

Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture, Centre for Baptist
History and Heritage and Baptist Historical Society
The heritage of Serampore College and the future of mission

From the Enlightenment to modern missions: how the vision of the Serampore Quartet has come full circle

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20 October 2018

The vision of the Serampore Quartet was an eighteenth century Enlightenment vision involving openness to ideas and respect for others and based on the idea that, for full understanding, you need to study both the ‘book of nature’ and the ‘book of God.’ Serampore College was a key component in the working out of this wider vision.

This vision was superseded in Britain by the racist view that European civilisation is superior and that Christianity is the means to bring civilisation to native peoples. This view had appalling consequences for native peoples across the Empire and, though some Christians challenged it, only in the second half of the twentieth century did Christians begin to embrace a vision more respectful of non-European cultures and to return to a view of the relationship between missionaries and native peoples more akin to that adopted by the Serampore Quartet.

1 Introduction

Serampore College was not set up in 1818 as a theological college though ministerial training was to be part of its work (Carey et al., 1819); nor was it a major part, though it remains the most visible legacy of, the work of the Serampore Quartet.¹

Rather it came as an outgrowth of the wider vision of the Serampore Quartet — a wider vision which, I will argue, arose from the eighteenth century Enlightenment and which has been rediscovered as the basis for mission in the second half of the twentieth century.

¹William Carey, Hannah Marshman, Joshua Marshman and William Ward; the quartet was supplemented from time to time by other missionaries, some of whom died and others of whom went on to work elsewhere, and by some of their children becoming missionaries.

2 The eighteenth century context

In the middle of the eighteenth century there was a remarkable explosion of ideas some of which we now take for granted and some of which disappeared in the nineteenth century.

For example, Thomas Coram created the framework for modern charitable organisations (Wagner, 2004); John Fielding created the first diversion from custody scheme (Heywood, 1978); Jonas Hanway created the first inspectors of foster care and won a competition for a home for abused women which included complaints boxes to ensure that they were not further abused by staff (Taylor, 1985); the Duke of Richmond provided a new Sussex County jail at Horsham with single rooms, bed and blankets and arranged for both chaplain and jailer to be paid (McGowen, 1995); Erasmus Darwin developed the first modern theory of evolution (1803); his friend, Josiah Wedgwood, campaigned for the emancipation of slaves (Uglow, 2002). None of these were radical non-conformists; they were members of the established church and, apart from the Duke of Richmond, with connections with other, mostly middle class, entrepreneurs several of whose sons went on to form the nucleus of the anti-slavery movement of the next generation.

These developments did not escape the notice of non-conformists; when John Sutcliff moved to Olney in 1775, he became a friend of the Anglican vicar and former slave ship captain, John Newton. No doubt what John Newton told him about the slave trade was conveyed to his erstwhile mentor, Dan Taylor, the leader of the New Connection, and to his future pupil, William Carey, who, along with the other members of the Serampore Quartet, refused to use sugar produced by slaves.

Dan Taylor, at the time ministering in Whitechapel, attended the third meeting of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Shepherd, 2017), which was formed in 1787, and in 1788 the General Baptist Assembly voted in favour of the abolition of the slave trade (Hayden, 2005).² In Derby, William Ward, not yet a Baptist, was receiving outraged letters from readers of the *Derby Mercury* threatening to withdraw their subscriptions if he did not tone down his regular attacks on slavery (Marshman, 1859).

Earlier Dan Taylor had argued for equal status for women in church and persuaded the General Baptist Assembly to pass a resolution in favour of this in 1772 (Jones, 2017). And it is to Dan Taylor that we can turn for an exposition of the intellectual framework which informed much thinking in the eighteenth century. In his profession of faith, read and approved, at a special Church-meeting of the General Baptist Society, in Church-lane, Whitechapel June 1st 1785, he says:

1. I believe that the whole creation gives proofs of a Deity; and that man is capable of forming such reasonings and arguments from the evidence of wisdom and power presented to our view in the several objects that our eyes daily behold, as are sufficient to manifest the workmanship of One, who is infinitely superior to mere mortals. But, however evident this may be, and how certainly soever all nations of the world have experienced the truth of it, yet the most sagacious mortal never was, nor ever will be, able to conceive of God, nor of those things which are necessary to give comfort and satisfaction, respecting future happiness or the way to enjoy that happiness, by the light of nature. Therefore, as far as we can judge, there is an apparent necessity of a fuller discovery of the mind of God to man than the light of nature, in order to understand how we can be accepted with him.

²There were no Particular Baptist Assemblies during the eighteenth century; so no equivalent stance was taken by them.

...

2.

3. That these instructions are since collected, by divine appointment, into one book, called the Bible, and preserved, by divine Providence, for the illumination of a dark world, in spite of many efforts that have been made use of to destroy them.

The idea that you had the ‘book of nature’ and the ‘book of God’ came from Thomas Aquinas (Capra and Luisi, 2014) and was the standard position at the time.

From the beginning, the Royal Society insisted that Nature must be studied closely, since it is God’s other book, alongside Scripture ... (Bragg, 2010).

Michael Faraday, a fundamentalist Christian whom Albert Einstein considered one of the three greatest scientists ever (the others being Isaac Newton and James Clerk Maxwell, a Presbyterian elder) was working on the first of his great scientific discoveries at the time when Serampore College was being developed. Faraday regarded all his work as revealing the wonders of God’s creation.

The year after Darwin’s *On the origin of the species* (1859) was published, Baden Powell, Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford University, argued that science and religion are quite separate fields of study (Parker, 1860) while John Draper (1874) argued, quite unjustifiably, that there had always been a conflict between the Catholic church and science. Unfounded as Draper’s arguments are, they have been generalised to all Christians and continue to inform approaches to science and religion among Christians in North America and Western Europe while Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and Christians in the Middle and Far East reject this approach in favour of the view that science and religion are complementary and not in conflict (Eklund, 2016).

