

Suffering and Christianity

Conversion and Ethical Change among the Newars of Bhaktapur

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Anthropology

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Hilary Term 2015

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Word count: 99,997

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Abstract

This thesis argues that conversion to Christianity in the Nepali city of Bhaktapur is closely connected with ethical attitudes towards suffering in Bhaktapurian churches. This argument is situated within broader debates in the anthropology of Christianity. Anthropologists have debated the extent to which Christianity is a force for cultural discontinuity, and have often connected it with modernity and individualism. I contribute to these discussions by showing how distinctively Christian conceptions of suffering may promote cultural change by stimulating new understandings of selfhood and ethics. The first three chapters explore the social life of Bhaktapur's Hindu majority. I describe how the last fifty years have seen a process of cultural unsettlement in Bhaktapur; one aspect of this unsettlement has been a disruption of traditional norms of care and deference. It is in this context that the distinctive ethics of Christianity have proved attractive to some. Those who convert have typically experienced a significant episode of suffering, and have felt themselves to be failed by those around them. They find in churches a framework that emphasises the moral significance of inner experience (I call this 'inwardness') and addresses affliction more in terms of ethics than ritual. I describe these ethics in terms of 'care': they stress presence with the afflicted person, engagement with their experience, and appeal to God in prayer. After two chapters describing Christianity in Nepal and Bhaktapur in general terms, I devote four chapters to examining different categories of Bhaktapurian Christians: those who have experienced healing, women, leaders, and youth. I focus on four conversion narratives, and relate these narratives both to other ethnographic materials and to broader trends in Bhaktapurian and global Christianity. I highlight the significance of the values of inwardness and care, and of narrative itself, in the life-worlds of Bhaktapurian Christians.

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Acknowledgements

My first thanks goes to my friends in Bhaktapur, who welcomed me into their homes and places of worship, put up with my constant questions, and in some cases spent many hours going over the details of my arguments and findings. The kindness I encountered from so many quarters in Bhaktapur was humbling. As I have used pseudonyms for all my informants, other than those who are well-known figures, I am not able to thank these people by name, but I am profoundly grateful to them. Particular thanks must go to ‘Kedar’, whose story is told in Chapter 9, to ‘Kamal’, whose story is in Chapter 10, to ‘Laxmi’, whose family I stayed with, and whom I write about in Chapter 2, and to my research assistant, Shamsheer Bahadur Nhuchhen Pradhan (his real name). Shamsheer, whose extensive help I describe in footnote 3, has guided me wisely and generously from my first trip to Bhaktapur in 2010, up to the present time. He found me a place to live, taught me Newari, explained numerous aspects of Newar culture to me, accompanied me for countless trips and interviews, and spent long hours transcribing interviews for me: it is not an exaggeration to say that this thesis would not have been possible without him.

I am also very grateful to the intellectual communities that have supported me in Britain. At SOAS, I was taught Nepali by Krishna Pradhan and encouraged in the early stages of formulating my research by Michael Hutt and Mara Malagodi. Since I came to Oxford, my principal supervisor, David Gellner, has been exceptionally supportive. His own scholarship has been a model for me, and he has spent many hours reading my work, discussing it, and helping me to shape both its details and overall form. Before I left for the field, he was patient with my disparate plans and ideas, and when my research interests shifted to Christianity he was encouraging and helped me to see how to proceed. Since I have returned, he has commented on countless drafts: every chapter of the thesis has been shaped by his observations. As with Shamsheer, the thesis would not have been possible without him. My co-supervisor, Ramon Sarró, has also been very supportive: he has read various drafts and helped me to relate my material to the broader field of the anthropology of Christianity. Robert Parkin, Marcus Banks, and David Pratten read earlier iterations of my work and made valuable comments, as did participants in the Work in Progress seminar to which I presented. My D.Phil. was funded by an ESRC doctoral studentship and a bursary from the Oxford University School of Anthropology.

On a personal level, I have been supported by my family, friends, and church community. My parents have always been supportive and understanding of my status as an eternal student, and have contributed to this thesis in more ways than I can possibly enumerate. My church in Oxford, St. Andrew's, has provided a community in which I can learn to know God better through worship, while I struggle to understand His creation through the discipline of study. My final and most important thanks goes to Kelli, my wife, whom I met after I returned from fieldwork, and who is the greatest blessing I have known.

Note on language, transliteration, and names

The principal language of my research was Newari, in its Bhaktapur dialect. Unless otherwise indicated, where I provide a transliteration of the original language in italics, this is Newari. Where the language transliterated is Nepali I preface it with ‘Nep.:’. As the Bhaktapur dialect of Newari departs in significant ways from the Kathmandu/Patan dialect, which is ‘standard Newari’ and the basis of most Newari dictionaries, I give exact transliterations of the words as they were spoken, rather than reproducing standard dictionary forms. In my transliterations I have employed the symbol ‘ā’ where the long Newari/Nepali ‘a’ sound is used, but I have not otherwise employed diacritics; rather, I transliterate words phonetically. It should be noted that contemporary Newari speakers often pepper their speech with Nepali and English terms. Each untranslated Newari or Nepali term in the text can be found in the glossary. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews I quote from in the text were conducted in Newari.

Unless discussing public figures such as Narayan Man Bijukchhe or prominent Christian leaders, I have used pseudonyms for all of my informants, and for all of the churches in which I conducted research. When discussing the history of Nepali Christianity in Chapter 5, I have used the real names of churches, leaders, and historical figures, following the historical works from which I have drawn. Where I use the real name of an informant I indicate this in the text. Where a named individual who does not appear elsewhere in the thesis appears in an interview extract, I substitute ‘XX’ for their name.

Quotations from the Bible are given according to the English Standard Version (ESV).

Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini
BDP	Bhaktapur Development Programme
IG	Ian Gibson
INF	International Nepal Fellowship
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
JW	Jehovah's Witness
NEB	Nepal Evangelistic Band
NWPP	Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
SNP	Shamsher Nhuchhen Pradhan
UMN	United Mission to Nepal
VS	Vikram Sambat (the official calendar of Nepal)

Glossary

Nep. = Nepali.

New. = Newari (if the Bhaktapur dialect differs from the Kathmandu/Patan dialect for a particular term, I indicate this in the gloss).

Ch. = A Nepali or Newari Christian term. Sometimes a neologism, sometimes an existing Sanskrit/Hindi/Nepali/Newari word, used to express specific Christian theological, ecclesiastical, or Biblical concepts.

aguwā (Ch.) From the Nepali, meaning ‘guide’ or ‘pioneer’. Used in Nepali churches to denote anyone in a leadership position.

ānanda (Nep.) Hindu/Buddhist theological term meaning ‘bliss’, ‘joy’, or ‘ecstasy’. Used in everyday speech in a wider sense, which encompasses general wellbeing and comfort.

anugraha (Ch.) From the Sanskrit, meaning ‘favour’ or ‘kindness’. Used by Nepali Christians to translate the Christian theological concept of ‘grace’.

Ashadh Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to June/July.

Ashwin Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to September/October.

bachan (Ch.) From the Nepali, meaning ‘word’ or ‘speech’. Used by Nepali Christians to mean ‘sermon’.

Baishakh Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to April/May.

Bhadra Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to August/September.

bhajan (Nep.) Hymn or prayer. Used to refer to religious music groups.

<i>cākari</i> (Nep.)	Sycophancy, service or flattery.
<i>cākari yāye</i> (New.)	To ‘do’ sycophancy (towards someone), to flatter.
Chaitra	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to March/April.
<i>dāi</i> (Nep.)	Older brother. Commonly used in Nepal as a term of address for a man older than or senior to oneself.
<i>dasāmsa</i> (Ch.)	Tithe. The ten percent of income which Nepali Christians are expected to contribute to their church.
Dashain	Nepal’s major national festival, falling in September or October, which celebrates the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura. In Newari, Mohani.
<i>dhāmi</i> (Nep.)	Shamanic healer. In Bhaktapur the term is normally synonymous with <i>jhānkri</i> . See Section 7.2.
<i>dharma</i> (Nep.)	Religion.
<i>dharmik</i> (Nep.)	Religious, dutiful, moral.
<i>didī</i> (Nep.)	Older sister. Commonly used in Nepal as a term of address for a woman older than or senior to oneself.
<i>dukha</i> (Nep.)	Trouble, misfortune, pain, suffering.
<i>dyah</i> (New.)	God, or deity (Patan/Kathmandu Newari). In Bhaktapur Newari, <i>dyo</i> .
<i>dyah waimha</i> (New.)	A Newar medium; literally, ‘one to whom the gods come’ (Kathmandu/Patan Newari). In Bhaktapur Newari, <i>dyo womha</i> . See Section 7.2.
<i>dyahmā</i> (New.)	A Newar medium; literally, ‘god mother’ (Kathmandu/Patan Newari). In Bhaktapur Newari, <i>dyomā</i> . See Section 7.2.
Falgun	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to February/March.
Farmer (when capitalised)	See Appendix 1.

Gai Jatra (Nep.)	Literally, ‘cow procession’. A major Newar festival, falling in August or September. In Newari, Saparu.
<i>gawāi</i> (Ch.)	From the Nepali, meaning ‘evidence’ or ‘testimony’. Used by Nepali Christians to mean ‘testimony of conversion’.
<i>gawāi dinu</i> (Ch.)	Used by Nepali Christians to mean ‘to give testimony of conversion’. In Newari, <i>gawāi biye</i> .
<i>ghāt</i> (Nep.)	Place for cremation of the dead.
<i>grahan</i> (Ch.)	From the Nepali, meaning ‘reception’. Used by Nepali Christians to indicate formal verbal commitment to Christ.
<i>guthi</i> (New.)	Among the Newars, a permanent association for social or religious purposes.
high-caste Newar	See Appendix 1.
<i>ijjat</i> (Nep.)	Prestige, reputation, social standing, face. See Section 3.3.
<i>isāi dharma</i> (Nep.)	Used in South Asia to refer to Christianity. More commonly in Nepal, <i>krishtian dharma</i> .
Jan Andolan (Nep.)	Literally, ‘people’s movement’. Used to refer to Nepal’s democracy movement of 1990. The democracy movement of 2006 is often called Jan Andolan II.
<i>jaymashi</i> (Ch.)	Used by Nepali Christians as a greeting to replace the conventional Nepali greeting <i>namaste</i> . A contraction of <i>jaya messiah</i> , meaning literally ‘victory to the messiah’.
Jestha	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to May/June.
<i>jhānkri</i> (Nep.)	Shamanic healer. In Bhaktapur the term is normally synonymous with <i>dhāmi</i> . See Section 7.2.
Kali	Hindu goddess; an aspect of Durga.
<i>karma</i> (Nep.)	In Indian religion, the results of action manifested in subsequent lives; fate.

Kartik	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to October/November.
<i>kaytā pujā</i> (New.)	Literally, ‘loin-cloth worship’. Name given to the Newar initiation ceremony for boys involving affixation of a loin-cloth. In Nepali, <i>bratabandha</i> .
<i>lajyā, lāj</i> (Nep.)	Shyness, embarrassment or shame. See Section 3.2.
Lalitpur	Official name for the city commonly called Patan.
Laxmi Puja	Festival for the worship of Laxmi, goddess of wealth.
low-caste Newar	See Appendix 1.
Magh	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to January/February.
Mangsir	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to November/December.
<i>murti</i> (Nep.)	Statue of a deity, idol.
<i>murti pujak</i> (Nep.)	Idol worshipper. Phrase often used by Christians in Nepal.
<i>nāstik</i> (Nep.)	Atheist.
<i>paisā</i> (Nep.)	One hundredth of a Nepali Rupee. Also signifies money in general.
<i>parameshwar</i> (Ch.)	Often pronounced <i>parmeshwor</i> . From the Nepali, meaning ‘God’. Whereas Nepali Hindus use various words – <i>parameshwar</i> , <i>bhagawān</i> , <i>ishwar</i> – to denote God in the unitary sense, Nepali Christians almost always refer to the Christian God as <i>parameshwar</i> , although occasionally <i>ishwar</i> is used. To my knowledge, Nepali Christians never use <i>bhagawān</i> to refer to the Christian God.
Pashupatinath	Regarded as Nepal’s most sacred Hindu temple; located in Kathmandu and dedicated to Shiva.
Patan	The commonly used name for the city officially called Lalitpur.

<i>partyā</i> (New.)	Literally, ‘hill person’. Term used by Newars to denote non-Newar Nepalis, whose mother tongue is Nepali.
<i>partyaini</i> (New.)	The feminine of <i>partyā</i> .
<i>pāthi</i> (New.)	A measurement of volume, used to measure rice paddy.
<i>phalcā</i> (New.)	A public shelter or porch, common in the cities of the Kathmandu Valley.
Poush	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to December/January.
<i>prasād</i> (Nep.)	An offering made to the Hindu gods.
<i>pujā</i> (Nep.)	Worship.
<i>bhajan</i> (Nep.)	Hymn, an informal music group.
<i>ropani</i> (Nep.)	A measurement of area, used to measure land.
<i>rupiyā</i> (Nep.)	Nepali rupee, the Nepali currency.
<i>shānti</i> (Nep.)	Peace.
Shrawan	Month in the Nepali (Vikram Sambat) calendar, corresponding to July/August.
<i>si-guthi</i> (New.)	Newar funeral association.
<i>su-samācār</i> (Ch.)	From the Nepali <i>su-</i> , a prefix indicating goodness, and <i>samācār</i> , meaning ‘news’; used by Nepali Christians to translate the Christian concept of ‘Good News’/‘Gospel’.
<i>su-samācār nyenke</i> (Ch.)	From <i>su-samācār</i> and <i>nyenke</i> , the Newar verb meaning ‘to cause to listen’, i.e. to relate or tell. Used by Newar Christians to translate the Christian concept of ‘to evangelise’.
<i>tikā</i> (Nep.)	In Hinduism, a mark worn on the forehead.
<i>vaidya</i> (New.)	A Newar healer. See Section 7.2.
<i>varna</i> (Nep.)	Term for the four broad levels into which Hindu caste society is traditionally divided

Prologue: methods and argument

I arrived in Bhaktapur in February of 2012 intending to study politics, and I returned in July 2013 having conducted an ethnography of Bhaktapurian Christianity.¹ The story of how my research evolved is connected with my intention to study social change. My original research proposal, ‘Caste and Social Change in Bhaktapur’, had proposed an examination of how politics – in particular, the activism of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP) – had transformed, and was continuing to transform, social relations in Bhaktapur. I had assumed, on the basis of my reading about the role the party had played in a peasants’ movement that successfully fought for the implementation of land reform (Hachhethu 2004, 2007; Raj 2010), that communism was the key agent of social change in the city. This assumption proved to be misguided, at least with respect to the present.

When I arrived in Bhaktapur I chose to live with a family in a Farmer² locality, Byasi, that was an NWPP stronghold; I also began to make contacts in the local party. I conducted a study of my locality, visited the party central office, attended rallies, befriended activists, and eventually secured a meeting with the NWPP’s leader, Narayan Man Bijukchhe. I enjoyed many of these interactions, and I collected material that informs chapters 2-4 below.

Nonetheless, as I reflected on my experiences, I felt that there was a certain dynamism lacking in the political processes I was observing, a formulaic and ritual quality to the political speech I recorded. Put simply, I discovered that while the NWPP has been a major

¹ I spent the summers of 2010 and 2011 in Bhaktapur learning Newari, and have visited the city twice since the end of my fieldwork; in total I have spent almost two years in the city.

² The Newar farmer caste, whom I shall refer to with a capital ‘f’ as Farmers, are in Newari termed the Maharjans or the Jyapus. I avoid the term Maharjan because it is seldom used in Bhaktapur, and also the term Jyapu because Farmers in the city consider it insulting. The word preferred in Bhaktapur is the Nepali term *kisan*, which can be translated as peasant or farmer. See Appendix 1 for a full list of castes in Bhaktapur and for further explanation of how I use terms such as ‘Farmer’ and ‘high caste’.

force for change in Bhaktapur's past, it is now to a significant degree institutionalised in the city's power structures.

I wanted to find a subject for my research that would allow me to study Bhaktapurian social change at its cutting edge; I was also attracted to human stories that reflected dramatic change on a personal level. I had heard that increasing numbers of people were converting to Christianity, and being a Christian myself I was naturally interested in this phenomenon. When I began to visit churches, I quickly realised that here was the type of field site I was looking for.

I began visiting churches about three months into my stay in Bhaktapur. The first church I visited was located near to where I was staying. The pastor was a Dalit from the south of Nepal, and a former communist activist, and warmly welcomed me and my research assistant to the church.³ For about a month I attended services and house fellowships at this church regularly; I also conducted a recorded interview with the pastor. Eventually I decided against making this church the primary base for my research, because there were few Newars among its members (its members were mainly Tamangs and Nepali-speaking Dalits), and I wanted to focus on Newar conversion. Some of the church committee were also reluctant to allow us to record services and interviews; I learned later that this was because my research assistant, who at this stage often attended church with me, is a Hindu and has a job at a government agency.

At this time (late May 2012) I began researching two other churches simultaneously: one in my local area, which I shall call 'Corinthi Church', and another in the village of Sanga,

³ My research assistant was Shamsher Nhuchhen Pradhan, whose extensive help I give thanks for in the acknowledgements. Shamsher is a high-caste Hindu Newar in his early 50s who has significant experience working with researchers, but who was unfamiliar with churches prior to our research. Early in my fieldwork I depended heavily on Shamsher for translation in social situations and organisation of social contacts; as my language skills improved and social contacts widened, I began to work much more independently. Shamsher was usually present for the recorded interviews I conducted.

6 km to the east of Bhaktapur, which I shall call ‘Ashish Church’. I chose Corinthi because it had a Newar pastor and a significant number of Newars in the congregation. I chose Ashish, whose congregation were mainly from Nepali-speaking Dalit and Magar castes,⁴ because I wanted to be able to contextualise my study of Bhaktapurian Christianity with knowledge of the Nepali Christian scene more generally. While I do not write in depth about Ashish in what follows, my experience there partly informs the generalisations I make about Nepali Christianity. In both Ashish and Corinthi I began to attend services and other fellowships, to befriend believers, and to conduct interviews.

During this time I also came into contact with a Jehovah’s Witness (JW) church in Bhaktapur. I met them after they had knocked on the door of a friend. Shamsher and I attended their services for about two months and I got to know an American missionary who was overseeing the church quite well. I soon realised that the JWs are far outside the mainstream of Nepali Christianity. The JW church was the only Christian group I encountered in Nepal that was run by foreign missionaries (as I describe in Chapter 5, the vast majority of Nepali churches are and always have been under indigenous leadership). Furthermore, the JWs do not practise prayer-based healing, and their services mainly involve study, with little singing or prayer. Healing and emotive worship are central to most Nepali churches. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the JWs in Bhaktapur have had little success in evangelisation and there are only a handful of local converts. As it was so different to most other churches, and had few local believers, I eventually decided to discontinue my research on the JWs. My experience among them, however, furnished me an example of the stagnation that would await any church in Nepal that decided to reject healing and emotive worship.

⁴ See Appendix 3 for a detailed description of the memberships of both congregations.

Corinthi is a relatively small church of 49 baptised believers; after spending a significant amount of time there and conducting many interviews (one of which forms the basis of Chapter 7), I decided that I would need to find another Bhaktapurian church with a high number of Newar believers. The pastor of Corinthi pointed me towards a church I shall call 'Fellowship Church', which he had previously been a member of himself. Fellowship is a church of 210 baptised believers, 76% of whom are Newars (see Appendix 3). It is on the outskirts of Bhaktapur, and is the second-oldest church in the city. From October 2012 to July 2013 Fellowship was the main focus of my research (I have subsequently returned to the church twice for short visits and talk regularly to friends there over Skype). I describe the church, its history, and my activities in it in detail in Chapter 6.

Alongside my research in Fellowship, Corinthi, and Ashish churches, I attempted to gain a more general picture of Nepali Christianity by attending large-scale Christian events, interviewing national Christian leaders, making contacts with missionary organisations, and conducting a survey of a large proportion of the churches in Bhaktapur (see Appendix 2). When I attended Christian events, I would often meet pastors and be invited to their churches: this led to one-time church visits all over the Kathmandu Valley, and occasionally beyond it. The most far-flung churches I visited were in Jumla, in the far west of Nepal; I visited these when I was in the district to attend an NWPP youth event. In chapters 5 and 6 I make generalisations about Nepali and Bhaktapurian Christianity on the basis of these varied experiences and researches.

The primary focus of this thesis is not Nepali Christianity in general but rather conversion to Christianity specifically among the Newars of Bhaktapur. As I describe in chapters 2 and 6, Bhaktapur is often seen as a bastion of Newar Hindu traditionalism: this makes it a particularly interesting location for an anthropologist to study the growth of Christianity. Because of the challenges facing Christian evangelists in the city, they have had

to engage with the local cultural situation to an extent that might not be necessary in other contexts (see Chapter 6). The extent to which Christianity has grown in Bhaktapur since 1990 is, in part, a measure of the rapidity of social and cultural change in the city over this period.

My primary research methods were participant observation and interviews, some of which were recorded and some of which were not.⁵ Interviews form the basis of chapters 3, 6, and 7-10; my participation in and observation of life in Bhaktapur informs the whole.

As I met Bhaktapurian Christians, and began to interview them, one thing above all struck me: most of these people had encountered some form of traumatic suffering before they converted. As I describe in Chapter 5, a very high proportion Nepali Christians ascribe their conversions to the miraculous healing of themselves or a family member. In order to understand Nepali Christianity, I decided, it was necessary to understand the healing process. As I collected healing narratives, and observed church practices surrounding healing, I realised that, while understood as a work of God, healing is generally a lengthy process that involves immersion in a church community and significant lifestyle changes. The process is embedded in social relationships and ethical norms. As I describe in Chapter 7, I came to interpret healing as depending fundamentally on the distinctive ethics of suffering present in Bhaktapurian churches. This, in turn, led me to focus on the ways that the ethics of suffering shapes Bhaktapurian church life more generally.

⁵ I outline my interview material in Appendix 7.

My argument about suffering can be clarified with reference to Max Weber's work on theodicy. Weber believed that the experience of suffering, and the desire to interpret it, was central to religious endeavour. He identified three ideal typical theodicies, or religious accounts of suffering, in the world religions: predestination, the transmigration of souls, and dualism.

Weber places predestination in the context of a monotheistic god who reveals himself to the world through 'ethical prophecy'. An ethical prophet, according to Weber, is 'primarily [...] an instrument for the proclamation of a god and his will, be this a concrete command or an abstract norm' (Weber 1978: 447). Ethical prophecy, involving as it does revelation from a god who decrees patterns of behaviour that may be contrary to human inclinations, tends to be related to the notion of god as 'sublimely above the world' (ibid.: 518), transcending it in power, goodness, and perfection (as with the god of the Abrahamic monotheisms). When god is thus understood, the problem of suffering becomes particularly acute: how can 'the extraordinary power of such a god [...] be reconciled with the imperfection of the world that he has created and rules over' (ibid.: 519)? The notion of predestination, which finds its most crystallised form in Calvinism, answers this problem with an assertion of the mysteriousness of God's will, holding that 'God's absolute power over his creatures is unlimited, and therefore [...] the criteria of human justice are utterly inapplicable to his behaviour' (ibid.: 522). In this understanding, God's question to Job – 'where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?' (Job 38: 4) – is sufficient to answer the problem of suffering: from the perspective of God, the world's sufferings must make sense, but this understanding is not given to humankind.

The transmigration of souls, associated with the Indian doctrine of *karma*, is, according to Weber, 'the most complete formal solution to the problem of theodicy' (ibid.:

524).⁶ According to this theodicy, '[g]uilt and merit within this world are unfailingly compensated by fate in the successive lives of the soul [...]. What may appear from the viewpoint of retribution as unjust suffering in the present life of a person should be regarded as atonement for sin in a previous existence' (ibid. 524-5). From this perspective, the human conception of justice is applicable to suffering, but feelings of injustice are merely the result of an inability to see particular events in their total context. The type of god associated with this theory is not so much the 'hidden God' of Calvinism, utterly mysterious yet intervening in human affairs, but rather a more knowable, yet at the same time non-intervening entity, imagined by way of the contrast between 'the world's transitory events and behaviour [and] the serene and perduring being of eternal order – immobile divinity, resting in dreamless sleep' (ibid.: 526).

Dualism, in varied forms, is the most common of the theodicies Weber identifies. The most systematic form of dualism to have emerged is Manicheanism, which held that,

[...] god is not almighty, nor did he create the world out of nothingness. Injustice, unrighteousness and sin – in short, all the factors that have generated the problem of theodicy – result from the darkening of the luminous purity of the great and good gods through contact with the opposite autonomous powers of darkness, which are identified with impure matter. The domination of these forces, which gives dominion over the world to some satanic power, has arisen through some primordial wickedness of men or of angels, or [...] through the inferiority of some subordinate creator of the world. (ibid.: 524)

An important contrast between dualism and the other theodicies identified, which will be vital to my arguments in what follows, is that '[t]he conception of evil, which, on the assumption of a definitely omnipotent god, always tends to take a purely ethical direction, may here assume a strongly spiritual character' (ibid.: 524). What Weber means is that, whereas in dualist religions the forces that cause suffering are likely to be seen as active and agentive

⁶ For a tabular summary of the differences Weber identified between South Asian and Judeo-Christian religions, see Gellner (2001: 89).

spirits, in monotheistic or *karma*-based religions suffering is more likely to be attributed to some working of justice which is beyond the comprehension of the sufferer. As Weber notes, '[i]n practically all the religions with an ethical orientation there are unavowed limitations of divine omnipotence in the form of elements of a dualistic mode of thought' (ibid.: 524). Thus most monotheisms and *karma*-based religions will include some notion of agentive forces of evil even if these forces are operating under the sovereignty of an all-powerful god or some ordering principle of justice.

Bhaktapurian Christianity, as I interpret it, is a monotheism with dualistic elements. Developing in a Hindu context characterised both by the doctrine of *karma* and by a strong conception of agentive spiritual forces, Christianity in Bhaktapur has built its monotheism on the foundation of a vibrant belief in the spirit world. While incorporating popular belief in the pervading presence of often hostile spirits, Christianity has remoulded this belief by means of an overwhelming emphasis on the defeat of evil by Jesus's death on the cross. This emphasis on God's victory over evil is manifested in the centrality of healing and exorcism, mediated by prayer, in local Christian practice. Thus, the world of spirits, while remaining a prominent part of the Bhaktapurian Christian cosmos, loses some of the terror and potency it possesses in the local Hinduism: the spirit world is seen to be tamed by the power of Christ, with the praying Christian invulnerable to witchcraft and other spiritual attacks. Consequently, Bhaktapurian Christians approach suffering, in Weber's terms, from an increasingly ethical, as opposed to a spiritual, standpoint.⁷

The ethical character of Bhaktapurian Christians' responses to suffering is the main subject of this thesis. Whereas in the local Hinduism, suffering tends to be seen as the result of an arbitrary and localised battle of wills in the human or spirit world, suffering is

⁷ I am using 'spiritual' here in the sense of 'to do with the world of active spiritual entities' rather than in the sense of an autonomous religious sphere.

increasingly seen by Bhaktapurian Christians as part of a wider story of the conflict between good and evil, in which good has already achieved decisive victory. Whereas in local Hinduism, engagement with evil is a constant and ongoing process, mediated through a diverse, complex and often costly array of ritual practices, in Bhaktapurian Christianity engagement with evil is radically simplified: it is reduced to the single action of prayer. The presupposition of prayer is the existence of an all-powerful God whose attitude towards the one who prays is benevolent. Prayer takes the form of an entreaty to God to take pity on the sufferer and to drive out the evil spirits that cause suffering. Rather than attempting to induce a deity to act through material offerings or formalised rituals, Bhaktapurian Christians simply assume the sympathy of God for the person who suffers, and his willingness to act if asked sincerely and persistently. The care of the Christian God for the one who prays is mirrored in the centrality of care for the afflicted in Bhaktapurian Christian practice.

The thrust of my argument, then, is that people convert to Christianity in Bhaktapur because they are suffering, and churches are places where suffering is ethically prioritised. It is important to distinguish this argument from the idea that Nepali churches prey on vulnerable people by offering them material inducements to convert. This idea is a common trope of Hindu nationalist propaganda; I have also found that in more nuanced forms it has some hold on Nepali intellectuals and scholars of Nepal. It is expressed in a comment I heard frequently in Bhaktapur: that Christianity is a ‘dollar-eating religion’ (Nep.: *dollar khane dharmā*). The reality is that most converts stand to lose, in material terms, far more than they stand to gain by converting to Christianity. Converts will often be ostracised by their families and suffer significant opprobrium in their communities. What foreign money there is in Nepali Christianity tends to be spent on church buildings; to my knowledge, people are never paid to convert, and seldom gain new economic opportunities by conversion. It is my hope that, among other things, this thesis can serve as a tool for those who would defend the

Nepali Christians against unwarranted attacks. Looking around the world, it is easy to see how entrenched verbal opprobrium based on false rumours can transmute into more deadly forms of violence (Shortt 2012; Allen 2013).

The thesis can be outlined as follows. I lay out the conceptual basis for my arguments in Chapter 1, examining in particular the concepts of cultural unsettlement, inwardness, and care. In Part I (chapters 2-4) I describe the ‘traditional order’ in Bhaktapur and explore various ways in which it has been unsettled. In Chapter 2 I describe traditional social and religious practices, and also changes they have undergone over the last fifty years. In Chapter 3 I focus on two aspects of change that are particularly relevant to ethical life: I describe these as the failure of care and the rejection of deference. In Chapter 4 I explore the ethical projects of Bhaktapurian communism. In Part II (chapters 5-6) I describe Nepali and Bhaktapurian Christianity in general terms. Chapter 5 focuses on Christianity in Nepal as a whole, while Chapter 6 focuses on Christianity in Bhaktapur. In Part III (chapters 7-10) I employ the concepts of inwardness and care in order to interpret individual conversion narratives, and place these narratives in the context of broader tendencies in Bhaktapurian Christianity. Chapter 7 focuses on the process of healing. Chapter 8 concerns the conversion stories of women, who significantly outnumber men in Bhaktapurian churches. Chapter 9 explores the distinctive qualities of the conversion stories of leaders. Chapter 10 examines conversion among youth. Throughout Part III I highlight the significance of narrative as a shaper of Christian identity and practice. In the Conclusion I summarise my findings and suggest some ways in which theology may provide resources for the anthropology of Christianity.

Chapter 1. Key concepts: cultural unsettlement, inwardness and care

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I lay out the theoretical basis for the analysis that follows. Three concepts, in particular, shape the structure of my arguments: cultural unsettlement, inwardness, and care. By cultural unsettlement I mean a state of cultural and ethical uncertainty caused by rapid social change in a traditional society; I will suggest that such a state is conducive to widespread Christian conversion. I clarify this concept with reference to the work of Robin Horton and Joel Robbins. By inwardness I mean an ethical prioritisation of inner experience: I take this concept from Charles Taylor, and propose it as an alternative to the concept of individualism in the study of Christianity. By care I signify solidarity with others who are in need: drawing on the work of Arthur Kleinman, I emphasise presence with the other person over more material forms of help. In Christian theology and practice, I will suggest, the values of inwardness and care are both closely linked with the experience of suffering. I aim to demonstrate in the thesis that the presence of the values of inwardness and care in Bhaktapurian churches, along with the unsettlement of Bhaktapur's traditional order, are the central factors in the growth of Christian conversion in the city.

I intend the thesis to be a contribution to the 'anthropology of Christianity'. Over the last decade and a half Joel Robbins, Fenella Cannell, and others have published pieces that outline the contours of this field and suggest ways in which it can move forward as a coherent scholarly endeavour (Robbins 2003, 2004b, 2007, 2014; Robbins et al. 2008; Cannell 2005, 2006; Engelke and Tomlinson 2007; Haynes 2014). In the Conclusion of the thesis, I present some such suggestions of my own. In this chapter, rather than repeating the surveys that others have provided, I select a number of the key problematics that have emerged in the field

and relate them to my key concepts. In Section 1.2 I relate the concept of cultural unsettlement to anthropological debates over the nature of conversion. In Section 1.3 I relate the concept of inwardness to anthropological discussions about the connection between Christianity and individualism. In Section 1.4 I suggest that the subject of ethics has been neglected by some anthropological students of Christianity, and, drawing on the emerging field of the ‘anthropology of ethics’, I suggest that care for those who are suffering has often been a significant part of Christian ethical life.

1.2 Conversion, discontinuity, and cultural unsettlement

Conversion, signifying a decisive shift from pre-Christian to Christian life, is one of the central components of Christianity (Robbins 2007: 11; Ruel 1997: 247-8). It is an issue that presents itself with particular force in contexts, like Nepal, where most Christians are first or second generation adherents and where infant baptism is not widely practised.

Anthropological debate over Christian conversion has centred on the extent to which it promotes cultural discontinuity. That is: does the Christian language of converts mask adherence to older cultural orientations, or do converts take on genuinely new forms of culture when they convert? This debate could be said to go to the question of whether ‘the anthropology of Christianity’ is in fact a viable enterprise. If Christianity tends to be a window-dressing for more fundamental cultural orientations, then it makes no sense to address the religion as a subject in itself. If, on the other hand, Christian ideas can be shown to have genuine cultural salience, the anthropology of Christianity is likely to be a fruitful comparative enterprise. In this section I suggest that those who contend that Christianity has cultural salience have the better of the argument. I further suggest that something both sides

of this debate have in common is the notion that widespread Christian conversion tends to arise from the unsettlement of traditional cultural norms.

