
The Church in Nepal: Analysis of Its Gestation and Growth

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Until recently Nepal was the world's only Hindu kingdom.¹ The mighty Himalayas and the fact that Nepal was a closed land until the middle of the twentieth century enticed many, but from 1881 to 1925 only 153 Europeans are known to have visited Nepal and none became a resident.² This tiny mountainous country, sandwiched between India and Tibet, had resisted the might of the British Empire since King Prithvi Narayan Shah from Gorkha (hence "Gurkhas," the renowned soldiers) unified the country into one kingdom in 1769. From 1848 until the middle of the twentieth century, the country was controlled by the Rana prime ministers, who had usurped the monarchy and had vested interests in keeping the world out. Their century of control was ended by an Indian-facilitated coup on February 16, 1951, that placed King Tribhuvan Shah in power.

The earliest recorded entry of Christians into Nepal was the visit of a Father Cabral, a Jesuit priest, in 1628. Capuchin monks were given permission by the Malla rulers to reside in the Kathmandu valley in 1715, but they were forced to leave by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769. The few national Christians, expelled at the same time, migrated to Bihar, India.³ For almost two centuries Nepal was totally closed to any Christian presence or influence.

The revolution in 1951 was a turning point in the country's development and in its openness to the outside world. Surprisingly, part of this story, the founding and growth of the church in Nepal, which is among the fastest growing anywhere in the modern world, has been recorded in only a handful of books.⁴ From just a single secret Christian residing in Nepal in 1951, the number of Nepali Christians grew to about 40,000 baptized believers by

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1990 and has increased more rapidly since then.⁵ Estimates of the number of Nepali Christians vary widely, and government census figures have been unreliable. The most comprehensive survey of churches and Christians in Nepal was conducted by the Nepal Research and Resource Network. Begun in 2001 with the results published in 2007, the survey covered all seventy-five districts of the country. It showed a total of 2,799 churches and 274,462 baptised church members. The survey counted 379,042 persons attending churches and presumed to be Christian; this number equals about 1.5 percent of Nepal's population. Ten percent of the churches have sent out a missionary or evangelist, and one out of five churches has planted one or more daughter churches.



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Some, however, question the approach used in the survey, and several church leaders consider the figures obtained to be unduly low.⁶ K. B. Rokaya, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Nepal, estimates that there are 800,000 Christians in Nepal.⁷ Whichever figure is correct, this growth during the church's formative years is striking and merits examination.

Background Factors (1628–1950)

Following the visits by the Jesuit and Capuchin monks, other significant factors spanning more than a century helped to prepare for entry of the Christian Gospel into Nepal. For one thing, Protestant interest in Christian mission to Nepal has been present from the time of William Carey. The Serampore translation of the New Testament into Nepali, completed in 1821, was superseded only when the British and Foreign Bible Society's Nepali translations of the New Testament (1902) and the Old Testament (1914) were completed.⁸ Although in 1950 only 2 percent of Nepalis were literate, Christian literature had been used sporadically during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to penetrate the border, despite laws that prohibited its sale, possession, or use within Nepal.

Second, as the map on page 190 illustrates, from the later nineteenth century numerous Protestant missions and missionaries in northern India were poised to enter Nepal when the opportunity came.⁹ Prior to 1950 all the towns underlined (and more) had ongoing mission work among the itinerant Nepalis who crossed the Indo-Nepal border. Four accounts, from among many more, underscore the high degree of anticipation and vision present during what Cindy Perry calls the "century of preparation."¹⁰

Darjeeling, on the eastern border of Nepal, was developed by the British, and a large community of Nepalis settled there to labor in the tea plantations. William MacFarlane, a Church of Scotland missionary, began the *Eastern Himalayan Mission* in 1870, a work active in education, Christian literature, Bible translation, and village evangelism. All were important foundations for the future as the Darjeeling and Kalimpong region became the main center for the nascent Nepali church.

Another group was the *Australian Nepalese Mission* (ANM), which began in a prayer meeting in Fitzroy, Melbourne, in 1911.¹¹ Founding missionary John Coombe with his wife, Lillian, and two children in 1917 established a base in Ghorasahan, Bihar, near the Nepal border. Although not one of the small band of ANM missionaries ever entered the closed land just across the border, their focus for three decades was on Nepal. They were typical of other missionaries and groups that, though seemingly insignificant, served faithfully in anticipation of Nepal's border opening.