William Carey was a keen botanist familiar with the Linnaean system of classifying plants, whether from the translation of Linnaeus’ text by C. Milne in 1771 or that by Erasmus Darwin (von Linné, 1787). His interest in the voyages of Captain James Cook may have been stimulated as much by the botanical findings of Sir Joseph Banks as by the new lands and peoples whom Captain Cook encountered.

So he may already have been aware of the ideas of the ‘book of nature’ and the ‘book of God,’ but, if he was not, he would surely have been instructed in them by his mentor for three years before he was ordained, John Sutcliff, Dan Taylor’s former assistant teacher whom Dan Taylor had taught Latin and John Fawcett Greek before sending him off to Bristol Academy. Later John Fawcett would train William Ward and we know that Dan Taylor continued to correspond with and to visit whenever he could both John Sutcliff, a key supporter of William Carey for the rest of his life, and John Fawcett.

So we can see why the prospectus for the College mentioned ‘... *instruction of Asiatic Christian and other youth in Eastern literature and European sciences*’ (Carey et al., 1819) and we can get some idea of the science which the Serampore Quartet thought important from the curriculum for native schools (Carey et al., 1816):

- knowledge of the solar system,
- geography,
- natural philosophy: meteorology, mineralogy, chemistry and natural history,

and the prospectus for the College (Carey et al., 1819):

- the principles of attraction and gravitation,
- the laws of motion,
- the nature of mechanic powers, &c.

along with geography, astronomy, and the various branches of natural science.

At this time the study of science was at a very low ebb in English universities; Charles Babbage organised the translation of a number of the most recent French texts, otherwise unavailable to students in English, while much later in the century, Michael Faraday toured the public schools urging them to teach science.

So, while the European sciences which were available to the Serampore Quartet might not have been the most up-to-date because of the lack of up-to-date English texts, they wanted to teach what was available to them in the native schools and in the College to bring people closer to God through the ‘book of nature’ as well as the ‘book of God.’

In fact, William Carey took a similar approach to the ‘book of nature’ as that advocated more recently by Lynn White (1967) in rejecting the Baconian approach of stressing man’s ‘dominion’ over creation and seeing human beings as *part of* and *responsible for* creation at the same time (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

But why ‘*Eastern literature*’?

A few years before the Quartet arrived in Bengal, Sir William Jones had delivered his famous lecture to the Asiatic Society in Kolkata on 2 February 1786 arguing that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin must have sprung from a common source.

When William Carey was appointed teacher of Bengali at Fort William College, the institution set up by Wellesley to ensure that East India Company staff were adequately trained for their jobs, there were only two texts in Bengali, a dictionary and a list of the laws applying in the East India Company’s domains; so he set about creating a Bengali literature, first with a translation from the Sanskrit of the *History of Pratapaditya* and then with a translation of the *Hitopadesha*.

Much to the disgust of many in England, Carey and Marshman later published a translation of one of the oldest Hindu texts, the *Ramayana* (Carey and Marshman, 1806–12). Carey had been distressed at the depressed state of the Hindu religion and must have been greatly cheered to find a Hindu text which sought to address ethical and moral issues in the context of religion. Later Hindu texts separated these issues whereas they are integral in the earlier Hindu texts (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

Also Carey could hardly have missed the fact that the *Ramayana* does not mention *sati*, the voluntary immolation of a widow on her husband’s pyre, which had so horrified him in 1799. Part of his argument to persuade Bentinck to support the abolition of *sati* in 1829 was that *sati* was not part of the Hindu religion — an argument also put forward by Ram Mohan Roy (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

However, the real seeds of the decision to focus on ‘Eastern literature’ can be found in the ‘Form of Agreement’ (Carey et al., 1947) made by all the missionaries at the time on Monday, 7 October 1805, in part to ensure that practice in the various outposts they were establishing was consistent. This sets out ten principles for their work:

1. to focus on conversion because of the eternal consequences for those who were not converted;

2. to seek fully to understand the beliefs of the unconverted in order to achieve the first objective;
3. to be sensitive to the beliefs and practices of those of other religions and not to do anything which might give them offence;
4. to seek to benefit others, not just preach at them;
5. to focus in preaching on the central doctrines of Christianity and not on peripheral or consequential aspects of becoming a Christian;
6. to set up no barriers which might inhibit Indians from getting to know them as people;
7. to support new converts in every way possible by helping them to deal with the adverse consequences of their conversion, not being over-critical of any failings and paying particular attention to the conversion of spouses and the social implications of such conversions;
8. to encourage Indian preachers and, when they form Indian churches, to select Indians as ministers and deacons in these churches so that they do not remain dependent on European Christians;
9. to make the scriptures available in vernacular languages and promote native schools;
10. to look after their own souls through prayer and the cultivation of personal religion.

It is difficult to think of any document which sets out so clearly the independence of the Christian faith from any particular culture and the importance of valuing all cultures insofar as they do not impinge on Christian values. For example, Christian converts were not expected to abandon the symbols of their caste but to show by their treatment of members of other castes that their Christianity transcended their caste.

Converts were not expected to take ‘Christian’ names; as the Quartet had observed as early as 1801, many English names come from Greek and Roman deities and, as John Clark Marshman (1859) was later to observe, many of the results of later missionaries encouraging the practice of adopting European Christian names were ridiculous!

