Dorothy, his first wife. He was not very effective as an evangelist and church planter. His translations of the Scriptures were severely criticized by contemporary scholars and were soon to be replaced by others. The Serampore Mission collapsed with the death of Marshman three years after Carey's death.

Yet despite these limitations we honour Carey, as a missionary two hundred years ahead of his time. Many of his principles are standard indomitable practices today. He was a man of vision and courage and hope, seen in his quiet but determined response to the many tragedies he faced—death of family members and colleagues, the press fire, the collapse of the Stock Market, and so on. His pietistic experience of Christ, his calvinistic faith learnt in his early years, his daily devotional life in his study and in his garden, earned him respect, as Mahatma Carey, the Great Spirit. His enormous linguistic achievement in the translation of both Christian and Hindu Scriptures is awe inspiring. A visit to the archives in Serampore College is a moving experience. His educational achievements, especially the building of Serampore College, his love of nature and his pioneering work in horticulture and agriculture, and his burning heart of compassion for the sick, diseased and the poor and his battle against the cruel injustice of infanticide, widow burning and slavery provide models of holistic mission for the churches and missions today.

Carey the dissenter was committed to the centrality of the local church. The first act of Carey and his colleagues when they arrived in Serampore in 1800 was to constitute themselves as a church. Carey gave high priority to the training of evangelists and pastors, hence Serampore College. He worked hard to ensure that the Serampore Mission and the local churches should be self supporting and he [p. 292](#) believed that evangelism should be the work of the native evangelists. Carey was not a profound theologian. His theological understanding grew out of his implicit trust in the Scriptures, and their direct application to life and mission. Apart from the *Enquiry* he left no theological writings.

Most biographers have recognized that the success of Carey is to be found in a unique relationship he had with Ward the printer until Ward's death in 1823 and with Marshman the educationalist and translator and his wife Hannah, until Carey's own death in 1834. The achievements of Carey were the achievements of the Serampore Trio.

As William O'Brien has noted, the phenomenon of the Serampore trio is to be found in the intersection of the *chronos*—the political and social crisis of India as it came under the domination of the colonial power, and the *kairos* of synergism of the Serampore team, symbolized in Carey's watch word, 'Expect great things (from God). Attempt great things (for God)'. To William Carey our Contemporary, this issue of ERT is dedicated. [p. 293](#)

The Legacy of William Carey

Christopher Smith

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The author of this article is, in my opinion, the most careful and exact researcher on the Serampore Trio at work today. In this lead article he gives a realistic evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Carey's thought and work and of his dependent relationship on the Marshmans and on Ward.

Editor

A scholarly quest for the 'history Carey' is long over-due. In spite of the fact that scores of biographies have been written about him, layers of popular mythology still remain to be cut through before the actual contours of his career as a pre-Victorian mission leader will be uncovered. His immediate brethren in the 1830s revered him as 'the father of the Serampore Mission', while evangelical posterity went much further and saluted him rather inaccurately as 'the father of modern missions'. Since then, many attempts have been made to coopt him as a heroic figurehead for the revitalization of missions in 'the modern era'.

One thing certain is that a wealth of primary missiological sources and of erudite, contextual studies still remains to be examined. This largely untapped deposit is enough to merit a new era in Carey scholarship. It has much to contribute to an analysis of the course of a very unassuming English Baptist, who was born on August 17, 1761, and dying on June 9, 1834, ended up as something of a missionary archetype.

HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The enigma of William Carey's life, historical significance, and missiological legacy is not easily resolved. What are we to make of this 'consecrated cobbler' who invested so much of his life in a Calcutta college and then founded one of his own?

Let us begin by considering the epitaph he chose for his tombstone [p. 294](#) in Bengal. Far from being incongruous, it reflected the struggle that he and his close colleagues went through in life and the modesty with which they looked back on whatever they managed to achieve. The words were taken from the last verse of hymn 181 in John Rippon's *Arrangement of the Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D. D.* (1802, third edition). They were used by Joshua Marshman at William Ward's funeral, eleven years before our subject's demise. Carey felt they were particularly apt and chose the first couplet for himself:

A guilty weak and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall.
Be thou my strength and righteousness
My Jesus—and my all

Of course, this reflected Calvinistic conviction of personal unworthiness to stand alone before the Almighty; but there was, arguably, more to the inscription than that. Carey and his close colleagues were quite sure that they did not merit being decked with garlands

or halos. Each was persuaded that it would be enough to be remembered simply as one who had sought to do his duty as a servant of Christ.

Ernest A. Payne was one of the few mission historians who realized that there was something profoundly enigmatic about Carey as a person. He asked in 1961: ‘How are we to reconcile his intense self-distrust with his great achievements, the range of his interests and his apparent [in]decision of character?’ Of all Carey’s biographers, only his nephew Eustace got close enough to him ‘on the mission field’ to realize that there was something odd about the way in which Carey functioned and contributed to the running of ‘the Serampore Mission’ (independently of the Baptist Missionary Society from the 1820s). His critique appeared in various publications and was given a more missiological turn by William Adam, a perceptive, young, Baptist missionary in Bengal of whom Carey once wrote very highly.

Just as relevant for our hermeneutical inquiry is evidence emerging from within the inner circle of the Serampore mission operation. Along with Carey, William Ward and Joshua Marshman rose to fame in some British circles and became known as ‘the Serampore Trio’. They were amazingly close-knit as a leadership team. For several decades they complemented one another in an intricate way. Indeed, very few people in Britain ever realized how dependent Carey was on his partners for insight and a wide range of initiatives. This in itself should alert us to the great need there is to refrain from assuming that Carey should be given the limelight, while his lesser-known colleagues fade p. 295 into the background. To the contrary, historical integrity requires us to recognize that too much has been attributed to him at others’ expense—as if he were a great, solitary figure who towered above his contemporaries. Carey would have been horrified to think, for example, that he was being credited with the wisdom of men such as Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, John Sutcliffe, or Charles Grant—not to mention his own partners and a host of other expatriates in Bengal. That is why a somewhat ‘trinitarian’ approach is called for, which sees Carey as one member of a triumvirate, and which recognizes that he was greatly indebted to three immediate groups of people: the Baptist Missionary Society’s home-base troika of Fuller, Ryland, and Sutcliffe; a sizable number of Orientalists and *pandits* (learned men) in Bengal; and his own close colleagues along with their dedicated wives. This does no despite to his person. Rather, it considers him *in situ*, recognizing what a huge difference others made to his life both before 1793 and after 1799. We therefore do well to distinguish carefully between his pre-1800 legacy and his post-1800 legacy.

Before 1800, Carey passed through three apprenticeships—as an artisan, a pastor, and a missionary. From then on, his career moved through several phases that mirrored the evolution of his metropolitan mission beside the Hoogli estuary of the Ganges delta. These phases also reflected developments in the fortunes of the East India Company and in the course of British rule in India. When such factors are taken into account, and special attention is given to the cultural dynamics of the Baptists’ Serampore enterprise, it becomes natural to reevaluate some of the popular ‘pleasing dreams’ that have accrued to his memory. These we will now outline, believing that ‘truthfulness will be more of a contribution’ than ‘heroic myths’ to the cause of mission.¹

INSPIRATION AND OBLIGATIONS

Carey’s much-narrated years in England before 1793 certainly make a good story. His father, Edmund Carey, was a weaver who became ‘master of the small free-school’ in

¹ Cf. Dorothy Friesen, *Critical Choices. A Journey with the Filipino People* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), p. 106.

Paulerspury, Northamptonshire, when William was about six years old. The boy's own grandfather, likewise, had once been the village's schoolmaster, so it comes as no great surprise that he himself turned to primary school teaching, in another of his county's villages, when he was in his mid-twenties. His [P. 296](#) uncle, Peter Carey, was a local gardener who had once served as a soldier against the French in Canada. He stimulated his nephew's imagination greatly. Thus, although William was a poor country boy, living in a landlocked province far from London and the sea, he *was* able to count his blessings. These he turned to good use by applying himself to acquiring knowledge during his spare time. He had two sisters and one brother who survived infancy. Brought up in an Anglican home, he married Dorothy Plackett, the daughter of a local Dissenter, in 1781, several years before he became a Baptist.

William Carey lived during a time of great change, when Europe's Enlightenment was beginning to make itself felt in English church and society. While a teenager, newspapers and mass-produced literature periodically came his way. As a young Midlands man, he became vividly aware of the outside world through reading about the American revolution and Captain Cook's voyages of discovery in the Pacific. He was most fortunate, during his shoemaking years, to live within reach of some noted Bible expositors. Anglican and Baptist pastors such as Thomas Scott, Andrew Fuller, Robert Hall, Sr., and John Sutcliff provided him with guidance and a sense of church history that helped him with guidance and a sense of church history that helped him break free from the straitjacket of hyper-Calvinism: viz., an exclusive type of Reformed theology that denied that sinners were duty-bound to exercise faith before they could be saved. A neo-Puritan theology much indebted to Jonathan Edwards was thus mediated to Carey without his having to pore over theological tomes. That freed him to focus on language-learning and to pursue his geographical interests during the little spare time he could find at day's end.

Six years (1787–1793) were spent pastoring Particular Baptist churches in Northamptonshire. That was when he became aware of early Protestant missionary work in North America during the previous 150 years. Given the evangelical-Calvinist convictions he had assimilated, he began to argue that *means* should be employed to propagate the gospel throughout the world. By 1792, he finally prevailed on his provincial brethren to consider seriously founding a society to 'preach the Gospel to every creature'. With their support, he wrote an unpretentious booklet that has been popularly called 'the charter of modern mission with its argument, review, survey and programme'.² Entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations [sic] of [p. 297](#) Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, it provided missionary apologetic and made practical suggestions in a forthright manner. His indebtedness to other authors for information was undoubtedly great. Distribution of the eighty-seven page pamphlet was very limited in Carey's day; however, it did contribute significantly to the formation of 'the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen' in October 1792. Humble and hesitant though that first step was, it surely represented a leap of faith on the part of the dozen or so Midland Baptists who first subscribed to the cause. This voluntary society was the prototype of what came to be known as the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) by the end of the century.

UNUSUAL DEVELOPMENTS

² M. H. Khan, 'History of Printing in Bengali Characters up to 1966,' London: School of Oriental and African Studies (microfilm copy of a Ph.D. diss.), 1976, vol. 1, p. 218.

Because times were so hard in Britain during the years after the French Revolution, late 1792 was a rather inauspicious time for ‘launching out into the deep’. Many questions remained to be answered by the infant society, yet Carey forged ahead, declaring: ‘Expect great things. Attempt great things.’³ Little did they think how they would be overtaken by events. John Thomas, the eccentric, footloose, Baptist medic-cum-evangelist who had spent several years in Bengal, strangely appeared on the scene. After some rudimentary screening by the BMS’s first leaders, his offer of service was accepted, as was Carey’s. Thus by June 1793, after many embarrassing crises, Carey and his family, which included five young children, found themselves setting sail for India in a foreign ship that was engaged in clandestine trade for illegal English interests! ‘Providence’ of a very unusual—even ominous?—sort was at work. Five months later, the largely unprepared mission party managed to slip into Bengal. Then six years of high drama began, in which Carey’s wife was tragically driven insane. In order to survive, and to avoid deportation by the East India Company, Carey eventually accepted employment as superintendent of an ill-fated indigo works in the remote interior of Bengal. An ‘interloping’ Dissenter who had recently displayed republican sympathies in Britain was a *persona non grata*. Thus Carey was under enormous pressure to conform. As he did so, the BMS managed to establish itself and make an impact on history. **P. 298**

During the first decade in Bengal, Carey discovered a surprising range of private enterprise and intellectual activity at work within the expatriate community. Precedents were to be found for almost every activity that his Serampore-based mission would engage in. For the most part, the Serampore Trio harnessed and adapted others’ ideas, inventions, and procedures for use in an integrated missionary enterprise. Pragmatic, ‘Enlightenment’ values operated within the framework of evangelical Calvinism, in the era of Britain’s industrial and agricultural revolutions, to introduce something quite unusual into the stream of missionary history. Mission perspectives thus broadened; but the aim was unchanged: to convert India’s people and those who were part of the European occupation.

How different Carey’s missionary career would have been had Marshman and Ward not arrived in the tiny Danish ‘colony’ or entrepot of Serampore at the end of 1799! Their arrival upset all his mission plans, virtually forcing him to move to the coast, dangerously close to the British-controlled metropolis of Calcutta. However, he was soon to value his new colleagues highly. They rescued him from becoming a solitary missionary here contesting with heathen natives after the manner of David Brainerd. They provided the sort of skills needed for the creation of a team that could free him from most mission management and outreach responsibilities.

Here too we must add how much *shalom* was brought to his life by petite Charlotte Rumohr. Six months after his first wife died (1807) in a state of derangement in Serampore, he married this linguistically gifted, Danish lady-of-means whom he had baptized in the Danish enclave in 1802. With her, he enjoyed thirteen years of joy, until she passed away in 1821. Another gracious helpmeet came along two years later in the person of a British widow. Mrs. Grace Hughes had been part of colonial Bengal for many years; she was to survive him. With all their help over three decades, he was able to devote his energies to a sedentary, though extremely demanding, ministry of Bible translation and college tutoring in secluded surroundings. It was a very unusual arrangement for one who was apparently a ‘mission pioneer’, but it reflected the extraordinary and unique

³ A. Christopher Smith, ‘The Spirit and Letter of Carey’s Catalytic Watchword’, *Baptist Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (January 1990): 226–37.

situation that the Serampore Mission managed to take advantage of between 1800 and 1837.

This sheds light on an apparently innocuous comment that Carey made in 1810 in a letter he wrote to Andrew Fuller, the secretary of the BMS in Britain whom he trusted so highly. In it he confessed: 'In point of zeal he [Marshman] is Luther; I am Erasmus'. This pointed subtly to the *modus operandi* of the Serampore triumvirate. It corroborates other evidence picturing Carey as a pious, irenic, hard-working, low-key p. 299 leader who maintained a rather retiring, literary lifestyle, thanks to the complementary labours of two stalwart co-directors, and a large team of pandits. Unlike Marshman, who was an aggressive evangelical, every ready to contend 'up front' for the mission, Carey was a more meditative person who preferred to 'sit on the fence' in times of strife. Perhaps that facilitated his surprising appointment by the British Governor-General in 1801 to the post of tutor in Bengali—and later to the professorship in Bengali, Sanskrit, and Marathi—in what would now be called the 'Civil Service' establishment of Calcutta's Fort William College. The *Enquiry* had never envisaged such a development. Such 'subimperial' employment made all the difference to his career as a linguist and translator and dramatically affected his mission's prioritizing.⁴ It meant that he functioned as a metropolitan official who never travelled beyond the twelve-mile stretch between Serampore and Calcutta after 1799. For more than thirty years, one of his major tasks was to earn huge amounts of money (many hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling, in today's values) and to secure printing contracts from the government for the Serampore Mission Press. By such means, the Trio sought to make themselves and the evangelization of northern India financially independent of the BMS. At the same time, they made themselves so useful to Bengal's British rulers that they secured a significant measure of immunity from official opposition.

A REALISTIC VIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

William Ward, Joshua Marshman, and Hannah Marshman each made a massive contribution to the Serampore Mission, severally running the large printing and publishing press, counselling Christian workers, managing the finances and public relations, developing mission strategy, running a boarding school and many day schools, as well as directing and caring for a large household including many orphans, missionary widows, and servants. Thanks to them, their wives and their protégés, Carey was able to concentrate on work in his study, being spared the rigours of furlough in Britain when serious disputes with the BMS had to be tackled. In fact, he never left Bengal. He went P. 300 there 'for life', and it was from that distant position that he emerged in the public mind as a mission catalyst. He was much more a mission motivator and Bible translator than a pioneer in the heart of India—or a mission strategist. Thus it was the number of *languages* into which he carried out or superintended (rudimentary) translations of 'the Holy Scriptures', rather than the small number of Hindus that he led to Christ, that impressed pre-Victorian and Victorian minds and made him a household name in evangelical circles. Direct evangelistic outreach generally fell into the hands of junior missionaries and

⁴ On the creeping capitalist 'subimperialism' that occurred in Bengal from 1765, under the aegis of the British East India Company, see P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740–1828*, vol. II.2 of *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 70–136. Bengal became 'a largely autonomous British-Indian state that was rather loosely connected with imperial Britain and pursued its own purposes of "safety" and consolidation' until the early 1830s.

people who were rather inaccurately termed ‘native’ brethren by 1805. Much heart-searching was to follow.

In financial, literary, educational, and technological terms, there can be no doubt that Carey and his colleagues made their mark in Asia at the beginning of Protestantism’s ‘modern missionary movement’. Many in the Anglo-Saxon world sought to emulate them, and their accomplishments were chronicled religiously by scores of biographers. However, more than a century was to pass before perceptive scholars of Baptist history, such as Ernest A. Payne and Daniel E. Potts, stepped forward to further the task of accurate historical inquiry. Many secular historians did likewise. As a result, the field has been wide open since the 1960s for a new investigation into Carey and his partners’ lives, times, and work. Thus we turn now to identify some aspects of his missiological legacy, hoping that interest in the legacies of Marshman and Ward will be revived in the process.

Many questions need to be answered on theological, ideological, cross-cultural, strategic, literary, and leadership aspects of the Serampore Baptists’ grand enterprise. For example, one might ask whether it is valid to view Carey’s *Enquiry* as a paradigm for his and his colleagues’ missionary career. Here the evidence suggests in notable ways that it is very difficult to respond in the affirmative. So often, the triumvirate made decisions at variance with the tentative guidelines set forth in the pamphlet, which was written before Carey ever left the English Midlands. During his lifetime, much more was probably made of his original catalytic watchword—‘Expect great things. Attempt great things’—which was later embellished by British Baptists.

It can be argued that the six-word dictum provides criteria that are more appropriate for evaluating the course and outcome of his life and mission. This motto was coined in keeping with postmillennial expectations that God would do great things throughout the world during their lifetime, and in certain respects the BMS men were not disappointed. Carey and his colleagues certainly attempted great things in God’s name and were thrilled to see the formation of so many [p. 301](#) missionary societies around the turn of the century. But great accomplishments, in Western terms, depended on herculean efforts being made, most often at the expense of almost overwhelming personal cost. Carey’s plentiful correspondence bears ample testimony to that. Providence had a way of earthing inclinations to a ‘theology of grandeur’ in lifelong experience of a *theologia crucis*. As a result, Carey had no time for glib enthusiasm. He was too aware of personal and corporate failure—not to mention serious limitations—in many areas of his mission’s operation and witness to entertain eulogies or attempts to set him up on a pedestal. A call for biblical realism therefore needs to be taken very seriously by future researchers into the actual scope of his team’s achievements, particularly in the cross-cultural sphere.

A TALE OF TWO MODELS

There is no need to minimize what Carey and his cohorts achieved in the areas of philology, Bible translation, Orientalism, literacy, education, publishing, technology, relief work, social reform, botany, evangelization, and mission promotion. Our concern is simply to identify the actual parameters and essential achievements of their capital-intensive, pre-Victorian missionary enterprise. Thus we turn to consider the two models from which they may be said to have operated: the ‘primitive’ and the ‘professional’.

In the 1790s, Carey began as a lonely pioneer, with little of this world’s goods, living to some extent like a ‘faith missionary’ of late Victorian times. He related to the pastoral BMS leaders back in Britain in a cordial, informal, and fairly intimate manner. All that changed as the BMS slowly institutionalized, as his position improved in the Governor-General’s prestigious college, after he married for the second time, and particularly after

the death of Andrew Fuller in 1815. This ‘change’ was symbolized, first, by the creation of Serampore College on a grand scale emulating Brown College, Rhode Island, and Fort William College; and second, by the Trio’s subsequent dispute with the BMS leadership under John Dyer over property rights and control of the mission estate at Serampore. In the second instance, Carey’s team believed they could appeal to (what I have called) the ‘primitivist’ model of relations that they had enjoyed for twenty years while Fuller headed British support. Their fundamental operational, and supposedly financial, ‘independence’ of British direction had been taken for granted then. Such a model was an effective way of building up relationships in Britain and North America. For sincere theological reasons, key supporters such as Christopher Anderson (of Edinburgh, Scotland) advocated the Serampore cause by promoting a heroic image of embattled veterans ‘at the cutting edge’ of mission.⁵ However, none of those supporters ever managed to visit Bengal; thus they do not appear to have fully realized that Carey’s enterprise had become more centralized than ever before. Was it becoming more of a burdensome ‘monument’ than a lively movement? Few, if any British Baptist leaders were clearly aware that Carey’s team operated according to one model at their colonial base and yet appealed by means of another for practical expressions of solidarity from their mother-country. It was as if they functioned in two different worlds. No doubt that helps to explain why Marshman had such a turbulent furlough in England between 1825 and the rupture with the BMS in 1827.

During Carey’s last twenty years, tensions increased rather than decreased in the Serampore Mission. Its identity as a Dissenting operation was rather ambiguous at times, and great problems were experienced in trying to accommodate a second generation of mission personnel. Institutionalization of the mission and maintenance of a large establishment resulted in the leaders increasingly losing touch with grassroots Indian life—notwithstanding their huge investment of time in linguistics and translation. Thus they became *sahibs* rather than *sadhus*. Even though they tried to put on a brave face in public, it caused them great sorrow that the real number of converts and homegrown churches resulting from decades of their (and their associates’) ministry was so low, by many standards. That is why they admitted in an important report in 1817: ‘relative to the work of conversion in India, perhaps all our expectations have been far wide of the mark’.⁶ Perhaps they would have had far more indigenous ‘disciples’, perhaps Baptist life in India would have been much more vibrant, perhaps the Serampore Mission would not have collapsed once the last of the veterans died (Marshman in 1837), if the resolute troika had focused on incarnating the gospel directly in the midst of India’s rural society rather than investing so heavily in professional, metropolitan means.

TRADITION IN THE BALANCE

It is a commonplace that Carey ‘did more than any other man to awaken the conscience of Protestant Christians to the spiritual need of millions worldwide who had never heard of

⁵ Cf. A. C. Smith, ‘The Edinburgh Connection: Between the Serampore Mission and Western Missiology’, *Missiology* 18, no. 2 (1990): 185–209. Also see the obituary on Carey by the BMS, in *Periodical Accounts* 9 (1835): 12.

⁶ On such confessions, see Smith, ‘The Spirit and Letter of Carey’s Catalytic Watchword’, pp. 233, 236f.

Jesus Christ'.⁷ But such a generalization may be far too sweeping. At least it needs to be examined carefully and restated with a sense of historical discrimination. To do this, we need to discover 'the historical Carey' beyond the periphery of the Victorian era.

We will consider him as a Victorian and post-Victorian rallying point for Protestant mission shortly. Here, we would return to basics, noting that heroic imagery could be applied to him properly between 1793 and 1799. That imagery remained in the popular mind during the next ten to fifteen years, especially during moments of high enthusiasm in Britain over the dramatic exploits of the Three. Certainly, he had enormous potential for endurance, and for submission to the inscrutable ways of Providence. He rose up the social scale in remarkable fashion in Bengal in harness with Marshman and Ward, and with the help of scores of employed assistants, he was able to perform wonders, until 1818. Then the building of Serampore College took over, and Ward tragically succumbed to cholera. After that, it was hard going to keep the mission afloat. Strife with the BMS on various fronts sapped away at precious energy and stymied or retarded missiological progress. Then the East India Company got into serious financial difficulties. Thus his old age was a time of tears and strenuous labour to protect his mission enterprise from collapsing.

Some commentators have declared that Carey was 'a forerunner whose missionary vision displayed a breadth and boldness which frequently embarrassed his contemporaries and immediate successors'.⁸ Perhaps that was so. Certainly, at times he appeared in the estimation of British evangelicals to be quite radical, holistic, and ingenious in his efforts to advance 'the Redeemer's cause' in southern Asia. To be sure, he played a major role in diffusing Christian principles throughout the subcontinent, and in encouraging Anglo-Saxon Christians of many denominations to co-operate voluntarily for the sake of propagating the gospel overseas. But let us not hastily dismiss all the penetrating observations made of the Serampore project by the young British Baptist missionaries who parted company from Carey and his [p. 304](#) colleagues. Of course, much can be said on both sides, but those observers did have a unique opportunity to grasp how the Serampore mission actually functioned. Their published critiques therefore must be considered as firsthand testimony that has important implications for study of the Trio's legacy.

To obtain the sort of light that will disperse some of the murky mist surrounding Serampore mission history, we would be well advised to tackle questions such as the following: How did India respond to the Western, Christian overtures made to it by Carey and his cohort? Could she distinguish them clearly from the framework and values of British rule? Were India's people pleased to accept 'benefits' from the occupiers' 'civilization' only so long as they could avoid making way for 'the Kingdom of God'? In Carey's day, did Protestant Christianity truly become accepted by true Indians, or was it mostly 'Asiatics' (the *mestizo* offspring of European men and Indian women) who heard the Baptists gladly and then formed churches? It is also worth asking whether the Serampore mission was subverted by the very forces of Western 'modernity' and subimperialism that did so much to change the face of India. Such inquiry, of course, must

⁷ Cf. Brian Stanley, 'Winning the World', in [anon.] *Heritage of Freedom*, Tring, England: Lion Publishing, 1984, pp. 78, 83. See Carey's letter 'to the Society' from the Bay of Bengal, dated October 17, 1793, in *Periodical Accounts*, 1 (1793): 63-64.

⁸ E.g., Stanley, 'Winning, the World', p. 81.

be carried out in further studies.⁹ Because of that, we will now draw to a close by focusing on Carey's missiological significance.