A third group was the *Regions Beyond Missionary Union* (RBMU), along with the Raxaul Medical Mission. Work by RBMU commenced in Bihar in the late nineteenth century, but the missionaries' eyes were fixed on Nepal. The railhead border town of Raxaul, directly south of Kathmandu, was chosen as the site for Duncan Hospital, established in 1930 by Dr. Cecil Duncan (son of a missionary in Darjeeling). The site was well chosen and Duncan Hospital subsequently played a vital role in the entry of both church and mission into Nepal.¹²

Finally, mention must be made of Dr. Kitty Harbord, the

Nepal Evangelistic Band (NEB) at Nautanwa, another railhead, and the *Nepal Border Fellowship* (NBF). Harbord, of the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission (later Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship, and now Interserve), opened a dispensary at Nautanwa in 1927. She recruited Dr. Lily O'Hanlon and Hilda Steele, who in 1943 founded the Nepal Evangelistic Band (now the International Nepal Fellowship). NEB was later, in 1952, to pioneer the move into Pokhara, west of Kathmandu. Harbord's article "The Closed Land of Nepal: A Modern Jericho" (1939) influenced many, including Jonathan Lindell, and—building on conferences organized by Cecil Duncan in Raxaul in 1934 and 1937—led to the formation of the Nepal Border Fellowship. The NBF was a loose association that brought various missions along the Nepal border together for encouragement, planning, prayer, and cooperation in terms of a Statement of Aims (May 17, 1948), a literature committee, and an advisory council. Later mission collaboration in Nepal grew from seeds sown in these conferences.¹³

Nepali Christians and the Darjeeling Church

Key Nepali men and women became Christians during the "century of preparation." One was *Chandra Leela*, the daughter of the Brahmin priest to the royal family in Kathmandu. Born in 1840, married at the age of seven, widowed at nine, and orphaned at fourteen, she became a sunyasi (Hindu holy woman) and for seventeen years searched the depths of Hinduism in her quest for solace and peace. Eventually she abandoned her quest but soon after met a young girl with a Bible. After reading the Bible she became a Christian and went back to Kathmandu to speak of her new faith. She baptized her older brother shortly before he died, but then returned to India as an itinerant evangelist until her death.¹⁴

Another early Christian was *Ganga Prasad Pradhan*, who was born into a wealthy Newar family in Kathmandu in 1851. When he was ten his father took him to Darjeeling to join his older brother in MacFarlane's school, where Ganga Prasad was educated and converted, which led to a remarkable life of Christian service. He was "the first ordained Nepali pastor, translator of the Nepali Bible (completed in 1914 after forty years of labor—he was made a life governor of the British and Foreign Bible Society), pioneer in Nepali literature, and owner of the first Nepali press."¹⁵ In 1914 Ganga Prasad returned with his extended family to Kathmandu to establish a Christian presence there, but they were expelled by the Rana rulers with the words, "There is no room for Christians in Nepal!" A great legacy of Ganga Prasad was a hymn he wrote that for fifty years expressed the expectant prayers of the waiting clusters of missionaries and exiled Nepali Christians—"Prabhu arji suni leu, Gorkhali le mukti paune dhoka kholi deu . . ."

Lord, hear our prayer, open the door of salvation for the Gorkhalis. . .

Show us the way by a cloudy, fiery pillar. . .

There are cities—Thapathali, Bhatgaon, Patan, Kathmandu, Our prayer is to make them your devotees.

