

Carey, Marshman and Ward

A Memorial Tribute

(Paulos Mar Gregorios)

We pay tribute today to three men of God, men sent by God to our country at a crucial moment of our history, to begin the process of its transformation. We hallow the memory of William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, the Serampore Trio.

At the end of the 18th century, British commerce had roused new thoughts, awakened new energies, and quickened latent greed in colonial master and colonised "heathen" alike. India was rousing herself from her sleep of centuries, seeking to flex her muscles which had become flabby from long disuse or misuse.

At that stage, at the close of the 18th century, Carey, Marshman, and Ward brought to us something we needed, something which neither the greedy traders of the East India Company nor the arrogant colonial masters who succeeded them could provide - the ferment of an Indian cultural renaissance. William Carey was particularly instrumental in creating that ferment, more than Raja Ram Mohan Roy. We must pay tribute to the remarkable effort of this foreigner, this simple village cobbler from England, in the same breath as we laud the prodigious achievements of the Bengali Zamindar. While paying tribute to Carey, we must remember before God his two colleagues in the faith and in the work - Marshman and Ward.

William Carey was all things to all men, in the name of Christ. His biographer Dr George Smith puts it this way:

"Carey was successively, and often at the same time, a captain of labour, a schoolmaster, a printer, the developer of the vernacular speech, the expounder of the classical language, the translator of the classical language, the translator of both into English, and of the English Bible into both, the founder of a pure literature, the purifier of society, the watchful philanthropist, the saviour of the widow and the fatherless, of the despairing and the world-be suicide, of the down-trodden and oppressed".

Let me continue in my own words:

He was also a scientist, a first class botanist, an accomplished agri-horticulturist, no mean industrialist, (paper making), a social reformer, a journalist, an educationist, a linguist, a philologist, and the leading orientalist of his time. Carey Marshman and Ward had founded and supervised, already by 1818, when Serampore College was founded, no fewer than 126 schools with 10,000 Indian boys, 7000 of them around Serampore. Carey toiled without respite, using every minute and every ounce of his energy for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. He was as humble and self-effacing as he was gifted and hard working. His achievements were prodigious indeed. This working village shoe maker until the age of twentyfour, made himself competent not only in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but also in Sanscrit, Chinese, Bengali, Hindustani, and a host of other Indian languages, by arduous self-instruction. But he was not an armchair academic. He was a man of action, a man of faith.

Above all, he was a man of God, committed to Jesus Christ and to His Gospel. It was not for honour and fame for himself that he toiled day and night. He attempted great things for God, and expected great things from God, for the glory of God, not for his own.

William Carey's faith was one tested in the fire. I wish today to draw attention to two of these tests by fire - one in his youth, and another in the evening of his life.

Let me begin with the second. William Carey, like a true son of the Kingdom, always experienced the last beatitude: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Mt.5: 11-12). There were many in England who laughed at the shoemaker's efforts to convert the heathen. The opposition came at first from those in England who, like Sydney Smith and Mr. Prendergast,

advocated "rational religion", some amalgam of Arianism, Unitarianism and Deism; and laughed at preachers who stood on an inverted tub at street corners, and preached hell and damnation. Carey was also the victim of these enlightened slanderers who despised missionary and heathen alike. But the worst blow was when Carey and his Serampore colleagues were accused of living in luxury and mismanaging Serampore funds. The accusation had been made by his own Baptist missionary society in Britain, where the first great trio of Sutcliffe, Fuller and Ryland, had given place to administrators and power seekers like W John Dyer, more interested in property questions than in the proclamation of the gospel. The controversy is reported in detail by John Marshman, son of the second person of the Serampore Trio. It was Joshua Marshman who was the target of attack. The accusation was that Ward was weak and easily managed by Marshman, and that Carey was too simple and was taken in by Marshman. The controversy lasted 16 years and was closed only around 1830, when Ward died, and Carey and Marshman drew up a new trust deed by which all the Serampore properties were handed over to a trust of eleven in England, Carey and Marshman retaining only the right of rent-free occupation of the buildings until their death. When Marshman died, the Trust wanted to sell the property in the open market, but his son John Marshman had sufficient resources to buy it from the Mission Board.