LEGACY AND LEGEND

From 1826 onwards, Carey and his Serampore colleagues receded into the background of British Baptist approval. For a decade or more, official mission promotion referred very little to the lead they had set after 1800, except when funds were needed to be raised for Bible translation and publishing. Publications and statements from the Trio's pens—from the 1792 *Enquiry* to the significant, 1827 Edinburgh edition of *Thoughts on Propagating Christianity More Effectually among the Heathen*—were allowed to fall by the wayside or were consigned to oblivion.¹⁰ By the 1830s, Serampore College, the crown of their mission, began to look as if it were 'a white elephant'. Thus we [p. 305](#) search in vain for evidence that Carey and his partners had much of an explicitly *missiological* impact on North Atlantic mission leaders—except perhaps among Baptists—during the last two or three quarters of the nineteenth century. Their legacy was of a different kind.

The Baptist Trio in Bengal, and Carey in particular, were transitional figures in 'modern missionary history'. They paved the way for conservative Dissenters to launch forth into an era of pragmatic, evangelical mission outreach. They represented the meeting of American and British Protestant concerns for evangelizing 'the heathen' at a time when missions were promoted only by a very small, zealous minority in the churches. Their cross-cultural evangelistic efforts probably had more in common with Puritan missions in North America than with mainstream Victorian evangelization in Asia. Their methods of Bible translation became a matter of considerable debate in their own day and needed to be overhauled. To be sure, they anticipated some Victorian and post-Victorian missio-theological reflection, but as evangelically reformed Baptists they were far more Calvinistic than were successive missionary generations. Their task was to make the most of the tense time during which Britain's role in the East Indies evolved from being purely commercial to being fully imperial.

Space does not allow us to reflect further on why Carey and his friends produced such a very small amount of missiological literature, by twentieth-century standards. Their hands were tied by so many other responsibilities. Their concern was simply to provide basic tools for communicating the gospel. They were filled with gratitude that the Lord spared their lives to do as much as they did for so long in Bengal, where the life expectancy of Europeans was extremely short. Carey, therefore, would not have stirred from his eternal rest if he had heard his dear friend Christopher Anderson declare in a special memorial sermon in Edinburgh in 1834 that his 'labours, however great', were 'chiefly preparatory or prospective'.¹¹

Surprisingly, extremely little has been done to investigate the extent [p. 306](#) (and nature) of whatever indigenous church growth did actually occur in Carey's mission

⁹ Such questions are explored in my forthcoming volume entitled *The Mission Enterprise of Carey and His Colleagues*, to be published by Mercer University Press, Macon, Ga.

¹⁰ Cf. Ernest A. Payne, 'Carey's "Enquiry"', *International Review of Mission* 31:122 (1942): 185–86; and Smith, 'Edinburgh Connection': 185, 190–93, 199–200. The 1827 work was written by Joshua Marshman, although Carey was privy to its contents before its first printing in 1825.

¹¹ Christopher Anderson, 'A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Carey, D.D. of Serampore, Bengal', Edinburgh, 1834, p. 20 (delivered on November 30, 1834). Anderson called Carey 'the Father of the Mission' at Serampore. When Carey thought that he himself was dying in 1823, he asked that [Psalm 51:1–2](#) should be taken as the text for his funeral sermon.

domain throughout the nineteenth century. Yet there have been many during the last hundred years or more who have held him high as a universal figure or missionary archetype. Symbols abound for him, as patriarch, apostle, prophet, or pioneer of modern Protestant missions, although some judge it wisest to see him as a convenient figure head—who could not possibly have represented every aspect of the movement. All this calls for differentiation between ‘the Carey of tradition’ and ‘the historical Carey’. It leads us to identify some of the diverse streams that either converged in his life or came together in the pilgrimage of the Trio.

In Carey we have a person accessible both to the humble poor and the self-made middle-classes of the Anglo-Saxon world. He is a figure who embodied the ideals, values, and aspirations of British evangelicals during the pre-Victorian phase of their country’s imperial history; a nonconformist and a Dissenter who became a valued member of Britain’s political establishment in Bengal. He is a self-educated young tradesman who rose to become a linguist and Orientalist—even a professor in a prestigious college; a penniless cottager who founded a grand scholarly institution of his own. He is a shoemaker who married an aristocratic lady; a rustic worker who used bare hands and improvised tools in an English backwater, who became a works foreman in the wilds of Bengal, only to end up at the cutting edge of European technology. He is a passionate village evangelist who spent precious years translating Hinduism’s scriptures into English. Both a specialist and a generalist, he was an individualist and a trusty team-player, who operated in creative tension between the poles of what are now labelled pragmatism and dogmatism, liberalism and conservatism, ecumenism and evangelicalism, imperialism and independency. He is revered as a world-oriented ‘man of vision’, albeit from the European ‘Enlightenment’. He was a catalyst extraordinary who operated during an unrepeatabe and critical *kairos* in world history.

This was the man who has featured in popular tradition as a marvellous, if not mythical, ideal, a supposedly familiar figure in mission history, about whom much has remained hidden for far too long. He has become legendary for arousing brave and purposeful notions of ‘good old days’ in the pre-Victorian era. Yet that has happened *in spite of* the certainty that he would deplore such usage of his name and memory. Thus he would be fully justified if he chose to address us by means of the words of counsel that he and his brethren gave to two young missionaries in 1807. Serampore sent them to Burma on a pioneer, reconnaissance mission, with this sound advice: [p. 307](#)

On every subject of research weigh well as you see, all you hear; take up nothing hastily. We are not so sanguine as to hope for satisfactory answers to all these questions ... [in] a month or two. Get whatever real information you can ... Satisfactory information on these points will much help ... the cause to be begun there.¹²

BIBLIOGRAPHY

An extensive collection of Carey’s letters writings, and publications is now housed in the consolidated Baptist Archives in the Angus Library, Regent’s Park College, Oxford. The

¹² These ‘Instructions to the Missionaries Going to Rangoon’ were presented to Mardon and Chater in the form of a letter, dated January 13, 1807, signed by the Trio and three new missionary recruits. The quotation is from the last of twenty points drawn up by William Ward. The MS is to be found in the BMS Archives, Oxford (box IN21), and in the BMS Archives microfilm reel no. 35. [The BMS is to be thanked for granting the present writer permission to quote from items in its archives.] For salutary hints on the dangers of myth-making (applicable to missionary biography), see Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), especially pp. 117–20.

Baptist Missionary Society Archives for 1792–1914 are otherwise available in microfilm form, published by the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tennessee 37234, USA.

Major Writings by Carey

(excluding small pamphlets, addresses, reports, and financial appeals)

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 1792 | <i>An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens, in which the religious state of the different nations of the world, the success of former undertakings, and the practicability of further undertakings, are considered.</i> Leicester, England. Further editions: 1818, 1892, 1934, 1961. |
| 1801 | <i>Dialogues Intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of the Bengalee Language.</i> Serampore (three editions in seventeen years; published in Bengali). Otherwise known as his <i>Colloquies</i> . |
| 1800s | <i>Itihasmala</i> (in Bengali), or <i>Garland of Stories</i> . Calcutta. A lively, earthy picture of the manners and notions of Bengali people. |
| 1824 | <i>Dictionary of the Bengali Language</i> [87,000 words]. Calcutta. |
| 1828 | <i>Letters from the Rev. Dr. Carey</i> (edited Joshua Marshman), London. Three editions. |

p. 308

For a listing of the Bible translations and Scripture portions (into many Indian languages) that he carried out or superintended, see Samuel Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, 8th ed., London, 1934, p. 426. For the three dictionaries and six grammars he wrote for various Indian languages: *ibid.*, p. 214.

Selected Works about William Carey

More than thirty biographies were written on Carey between 1836 and 1990, mostly in English, but also in Bengali, Danish, Dutch, German, Swedish—and perhaps other languages. An excellent essay was written on some of the better works in English by Ernest A. Payne some thirty years ago: ‘Carey and His Biographers’, *Baptist Quarterly* 19 (1961): 4–12; see also his ‘A Postscript’, *Baptist Quarterly* 21 (1966): 328–31; cf. 19 (1962): 156.

Only the most noteworthy accounts and interpretations of his life are mentioned below; penetrating studies that make mention of him in his immediate contexts will be identified elsewhere.

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- 1859 Marshman, John Clark. *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward, Embracing the History of the Serampore Mission*. 2 vols. London.
- 1885 Smith, George. *The Life of William Carey—Shoemaker and Missionary*. London.
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- 1967 Potts, E. Daniel, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793–1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- 1978 Drewery, Mary, *William Carey: Shoemaker and Missionary*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Dissertations dealing with Carey are not provided here because they are out-of-date and have been superseded by the works cited above.

Dr. Christopher Smith, works in the Religious Programme of the Pew Charitable Trusts. Until recently he was research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, New College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland. [p. 309](#)

Carey's 'Enquiry'

Ernest A. Payne

Printed with permission from International Review of Missions (1942)

Carey published his booklet *'Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens'* one year before he left for India. The author of this article outlines its content and likely source material. He argues that the message of the *Enquiry* is valid for today's apologetic for missions

Editor

I

In the spring of 1792 there appeared an unpretentious booklet of eighty-seven small octavo pages. It was printed in Leicester, and was offered for sale there by various booksellers, and in three shops in London and one in Sheffield. There are reasons for thinking that it had no very large sale, and it rarely, if ever, finds notice in literary histories; yet it has been reprinted at least three times in the last century and a half, and there will be many references to it in the next few years. For Carey's *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the conversion of the Heathens* is a real landmark in Christian history. The modern era of the missionary expansion of the Church dates from 1792, and this pamphlet: sets out the plea of one of those chiefly responsible for the new movement.

Shortly after its publication, Carey preached his famous sermon with its two heads, 'Except great things.... Attempt great things', and less than five months later the Baptist Missionary Society was formed followed in quick succession by the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, the Religious Tract Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society—to name but a few of the organizations formed as channels for the rising spirit of evangelical enterprise. Those years were notable in general history for the French Revolutionary Terror and the emergence of Napoleon. The literary historian recalls the work of the Lake Poets and their circle, and that of Burns and Blake. Those interested in the emancipation of the human spirit think of the writings of Tom Paine, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. These were Carey's contemporaries, and he seems at first sight 'a poor journeyman shoemaker' in comparison. He had few literary graces. He shunned p. 310 the limelight. He belonged to one of the Dissenting bodies. Nor was his a picturesque personality in the sense in which such a description is usually applied. Yet when he died forty years later, a revolution in the position and outlook of the Christian Church had taken place, and he had himself taken an outstanding part in it. Recognition of Carey's greatness has grown with the years, and we stand now amazed not only at his unparalleled series of translations, but also at the farsightedness of his missionary planning. Not a little of the secret of what had been achieved may be found in the pages of the *Enquiry*.

II

The contemporary records and traditions give us few detailed hints of the circumstances in which it was written. It was begun while Carey was pastor of the little Baptist church in Moulton, a youthful pastor who supplemented his very slender stipend by keeping a school, and who surely needed so to do, for he had a wife and small family to support. He had set about his task reluctantly, conscious of his limitations; but concern for the cause of Christ in the far corners of the earth made him brave, particularly when he realized that even the more sympathetic of his ministerial neighbours would require a good deal of convincing that it was possible or right for them to do anything themselves about the condition of those overseas, save perhaps pray for them. It is thought that the final decision to write on this issue, which he had already raised—with no very encouraging

result—in the Ministers’ Fraternal of the Northampton Baptist Association as early as September 1785, came on a visit to Birmingham three years later. Carey was by then twenty-seven, and was trying to collect funds for the enlarging of the Moulton chapel. In Birmingham he met Thomas Potts, a business man only a few years his senior, who had been in the American colonies, and who had there had contact with both Red Indians and Negroes. Potts promised Carey ten pounds for the printing of a pamphlet setting out his concern.

In the early summer of 1789 Carey moved to the church at Harvey Lane, Leicester, and it was no doubt there, amid increasing calls and responsibilities, but also with access to more books, that he slowly shaped his material. It was ready, in part at least, by May 1791, for that month his formal induction services to the Leicester pastorate took place—services held, as was customary in those days, a year or so after a man’s first regular preaching to a people—and at the close of the day Carey read to a little group of friends what he had written. About twenty ministers had been present during the day, and we may assume p. 311 that it was those who had had to ride a distance who remained for the night and who heard the first draft of the *Enquiry*. There can be little doubt that Carey’s closest friends were there—Ryland of Northampton, Fuller of Kettering, and Sutcliff of Olney—and that they gave him the benefit of their criticism. Pearce of Birmingham, had been preaching the evening sermon at Carey’s induction, and it was at his request that Carey’s manuscript was read; probably Thomas Potts had asked him to enquire as to its progress.

During the following months Carey revised and perhaps expanded what he had written. Some time during the winter of 1791–2 it was taken to a certain Ann Ireland, printer and bookseller in Leicester, and the next spring it made its modest appearance.

III

He who reads the *Enquiry* to-day is struck, first of all, by its sober matter-of-factness and its modernity. More than a fourth of the pages is taken up with schedules detailing the different countries of the world, their length and breadth, the number of their inhabitants and the religions there represented. Throughout there is the clearest division into sections, and the regular numbering of the points made. It is brief, logical, precise, more like a Blue Book or a committee’s report than a prophetic call to the Church of Christ. No appeal to eloquence or sentiment is here, no elaborate building up of proof-texts from Scripture, no involved theological argument, but a careful setting down of facts. The very title is significant of the man.

After a brief introduction urging that those who use the Lord’s Prayer ought to inform themselves as to the religious state of the world, the book is divided into five sections. The first is ‘an enquiry whether the commission given by our Lord to his disciples be not still binding on us’. Was the command to teach all nations intended only for the Apostles? If not, then only the impossibility of fulfilling it would exempt us from doing our part. But that it is not impossible is shown by what has been done by Jesuits and Moravians, and also by English traders. Nor does it exempt us that there are still many in this land ‘as ignorant as the Southsea savages’. Section II consists of ‘a short Review of former Undertakings for the Conversion of the Heathen’, beginning with Pentecost and giving in a dozen pages an outline of the progress recorded in *Acts*, then a few references to the expansion of the Church in the early centuries and in the Middle Ages, and on to the sporadic seventeenth and eighteenth century efforts among the Indians of America and those in India and the East Indies. The ‘survey of the p. 312 present State of the World’, which forms Section III, has been referred to already. After the statistical tables, into

which long hours of work and much searching must have gone, there come a few candid general remarks. It would appear, says Carey, that of the 730,000,000 of the world's inhabitants, 420,000,000 are still 'in pagan darkness' and a further 130,000,000 are 'the followers of Mahomet'. In the enumeration of the Christians, 'Catholics' or 'Papists' are clearly distinguished from Protestants and from those of the Greek and Armenian Churches; they total in all but 174,000,000. The most barbarous of peoples 'appear to be as capable of knowledge as we are'. Where there is a higher civilization, there is often equal ignorance of the gospel, and 'it is a melancholy fact that the vices of Europeans have been communicated wherever they themselves have been'. Muslims clearly need special attention. Even among those who bear the Christian name, particularly those of the Eastern and Roman Churches, there is much ignorance and even vice. 'Nor do the bulk of the Church of England much exceed them, either in knowledge or holiness; and many errors and much looseness of conduct are to be found amongst dissenters of all denominations'. Section IV urges 'the practicability of something being done, more than what is done, for the Conversion of the Heathen', replying specifically to objections that these heathen peoples live too far away and are too uncivilized and barbarous in their ways of life; that missionaries could go only at the risk of their lives and might be unable to obtain the necessaries of life (there is a fine passage here on the Christian minister as the servant of God); that language difficulties would be insuperable. These are all shown to be excuses, not valid objections. Finally, Section V indicates the immediate practical steps which might be taken: first, fervent and united prayer, then the energetic use of the new opportunities provided by the opening up of the world to trade and the organization of a society with a committee charged to make a beginning at the sending out of missionaries. Carey appeals to Christians of all denominations, but drives home his challenge pointedly to his own friends:

In the present divided state of christendom, it would be more likely for good to be done by each denomination engaging separately in the work, than if they were to embark on it conjointly.

The expenses would easily be met by the regular tithing of their incomes by Christian people, even though many of the subscriptions could be but a penny a week. Indeed, this would also provide much needed money for the evangelization of the villages of England. 'We have only to keep the end in view, and have our hearts thoroughly [p. 313](#) engaged in the pursuit of it, and means will not be very difficult'. 'Surely', he concludes, 'it is worth while to lay ourselves out with all our might, in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ.'

IV

Even a brief outline shows how the *Enquiry* deals with questions of missionary apologetic and strategy still surprisingly relevant. Dr George Smith, writing in 1885, called it 'the first and still the greatest missionary treatise in the English language'. It has not yet been surpassed.

Where did Carey get the materials for it? Primarily, of course, from his own thinking and praying about its central theme, and from a close study of the Bible. He was also helped by the reading of Captain Cook's *Voyages* and the latest geographical handbooks of which he could get a sight, and by a careful noting (as Mr Deaville Walker showed) of

the *Northampton Mercury*.¹ Jonathan Edwards' *Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer* had had deep influence on the Northamptonshire Baptist churches from 1784 onwards, and Carey bears testimony to the quickened spiritual life which was showing itself as a result of the special monthly prayer meetings, but he expresses in parenthesis his doubt about Edwards' interpretation of prophecy. Some book on church history must have been to his hand, or else a general encyclopaedia. A few sentences from the earliest work of his friend Andrew Fuller may have started him on what became the heart of his pamphlet. 'Let the present religious state of the world be considered', wrote Fuller in his notes about prayer for revival at the end of *The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith* (1784). But neither separately nor together do these suggested sources explain the simple strength, sincerity and cogency of the pamphlet, qualities which make it readable and effective after one hundred and fifty years, whereas the works of Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller now require much effort, as do also those of the contemporary pamphleteers, Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. These all seem much more remote from us than does Carey.

One or two further points are worth noting. The argument in Section I is, according to an autobiographical letter sent by Carey twenty years [p. 314](#) later to Fuller, a setting out of his considered reply to the ministers who snubbed him when he raised the issue at the Fraternal in 1785. There is a friendly allusion in Section II to the work for the Caribs and Negroes of 'the late Mr Wesley' (who passed away while the *Enquiry* was being completed)—a reference the more welcome because not all Dissenters regarded the great man with favour. Among the things for which Carey gives thanks as resulting from the special monthly prayer meetings it is somewhat surprising to find this: 'Some controversies which have long perplexed and divided the church are more clearly stated than ever.' This refers, no doubt, to the discussions among Baptists about Calvinism. Do we give thanks to-day as theological issues become plainer? A remark of Gustav Aulén, the Swedish thinker, would have met with Carey's approval:

Theological controversy is not always an unmixed evil. Time and again a pointed formula to which some controversy has given birth has served as a protective covering to save some positive insight into truth from being lost and forgotten.

V

What sort of circulation did the *Enquiry* secure? The cost of publication was covered, largely at any rate, by Thomas Potts' provision. It was offered for sale at one shilling and sixpence. At the meeting on October 2nd, 1792, at which the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, Carey promised all the profits to the new enterprise, but I have not been able so far to trace any record of sums received. Indeed, a resolution in the first B.M.S. Minute Book suggests that the business side of things did not go too well. At a Leicester committee on March 20th, 1793, just as Carey was setting out for India, it is recorded:

As Mr Carey printed his late publication with a view to subserve the Mission and publicly proposed that the profits should be appropriated to it, and as many of them are yet unsold, Resolved that the Society shall take that publication upon themselves, and that Mr Sutcliff, of Olney, be appointed to transact the business of it.

When John Thomas, the eccentric doctor who became Carey's companion in India, visited the churches on behalf of the new mission, he took copies with him, and so no

¹ Carey notes that many people had given up using West Indian sugar. Cowper's 'Pity for Poor Africans' was in the *Mercury* for August 9th, 1788.

doubt did Fuller, the first B.M.S. Secretary. But how many people read it? The striking sentences on the Christian minister, alluded to above, were quoted by the Anglican, Melville Horne, in the *Letters on Missions* which he issued in 1794, as p. 315 well as by Christopher Anderson in his fine memorial sermon for Carey in 1843. Otherwise, references to the *Enquiry*, save in biographies of Carey, are hard to find.

Perhaps the truth is that its prose style was not sufficiently polished or elaborate for those whose lives spanned the gulf between the English Augustans and the Victorians, nor had it sufficient of the conventional popular theology and piety about its phrases. Confirmation of this view is to be found in the fact that when Isaac Mann wrote to John Ryland in 1817 suggesting a new edition, the worthy doctor replied: 'I very much question whether it would be expedient to reprint Dr Carey's Pamphlet NOW, or whether it would add at all to his reputation to do so'. Ryland was overruled, it is true, but the 1818 edition of the *Enquiry* is a very diminutive paper-covered publication with the statistical information set in connected form in smaller type, and with three short appended notes, one on Carey's early days, one on the translations that were being made at Serampore and one on the number of adherents of the chief religions of mankind. Interest in the *Enquiry* was revived in 1892 at the time of the B.M.S. centenary; and in 1934, for the hundredth anniversary of Carey's death, a facsimile was produced by the Carey Press by the photographic process.

It is not, however, as a literary curiosity that it deserves attention, nor simply as a document underlying the modern missionary movement. It still has a message. Its arguments are needed for a twentieth-century apologetic. Its shrewd common sense still indicates the kind of recruits needed for work abroad. Its exhortation to missionaries 'to encourage any appearance of gifts amongst the people of their charge' is not yet universally heeded. Its very detachment, under-statement and absence of verbiage give it effectiveness to-day, even though its facts and figures need replacing by those in the *Interpretative Statistical Survey* and Latourette's *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, and it needs supplementing by certain other lines of approach, and most notably by an emphasis on the nature and function of the world-wide Church, such as is given by Wilson Cash in his recent James Long Lectures. But the ordinary Christian has no time or capacity for large-scale works. He wants the gist of the matter presented in terse and unadorned fashion, and here Carey remains supreme. It will indeed be a pity if many are not led by the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its appearance to study the *Enquiry* and to face its challenge.

The late Dr. Payne was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. p. 316

The Enquiry

William Carey 1792

(Excerpt)

SECTION 1

*An Enquiry whether the Commission given by our Lord to his
Disciples be not still binding on us.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to *Go, and teach all nations*; or, as another evangelist expresses it, *Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*. This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country of the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception, or limitation. They accordingly went forth in obedience to the command, and the power of God evidently wrought with them. Many attempts of the same kind have been made since their day, which have been attended with various success; but the work has not been taken up, or prosecuted of late years (except by a few individuals) with that zeal and perseverance with which the primitive Christians went about it. It seems as if many thought the commission was sufficiently put in execution by what the apostles and others have done; that we have enough to do to attend to the salvation of our own countrymen; and that, if God intends the salvation of the heathen, he will some way or other bring them to the gospel, or the gospel to them. It is thus that multitudes sit at ease, and give themselves no concern about the far greater part of their fellow-sinners, who, to this day, are lost in ignorance and idolatry. There seems also to be an opinion existing in the minds of some, that because the apostles were extraordinary officers and have no proper successors, and because many things which were right for them to do would be utterly unwarrantable for us, therefore it may not be immediately binding on us to execute the commission, though it was so upon them. To the consideration of such persons I would offer the following observations.

First, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be restricted to the apostles, or those under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, then that of baptizing should be so too; and every denomination of Christians, except the Quakers, do wrong in baptizing with water at all.

Secondly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be confined to the apostles, then all such ordinary ministers who have endeavoured to carry the gospel to the heathen, have acted without a warrant, and run before they were sent. Yea, and though God has [p. 317](#) promised the most glorious things to the heathen world by sending his gospel to them, yet whoever goes first, or indeed at all, with that message, unless he have a new and special commission from heaven, must go without any authority for so doing.

Thirdly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations extend only to the apostles, then, doubtless, the promise of the divine presence in this work must be so limited; but this is worded in such a manner as expressly precludes such an idea. *Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.*

That there are cases in which even a divine command may cease to be binding is admitted—As for instance, if it be *repealed* as the ceremonial commandments of the Jewish law; or if there be *no subjects* in the world for the commanded act to be exercised upon, as in the law of septennial release, which might be dispensed with when there should be no poor in the land to have their debts forgiven (Deut. xv. 4.) or if, in any particular instance, we can produce a *counter-revelation*, of equal authority with the original command, as when Paul and Silas were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Bythinia. (Acts xvi. 6, 7) or if, in any case, there be a *natural impossibility* of putting it in execution. It was not the duty of Paul to preach Christ to the inhabitants of Otaheite¹ because no such place was then discovered, nor had he any means of coming at them. But none of these things can be alleged by us in behalf of the neglect of the commission given by Christ. We cannot say that it is repealed, like the commands of the ceremonial law; nor

¹ i.e. Tahiti.

can we plead that there are no objects for the command to be exercised upon. Alas! the far greater part of the world, as we shall see presently, is still covered with heathen darkness! Nor can we produce a counter-revelation, concerning any particular nation, like that to Paul and Silas, concerning Bythinia; and, if we could, it would not warrant our sitting still and neglecting all the other parts of the world; for Paul and Silas, when forbidden to preach to those heathens, went elsewhere, and preached to others. Neither can we allege a natural impossibility in the case. It has been said that we ought not to force our way, but to wait for the openings, and leadings of Providence; but it might with equal propriety be answered in this case, neither ought we to neglect embracing those openings in providence which daily present themselves to us. What openings of providence do we wait for? We can neither expect to be transported into the heathen world without ordinary means, nor to be endowed [p. 318](#) with the gift of tongues, & c, when we arrive there. These would not be providential interpositions, but miraculous ones. Where a command exists nothing can be necessary to render it binding but a removal of those obstacles which render obedience impossible, and these are removed already. Natural impossibility can never be pleaded so long as facts exist to prove the contrary. Have not the popish missionaries surmounted all those difficulties which we have generally thought to be insuperable? Have not the missionaries of the *Unitas Fratrum*, or Moravian Brethren, encountered the scorching heat of Abyssinia, and the frozen climes of Greenland, and Labrador, their difficult languages, and savage manners? Or have not English traders, for the sake of gain, surmounted all those things which have generally been counted insurmountable obstacles in the way of preaching the gospel? Witness the trade to Persia, the East-Indies, China, and Greenland, yea even the accursed Slave-Trade on the coasts of Africa. Men can insinuate themselves into the favour of the most barbarous clans, and uncultivated tribes, for the sake of gain; and how different soever the circumstances of trading and preaching are, yet this will prove the possibility of ministers being introduced there; and if this is but thought a sufficient reason to make the experiment, my point is gained.