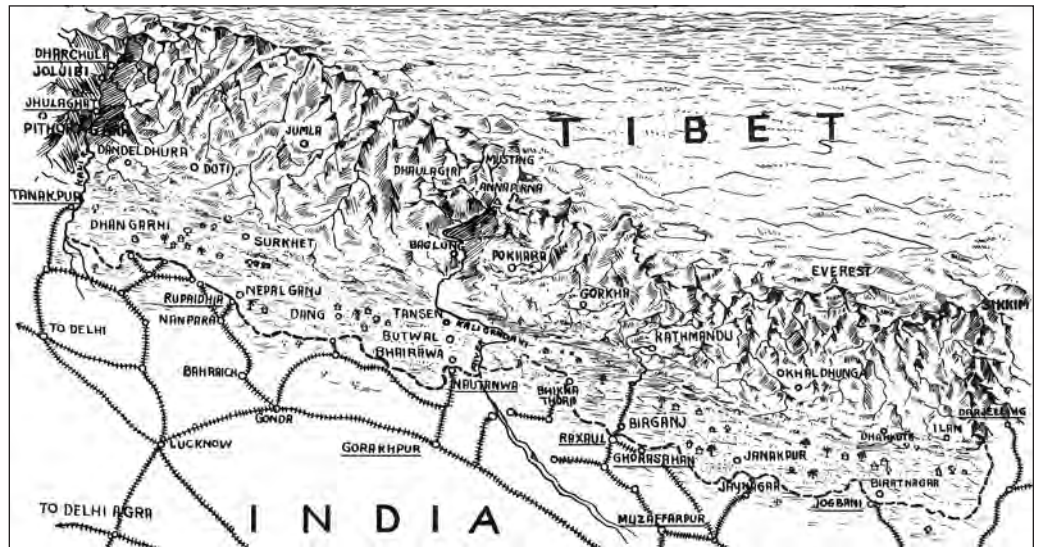
Up, brothers, we must go, leaving wealth, home, people, and comfort,

To do this holy task.¹⁶

Forty-three years after Ganga Prasad had been expelled, his great-grandson Rajendra Rongong, Robert Karthak, and a small group of Darjeeling Christians entered Kathmandu with a strong sense of missionary calling instilled by RBMU missionary Elisabeth Franklin. And forty years later, in 1997, Rajendra Rongong and Robert Karthak were the key persons to lead one of the earliest Nepali missionary teams into Myanmar, where they helped establish the Myanmar Gurkhali Christian Fellowship.¹⁷

Buddhi Singh, a humble watchmaker from eastern Nepal who was converted in Darjeeling by Ganga Prasad, was for many years an itinerant village evangelist with the Gorkha Mission, an indigenous Nepali mission founded by Darjeeling Christians in 1892 to evangelize Nepalis. In his later years he influenced the young David Mukhia, who in 1952 became the first pastor in Nepal, at the Ram Ghat Church in Pokhara.¹⁸

Colonel Nararaj Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana was a member of the Rana aristocracy who retired from the army and lived in the Terai region, not far from Raxaul. He visited Duncan Hospital



Courtesy of United Mission to Nepal

Missions poised to enter Nepal before 1951 were based in towns underlined.

with his sick grandson, met Ernest Oliver (then field leader of RBMU but later a founder of the United Mission to Nepal and its first executive secretary),¹⁹ and became a secret believer. The Colonel Sahib (as he was known) was baptized by Oliver on Easter Sunday, 1952, and was instrumental in hosting the first church services in Kathmandu in his home there in April 1953. He was also a major contributor to the revised translation of the entire Nepali Bible, published by the Bible Society in 1977.²⁰

The First Generation (1951–90)

When King Tribhuvan opened Nepal's borders in 1951, he invited the world to assist in Nepal's development. It was then, by almost any criteria, one of the world's poorest countries—and it still is. Three distinct groups converged to contribute to the formation of the church in Nepal.

Chronologically, the first group consisted of foreign Christians entering from India, beginning with Father Moran, a Jesuit priest working in Patna, Bihar, who established St. Xavier's School on the edge of the Kathmandu valley in July 1951. In 1952 the Nepal Evangelistic Band in Nautanwa was given permission to establish medical work in Pokhara, and in October Dr. O'Hanlon and Hilda Steele, with four expatriate colleagues and five Nepali Christians, including David and Premi Mukhia, trekked for nine days from Nautanwa to reach Pokhara. The "Shining Hospital" soon became renowned, and the mission later developed into the International Nepal Fellowship (INF). Its work continues to be primarily medical, but it has spread and diversified through many parts of western Nepal.²¹

Formation of the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) came about through several remarkable coincidences. During the 1951 revolution, fighting took place just over the border from Raxaul, and wounded combatants from both sides were treated at Duncan Hospital. As a result of this service, after the revolution Dr. Trevor Strong and Ernest Oliver were invited by His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) to visit Kathmandu to explore the possibility of mission work. They were told that medical and educational work would be welcome, but open preaching would be prohibited.²² These discussions dovetailed with a separate approach made by authorities in Tansen, a large hill-town west of Kathmandu and halfway between Nautanwa and Pokhara, to American missionaries Bob and Bethel Fleming (Methodist) and Carl and Betty Friedericks (Presbyterian). Contact had been made earlier as a result of ornithological trips into Nepal in October 1949 and in the winter of 1951-52, during which medical assistance had been given to the people of Tansen. Eventually, permission was granted to open a hospital in Tansen and clinics in Kathmandu.

