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THE MIND OF A MODERNIZER

The question

Why would William Carey oppose *sati*, when he had himself observed that it was the widow's 'voluntary choice' to be immolated on her husband's funeral pyre? Did he not believe in the right of the individual to make a free choice?

Or, how could he assume that his efforts would help change a centuries' old religious-cultural tradition in Hindu India, administered by an irreligious British company which would not even permit a British missionary to reside in its territory?

This chapter is concerned with the question: *Why did Carey attempt what he did?* Why couldn't Indians or other British leaders initiate what he ventured to do? And, for that matter, why don't Indian Christians today walk in his footsteps, in this area of reform?

The central thesis of this chapter is that certain conscious or unconscious theological assumptions served as one of the basic dynamics behind William Carey's work. A knowledge of these truths came from his understanding of the Bible. Many segments of the Christian church today have ignored these basics of their doctrinal heritage. That is ironic, because even the Hindu reformers of the nineteenth century had accepted at least some of these beliefs, as being essential for their task of modernizing India.

Without recovering these basics, we will succeed merely in a hollow 'celebration' of the Bicentenary of Carey's arrival in India. We could, no doubt, feel a second-hand or vicarious glory from his achievements, but if Carey is to become more than a 'hero' – a model who inspires radical discipleship – then it is imperative that his theological assumptions are understood and that they are taught from our pulpits.

The social climate of his day, and the historical factors that forged his mentality and his priorities were, obviously, significant. Nevertheless, his background and environment elicited a particular response from Carey because of his prior theological assumptions. While we cannot recreate history, there is nothing to prevent us from recovering the dynamics of his theological assumptions the mind of a modernizer.

The following aspects of Carey's world view seem to me to be most relevant for reform and modernization. Most people never articulate the world view which forms the intellectual grid through which they understand and respond to their environment. Therefore, it is not necessary to assume that Carey was always conscious of his theological reasons for reacting the way he did.

God as the Creator: the doctrine of Creation and Science

Carey's deep and dogged interest in nature – in stones (Geology), in insects (Biology), in plants and flowers (Botany and Agriculture), in trees (Forestry), and in the stars (Astronomy) – was rooted in his understanding that this world was his Father's creation.

Obviously, the intellectual climate of England in which William Carey grew up was important in shaping his interest in studying natural science, in publishing scientific books, and in teaching science to his students. This scientific climate in England was a result of the biblical teaching that God had created the cosmos with his *Logos*. The *Logos* is translated as 'Word', 'Wisdom', or 'Reason'. The Bible taught that human beings were created with minds similar to God's own rationality, so that we may understand the laws of nature and manage the earth. Thus, Carey was interested in the physical universe around him because he believed that our heavenly Father had blessed mankind, both with a rationality to understand the creation and with an authority to govern it.

Creation and the inductive method of knowledge

The doctrine of Creation as taught in Genesis 1 had already given birth to the inductive method of knowledge before Carey. Theological assumptions, that (a) the universe is a stable system run by rational laws ordained by God, and (b) that the universe is a book of God's 'natural revelation' which can be and ought to be read by us, so that we may both (c) learn about God's wisdom and power and also (d) govern the earth, implied that *objective knowledge was possible through careful observation*.

Carey's *Enquiry* reflects a mind that investigated the facts. His entire appeal for world mission was based on meticulously collected data, not on an appeal of emotions of the moment. One can say that the inductive method which John Calvin had applied to the Scriptures in his *Institutes*, and which served as the foundation for the Scientific Method articulated by Francis Bacon was, for the first time, applied by Carey to the field of Missiology. The same methodology – finding objective facts (say, about *sati*, with the help of researchers) – made Carey's writings so powerful.

It should be obvious that this 'religious' theory of how knowledge of truth (Epistemology) was to be obtained, was the exact opposite of mystical, magical, and esoteric ideas of knowledge then prevalent in India. Hindus did not translate their scriptures from Sanskrit into the languages of the people because truth was not something to be understood rationally. It was to be experienced by 'killing' the intellect through various means of meditation and yoga. In some religious traditions such as Tantra, a deliberately ambiguous and misleading language called *sandha-bhasha* was used, both to confuse and discourage the non-initiate and also to remind the enlightened tantric that the reality he sought was beyond logical rationality. Even the non-tantric religions sought to annihilate meaningful / rational language through *mantras*. A mantra is a systematic annihilation of meaningful language by mechanical repetition of a word or sound. In Hinduism, destruction of rationality was presumed to be a precondition for obtaining a knowledge of truth. Science, based on observation or inductive method, was thus ruled out *a priori*, by India's religious tradition.

Philosophies that undermine science

The lack today of a similar interest in the natural sciences in the Indian Church is rooted in a spirituality which sees God as Saviour, but fails to appreciate him as the Creator. Some versions of a new spiritual trend among Christians, known as spiritual warfare, also accept, perhaps unconsciously, the essence of polytheism. They refuse to see that much of the occult phenomenon is hoax, not

genuine instances of demons and demigods influencing material reality. In reacting to a secularized-materialistic science, they undermine a basic feature of the biblical world view, which is that the material realm is normally a stable order, open to scientific investigation, except when there is a miracle – an unusual supernatural intervention.¹

The Hindu mind-set at Carey's time did not acknowledge God as the Creator. Creation was considered to be either a dream of God (*maya* or illusion), or worse still, creation itself was deified as divinity.