But the key argument is a very modern one: start from where people are and walk the road with them. The people who are most likely to be able to do that are those who are fully at home in the culture of those whom they are seeking to convert and who are culturally sensitive in their interpersonal relationships. For the Serampore Quartet those brought up within Indian culture would always be able to do this more effectively than those imported from another culture. So, in complete contrast with the East India Company practice of recruiting and training Europeans to manage its operations in India, they saw the recruitment and training of Indian Christians as central to bringing the gospel to India and reaching the point at which Indian churches would no longer be dependent on European Christians for their future.

The insistence on believers having the scriptures in their own languages has recently been supported in a study of science and faith among top scientists; while all these highly educated scientists were fluent in English when talking about their scientific work, when asked to talk about their beliefs, many could only do so in their native languages (Eklund, 2016).

The Form of Agreement clearly locates the Serampore Quartet in the eighteenth century; it is comparable with the enlightened attitudes of the Russian Company whose entrepreneurs and associates such as John Fielding adopted measures for social improvement far in advance

of their time (Taylor, 1985). It reflects the openness which enabled Jean-Baptiste Pussin at the Bicêtre Hospital, Paris, (Pinel, 1801, 1809) and George Jepson and Katherine Allen at The Retreat in York to introduce humane ways of treating people with mental illnesses (Glover, 1984). It reflects the openness to ideas which initially surrounded the American and French Revolutions and which led to William Ward becoming both a republican and a passionate opponent of slavery (Marshman, 1859).

Many of these ideas did not survive into the nineteenth century as the horrors of the French Revolution followed by the rise of Napoleon turned the British away from many of these revolutionary ideas. Nor are ideas developed in similar periods of enlightenment necessarily taken up later; for example, the most comprehensive demolition of the deterrent theory of punishment occurs in fifth century BC Athens (Thucydides, 1954, Bk 3) but it has had no impact on penal theory, at least in the Western world. In the eighteenth century Hanway forbade reminding those who have suffered of their past (Taylor, 1985) and modern research into recovery from abuse suggests that he was right (Clarke and Clarke, 1976) whereas Freudian theories of recovery through reliving the past permeate most professions, even those who would claim to owe nothing to Freud.

The Serampore Quartet were fortunate to grow up at a time when the exchange and development of ideas in England was very fluid. Carey could read about James Cook's voyages and the Linnaean system; Ward could read about republican ideas and the evils of slavery; as dissenters, they were used to making up their own minds about things and not relying on some eternal authority. They were also fortunate in ending up in a colony of Denmark, the most enlightened of the European colonial powers, and, though the fate of the colony was ultimately decided by what happened in Europe, their enlightenment ideas were only challenged by those outside the colony, not by those in it.

At the same time, they never romanticised India as some Orientalists did — they were always aware of its dark side — and they never gave up hope because they put their hope in the power of the gospel to enable people to change because they believed that all are made in God's image (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

3 The vision in practice

The first step in putting the vision of the Serampore Quartet into practice was taken by Hannah and Joshua Marshman when they opened schools for European children whose profits enabled them to fund schools for native children in the area. In taking on this role, Hannah set a rare example to Indian women of what was possible for a woman outside the normal role of a housewife and mother (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

William Ward undertook the outrageous initiative of training local blacksmiths to make components for the printing press and hiring Panchanon and Monohor to develop new founts for the Devanagari languages. Practice at the time was not to share technology with the colonies; Samuel Slater, an apprentice to textile manufacturer Jedediah Strutt in Belper, Derbyshire, had memorised all he could and in 1789 emigrated to the newly established United States where the following year he began assisting US factory owners in setting up similar textile mills. He quickly gained the name 'Slater the Traitor' in England.

In practice, William Ward's technology transfer may have been significant in how the press was able to resume work within a month of the disastrous fire in 1812 and reach full capacity within six months. In 1820 the Quartet were to import a steam engine for their paper mill

from Thwaites, Hick and Rothwell of Bolton to which they applied the same principles.

Another early initiative of the Serampore Quartet was to propose that missionary children should be educated in the mission field (Marshman, 1859, p. 165), a proposal accepted by the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) at the time but not put into practice until the mid-1950s.

The Serampore Quartet adopted the economic arrangements of the early church, having everything in common, which meant that, when William Carey was invited to become teacher of Bengali at the newly established Fort William College in 1801, his salary went into the common fund.

The Serampore Quartet took great pains not to start any new work in any area where there was an existing Christian witness and had friendly relations with every Christian denomination which they encountered in India, including a Brazilian Roman Catholic priest who had spent ten years in Beijing and helped Marshman with his translation of Confucius (Marshman, 1859). The prospectus for the College explicitly states that it will be open to Roman Catholics (Carey et al., 1819). Given the official attitude to Roman Catholics in the UK at the time and the continuing animosity towards Roman Catholics from many in non-conformist denominations today, this may come as a surprise.

But I am reminded of a comment made to me many years ago by a professional colleague to the effect that the only people who are genuinely able to be open to others are those who are secure in their own belief system and one of the characteristics of the Serampore Quartet was that they were secure in their own belief system to the extent that some regarded them as rigid and unyielding. Yet these people, as my colleague observed, are often more able to be open to others than those who claim to be open-minded but do not really know where they stand.

In the ten years after the Form of Agreement, the Quartet's efforts were mainly focused on translations and setting up mission stations, along with building a non-conformist church in Calcutta, partly because, from 1807, their activities in the British controlled areas were constrained by the less friendly attitude of Lord Minto, the new Governor of Bengal, and the occupation of Serampore by the British as part of the Napoleonic Wars, an occupation which did not end until the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Though this did not impede the translation work of the missionaries — as Col. Krefting, the Danish Governor, pointed out, the conditions the British set made no mention of works in vernacular languages — opportunities to develop new mission stations were limited but they were able to start work in Burma and Java and the first missionaries arrived from America to complement the work of the European non-conformist missionary societies.

