

**Homily for Henry Martin, Priest, 1831, and Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky, Bishop of Shanghai, 1906**  
**October 15, 2020**  
**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

Henry Martyn and Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky shared gifts for missionary work. They were also gifted linguists and translators. On October 16, 1831, Martyn died in Tokat, now in Armenia, then a part of the Ottoman Empire. Schereschewsky died on October 15, 1906, in Tokyo.

At Cambridge, Martyn was inspired by the evangelical rector of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, Charles Simeon, to be ordained. After serving briefly as Simeon's assistant, he became a missionary. He went first to India. With the support of the East India Company, British Martyn founded private schools and parishes.<sup>1</sup>

During his five years there, he translated the New Testament and the *Book of Common Prayer* into, not Hindi, as *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* has it, but Hindustani.<sup>2</sup> The widely spoken vernacular in Pakistan and

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<sup>1</sup> *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2006* (LFF 2006) (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 426.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. "Martyn, Henry," 881.

northern India, then and today, is intelligible at conversation level to speakers in both groups.

The alphabet Martyn used for Hindustani was Arabic, not the Devanagari alphabet, an ancient South Asian alphabet from Sanskrit. When words of Sanskrit—Hindu—origin were substituted for Arabic and Persian origin words, they were written in the Arabic script. The form of Hindustani spoken by Muslims in Pakistan and India is usually called “Urdu.” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* says Martyn translated the New Testament into Hindustani and Persian, the Psalms into Persian, the Book of Common Prayer into Hindustani, and the New Testament in Arabic. When Martyn was in India, Persian was the language of not only of the Mughals and Mughal administration but also the language of administration by the English in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Martyn was thirty-one when he died. The Oxford Dictionary says, “he was given a Christian burial by the Armenian clergy.”<sup>4</sup>

Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky was born in Lithuania on May 16, 1831, to Jewish parents. Studies in Germany led him to Christianity. At that time, there

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<sup>3</sup> Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, 3rd. ed., Percival Smith, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 588–89.

<sup>4</sup> ODCC, s.v., “Martyn, Henry,” 881.

was an outpost in Germany of the "London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews." Over time, it has become an agency of the Church of England and is called "Church's Ministry Among Jewish People."<sup>5</sup>

I don't know when he was baptized, but when he emigrated to the United States in 1854, he already knew Yiddish, Polish, and Russian. English and Greek would follow. He started at a Presbyterian seminary but became an Episcopalian. He graduated from the General Theological Seminary in 1859.

He joined the Episcopal Church's mission in China. From 1862 to 1875, he lived in Peking and translated by Bible and parts of the Prayer Book into Mandarin. He was elected bishop of Shanghai in 1877. He returned to New York for this ordination, which occurred in Grace Church here in the city. Returning to Shanghai, he established St. John's University and began translating the Bible and other works into Wen-li—a very formal, now archaic, Mandarin style.<sup>6</sup> In 1883, however, he became paralyzed. He had the use of one finger of one hand. The bible translation

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cmj.org.uk/>, (accessed 15 October 2020).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wen-li>, (accessed 15 October 2020).

went to 2000 pages. These words are from *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, “Four years before his death, he said, ‘I have sat in this chair for over twenty years. It seemed very hard at first. But God knew best. He kept me for the work for which I am best suited.’”<sup>7</sup> May the lives of these men help us as we try to serve our God and others.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> LFF, 2006, 414.