Probably the most influential anthropological proponent of the view that Christian conversion tends to be a superficial and selective process is Robin W.G. Horton.⁸ Drawing on fieldwork among Kalabari Christians in the 1950s and 60s, and also on the work of J.D.Y. Peel on indigenous Yoruba churches,⁹ Horton developed a theory to explain the extent and timing of Christian conversion in Africa.¹⁰ He argues that the nature of traditional African religions, along with social changes that were taking place in Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries, made a transition to something akin to monotheism probable with or without the presence of Christianity or Islam. In an article co-authored with Peel, he writes,

[The “traditional” African world-view has a] “two-tier” structure [...] in which lesser spirits underpin events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment, whilst the supreme being underpins events and processes in the macrocosm of which the local community is ultimately a part. Given such a structure, it follows that where social relations are largely confined by the boundaries of the local community (as tends to be the case in, say, a subsistence farming economy), most of the emphasis will tend to be on the lesser spirits rather than on the supreme being. Equally, however, any development of social relationships which cut across the boundaries of the local community (as, for instance, when people turn in large numbers from subsistence farming to long-distance trade) is likely to result in an elaboration of the concept and cult of the supreme being. (Horton and Peel 1976: 482)

From this perspective, Christianity in itself is reduced to the role of a catalyst, a ‘stimulator’ and ‘accelerator’ of ‘changes that were “in the air” anyway’ (Horton 1971: 104). Horton thus argues that conversion is often a ‘highly conditional and selective’ process:

⁸ In what follows, I will not survey the whole body of scholarship on Christian conversion, which is substantial, but rather examine in depth two significant contributors to the field. For surveys of the field, see Hefner (1993) and van der Veer (1996a).

⁹ See Peel (1968). For later contributions on related subjects, see Peel (1977, 1990, 2000).

¹⁰ For an overview of the considerable debate provoked by Horton’s theory of conversion, see van Binsbergen (1981: 28-54).

[...] the beliefs and practices of the so-called world religions are only accepted where they happen to coincide with responses of the traditional cosmology to other, non-missionary, factors of the modern situation. Where such beliefs and practices have no counterpart in these responses, they tend to be weakly developed or absent from the life of “converts”. Again, where responses of the traditional cosmology to other factors of the modern situation have no counterparts in the beliefs and practices of the world religions, they tend to appear as embarrassing additions to the life of “converts”. (ibid.: 104)

For Horton, then, Christian conversion is more an adaptation of traditional culture to modern conditions than a radical shift from one cultural framework to another. The nature of this adaptation is presented in terms of what Horton sees as the ‘explanation/prediction/control’ function of religion (Horton 1993: 5).¹¹ Movement from one religious community to another is viewed in terms of ‘the efforts of intelligent people to draw out the full implications of their traditional world-view in order to comprehend, predict and control pervasive changes in their environment’ (Horton 1970: 211).

Since Horton published his theory of conversion in 1971, a great deal has occurred in Christian history, most notably the global explosion of Pentecostalism (see Anderson 2004). It is in this context that we should view the work of Joel Robbins, who is probably the most influential proponent of the view that conversion does tend to produce radical cultural discontinuity. In his article ‘Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture’ (2007) Robbins presents a wide-ranging critique of prevailing anthropological approaches to Christianity. He structures his argument around a contrast between the conceptions of time characteristic of Christianity (particularly in its evangelical Protestant form) and those common among anthropologists. Christianity, he writes, ‘represents time as a dimension in which radical change is possible’ (ibid.: 10). This is most clearly evident in the Christian understanding of conversion:

¹¹ See Horton (1993: 1-15) for elaboration on his intellectualist understanding of religion.

[...] not everyone reports having an experience akin to Paul's on the road to Damascus, and even conversionist-minded evangelicals allow for the possibility that the path to conversion may be a long one [...]. But conversion itself, however long it takes to get there, is always an event, a rupture in the time line of a person's life that cleaves it into a before and after between which there is a moment of disconnection. Most kinds of conversionist Christianity mark this moment and ritualize it, as with rites of baptism [...]. In such rituals, the status of conversion as an interruption in the time line of a person's life is celebrated as such, rather than treated as a problem that needs to be repaired. (ibid.: 11)

Anthropological models of time, in contrast, tend to stress continuity, and the resilient quality of culture. 'Cultural anthropologists', Robbins writes, 'have for the most part either argued or implied that the things they study – symbols, meanings, logics, power dynamics, etc. – have an enduring quality and are not readily subject to change' (ibid.: 9). These contrasting understandings of time and culture open up a gulf of mutual incomprehension between Christians and anthropologists, where 'certain claims that previously non-Christian converts make about their lives [are] hard for anthropologists to credit. Many of the most important of these claims have to do with discontinuities in time and belief' (ibid.: 10).

Building on a critique of the work of John and Jean Comaroff, Robbins identifies some common strategies by which anthropologists have discounted Christian claims to radical discontinuity. One strategy, which bears comparison with Horton's emphasis on the 'explanation/prediction/control' aspect of religion, is to argue that

[...] people actually convert for everyday, pragmatic reasons—in search of things like money and power. These arguments assert that, while converts may dress up their speech and behaviour in the clothes of Christian change, underneath them they are the same people pursuing goals fully recognizable from within their traditional cultures. (ibid.: 12)

Another strategy is the classification of the speech of converts as cliché, which construes Christian speech as 'the least meaningful kind of speech its speakers produce. What converts say outside of Christian contexts – most generally what they say that sounds pre-Christian – must, then, represent their true, deeply held way of thinking: ways of thinking that are,

unsurprisingly, continuous with those of the past' (ibid.: 13). A further strategy is the argument, made for instance by the Comaroffs, that the category of conversion itself should be discarded, due to its theological nature and implication in the history of Western colonialism.

Robbins problematizes these strategies by way of an examination of the assumptions about belief that underlie them. He distinguishes between two different senses of the verb 'to believe', which

[...] can be captured in the English distinction between "to believe in" and "to believe that." To believe in a thing, person, or idea—"I believe in God," for example—means to trust it and implies a commitment to act in a certain way toward it. To utter the verb "to believe" in this "believe in" form also conveys a sense of certainty and conviction about what one is saying and about the rightness of the actions one's speech is explaining or justifying. The phrase "believe that," by contrast, is usually applied to propositional statements—"I believe that God exists"—and implies a sense of uncertainty about the truth of the proposition, an uncertainty that would not be carried by the use of the verb "to know." (ibid.: 14)

Drawing on the work of Talal Asad and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Robbins suggests that the early Christians understood belief primarily in the 'believe in' sense, and it was only later that the 'believe that' sense of the word became prevalent, influencing the wider intellectual culture of the West. Robbins argues that 'it is probably only moderns, and perhaps only elite moderns, who have understood themselves primarily to be engaged in believing that certain propositions are true about the world. More often [...] people have been involved in believing *in* certain gods, values etc., and thereby committing themselves to them and ordering their lives or parts of their lives around them' (ibid.: 14-15).

Robbins argues that anthropologists have inappropriately applied a propositional understanding of belief to non-Western converts to Christianity, thereby mistaking situations of mixed belief for situations of superficial or inauthentic belief. He writes:

If we assume that culture consists of a set of propositional beliefs, it then becomes natural in situations of cultural change such as conversion to ask which propositions are new and which are old. When anthropologists ask this of the cultures of recent converts, they invariably find that, in spite of people's claims to be Christian, many of their propositional beliefs are demonstrably old. Moreover, people can be shown to be interpreting at least some propositions that look new in old ways. Given their disciplinary drive to stress continuity and the patent falseness within this propositional framework of Christian claims to complete transformation, anthropologists tend to regard these as situations in which people are not best studied as Christian [...]. (15)

In *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*

(Robbins 2004a), Robbins lays out an alternative framework for understanding conversion, which provides a different way of interpreting situations of mixed belief, allowing for the possibility of radical cultural discontinuity.

Robbins presents a theory of cultural change drawn from an engagement with the work of Marshall Sahlins and Louis Dumont. Adopting a structuralist model of human behaviour, wherein 'people are held to act in the world in terms of the categories that are given their meaning by their systematic relationship to other categories' (ibid.: 11), he identifies three mechanisms by which these sets of categories (in other words, culture) can change. The first – 'assimilation' – is where old cultural categories are stretched to incorporate new circumstances. A classic example of this is the encounter between the Hawaiians and Captain Cook, as interpreted by Sahlins, in which the Hawaiians understood Cook to be their god Lono (Sahlins 1985, 1995; see also Obeyesekere 1992). The second mechanism – 'transformative reproduction' – is where traditional categories are used to interpret new circumstances, but transformed in their relationship to each other in the process. The third mechanism, and the one in which Robbins is most interested, is 'adoption'. This is where 'people take on an entirely new culture on its own terms, forgoing any conscious effort to work its elements into the categories of their traditional understandings' (ibid.: 10). This,

he argues, often stems from experiences of ‘humiliation’, which cause people to feel ashamed of their traditional culture.

Robbins uses these models of cultural change to frame an ethnography of the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. The Urapmin are a small and relatively isolated group who were rapidly Christianised after they were caught up in a charismatic Christian revival which swept their country in 1977. Robbins illustrates his model of adoption, and its relation to cultural humiliation, with reference to Urapmin moral life. While the Urapmin’s traditional moral system provided a degree of flexibility with regard to the vicissitudes of inner feeling, it also placed a strong emphasis on the need for moral judgment in social interaction, particularly with relation to the wilful desires of local ‘big men’. When confronted with a system of colonial law which presented them as backwards and morally immature, the Urapmin’s image of themselves as morally sensitive people was profoundly disturbed (ibid.: 20-1). This, along with other disruptions to their traditional order, make the Urapmin receptive to the new system of morality that Christians presented: one which stressed the sinfulness not simply of disordered social interaction but of certain inner states.

Enthusiastically taking up the challenge of moral self-reformation, the Urapmin have come to live in a constant state of self-examination, confession, and repentance, examining their minutest actions for undertones of anger or wilfulness (ibid.: 235-6). Robbins does not ignore the continued presence of traditional cultural orientations, but rather shows how some aspects of Christianity have been adopted on their own terms, and exist alongside, rather than as a part of, traditional cultural categories.

I would suggest that Robbins’ understanding of conversion is more persuasive than Horton’s. Robbins has a broader and more subtle understanding of religious experience, which allows him to see more clearly how cultural change is experienced by converts. Whereas Horton understands religion as a system of ‘explanation/prediction/control’ akin to a

primitive form of science, Robbins sees it as primarily a form of moral commitment – a ‘believing in’ rather than a ‘believing that’. By examining the ways in which people’s commitments (rather than their simply their statements) change, he is able to show the profundity of the experiential divide which may separate the ‘before’ from the ‘after’ of conversion. His model of ‘adoption’ provides a way of interpreting situations where Christian converts continue to say things which sound ‘pre-Christian’, but also insist that they have been deeply changed by conversion. The model prompts us to look for pattern and consistency within newly adopted sets of beliefs, rather than for contradictions between older beliefs and new ones. In Part III (chapters 7-10) I will examine the lives of four converts, all of whom can be said, to varying extents, to have ‘adopted’ a new ethical framework.

While Robbins’ approach contrasts with Horton’s in significant respects, there is also an important similarity between their theories: both suggest that in order for Christian conversion to take place on a large scale, it is necessary for the pre-Christian culture to have been seriously unsettled in some way.¹² Horton emphasises the move from local to extra-local forms of life, while Robbins emphasises feelings of cultural humiliation, and in particular those associated with colonialism. In Bhaktapur, there are elements of both these phenomena. As I show in Part I (chapters 2-4), Bhaktapur’s traditional order has been seriously unsettled by a number of developments, including integration into national and international economies and contact with ideologies, such as communism, which are highly critical of aspects of city’s traditional life. I will suggest that this cultural unsettlement is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of the widespread Christian conversion that has occurred in the city.

¹² On the literature linking Pentecostal and charismatic conversion to social deprivation and disorganisation, see Robbins (2004b: 123-7).

1.3 Individualism and Inwardness

Those anthropologists who do associate Christianity with cultural discontinuity often write broadly from within the tradition of Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (1930), in that they associate Christianity, and Protestantism in particular, with modernity and its core values such as individualism. The relationship between Christianity and individualism has been a theme of a number of influential texts in the anthropology of Christianity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Hefner 1993; van der Veer 1996a; Meyer 1999; Robbins 2004a; on Nepal see Ripert 2014). Rather than engage with these ethnographies directly, in this section I examine some of the theoretical assumptions that underlie them. Within anthropology, probably the most influential theorist of individualism has been Louis Dumont.¹³ While I recognise the power of Dumont's insights, I will suggest Charles Taylor's concept of inwardness has the capacity to inject greater phenomenological precision into the anthropological discussions Dumont initiated.

Dumont's intellectual project was structured by his long-term engagement with both India and the societies of the West, which provided the foundation for this comparative sociology. According to Dumont, the ideology of Indian society is hierarchical and holistic, whereas that of Western society is egalitarian and individualist. Within a holistic society what is valued above all is order: 'the requirements of man as such are ignored or subordinated [to] the requirements of society' (Dumont 1977: 4). The principle of holism, according to Dumont, logically entails that of hierarchy, which is 'the *principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole*, it being understood that in the majority of societies it is religion which provides the view of the whole' (Dumont 1980: 66; original emphasis). For Dumont, the Indian caste system provides the most crystalized example of the joint

¹³ For a survey of the literature on individualism, see Lukes (1973).

operation of holism and hierarchy, with caste being hierarchically ordered according to its relative purity, which defines its relationship to the whole. In contrast to this, Western societies ‘value, in the first place, the individual human being: [...] every man is, in principle, an embodiment of humanity at large, and as such he is equal to every other man, and free’ (Dumont 1977: 4). Just as there is a logical relation between holism and hierarchy, so there is a logical relation between individualism and equality.

While Dumont’s analysis of Indian society (Dumont 1980) was largely synchronic, portraying the principles the caste system such that they seem almost timeless,¹⁴ his analyses of Western individualism were generally historical in nature. Dumont placed a strong emphasis on the role of Christianity in the development of this individualism. Drawing on categories first put forward in an essay on Indian renouncers, he argues that, in its early period, Christianity was associated with the ‘outworldly individual’ – that is, an individual who becomes individual only by leaving society, which is holistic, behind. He writes,

It follows from Christ’s and then Paul’s teaching that the Christian is an ‘individual in relation to God’. [...] The individual soul receives its eternal value from its filial relationship with God, in which relationship is also grounded human fellowship: Christians meet in Christ, whose members they are. This tremendous affirmation takes place on a level that transcends the world of man and social institutions, although these are also from God. The infinite worth of the individual is at the same time the disparagement, the negation in terms of value, of the world as it is: a dualism is posited, a tension established that is constitutive of Christianity and will endure throughout history. (Dumont 1982: 5-6)

Nevertheless, the outworldliness of the Christian is never as absolute as that of the Indian renouncer, as ‘the brotherhood of love in and through Christ, and the consequent equality of all,’ entails ‘the union of outworldly individuals in a community that treads the earth but has its heart in heaven’ (ibid.: 6). Thus the history of Christianity has seen a gradual

¹⁴ It should be noted that Dumont does propose the idea of ‘substantialisation’ in order to account for changes in the caste system over the 20th century (1980: ch.11).

accommodation of Christ's outworldly message to life in the world, which reached its culmination in the Protestant Reformation, and in the theology of Calvin in particular. According to Dumont, Calvin's strong understanding of predestination allowed him to conceive of 'the Christian city as the object on which bears the will of the [elect] individual' (ibid.: 20); the consequence of this is that 'the antagonistic worldly element that individualism had hitherto to accommodate disappears entirely in Calvin's theocracy' (ibid.: 19). The contribution of Calvin to Europe was to allow 'the individualist value [to rule] without restriction or limitation' (ibid.: 19).

Dumont's work, and in particular his theory of caste, has been controversial (see Section 2.3), but arguably the broad lines of the contrasts he draws between holism and individualism have been borne out by ethnographers. Many anthropologists (even those who disagree strongly on other matters) have concurred with Dumont's observation that notions of personhood differ profoundly across cultures, and that non-Western cultures tend to have less individualistic understandings of personhood than the West. McKim Marriott, for instance, suggests that the Indian person should be understood as a "dividual," in contrast to the Western "individual":

[In Western thought] persons and many other entities are postulated as being normally self-reflexive ('individuals' having identity with and being sufficient to themselves), and as symmetrical (equal) and transitive (consistent) in their relations to each other. [...] The Hindu postulations of mixing, unmarking and unmatching instead assert that persons are in various degrees nonreflexive (not necessarily identical with or otherwise related only to themselves), nonsymmetrical (not necessarily equal), and nontransitive (no necessarily consistent) in their relations. [...] what one might better call 'dividuals'. (Marriott 1989:17)

To take two further examples: Marilyn Strathern (1988) has written on relationalist concepts of personhood in Melanesia; Godfrey Lienhard has written that the Dinka institution of clan divinities provides a sense of selfhood which 'is both within those who inherit it, and outside and above them' (1985: 155).

What is most lacking in Dumont's work is attention to the *experience* of individualism and holism. To take the individualist side of the equation: any anthropologist who has worked among Christians will know that, whatever the historical contribution of Christianity has been to the growth of individualism, most Christians, and especially those in non-Western societies, would vigorously reject the idea that they were individualists. The Nepali term normally translated as 'individualism' – *vyaktivad* – is one that Nepali Christians would never associate with themselves. So how can we characterise the Christian experience of individuality? The work of Charles Taylor provides powerful tools for this. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1992) Taylor shows that modern notions of individuality are best understood not simply as amoral self-seeking or a competitive drive for material accumulation, but rather as being the result of 'our long efforts to define and reach the good'. Modern notions of individuality, Taylor argues, resulted from ethical and theological developments which relocated moral authority from the social order to the individual conscience, thus making the individual the basic unit of modern ethics. Taylor agrees with Dumont that Christianity was the major catalyst of a heightened sense of individual personhood in the West, but he also nuances this story by showing that Christian individuality has an inherently ethical quality, which is better described in terms of 'inwardness' than 'individualism'.

By inwardness, Taylor means an ethical valorisation of and attentiveness to inner experience, which is manifested in self-reflection and a sense of personal narrative.¹⁵ He finds the origins of the sense of inwardness not only in the teachings of Jesus but also, and vitally, in the writings of Augustine of Hippo. Augustine pioneered the notion that the road to knowledge of God lies inward, because

¹⁵ Narrative is an important theme in Part III of the thesis. I explore scholarly literature on narrative in Section 5.3 and the thesis Conclusion.

God is not just the transcendent object or just the principle of order of nearer objects, which we strain to see. God is also and for us primarily the basic support and underlying principle of our knowing activity. God is not just what we long to see, but what powers the eye which sees. So the light of God is not just 'out there', illuminating the order of being [...] it is also an 'inner light'. (ibid.: 129)

The consequence of this insight is a turning inward, which leads to a 'radical reflexivity', meaning a conscious reflection on one's own experience, the attempt to 'become aware of our awareness, [...] to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is for us' (ibid.: 130). The most famous product of Augustine's self-reflection was his *Confessions*, which effectively invented the genre of spiritual autobiography, and is the distant progenitor of the conversion narratives I explore in Part III.

Sources of the Self ranges over the history of Western thought from the ancient Greeks to the modern period, showing the subtle shifts by which Western culture turned inwards in a quest for the source of the good. For Plato, Taylor argues, the world itself was rationally structured and ordered towards the good, and thus the good life consisted in self-mastery such that one was turned outwards towards this cosmic order (ibid.: 143). With Augustine, the inner life became more highly valued, but it was not until the modern period that the full implications of Christian inwardness were realised:

Augustine does give a real sense to the language of inwardness. But this is not because he sees the moral sources as situated within us any more than Plato did. Augustine retains the Platonic notion of an order of things in the cosmos which is good. True, this doesn't suffice for us, because we have to be healed of sin to love this order as we should. And this healing comes to us within. But it does not come from a power which is ours. On the contrary, we turn to the path within only to accede to the beyond, to God. [...] The internalization wrought by the modern age, of which [René] Descartes' formulation was one of the most important and influential, is very different from Augustine's. It does, in a very real sense, place the moral sources within us. Relative to Plato, and relative to Augustine, it brings about in each case a transposition by which we no longer see ourselves as related to moral sources outside of us, or at least not in the same way. An important power has been internalized. (ibid.: 143)

What Taylor is describing here is a shift in moral experience whereby ethical guidance comes to be found more in the individual conscience and less in the structures of the world. Taylor associates this shift with a growth in the ethic of ‘personal commitment’, which holds that ‘no way in life is truly good, no matter how much it may be in line with nature, unless it is endorsed with the whole will’ (ibid.: 185).

It will be my contention in Part III that the concept of inwardness provides a powerful way of describing the moral experience of Bhaktapurian Christians. While most of these Christians are in no way familiar with the philosophical traditions associated with Augustine and Descartes, all of them do have knowledge of the New Testament, which I would suggest contains in embryo the ethic of inwardness Taylor describes.¹⁶ One of the most notable features of Jesus’s teaching is its insistence on rightness of interior disposition, or conscience, as a precondition for right relationship with God. Jesus condemns the Pharisees as follows:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Matthew 23: 25-8)

What Jesus is saying is that even if the Pharisees act in ways that are in accordance with the Jewish Law, if they do this for the wrong reasons, then they are not in right relationship with God. Throughout his ministry, Jesus insisted that his followers should aspire to interior transformation as a precursor to changes in behaviour, as in the Sermon on the Mount where he interprets the commandment against adultery in this way: ‘I tell you that anyone who

¹⁶ For parallels in Buddhist thought, see Gombrich (1988, 2009).

looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (Matthew 5: 28).

In my judgement, inwardness in the sense of an ethical prioritisation of inner experience is a relatively new phenomenon in Bhaktapur's religious and cultural history (see Section 2.4).¹⁷ Elements of inwardness are reflected in new Hindu religious movements (see Section 2.4) and in political commitment to communism (see Section 4.3). Nonetheless, inwardness as it manifests itself in Bhaktapurian Christianity is, in significant ways, distinct from inwardness as it has manifested in other contemporary movements. This can be seen, for instance, in the depth of the break from family and community life that conversion often entails (see in particular chapters 7 and 9), and in the distinctive understandings of relationship with God conversion is associated with (see in particular chapters 8 and 10). While some Christians hold to notions of personhood that are relatively traditional in the Bhaktapurian context (see Chapter 8), the impact of values of inwardness on many Bhaktapurian Christians could, I will suggest, be described in terms of Robbins' concept of 'adoption'.

1.4 Suffering, Ethics, and Care

Suffering is central to Christian symbolism, soteriology, and ethics. The symbolism of Christianity – from the crosses that hang in churches to films such as *The Passion of the Christ* – is pervaded by suffering and physical pain, most commonly representing pain suffered by God himself. Understandings of religion such as Horton's, which emphasise its worldly uses, struggle to comprehend the significance of something such as the cross – that

¹⁷ I am not claiming that a sense of individuality is a new phenomenon in Bhaktapur, but rather that an ethics that prioritises inner experience is.

is, the complete failure, in worldly terms, which the cross represents. The cross points towards an important paradox in Christian approaches to suffering. On the one hand, the crucifixion was a voluntary embrace of suffering, and so suggests a positive value in affliction. This re-valuation of suffering was strongly evident among the early Christians, who developed a cult of martyrdom and scandalised the Greco-Roman world by treating pain and weakness as holy. Judith Perkins writes,

The discourse of the martyr [...], representing pain as empowering and death as a victory, helped to construct a new understanding of human existence [...] Things that had universally been thought bad and contemptible, such as pain and death, were suddenly seen as valuable, just as Blandina [an early Christian martyr] thought “cheap, unsightly and easy to despise” was recognised as noble in her courageous endurance. (1995: 123)

On the other hand, the crucifixion is, for Christians, a victory over suffering which promises resurrection and freedom from mental and physical pain. While Christians have seen suffering as holy, they have also often worked to relieve the suffering of others, believing that to show mercy towards the afflicted is to imitate the mercy of God in sending his son to die for humankind. This tendency was also evident among the early Christians, who were active in charitable works: at times of epidemic in the Roman Empire, Christians would stay in the cities and minister to the sick when others had fled (Stark 1996: ch. 4). Just as the voluntary embrace of suffering scandalised the surrounding world, so did the principle that ‘love and charity must extend beyond the boundaries of the family and even those of faith, to all in need’ (Stark 2011: 112).

A clue to elucidating this paradox can be found in the concept of inwardness introduced above. As we saw, Taylor associates inwardness with the notion that God speaks directly to the individual’s experience, rather than through the structures of the world. If one approaches suffering from the standpoint of the ethical primacy of experience, then the seeming contradiction between belief in suffering’s holiness and the desire to alleviate it

becomes comprehensible. When in the midst of personal suffering, almost all people have a desire for the suffering to end. So, if ethics consists primarily in responding to the experience of the individual, the relief of suffering will be a central concern. However, in order to relieve the suffering of others, or to be in a group that holds this as a priority, it may be necessary for an individual voluntarily to undergo suffering him or herself. This is not only because in order to relieve suffering one must at times enter hazardous situations, but also because a group which values the relief of individual suffering over social order is likely to come into conflict with society, and so to be persecuted. From this vantage-point, we can see that the voluntary embrace of suffering is ethically secondary to the imperative to relieve suffering: it is a form of endurance which is necessary in order for the work of mercy to be carried out. In the same way, in Christian theology, the crucifixion is secondary to the resurrection: it is a voluntary embrace of suffering necessary for the work of salvation.

Just as suffering is central to Christianity, it is also central to South Asian religions. I cannot do justice here to the diverse understandings of suffering that exist in these religions,¹⁸ but I will draw some broad lines of comparison which will be relevant to the discussions that follow. In the Prologue I referred to Weber's identification of *karma* as the central idea in Hindu and Buddhist theodicy, and to the admixture of ideas about *karma* and those about spirits in Bhaktapurian Hindu interpretations of suffering (see Fuller 2004: 245-50 on the possible tensions between these two types of theodicy). There is an extensive literature that highlights the significance of ideas about *karma* and fate in South Asian approaches to suffering (Sharma 1973; Babb 1983; Fuller 2004: ch. 10; Bowker 1970: ch. 5 and 6; Des Chene 1998; March 2002: 68-70; Bennett 1983: 35-40). There is also a large literature on the the spirit world and its relationship with suffering in South Asia (Opler 1958; Kapur 1979; Trawick 1984; Skultans 1987; Fuller 2004: ch. 2 and 10). I discuss the interaction between

¹⁸ On this diversity see Sharma (1973).

Bhaktapurian Hindu and Christian understandings of the spirit world, in the context of suffering, in sections 8.2 and 8.4.

Ideas about *karma* and fate are closely connected with the way that suffering is narrativised. Kathryn March, for instance, has shown how Buddhist notions of suffering as a destiny intrinsic to human life, being ‘reexperienced many times in the course of birth, death, and rebirth’ (2002: 61), shape the ways that Nepali Tamang women tell their life stories. ‘In their broadest strokes,’ March writes, ‘Tamang life stories are told as hanging in the balance between *dukka* [suffering] and *sukha* [happiness or comfort]’ (ibid.: 36); ‘each account declares a net balance between *dukka* and *sukha* in a reading of the life ledger that is supposed to have been written for each’ (ibid.: 78). As I illustrate in chapters 7-10, the life narratives told by Bhaktapurian Christians tend to have a structure that moves from *dukha* to *sukha*, in keeping with the Biblical narrative of crucifixion and resurrection, rather than weighing a balance between *dukha* on the one hand and *sukha* on the other, as experienced over multiple rebirths. I discuss this contrast further in Section 5.3, and in the thesis Conclusion.

Throughout this thesis I will emphasise the significance of ethics to Christian conversion, and in particular ethics as they relate to suffering.¹⁹ Like the anthropology of Christianity, the anthropology of ethics is relatively young as a self-conscious scholarly field. There have recently been a number of notable attempts to define the field (Lambek 2010; Faubion 2011; Laidlaw 2002, 2014a; Robbins 2012, 2013), and prominent among these is James Laidlaw’s recent book *The Subject of Virtue* (2014a). Laidlaw argues, quoting from Zygmunt Bauman, that the social sciences, including anthropology, have been in the main a ‘science of unfreedom’ (ibid.: 3). That is to say: social scientists have specialised in

¹⁹ Works in the anthropology of Christianity that foreground ethics include Robbins (2004a), Klaitis (2010), Elisha (2011), and Zigon (2011).

describing the constraints – social, cultural, economic, and institutional – on individual action, rather than on describing the ways in which individuals, acting in the context of these constraints, may exercise personal freedom. The language of ‘agency,’ which has often been used by scholars mindful of this problem, ‘systematically conflates any question of freedom – of whether and in what sense people’s actions are unconstrained and really their actions – with that of their structural or transformative efficacy, and therefore recognises as “agency” only actions conducive to certain outcomes: those that are structurally significant’ (ibid.: 5). Unless anthropologists develop adequate ways of describing freedom, Laidlaw argues, the anthropology of ethics will fail to develop, because the nature of ethical action is that it is the product of reflection and choice (‘Wherever and insofar as people’s conduct is shaped by attempts to make of themselves a certain kind of person, because it is as such a person that, on reflection, they think they ought to live, to that extent their conduct is ethical and free’ [Laidlaw 2002: 327]). Unless anthropologists develop such a language, Laidlaw suggests, they will slip into treating ethics as a mere epiphenomenon of power or some other force in human life.

The anthropology of Christianity provides some excellent case studies of the anthropological tendency to neglect ethics that Laidlaw identifies. One case study can be found in the work of John and Jean Comaroff, which is effectively critiqued by Robbins in the 2007 article discussed above (2007: 7-9). Another example can be found in the influential work of Talal Asad. Asad’s essay ‘Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual’ (1993), which forms part of his justly celebrated book *Genealogies of Religion*, is an extended attempt to reduce to nothing the ethical component of an important Christian practice. Examining the Christian practice of penance, Asad attempts to demonstrate that it has functioned primarily as a means of social discipline within church institutions and wider society. He writes:

In the Christian institution of penance, bodily pain and the pursuit of truth have been connected since the earliest centuries, although not always in the same way. [...] I [...] attempt to trace these connections in three stages: first, the way the body of the Church excluded and then readmitted those who had transgressed, imposing on them a range of physical discomforts and deprivations and requiring from them a confession of the truth about themselves for fear of pain in the life after death; second, and parallel with this exercise of power within the secular community, the practices of ascetic discipline distinctive to the religious community (the monastery), in which processes of observing and testing the body's inclinations were systematically developed by the subjection of the self to the divine authority vested in the community's rule and in the abbot; third, a confluence and adjustment of these two traditions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in which verbal discourse gradually becomes the preeminent modality of power and the medium through which the collaboration between dominators and dominated could be effected. (ibid.: 97-8)

In this summary of Asad's argument, it can be seen that such ends as 'the pursuit of truth' and 'the subjection of the self to the divine authority' are treated as nothing more than aspects of the operation of power, or mediums 'through which the collaboration between dominators and the dominated could be effected'. Although the essay contains many acute insights into the particularities of Christian history, what was most striking to me is Asad's failure to consider the ways in which Christians themselves have understood penance: that is, as a means through which repentance for sin can be manifested and right relationship with God restored. Those Christians who embrace suffering as penance therefore appear in Asad's essay as passive victims of ideological power, rather than as ethical agents with a capacity for reflection and choice. Ethics as a distinctive area of human life effectively disappears within the confines of Asad's theoretical framework.²⁰

²⁰ Asad's approach is strongly shaped by a certain reading of Michel Foucault, drawn particularly from the latter's *Discipline and Punish* (1991), in which the operation of power appears as kind of enveloping force determining every aspect of human life, and where the operation of power is seen to be internalised to such an extent that the individual becomes their own gaoler. Nonetheless, as Laidlaw (2014b) has observed, Foucault's later work in fact provides a basis for understanding ethics that gives space for free ethical reflection; this aspect of Foucault's work is not reflected in Asad's essay.

An anthropologist who does recognise the significance of ethics is Arthur Kleinman; he proposes a theoretical framework which connects ethics, experience, and suffering (Kleinman 1997, 1999, 2004, 2006). An anthropology of morality, Kleinman argues, must also be an anthropology of experience:

For the ethnographer, ordinary experience is the social grounds of human conditions. Experience is the flow of everyday interactions in a local world. Experience is intersubjective. [...] It is perhaps best thought of as a cultural and social *medium* in which collective processes (such as social values and relationships) and subjective states (such as emotions and memory) interfuse. Experience occurs in local worlds: a village, a neighbourhood, networks, families. [...] What characterises experience is an orientation of overwhelming practicality. The participants in a local world are absorbed in certain things that matter, matter greatly. [...] That some things really matter and that those things that matter most orient agonistic (and antagonistic) interactions is what gives each local world its moral conditions. That is to say, at the level of social experience, the moral is defined by the local processes concerning lived values that are at stake. (Kleinman 2004: 269-70)

Kleinman argues that suffering should be a central concern of the anthropology of morality, because it ‘concentrates attention on what is at stake, and thereby episodes of suffering become occasions of drama when moral processes become particularly visible’ (ibid.: 270).

Kleinman is unusual among anthropologists in that some of his work has an explicitly normative character; the values that he has advocated have principally to do with the ethics of suffering. Kleinman’s understanding of the ethics of suffering, as found in his 2006 book *What Really Matters*, is influenced by the moral philosopher and Jewish theologian Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas, as Kleinman interprets him, insists that ‘face-to-face acknowledgement of [...] suffering is the basic ethical action’ (Kleinman 2006: 137), and argues that ‘the ethical precedes the epistemological, that acknowledgment and affirmation of the other precedes inquiry and enables a readiness for unexpected transformations’ (ibid.: 234). Kleinman, who is a psychiatrist as well as an anthropologist, describes how he put these ethics into practice in his clinical consultations with a Christian minister who, to the surprise

of Kleinman, insisted that his chronic neck pain was a good thing. After some episodes of personal transgression the minister began to experience pain in his neck and head:

At first he interpreted the pain literally as God's punishment. Later he took it to be God's grace. Periodically, over the decades, especially at times when he feels a return of fantasies [...] the pain worsens into a stronger paroxysm. The intense pain both breaks the intrusiveness of sexual fantasies and produces relief and a sense of control. It follows a trajectory of transformation from the unendurable to the endurable and then to the spiritually transporting. For Jamison, his pain increasingly fused with religious sensibility, enabling him to identify with Jesus on the cross. It became a feeling of transcendence, as if he was moving through suffering to the sublime. [...] Pain, for Reverend Jamison, is salvational, converting a harmful and unwanted desire into a state of grace and redemption. (ibid.: 130)

Bearing in mind the cost to the minister's family and congregation of his refusal to take the strongest forms of medication to reduce his pain, Kleinman was at first reluctant to take this religious reading of suffering at face value. In the end, however, he opted to follow Levinas's model, and 'dealt with [Jamison's] sexual fantasies not just as a psychological problem but as a moral one' (ibid.: 137). This story of Kleinman and his patient illustrates a number of things: the way that Christian belief can transform the experience of suffering; the way that personal crisis tends to bring essential moral values to the fore (this is a theme throughout *What Really Matters*); the powerful effect on personal relationships that an ethics of acknowledgement and affirmation of suffering can have.