It has been said that some learned divines have proved from Scripture that the time is not yet come that the heathen should be converted; and that first the *witnesses must be slain*, and many other prophecies fulfilled. But admitting this to be the case (which I much doubt)² yet if any objection is made from this against preaching to them immediately, it must be founded on one of these things; either that the secret purpose of God is the rule of our duty, and then it must be as bad to pray for them, as to preach to them; or else that none shall be converted in the heathen world till the universal down-pouring of the Spirit in the last days. But this objection comes too late; for the success of the gospel has been very considerable in many places already.

It has been objected that there are multitudes in our own nation, and within our immediate spheres of action, who are as ignorant as the South-Sea savages, and that therefore we have work enough at home, without going into other countries. That there are thousands in our own land as far from God as possible, I readily grant, and that this ought to excite us to ten-fold diligence in our work, and in attempts to spread divine knowledge amongst them is a certain fact; but that it [p. 319](#) ought to supersede all attempts to spread the gospel in foreign parts seems to want proof. Our own countrymen have the means of grace, and may attend on the word preached if they choose it. They have the means of knowing the truth, and faithful ministers are placed in almost every part of the land, whose spheres of action might be much extended if their congregations were but more hearty and active in the cause; but with them the case is widely different,

² See Edwards on Prayer, on this subject, lately re-printed by Mr. Sutcliffe.

who have no Bible, no written language, (which many of them have not), no ministers, no good civil government, nor any of those advantages which we have. Pity, therefore, Humanity, and much more Christianity, call loudly for every possible exertion to introduce the gospel amongst them. [p. 320](#)

Reflections on the Enculturation/Social Justice Issue in Contemporary Mission

Frederick S. Downs

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In this thought-provoking article, the author reflects on the issue of enculturation and/or social justice in the context of Carey and missions today. He argues that Carey sided with Paul against James on this issue. He compares Carey's attack on caste with the protests of the Dalit Movement in India today.

Editor

One of the oldest missiological issues for Christians is the relationship between faith and culture. It was implicit in the James/Paul controversy of the apostolic period. From the perspective of this paper the issue can be described in the terms of varying responses to the question: is there a normative Christian culture? James argued that there was: Palestinian Jewish culture. Therefore it was necessary for anyone desiring to become a Christian first to become a Jew. Paul argued that there was no normative Christian culture. Christianity was a culturally pluralistic faith. At the time Paul's argument prevailed. In the history of Christianity, however, the voice of James has continued to be heard, and there have always been those, perhaps the majority, who have acted on the assumption that there is, in fact, a normative Christian culture into which converts must be initiated.

CAREY ON THE SIDE OF PAUL?

To give an example, among those involved in missionary work in nineteenth-century India there was a heated debate on the subject. One side argued the case of James, the other the position of Paul; and as usual there were the Peters trying to establish a compromise position! In effect the Jameses argued that in order for the people of India to become Christians they must first embrace western culture. [P. 321](#) They had some persuasive arguments; the Jameses always do. The main stumbling block for Indian people who might otherwise wish to become Christian was the traditional culture, particularly the caste system. Caste and traditional Indian culture were so closely related, it was argued, that the only way Christian missions could succeed was by doing everything possible to destroy that culture. The best way to do this, they believed, was through the introduction of English education—or, at least, western education in the vernacular medium. When exposed to the obviously superior western culture, traditional Indian culture would crumble. In the pre-Darwinian days they placed great emphasis upon

western science as an important ally in proving the superiority of western-Christian culture. One of the interesting things about the arguments used by the Jameses was that among those elements in western culture described as superior to Indian culture were the writings of pre-Christian Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle! It was not until the twentieth century that this perception began to change in light of the increasing secularization of western society, two world wars and the replacement of Christian values with materialistic ones. Western materialism is, in fact, a far greater obstacle to the world mission of the Church than other religious traditions have ever been.

Fortunately, there were always missionaries who took the side of Paul. Among them were a number of Baptists. William Carey, the most influential of all Baptist missionaries, strongly opposed those who worked on the assumption that evangelization could take place only after traditional Indian culture had been destroyed. He argued that that culture should be baptized rather than destroyed. He believed that evangelism would suffer if people were taken out of their cultural context and made aliens in their own land. Their culture should be Christianized, not destroyed; and certainly not replaced by the Enlightenment-inspired forms of western culture being promoted by influential persons within the British Indian establishment. One of the most radical expressions of this conviction was Carey's refusal to adopt a practice then common among missionaries, that of renaming converts with so-called 'Christian' names. Sometimes the new names given were Biblical ones, but often they were simply western names like Smith or Brown or Farwell (all names given to early converts in North East India). Carey refused to do this, even when the converts' names included the name of a Hindu deity. The first convert of the Serampore mission was named Krishna Pal. He retained his name after baptism at Carey's insistence despite the criticism of other missionaries. Similarly the Serampore Christians were encouraged to retain [p. 322](#) their traditional dress, including religiously significant apparel such as saffron robes and the sacred thread which identified higher caste Hindus.

At least those of the ecumenical missionary tradition ('main line' is an awkward expression, especially in the contemporary drug culture!) have now come down firmly on the side of Paul, and Carey. They recognize that there is no single Christian culture, and that the Christian faith has been and must be incarnated in many different cultures. When this enculturation does not take place the church is not likely to be vital or to make a significant contribution to the life of the society of which it is a part.

There is a problem, however. Its extreme form, what might be described as ultra-Paulinism, has tended to see culture as sacred. Instead of one normative culture being sacralized, all cultures, particularly the Third World cultures, are made sacrosanct. Christianity must be poured into the traditional cultural molds, in no way altering or challenging them. Needless to say this undermines a prophetic role. In fact there are always elements in any culture, including those out of which the missionaries themselves have come, which apparently are not reconcilable with the gospel. But is it possible to affirm a culture while denying important aspects of it? There are two dimensions of the cultural contexts within which missionaries in the Third World work that have been called into question. One is the religious. How does one perceive the relationship between Christianity and other faith systems? One could write a very long paper on that subject alone. Some have seen the relationship as one of substitution: the new faith for the old. Others have viewed it as a matter of fulfilling the best in the old through the new, a dialogical enrichment.

THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

But I would like to concentrate on the second problematic dimension: the social. From the time of their arrival on the scene missionaries have called into question certain social practices of the indigenous culture on the grounds that they were irreconcilable with the gospel. I am not simply talking about puritanical missionaries insisting that women should be dressed in accordance with western concepts of decency. Even that question is not as simple as it seems, as we will see below. What I have in mind are practices like those which William Carey, the great advocate of enculturation, sought to have abolished in India: the burning of widows alive on the funeral pyres of their husbands (*sati*), the killing of female infants, or caste untouchability. **P. 323**

While very few people, including the ultra-Paulinists, would want to say that Christians should not have attempted to have such social practices abolished, an important question remains. Are cultures wholes that will be destroyed if any important element within them is removed? Is enculturation irreconcilable with social reform, let alone radical social transformation? This is particularly a problem for persons of the ecumenical tradition. Ironically, those who have been most insistent on affirming value in Third World cultures are also those with the strongest commitment to social justice. In any event, there is no way that the problem of social change can be avoided. It cannot be avoided by announcing, as some do, that we will simply concern ourselves with preaching the 'pure' gospel, and not confuse matters by referring to social issues. Historically, certainly in India, when the gospel has been preached, social change takes place whether or not the preachers intended it to happen.

Let me illustrate this in relation to the question of women's dress that I introduced above. In southwestern India, Anglican and English Congregational missionaries began working among a people called the Nadars. The Nadar women did not wear any clothing above their waists. Shocked, the missionaries devised a simple blouse for converts. They were surprised at how quickly the idea caught on and how even Hindu Nadar women began wearing the blouses. They were also pleased when large numbers of Nadars began to become Christian. But bewilderment followed when they found themselves in the midst of a full-fledged crisis. Nadar women were being attacked in the streets and the upper garments forcefully removed. The Nadar men counterattacked and riots followed.

About this time the missionaries finally realized what was really happening. It had nothing to do with female modesty. The Nadars had always had their own standards of decency, they were simply not the same as those of the missionaries. What in fact was going on was a social revolution. In that part of India the higher castes prohibited lower caste women from wearing upper garments. Only those of high social status could do so. Thus when the missionaries put blouses on the Nadar women it was understood to be a revolutionary affirmation of their human dignity and equality. The gospel was perceived to have liberated them from social degradation, even though that had not been the explicit intention of those who preached it to them.

The largest of the mass movements to take place in India was that among the tribal peoples of Chota Nagpur in the second half of the nineteenth century. The tribals had been exploited by outsiders to such an extent that they were in danger of losing all their land. In that culture **p. 324** the people's identity was closely related to the land much as the identity of Jews is related to the land of Israel. Thus the people were not only becoming impoverished landless labourers, they were also losing their human identity. At this point Christian missionaries, first Lutherans and then Roman Catholics, began to help them. They advised them on their legal rights and led an agitation to preserve and even restore their land. The gospel made the people human once again. The hill tribes of North East India had a similar understanding of what happened as the result of the preaching of the gospel. Some years ago I met one of the first converts from a village in that region. He was

a very old man, illiterate and uneducated, but mentally very alert. Through an interpreter I talked with him about what it had been like in the old days. I then asked him a question: 'What did the coming of Christianity mean to your people?' His answer was simple: 'Before we knew Christ we were animals; now we are humans.'

The point is that irrespective of the consciousness or intention of the person proclaiming it, the gospel has social implications and very often brings about social change. I have presented only an illustrative fragment of the large body of evidence supporting this hypothesis. None of the mass movements to Christianity that have taken place in that country can be understood apart from the dynamics of social change. Yet it is strange that this reality is often completely overlooked or depreciated both among those engaged in missionary work and among Third World Christians themselves. This creates a dangerous situation, because when an important aspect of reality is ignored it tends to exert an uncontrolled influence. When the social implications of the gospel are not recognized, the social tends to become secularized if not paganized.

There is a tendency among Christians in India, for instance, to see their faith as relating almost exclusively to so-called spiritual matters, i.e., the transcendent dimension. Salvation is getting to heaven. The Kingdom of God is understood to mean the heavenly kingdom. It has nothing to do with this earth. And yet these same Christians are aware that there are serious social problems in their churches. The continuance of behaviour based upon caste attitudes brought with them from Hinduism into the church is one of the most serious. Church affairs are disrupted by conflicts among groups with different caste backgrounds, conflicts which are often taken to the secular courts for resolution. Large amounts of money are spent in litigation that could have been used in the exercise of mission, and the unity of the church is broken, seriously compromising its witness in the process. Nearly all Indian Christians will say that such behaviour is inappropriate even [p. 325](#) while they practise it. There is a kind of schizophrenia among the Christians that is gradually sapping the vitality of the church.

The reason for this situation is that Christians do not understand that the gospel relates both to the transcendent and social dimensions of life. Christians in India thus do not understand that the gospel has liberated them from caste and that continuing to practise it is not simply an unfortunate example of human weakness but is a serious denial of the gospel itself. Interestingly enough, members of other faith communities often understand this better than Christians do. When confronted with the claims of Christ they will time and time again cite the social sins of the Christians as their reason for rejecting those claims.

Given this situation a number of Third World Christians are beginning to turn to theologies that emphasize the social dynamics of the gospel. The best known are probably the liberation theologies of Latin America. This is not simply an academic exercise for them, nor is it the result of biblical proof-testing. The very people from among whom the churches of the Third World have drawn most of their members during the past one hundred and fifty years are now being approached by advocates of other ideologies. The most potent of these claimants for their allegiance and commitment are the Marxists. This is because the Marxists speak forcefully and relevantly about the social injustices of which these people are the victims. It is not difficult to point out that the Marxists are as one-sided in their approach as the pious Christians. In their emphasis upon the social they completely ignore the potency of the transcendent. They also ignore the significant contributions the Christian mission has made to social liberation. While that is true, for an increasingly large number of people the ideology which promises liberation from the social hell in which they now live will be preferable to one which prioritizes deliverance from an anticipated transcendent hell.

FROM CAREY TO DALIT THEOLOGY

In India today many people familiar with theological developments believe that in the near future the most potent ideological force will be that of something called Dalit Theology. Dalit is the name that is being used for India's most oppressed social groups, what used to be called the outcastes or untouchables. Previous efforts to create a genuinely Indian Christian theology have tended to ignore the fact that some 80% of the Christians of that country come from a Dalit background. Theologies that have attempted to build upon the philosophical Hindu **P. 326** culture of the Brahmins and higher castes have not found acceptance among the ordinary Christians. The people seem to prefer a conservative western theology to that. The Brahmins represent their oppressors. There are several explanations that may be given for the Brahmin-culture approach to theologizing in India. First, is the fact that it was mainly Brahmin converts who were doing it. Though their numbers are very small, their influence is disproportionate because they have often been the best educated, a class of people used to the reflective process. Another reason for using the Brahmin cultural categories is perhaps an unconscious attempt to make Christian theologians more respectable among the Indian intelligentsia.

The Dalit theology will not be an Indian version of Latin American Liberation theology which utilizes a Marxist analytical framework. Many of those involved in the Dalit movement believe that Marxism has betrayed the Dalits by becoming the ideology of the middle class, of the landed castes rather than of the landless Dalits, the poorest of the poor in India. At present there is a strong Dalit movement developing in India without any commitment to an existing religious or ideological option. There is real concern among Christians involved in this movement that a theology must be developed that provides a basis for Christian participation, but does not do so by separating Christian Dalits from those related to other religious communities. There is considerable anxiety on this score in part because Christians lost a similar opportunity some fifty years ago. At that time there was a strong movement of Dalits (then called the Depressed Classes) under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkhar. Dr. Ambedkhar became convinced that there was no future for his people under Hinduism because the caste system was so inextricably connected with it. He began looking for options. Christianity was among them. In the end he rejected that option because as Christians the Dalits would become divided—divided along denominational and caste lines. The unity which provided the people with their political strength would be lost. In due course Ambedkhar led his people into Buddhism.

Serious questions can be asked about whether movements to Christianity of such a coldly calculated sort would be legitimate, but that is not the point I am making here. The point is that Christians must bring to their exercise of mission an understanding of salvation in Christ that is relevant to the contexts in which the people live to whom they proclaim it. The context of those who are doing the proclaiming is irrelevant. For large portions of the world, the largest part, the context is conflict and injustice. Unless the church proclaims a liberating word in this situation people will listen to other voices. **p. 327**

But it is not simply a matter of missiological strategy. One thing that the new movements in the Third World have made quite clear is that affluent Christians have unconsciously tended to read out of the gospels the radical social critique that is found there. Hence we can learn from Third World Christians, now the majority of Christians, that we must not only be relevant to context, but true to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The Great Commission points us to the world, not out of it.

ENCULTURATION OR SOCIAL CHANGE

This brings us back to the questions with which we began. Is there not a fundamental difference between those who begin with the concept of incarnation and emphasize enculturation as essential to the relevance of the gospel, and those who begin with the concept of liberation and emphasize a prophetic critique of culture to the extent that culture provides the ideology for oppressive social systems? There certainly is tension between advocates of these two points of view in India. The former wish to retain for Christianity the values of the spiritual riches that have been developed in India from ancient times; the latter see any attempt to promote such enculturation as irrelevant at best, and downright dangerous at worse. The coincidence of the demonology of fundamentalists and radicals is interesting. For the former, non-western faith and culture systems are snares of Satan; for the latter they are the opiate used by the ruling classes to perpetuate oppressive systems.

Do we have to make a choice between enculturation and commitment to social justice? Some think that we do and perhaps they are right. But people like Carey didn't think so. They believed that Christianizing a culture did not mean leaving it as it had been. Certain elements in the Indian culture of his day were not compatible with the gospel in Carey's view. One of them was caste exclusiveness. Thus while converts could keep caste names and dress, they could not practice caste exclusiveness in their relations with each other. He insisted that all should eat together on social occasions as well as at Holy Communion (something not done in some churches in India at that time), and he encouraged inter-caste marriage. Thus, in the communion service following the baptism of a Brahmin named Krishna Prasad, he took the cup after Krishna Pal had drunk from it (single communion cups were used by Baptists then, a very powerful symbol in India where inter-caste dining was and even today is thought by the orthodox to be polluting) from the hands of Krishna Pal who came [p. 328](#) from a lower caste background. Later on Prasad married the daughter of Pal.

It is not always easy to know where to draw the line, however. Is monogamy a Christian or simply a western cultural norm? What should be done if a person with several spouses wishes to become a Christian? If one takes the view, as many missionaries have and do, that polygamy is incompatible with Christianity what happens to the wives of a convert? If he must choose one wife and put aside the others, what will happen to them in their cultural context? In some cultures rejected wives become either slaves or prostitutes, neither option compatible with Christian values as most of us understand them.

It is not always easy for us to know where the values of our culture end and the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ begin. But it is necessary to make the effort. If you alienate people from their culture you destroy their identity and very often their sense of self-worth. This will never lead to the establishment of a strong, witnessing church. At the same time the church will become the victim of its culture (this can be well documented in this country) if it is unprepared to see the gospel as in one sense a liberator from cultural bondage. What is self-affirming and therefore humanizing in a culture and what is oppressive? How is it possible to affirm the one and root out the other? What, for that matter, *is* culture? Is it a fixed entity, a whole that will be brought down if any part of it is denied? Is it static or dynamic?

Part of the reason why there seems to be conflict between the enculturators and the liberators is a static understanding of culture that both seem to hold. Culture is defined by the past, by its roots in time and in certain conceptual horizons. Hence the one hesitates to change anything and the other rejects everything as oppressive. In fact culture is a living reality, constantly changing. Its horizons are fluid and not static. Culture like a living organism can be declared clinically dead when change no longer takes place in it. Perhaps

the important question is not whether or not change, even radical change, can take place without destroying a culture and consequently dehumanizing those who had it as their own. Perhaps the important question is how the change takes place. If it is forced on a people from outside, intentionally or unintentionally, it is likely to be destructive of human values. However, if it takes place from inside, as something embraced and promoted by the people themselves as both necessary and desirable, it is likely to strengthen, not weaken, a culture. This is the role that Christianity has played in its best moments. It brings God as revealed in Jesus Christ within a culture, helping people to see a new liberating, changing possibility for them.

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Baptists and the Transformation of Culture: A Case Study from the Career of William Carey

John D. W. Watts

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The interaction between cultures which is involved in the very acts of mission may be presumed to affect the cultures of both the sending and the receiving countries. It certainly has an effect on the missionary and the missionary family. The extent to which missionaries consciously involve themselves in the support and development of the culture in which the mission work is done, of course, varies. Many missionaries have held themselves apart from the cultures in which they worked, sometimes taking on the attitude of the occupying powers, where the work is done in a colony. Sometimes missionaries have used their preaching to teach the inferiority of 'heathen' cultures while magnifying their own home culture as synonymous with 'Christian' values. But a few, like William Carey and his colleagues at Serampore, West Bengal, involved themselves in the revival of a native culture and left a lasting contribution to the culture they served in addition to the churches they founded.

The monuments and testimonies to the contribution that Carey made to Bengali culture and education are impressive even today. This article grows out of my brief stay of three years as professor in the theology department of Serampore College, 1972-75. The cordial welcome and hospitality accorded me and my family at Serampore have left a lasting impression. An even deeper impression was left by the experience of walking on the ground of the college campus and surrounding areas, hallowed as the place where the Serampore trio, Carey, Ward and Marshman, laboured so productively. This article represents another enduring impression from those years, supported by many conversations with Indian people, Christian and Hindu alike, who spoke in reverent tones of what Carey had done for India and for Bengal particularly.

What Carey meant to the course of Christian missions is recorded elsewhere. This article will try to point to the remarkable way that Carey and his colleagues related to Bengali culture. [p. 330](#)

CAREY'S GIFTS AND ATTITUDES

Though we write of Carey, what is described applies to all three of the Serampore pioneers and to those who followed them, like John Marshman and John Mack. Unfortunately they were not typical of all the missionaries of that time, even those sent from the Baptist Missionary Society. The difference in attitude toward their task and toward their cultures both at home and in India led to severe disagreements concerning missionary methods and even to complete division. Serampore stood, and stands, as a monument to a view of missions and to the relation of faith to culture that is unique.

Carey and his co-workers were multi-faceted persons. John Marshman writes of Carey: His 'herculean labours he was enabled, even in the climate of Bengal to accomplish without any strain to his constitution by that methodical distribution of his time to which he rigidly adhered through life, and that cheerfulness which was the spring of exertion. His relaxation consisted simply in turning from one occupation to another'.¹

Carey was not only a preacher and Christian apologist. He was also a cobbler, a linguist, a scientist, anthropologist, and orientalist, specializing in ancient Indian literature and religion. He was concerned for and interested in practical matters such as agriculture.

The achievements of these missionaries included translations of portions of the Bible into 22 Indian languages. Marshman learned Chinese and published a rudimentary translation into Chinese. They set out to translate sacred Hindu literature into Bengali from the Sanscrit, making it accessible to ordinary people. They published dictionaries, and Carey served for a time as the official government translator of important laws and decrees.

Carey's interest in science was related to his love of plants. In 1823 he was elected a fellow of the prestigious Linnaean Society as well as a member of the Geological Society and the Horticultural Society of London. We do well to remember that this predated Darwin's era. This science was still Newtonian in form and method. But Carey saw no conflict between his science and his faith. He regarded Western science as one of the gifts that he could help to bring to India. Marshman was a teacher of chemistry in the college.

Beyond their specific occupations, the Serampore missionaries brought certain values and attitudes which set them apart. Their [p. 331](#) concern for the status and dignity of women not only allowed the women missionaries a wide range of activities, but led to the establishment of schools for girls and to forthright efforts to have laws against the immolation of widows (*sati*) enacted. Their broad sympathies led to opening the college to Christians from all denominations as well as to Hindus. The attitude toward other denominations has led to recognition of their being one of the first to lay the foundations of the 20th century ecumenical movement.

In these things the missionaries worked better than they knew. John Marshman wrote of them: 'The influence of Hindooism (sic) has been sapped, not, as the missionaries supposed, by learned argumentation, but by the introduction of higher and nobler

¹ John Clark Marshman, *The Life and Labours of Carey, Marshman & Ward* (New York: U. D. Ward, 1867) p. 321.

sentiments. If they could have foreseen this revolution, they would, doubtless, have accommodated their plans to it'.²

CAREY'S CAREER

Stephen Neill recounts the beginnings of Carey's stay in India: 'The beginnings of Carey's Indian career were inauspicious. He had no permit to reside in India. For five years the only way in which he could escape arrest and find means to maintain his family was to take service as manager of an indigo plantation in the interior of Bengal. Here little missionary work was possible; but Carey was able to lay the foundations for his *spendid knowledge of the Bengali language*'.³ In 1800 Carey was joined by two other missionaries: Joshua Marshman, a teacher, and William Ward, a printer. They decided to place their mission in the Danish commercial enclave of Serampore where they would be safe from the strictures of the British East Indian Company under the protection of the Danish flag.

Neill continues the story: 'Carey and his colleagues had clear ideas as to the lines which missionary endeavour should follow. The first step must be the translation, printing and dissemination of the Scripture in all the main languages of the East. Carey himself performed the astonishing feat of translating the entire Bible into Bengali, Sanscrit and Marathi. In a little over thirty years parts of the Scriptures had been printed in no less than thirty-seven languages, including Chinese'. Neill goes on to note that the translations were 'rough and in need of p. 332 revision ... Nevertheless, the achievement stands unequalled in the whole history of Christian missionary work'.⁴

Neill then goes on to note that the second line of missionary work conducted by the Serampore trio was preaching. And that 'if this was to be effective, the preacher must be armed with good knowledge of the manners and customs of his hearers. To this end the missionaries devoted themselves to a careful study of Hinduism, *and to the translation of some of the Hindu classics*'.⁵

Thus, the missionaries were involved in a two-way traffic of ideas and understanding between their own Western education, cultures, and concepts and those of their host country. Marshman and Carey brought instruction in science and scientific methods to their teaching in Serampore and Calcutta.

Carey was a founding member of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Bengal which continues to flourish to this day. He is commemorated by a bust near the entrance to the Botanical Gardens. He planted a botanical garden in Serampore which was considered to be one of the finest in the East. A few trees from that garden can still be seen on the Serampore campus. Marshman introduced the teaching of chemistry to the curriculum of the college. Neither he nor Carey found any basic problem in combining the study of science and the Christian faith.

Carey as a Teacher of Bengali Language and Literature

'In 1801 ... Carey was appointed Professor of Bengali and Sanscrit in the College newly formed at Fort William for the training of European employees of the East India Company.

² Ibid. p. 284.

³ Stephen Neill, *The Story of the Christian Church in India and Pakistan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) p. 74. Italics are mine.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 74–75.

