

Fides et Historia

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ROUNDTABLE:

RE-EXAMINING DAVID BEBBINGTON'S "QUADRILATERAL THESIS"

INTRODUCTION

Charlie Phillips

David Bebbington's seminal *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* appeared in 1989, and among other things it is admired for the first appearance of the "quadrilateral" that defined "evangelicalism." The monograph itself was an important part of a fresh advance of scholarship that described evangelicalism not in opposition to but as an extension of the Enlightenment. My paperback copy of *EMB* has a back-cover excerpt (from what appears to be Grant Wacker's review in *Christianity Today*) that describes the book as "a closely reasoned monograph governed by a single argument ... that evangelicalism is, despite its self-perception, a radically modern form of Christianity." If this view seems commonplace now, it is a tribute to the work of Bebbington and his peers that over the last twenty-five years a once startling departure is now sufficiently established to merit challenges of its own—and our panelists' essays are presented as fine examples of such healthy revisionism.

For all those who have labored diligently in this sorting out of evangelical history since the 1980s, it is surely much comfort that a modifying term of such elasticity might have an accepted definition in Bebbington's quadrilateral. If something as plastic as evangelicalism can be defined, then of course it could be worthily studied. Bebbington betrayed no hesitation in leaping at the very start of *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* into a first chapter subtitled: "The Nature of Evangelical Religion." The quadrilateral provided the armature around which his trenchant study of 250 years of British evangelicalism might take place. Without this initial definition, even he could not have asserted so boldly in his preface that the evangelical movement was "self-consciously distinctive and unitary." The readers of *EMB* will have barely settled into their armchairs before the top of page 3 announces the four distinctives: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism—"a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism."

The papers collected here were delivered at two separate panels in 2014: in January at the American Society of Church History conference in Washington, D.C. and in September at the Conference on Faith and History meeting at Pepperdine University. Jonathan Yeager, assistant professor of religion at the University of

Charlie Phillips is a senior analyst and national program officer at The Maclellan Foundation, Inc. in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He pursued graduate studies under David Bebbington at the University of Stirling, where he received his Ph.D. in history. His field of academic interest is nineteenth-century American evangelical theology.

RE-EXAMINING BEBBINGTON'S "QUADRILATERAL"

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Tennessee at Chattanooga, and I organized both sessions with the financial support of the Maclellan Foundation, Inc. In the interest of full disclosure, I must reveal that Yeager and I are happy Bebbingtonians. We each completed our doctoral work with David at the University of Stirling in Scotland and continue to benefit from his professional counsel and warm friendship.

Each panel included three papers and a response by David, who was able to attend both sessions. (For the purposes of this issue of *Fides et Historia*, David's two responses have been collapsed into a single piece.) The theme of both panels was the same: how might Bebbington's quadrilateral now be assessed twenty-five years after its first appearance? In frosty Washington under the influence of a "polar vortex," Kelly Elliott (Abilene Christian University) tested how well the quadrilateral travelled, assessing it in the shifting imperial context of the work of the Baptist Missionary Society in India. Thomas Kidd (Baylor University) asked whether the quadrilateral had made sufficient room for the work of the Holy Spirit by examining aspects of George Whitefield's ministry in the First Great Awakening. Finally, Amanda Porterfield (Florida State University) looked for affective space within the quadrilateral that might otherwise be obscured by its apparently intellectualist properties. Timothy Larsen (Wheaton College) gracefully chaired the first panel. At balmy Pepperdine, Darren Dochuk (Washington University in St. Louis) looked at recent evangelical experience to ask whether any other elements ought to be added to the admittedly sturdy four-part construct. Molly Worthen (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) challenged the helpfulness of the generally "static" usage of the quadrilateral since 1989, while acknowledging that its application in *EMB* was far more nuanced. And Bebbington's great friend, Mark Noll (Notre Dame)¹ wondered if his own nominalist affliction disqualified him from the very "task of assessing ... the four-fold definition." I think not. Jonathan Yeager chaired the panel. David Bebbington's gracious but still pointed response to each of the papers closes this special section of the journal.

Jonathan and I were confident that having first-rate minds test Bebbington's quadrilateral in a manner that might advance the very scholarship he so well embodies would be a better way to honor our friend and mentor than mere hagiography. We are deeply grateful to each of the panelists for their well-considered papers collected here, for the assistance of the professional societies sponsoring the panels, for the generous help of Donald Yerxa in collecting the panel papers, and for the financial support of the Maclellan Foundation, Inc., in making the panels themselves possible. It is our hope that we have successfully extended our personal gratitude to David Bebbington through this excellent work by his professional colleagues because their academic scholarship honors him in a manner he will value profoundly.