Lindell rightly refers to the foundation of the UMN as "some of the finest missionary statesmanship that has been exercised in the modern missionary movement." Influential Methodist bishop J. Wascom Pickett circulated HMGN's letter of invitation to other missions in conjunction with the National Christian Council (NCC) of India, with a view to "establishing a Christian mission in Nepal on the widest possible cooperative basis, a combined interdenominational and international approach."²³ The NCC endorsed Pickett's proposal, and the United Christian Mission to Nepal was founded in Nagpur in March 1954.²⁴

There were eight founding missions; Pickett became the founding president of the board and Ernest Oliver the first executive secretary. The Flemings had already commenced medical work in Kathmandu in January 1954, and the Friederickses began work in Tansen in June 1954, but the work quickly expanded and diversified to include education, engineering, and rural development. The activities of the UMN were defined and reviewed in a series of five-year agreements with Nepal's government. There have always been clear prohibitions on proselytizing, but the Christian nature of the UMN and the personal faith of its workers are known and accepted. "The Mission takes the terms seriously . . . and has learned that its stay in Nepal rests on a mixture of invitation, permission and mutual agreement; that it is temporary . . . [and] that it is in partnership with Nepali

society."²⁵ At the time of the 1990 revolution, the UMN comprised 39 member missions, 420 expatriate missionaries, and over 2,000 Nepali staff.

The second group contributing to the formation of the church in Nepal consisted of Nepali Christians, including a small but significant contingent from the Darjeeling-Kalimpong region. While the foreign missions were constrained from evangelizing and church planting by the terms of their agreements with the government, the Nepali Christians began to engage in Christian outreach and to form small congregations of believers. Nepal's first church was formed at Ram Ghat, Pokhara, in 1952 with David Mukhia as pastor. Others followed in the Kathmandu valley. Tir Bahadur became the pastor at Bhaktapur in 1954. Rongong and Karthak's small group that arrived from Darjeeling in 1956 appointed Robert Karthak as pastor the following year. This group developed into the *Nepali Isai Mandali*, commonly known as Gyaneshwar Church, which today is the largest congregation in Nepal. Other Darjeeling Christians became an integral part of the work of the UMN in remote projects and were instrumental in establishing small congregations that

have continued. Many have grown into substantial churches, and several have multiplied.

A third, smaller group consisted of four Christians from the Mar Thoma Church in Kerala, South India, who arrived early in 1953.²⁶ They were led by C. K. Athyali, whose mother had been so challenged at the Kerala Marama convention in the 1920s by Sadhu Sundar Singh's accounts of his trips through Nepal to Tibet that she dedicated her unborn child to be a missionary to Nepal. The group joined with the Colonel Sahib, who hosted worship services in his house in central Kathmandu. Later, he helped them purchase land in Putali Sadak, close to the parliament buildings, on which Kathmandu's first church building was constructed.²⁷ Over the years many Christians from Kerala have given exemplary, lifelong service to Nepal, especially in the fields of education and medicine.

During this early phase (1951-61) numerical growth was gradual, but three important features should be noted. First, Nepal's constitution and legal code prohibited conversion to another religion. The flow of converts was only a trickle during these early years and only a few baptisms took place. Second, although the NEB and the UMN were not engaged in church planting and were not officially linked to any of the churches, a symbiotic relationship between the churches and the missions did exist with mutual benefit and encouragement as the church was being established. Third, the independence of the churches from the missions was fully evident: the leadership was entirely Nepali, the churches were self-funding, and there were no denominations. Each congregation was autonomous.