Carey had to answer the charges against Marshman - which were (a) that his house was superbly furnished, (b) that he kept several vehicles for his family, (c) that his table was more luxurious than that of the Governor General, and (d) that he was pushing himself and his family to social prominence by ostentatious living. Carey took these charges levelled at Marshman as directed against himself. The origin of the charges was in the Calcutta Baptist Missionary Society, set up by youngsters who had arrived from England with a different vision and wanted to play down the work of the Serampore Trio. Carey wept that the Church that he planted in India was already broken up in his life time. It was a test of fire that only deepened

his trust in God and sustained his characteristic humanity. Calumny and slander will attend anyone who even today tries to make Serampore a place of true Christian obedience. Fortunately, we who are responsible to do so, do not even try.

His other and earlier test by fire had prepared him for facing the venom of slander and calumny. The first was a more severe test - especially when it came in the wake of a series of triumphs of faith.

The first of these triumphs came a few years after he was appointed professor of Sanskrit and Bengali at the College of Fort William. Carey presented his first batch of graduates to Lord Wellesley (incidentally of the same family and name as John and Charles Wesley) - the Governor General of India, in 1804. The presentation was made by Carey in flawless Sanskrit. All the graduates were Europeans, and the audience consisted of the top leaders of the British Raj and the top scholars of Bengal. The first to be presented was young Romer, a British civil servant, who made a learned speech in Hindostani, proving that Sanskrit was the parent language of the North Indian tongues. He was followed by another Englishman, Young Surinton, who discussed in Persian about the poems of Hafiz. Tod, another young British civil servant followed, declaiming in excellent Bengali that the best way to promote scientific and cultural development in India was to translate all classical Sanskrit works into Indian regional languages - a view which came from Carey himself. Tod was opposed by Hayes, who reflected the view of later British educators like Alexander Duff, who held the view that the best way to transform India was to place a mine, in the form of western education, under the moribund corpus of this giant Indian religion and culture. Further declamations on the subject were in Arabic and Sanskrit, and all the participants were British-trained by the Shoemaker from Olney.

Carey, who presided and gave the summing up oration also in Sanskrit, later in the day wrote to the Governor General:

"What a Singular exhibition has this day been presented to us ! In presence of the Supreme Governor of India, and of its most learned and illustrious characters Asiatic and European, an assembly is convened, in which no word of our native tongue (i.e. English) is spoken, but public discourse is maintained on interesting subjects in the languages of Asia. The colloquial Hindostani, the classic Persian, the commercial Bengali, the learned Arabic, and the primeval Sanskrit are spoken fluently, after having been studied grammatically, by English youth. Did ever any university in Europe, or any literary institution in any other age or country exhibit a scene so interesting as this ?"

The triumph of the cobbler of Olney was of course by the Grace of the carpenter from Nazareth, but it was also a sincere act of devotion to the culture of India. In this Carey and Duff stand in stark contrast to each other. Many other triumphs followed - edition of Valmiki's Ramayana in original Sanskrit with Carey's prose translation and explanatory notes, the translations by Carey and Marshman of the Sankhyakarika and the Hitopadesa, the Dasakumaracarita and Bhartrhari, and finally in 1811 Carey's magnum opus - the Universal Dictionary of the Oriental Languages.

We have no time to catalogue the triumphs of the Serampore Trio, but here is a list of some of the 36 translations of the Bible made, edited, and printed by them at Serampore:

Whole Bible - Bengali, Oriya, Assamese,

Sanskrit, Marathi and Panjabi

New Testament - Magadhi, Khasi, Manipoori, Brij-bhasha, Kanouji, Udaipuri, Jaipuri, Bhugeli, Marwari, Haraoiti, Bikaneri, Ujjaini, Bhatti, Palpa, Kumaoni, Gurhwali, Nepalese, Gujerati, Kashmiri, Dogri, Pushtoo, Telugu, Canarese.