The aspect of Kleinman's work which I particularly wish to highlight is that dealing with the concept of care. Drawing on his own experience of caring for his dying wife, a significant proportion of Kleinman's recent work has focused on care and caregiving (2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Kleinman and Van Der Geest 2009). He defines care as follows:

The term 'care' has various shades of meaning. Its two basic constituents are emotional and technical/practical. The latter refers to carrying out activities for others who may not be able to do them alone. Parents take care of their children by feeding them, providing shelter, educating and training them, and so forth. Healthy people take care of sick ones and young people of older

ones. [...] ‘Care’ also has an emotional meaning; it expresses concern, dedication, and attachment. To do something with care or carefully implies that one acts with special devotion. Depending on its context, one aspect may dominate, indeed overrule, the other. In ‘health care’ the term has assumed an almost entirely technical meaning. In personal relationships the emotional meaning prevails (“I care for you” / “I don’t care”). (Kleinman and Van Der Geest 2009: 159)

Kleinman stresses what he refers to here as the emotional side of care, and highlights the philosopher Heidegger’s understanding of care as ‘[being] with others, [being] oriented towards the presence of other people’ (ibid.: 159-60). This chimes with Levinas’s emphasis on the face-to-face acknowledgement of other people’s suffering. It is an understanding of care that emphasises presence and acknowledgement that I shall work with in this thesis.

An ethnography that movingly describes an ethic of care of the type that Kleinman advocates is Fredrick Klait’s *Death in a Church of Life: Moral Passion during Botswana’s Time of Aids* (2010). Klait describes how members of a small Apostolic church in Botswana have ‘attempted to sustain love in the context of the widespread illness and death brought about by the catastrophic AIDS pandemic’ (ibid.: 2). The social disaster of AIDS has led to an upsurge in fears of witchcraft, with traditional healers and Christian prophets alike attributing illness to occult attacks from resentful sorcerers. Klait shows how the congregation he studied has both drawn on and transformed local understandings of care, love, scorn, and jealousy in order to construct a way of life in which the dysfunctional relationships from which witchcraft accusations arise can be avoided, and the sentiments necessary for the effective care of the dying can be cultivated. The moral sentiment which Klait translates from Setswana as ‘love’ is close to ‘care’ as I will deploy the term:

In Setswana usage, love (*lerato*) is action and sentiment directed toward enhancing the well-being of other people. A loving person has “compassion” and “patience” [...], bearing with the faults of others so that they too will “feel love” [...] for one another. Many Batswana speak of God [...] and of Jesus as sources of love [...]. Describing a very similar concept of love (*orusuvero*) among the Herero ethnic minority in Botswana, Deborah Durham points out that

love and related sentiments “operate across bodily space; they work in the heart of one person and in the bodies of others” [...]. For example, when people are sick they depend on the love of caregivers, who hear their complaints with patience, devote scarce resources to them, and say prayers for their recovery. Prayers and hymns communicate love from the bodies of the well to the bodies of the ill, who say that the loving sentiments in other people’s “hearts” [...] “cool them down” [...] while they are lying wrapped “in blankets that dry them out” [...] – a conventional Setswana phrase describing the position and posture of the sick. Love is something people do as well as feel, since it involves communicating what is in one’s own heart and body to those of others. (ibid.: 3-4)

What Klaitis is describing here is how Apostolic churches draw on traditional Batswana understandings of morality as something that is relational and somatic, while also promoting an ethics that is distinctively Christian, in that love is seen to override other moral sentiments. Klaitis goes on to describe how the theological concept of *tumelo*, which translates roughly as ‘faith’, is used to distance Apostolic Christians from some aspects of traditional Batswana culture, such the idea that it is legitimate to feel hatred and vengefulness towards witches (ibid.: 21-31; 57).

My approach in this thesis will echo that of Klaitis in that I will show how Bhaktapurian Christians both draw on and transform local understandings of care. As I show in Section 3.2, there is a widespread perception in Bhaktapur of a ‘failure of care’ associated with increasing individualism linked to economic and educational changes. Christianity provides a perceived solution for people who feel themselves to have been failed in this way. A central finding of my thesis, which is illustrated in chapters 7-10, and discussed in Section 7.2, is that a breakdown in social relationships between a convert and those around them often precedes conversion, rather than simply following from it, as is often assumed.²¹ This breakdown is usually related to a perceived ‘failure of care’. While Bhaktapurian Hindus see the growth of Christianity as a symptom of increasing individualism, Christians themselves

²¹ In this respect my findings are similar to those of Smilde, who examines in detail the relationship between evangelical conversion and social networks, or the lack thereof (2007: ch.6).

see their religion as promoting an understanding of care that is better than its Hindu equivalent. This superiority is seen to lie particularly in the idea that care is due as much to those outside one's social group as to those who are within it (see chapters 7 and 9), and in the principle that care for the sick should not be performed for payment but for the sake of love (see chapters 7, 8 and 10, and also appendices 4 and 5). As with inwardness, the ethical change associated with Christian understandings of care is such that it can be described in terms of 'adoption'.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the theoretical background to the concepts of cultural unsettlement, inwardness, and care, and have outlined the ways in which they will feature in my analysis. Cultural unsettlement I employ primarily in Part I, where I discuss the unsettlement of Bhaktapur's traditional order. What I describe in Part I provides vital background to the material discussed in parts II and III. The values of inwardness and care, in the Christian-focused definitions I have developed here, I employ primarily in Part III, where I examine individual conversion stories. I also examine the nearest local equivalents of these values in Part I, in order to show how the development of Christianity is related to wider trends in Bhaktapurian society. My argument in Part III is that the distinctiveness of Bhaktapurian Christian understandings of inwardness and care is such that the ethical changes brought about by conversion can in the main be described in terms of Joel Robbins' model of adoption.

Chapter 2. The traditional order: sociality and patronage

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I put forward an interpretation of Bhaktapur's traditional order. Section 2.2, which outlines Bhaktapur's history, clarifies what I mean by the term 'traditional order'. By using this term I intend to indicate that there exists in Bhaktapur a set of social and religious practices that are of long standing and which, in comparison with the social instability of the last fifty years, existed in relatively stable form during the two centuries after the unification of Nepal in 1768. Section 2.2 describes the contexts in which these practices developed, the ways in which they have been reproduced and the pressures that they have recently come under. Some of these pressures are explored in more detail in chapters 3 and 4. In Section 2.3 I examine Bhaktapur's caste system, which is the city's most important social institution, and argue that it is structured by the principles of sociality and patronage. In Section 2.4 I examine Bhaktapur's Hindu religious life, and suggest that relationships between humans and the Hindu deities have traditionally, like relationships between human beings in the caste system, been structured by the principles of sociality and patronage. In this section I also describe the development of modernist forms of Hinduism in Bhaktapur, and their relationship with the traditional order.

2.2 Tradition and change in Bhaktapur

Bhaktapur is generally regarded as the most traditional, and best preserved, of the three Newar cities of the Kathmandu Valley.²² Set apart from the noise and modernity of the

²² These cities are Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, and Patan. The Newars are the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley (see Nepali 1965; Gellner 1986, 2001; Toffin 2007).

capital, the city appears recognisably ‘other’ to visitors who pass through. With a temple seemingly on every street and architecture of terracotta-coloured brick, there is a physical coherence that is lacking elsewhere in the valley. In culture and language too, there is a striking homogeneity: nearly 80% of the population are Newar, and the great majority of these are Hindu,²³ many older residents speak only Newari, as opposed to being bilingual in Newari and Nepali, as most Newars in Kathmandu and Patan are.²⁴ Bhaktapur is renowned for its dense ritual and festival life, the vitality of which is evidenced by the flowers, food, and fresh blood from sacrifices that can be seen on shrines around the city. The Newar caste system continues to be the main determinant of social organisation, more so than in Kathmandu and Patan, where class stratifications have become increasingly important (Liechty 2003, 2010). Higher castes tend to live in the city centre, while lower castes are grouped on the periphery; people often pursue their traditional caste employment; caste rules in eating and marriage are still, on the whole, observed.²⁵

Bhaktapur’s apparent archaism has proved alluring to anthropologists. Robert Levy, the most comprehensive ethnographer of the city, describes Bhaktapur as sitting on a ‘third continent’ of human development, somewhere between ‘primitive’ small-scale communities and the modern ‘scientific’ world (1990: 23-5). This ‘third continent’, Levy argues, is characterised by the ‘archaic city’, which ‘[carries] forward [...] a long-established local culture or civilisation’, and where social organisation is oriented towards ‘moral, rather than technical order’ (ibid.: 18-19). Hinduism, Levy argues, is a religion of ‘archaic urban order’:

Ahistorical [...]; rooted in local space [...]; distributive of its godhead into a pantheon of meaningful and immanent gods [...]; insisting on the inclusion of social order and social behaviour within the sacred realm; insisting on the presence of the sacred in the here and now

²³ On Bhaktapur’s demography, see Appendix 1.

²⁴ Nepali is Nepal’s national language, and is used in schools, business, government, television, and radio programming.

²⁵ On Bhaktapur’s caste system, see Appendix 1.

[...] Hinduism is in many of its features, which contrast with the ‘world historical religions,’ a system for and of what we have called ‘archaic urban order.’ (ibid.: 27-8)

Bhaktapur, according to Levy, is the best preserved example of an archaic Hindu city, a social form that was once common in South Asia but is now almost extinct. Among subsequent ethnographers of Bhaktapur, Niels Gutschow (Gutschow and Kolver 1975; Gutschow and Michaels 2005, 2008, 2012) and Stephen Parish (1994, 1996) have taken approaches that are broadly aligned with that of Levy, while Gregory Grieve (2006) has been severely critical of Levy’s approach. It is not my intention here to enter directly into these debates, but the implication of what follows is that Levy’s emphasis on Bhaktapur’s traditionalism has been rendered at least partially obsolete by modern social developments.²⁶

Bhaktapur is said to have been founded by Jayasthiti Malla, who became ruler of what is now the Kathmandu Valley in 1382, and made Bhaktapur his capital. Jayasthiti, it is popularly believed, was responsible for codifying caste system of the Kathmandu Valley along classic South Asian lines. Daniel Wright, a late-nineteenth century visitor to Nepal, was told that during Jayasthiti’s reign,

to the low castes dwellings, dress and ornaments were assigned, according to certain rules. [...] [They] were not allowed to have houses roofed with tiles, and they were obliged to show proper respect to the people of castes higher than their own. [...] The four highest castes [*varnas*] were prohibited from drinking water from the hands of low caste people [...]. (Wright 1877: 182-7)

Mary Slusser argues that the caste system had in fact been in effect in Nepal since at least 300 AD, and that Jayasthiti, at most, gave the force of law to well-established customs (1982: 59). In any case, it is clear that norms of caste comparable to those found in twenty-first century Bhaktapur were established in the city by at least the late fourteenth century.

²⁶ Similar arguments have been made by Mikesell (1993) and Hachhethu (2004, 2007).

When, after 1482, the Kathmandu Valley was divided into a number of competing states, there followed 300 years of interstate rivalry, which saw the development of much of what is now called ‘traditional Newar culture’.²⁷ This is known as the Malla period, after the kings of the era. The competing states were centred on the cities of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, and Patan, and while war between them was intermittent, cultural competition was unceasing. The fertile soils of the Kathmandu Valley, and its location on a trade route between Tibet and India, provided the resources for lavish court ceremonialism, with the construction of temples, the establishment of festivals, and the promotion of rituals which permeated much of social life. David Gellner has interpreted this period in terms of Clifford Geertz’s notion of the ‘theatre state’:

the kings indulged [...] in relentless status competition based on ‘court ceremonialism’ and ‘mass ritual’ [...]. This activity at the court, while it did not impinge politically all that much on the village, was crucial *culturally*. The court was in Geertz’s term an ‘exemplary center’ which thanks to its greater resources and purer descent was closer to the world of the gods than the villagers were. (Gellner 1983: 137)

This touches on an important aspect of Newar society: the cultural dominance of the urban centres. It also helps to explain the density and lavishness of Bhaktapur’s ritual life.

The Kathmandu Valley was conquered in the late eighteenth century by the ruler of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah, and thereafter Bhaktapur ceased to be the capital of a state and instead became a political backwater within the larger kingdom of Gorkha (later to be called Nepal). After the conquest Bhaktapur was treated leniently: its physical infrastructure was spared and inhabitants were allowed to continue their religious life largely unmolested (Oldfield 1880: 133). Rather than integrating themselves into the Valley’s social structure, the Gorkhalis established a separate social and political hierarchy, with the Newars, as the

²⁷ For instance, the Nava Durga dance cycle and Taleju temple were established during this period (Levy 1990: 46).

Valley's original inhabitants came to be called, being considered one of a number of subordinate ethnic groups (Höfer 1979).²⁸ However, the internal caste system of the Newars persisted, as did their language, Newari, which was unintelligible to the conquering group.

A nineteenth-century visitor to Nepal noted the separateness of Newars from the other inhabitants of the Valley:

Between the Newars [...] and the other Hindoo inhabitants of Nepal, there subsist, as well as in character, customs, manners and features, as in religious rites and language, very essential differences, all of them abundantly proving that they are an insulated race of men. (Kirkpatrick 1811: 186)

The Newars of Bhaktapur were particularly insulated. Although Bhaktapur's high-caste Shresthas,²⁹ like those of Kathmandu and Patan, gradually gained a niche for themselves within the state bureaucracy (Gellner 1986: 142-3), the middle and lower castes of Bhaktapur lived a life which was substantially separate from the other inhabitants of the Valley, usually marrying exclusively within the city. For roughly two centuries after the Gorkhali conquest, Bhaktapur preserved, but ceased significantly to elaborate the cultural forms developed under the Mallas.

In 1950-51 Nepal experienced a political revolution that did something to reintegrate Bhaktapur into the wider currents of national life. The Rana prime ministers, who had effectively controlled the Nepalese state since 1846, were ousted by a royal coup backed by popular protests in which the people of Bhaktapur played a part (Hachhethu 2007: 81). Joshi and Rose describe the events following the 1950 revolution as follows:

The revolution [...] unleashed complex and multifaceted forces in this previously isolated, sternly regimented society. A renaissance in the sphere of literature was one of the first evidences of a new awakening. [...] Educational facilities also multiplied rapidly [...] Perhaps the most

²⁸ Höfer shows that different Newar castes were placed at different positions in the new caste hierarchy (1979: 135-4).

²⁹ See Appendix 1 for an explanation of my use of caste terms.

distinctive aspect of the immediate post-revolutionary period [...] was the broad political freedom conceded to virtually all political elements. (1966: vii)

This cultural and political effervescence had an impact on Bhaktapur, though initially a relatively limited one (Hachhethu 2007: 81-2).

In 1960 King Mahendra overthrew the elected government and established a regime of so-called ‘partyless Panchayat democracy’. This regime’s attempts to modernise and culturally homogenise Nepal were to sow the seeds of significant change in Bhaktapur. The centrepiece of the new government’s programme was the rapid expansion of the education system, which brought literacy and knowledge of the Nepali language to the majority for the first time (Ragsdale 1989: 2-9; Shields and Rappleye 2008: 266-7). This laid a basis for politicisation and cultural change among non-elite groups. Within Bhaktapur, the most consequential of Mahendra’s policies was land reform. Whereas in much of Nepal the provisions of this land reform were implemented only partially or after a long delay (Wiley et al. 2009), in Bhaktapur a new political force arose that ensured the legislation was fully enforced in the interests of peasants. This was the Communist Party of Nepal (Bhaktapur), which would later become the Nepal Workers’ and Peasants’ Party (NWPP) (Hachhethu 2007: 81-7). The NWPP has dominated Bhaktapur’s politics since the 1970s; I describe its varied impacts on the city in Chapter 4.

Alongside educational and political developments, Bhaktapur has been significantly impacted by growing international links and the presence of mass media, consumer goods, and office-based working environments. Between 1974 and 1986 there was a major German-funded development project in the city (the Bhaktapur Development Project or BDP), which saw the investment of over 30 million Deutschmark (Grieve 2006: 27). It funded the renovation of temples and historic buildings, street-cleaning, and the installation of indoor toilets and sanitation. In Chapter 4 I describe how the NWPP-controlled municipality has

built on this legacy. I explore some of the effects of social change on Bhaktapurians' ethical lives in Chapter 3.

2.3 Sociality and patronage in a caste society

In this section and the one that follows I argue that the controlling principles of Bhaktapur's traditional order are sociality and patronage. In this section, I illustrate this claim with reference to Bhaktapur's caste system; in the next section, I illustrate it with reference to religious life. By 'sociality' I mean something similar to Louis Dumont's concept of holism, which denotes an ethical system where 'the requirements of man as such are ignored or subordinated [to] the requirements of society' (Dumont 1977: 4). Sociality, then, indicates the ethical priority of the group over the individual. I prefer the term sociality to that of holism because it points towards the way holistic ethics arise from face-to-face social interaction, something that will be evident in the chapters that follow. By 'patronage' I refer to a pattern of relationships where people 'adopt a posture of deference to those more powerful than they and gain access to resources as a result' (Davis 1977: 132).

For anyone familiar with the Newars, the idea that Newar ethics prioritises the group over the individual is unlikely to be controversial. A number of anthropologists have made this point using different theoretical vocabularies. Gellner, for instance, has argued that Newar Hinduism is 'essentially a social religion' (2001: 72) – that is, a religion whose aim is the maintenance of group solidarity, and which is justified primarily in terms of the maintenance of group traditions (ibid.: 98). Parish makes a parallel argument with reference to Bhaktapur. He writes that the self in Bhaktapur is defined by the 'web of relatedness' into which each Newar is born, that is, by the 'mothers, fathers, siblings and kin [who have] shaped and nurtured them' (1994: 126). Accordingly, morality is understood primarily in

terms of duty towards social groups, and in particular kinship groups. Parish describes how these social duties are sacralised, citing the comment of one informant that ‘society itself is a god’ (ibid.: 73).

The social focus of Bhaktapurian ethics is related to patterns of social organisation. Newar culture is dominated by its urban centres: Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur. The compact, urban nature of Newar settlements gives them a quality of intense social interaction. The French Sanskritist Sylvain Lévi writes,

The dominant feature of the Newar character is the taste for society. The Newar never stays alone; he likes to live, a little like the Parisian, in houses which are several storeys high and bursting with inhabitants. (Sylvain Lévi, quoted in Quigley 1999: 301)

A number of scholars have argued that the caste system reaches its fullest development in cities, as cities are large enough to contain the full spectrum of caste groups, and are the traditional homes of kings, whose duty is the maintenance of social order (Pocock 1974: 21; Dumont 1980: 154-6). Drawing on this idea, Declan Quigley has proposed that Newar cities, and Bhaktapur in particular, provide a paradigm of caste: ‘[caste society] is exemplified by any of the old royal cities, but especially well by Bhaktapur, which has resisted to a much greater extent the encroachments of the modern world. It is the urban, king-centred structure of these “archaic” cities which allows caste to manifest itself in all its glory’ (Quigley 1999: 319). The caste system, organising society as it does on the basis of hereditary groups, can be seen as a paradigmatic example of a social system that promotes an ethics of sociality.

It should be recognised that while there is consensus among specialists about the social focus of Newar ethics, the place of the individual in Hindu and caste societies has been a subject of significant scholarly debate (Hausner 2007: 196-7). The tendency in much of the literature is to nuance or move away from Dumont’s emphasis on the holism of householder life towards a greater appreciation of the significance of inner experience and individuality

(for instance, Mines 1994; Appadurai 1986; Trawick 1990; Skinner et al. 1998; Ahearn 2001; on individuality in Buddhism and Buddhist societies see Gombrich 1988, 2009; Schober 1997; Covill et al. 2010; Ortner 1995; March 2002).

This tendency is reflected in the literature on Bhaktapur. Parish balances his portrayal of the relational nature of Newar selfhood with an attention to the inner experience of that selfhood, especially in his discussion of the Newar concept of ‘heart’ (*nuga*), which ‘embodies a person’s [...] sense of self’ (1994: 190). As Parish describes, the *nuga* is understood to contain both qualities associated with ‘mind’, such as memory and intention, and those associated with emotions, such a fear or joy. Just as society is sacralised, so is the self, through the concept of an inner deity or ‘heart god’, normally thought of as Narayan, who ‘makes possible, or empowers, perception and cognition’ (ibid.: 191). This is somewhat analogous to Augustine’s notion of God as the ‘underlying principle of our knowing activity’, as discussed in Section 1.3. In Bhaktapur, then, an ethics that prioritises the group co-exists with an experiential world in which the self is highly significant. This is apparent in the material I discuss in chapters 3 and 4, in particular in the land dispute in Section 3.2. Further material illustrating the significance of individuality in Hindu Bhaktapur can be found in Yogesh Raj’s *History as Mindscapes* (2010), which I refer to in Section 3.3.

My argument for the centrality of patronage to Bhaktapur’s caste order raises more complex theoretical issues than my argument about sociality. The place of patronage in caste societies has been the subject of extended controversy among anthropologists.³⁰ Dumont famously argued that the basis of the Indian caste system is a separation of hierarchical status and temporal power, with the latter being subordinate to the former (1980: 45, 212-4).³¹ The

³⁰ See Piliavsky (2014) for a recent collection of essays on patronage in South Asia.

³¹ Hierarchical status, as it is conceived by Dumont, is perhaps best understood as a distinct form of power, one that is hierarchically related to and complementary with temporal power, and defined by its association with the

form that hierarchical status takes, in Dumont's account, is the opposition of the pure and the impure (ibid.: 43). The subordination of power to status is expressed, Dumont argues, in the superiority of the Brahman to the king. Dumont suggests that the subordination of power to hierarchy was established very early in Indian history, 'some eight centuries before Christ' (ibid.: 37).

The theoretical tradition associated with Maurice Hocart tends to reverse the priority Dumont gives to status over power; this tradition emphasises the significance of patronage and temporal authority in the caste system. Hocart presents caste as being organised not on the basis of a unitary hierarchy, as in Dumont's work, but rather around the ritual centrality of the king, or locally dominant castes, who sponsor sacrifices and other rituals. The purpose of caste, according to Hocart, is to maintain the purity of the king through the ritual service of other agents (1970: 86-101). In each locality the dominant caste imitates the ritual action of the king (Hocart 1950: 68). According to this understanding, the opposition of pure and impure is not separate from the exercise of temporal power, but rather an intrinsic part of it. The king, in Hocart's understanding, is superior to the Brahman, and the patronage relationships formed by the sponsorship of rituals are oriented towards the creation of political order (ibid.: 67-8).

Nicholas Dirks has employed Hocart's theory historically to contextualise the apparent separation of power and status Dumont observed. Examining the history of caste in the south Indian kingdom of Pudukkottai over a period of six hundred years, Dirks (1987) finds that during much of Pudukkottai's history the king reigned supreme, being both the centre and the guarantor of the caste system. It was only with progressive undermining of kingship in south India, which was finally completed with the establishment of the British

religious, as opposed to the political sphere (see Parry 1998: 156-9; for further discussion of the complex issues surrounding the concept of power see Anderson 1990: ch. 1; Lukes 2004).

Raj, that the notion of the superiority of the Brahman arose (1987: 10). Dirks (2001) argues that caste as Dumont describes it, in which the Brahman is supreme and religion is separated from power, is a product of British colonialism rather than, as Dumont has it, of developments in the Vedic period. He shows persuasively how a ‘Dumontian’ understanding of caste was convenient for the British colonists, who, along with Brahman administrators, actively promoted it. It was only when caste was legally and ethnographically codified under the Raj, Dirks shows, that it became a ‘a single term capable of expressing, organizing and above all “systematizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization’ (2001: 5).³²

Declan Quigley (1999) has applied Hocart’s insights to Bhaktapur, and does so by way of a critique of the work of Levy. As Levy’s is the most comprehensive analysis of caste in Bhaktapur, I will describe it in detail before turning to Quigley.

Levy, as I have noted, understands Bhaktapur to be an archaic Hindu city; part of what makes Bhaktapur archaic is ‘the inclusion of social order and social behaviour within the sacred realm’ (Levy 1990: 27). Levy’s theorisation of this religious ordering of society focuses on religious symbolism. He describes Bhaktapur’s religious life as a ‘civic dance’, where the raw materials of Hindu thought have been transformed into a self-sustaining system of symbolic action (ibid.: 16-17). Bhaktapur’s symbolism, for Levy, exists as an answer to the psychological disturbances created by living in an urban environment. The people of Bhaktapur are ‘involved in a great number of *different* culturally defined and validated realities’ (ibid.: 31; original emphasis); this creates a psychological ‘crisis of complexity’, where the integration of the self is threatened in a way that is ‘potentially subversive to society’ (ibid.: 32). Society meets this threat by creating ‘a kind of enchantment

³² Hocart’s work has influenced a number of other contemporary scholars, such as Gloria Raheja (1988) and Declan Quigley (1993).

[...] through a leap of faith into a commitment to [...] the community's coherent and fascinating array of marked symbols (ibid.: 32). In this way, individuals experience 'a *conversion* into "understanding", acceptance, and social solidarity' (ibid.: 32).

Levy describes the symbols particularly characteristic of Bhaktapur as 'marked symbols'. Marked symbols, according to Levy,

are objects or events that use some device to call attention to themselves and to set themselves off as being extraordinary, as *not* belonging to – or as being something *more* than – the ordinary banal world. This is the symbolism of various attention-attracting, emotionally compelling kinds of human communication [...]. (ibid.: 27)

A central example of this type of symbolism in Bhaktapur is blood sacrifice (ibid.: 32).

Marked symbols are defined in contrast to 'embedded symbols', which are associated with 'common sense', or meanings that 'are condensed and dissolved in any culturally perceived object or event so that they seem to belong to the object or event as aspects or dimensions of its "natural" meaning' (ibid.: 26). Embedded symbolism represents the taken-for-granted; marked symbolism represents the extraordinary.

The distinction between embedded and marked symbolism structures Levy's account of Bhaktapur's caste system. What could be described as the Dumontian aspect of caste – that is, caste as a Brahman-headed hierarchy structured on the basis of relative purity – is presented by Levy in terms of 'embedded symbolism'. Levy sees the notion of purity, partly because of its associations with hygiene, as something that is taken for granted, and therefore an example of embedded symbolism (ibid.: 397). Levy finds in Bhaktapur a linear hierarchy of nineteen caste levels ordered on the basis of relative purity. This hierarchy is reproduced in tabular form in Appendix 1.

Levy argues that the basis of Bhaktapur's purity-centred hierarchy is a system of (embedded) symbolism associated with the 'religion of moral order'. This is the religion of

the ‘benign,’ or ‘ordinary’ Hindu deities, such as Vishnu and Shiva, who are seen as pure and who do not require blood sacrifice. He writes:

One segment – ranging from Brahman to untouchable – is concerned with the manipulation and maintenance of the *dharma*-supporting symbolically constituted civic social system, whose central organising metaphor is purity and impurity. Its proper religion is the religion of the ordinary deities. (ibid.: 343)

The religion of the ordinary deities depends ultimately on another symbolic system, which ‘provide[s] the context for the moral religion [i.e. that of the ordinary deities], respond[s] to the problems that the moral system cannot deal with, and in doing so protect[s] the moral realm’ (ibid.: 602).

This second symbolic system Levy calls the ‘religion of power’. This is associated with the ‘dangerous’ deities who require blood sacrifice, such as Kali and Bhairava, and is linked with a second, alternative social hierarchy, different to the Dumontian one described above. This hierarchy is headed by the king, rather than the Brahman, and is based more on force and coercion than on purity. It could, very loosely, be called a Hocartian hierarchy.

Levy describes it as follows:

The other segment, ranging from king down via farmers through the lowest-status craftsmen, have their representative functions within another realm that may be disentangled from the symbolically constructed, hierarchical, civic *dharma*. They deal, in comparison, with a more material world, and with symbolic forms other than those characteristic forms which organise the *dharmik* community [...]. [...] their relation to the religion of the dangerous deities is different [...] [These deities], and their special worship and meanings, express the realm of value-transcendent power [...]. (ibid.: 343-4)

Just as the religion of power protects the religion of moral order, the king-headed hierarchy operates ‘in a world [...] which is necessary for the support, maintenance and protection of the city’s realm of values’ (ibid.: 344). Thus, the king-headed hierarchy, and the religion

associated with it, may be said to be ‘systematically higher’ (ibid.: 602) than the Brahman-headed hierarchy and its associated gods.

Quigley (1999) has, to my mind persuasively, identified the strengths and weaknesses of Levy’s approach. An important strength of Levy’s work, as Quigley sees it, is his identification of the centrality of kingship to Bhaktpur’s caste system, and his related argument that the religion of moral order is ultimately subordinate to the religion of power. Levy’s argument for the centrality of kingship is evidenced partly by his stress on the role of the Rajopadhyaya Brahman, who is the king’s priest, and on the group of ritual functionaries – ‘para-priests’ – who assist the Brahman in his activities. Quigley finds, however, that Levy’s interpretation of the role of the Brahman is flawed because it fails to recognise the overriding significance of political patronage as opposed to Brahmanic purity:

Levy writes that what auxiliary priests and para-priests are doing is protecting the status of the Rajopadhyaya Brahmans [...]. But, ultimately, I would argue that it is not the Rajopadhyaya’s status which must be protected, but the status of those whom he serves – in former times, the king and the noble families who surrounded him; today, the noble families alone [...]. (ibid.: 313)

By separating, like Dumont, the sphere of status and the sphere of power, Levy obscures the centrality of patronage to those ritual functionaries who appear to be primarily concerned with purity. According to Quigley, the relationship of patronage between king and priest, which is imitated in the contemporary context in the relationship of high-caste patron to priest, reveals ‘the underlying structure of all inter-caste relations’ (ibid.: 323). Because Levy’s informants were primarily drawn from the Brahman caste, Quigley suggests, he failed to recognise the centrality of power and patronage to all levels of caste relations (ibid.: 303). Levy misguidedly takes the normative representations of Brahmans to represent empirical reality at all levels of society.

Ethnographic confirmation of the centrality of patronage to Bhaktapur's traditional caste order can be drawn from a number of sources. Particularly rich in this respect is Raj's *History as Mindscapes* (2010), which I quote from in Section 3.3. Here, I refer to the following description of traditional patronage relations between Newar Farmers and landlords, given by Gellner and Pradhan:

The tenant was a social inferior [of the landlord] who acted out his subservience (*cākari yāye*). He often acted as a messenger on ritual occasions, carrying invitations to invite married daughters for every festival (*nakhah*), which were as many as eight a year in the past. All tenants were themselves invited to eat at every *nakhah*. The tenant's wife would act as chaperone during the several days of complex ritual accompanying the giving in marriage of the landlord's daughter. In return for all these services the tenant felt he had the moral right to the help of his landlord in times of economic or political difficulty [...]. It was not uncommon for tenants to wear the passed down clothes of rich landlords. (Gellner and Pradhan 1999: 170-1)

This passage brings out the inseparability of considerations of status and power in patronage relations between Farmers and landlords in Bhaktapur. In sections 3.3 and 4.2 I will deepen this ethnographic picture with reference to the effects of recent social and political developments on traditional patronage relations.

2.4 Gods and people

It is a common anthropological observation that relationships among divine beings, and between humans and such beings, tend to parallel relationships among humans themselves. William Christian (1989), for instance, has written about how the relationship between God, the Virgin Mary, and the individual in northern Spanish Catholicism parallels the relationship between father, mother and children in northern Spanish family life, with both Mary and the mother acting as mediators between the other parties in their groupings. Similarly, Gellner (1992: 343) has shown how the hierarchical relationship between divine figures in Newar

Buddhism parallels the hierarchical structure of Newar society. In this section I make analogous observations about Bhaktapur's religious life. Just as social relationships in Bhaktapur are shaped by the principles of sociality and patronage, I suggest, so relationships between people and divinities are also shaped by these principles. The centrality of these principles to relationships with Hindu divinities helps to explain some of the problems social and cultural change has posed for traditional religion.

Bhaktapur's Hindu pantheon is diverse, and has been mapped by Levy (1990: 202-5). There are roughly 120 active shrines and temples in the city, all of which contain a stone god (*murti*) or a carved or natural stone that represents a god. The most commonly represented gods are Vishnu (29), Shiva (28), Ganesh (24), and the group Levy labels the dangerous or Tantric goddesses (26). In addition to these fixed deities there are a significant number of portable deities which are kept in 'god-houses' (*dyo chen*), which are transported around the city during various festivals and processions.