Two important events marked the end of the first decade: the outbreak of state persecution and formation of the Nepal Christian Fellowship. The first official persecution by the state took place following baptisms in Nepalgunj (1958) and Tansen (1959) by Pastor David and in 1960 by Pastor Prem Pradhan. In November 1960 Prem Pradhan and six baptized believers (three married couples) were imprisoned in Tansen, and the Supreme Court convicted them a year later: the women were sentenced



Bir Bahadur Rai, Prem Pradhan, and Dil Bahadur Thakuri in Tansen prison for their faith in Christ, 1961

for six months, the men for twelve months. Prem Pradhan was sentenced for six years (though he was released by royal pardon after four and a half years). Pastor David was included in the conviction, but he escaped across the border to Nautanwa and returned only in 1969. Sporadic arrests, which became the pattern for the next two decades, occurred elsewhere. Vilification and ostracism by families and communities were common responses to baptism.²⁸

Although the congregations were independent of the missions, the initiative of Ernest Oliver resulted in formation of the Nepal Christian Fellowship (NCF) in 1960, something that he regarded as “the most significant event in the first ten years of the

Government restrictions ensured that church and mission remained officially distinct and that evangelistic activity was done only by Nepalis.

church.”²⁹ Pastor David from Pokhara was appointed president, and during his time in Nautanwa the NCF met there in 1962 and 1963. In 1966 Robert Karthak was appointed president; thereafter the NCF met biannually in Nepal and was “the means of bringing the autonomous young churches together for fellowship and mutual encouragement. . . . This was an effective means of uniting almost all of the [Protestant] Christians in the country until the late 1970s.”³⁰

For the church’s first ten years (1951–61), there was not much growth in numbers, but a strong foundation was laid. During the 1960s churches were established in key areas and wherever mission groups were working, even though government restrictions ensured that church and mission would remain officially distinct, that evangelistic activity would be done only by itinerant Nepali evangelists, and that the churches would remain nondenominational though they were united in fellowship and purpose. Perry observes, “The Nepali church was clearly set on an independent course. . . . The stage was set for an explosion of growth over the next 20 years [1970–90].”³¹

Freedom and Expansion (1990 to the Present)

The dramatic events of the first half of 1990 marked a watershed both in the history of Nepal and in the growth of the Nepali church. The bloody Democracy Revolution in February/March 1990 culminated on April 6 with King Birendra’s announcement of a return to multiparty democratic government. A year passed before general elections were held and six months more before the new constitution was promulgated, but a new atmosphere of freedom and hope replaced the repression of the previous three decades.

It took months for the country to recover from the postrevolution upheaval. At that time there were about 60 Christians in jail, and 200 cases against Christians were pending in the courts. The general amnesty granted by King Birendra on June 2, 1990, heralded a new era of freedom for Christians and the church. Still, though Section 19 of the 1990 constitution gave every religious community the right “to maintain its independent existence . . .

and to manage and protect its religious sites and trusts,” Christian organizations experienced difficulty obtaining official recognition and registration. And although “freedom to profess and practice [one’s] own religion”³² was acknowledged, prohibition of conversion continued, with penalties of three to six years in jail specified by the Civil Code. Nevertheless, churches found ways of owning land and buildings, and public worship was open and without threat, although individuals continued to face persecution at personal and social levels, and sporadic cases of state persecution continued through the 1990s.

Following 1996 Nepal’s attempts to establish democracy were destabilized by the activities of the Maoist “People’s War.” The massacre of King Birendra and his family in June 2001 stunned Nepal and the world and gave rise to suspicions of treason within the country. After the February 2005 sacking of the government by King Gyanendra, political upheaval led to further unrest and instability until peace talks, brokered by the United Nations, led to an interim government that included the Maoists. The general election in April 2008 resulted in a Maoist-dominated coalition government with P. K. Dahal, popularly known as Comrade Prachanda, as prime minister. On May 28, 2008, Nepal’s Constituent Assembly, in a virtually unanimous vote, abolished the monarchy, establishing a federal democratic republic, and on July 23 Ram Baran Yadav was sworn in as the country’s first president.

At present Christianity is recognized publicly in many ways, a change foreshadowed by inclusion of “Christian” as an option in the religion category of the 1991 census. Christians regularly hold public meetings and processions at Christmas and Easter, to which senior politicians and dignitaries are invited. Ramesh Khatri states that during the People’s War “the government had the Maoists to deal with full time, thus the church grew unhampered,” and now with the change to democracy Christians have “boldness to make their demands known to the government. . . . Political instability remains despite the elections held in 2008, but Nepal has been declared a secular state and freedom of religion is now guaranteed.”³³

But there have also been less salutary developments. Denominationalism has entered Nepal, often by infiltrating existing churches.³⁴ Alongside this development, the NCF has fragmented into various groups (e.g., National Churches Fellowship of Nepal, Agape Churches, and Four square). Still, in many places fellowship and cooperation continue between the churches. On the positive side, a large number of parachurch organizations and Christian NGOs, both national and international, have emerged, including the National Council of Churches, Nepal (NCCN; known in Nepali as *Nepal Rastriya Mandali Parisad*), founded in 1999. K. B. Rokaya, who became the NCCN general secretary in 2003, was actively involved in the political peace negotiations, and the NCCN initiated an interfaith Peace and Reconciliation process.³⁵

Mission organizations have had to rethink both the nature of their own work and their relationship to the Nepali churches. The UMN and the INF have undertaken significant restructuring, which has entailed a degree of confusion and misunderstanding among some sectors of the Nepali church, but relationships overall continue to be strong and cordial.