The renewal of the East India Company charter in 1813 with a clause enabling support for religious activity and the arrival in Serampore of information on the Lancasterian system of schooling which made use of monitors encouraged Joshua Marshman to put forward to the BMS a scheme for developing these schools in India.

But the arrival of Lord Moira as Governor of Bengal and the return of Serampore to Danish control in 1815 appear to have been the stimuli for a whole series of new initiatives by the Quartet. The reason for these new initiatives can, I think, be found in the message which William Ward took to England during his visit in 1818: that there are so many people in India that it would be impossible to find enough Europeans to convert them all; so we must find the means for Indians to convert Indians. This had been inherent in the 1805 Form of Agreement but it appears that the Quartet had become convinced that the combination of translations and mission stations was not producing results quickly enough.

Because William Ward was dispatched to England in 1817 and was not present when the

prospectus for the College was announced and the newspapers launched, it seems reasonable to suggest that the two years between 1815 and 1817 were occupied not just with the disagreements with the younger missionaries in India and with the newer members of the BMS committee in England but with a quite significant realignment in the tactics — but not the strategy — of the Serampore Quartet.

The launching in 1816 by Lord Moira (who became Lord Hastings in the same year) of the Hindu College in Calcutta may have spurred them into action because the first initiative to appear is not Joshua Marshman's Lancasterian schools as such but *Hints relative to native schools together with the outline of an institution for their extension and management* (1816).

This is followed by:

- the missionaries' support for the Calcutta School-Book Society founded in 1817;
- the launch in April 1818 of the monthly *Friend of India*, an English language newspaper, now incorporated into *The Statesman*;³
- the launch on 23 May 1818 of *Sumachar Durpan*, the first Bengali language newspaper, though another was launched almost immediately afterwards;
- the launch on 15 July 1818 of *College for the instruction of Asiatic Christian and other youth in Eastern literature and European sciences* (1819).

Their argument in *Hints relative to native schools* was that there was widespread ignorance among children, not just of the Gospel:

they have no just idea of the objects of nature so constantly before them, of the sun, moon and stars — the clouds, the winds, the rain; — the earth on which they dwell, — the groves, trees and plants which surround them — the domestic animals which they nourish; nor, in a word, of the flowing stream, the buzzing insect, or of the plant which creeps over their lowly shed.

They pointed to:

- lack of knowledge of their own language,
- the low standard of education in local schools [Bengal had many thousands of village schools at the time (Mangalwadi, 1998)],
- the lack of books and none on morality,
- the treatises in Sanskrit on arithmetic and geometry being inaccessible to students.

They went on to argue from the example of Ireland, where English was the medium of instruction rather than Gaelic, for educating children in their own language because acquiring ideas in a foreign language imposes additional barriers.

³The first English language newspaper was *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, published from 1780–82 in Kolkata but closed down by the Supreme Court after attacks on Warren Hastings' corruption which were later used in evidence during Hastings' impeachment. However, James Hicky tackled a wide range of issues, often rather inconsistently, and one of the prosecutors was John Zakariah Kiernander (Hicky, 1782), a missionary in Kolkata.

They stressed the need to improve the availability of books on and in the local languages in maths and grammar as well as natural science, geography, history, ethics and morality, and to develop encyclopaedias.

They argued for introducing the scriptures only where it is useful; in other words, they stressed studying the ‘book of nature’ before the ‘book of God’ and studying it in the vernacular, Bengali, a language held in about the same contempt in India as Czech was in Europe at the time.

Ultimately, there were 8,000 children attending these schools within a twenty mile radius of Serampore. The initiative contributed to the setting up in 1819 of the Baptist Female School Society which opened a school for girls in Calcutta to be followed by schools in Varanasi, Dhaka and Allahabad (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

Around this time, the missionaries had encountered Ram Mohun Roy who disagreed with their choice of the vernacular as the medium of instruction and preferred English. In the 1818 Mission Report to the BMS, Carey set out their arguments for instruction in the vernacular:

The moment a native youth found he had enough English to enable him to copy an English letter a stop would have been put to his studies . . . They imagined there was a prospect of getting Rs. 16 or 20 as a copyist in the English metropolis. This course, therefore, instead of promoting the welfare of the country would have transformed its finest youth into mercenary copyists, ignorant of their own language and even of English as to any purpose of mental improvement (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997, p. 76).

So the detailed curriculum for the College (figure 1) builds on the arguments in *Hints relative to native schools* for education in vernacular languages and study of the ‘book of nature’ but it adds in depth study of Indian languages as only someone with a real understanding of where someone comes from can walk alongside them on the road to faith.

They make provision in the prospectus for a preparatory Sanskrit course which they say children as young as seven might start but they appear to suggest that a normal period of study might be seven years, matching that of existing apprenticeships (and today the period between matriculation and being granted an MA at Oxford University).

The study of Sanskrit and the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religions is at the centre of the curriculum with a range of options for studying other languages and Hindu law so that students can fully immerse themselves in the cultures of those to whom they might take the gospel as well as having a firm grasp of the gospel.

Study of the ‘book of nature’ forms the other main strand with another strand concerned with the management of schools. So students would leave the college with a thorough understanding of Sanskrit, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, normally at least one other Indian language, history, geography, science and school management.

Apart from the language and Hindu law options, the other option would be ministerial training. All teaching would take place in Bengali or Hindi — languages which are sufficiently similar that hearing lectures in the language with which you were less familiar would not be a serious impediment — and there would be continuous assessment — final examinations were yet to be invented.