An implication of viewing creation as *maya* or illusion, is to dislike it – to seek isolation or escape from it, not to love it and care for it.

The result of seeing the Creator and creation as one is to fall into the bondage of idolatry or mysticism. If creation is divine then we can fear it, worship it, absolutize it, or seek to become one with it, but we cannot assume the responsibility of understanding managing or changing it.

William Carey found India in the grip of chronic deprivation because while in *folk Hinduism* idolatry and polytheism, i.e. the worship of creation and gods and goddesses, had rendered the human mind incapable of governing creation and harnessing its potential for development, in *philosophic Hinduism* mysticism had undercut the motivational and epistemological foundations of science.

Science and technology are a result of human desire to enjoy nature by understanding it, subduing it, and by establishing our rule over it. Science is based on the assumption that the universe is a stable-rational order. Polytheism and the occult, on the other hand, demolish the possibility of science by assuming that the natural universe is an unstable magical system constantly changing according to the whims and fancies of supernatural beings. Mysticism can motivate us only to enjoy nature by feeling it in a non-rational way. Science has to be able to trust human rationality as a valid source of knowledge. Mysticism requires a systematic obliteration of rationality. Science has to insist on objectivity, even while recognizing that we are subjects trying to be objective. Mysticism also precludes science because it begins when we cease being objective in our observation.

Creation and ecology

Today, there is a naive and mistaken notion in the West that our environmental crisis is a result of the human desire to have dominion over creation. The fact, on the contrary, is that we cannot manage the environment unless we see ourselves both as an integral *part of* creation, therefore dependent on it, but also *over* creation, therefore responsible for it. The environmental mess in India, which is far worse than in the industrialized West, is a clear indication that the worship of nature damages creation more than do our attempts to manage it. It is enough here to point out that it was William Carey and not the Hindu mystics who initiated the struggle for regenerating the eco-balance in India.

¹ The concept of 'spiritual warfare' in its most damaging manifestation in the Indian context is unbiblical in denying the sovereignty of God. It suggests that territorial spirits, not God, rule, reinforcing Hindu polytheism and New Age spiritism. Man was created to have domination over the planet and he has to assume responsibility for what goes wrong: passing the buck onto spirit entities further undermines the significance of human choices, already problematic in India.

Creation and social reform

An implication of the belief that God is the Creator is that he is transcendent – apart from the physical and social realms, and above them. Our ability to change our physical, social or political environment, as we shall see, is directly proportional to our ability to grasp both the significance of God's transcendence and authority over creation and also our God-given authority over creation.

A second ramification of the belief that God is the Creator also served as a decisive determinant in the modernization of India. In this basic tenet Carey found a moral basis for opposing evils such as *sati*. Many Indian reformers (e.g. Jotiba Phule) who succeeded Carey found this idea compelling. Today, ironically, the Western world, in a self-destructive mood, seems to be turning away from the implication that, *if God is the author of a universe that exists objectively, (independent from our experience of it) then reality – whether natural, social or moral – has a given meaning and definition. This meaning is independent from how we perceive the universe around us.*

The significance of this principle for reform can be illustrated with Carey's battle against *sati*.

An illustration

The culture of idol-worship assumes that we are free to decide if a stone is a god or not. It implies that God has not given a revelation of the objective truth to mankind, therefore we can define reality ourselves and give to it whatever meaning we prefer. If this assumption is true, then a woman is free to imagine that her husband is her god; and that she lives for him. Therefore, after he dies her own life has no meaning. This outrageous conclusion served as the hidden basis for a justification of *sati*.

For Carey, however, ultimately it was God who, as the Creator, gave meaning and definition to his creation. God decides who we are, and what the true nature of the husband/wife relationship is, or what it ought to be. Therefore, neither one's society, nor an individual, is finally free to define himself and/or his relationships.

This belief meant that Carey had no problem in judging whether or not *sati* was evil. For him the relevant question was not whether or not *sati* was a voluntary act of a woman, or whether she was forced to kill herself. The objective fact, as far as Carey was concerned, was that a woman's life was neither her own, nor her husband's. It was God's. And the Creator had not given to us the right to violate his gift of life. Suicide is sin because it considers a life valueless which is, in fact, precious to the Creator; it sees a situation to be hopeless where God expects faith and patience.

Contemporary relevance

This theological factor is of enormous significance in the current Indian debate on *sati*, which started with the Roop Kanwar episode² in September 1987. The matter is still *sub-judice*. Depending on how the court views the case, it could revive the hideous tradition of widow-burning.³

² Roop Kanwar, an 18-year-old upper-caste widow, committed *sati* in 1987 in a village in Rajasthan. The national press in India reported it as a three-line news item on a back page. Thirteen days later I followed up with a front page piece for the *Indian Express* – and it became a major national controversy. Such coverage has put Hindu women's rights on the national agenda for the first time since the Independence in 1947.

The following two factors make the danger of *sati*'s revival a real possibility:

First, the democratic temper of our times suggests to many people that in the ultimate sense, the majority decides what is right or what is wrong. So, if the majority favours *sati*, it ought to be permitted.