I have noted Levy's distinction between the religion of moral order and the religion of power, and his stress on the dominant position of the sacrifice-requiring dangerous deities, which are associated with the religion of power. Levy remarks on the peculiarity of this situation in the wider South Asian context:

[...] in many Hindu communities in South Asia the religion of the dangerous deities is thought of by the upper-status Hindus in those communities (and by many modern Indians) as an inferior, illegitimate, superstitious folk religion, alien to true Hinduism and its Aryan roots. The legitimate religion of such communities is held by these elites to be the moral Brahmanical religion concerned with benign deities, representatives of an ideal patriarchal social order. In Bhaktapur, in contrast, the dangerous deities are fully legitimate, and not only legitimate but at the focus of aristocratic and royal Tantrism. (ibid.: 602)

Levy's argument for the centrality of the dangerous deities in Bhaktapur is supported by abundant evidence. The city's very structure – bounded by eight protective Tantric deities

and centring on the royal palace which contains the Tantric goddess Taleju – is determined by the protective power of the dangerous deities. Many of the most important events in Bhaktapur’s festival year, such as Bisket Jatra and Mohani (Dashain in Nepali), are focused on the dangerous deities.

The relationship between person and deity in Bhaktapur is mediated by a diverse spectrum of ritual practices. The central religious act within Bhaktapur, as in Hinduism generally, is *pujā*, which is usually translated as ‘worship’ (on the place of *pujā* in Newar religious practice see Gellner 1992: 105-8). *Pujā* typically involves making material offerings to particular deities – such offerings may be water, food, coins, flowers, or (depending on the deity) alcohol or animal flesh. The daily *pujā* of a household is generally performed in the early morning by the senior woman of the family, who will go first to worship at the local Ganesh shrine and then on to other local shrines to make offerings. Worship will also be made to gods within the household; for families who host powerful Tantric deities, these duties of worship will be particularly onerous. *Pujā* is also performed on many non-routine occasions: for the purpose of a particular intention; for thanksgiving; for a feast or family event; perhaps when passing a particular shrine.

Other than daily worship, the most important categories of religious activity are life-cycle rituals and festivals. The Newars are well-known for the quantity of their life-cycle rituals and the seriousness with which they take them. The very significant resources that Bhaktapurian Newars devote to life-cycle rituals have been documented by Gutschow and Michaels (2005, 2008, 2012). The primary Newar life-cycle rituals are:

- 1) Name-giving (*na chuyegu*), which occurs at birth;
- 2) Rice feeding (*ja cipa thiyekegu*), occurring in infancy;
- 3) Hair shaving (*busa khayegu*), occurring in infancy for boys;

- 4) Affixation of the loin cloth (*kaytā pujā*) to mark full membership of the caste group, occurring during childhood for boys;
- 5) Symbolic marriage to Vishnu/Narayana (*ihī*), occurring during childhood for girls;
- 6) Ritual of confinement relating to menarche (*barha*), occurring at onset of menarche for girls;
- 7) Marriage (*biha*);
- 8) Rite of old age (*janko*), occurring at the age of 77 for men and women;
- 9) Death rites (*dasa kriya* and *sraddha*), occurring immediately after death and at regular intervals thereafter. (see Parish 1994: 238 and Gellner 1992: 199)

These rituals are compulsory, and all Hindu and Buddhist Newars undertake them.

The festival life of the Newars is famous for its density, expense and consumption of time. As a popular Nepali saying has it: ‘*Chetri bigrincha mojle, Newar bigrincha bhojle*’ (the Chetri [high caste Nepali] is ruined by indulgence, the Newar is ruined by feasts).

Highlights of the festival year include:

- 1) Bisket, a major festival of nine days marking the New Year, during which various dangerous deities are transported around the city;
- 2) Saparu (Nep.: Gai Jatra), a major festival of eight days, centring on a procession of real and symbolic cows around the city to mark deaths over the previous year;
- 3) Mohani (Nepali: Dashain), a major festival of ten days commemorating the victory of the goddess Devi over the demon Mahishasura, the focal point of which is a large-scale sacrifice of buffaloes in the Taleju temple.³³

At major festival times in Bhaktapur, the streets are crammed with people and the whole city is abuzz; the main festivals in Bhaktapur are genuinely communal events, with most of the city’s population participating in some way.

The diversity of Bhaktapur’s pantheon and the activities relating to it promotes a diversity of personal response to deities. Each Bhaktapurian will have their own favoured

³³ Levy (1990: ch. 12-16) documents Bhaktapur’s festivals exhaustively.

deities, and while some religious activities, such as life-cycle rituals, are compulsory, many aspects of religious practice are determined by choice, circumstance, and personal temperament. A common theme in almost all Bhaktapurian relationship with deities, however, is that the relationship is understood in social terms. Put simply: Bhaktapurians tend to relate to their gods in the context of a social group rather than as an individual. In daily worship the household is the unit which relates to divinity: this is usually performed by the senior woman of the household on behalf of the other householders, who are thereby relieved of the duty of daily *pujā*. In lifecycle rituals the relevant group is the clan rather than the household: clan-members are invited to witness the ritual, to give a blessing and to share a feast afterwards. At festival times Bhaktapurians worship with the city as a whole: the noise and teeming crowds at these times will in a sense compel anyone who enters the street to participate.

When I asked non-priestly Hindus in Bhaktapur about their religious lives, they tended to emphasise the social, rather than the personal aspects of religion. Young people would often talk primarily about the excitement of festival times, while older people would emphasise life-cycle rituals or habits of daily worship. Many people, perhaps influenced partly by communist ideas, would talk about religion's role in promoting social harmony. This is what one retired schoolteacher from the Farmer caste said to me when I asked how he felt when he performed worship:

We need to understand the value of our own religion [*dharma*] and culture [*sanskriti*], but we simply stay silent [*sumka chwona*] about our religion. We have to give people knowledge [*gyan*] about the Hindu religion; we have to give people knowledge about the religion of our family [*kul dharma*]. We should teach this in schools so that we feel proud of our own religion. [...] Religion is helping others. [...] When we don't help and support others they will go to another religion. When we complain to them they say they went there because they didn't get support from others [*sāhārā maruguling*]. This is the weakness of our government which I mentioned earlier.

We see here that the respondent deflected my question about personal experience in order to talk about religion in social terms. He interprets the significance of religion in terms of the social cohesion it brings and focuses his remarks on what can be done to support religion politically. Religion is distanced from personal experience on two levels: not only is religious life described from a social perspective, but responsibility for its maintenance and direction is given to political rather than social actors.

When I asked people from non-priestly castes about their personal religious experiences or devotion to particular gods, they would often suggest that I should put the question to a religious specialist, disavowing the authority to interpret religious acts, even if these acts formed part of their daily routine. This shows the way religious life in Bhaktapur is shaped by the caste system and the elaborate system of religious specialisation it involves. Many Bhaktapurians expressed the view that as long as a specialist or relative is taking care of religious duties on one's behalf, there is no need to trouble too much about the details of these duties. We see here the principle of sociality at work in Bhaktapurian religious life.

Christopher Fuller has noted that in Hinduism there is no clear dividing-line between human beings and deities, as there is in Abrahamic religions; the difference between the human and divine worlds is understood in terms of degree rather than quality (Fuller 2004: 3). Accordingly, the act of *pujā* is analogous to acts of respect or obeisance that might be made to human beings, such as a superior in the household or a political ruler; it is a social act that assumes an unequal relationship. Fuller writes:

Puja [...] is an act of respectful honouring for powerful deities [...]. The ritual owes as much to notions of domestic hospitality as it does to obeisance in the king's court. In general the worshipper is as much a deity's wifely servant as its royal subject. [...] [F]undamental to *puja* is the ideal of achievement of identity between deity and worshipper; it is inherent in the ritual's internal sequential logic and it is consolidated by the taking of *prasada* afterwards. [...] Like *namaskara*, the gesture of respect made to the deities, but more elaborately, *puja* expresses the

principle of hierarchical inequality between deity and worshipper. But the ritual simultaneously – even if only temporarily – can also overcome the relative separation between divinity and humanity. (ibid.: 81-2)

In a similar vein, Parish writes that the act of *pujā* in Bhaktapur ‘resonates with the structure of feeling of Hindu Newar family life: the worshipper anticipates and responds to the deity’s desires and needs; bathes, clothes, adorns, feeds, cares for the deity; shows respect, expresses reverence for the deity, does homage “from the heart”’ (Parish 1994: 38-9). These insights point towards not only the social nature of relationship with deities in Hinduism, but also the ambiguity of this relationship: a deity may bring comfort as a member of one’s own family might bring comfort, but, at the same time, that deity is a powerful being capable not only of protection but also of inflicting harm.

This relational ambiguity is best explored with reference to the dangerous deities and the characteristic form in which they are worshipped: blood sacrifice.³⁴ Sacrifices of chickens, goats, and buffaloes are a continual feature of Bhaktapurian life: if one walks around the city for a day, one will not fail to see evidence of such an event (such as a man carrying a severed goat’s head on a worship plate). All major life-cycle rituals are accompanied by a sacrifice, as are the feasts associated with major festivals and other special occasions, as well as large acts of worship performed to dangerous deities for special intentions. Typically, a sacrifice will involve cutting the throat of the animal and spraying its blood, from the throat, onto the stone image of the deity (*murti*). After this the animal is cut up; sometimes its intestines are draped around the image of the deity as a kind of garland. The animal will then be taken away from the shrine and cooked for a feast.

³⁴ It should be noted that my discussion of sacrifice here is necessarily brief and is intended primarily as a background to the beliefs of those in Bhaktapur who reject sacrifice, rather than as a full account of the meaning of sacrifice for the majority of Hindus in Bhaktapur.

Levy and Parish agree on the central importance of sacrifice to Bhaktapur's religious life. Levy sees it as the central act of the 'religion of power', and also the point at which the religion of power comes into greatest tension with the religion of moral order:

Blood sacrifice in Bhaktapur might be regarded as an extremely immoral act transformed by a powerful context, a 'religious' one of a special kind. [...] [S]acrifice in Bhaktapur is *the* antinomial act in which all levels of society participate [...]. The transformation produced by the context is equivocal [...]. The possibility of a characterization of sacrifice as murder is always there. (1990: 332)

Both Levy and Parish note that many Bhaktapurians recall the fear they felt as children when watching animal sacrifices. This fear seems to stem both from pity for the animal and identification with it: what happens to the animal suggests what might happen to a person who incurred society's displeasure. This is suggested in particular by the fact that parents tease their children by saying that if they do not behave they will offer them to a god as a sacrifice (Parish 1994: 33).

The moral ambiguity that may at times be present in the Bhaktapurian relationship with the gods can be illustrated with reference to the process by which permission is obtained from an animal before it is sacrificed. Prior to a sacrifice, the animal is told by the chief worshipper that, if it agrees to be sacrificed, it will go to heaven; sacred water, uncooked rice, and flowers are then thrown onto its body. In the case of a chicken, duck, or water buffalo, a shake of the head indicates acceptance of the sacrifice; in the case of a goat, a shake of the body indicates this (Levy 1990: 328). When I witnessed sacrifices, I would often ask the worshippers about the process of gaining permission from the animal, and try to ascertain the extent to which they felt the permission to be morally significant. I found that those involved in the sacrifice, particularly young or more educated people, would quite often explain this aspect of the sacrificial process with a smile on their face, or with some other indication of distancing from the orthodox interpretation they were repeating, which suggested a lack of

inner conviction. Sometimes this distancing was subtly acknowledged as a source of guilty humour; sometimes it was explicitly acknowledged and accompanied with some other justification of sacrifice, often relating to its social usefulness. In the minds of some sacrificers in Bhaktapur, it seems, ‘the possibility of a characterization of sacrifice as murder’ (ibid.: 332) is present.

Sacrifice in Bhaktapur illuminates the operation of patronage in the relationship between person and deity. The Hindu cosmos, as it is popularly understood, is multi-faceted and unstable. Bhaktapur’s pantheon contains a diverse range of actors who require worship in highly contrastive modes: while it would be inappropriate to offer blood sacrifice to a ‘benign’ deity, for dangerous deities it is required. Within this multi-faceted cosmos no particular deity appears to have dominating power; rather, the worshipper must balance the demands of a range of gods and hope that the deities he succeeds in pleasing have enough power to fulfil his ends. In order to appease the deities whose power one needs, it is sometimes necessary to perform acts like sacrifice that seem, to some, morally ‘equivocal’ (ibid.: 332). The deities that require this act may seem to some to operate in a realm of ‘value-transcendent power’ (ibid.: 343). Some in contemporary Bhaktapur, including those who become Christian, come to feel that their relationship with the dangerous deities is exploitative, being based in fear and desire for patronage rather than in affection or ethics. Such sentiments are evident, for instance, in the story of Vishnu Prasad in Chapter 7.

It is important to note that although some feel like this, there are many in Bhaktapur who do not question the morality of sacrifice. For them, sacrifice has an internal moral logic, though one that is distinct from other forms of worship (see Parish 1994: 25-34, 39-44). My discussion here has been intended to provide background to the beliefs of those Bhaktapurians who reject sacrifice; for fuller accounts of the significance of sacrifice for the

Hindu majority in Bhaktapur readers should consult the work of Parish (*ibid.*), Levy (1990: 323-335), and Grieve (2006: ch. 6).

The discomfort that some Bhaktapurians feel over sacrifice has been manifested in various Hindu anti-sacrificial movements that have grown up in recent decades.³⁵ The most significant of these are Om Shanti and The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON; better known in the West as the Hare Krishnas).³⁶ I was staying with a family where the daughter-in-law, Laxmi, was a member of ISKCON, and so I had the opportunity to observe and discuss the movement over a long period. Gutschow and Michaels (2005: 199-201) have outlined the history of ISKCON in Bhaktapur. Founded in the United States by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1969, ISKCON spread rapidly to South Asia, with a Nepali branch being founded in 1970 and a large ISKCON temple being built at Budhanilkantha, to the north of Kathmandu, in 1997. A Bhaktapur branch was established in 1981, and by 2005 there were roughly 400 members, mostly from the Farmer caste. The current membership in Bhaktapur is said to be around 600, and is still drawn mainly from the Farmers.

To be a member of ISKCON is, in theory, to subscribe to a highly elaborated philosophy laid out in the writings of Prabhupada. This philosophy involves a comprehensive cosmology which differs in important respects from the Shaivite form of Hinduism dominant in Bhaktapur. ISKCON teaches that Krishna (who is conventionally seen as an avatar of Vishnu) is the Supreme Lord of the universe and the source of all avatars of God: it is therefore described by some scholars as a monotheistic tradition (Dwyer and Cole 2007: 11, 208). Like other Vaishnavite movements, ISKCON teaches the supreme importance of

³⁵ On new religious movements in Nepal see Toffin (2013: ch.5).

³⁶ On the modernising role of ISKCON in Bali, see Howe (2001).

devotion (*bhakti*) to God, and rejects what it sees as superstitious accretions to Hinduism such as blood sacrifice, excessive ritualism, and the hereditary caste system.

In the context of Bhaktapur, ISKCON has primarily taken on the aspect of a devotional and anti-sacrificial movement: the anti-ritualistic and anti-caste teachings of Prabhupada are not stressed. As Gutschow and Michaels (2005: 199-201) describe, ISKCON members in Bhaktapur have been able to reconcile its principle of *ahimsa* – non-violence which proscribes the killing of any living thing – surprisingly successfully with Bhaktapur’s sacrifice-intensive ritual life. Unlike Christians, ISKCON members in Bhaktapur claim to participate fully in the Hindu religious life of the city, maintaining membership of clan funeral associations and taking part in all life-cycle rituals and major festivals. Where a sacrifice or the use of animal products is required by a traditional ritual, they simply excise that ritual or adapt it in such a way that it is acceptable to them, for example by substituting coconuts for eggs when making offerings to a deity. The main ways in which ISKCON membership in Bhaktapur is manifested are in a refusal to sacrifice, a refusal to eat meat or animal products, and in a regular participation in devotional music groups (*bhajan*) that sing the praises of Krishna. ISKCON members also participate in private devotions, which mainly consist in the repeated chanting of the ‘great mantra’ beginning, ‘Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare’.

The practices of ISKCON in Bhaktapur can be seen to represent an embryonic critique of both sociality and patronage in Hindu religious life. I spoke at length with Laxmi about her beliefs: the two themes that recurred again and again were a sensitivity to the suffering of animals and a sense that relationship with divinity should be based on love rather than fear. During the ten-day festival of Mohani buffalos were often sacrificed outside of our house early in the morning, and we would awake to their whines and screeches as their throats were slit outside our windows. When I would come to breakfast during this time of

year, I would often find Laxmi visibly distressed at the animal suffering she had witnessed that morning. When speaking about sacrifice, Laxmi would condemn it as both cruel and backward, once saying to me that it was a ‘feudal’ (*samanti*) tradition.³⁷ More positively, Laxmi would delight in telling me about the life of Krishna and his various ‘pastimes’, speaking of him with great affection. She also enjoyed explaining the details of ISKCON’s complex philosophy to me, demonstrating the premium the group places on personal religious knowledge. Members of ISKCON, whatever their caste, are expected to become religious specialists in their own right. Unlike most non-priestly people in Bhaktapur, then, Laxmi claimed the right to speak knowledgably about a deity based on her own intimate relationship with and study of that deity. She spoke about Krishna less as a patron and more as a friend.

Although there are some significant similarities between ISKCON and Christian churches in Bhaktapur– most notably in the emphasis on inner experience of relationship with divinity – ISKCON has been less successful than the churches in expanding its membership.³⁸ The main explanation for this, I would suggest, lies in the churches’ focus on human suffering, as opposed to ISKCON’s focus on animal suffering. A further explanation lies in the ways the groups articulate religious experience. While ISKCON members had intense religious experiences, and confirmed this in interviews, they did not articulate these experiences with anything like the detail or fluency that I found in Christian conversion narratives. ISKCON members in Bhaktapur were expected to *have* personal religious experiences, but they were not necessarily expected to *describe* these experiences to others. Thus my friend, when I asked her to describe her experiences of Krishna (as opposed to details of his life she had read about), would generally say something heartfelt but vague and

³⁷ This illustrates the influence of Marxist concepts in Bhaktapur.

³⁸ See Appendix 2.

unexpansive, along the lines of ‘how much love, how much bliss I felt’ (*guli prem, guli ānanda*). Observing ISKCON events in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, it was clear that devotees would often become greatly moved during worship; they did not, however, usually feel the need to put these experiences into words.

It should be noted that although relatively few Bhaktapurians have joined devotionalist movements such as ISKCON or Om Shanti, the wider influence of devotionalist practices can be seen in the growth of modern *bhajans*, which take the form of informal community music groups. Ingemar Grandin (1989: 92-105) has described how the modern *bhajan* was introduced to the Kathmandu Valley from India in the late 19th century and gradually became a popular activity in Newar neighbourhoods.³⁹ In Bhaktapur the practice appears to have arrived considerably later: the *bhajan* of the neighbourhood in which I was staying, according to the memory of local people, was established around twenty years ago. An even more recent development has been the participation of women in *bhajans*: although at the time of my stay the majority of participants in *bhajans* were women, apparently it had only become acceptable for women to participate in this way over the last decade. A *bhajan* involves a group of people sitting in a public porch (*phalcā*) and singing religious songs in Newari or Hindi to the accompaniment of a harmonium, as well as (optionally) small drums, triangles, and other instruments. Those involved are normally older, of the Farmer caste, and have no formal musical training.⁴⁰ As with ISKCON events, those singing in *bhajans* sometimes appeared to be quite moved; however, when I asked participants about their experiences they were usually reluctant to expand.

³⁹ On the more formalised Newar musical traditions which predate modern *bhajans* see Widdess (2013).

⁴⁰ In contrast, the traditional musical form of *dāphā* is restrictive in terms of who is allowed to participate, and requires extensive training (see Widdess 2013).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described various forces of tradition and change in Bhaktapur's history and contemporary life. I have also proposed an interpretation of Bhaktapur's traditional social and religious orders, arguing that they are structured by the principles of sociality and patronage. At the end of Section 2.4, I examined the growth of ISKCON and other modernist Hindu movements in Bhaktapur. I related them to feelings of unease about various aspects of Bhaktapur's traditional order, in particular sacrifice and religious specialisation. In the next two chapters I will examine other developments in Bhaktapur that signal unease with the traditional order; taken together, I suggest, these developments indicate a state of profound cultural unsettlement.

Chapter 3. Cultural unsettlement: failure of care and rejection of deference

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore some aspects of cultural unsettlement in Bhaktapur that touch particularly on ethical life. By examining two dramatic episodes I encountered during my time in the field, I hope to illustrate what I take to be two of the most important recent developments in Bhaktapur's ethical life. The first of these, which I examine in Section 3.2, I label 'the failure of care'. By this I mean a widespread perception in Bhaktapur, felt particularly strongly among older people, that as living conditions have improved moral standards have declined. This moral decline is taken to be related to increasing levels of individualism, which cause people to neglect their duties of care to the social groups they belong to (and to their families especially). Ideas about moral failure and moral decline are often expressed in language referring to lack of *lajyā*, or shame. The second development, which I examine in Section 3.3, I identify as 'the rejection of deference'. This is connected with the rejection of traditional caste-based patronage relations that I referred to in the last chapter, and explore further in the next chapter. This development is intertwined with politics, and the way in which it is experienced is bound up with the concept of *ijjat*, or 'face'. As I examine the unsettlement of Bhaktapur's ethical life in this chapter, I will suggest how this unsettlement may be connected with the growth of Christianity.

3.2 *Lajyā, sociality, and the failure of care*

Parish has argued that *lajyā*, usually translated as 'shyness', 'embarrassment', or 'shame' (1994: 199), is the conceptual and emotional cornerstone of Newar moral life; it is the value

that expresses most clearly the Newar ethic of sociality. *Lajyā* is a concept which ‘combines feeling and evaluation’ (ibid.: 199): it is both a mode of experience and a standard to which people are held. It relates centrally the integration of the individual in the structures of family and society, and the self-control this necessitates:

Newars sometimes assert: If you are a person, through shame (*lajya*) you must bind yourself (*manu kha:sa that:yata lajyan(n) ci-ma*). This maxim says something about the morality of everyday life in Newar society [...] being a moral person means regulating the self through sensitivity to the emotion *lajya*. (ibid.: 200)

Lajyā is felt when an individual transgresses social norms or disturbs social order, and particularly when they are observed to have done so. To have *lajyā* is to be aware of the types of actions that would produce such an effect, and to be vigilant against them. Such is the centrality of acting with social appropriateness to Newar identity that Parish identifies the experience of shame with a ‘loss of self’, where ‘self is evaluated and experienced as diminished, as having reduced value or reality’ (ibid.: 209).

In what follows I recount a long-running dispute in Byasi, the Farmer locality I stayed in in Bhaktapur, and suggest that the nature of the dispute, and the way local people responded to it, illustrates the development I refer to as ‘the failure of care’. Land reform, combined with the introduction of fertilizers and rises in land prices, has brought previously undreamt-of levels of prosperity to Bhaktapur’s Farmers over the last 30 years. This prosperity, alongside the growth of mass education and literacy, as well as street cleaning and other social projects initiated by the NWPP-controlled municipality, have transformed Farmers’ living conditions (Hachhethu 2004, 2007; Raj 2010). While no one I spoke with in the Farmer community suggested that these developments were bad things, many people did speak of how increasing levels of property ownership and higher levels of education among the younger generations tended to promote discord within families. Undoubtedly the most common form of family dispute in Bhaktapur is conflict between brothers over the division of

property. While this is by no means solely a modern phenomenon, many people say that the frequency and intensity of such quarrels have been increased by the greater value of the land which people are now arguing over, and by an increasing readiness to resort to the law.

The division of land between brothers is probably the most common source of family conflict not only in Bhaktapur but in Nepal, and perhaps also South Asia, as a whole.⁴¹ In both Nepali law and Newar tradition, property is something which is held in trust by male family members in order that it should be handed down to future generations, rather than something which an individual owner has the right to dispose of as they see fit, as in English law and tradition (Macfarlane 1978). Traditionally, male family members live in a joint household, with property, under the supervision of the eldest male, shared between all male family members. However, as families grow, brothers will often decide to split and form separate households. When this happens, each male member of the family unit – the father, the father's brothers, the father's sons, the father's brother's sons – is entitled under law to an equal share of the family property. Sometimes such divisions of property – that is, most significantly, the family's house and land – are completed amicably, but quite often there are disputes relating to the relative value of various sections of property, which are usually debatable.

While I was staying there, a particularly fraught instance of fraternal dispute over land was reaching its culmination in Byasi. In the late 1990s, a large joint household of the Farmer caste made the decision to separate their house and extensive lands; a significant proportion of these lands had come to the family as a result of land reform.⁴² There were disputes among

⁴¹ On Newar property division see Gellner (1992: 25-6) and Quigley (1985); for an examination of the process as it occurs elsewhere in South Asia see Parry (1979: ch.6).

⁴² By land reform I am referring not only to the 1964 Lands Act, but also to subsequent land reform legislation such as the 1997 amendment to the Lands Act, which stipulated an equal division of land between landowner and tenant (see Wily et al. 2009: 107).

the brothers and cousins over who had received the most valuable land, which resulted in several legal cases that stretched over a number of years. In the view of three brothers, one of their cousins was particularly culpable in pursuing a legal case which they saw as unjustified and as draining the family's resources. Their anger reached its climax one early morning in 2000 when the three brothers confronted their cousin near to his home just outside Byasi, and a physical fight ensued. What exactly occurred is disputed. The cousin claims that the brothers tried to kill him by throwing him in front of an oncoming vehicle. The brothers claim that it was only a minor physical fight, and point to the fact that their cousin sustained no serious injuries. It is agreed by both sides that one of the brothers verbally threatened to kill the cousin during the course of the confrontation.

After this confrontation, the cousin reported to the local police office that the brothers had attempted to kill him, and word came to the brothers that they would soon be arrested. In order to avert this, they attempted to make peace with their cousin, by offering him a significant amount of money in exchange for him dropping both the attempted murder case and his land-related litigation. The cousin initially rejected this offer, but the entire community of Byasi, many of whom were in some way related to the people in question, rallied around the brothers and pressured the cousin to meet with them in a large public meeting held in a hall at the local school. At this meeting, which was brokered by two prominent local men who were also relatives of the disputants, it was agreed that the cousin would accept a somewhat larger sum of money than originally proposed and drop his legal cases. A document was signed to this effect by the cousin, the brothers, and several local men who acted as witnesses.

When the brothers came to hand the money over to their cousin, he appeared to have changed his mind about the deal and refused to take it. The brothers decided that the best course of action was to leave the money at the local police station, where it could be collected

by their cousin in a way that would be less damaging to his pride. They claim that the cousin collected his money from the police station at a later time, although what became of the money is disputed. In any case, the land case that was being pursued at that time was dropped, and the police, aware of the agreement that had been reached, did not pursue the attempted murder case against the brothers.

During the 12 years after these events, the brothers and the cousin appeared to have reached an uneasy truce; resentments over the land division persisted, but the brothers considered the legal aspect of the dispute to be over. However, in early 2012 the cousin brought a new legal case relating to the land division, and shortly after this, when the cousin's mother died in mid-2012, the dispute again erupted into a major social conflict in Byasi. The cousin, who was the younger of two sons, had considered his mother an antagonist in his disputes with his family, and she had lived with his elder brother, even though it is traditional where families are divided for the mother to live with her younger son. Immediately after the death of his mother, the cousin refused to act as the chief mourner at her funeral, although this is the younger son's traditional duty. The chief mourner at a Newar funeral is central to the entire occasion, and has many ritual duties, including, most importantly, that of lighting the funeral pyre (see Gutschow and Michaels 2005: 88-96). The cousin said that he would act as the chief mourner only if the other men involved in the land dispute settled it in his favour.

The man's brother and cousins, as well as other relatives and neighbours (*jala khala*), considered this an outrageous way to behave, and a vocal and physically charged confrontation ensued outside the house where the deceased woman had lived. This lasted from the early morning after the night in which the mother had died until about 1pm, and took place with the mother's body lying feet away on the ground floor of the house. I observed most of this dispute: it had the appearance of an isolated elderly man (the cousin) shouting angrily and indiscriminately at a large crowd of people. Some of the people were

shouting back at him; others were simply watching with interest. The cousin focused his rage particularly on the brothers with whom he had fought in 2000, one of whom had to be restrained by friends from attacking his cousin. A few people who appeared to be the cousin's friends were standing near to him, but they looked uncomfortable and did not speak.

Eventually, the cousin was convinced to fulfil his duties as chief mourner at the funeral. By around 1.30 p.m. (an unusually late time to begin a funeral procession, for a person who had died in the night) the cousin was barefoot, and dressed only in a white loin cloth with a white scarf around his head, as is expected of a chief mourner. He joined the funeral procession, which included around 80 male neighbours and relatives, which processed by a set route towards a *ghāt* (cremation ground) on the river on the edge of the city, which is the traditional place where people of the woman's clan are cremated. Like the cousin, the other primary mourners (*dukha kayephung*) – that is the men most closely related to the dead woman – wore white scarves. They were supported by relatives as they walked and every one of them, including the cousin, appeared to be crying, including men whom I had seen conversing happily with friends only minutes earlier.⁴³

When we reached the *ghāt* everyone took their shoes off and went inside a walled area, and the body was placed on a dais in the centre of the area. A specially shaped stone was placed in the mouth of the corpse, which had earlier been decorated with fine clothes, flowers, and a garland, and all of the mourners processed past the corpse and poured water into the mouth of the dead woman with their right hands. Few of the ordinary mourners showed any special emotion while doing this, but when the primary mourners (*dukha kayephung*) came, after the others, they were all crying profusely. The cousin, being the chief mourner, came very last of all, and he was also crying profusely, as is required of the chief

⁴³ On ritual and emotion see Michaels and Wulf (2012).

mourner: he seemed to be participating in the event with a surprising degree of social appropriateness, given the bitter dispute in which he had been engaged not long before. The cousin lit the funeral pyre and it was then time for the ordinary mourners, including myself, to go back to Byasi, taking a different route back and washing ourselves from a tank of water in order to purify ourselves. The cousin and the other primary mourners remained to perform further rituals.

This was not the end of the story. The cousin apparently continued to harbour resentments and, as well as continuing with his litigation over land, decided to up the stakes of the dispute in a dramatic way in early 2014. It transpired that the legal case he had brought against his cousins in 2000 for attempted murder had never been officially closed, but had in fact simply lain dormant in the local police office, not acted on and apparently now forgotten. Acting on advice from his daughter, who had trained as a lawyer, he decided to re-initiate the case, and with the representation of his daughter was successful in obtaining an order from a judge that his cousins should be arrested. They were duly arrested, and spent several days in prison in Bhaktapur.

My fieldwork ended in July 2013, but I happened to be taking a short visit to Bhaktapur when these arrests happened in April 2014. The family with whom I was staying in Byasi were related to the imprisoned cousins through the grandmother of the house, and so I was able to observe at first-hand how the family reacted. During the time of the men's imprisonment, which lasted three days, most of the men's relatives rallied around them. They visited them in prison, bringing them food and staying to comfort them. They also hired a lawyer who presented documentary evidence to the court of the agreement reached in 2000, and also argued from medical records from that time that, as the cousin had sustained no serious injuries in the attack, there could have been no attempted murder. These arguments were accepted by the judge and the men were released from prison.

What struck me most about this dispute was the way that it pitted an ethics centred on the individual against an ethics centred on the group. The cousin was a man who was very much cognizant of his rights as an individual: he considered the original land settlement of the late 1990s to have been unjust to him personally and was dogged in his attempts to have it overturned. He was willing to threaten to abandon even the most sacred of family duties – that of acting as the mourner at his mother’s funeral – in order to achieve this end. He was also encouraged in his struggles with his family by his daughter, whose education as a lawyer gave him the tools necessary to resume his legal attacks on his brothers. His sense of outrage was deepened by the violence his brothers had allegedly committed on him in 2000. Nonetheless, despite his doggedness in pursuing what he saw as his rights, the cousin was forced at various points to modify his behaviour by the moral weight of the community. At the time of the alleged murder attempt in 2000, and again during the 2012 funeral, he eventually succumbed to social pressure to compromise and conform. During the funeral it appeared both to me and to others to whom I spoke that he had succumbed to the point where he in fact fulfilled his social duties with energy and a strong sense of what was socially appropriate.

Most of the Byasi community were united in condemning the actions of the cousin, and would generally defend the conduct of his brothers. People would describe the cousin as ‘mad’ (*pagal*) and as a ‘good-for-nothing’ (*mwa maru mha*). The most common phrase used, however, was ‘shameless person’ (*lajyā maru mha*).⁴⁴ The basic problem, as most people saw it, was that the cousin lacked *lajyā*, and thus could not distinguish the socially inappropriate from the socially appropriate (to describe appropriateness, people use the phrases *milay ju* [is appropriate] and *milay maju* [is inappropriate]).

⁴⁴ In Kathmandu and Patan, the phrase *machhā maju mha* is more common than *lajyā maru mha* as a term for a shameless person. *Machhā*, like *lajyā*, means shame, decency, or embarrassment.

When I spoke to them about the case local people did not seem very interested in the justice of the original land settlement, which I, as a rights-conscious Westerner, had instinctively felt to be a key question. Neither were local people particularly interested in the rightness or otherwise of the brothers' actions in attacking their cousin. Rather, what they focused on in conversation was the fact that the cousin had disregarded the adjudication of the community, and that his persistent litigation and refusal to fulfil his ritual duties disturbed the community and brought shame on his family. The question of the man's individual rights – either to land or to be safe from physical attack – did not appear to most people to be morally significant; rather, the significant rights at stake were those of the community to be respected and undisturbed, and those of the family to maintain its resources and honour (*ijjat*). Thus the most important reference points of local morality were the community and the family, rather than the individual.

This case, then, illustrates both the ways in which social changes (in the form of land reform and the education of daughters) can disturb traditional moral systems, and also the tenacity and continuing salience of traditional morality (in the response of local people to what they perceived as shameless individualism). The story I have described is unusual in some of its details (such as the alleged attempted murder), but its basic structure – a brother or cousin aggrieved over a land division coming into conflict with his family and the wider community – is quite common. Such disputes were a frequent subject of gossip in Byasi.