In other words, the college would train Indian Christians to be sufficiently conversant with their own culture and languages that they could present the gospel in a culturally sensitive way. It would give them the knowledge to enable them to show how the ‘book of nature’ reveals the wonders of God’s creation and it would fit them to run the native schools in which

College curriculum

Preparatory course in Sanscrit

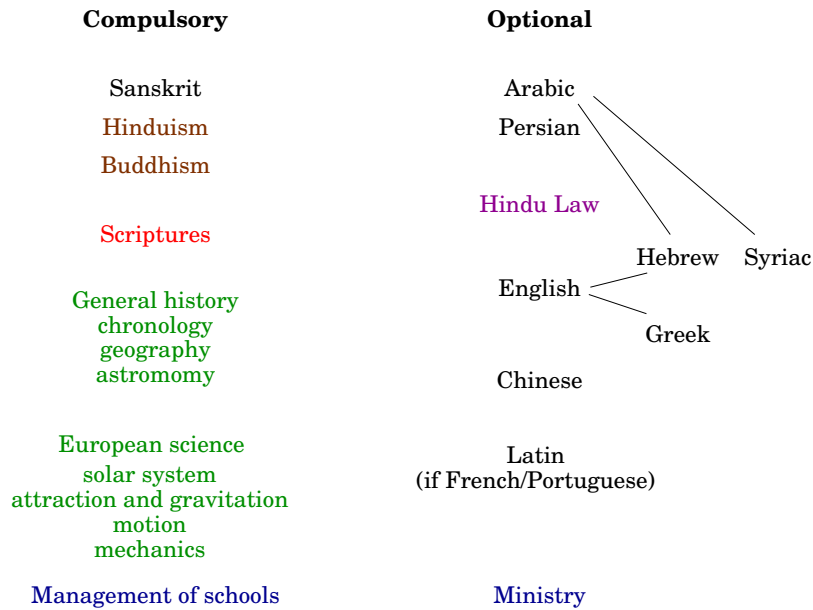


Figure 1: College curriculum

the next generation could receive a similarly culturally sensitive education. A very few might opt for ministerial training.

To reflect the third principle of the 1805 Form of Agreement, they also opened the college to non-Christians who were permitted to take any of the courses but without any obligation to study a course which might conflict with their religious sensibilities. When I was at school in India, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists had no problem taking the Bible Knowledge course for O level and the first tribute on the death of a former head of the school who had taken the Bible Knowledge course came from a Muslim. So it may well have been that some non-Christians would have been happy to take the Scripture course along with Christians. After all, Christians were learning about their religions; so why not return the compliment?

The modern view that adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam in Britain might be offended by certain aspects of Christianity fails to recognise that intolerance is a peculiarly Christian vice which has had no place in most other religions, particularly those in the Indian subcontinent, and that, where it does rear its ugly head, it has almost always been copied from Christianity.

The launch of the newspapers proved to be timely as on 19 August 1818 Lord Hastings removed the censorship of the press in British controlled India which had been in place since the Hicky trial in 1782. Interestingly an article on the improvement of agriculture advocating that Europeans should be allowed to own land in India and one on the need for a native press pass without comment but an article on *sati* excites comment and Lord Hastings, though in favour of abolition, privately advises Marshman to be careful.

William Ward's fundraising campaign was dogged in the UK by misinformation arising from the split between the senior and the junior missionaries though a visit to America was more

fruitful and, by the time he returned to the UK, Hannah Marshman's arrival in the UK and her response to questions about some of this misinformation appears to have calmed things down though William Ward's final meeting with the BMS Committee prior to the return of himself and Hannah Marshman in May 1821 did not go well. However, they were accompanied by two missionaries of the General Baptist Missionary Society en route to Orissa, a Miss Cooke, joining another missionary society to organise female education, and John Mack, a brilliant scholar with a Church of Scotland background who had become a Baptist. By this time, the college had 45 students and William Ward and John Mack became professors, William Ward covering divinity and John Mack the secular subjects.

The college building, supervised by Major Wickedie cost £15M, or five times the cost of their existing property, but their initiative had attracted the approval of the Danish crown who transferred to them a large house and grounds adjoining the property already purchased by Marshman in 1818.

As if starting native schools, newspapers and a college were not enough, in 1820 they had set up savings banks, imported a steam engine for the paper mill and founded the Agricultural Society of India; in 1821 on his return from England, William Ward started a religious magazine in Bengali and an auxiliary missionary society among native Christians; they were also developing new places of worship while Joshua Marshman was completing the translation of the Bible in Chinese and William Carey was editing the *Flora Indica* (Roxburgh, 1820–24), which brought the Linnaean system of classification to Indian plants.

Alongside all this translations had progressed apace; in a memoir on translations, they reported that they had translated the New Testament into twenty languages; the Bible in Bengali had reached its sixth edition and those into Hindi, Sanskrit, Oriya and Mahratta had all reached their second editions. They had also started work on translations in nine other languages (Marshman, 1859).

A lot of this was down to their willingness to place Indians, Christian and non-Christian, in positions of trust to assist them in their work. Rather than looking down on them, they saw them as essential partners in their work (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

4 Racism as state policy

In 1835, the year after Carey died, Macaulay penned his infamous Memorandum arguing that the future of India lay in the hands of 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Macaulay, 1965, from a reprint). It is important to say that Macaulay was not coming down on one side or the other in the debate about the medium of instruction; he was happy for vernacular languages to be a medium of instruction. His racism is about 'taste ... opinions ... morals and ... intellect.'

His racism was nothing new; John Zakariah Kiernander, who had been supported by the Danish, served as a missionary for over 50 years, over thirty of them in Kolkata, and met Carey in 1794 but had never bothered to learn Bengali and all his converts had been of European extraction (Marshman, 1859).