¹Bebbington joked at Pepperdine that in answering challenging questions from inquisitors he often looks first to his WWMS bracelet: "What Would Mark Say?"

THE BEBBINGTON QUADRILATERAL TRAVELS INTO THE EMPIRE

Kelly Cross Elliott

Over the twenty-five years since its publication in 1989, David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* has achieved an enviable status. It is simultaneously a venerable standard in scholarly conversations about British religious history, yet also fresh and provocative enough to incite the kind of lively debate evidenced in this roundtable. In *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* Bebbington examines the contours of British evangelical religion over more than two centuries, finding that the character of the movement developed and changed over time in response to shifts in British high culture. He further outlines a quadrilateral of traits common to evangelical religion through these centuries, making it possible to identify connections and make comparisons between evangelicals across time. Conversionism, crucicentrism, activism, and biblicism might look quite different in Jonathan Edwards's eighteenth-century guise than in John Stott's twentieth; nevertheless, these four characteristics stand out as markers that identify a core faith.¹

This essay follows the Bebbington quadrilateral out of Britain and into the Empire as evangelical missionaries carried it abroad, beginning in the late eighteenth century. In the imperial mission field, evangelicalism encountered new influences and took on a variety of forms. Yet the four most central characteristics of the faith remained, and culture continued to influence the shape of evangelical religion. If one reframes Bebbington's original argument within the context of recent scholarship of British imperialism, which has focused particularly on the interactive and mutually constitutive nature of metropolitan center and imperial periphery, the question that naturally arises is: How did British evangelical religion change over time in response to the changing assumptions, not only of Western and British civilization, but also to the cultures and complex interactions of the foreign mission field?

The Baptist Missionary Society's work, begun famously at Serampore in Bengal by William Carey in 1795, unfolded in a new cultural context, very different from the British environment in which evangelical religion had grown. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the particular problems and complexities of the Indian mission field deeply shaped the character of missionary evangelicalism. The Baptist mission in Bengal and the Indian Christian churches that formed there tested the cohesiveness of evangelical religion as it jostled against many of the central assumptions of British imperialism. In particular, the activism of colonial Christians starkly illuminated the contradictory attitudes of British Christians who

saw evangelistic efforts as a natural outgrowth of conversion, yet doubted the ability of those outside of European civilization to spread the gospel or build their own religious institutions.

It is not difficult to find all four characteristics of "Bebbingtonian evangelicalism" among Bengali Baptist converts in early nineteenth-century India. The classic evangelical conversion narrative, originally associated with writers like John Wesley and David Brainerd, finds echo in the testimony of Gokul, one of the first converts at Serampore. A Bengali sudra, Gokul encountered the gospel in 1800 when British missionary John Thomas, a medical doctor, set a dislocated shoulder for Gokul's friend Krishnu, preaching all the while. Yet Gokul did not care for Christianity at first. "Displeased that the bible did not agree with some of his notions," Gokul "discontinued his visits" to the missionaries after initial interest. Yet, as Gokul later told William Carey, "his mind was so uneasy that he could scarcely get sleep for two months ... his heart was all sinful." Once he accepted Christ, Gokul had "no other hope" and declared himself "willing to leave all God forbids, when he knows it, and to do all that is commanded, when he knows it. All this he said with many tears," as Carey recorded. This account of Gokul's transformation aligns with the normative evangelical conversion story—initial resistance to the gospel followed by consciousness of sin, fear of damnation, and finally, confident joy and relief in salvation.² Like Sampson Staniforth, whose conversion narrative Bebbington cites, Gokul experienced spiritual "agony, guilt" and then "immense relief" once he came to believe in the missionary message.³

Gokul's conversion story is provided through the voice of William Carey, but similar accounts also appear in Bengali Christians' own words. A new convert wrote to the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) leadership in 1802: "I Petumber Singh (60 years of age) write to thank friends for writing and to send our Christian greetings ... I was born a Hindu, early left home, and became a sinner. I found no salvation in Hindu ceremonial, but by God's grace his true Gospel has brought me cleansing and peace."⁴ Though less emotive than many accounts, Petumber's explanation of how he became a Christian is typical of evangelical emphasis on conversion. The testimony of Bengali Baptist convert Sebuk-ram provides another striking example of evangelicalism in the Indian context. In a letter to a Scottish Baptist preacher written c. 1800, the newly-baptized Sebuk-ram demonstrates his adoption of at least three of the four qualities Bebbington identifies as central to evangelical religion. Describing his conversion after reading the New Testament, Sebuk-ram emphasizes Christ's substitutionary sacrifice on the cross and his own feeling of compulsion to share the gospel message once he embraced it:

¹D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1–17.