Early in my fieldwork, I discovered that the best way of befriending local people in Byasi was to sit out on the public porch (*phalcā*) during the days and in the evening, and talk to the other people sitting there. Many of the older people in the locality, particularly the older women, will sit out on the *phalcā* for hours at a time, and they found it amusing to talk to a young foreigner who was trying to learn their language. As time went on and my language skills improved, I developed close friendships with a number of the men and

women who were in the habit of sitting on the *phalcā* outside my house. A common theme in my discussions with these older people was how things had changed since their childhoods. Everyone agreed that the transformations had been profound. Most people remarked positively on the material changes that had occurred: the lessening of the difficulty of work in the fields,⁴⁵ increasing prosperity, indoor toilets, and cleaner roads. However, most of these people also agreed that there had been a moral decline in Bhaktapur over the period of their lifetimes.

The way in which this moral decline was usually described was in terms of a decline in care (*sahārā*) or love (*māyā* or *prem*) for family members. Sometimes it was members of the extended family – that is, family members who lived in a separate household – who were accused of lacking care, as with the cousin in the story above. When discussing the case I have described, local people would often relate it to the wider phenomena of greed for property or the neglect of family ritual duties, which often incorporate acts of respect towards senior family members. Another common target of complaint in my conversations on the *phalcā* was daughters-in-law, who were said by older women to lack care and respect for their elders because of their higher levels of education, which made them arrogant and careless of their household duties. While conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have long been a feature of Newar society,⁴⁶ it is commonly agreed that the education of the current generation of young women has exacerbated tensions between them and their elders. Disrespectful daughters-in-law, like troublesome cousins, were often described as lacking *lajyā*.

⁴⁵ Due to the introduction of fertilisers and modern technology such as tractors.

⁴⁶ See Gellner (1992: 28) on the frequently tense nature of this relationship in Newar society. Lynn Bennett's *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters* (1983) is a powerful study of, among other things, the difficulties faced by high-caste Nepali-speaking women within their husbands' households.

When the people I talked with on the *phalcā* (all of whom were Hindu) discovered that I was studying Christianity, many of them were curious. They had all heard of Christianity (which they called *isāi dharma*), and many of them had relatives or acquaintances who had converted. They were interested in discussing what would make people take the step of Christian conversion, which they thought of as highly immoral, and as signifying a lack of care and respect for family (most significantly for them, Christians are required to give up all Hindu rituals including funerary rites). While some would simply describe Christian converts as being mad or shameless, others would say that people converted to Christianity because they had not been properly cared for by their families. One example that was used was that of a local family who had converted to Christianity after having failed to receive support from their extended family at the time of their father's funeral. In this case one of the local men actually expressed sympathy for the decision to convert. Perhaps paradoxically, then, Christianity seems to be viewed by people in Byasi both as a symptom of moral decline and as a response to that decline, and in particular as a response to the failure of care. In Part III I will explore how many Christians themselves see their conversions as being a response to a failure of care.

3.3 *Ijyat, patronage, and the rejection of deference*

The concept of *ijyat* - which can be defined variously as 'prestige, social esteem, honour, reputation, worth or value in the estimation of others, or social standing' (Parish 1994: 90) – is central to Bhaktapur's caste system. *Ijyat* is a concept that is particularly related to how a person's status is evaluated by others, and thus it is both social and hierarchical. One illuminating translation for the word *ijyat* is 'face' (Levy 1990: 185): that is, the appearance of a person in the gaze of others. Indeed, the loss of *ijyat* is often described by Newars with

the term *nhāy wanegu*, which literally means ‘nose going’, or ‘loss of nose’. Patronage as it traditionally operated in Bhaktapur was closely connected with the reproduction of *ijjat*. As well as giving a large proportion of their agricultural produce to their landlords, the Farmers would traditionally be required (as I noted in Chapter 2 and will explore in greater detail in the next chapter) to enact their subservience to their landlords in ritual form. Many of these ritual forms of service served the purpose of honouring the landlord and maintaining his *ijjat* in the wider society.

It is this system of *ijjat* reproduction that has been undermined by the peasants’ movement and the rise of the pro-Farmer NWPP. Farmers and other lower castes no longer work to maintain the *ijjat* of the upper castes as they once did. Few Farmers now keep up their traditional ritual duties to landlords: as Gellner and Pradhan note, ‘young [Farmers] tend to see the old kind of landlord-tenant relationship as highly exploitative’ (1999: 171). Yogesh Raj’s *History as Mindscapes* – which is a life-history of a Bhaktapur Farmer born in the 1928 – gives a vivid sense of the shift from a world where caste hierarchies were unquestioned to one where they were openly challenged. The Farmer in question remembers,

After I started talking with other Samgh⁴⁷ members about all this I began to understand the tragedy of it all. My heart bled. [...] Suddenly I could see the injustice of it all: my mother would wash the blood stained undergarments of their [the landlord’s family’s] female members.

Unwillingly, for she never liked it. But she could not imagine that there could be a different life than that. (Raj 2010: 123)

The rejection by Newar Farmers of deference towards higher castes – that is, of attentiveness to their *ijjat* – has occurred not just in Bhaktapur, but throughout the Kathmandu Valley, and has been manifested in widespread Farmer support for communist political parties (Gellner 1997: 165-77).

⁴⁷ The Kisan Samgh was an early peasant organisation in Bhaktapur. This recollection dates from the 1950s.

The disruption of traditional forms of patronage in Bhaktapur has not decreased the salience of *ijjat* in Bhaktapurian society: rather, it has made the *ijjat* of the higher castes less secure and has increased opportunities for the middle and lower castes to pursue *ijjat* of their own.⁴⁸ Whereas, traditionally, the general lines of the caste hierarchy were broadly agreed on and status competition mainly occurred among different clans on the same caste level,⁴⁹ many Farmers now aspire to equal status with the high castes, and most Newar Dalits demand at least respectful treatment from others. These trends can be seen in the tall houses which richer Newar Dalits have built around the edge in the city. Whereas in the past Dalits were forbidden from building dwellings of more than two stories or using roof tiles, they now proudly exhibit their wealth, if they have it,⁵⁰ in tall and colourful dwellings. Desires for increased status among the Farmers are often expressed in lavish expenditure on life-cycle rituals, and in the choice of some from the Farmer caste to change their name to ‘Shrestha’.⁵¹

The increasing desire of the Farmer caste for equal status with the high castes, and their general refusal to show deference towards these castes, has greatly disturbed many members of the upper castes in Bhaktapur. A striking example of this disturbance, and of how it relates to the concept of *ijjat*, can be found in the life story of a man I will call Bir Bahadur. Bir was born in Bhaktapur in 1959 into the upper level of the Karmacharya caste,⁵² to the family responsible for worship at the Taleju temple. He did a Master’s degree in political science and gained a job teaching political science in the Bhaktapur campus of Tribhuvan University in the early 1980s. From his time as a student, he was involved in

⁴⁸ On the ‘*ijjat* economy’ in Kathmandu see Liechty (2010: 17-18); I discuss Liechty’s work further in Section 10.1.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 1.

⁵⁰ The butcher caste, in particular, has prospered, due to increasing levels of meat consumption.

⁵¹ Colin Rosser collected statistical evidence showing that as early as the 1960s very significant numbers of Farmers within Bhaktapur had experienced mobility into the Shrestha caste (Rosser 1966: 101-2). Although his findings have been questioned by Quigley (1986, 1996), even Quigley recognises that many Farmers have *attempted* upward mobility.

⁵² He is a Chathariya Shrestha (see Appendix 1).

Panchayat politics, on the monarchist side. Through a close connection with Dinesh Shrestha,⁵³ the leading pro-monarchy politician in Bhaktapur, Bir assumed formal political roles at times of monarchist ascendancy in the city. First, when most of the NWPP leadership was imprisoned after the ‘Hyoju incident’ of 1988 (see Brown 1996: 118-9), Bir assumed the role of ward chairman for his local ward, and also acted as an advisor to Dinesh Shrestha, who became mayor. This role ended with the establishment of multi-party democracy in 1990.

Bir’s fortunes were again revived in 2004 when King Gyanendra assumed direct rule in Nepal and all elected local government officials were dismissed. Dinesh Shrestha again became mayor of Bhaktapur, and Bir again assumed the role of his advisor. During this time he was also made acting campus head of the Bhaktapur campus of Tribhuvan University. However, when multi-party democracy was re-established in 2006, Bir lost his position as campus chief, though he retained a teaching job at the university. Bir considered his loss of the position of campus chief to be a great humiliation, a devastating loss of *ijjat*. His reaction to this loss was extreme: he decided to move to Canada, which he did in late 2006. In Canada he has worked in a manual job, in a position which is undoubtedly of lower status than the one he held in Bhaktapur. In 2012 he was able to bring the rest of his family – his wife and two daughters – to live with him in Canada.

I interviewed Bir Bahadur when he visited Bhaktapur in 2012 in order to perform his son’s *kaytā puja*, and to collect his family to come with him to Canada. It was striking how reluctant Bir was to talk about his political life and the events that had led up to his departure for Canada in 2006. Although he confirmed the political roles he had held during his life, and that the reason for his going abroad was his failure to retain the campus chief position, he did

⁵³ As Dinesh Shrestha is a well-known politician, I use his real name.

so only in the briefest manner, making it clear that he wished to discuss other subjects. The subject on which Bir did wish to expand was that of his family history, which he clearly considered to be a matter of great pride. He interpreted his family history in terms of his monarchist political ideology, which focused on the idea that the monarchy is a guarantor of peace between Nepal's diverse caste and ethnic groups. The way that Bir talks about monarchy and the role of his own family clearly reflects the principles of sociality and patronage.

I reproduce a relevant section of the interview below:

IG: Your father worked as a priest?

BBK: Yes, he did. You may have come to see our house courtyard where you can see our family deity temple [*āgan chhen*]. [...] Our caste, Karmacharya, receive initiation [*dikshā*] in that temple. Those who receive *dikshā* from this temple become eligible to be a priest of Taleju, who is the family deity of the royal families. My father was the head [*nāyo*] of the Karmacharya priest group. He was the chief priest.

IG: You are the only ones who are allowed to see the Taleju goddess?

BBK: No, not only us but Rajopadhyaya priests⁵⁴ and Joshi priests⁵⁵ are also allowed to enter the Taleju temple. Joshis are the ones who look after the management of the Taleju temple. People from these three castes jointly run the Taleju temple. It is a joint organization of three castes. During the period of Newar Kings, Taleju was the family deity of these kings. That is why the kings' palace and the Taleju temple are close to each other. The Newar kings' power to rule is gone but Taleju is the symbolic form of Newar kings' system of rule. All activities in the name of Taleju are from the period of the Newar kings. The Newar kings' kingship is gone in a political sense but this kingship still exists in the form of religion and culture. Shahs⁵⁶ were also the kings but their kingship has gone, so their palace looks like a dead place because they do not have any continuing religious or cultural rule. Nothing remains of the Shah dynasty. The Newar kings had a lot of social and cultural influence: they maintained social and cultural harmony among different the castes and communities. [...]

⁵⁴ Newar Brahmans, occupying caste Level I in the table in Appendix 1.

⁵⁵ Newar astrologers, occupying caste Level II in the table in Appendix 1.

⁵⁶ This is the Nepali-speaking royal dynasty that ruled Nepal from 1768 until the declaration of a republic in 2008.

IG: Did your father have any political role?

BBK: From one perspective there might be some political influence because of being a royal priest of the Taleju temple. It used to be a royal palace so all the political decisions were made from there. [...] In Taleju there are many people from different castes involved as service providers. We are involved there as priests. Some are working as assistants. Some are involved there as a clay providers. Some are involved there as killers of buffaloes, they are called butchers [*nay*]. Some are musicians. Almost all the different castes are represented there in Taleju. Some people do the job of supplying water for the temple; they are called *nā-kā*, which means to bring water. In that way almost all castes have big or small job in the Taleju temple, so they are naturally thankful to the Newar Malla kings. So they try to keep up a continuation of the Malla kings' kingship. Therefore from this perspective we did have some sort of political role because of our relation with the Taleju temple. The priests from Taleju are not only working in Taleju to play a role in the continuation of Newar kingship, they also work or conduct rites and rituals for the local people too. So he had an influence in society and in communities too.

Here, Bir Bahadur envisions the workings of the Taleju temple as a microcosm of what a good Hindu society would look like.⁵⁷ Each caste has a specialised role, and acts under the supervision of the three caste groups who control the temple – the Karmacharya, the Rajopadhyaya, and the Joshi. Apparently, the castes all get on well and show each other due respect. Ultimately, the system is guaranteed by the Malla kingship, which Bir Bahadur sees as socially and culturally, if not politically, present. This view of things is naturally comforting for Bir Bahadur: he maintains his *ijjat* as a Karmacharya, at least, even if he lost his *ijjat* in the political and professional spheres.

What is most striking about Bir Bahadur's life is the extremity with which he reacted to what he perceived as a loss of *ijjat*. It is by no means unusual for a Nepali man to go abroad to look for work, but it is unusual for a man of Bir's status and wealth to go abroad in order to carry out a low-status job. Even though he failed to retain his position as campus

⁵⁷ See Levy (1990: 234-241) and Vergati (1995: 85-97) on the religious significance of the Taleju temple.

chief, Bir retained a teaching position in the university, and, more importantly, has a large private income derived from rents paid on lands and property. So he had no need to go to Canada in order to earn a living. Despite his political failures, Bir is still a respected figure in much of Bhaktapurian society, as demonstrated by the several hundred people who came to the feast for his son's *kaytā pujā* in 2012, many of whom I saw greeting him enthusiastically. Bir has many friends and close relatives in Bhaktapur. So to go to Canada represented a major sacrifice.

It seems that the reason Bir went to Canada was not financial but rather that he simply could not 'face' Bhaktapurian society after he had lost his position as campus chief. When I asked him why he went to Canada, he simply said that could not stand the city's 'dirty' (*phohor*) politics, and then talked about the arrogance and disrespectfulness of the Farmers (the politicians who were responsible for Bir's downfall were mainly communists of the Farmer caste). Bir's personal identity, and identity as a member of Bhaktapur society, was so tied up with his *ijjat* as an academic, political, and social leader, that when his *ijjat* in these spheres was decisively downgraded, when he felt disrespected and humiliated, he simply could not envisage a place for himself in Bhaktapur. Going to Canada was a kind of social suicide: a putting to death of his social self within Bhaktapur. This became particularly clear to me when I saw how reluctant Bir was to discuss the events leading up to his going to Canada. For him, the act of going abroad was an attempt to erase the event that led to his loss of *ijjat*; to discuss these events would be to allow them in some sense to live on.

The political background to Bir's loss of face was the rise to political power of the Farmers, in the form of the NWPP; the social background was the dissolution of Farmer deference. In parts II and III I will observe various ways in which the rejection of deference in Bhaktapur is linked with the growth of Christianity. On the most basic level, Christianity appeals as a religion whose norms are more egalitarian than those of Hinduism. On a deeper

level, it can be seen that the rejection of patronage in social relationships is mirrored in Christian converts in a rejection of patronage relationships with deities themselves (see, in particular, chapters 7 and 10).

3.4 Conclusion

At the end of Section 3.2 I noted a paradox in the way Hindus in Byasi view people who convert to Christianity: they see conversion both as an uncaring action and, in many cases, as a response to a failure of care that converts themselves have experienced. The fact that conversion is often seen, both by Christians and non-Christians, as a response to a failure of care suggests that Christianity may be seen as an effort to reconstitute ethical norms that are seen to have failed. In the next chapter I will examine a movement that is similar to Christianity in this respect. The communist movement in Bhaktapur represents not only an attempt to improve the lot of the Farmers and undermine norms of caste deference (both of which it has done very successfully), it also represents an effort to reconstitute norms of care in Bhaktapurian society, as well as (less explicitly) to replace traditional norms of deference with newer ones. In the next chapter I will attempt to show how this is so.

Chapter 4. Reconstituting ethics: the NWPP and Narayan Man Bijukchhe

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore some ways in which Bhaktapurian communism can be seen as both a cause of, and a response to, the ethical unsettlement I examined in the last chapter.

Specifically, I argue that the NWPP has actively attempted to reconstitute the two values I described as having been unsettled: care and deference. Using the terms developed by Joel Robbins to describe cultural change, which I laid out in Section 1.2, I suggest that communist understandings of care can be seen as a ‘transformative reproduction’ of traditional values, while communist understandings of deference can be understood as an ‘adoption’ of substantially new values (though ones that still resonate in some ways with the old). In Section 4.2, I argue that while the NWPP has actively and successfully opposed traditional caste hierarchies and norms of deference, the values of care it promotes are generally understood in rather traditional terms. In fact, the NWPP has increasingly positioned itself as a defender of traditional culture against corrupting outside forces, such as individualism and Christianity. In Section 4.3, by examining the life and thought of the NWPP leader Narayan Man Bijukchhe,⁵⁸ I will explore the ways the NWPP has attempted to replace older norms of caste deference with newer norms of hierarchy based on the values of integrity, intellect, and social service. I suggest that the ways NWPP leaders legitimate their power have similarities with the ways Christian leaders legitimate their positions.

⁵⁸ As Bijukchhe is a prominent public figure, I have used his real name.

4.2 *The NWPP, the Farmers, and tradition*

David Gellner has noted the ‘elective affinity’ between communism and the social traditionalism of the Newar Farmers (2001: 291). This observation might seem surprising: in Nepal, as elsewhere, communists usually employ a rhetoric of radical social change. However, as Gellner has observed, Newar communists have been reluctant to attack conventional religion; they do not tend to stand so much for wholesale modernization as for ‘equality, for helping the poor, and for the rights of the tiller’ (Gellner 1997: 176). In this section, by outlining the history of the peasants’ movement (*kisan andolan*) and the activities of the NWPP subsequent to this, I intend to show that while the NWPP have been a force for radical change with respect to inter-caste relations, they have been a conservative force with respect to tradition religious and ethical norms within the Farmer community, including those related to care.

The legal context of the changes in landholding that occurred during the time of peasants’ movement has been described by M.C. Regmi. Regmi characterises the landholding system in Nepal prior to the 1950s as feudalistic, in that it entailed ‘the unlimited concentration of landownership rights in the hands of select groups in the society’ (1976: 55). Historically, the dominant form of land tenure in Nepal has been *raikar*, or state land, with the state theoretically claiming ownership of all land within the kingdom. *Raikar* land was allotted to subordinate agents in a number of ways: as *birta* (to individuals), as *jagir* (to officials in lieu of salary), or as *guthi* (to religious institutions). According to Regmi, the 1964 Lands Act, in the places where it was implemented, had ‘profound social and psychological consequences’ (ibid.: 208), granting security of tenure and so giving tenants a far greater independence in relation to landlords.⁵⁹ It also reduced the amount of rice crop due to

⁵⁹ Prior to the act landlords could throw tenants off their land arbitrarily and at any time, meaning that the tenant had constantly to try to please the landlord through acts of deference.

landlords to 23 *pāthis* per *ropani*: in the Kathmandu Valley, this was roughly half what had previously been paid (Gellner and Pradhan 1999: 169).⁶⁰

The peasants' movement arose in Bhaktapur from the mid-1960s, in order to agitate for the full implementation of the 1964 legislation. The ferment of that time, and the social transformation that eventually came about, are vividly described by an elderly Bhaktapurian Farmer who spoke with Suresh Dhakal and Sanjeev Pokharel:

I can still remember that after the Land Reform of mid-1960s, the local peasants started renovating the roof [*sic*] of their houses, frequently appeared in new clothes, and many started wearing shoes, enrolment in schools increased, new shops in the neighbourhood were being opened and so on. Likewise, farmers started buying improved seeds, chemical fertilisers, and harvested increased production. This eventually increased the purchasing capacity of the ordinary farmers. I think, if communists of Bhaktapur had not launched a peasants' movement at that time, we could not have come out of that [*sic*] harsh living conditions, instead [we] would have continued the life of *das* [a slave] like earlier.

I myself was a participant [in] the peasants' movements of that time. By 1968 AD, Jyapus [Farmers] of my neighbourhood started organising meetings at night, which later resulted in a series of movements like *bharpai andolan* [receipt movement], *mohiyani hak* [tenants' rights], reduction of *kut* [land tax paid to landowners], *sadhe dhapaune andolan* ['chase away the bulls movement'] and so on. The results of all these movements were that we could acquire tenancy rights as provisioned by the Land Reform Act, 1964.

Earlier we were just *halis* [bonded agricultural labourers]. [...] Farmers had to offer 'free but compulsory' labour to landowners. Later, [we had to do] no 'free but compulsory' labour [for] the landlords. If we wanted to discontinue tilling the landowner's land, we could claim our share [of] up to 50 percent of the land we had been tilling.⁶¹ My living condition which you see today would never have been possible if there was no *bhumi sudhar* [land reform]. (Dhakal and Pokharel 2009: 187)

⁶⁰ In Bhaktapur, at around the same time that the quantities of crop due to the landowner dropped, fertilizers were introduced that significantly increased yields: the combined effect of these developments was to reduce the overall proportion of crop paid to the landowner to approximately one eighth of what it had been previously (Dhakal and Pokharel 2009: 187).

⁶¹ This reform was in fact implemented by a 1997 amendment to the Lands Act (Wily et al. 2009: 107).

The mention here of night-time meetings hints at the severe social tensions between Farmers and the upper castes that developed during the time of the land reform agitation.

A description of the ‘receipt movement’ mentioned in the passage will illustrate these tensions. As I have noted, the 1964 Lands Act gave tenants security of tenancy, and reduced the rice crop due to the landlord to 23 *pāthis* per *ropani*. The way in which this new system was to be enforced was that the landlord was to give a receipt (*bharpāi*) to the tenant when he was given his share of the crop: this receipt would serve as proof that the year’s crop share had been paid, and as proof of tenancy. In order to evade the reforms landlords, in Bhaktapur and elsewhere, often refused to give their tenants receipts if they paid only 23 *pāthis*. They would then take the tenant to court, claiming they had refused to pay anything at all; without a receipt, the tenant could not show that they had paid their 23 *pāthis*. If the landlord was successful in court, they would be able to evict the tenant and find someone more pliable, who would pay the traditional share of crop. The ‘receipt movement’ was started by communist leaders in Bhaktapur in order to respond to this practice. Farmers would congregate at night and arm themselves with clubs and sharp-edged farm tools; they would then go as a group to the houses of landlords who refused to write receipts for their tenants, and physically compel them to do so. The numerical dominance of the Farmers in Bhaktapur (they comprise more than 60% of the population), along with their high levels of social cohesion, allowed them to operate this strategy with a high degree of success. By the mid-1970s, the Lands Act had been largely implemented in Bhaktapur.

In 1975 the group of communists who had led the peasants’ movement – most notably Narayan Man Bijukchhe and Babu Kaji Basukala⁶² – split off from the national communist party to form the Nepal Workers and Peasants’ Organisation (later renamed the NWPP).

⁶² A Farmer caste leader from Byasi.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, NWPP candidates were consistently victorious in municipality elections (they formally stood as independents, as during this time political parties were illegal). The NWPP deepened its support in Bhaktapur during the periods leading up to the national referendum of 1980 and the People's Movement (Jan Andolan) of 1990, during both of which Bhaktapur was seen as remarkable for scale of its political mobilization.⁶³ After the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1990 the NWPP came into the open and continued to dominate Bhaktapur's politics.⁶⁴

In 1993 the NWPP-controlled municipality introduced a tourist entrance fee, which has been the primary financial basis of NWPP policy in Bhaktapur ever since (Hachhethu 2004). The NWPP's tourism-focused financial strategy builds on the work of the German-funded BDP, which operated in the city from 1974-1986. This project focused on the renovation of temples and historic buildings, street-cleaning, and sanitation. The tourist entrance fee, which raised the more than USD 330,000 between 1993 and 2000 (Hachhethu 2004: 20), has allowed the municipality government to continue the street cleaning and temple renovation instituted by the BDP, which in turn has attracted higher numbers of tourists and increased revenues. The municipality actively promotes Bhaktapur's image as a 'Hindu medieval city' in order to attract tourists (Grieve 2006: 28). The money has also allowed the municipality to initiate various projects that benefit the Farmer community: most importantly, affordable 'community schools', health posts, and a college that provides low-cost higher education.

There is a general consensus in Bhaktapur that the municipal government is run by and in the interests of the Farmer caste. Although the NWPP's leader is upper-caste, almost

⁶³ On Nepal's recent political history see Brown (1996), Hoftun et al. (1999), and Whelpton (2005).

⁶⁴ The NWPP has not been able to maintain significant support outside of Bhaktapur, although it does have parliamentary representatives for the far-western districts of Dailekh and Kalikot.

the entirety of the NWPP's leadership and membership other than him comes from the Farmer caste;⁶⁵ the leadership and employees of the municipality are likewise mainly Farmers. An example of pro-Farmer bias in the municipality can be found in the story of a property dispute experienced by a high-caste friend of mine. This man had constructed a new house on the outskirts of Bhaktapur in the early 2000s. After another man, a member of the Farmer caste, had built a house adjacent to my friend's, he began to use part of my friend's land as an access route, driving vehicles up and down it and even going so far as to enclose the area with barbed wire, such that it was separated from the rest of my friend's property. My friend took the neighbour to court in order to establish his right to the property, and although he won the court case, the municipality, whose responsibility it was to enforce the decision, did not do so. My friend interprets this as an example of the bias of the municipality towards the Farmers. Stories such as this are common among the higher castes.

While the NWPP has strongly opposed traditional patronage relations between the Farmers and the high castes, they have supported traditions that reinforce intra-caste solidarity among the Farmers. Much of the newfound prosperity of the Farmers has been spent on traditional religious and cultural activities: it is not uncommon for Farmers to spend the equivalent of several thousand pounds on the ceremony and feast for a child's initiation ritual or wedding (see Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 2012). The reinvigoration of traditional ritual and religious life brought about by Farmer prosperity has been actively supported by the municipality and the NWPP. Events I observed in August 2012, during the festival of Gai Jatra, illustrate this.

As Richard Widdess (2006) has described, Gai Jatra has traditionally been a time of subversions and inversions in Bhaktapur, during which it is licensed for men to shout

⁶⁵ At one time there were a significant minority of upper-caste people in the NWPP leadership, but most of them have now left the party.

obscenities at women in the street, and for dramatic groups openly to mock the powerful. An important feature of this week-long festival is the *gaicha pyākhāng* (literally, ‘small cow dance’), which involves masked men dancing in a circle, banging large sticks on the ground, and singing-self composed songs of a satirical nature. The *gaicha pyākhāng* has apparently been dying out in recent years, and so to re-invigorate it, and other related traditions, the municipality organised a competition throughout the 2012 festival where *gaicha pyākhāng* and other cultural groups would come to perform at set spots, where they would be judged by NWPP leaders, with the winners receiving significant cash prizes. These competitions were not for the benefit of tourists – they were held in the evenings and I spotted no other foreigners in attendance. Rather, they seemed to be a way of reconstituting Bhaktapur’s traditional cultural practices under the stewardship of the NWPP, allowing the party to present itself as the protector of local traditions against harmful outside influences.

Some men from Byasi were organising a *gaicha pyākhāng* group for the competition, and invited me to join them as they travelled around the city performing in various localities. Most of these men were NWPP activists, and their performance was commended by the judges. One of their songs had the following lyrics:

Art and culture is the property of our nation [*jheegu deyā sampati*]

Everyone must remember to protect this property

Religion is also our culture [...]

It is we who keep our religion alive [*jheegu dharma jheesang he mwāke*] [...]

There are many religions here, foreigners are also coming to stay here

There are those who cheat us [*jhānga lāipung*] by changing our religion [*dharma heeka*] and breaking our minds

There are those who come here saying ‘religion, religion’, hammering [*chhyāchhyā yāigu*] against our religion

They change our religion by enticing us, showing us our greed [*lobha*]

They come to our place in the name of religion, and destroy our society

After they have broken up our society and our minds, they eat up the whole country [*desh he naigu*]

We should not be greedy and we should not abandon our religion

Those who eat our country in the name of religion should not be allowed to stay here

We need our religion, we don't need the religion of others

We have to fight [*jhee he lwāy ma*] in order to keep our religion alive.

Another of their songs contained these lyrics:

People have forgotten how to weave the *halega malega* pattern

People celebrate Christmas and New Year and they learn how to sing rap songs

People have stopped shaving their heads when they conduct death rituals for their mothers and fathers
[*māng bau yāgu srāddha yāsā sāngkhāy mwāyekala*]

People are learning foreign culture [*videshi sanskār*], and destroying their own culture

Destroying their culture they become a 'model' [*modal*; i.e. a fashion model]

We have to learn new things and do new things, but we should not abandon our identity [*china*]

In order to preserve our identity we should not abandon our culture.

We see here that the NWPP promotes notions of care and community morality that correspond closely with the ethic of sociality described in Chapter 2. Both of these songs, and much NWPP rhetoric besides, centre on the contrast between those who are 'inside' – that is, Hindu Newar Farmers in Bhaktapur – and those who are 'outside' – foreign capitalists, Christian missionaries, media and music producers, other political parties, other castes and ethnic groups.⁶⁶ The task of the NWPP is to protect those who are 'inside' from those who are 'outside'. The ethics promoted here centre on duty to community (as in 'we have to fight

⁶⁶ The NWPP has been active in opposing the granting of citizenship rights to undocumented people in the south of Nepal. During Gai Jatra 2012 I heard a song from an NWPP-linked *gaicha pyākhāng* group which bemoaned the numbers of 'black-faced *marsyas*' living in Bhaktapur (*marsya* is a term used by Newars to signify people from the south of Nepal).

in order to keep our religion alive’) and duty to family (as with the condemnation of ‘people [who] have stopped shaving their heads when they conduct death rituals’).

Overall, the values of care which the NWPP promotes can be seen, in Robbins’ terms, as a ‘transformative reproduction’ of traditional values of care. The way that care is understood to apply primarily to those within one’s own social groups, and to relate closely to the continuation of traditional ritual and religious life, makes the NWPP’s ethic of care a ‘reproduction’ of traditional values. At the same time, a limited transformation of traditional values has occurred: whereas in the past values of care were reproduced primarily within families and localities, and by kinship organisations such as funeral associations, the NWPP promotes the idea that the party itself is necessary to protect tradition from outside forces. The NWPP advocates a selective adoption of modern institutions – such as schools, colleges and hospitals – in order that the material benefits of modernity can be enjoyed while the party protects Bhaktapur from the cultural aspects of modernity. Thus, under the leadership of the NWPP, traditions of care have become a reified object used for the maintenance of political power, rather than a localised cultural process reproduced below the level of political articulation.

4.3 Narayan Man Bijukchhe and social service

In this section I explore further some of the themes introduced in the last section, with reference to the life and thought of the NWPP leader, Narayan Man Bijukchhe. Bijukchhe’s thought reflects not only the way the NWPP has reproduced and transformed traditional understandings of care, but also the more complex ways it has undermined traditional norms of deference, and adopted substantially new ones. While the great majority of the NWPP’s leaders and activists are from the Farmer caste, Bijukchhe is from an upper-caste family. This

fact, considering that so much of the NWPP's rhetoric appeals to Farmer communalism, poses an obvious problem of legitimation for Bijukchhe. Why should an upper-caste man lead a pro-Farmer party? The way Bijukchhe legitimates his position – which is in fact very strong – relates to an ideal of social service that appeals not only to the traditional ethic of sociality but also to values of integrity and intellect.

Somewhat to my surprise, I was able to develop quite a close relationship with Bijukchhe during my time in Bhaktapur. As my initial plan had been to focus on Bhaktapur's politics, I started to develop links with the NWPP as soon as I arrived in the city. I visited their offices a number of times, attended rallies, and interviewed party leaders and cadres. At first, I had the impression that party workers were suspicious of my motivations: one activist asked me directly if I was a spy for the British government, and said meaningfully that Britain and America must have sent spies to research Iraqi politics before they invaded the country.

The decisive event in my gaining the trust of the party was during a trip I made to Jumla, a district in the far West of Nepal, in April 2012, for the national conference of the Nepal Revolutionary Youths' Union, the youth arm of the NWPP. I got to know a number of mid-ranking NWPP officials quite well during this trip, and produced a report in English on the conference for a party magazine, which pleased the leadership. Soon after this, I was able to meet briefly with Bijukchhe (whom party workers refer to simply as *dāi*, or 'older brother'), and he seemed to be impressed that I had learned some Newari. His trust in me was increased by the fact that one of his brothers was related by marriage to my research assistant, and I had got to know this brother well.

After submitting a request through the brother, I was invited to Bijukchhe's house in order to discuss interviewing him. I proposed that we divide our conversations into three

sessions, each focusing on a different period in his life. He agreed, and also asked me to translate a book he had written from Nepali into English. I knew that this would be a big job but assented nonetheless.⁶⁷ In our initial meeting we talked mainly in Newari; it seemed that my ability to speak Newari was one of the main reasons Bijukchhe was happy to cooperate with me (he apparently mentioned at a public meeting that there was a foreigner in Bhaktapur learning Newari, and used this example to encourage young people to use their mother tongue). It also seemed that Bijukchhe – surrounded as he was by everyday party-political concerns – thirsted for intellectual conversation: he was eager to talk about Marxist political theory, English history and poetry, and previous anthropological studies of Newar society.

Bijukchhe's life has been an eventful one. Born in 1939, he grew up in a Chathariya Shrestha family who lived in the centre of Bhaktapur. His father was a prominent local personality and supporter of the Panchayat regime, and made a good living as a tax-collector for the government. Bijukchhe studied at schools in Kathmandu, Gaur (in southern Nepal), and Bhaktapur, and after receiving a Bachelor's degree in political science, worked as a schoolteacher in Bhaktapur between 1960 and 1965. In 1956 he joined the Students' Federation, a progressive political group, and became a member of the Nepal Communist Party in 1957. In 1958/9 he became a member of his district level committee in the party; he became a district-level leader in 1963/4 and in 1970 he became a national-level leader as a member of the Nepal Communist Party's central committee.⁶⁸ A formative event during this period was a year-long trip to China in 1959-60, ostensibly for treatment of tuberculosis, during which time he studied the thought of Mao and socio-economic developments in

⁶⁷ I eventually employed a student with whom I was acquainted to do the bulk of the translating, which I checked and tidied up into correct English. The book will be published as *Bhaktapur After 100 Years*, and I examine an extract from it below. The book was originally published in Nepali in 2002/3 (Bijukchhe 2059 VS (2002/3 AD)).