In 1804 a fund had been set up to support the widows and children of East India Company employees; during the eighteenth century many employees had settled down in relationships with Indian women which had not been solemnised according the Anglican rite, not least because there were very few Anglican priests to perform the rite. It was eventually decided that only the families of those who had gone through an Anglican ceremony could benefit from

the fund.

In 1801 Lord Wellesley had opened Fort William College in Kolkata to train new recruits to the East India Company but the Court of Directors in England were not convinced about the initiative and tried to shut it down, eventually compromising in 1807 by opening Haileybury College near Hertford to train new recruits and retaining Fort William College to provide a one year finishing course for graduates from Haileybury College (Marshman, 1859).

One consequence of the abolition of slavery was the development of the more insidious argument that Europeans are genetically superior to other races, an argument which was only formally discredited with the decipherment of the human genome towards the end of the twentieth century. Though not originally intended to support such arguments, the recently developed discipline of phrenology was dragooned into supporting the idea that, because the skulls of non-European races were obviously different from those of Europeans, non-Europeans must be inferior. More recently Dale Spender (1980) and Carol Gilligan (1982) have shown how similar arguments that, because women are different from men, they must be inferior, continued to dominate academic thinking into the late twentieth century.

In 1836 the British missionary societies gave evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes set up:

... to consider what measures ought to be adopted with regard to the NATIVE INHABITANTS of Countries where BRITISH SETTLEMENTS are made, and to the neighbouring Tribes, in order to secure to them the due observance of Justice and the protection of their Rights; to promote the spread of Civilization among them and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion (Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes, 1837, p. 1).

They cite the address to Parliament given by William IV in 1834 stressing the need to impart 'to [native inhabitants] that degree of civilization, and that religion, with which Providence has blessed this nation' (1837, p. 3).

The report begins with grim accounts of the ill-treatment of the native inhabitants of all the British settlements and colonies before going to say that there is

... one effectual way of staying the evils we have occasioned, and imparting the blessings of civilization, and that is, the propagation of Christianity, together with the preservation, for the time to come, of the civil rights of the natives (1837, p. 60).

Among those who gave evidence were Mr Ellis of the London Missionary Society who argued that '[t]rue civilization and Christianity are inseparable' while the Church Missionary Society also argued that they should be pursued side by side and there follow numerous accounts of the civilising effect of people becoming Christians. The fact that former slaves in Sierra Leone were able to take official positions in the new country was taken as evidence of the power of Christianity to civilise people.

The whole report might today be described as 'victim-blaming' in that it documents the atrocities perpetrated by 'civilised' Europeans on native inhabitants before going on to argue that the native inhabitants need European civilisation in order to avoid becoming victims and that that is best imparted through Christianity!

That year Bahadur Shah Zafar became Mughal Emperor; already in his sixties he presided over a cultural renaissance in Delhi, a tolerant society where Europeans felt free to adopt Indian

lifestyles. In 1852 Revd Midgeley John Jennings, who had already served twenty years as an East India Company chaplain, arrived in Delhi; in *Proposed Mission at Delhi* he argued that, ‘as the course of our Empire is so marvellously taking its course from the East of India towards its West,’ so the British should be preparing to conquer the subcontinent for Anglicanism and the one true God (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 59). Jennings was disliked by most of the British and quickly gained a reputation as a fanatic for his attempts at conversion. However, his views about the conversion of the Empire’s subjects to Christianity were widely shared particularly among the Evangelical community.

By this time, there had been instances of unrest among Sepoy troops (that is, Indian troops with the rank of private) and these came to a head with the issue of the new Enfield rifle which, allegedly, required the use of animal fat. Initial opposition was quickly suppressed by the British but on 9 May 1857 85 Sepoys in Meerut were sentenced to ten years penal servitude for refusing to use the new rifle. A call went out for all true Muslims to rise up and slaughter Christians and the Sepoys marched to Delhi where they proclaimed themselves subjects of the Mughal Emperor and proceeded to slaughter all the Christians they could lay their hands on, including the Revd Jennings; however, they spared all Europeans who had converted to Indian religions (Dalrymple, 2006).

The Mughal Emperor was deeply embarrassed by all this not only because it was completely contrary to his own beliefs about religious tolerance but also because he had no resources to counter the Sepoys, the Mughal Emperors having long been just titular emperors with no military resources. He eventually agreed to accept the Sepoys’ demands and was later blamed by the British for the uprising.

Many Sepoys from elsewhere joined the uprising, often entirely peacefully and without any recriminations against their British officers, but it was also joined by Muslim fanatics who provoked conflicts with the Hindu community in Delhi which the Mughal Emperor was ill-placed to deal with. Fortunately for the British, the Sepoys were insufficiently skilled to mount an effective defence of the city and, after a four month siege through the monsoon, the British mounted an assault on the city in September 1857. They met more organised resistance than they had expected but

[i]t was a war of extermination, in which no prisoners were taken and no mercy shown — in short one of the most cruel and vindictive wars this world has seen . . . Dead bodies lay thick in the streets and open spaces and numbers were killed in their houses . . . Many non-combatants lost their lives, our men, mad and excited, making no distinction (Griffiths, 1910, p. 164).

On 22 September 1857 Edward Vibart wrote to his Uncle Gordon:

I think I must have seen about 30 or 40 defenceless people shot down before me. It was literally murder and I was perfectly horrified (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 385).

Indian Christians were slaughtered along with Hindus even though the uprising had originated among Muslims; the Delhi College mathematics lecturer, Ramchandra, a Christian convert, had escaped from Delhi before the siege but when he returned he found himself the object of threats and harassment from the British. Having escaped being killed by the Sepoys, he wrote to Colonel Burn, Military Governor of Delhi, commenting:

there is hardly any comfort remaining, when a native Christian is in danger from Christian officers themselves, merely because he was not born in England and has not a white skin (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 416).