Kelly Cross Elliott is an assistant professor of history at Abilene Christian University with research interest in British religious history, the history of missions, British imperialism, and the forging of indigenous Christianity in colonial contexts. She is currently at work on a book manuscript entitled *Chosen Race: Baptist Missionary Christianity against the Hierarchies of Empire, 1795–1875*.

²William Carey's diary, December 22, 1800, quoted in Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D.D.* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 437–38; and E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793–1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 35.

³Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5.

⁴Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive (Nashville), Baptist Missionary Society Manuscripts, Missionary Correspondence, Petumber Singh, Box IN/10.

I ... examined the book [a New Testament left by British missionary William Ward and Indian convert Krishnu]. I saw it contained the only way of holiness, and that God for sinful men in his own body, bearing sufferings, had completed the sacrifice ... The same night two or three friends getting together, and throwing open the door of our hearts, we confessed that we had committed the blackest crimes, and wept much. We confessed to each other, that our Lord Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners: we really believed this, and making it certain in our minds, with a loud voice we called out in faith, "Oh! Lord! Where art thou! Oh! Saviour, save us." Then closing our eyes, we saw through our tears, the light which the Holy Spirit had shed in our hearts. Thus possessing a mind fixed in faith, we were brought to hate all transgressing and sin, all evil connexions and works, the gods and goddesses; all the evil customs of this wicked world; so that hearing of them our ear tingled, and seeing them we turned another way. This we considered as the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ our mind became prepared ... This is now my desire, and day and night, full of fear, this is my prayer to God, that I may be constantly ready to proclaim this gospel.⁵

Here we see conversionism—Sebuk-ram's description of his consciousness of sin, his tears, and the coming of salvation as the illumination of the Holy Spirit—crucicentrism—his realization of Christ's bodily suffering for sinful human beings—and activism—his strong desire to share the gospel with others. And while he does not reference biblicism directly, it is significant that Sebuk-ram's change of heart came after reading the New Testament.⁶ Sebuk-ram's contemporary, an itinerant preacher named Vrinda-vuna, foregrounds the role of the biblical text more clearly in his description of his own conversion and continuing struggle against sin. Writing to the missionaries and the church at Serampore in 1814, he confesses, "My body, through my sinfulness, is fast moldering to the dust, but though so sinful, having received God's holy word, my mind thirsting, I go as to a sea and drink; but drinking a little, I thirst and go again ... My worshipping of idols in this way was a very great sin; but when I received the bible from [British missionary] Mr. Chamberlain, my second birth was accomplished."⁷ Such testimony nicely reflects Bebbington's markers of the evangelical faith and certainly would have resonated with any contemporary Western evangelical.

Similar examples of Indian converts adopting British evangelism's central

⁵Letter from Sebuk-ram to Rev. George Barclay, Kilwinning, Scotland, quoted in *The Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society*, Vol. VI: 30 (London: Button, 1801), 11–12.

⁶Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5. See also Bruce Hindmarsh's discussion of similar narratives, including Native American conversions under David Brainerd's ministry, as well as conversions in Sierra Leone in "Patterns of Conversion in Early Evangelical History and Overseas Mission Experience," in Brian Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 71–98.

⁷*Periodical Accounts* Vol. V: 28, 445–46.

characteristics abound in the sources of the BMS, often appearing in what are apparently the converts' own words. Of course, it is important to ask questions about the mediated nature of these accounts.⁸ Mission texts were crafted to reflect a specific worldview and to persuade readers to support a particular religious purpose. It is hardly surprising that Indian Christian testimony within these publications should employ literary forms and terminology common to British evangelicalism. Missionary sources, however, also suggest that the transmission of the evangelical quadrilateral into the imperial mission field was a deeply complex process. Evangelicalism was no whole-cloth Western import accepted without question by colonized subjects. Rather, just as the British cultural environment molded evangelical religion in Britain, the interaction of Indian, missionary, and metropolitan concerns deeply influenced the shape of Christianity in India. Conversionism, biblicism, and crucicentrism all appear in Indian Christianity. But it is the activism of colonial Christians that reveals most about the complicated and ambivalent nature of the relationship between British evangelicalism and mission churches in the Empire.

