

**EXPLORING THE LIFE, THE MISSIONS, AND
LEGACY OF ERNEST AND PHEBE WARD: THE
PIONEERING FREE METHODIST
MISSIONARIES TO INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the life and legacy of the pioneering Free Methodist missionaries to India – Phebe Ward (1850-1910) and her husband Ernest Ward (1853-1937). The Wards worked in central India during 1881-1927. Evangelism and social work went hand in hand in their ministry. Their central message was Christian holiness.

Keywords: *Phebe Ward, Ernest Ward, Free Methodist Church, Central India, Conversion, Evangelism, Church Planting, Humanitarian Services, Christian Holiness.*

INTRODUCTION

Missionary biographies are integral and vital elements of history. The history of Christianity and Christian missions in India has many unknown, lesser-known, and uncelebrated missionaries as well as native Christian leaders whose stories are yet to be shared and discussed in our generation (and beyond). Throughout Christian history, historians and missiologists have generally focused on most famous or prominent missionaries. This dominant tendency of celebrating the celebrated among scholars has consciously or unconsciously neglected the need to explore the lives and legacies of not so well-known Christians and missionaries. Thus, in this paper my aim is to initiate a new trend of celebrating the lesser-known missionaries – Ernest and Phebe Ward. Not many of us may have heard their names before. Who were the Wards? Where did they come from? What was their missionary vision and calling? What are their contributions to the society and church in India? How can we grasp the significance of their legacy toward nation building in India? This paper will answer some of these questions and demonstrate the significance of the life and legacy of these lesser known missionaries.

THE LIVES OF ERNEST AND PHEBE WARD

In this section we briefly explore the lives of Ernest and Phebe Ward. The story of their lives is an incredible story of transformation and impact.

Introducing Phebe E. Ward

The life of Phebe Elizabeth Cox-Ward is a fascinating story of transformation. From a life of worldly pleasures to godly pursuits, Phebe's journey is truly inspiring. She responded to God's call in her life with a great sense of honor, urgency, and optimism.¹ She was the co-founder of the Burhanpur Faith Mission, Pilgrim Faith Mission, and several other missions with her husband, Ernest F. Ward. Phebe was the first woman foreign missionary of the Free Methodist Church.

Phebe was born on October 7, 1850 in Canandaigua, Ontario County, New York.² She grew up in the small town of Cary, McHenry County, Illinois. Phebe was the youngest child and the only girl among the four children of Carman and Sarah Cox. Phebe's father was a farmer and cattle herder. Phebe's mother was a homemaker.³ Carman and Sarah lived in log cabins (wood homes). They were neither religiously inclined nor materially prosperous, but they were a happy family.

Great students make great teachers. This was so true of Phebe. Her oldest daughter Ethel records that Phebe was a "born teacher" who loved her profession and her students.⁴ Prior to

¹ Shivraj K. Mahendra, *Lived Missiology: The Legacy of Ernest and Phebe Ward* (London, KY: Fishers for Christ, 2021), 78.

² Some other sources show the birth year to be 1851 as well as 1852. On Phebe's birth city, Canandaigua, see, Charles F. Milliken, *A History of Ontario County, New York and Its People, Volume 1* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1911).

³ Date of births noted from Phebe's journal page titled "Births" (undated manuscript). Dates of demise are calculated from Phebe's journal entry dated January 22, 1901, *P.E.W. Journal, Jan 1901-Dec 1904*. Phebe wrote: "20 years ago today father died and mother died 27 years ago today." Phebe notes that her mother, Sarah Cox, died at the age of 53 years 8 months and 19 days. See, Phebe Ward, Letter to Gilbert Cox, Raj Nandgaon, Sept. 8, 1896. This letter says Gilbert was 53. Ward Collection ATS (Asbury Theological Seminary).

⁴ Ethel E. Ward, *Ordered Steps, or, the Wards of India: A Biography of the Lives of Ernest Fremont Ward and Phebe Elizabeth Cox Ward, Missionaries to India, 1880-1927* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press,

her conversion, Phebe had taught for over a decade. She had received the teacher's license from the education department.⁵ Phebe also taught Sunday school kids in her church. Her gifts of teaching were to become a great blessing for India's many underprivileged children.