The *second* factor is the current ('New Age') belief that an individual is totally free to define his or her own reality. We indeed have freedom, but our freedom is limited because our freedom comes, not from being God, but from the fact (as we will consider later) that we are made in the image of God. We are not programmed machines, but persons with freedom of choice. We are therefore at liberty to have subjective / private perceptions of reality. This, too, has important implications for the process of modernization: it sets us free to be creative. However, since God is the Creator of the universe, including ourselves, reality already has an objective meaning given to it by him. God's revelation sets limits to our freedom. We sin when we cross those limits. For example, a woman is free to see her husband as a lover, or as an oppressor; as her master, or as her partner, or consider herself as his slave. But she is not free to see him as her God. That, the Creator says, is idolatry and therefore, sin.

It is possible to imagine that a group of Hindus could decide that a revival of *sati* would be a symbolic necessity for ridding India of its cultural colonization by 'Christian England'. If a group decided to force a nation-wide showdown on the issue (whether or not a Hindu woman is free to abide by her conscience to commit *sati*) then I have no doubt that the pro-*sati* lobby would win in India (just as the pro-abortion and pro-euthanasia lobbies have, for now, won in the West). I think the pro-*sati* lobby would win because the so-called 'democratic' temper of our times and the modern idea of unbounded individual freedom favour their viewpoint.

The practice of *sati* does meet certain social needs, just as abortion, infanticide and euthanasia do: the death of a high-caste man creates some peculiar socio-economic problems and by eliminating the widow, *sati* eliminates those problems. For example, if a widow remarries, does she take her husband's family property into another family or into another caste? If she could, then the poorer, lower caste young men would love to marry the higher caste widows!

The pro-*sati* lobby was defeated in the Privy-Council in London in the early 1830s, only because the British mind then shared Carey's theological assumption that the final source of Law is the Law-giver, the Creator, not an individual, nor the consensus of a society. We would have lived like amoral animals if the Creator had not made us in his image, i.e., with the ability to make value judgements – both aesthetic and moral. In this sense, the Law is what the Creator describes as the moral reality. Neither an individual, nor the majority is free to violate the divinely-ordained moral categories.

(We may note that even though Ram Mohun Roy's defence of the edict before the Privy-Council was helpful and received well-deserved media attention, it was not as significant a factor as the Indian historians make it out to be. The Council members included at least two close friends of Carey. One of them, Lord Wellesley, as already mentioned, had been convinced by Carey that *sati* was evil as early as 1806, 25 years before Ram Mohun Roy argued the same case before the Council in London.)

³ At the end of 1996 the court acquitted Roop Kanwar's relatives charged with abetting *Sati*. The press has been filled with stories of how *Sati* is currently being glorified in the state of Rajasthan – millions throng the temples dedicated to women who committed *Sati*. Their picture postcards are used as greeting cards, etc.

Needless to say, the prejudices of India's present judicial and political leaders at this point could be as decisive as the pressure of liberal public opinion. If the judiciary were to acquit Roop Kanwar's family on the grounds that there was no evidence that they had forced her to commit *sati*, then it would encourage other families to follow her example. Indian politicians today are bound to feel that the pro-*sati*, high-caste 'vote bank' is more important than what Carey or Lord Bentinck thought two centuries ago.

Our generation is guided more by how we 'feel about an issue', than by the facts of the situation. But, am I to take care of the creation because of how I feel about a particular issue or a species? Or am I to take care of it because I was created for that purpose? For the sake of the future of human civilization it is immensely important to recover, in our day, the truth that an objective physical and moral universe exists (independently of our perception); that God is its Author; that he, ultimately, defines it and gives value and meaning to it; and that we have to abide by his word irrespective of how we feel.

Human beings as God's image

A modernizer has simultaneously to hold on to two elementary beliefs: *first*, that a given physical-moral reality exists independently of their perception, and *second*, that they can alter what exists according to their imagination.

That may sound obvious today. When Carey arrived in India, he found a civilization that had deliberately denied both those essential beliefs and consequently was powerless to improve.

Both these ideas formed part of the mind-set of William Carey. On the one hand the Bible affirmed that the objective universe had a definition and meaning given by the Creator himself. Yet, on the other hand, the same Bible also liberated post-Reformation Europe to imagine and create a world better than that which they experienced. This freedom to be imaginative and creative was fundamental to the reforms and developments of the centuries immediately preceding Carey.

Let us first mention an obvious implication of the doctrine that human beings are made in God's image, after which we can look at other implications which are not so obvious in our day.

Human life is precious

It should not require much imagination to see that Carey's struggle to save the lives of innocent infants – the potential victims of infanticide; widows – the potential victims of *sati*; and lepers – the potential victims of our cultural beastliness, was rooted in his understanding that human life is precious because men and women are neither machines, nor animals, but persons created in God's image. The Bible prohibited murder precisely on this premise.

What, perhaps, does need to be mentioned is that many Christians today fail to stand up in defence of human life, because they think that the human soul alone reflects God's image.

By *imago Dei*, or the 'image of God', the Bible, of course, does not mean that God has a physical form such as our own. What it does mean is that when God breathed into Adam, and he became a 'living soul' – a unity of body and spirit he began to share, in a finite way, some of God's attributes such as: self-awareness, rational intelligence, volition, verbal communication, creativity, ability to make value judgements and to rule, i.e., to impose on the external environment the results of his intellect, will,

and verdicts. A human being, even though a sinner, is precious because he is the crown of God's creativity on this earth.

