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Evaluation of a Missionary Biography

Dr. Rommen

ME 523 Introduction to Christian Missions

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William Carey: The Father of Modern Missions

by Basil Miller

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The overall perspective of missions presented in the book by Miller is one of balance between privilege and responsibility; blessing and hardship. This makes the presentation appear realistic in spite of the "inhuman" accomplishments of William Carey. We are shown from the beginning that God is the One who provided Carey with what he needed ("capacities and abilities" p. 21) in order to fulfill his ministry.

Carey was stirred to consider involvement in missionary endeavor as a result of his research and study of the condition of unreached peoples (p. 23, 29, 30, 31, 53, etc.). The NEED of these people seemed to compel him to do something about it. This is contrary to the thought nowadays that, "need does not constitute a call." I think that it can and it seems that it did in the case of William Carey. Of course it can be argued that there is an almost infinite amount of need in the world and that one person simply cannot meet all of that need. However, God can use the sensitivity to a particular need that a person might have in order to direct him/her to the place where He wants him/her to minister. This can be confirmed by determining if God has also provided the person with the ability to meet the need as he did in the case of William Carey.

Another aspect of missions which can be seen in the life of Carey is the necessity of proper preparation. Carey recognized his need for knowledge and "the improving of his own native gifts" (p. 27, 35) and so set about the task of training and to be recognized as fit to minister through the judgment of a church. This does not mean that God cannot and does not use men and women who do not have formal education for the furtherance of the gospel but it does mean that God's usual means is to operate in cooperation with human effort. Thank God that he blesses in spite of our weaknesses and failings but He may also allow us to fail if we are not properly prepared. And when blessing does come who knows how much more could/would have been accomplished if we were even

more prepared?! As Carey so fittingly summed it up, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." (p. 37)

Another aspect of missions presented is that of it being a team effort. It takes both those who are willing "to go down" and also those who are willing "to hold the ropes!" (p. 42) For every person that goes overseas there must be people to support him/her financially and prayerfully as well as "politically." Someone has to be willing "to go to bat" for you and think of your concerns and needs when you are "hanging from a rope" that is thousands of miles long!

Missions is also presented as requiring personal sacrifice. Carey knew that by going to India he would be giving up many things (e.g. family, friends, etc. p. 43) but for the sake of the gospel he was willing. His willingness was tested many times through illness (his first wife had mental health problems as a result of the stress, etc.), disasters (fires, etc.), lack of money, lack of food, lack of housing, and lack of converts. This is not to say that Carey experienced no blessings or had no successes but that the sacrifices and struggles of missions must not be minimized. Yet, as Carey reminds us, there is an avenue from which to look for hope: "Carey lifted his voice in trust and faith to the Almighty. Shortly thereafter aid came from an unexpected source." (p. 55) The lesson that Carey learned must also be learned by all Christians but not the least by today's missionaries: "God thus taught Carey the lesson that when all human efforts were unavailing, when all supplies were exhausted, when there was no food in the larder nor money in the treasury, that help was as near as the heavenly approach to the throne of God." (p. 55) Though missionaries must make many personal sacrifices and suffer personal loss they could not be more safe than in the strong care of the most powerful, loving God. It was remarkable to read how often God turned what looked like a tragedy into a blessing in disguise! (p. 117-118, 135-136)

Carey realized that "he must not only be able to heal the souls of the Indians with the Gospel, but to touch the sick bodies as well." (p. 69-70) Here we see the correct blending of the social gospel with the gospel of salvation. Missionaries must be

concerned not only with the spiritual welfare of the people but also with their physical, mental, social, political, etc. welfare. It is not either/or but both/and. At times one may take temporary precedence over the other but neither should be neglected. God wants all people to be whole in every way!

Carey also recognized that the spread of the gospel would be enhanced if the story of Christ could be heard from one of their own people. (p. 97) This hits upon the fact that nationals know their own culture and language better than any foreigner ever will! Also, the work is simply too large for foreign missionaries to accomplish along. (p. 123) Thus, it makes more sense to train nationals for the work of the conversion of their own people. But as the story of Carey shows, there can still be much room for the work of foreign missionaries!

The three main tenets of Carey's missionary approach are spelled out for us on p. 139: 1) Preach the gospel in the people's native tongue, 2) Give them the Bible in their mother tongue if they do not already have it, and 3) educate the young whether Christians or not. It is no wonder that William Carey is referred to as the father of modern missions for he certainly taught (reminded?!) us many great truths about missions and showed us how they might be put into practice. May many more catch the vision and the fire for winning the world for Christ that he had!