INDIAN ACTIVISM AT SERAMPORE, 1800–1820S

Activism, "the expression of the gospel in effort," was a typical response when a newly saved sinner accepted Christ.⁹ New Christians felt compelled to work for the conversion of others and spent their energies daily in this task. The British evangelical preachers who, after the example of John Wesley, rode hundreds of miles while studying and preaching sermons every day of the week had their counterparts in India. In 1814 British missionary J. Leonard described the work of Indian preachers in and around Calcutta as "indefatigable," declaring that "it would take a whole day to do justice to a week's work of these men":

Sebuk-ram preaches in twenty different places during the week, some of which are seven miles distant. He crosses and recrosses the river every day. Bhagvut preaches at eleven, in and about the town; Neeloo at about ten; and Manik at six ... [These] Brethren preach regularly during the week in forty-seven different houses; and are invited to many more, but their time does not admit of their accepting these invitations.¹⁰

⁸Gareth Griffiths notes that "the voice of the native subject to the pen of the mission recorder was only the first step in a long process of control exercised over the record of the lives of ... converts." Griffiths, "Trained to Tell the Truth: Missionaries, Converts, and Narration," in Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire [The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 153. See also Peggy Brock, "New Christians as Evangelists," in *Missions and Empire*, 132–52.

⁹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 3.

¹⁰Leonard to William Ward, Calcutta, April 13, 1814, quoted in *Periodical Accounts* Vol. V: 28, 431–32. This laundry list of evangelistic efforts makes close comparison to British accounts of the same period. See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 10–11.

Like their fellow evangelicals in Britain, many Indian converts dedicated their new lives to God, and their activism was vital to the spread of Christianity in India. Such "indigenous preachers," as Peggy Brock has argued, acted as "the footsoldiers of the advance" of the gospel in the Empire.¹¹ Where European agency failed due to ill health, cultural barriers, language difficulties, and expense, native agency thrived. The activism of Indian Christians, Baptist missionary William Ward declared in 1803, was "the grand desideratum that [was] to move the Hindoo nation."¹² The trio of early missionaries at Serampore stressed the efficacy and abilities of Indian Christians almost from the beginning of their work. William Carey wrote in 1806: "When we consider their superior acquaintance with the language, the circumstances, the ideas and reasonings of their fellow-countrymen, & with the snares which surround them, everything else being equal, how much more effectually must they speak to the heart, than a European can possibly do!"¹³ The missionaries' confidence in Indian activism led them to emphasize the need to build indigenous churches with Indian pastors, financial support, and administration, free from any dependence, financial or otherwise, upon European Christians or missionary societies. Carey, Marshman, and Ward even wrote this policy into the 1805 *Form of Agreement*, a foundational document for their mission:

We think it our duty as soon as possible, to advise the native brethren, who may be formed into separate churches, to choose their pastors and deacons from amongst their own countrymen, that the word may be stately preached, and the ordinances of Christ administered, in each church, by the native minister, as much as possible without the interference of the missionary of the district ... The different native churches will also learn to care and provide for their ministers, for their church expenses, ... and the whole administration will assume a native aspect; by which means the inhabitants will more readily identify the cause as belonging to their own nation, and their prejudices at falling into the hands of Europeans will entirely vanish.¹⁴

It was to Indian activism that these early Baptist missionaries looked for the ultimate evangelization of India.

SHIFTS IN BRITISH ATTITUDES TOWARD COLONIAL ACTIVISM

Examination of the policy of evangelical missionary societies in general, and the

¹¹Brock, "New Christians as Evangelists," 132.

¹²William Ward's journal, March 6, 1803, quoted in *Periodical Accounts* Vol. II: 12, 370. Ward reflections here follow his hearing the first sermon preached by an Indian convert, Petumber Singh.

¹³Carey et al., to BMS, Serampore, August 31, 1806, quoted in E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India*, 33. The Serampore Trio were William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward.

¹⁴The full text of the *Form of Agreement* appears in *Periodical Accounts* Vol. II: 16, 198–211.

Baptist Mission in particular, reveals, however, that this confidence in indigenous agency began to wane as the nineteenth century continued. The activism of colonial Christians came under fire from several quarters. A new generation of British missionaries in India and leadership in London began to deviate significantly from the Serampore missionaries' original vision of independent Indian churches as the primary agency for evangelization.