The Hindu mind which Carey encountered had no such philosophic basis for fighting, either to preserve human life or to affirm its dignity. On the contrary, it pictured human life as being in bondage to the wheel of 'samsara'. Individuality, according to Hinduism was, at best, suffering, and at worst a hideous illusion. Almost the entire mainstream Indian orientation had been a negation of life. When it did affirm life, such as in the Tantric tradition, it tended to exalt the sordid. The process of modernization had to begin with someone who was committed to the biblical view that even the life of a leper or a cobbler is precious and that every human being has to be transformed until he or she fully reflects God's glory.

We share something of God's transcendence over nature

The Oxford English Dictionary defines God's transcendence as 'existing apart from, not subject to limitations of, the material universe'. A disembodied spirit exists apart from and without some of the limitations of physical laws such as gravity.

Our physical bodies are a part of the material universe and subject to its limitations. ('Dust thou art, and to dust thou shall return.') But being made in God's image means that even as physical beings, we can transcend some of the limitations of nature and alter physical reality. For example, in a dark room animals have to resign themselves to darkness, but we don't need to. Similarly, in a desert we can bring water. We are not completely limited by external reality. God has made us creative. We are free to imagine a different and better physical, social, and political world. Where there is oppression, we can dream freedom and dignity for the smallest individual.

Transcending Reality In our Imagination And Arts.

Carey is a classic example of Christian thinking not ruled by fatalistic resignation. Instead, we should use our creative imagination to make a difference. Being made in God's image has ramifications both for scientific innovations and for social reform. God saw physical darkness and, as we read in Genesis, he proceeded to create light. Later, in the gospels we read that he saw our moral-social darkness and sent Jesus to be the 'Light of Life.' As God's children, we too have to transcend the natural / social scene around us and make a difference. Jesus said to his disciples, 'You are the light of the world.'

William Carey was not surprised by the moral and social darkness that he saw in India, nor did he accept it as final or unchangeable. He knew that he had been sent to India to be light, and he sought to make a difference to his surroundings.

It cannot be denied that today the Indian mood, including the mood of Indian Christians, is pessimistic. Many think that the social evils of caste and political corruption in India are the given facts of life – beyond transformation. This mentality results from a lack of understanding that we are created qualitatively different so that we can make a difference in our environment.

Creativity and imagination are often expressed first of all in arts and literature. For example, Europe experienced the darkness of the holocaust in the 1940s, and it produced powerful works of art about that dark period. Those literary and artistic works have had such a profound impact on the present generation that it is difficult to imagine similar, state-sponsored brutalities ever being repeated there.

During the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 the Indian Subcontinent went through its own version of a 'holocaust' – a massacre of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims by each other. Yet no comparable works of imagination and creativity were created to lament and counter that darkness. The result is that even today, the Indian mind is not ashamed of communal killings. They have become a regular feature of social life, blatantly encouraged by 'religious' and political leaders! Indians have resigned themselves to live with the darkness of communal clashes.

William Carey used his imagination in the literary arena to make a difference in his social environment. Carey wrote his *Colloquies* – 'a lively depiction of manners and notions of the people of Bengal' – as a contribution to Bengali literature. He encouraged and published both comical and literary books such as *Tota Itihas* – 'Parrot's History'!

Where Carey saw barren wilderness, he did not revert to lamenting, but began to plan forests. He studied trees, planted them, and then taught forestry. Where he saw weeds, he imagined gardens, cultivated them, published books and established forums such as the Agri-Horticultural Society of India to help give sustained support to his initiatives.

Undoubtedly the spiritual bankruptcy of many Christians in our time is closely related to the bankruptcy of godly imagination. True, many Christians do seek to be transformed into the moral image of God, but there is little desire among Indian Christians to exercise the creative dimension in them of the Maker's image. Many church leaders and their congregations in India do not plan worship services creatively, let alone plan for the landscaping of their church compounds or for the surrounding countryside. (Needless to say, many of the Hindu pilgrim centers, in spite of being wealthier than churches, are aesthetically even worse. They offer a study in contrast between God-made beauty and religion-inspired ugliness.)

Transcending reality through work

In Carey's mind imagination itself was not reality. Today, in some circles of 'alternative therapy' the practice of 'creative visualization' has become very popular. Some of our physical illnesses that are rooted in our own choices and feelings can indeed be cured by this practice because mind does transcend matter. However, it is foolishness to think that all reality is in the mind, and to look upon meditation as a panacea for our ecological and other external problems.

Carey knew that the cosmos is a result, not only of God's thought, but also of his work. We too are created to work hard to establish our rule on earth. Carey was not simply an imaginative person; he saw himself primarily as a worker. And for him, 'work' was not merely a job or a career, but a means of establishing human 'dominion' over the material realm . . . a means of partially realizing God's image in ourselves.

The Evangelicals of Carey's generation were convinced that we become less of God's image when we choose to be lazy. Many of them religiously wrote their daily journals and, if they thought that they had wasted time on a particular day, they repented. Wasting time, not being diligent in work, were serious moral issues for them. This attitude, a key factor behind the modernization of Europe, has been called the 'Protestant work ethic'. It helped Protestant Europe to march ahead of non-Protestant Europe.

