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FROM BACK PARLOUR TO WORLD CHURCH

Brian Stanley's *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (T & T Clark, 1992, 564pp, £29.95) is institutional history at its best, but it is more than that because the institutional form of the missionary society is skilfully set within the dynamics of a changing global perspective which does not neglect the missiological dimensions. The tale is told warts and all, and this strengthens rather than weakens this 200-year long story of an attempted obedience to Christ's Great Commission to his Church. An example of the tone of Dr Stanley's elegant presentation is the way in which the significance of Carey and the Northamptonshire Baptists is recorded: no false claims here about the first missionary society, instead a more careful: 'The BMS set the pattern for the voluntary society model of missionary agency which became so widespread in the nineteenth century'. Venerable folk stories are carefully analyzed: the older Rylands' charging of Carey with a misplaced enthusiasm is deconstructed and put in proper perspective, even if the substance is sustained. This is typical of the way in which the analysis is always controlled by the available evidence, swiftly building confidence in Dr Stanley as a reliable guide.

Very soon we encounter the tensions that beset the Society after Fuller's death, leading to the sad rift between the Society and the Serampore missionaries between 1827 and 1837. Part had to do with tensions at home between the provincial leadership in Northamptonshire and the changes entailed in transferring the direction of the Society to

London. More significant were the tensions between London and Bengal with Carey's complaint that full-time secretary John Dyer's letters were 'like those of a Secretary of State', as over against Fuller's gracious confession, 'we do not consider ourselves as legislators for our brethren; but merely as co-workers with them'. In India Carey confronted major strategic issues: the difficulties of cross-cultural communication and therefore the desirability of Indian evangelists as the principal agents in creating an Indian church, with missionary support in translating the scriptures and developing educational institutions. Aspects of Indian culture seemed to abuse human rights and were condemned, but the missionaries were in no mood to confront Hinduism, or its Company protectors generally.

The Caribbean mission demanded a different approach: here the missionaries were called not to evangelize pagans, but to aid an already existing Christian society as pastors and teachers. In this context, Stanley notes: 'Baptist missionaries in the West Indies exercised a more decisive influence on the course of secular history than they did in any other part of the world', and so provoked 'public debate and criticism in Britain to a degree that finds no parallel in the Society's history'. The strategic question was whether the Society, under great pressure to provide more resources for Africa, withdrew too early, especially given the poor state of the Jamaican economy.

The Congo Mission, involving exploration, development of river transport, formulation of language and scripture translation, with huge losses amongst missionary personnel, must have seemed a task with tremendous cost and little success, but patience paid off and large churches were created. An over-cautious Society leadership kept silent for too long over the abuses of the Congo people permitted by Leopold and the government of the Free State - in many respects little better than the lawlessness of primitive cannibalism that it replaced. Of this, Stanley writes, 'Such apparent myopia in a society with an honourable tradition of humanitarian protest demands explanation.'

A bicentenary stretches over 200 years and Dr Stanley is faithful in allocating space fairly between the centuries. Perhaps the most valuable part is the last nine chapters which tell the story of the twentieth century. In India, a century of service found missionaries posing difficult questions about the success of their labours, though tribal peoples proved more responsive than the population at large. The China field was no less problematical: the evaluation of Timothy Richard's endeavours, set not only in a Chinese but an English context, is of particular importance. Was his wider concept of mission acceptable to the churches at home or his colleagues in the field? Was he, in fact, a prophet of how missions were to develop in the twentieth century?

The development of more holistic approaches to mission, accomplished not without difficulty, are discussed by Dr Stanley alongside the strategic need to move from mission structures to the establishment of autonomous churches, processes which are traced within the several fields. Theological insight into the relationship between autonomous church and external mission, not to mention the forces of escalating and ever more forceful nationalisms, might suggest that the process should have been hastened. Caution and economic weakness in the field delayed the process of change in a world where increasingly the ecumenical dimension to missionary endeavour could not be ignored, though the detailed account of attempts to improve the financial base for the work of Serampore indicates the gap between rhetoric and reality. Baptists were not conspicuous in schemes to secure united churches, but their participation in the Church of North India brought the appointment of a Baptist Bishop in Orissa in 1970.

Sometimes, as in China, political circumstances imposed their own chronology on

change, which might suggest that missionary strategists could helpfully have exercised more faith in contemplating God's future. Elsewhere, as in Angola, missionary support of native peoples suffering from oppressive imperial régimes was to yield spiritual benefits later. Equally important is the chronicling of the origins of the Kimbanguist movement within the work of the BMS and how this appertains to the distinction between mission-founded African churches and the independently organized African Churches which have grown so spectacularly in recent years.

Dr Stanley carefully tells the story of the pressures on the work of the Society from a fundamentalist lobby in the 1920s (and later) and compares the maintenance of the unity of Baptist missionary work, largely secured through the unassailable evangelical orthodoxy of W. Y. Fullerton, then Home Secretary, with the tragic split that occurred in the CMS. The recent history of the Society, as its early years, has not been free of controversy involving delicate issues of personality as much as disputes over mission strategies: Dr Stanley's skills as a historian are here indispensable in putting these matters on record with a judgment that is both shrewd and balanced.

The work of the BMS in Brazil, now forty years old, has been part of a remarkable story of church growth, though not as high as that of the pentecostal churches. Greatly dependent on lay leadership and committed to charismatic worship, Pentecostals have been better able to address the urban poor than the Baptists whose constituency has been mainly the lower middle-class. Moreover, Brazilian Baptists have been mainly a-political and have only recently begun to see the importance of the social dimension of the gospel.

Properly the story ends with the Society seeking new styles of management appropriate to the twenty-first century, new patterns of partnership with churches overseas, the opening up of new fields of mission in Central America and in Thailand, and a return to Europe as an appropriate field of mission.

Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: the Life and Mission of William Carey* (IVP, 1992, 196 plus 57pp, £8.95) wisely takes the bicentenary as occasion to issue a new biography of Carey, with a reprint of his *Enquiry*, upon which Carey's subsequent career acts as a kind of fleshed-out commentary. This study concentrates on Carey's early life (the longest section), the motivation of his missionary call, and his crucial contribution to reawakening the church to its gospel commission to world-wide evangelization. It ends with a seven-page essay on 'Carey Today'.

Four other timely publications need to be noted. Gwenda Bond's popular history of the BMS, *The Answered Call* (Marshall Pickering, 1992, 234pp, £4.99) is properly subtitled *William Carey and the Dawn of Modern Missions*. Good on reconstructing historical situations, the contexting is sometimes approximate. In T. M. Bassett's bilingual *The Baptists of Wales and the Baptist Missionary Society* (Ilston Press, Swansea, 74pp, 1991), the first section, 'The Home Field', pays particular attention to financial support and problems associated therewith, then comes 'The Missionaries at Work', and a Directory of Welsh missionaries. From Scotland comes, *A Mind for Mission*, ed., D. Meek, (Scottish Baptist History Project, 14 Aytoun Road, Glasgow, G41 5RT, 1992, 42pp, £3 plus £1 postage), which offers five essays on Christopher Anderson, that staunchest of all supporters of the Baptist Mission in India. *The Kettering Connection: Northamptonshire Baptists and Overseas Missions*, ed., R. L. Greenall (68pp, Department of Adult Education, University of Leicester, 1993, £3.50) has essays by the BMS Secretary (on Andrew Fuller); by Brian Stanley (on BMS origins); by R. L. Greenall (on Kettering Baptists); by Michael Laird (on Carey and Bengal), and by Gordon Catherall (on Knibb and Jamaica).