Phebe accepted Christ as her personal savior in 1875 and became a passionate follower and witness of Jesus in her family and church community. Phebe also had a heart for charity and mission. In addition to Sunday worship and Wednesday prayer meetings, she regularly attended the camp meetings held in the Cary area. The history of camp meetings may be traced as early as the 1850s, to the evangelistic and revival meetings of John Wesley Redfield (1810-1863) of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was the co-founder of Free Methodism with Benjamin T. Roberts (1823-1893).⁶ The Free Methodist Camp meetings were powerful revival meetings organized once or twice a year for spiritual renewal. Spirit filled worship and life challenging holiness sermons defined the nature of these meetings. In one such camp meeting Phebe met Ernest.

Introducing Ernest F. Ward

Ernest Fremont Ward was born on April 25, 1853 in Elgin and grew up in Geneva, both in Kane County, Illinois, USA. He was the second child of Pindar and Emily Ward. Ernest is described as a bookworm, always fascinated with books on various subjects.⁷ He loved singing, was a commerce graduate, and a courthouse employee who went on to be a missionary.

Ernest was converted to Christ in 1871, during the ministry of R. S. Cantine, a Methodist Episcopal Church minister. Ernest wrote, "On the 14th of November 1871, God sent a dispatch from heaven to assure me that my sins were blotted out in the blood of his Son, and my soul was filled with joy unspeakable..."⁸ From 1873, he also began to search for a "more perfect way" (Christian holiness), which was not taught in his church. In 1876, he attended a Free Methodist Camp Meeting at St. Charles, Ill., and his search came to an end. He found the teaching and practice of holiness among the Free Methodists and surrendered his life to receive it.⁹ Consequently, in 1879, he joined the Free Methodist Church.

Among the Free Methodists, Ernest not only found his soul's desire but also his soulmate, Phebe. The two met each other for the first time at the St. Charles Camp Meeting in 1878.¹⁰ Phebe saw Ernest as the young man with a "heavenly smile."¹¹ Some people are drawn to each other naturally. Ernest and Phebe were one such young adults. The camp meeting had not only brought them closer to Christ, but also to each other. To Ernest and Phebe, this camp meeting

1951), 16.

⁵ *Ordered Steps*, 16. The original certificate seems to be lost. However, Ethel had the opportunity to see it and copy it for her biographical project.

⁶ See, Joseph Goodwin Terrill, *The Life of John Wesley Redfield, M.D.* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1889, 1912), Kindle edition 2012. See also, Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), esp., Chapter 10.

⁷ Ethel Ward, *Ordered Steps*, 19.

⁸ Ernest F. Ward, "Experience," *The Free Methodist*, Oct 8, 1879:2 (Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary).

⁹ Ward, "Experience," *The Free Methodist*, Oct 8, 1879:2.

¹⁰ For a history of this camp meeting, see, Joseph Goodwin Terrill, *The St. Charles Camp-meeting, Embodying its History and Several Sermons by Leading Ministers, with some Practical Suggestions concerning Camp-meeting Management* (Chicago, T.B. Arnold, 1883).

¹¹ *Phebe*, 26. Ward Collection ATS. Cf. *Ordered Steps*, 23.

marked the beginning of a great friendship that would soon result in a relationship and a life-long partnership.

At St. Charles, Ernest talked with Phebe about missions. He also gave her tracts about mission work in India which he had received from Albert Norton. Norton, who had worked in central India as an independent missionary for several years by now, was back in the USA for health reasons, and was looking for young people to go to India to continue the mission work.¹² Describing his missional vision, Ernest wrote, “*I have one ambition paramount to all others: to so accurately exhibit Jesus Christ in my life and conversations as to stimulate seekers, promote revivals, and hasten the millennium.*”¹³

The Missionary Calling of the Wards

Ernest and Phebe were called by God to serve in India. They were called to preach holiness and serve the needy with the love of Christ. The Silver Lake Camp meeting of summer 1880 marked Phebe’s most decisive meeting with Ernest. Meanwhile, they had had some correspondence with each other. At Silver Lake, in addition to spiritual renewal, Phebe also received her personal missionary call. Ethel Ward quotes an eyewitness, “When an invitation was given for special dedication to God’s service, Phebe walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar. Soon the glory of the Lord seemed to come upon her, and she began walking back and forth repeating the prophetic words, ‘India, India, India.’”¹⁴ A similar conviction had already gripped the heart and mind of Ernest. That night also witnessed Ernest as a young preacher on the stage. He had already started talking about missions to Phebe.