⁶⁸ This was a period of splits in the Nepal Communist Party; for a diagrammatic representation of these splits, see Hoftun et al. (1999: 392).

Chinese society. He came back a convinced Maoist. As he gained greater political prominence during the 1960s he attracted increasing attention from the authorities, and was arrested several times. He adopted the pseudonym 'Rohit' in 1963 and in 1965 went underground in Nepal. From 1970 until 1980 he was living underground in India.

After he became a member of the Nepal Communist Party's central committee in 1970, Bijukchhe came into increasing conflict with the party's chairman and founder, Pushpa Lal Shrestha. These conflicts centred around Bijukchhe's radicalism and commitment to a Maoist understanding of communism: Bijukchhe criticised Pushpa Lal for supporting an alliance with the moderate Nepali Congress Party, for failing to label the Soviet Union an imperialist power, and, most importantly, for supporting India's 1971 incursion into East Pakistan, which he considered to be an imperialist invasion (see Parajulee 2000: 57). Hostility towards India has been a constant in Bijukchhe's politics up to the present day. In 1975, as a result of the tensions with Pushpa Lal, Bijukchhe left the Nepal Communist Party and formed the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Organisation (later renamed the NWPP). Bijukchhe has been the president of the party since its formation, and has been a parliamentary representative for the party almost continually since the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1990 (he was re-elected in his Bhaktapur constituency in the elections of November 2013).

Bjukchhe occupies a position of unchallenged authority within the NWPP. Outside of Bhaktapur, the party is almost synonymous with Bijukchhe, and within the city, and among party members in particular, he is held in a great deal of awe. If one visits an NWPP-affiliated bookshop, one will find that the majority of the political books are authored by Bijukchhe;⁶⁹ if one goes to the party offices, one will see pictures of Bijukchhe hanging

⁶⁹ Bijukchhe has written more than forty books.

alongside portraits of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. As he is aging, there are occasional whispers among party supporters as to who will replace him when he passes away; there seems to be a consensus that the death of Bijukchhe will precipitate a major crisis of authority in the party.

During the course of my stay in Bhaktapur, I conducted three long interviews with Bijukchhe, and visited him in his house for informal conversation on a number of other occasions. From my interactions with him, two things above all struck me. The first was the value he placed on ideas. Despite being a politician, it seemed to me that in his interests Bijukchhe was first and foremost an intellectual. When I tried to ask him about the details of Nepali or Bhaktapurian politics, he would often seem impatient to move on to other matters, and his answers would be formulaic and predictable. When I asked him about Marxist theory, history, literature, or religion, however, he would become deeply engaged, and speak animatedly and at length, giving what were idiosyncratic yet interesting interpretations of ideas or events. People who have observed Bijukchhe over the course of his life often comment on this aspect of his personality: his intellectual idiosyncrasy. One Bhaktapur Brahman, who has recently published a book critical of the NWPP, said to me that despite all of his criticisms of NWPP policy, he cannot help but admire Bijukchhe himself, most of all for his independent-mindedness in the face of national consensus.⁷⁰ The second thing that struck me about Bijukchhe, which is perhaps paradoxical in light of his individuality, is his commitment to a certain vision of traditionalism in Newar society. Bijukchhe's intellectualism and his traditionalism come together in his understanding of social service as the highest human vocation.

Bijukchhe's understanding of his own vocation, as well as his cultural traditionalism, comes out clearly in the following extract from his book *Bhaktapur After 100 Years*. The

⁷⁰ For instance, in contrast to other communist parties in Nepal, the NWPP has strongly opposed the adoption of ethnic federalism.

extract takes the form of a letter to a fictional ‘honest bureaucrat’, who has written to Bijukchhe expressing the bitterness of his experiences as a civil servant, and also his concerns for the future of Nepal.

Dear friend Krishna,

I received your letter sent in Asadh. Many, many thanks for putting your thoughts openly and honestly.

While reading your letter, I came to know that you think that the country has been moving towards a huge dark ditch and that there is no possibility of saving it from this. You have raised the issue of possible calamity for you yourself, the country, and Nepali people – to the point even of destruction or disappearance of the country. Your concern [...] is appropriate, but I would compare you with a person who is dreaming frightening dreams [...] and with one who has stopped imagining the brightness of the morning.

Friend, how can life be like that! However long and cold the night is, morning comes and warm light rises on mountains, hills, fields, and houses. Yes, as stated in your letter, you worked honestly as a bureaucrat for 33-34 years, retiring and now having to survive on 5-6 thousand rupees per month. In the letter, you have given the examples of many bureaucrats, who were of your level or lower, being rapidly promoted and becoming millionaires by providing the country’s secret maps and information to foreigners. You mentioned your unhappiness that they were getting promotion on the basis of personal relationships, language, and ethnicity [...] while there are honest bureaucrats who do not flatter their director, secretary, and ministers, who do not compliment and cajole, do not falsely praise, do not send gifts or do not spend millions of rupees in elections, joining hands with various projects or contractors. [...]

In the letter, you also mentioned that you accepted my suggestion that you should be honest while occupying any position of responsibility, but that that did not help your economic condition. I am proud to see you [...] in the list of [...] honest bureaucrats [...]. Some simple bureaucrats join the bureaucracy only in order to put hand to mouth [...]. Some bureaucrats desire to look after and serve the wellbeing of the country and people honestly. Some feel [...] ‘why work in government service if one cannot benefit from being in that position?’ [...] They do corruption, irregularities, and all immoral works by misusing their authority and giving priority to their children, relatives or small self-interest, and become sycophants; they become servants of foreigners, ignoring the fact that the people are the masters of the country. [...]

Krishna, you might have become jealous from seeing those traitors gathering a lot of money or constructing big buildings or enjoying luxury or you might have felt destitute because of your

poverty. The truth is not like that. Hatred should not come into you in the form of jealousy towards those traitors. You should be proud of your poverty [...] because you remained honest during the whole of your service.

Friend, we become old one day. We will remember various incidents of our lives from time to time; our age will provide us with an understanding of good things and of bad things. When you are alone, you will remember your patriotic good works and contributions and feel satisfaction and happiness. Sometimes, you will also repent when you remember any bad things that you did intentionally or unintentionally. But, as you have served and struggled in your lifetime for the wellbeing of the country and people by being a civil servant, you will always live your remaining life with dignity, satisfaction, and joy. Your children and relatives will be inspired to be honest and you will become an example for society.

In contrast with this, those people who betray their country and people and become millionaires or billionaires through links with foreigners and corrupt people will, after retirement, be startled in their dreams with memories of all of their irregularities, conspiracies and betrayals; they will not be able to sleep due to their crimes; they will only be able to sleep by having alcohol and other intoxicating substances. Though all familiar staff do 'Namaste' in front of them, they will say, 'this person was a big corrupt person, used to do irregularities; he is treasonous, betraying his own country by providing confidential information to foreigners'. Some will curse: 'this traitor's three generations will go to the hell; this huge building will be demolished one day and this old man will get buried in it'; some will call him a 'living corpse'.

Krishna, do you know that the children of these kinds of treasonous people will either live their lives as in hell by becoming corrupt or else will leave their parents alone because their knowledge of their misdoings, though they should be good due to their upbringing and education. Many of their children will commit suicide; some will live reviled lives like worms in dirt by being involved in similar crimes and will not think of returning after going to foreign countries. Those traitors will have shameful deaths like insects, with regret, and feelings of guilt and unwashable sin (*pāp*) at the time of their deaths. [...]

My friend Krishna, you have raised some worrying ideas in your letter, to which I must object. You have concluded that small, developing countries like Nepal do not have any future [...]. Whatever happens, the world is progressive [...]. In the end the present human society will dissolve into communism, whatever name we give it. [...]

There were only 50 doctors in Nepal in 2007 VS [1950/1 AD] while there are 2,600 doctors today. [...] You might say that that only 53% of the population is literate: what could be done in 50 years? 50 years ago only 2-4% of people were literate, there were only about 300 university

graduates and 2 or 3 engineers. Today, after 50 years, we have 3,000 engineers, 19 or 20 government and private engineering colleges, 5 universities and 53 % of people are literate. [...]

Krishna, you raise the question of Nepal's art, culture, language and literature being destroyed or defiled by the attack of foreign cultures. [...] But despite 150 years of attack by imperialism and colonialism, the language, literature and culture of countries like China, India, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and Sri Lanka could not be wiped out. Foreign cultures will not succeed in destroying Nepali language, literature and culture. Instead, new science and technology will be used to conserve and promote our language, literature and culture. [...]

You say that it will take more than 150 years to free the Nepali people from poverty and hunger. Friend, your guess is also incorrect. This question depends on the political system of our country. Cuba and the DPR Korea [North Korea],⁷¹ which were blockaded for 40-50 years and 45-50 years respectively, have been successful in freeing all their people from hunger. [...] Nepal will become an educated, cultured, scientific and agriculture and industry-oriented country within 50 years.

(*Shrawan* 2059 VS [2002 AD])

In this extract we see a reflection both of the NWPP's policy orientation and of Bijukchhe's personal ethical vision. The piece was published in a collection of Bijukchhe's writings entitled *Bhaktapur After 100 Years*. The contents of the book are not what one might expect from the pen of a communist. Chapter titles include the following: 'Bhaktapur 50 years ago'; 'Necessary background for studying Nepal's art and culture'; 'Bhaktapur: Capital of Song and Dance'; 'An opinion on making Bhaktapur a touristic destination and centre of education and culture'; 'Opinions on the study report declaring Bhaktapur "a cultural city"'; 'Bhaktapur after 100 years'. In essence, the book is a quite unambiguous celebration of

⁷¹ One of the peculiarities of the NWPP is its close affiliation the Workers' Party of Korea, which is the ruling party of North Korea. Bijukchhe has visited North Korea many times and speaks highly of the living conditions there; when I questioned him gently about famines and human rights abuses in the country, he seemed unmoved, and blamed any problems in the country on the Western imperialist powers. The North Korean ruling philosophy of Juche, which emphasises nationalism and self-reliance, alongside state ownership of the means of production, has obvious resonances with the NWPP's combination of cultural traditionalism and economic radicalism.

traditional culture in Bhaktapur, and an argument that Bhaktapur's future prosperity lies in making it an internationally renowned 'city of culture', which will promote tourism and create a harmonious and flourishing social order (as I have noted, the NWPP has already had significant success in promoting Bhaktapur as a tourist destination). The argumentation is couched in a 'materialist' idiom, but what this materialism amounts to in the main is the assertion that religious and cultural forms have social functions (something that the most conservative of Hindus in Bhaktapur would be prepared to recognise), and that new technologies and social services introduced under the guidance of a communist party can improve living conditions without unduly disturbing traditional culture.

We can see in the extract how Bijukchhe's philosophy involves a reconstitution of traditional ethics under the controlling idea of social service. The moralising tone of Bijukchhe's letter strikes the reader immediately: his primary goal is to lay out the correct basis for individual behaviour, rather than to make a political analysis. Bijukchhe's speeches also often contain a strong strain of moral guidance: it could be said, with only some simplification, that his role in Bhaktapur has developed from that of chief revolutionary to that of chief public moralist. The vision of a good life and of a good society that Bijukchhe implicitly lays out in the letter is in many ways very traditional: because of their lack of *lajyā*, Bijukchhe seems to be saying, corrupt bureaucrats will lose their *ijjat* and thus be despised by their families and community.⁷² This is similar to the traditional understanding of shameless behaviour I outlined in Section 3.2.

Nonetheless, the ethic proposed by Bijukchhe is not identical to the ethic of sociality described in chapters 2 and 3. The difference is best understood in terms of the difference between *sociality* and *social service*. Whereas sociality is concerned primarily with the

⁷² Relative to other bureaucracies in Nepal, the NWPP-run municipality in Bhaktapur is famously un-corrupt; the NWPP is known to deal harshly with those involved in corrupt practices (see Raj 2010: 161-3).

judgement of the community in which a person lives, social service is concerned primarily with the wellbeing of that community as it is conceived by the individual on the basis of his or her own judgement. Thus, the ethic of social service has a place for individual conscience, in a way that the ethic of sociality does not. We can see the role of individual judgement and conscience in how Bijukchhe contrasts the fates of the honest bureaucrat and the corrupt bureaucrat. In terms of immediate social approval, the corrupt bureaucrat may do better: he ingratiates himself with those above him, and receives sycophancy from those below. However, at the end of his life, as well as being despised by the community, he will be troubled by his conscience and unable to sleep, whereas the honest bureaucrat will be able to look back on his life with satisfaction. A central value in Bijukchhe's letter is that of sincerity or authenticity, a value that Webb Keane has associated with modern forms of selfhood (Keane 2007: ch. 6 and 7; see also Taylor 1991). In his refusal to 'falsely praise' his superiors, the honest bureaucrat obeys the inner voice of conscience in opposition to the outer imperatives of sociality, but does this for the good of society as he sees it. He is operating, then, according to an ethic that is substantially different to the ethic of sociality.

In Section 3.3, I explored the ways in which the upper castes have responded to the decline of Farmer deference. The most common kind of reaction is that of Bir Bahadur: frustration, anger, and nostalgia. Nonetheless, some members of the upper castes, such as Bijukchhe, have found ways to reconstitute their moral authority through what could be called 'ethical entrepreneurship'. By this I mean participation and leadership in projects that have moral legitimacy from the perspective of the socially egalitarian norms that now dominate Bhaktapur. Communist activism provides one such avenue. By emphasising his own integrity and intellectual ability, Bijukchhe has been able to present himself as a morally

legitimate leader with the best interests of the Farmers at heart.⁷³ His emphasis on leadership by intellectuals can be seen in the way he describes economic development in terms of the number of doctors, engineers, and professors a country is able to produce. His belief in leadership by an incorruptible and scientifically trained elite reflects a classical Leninist understanding of communist leadership (see Lenin 1988). In this sense, the NWPP can be seen to have, in Robbins' terms, 'adopted' a substantially new cultural understanding of social hierarchy and deference.

Bijukchhe's presentation of himself as a virtuoso of social service resonates with the ways that Christian leaders in Bhaktapur legitimate their positions.⁷⁴ As we will see in Chapter 9, notions of integrity, intellectual ability, and commitment to service are invoked by upper-caste Christian leaders in Bhaktapur in ways that are similar to what we have seen in this section.

4.4 Conclusion

My purpose in examining the ethical projects of the NWPP has been to provide a point of comparison and contrast to the Christian ethical projects I will examine in parts II and III. I have suggested that the ethics of the NWPP can be seen, to a significant extent, to represent a response to cultural and ethical unsettlement. The widespread perception of a failure of care within families and communities, and associated notions of moral decline, have guided NWPP attempts both to promote traditional practices of care within the Farmer community, and to promote an ideal of honest and socially minded leadership. The decline of deference

⁷³ When Bijukchhe was living underground in Bhaktapur in the 1960s, he would eat rice from Farmers families, at a time when most members of the upper castes would never contemplate this. This is often cited as a reason for his popularity with the Farmers in Bhaktapur.

⁷⁴ See Appendix 6 for extracts from one of my interviews with Bijukchhe, where he tells the story of his 'conversion' to communism.

has posed problems for the legitimation of the NWPP leadership which have been handled with reference to an ideal of social service that emphasises intellect and integrity. In what follows, I will suggest that, while the way the NWPP legitimates leadership has strong parallels in local Christianity, Bhaktapurian Christian notions of care depart much more radically from traditional understandings than do those of the NWPP.

Chapter 5. Nepali Christianity in Historical and Theological Context

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will place Nepali Christianity in historical and theological context. The history of Nepali Christianity in the modern period is relatively short: it was only after 1951 that Christian groups were allowed inside the country, and even then proselytism and conversion remained illegal (proselytism is still officially illegal, though conversion is not). Despite this short history and legal circumscription the number of Christians in Nepal has grown rapidly, and by some accounts Nepal's is the fastest growing church in the world. In Section 5.2 I outline the history of Christianity in Nepal from the earliest missions to the present day, and try to provide a sense of the changing character of the Nepali church and of the range of explanations that have been proposed for its rapid expansion. In Section 5.3 I place Nepali Christianity in a wider world-historical and theological context, by relating it to various streams within global evangelical Protestantism. In particular, I examine the ways that evangelical understandings of atonement and conversion have influenced Nepali and Bhaktapurian Christianity.

5.2 The history and character of Nepali Christianity

The first Christians to come to Nepal were Catholic Capuchin missionaries, who arrived in the early eighteenth century and settled in Bhaktapur, which was then the capital of an independent kingdom. The Capuchins were pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome accorded to them by the king, Ranajit Malla, who, one wrote, 'embraced us all affectionately and treated us with great familiarity and confidence; he made us sit at his side and kept us for

more than an hour' (Alsop 1996: 125). The missionaries resolved to focus their attentions on the court, and composed a treatise on monotheism for the king. After the book elicited an enthusiastic response, the king's chief advisor was thrown into confusion and challenged the Capuchins to a trial of magic, claiming that he would prove the superiority of his religion by 'being able to fly in front of all the people' (ibid.: 134). In the end, the king did not convert, but he did offer, as compensation, some of the populace to be Christians in his stead. The Capuchins refused this suggestion, and, although they succeeded in making a small number of voluntary local converts, their mission was put to an end in 1768 when Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of Gorkha, conquered the Kathmandu Valley and expelled all Christians from his new kingdom.⁷⁵

Over the next 200 years, until 1951, Nepal was entirely closed to Christians, although small numbers of ethnically Nepali evangelists from India were able to cross the border surreptitiously.⁷⁶ Most famous among these is Ganga Prasad Pradhan (1851-1932), a Newar raised in Darjeeling who is known as the first ordained Nepali pastor. Pradhan converted to Christianity while studying at a school run by Church of Scotland missionaries in Darjeeling. After forty years of ministry to the Nepali-speaking community in northern India, focused mainly on producing a Bible translation and other evangelistic materials in Nepali, he resolved in 1914 to return with his family to Kathmandu in order to establish a Christian presence in Nepal. Travelling with a group of around forty people, Pradhan and his colleagues' presence was discovered by the authorities soon after they arrived in Kathmandu, they were instructed firmly to leave, being told: 'there is no room for Christians in Nepal'

⁷⁵ For a general examination of the history of religious conversion in Nepal, see Gellner (2005a).

⁷⁶ The historical information that follows derives mainly from Perry (2000), Barclay (2009) and Rongong (2012a).

(Perry 2000: 34). Pradhan composed a song which was to become one of the best-known in the Nepali church:

Lord, hear our prayer, open the door of salvation for the Gorkhalis [Nep.: *Prabhu arji suni leu, Gorkhali le mukti paune dhoka kholi deu*].

Show us the way by a cloudy, fiery pillar.

There are cities – Thapathali, Bhatgaon [Bhaktapur], Patan, Kathmandu,

Our prayer is to make them your devotees.

Up, brothers, we must go, ignoring the criticism of others, leaving wealth, home, people, and comfort,

To do this holy task. (ibid.: 33-4 and Barclay 2009: 190)

We can see here the note of self-sacrifice (‘leaving wealth, home, people, and comfort’) that was characteristic of Nepali Christianity prior to the 1990s.

Ganga Prasad’s prayer appeared to have been answered in 1951 when, in the words of the missionary Alma Hagen (2006), ‘Nepal’s door opened’ to Christians. After the overthrow of the Rana regime in the 1950-51 revolution, a multi-party democracy was established under King Tribhuvan; Tribhuvan opened Nepal’s borders and appealed to the outside world to assist in Nepal’s development. Christian groups were quick to respond to this call.⁷⁷ The largest missionary organisation to enter Nepal at this time was the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), which was invited to the country as a result of events occurring during the revolution. Fighting had taken place in an area just across the border from town of Raxaul in India, where there was a mission hospital associated with the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU). Combatants were treated at the hospital, and as a result the missionaries in charge of the hospital were invited by the Nepali government to explore the possibility of

⁷⁷ I consider post-1951 Catholic missionary activity in Nepal at the end of this section.

medical and educational work in Nepal, though they were told that preaching would be prohibited (Barclay 2009: 191).

The Methodist bishop J. Wascom Pickett circulated the letter of invitation to various missions through 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' (ibid.: 191). Eight missions of different Protestant denominations agreed to the proposal, and the UMN was founded in March 1954. The first projects of the mission were the foundation of medical facilities in Tansen in west Nepal and in the Kathmandu Valley near to Bhaktapur; the work soon expanded to include rural development, education, engineering, and the foundation of other hospitals. The UMN's work in Nepal was defined and limited by a series of five-year agreements with the Nepal government, which always clearly prohibited proselytism. By 1990 the UMN 'comprised 39 member missions, 420 expatriate missionaries, and over 2,000 Nepali staff' (ibid.: 191). The scope of the UMN's work is currently much reduced from this level, as a result of a decision in 2002 to hand over major projects to local control and work instead through partner organisations (United Mission to Nepal 2014).

The other main missionary group to enter Nepal in the early 1950s was the Nepal Evangelistic Band (NEB), whose origins are rather different to those of the UMN. In December 1932 Lily O'Hanlon, a missionary doctor working in a hospital in the Punjab was travelling by train from Gorakhpur, near to the Nepal border, and saw the Annapurna mountain range, which she knew to be in the closed kingdom of Nepal. As she looked at the mountains she received a vision, which she described in her diary:

In the foreground there were fields of yellow mustard plant and young green wheat, and away in the distance snow-clad mountains pink with early sunlight. These mountains were in Nepal... as I looked and looked, it seemed that the carriage was filled with the glory of the Lord and that He

was saying ‘Who will go for us, who will go for us,’ and with an all but breaking heart I said ‘Lord, send me, allow me to go.’ (Hale 2012: 2)

From this time O’Hanlon was determined to undertake missionary work in Nepal, but her plans took some time to come to fruition. Collaborating with Hilda Steele and Dr Kitty Harbord, she began medical work in the border town of Nautanwa in 1936. In 1943 they formed the NEB, which aimed to use medical work as a doorway to evangelisation (Perry 2000: 71). Harbord’s 1939 article ‘The Closed Land of Nepal: A Modern Jericho’ influenced many missionaries working on the Nepal border, and the NEB cooperated with other border-area workers under the auspices of the Nepal Border Fellowship, which was also founded in 1943 (ibid.: 86). During the 1940s the NEB began working with a various Nepali converts in northern India, some of whom, such as David Mukhia and Tir Bahadur Dewan, would go on to be the first generation of church leaders in Nepal.

When Nepal was opened to outsiders in 1951, the NEB was able to act swiftly and in such a way as to support the growth of an indigenously led church. Lily O’Hanlon and her colleagues were given permission to undertake medical work in Pokhara, and travelled there in 1952 along with five Nepali Christians. They established ‘The Shining Hospital’, which would become renowned in the area for its quality of treatment, and in 1957 opened the ‘Green Pastures’ hospital for the treatment of leprosy. David Mukhia and his wife Premi, who had travelled with the NEB group, opened in 1952 what is generally known as Nepal’s first church – Ram Ghat church in Pokhara. Tir Bahadur Dewan and his wife Ratan, who had previously been associated with the NEB but later went on to work for the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU), came to Bhaktapur in 1954 in order to establish a Christian fellowship in association with a medical clinic that had been opened there by the UMN (ibid.: 66). The NEB would later change its name to the International Nepal Fellowship (INF), and

expand its work into a range of medical and social justice activities; it currently has a staff of around 400 (International Nepal Fellowship 2013).

Another significant development in this period was the arrival, in 1956, of a group of Nepali Christians from Kalimpong, who came with the intention of establishing a church which was independent of missionary organisations. This group was led by Robert Karthak, who came with a group from Macfarlane Memorial Church in Kalimpong that included Clara Elizabeth Franklin of the RBMU, who was coming to work for the UMN. Karthak and his group established a fellowship in Kathmandu in August 1957 that would become Nepal Isai Mandali, and which is popularly known as Gyaneshwor Church. As Norma Kehrberg describes, ‘one of the profound decisions taken by the leaders of the church was their intent to organise the church separate and apart from foreign missionary groups’ (Kehrberg 2000: 99). The guidelines on which the church was established are described by Rajendra Rongong, one of the founding group:

The church would be interdenominational, because members had come from different denominational backgrounds. [...]

The church and mission would remain separate. Christian workers and expatriates would participate in the church as members.

The church would give preference to believer’s [adult] baptism. (Now it is mandatory.)

Western practices in the form of observation of the sacraments would be replaced by more acceptable rites suitable to the local culture.

The salary of the pastor and full time workers of the church would be borne by the church.

Church leadership would be in the hands of Nepalese, as far as possible.

The future nature of the church would be decided after the church had a sufficient number of local believers. (Rongong 2012: 69)

Kehrberg describes how ‘the church [...] made a conscious decision to worship in an eastern style, removing one’s shoes and sitting on the floor with men and women seated on opposite

sides; not using pews as already adopted in India, their former home. The music was Christian words set to Nepali folk tunes' (2000: 100).

As their residence in the country was not dependent, like that of foreign missionaries, on agreements with the government, and as they were less conspicuous, Nepali Christians felt freer than missionaries to evangelise;⁷⁸ they nonetheless still faced a highly restrictive legal environment. I have noted that the founder of the modern Nepalese state, Prithvi Narayan Shah, expelled all Christians from Nepal in 1768; throughout the period from 1768 to 1990 proselytism of or conversion to Christianity or Islam was legally prohibited (Gaborieau 2002: 93). One statement of this prohibition can be found in the legal code of 1935:

To him who preaches beliefs opposed to the traditional religion of the subjects of the kingdom, to him who abandons or cause to abandon one religion to adopt, or cause to adopt, another one, the following rules will be applied: In the whole of the kingdom of Gorkha – Nepal, putting into practice (*calauna*) and preaching (*pracar garna*)... Kabir panthi, Christian, Islamic and other irreligious (*vi-dharmi*) and foreign (*vi-deshi*) beliefs (*mat*) which ruin the religion traditionally practised (*sanatan-dekhi hindu jati ma cali-aeko*) by the Hindu community and the caste hierarchy, is prohibited; converting to these beliefs any of our subjects belonging to the Brahman caste, or any other clean caste is prohibited. (quoted in *ibid.*: 93-4)

These laws were in force even after the revolution of 1951, and were reaffirmed in the legal code of 1963, which was promulgated after, in 1960, King Mahendra put an end to Nepal's first experiment with multi-party democracy and established a system of 'partyless Panchayat democracy' (a system of monarchical rule combined with locally elected councils, or panchayats). The legal code of 1963 prohibited the preaching of Christianity or Islam and stipulated three years in jail for those who attempted to convert people, and six years for those who succeeded in converting others. For those who 'attempt' to be converted, there was a fine of a hundred rupees, and for those who actually converted (that is, were baptised), there

⁷⁸ Missionary organisations that were suspected of evangelism were dealt with firmly by the government, as is evidenced in the expulsion of the Summer Institute of Linguistics from Nepal in 1976.

would be imprisonment of one year. The code stated that ‘when somebody becomes converted, the conversion is nullified, and he remains in the Hindu *dharma*’ (quoted in *ibid.*: 94).

From the early 1960s, the state began actively to prosecute Christians where the baptism of Nepali citizens had occurred; this active governmental persecution would continue up to 1990. Following baptisms in Nepalgunj and Tansen between 1958 and 1960, pastors David Mukhia and Prem Pradhan, along with six baptised believers, were prosecuted by the authorities for proselytism and conversion. The pastors were sentenced to six years imprisonment; the male converts were sentenced to one year imprisonment and the female converts to six months. In the end, Pradhan served four and a half years before receiving a royal pardon, while Mukhia escaped across the border to India (Barclay 2009: 192). Such prosecutions continued for the whole of the Panchayat period (Kehrberg 2000: 106-9); when an amnesty was proclaimed in 1990 there were 30 individuals in Nepal imprisoned for crimes of proselytism or conversion, and 200 others who were subject to legal action for the same offences (Gaborieau 2002: 95). After the revolution of 1990, a new constitution was promulgated which retained the ban on proselytism, but decriminalised religious conversion. The interim constitution of 2007, which is currently in force, is identical to the 1990 code in this respect. Since 1990 there have been occasional incidents of arrests or judicial investigation relating to proselytism, but few of these cases reach the courts; in practice, the ban on proselytism has hardly been enforced since 1990.

Church growth after 1951 was severely impeded by governmental persecution but was not made altogether impossible. The growth of the fellowship established by Robert Karthak in 1957 provides a representative case study of the path Nepali church growth has followed since the 1950s. Fifteen or sixteen people attended the first meeting of this fellowship in 1957; in the years that followed, their number grew slowly, with conversions

coming mainly from the quiet cultivation of personal contacts in the local area. The fellowship would meet in secret, often at night, and believers from that period remember singing hymns in a whisper so that they would not be overheard. After 1970 there was a spurt of growth in attendance of the weekly service, and a decision was made to expand the building of the mother church in Gyaneshwor and also to start a church in Patan, under the leadership of Mangal Man Maharjan (Kehrberg 2000: 110). The Patan church began as a house fellowship of five people in 1975 in Mangal Bazaar, and by 1978 had expanded to about thirty members (Maharjan 2012). Meanwhile, the Gyaneshwor church was also growing; by 1980 it had a membership of more than 150 (Rongong 2012: 90). In 1968 Robert Karthak experienced ‘Holy Spirit baptism’ and subsequently shifted away from his Presbyterian roots, moving the Gyaneshwor church in a more Pentecostal direction.⁷⁹ This, along with personality-related issues, led to disagreements which resulted in the separation of Gyaneshwor and Patan churches in the late 1970s. Both churches grew steadily during the 1980s and then rapidly from the 1990s, becoming the two largest churches in Nepal. Gyaneshwor and its branches today claim more than 4,000 baptised members (Rongong 2012b), while Patan Koinonia Church and its branches, under Pastor Maharjan, claim more than 6,000 (Maharjan 2012).

By the late 1950s the need was felt for a national Christian organization, which resulted in the foundation in 1959 of the Nepal Christian Fellowship (NCF). Kehrberg writes that ‘in the early years, every Nepalese Christian attended the [Nepal] Christian Fellowship meetings; these provided an opportunity for the new Christians to meet other Christians and also a means for being away from their homes when all family activities were related to the worship of *kali* [a Hindu goddess] at Dasain’ (Kehrberg 2000: 118). In the early 60s meetings were held in Nautanwa, on the Indian side of the India-Nepal border, but from 1964 NCF

⁷⁹ See Section 5.3 on the distinction between Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Nepal.

conferences have been held every year in Nepal (Perry 2000: 110). In 1966 Robert Karthak was appointed president. The NCF united almost all Protestant Christians in Nepal until 1978, when the disagreements between the Gyaneshwor and Patan churches led to the formation of the separate Agape Fellowship under Robert Karthak, and the leadership of the NCF passed to the group associated with Mangal Man Maharjan. The NCF was later renamed the National Churches Fellowship of Nepal (NCFN), and is still the largest coalition of churches in Nepal, currently representing around a thousand churches (National Churches Fellowship of Nepal 2014). The Agape group is smaller and functions as a loose group of like-minded churches united by a Pentecostal/charismatic orientation. The only other large grouping of churches to emerge before 1990 was the Pentecostal denomination the Assemblies of God (AG), which was established as a denomination in Nepal in 1981. At that time AG had eight churches in Nepal; today it has roughly 250 (Sharma 2012).

The numerical growth of the Nepali church as a whole before 1990 has been estimated as follows:

Year	Baptized believers
1966	100
1973	500
1977	1,400
1980	7,000
1982	10,000
1985	25,000
1990	50,000

(adapted from Kehrberg 2000: 124)

These numbers have been estimated from informal reports of church leaders given to the Nepal History Project, which was undertaken by Kehrberg; no official records of baptisms were kept during this period due to the danger of prosecutions. What can be seen in the figures, though, is that from the early 1980s Nepali Christianity began to expand rapidly. This development corresponds with the greater liberalisation of Nepal's political scene after the

national referendum of 1980. It was the next phase of political liberalisation in Nepal – brought about by the People’s Movement of 1990 – which opened the way for the explosive growth the church has seen over the last two and a half decades.