A dearth of trained leadership arising from inadequate opportunities in Nepal for pastoral and theological training is a matter of concern. Only a handful of Nepalis possess advanced training in theology. Ramesh Khatri was the first Nepali to earn a Ph.D. in New Testament studies, from Oxford University. He founded the Nepal Bible Ashram and heads the fledgling Asso-

ciation for Theological Education in Nepal, which commenced a B.D. program under Serampore University in July 2005. He also writes commentaries in Nepali.

The Nepali church continues to grow outside Nepal as well. The Nepali diaspora is estimated at 10 million, and Nepali congregations meet in many cities of India and in other countries. Cindy Perry and colleagues in Himalayan Ministries (now HIM-Serve), based not far from Darjeeling, pioneered work among the Nepali diaspora.

Factors Contributing to Growth

Parallels between the first generation of the Christian church—which grew rapidly despite being situated within a hostile Roman Empire—and the first generation of the church in Nepal are apparent and have been explored elsewhere.³⁶ From just a single believer residing in the country in 1950, the number of Christians in Nepal has grown, by a conservative estimate, to 2 percent of the population.

Several factors present during the three decades 1960–90 helped to form the character of the Nepali church and contributed to its growth and spread.³⁷ First, there was an unprecedented degree of cooperation among various Christian groups, including those from Darjeeling and Kerala, together with expatriate missionaries. The NCF promoted unity and the church remained nondenominational.³⁸

Second, rapid development in Nepal, encouraged by His Majesty's Government of Nepal, resulted in openness among the common people to new things. The expansion of missions, especially the UMN, into remote corners of Nepal inevitably resulted in new fellowships and churches springing up. At the same time the restrictions and constraints imposed by the government on missions and missionaries ensured the independence of these churches, and this independence was intentionally encouraged by mission leaders.³⁹

Third, the prohibition of conversion and the reality of persecution from the outset prevented nominalism and kept the church strong. Oppression of Christians increased in the late 1980s, along with widespread political agitation against the government.

Fourth, most converts were young, vigorous, and vibrant, with a keen sense of evangelistic outreach to the majority society. Also, family conversions were not uncommon, and mass conversions occasionally took place among tribal groups (e.g., the Tamangs of Dhading District).

Fifth, retired Gurkha servicemen who had converted to Christianity while in the Indian or British army returned to their villages and established small Christian communities.

Sixth, new Christians were trained in India at Mirik Bible School in Darjeeling and Union Biblical Seminary in Pune to fill the need for pastors and church leaders. Locally, the NCF sponsored short-term training schools and conferences.

Seventh, several parachurch groups, especially student and youth organizations, worked alongside the churches to spur evangelism and to support new Christians. The women's movement of the early 1980s resulted in the first nationwide women's conference in 1985, more than 300 women's prayer groups, and their increasing involvement in churches across the country.

Eighth, Christian literature, including translation of portions of Scripture into several tribal languages by SIL/Wycliffe and the translation released by the Bible Society in 1977 of the whole Bible in Nepali, spread the Christian message. Radio ministries such as the Far East Broadcasting Company and Trans World Radio transmitted the message. Bible correspondence courses

offered by the Nepal Gospel Outreach Center and others provided instruction to thousands of new believers.⁴⁰

Ninth, the Nepali songbook brought together various earlier collections of indigenous songs as well as hymns translated from English and Hindi.⁴¹ The predominant use of indigenous songs and tunes reflected the general pattern of indigenous worship that included such culturally appropriate practices as meeting on Saturdays (Sunday being a working day in Nepal) and gender-segregated seating on the floor, often in ordinary village homes.