The inspiration to go to India as missionaries had come through Ernest’s friend Albert Norton (1847-1932), who was already working as a missionary in Central India and had called for more missionaries. It was Ernest who had the primary calling for India and he invited Phebe to join in the venture with God. Ernest was ordained during the 21st Annual Session of the Illinois Conference of the FMC (Oct 6-11, 1880). Ernest and Phebe left for India on November 15, 1880, only six weeks after their marriage.

The Marriage and Family

Soon after the St. Charles Camp Meeting, correspondence increased between Phebe and Ernest. Ernest wrote to Phebe, “You remember I told you about my friend Albert Norton who gave me those booklets on India. He has just written to me that he believes it’s God’s will [that] I go to India as a missionary.” Then he adds, “Take Phebe Cox with you to India as a life companion. As Jesus sent out His disciples two by two, so today He sends them out in couples.”¹⁵ Though it may sound like the marriage plan was strictly for mission purposes, the couple genuinely loved each other. Their relationship was already in the making from the first camp meeting in 1878. Their wedding was a beautiful culmination of their love for one another with the love and commitment to God’s mission. Phebe and Ernest’s decision to get married and venture into foreign mission in India had the blessings of everyone – ministers,

¹² *Phebe*, 26. Ward Collection ATS.

¹³ Ernest F. Ward, *General Triads E*, No. 10696-97 (c. 1880-1881). Emphasis original. The Ernest F. Ward Collection, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

¹⁴ Ward, *General Triads E*, No. 10696-97 (c. 1880-1881), 28.

¹⁵ Ward, *General Triads E*, No. 10696-97 (c. 1880-1881), 25. Cf. *Phebe*, 29. Ward Collection ATS.

missionaries, church, friends and family. They got married on October 4, 1880 at Cary, Ill.¹⁶ The marriage was solemnized by Rev. C. B. Ebey, a prominent minister of the Free Methodist Church.¹⁷ Laying his hands on the heads of the newly married couple, he prayed, “O God, we dedicate these two young lives to Thee and Thy cause this day. May they be set apart as truly as Paul and Barnabas were to the work whereunto Thou hast called them. Go with them on their long journey to India and their long journey through life.”¹⁸

Ernest and Phebe had three daughters, Ethel, Bessie, and Louisa. Ethel went on to become a lifelong missionary in India in her own right. After her mother’s demise, Ethel assisted her father in India. Ernest’s adopted son Thomas Ward was the father of India’s first FMC Bishop (Daniel Ward).¹⁹ After Phebe’s demise, Ernest continued to work in India. He was called “the Francis Asbury of the Free Methodist Mission in India.”²⁰ The Wards were engaged in holistic missions in central India and preached Christian holiness. Ernest and Phebe had together worked in India for three adventurous decades. The road of mission work was certainly narrow, often making one realize that they may have done nothing significant at all. Phebe entered her eternal rest on September 1, 1910. Ernest continued his mission in India until his retirement in 1927. Ernest passed away in 1937 in Los Angeles, CA, where he was witnessing Christ to Sikhs and others.

THE MISSIONS AND THE LEGACY OF PHEBE AND ERNEST WARD

Phebe and Ernest were co-laborers in central India during 1881-1910. The Wards were instrumental in the following significant ventures: (1) the conversion of Narayan Vaman Tilak who went on to become the famous Marathi Christian poet; (2) founding of the original vernacular Bible School at Yavatmal that paved the way for present day Union Biblical Seminary; (3) starting of village clinics that lay at the roots of the Umri Christian Hospital; (4) managing of orphanages, famine kitchens, and Sunday schools that continue to inspire humanitarian ministries of the denomination; and (5) officially establishing of the India Holiness Association in 1910.

