

Reviews

Terry G. Carter, ed. *The Journal and Selected Letters of William Carey*, Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 1999, xiv + 304pp. ISBN 1-57312-197-5

William Carey, deservedly, has been recognised as having a significant role in missionary history and the founding of the modern British Protestant Missionary Movement. While Carey is often quoted in the many biographies about him, a readily accessible publication of his Journal and correspondence has not been available. Terry Carter has filled this gap by undertaking the painstaking task of transcribing Carey's writings, not always the easiest of tasks as I can attest to having laboured over some of Carey's letters some thirty years ago!

There is a freshness in Carey's writings, particularly as he encounters in India worlds and people very different from his own as he tries to understand them in order to convert them. Carey's own autobiography is expressed in these writings, struggling at times with ill health, the death of family and colleagues. His first wife, Dorothy, and the tragedy of her life in India, 'her who was never hearty in the undertaking' is barely mentioned. Carey's dogged persistence, facing opposition, learning languages, translating the Bible, developing Serampore, are faithfully recorded in letters to family and above all to his great English supporters, John Ryland and Andrew Fuller.

In these writings there is a juxtaposition of Carey, the Evangelical, expressing his own sense of self depreciation - 'I feel so very little of the life of godliness in my own Soul' - and Carey, the pioneer missionary, who is willing 'to spend his life ... to deliver an (otherwise) Amiable People, from the misery and darkness of their present wretched state.' The struggles in establishing the mission, the companionship of colleagues, relationships with East India Company officials and the sense of betrayal as 'the younger brethren' caused a schism in the

mission are among the things told by Carey with direct honesty. There is almost a confessional element in some of Carey's letter writing as he not only reports on his work but expresses something of his own inner feelings.

The editor has chosen to take extracts chronologically from Carey's letters and place them under themes such as: 'The value of missions', 'Life on the Mission Field', 'Mission Strategy', 'Mission Support', 'Relationship to the Mission Society', 'Spiritual Life of the Missionary', and 'Family Life of the Missionary'. The result is an easily accessible latter day compendium of Carey's missiological thinking. While introductions to the sections try to elaborate on the themes, the disadvantage of this approach is that Carey's thought is given in brief extracts without the surrounding context which informs Carey's reflections. The alternative approach would have been to give Carey's letters in fuller historical sequence with, if necessary, a comprehensive index to themes.

Many of Carey's letters were published contemporaneously in the *Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society*, although they were subject to the editorial pen of Andrew Fuller who in some instances excised, for example, references which gave even feint praise to Hinduism. The strength of Carter's collection is in giving the reader the opportunity to read Carey first hand. The selection and arrangement, however, means that Carey is read to some degree through the editor's eyes. The biographical entries in the index are very helpful but the index would have been more user friendly with subheadings to some of the longer entries.

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