

**William Carey University**  
**Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA**

**Lecture on the Topic**

**“Relevance of William Carey Today”**

Delivered on Friday, 13 November 2015  
To Carey Scholars Colloquium  
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**1. Introduction**

An adolescent of thirteen years was returning from the school with many of his friends. All those friends wanted to visit the adolescent's bed room which was decorated with lots of interesting and natural objects. When the friends entered his room, the boy showed them a nest and asked, “Can you recognize this one?” All his friends nodded their heads saying “No.” The boy told them, “This is that nest which was on the top of a big tree near the main road and you all agreed to bet with me whether I could bring down the nest from the top of the tree.” James, one of his friends was excited and asked him, “Yes, I remember, the nest was on the topmost branch, and as soon as you climbed half of the tree and caught a small branch, it was broken and you fell down on the ground. Fortunately you did not break your bones. We lifted you up and brought you home. Your mother rebuked you so much that you locked yourself inside the room. But then, after all that had happened, how did you manage to get it? Who got it dismounted for you?” The boy smiled with a great relief and replied, “I myself brought it down.” The friends asked, “How was it possible?” He said, “Next day I didn't go to school; when my mother was busy and grandma was asleep, I stealthily went out. This time very carefully I climbed the tree and brought the nest down.” Friends exclaimed, “What a dangerous attempt! Why did you take such a risky attempt again?” He replied, “What to do, I could not help myself, because whenever I decide to do something, I cannot but complete the task.” The friends stared at him with awe and wonder. That boy was none other than Bill alias William Carey, the Father of modern Missionaries who reiterated, “Expect Great Things from God, Attempt Great Things for God.”

**2. Glimpse of his Great Attempts**

Thus the great attempts of William Carey could be seen from his school days. His friends used to call him Columbus, because he never left anything undiscovered in his surroundings. His bed room indeed became a museum with different kinds of birds, nests, insects, stones, herbs, plants, roots, seeds etc. And each of those objects he labeled with small papers describing their names and other informations even at that small age.

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### **3. His Childhood and Struggles that made him stronger in Faith**

William was growing up as a lover of nature and being loved by his friends and dear ones. But at the age of 14, he had to stop his study due to financial crisis in the family. So he began to cultivate land with his uncle Peter. William's father was a poor man. So he engaged Bill in the apprenticeship of shoemaking and repairing. The life of struggle began. But during this time he began to grow stronger in his Baptist faith. When he was fully convinced of his personal salvation and the need for sharing the Gospel, he had grown a tremendous desire to spread the Good News to the utmost part of the world. So he started learning Greek and Latin languages.

Carey was married before he completed 20 years of age. Even then misfortune did not leave him. Carey and his one year old daughter fell sick together, the daughter died and Carey returned to life after 18 months of suffering, but he became fully bald at the age of 22. Carey once again started reading books, particularly books of Columbus and Thomas Cook. As a result, he was greatly inspired to prepare himself and attempt for a greater engagement in God's mission. He wrote the epoch-making book entitled, "Enquiry" which gives the complete information of how anyone could do effective mission in a given context. He did a tremendous research work giving all details of mission strategy, goal and various statistics in his book. As a result of this effort, a Mission Society was established in 1792 and eventually Carey could launch into his great mission journey. Finally, after about 5 months' journey, his ship disembarked Carey, his family and Dr. Thomas near Calcutta on 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1793. Before coming to Serampore, Carey and his family spent little less than 7 years in different parts of Bengal struggling and working hard for livelihood.

In 1799, the Mission Society sent four more missionaries namely, Joshua Marshman, William Ward, William Grant and John Bransdon to join William Carey in the mission work. They took shelter at Serampore, a peaceful Danish colony congenial for mission work. Carey was overjoyed and he joined them at Serampore on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1800. As soon as they settled at Serampore, they began to create history one after another by attempting great things for God. We do not have sufficient scope here to give all the details of Carey's achievements. We shall rather concentrate on the theme 'Relevance of William Carey Today.'