The Wards carried out what may be called a holistic mission. They lived in poverty, lacked formal ministerial (seminary) qualifications, and suffered health conditions. In spite of all these vulnerabilities, they gained extraordinary victory in the mission field. Here is a snapshot of their contribution to nation building with special reference to Phebe’s role.

A Brief History of the Mission Stations

Arriving in India (Bombay, Jan. 16, 1881) the Wards founded the following missions and mission stations:

¹⁶ The introductory note by Asbury Seminary Archive’s Ward Family Collection gives the wedding date as October 11, which is incorrect. The correct date per the marriage certificate is October 4, 1880.

¹⁷ For a brief life and obituaries of Rev. C. B. Ebey, see, *The Free Methodist*, Chicago, July 21, and September 1, 1908.

¹⁸ *Phebe*, 29. Ward Collection ATS.

¹⁹ I met Bishop emeritus Daniel Ward in December 2022 at his home in Nagpur. I met the rest of the Wards at Yavatmal in May 2023. It was a joy to present them a copy of the book (*Lived Missiology*) containing their grandfather and great grandfather's story.

²⁰ It was Albert Norton who called Ernest with that title. See, Ernest Ward, Letter to Ethel Ward, Umri (May 1, 1912).

Burhanpur Faith Mission (1881)

Located in southern Madhya Pradesh, Burhanpur was a strategic place. Emperor Shah Jahan's wife Mumtaj was first buried here. Ernest and Phebe's oldest daughter Ethel was born here in 1883. Ward's first Indian colleague Vinayak Trimbuck was converted here. Official FMC missionaries Mary Louisa Ranf and Julia Zimmerman joined the Wards here in 1886. At Burhanpur the Wards initially witnessed in bazaars and village streets. Phebe started a Sunday school for children at her home. The school began with six children and grew to over 634 by 1887.²¹ In addition to the children ministry, Phebe reached out to the Muslim women in zenanas.

Pilgrim Faith Mission, Ellichpur (1887)

Achalpur (then Ellichpur) is located in northern Maharashtra. It was a tribal area. The Wards had briefly lived here with a missionary family when they first came to India in 1881. They had returned to this place to carry out the Korku Mission. Along with regular bazaar preaching, village outreach, and short evangelistic trips to cities, the Wards were increasingly occupied with ministry among the Korku people in the hills. Ernest published *A Brief Sketch of the Korkus* in 1891. This booklet provides an excellent summary of the life, belief, and practices of the Korkus.²² Phebe had two Sunday Schools at Achalpur: First for British children in English in the mornings and second for indigenous children in Hindustani in the afternoons. Wards also started their children adoption ministry from this place.²³

Chhattisgarh Pilgrim Mission (1895)

Chhattisgarh (then eastern part of the Central Provinces, later Madhya Pradesh) was one of the most challenging mission fields of the Wards. They served here during one of the most difficult times in Indian history. Here they built orphanages and served the famine sufferers. They made friends with local rajahs (such as Maha Raja Bali Ram Das of Raj Nandgoan and Maha Raja Narhar Deo of Kanker) and also faced internal disputes with colleagues. Here they had some of their most important converts such as Tilak, the famous Marathi Christian poet. Biographers of Narayan Vaman Tilak (1862-1919) such as Winslow, David, and Richard did not know that it was Ernest and Phebe Ward who had witnessed Christ to Tilak. They simply call him a "European" or an unknown missionary.²⁴ My research reveals it was Ernest.²⁵ Ernest, Phebe and their daughter Ethel were all in touch with Tilak and his son. The friendship that began on a train continued in Raj Nandgaon and beyond.²⁶

²¹ *Ordered Steps*, 51. Cf. Ernest Ward and Phebe Ward, *Pilgrim Faith Mission: Second Quadrennial Report, 1885-1888* (Bombay: Guardian Printing Works, c. 1889), 32. Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary.

²² Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 128.

²³ Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 126.