Parts of the Tamil, Malavalam, Singhalese, Chinese,

Even Malayalam was not omitted. Carey writes to Dr Ryland on 22nd January 1808:

"the Syrian Bishop at Travancore is now superintending a translation from Syriac into Malayala"

(p 220)

That work was started by the Secretary of the Syrian Bishop at Travancore who later moved to this place by the river, and founded this Seminary in 1813. He was encouraged by Carey's College and Chaplain at the College of Fort William, Claudius Buchanan who came and visited us here. It was Buchanan's inspiration that encouraged the young and learned secretary of our Metropolitan to come to this riverside, and start praying for the foundation of a theological seminary and a Bible translation centre. Ittoop Malpan, the Secretary of the Metropolitan and the Founder of this Seminary in 1813, had been ~~xxxx~~ through fire himself, having survived Tipu's attack of his native city, Kunnankulam. The young priest refused to bend before Tipu's "Islam or The sword". The Muslims impressed by his piety, had spared him from both Islam and the sword.

He became a monk and settled down on this river-bank wilderness, and it is out of his prayer and suffering that the Syrian College, as it was then called arose. At least in Kerala it was the first place to begin English education, to complete a Bible translation and to start a printing press.

So back to Carey's great test by fire. It came suddenly. Carey was away in Calcutta; teaching at Fort William. It was the 11th March 1812. The Indian workers of the press in Serampore had gone home after work. Only William Ward who lived in two rooms next to the press was in the Press when it happened, with a few servants. The printing establishment in Serampore was at its acme. Seventeen fourts of types ~~as~~ for 14 Indian languages and Hebrew, Greek and English, the steel punches to create the types, the translation manuscripts, a vast stock of paper.

It was fire- fire which raged from sunset to midnight. against which Ward and Marshman. along with

down except the steel punches and the cast iron printing press and the place was still smoking when Carey arrived from Calcutta the next evening, brought back by Marshman who conveyed to him the bad news. The translation of the Ramayana, Gurumukhi and Telugu Grammars, ten bible translations - the MSS were all gone. So were the MSS of Carey's great project, the polyglot dictionary.

When Carey and Marshman arrived on the spot, Ward was rejoicing, for he had recovered the unburnt type matrices and the presses. Ward, about whom we hear so little, had already prospected for a new place to shift the presses and start all over again. Of course Carey's was the greatest loss, for his were the manuscripts. His remarks were "In one short evening, the labours of years are consumed ! How unsearchable are the ways of God ! I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection of which they seemed capable, and contemplated the missionary establishment with perhaps too much self-congratulation. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to Him ... All was smiling and promising a few hours before - now all is vanished into smoke or converted into rubbish ! Return now to thy books, regard God in all thou doest. Learn Arabic with humility. Let God be exalted in all thy plans, and purposes, and labours; He can do without Thee"

Such are the men whose memories we honour this day. They were great scholars, but perhaps not great theologians; they were, however, men of prayer and faith. I have no reason to think that they had a great vision about theological education, narrowly defined, in India. Serampore College was meant, if anything, for "educational evangelising" - a vision which stood on three legs - preaching the gospel in the people's language, translating the Bible into the same languages, and educating Indian Christians and non-Christians alike in Indian languages. The Serampore Trio added a fourth leg for the vision to stand on - the training of leadership through a College - " a college for the instruction of Asiatic, Christian and other youth in Eastern Literature and European science"

as the published brochure of 15th July 1818 puts it, with "a theological institute, as the crown of all, to equip the Eurasian and native christian students, by a quite unsectarian course of study, in apologetics, exegetics, and the Bible languages, to be missionaries to the Brahmanical classes".

We have added to that vision and altered it in accordance with our own lights as we are in duty bound to do. But the path they laid down is the one we still tread. Let us pay tribute to the great men of God who showed us the way, and toiled night and day, by nothing daunted, even by consuming fire and devastating cyclone. May we also learn to walk in their ways, in faith tested by fire, in a vision pure and purged of all dross, seeking neither power nor prestige, but walking in the way of Christ our Lord ! As Carey would have put it, there is work to be done, and the Lord calls us to it.