### **4. Relevance of William Carey Today**

For understanding Carey's relevance today, I wish to discuss about the unmatched qualities of Carey using the five letters of his name. We shall look into five points C-A-R-E-Y. Here C stands for Cordwainer (shoemaker), A for Assiduous (hardworking & persevering), R for Revolutionary, E for Exemplary and Y for Youthful. Let us examine these qualities and see how Carey is relevant till today.

#### **4.1. Cordwainer**

Carey was identified as Cordwainer or shoemaker during his younger days which he never forgot when he was doing his tentmaking mission. While Carey worked as a shoemaker, he used to carry shoes on his shoulders for selling them. God lifted him from the shoe bearer to the Gospel bearer. Carey as a shoemaker learnt to face the hard realities of life. Carey's life and passion as a mere leather worker made it possible for him not only to make and sell beautiful shoes to people in order to help them to walk comfortably, but also generated a cluster of dreams in his young mind for putting his own legs into those beautiful shoes to walk for a greater path of mission to a distant country like India. From this time forth, the time of struggles in shoemaking, a great dream had captured the mind of Carey of expecting great things from God and attempting great things for God.

As a shoemaker, Carey never felt bogged down or disheartened, rather he accepted and carried the memory of this profession as a mark of humility throughout his life. He adorned himself with the unadulterated quality of humility and workmanship from this great leatherworking profession, of which St. Paul was also proud as a tentmaker. Once, Carey went from Serampore to Barrackpore on the other side of the river to meet Lord Minto, the then Governor of British East India Company. When Carey was coming out of his grand house, one of the staff asked his companion in a tone little louder than whispering, “Is he not that man who used to make shoes in England?” Carey heard it, turned back and said to him, “No Sir, I was just a cobbler.” Many a time, people boast of their high positions, qualifications etc. But here is a man who boasted of his humble job and identity, which any other person would have liked to forget. There was no distinction of small or great work, low or high work in Carey’s life. Every small or big attempt was taken as great attempt by him. Thus, this characteristic of Carey the Cordwainer is still relevant for us.

#### 4.2. Assiduous

Carey’s assiduous character was incomparable and uncompromising throughout his life. Carey didn’t go for short-cuts and cheap popularities. He gave a clear idea of his understanding about such a hardworking mission endeavor in his masterpiece work for mission strategy, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, in which he wrote, I quote,

The missionaries must be men of great piety, prudence, courage, and forbearance; of undoubted orthodoxy in their sentiments, and must enter with all their hearts into the spirit of their mission; they must be willing to leave all the comforts of life behind them, and to encounter all the hardships of torrid or a frigid climate, an uncomfortable manner of living, and every other inconvenience that can attend this undertaking. Clothing, a few knives, powder and shot, fishing tackle, and the articles of husbandry above mentioned, must be provided for them; and when arrived at the place of their destination, their first business must be to gain some acquaintance with the language of the natives (for which purpose two would be better than one), and by all lawful means to endeavor to cultivate a friendship with them, and as soon as possible let them know the errand for which they were sent. They must endeavor to convince them that it was their good alone which induced them to forsake their friends and all the comforts of their native country. They must be very careful not to resent injuries which may be offered to them, nor to think highly of themselves so as to despise the poor heathens, and by those means lay a foundation for their resentment or their rejection of the gospel. They must take every opportunity of doing them good and laboring and travelling night and day they must instruct, exhort, and rebuke, with all long-suffering and anxious desire for them, and, above all, must be instant in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of their charge. Let but missionaries of the above description engage in the work and we shall see that it is not impracticable.<sup>2</sup>

This is how Carey could attempt all his hardest works as great attempts for God. His inspiration for attempting great things for God came from Isaiah chapter 54. Carey’s assiduous

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<sup>2</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians...* (Leicester: ANN IRELAND, MDCCXCII), pp. 51-52.

mentality grew up from his vision of enlarging the tent, stretching out curtains of habitations, lengthening the cords, strengthening the stakes without holding back, which indeed is the spirit of Isaiah 54. Carey's daily work routine (which is mentioned under the heading 'Youthful' in this speech) gives us an idea about how hard working and persevering Carey was in his daily life.