Carey injected this work ethic into Indian society. The Hindu spirituality had taken the best of India's children away from work, into ashrams – which etymologically means *a(non)-shram* (labour). To be

spiritual in India implied the very opposite of what Carey understood it to mean: in India to be spiritual meant to meditate, not labour. When the Divinity is seen as an impersonal consciousness or energy, and man is assumed to be divine, then spirituality is automatically an attempt to depersonalize ourselves. Hindu religious discipline, therefore, was an attempt to annihilate human rationality through mysticism, language through *mantra*, creative imagination through *yoga* or systematic emptying of the mind, and work through meditation and the *ashram* system. In this milieu Carey's religious ethic of work was a revolution.

We are meant to have dominion over time

Should our times be governed by our 'stars', via astrologers, or are we created to plan and manage our time? In other words, are we created in the image of our stars, or in the image of God who created the 'stars' and rules over them? These are not theoretical issues. A society's answers to them substantially determines whether it will advance, or remain static and under-developed.

By introducing a study of Astronomy in the classroom, Carey brought the modernizing idea that space and time were a part of the physical world we were made to govern. The Hindu ideas of four *Yugas* (periods in a cosmic cycle) and reincarnation, as well as the all-pervasive faith in astrology, had conspired to relegate individuality to a transient phenomenon in time. If our times are ruled by our stars, then we cannot plan or manage our days and hours in terms of our own goals. We have to wait for the set 'auspicious moments'.

Carey's interest in Astronomy came from the fact that with the help of the stars, sailors such as Captain Cook had opened the sea routes for European trade with the Far East. Carey felt that Christians ought to use these routes for missions. But there was also a more basic theological dimension to his interest in astronomy.

Various means of divination, including astrology, had enslaved the human spirit in India with chains of fear and superstition, making it vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous priests and astrologers. This made biblical injunctions against divination come alive in Carey's mind, reassuring him that God's word was the light that India needed for her emancipation.

The Bible teaches (in Genesis 1:14-18) that the sun and the moon are not deities, but objects created to govern the day and the night. Along with the other heavenly bodies, they were created also as 'signs', or 'markers', for giving us a sense of direction, as well as a feel for history – for days and years and seasons. This means that human beings who are created to 'subdue the earth and have dominion over it' could study Geography and History because of the reference points provided by these heavenly bodies and thus 'govern'. Putting it differently: if the heavenly bodies were not there, or were invisible, we could not know North from South, or day from night, let alone make calendars.

The sun and the moon, as markers, the Bible says, divide time for us into small and manageable parts so that we can plan our work and obey the command to work for six days and rest on the seventh. Without markers by which to divide our time, we would invariably carry over one week's work into the next. We would not be able to plan, or to manage, or to govern.

India's backwardness is substantially rooted in the false view of time propagated by her religious teachers. Development requires a correct understanding of human destiny in relation to the universe of space and time.

Human beings are above time, *firstly*, by virtue of the fact that we share God's image who is above the universe of space and time, and *secondly*, because we were made to live 'forever'. Our individuality is not a passing phenomenon which will be reincarnated as something else the next time round. Adam, as Adam, was created to live forever. That changed after sin entered the scene. One of sin's consequences was death. Death has put human beings 'under time'; we die, while time appears to go on and on.

Carey had come to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, which says that human beings can once again have 'eternal life'. When Jesus died on the cross, he took our sin and its result – death – upon himself. When he rose again from the dead, he defeated death – our final enemy. The New Testament teaches that Christ's resurrection has colossal consequences for us.

The resurrected Jesus said, 'I am the beginning and the end.' If we are in him, we will also reign with him for ever. 'For ever' means that we are not under time, but above it. While, as created beings we will always remain finite, we can still have the authority to plan and manage the course of our days and years, just as we can also regulate the course of a river, or order the crops of a field.

In resisting the 'superstitions' of Indian culture, such as faith in astrology, palmistry and other forms of divination, and by the teaching of the resurrection – God's triumph over death in history – Carey was setting India free from an enslaving concept of time; he was modernizing the Indian mind at a very fundamental level.

We share God's transcendence over 'powers and principalities'

For Carey's contemporaries, one of the biggest deterrents to mission were the oppressive socio-political power structures of the 'heathen' countries such as India. Having grown up in 'civilized' societies, they could not consider living in countries governed by the 'laws of the jungle'. Carey confronted this objection head-on in his *Enquiry*:

As to their uncivilized, and barbarous way of living, this can be no objection (to mission) . . . It was no objection to the apostles and their successors, who went among the barbarous Germans and Gauls, and still more barbarous Britons! They did not wait for the ancient inhabitants of these countries to be civilized before they could be Christianized, but went simply with the doctrine of the Cross; and Tertullian could boast that 'those parts of Britain which were proof against the Roman armies, were conquered by the Gospel of Christ' – it was no objection to an Elliot, or a Brainerd, in later times. They went forth, and encountered every difficulty of the kind, and found that a cordial reception of the Gospel produced those happy effects which the longest intercourse with Europeans, without it, could never accomplish . . . After all, the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection against preaching the Gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument for it . . . Can we hear that they are without the Gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts, and sciences, and not exert ourselves to introduce amongst them the sentiments of men, and of Christians? Would not the spread of the Gospel be the most effectual means of their civilization? Would not that make them useful members of society?