²⁴ See, M. D. David, *Missions: Cross-cultural Encounter and Change in Western India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), 343; H. L. Richard, *Following Jesus in the Hindu Context: The Intriguing Implications of N. V. Tilak's Life and Thought* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1998), 19; J. C. Winslow, *Narayan Vaman Tilak: The Christian Poet of Maharashtra* (Calcutta: Association Press, YMCA: 1923), 20.

²⁵ Ernest Ward, Letter to Ethel Ward, 557 Redfield Ave, Los Angeles, Apr 25, 1928. Ward Collection ATS. Tilak's researchers did not know that his correspondences concerning the Wards were preserved at the Asbury Seminary Archives which were actually brought from the Marston Memorial Historical Center.

²⁶ For details, see, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 129-134.

Orphanages in Central India

What began with the adoption of one baby girl in Achalpur, culminated in adoption of hundreds of orphans in central India. The Wards orphan work extended to five cities in three states: Raj Nandgaon, Khairagarh, Dondi Lohara (Chhattisgarh), Daund (near Pune, Maharashtra), and Sanjan (Gujarat). Phebe wrote, "I praise God for the privilege of mothering so many. Perhaps I will not be the mother of nations ever as Sarah. Nearly 664 have been under my care for a longer or shorter period the past year.... many of them have my special care."²⁷ Some of their orphans from Raj Nandgaon were an integral part of the Great Revival at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in 1905.²⁸

The Free Methodist Church Mission (1904-1927)

Although the Wards were Free Methodists, they had worked as independent missionaries for more than two decades. Only from 1904 they became official FMC missionaries supported by the FMC Board of Missions. The FMC established its mission headquarters at Yavatmal on Ernest and Phebe's recommendation. The leading missionary here was Celia J. Ferris, who was mentored by the Wards. Under the FMC Mission Board, the Wards worked in several places such as Wani, Darhwa, and Umri. Ernest and Ethel worked in Umri and other places after Phebe's demise in 1910.²⁹

Characteristics of the Mission Works of the Wards

In their various mission stations Ernest and Phebe carried out the following activities:

Evangelism and Church Planting

Preaching the good news of Jesus Christ was the supreme commitment of the Wards. They would go where they were needed the most, build a mission bungalow, and then reach out to the neighbors. The bungalow was the initial church where they all worshiped and learned the Word of God. Evangelism included ministry among children, bazaar preaching, village outreaches, singing, tract distribution, etc. They reached hundreds of villages on foot or bullock carts. Evangelization was also about exalting Christ, even in the midst of difficulties. Phebe wrote, "These are perilous times in which we are living...God is putting me through a different crucible than ever before, and I believe I shall come out pure gold and yet, not I, but Christ that liveth in me. I am trying to exalt Christ in my daily life."³⁰

Humanitarian Services

Evangelism and social work went hand in hand in the ministry of the Wards. From the very beginning of their ministry, they were adopting orphan children. During the famines of the 1900s, they were largely engaged in caring for the hungry, the dying, and the orphans. Phebe noted, "God seems to be moving our hearts to help rescue the perishing in body as well

²⁷ Phebe Ward, Letter to Gilbert and Ceeny Cox, Raj Nandgaon, CP India, Feb 10, 1898. Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary.

²⁸ See, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 315.

²⁹ Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 141-149.

³⁰ Phebe Ward, Letter to Gilbert and Ceeny, Burhanpur, November 5, 1881. Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary.

as soul...”³¹ In addition to rescuing children and managing orphanages, the Wards conducted vocational schools for boys, (the school work also began from Burhanpur), schools for girls, started Marathi medium Bible school to train local evangelists, and carried mobile clinics to the villages.³² These ministries were significant contributions to nation building.