The timing and geographical location of this shift in British Baptists' view of indigenous agency suggests that Bebbington's thesis—that British evangelical culture reflected its contemporary cultural context—holds true in the broader framework of global missions and imperialism, as well. In the 1820s and 1830s serious contention arose within the BMS, centering primarily on the issue of the activism and leadership of colonial Christian converts in the mission field.¹⁵ I contend that this schism reflects changes in the respective cultural contexts of those involved in the conflict. These changes in context arose both from the passage of time—thus some Baptists brought a late-eighteenth-century brand of evangelicalism to the debate, while the attitude of others mirrored the more confident and aggressive evangelicalism of the 1830s—and from distinctive geographical settings. Those individuals who lived and worked in the mission field witnessed daily the effort and abilities of colonial Christians; they also better understood why Indian preachers were more effective in the Indian environment than Europeans. In the case of Serampore, Indian converts initiated preaching and teaching themselves, directly influencing missionary attitudes towards indigenous activism.¹⁶ But those Baptist leaders and mission supporters who remained in Britain, and experienced firsthand the rise of evangelicalism's fortunes and respectability over the first few decades of the nineteenth century, approached the question of convert activism from a different point of view. Their context suggested that missions would be most successful if wedded to the paternalist rhetoric and political strategies of the humanitarian movement, which saw Christianity as marching forward hand in hand with European commerce and civilization, and thus downplayed the activity of colonial Christians.¹⁷

This ambivalence toward colonial activism highlighted differences not only between evangelicals in the mission field and evangelicals at home, but also between

¹⁵The Serampore missionaries differed from the London Committee on other questions, as well. Most importantly, Serampore wanted to remain independent of direction from the Society, and to keep the mission station property they had purchased in their own hands or the hands of local leadership (including Indian leadership), while the Committee expected all of its missionaries and mission property to be placed under the superintendence of the Society. See Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 27ff.

¹⁶See *Periodical Accounts* II, 185, 357–58, and 272–73.

¹⁷This approach had, after all, been very effective in the antislavery campaign, in which evangelicals had played a leading role. On the missionary societies' partnership with evangelical philanthropy and humanitarianism, see Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 137–38. On the "commerce, Christianity, and civilization" sloganeering of the nineteenth century, see Andrew Porter, "Commerce and Christianity": The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan," *The Historical Journal* 28: 3 (1985): 597–621; and Brian Stanley, "Commerce and Christianity": Providence Theory, the Missionary Movement, and the Imperialism of Free Trade, 1842–1860," *The Historical Journal* 26:1 (1983): 71–94.

one generation and the next. As the British cultural context of evangelicalism changed from Enlightenment to Romantic, the pragmatic, self-reliant missionaries who had begun their work in the 1790s, now deeply affected by their relationships with colonial Christians and their experience of the Indian context, found their commitment to indigenous agency challenged by a generation more inclined to publicity, fund-raising, and the dominance of European leadership and cultural forms in mission churches.¹⁸

The consequence of this divergence of views within the Baptist Missionary Society was, ultimately, a significant change in the Society's policy toward indigenous agency and leadership. Where the Serampore missionaries had encouraged the activism of colonial converts, the next generation of leaders in London, and the new generation of missionaries they sent to India, openly questioned the fitness of Indian Christians for preaching, teaching, and pastoring churches. The BMS leadership wrote plaintively in 1822 of the convert Krishnu Pall's lack of success as an independent evangelist in Malda, where he had been working for twenty years. "Perhaps, if it were possible for the Society to associate some brother from this country with this faithful and interesting Hindoo [sic] teacher, we might, under the divine blessing, witness pleasing results," ran the *Annual Report*, penned by the BMS secretary. "Experience has fully proved that native talent is employed to most advantage, when aided and directed by the judgment of a European Missionary."¹⁹ This statement marks a clear digression from the policy Serampore had adopted less than twenty years before. Eustace Carey, one of the second generation of Baptist missionaries in India and William Carey's nephew, likewise doubted the ability of Indians, who were "only newly awakened from heathen superstition," having had "little previous mental culture," to preach effectively. At best, he thought, native ministers would "be but partially competent to make known, defend, and exemplify the gospel."²⁰ Similarly, General Baptist Amos Sutton argued that Indians' conscience and habits—which, he posited, were not so well developed as the Europeans'—would make them "idle and unfaithful" ministers. He further declared that he had never met an Indian preacher who could "be depended upon when alone," without the watchful accompaniment of a European missionary.²¹ The shape that the Bebbington quadrilateral was allowed to take in the Empire was thus deeply marked by the contemporary currents of