Likewise, Carey begins the introduction of the *Enquiry* with, these words:

As our blessed Lord has required us to pray that His kingdom may come, and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, it becomes us not only to express our desires of that event by

words, but to use every lawful method to spread the knowledge of His name . . . Sin was introduced amongst the children of men by the fall of Adam, and has ever since been spreading . . . Yet God repeatedly made known His intention to prevail finally over all the power of the Devil, and to destroy all his works, and set up His own kingdom and interest among men, and extend it as universally as Satan had extended his. It was for this purpose that the Messiah came and died, that God might be just and the justifier of all that should believe in Him. When He had laid down His life, and taken it up again, He sent forth his disciples to preach the good tidings to every creature, and to endeavour by all possible methods to bring over a lost world to God.

What made Carey so confident that the oppressive social and political structures of this world can be reformed? One cause was the obvious cultural impact of the Wesleyan revivals, already becoming apparent in his own generation. But a more important reason was his understanding that the Lord himself had promised that darkness would not overcome the light, and that the Gospel was like the small amount of leaven, put into a batch of flour, that gradually transformed the whole dough.

It should be clear from the above quotations that Carey was a modernizer chiefly because his mind was motivated by a theological optimism: Satan's kingdom had already been defeated in history, by the death and resurrection of Jesus; Christ was already King over all the kings of this world; believers were already seated with Christ who, in turn, was above all powers and principalities of this dark age. Therefore, Carey understood that Christ's command to, 'Make disciples of every nation, teaching them to observe all My teachings', implied that the nations could be disciplined before Christ's return.

The tragedy of our times is that while many Christians have confidence in the power of the Lord to return and change the world, many of us do not have confidence in the power of the Gospel to transform society now. Carey struggled against specific social evils, just, as his friends in England were continuing their struggle against evils. But Carey's confidence was not in his social protest or social action, but in the Gospel. This is the very opposite of those Christians who put their hope for change in their 'social action'. It is also different from the faith of those who believe that the world can improve only after the Lord Jesus Christ will return. Carey became a reformer because he understood the breadth of the theological concept of the 'Kingdom of God'. He believed that if we disciple nations, we will increasingly see God's will being done here on earth.

Lord Wellesley and William Carey were deeply aware of the immorality among the young men, aged fifteen to twenty years, who were arriving from England to administer India. Carey believed that he could influence the political administration of India, since Jesus Christ was above the powers and principalities of the world, and Carey himself was his servant. Therefore, besides teaching languages to the newly arrived administrators, Carey strove for three decades to shape their moral character as well. As a missionary, his priorities were naturally opposite to those of the Company's servants, who had come to India to create wealth for themselves and for their nation. His compassion for the needs of India together with his gentleness were a great influence on his British pupils.⁴

Even the most skeptical of the Indian historians have to admit that, during Carey's tenure as a teacher, the character of the civil servant trainees underwent a radical transformation.

⁴ Both Fort William College in Calcutta, and Hailebury College in England, where the civil servants were trained to administer India, were run by Evangelical missionaries and clergy.

India became a showpiece of colonial administration that is, it was better governed than the colonies of Germany, France, Holland and Denmark. There can be no doubt that the continuing decline in the moral and professional standards in the Indian Civil Service is an indication of the deliberate rejection of Carey's heritage.

Our call, however, is not to succumb to resignation and mourning for what is lost. We are called to summon the nation to repentance and to suffer for righteousness. The nation has lost its standards because the church has forgotten the truth that it is seated with Christ above all powers and principalities of this dark age. It is sad that those Christians who talk the most about the 'spiritual warfare' against the powers and principalities, seem to understand it the least. Today they tend to see themselves primarily as a "minority besieged by satanic powers and principalities". They don't seem to realize that they are servants of the One who claimed, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and on the earth'. Some Christians are so paralysed by a minority-complex that they keep casting demons from, say, the broken-down refrigerators but they never, lamentably, become a reforming force.

All people can change because we are all made in God's image

For Carey another implication of the fact that we are made in God's image was that even the most wretched of this world, 'the scum of the earth', can be transformed. Carey was well aware of the depravity in the countries where he wanted to see missions become active. Yet, he wrote in his *Enquiry*:

Barbarous as these poor heathens are, they appear to be as capable of knowledge as we are; and in many places, at least, have discovered uncommon genius and tractableness . . .

Carey, himself, had humble origins. As a shoemaker in England, he had found that God's grace was sufficient for him. He rejected the British class system and actively opposed the racism inherent in the slavetrade, refusing to buy goods made by slave labour. It follows that it was not possible for him to condone the caste system in India.

At the outset Carey understood that his open social intercourse with Untouchables would, at least initially, slow the rate of conversions. Yet he chose not to compromise with caste distinctions – a fundamental evil of Indian society. His mission was not to collect a large number of 'converts' but to see God's overall will being done in individual lives and in the culture of India.

Carey knew that ultimately, his commitment to truth alone would be fruitful. After a low-caste person was baptized, he would celebrate by sitting and eating with the converts from all castes and with Europeans, the colonial rulers – a revolutionary gesture at that time. Until today, sadly, such behaviour is radical in India's caste-ridden society.

Virtually from every part of India we still hear stories of Christian leaders refusing to accept low-caste people into church membership because they allegedly, 'lower the cultural, intellectual, and even moral standing of the church'.

This attitude, among other factors, is undoubtedly a result of a lack of confidence in the power of the Gospel to restore God's image to the lowly. Carey remained committed to the downtrodden till the end of his life because he believed that every human being could choose to become a child of God.

