

WILLIAM CAREY AND 1792  
by Samuel Hugh Moffett

This is the year to celebrate William Carey and the birth of the modern missionary movement. Some trace the beginnings of Protestant global missions to John Calvin's brave but failed attempt to send an evangelical mission to Brazil in 155<sup>5</sup>; or to the chaplains of the Dutch East India Company in Indonesia in the early 1600s. Others point to the first Lutherans sent to India in 1706, or the Moravians in the West Indies in 1732.

But for world-wide, enduring missionary impact, no rapid sequence of events in the history of Protestant missions can match what was accomplished between May 1792 and June 1793 by a thirty-one year old, part-time shoemaker, part-time school teacher, and part-time Baptist preacher who had recently flunked his ordination exams.

In the short space of that one year, four momentous incidents changed the history of missions: the publication of a book, the preaching of a sermon, the organization of a society, and the sending of a missionary. The central character in all four was William Carey, and each of the four has a missionary lesson for today.

The first was the book, Carey's An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen. It was Carey's answer to the common misapprehension in the Protestantism of his day that the Great Commission of Jesus Christ had already been accomplished by the church, and that the whole world had been reached. But Carey's open Bible, next to a leather globe of the world which he had placed near his cobbler's bench told him differently. According to his calculations from scripture and geography, more than three-fourths of the world's population was still unreached. That is the first missionary lesson from 1792: get the facts about the mission right.

The second lesson is in a sermon he preached shortly after the book was published. It is not enough to convince the mind with facts and statistics; the challenge to mission must reach the heart. So Carey stood up to preach at a meeting of the Baptist Minister' Association. He took as his text, Isaiah 54: 2-3. His sermon had two points; one on faith, and one on works, an important combination. The first point was "Expect great things from God". The second was "Attempt great things for God". The missionary must believe in God's great purpose for the world, and be ready to do something about it. The lesson is: to the right facts, add the right motives

But it was the organizing of a missionary society four months later that put the muscle, the necessary structural fiber into the mission. It was the forming of this Society in October 1792 that is generally taken to mark the beginning of the modern missionary movement. It calls to mind the practical injunction of a more recent missionary statesman, John R. Mott. "Pray as if everything depended on prayer; organize as if everything depended on organization." To the facts and the motives, add the right kind of organization.

However it was all still on paper. It was only theory. Not until when in June 1793 Carey actually sailed himself as a missionary to India, instead of remaining to be the president of the missionary society, only then did it all come to life, and only then did Carey give Protestantism its modern model of a missionary. He did not even wait until reaching India to begin his work. All the way on board his ship he studied Bengali and began to translate Genesis into that language.

In 1805 Carey and his colleagues drew up what they called the Serampore Form of Agreement to guide them in their missionary methods. Here is a sampling, paraphrased:

1. The human soul is of inestimable value, and is in mortal danger of eternal punishment. But Christ can save them.
2. We must gain all the knowledge we can of the Indian mind and the Indian religions.
3. We must not offend Indian sensibilities by vaunting our

English ways and attacking theirs.

4. We must "watch all opportunities of doing good"-- preaching, itinerating, talking to all who will listen.

5. The "great subject of our preaching" must be "Christ the Crucified".

6. We must do everything necessary to win the confidence of the people.

7. We must remember the importance of native leaders, of building up the Christian lives of our converts. We must value the work of our female colleagues in the Mission in their important work with women.

8. We must in all possible ways promote the development of Indian leadership and the formation of Indian churches led by Indian pastors.

9. We must "labour with all our might in forwarding translations of the sacred scriptures in the languages of Hindoostan".

10. We must remember that to be fit for these "unutterably important labours" we must be "instant in prayer and the cultivation of personal religion".

Carey died in 1834. He had translated the Scriptures into 35 languages and dialects; he had founded a college which still grants the degrees for most of the Protestant schools of Christian higher education in India; he was honored by some of the most prestigious academic societies of England. But on his tombstone, the only words inscribed at his request besides his name and dates were these:

"A wretched, poor and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall".

Stop talking about Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey; it's Christ you must remember, he told his friends at the end.

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