What had started as a religious uprising ended with the slaughter and persecution of people solely on the basis of the colour of their skin, without regard to their religion, something which has continued into the twenty-first century.

Interestingly, as had happened after the Vellore uprising in 1806, missionaries were also blamed for the 1857 uprising and John Clark Marshman (1859) wrote *The life and times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward: embracing the history of the Serampore Mission* to counter the accusation that educating Indians had provoked the uprising.

In 1838 a year after the report of the Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes was published, the missionary societies opened a school for the daughters and orphans of missionaries and six years later a school for the sons and orphans of missionaries which eventually became Walthamstow Hall and Eltham College respectively.

Over the nineteenth century Indians were transported across the Empire because they were considered superior to peoples of African origin. Racism was a key driver in the native Indian residential school system set up by the Canadian government under the Indian Acts 1876 and 1884 and run by the churches (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) and in the various initiatives undertaken by Australian states to separate Aboriginal children from their parents (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), initiatives in which the churches were active.

Much to my surprise I discovered when I went to Eltham College, the boarding school for sons of missionaries, to do my A levels in the 1960s that racism was very much alive and well; I was told in no uncertain terms that it was impossible that any of my Indian school friends would be intelligent enough to study at Eltham College!

I have addressed the issue of racism in detail because it reflects better the facts about Christian behaviour towards non-Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than the alternative theories of commerce and imperialism.

The missionary-explorer, David Livingstone, had adopted the threefold motif, 'Christianity, Commerce and Civilization.' The link between Christianity and commerce can be traced back to Lord Shaftesbury in 1789 and the formation of the Sierra Leone Company by the Clapham Sect in 1790 but missionary societies had generally taken a dim view of this connection (Stanley, 1990) and Livingstone left the London Missionary Society in part to avoid embarrassing them with his wider activities.

Missionaries have also been charged with being instruments of imperialism (Mangalwadi, 1998) but it is only in the late nineteenth century, if at all, that ideas of imperialism begin to infect missionary activity (Stanley, 1990).

However, though racism in the form of the assumption of the superiority of European civilisation was a significant factor in driving many Christian missionary enterprises in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was not universal; for example, James Hudson-Taylor adopted native Chinese clothing, learned various Chinese dialects and was sensitive to Chinese culture (Stanley, 1990).

Charles Freer Andrews, an Anglican Priest and then a missionary to India, visited Fiji to examine the condition of Indians there and also South Africa, where he was instrumental in persuading Mahatma Gandhi to return to India to take up the cause of Indian Independence. Early in his time in India, he criticised the attitude of European Christians and their westernising tendency which he saw as obstacles to the conversion of Indians (Andrews, 1912).

But, in *India and Britain: a moral challenge*, a series of dialogues arising out of his conversations with Indian and English students at Oxford during the early 1930s, he is much clearer that the issue is racism:

it clearly had never dawned on those undergraduates at Oxford that the white race prejudice meant incessant humiliation in the larger world outside Britain (1935, p. 91).

Commenting on racism in South Africa, he says:

For as soon as ever we leave England, with its higher Christian ideals, we seem at once to assume a domination over other races, and even to institute a ‘white race’ creed, with ceremonies and formulas which deny altogether the unity of mankind in Christ (1935, pp. 96–97).

However, he could just as well have been describing the behaviour of many British people in India who lived quite separate lives from Indians of equivalent status and professions even after independence, retiring to the club where they could read the English newspapers and play billiards, snooker or cards.

My father, Donald F. Hudson, as a leading light in the Christian Student Movement at Oxford in the late 1930s, would almost certainly have come across Charles Andrews’ book. Certainly, by the time he arrived at Serampore College in the early 1940s, its staff, notably, C. E. Abraham who was to become Principal from 1949–1959,⁴ were known for their support for Indian Independence. My father met people who had been part of the Indian National Congress inner circle during World War II and he held Winston Churchill in the same contempt as Charles Freer Andrews did for his desire to retain India as a ‘possession’ (Andrews, 1935).

Also my parents would not sing certain hymns in the 1933 *Baptist Church Hymnal* because of their racist content.

5 The vision in practice today

Our family were the first beneficiaries of a change in BMS policy in the 1950s allowing the children of missionaries to accompany their parents throughout their childhood — a policy first advocated by the Serampore Quartet over 150 years earlier and agreed in principle by the BMS but set aside in favour of education at the schools for the daughters and sons of missionaries in England in the early nineteenth century, mimicking in a way the decision of the East India Company to set up Haileybury College rather than train their officers solely at Fort William College in India.

Today there are BMS World Mission supported schools in several countries where the children of missionaries can receive their education within easy reach of their parents if not actually living with their parents.

In the 1960s the original ambition of the Serampore Quartet that India should become self-sufficient in church leaders and trainers was achieved and the remaining BMS missionaries began to be withdrawn from the College.

The BMS had long sought to put into practice the fourth principle of the 1805 Form of Agreement: to seek to benefit people and not just preach to them. So it had long had medical and educational missions, one of which was notable for work by Dr Stanley Browne (1966) on leprosy and another possibly infamous as the school in Angola attended by all three leaders of the later civil war in that country.

⁴Thanks to Professor Brian Stanley for highlighting C. E. Abraham’s contribution during his paper *The vision of a Christian Higher Education for India: 200 years of Serampore College History* given on 19 October 2018 at the same conference.