### 4.3. Revolutionary

Carey was a great revolutionary in his character. He wanted to see radical change and transformation in his own society, in his own Church and then in the place where he worked. He was instrumental in bringing drastic changes in the society of Bengal by abolishing many evil practices in the society of Bengal. Shortly after his arrival in India, in the year 1802, he began an investigation on the commission of the Governor into religious killings among Hindu people in India, and very soon he got the result. Carey personally witnessed a heinous practice in the society in Bengal called *Sati*<sup>3</sup> which was indeed one of the most dreadful and evil practices that prevailed at that time but no one ever said anything against it. Carey made special efforts to collect the data of *Sati* and he reported that nearly 300 widow wives were burnt alive around Calcutta and about 10,000 in all of India within a short span of time. Carey started his tireless campaign against this gory practice. He published many articles against *Sati* and worked with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, another great social reformer of Bengal, for fighting against it. As a professor in Fort William College, he could influence the civil servants who were his students, so that they could together resist the evils of that society. When widows were converted to Christianity he arranged marriages for them.<sup>4</sup>

At last Carey could persuade William Bentinck who was considerate to pass a regulation on December 4, 1829, declaring *Sati* as an illegal and criminal practice. While making such a brave attempt, William Carey had to do a lot of studies into the history of such existing rituals and practices and he also studied the Hindu Scriptures to see whether those customs were supported at all by the Scriptures. After a careful study of the Hindu Scriptures, he persuaded the Government for legal proscription, because he found that the Scriptures were not supporting those practices. Timothy George writes,

Just as Carey had collected evidence of infanticides which led to their restriction, he also investigated the incidents of *sati* and publicized the details of its practice throughout both England and India. His studies of the Hindu sacred books also revealed that this cruel custom was by no means required by these writings, contrary to the common view. The government was reluctant to forbid a practice so long sanctioned by tradition and religion. Still, Carey continued to campaign against the *sati*. Eventually, in 1829, his appeals were heard by those in authority and the burning to death of thousands of widows was legally proscribed.<sup>5</sup>

When the legal proscription against *sati* was declared during the governance of the East India Company under the leadership of William Bentinck, Carey was the happiest person, and he immediately sat down, without wasting a single moment, for translating the text of the proscription for distributing it to the public; so that everyone would know about it and no more unfortunate widows would be burnt alive. Such was the brave and epoch-making attempts of William Carey,

<sup>3</sup> *Sati* was a ritual or practice in the Hindu society which allowed the wife of the dead husband to sacrifice her life on the same funeral pyre prepared for the dead.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth and Vishal Mangalwadi, *William Carey: A Tribute by an Indian Woman* (New Delhi: Good Book, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Alabama: New Hope, 1991), pp. 151-152.



the social reformer. He also understood that the mere abolition of evil practices from the society will not solve the problems from the roots. He delved into the depth of the problems and came out with the suggestion that the welfare of the society is possible when proper education will bring awareness in the society. And that is why Carey concentrated more and more on the spread of primary as well as higher education throughout the society.

Carey also fought for the eradication of another evil practice of that society called *ghat murders*. This was a practice by which the sick and the dying were left by the riverbank to die. There was yet another evil practice which allowed the rejection or burning of lepers by their families. Carey taught people to love the lepers. He provided medicines and established hospital for them. Still another social evil which was prevalent in those days was the cult of *thug* which was a belief that the goddess granted sanction to certain people to strangle others and to take their valuables. William Carey unspeakably fought against this evil practice so much so that at last it led to the suppression of *thugs* by William Bentinck in 1830. At that time there was one more dreadful practice or ritual against which Carey fought tooth and nail was infanticide. Carey's role was also enormous in abolishing infanticide. By his relentless efforts he could rouse general conscience and present reports so sincerely and bravely that at last the Governor General Lord Wellesley had to pass the legislature to abolish the practice in 1802. Carey also fought against caste system, which he understood as a social evil. He preached for spreading love and goodwill among all people and encouraged inter-caste marriage. Carey's mission pioneered in emancipation of women through education by establishing schools for girls and women. As we mentioned before Carey was instrumental in establishing a leprosy hospital and an institution for the poor and the neglected children in Calcutta.