God calls individuals

Initially, Fort William College refused to appoint Carey as a full professor because he was not an Anglican. Instead he was offered a tutorship earning only Rs.500 instead of Rs.1,500. For most of us, today, it is incomprehensible that out of this salary Carey would keep only Rs.40 as pocket money for himself, and give the balance to his Mission.

Obviously, to understand Carey, we need to understand Carey's view of vocation, an important concept of Protestant Christianity during his time.

Vocation and work

The idea of vocation is illustrated by a New Testament missionary, St Paul. When Paul had his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, he was 'called' to be an apostle to the Gentiles. It was an honour to be called personally by the Lord of the Universe to do something special for him. Therefore, Paul – a thinker and a teacher – was willing to stitch tents, on occasion, so that he might have the economic resources to fulfil his 'calling' or vocation.

William Perkins (1558-1602), a Puritan theologian, in his *Treatise On Calling*, (published more than a century before Carey), taught that as soon as a person becomes a Christian, they should be taught to wait upon the Lord, to find out from the Lord what their calling is. Today we do teach about prayer, Bible study, evangelism, and social work, but not about that most personal meeting with God. At best, our 'work' is understood as our 'vocation'. Our work can also be our vocation, but it is not always so. Carey's calling was not to work in an indigo factory, but he was prepared to take up such work for the sake of his vocation.

Unlike Carey, our young people will continue to seek the best paid, most secure and the least demanding jobs as long as work is understood in secular terms—as a job (making money), or a career (pursuing power, prestige and influence)—and work is automatically baptized 'vocation'. Truly, however, a missionary is a 'called one' who waits on the Lord to be commissioned by him. A missionary is thus a reformer because they a person of destiny.

Vocation and destiny

Hinduism could not produce a man such as Carey because the idea of individual destiny is alien to Hindu culture which emphasizes the dissolution of one's individuality, not its fulfilment. In fact, most people who speak Hindi, my mother-tongue, would not even know that a Hindi equivalent for the word 'destiny' exists in dictionaries. (I have never read or heard the word, only seen it in the dictionary.) The word commonly used, and the idea that dominates Hindi literature is 'fate' – the exact opposite of what the Christian concept of destiny means.

It is a serious matter that the Western cinema, for example, seems more interested today in glamorizing the very ideas that had destroyed Indian civilization – the concepts of *karma* and fate. If one were to judge the contemporary Western civilization by its entertainment media it would seem that the notion of destiny – the force which propelled men such as William Carey to heroic and altruistic service – has now been lost.

The industry and staying power of a William Carey cannot be recovered by the Indian Church unless our pulpits recover the lost doctrine of Vocation, i.e. unless we experience the reality that God wants

to enter into a personal and direct working partnership with individuals who have become his children. Everyone wants a nine-to-five job. Carey had a five-to-ten job (i.e. 5.00 a.m. to 10.00 or 11.00 p.m.). He persevered because he was assigned a mission by God himself.

Vocation and individualism

Carey's heroism – a result of his understanding of vocation and destiny – represents the best form of Western individualism which followed the Protestant Reformation. One central emphasis of the Gospel is that each individual has to stand alone before God and give an account of his life. I cannot blame others for my life, any more than Adam could blame Eve for eating the forbidden fruit. I am responsible for my choices. I have to trust God and obey him, whether or not those close to me obey him. If I have disobeyed, I have sinned. I need to repent.

Christian life begins with repentance that leads to conversion. Repentance, therefore, implies a radical individualism – a person assuming responsibility for their life. A Hindu, for example, cannot say that I have to worship my *Ishtdev*, because my family has worshipped this god for generations. In India, religion had been a tool of social control over a person's conscience, an instrument for quashing a person's individuality. In contrast, when Jesus called his disciples to 'forsake all' for the Kingdom of God, he set them free to be themselves; to follow God and fulfil their destiny – their calling. Christ's disciples, as a result, became heroes who turned the world upsidedown. Sixteenth-Century Reformers, and Nineteenth-century missionaries who followed Carey's initiative, resembled Christ's apostles at this point.

We should be grateful that some parts of the Indian Church today have recaptured Carey's missionary vision and the individual heroism that accompanies it. They seem to be the best hope for India's marginalized millions.

The above is not to imply that all facets of Western individualism are good or rooted in the teaching of the Bible. One stream of individualism also sprang from Enlightenment thinking, summed up in the ethic of 'self-reliance' by Emerson. This increasingly dominant form of individualism turns individual self-reliance into selfishness. Carey's individualism, like his Lord's, was both self-sacrificing and balanced by the biblical emphasis on being a 'body'.

The church as a body

The Serampore trio – Carey, Marshman and Ward – generated immense power for bringing about spiritual, intellectual, and social change in India because they believed that they were called to be a 'body'. They sought to obey their call and lived as a community – sharing a common purse and a common mission.

The church is not meant to be a collection of heroes, but a community knit together by love – a fruit of the Holy Spirit. If Carey had failed at this point he would have been forgotten a long time ago. He was the leader. He stood tall above the others, but without their support his endeavours would have amounted to little. He needed them for even such basic requirements as looking after his own children, since his first wife, Dorothy, had tragically become mentally ill and required constant care herself.

Hinduism as a religion had divided people into castes. This was a primary source of India's weakness. Foreign invaders were able to come here with small armies, and conquer and rule a large populace by

exploiting the inherent divisions in the Subcontinent. Carey wanted to strengthen India by uniting people across the caste barriers. He knew that through the Gospel, God himself was uniting people into one bond, a body, that is, a church.