In 2004 Betty Young, UMN archivist, added the following: "A very widespread means which God has used in the rapid spread of the Gospel is healing, not in any dramatic way, but quietly, one to another—there must be thousands who have come to the Lord through healing. Another answer given by Nepali Christians to explain why the church was growing so quickly was because it was a praising, worshipping church."⁴²

Conclusion

The growth of the Nepali church in numbers and spiritual depth can be attributed to a mix of factors—historical, theological, and missiological. The "century of preparation" included Christian literature, translation of Scripture, and development of Nepali songs. Key Nepalis became Christians, and missionaries were strategically placed around the borders, ready to enter the country. Expatriate missionaries and Nepali Christians showed wisdom, humility, and foresight to ensure that known errors in mission practice were not repeated. Nepali Christians showed great courage in the face of persecution, which in turn refined and purified the church in the early decades. Factors external to

Perhaps the most significant factor—certainly the single most recurring theme in the short history of the Nepali church—is the place of prayer.

the church, such as the political revolutions of 1951 and 1990 and the presence of the Nepali language as a lingua franca within the country (as Greek was in the first century), have been additional catalysts in the church's growth.

Another factor in its growth is that the church represents the whole spectrum of Nepali society. There is no more dramatic demonstration of the Gospel's power to transcend the entrenched social barriers of caste and to unify disparate and segregated groups in the mosaic of Nepali society than the practice of the Lord's Supper in a Nepali church, as men and women, young and old, high caste, tribal, and Dalit break bread together and share a common cup.

Perhaps the most significant factor, and certainly the single most recurring theme in the short history of the Nepali church, is the place of prayer. A quarter of a century before Nepal's borders opened, Gordon Guinness wrote these prophetic words: "Prayer can penetrate anywhere. Long before we enter the valleys of Nepal prayer can be doing a concrete work in laying the foundations for the future kingdom. . . . When we have prepared the way with

the Spirit of God in prayer, he will answer those very prayers in permitting us to occupy Nepal."⁴³ The truth of these words is seen in all of the following: Ganga Prasad's prayer-song and the Darjeeling Nepali Christians who prayed for their closed land for decades; the NEB prayer groups across Britain spawned by Kitty Harbord's enthusiasm; John Coombe's prayer group in Fitzroy, Melbourne;⁴⁴ the NBF (and later NPF), which prayed for decades in anticipation of Nepal's borders opening; Ernest Oliver and Trevor Strong praying as they overlooked the Kathmandu valley in April 1951;⁴⁵ Elizabeth Franklin, who prayed for twenty-three years before entering Nepal; and the Kerala mother who, like Hannah, prayed for a son and then dedicated him to be a missionary in Nepal. The list is too extensive to record, and it continues to grow today.⁴⁶

The church in Nepal today stands as a testimony to those prayers. In November 2007, at the fiftieth anniversary of Nepali Isai Mandali, Nepal's largest church (Gyaneswar Church in Kathmandu), my father and I were among thousands of Nepali Christians singing Ganga Prasad's prayer song, "*Prabhu arji suni leu, Gorkhali le mukti paune dhoka kholi deu . . .*" (Lord, hear our prayer, open the door of salvation for the Gorkhalis . . .). Less than forty years after Ganga Prasad was told in 1914, "There is no room for Christians in Nepal," the Rana regime was ousted by the Shah dynasty. Today, less than 100 years after Ganga Prasad was turned out of the country, King Gyanendra has abdicated and the Shah dynasty itself has been abolished, but the church is firmly established and growing in Nepal.