He also promoted the idea of saving money in the banks for the poor. Therefore, he pointed out that the liberal education system should reach the grass root levels of the society. Carey emphasized that everyone should have equal right to education; so that the educated well-wishers of the society could stand against the evil practices and support the cause of the poor. He showed that the Scriptures and the social customs should be properly studied, interpreted and applied for the welfare of the society. He encouraged the rich people and the government employees to be sympathetic toward the poor people of the society.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Carey's contributions to the society are far-reaching and inestimably significant, which will be remembered by the posterity forever. Thus, in Carey's mission strategy there was interdependence and unique blend between evangelism and social actions.

#### 4.4. Exemplary

Carey is certainly an exemplary person who lived as an example and left many examples for others to imitate. We find lots of imitable qualities in him. In recent times, Carey was the most successful inducer of self-supporting mission operated from Serampore, in line with that of St. Paul, the tentmaker. Carey showed us how mission works can go on with self-supporting endeavors and without depending much on others for help as we find in the mission strategy of Paul. Carey's versatile works of translations, publishing, teaching, preserving, documenting, public relations, social involvements etc. were all possible because of his self-supporting mission plan. Carey's mission strategy is termed by many as classical, scholarly and far-reaching. Therefore, Carey is always exemplary and imitable.

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<sup>6</sup> Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, *Baro Sadh Baro Seba* (In Bengali meaning 'Great Desire, Great Service') (Seoraphuli: S. K. Chatterjee, 1989), pp. 123-124.

#### 4.5. Youthful

Carey was no doubt an ever youthful personality throughout his life. His youthfulness is not only seen in his boyhood, but throughout his life. His youthful energy and spirit could be seen when he could restart everything from zero after all his laborious works and produces were destroyed by fire, his youthfulness could also be seen even when his beloved first wife died and thereafter how he did not stop his mission works and go back to his country. His ever youthful spirit did not allow him to be daunted by any difficulty, disadvantage and opposition. William Carey's daily schedule will give us an idea about how youthful and energetic he was at all levels of his life. It is recorded in his schedule about Thursday, June 12, 1806 that Carey got up at 5.45 a.m. and read one chapter from the Hebrew Bible. Then till 7.00 a.m. he did his personal devotion, after which he sat for a Bengali prayer time with the servants. Then he sat for learning the Persian language with a scholar. Then after a quick breakfast he sat for translating Ramayana with a scholar up to 10 a.m. Then he went to do the Principal's duties from the chair and worked till 2 p.m. Having returned to residence he again started checking the printed proofs of the book of Jeremiah in Bengali. Then he sat for dinner with his friend Mr. Rolt (Mr. Rolt was the architect of the Carey Baptist Church in Kolkata). After dinner he did the translation of a chapter of Matthew in Sanskrit. Then at 6 in the evening he began to learn Telegu with a scholar. Then in a prayer meeting of about 40 people he preached his sermon in English till 9 p.m. Then he sat for translating Ezekiel into Bengali. He finished his work at 11 p.m. Then he read a chapter from Greek New Testament and submitted himself in prayer to God and went to sleep.<sup>7</sup>

#### 5. Conclusion

Thus, we find that William Carey's missionary qualities are still relevant in our time. The missionaries, Church leaders, lay leaders and all others, in whatever professions they are engaged in, can definitely imitate William Carey and his qualities in rejuvenated spirit for successfully implementing mission works in their own contexts. One of those who witnessed the burial service of Carey was a young missionary from Scotland, John Leechman, said, which even Carey himself would have approved,

And now what shall we do? God has taken up our Elijah to heaven. He has taken our master from our head today. But we must not be discouraged. The God of missions lives forever. His Cause must go on. The gates of death, the removal of the most eminent, will not impede its progress, nor prevent its success. Come: we have something also to do than mourn and be dispirited. With our departed leader all is well. He has finished his course gloriously. But the work now descends on us. Oh, for a double portion of the divine Spirit!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (London: The Carey Press, 1934), pp. 258-259.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey...*,

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