Table 1: Comparison of missionary visions

<i>Serampore Mission</i> (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997, pp. 1-8)	<i>BMS World Mission</i> (Prayer Calendar 2018)
Caring for the natural world	Sustainable agriculture and water management
Technology transfer	Electricity generation
Savings banks	Community development
Humane treatment of leprosy patients	Treatment of leprosy and AIDS patients
Development of print media	Support for new media
Agricultural Society of India	Operation Agri and successors
Translations into vernacular languages	Largely undertaken by the Bible Society
Schools for native children	Educational programmes for children of all ages from pre-school onwards and for those with special needs; programmes for young people
Serampore College	Training for church leaders; support for various colleges; specific programmes in colleges and universities; vocational training programmes
Astronomy to counter astrology	
Lending libraries	
Forestry	
Schools for girls; campaign against <i>sati</i>	Schools for girls; initiatives to counter gender based violence; support for abused or marginalised women
Idea of a 'civil service'	
Religion cannot be separate from morality	Justice based programmes
Revival of Indian culture	

Today the BMS World Mission continues to support some more traditional medical facilities but has broadened its work to include programmes to counteract malnutrition, develop community maternal health and palliative care, address mental health issues and develop health management and administration. In education, apart from more traditional schools, the BMS World Mission supports a wide range of colleges and educational programmes for children and young people of all ages as well programmes to train ministers, church leaders and administrators and more specialist programmes such as speech therapy.

An area of work which would not have been recognised as such by the Serampore Quartet is work with people with a range of disabilities, particularly learning disabilities which were not identified as a separate area of concern until the mid-nineteenth century, though they would have been familiar with people with physical disabilities, not least William Carey's second wife, Charlotte Rumohr.

The 1950s saw the launch of Operation Agri which has morphed into a wide range of projects to support people in sustainable agriculture and water management — projects which would have been dear to the heart of William Carey. More recently, the BMS World Mission has begun to support more 'industrial' projects such as the bakery in Thailand and business development to address unemployment and improve employment opportunities. Implicit in some of the work in these areas has been the need to give legal aid or counter gender based violence in communities. In others family or community support are important to enable people to live constructive lives.

Another more recent development has been the involvement of the BMS World Mission in supporting disaster relief whether sudden disasters such as the earthquake in Nepal or slow-burning disasters like the refugee crises in the Middle East or street children in large cities.

Alongside all these initiatives are support for Christian media and support and training to enable native Christians to take the responsibility for the work in their own countries, including church planting, things which were at the heart of the work of the Serampore Quartet.

So if we compare the achievements of the Serampore Quartet with the work of the BMS World Mission today (table 1), we find that:

- translation amounts to very little of the work of the Society but use of new media continues to be part of its work;
- agricultural, community and business development are a developing part of its work;
- health care, including through support for marginalised groups, and education at all levels remain important parts of its work;
- work to support women remains an important part of its work;
- justice based programmes are a developing part of its work;
- church planting remains an important part of its work;
- preparing and supporting church leaders remains an important part of its work.

In short, though the range of activities now carried out by BMS World Mission does not provide an exact match with the work undertaken by the Serampore Quartet, both interpreted and interpret their call as demonstrating, not just preaching, the love of God in a very wide variety of ways.

More importantly, the attitude of missionaries today towards the communities they serve is more a reflection of the 1805 Form of Agreement than the attitudes which Charles Freer Andrews (1912) encountered a hundred years ago.

6 Conclusion

I realised long ago that living at Serampore College for so much of my childhood and adolescence had had a profound impact on my outlook towards many things, not least my attitude to the ‘book of nature’ and the ‘book of God.’ I first became specifically aware of their complementarity as an undergraduate in Oxford and my life mostly in academia has reinforced that understanding across the wide range of disciplines in which I have worked.

For, just as the BMS World Mission vision of mission today is closer to that of the eighteenth century, so is our concept of science. In the twentieth century Lynn White (1967) argued against Bacon’s formulation of our relationship with nature, Albert Einstein destroyed the mechanical worldview of Isaac Newton and Gilbert Ryle (1949) took aim at the Cartesian worldview while Osterweis et al. (1984) hammered the nails into the coffin by showing that you cannot separate body and mind. By then the Aristotelian view of a steady state universe had been overtaken by Georges Lemaître’s concept of an expanding universe (1927), giving a whole new meaning to the idea of God the Creator, one of the key differences which William Carey had noted between Christianity and Hinduism and Buddhism (Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, 1997).

Yet Christians in England have not understood the importance of the vision of the Serampore Quartet two hundred years ago or that of BMS World Mission today. They are often as ignorant of the ‘book of nature’ as non-Christians are of the ‘book of God.’ Moreover, many scientists who claim to be Christians still take their cue from Baden Powell’s arguments that science and religion relate to completely different things.

More recently, the New Zealand theologian, Chris Marshall wrote a book in which he interwove the ‘book of nature’ and the ‘book of God.’ When it was offered to an English publisher, they wrote to him asking him to re-write it so that the material from the ‘book of nature’ was in one part of the book and the material from the ‘book of God’ was in another. The idea that one could inform the other was completely absent from the English publisher’s consciousness (in fairness, this is part of a wider problem in English publishing which dislikes multidisciplinary texts).

In May 2018 I heard a talk by Marina Cantazucino, founder of the Forgiveness Project, a non-Christian, which was more in tune with the ‘book of God,’ even though all her material had come from the ‘book of nature,’ than anything I have ever seen written by a Christian. Dan Taylor was right when he said that you can get a long way with the ‘book of nature’ but, for a full understanding, you need the ‘book of God.’ But, if Christians only study the ‘book of God’ and ignore the ‘book of nature,’ they will only receive part of God’s revelation.

If Christianity is to recover in the pagan West, it needs to recover the vision of the Serampore Quartet and, for that matter, of Michael Faraday and James Clark Maxwell that the ‘book of nature’ is as important as the ‘book of God’ for understanding God’s revelation and it needs to implement the principles of the 1805 Form of Agreement in its work with non-Christians.

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