BOOKS I HAVE READ: AN ENQUIRY

Posted on February 5, 2015 by Eddie

Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to Go, and teach all nations; or, as another evangelist expresses it, Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country of the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception, or limitation.

Category: Reviews

One of the things about old books is that they write in a way that you couldn't get away with today. William Carey writes cheerfully about people being ignorant, savages and uneducated and the things he has to say about the Anglican church would lose me a lot of readers.

However, despite the quaintness of its langauge and the length of its title, CareysÂ An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings,and the PracticabilityÂ of Further Undertakings, Are ConsideredÂ is a bookÂ which stands the test of time.

The book starts with an examination of the 'Great Commission' and a demonstration that it is still relevant to the church.

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Carey then works through the book of Acts and gives a quick sprint through church history to describe how the gospel had spread through the world up until his day.

> *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"*

The next section is a sort of 200 year oldÂ Operation WorldÂ in which Carey attempts to describe the geography and religious situation in every nation on the planet. Given the amount of information that was available at the time, this is a phenomenal piece of work.

The book concludes with a series of practical suggestions of how missionary work could be carried out. He covers the big picture of setting up missionary societies and the small details of how a missionary might learn languages.

> *As to learning their languages, the same means would be found necessary here as in trade between different nations. In some cases interpreters might be obtained, who might be employed for a time; and where these were not to be found, the missionaries must have patience, and mingle with the people, till they have learned so much of their language as to*

> *be able to communicate their ideas to them in it. It is well known to require no very extraordinary talents to learn, in the space of a year, or two at most, the language of any people upon earth, so much of it at least, as to be able to convey any sentiments we wish to their understandings.*

I think Carey is being just aÂ *tiny* bit ambitious when he says that any language can be learned in a year or two. Then again, this is a man who taught himself Greek and Hebrew at a very early age. It is rather easy to find fault with some of Carey's assumptions; his history and geography and his understanding of non-British cultures is limited - as you would expect from a man of his time. However, what you can't fault is his passion for the Gospel. He was a man who walked the walk as well as talking the talk.

I often hear Christians saying that we shouldn't be sending missionaries abroad, we have so many needs in this country and we should look after our own needs first. To those people, I can just echo Carey's words:

> *It has been objected that there are multitudes in our own nation, and within our immediate spheres of action, who are as ignorant as the South-Sea savages, and that therefore we have work enough at home, without going into other countries. That there are thousands in our own land as far from God as possible, I readily grant, and that this ought to excite us to ten-fold diligence in our work, and in attempts to spread divine knowledge amongst them is a certain fact; but that it ought to supercede all attempts to spread the gospel in foreign parts seems to want proof. Our own countrymen have the means of grace, and may attend on the word preached if they choose it. They have the means of knowing the truth, and faithful ministers are placed in almost every part of the land, whose spheres of action might be much extended if their congregations were but more hearty and active in the cause: but with them the case is widely different, who have no Bible, no written language, (which many of them have not,) no ministers, no good civil government, nor any of those advantages which we have. Pity therefore, humanity, and much more Christianity, call loudly for every possible exertion to introduce the gospel amongst them.*

The link at the top of this post is to the Kindle version of the Enquiry, which is available free. If you don't have a Kindle but would still like to read it, you can find a PDF here. A number of publishers also offer printed copies for sale.Â