The church was inaugurated, supernaturally, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On that day the Holy Spirit had given the disciples the ability to speak the languages of all the nations from where the devout had gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. That event was the great reversal of the incident of Genesis 11, when, supernaturally, mankind was divided (as a punishment) into different language groups. The plot of the book of Acts is centred around the events through which God united the Aramaic speaking Jewish believers with those who spoke Greek; and both the groups with the Samaritans (who were the 'untouchable' half-Jews); and then, the Jewish believers with the hated 'Gentiles'. The Jews did not allow men and women to worship together; the Gospel made them one. It also united the slaves with the freed men into one body.

This understanding that through the church God was creating a new race, a body for himself, naturally forced Carey to reform the very structure of Indian society. He resolved that caste would be broken in his church; that all who become God's children by faith in Christ must become equal members of God's household.

The schools and the college at Serampore taught children of all castes in the vernacular in an attempt to break down caste. In contrast, many English-medium schools and colleges, started and run by Christians who followed Carey, catered mainly to high-caste Hindus – as a matter of policy and convenience! This had tragic consequences; Christian education was gradually swallowed up by the very evil that it was seeking to eradicate. The seats in these institutions were first filled by the high-caste students and later, the same graduates who retained caste prejudices became teachers. This fact prepared an English-speaking casteist élite to recapture the whole nation when the British were ready to pack up and leave. This élite considered themselves 'modern' because they spoke English rather than Sanskrit. But for all practical purposes, their medieval mentality has continued to this day. It weakens India by permitting an elitist language as a barrier that divides Indians from each other.

Thus the Christian English-medium education, tragically became the chief means of undermining the modernization of India; of handing India back to the slavery of Brahmanism. In the last century itself, the low-caste social reformers such as Mahatma Jotiba Phule of Pune, had seen the disastrous consequence of this compromise with the evil of caste, and the denial of the Christian truth of the equality of all men. Phule's followers, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar for example, rightly saw that an emasculated Christianity had ceased to be of much value to the downtrodden in India. Therefore, he chose to try Buddhism, as a possible hope for the oppressed yearning to be freed from the slavery of caste.

The Gospel as the power of God for total salvation

Conservative Christians have admired William Carey because he reawakened the church to its commission to evangelize the world. Theologically liberal Christians have admired him because he triggered India's Social Reform Movement. Historians, both Christians – such as G.A. Oddie – and non-Christians such as Sen Gupta – have misunderstood Carey's social action as being incidental to his passion to 'save souls'.

The truth, however, is clear from his *Enquiry* that even before coming to India, Carey had understood that nothing would dispel the social darkness of India, save the spread of the Gospel.

Carey knew the Gospel to be the only effective antidote to social evils, besides, of course, being the divinely ordained means of the eternal salvation for our souls. This conviction sustained Carey's chief labour: to make the Bible available to the Indian masses in their own languages.

It is worth repeating that our mistake today is that some who believe the Gospel look upon it merely as a means of private salvation (for going to heaven). They do not seem to realize that the Gospel is the God-given 'public truth' - the means of organizing a decent society. Therefore, their faith becomes privately engaging but publicly irrelevant. On the other hand, those 'Christian' activists who do not believe the basic truth of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ died and rose again for our sin, attach themselves to ideologies that are most popular in their day. For example, some of my friends, until recently, prided themselves on being Christian-Marxists or Socialists. In contrast to both the Conservatives and the Liberals, William Carey knew that Jesus is the 'Light of the world' – not just the One who lights the way to heaven. He sought to reflect that Light in the world.

Unfortunately many Christians today who are sincerely trying to serve society are oblivious of the power that God has already given to us to dispel darkness. They tend to put their hope for social change primarily in their own projects. Thus, it appears that their main anxiety is how to keep getting financial aid for their particular programmes. I know many projects which survive only because the project holders are willing to bribe officials, i.e., participate in one of the main evils of Indian society today.

Why have we sunk to this level? I suggest that this is a result of the materialistic presupposition of our age. Since the time of Karl Marx many have assumed, often unconsciously, that material reality is basic and that moral / intellectual / spiritual aspects of reality are secondary – by-products of economics. Carey, on the other hand, believed that the real battle is in the mind. False beliefs lead to wrong behaviour and harmful culture. Therefore, Carey strove to fill the Indian mind with the truth of God's word. That, he understood, was conversion – the cornerstone in the task of civilizing.

Conclusion

In *A New History of Methodism*, W.J. Townsend wrote,

Important eras of human progress and national salvation are generally inaugurated and moulded by a man who has understanding of the times, whose ear is open and attuned to respond sympathetically to the sighs and groans of humanity for redemption from the powers of evil, and who has the constructiveness and comprehensiveness of nature to become a builder of a nation and a hero of far reaching reformation.

These words, *adds A.H. Oussoren*, may be applied to William Carey. Just like all great leaders of humanity, he not only understood his own time, but also had a clear conception of the times before him. He saw their corruption, their baseness, their frivolity, their deplorable state of affairs everyday. . .

But unlike most of us, Carey never gave up hope for India because he looked beyond man, beyond society, to God's saving act in human history. Carey put his confidence for our salvation in the power of the Gospel; that is, in the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sin.