⁵ Ibid., p. 75. Italics are mine.

Carey held the appointment for thirty years, and the results accruing from this can hardly be overestimated'.⁶ This appointment enabled Carey to come into contact with prominent persons of that time, including educated Indians from many provinces. These contacts brought many benefits for Carey who was largely a self-taught man in other respects.

Carey's teaching appointment led to his writing a Bengali grammar and a work in Bengali called the 'Colloquies'. In collaboration with p. 333 Ram Basu and other teachers, (he) wrote books in Bengali prose to be used as textbooks in his classes. He also started work on his *Bengali Dictionary*, published in 1815, a work which has been of the greatest service to subsequent makers of dictionaries.

'Carey and Marshman together translated and edited a large part of the great Indian epic, the *Ramayana*. Marshman, moreover, not content with working in a number of Indian languages, turned his attention to Chinese, and for many years devoted much of his spare time to this task. He published an introduction, and in 1822, a complete translation of the Bible (in Chinese)'.⁷ Carey and Marshman were at work on a great polyglot dictionary of the Sanscrit family of languages when a fire destroyed the printing press in 1812 along with this manuscript and portions of the translation of *Ramayana*.

The first book published in Serampore in 1801 was the complete New Testament in Bengali. 'This was the first book of any size ever printed in Bengali prose, and the first complete printed copy of the New Testament in any Indian tongue'.⁸ The importance of this printing in Bengali, along with the subsequent teaching and printing in that language, cannot be appreciated without the knowledge that the Bengali language and the culture it represented were despised and denigrated in India by the Brahmin elite who considered Hindi the only proper language for the educated people to use and of course Sanscrit the only language for religion.

Carey's writing and printing of Bibles and other books in Bengali, as well as his dedicated teaching of this language in the Fort William College, gave the language and the culture a standing both in the eyes of the British and in the eyes of the Bengalis themselves which they had never had from their Hindi overlords.

In a letter to Dr. Ryland of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1799, Carey wrote: 'I am forming a dictionary—Sanskrit, Bengali and English—in which I mean to include all the words in common use. It is considerably advanced; and should my life be spared, I would also try to collate the Sanscrit with the Hebrew roots ...'. In December of 1811, Dr. Ryland was sent the news: 'I am now printing a Dictionary of the Bengali which will be pretty large, for I have got to page 256 and am not near through the first letter'. But by 1815 the first edition was published. A second edition followed in 1818. The second volume was finally available in 1825. The polyglot dictionary was never published, p. 334 as noted above. But Dr. Kalidas Nag writes: 'The publication of this Bengali Dictionary stands even today as a *magnum opus*'.⁹

Carey contributed to the development of a Bengali prose style. Sajani K. Das wrote, in 1942, explaining, the great progress in Bengali prose that took place between 1800 and 1812: 'If we understand this fully, we must remember the scientific directions of Professor Carey and the combined efforts of his "Punditmunshis" (of the Fort William College)'.

⁶ Mrs. E. L. Wenger, 'The Serampore Mission and Its Founders', *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Edited by Wilma S. Stewart. Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, rev. ed. 1961) p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹ Kalidas Nag, 'Carey's Contribution to Bengali Literature', in *The Story of Serampore & Its College*, edited by Wilma S. Stewart (Serampore West Bengal: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 94.

'In his *Itihasamala*, Carey gave an anthology of prose tales from the East and the West, starting with Hitopadesa, Panchatanta from Sanscrit, Rupa Sanatan Goswami of the age of Sri Chaitanya (born 1485) and Dhanapat-Khullana and Lahana episodes from middle Bengali collections; as well as Islamic stories of the age of Akbar, his Hindu jester Birbal, and Brahmin Pandits. The translation in Bengali prose were remarkably lucid and logical in syntax'.¹⁰ Nag continues, 'As early as 1802 Carey completed in four volumes the Bengali *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* in five volumes ... William Ward in 1818 produced in English *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos* in 2 volumes 'which even today is read as "a monument of patient thought, observation and inquiry"'.¹¹

Dr. Kalidas Nag concludes his commemoration of Carey: 'Our gratitude to Dr. William Carey is profound. From his colloquies of *Kathopakathan* of the common men and women (first recorded, 1793–1801) to the publication of the vulgates of the Bengali *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (1802), his Bengali Grammars (1801–1805, 1818), his Historical Tales or *Itihasamala* (1812) and above all his Bengali-English Dictionary (1812–23) entitle Rev. Carey to immortality among the workers in the field of Bengali language and literature. The subject will be studied by the Teutonic and Latin races with as much thoroughness as the Soviet State and nations are doing ... I salute him, with thousands of my countrymen, on his Bicentenary (1761–1961)'.¹²

The Periodicals

Wenger's words speak of the periodicals and their impact more eloquently than mine ever could.¹³ 'The growth of education, resulting p. 335 in a widening interest in the world around, led the missionaries to turn their attention to the production of periodicals. At this period even the English journals were under severe censorship, and the prospect of being permitted to publish such material in the vernacular did not appear bright ... Under the leadership of Marshman, the attempt was made. *Dig-darshan* appeared in February, 1818, and contained articles of general interest together with a few brief notes on current affairs. This production, so far from incurring censure, met with active approval from members of the Government, and the missionaries were thus emboldened to proceed further. In May, 1818, the first number of *Samachar Darpan* (Mirror of the News) was issued, being the first newspaper ever published in an Indian vernacular. This weekly newspaper met with great approval in the Hindu community, and high on the list of subscribers is the name of Dwarkanath Tagor' (the famous Bengali poet and Nobel prize winner). In April 1818, also appeared the first number of the *Friend of India*, a monthly magazine in English. This paper continued to be published in various forms until 1875, when it was amalgamated with *The Statesman*, and in that form is still extant today.

'The publication of the periodicals shows how keenly interested the missionaries were in all current social questions, and references must also be made to the vigor with which they prosecuted their protests against the evils of the time, such as suttee (the burning of widows on the funeral piers of their husbands) and infanticide. Great was their joy when by gradual degrees public conscience was aroused on these matters, and laws were enacted prohibiting such practices.'¹⁴ The periodicals documented the great needs for

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 100.

¹³ Wenger, 'The Serampore Mission & Its Founders', pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

reform that they and others saw around them. The very publication of the facts helped to hasten action by the government and by mission efforts.

One of these evils was the Hindu custom of having a man's widow throw herself or be thrown onto the funeral pyre of her husband. The custom is called *suti* (or *suttee* or *sati*). Between January and September, 1920, *Samachar Darpan* reported such incidents sixteen times.¹⁵ In an interesting turn of history, Carey was serving as an official government translator in 1828 when a regulation was passed which declared the act of *suti* illegal and punishable in the criminal courts. He was called upon to translate the intricate legal wording of p. 336 the regulation. He rushed the translation in order that no time be lost in promulgating the regulation lest more deaths should take place.¹⁶

A second example of missionary concern and action related to lepers. It was common practice for lepers to be burned alive. This practice was also reported regularly in *Samachar* and *Friend of India*. It was said that 'Carey never rested till a leper hospital was established in Calcutta'.¹⁷

Serampore College

The idea of involving the missionaries in developing and running schools was a part of their strategy from the beginning. Among other things, it was a means by which they could earn their living. Their earliest work was in schools that taught English, but this was expanded to schools using the Bengali language and came to include schools for girls as well as for boys.

By 1815 the idea of providing schooling for the Indian population was finding support from a more liberal direction of the East India Company despite opposition that pronounced it 'the most absurd and suicidal measure that could be devised'.¹⁸

The Serampore missionaries had previously proposed such measures. They now moved to exploit these new opportunities. 'Dr. Marshman accordingly drew up "Hints relative to Native Schools, together with an outline of an Institution for their Extension and Management"'.¹⁹ It insisted that this must be done in their native language. The curriculum should include 'a knowledge of orthography and of grammatical structure of the Bengalee (sic) language; a vocabulary of three or four thousand words in general use, and a simple treatise on arithmetic. These were to be followed by an outline of the solar system, couched in short axioms in accordance with the mode in which instruction had been conveyed by the Hindoo (sic) sages from the most ancient period; then a compendium of geography, and a popular treatise on natural philosophy. This was to be followed by a historical and chronological treatise; and, lastly, by a compendium p. 337 of the doctrines, ethics, and morality of Christianity'.²⁰ These schools prospered and multiplied both for boys and for girls.

These developments led naturally to the idea of an institution which could prepare native preachers for evangelism and the churches, as well as schoolmasters for the

¹⁵ S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey, D. D. Fellow Linnaean Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923) p. 336.

¹⁶ Marshman, *The Life & Labours of Carey, Marshman & Ward*, pp. 354–55.

¹⁷ S. P. Carey, *William Carey, DD ...*, p. 335.

¹⁸ Marshman, *The Life & Labours of Carey*, p. 263.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

schools. In 1918 they issued a prospectus for a 'College for the Instruction of Asiatic Christian and other youth in Eastern Literature and European Science'. Marshman envisaged the school as 'the handmaiden of evangelism'. The prospectus 'stated that those who were to be employed in propagating the gospel in India should obtain a thorough knowledge of the doctrines then held sacred in the country, and that this could not be gained without a knowledge of the Sanscrit language in which they were enshrined ... In pursuance of these views, it was proposed to give the students a thorough knowledge of Sanscrit, the sacred language of Hindooism (sic), and of Arabic, the canonical language of Mohammedanism. The students were, moreover, to be well grounded in European science and knowledge'.²¹ At an advanced stage students were to study English and gain access to all the knowledge available in English books. The college should include a normal school for teachers, but be preeminently a divinity school.

Significantly, despite these narrow goals, the course of instruction was to be open to native youths from all parts of India *without distinction in caste or creed*. The missionaries soon learned that Indian youths were much more interested in that period in learning English than in learning Sanscrit, so they adapted their courses accordingly. But the openness to all, whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu was maintained. Living and eating facilities were available in the College for Christians, but arrangements for Muslims and Hindus to live and eat according to their own custom was arranged. Eleven Brahmin students enrolled in the first session.²² The college proposed to introduce its students to the best knowledge of the East and the best knowledge from the West. It was to be an open, free, liberal arts course at its best. This has continued through many changes to the present day. Now the college uses Bengali as its basic language for the arts course, but English for theology because students are enrolled from all over India, not just from Bengal.

The ambitious plans called for the erection of buildings on a campus [p. 338](#) fronting the Hooghly River in Serampore. With help from many people including the Danish king the project was carried out. The buildings still stand and are used in higher education.

The Danish king also granted the college a royal charter giving it the right to grant degrees. This charter continues to be used to legitimate the granting of B. D. and Ph.D. degrees in theology through a system of theological colleges. The college and its system of theological education is the most obvious monument to the vision and achievements of the Serampore trio that is extant today.

Higher education in many forms has spread across India. Serampore has made its peculiar contribution to make that accessible to all Indians. But its most lasting contribution has been to set a standard of higher education for the training of Christian ministers in the seminaries of all denominations across India.

Serampore symbolized so much of the missionary philosophy. It provided higher education in English or in the vernacular. It provided access to their own Indian scriptures, to the best of Western education including science, and to the Christian Scriptures. It was catholic, open to all Christian denominations, and was all Indian, open to persons of all castes and from all parts of India. Its first examinations were held publicly with some thirty Brahmins present to witness the event.²³

²¹ Ibid., p. 282.

²² S. P. Carey, *William Carey, DD* p. 330.

²³ Ibid., Carey, p. 333.

OPEN CHURCH AND OPEN SOCIETY

In contrast to the hierarchies of Hinduism, everything the missionaries established was open to the lower castes and the 'outcastes', to women as well as men. This was true of the gospel, the churches, the schools, and the college. It applied to the basic rights for life and wellbeing, even for widows, for lepers, and for children. In the openness to all Christians one may note the first stirrings of ecumenism which would flourish in India and in the world a century later.²⁴

INDIGENIZATION

In a Commemoration Address given on February 2nd, 1974, in St. Olave's Church in Serampore, Reverend C. V. John refers to principles which Carey laid down for the Mission. 'Two principles regulated the conception, the foundation and the whole course of the mission which P. 339 Carey began. He had been led to these by the very genius of Christianity itself, by the example and teaching of Christ and of Paul, and by the experience of the Moravian Brethren. He laid them down in his pamphlet called 'The Enquiry'. His daily life during forty years in India confirmed him in his adherence to these two principles. They are that (1) a missionary must be a companion and equal of the people to whom he is sent. (2) a mission must as soon as possible become indigenous, self-supporting, self-propagating'. The Reverend John remembers the principles well. Carey lived out both of them and thereby achieved the possibility for influencing culture to the extent that he did.²⁵

Nag writes: 'Within 20 years of Rev. Carey's death, his devoted labor for 40 years (1793-1834) was developing the field of Bengali literature which, in the next century, produced so many important works, essays and plays, stories and novels, as to rouse the sister languages of India from their slumber. Hindi drama was directly influenced by Bengali dramatists; and many essayists, novelists and playwrights of Maharashtra, Gujerat and even the Dravidian South translated and adapted freely from Bengali originals'.²⁶

Professor Susil Kumar wrote: 'To Carey belongs the credit of having raised the (Bengali) language from its debased condition as an unsettled dialect to the character of a regular and permanent form of speech, capable, as in the past, of becoming the refined and comprehensive vehicle of a great literature in the future'.²⁷

SUMMARY

Some of the supporters of the Baptist Missionary Society probably felt Carey and his colleagues spent too much of their time on study and publications in Bengali. But the spiritual and missionary harvest of their labours lay in Bibles that could be read in the vernacular and sermons that could be preached and heard in the language of the people.

What Wycliffe did for the English, Carey did for the people of south Asia. 'Wycliffe had first done this for the English-reading races of all times, translating from the Latin.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 333.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 331.

²⁶ Nag, p. 96.

²⁷ Quoted by Nag, in 'Carey's Contribution to Bengali Literature', pp. 97-98.

Erasmus and Luther followed him. Tyndale first gave England a Bible from the Hebrew and Greek. And p.340 now one of these cobblers was prompted and enabled by the Spirit to give to the South and Eastern Asia the Holy Bible'.²⁸

The Serampore trio left their mark and are recognized in India today for so much more than can be described here. They appreciated the best of Indian culture and they freely offered India the best of their own, including both Science and Christianity. They contributed so much to the 'moral, religious, and intellectual improvement of India'.²⁹

Carey embraced Bengali and Asian culture in the name of Christ and accomplished much more for the Kingdom and for humanity than he could ever know. And generations rise up to call him blessed. 'The influence of Hindoo (sic) has been sapped, not, the missionaries supposed, by learned argumentation, but by the introduction of higher and nobler sentiments. If they could have foreseen this revolution, they would, doubtless, have accommodated their plans to it'.³⁰

One should not assume that these things were accomplished without cost to the missionaries and to the enterprise. The missionary families paid their own heavy price in health and in deaths of children. But they also celebrated their triumphs in children who grew up to work directly in the mission and shared the dreams and ideals of their fathers. Felix Carey and John Marshman may be counted among these.

Disagreements and divisions with missionaries who were appointed to join them, sadly, including Carey's nephew, Eustace Carey, led to Serampore's isolation and to sharp disagreement within the society that marred more than two decades of their lives and left its marks on the mission to this day. Not everyone drawn to mission work shared the broad sympathies and vision of the Serampore trio. Yet, at this point two centuries later, it is that very vision and its application that challenges continuation of mission work everywhere to be its best, to give its best, and to see the best in every culture that it serves.

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²⁸ C. V. John, p. 3.

²⁹ The words were used to describe an enlightened director of the East India Company named Charles Grant by John Marshman, p. 326. But they also summarize the broad result of Carey's enlightened understanding of the place of missionary activity.

³⁰ Marshman, *The Life & Labours of Carey* p. 284.

Mrs. E. L. Wenger, 'The Serampore Mission and Its Founders', *The Story of Serampore and its College*. Edited by Wilma S. Stewart. Serampore, West Bengal: The Council of Serampore College, rev. ed. 1961 (pp. 1–11).

Research at Serampore College or in other missionary files in India or at Regent's College in Oxford, England would undoubtedly turn up much more documentation for this subject.

Dr. Watts taught for several years in the Theological Faculty of Serampore College. p. 342

Aspects of William Carey's Missionary Policy

Waiter B. Davis

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In this carefully researched article the author analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Carey's missionary policy in his relationships with the officials of the British government and the East India Company and with younger missionaries and the home board of the Baptist Missionary Society. Conflicts over the control of work, money and property, and confusion over accountability, have been endemic to the missionary movement since Carey. The cause may be other than theology and spirituality.

Editor

August 17, 1961 was the 200th anniversary of the birth of the famous English missionary, William Carey; and commemorative services were held in many places in Great Britain, India and East Pakistan. The facts of Carey's life are generally well known to British Baptists, but not so well known to American Baptists. The best biographies of Carey are by John Clark Marshman,¹ Pearce Carey² and Deaville Walker.³ A small, popular edition of Carey's life by J. B. Middlebrook, the home secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, was published in 1961.⁴

Carey's greatness as a missionary statesman is unquestioned. Some missionary historians and biographers such as George Smith,⁵ Robert p. 343 Glover,⁶ Miller,⁷

¹ John Clark Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward* (London, 1859).

² Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (George H. Doran, New York).

³ Deaville Walker, *William Carey, Missionary Pioneer and Statesman* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960).

⁴ J. B. Middlebrook, *William Carey* (London: John Murray, 1885), p. 437.

⁵ George Smith, *William Carey* (London: John Murray, 1885), p. 437.

⁶ Robert Glover, *The Progress of World Wide Missions* (revised by Kane), (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 59.

⁷ Basil W. Miller, *William Carey* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1952), p. 5.

Oussoren⁸ and Meyers⁹ accord him the title of 'Father of Modern Missions'. Other writers who are not prepared to acknowledge Carey as the father of modern missions still hold him in the highest honour. Deaville Walker writes about Carey: 'He was not the "Father of Modern Missions." ... When mistaken ideas are swept away, Carey still stands before us a unique figure, and the present writer firmly believes him to have been beyond question the greatest, and certainly the most versatile, missionary ever sent out'.¹⁰ J. B. Middlebrook states, 'He was neither the "Father of Modern Missions" nor their "Pioneer." ... His title to fame, and it is notable, is that he founded the Baptist Missionary Society'.¹¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette writes:

The organization of the Baptist Missionary Society is usually called the inception of the modern Protestant foreign missionary enterprise. In one sense this is not in accord with the facts. As we saw in the preceding volume, more than two centuries before Carey Protestants had had missions among non-Christians, and the eighteenth century had been marked by a rising tide of Protestant efforts in many parts of the world to win pagans to the Christian faith. Yet in another sense Carey marks the beginning of a new era. He seems to have been the first Anglo-Saxon Protestant either in America or in Great Britain to propose that Christians take concrete steps to bring their Gospel to all the human race.... William Carey and the Society which arose in response to his faith were in fact the beginning of an astounding series of Protestant efforts to reach the entire world with the Christian message.¹²

In the light of Carey's acknowledged place in missionary life and work, it is unfortunate that his views on missionary policy are not more widely known. It is not possible within the limits of one article to review systematically Carey's policy on such important subjects as the foreign missionary, converts, and non-Christians and their religions. This article will deal with Carey's policy in two areas: the relationship of the missionary to government, and the relationship of the missionary [p. 344](#) to his colleagues and the missionary society; for it is in these two areas perhaps more than in any other that one sees illustrated both the strength and the weakness of Carey's policy.

1. RELATIONSHIP OF THE MISSIONARY TO GOVERNMENT

Carey's views on the relationship of the missionary to government were two-fold: the missionary must be loyal to government; and in cases where serious trouble arose between the missionary and government, the attitude of the missionary must be one of conciliation, not of defiance. Carey's attitude is best summed up in his own words: 'Whatever be my ideas of the best or worst modes of civil Government, the Bible teaches me to be an obedient and peaceable subject'.¹³

However, it has been said of Carey that, with respect to these views, he was inconsistent. In 1793 when Carey and his colleague Thomas determined to go to India as

⁸ A. H. Oussoren, *William Carey* (Leiden: A. W. Siethoff, 1945), p. 36.

⁹ John B. Myers, *William Carey* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1887), p. 25.

¹⁰ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹¹ Middlebrook, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹² Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. iv (New York: Harpers, 1941), pp. 58f.

¹³ Marshman, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 76.

missionaries, they tried to obtain the East India Company's license required by all persons proceeding to the Company's territories, but failed. They resolved to go without licenses and found an East India Company ship whose captain, knowing their predicament, agreed to take them to India. Just before sailing, the captain ordered them off the ship, as he had received an anonymous letter informing him that he would be reported for having unlicensed passengers on his ship. Nothing daunted, the two missionaries found the captain of a Danish vessel who expressed his willingness to convey them to India.

Here we raise the question, as did some of Carey and Thomas's supporters at the time, of the legality of the action of the missionaries in going to India without licenses. We note the following facts:

1.) Carey knew that a license was necessary. The East India Company Court of Directors was at the time invested with absolute power to exclude or to banish from their territories anyone who contravened their wishes. Knowing this, Carey tried to obtain a license.

2.) In deciding to go without a license, Carey had precedents for this action as there were already hundreds of unlicensed Europeans in India.¹⁴ It seems clear that the letter of the licensing law had never p. 345 been strictly enforced, and the practice was to allow unlicensed persons to settle in India.

3.) As an unlicensed person in India, Carey was not guilty of a high crime as J. C. Marshman supposes him to have been. Marshman states that a law was passed in 1783 enacting that any person, not lawfully licensed, who was found in the East Indies, was guilty of a high crime.¹⁵ An examination of the Statutes at Large for 1783, however, reveals that no such statute was enacted. Furthermore, the words of the statute which Marshman quotes are similar to a statute in the Charter Act of June 11, 1793, namely 33 Geo. III C52, S131, S132:

Be it further enacted, that if any subject or subjects of His Majesty, etc., not being lawfully licensed or authorized, shall at any time or times, etc., directly or indirectly go, sail, or repair to, or be found in the East Indies, or any of the parts foresaid, all and every such person and persons are hereby declared to be guilty of a high crime and misdemeanour: and being convicted thereof, shall be liable to such fine and imprisonment, as the Court in which such person or persons shall be convicted, shall think fit.¹⁶

This statute did not come into force in India until February 1, 1794, that is, after Carey's arrival there. In that same year the East India Company of Directors sent a dispatch dated May 28 in which they stated that unlicensed residents, instead of being summarily deported, could remain, provided some responsible person stood surety for them and that they entered into a covenant to date from February 1, 1794 when the Charter Act came into force.¹⁷ In 1795 Carey entered into a covenant with the Company. This gave him a recognized position and protected him from expulsion.

Carey's first twenty years in India from 1793 to 1813 have been called 'The Dark Period in the history of Christianity in India', because during these years, according to Stock, the historian of the Church Missionary Society, 'All possible discouragement was

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 57.

¹⁶ *Statutes at Large*, xxxix, p. 185.

¹⁷ Charles Hole, *Early History of the Church Missionary Society*, (London, 1896), p. 154.

given by the East India Company to every effort to spread the Gospel'.¹⁸ This statement may be true of the Company's official attitude, but it should be kept in mind that many of the Company's representatives in Bengal were sympathetic towards missionary work, and several of them openly p. 346 encouraged it. The credit for accomplishing this must go to William Carey.

There were only four occasions when the government definitely interfered with the work of Carey's mission, and on each of these occasions it felt it had good grounds for action. In 1799 there was fear that the four new missionaries were political revolutionaries. In 1806 the Vellore Mutiny was at first thought to be the result of missionary work, when some sepoys mutinied and massacred fourteen British officers and 99 soldiers.¹⁹ In 1807 the Baptist Mission Press inadvertently published a tract which was offensive in its references to the Prophet Muhammad.²⁰ In 1812 the government was apprehensive that, unless action was taken against missionaries, princes like the Dowlat Scindia, who had registered a formal protest against missionary work, would cause political trouble.²¹ The restrictions placed upon missionary work in these several instances were severe, and pressure was brought upon Carey to defy government; but he firmly maintained an attitude of conciliation.

The wisdom of this policy bore fruit in Great Britain in 1813 when Parliament reviewed the East Indian Company's policy in India, and considered a resolution, the effect of which would be to give missionaries the right to pursue their calling in Company territories without government interference. There was much bitter opposition by many members of Parliament to this resolution and to other clauses on Christianity in the East India Charter Bill of 1813. When Wilberforce was urging Parliament to pass the resolution, he spoke in glowing terms about Carey and his colleagues at Serampore, and referred to their loyal and conciliatory attitude. There can be no question that this was a major factor in bringing about the passage of the Charter Bill on July 13, 1813, thus making possible a new era for missions in India.

2. RELATIONSHIP OF THE MISSIONARY TO HIS COLLEAGUES AND THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The far-sightedness of Carey, so evident and so rewarding in all of his dealings with government, seems lacking in some of his dealings with his colleagues and the Baptist Missionary Society. When Carey sailed to India in 1793 under the auspices of the Baptist Mission, it was with p. 347 the clear intention of becoming financially independent of the Home Board after a year. In his pamphlet, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, published in 1792, Carey advocated the setting up of a missionary community on the mission field to make the mission self-supporting.

It might be necessary, however, for two, at least, to go together, and in general I should think it best that they should be married men, and to prevent their time from being employed in procuring necessaries, two, or more, other persons, with their wives and families, might also accompany them, who should be wholly employed in providing for

¹⁸ Eugene Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society* (London, 1899), vol. i, p. 55.

¹⁹ John W. Kaye, *Christianity in India* (London, 1859), p. 252.

²⁰ Marshman, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 307.