¹⁸This pattern is in keeping with Bebbington's contention that "cultural diffusion within Evangelicalism was normally a matter of percolation down the social scale" and that "spatial variation" resulted from "differing degrees of proximity to the sources of fresh waves of opinion, and especially to London." The BMS of the 1790s was dominated by Northamptonshire mechanics, while the next generation was more urbane, educated, and middle class. Thus the younger generation adopted humanitarian attitudes and approaches while the older generation remained fixed on a more traditionally nonconformist approach to church autonomy and mission work. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 274.

¹⁹*Annual Report* 1822, 2. It is significant that the writers of the Report did not base this conclusion on any information they had received from Serampore, whose missionaries remained confident in Krishnu and native agency generally. Rather, this statement follows a complaint that "no intelligence has reached us, for some time past, from Malda. It appears still to be occupied by Krishnu." Hearing nothing, the BMS committee assumed the worst. Further, it seems not to have occurred to them that European missionaries in India were faring no better at the time.

²⁰Eustace Carey quoted in Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries*, 34.

²¹Amos Sutton quoted in Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries*, 34.

British imperial culture—a culture whose assumptions about the superiority of British civilization and agency jangled uncomfortably against evangelical rhetoric of Christian brotherhood and unity.

Yet this is not the end of the story. For in the mid-nineteenth century, faced with falling conversion numbers and ebbing funds, the Baptist Missionary Society changed direction again, returning to its original confidence in the activism of colonial Christians. "It becomes our duty once more to revise the principles on which we are conducting our enterprise," declared the 1855 *Annual Report*. Its founders, from the hour that they fairly embarked in it, boldly avowed their conviction that the evangelization of the heathen was to be carried on by native converts. They relied on European agency only to do the preparatory work, and to assist and direct the movements of those who were raised up, by their instrumentality, to preach the gospel. It can scarcely be questioned that in later days we have considerably departed from this practice.

Furthermore, the Society's emphasis on European evangelists and the importation of British cultural forms had created stilted, dependent churches. Now the Baptist Missionary Society advocated a return to Serampore's convert-centered model, not only because of financial exigencies, but also because of practical results, citing "the fact, which almost every missionary confirms, that the larger proportion of converts is the fruit of native agency."²² Evidence from the imperial mission field countered the racial assumptions of British culture: Indian preachers were, in fact, capable and effective missionaries, and the gospel flourished when presented in its own cultural context.²³ Thus it appears that, at least in some instances, the imperial context shaped missionary evangelicalism even more than British culture at home did, for the BMS continued to pursue indigenous leadership and independence, and most crucially, persisted in this course even as contemporary British culture grew more racist in the later part of the nineteenth century.²⁴ The shape evangelicals took in the Empire was thus conditioned by both colonial and metropolitan cultures.

²²*Annual Report* 1857, 14. The repentant and self-deprecating tone of this report is quite striking; the leadership later expressed their gratitude that "amidst all our mistakes, deficiencies, and shortcomings, thanks be to God, His kingdom is rapidly spreading throughout the world," 14–5. The same reference to deviation from original policy appears in the 1860 report: "The system adopted by the Serampore brethren undoubtedly was to constitute the missionary an overseer, who was to superintend a band of native agents, itinerating through a given district, and to instruct the churches to choose their pastor from among themselves. And if that system has subsequently been somewhat departed from, the directors of all missionary societies are now fast returning [to] it." *Annual Report* 1860, 6–7. On the problem of dependency, see Edward Bean Underhill's letter to the Baptist Missionaries of Bengal in *The Minutes and Reports of a Conference of the Baptist Missionaries of Bengal* (Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1855), 99–100.

²³Missionary C. B. Lewis wrote in 1871 that the "trim model of an English church" many in the British public hoped to see in India was "an artificial thing. It owes its existence to foreign benevolence, and its shape to foreign civilization, and, with the failure of foreign resources, it must necessarily fall to pieces." *Annual Report* 1872, 9–10.

²⁴Andrew C. Ross, "Christian Missions and Mid-Nineteenth Century Change in Attitudes to Race: The African Experience," in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 85–105; Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978).