The exceptionally rapid growth of the Nepali church since 1990 has led some missionary observers to identify it as the fastest growing church in the world (for instance, Church Mission Society 2014). The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary concurs with this assessment, estimating the Nepali church’s average annual growth rate since 1970 at 10.9%, the highest in the world (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary 2013: 38). Kehrberg estimates church growth during the 1990s as follows:

Year	Baptized believers
1992	75,000
1998	300,000
1999	400,000

(adapted from Kehrberg 2000: 125)

Since 2000 church growth, according to some accounts, has been even more rapid. C.B. Gahatraj, general secretary of the Federation of National Christians of Nepal (FNCN) estimated the number of Nepali Christians at 2.5 million in 2012; K.B. Rokaya, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Nepal (NCCN), suggested a figure of more than 2 million (International Institute for Religious Freedom 2012). The NCFN gives a more conservative estimate of between 700,000 and 1 million (National Churches Fellowship of Nepal 2014), which is closer to the estimates given to me by informed missionary observers.⁸⁰ Although the precise numerical reality of the Nepali church is impossible to

⁸⁰ It should be noted that these estimates relate to the number of *baptised* believers. The numbers attending church services will certainly be higher than these figures. An indication of this is given by the fact that while Patan Koinonia Church and its daughter churches (69 in total) claim 6,000 baptised members (Maharjan 2012), they claim 15,000 believers in total (Koinonia Churches 2014). This suggests that more than half of those who attend services at Koinonia churches have professed faith in Christ but have not yet been baptised.

establish, it can be said with confidence that the numbers given in Nepal's 2011 census - 375,699, or 1.4% of the population – are a considerable underestimate. It is well known that non-Hindus are consistently under-recorded in Nepali censuses (see Gellner 2005b: 10).⁸¹

The period since 1990 has seen organisational fragmentation alongside numerical growth. It is common to hear Nepali Christians who converted before 1990 lament the rise of denominationalism and church-splitting since the time of the People's Movement. Whereas before 1990 the great majority of churches in Nepal were non-denominational and independent of foreign ties, since 1990 the full gamut of Protestant denominations has entered the country: Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Plymouth Brethren, Four Square, and many more (Shrestha 2012: 45-6). These denominations bring financial resources which may create incentives for previously independent churches to take on denominational affiliation, and consequently to take on practices associated with that denomination rather than those developed locally. Ganesh Tamang, a Nepali pastor who converted in 1987, writes:

Despite the significant presence of small numbers of denominations such as Assemblies of God [...] the pre-1990 church in Nepal does not project a sense of western or Indian denominationalism. [...] This was a time of toleration among Christians. Naiveté about one's theological conviction did not get in the way of inter-church relations and unity. Most Christians in Nepal have come to Christ without missionary effort; they do not belong to any particular theological affiliation. [...] Until 1990, Nepali churches to some extent had striking resemblances to the first century church. They were actively involved in bearing witnesses, healing and performing miracles in the name of Jesus Christ, without any theological prejudices. The household concept [...] was beautifully reflected in the churches of Nepal. Even today, grassroots, local Nepali churches are evangelical by nature [...]. [After 1990] many denominations were imported from the west and other Asian countries, not because they had been pioneer churches, but because the local Nepali church leaders embraced the foreign denominations in order to enhance their material assistance and monetary gain. Unfortunately, as the result the formerly practiced values, doctrines and styles were compromised. Corresponding

⁸¹ See Shrestha (2012: 21-6) for a more exhaustive discussion of the various estimates of Nepali church membership. Shrestha settles on the figure of 1 million as the most plausible estimate (*ibid.*: 3). For a more conservative assessment, see DAWN Nepal (2007).

with the denominations' statements of faiths, they either become extremely charismatic or legalistic, and no longer formulated their own statements of faith and worshipping style. Alien practices brought division among churches and between believers over minor issues. (Tamang 2012: 135)

Tamang also notes the increasing prevalence of intra-church divisions in the post-1990 period, often resulting in church splits:

[...] the number of churches has increased not because of pioneering new churches but because of splitting – anybody can begin a church and become the pastor without recognition by dividing the existing local church. There are numerous churches/congregations with only a handful of members [...]. (ibid.: 137)

Ram Prasad Shrestha found that a range of Nepali church leaders had similar concerns to Tamang's over denominationalism and church splits, though they tended to express their concerns in more measured language (Shrestha 2012: 39-46). It should be noted that while foreign groups may provide material incentives for Nepali church leaders to shift denominational affiliation, the vast majority of Christians in Nepal make no financial gain by converting; more commonly, the reverse is the case.⁸² It should further be noted that the majority of churches in Nepal still claim no denominational affiliation (see ibid.: 24-5 and DAWN Nepal 2007: 547-8).

Just as the entry of denominations into Nepal has prompted concern among church leaders, the growth of Christianity after 1990 has prompted concerns among Nepal's non-Christian majority. The intensity of these concerns can be seen in an article published by the Nepali sociologist Saubhagya Shah in the September 1993 issue of *Himal* magazine, entitled 'The Gospel comes to the Hindu kingdom' (Shah 1993), and the considerable reaction it generated among Nepal's intellectual elite (the piece engendered a large volume of

⁸² As I noted in the Prologue, converts in Nepal are far more likely to suffer material loss caused by social ostracism than to gain from money given by foreign missionaries, which is spent on projects such as church buildings, rather than being given to individuals as enticement.

correspondence over three subsequent issues). The article argued that the explanation for the rising number of conversions in the country lay in aggressive proselytising activity by foreign missionary organisations, and insinuated that Nepalis were being systematically bribed to convert:

[...] not a few, it seems, are being prepared for [conversion] with non-spiritual enticements. Salvation or identity aside, the success of the proselytisers might also be a simple case of people responding to need and poverty. Case to case, free medical treatment, scholarships, employment, or even a change of clothes and a meal might work as adequate incentive for adopting another religion. [...] Not only are the destitute given monetary incentives to convert, the relatively well-off also convert for a price, says Chiranjibi Nepal, a lecturer of economics at Tribhuvan University. He recalls the case of a senior bureaucrat's son who 'converted' to get himself to the US but 'reconverted' when his purpose was served. (ibid.: 36)

The article – by a Harvard-trained social scientist – gives a stamp of academic respectability to what was in reality poorly sourced gossip. As any missionary will confirm, the UMN and INF have been so scrupulous in avoiding the appearance of bribery that they do not even give Bibles away for free (interview with Paul Hagen, INF Diaspora Coordinator, 9th September 2014; see also Hale 1993: 75-86). Missionary medical treatment since the 1950s has been available to all, irrespective of religion (Hale 1986, 1993). While there may be some cases of conversions in the hope of material gain, what Shah fails to recognise is that missionaries themselves are wary of such conversions, and do not consider them to be authentic (Hale 1993: 75-86). The 'material assistance and monetary gain' referred to by Tamang in the passage quoted earlier refers to possible opportunities for Christian leaders to profit from resources foreign denominations put into projects such as church buildings; it does not refer to material incentives for conversion.

While Nepali intellectuals have expressed their concerns about Christianity on the written page, other groups have turned to more violent methods. In May 2009 a bomb was set off in the Catholic Cathedral in Kathmandu, killing two people and injuring a further 13. The

group believed to be responsible is the Nepal Defence Army, a southern Nepal-based Hindu nationalist group (Parajuli 2012). During the civil war which lasted from 1996-2006, churches in Maoist-controlled areas were routinely harassed and extorted, and there have been isolated incidents of murder or kidnap of Christian pastors (Coday 2003; Parajuli 2011). Since returning from fieldwork, I have received a number of emails from pastors asking for prayer in the wake of threats of violence against their churches; fortunately none of these threats has yet come to fruition. The landslide election of Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India in May 2014 has sparked further concern among Nepal's Christians. The BJP's vice president visited Nepal after the election and called for a legal ban on conversion: the visit has been linked with the arrests of 40 Christians in Kathmandu on charges of forcible conversion of Hindus, and associated anti-Christian riots (Barnabus Fund 2014). Up to the present date, organised violence against Christians in Nepal has been isolated and sporadic; the omens for the future, however, are not positive.

Despite Nepali Christianity's rapid growth, anthropologists have so far given it only limited attention. Those who have commented on Christian conversion have tended to see it as a response to rapid social change and the deprivations and dislocations this creates. Thus Lauren Leve, who has conducted research among rural women in the district of Gorkha, writes:

[...] [I]t is hard to survive in Nepal right now. Beyond the political stalemate and social breakdown [...] high unemployment is destroying young people's dreams and dividing families by forcing mass dependence on dangerous contract labor abroad. The stress of all of this, plus diet and exercise changes associated with urbanization, has given rise to an explosion of illnesses like diabetes and hypertension, as well as a range of mental-health problems that often take somatic form and that religious power seems uniquely able to heal. [...] In this environment, it's easy to understand the appeal of a compassionate god who remedies what the state does not. (Leve 2014)

Bladine Ripert takes a similar approach to Christianisation among the Tamangs, the historically subordinated ethnic group who have converted to Christianity in greatest numbers.⁸³ Ripert notes the profound economic and social transformations that have occurred among the Tamangs in recent decades, most notably an ‘opening to the world’ signalled by a high level of labour migration and access to modern education and consumer goods. Ripert writes:

Although the Tamangs warmly welcomed the advances of missionaries, their success is arguably due to the fact that their belief system seemed to complement ongoing transformations. Tamang converts report considering Christianity better adapted to the newer economic, political and social forms they value, especially among the young and migrants. They claim that Christianity is more ‘effective’, a belief stemming from their perception of the West’s success and Christianity’s more ‘rational’ practices and conception of the world, and ultimately what is viewed as its more ‘modern’ and universal outlook. (Ripert 2014: 55)

‘The process of Christianization’, Ripert writes, ‘has provided a means of jumping from the local directly to the global’ (ibid.: 58).

To my knowledge, the single example of an anthropological approach to Nepali Christianity that moves substantially beyond socio-economic determinism is a 2008 article by Tom Fricke on Tamang conversion. Fricke recognises, like Ripert, the significance of the major social dislocations caused by integration into the global wage labour economy, and notes that conversion would probably not have happened on the scale it has without these dislocations. However, he also notes that,

The first conversions were in Timling [the Tamang village Fricke worked in] itself and precisely among Tamang who, although stressed by the general conditions of the village, were no more stressed than others and were not deeply involved in these dislocations. Moreover, those Tamang who were most involved in new economic pursuits were among those most likely to be hostile to conversion in the earliest phases. (Fricke 2008: 52)

⁸³ On Tamang history and identity, see Campbell (1997).

Thus while socio-economic disruption provides the general context for conversions it cannot explain why one individual would convert and not another, nor can it illuminate the experience of conversion. In order to do these things, it is necessary to examine ‘a pre-existing cultural world that structures Tamang perceptions and provides the motivations for acting in that world’ (ibid.: 56). Fricke’s argument is complex, but his broad contention is that social change has led to a breakdown in Tamang practices of giving and reciprocity, which in turn has led to a generally shared sense of moral decline characterised by deterioration in the quality of human relationships (ibid.: 53). Tamangs, Fricke suggests, have attempted to address this moral decline by adopting new ways of relating to the divine that claim to address the spiritual manifestations of breakdowns in relationships.

In order to illustrate this argument, Fricke presents the conversion narrative of Dorje, a Tamang man who converted to Christianity after his daughter became ill. Dorje found that traditional Tamang methods of healing were ineffective; after Christians began to pray for her, however, his daughter experienced healing, and the family subsequently converted.

Fricke interprets this story as follows:

Dorje explains his own conversion as a response to his daughter Mayawati’s illness and the failure of trusted methods to effect a cure. But in looking at this story in cultural terms we see that health and its maintenance is about the quality of relationship. What we might think of in western terms as sickness is in fact a failure of relation. In the same way, the failure of trusted curing techniques indexes a wider failure in relationships with those actors – local deities and spirits – who are expected to behave in ways that cement their involvement in continuing reciprocities. Mayawati’s illness and the failed cures ramify from this single person to a broader premonition of a world out of whack. All of these can be condensed into a diagnosis that echoes earlier stories of the decline and renewal of *dharma* – in all of its senses including virtue. (ibid.: 58)

Fricke, then, approaches conversion as an ethical project concerning interpersonal relationships that must be considered in the context of pre-Christian cultural frameworks and

the ways in which they interpret socioeconomic change. There are obvious parallels between Fricke’s arguments and my own.

An important aspect of Nepali Christianity which Fricke’s work touches on is the centrality of miraculous healing to church practice and to conversions. Ram Prasad Shrestha, who is head of the Missions Commission of Nepal writes that, ‘after almost 26 years of [...] Christian experience, I would say that there could be about 75% of the people in the church who have come through a personal experience of God’s healing and miracles’ (2012: 60). Norma Kehrberg oversaw a nationwide survey of 530 Nepali Christians in the late 1990s. She summarises the reasons for conversion given by respondents as follows:

Reason	Number	Percent
Healing of self	102	19%
Healing of family	78	15%
To receive salvation	77	15%
Find peace	57	11%
Find truth	42	8%
Family witness	27	5%
Others	144	27%
Not stated	3	-
Total	530	100

(adapted from Kehrberg 2000: 149)

It is important to note here that these figures relate to the *main* reason for conversion, as given by respondents. Thus the figure of 34% for healing-related conversions that emerges from this data can be seen as compatible with Shrestha’s estimate. It seems likely to me, based on personal experience, that many of those who cited salvation or some other reason for conversion will have had some aspect of healing in their story, even if it was not labelled at the time of the survey as the most important factor. My own impression, based on personal experience and the assessments of friends in Nepal, is that at least 75% of Christians in Nepal cite healing of self or family members as a major reason for conversion (see also Appendix 2). It may be speculated that the importance of healing in the Nepali church is connected with

the this-worldly orientation of much popular religion in Nepal, which is evident, for instance, in the literature on shamanism (Gellner 2001: 197-220; Hitchcock and Jones 1976; Desjarlais 1992; Walter 2001). I put forward my own interpretation of the Christian healing process in Chapter 7.

The reader may note that I have omitted to mention the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Nepal after 1951. Catholics were in fact the first Christians to enter Nepal in 1951, with the Jesuit Fr. Marshall Moran establishing St Xavier's School on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley in July of that year (Barclay 2009: 191). The strategy of Catholics differed markedly from that of Protestants, in that it was oriented primarily towards the Nepali elite. St Xavier's School, which still exists today, has always catered primarily to the upper echelons of Nepali society, including members of the royal family. Fr. Moran, who was the headmaster of the school and the guiding spirit of the mission, became a figure in Nepali high society. One Nepali intellectual recalled of the 1950s, 'Fr Moran was at every party in those days. If a visitor didn't see Fr Moran in Kathmandu, his trip wasn't really complete' (Messerschmidt 2012: 227). The expansion of the Nepali Catholic Church has been hampered not only by its focus on the elite but, probably more importantly, by the fact that it has not placed a high priority on evangelisation. Many of the Jesuit missionaries have been more interested in studying Nepali history or religions than in making new believers, and have made notable contributions to scholarship (for instance Stiller 1973; Locke 1980; Sharkey 2001). In 2006 there were only 7,500 Catholics in Nepal (Sharma 2013: 82), and many of these were expatriates from India or elsewhere. The Catholic Church, then, has played little

part in the dynamic expansion of Nepali Christianity over the last six decades; it has no real organic relationship with the kinds of church that are the subject of my study.⁸⁴

5.3 Nepali Christianity in theological context

Most churches in Nepal fall within the mainstream of international Protestant evangelicalism. Evangelicalism emerged as a movement within Protestantism in the 1730s in Britain and the United States, with the rise of Methodism in the former and the ‘First Great Awakening’ in the latter (Bebbington 1993; Balmer 2002). Bebbington identifies four defining features of evangelicalism:

[...] *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; [...] *crucicentricism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. (1993: 2-3)

Today, the World Evangelical Alliance (2014) claims to represent more than 600 million evangelicals worldwide: that is, roughly 27% of the world’s Christian population. The forms of evangelicalism that have developed on the global stage, including those in Nepal, are particularly indebted to American evangelicalism, which, according to Randall Balmer, represents ‘the confluence of Pietism, Presbyterianism, and the vestiges of Puritanism [...] warmhearted spirituality from the Pietists [...], doctrinal precisionism from the Presbyterians, and individualistic introspection from the Puritans’ (2002: vii).

Robbins (2004b: 119-23) has dissected the definitional issues attending the study of global evangelicalism. He distinguishes between fundamentalist evangelicalism, which holds that gifts of the spirit (such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues) ceased after the

⁸⁴ In making this assessment I do not wish to detract from the valuable educational and scholarly work Catholics in Nepal have undertaken; I mean simply to indicate that Catholic and Protestant churches in Nepal operate in substantial separation.

time of the apostles, and Pentecostal/charismatic evangelicalism, which affirms that these gifts continue to be available (ibid.:122-3). Within the Pentecostal/charismatic stream, a distinction can be made between Pentecostalism proper and charismatic or neo-charismatic Christianity. Classical Pentecostalism emerged at the time of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906, and is characterised by the doctrine that Christians must seek ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’, which is marked by the ability to speak in tongues (ibid.: 121). The charismatic and neo-charismatic movements grew out of the opening of mainline Protestant churches to gifts of the spirit after about 1960, and the growth of various nondenominational churches stressing the gifts of the spirit from about 1970 (ibid.: 121). While laying importance on the gifts of the spirit, these movements tend to be doctrinally less rigorous than Pentecostalism: speaking in tongues is no longer seen as a requirement and ethical codes tend to be less strict than in Pentecostal churches (ibid.: 121). Robbins notes that these churches often draw from more prosperous social strata than Pentecostals, and that they have been particularly associated with the prosperity gospel – which promises believers ‘health and wealth’ – and the practice of spiritual warfare, which promotes continual rituals of deliverance from demonic influences (ibid.: 122).

As I have described, the early development of Christianity in Nepal was associated with Protestant missions based in India that were mainly British or North American in origin. These missions, and the non-denominational Protestantism that developed in Nepal in their wake, can be classified, in light of Bebbington’s definition, as evangelical. From the 1970s a charismatic revival increased theological diversity in the Nepali church (Sharma 2001), and the rise of denominationalism since the 1990s has further deepened this process (Shrestha 2012: 39-46). Insofar as the great majority of Nepali churches practise healing and exorcism, and have emotive styles of worship, most churches in Nepal could be classified as either charismatic or Pentecostal, rather than fundamentalist (Tamang 2012: 136). The fault lines of

the Nepali church, such as those that divide Gyaneshwor and Koinonia churches, relate to the degrees to which spirit baptism and tongue-speaking are stressed, and also to the degree of strictness in moral codes and separation from Hindu practices.⁸⁵

Although Bhaktapur, as I noted in the previous section, was home to one of the first UMN medical projects in Nepal, the city did not see a significant number of Christian conversions until the 1990s. The relatively late development of Christianity in Bhaktapur has meant that the process of theological fragmentation is less developed there than elsewhere in the Kathmandu Valley. Talking with Bhaktapurian church leaders, I found broad agreement on basic evangelical doctrines such as the inerrancy of the Bible and salvation through Christ alone (see Erickson 2013);⁸⁶ theological diversity in Bhaktapur can be characterised in terms of the distinction between Pentecostal and charismatic evangelicalism (see Appendix 2). The two churches in Bhaktapur where I spent the majority of my time are best characterised as charismatic, while the church I studied in Sanga was Pentecostal. I define the churches in this way because the two Bhaktapur churches practise healing and exorcism but do not usually practise speaking in tongues, while the Sanga church practises healing, exorcism, and speaking in tongues.

Most pastors in Bhaktapur have some theological training (DAWN Nepal 2007: 98). The main church I was based at in Bhaktapur (Fellowship Church) also provided formal theological training for senior congregation members and youth leaders. Pastors in Nepal are usually trained at Bible colleges in the Kathmandu Valley or India. There are more than 65 Bible colleges in the Kathmandu Valley, most of which were founded after 1990 (Kathry

⁸⁵ For instance, some Christian leaders discourage any attendance of Hindu feasts, whereas others say that it is acceptable to attend Hindu feasts so long as food that has been offered to idols is not eaten. I discuss this issue further in Section 10.4.

⁸⁶ A statement of mainstream evangelical theology can be found, for instance, in the Lausanne Covenant, which is a statement of beliefs adopted by evangelical leaders from over 150 countries at the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974.

2012: 131-2). Most of the Bible colleges in Nepal have international links, and teach mainstream evangelical theology.⁸⁷ Evangelical theology, therefore, has a direct impact on Nepali church life, and probably more so in Bhaktapur than in areas outside of the Kathmandu Valley.

Weber, as I noted in the Prologue, draws a connection between divine transcendence and the centrality of ethics in religious life. The ‘classical’ evangelical understanding of God’s transcendence is well expressed in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*.⁸⁸ God, it states, is ‘a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth’ (Anonymous 2012). These qualities may be grouped into two categories: those asserting God’s power, or greatness, and those asserting his goodness (Erickson 2013). According to this understanding, it is God’s goodness which prompts him to lay down ethical laws, and his power that guarantees these laws are ultimately enforced (ibid.).

The central doctrine of Christianity is that of the atonement, signifying the reconciliation of humankind with God through the death of Jesus on the cross (McGrath 2011: ch. 13). An examination of evangelical understandings of atonement will clarify the significance of the belief that God is both all-powerful and good. The idea of God’s all-powerfulness must be seen in light of the idea of Christ’s victory over evil on the cross. According to the Swiss theologian Gustaf Aulén, the dominant understanding of atonement in the early church can be described as follows:

⁸⁷ See footnote 86.

⁸⁸ The Westminster Catechism, composed in England in 1646-7, is the canonical statement of Reformed Christianity (also termed Calvinism); evangelicalism is strongly indebted to this tradition (Balmer 2002: vii).

This type of view may be described [...] as the ‘dramatic’. Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ - *Christus Victor* - fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself. (Aulén 2010: 4)

The evil powers over which Christ triumphs are sin, death and the devil (ibid.: 20). This understanding of atonement, which emphasises Christ’s victory over evil, is often called the *Christus Victor* theory.

According to Aulén, *Christus Victor* was the dominant understanding of atonement in the church for over a millennium; the influence of the theology of Anselm of Canterbury from the late 11th century, however, introduced a new theory of atonement to the Western church. Anselm’s approach is known as the ‘satisfaction’ theory, and is connected with ideas about God’s goodness. Modelling the relationship between God and humankind on the relationship between lord and debtor in medieval society, Anselm held that mankind’s disobedience at the time of the fall was an affront to God’s honour; the extent of this affront was such that humankind was incapable of repaying the debt that was owed. The only way this debt could be paid, therefore, was for God himself to pay it, by giving his son as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of humankind. This theory was popularised in the Catholic Church in the work of Thomas Aquinas, and in Protestantism in the work of Martin Luther and John Calvin. In evangelicalism, this understanding of atonement is usually referred to as penal substitution. Penal substitution is similar to Anselm’s theory but emphasises Christ’s punishment rather than God’s honour (see McGrath 1998, 2011).

Although penal substitution has historically been the dominant understanding of atonement among evangelicals, the rise of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement over the twentieth century brought *Christus Victor* back to the centre of evangelical thought. The centrality of exorcism and deliverance to Pentecostal/charismatic practice foregrounds Christ’s defeat of Satan over the forgiveness of individual sin by penal substitution. As will

be evident in Part III, I found during my research that ideas akin to *Christus Victor* were the most common way of understanding atonement among Bhaktapurian Christians, although notions of personal sin and penal substitution were also present.

Matthew Engelke (2007) has written that the ‘problem of presence’ lies at the heart of the Christian tradition. This is the tension between the belief that God is unceasingly present to believers and the undeniable fact that God is not visible, and thus not present in the same sense as objects in the material world. The Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions have tended to address this problem with reference to sacraments of the church, commonly defined as ‘outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace’. The seven sacraments of the Catholic and Orthodox churches are baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony. In these sacraments God becomes visibly and indeed physically present (as in the doctrine of transubstantiation). A challenge to this understanding of the sacraments lay at the heart of the Reformation. For Luther and Calvin, there were only two sacraments – baptism and the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper – and their efficacy depended not on the action of the priest, but on the faith of the one who received them. In this view, the presence of God in the sacraments becomes a purely spiritual fact, whereas for Catholics and the Orthodox it is objective and physical.

Thus for Protestants the ‘problem of presence’ presents itself with a high degree of urgency. If God only becomes present to the believer when they have faith, then the believer must turn inward to examine their soul and determine whether faith is truly present. As we saw in Chapter 1, Taylor identifies this sense of inwardness as one of the distinctive contributions of Christianity to Western culture. As we saw, Taylor argues that Augustine, who influenced Luther, pioneered the notion that knowledge of God should be sought in reflection on inner experience. Whereas in Augustine’s time (354-430 AD) Christian inwardness was balanced by the centrality of the sacraments to the ordinary life of the church,

at the time of the Reformation the place of the sacraments was downgraded, and the importance of inner relationship with God became correspondingly greater. Luther's doctrine of justification by faith, shared by all the major branches of the Reformation (McGrath 1998), made a demand on the ordinary Christian far more strenuous than that of participating in sacramental life: that of a self-examination on which salvation depended. The Christian would have to examine their soul and determine whether they were right with God. The sign that a Christian was right with God would be that they had experienced conversion: that is, that they had, at a particular moment in time, made an act of faith in Christ which assured them of their salvation. Some of the psychological consequences of this search for assurance are explored in Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (1930; see also Marshall 1982).

After the Reformation, the conversion story became a central feature of Protestant culture; this is particularly true within evangelicalism (van der Veer 1996b). Before the Reformation, spiritual memoirs had been written by mystics and lives of the saints were widely distributed, but there was no expectation that the ordinary Christian would be able to present a narrative of how they converted to Christ. Subsequent to the Reformation, in contrast, each Protestant believer was expected to be able to articulate how God had performed saving work in their life; the corresponding assumption was that lack of such a story indicated an absence of salvation. A conversion story would centre on the moment of commitment to Christ, or conversion experience; it would also provide background to this experience and trace its consequences up to the present time. By the nineteenth century, with the development of widespread literacy and mass printing, the conversion story had attained a ubiquity within Protestant life, as evidenced by the material examined in William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (2004; first published in 1902). This turn towards 'commonplace' conversion is part of what Taylor (1992) has called the 'affirmation of ordinary life' inherent in the processes associated with the Reformation.

As I began research among Christians in Bhaktapur, I quickly realized the centrality of conversion stories to both self-presentation and self-understanding. Two local factors make conversion narratives particularly important in Nepal. First, the great majority of Nepali Christians were brought up in Hindu or Buddhist homes: becoming a Christian in Nepal is thus a conversion in the fullest sense of the word, a radical change in the life of the believer. Second, and relatedly, Christians in Nepal often encounter great resistance from family members and others when they decide to convert: it is consequently vital that they should be able to explain their actions in a way that is compelling to others.

In Nepal, as elsewhere, the act of telling one's conversion story is called 'bearing witness' (New.: *gawāi biyegu*; Nep.: *gawāi dinu*; literally, 'giving testimony'); the word used for witness is a legal term used for testimony given in court. A conversion story will typically consist first of a depiction of the convert's early life, dwelling on the negative consequences of separation from God: for instance, sin, family discord, illness, economic failure, unhappiness, or feelings of aimlessness or loneliness. The convert then finds themselves in a situation where they hear about the Christian God: usually initially in conversations with a believer, then later in a church or prayer meeting. Sometimes immediately, more commonly after a period of struggle, they accept this new God and the doctrines associated with him; this moment of acceptance will sometimes be associated with intense emotional or physical experience. Among those who remain Christians, the conversion experience will be presented as a permanent transformation that bears positive fruit in subsequent life. In addition to explaining the convert's actions, a conversion story will often be intended to convince the listener of the reality of the Christian God, of his benevolence and transformative power, using the convert's experience as a kind of proof.

The centrality of conversion stories to Christian self-understanding became evident to me by way of the contrast between interviews with Christians and non-Christians. Christians,

I found, needed no prompting to present their lives as a coherent narrative.⁸⁹ Usually, I simply had to ask ‘how did you become a Christian?’ for them to present a lengthy outline of their lives, structured around the moment of conversion, with the pre-conversion world contrasted to that after conversion. Of course, as I dug deeper into people’s experiences, many nuances and qualifications emerged; this overall narrative structure, however, in general remained. Non-Christians, I found, were far less accustomed to describing their lives within the structure of a narrative (see March 2002): they tended to see their lives as an accumulation of everyday experiences – an illness, a good harvest, a death, a marriage – and not as a story containing a single meaningful arc. One exception to this was a number of political activists I interviewed, who structured their life stories around narratives of political struggle and eventual success or failure. In Part III, I will explore the significance of conversion narratives both as an evangelistic tool and as a way of structuring personal identity.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a historical and theological context for the ethnographic material I will introduce in the chapters that follow. We have seen that while Nepali Christianity has grown out of the global evangelical movement, there are several things about it that are distinctive and related to local circumstances. These include: the large proportion of non-denominational churches, the overwhelming importance of healing, the predominance of a *Christus Victor* understanding of atonement, and the centrality of conversion narratives to self-understanding and evangelistic practice. In the next chapter I will describe the history,

⁸⁹ On the cultural functions of narratives see, for instance, White (1980) and Ricoeur (1991). There is a large anthropological literature on notions of temporality and futurity, which is very relevant to the subject of narrative. See, for instance, Anderson (2006: 22-36), Crapanzano (2004), Miyazaki (2004), Cole and Durham (2008), and Appadurai (2013). On ‘narrative theology’ see the thesis Conclusion.

character, and theology of Nepali Christianity from the vantage point of a particular locality: Bhaktapur. While Bhaktapurian Christianity is closely connected with Nepal's wider Christian culture, there are also certain local factors that make it distinctive.

Chapter 6. Fellowship Church and Christianity in Bhaktapur

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I tell the story of Christianity in Bhaktapur through the lens of the church that was the main focus of my research: Fellowship Church. As I describe in the Prologue, I started attending Fellowship roughly halfway through my fieldwork, and from this point it was my ‘church home’ in Bhaktapur. Fellowship is the second oldest church in Bhaktapur, and also one of the largest (see Appendix 2). Several of its leaders were among the first Newar Christian converts in Bhaktapur. It thus provides an ideal location for studying the history and experience of Newar conversion in Bhaktapur. In this chapter I will interweave the story of Fellowship, the story of my interactions with it, and reflections on the wider history and character of Christianity in Bhaktapur. By doing this I hope to provide a sense of the immediate social and institutional context of the conversion stories that will be the focus of the next four chapters: each of the people on whom I focus in these chapters are either members of Fellowship or, in the case of one, a former member.

6.2 Fellowship Church and Christianity in Bhaktapur

Fellowship Church is a church of 210 baptized believers (as of 2013), located on the outskirts of Bhaktapur. It is part of one of Nepal’s largest non-denominational church networks. It was founded as a branch of the central church of this network (located in Patan) in 1988, and became organisationally independent (though remaining part of the founding church’s network) in 2006. The church is governed by a management committee of 13 people, composed of the committee chairman, four deacons, four founder members, the chairs of the

youth, children's, and women's fellowships, and the church secretary. It employs a secretary, an evangelist, the church committee chair (who manages the day-to-day running of the church), and also a custodian for the church building. There is a pastor who was ordained in 2006 and works on a voluntary basis. The church has occupied its current building since 1999. The building consists, on the ground floor, of a large worship hall, a kitchen, and a room occupied by the custodian; on the first floor there is an office, a small library room, and two rooms for Sunday school classes and church meetings. In the area to the rear of the church there is a small one-room building which is occupied by an elderly man who the church looks after on a charitable basis.

As I described in the Prologue, when I started studying Christianity in Bhaktapur I made the decision to focus on conversion among the city's Newar majority. When I asked about churches with a large proportion of Newars, I would usually be pointed towards Fellowship. The senior pastor of Fellowship's church network is a Newar; the pastor of Fellowship itself is a Newar; 11 of the 13-member church committee are Newars; 76% of the church's congregation are Newars (see Appendix 3). Fellowship is thus justly known as a church whose ministry is predominantly focused on the Newar community.

Since the opening of Nepal to Christianity in 1951, it has often been noted by evangelists that the Newars of Bhaktapur seem particularly unreceptive to the Gospel. When Robert Karthak's group arrived in Nepal from Kalimpong they initially settled in Bhaktapur, but found that they were unwelcome: they were refused employment because they were Christians, and found that local people were hostile to their work (Rongong 2012: 68). Rajendra Rongong, a member of Karthak's group, writes: 'Bhaktapur was very different from our expectation. The inhabitants were Newars and very few spoke Nepali. We felt as though we had come to a strange land' (ibid.: 57). Eventually, Karthak's group decided to leave Bhaktapur and founded their fellowship in Dilli Bazaar in Kathmandu.

Tir Bahadur Dewan, who came to Bhaktapur in 1954 to work as resident pastor and evangelist at the UMN hospital⁹⁰ on the outskirts of the city did stay, but met similar obstacles to those encountered by Karthak's group. His ministry was not helped by the ambiguity of his position. Dewan and his wife stayed in rooms at the hospital, and church services were held in the hospital building; in a 1986 interview Dewan recalled:

I realized that the mission hospital wouldn't always be there (in Bhaktapur), so I refused to have the land put in my name. I also didn't want to be accused by the local people of getting benefit from being with the missionaries... From the time the hospital opened I advised the missionaries to have a separate place for the church, and separate accounts. [...] But they didn't agree. (Perry 2000: 67)

In 1962 the Dewans were able to move their living quarters out of the hospital and into Bhaktapur's central road or bazaar. At this point only one local Newar had come to faith; she was a widow who had first heard the Gospel when seeking medical treatment in Raxaul (ibid.: 67). Soon after the Dewans moved, three more Newar families began coming to the church, and were later baptised. However, a dispute over caste reversed this progress. Dewan recalled:

A sweeper [the sweepers are the lowest of Bhaktapur's Newar Dalit castes] at the hospital began to come to the fellowship, and he asked for baptism. Some missionaries had the idea that caste must be cancelled out immediately, and bringing this man was the way to do it. But it actually drove local people (local Newars) away. They resented the sweeper being brought into their homes and being told they must eat food with him. I myself refused to eat with him and argued hotly with the others. All the Newars who had come into the church went back, and until today [1986] no other Newars from the bazaar have openly come to the Lord. (ibid.: 67)

We see then that in 1986, some 32 years after Christian workers first came to Bhaktapur, there were, to Pastor Dewan's knowledge, no 'clean' caste Newar Christians in the city.

⁹⁰ Although Dewan was working in association with the UMN project he was in fact an employee of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU), as the UMN were only able to employ staff working in medical or social service capacities (Perry 2000: 100).

Dewan did succeed in gaining some 100 converts in the decade after the UMN hospital was handed over to the government in the mid-1970s, but these were almost all Tamangs from the villages surrounding Bhaktapur, rather than Newars from the city (ibid.: 67). Dewan, a non-Newar from East Nepal, never learned to speak Newari. It was the arrival in Bhaktapur in the late 1980s of a group of mainly Shrestha-caste Newar Christians from outside of the city that allowed Christianity to start making inroads in the Newar community. It was out of this group that Fellowship Church was formed in 1988.