²¹ *Life of Wilberforce* by his sons, vol. iv, p. 15.

them. In most countries it would be necessary for them to cultivate a small spot of ground just for their support, which would be a resource to them, whenever their supplies failed. Not to mention the advantages they would reap from each others company, it would take off the enormous expense which has always attended undertakings of this kind, the first expense being the whole.²²

Soon after his arrival in Bengal, Carey began to implement this policy of self-support. He accepted the offer of some jungle land in the Sunderbunds rent free for three years, and spent three months clearing and planting it. In March 1794 Carey accepted the lucrative position of superintendent of an indigo factory in North Bengal, and wrote to the Missionary Society in England that he would no longer require their support for his personal needs, but that he wished to remain in the same relation to the Society as if he needed support.

In 1799 four Baptist missionaries and their families arrived in India, but as the East India Company refused them permission to join Carey in North Bengal, he came to Danish Serampore, where they had taken refuge and established a missionary settlement there. Rules for the missionary community were prepared by Carey and adopted by his colleagues. It was agreed that each missionary would take his turn in acting as superintendent of the Mission for a month; the missionaries and their families would dine together at a common table; the missionary community would be supported by the earnings of its members, all income being credited to a common treasury, and each family receiving a small allowance for personal expenses: and on Saturday all would gather at a special session to settle, in the spirit of Christian love, any differences which might have arisen during the week.

In uniting secular occupation with missionary work Carey was not p. 348 inaugurating a new policy. Missionaries connected with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, such as Schwarz, Gericke and Kiernander, had never depended upon their missionary society for their entire financial support, but supplemented the Society's allowance by their own earnings in India. Carey however, did adopt a new principle by which missionaries divested themselves of the right of property in their own earnings and devoted their income exclusively to missionary work through a common fund.

Carey's colleagues, the Marshmans and William Ward, loyally endorsed his policy of making the mission self-supporting. In May 1800 the Marshmans opened boarding schools at Serampore to help mission funds. By the end of two years, profits from these schools had risen to \$200 per month. Ward had set up a printing press with the primary object of printing the Bible and gospel tracts; but he also undertook printing for the government and the general public, and income from work of this nature steadily grew. The finances of the Mission were further strengthened when in May 1801 Carey became teacher of Bengali in the government's College of Fort William, Calcutta at a monthly salary of \$100. Some years later Carey was promoted to a professorship in the college, and his salary was increased to \$200 per month. All of this money was put into the common fund.

Although the Baptist Mission at Serampore had gained financial independence, Carey encouraged the Home Committee of the Baptist Mission to send grants-in-aid. This policy gave the missionaries freedom of action and they were able, without reference to the Society at home, to enlarge the sphere of their work, purchase buildings, erect churches and appoint missionaries raised up in India. From a financial aspect, the communal system of living adopted by the Baptist missionaries at Carey's suggestion was successful; but in the realm of personal relationships the scheme did not have similar success. By July

²² William Carey, *Enquiry* (New facsimile edition, London: Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1961), p. 73.

1801, of the six missionaries who had agreed upon the rules for communal living, there were only three survivors, Carey, Marshman and Ward. These three seem to have been well adapted to each other and lived in close harmony.

The situation changed with the arrival in Serampore of several new missionaries, one in 1803 and four in 1805. Dissatisfaction arose among the new missionaries because they were not permitted an equal share in the management of the mission on the ground of inexperience. Feelings were aroused, and there was much correspondence on the subject between Serampore and the Home Committee. The Committee in England had from the first disagreed with Carey's feeling [p. 349](#) that every missionary was entitled to an equal share in the management of the Mission. In 1807 the missionaries decided that they and their families should live communally only by their own consent, and that the distinct families should constitute a general mission with a committee and a secretary to transact business. This new arrangement did not succeed as the junior missionaries still objected to the control of affairs exercised by their senior colleagues. The dispute was ended, at least openly, when the Home Committee notified all concerned that the management of the Baptist Mission in Bengal was to be vested in Carey, Marshman and Ward for their lifetime.

By insisting in 1805 that experience be the determining factor in deciding who should manage the mission, Carey revealed a change in opinion; in 1800 he had admitted Marshman, Ward and the others to equal partnership in the affairs of the mission, even though they had newly arrived in the country and were totally inexperienced in missionary matters. Carey's later viewpoint failed sufficiently to appreciate that it was unreasonable to expect missionaries and their families to conform to a system of communal living, yet deny them the privilege of an equal share in the management of the community life and work. One of the junior missionaries, Johns, in a series of letters entitled *The Spirit of the Serampore System* points out in Letter Two that the senior missionaries, who had arranged for him to be appointed government surgeon in Serampore, received all his salary and private fees into the common fund, and expected him to take his meals at the common table, but did not admit him to equal partnership in the system.

After the death in 1815 of Andrew Fuller, home secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society from its commencement, a dispute arose between the Serampore missionaries and the Home Committee about the same matter, the management of the Baptist Mission in India. The dispute was carried on for several years and became known as the Serampore controversy. The controversy involved a vital question of missionary policy: whether or not missionaries, in managing the affairs of the mission in India, were to be subordinate to the wishes of the Committee in England.

Carey never regarded himself and his colleagues as being in a position of subordination to the officers and members of the Baptist Missionary Society in England, but considered they were equal partners with them in a great enterprise. It was quite out of the question, so far as Carey was concerned, that the Home Committee should issue orders to him. Though Carey received grants from the Society in England, he depended mainly upon the secular occupations [p. 350](#) in which he and the other missionaries engaged to supply money to finance the work of the mission. He therefore felt free to use the funds of the mission to purchase property, erect buildings, appoint Indian evangelists and train missionaries without consulting the Home Committee. A full account of all decisions reached at Serampore was sent to the Home Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society for information, not for approval.

In 1816 the Home Committee wrote to Carey of their desire that the Serampore property be vested in eleven trustees, eight in England and three in Serampore. The

Serampore missionaries were astounded, and Marshman states that the letter containing the resolution 'filled us all with astonishment and grief'.²³ The missionaries felt that 'to place the premises in the hands of a majority of trustees in England chosen by the Committee would deprive them of all control over them, endanger their continued residence in them, and expose all their Missionary operations to the risk of interruptions'.²⁴ The Home Committee resolution concerning the control of property and another resolution concerning the control of Indian workers associated with the Mission do not seem to justify the feeling of alarm aroused among the Serampore missionaries upon receiving them. The expression used about property and the direction of workers appear to be straightforward, and the suggestion about the appointment of trustees seems perfectly reasonable. To understand fully the reaction of Carey and his fellow-missionaries, two facts must be kept in mind: one of Carey's great friends in England, Ryland, had written that the Home Committee was suspicious of the senior missionaries at Serampore and was anxious to seize power; and the junior missionaries at Serampore, some of them with close personal friends on the Home Committee, had become increasingly hostile to Carey, Marshman and Ward. When the three senior missionaries indicated their unwillingness to comply with the Committee's wishes, the junior missionaries, who advocated submission to the Home Committee in every matter, withdrew altogether from Serampore in 1817 and formed a separate Missionary Union in Calcutta.

In September 1817 the Serampore missionaries sent a lengthy reply to the Committee resolutions of December 1816. Two matters raised by the Home Committee are especially dealt with in this letter. The first concerns what exactly is involved in the committee's resolution that p. 351 the supervision of the native preachers be carried out by the Serampore missionaries 'on behalf of the Society'.

Your requesting in your 7th resolution 'that we will undertake on behalf of the Society, the direction of the native ministering brethren already under our care', that is, of the brethren whom we support ourselves, has created much uneasiness in our minds, lest you should thereby have intended to hint, that you have some kind of right over the labour of our hands. If undertaking it 'in behalf of the Society' be intended to convey no other idea than that of cooperation with the Society at home;—if it be addressed to us as brethren and fellow helpers in the cause, possessing the same right over the funds we originate, as you possess over those intrusted to you, we feel no objection to the expression of the thing; ... But if it be intended to convey any further idea, regard for the welfare of the cause, and for our usefulness in the work of God forbids our admitting it even for a moment.²⁵

The second matter dealt with is property.

What shall we say to the request made us to put into the hands of a majority of trustees in England the premises on which we reside? The spirit of this request is impossible not to perceive ... To waive the injustice of it, where could be the delicacy of a new Committee's saying to those who have for so many years furnished the greater part of the funds expended in the mission: 'It is no longer safe to intrust with four thousand pounds' of property: give it up to US?'²⁶

²³ J. C. Marshman, *Statement Relative to Serampore* (London, 1828), p. 44.

²⁴ Marshman, *Life and Times*, vol. ii, p. 140.

²⁵ Marshman, *Statement Relative to Serampore*, p. 63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The reply of the missionaries clearly attributes to the Committee in England a desire to dominate and control the Baptist mission at Serampore. So convinced were they of this, that at the time of making the reply they drew up an Explanatory Declaration which recorded their decision that the Serampore premises, though held in trust for the Baptist Missionary Society, were to be forever attached to the Baptist Mission at Serampore, and to be held in trust by Carey, Marshman and Ward and by such persons as they might appoint.

And they further hereby declare, that it is their will, design, meaning and intention that no other person or persons, either in England or in India belonging to the said Baptist Missionary Society ... shall have the least title or right to the property or the administration of the said premises, unless lawfully appointed thereto by them as Trustees for that purpose.²⁷

In order to protect themselves from what they considered an [p. 352](#) unfriendly Home Committee, the Serampore missionaries thus adopted the anomalous position that, though the Serampore premises belonged to the Baptist Missionary Society, the Society was not to be allowed to occupy the premises or to have the right of appointing trustees. The argument between the Serampore missionaries and the Committee over the question of the control of the mission in India continued for ten years, and on occasions the exchanges were angry and bitter. The climax of the controversy was reached in March 1827, when it was decided that the Baptist Missionary Society and the Serampore Mission were henceforth to operate as separate and distinct mission organizations.

An examination of the views of missionary historians and Carey's biographers concerning the Serampore controversy reveals that in almost every case their sympathies are with the Serampore missionaries rather than the Home Committee. Writing nearly forty years after the controversy, John Marshman states:

The missionaries offered the society cordial and affectionate cooperation on the basis of independence, a kind of federal union with individual freedom ... Had it been possible to create a dozen establishments like that of Serampore, each raising and managing its own funds and connected with the Society as the centre of unity in a common cause, it ought to have been a subject of congratulation, and not of regret.²⁸

Deaville Walker comments:

Secretary Dyer and a group of London men were determined to run the mission on the same lines as a business concern, and to put its mission staff on the same footing as the employees of a commercial house—with regard to receiving instructions be it noted, not with regard to remuneration.... The Committee in England had a perfect right and even a duty to look into the management of affairs and also to ask for full information. That information Carey, Marshman and Ward were perfectly willing to give and did give; what they were grieved about was the tone and spirit of the demands and the way the correspondence was conducted.²⁹

Richter, the gifted missionary historian, writes about the controversy:

It was a tragic circumstance that these lives which had been 'in labours more abundant' should be embittered during a decade and a half by a quarrel of the most petty character

²⁷ Appendix to the Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1827, p. 32.

²⁸ Marshman, *Life and Times*, vol. ii, p. 213.

²⁹ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

with the Society which Carey had himself founded, and which really existed on the strength of his p. 353 success—the Baptist Missionary Society.... Today we can only read the annals of this unworthy strife with the deepest regret.³⁰

It is impossible, however, to escape the feeling that Carey and his colleagues were themselves responsible for bringing about the controversy. It is not enough, as nearly every historian and biographer of Carey has done, to consider the controversy in the light of events from the death of Fuller, the first home secretary, until the 1827 Agreement. The seeds of controversy were sown in 1805 when the Serampore trio refused to admit new missionaries to full and equal partnership in the Baptist Mission at Serampore. The dissatisfaction created among the new missionaries because of this policy spread to their friends in England, some of whom were members of the Home Committee. It is argued that the older group did not consider several of the new missionaries fit to share with them in the management of the Mission. However, if Carey, Marshman and Ward had shown to their junior colleagues that perfect trust which they expected the Home Committee to have in them, it is doubtful that there would ever have been a controversy.

On the other hand, the Home Committee in England failed to appreciate fully the self-sacrifice which had characterized the lives of Carey, Marshman and Ward from the very beginning. If they had so chosen, the Serampore trio could have used the large sum of money they earned in secular employment for their own personal benefit, rather than devoting all of it to the Baptist Mission. Furthermore, it was too little realized that the contributions which steadily and increasingly flowed into the funds of the Baptist Missionary Society were largely given because of interest in the splendid accomplishments of the Serampore missionaries. If the Serampore missionaries sowed the seeds of controversy, the Committee in England, by its lack of sympathetic understanding of all the factors involved, and in some instances by its lack of tact, helped the controversy to flourish.

There can be little doubt that a vital question was involved in the Serampore controversy, although at times it was obscured by arguments about property rights: To what extent did the Baptist Missionary Society in England have the right of control over the work of its missionaries in India? The principle laid down by Carey was that 'control originates in contribution'. Since he and his colleagues contributed the major share of the money required for the Baptist p. 354 Mission in Bengal, they reserved the right to control the work of the Mission. The Home Committee, in accordance with the same principle, felt that they should have a share in the control of the work in the measure that they have contributed financially to it.

It is important to realize that we have here a decided change in missionary policy as it had been originally conceived by Carey. The policy under which he went to India was to make himself self-supporting as soon as possible and thus relieve the home Society of any further financial responsibility for him. After Carey went to India, the financial resources of missionary societies grew to such an extent that it was no longer deemed necessary to send missionaries who would be expected to support themselves by secular employment. It was then possible for missionaries to devote their whole time to missionary work, under the arrangement that a regular and sufficient allowance would be paid them by the Home Committee. The missionary whose salary was paid in full from the homeland came to be regarded as an agent or a servant of the missionary society rather than a co-partner in a great enterprise. Moreover, the missionary became dependent upon the society at home not only for his own salary, but also for the salaries of the nationals whom he

³⁰ Julius Richter, *History of Missions in India* (Edinburgh, 1908), pp. 142f.

employed and for all the money necessary to finance local missionary work. The missionary no longer found himself able to appoint workers or commence new work without first ascertaining from the Home Committee if money was available. All of this meant that ultimately the control of work overseas rested with a committee in the homeland.

The agreement of 1827 between Carey and the Baptist Missionary Society brought to an end a bitter controversy. However, it also marked the abandonment of Carey's policy concerning the financial support and control of missionary work, a policy which, had it received the encouragement it deserved, might have resulted in something not yet achieved in Bengal 127 years after the death of Carey—a self-supporting, self-propagating Bengali church.

Walter B. Davis, professor of missions at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, has recently returned from the scene of Carey's labours, where he turned over a manuscript of Carey's life for publication by the East Pakistan Christian Council in Bengali. [p. 355](#)

William Carey: Climbing the Rainbow

Iain H. Murray

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Exactly two hundred years ago the modern missionary movement was born in England and at the centre of that movement was a man who lived here in Leicester. So this is an appropriate place and certainly an appropriate time to speak of William Carey. Such a bicentenary is far too important to be ignored and we need to stir up our churches to remember it.

I am also convinced that this bicentenary can be a special inspiration to us at the present time. We live in a confusing and, in some ways, discouraging period of church history. At times the confusion enters into our own thinking as we begin to wonder what our priorities ought to be in the present spiritual conditions. There is an emphasis in Carey which is very relevant to our need. We want a key to break through the circumstances of our day which often seem so restricting to the advance of the gospel. We know what that key is, it is *faith in the Word of God*, but Carey put a far stronger emphasis upon that key than we commonly do—for him it was the sole means of going forward. He took literally the words of the apostle John, 'this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith', and, supremely, the words of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.' For Carey the Word and promises of God were so sure that he laid everything upon them.

Let us begin by paying a visit to Carey, just a few miles from here, on the first Tuesday in April, 1792. His house would not be hard to find for it was almost opposite the Baptist chapel which he served in Harvey Lane and it stood out from the other simple homes in that lane because of the flowers that were so often in the windows. Carey had a life-long

love for plants and flowers. If we arrive after 4 p.m., when schoolteaching is finished for the day, Carey himself might open the [p. 356](#) door—29 years of age, short and strongly built, perhaps wearing a leather apron and certainly a poorly-fitting wig. An illness when he was 22 had left him bald.

The first thing to impress us might be the smallness of the home. From the lane we enter a brick-floored living room, the only groundfloor room apart from a lean-to kitchen. Overhead there is one bedroom and an attic. In these four rooms Carey lived with his wife Dorothy and their three young boys. Among the things to be seen in the living room would be books and piles of shoes in the process of being made or repaired, for the head of the house was still a cobbler as well as a pastor.

We can be fairly sure what was on Carey's mind that first week in April 1792. On the Monday there had been the special monthly prayer meeting, observed for the previous eight years by a number of churches. The agreed object of these meetings was that 'the Holy Spirit may be poured out upon our ministers and churches' and the gospel spread 'to the most distant parts of the habitable globe'.

Normally for his personal studies on a Tuesday, Carey read books on 'science, history and composition' but these were not normal months for the pastor of Harvey Lane. Fresh from a printer in Leicester, he had in his living room the first copies of a little book upon which he had worked for years. It was selling at one shilling and six pence per copy and seems to have cost about ten pounds to print. The title was, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* and ran on to 41 words in all. The book was in part factual, describing statistically the spiritual darkness of the known world, and in part a call for missionaries—men of 'great piety, prudence, courage and forbearance; of undoubted orthodoxy ... willing to leave all the comforts of the world behind them'.

Although the *Enquiry* (as it became known) was finished, Carey had something of equally great importance which he was in the middle of preparing. Before him lay the opportunity to preach the next month to his fellow ministers of the Northamptonshire Association, and he sensed it might be a momentous occasion. How he chose [Isaiah 54:2](#) as the text he would preach from on May 31 we do not know. Perhaps a hymn of William Cowper's had been a signpost to him. Since 1779 Christians in the Midlands of England had been singing 'Jesus where'er thy people meet', with its lines (now dropped from most hymnals),

Behold, at Thy commanding word
We stretch the curtain and the cord.
Come thou and fill this wider space
And bless us with a large increase. [p. 357](#)

Whether this supposition is true or not, Carey was clearly arrested by the same prophetic words as those from which Cowper had drawn his verse. 'Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles....' It was in these Spring weeks of 1792 that Carey, accustomed, as has been said, to making things in pairs, divided up that text into two never-to-be-forgotten principles: 'Except great things from God. Attempt great things for God'. But before we look at the consequences of that sermon we must first briefly consider the preacher's earlier years.

Leicester was the first town in which Carey ever lived. Until 1789 he had spent all his time in small villages and country districts of the adjacent county of Northamptonshire. He came from a religious home but one in which the influence was 'churchianity' rather

than real Christianity. At fourteen he left home to become an apprentice shoemaker, and it was through another apprentice in the village of Hackleton that he heard the gospel for the first time. After a period of resistance he passed from death to life about the age of seventeen. A final nail of conviction had come with hearing a sermon in a Nonconformist chapel on, 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach' for there was no whisper of reproach connected with the parish—church religion of his upbringing. Slowly his faith deepened. He was baptised at the age of twenty-two and soon after began to be a lay-preacher. In 1787 he was ordained as the Baptist pastor of Moulton and two years later, to his surprise, he was called to Leicester.

As a young Christian there were four outstanding difficulties in Carey's experience:

1. The first of these was extreme poverty. Often Carey had barely enough to keep his family alive. On one occasion when he went to hear preaching at Olney, he was penniless and had no refreshment the whole day apart from a glass of wine given to him. When he was ordained it was only through the enterprise of a Christian woman who took a collection that he had a suit to wear. At Moulton his stipend of four shillings a week was less pay than that of a farm labourer. One cannot but wonder if the deaths of two baby daughters before 1792 were not connected to the hardships of their home.

2. A second difficulty was Carey's lack of mature Christian friends who could have been his guides and instructors. For the first six years of his Christian life he belonged to small, weak and struggling Christian fellowships which seem to have had little spiritual or doctrinal [p. 358](#) leadership. By the Scriptures and by the borrowed books, by prayer and by hard work, Carey was forced to find his own way. For several years no one recognized any signs of his future greatness. John Sutcliff, Baptist pastor at Olney, eventually befriended him and advised him to seek recognition as a preacher through the Olney church, but when the members had heard him they postponed any decision for a further twelve months.

God blessed Carey with a great hunger for an understanding of the Scriptures and he walked far and wide to hear preachers as well as to borrow good books. He was often at Olney and at times he would walk the twenty-two miles to Arnsby, only a few miles from Leicester, to hear Robert Hall, Senior. Hall became something of a spiritual father to him and it was in Hall's *Help to Zion's Travellers* that Carey 'first found his own system of divinity'.¹ Other men who became significant helpers to Carey were John Ryland, Junior, of the College Street Church, Northampton, and Andrew Fuller of Kettering. Carey first heard Fuller in 1782 but several years were to pass before the author of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1784) was to visit Carey's cottage at Moulton and be astonished at the home-made maps, with their details of various parts of the world, which he found on the walls. Ryland, summarizing Carey's background, says he was 'raised from the greatest obscurity'.

When Carey reached Leicester in 1789 as the probationary pastor of Harvey Lane he faced new and surprising problems. Two deacons and nine members had signed the invitation and small though their numbers were, they soon proved to be far from united. It is said that three previous pastors had successively served the church for only a twelve-month period. High orthodoxy seems to have been combined with worldliness, and disharmony had been endemic for years. Carey confided in Fuller that 'he was distressed beyond measure at the trials of his situation'. He tried in vain to win over the chief trouble-

¹ The words are those of his friend, John Ryland, Junior, in his Preface to the second edition of Hall's book. The 'system' was, of course, evangelical Calvinism, to which, Ryland says, Carey became committed after being initially 'perplexed between the statements of the Arminians and the crudest representations of Calvinism, by persons bordering closely on Antinomianism'.

makers. Finally, in September 1790, Carey proposed that the membership be dissolved and a new membership formed on a basis which would 'bind them to a strict and faithful New Testament discipline, let it affect whom it might'. Despite fierce opposition this was put into effect. [p. 359](#) When Carey was finally ordained pastor of the church in May 1791 the malcontents said they would disrupt the service. The threat was unfulfilled and thereafter Carey had happier days at Harvey Lane.

3. The greatest difficulty of all for Carey in these early years had to do with the fulfilment of his desire to see the gospel carried overseas. For eight years before 1792 the call of 'Come over and help us' had been with him. The word 'world' seemed to be laid upon his heart. What John Angell James says of Carey's friend, Samuel Pierce, was equally true of Carey himself. On the subject of world missions, 'he not only thought and talked and wrote and preached by day, but mused upon it in his slumbers'. But the obstacles in the way of any fulfilment of this hope were enormous.

4. The final difficulty was theological. An error existed among leaders of the churches with which Carey was in association to which it is hard to give a name. Modern authors call it Hyper-Calvinism but I do not believe that is correct. Hyper-Calvinism—that is, the belief that the invitations of the gospel, with commands to believe it, are not to be pressed upon all men—certainly existed among eighteenth-century Baptists, but the evidence is against the commonly held view that it prevailed among the leaders of the Northampton Association of Baptist churches. As proof of its prevalence, attention is usually directed to an incident alleged to have happened at one of the meetings of the Ministers' Fraternal of that Association about 1786. It was chaired by John Ryland, Senior, and when Carey is said to have asked whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not binding on the Christian ministry to the end of the world, Ryland is alleged to have replied: 'Young man, sit down, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without consulting you or me. Besides, there must be another pentecostal gift of tongues?'²

No one claims these were Ryland's exact words but, if we take them as approximately correct, they are still no proof of Hyper-Calvinism. It may well be that the old man's mistake was connected rather with the subject of revival. He believed in revival. He was an example in his [p. 360](#) prayer that the knowledge of Christ should be spread 'thro' all the counties in England, thro' the whole British empire, and, if possible, thro' the whole world!'³ We suspect that he thought that when prayer for a mighty outpouring of the Spirit was answered, perhaps with special gifts conferred again upon preachers, then such things would indeed be possible and the gospel would be heard to the ends of the earth! In other words, it may be that Ryland and others believed that unmistakable divine agency had to be demonstrated before Christians could throw themselves into a forward movement. The error was not Hyper-Calvinism. Ryland was far from being opposed to a free and universal proclamation of the gospel, but, if the above was his thinking, it was a serious mistake. Certainly this was the thinking which Carey found it necessary to face in

² *William Carey*, S. Pearce Carey, London, 1923, p. 50. This biography remains the most readable of the Carey biographies but for doctrinal understanding it is far from reliable. We prefer *The Life of William Carey*, George Smith, London, 1885. *Faithful Witness: the Life and Witness of William Carey*, Timothy George, New Hope, Birmingham, Alabama, 1991, gives a good, sympathetic introduction to Carey. For serious readers, the most important material currently available for an understanding of the new missionary era lies in *The Works of Andrew Fuller*, reprinted by Sprinkle Publications, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

³ *contemplation on the Existence and Perfections of God*, John Ryland, 1776, p. 420. Other relevant material on whether or not Ryland was Hyper-Calvinistic can be found in *Rylandia: Reminiscences Relating to the Rev. John Ryland*, William Newman, London, 1835, pp. 50, 73–4, 78 etc. Closer examination of this whole subject is needed.

his *Enquiry*. It is represented in the question he poses: 'But must not a second miraculous Pentecost precede and permit successful world-missions?'⁴

Young though he was, Carey had grasped the great principle that God's secret counsel is never to be the rule for our actions. We do not know the times and seasons which are in his power. Our duty is to act in faith on his Word, and God's promise is that the Spirit will be given to believers. We must not, therefore, desist from action that has biblical warrant out of a concern that we may be going before God. If Scripture authorizes us to expect great things from God then let us be up and attempting them!