Notes

1. This article is based on work done at the Bible College of Victoria in 2003 as part of an Australian College of Theology D.Min. course on church growth. Extensive reference was made to archival documents in the Nepal Church History Project (NCHP), Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, New College, University of Edinburgh.
2. Jonathan Lindell, *Nepal and the Gospel of God* (Kathmandu: United Mission to Nepal, 1979), p. 42. The map on p. 190 is adapted from Lindell, pp. vi-vii; used by permission.
3. Details of these early visits are recorded in *ibid.*, pp. 1-37; and in Cindy Perry, *A Biographical History of the Church in Nepal*, 3d ed. (Kathmandu: Nepal Church History Project, 1990), pp. 1-9.
4. Mark Arnett, *Himalayan Vision: Fifty Years in Nepal—the Story of the INF* (Pokhara, Nepal: International Nepal Fellowship, 2002); Norma Kehrberg, *The Cross in the Land of the Khukuri* (Kathmandu: Ekta Books, 2000); Lindell, *Nepal*; Perry, *History*.
5. Cindy Perry, e-mail to author, July 29, 2009. Perry was a consultant to the Nepal Church Survey Project, 1986-87.
6. For example, Bhab Ghale, e-mail to author, August 2, 2007.
7. K. B. Rokaya, PowerPoint presentation, copy provided to author, October 10, 2007.
8. Only 4,500 copies of the whole Bible were printed. Until the new Bible Society translation of 1977 was published, there were hardly ten copies of the whole Bible extant in Nepal (Perry, *History*, p. 41).
9. Lindell lists twenty-five Christian missions (*Nepal*, p. 115) and Perry lists forty groups operating along the Indo-Nepal border in the century before the 1951 revolution (*History*, pp. 116-18).
10. Perry, *History*, p. 23.
11. My paternal grandparents were founding members of this group; see note 44.
12. Gordon Guinness, *Quest for the Nepal Border* (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott [ca. 1928]), p. 118.
13. Perry, *History*, pp. 86-89.
14. Lindell, *Nepal*, pp. 87-89; Perry, *History*, pp. 15-17.
15. Perry, *History*, p. 29.
16. *Nepali Khristiya Bhajan* (Kathmandu: N.C.F./Samdan Publishers, 1996), p. 196; Lindell, *Nepal*, p. 78; Perry, *History*, p. 33.
17. Cindy Perry, e-mail to author, June 16, 2005.
18. Perry, *History*, pp. 35-37; Arnett, *Himalayan Vision*, pp. 138-67.
19. See Richard Tiplady, "The Legacy of Ernest Oliver," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 1 (January 2005): 38-41.
20. For the stories of key Nepali Christians in the formative years after 1951, see the works by Lindell, Perry, Kehrberg, and Arnett cited above.
21. For the story of the NEB/INF, see Lindell, *Nepal*; Perry, *History*; and most thoroughly, Arnett, *Himalayan Vision*.
22. Elizabeth Pritchard, *For Such a Time* (Eastbourne, Eng.: Victory Press, 1973), p. 91.
23. Lindell, *Nepal*, pp. 143-44.
24. In 1956 the name was changed to the United Mission to Nepal (*ibid.*, p. 181).
25. *Ibid.*, p. 200. Details of UMN's founding and work are in Lindell, *Nepal*, pp. 133-81.
26. These four were graduates of the Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal (now in Pune).
27. Kehrberg, *Cross*, p. 99; Lindell, *Nepal*, pp. 128-30; Perry, *History*, pp. 60, 95.
28. Kehrberg, *Cross*, pp. 105-9; Perry, *History*, pp. 103, 110.
29. Perry, *History*, p. 109.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
32. The words in quotations are from Section 19 of the Constitution of Nepal 2047 B.S. (1990).
33. Ramesh Khatry, e-mail to author, December 11, 2007.
34. In addition to the Roman Catholic Church, the Assemblies of God and Seventh-day Adventists were present before 1990. There are now several denominational churches, including Presbyterian, Baptist, and Foursquare, as well as groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons.
35. K. B. Rokaya, PowerPoint presentation, copy provided to author, October 10, 2007.
36. See Peter McDowell, "Early Church History in Nepal" (unpublished essay, 2002).
37. The following points have been adapted from a paper by Howard Barclay presented to the UMN Annual Conference, 1980, NCHP AO215010043000.
38. Kehrberg, *Cross*, p. 116.
39. The NBF had earlier established the pattern of collaboration, and indigenous leadership of the church was another imperative for the founders of the NEB and UMN.
40. Perry documents the many sources of Christian literature and the process whereby the organizations combined resources (*History*, pp. 119-23).
41. *Nepali Khristiya Bhajan*; a comprehensive revision by Loknath Manaen, Ron Byatt, and others, was published by NCF in 1985 (NCHP A1010010007000) and again in 1996 and 1999.
42. Betty Young, UMN archivist, e-mail to author, March 1, 2004.
43. Guinness, *Quest*, pp. 116-17.
44. Elizabeth Barclay, a founding member, prayed for forty years until Nepal's borders opened, and for another forty years until she died in 1990 at the age of ninety-seven.
45. Pritchard, *For Such a Time*, p. 91.
46. Bhab Ghale, nephew of a British Gurkha soldier converted in the 1960s, coordinates the Prayer for Nepal Global Network (www.prayerfornepal.org).