Interreligious Encounters

Ernest and Phebe worked among the Muslims, Hindus, and Tribal people of central India. With each of these people, they were engaged in dialogues. They employed the converts from these backgrounds to work together in the mission compounds and created an inclusive community. They had a Muslim cook (Jewarbee), a Hindu preaching assistant (Trimbuck) and a Tribal language assistant (Loka).³³ In the context of interreligious encounters, Phebe wrote, “It takes grace and perseverance in these days of compromise to be a Christian... We are having a hard fight but with God’s help we are sure to conquer – but it may not be at present.”³⁴

Christian Holiness

Wards’ central message was Christian holiness. Ernest was the founding president of India Holiness Association (1910). This was an interdenominational annual conference. Ernest believed, “There can be no permanent happiness without holiness. Holiness and happiness are eternally wedded together.”³⁵ Phebe wrote, “I believe God has a great work for me and the devil don’t [sic] want me to bear the straight testimony before these missionaries and he knows it will be worse for his kingdom if they get the blessing of holiness, but I do testify to all God does for me and the heaven is working.”³⁶ Christian holiness was the defining principle for all their works and words.

Publications

Although they were not prolific writers, the Wards published two important books and several small articles for mission bulletins. In addition to *The Sketch of the Korkus* Ernest produced a Korku grammar and vocabulary and translated select Bible portions like the Ten Commandments into Korku. His grammar was later improved by John Drake and published by the Baptist Mission, Kolkata in 1903. The second notable publication was *Echoes from Bharatkhand*.³⁷ Co-authored with Phebe, this book provides a summary of their mission works in India up to 1908.

³¹ Phebe Ward, Letter to Gilbert and Ceeny, Raj Nandgaon, CP India, Feb 25, 1897. Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary.

³² See, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 196-209.

³³ For Jewarbee’s story see, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 180-182; For Loka, see, pp. 240-241.

³⁴ Phebe Ward, Letter to Brother Gilbert, Ellichpur, India, Aug. 3, 1881. Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary.

³⁵ Ernest Ward, “Thoughts on Holiness,” *Pentecost Herald*, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 1, 1896:2. For more, see, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 278ff. (Chapter 6).

³⁶ Phebe Ward, Letter to Brother [Gilbert] and Sister [Sister-in-Law], Chickalda, India, May 24, 1881. Ward Collection Asbury Theological Seminary.

³⁷ Ernest Ward and Phebe Ward, *Echoes from Bharatkhand* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1908).

Challenges and Responses

The following challenges may be highlighted from the life and ministry of Ernest and Phebe Ward: Financial, Medical, Organizational, Contextual, and Spiritual. It is encouraging to see how they responded to these challenges and came out quite victorious or successful.

Financial

The Wards labored as faith missionaries for the first 25 years of their ministry. They came to India when the FMC had not formed a Foreign Mission Board. Thus, they received no guaranteed regular support or salary. They depended on God for their daily provisions. They received occasional support from family and friends including locals. They were thrifty and lived in poverty. Phebe once wrote, “God has *never* failed me.”³⁸

Medical

Both Ernest and Phebe suffered from seasonal heat strokes, fatigue and burnouts, and fever. Phebe was highly dependent on prayer for healing. She did not generally opt for medication. Ernest was moderate. He in fact carried medicines on village outreaches.³⁹

Organizational

The Wards’ organizational challenges were characterized by separation as well as reconciliation. The partnership with the Pentecost Bands, which was formed during the Chhattisgarh mission, did not last long. Serious disagreements, leadership issues, and some painful memories necessitated a permanent separation. The work with the Vanguard Mission in Gujarat was also short-lived. The opportunity to reconcile with the FMC Board of Mission was taken as a timely blessing. The Wards did not hesitate to apologize for any misunderstanding caused by their association with the Pentecost Bands.⁴⁰

Contextual

Unlike some other missionaries who promoted English and western lifestyles among local Christians, the Wards adapted local dress code and languages. Ernest worked with Hindi, Hindustani, Marathi, Korku, Gujarati, and Chhattisgarhi languages. They identified with the poor and needy and at the same time fellowshipped with rulers⁴¹ (such as the Raja Bali Ram Das) and officers (such as Tilak). They mastered the basics of Hinduism, Tribal religion, and Islam to witness Christ to the people belonging to those faith traditions.

Spiritual

Spiritual battle was fought with fasting and prayers. Ernest did not hesitate to expose the practice of idolatry among Hindus. He presented Christianity as the true religion.⁴² Both

³⁸ Phebe Ward, Letter to Gilbert Cox, Raj Nandgaon, C.P. India, Sept. 8, 1896: 8. Emphasis original. Ward Collection ATS.