The Association meeting for which Carey, as we have already noted, was preparing began at the Friar Lane Baptist Chapel in Nottingham on May 30, 1792. Seventeen pastors from twenty-four churches were present and were put up for two nights together at *The Angel*, a local inn. On the first evening of the Association, reports and letters from the churches were read which suggested that circumstances were much as usual. Some congregations were encouraging, some depressed, some [p. 361](#) in dissension. It was certainly no day of revival. The next day, Wednesday, the brethren assembled for prayer at 6 a.m. and then for preaching at 10 a.m., when Carey announced the [Isaiah 54:2](#) text that no one present was to forget: 'Enlarge the place of thy tent ... Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes....'

No copy of the sermon exists. One thing we can be sure of with respect to its content is that Carey had remembered a criticism of his early efforts by Robert Hall, Senior. He was told he needed more illustrations, more windows: 'There are not enough *likes* in them', said the old pastor of Arnby, 'whereas the Master was always saying, "the kingdom of heaven is *like* seed or treasure or leaven" '. Carey's whole sermon on that morning was almost a picture. Here was the church, living sadly like a widow in a small tent; not preparing a larger canvas, not getting longer cords and stronger stakes, not anticipating the children that would make her a glorious home for all nations—in a word, not expecting great things from God but faint-hearted, supine, unbelieving, satisfied with small things. We know from the effect of the message that it contained not a little tender rebuke. 'Had all the people lifted up their voice and wept', said John Ryland, Junior, 'as the children of Israel did at Bochim, I should not have wondered, so clearly did he prove the *criminality* of our supineness in the Cause of God'.

Yet despite this, when there was more discussion the following morning before they broke up, there were more doubts and hesitations. These were finally interrupted by Carey's plea to Fuller, 'Is there nothing again going to be done, sir?' Perhaps that was the moment when Fuller reached his own decision. We know that before they parted at noon on Thursday, June 1, the following proposition of Fuller's had been passed: 'Resolved, that a plan be prepared against the next Ministers' Meeting at Kettering, for forming a Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel among the Heathen'.

That next meeting, the birthday of modern missions, took place in Kettering on October 2, 1792. There was nothing in the venue or in the participants to suggest there would be such a momentous consequence. There were few more than a dozen men, meeting in the back room (a mere twelve foot by ten in size) of the home of the recently deceased deacon Beeby Wallis. Most of the men came from village churches, the eldest of the leaders (Sutcliff) was only forty years of age, and once their resolution—'Humbly

⁴ To this he answered: 'This logic comes too late. Its theory collides with facts. Wherever the Christ has been lovingly offered to men, some, and often many, have accepted the gift with joy. God's power has been proven.' Ryland, Junior, who had to have been present, denied the authenticity of the anecdote about the rebuke given by his father to Carey when it surfaced many years later, but we have the testimony of John Marshman, Carey's life-long friend in India, that there was some difference of belief between the two men.

desirous of making an effort for the propagation of the Gospel among the Heathen...’—had been determined, their combined resources pledged that day came to the meagre figure of thirteen pounds, two shillings and sixpence. We p. 362 should perhaps not be surprised that more prestigious Baptist churches in London and elsewhere stood aloof in incredulity. Summarising Carey’s credentials, Timothy George, his latest biographer, writes: ‘education, minimal; degrees, none; savings, depleted; political influence, nil; references, a band of country preachers.... Cowper of Olney had said it: “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform”’.

We cannot of course detail the steps which followed—the decision for India (in the company of John Thomas and his family); the struggle to find a ship that would carry them, concluding with their embarkation on the Danish vessel, *Kron Princessa*, on June 13, 1783; and then the five months’ passage of 15,000 miles to Bengal where Carey was to remain for life—all these events lie at the heart of the story and must be read elsewhere. What I want to focus on are the new set of trials which faced Carey in India. Past difficulties had only been preparations. He was now to live among problems as different in size as a Leicestershire stream from the great Ganges.

There was first the oppressive, enervating heat, little different from summer to winter save for changes in humidity. As Carey and later colleagues wrote in that formative missionary document, *The Bond of the Missionary Brotherhood of Serampore*: ‘We are apt to relax ... especially in a warm climate, but we shall do well always to fix it in our minds that life is short, that all around us are perishing, and that we shall incur a dreadful woe if we proclaim not the glad tidings of salvation’. The climate was to shorten the lives of many of India’s first missionaries.

A barrier of a different kind existed in the British organization which then virtually controlled India, the East India Company. After British victories over the French earlier in the century, the country that had seen many invasions was now administered, as far as trade was concerned, by officials of the Company whose ships were the riches on the seven seas. It was the power of these men which had made the finding of berths for India so difficult and that same power, the very month before Carey sailed, had blocked the attempt of William Wilberforce in Parliament to authorize the gradual spread of Christianity in India. Appalled at Parliament’s treatment of the East India Bill, Wilberforce wrote to a friend: ‘Our territories in Hindostan, twenty millions of people included, are left in the undisturbed and peaceable possession, and committed to the providential protection of—Brahma’. The Company’s view was that all religions were man-made, and it was a truism of their representatives who lived in luxury in Calcutta that ‘they had left their religion behind at the Cape’. Carey found his fellow p. 363 countrymen who had preceded him to be no friends of evangelical Christianity.

Of far greater concern to Carey than these things was the undisputed sway of evil and the demonic among the people whom he had come to serve: ‘Oh, you do not know a hundredth part of the mercy of your birth ... till you come and live here’, he wrote later. Hinduism was, and remains, a religion which combines external rites, penances and pilgrimages with fearful moral corruption. How could it be otherwise when the gods worshipped were inventions of Satan? Life was cheap and bound from birth to death by a sovereign system of caste divisions. It was commonplace through the practice of *suttee* for widows to be burned alive on their husband’s funeral pyre—Carey knew of 438 instances in one year in his area and other statistics reported 6,000 in nine years, including thirty-three women at the death of their common husband. Similarly, babies were drowned to placate Ganga and lepers were ‘cured’ by being burned alive in pits—an experience which, they were assured, would secure a healthy body on their reincarnation. It is no wonder that early missionaries were sometimes almost numb with horror. For

five-and-half years Carey saw no Indian convert. He confessed that he 'was often almost dried up by discouragement, and was tempted to go to his work like a soldier expecting defeat.... Never was such a combination of false principles as here ... people are immersed in impurity'.

To these sorrows there was yet another which was perhaps hardest of all to bear. Carey not only lost the sympathy of his parents in going to India—his father had told him he was 'mad'—but within a few years he literally lost his wife through insanity. Thereafter, she was to live beside him but as the very opposite of an 'help meet'. Writers, distanced from the period, have spoken of Carey's marriage as unfortunate and of his wife as unsuitable. There is no real evidence for the charge. It seems rather that through ill-health and all the painful shocks experienced in India, Dorothy Carey 'grew opposite of all she naturally was'. Though she lived till 1807, the beloved companion of his youth was gone and few can have been lonelier than Carey in his early years in India. John Thomas, his colleague at the outset, was a disappointment and lived elsewhere, and for almost two years after leaving England there was no mail from home. At times the former pastor of Harvey Lane felt like a man who had descended a mine and lost all contact with those who were supposed to be holding the ropes.

Through all this Carey's faith was sustained ('When my soul can drink her fill at God's Word, I forget all') and before the year 1801 a new day had dawned. It began quietly with the arrival of four Baptist [p.364](#) missionary families to join Carey in 1799—an event which gave the latter an experience parallel to Paul's in [2 Corinthians 7:5, 6](#): 'When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus'. There was a further, at first hidden, blessing in the refusal of the authorities to allow the party to land in British Bengal. Their only option was the little Danish settlement of Serampore, only an hour-and-a-half from Calcutta by boat. From 1800 Serampore thus became a secure mission centre and base for outreach across the continent. On the last Sunday of that same year Krishna Pal, the first Hindu convert, was baptized at Serampore and became a faithful witness until his death in 1821. That joyful event had a thrilling impact. In the words of one commentator, 'The conversion and transformation of one Hindu was like a decisive experiment, the divine grace which changed one Indian heart could obviously change a hundred thousand'.

A few months after this there came another major break-through of an entirely different and altogether unpredictable kind. In Richard Wellesley, Earl of Mornington (and brother of the future Duke of Wellington), Bengal received a new Governor-General in 1798. Aware of the need of training for the young members of the British aristocracy who came to India as administrators, not least in the languages of the people of the land, Wellesley founded the Fort William College in Calcutta. It was an ambitious and far-sighted plan, but who was available to teach such languages as Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindustani? The choice fell on the Baptist missionary who had left school at the age of twelve and who was not, officially, even supposed to be in India! Carey was at first dismayed. As he wrote to Ryland, 'I am almost sunk under the prospect, having never known college discipline.' But he did not fail to see the God-given opportunity. Here was a platform in the midst of future leaders, with facilities, including native pundits, provided by the government which could be wonderfully used to advance the gospel. There was also a handsome salary for Carey which he at once and permanently employed to the furtherance of the whole mission.

From this date on, the work at Fort William College—for which Carey's natural linguistic gifts, developed by hard study, had prepared him—became a central part of his weekly schedule. Unwittingly, the East India Company became a major participant in the

very cause which it had sought to prevent! In addition to this, Carey was subsequently to become the government's official Bengali translator, [p. 365](#) and one of the brightest Sunday mornings of his life came when a regulation making widow-burning criminal reached him for translation. He laid aside his preparations for preaching and, passing that duty to another, gave himself at once to the translation work. In the words of S. Pearce Carey, 'He would not lose an hour with women's lives at stake'.

The greatest marvel of all to the missionaries at the beginning of the new century was the evident awakening of spiritual hunger and concern. In 1801 the people of Bengal saw the first New Testament in their own language. Carey had done for them what Tyndale had done for England in 1525. The next year the translator wrote: 'What hath God wrought? Eighteen months ago we should have been in raptures to have seen one Hindu eat with us; now it is sometimes difficult to find room for all who come.' By 1812 there were eleven Bengali churches and twenty native evangelists. By 1813 more than 500 had been baptized and Carey could say:

The Bible is either translated or under translation into twenty-four languages of the East, eighteen of which we are employed about, besides printing most of the others. Thirteen out of these eighteen are now in the press, including a third edition of the Bengali New Testament. Indeed so great is the demand for Bibles that though we have eight presses constantly at work I fear we shall not have a Bengali New Testament to sell or give away for the next twelve months, the old edition being entirely out of print... In short, though the publishing of the Word of God is a crime, there never was a time when it was so successful. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'

The same year that Carey wrote these words, a bill in the British Parliament at last curbed the East India Company and authorized the spread of Christianity in India. Lord Wellesley himself in the Upper House spoke on behalf of the work of Carey and his colleagues.

There is much here that must remain unsaid: how Carey pastored the Lall Bazar Chapel in Calcutta; how a College for evangelists was formed at Serampore; how the Second Great Awakening in America brought major financial aid; how the example of the Calvinistic Baptist missionaries inspired thousands of others with the same vision; how the number of forty Bible translations was reached—all this and much more must be passed over now. It remains only to summarize the great lessons which this record brings before us:

1. Faith in the Word of God is the great means by which Christ advances his kingdom through human instrumentality. At every critical turning point in the history of the church, in the Apostolic age, at the Reformation and here at the beginning of the age of missions, it is the [p. 366](#) agency of faith which stands out. It was not for nothing that God used a sermon on [Isaiah 54](#) and then a meeting of unknown pastors to set in motion a movement that would change the earth. 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men ... God hath chosen the things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are.'

It was staggering what these men contemplated—a Christian India where 'the widow burns no more on the funeral pile; the obscene dances and songs are seen and heard no more; the gods are thrown to the moles and bats, and Jesus is known as the God of the whole land.' And not India only, the Bible and the gospel for all the East: for Burma, for China and the Pacific. The cultured at home in Britain called them 'fools, madmen, tinkers, Calvinists and schismatics', but to Carey nothing more was being done than what was warranted by the promises of God. 'Only let us have faith and we shall not want money' he had said at the outset and it was true. In the same spirit he would urge, 'Were the trial made I believe difficulties would remove.' To the question, 'How can these men translate into so great a number of languages?' he would reply, 'Few people know what may be

done until they try, and persevere in what they undertake.’ His last message home to England, on September 30, 1833, summarized it all: ‘As everything connected with the full accomplishment of the divine promises depends on the almighty power of God, pray that I and all the ministers of the word may take hold of *His* strength, and go about our work as *fully* expecting the accomplishment of them *all*, which, however difficult and improbable it may appear, is certain, as all the promises of God are in Him, yea, and in Him, Amen.’

Carey never held a belief which is too popular in modern Christianity, that results provide the confidence for the rightness of a cause, but some observers of the Indian scene who were not evangelicals could not miss the extraordinary events that were taking place in India. Robert Southey, for instance, in response to an attack on the Baptist missionaries in the *Edinburgh Review*, wrote: ‘Only fourteen years have elapsed since Thomas and Carey set foot in India, and in that time these missionaries have acquired this gift of tongues; in fourteen years these low-born, low-bred mechanics have done more to the spreading of the knowledge of the Scriptures among the heathen than has been accomplished, or even attempted, by all the princes and potentates of the world—and all the universities and establishments into the bargain.’

2. It needs to be emphasized that the faith which Carey and his colleagues exemplified was the opposite of self-confidence and presumption. It was rooted rather in that understanding of salvation [p. 367](#) which said of faith itself that ‘it is the gift of God’ ([Eph. 2:8](#)). These men were humble, meek, lowly-minded Christians. ‘I esteem it’, Carey writes in 1802, ‘a miracle of grace which has preserved me ... I need the immediate help of God every moment’. Their spirit was never better illustrated than by words of Andrew Fuller to his friend after the disastrous conflagration of the printing works at Serampore in 1812 brought the Mission unprecedented attention and help: ‘The fire has given your undertaking a celebrity which nothing else, it seems, could; a celebrity which makes me tremble. The public is now giving us their praises. Eight hundred guineas have been offered for Dr. Carey’s likeness! If we inhale this incense, will not God withhold his blessing, and then where are we?’ These men were Calvinists. They could affirm, ‘We are sure that only those who are ordained to eternal life will believe, and God alone can add to the church such as shall be saved.’ But it was for them a creed which meant a life of humility and prayer. In their *Bond* of agreement drawn up in 1805, from which we have just quoted, they go on to say: ‘Prayer, secret, fervent, believing prayer, lies at the root of all personal godliness ... let each one of us lay it upon his heart that we seek to be fervent in spirit, wrestling with God, till He famish these idols and cause the heathen to experience the blessedness that is in Christ.’

When Carey expected to die in 1823 he desired that his funeral sermon should be preached from ‘the first and second verses of the fifty-first Psalm’. Another eleven years were to pass before, at his direction, a gravestone at Serampore bore the words:

WILLIAM CAREY, BORN AUGUST 17, 1761; DIED JUNE 9, 1834
‘A wretched, poor and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall.’

Carey thus chose the words of Isaac Watts for his epitaph. His memory perhaps brings the words of other hymn writers more immediately to our minds. How appropriate to his life story, for instance, are the lines of J. M. Neale’s, ‘Art thou weary, art thou languid’, with their conclusion:

Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?

Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer, yes!

But it is another hymn that reminds us most of Carey. The first three lines of the third verse of George Matheson's hymn, 'O love that wilt not let me go', read: [p. 368](#)

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain ...

That last line, however, was not the author's, it was the work of a hymnal committee—surely the worst of all committees! These gentlemen objected to Matheson's original which read, 'I climb the rainbow in the rain'. Rainbows, they protested, are not realities that can be climbed. They felt that Matheson's words verged on the ridiculous! Their view and their alternative prevailed but it presented a different picture from the one intended by the author. Rainbows can be 'traced' merely by looking through a window while seated comfortably at a warm fireside. But to climb them one needs to be out in the rain and the storm! And the rainbow, that is to say, God's promise (his 'bow in the cloud'), is a reality. Had Carey been on that committee he would surely have opted for the words:

I climb the rainbow in the rain
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

An Address given at the 1992 Leicester Ministers' Conference by Rev. Iain Murray, Managing Editor of The Banner of Truth. [p. 369](#)

The Theology of William Carey

Bruce J. Nicholls

Little has been written on Carey's theology. It was more implicit in his correspondence and work than explicit. Except for the Enquiry which Carey published before he left England, we have little to guide us. In this article I seek to probe five areas of Carey's theological concerns. More research is needed if we are to understand better Carey's motivation, his priorities and his message.

Editor

William Carey's involvement in evangelism, church planting, language learning, translation work and institutional building left him no time for theological reflection. His gifts lay in linguistics and administration and not in theological formulations. No record of his sermons remains. The *Enquiry*, his letters, articles in the *Friends of India* and *Samarchar Darpan* and the numerous biographies are the only source materials for understanding and evaluating his theology. It is clear that his general theological outlook took shape during his youthful years in England prior to sailing to India in June 1793. He was caught up in the impact of the first Evangelical Awakening of the 18th Century which impacted the lives of the working class people in rural England as well as in the towns and

cities. John Wesley was at the heart of this movement. Its theological origins were in the Protestant Reformation but spiritually it was in the succession of the mystical and ascetic traditions of the medieval and early Church, the Puritan revival of the 17th Century and the pietism of the Moravian movement in Germany. John Wesley's theology led him in the direction of Arminianism while Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards in the American colonies were more influenced by the Puritan Calvinism. His own particular group of dissenters, the Particular Baptists were Calvinistic while the General Baptists were more moderate. Carey was caught in this tension, as is clearly evident in the *Enquiry*.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Bible was the common manifesto of the Evangelical Movement and it became the controlling factor in Carey's life. His conversion experience which began under the influence of his fellow apprentice **p. 370** journeyman shoemaker John Warr in his 17th year, was the turning point of his life. He left the Church of England and was baptized as a believer four years later (7th October 1783). During this period Carey's theology was shaped by his close association with the leaders of the Northamptonshire Baptist churches and in particular by John Ryland, Andrew Fuller, Robert Hall Snr. and John Sutcliff. Carey became 'an ardent student of the scriptures'. From a New Testament commentary on the shelf of his employer Clarke Nichols, Carey was introduced to the Greek text. Thereafter Latin, Greek and later Hebrew, became the centre of his studies and the foundation for his later translation work. He studied the Bible with implicit trust in its truthfulness, reliability and authority all of which characterized the Evangelical Movement. For Carey the Bible was the word of God to be loved and obeyed. His passion was to be a preacher of the Word.

Carey's hermeneutical principles were literalistic and uncomplicated. He took literally the commands of Jesus and expected God to fulfil his promises. The Bible was his sole means of knowing the truth of God and the way of salvation. An example of his proof text method was his use of the Great Commission of [Matthew 28:18-20](#) in his pioneering booklet *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. David Bosch notes that Carey 'based his entire case on the argument that the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)) was as valid in his day (1792) as it had been in the days of the Apostle'.¹ On this basis Carey stressed the obligation of Christians to proclaim the gospel worldwide and to use every means possible for the conversion of those who heard it.

Carey followed the expository model of the Baptist preachers of Northamptonshire. This can be seen in his so-called 'Deathless Sermon' preached to seventeen pastors of the Northamptonshire Association of Baptist churches on the 31st May 1792. With graphic illustrations on enlarging the tent Carey expounded [Isaiah 54:v2](#), dividing the text into his two memorable principles, 'Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.'² This sermon proved to be a milestone in Carey's appeal to Andrew Fuller and others to form the Baptist Missionary Society, an event which took place four **p. 371** months later. The sermon reflects Carey's confidence in the sovereignty of God and his love for the

¹ David J. Bosch 'The How and Why of a True Biblical Foundation for Missions', Zending op weg Naor de Toekomst (Kampen U.J.H. Kok. 1978), p. 34.

² A. Christopher Smith has argued that the words 'from God' and 'for God' were not part of the original sermon. See A. Christopher Smith, 'The Spirit and Letter of Carey's Catalytic Watchword' (*Baptist Quarterly* 33, January 1990, 266-37).

world and his own certainty of the need to use every possible means to proclaim the gospel worldwide.

Throughout Carey's forty years of missionary service in India he was motivated by this consuming passion to translate the Bible into as many languages of the common people as possible so that all might hear and believe the gospel. Like other evangelicals of his day Carey believed that unless the heathen hear the gospel they are eternally lost; a conviction that continues to motivate evangelical missionaries today.

CHRISTOLOGY FOR MISSION

William Carey's theology was clearly Christocentric. Jesus Christ was the centre of his spiritual pilgrimage and the only hope for the salvation of the world. Having imbibed the piety of Moravian missionaries and having been inspired by the prayer life of David Brainerd (missionary to the American Indians), Carey was disciplined in maintaining his daily early morning devotional life of Bible reading and prayer. He often talked aloud with his Lord as he walked in his garden. Carey sought to bring every thought captive to Christ and he refused to speculate beyond the revelations of scripture. It cannot be over-emphasized that the cross was the centre of his preaching whether in the church or in the bazaar. He believed Christ's death was a substitutionary atonement for sin. In preaching the cross, Carey called upon his hearers to repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ for salvation alone. He had little confidence in himself and through the stress and sorrows of his missionary career Carey turned again and again to his Lord for solace and strength. This is beautifully illustrated in the epitaph he prepared for himself, taken from the first couplet of Isaac Watt's hymn:

A guilty weak and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall.
Be thou my strength and righteousness
My Jesus—and my all.

This moving testimony reveals Carey's humble piety, his Christ-centred hope and his trust in the sovereign grace of God. His sense of personal unworthiness before the righteousness of God sheds light on his Calvinistic faith. There is no doubt that his moderate Calvinism had sustained him through the crises in his life. It is also reflected in his love of nature as the handiwork of the Creator. He does not appear to have given very much emphasis to the work of the Holy Spirit as in the later [p. 372](#) Missionary Movement. Carey was a man of the Book and of his Lord, Jesus Christ.

In these early years, Carey the pastor felt deeply the conflict among his contemporaries concerning the sovereignty of God and human obligation to proclaim the gospel. The alleged comment of John Ryland Sr. at a ministerial fraternal of the Baptist Association about 1786 hurt him deeply. In response to his questioning as to whether the Lord's command was still binding, Ryland is supposed to have replied 'Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me. Besides, there must be another Pentecostal gift of tongues!'³

THE GATHERED CHURCH

³ There is no proof that these were Ryland's exact words. His son, John Ryland Jnr. denied the authenticity of the anecdote. See Iain H. Murray, 'William Carey: Climbing the Rainbow', *The Banner of Truth*, October 1992, p. 21, n. 1.

William Carey's theology was not only Christ-centred; it was Church-centred. Having left the Anglican Church of his fathers, Carey became an enthusiastic Dissenter and a committed member of the Particular Baptist church in which he had been baptized. Following Carey's baptism at the age of 22, John Sutcliff, the pastor at Olney, recognized his gifts and encouraged him to seek recognition as a lay preacher. This led to his being called as pastor to the village church of Moulton in 1787 and two years later to the Harvey Lane Baptist Church at Leicester. His six years in pastoral ministry, much of which was spent in controversy owing to the low level of spirituality in his churches, laid the foundation of his Church-centred understanding of mission. Here too he was influenced by his friends John Ryland, Andrew Fuller and John Sutcliff. It was to be expected that the missionary structure Carey pioneered was a denominational one.

Carey's Doctrine of the Church followed the 'primitive' New Testament model which stressed preaching, spontaneous spirituality in worship, emphasis on fellowship, the ordinances of believers' baptism and on the Lord's Supper and on independency in church organization.⁴ Carey carried this model to India. It is significant that with the p. 373 arrival of the new missionaries in Serampore early in the year 1800, Carey and his colleagues immediately constituted themselves as the local Baptist Church and elected Carey as pastor. The first convert, Krishna Pal, upon his baptism in December 1800, was admitted without delay to the membership of this church and invited to participate in the service of the Lord's Supper. Thus the concept of the gathered church with its emphasis on the fellowship of believers became the guiding principle of Carey's evangelistic and church planting ministries.

Carey and his colleagues carried this principle into the structuring of the Serampore Mission. As a community they covenanted together to live as an extended family, sharing in a common table, common purse and in rotating leadership. Carey had been inspired to follow this joint family lifestyle by the example of the Moravian missionaries, except in the concept of a permanent house father. In October 1805 they drew up a 'Form of Agreement' in which in eleven points they outlined their Mission strategy. This included the resolution that the church must be indigenous from the beginning. The 8th principle stated: 'it is only by means of native preachers that we can hope for the universal spread of the Gospel throughout this immense continent. We think it is our duty as soon as possible, to advise the native brethren who may be formed into separate churches, to choose their pastors and deacons from their own countrymen.'⁵

It was often stated that Carey failed as an evangelist and in establishing new churches. John Mack of Serampore College, in a funeral sermon on Carey (reprinted in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, Calcutta 14th August 1834) remarked that he had never heard of a single Indian converted directly by Carey's preaching and that in the last twelve years of his life Carey only once, to his knowledge, addressed the gospel to 'the heathen'.⁶ This harsh judgement hardly does justice to the priority Carey gave to preaching and to establishing new churches in the earlier years of his ministry. It is understandable that in his later years Carey was preoccupied with his translation work, his teaching at Fort William College and the founding and developing of Serampore College and he was overwhelmed by personal

⁴ Christopher Smith contrasts the 'primitive' model with the 'professional' institutional model of the later church. He argues that the Serampore trio operated simultaneously in the spiritual world of personal piety and the commercial world of technologically-impressive capitalism. See his article 'A Tale of Many Models', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1992.

