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George R. Knight
Andrews University

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Protestant Mission Explosion

And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it: and then, finally the end will come. Matthew 24:14, NLT



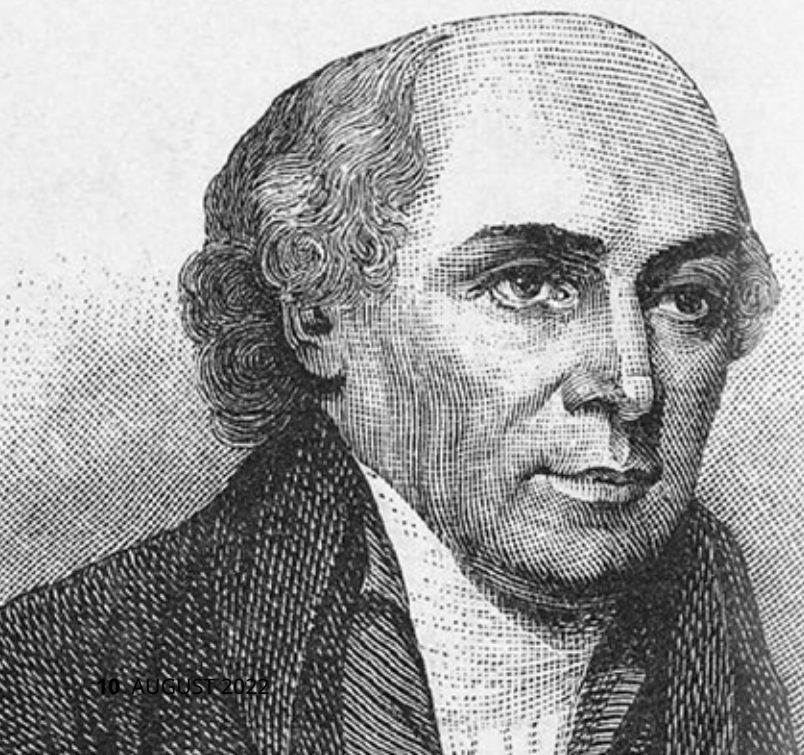
▲ George R. Knight

World mission stood at the heart of the nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity. The modern mission movement began in 1792 when William Carey published, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.

That might not seem so revolutionary to us, but it was in 1792. The next year saw the establishment of the first missionary society for sponsoring foreign missions and the sending of Carey to India, where he worked for seven years without an Indian convert.

But even though his efforts began slowly, they rooted themselves firmly. By the time of his death in 1834, Carey had not only established a strong Christian church in India, but he had fathered the modern mission movement that would take Protestantism around the world. The first great wave of Protestant missions to the world peaked in the 1830s, but it didn't stop there. Rather, it increased in magnitude during the

▼ William Carey



latter part of the century. Kenneth Scott Latourette has labeled the nineteenth century as “the great century” of Protestant missions, while Sydney Ahlstrom, a leading student of American church history, has noted that “the closing two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the climactic phase of the foreign missions movement in American Protestantism.”

One of its main stimulants was the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, which grew out of an appeal by evangelist Dwight L. Moody in 1886 for college students to devote their lives to mission service. One hundred took their stand that first year. That number increased to 2,200 in 1887; within a few years, many thousands of young people had pledged their lives to mission service. The movement's motto was, “The evangelization of the world in this generation.”

It stimulated, claims Ernest R. Sandeen, “the greatest demonstration of missionary interest ever known in the United States.” As a result, American Protestants began to see such places as Africa, China and Japan as their spiritual provinces.

Such a movement did not catch Adventists sleeping. God had opened the way through the Protestant initiative, and the Seventh-day Adventists would rapidly reach out to *every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people* with messages of the Three Angels. ■

George R. Knight is a retired professor of Church History at the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This article is from his book, Lest We Forget, a daily devotional, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, page 313. Reprinted with permission.

Editor's Note — This marks the final installment from the book, Lest We Forget. Next month, we begin a new history column from the Center for Adventist Research.