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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.

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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'.<sup>1</sup> 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-

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<sup>1</sup> 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?'<sup>2</sup>

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!'<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> *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.

<sup>3</sup> *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?'<sup>4</sup>

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 (Sutcliffe) was only forty years of age, and once their resolution—'Humbly

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<sup>4</sup> 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 misions, 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.

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**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