³⁹ Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 205-209.

⁴⁰ See, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 183-187.

⁴¹ Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, 137.

⁴² Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, Chapter 5.

Phebe and Ernest preached Christian holiness as the supreme virtue.⁴³ They regularly organized holiness and revival meetings to combat the spiritual darkness in the mission fields.

A BRIEF MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A study of the life and mission of the Wards within the framework of biography as missiology brings out their missional legacy in terms of a “Lived Missiology.”⁴⁴ The ingredients of a lived missiology may be summed up as follows:

Activistic Missiology

Not much time was spent in doing missiology at the sunset (i.e., reflecting and writing papers or books), but almost the entire time was spent in doing missiology at sunrise (i.e., active mission engagements through ongoing outreaches).

Holistic Missiology

As stated earlier, evangelism and social work went hand in hand. They sheltered the orphans and widows, educated boys and girls, trained native evangelists, and provided medicines for the sick. Theirs was a holistic mission catering for the needs of the whole person.

Orientalist Missiology

With their somewhat anti-Western or pro-Eastern approach, promotion of local language and culture, and labor toward a truly indigenous Three-Self church,⁴⁵ the Wards signified an orientalist⁴⁶ mission mandate. This was seen in their adaptation of local language and dress, among other things.

Dialogical Missiology

The interreligious encounters of the Wards with Hindus, Muslims, and Tribal people, if recorded in detail, would have presented a candid introduction to a dialogical missiology in the context of interreligious encounters with people of other faiths. They would have been somewhat comparable to the works of missionary-statesman such as E. Stanley Jones.⁴⁷ However, gleaning through their letters, we do get a glimpse of such a work.

Holiness Missiology

The Wards’ central message was Christian holiness. This provides a unique and special framework to their theology of mission, which may be rightly called, holiness missiology.

⁴³ Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, Chapter 6.

⁴⁴ Lived missiology is a new way of doing biography as missiology and vice versa.

⁴⁵ The Three-Self Church refers to a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating church.

⁴⁶ In this paper the term orientalist refers to a pro-East approach. It should not be confused with the interpretation of Edward Said (1935-2003) of the term as a false imagination or representation of an Eastern community by the Wards. During the time of the Wards the idea of orientalism was not associated with the idea of postcolonialism as it is today.

⁴⁷ For a recent biography of Jones, see, Robert G. Tuttle, Jr. *In Our Times: The Life and Ministry of E. Stanley Jones* (Potomac, MD: The E. Stanley Jones Foundation Publications, 2019).

The founding of the India Holiness Association (IHA),⁴⁸ must be seen as a significant endeavor and emphasis on holiness in relation to mission. It also had an ecumenical undergirding as it brought together ministers and missionaries from various denominations for Word, worship, and fellowship.

CONCLUSION

Ernest and Phebe came from humble backgrounds. They were an ordinary and vulnerable but courageous couple in the hands of an extraordinary God. They had a special sense of calling and burden for mission work in India. The Wards were the pioneering Free Methodist missionaries in central India. They were instrumental in founding several schools and orphanages for boys and girls and planting churches and promoting Christian holiness in central India. The Wards conquered the challenges, overcame the obstacles, and fulfilled their call, leaving a significant legacy for others after them to build upon. Their life and work have the potential to inspire our generation to remain actively engaged in mission even with limited resources and abilities. Their story has a significant impact in my own life and ministry. I come from the same region in Chhattisgarh where Ernest visited in 1896, had chicken curry with the Raja, and wanted to start a mission station. It was in 1996, exactly 100 years after Ernest's Bastar visit, that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to me and called me to follow Him.⁴⁹ I am grateful to the prayers and labors of the Wards for the salvation of India in general and Chhattisgarh in particular, and it is my privilege and honor to share their amazing story.

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⁴⁸ See, Mahendra, *Lived Missiology*, Chapter 6.

⁴⁹ For my brief story, with special relation to Hindi theological translation, see, Shivraj K. Mahendra, "Translation as Mission: A Brief History of My Pilgrimage in Hindi Theological Translation" *Indian Church History Review*, Vol 56. No. 1, January 2022: 63-86.

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