⁵ cited *Christian History* (Vol. XI. No. 4) p. 34.

⁶ E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India 1793-1837* Cambridge CUP 1967) p. 35, n. 1.

controversy. It is clear from his letters and biographers that in his early years in Serampore Carey preached regularly in the bazaar and entered into serious [p. 374](#) dialogue with Hindus and others. The statistics of the Serampore Mission suggest that by 1812 there were eleven Bengali churches and twenty native evangelists and by 1813 five hundred had been baptized. This would have included Anglo-Indians and Europeans as well as Hindus. These figures represent the work of the Mission as a whole, not just of Carey. Considering the suspicion and resentment of the European community, the fanaticism of the Brahmins, and the low moral standards of the people, the slow growth of the church is understandable. The Hindu reform movement beginning with Rammohan Roy after 1815 proved an effective half-way house for would-be converts from the upper classes. They accepted Christian ethical teaching but chose to remain within the Hindu caste community. In a letter to his son Jabez dated 26th January 1824, Carey shared his distress that the people seem 'as insensible as ever' to Christianity.⁷ Even if Carey saw little direct fruit for his preaching he was instrumental in the conversion of many through his multi-faceted ministries.

The Serampore trio, Carey, Marshman and Ward, were much more committed to the principle of establishing indigenous churches than were the Calcutta and General Baptist missionaries. This created some friction between them. The Serampore trio recognized that native pastors needed to be properly trained and to become self supporting, and that the churches must be self governing. Their first step in this policy was to establish as many schools as possible giving a general education in the Bengali language and seeking to make the schools self-supporting. Joshua Marshman drew up guidelines in *Hints relative to Native Schools, together with an outline of an Institution for their Extension and Management*.⁸ The success of their educational system led the Serampore missionaries to recognize the need for a higher institution to train teachers for the schools and to prepare native preachers as evangelists and pastors for the work of the churches. In the prospectus for the proposed College at Serampore they emphasized both Sanskrit, Eastern literature and European science and knowledge as being essential to the training of national church leaders. It is also significant that in addition to training Christians as teachers and evangelists they opened the College to youth from all parts of India 'without distinction in caste or creed'. Eleven Brahmin students enrolled in the first session. [p. 375](#)

The Serampore missionaries saw that though the church was called out of the world to be a new fellowship, it must be engaged in witness in the world; thus Serampore symbolized all that Carey and his colleagues stood for—respect for Indian language, literature and culture, the values of Western science and knowledge and a commitment to the message of the Bible and to Christian ethical lifestyle. The original vision for Serampore College continues to be maintained to the present day, both as a University College with faculties in Arts, Science and Commerce and as a Theological faculty for training men and women for the service of the Church.

William Carey's Doctrine of the Church was not only that of the local church but of the ecumenical family of Churches. In Calcutta Carey had a good working relationship with the evangelical Church of England chaplains. He met regularly with Henry Martyn for fellowship in the re-structured pagoda at Serampore. Carey was a catalyst for world evangelization. In 1806 he proposed to Andrew Fuller, the Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, that they should summon 'a meeting of all denominations of Christians at the Cape of Good Hope somewhere about 1910 to be followed by another

⁷ Potts, *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸ John D. W. Watts, 'Baptists and the Transformation of Culture: A Case Study from the Career of William Carey' *Review and Expositor* 89, (1992) No. 1, p. 16.

such conference every ten years'. Andrew Fuller turned the project down, replying, 'I consider this as one of Br'r Carey's pleasing dreams'.⁹ It was not until the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910 that Carey's vision was realized. In a real sense it may be said that Carey's vision for world evangelization also anticipated the slogan of the contemporary Lausanne Movement for World Evangelism, 'calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World'.

FAITH AND CULTURE

For William Carey the Christian faith and Indian culture were not irreconcilable. He strove to affirm Bengali culture where it did not conflict with the gospel so that converts could retain their cultural self-identity and give leadership in evangelism and to the emerging church. He resisted attempts to replace Indian culture by the so-called Christian culture of the west. Carey was motivated by his respect for the highest values in Indian culture as well as by his conviction that evangelism was primarily the task of the national Christians.

This culture-affirming attitude was expressed in a number of ways. p.376 For example, Carey did not ask his first convert Krishna Pal to change his name even though he carried the name of a Hindu god. The prevailing spirit then and until recently was that converts at their baptism should take an anglicized biblical name or the western name of their missionary benefactor. Similarly in regard to dress, Carey and his colleagues encouraged new believers to retain their traditional dress and even the sacred thread of the higher castes.¹⁰

When the Brahmin convert Krishna Prasad disregarded and trampled on his sacred thread before his baptism, Ward kept it and later sent it to England for safe keeping. Then Ward gave Krishna Prasad money to buy another *paita* and for some years Krishna Prasad wore his thread on his preaching tours.

However, the most significant factor in Carey's approach to Indian culture was his insistence that education be in the vernacular language.¹¹ While other missionaries and social workers were emphasizing the use of the English language and western education, on the assumption that the Enlightenment culture of the west was superior to native language and culture, Carey insisted on Bengali as the medium of education from primary school through to university education in Serampore College. As we have seen, Carey recognized the importance of both Eastern and Western knowledge and these were taught side by side at Serampore College.

While endorsing Bengali cultural values Carey and his colleagues rejected those cultural practices that conflicted with biblical ethics and social justice. Carey opposed idolatrous practices such as the Jagannath festival in which worshippers lost their lives, but he did not attack idolatry as such in public.

⁹ Ruth Rouse 'William Carey's "Pleasing Dream"' *International Review of Missions* (1949) p. 181.

¹⁰ It is perhaps significant that despite his commitment to affirming national culture, Carey himself continued to wear the dress of his own English culture and of his status as a college professor. For Carey there was no single Christian culture; each was valid in its own context.

¹¹ In his translation work Carey not only translated the Bible into many Indian languages but, with Marshman, one third of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, into Bengali (5 volumes) and with Ward into English (3 volumes). He also published *Itihasamala* in Bengali, an anthology of prose stories of Bengali life. It can be argued that he wanted to show the superiority of the teaching of the Bible to other scriptures, and at the same time win respect in official circles. This was no doubt true, but it does not fully explain the enormous effort put into this work in spite of the criticism of other missionaries and the Society in England.

Carey was a vigorous opponent of the evils of the caste system. Upon profession of faith, Krishna Pal was invited by Thomas and Carey to share a meal with the missionaries and so break caste. Only then p. 377 was he baptized and admitted to the Church. At his first communion Krishna Prasad the Brahmin convert received the common communion cup from the hands and lips of Krishna Pal, the Sudra. This was no doubt an intentional breaking of caste. Carey's life-long campaign against the evils of infanticide, the burning of widows (*sati*) reflected his commitment to biblical ethics and to compassionate justice. Carey was committed to the social transformation of culture.

This raises an important question as to how far Carey's action for social change was the consequence of his theological convictions or of his instinctive response to injustices that he experienced in his early years. Carey was no systematic theologian and the answer is probably both/and rather than either/or. Carey's acceptance of and love for the Bible and his sense of obligation to obey its teaching shaped his faith and action. Frederick Downs argues that in the New Testament conflict between James and Paul on the issue of Gentile converts accepting Palestinian Jewish culture, Carey was clearly on the side of Paul, who recognized that there was no single Christian culture but that the Christian faith must be incarnate in every culture.¹² Yet there can be no doubt that Carey's own cultural background prepared him in a unique way to feel deeply about the injustices of Indian society. Throughout his life in England he lived in constant poverty, and as a dissenter was disadvantaged in education, employment and social acceptance. The spirit of the second half of the 18th Century in England was one of radicalism and revolt, reformers clamouring for freedom of the press and dissenters expressing their resentment of the Test and Cooperation Acts. The idealism of the French and American revolutions encouraged republican inclinations to overthrow the monarchy. Carey the young radical was caught up in this ferment. On one occasion Andrew Fuller his mentor chided him for not drinking to the King's health.¹³

Carey had also imbibed the social conscience of the pre-Victorian Evangelical Movement. Throughout his life he identified with the evangelical revolt against the slave trade. For example, he stopped eating sugar from the West Indies. In India, Carey constantly prayed for the emancipation of the West Indian slaves. With tears of joy he thanked God when the news came in September 1833 of their intended release.¹⁴ Carey's cultural background made it inevitable that p. 378 he would be opposed to the many social injustices he faced during his missionary career.

INTEGRAL MISSION

Another significant and abiding factor in Carey's theology was his commitment to what we may call integral mission—social justice and the renewal of society integrated with compassionate service, universal education, fearless evangelism and church planting. Carey and his colleagues, Joshua and Hannah Marshman and William Ward, without whom he would never have succeeded, were pioneers and catalysts for change 150 years ahead of their time. Carey's respect for the best of Indian language and literature, his compassion for the suffering and the oppressed, his ceaseless campaign for social justice won him the respect of both the British imperialistic bureaucrats and the social activists

¹² Frederick S. Downs 'Reflections on the Culture/Society Issue in Contemporary Mission', *American Baptist Quarterly* (December 1989) pp. 239–246.

¹³ S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (London, Carey Press, 1934), p. 6.

¹⁴ Carey, *ibid.*, p. 436.

among Hindu Reformers such as Raja Rammohan Roy. He is called Mahatma Carey—the Great Spirit—by Hindu leaders in Bengal today. However, his policies were not accepted by all. His own Baptist missionary colleagues in Calcutta who separated themselves from him, were critical of his indigenous policies, his autocratic methods and his independent spirit. As a catalyst for change, he inevitably attracted criticism. It is Carey’s translation work and his holistic approach to mission that have inspired the leaders of churches and of many Christian agencies in India today to call for the bicentenary celebrations of Carey’s arrival in India on 11th November 1793. Irrespective of denominational allegiance, the churches want to recognize his unique contribution to the founding and development of Christian witness in North India. Christopher Smith notes that Carey was a self-educated tradesman who rose to become a linguist and orientalist, a penniless cottager who founded a grand scholarly institution, and a shoemaker who married an aristocratic lady. He was accessible to both the humble poor, to the Anglo Saxon middle class and to the ruling aristocracy. Smith adds: ‘He was a catalyst extraordinary who operated during an unrepeatably and critical *kairos* in world history.’¹⁵ He belongs to the whole Church and to India.

As we have already suggested, Carey’s theology was shaped by his biblical faith, his social background and early struggles, the radical spirit of his age and by the impact of the Evangelical pre-Victorian p. 379 Movement for social reform. *The Enquiry* represents the summation of his thinking prior to going to India. During his forty year missionary career he built on this foundation and made no radical departure from it. His thought naturally matured and his commitment to holistic and integral mission strengthened, despite the fact that he himself became less involved in direct evangelistic work. It has been left to others to build on these foundations.

Carey’s working relationship with William Ward from 1800 until Ward’s sudden death in 1823 and with Joshua and Hannah Marshman until his own death in 1834 is unique in the history of missions. Although different in temperament they were of one heart and mind in their mission. Without Ward and the Marshmans, Carey would never have achieved his holistic and integral Mission.

Part of the Serampore Mission’s unique contribution to missions was their ability to develop structures and institutions to carry through the functional programmes they initiated. For example, William Ward pioneered the printing press as a vehicle to publish Carey’s biblical translations and as a means of self-support for the Serampore Mission. Carey and Marshman opened numerous schools to give education to the poor. Again, Carey and Marshman established Serampore College to provide training for Indian pastors and teachers for the schools. Carey started a Savings Bank to enable the poor to provide for the education of their children and to assist the unemployed. He was instrumental in the founding of the Agro-Horticulture Society in order to raise the level of agricultural production to provide a better diet for the poor. He entered into an ongoing dialogue with the political leaders to carry through the needed social reforms. He appealed directly to the British authorities in India and to the Parliament in London. In the periodicals which he and Marshman founded, *Samachar Darpan* and *Friend of India*, they brought to the attention of their political rulers cases of infanticide, *sati*, the ill treatment of lepers and instances of slavery. They believed that word and deed were inseparable. Thus by every means Carey and his colleagues sought to arouse the consciences of both the educated national leaders and their people and the political authorities on issues of social injustice. The two most notable examples of Carey’s

¹⁵ A. Christopher Smith, ‘The Legacy of William Carey’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (16/1, 1992) p. 7.

successful influence on the political structures were the action of the Governor General Lord Wellesley in 1802 to make the practice of infanticide illegal, and the action of Governor General Lord Bentinck in abolishing *sati* in December 1829. The latter action was the culmination of Carey's protest against this social evil from the beginning of his ministry in Serampore thirty years before. At the same time it is probable that p. 380 Carey's efforts inspired Rammohan Roy in his campaign against *sati*. It appears that these two leaders rarely met.

The work of William Carey cannot be judged only by the immediate successes and failures of the Serampore Mission, for as his friend Christopher Anderson declared in a memorial sermon in Edinburgh in 1834, Carey's labours, however great, were 'chiefly preparatory or prospective.'¹⁶ Carey expected great things from God and he attempted great things for God. He was a man of vision and a man of action. Some of Carey's achievements have stood the test of time, notably Serampore College; others have not. His translation of the Bible into the languages of India was less than satisfactory and has been replaced by others, especially those working under the guidance of the Bible Society. Yet his Bengali grammar and his 87,000 word *Dictionary of the Bengali Language* (1824) helped to raise Bengali from an unsettled dialect to the level of a national language. Carey's role in the Bengali Renaissance is acknowledged by all. In the words of John Watts, 'Carey embraced Bengali and Asian culture in the name of Christ and accomplished much more for the Kingdom and for humanity than he could ever know. And generations rise up to call him blessed.'¹⁷

Despite the limitations of Carey's work as an evangelist, his principles for indigenous self-supporting churches are standard practices today. The heart of Carey's theology is summed up in the words he whispered to Alexander Duff on his death bed: 'Mr Duff, you have been speaking about Dr Carey, Dr Carey: when I am gone say nothing about Dr Carey. Speak only about Dr Carey's Saviour.'¹⁸

Dr. Nicholls has relocated from New Delhi to Auckland, New Zealand from where he will continue his several Asian and international ministries. p. 381

William Carey's 'Pleasing Dream'¹

Ruth Rouse

¹⁶ Smith *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ Watts *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Pearce Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

¹ The facts in this study have been gathered from contemporary letters, journals and reports, e.g. the Journals of Henry Martyn and Claudius Buchanan: The Periodical Accounts (herein referred to as P.A.) Relative to the Baptist Misisonary Society: and the Minutes and Reports of the S.P.C.K. It is unfortunate that the original correspondence between Carey and Fuller has disappeared. Information as to its whereabouts will be welcomed.

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The celebrated historian of the ecumenical movement suggests why the first international interdenominational missionary conference proposed by Carey to be held at the Cape of Good Hope in 1810 never took place. Then she gives an imaginative study of who might have attended if it had taken place and what the results might have been. It was not until 100 years later at Edinburgh in 1910 that Carey's dream was fulfilled.

Editor

A VISION FRUSTRATED

The most startling missionary proposal of all time was made by William Carey in 1806. He calmly proposed to Andrew Fuller, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, that they should summon 'a meeting of all denominations of Christians at The Cape of Good Hope somewhere about 1810', to be followed by another such conference somewhere every ten years. Truly an audacious concept! An international and interdenominational conference at a time when conferences of any kind, missionary or otherwise, national or local, were practically unknown! More astonishing still, Carey's vision was of a conference such as was not attempted for another hundred years. Like the conference at Edinburgh, 1910, it was to be a gathering of missionaries, missionary experts and missionary society officials, for the planning of advance and to solve the problems which confronted them all. 'We should understand each other better in two days than in two years of correspondence.'

The international missionary conferences held in 1854, 1860, 1888 and 1900 were not of this character: they were 'chiefly great missionary demonstrations fitted to inform, educate and impress'.² p. 382

But Andrew Fuller turned the project down:

I consider this as one of bro'r Carey's pleasing dreams. Seriously I see no important object to be obtained by such a meeting, which might not be quite as well attained without it. And in a meeting of all denominations, there would be no unity, without which we had better stay at home....³

It is characteristic of the ecumenical situation of the time that Fuller rejected Carey's idea, not because of the obvious difficulties of transport, or of travel in a world at war, but because of the universally held assumption that Christians of various churches could not meet without quarrelling. The project indeed was less unpractical than might be thought. Capetown formed the crossroads between East and West, the outward and homeward port of call for traders, civil and military officials and missionaries. The London Missionary Society's veteran, Vanderkemp, was on the spot and might have organized the reception and accommodation of the conference. Andrew Fuller, missionary statesman and saint though he was, made a 'great refusal'.

WHAT IF CAPE TOWN 1810 HAD BEEN HELD?

² World Missionary Conference, 1910, Vol. IX, p. 8.

³ Letter of Andrew Fuller to William Ward, Serampore, December 2nd, 1806, quoted in *William Carey* by S. Pearce Carey. Carey Press, 1934, pp. 268, 269, which see, *passim*.

If it had been otherwise, missionary and ecumenical history might have been changed. The World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh, 1910, resulted in the International Missionary Council; it made possible the Faith and Order movement and ultimately the World Council of Churches. Capetown, 1810, and ensuing decennials, might have anticipated by many decades the results of the Edinburgh conference. For Carey, not Fuller, was the practical man. It was Carey who discerned the signs of the times. He and other missionary pioneers were in eager correspondence both on the strategy of missions and on details of missionary policy. They were already wrestling with every subject dealt with by the commissions which prepared for Edinburgh, 1910. Small wonder that Carey longed to substitute personal conference for the lengthy and uncertain process of correspondence carried by sailing-ship.

First on the programme at Capetown, 1810, would have come, as at Edinburgh: 'Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World'. Carey's *Enquiry*, 1792, had surveyed the beginnings of Protestant p. 383 missionary work by the Moravians in Greenland, Labrador, the West Indies (where Wesleyans were also at work) and Abyssinia; by Eliot and Brainerd among the North American Indians; by the Halle-Danish Mission in South India; by the Dutch in Ceylon and the Netherlands East Indies.⁴ But since 1792, an advance had taken place, unparalleled in so short a time. Missionaries had entered Astrakhan and the Caucasus; Sierra Leone and South Africa; Bengal, Bhutan, Agra and Bombay; Burma; China; the South Sea Islands and New Zealand. Advance abroad was made possible by the swift spread of missionary organization at home: the Baptist Missionary Society (1792); the London Missionary Society (1794, largely Congregational); the Edinburgh and Glasgow Missionary Societies (1796, Presbyterian); the Church Missionary Society (1799, Anglican); the London Jews' Society (1802); the two great auxiliaries—the Religious Tract Society (1802) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804). Though the Wesleyan Missionary Society was not organized till 1813, Methodist missions had already a Committee of Finance and Advice (1804). On the Continent, the Netherlands Missionary Society began in 1799; Jänicke opened his Missionary Seminary in Berlin in 1800.

At Capetown it would surely have fallen to Carey, under the title, say, of 'Eighteen Years of Miracle', to bring his *Enquiry* up to date as a basis for plans of advance. World evangelization was the passion of those early missionaries: to them any new field entered was just a stepping-stone to yet another. Vanderkemp, with all South Africa before him, is lured on by Madagascar. Robert Morrison, first into China, keeps in view 'the important islands of Japan ... to prepare for a voyage by some of us to that country' and to discover whether his Chinese Bible could be altered for use there.⁵ Meantime he thinks out southward advance to Cochin, Malacca, Singapore, Java, Sumatra and Borneo. Before ever the Baptist pioneers land in Burma, the 'regions beyond' it are Carey's main interest ... 'the east side ... borders upon China, Cochin China and Tonquin, and may afford us the opportunity ultimately of introducing the Gospel into those countries. They are quite within our reach.'⁶ Letters from India are full of calculations as to the number of missionaries required to evangelize that land. We can envisage the Capetown conference uniting in appeal p. 384 to the home societies to send out a missionary force multiplied tenfold, if even the most crying opportunities were to be met.

What of the *personnel* at Capetown? Contemporary documents show no obstacle to the presence of any one of the following possible delegates. Let us look first at the

⁴ Carey's *Enquiry*, pp. 36, 37.

⁵ Broomhall: *Robert Morrison*, pp. 108, 109.

⁶ P. A., Vol. III, p. 285.

missionaries available. In South Africa, the L.M.S, Moravians from Germany and the South African Missionary Society (a Boer organization) were on the spot; India would have sent Carey and Marshman (B.M.S.); Taylor (L.M.S.) from Bombay; Jacob Kohlhoff, forty years in the Halle-Danish Mission, Swartz's successor at Tanjore; Robert Morrison would have come from Canton, China; one or two of the L.M.S. missionaries from Tahiti who in 1810 were refugees in Sydney; from Russia, Pinkerton, perhaps, the Bible Society agent in St Petersburg.

The younger churches would have had at least one representative. The Tamil Sathianadhan, ordained in 1790 according to the Lutheran rite, could have accompanied Kohloff. His ordination sermon, published by the S.P.C.K. 'to evince the capacity of the Natives for undertaking the office of the Ministry', had made him well known in England. He could preach in English, and his whole personality demonstrated that the secret of evangelization lay in the raising up of indigenous teachers and ministers.

Among the 'evangelical chaplains' would have been those fervid promoters of missions, Samuel Marsden from Sydney, N.S.W; Claudius Buchanan, Calcutta; and of course, Henry Martyn; while the missionary societies would have sent Josiah Pratt, secretary of the C.M.S; Andrew Fuller and Dr Ryland, B.M.S; George Burder, secretary of the L.M.S; Joseph Hardcastle, treasurer of the L.M.S. and the Religious Tract Society; Thomas Coke, pioneer of Methodist missionary effort in America and the West Indies. His heart's desire was to establish Methodist missions in India: he would have leapt at the chance to go eastward to Capetown. America had as yet no foreign mission, but the several home missionary societies working among Indians and Negroes would doubtless have been represented.

Among missionary-minded laymen one sees there Robert Haldane from Scotland; William Wilberforce, M.P. for Yorkshire, surely, with his parliamentary experience and wide missionary sympathies, the predestined chairman of the conference; Zachary Macaulay, former Governor of Sierra Leone, and his brother Colonel Macaulay, British Resident in Cochin, India, and according to Claudius Buchanan, 'on the subject of the Syrians the highest authority in the world'.

And what of Europe? One name stands out, the John R. Mott of the early nineteenth century. This fascinating personality was a German, p. 385 C. F. A. Steinkopf.⁷ As soon as he left Tübingen University, he became secretary of the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* at Basel (and later helped to found the Basel Mission). He became chaplain of the German Savoy Chapel in London in 1801. He was 'foreign secretary' of the Bible Society as well as of the R.T.S. He travelled repeatedly and systematically all over Europe, establishing Bible Societies, and was thus an unofficial liaison officer between every European and British missionary interest, securing numerous Continental candidates for the English societies. He had friends in every church, including many Roman Catholics. With Steinkopf at Capetown, the missionary voices of Europe would have been effectively heard.

Many of these men were in correspondence with Carey: all of them were deeply concerned, not only with the world-evangelization and its strategy, but with the main points of policy and method dealt with a hundred years later by the Edinburgh commissions.

A QUESTION OF RELATIONSHIPS

The relation of missions to indigenous culture and customs was a live issue. The missionaries had a high standard for inter-racial intercourse and manners. 'Be meek and

⁷ C. Schoell: *Carl Friedrich Adolf Steinkopf*, 1890 (a sixteen-page biography).

gentle among them ... Cultivate the utmost friendship and cordiality with them, as your equals, and never let European pride or superiority be felt by the natives in the mission house at Rangoon.⁸ But where draw the line between courtesy and compromise? What about suttee and child marriage and caste? Of none of these had the missionaries heard before coming to India.

Caste formed the crucial issue. Controversy was inevitable between the Halle-Danish men who, with approval of the S.P.C.K.,⁹ allowed caste divisions in the Church even at Holy Communion, and the new missionaries in Calcutta, who insisted that their converts by eating with them should make a complete break with caste before baptism.¹⁰ Polygamy confronted the missionaries in every field, raising the very same questions about the polygamist convert and his wives which remain largely unsolved even to-day.

On the preparation of missionaries there were marked differences of opinion. Should Latin, Greek and Hebrew be taught in the trainingschools? p. 386 Is the best pioneer work done by unordained men, mechanics without literary or theological training? Behind this lay a fundamental question of missionary principle, then much discussed. 'Must civilization precede the gospel, or the gospel civilization?' Samuel Marsden,¹¹ and not he alone, contended that 'the attention of the heathen [to the gospel] can be gained only by the arts': others, that to attempt civilization without the knowledge of the gospel is to little purpose, a view supported by L.M.S. experience in the South Seas of the frequent failure of such uneducated missionaries.¹²

The relations between missions and governments cried for attention then as now in every field, whether the rulers were the chiefs of savage tribes in Africa or Tahiti; or Dutch or Danish colonial governments in South Africa, Ceylon or India; or the officials of the East India Company, and with their varying attitudes towards missions—in Calcutta and Canton so often antagonistic, in Madras almost uniformly helpful.¹³

Home Base questions, in particular the relation of missionaries to their societies, had to be worked out from the very start, and such matters as the provision for pensions, illness, support of widows, children's allowances. It was hotly debated whether missionaries should be encouraged to earn their own living in government employ or in business, as so many were actually doing. Grave difficulties between the Boards and their missionaries arose from the fact that most missionaries went out for life, while their work was directed by men who had never seen a mission field. The lamentable split between the B.M.S. and the Serampore men, which, after Andrew Fuller's death, darkened the later days of the great pioneers,¹⁴ and much other trouble as well, might have been avoided, if society officials at Capetown had seen for themselves the realities of one mission field, South Africa, and had learnt from eye-witnesses the realities of many more.

Problems of co-operation and comity urgently needed attention, strange as it may seem in a world so empty of missionaries. The Lutheran missionaries in South India had long been tenacious of their rights. When the Moravians landed in Tranquebar in 1760

⁸ P. A., Vol. III, p. 426, Instructions to pioneers sent to Burma.

⁹ S.P.C.K. Annual Report, 1810.

¹⁰ P.A., Vol. I, p. 338.

¹¹ Stock: *History of the C.M.S.*, Vol. I, p. 206.

¹² Horne: *Story of the L.M.S.*, pp. 27, 31, 40.

¹³ See S.P.C.K. Annual Report, *passim*.

¹⁴ George Smith: *William Carey*, pp. 359–76.

with a mandate from the Danish Government to establish a base from which p. 387 they might evangelize the Nicobar Isles, the Lutherans forbade them to preach in public, and confined them, while in Tranquebar, within the four walls of the 'Garden of the Brethren'. In 1806, the S.P.C.K. reports 'disorders produced in the established missions, both Danish and English, through certain missionaries sent out by an Anabaptist Society and by that called the L.M.S.'. The strange tendency of missionary societies to enter already occupied territory was unhappily manifest. By 1792 in Sierra Leone there were already churches of freed slaves, Baptist, Wesleyan and Lady Huntingdon's Connexion. In the next ten years, Baptists, Wesleyans, Moravians, L.M.S. and C.M.S. all sent missions to the Colony: only the C.M.S. work (1804) proved permanent. Zachary Macaulay returning to the Colony in 1796 had to use his authority as Governor to stop acrimonious disputes between the missionaries on board ship, which were rousing the mockery of the ungodly.¹⁵ Robert Morrison was toiling at translating the Bible into Chinese at Canton, unconscious that Marshman and his colleagues, aided by a Chinese-speaking Armenian, were producing a Chinese Bible in Calcutta.¹⁶ The result was a painful clash when later on Marshman and Morrison presented their completed labours to the Bible Society, a clash which might surely have been avoided, if the two scholars had met at Capetown and discussed the situation with the genial Steinkopf, and if the conference had arranged for inter-society exchange of plans on that Bible translation which was the distinguishing glory of those pioneer missionary days.

If practical missionary statesmen, burning to see obstacles to world evangelization removed, had conferred at Capetown and succeeding decennials, is it not more than probable that they would have anticipated the coming of the International Missionary Council by over a century, and have evolved some elementary form of international and inter-society machinery for the united planning of advance, for the securing of missionary comity and for the pooling of missionary experience?

THE BIRTH OF THE ECUMENICAL SPIRIT

Is it fantastic, moreover, to imagine that world missionary conferences begun in 1810 might have hastened not only the appearance of an International Missionary Council, but also of the Faith and Order P. 388 movement and of the World Council of Churches? An ecumenical wind was stirring the sails of the Church. Not for another hundred years were the omens so favourable for ecumenical advance.

1. *Societies were bringing together Christians of different churches and different nations for united action, usually missionary.*

On the Continent a new thing under the sun had appeared—an international and interdenominational society, the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* (German Christian Society) formed to resist rationalism and to develop Christian life and faith largely through the spread of literature. Founded in the 'eighties with headquarters in Basel, it gathered into its membership people of every class of society from Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and even Britain—Lutherans, Reformed and those outside the national churches—Moravians, Mennonites and even Roman Catholics. It exerted wide missionary influence and among other things gave birth to the Basel Missionary Society, in which Lutheran and Reformed churchmen so freely co-operated.¹⁷

¹⁵ Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay, Trevelyan, pp. 15–16.

¹⁶ Broomhall: *Robert Morrison*, pp. 69–73, S.C.M. Press, 1924.

¹⁷ *Evangelisches Missions Magazin*, January 1947, pp. 1–12.

In Britain the L.M.S. was formed on an interdenominational basis (chiefly Congregationalists, Anglicans and Presbyterians): its foundation was hailed as 'the funeral of bigotry'. The Committees of the R.T.S. and the Bible Society were formed on a fifty-fifty basis of Anglicans and Nonconformists, with a careful balance of churchmanship among their secretaries.

2. *In the mission field, missionaries of different communions were working together under the same societies.*

The C.M.S. was employing missionaries with Lutheran ordination, drawn from Jänicke's Missionary Seminary in Berlin. In this, the C.M.S. was following the example of the S.P.C.K., the oldest Anglican missionary society (1698) which for a hundred years had supported as its missionaries in South India Germans with Lutheran ordination, trained under the Franckes at Halle University and sent out by the Halle-Danish Mission. These men not only built up an indigenous Church in which they ordained Indian ministers¹⁸ with Lutheran rites but, as chaplains under the East India Company, or as part of their ordinary duty as S. P.C.K. agents, in the absence of Anglican chaplains, preached and ministered to English congregations and garrisons, p. 389 conducting weddings and funerals, baptizing and administering Holy Communion.¹⁹

3. *On the mission field, spiritual fellowship was developing rapidly among missionaries of different communions.*

At home there were grave difficulties. It was widely believed, by many besides Andrew Fuller, that Christians of various denominations could not meet in conference without quarrelling about their differences—a belief that persisted long. 'Capetown, 1810', would have given the first of a thousand demonstrations that conferences which bring together men on fire for the same missionary object lead not to dissension but to understanding.

There was a conviction, moreover, that Christians of different churches could not pray together in any one of their several forms without offence or hypocrisy. From its foundation in 1804 right on till 1859, the Bible Society had no prayer at its committees or annual meetings; they wanted Quakers on their committees, and these could not, without in their view dishonouring the Holy Spirit, be present at pre-arranged prayer.

In the mission field, Christians learnt to glory in united prayer. Henry Martyn in 1806 hastens ashore at Capetown on his way to India, to find the L.M.S. missionaries: 'Meeting these beloved and highly honoured brethren filled me with joy... I joined their family service.'²⁰ In Calcutta, Anglican chaplains, Baptist missionaries and L.M.S. Congregationalists met frequently for fellowship and prayer, 'taking sweet counsel together and going to God's House as friends.... No shadow of bigotry falls on us here'.²¹ Henry Martyn's pagoda on the banks of the Hooghly was habitually used for united prayer meetings:

It would have done your heart good to have joined us at our meetings at the pagoda. From this place we have successively recommended Dr Taylor [L.M.S.] to the work of the Lord at Bombay; Mr Martyn [Anglican] to Dinapoor; Mr Corrie [Anglican Chaplain] to Chunar;

¹⁸ 'Native priests' is the S.P.C.K. phrase for these Indian ministers.

¹⁹ See, *passim*, S.P.C.K. Annual Reports. Before 1810 there is scarcely a trace of questioning as to the ecclesiastical correctness of this procedure, though constant regret that Englishmen in regular Anglican orders could not be found for this glorious service. It would seem that the tradition of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anglican divines, of refusing to unchurch Continental non-episcopal communions, prevailed in Anglican missionary operations.

²⁰ *Journals of Henry Martyn*, Vol. I, pp. 397–8.

²¹ S. Pearce Carey: *Life of Carey* (abridged edition), p. 69.

Mr des Granges p. 390 [L.M.S.] to Vizagapatam, and our two brethren [Baptist] to Rangoon. in these meetings, the utmost harmony prevails and a union of hearts unknown between persons of different denominations in England.²²

4. *A remarkably broad-minded attitude towards Roman Catholics prevailed among missionaries.*

The attitude of the Carey-Martyn generation differed from that of earlier missions. The Halle-Danish missionaries, with encouragement from the S.P.C.K, had in many places built up Protestant churches out of converts from the 'Portuguese', i.e. the half-caste community who were practically all Roman Catholics.

The policy of the Baptist missionaries was rather to cultivate friendly relations with Roman Catholics with a view to gaining light from them on missionary methods. The Baptist pioneers in Burma are instructed 'to find out the present state of the catholics, and in what way they attempt to make proselytes'; and are told, 'If introduced to any of the catholic priests, endeavour to procure their confidence, by an ingenuous and affectionate behaviour towards them'.²³ Henry Martyn in 1807, while at Dinapore, hearing that there were 'large bodies of Christians (i.e. Roman Catholics) at Delhi, Agra, etc.', sent a questionnaire in Latin to the Roman Catholic missionaries in these places, asking: 'Do you itinerate? Have you any portion of Scripture translated, or do you distribute tracts? Do you allow any remains of caste to the baptized? Have you schools? Are the masters heathen, or Christians? Is there any native preacher or catechist? Number of converts?', and so forth.²⁴ A friendly correspondence with several priests was the result.

The *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* adopted a similar attitude. It not only had Roman Catholic members, but one of them, a priest, Johannes Gossner (sixteen years before he became a Protestant), acted as its secretary in Basel, while the Protestant secretary was on military service. The D.C.G. leaders helped a remarkable evangelical movement among priests in Bavaria by every means in their power, but firmly discouraged them from leaving their Church. The Bible Society, p. 391 in the first ten years of its existence,²⁵ circulated Roman Catholic versions, employed Roman Catholic agents, including Leander van Ess, theological professor at Marburg, and records many instances of hearty co-operation in the circulation of the Scriptures from Roman Catholic ecclesiastics. In the same ten years, the Bible Society had made contacts with most of the ancient Oriental churches in the Near East, Orthodox, Armenian, Jacobite or Syrian, Coptic, Abyssinian.

5. *The missionary societies took an ecumenical attitude towards the Orthodox and other Eastern churches.*

These ancient Eastern churches and their place in the missionary enterprise could not have failed to play a large part in the discussions of Capetown. The attitude of the missionary societies of that period towards them was clear and unanimous. Contact with them was eagerly sought in the belief that they were the main hope for the evangelization of Muslims, Hindus and other non-Christians. Missions should be planted among them, the Scriptures should be circulated, schools should be established, not with a view to converting them to Protestantism (this was deliberately discountenanced), but to helping to purify and strengthen their faith and life, so that they might witness to Christ among

²² Letter from Carey to Dr Ryland, January 20th, 1807, quoted in Geo. Smith's *William Carey*, p. 190.

²³ P.A., Vol. III, pp. 329, 330.

²⁴ *Journals of Henry Martyn*, Vol. II, pp. 47-9.

²⁵ See, *passim*, John Owen: *The History of the First Ten Years of the B.F.B.S.*, 3 vols, 1816-20.

the non-Christians. Already by 1802, the Edinburgh Missionary Society had begun planting such missions among Orthodox and Armenians in Astrakhan and Tartary. Their example was followed by the L.M.S. and the Basel Mission.

Claudius Buchanan, evangelical of evangelicals, was a vigorous advocate of this policy. From June 1806 to February 1807 he travelled in South India 'to investigate the state of religion amongst Hindus, Jews, Roman Catholics, Syrians and Protestant Christians' and to promote the circulation of the Scriptures. He travelled in Travancore and up the West Coast, visiting in friendly fashion the Roman Uniate churches and recording that 'the Romish Syrians also want the Bible'. But his main objective was the non-Roman Catholic Syrians. He conferred with their Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius, and their clergy on the translation of the Scriptures into Malayalam; on the establishment of Christian schools in every parish; and on 'their disposition to a union with the English Church'. Such union was seriously discussed, though Buchanan came to consider 'an official union scarcely practical in present circumstances'. His verdict on the Syrian Church was that [p. 392](#) 'Providence was about to unfold itself by dispensing the Bible throughout the East, by means of this people':

Finding a church, possessing the Bible, and abjuring Romish corruption ... possessing too an ordination, with which ours is scarcely to be compared ... what more required to make them a useful people in evangelizing that dark region?²⁶

Might not such a conception of the ancient Eastern churches, if developed at Capetown and later decennial conferences, have given courage to the missionary societies resolutely to pursue their policy of co-operation with these churches in spite of the ecclesiastical difficulties which almost invariably arose? And might it not have prevented or modified the policy adopted by American missionary societies in the mid-nineteenth century, of building up Protestant churches from Oriental church converts, which introduced so much bitterness into Near Eastern ecumenical relationships?

6. *Missionary thought was concentrated on the building-up of the Church.*

There is no stranger fact in missionary history than that the subject of the Church in the mission field found its place for the first time in the programme of a missionary conference at Edinburgh, 1910. Nothing is more certain than that it would have figured prominently at Capetown. As early as 1797, the Baptist missionaries were in correspondence with the Halle-Danish men,²⁷ eager to know how they were building up the Church. Conditions of baptism? Conditions of ordination? Who baptized? Who ordained? Attitude towards caste? Place of the foreign missionary in the indigenous Church? Relation of the indigenous ministry to the foreign missionary etc. etc.²⁸ This last was the most urgent question, for already the new missionaries were convinced that India would be evangelized chiefly by the indigenous Christians.²⁹

Plans for the future of the indigenous Church were already in the minds both of societies and of missionaries. The S.P.C.K. as early as [p. 393](#) 1791 had laid down as the

²⁶ Hugh Pearson: *Memoirs of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, D.D.*, Vol. II, pp. 56, 78, 64-95, 265, 267-9. Spottiswoode, 1819. And see, *passim*, Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia*.

²⁷ The Church built up by the Halle-Danish missionaries was by far the most striking instance of an indigenous Church found anywhere. By 1800, it included 18,000 to 20,000 members. (See Hough: *Christianity in India*, Vols. III and IV, *passim*.)

²⁸ P.A., Correspondence with Gericke, Vol. I, pp. 421 and 430 ff.

²⁹ P.A., Vol. III, pp. 329-31, etc.

ultimate aim of their missionary endeavours a self-governing, self-supporting Church with an indigenous ministry:

If we wish to establish the Gospel in India, ... we ought in time to give the Natives a Church of their own, independent of our support: we ought to have suffragan Bishops in the country, who might ordain Deacons and Priests, and secure a regular succession of apostolical Pastors, even if all connections with their parent Church should be annihilated.³⁰

The Serampore missionaries were strong on self-support and self-government. They contemplated a series of local churches, the Indian brethren to choose their own pastors and deacons from among their own countrymen. A European missionary should be stationed every two hundred miles to superintend and to advise, but should always be passing on to plant new churches:

The whole administration will assume a native aspect: the inhabitants will identify the cause as belonging to their own nation, and their prejudices at falling into the hands of the Europeans will entirely vanish.³¹

Concentration on the problems of church-building must surely have drawn missionary attention to the perils arising from church divisions. Might not 'Capetown, 1810', like Edinburgh, 1910, have given rise to a desire for understanding in the realm of faith and order? There was one most cogent reason why it should.

7. By their very absorption in church-building the missionaries were courting disaster.

It was an ecumenical instinct which made the L.M.S. 'design not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy or any other form of church government ... but the glorious Gospel of the blessed God to the heathen': but the corollary was wholly impracticable, the idea that 'it shall be left ... to the minds of the persons, whom God may call into the fellowship of His Son to assume such form of church government as to them shall appear most agreeable to the word of God'.³² There is no recorded case of missionaries who found themselves able to leave so momentous a choice to an infant Christian community. Willy nilly, the missionaries built up indigenous churches more or less on the model to which they were accustomed. They carried Independency, Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, Lutheranism and p. 394 Methodism to the heathen, and were reproducing every western division in the non-Christian world.

It required no great amount of acumen to discern the perils of confusion and collision that lay ahead. If missionaries with so broad an attitude towards other communions, who trusted each other and had learnt to work and worship together, had met in council every ten years, would it have taken a century for the idea to dawn that the ultimate solution for denominational strife in the mission field lay in the drawing together of the churches as such, first in the foreign field, and then in the homelands?

If Carey had been given his conference, if the missionary world had not ignored its prophet, might not a United Church of China have been a nineteenth-century phenomenon? Might not 'Presbyterianism, Independency and Episcopacy' have combined their strength in some Church of South India decades before the twentieth century?

³⁰ S.P.C.K. Annual Report, 1791, p. 110, footnote.

³¹ 'Form of agreement, respecting the great principles in the work of instructing the heathen', Vol. III, pp. 182-3.

³² See Minutes of the L.M.S., May 9th, 1796; Society's First Minute-book, p. 78.

Once more we would ask—in view of such evident signs of the dawn of ecumenism in the mission field, is it wholly fantastic to imagine that a world missionary conference in 1810 might have heralded not only the advent of an international missionary council, but also the beginning of corporate search for agreement in the realm of faith and order, and the appearance of some form of world council of churches in the mid-nineteenth instead of the mid-twentieth century?

Dr Ruth Rouse is a well-known historian of the ecumenical movement. [p. 395](#)

Carey's Commitment to Social Justice

Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar

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In a popular style the author surveys Carey's 40 years of unceasing protest and compassionate action for those who were condemned to cruel death in the name of religion—infants, widows, the sick and lepers.

Editor

William Carey and fellow missionary John Thomas were riding near Malda, India, in 1794 when they saw 'a basket hung in a tree, in which an infant had been exposed; the skull remained, the rest having been devoured by ants.' This 'holy' act of infanticide had been committed with religious fervour by a Hindu mother.

Infanticide was not uncommon in India in Carey's day. But the British government in India ignored such sacrifice of infants—it didn't want to interfere in religious matters of the people. The Indian masses were ready to sacrifice their lives (and their children's) for the sake of salvation and to escape the karma-samsara cycle. The people were intensely religious and were following (though sometimes misinterpreting) written religious laws.

William Carey strongly protested against these crimes against humanity. He was one of many who prodded the apparently passive government to halt or at least regulate a variety of harmful social practices.

KILLING INFANTS

In 1802 Carey's colleague William Ward studied infanticide on the river island of Saugor. Many women made vows to the Holy Ganges River 'that if blessed with two children, one would be presented to the River'. As many as a hundred children, he estimated (though probably more), were being sacrificed every year.

William Carey, Jr., reported one such sacrifice to his father: A boatman pulled a drowning child into his boat. He presented the infant to its mother. She took the child, broke its neck, and cast it into the river again! [p. 396](#)

After joining Fort William College as a professor, Carey protested against infanticide to Governor-General Wellesley. Wellesley called for a study of the frequency, nature, and cause of infanticide in Bengal. So Carey prepared an exhaustive report; other people were

at work as well. Since the attention of the government was now awakened, and Lord Wellesley was convinced, infanticide was abolished in 1802 before Carey even presented his report.

In a letter to John Ryland six years later, Carey explained his contribution: 'I have, since I have been here ... presented three petitions or representations to Government for the purpose of having the burning of women and other modes of murder abolished, and ... in the case of infanticide and voluntary drowning in the river ... laws were made to prevent these, which have been successful.'

This marked the first time the British government interfered so directly with religious practice in India. It set the stage for abolition of other practices.

BURNING WIDOWS

As scholar E. Daniel Potts explains, widow burning was 'based on the religious belief that only by burning could the widow win eternal happiness and bring blessings on her family.' (*Sati*, or *suttee*, refers to the *act* of burning alive a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband; it also becomes the name of the *woman* who performs the act.) Voices had been raised against *sati* for centuries, but no one before Carey had the ability to drown out the voices that encourage it.

Carey first witnessed the rite, to his horror, in 1799. The next year, when he saw a group of people assembled for *sati*, he tried to stop them by (falsely) saying the governor-general had threatened to hang the first man who kindled the funeral pyre!

Carey and other missionaries soon launched a strong protest against *sati*, saying it was not voluntary but forced. Carey was then asked to submit full information on *sati* to the governor-general's council.

In 1803, Carey arranged for a debate on *sati* at Fort William College. Two years later the governor-general asked the Indian Supreme Court to study how much the practice was based on Hindu law. The report said that it had a religious sanction, and therefore, *any reform would be unwise*.

But in 1816, Carey's former pundit (native teacher), who was now chief pundit of the Supreme Court, determined that *sati* had no basis in the Hindu Shastras [Hindu sacred writings]. Still it continued to be [p. 397](#) debated. Carey's colleague William Ward and Indian leader Raja Ram Mohan Roy helped to influence Parliament to take up the matter in 1821.

Meanwhile, the Baptist missionaries continued their fight. They dismissed an Indian helper who participated in the *sati* of his sister-in-law. They continued to write against the practice in the periodicals *Samachar Darpan* and the *Friend of India*, criticizing the government for inaction.

In 1828, William Bentinck was appointed governor-general. Bentinck, an active Christian influenced by the steady *sati* debate, had the 'stern and unalterable determination ... that this atrocious rite should cease absolutely and immediately.' He consulted with *Indian leaders and abolished sati* in December 1829, which the Serampore missionaries praised as a 'bold and decisive step'.

William Carey was the government's translator in Bengali, and on Sunday morning, December 6, 1829, he received the official declaration that *sati* had been abolished. He decided that translating the declaration was more important than preparing his sermon. Giving the preaching task to another, Carey raced to translate the declaration by that evening, believing lives hung in the balance every minute he delayed.

EXPOSING THE SICK

The sick and dying were often taken to the banks of the holy rivers and allowed to die. William Ward described such 'ghat murders': 'When a person is on the point of death, his relations carry him on his bed, or on a litter, to the Ganges ... A person, in his last agonies, is dragged from his bed and friends, and carried in the coldest or the hottest weather, from whatever distance, to the river side, where he lies, if a poor man, in the open air, day and night, till he expires.' In some cases, the practice veiled simple murder.

William Carey protested against the act in 1802, and later the Serampore journal *Friend of India* declared that controlling the practice would require 'delicate handling, for the strongest religious feelings of the Hindoos' were involved. Yet it was time to halt 'barbarous cruelty even in the well-meaning'. Till a formal abolition took place, the missionaries occasionally carried home people who were exposed to die and nursed them back to health.

In *India's Cries to British Humanity*, Baptist James Peggs brought to the fore the passivity of the government to this 'murder'. The Baptist p. 398 missionaries also continuously protested against the social evil. Finally an otherwise insensitive government was forced to halt such exposures of the sick and dying.

DROWNING LEPERS

Lepers were rejected by their families and society and sometimes either helped to commit suicide or actually murdered. Carey saw a leper die in Katwa in 1812: 'A pit about ten cubits in depth was dug, and a fire placed at the bottom of it. The poor man rolled himself and struggled for that purpose [of getting out of the pit]. His mother and sister, however thrust him in again; and thus a young man, who to all appearances might have survived several years, was cruelly burned to death.

'I find that the practice is not uncommon in these parts. Taught that a violent end purifies the body and ensures transmigration into a healthy new existence, while natural death by disease results in four successive births and a fifth as a leper again, the leper like the even more wretched widow, has always courted suicide'. Others who suffered from what Carey called the 'great sickness' were drowned.

The missionaries once again used their vital tool, *Friend of India*, to make known the lepers' pathetic state and call for better care. In addition, Carey and Thomas preached to and provided medicine for many lepers. Missionary wife Ann Grant wrote in 1803, 'This morning 34 poor people met before our door ... Many with the Leprosy; some with the ends of their fingers, some with their toes eaten off, by the Leprosy, many of them receive two-pence a week. Bro. Carey gives them medicine for their bodies, & the best medicine for their poor Souls.'

PROTESTING BOLDLY

Carey and his colleagues also objected to slavery ('In some parts of India,' William Ward wrote, 'children are as much an article of sale as goats or poultry'). They also spoke out against religious practices involving self-torture and published tracts against the caste system.

One can debate who deserves credit for abolishing the evil practices of infanticide, *sati*, the slave trade, or the exposure of the sick and the dying. Writers have ascribed the honour to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Lord Bentinck and others, as well as Carey. p. 399

But Carey definitely raised his voice in protest, and he succeeded in drawing, and keeping, the attention of the government through the publications *Friend of India* and

Samachar Darpan. He and his fellow missionaries stood with the oppressed, reflecting the type of God he believed in—the Friend of India.

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***Sati* or Widow Burning**

S. Pearce Carey

Excerpt from William Carey by S. Pearce Carey (London, Carey Press 1934) p. 182f

William Carey wrote: ‘We saw a number of people assembled on the river-side. I asked for what they were met, and they told me to burn the body of a dead man. I enquired if his wife would die with him; they answered yes, and pointed to her. She was standing by the pile of large billets of wood, on the top of which lay her husband’s dead body. Her nearest relative stood by her; and near her was a basket of sweetmeats. I asked if this was her choice, or if she were brought to it by any improper influence. They answered that it was perfectly voluntary. I talked till reasoning was of no use, and then began to exclaim with all my might against what they were doing, telling them it was shocking murder. They told me it was a great act of holiness, and added in a very surly manner, that, if I did not like to see it, I might go further off, and desired me to do so. I said I would not go, that I was determined to stay and see the murder, against which I should certainly bear witness at the tribunal of God. I exhorted the widow not to throw away her life; to fear nothing, for no evil would follow her refusal to be burned. But in the most calm manner she mounted the pile, and danced on it with her hands extended, as if in the utmost tranquillity of spirit. Previous to this, the relative, whose office it was to set fire to the pile, led her six times round it—thrice at a time. As she went round, she scattered the sweetmeats amongst the people, who ate them as a very holy thing. This being ended, she lay down beside the corpse, and put one arm under its neck, and the other over, when a quantity of dry cocoa-leaves and other substances were heaped over them to a considerable height, and then *ghî* was poured on the top. Two bamboos were then put over them, and held fast down, and fire put to the pile, which immediately blazed very fiercely, owing to the dry and combustible materials of which it was composed. No sooner was the fire kindled than all the people set up a great shout of joy, invoking Siva. It was impossible to have heard the woman, had she groaned, or even cried aloud, on account of the shoutings of the people, and again it was impossible for her to stir or struggle, by reason of the bamboos held down on her, like the levers of a press. We made much objection to their use of these, insisting that it was undue force, to prevent her getting up when the fire burned. But they declared it was only to keep the fire from falling down. We could not bear to see more, and left them, exclaiming loudly against the murder, and filled with horror at what we had seen.’