One of these Newar pioneers, a Chathariya Shrestha born in the town of Panauti (12 km to the south-east of Bhaktapur), whom I shall call Yogendra, described these early years to me. After coming to faith in 1979 at the age of 19, Yogendra began attending a predominantly Newar fellowship in Patan. After completing his university studies and a further course of theological training in India, Yogendra returned to Nepal and received permission from his church to begin evangelistic work in Bhaktapur in 1987. He described his arrival in Bhaktapur and subsequent ministry, including his relations with Pastor Dewan:

We came to Bhaktapur in October 1987 AD. [...] When I came to Bhaktapur I did not have the aim of establishing a new church. There was Immanuel Church located in Vanshagopal. [...] My wife and I went to that church. Tir Bahadur Dewan was pastor. [...] That was the only church in this district. He, as the pastor, welcomed us, but it was a sceptical welcome and so not really a welcome at all. He wondered whether we were spies, so he was not open with us. He thought we were people from the government. Later XX [a leader at the Patan Church] commended us to him, but he was still not fully convinced. [...] We had different ideas, so we stopped going to that church.

[...] In Immanuel Church most of members were Tamangs. And we were the only Newars in that church. I had a great feeling that it was my mission to bring Newars to Christianity. That was why we came to Bhaktapur. But it is extremely difficult to bring Bhaktapur Newars to Christianity [*khwopay tayeta prabhuyāthāy haye sikka he thāku*]. [...] I began to share the Gospel with many people in many places but this did not seem effective. So we rented a room where we lived [...] and we began to run a house fellowship there [this marks the foundation of Fellowship Church in 1988].

Yogendra described how, when his ministry began to be successful, it attracted the attention of the authorities:

[...] We used to run our house fellowship secretly. We locked the door and would sing songs in a soft voice. Even though we were running the house fellowship in that way, more and more people began to come. A few people from this area [Newars] began to come too. Due to the entry of local people into our group, it became harder to keep it secret. Some Prajapati [Newar potter caste] families became Christians, so it became hard to keep our activities secret. A family who was working in the police office became Christian and this was a catastrophe. All the members of our fellowship were arrested. The police came on Saturday and arrested all of us. This was in 1990 AD.

We were conducting the house fellowship as usual, but [...] the police had a plan to arrest us because of somebody's complaint about us. [...] There were seven or eight of us who were arrested. [...] We were badly beaten by the police. [...] When we were arrested this news was publicised all over. Then Christians from all over began to pray for Nepal, people from Nepal and from outside the country were praying [*desh bideshay Nepalay sakasinang prāthanā yāta*]. At the same time, the 1990 People's Movement was also beginning. [...] We were released during the time of that movement.

We see here that when Newars did begin to convert to Christianity in Bhaktapur, this was taken so badly by the community that they encouraged the police to intervene.

Yogendra and his wife Laxmi described the severe social pressures that were applied to early Newar converts in Bhaktapur:

Yogendra: They would swear at us, not speak to us, and come to fight with us. They would not invite us to feasts when others were invited. [...] They treated us in a very humiliating way, in a very low and insulting way, they oppressed us greatly.

Laxmi: They treated Christians like they were not human beings. [...] They treated us like very low caste people [*kwo:jāt ekdam tallo tallo jātiping theng*].

Yogendra says that these kinds of behaviour, which he attributes mainly to the caste system, continue to the present day, but are less evident in the young than in the old:

People are still behaving towards us in these ways. Even people who are educated and literate have the idea that Christians are low caste people. Here in Nepal, many people follow the caste

system [*jātpāt*] in accordance with Hindu traditions [*hindu sanskār anusār*]. In the church, everyone is treated equally [*nhyāmaheye wosāng barābar*]. Anyone will accept food from the hand of anyone, anyone will feed anyone else. Those people [Hindus] do not like this, they say it is not right. [...] They are still following the caste system and still following old traditions [*paramparā*] and sayings. Nowadays the younger generation are more educated and behave in a somewhat more liberal way towards Christians. But the older generation still says, ‘look, it is a Christian, don’t let them eat in the kitchen’.

We see, then, that throughout the history of Christianity in Bhaktapur the Newar caste system has been one of the greatest obstacles to the growth of churches.⁹¹

After the arrests of 1990 there were some disagreements among the group of Newar leaders Yogendra was part of; Yogendra founded a separate church in 1991 and the previous fellowship retained its connection with the Patan church – this latter group is Fellowship Church. After 1990 Fellowship began to grow steadily and to make greater inroads into the Newar community. While at the time of the arrests in 1990 there were less than 10 believers in the group, by 1992 Fellowship had grown to around 25 baptised members; by the end of the 1990s there were around 80 baptised members. The majority of these were Newars of the Farmer and Shrestha castes. During the 1990s, a significant number of other Christian churches grew up on the outskirts of Bhaktapur, though, at this time, only a limited number of these other than Fellowship, such as Yogendra’s church, were able to attract substantial numbers of Newars from the city. By 2013 there were 26 churches in the immediate vicinity of Bhaktapur (see Appendix 8), and a substantial number of these had a significant proportion of Newars in their congregations (see Appendix 2). Some of these churches are very small and comprise only a few families gathered together in a house fellowship; at least 10 of the churches, however, have more than 100 baptised members (see Appendix 2).

⁹¹ On the relationship between Christianity (in particular, Catholicism) and caste in South India see Mosse (2012); Mosse shows that it was only by accepting caste that the Catholic Church was able to grow in Tamil Nadu from the seventeenth century onwards.

During the 1990s the growth of Fellowship can be attributed, to a significant extent, to the efforts of the man who is now pastor of the church, whom I shall call Kedar Shrestha. Kedar, whose life and ministry I examine in Chapter 9, is a Chathariya Shrestha born in the village of Chautara, whose ancestors are from Bhaktapur (he has many relations in the city). He was baptised in 1986. During the 1990s he and another man (a Nepali-speaking Brahman who converted after contracting leprosy) were responsible for the running of Fellowship Church, and had the position of elders. The church was at this time under the authority of the management committee of the network's central church in Patan, and of the senior pastor there. This was symbolised by the fact that the senior pastor, or his assistant pastor, used to come from Patan once per month to offer the Lord's Supper at the church; since 2006, when Kedar was ordained, he has offered the Lord's Supper himself. As I interviewed members of Fellowship, and particularly those who converted during the 1990s, I discovered that a large proportion of them had encountered the Gospel, and been led to eventual acceptance of it, through Kedar.

During the 1990s Kedar pursued a conscious strategy of building up a core of Shrestha-caste Newar converts, who would provide a solid financial base for the church's operations and also make the church seem more attractive to other 'clean' caste Newars. One Chathariya Shrestha convert recalls that when he first encountered Christians in the 1980s he was put off by the predominance of low castes; however, when he encountered Kedar and was invited to Fellowship in the late 1990s he found a more congenial atmosphere:

[In the Panchayat period] most of the Christians were from the sweeper caste or butcher castes, and other low castes. And at the time of house fellowships they would all come into the house and start to go here and there and even into the kitchen, and they tried to touch here and there. It was not tolerable for everybody. They didn't behave in the proper way in upper caste people's houses. Because of that people started to hate Christians. They started to feel that the Christianity is the religion of low-caste people [*tallo jāt yāgu dharma*]. [...] The leaders are supposed to control things but they did not control things properly. But in the end I came into contact with

Kedar *dāi* when I was ill and he said that if I became a Christian he was quite sure that I would be cured. They started to come to my house and to pray for me, and I started to get better and better. They were not like the other churches and their behaviour was very good so I started to like Christianity.

Kedar would encourage high-caste Newars to take ministry training courses if they expressed an interest in Christianity, and if they converted he would ask them to take on positions of leadership soon after joining the church. Dinesh, whose story is recounted in Appendix 5, recalled:

I had been studying the Bible continuously for about six or seven months when Kedar *dāi* came into contact and made me listen to the Gospel according the Four Spiritual Laws⁹² [*chār ātmik niyankhang susamācār nyengkala*]. He came in contact regularly; he took me to his church and I went to his church for few days but I did not want to go there regularly. [...] I did not want to go but he [Kedar] lives near my house so he was running after me tirelessly, saying to come to church. So it came to a situation where there was no way for me to avoid going to church [laughs]. [...]

He asked me to come to church again and again, and eventually I went there. Even when I started to go I was not regularly going on Saturday. I used to go only on every third week. Meanwhile I went to a training course [run by Campus Crusade for Christ] for three days. It was about how to convey the Gospel to others. After having that leadership training I started to go to the church regularly. [...] Within six or seven months, the church gave me a leadership position. I started to go to the church regularly and started to work as a leader [*aguwā*], to handle the church accounts, and to go here and there to convey the Gospel.

For Dinesh, the prospect of doing training and becoming a leader seems to have been part of the attraction of coming to church.

The conversions that took place in Fellowship during the 1990s were due largely to the cultivation of personal contacts. Typically, the process would work as follows. A church

⁹² The Four Spiritual Laws is a method of evangelisation developed by Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as Cru); it has been disseminated in a booklet which has been translated into many languages and distributed in more than one hundred million copies (Cru 2015). The four laws, in brief, are 1) God loves you; 2) Man is sinful and separated from God; 3) Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin; 4) We must individually receive Christ as Saviour and Lord (ibid.).

member would meet or hear about someone who was facing some sort of personal crisis, and offer that person prayer. After doing this, the church would seek to start a regular prayer fellowship at that person's house, in order that they could receive more concerted prayer, and in order that a relationship could be built up with the family. If the prayer seemed to be successful, then the family, or some member of it, might convert. A sense of this process is given by the story of Sushila and Ramesh, a Chathariya Shrestha couple who were baptised in 2001. Below, I present their narrative in abbreviated form:

Ramesh: After I had a motorcycle accident we had to face a lot of troubles. My mind was not working at all. [...]

Sushila: [...] Meena *didi* [a high-caste Newar church member] and her daughter used to visit my tailoring shop quite often. Her daughter treats me like her own older sister. Because they saw my hardship Meena's daughter asked me to go and try the church. But I replied that she should not ask me that. I never thought of going to such places because I really hated them. [...]

One day [Ramesh] fainted again and could not speak for a few hours, so we were very worried, and his mother said to me that we should bring our children back from the school and ask them to call Ramesh so that he might wake up after he heard the voices of his children. [...] At that time my daughter was already going to the church. When she returned from her school she started to pray what she had learned on that very day from the Bible. She read from the Bible that Jesus is our life-giving saviour [*jiwan bimhā muktidātā*]. [...] And all of sudden he [Ramesh] became conscious. It was the very first prayer she had ever made.

IG: Your daughter went to church before you?

Sushila: Yes! But I was not so happy that she went to the church at that time. So I used to say that I was not happy about her going to the church so and I used to tell her not to go to church. Then she started to say to me I should be a believer. [...] She requested me to go to church and assured me that her father would be cured after going to the church. She kept going to church and he started to be healed little by little but I was still not going to the church. And Meena *didi* was praying for his health, which helped him to get better. [...] Soon after, Kedar *dāi* also came to our house to pray. One day they all come to our house and asked us to take *grahan* [acceptance] and we took *grahan*. We took the *grahan* sitting on the terrace floor right here. [...]

When I went to the church the first time I felt like I could not go to the church three times. When I went to the church the first time I saw that people were shouting as though they were

mad [Nep.: *pāgal jasto karāune*]. So I said to my daughter that I did not want to go to the church again. Then she again asked me if I would like to see the face of her father or not [Nep.: *daddyko mukh herne ki naherne*]. When I went next time it was the day of the Lord's Supper [*prabhu bhoj*]. I realized that they offer the blood of Jesus. So I again complained to my daughter that I did not want to go there because they offered us blood. Should we even go to a place where blood is eaten? [Nep.: *tyasto ragat khāne thāunmā pani jānchha?*]. I said so because it was unknown to me.

When I went the third time I all of a sudden began to cry and then I began to cry a lot. Maybe the Lord acted on my heart [*shāyad prabhu nanga jheegu hridayay jyā yāgu jui*]. Since then, I started to feel like going to church. And he [Ramesh] also started to become better and better. But he was not able to go to the church on his own so we organized a house fellowship in our house. Many people from the church were doing many prayers in his name. Since we started to organize the house fellowship in our house he started to become better and better.

We see here that Sushila and Ramesh's contact with the church began through two relationships: that with Meena, a high-caste Newar Christian friend, and that with their daughter, who was the first in the family to go to church. It was a time of crisis for the family: Ramesh's injury meant that he could no longer care effectively for his family, and Sushila was looking for healing for her husband and support for the family. Even so, when she first visited the church, she found the forms of worship unattractive, perhaps not in accord with her notions of decency ('people were shouting as though they were mad'). What seems to have brought the family to the point where they decided to become Christian were two things. First, although she initially found Christian worship to be unattractive, Sushila eventually found it cathartic, breaking down in tears the third time she came to church ('I all of a sudden began to cry'). Second, there were the persistent efforts of Kedar, Meena, and other Newars from the church, who consistently visited the family and set up a house fellowship in their house in order to pray for Ramesh.

The organising of prayer fellowships for afflicted people is still the most common means of integrating new families into church life. When a church member encounters

someone who was ill or otherwise afflicted, they offer to pray for that person, and invite them to their house, and visit them regularly. Usually along with other Christians, they will pray for the person intensely and perhaps for many hours on end, insisting that prayer has the power to cure. If the prayer seems to be effective, the afflicted person might invite the Christians to set up a regular fellowship at their house. In Fellowship Church, by far the most active and effective evangelist has been Kedar. He preaches the Gospel to almost anyone he meets, and in particular to people he sees to be suffering: he offers them prayer and speaks confidently of the prospects for healing.

By the end of the 1990s, due to growth in numbers, it was felt that Fellowship Church needed a permanent building.⁹³ The current site on the outskirts of the city was purchased in 1999 and a building was constructed that year. The 2000s were a time of rapid growth for all churches in Bhaktapur, and Fellowship shared in this general upward trend. During the 2000s the children of some of the early converts were coming into their teens, and the church's youth fellowship became an important avenue for outreach. The youth fellowship also influenced the style of the church's worship – some of the young people could play instruments and so Saturday church services came to include Nepali-language 'Christian rock' style songs alongside the more traditional hymns in the style of Nepali folk music. During the 2000s various specialist ministries developed in addition to the youth fellowship: the most important of these are the women's fellowship and the 'Sunday School'⁹⁴ for children. Whereas in the early period of the church there was only one house fellowship per week, rotating between the houses of the leading church members, to which all believers

⁹³ Previous to this, fellowships had been held in rented rooms and in the houses of believers.

⁹⁴ Despite its name this takes place on Saturdays. All Nepali churches hold services on Saturdays because Saturday is a general holiday in Nepal, while Sunday is not.

came, during the 2000s separate house fellowships were established in each area of Bhaktapur: in 2013 the church had seven area-based house fellowships.

As of 2013, the caste composition of Fellowship Church's 210 members is as follows.⁹⁵ 76% of the congregation is Newar, including 14.3% from Chathariya Shrestha castes, 30% from Panchthariya Shrestha castes,⁹⁶ 23.8% from Farmer and potter castes, and 6.7% from Newar Dalit castes (mainly the butcher caste). Of non-Newars, the largest groups are Chetri (9.5%), Dalit (8.6%) and Tamang (4.3%). What these statistics reveal are the fruits of the church growth strategy pursued by Kedar and the other church leaders, concentrating in the first instance on Shrestha-caste Newars and in the second instance on Farmer and Prajapati (potter) caste Newars. The church has also welcomed a significant number of Newar Dalits of the Butcher caste and non-Newars from Chetri and Nepali-speaking Dalit castes. The one group which is notably unrepresented at the church is the Newar Sweeper caste. This is not because of a general lack of Newar Sweepers in Bhaktapur's churches: I encountered Sweepers in various churches throughout the city, and particularly in one Tamang-dominated church. Although there is of course no bar on Sweepers in Fellowship, it does seem likely that the predominance of middle and high-caste Newars at the church has made it an unattractive option for potential Sweeper converts, as they know that 'clean' caste Newars may feel uncomfortable around them. The absence of Sweepers in the church has probably been an attracting factor for potential middle and high-caste Newar converts.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Appendix 3 for fuller details.

⁹⁶ It should be noted that some of this number are likely members of Farmer castes who have adopted the name 'Shrestha'. See footnote 51.

⁹⁷ In relation to food and drink, members of Fellowship Church, like members of other churches in Bhaktapur, do not follow caste purity rules: everyone will eat and drink with everyone else. With respect to marriage, the official line of the church, as with all other churches, is that marriage between all castes is acceptable. There are a significant number of inter-caste marriages in Fellowship, but the reality is that caste is taken into account when choosing marriage partners. Most non-Dalit Newars in the church would be unlikely to arrange marriages with Dalits for their children (most marriages in the church are arranged); rather, they will choose non-Dalit partners for their children, though quite possibly one from a different 'clean' caste to their own. This preference

When I first came to Fellowship I had already been in Bhaktapur for more than eight months; I had spent a considerable amount of time in various other churches, and had got to know two particular churches well (see the Prologue). One of these – Corinthi Church – was a small congregation quite near to where I was staying in Bhaktapur, with a significant minority of Newars in the membership (see Appendix 3) and a Newar pastor. The pastor and his family had previously been members of Fellowship, but after disagreements with the leadership there had formed their own separate church in 2007. Although he still felt some resentment over this disagreement, when I asked him about churches that were mainly Newar, the pastor of Corinthi pointed me towards Fellowship. When I arrived at a Saturday service at Fellowship in late October 2012, I already knew something of the internal politics of the church; I also knew a reasonable amount about Nepali Christianity, and was by that time proficient in Newari.

I arrived at the church during a Saturday service with Shamsheer, my research assistant. We sat through the service, and afterwards introduced ourselves. We found ourselves talking to the pastor, Kedar, about a recent Christian healing festival that Shamsheer had observed. Shamsheer asked if many of the people who attended the festival had started coming to church afterwards, and Kedar said that there weren't many, and attributed this to the activity of evil spirits in the local area. He said because of the high number of Hindu temples in the area there were many evil spirits which prevented people from coming to church (Nep.: *yo chetrama dherai math mandirharu bhaekole saitanharule churchma aunai didaina*). Just then, an acquaintance of Shamsheer's, Shyam, saw him and greeted him with some surprise, asking when he had become a Christian. Shamsheer said that he was not in fact a Christian, and was still learning about Christianity. Kedar expressed his surprise that

will be explained, in private, with reference to the desire not to cause scandal within one's family. Marrying non-Christians is viewed as unacceptable in Fellowship Church and other churches in Bhaktapur.

Shamsher was not a Christian, saying that he seemed like one. He said that Shamsher should become a Christian, and that that way he would have peace and God would take all of his burdens (*parmeshworyagu thae he jaka shānti dai, chigu bhoj phukang parmeshworwrang kai*).

I got talking to Kedar, who seemed interested by the fact that I spoke Newari. He went to the church library and found some copies of the gospels in Newari, which he gave to me; he also told me that he had a particular passion for bringing Newar people to Christ. He invited me to a house fellowship in the centre of Bhaktapur the next day, where he was going to give a sermon in Newari (as all of the attendees of that fellowship are Newars). I also met a young Farmer man, whom I will call Rojan, who, it turned out, lived in my local area. We exchanged phone numbers and he later invited me to the church's youth fellowship.

My relationships with the pastor and the four deacons of the church, on the one hand, and with Rojan and members of the church's youth fellowship, on the other hand, would be the most important bases of my engagement with Fellowship Church. My interactions with Kedar and the deacons were friendly, but not as deep as my interactions in the youth fellowship. The pastor would often invite me to his house for dinner, and I would talk at length with him and his wife. They would show me pictures of their sons, who both live in the United States; he would sometimes invite other people who lived his building, and encourage me to speak with them in Newari. The deacons I would often talk over cups of tea after a church service or programme; I would also visit their homes for a house fellowships and occasionally for meals. The relationships I developed with the pastor and deacons were vital to my research: it was they who reassured church members that they could be open with me in interviews and conversations. Nepali churches mirror Nepali society in that structures of authority and eldership are taken very seriously.

My relationships in the youth fellowship were more relaxed and could be characterised more as ‘friendships of equals’. I started to attend the youth fellowship – which is held every Wednesday, and is for youths aged 14 to 30 – every week, and I would often travel there with Rojan, the chair of the fellowship, as he lived close to me in Byasi. Rojan would sometimes describe to me how becoming a Christian in his mid-20s had helped him to escape the ‘thug lifestyle’ he had been living (which involved the use of alcohol and marijuana); he also described to me how he had fully committed himself to Christian service while living as a foreign worker in Malaysia. His descriptions of his conversion as a search for meaning and direction in life resonated more closely with my own experience than did the many stories of healing I had collected from older Christians. As I spent more time in the youth fellowship I found that conversions among youths were more likely to be connected with a search for meaning than to healing; I resolved to investigate these stories as a counterpoint to the many healing stories I had collected.

The youth fellowship contained some of the most active members of Fellowship Church. The music and organisational legwork for Saturday services and other church events were invariably provided by youths. The fellowship would regularly hold outreach events, sometimes large ones. For instance, in the week before Christmas 2012 it held a ‘food festival’ (involving live music and food for sale), which attracted more than 100 people, including many non-Christians, from the local community. I further describe the activities of the youth fellowship in Section 10.2.

Rojan and Kamal – another youth leader, whose story I recount in Chapter 10 – became my closest friends in Bhaktapur. Rojan is the chair of the youth fellowship and also the secretary of the church (which is a paid role); he combines this job with work at a Christian NGO that supports migrant workers. He was born in 1980 and is married with one daughter. Kamal, at the time of my research, was the deputy chair of the Bhaktapur youth

fellowship, chair of the youth organisation of Fellowship Church's network as a whole, and also worked as a Japanese language teacher. He was born in 1984 and is married with one daughter. From November 2012 I spent a significant amount of time socialising with Rojan and Kamal (who have been friends for years): we would often meet in the late afternoon or evening in a tea shop and sit together talking for hours (we still talk regularly on Skype and I have discussed many of the arguments of this thesis with them). The older people I got to know in the church were friendly and kind to me, but were sometimes less than fully candid when discussing the details of the church's internal politics. Rojan and Kamal, however, were keen to give me what Kamal described as the 'full picture' of the church, and of Nepali Christianity more generally. From them I learned about the difficulties as well as the joys of life in Fellowship Church.

As well as attending the youth fellowship, I would regularly attend Fellowship Church house fellowships. Both Kehrberg (2000: 118) and Tamang (2012: 135) note the centrality of house fellowships to the life of the Nepali church. This stems partly from the fact that Christian activities in Nepal before 1990 were held mainly in the homes of believers, due to their necessarily secretive nature; it also stems from the centrality of prayer in Nepali church life. House fellowships will generally take place either in the early morning or in the evening, and can last anything from half an hour to an hour and a half, or more. They involve the singing of hymns, a Bible reading, and a short sermon from a senior member of the church. The most important activity, however, and the one which takes up the most time, is prayer. Sitting in a circle, the attendees of the house fellowship each share their personal prayer requests with the group, and then the group all pray together simultaneously, out loud, standing or kneeling, and passionately entreat God to answer the prayers of the other people in the room. This prayer may last for half an hour or more. I describe a house fellowship in Section 10.4.

Saturday services in Fellowship, and in other Nepali churches, are also centred on prayer, song, and exposition of the Bible. When one enters a Nepali church service, the first thing one notices is that everyone sits on the floor, leaving their shoes outside, with men sat on one side and women on the other. The pastor and senior members of the church will often sit towards the front. A typical Saturday service at Fellowship Church proceeds as follows:

Greeting and opening songs

Opening prayer

Recitation of the Apostle's Creed, and of the vision and mission statements of the church

Reading of a Psalm

Praise and worship [*stuti prasamsa*] (around half an hour of singing, accompanied by the worship band)

Period of prayer (roughly 15 minutes)

Collection of offerings and prayer for offerings

Notices and prayer requests

Reading of a Bible passage

Sermon (between 30 minutes and an hour)

Lord's Supper, if Lord's Supper is to be offered (this happens once a month)

Singing of the Lord's Prayer

Closing prayers

If the Lord's Supper is offered or there is a special programme, the service will last for up to two hours; otherwise, the service will take roughly one and a quarter hours, in total. At Fellowship, there are two services on Saturday, at 9am and 11am, and a combined service once a month on the occasion of the Lord's Supper. During the 11am service a 'Sunday School' for children runs concurrently, in the rooms above the worship hall.

Throughout the year Fellowship holds various special programmes to which non-Christians will be invited (for instance, on the occasion of Children's Day [*bal diwas*]); there are also large events which involve cooperation between churches at Christmas and Easter, and 'healing crusades' several times throughout the year. The Easter Rally is the most publicly visible event of the Christian festival year in Nepal. The tradition of publicly parading at the time of Easter began in 1990, shortly after the People's Movement. The missionary Thomas Hale writes:

Victory Day took place on Monday, April 9 [the day on which the king removed the legal ban on political parties]. The following Sunday was Easter, the greatest victory day in history. On Easter morning over 500 Nepali Christians marched through Kathmandu carrying flags with crosses and Scripture verses, singing as they went, and stopping from time to time to pray for the city and for the land. (Hale: 1993: 250)

Since 1990 the Easter Rally has grown into a huge event that involves nearly all the churches in the Kathmandu Valley, and attracts many thousands of participants. In 2013, the year I participated, the rally progressed from Bhaktapur to Thimi (a town 4km to the west of Bhaktapur). Bhaktapur's Christians, along with many others, gathered in some open ground outside the city in the early morning, and progressed down the highway towards Thimi singing, carrying banners, and chanting, in Nepali, '*hamro prabhu Yesu Krisht bhari uthnubhaeko cha!*' ('our lord Jesus Christ is resurrected!'). The rally converged at a large piece of open ground in Thimi, where various Christian leaders spoke about the political and social challenges facing Christians in Nepal, and prayed for the nation.

While Easter is time when Christians come together publicly to proclaim their identity, and to speak about the challenges they face as a group, healing crusades are oriented towards evangelism. Shrestha identifies open-air healing crusades as a significant factor in church growth after 1990 (2012: 60-1). During my time in Bhaktapur, there were several large healing crusades held in a large piece of open ground just outside the city. One of these

crusades, during the time of Dashain, was organised by churches from the Bhaktapur Church Association. Another, held in July 2012, was organised by the International Fellowship for the Full Gospel (IFGF), a network of Pentecostal churches that is headquartered in Indonesia, and has a large branch in Kathmandu. This event lasted for several hours and included entertainment as well as prayer for healing. After some singing and an introduction by a pastor, there was a lengthy comedy performance by a popular Nepali comedian and Christian convert who plays a character called 'Iku'. The performance seemed to be very much enjoyed by the audience, and drew a large crowd. After this, there was a sermon by an Indonesian pastor in English, which was translated into Nepali by a local pastor. The Indonesian pastor encouraged everyone in the audience who was ill to place a hand on the affected body part and pray together for healing. After this, people were encouraged to come to the stage and give their testimonies of healing. A stream of people came up to the stage and testified that they had just been healed – of ailments ranging from stomach aches, to a head injury, to a damaged leg. After this, there was further prayer and singing, and after the main event people were encouraged to come to the front to be prayed for by the various pastors and other Christians.

Whereas the Easter Rally and healing crusades are opportunities for Christian outreach, events held in connection with Christmas and baptisms tend to be more focused on people who are already believers: they are times to reinforce identity and solidify the community. In 2013 I went to the Christmas celebration of the church network of Fellowship Church: it was a very large event of several thousand people held in a sports ground in Patan. The general tone of the programme was one of entertainment and 'rallying of the troops': in various speeches, the believers were congratulated on their hard work during the year, and encouraged to redouble their efforts, particularly in evangelism, over the next year.

A baptism service of Corinthi Church that I went to in Dharkhola – a village to the east of the Kathmandu Valley – also seemed oriented towards strengthening internal church cohesion. When we arrived in Dharkhola – after a long journey from Bhaktapur in a hired coach – the people who were to be baptised sat in a circle with the pastor and some of the senior church members; the meaning of baptism was explained to them, and it was made clear that they should only take baptism if it was freely chosen and desired. The pastor said that baptism meant gaining citizenship (*nagarikatā*) of the church. After being baptised people would have to pay 10% of their income (*dasāmsa*) to the church as a tithe,⁹⁸ just as citizens of a country must pay tax. After this, the people were baptised in the river, being asked three questions before they were baptised: 1. Do you believe in Christ? 2. Do you accept to be baptised by your own wish? 3. Do you agree to follow all of the rules of the church?⁹⁹ After this all of the church members (most of the church had come to witness the baptisms) sat together by the river and ate a meal.

The period over which I have been connected with Fellowship Church – 2012 to 2015 – has been a time of transition for the church. When I first arrived there, the church was governed by a deacons’ committee, composed of the four deacons and the pastor; it was only in 2013 that the 13 member church committee described at the beginning of this chapter was set up. Another significant development has been the return (in 2013) of a young (early 30s) church member from his studies in Korea; he is now the chair of the church committee. This man had been a long-standing member of the church before going to Korea, with the support of the church, to study for a Master’s in Divinity: it is likely that he will be the next pastor of Fellowship when the current pastor retires. The time of my connection with Fellowship has

⁹⁸ This is the standard practice in Nepali churches. It is likely that many Bhaktapurian Christians do not in fact give 10% of their income to their church; all baptised church members, however, are expected to give financial contributions to the church if they can afford to do so.

⁹⁹ These rules include not drinking and smoking, and attending the church regularly.

thus been a time of organisational reform,¹⁰⁰ and also a time when preparations were being made for leadership to be passed to a younger generation.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the historical, social, and institutional context of Christianity in Bhaktapur, and of Fellowship Church in particular. In Part III I will focus on four of the most significant categories of people within Nepali churches: people who have experienced healing, women, leaders, and youth. The backbone of the chapters that follow will be close readings of conversion narratives recounted to me in interviews. In order for these narratives to be fully understood, it will be important to bear in mind the various contexts described in this and previous chapters.

¹⁰⁰ It is becoming more common for churches in Nepal to be governed by an elected church committee rather than just by the pastor with elders and deacons.

Chapter 7. Healing: the recognition of suffering

7.1 Introduction

In Part II I described Christianity as it is practised in Nepal, Bhaktapur, and Fellowship Church in general terms. In this chapter and the three that follow (Part III), I move from general descriptions of Christian life to focused interpretation of four particular conversion narratives, which I relate to broader material and themes. This method allows me to draw out the ways in which narrative is woven into the texture of Bhaktapurian Christianity;¹⁰¹ it also, I hope, will give the reader a relatively unfiltered sense of how converts themselves describe their conversions.¹⁰²

Each of the chapters of Part III focuses on a particular group of people who play an important role in Bhaktapurian Christianity: people who have been healed (this chapter), women (Chapter 8), leaders (Chapter 9), and youth (Chapter 10). In the introduction to each chapter, I place the material to come in comparative context with reference to literature in the anthropology of Christianity. In the next section, I describe the distinctive features that tend to appear in the conversion stories of the particular group who are my focus. I then present an extended extract from a conversion narrative recounted to me in a recorded interview. I break these extracts up with contextualising footnotes. After presenting the narrative, I interpret it closely and explore the ways it illustrates more general tendencies in Bhaktapurian Christianity. I also bring in other forms of evidence, such as a sermon, a recording of a house

¹⁰¹ I also discuss the importance of narrative in Bhaktapurian Christianity in Section 5.3 and the thesis Conclusion.

¹⁰² For a reflection on individual portraits as an ethnographic method, see Jeffrey and Dyson (2008). Nepal-based ethnographies that utilise in-depth individual portraits include Parish (1994), March (2002), Hausner (2007), and Raj (2010). For a powerful ethnographic examination of Christian conversion that focuses on a single life history see Mintz (1960).

fellowship, material from other interviews, and general ethnographic observation in order to illustrate the interplay of individual lives with wider processes. In particular, I describe the ways in which the ethical approaches to suffering explicated in Chapter 1 – which I characterised as ‘inwardness’ and ‘care’ – play a central role in both conversion and subsequent Christian life. I also relate the material to the cultural unsettlement described in Part I. Throughout, I stress the role of narrative in shaping practice and experience.

All the four individuals I focus on in these chapters, apart from one, are members of Fellowship Church. The exception – Vishnu Prasad, whose story I examine in this chapter – was a member of Fellowship for many years but joined Corinth Church in 2007. I focus my analysis in this way in order that the reader may build up a detailed picture of a particular church – its modes of operation and major personalities – and so see how Christian experience is shaped strongly not only by large-scale forces but also by the character of particular congregations. As described in the Prologue, I conducted extensive research in three churches, and visited many more. I am confident that the material I present here is, in ways I will indicate in the course of my analysis, representative of, at minimum, Newar Bhaktapurian Christianity generally. Although I do not examine conversion narratives from the other churches I studied at length, I have considered this wider material when making generalizations about Nepali or Bhaktapurian Christianity as a whole.

In this chapter I examine the healing narrative of Vishnu Prasad. I interpret his story in terms of ‘the recognition of suffering’, by which I mean two things. First, I mean the decision by an individual to give ethical priority to their own experience of suffering, and to the resolution of that suffering, over and above traditional norms of duty towards family or community. When a person recognises his or her own suffering, they are looking inward to their own experience as an ethical guide; their approach can thus be associated with inwardness as it is discussed in Section 1.3. Second, by the ‘recognition of suffering’ I mean

the recognition of a person's experience of suffering by others in a way that gives ethical priority to that experience. Such a response would tend to involve: learning about the other person's suffering; sympathising with it and discussing it; engaging with that person on a long-term basis in order to comfort them and attempt to lessen their suffering. In Bhaktapurian Christianity, much of this takes place in the context of prayer. This type of approach can be associated with Arthur Kleinman's understanding of care, as discussed in Section 1.4. Vishnu Prasad's story, I suggest, illustrates the centrality of inwardness and care to process of Christian healing in Bhaktapur.

Vishnu Prasad's story also relates to the processes of ethical unsettlement described in Chapter 3. The way Vishnu Prasad describes his conversion fits within the discourse of the 'failure of care' identified in Section 3.2. As Vishnu Prasad sees it, the reason he turned to Christianity was that his family, his religious specialists, and his gods failed to care for him adequately. They failed to prioritise his experience of suffering, and instead worried more about their own wellbeing, and in particular their own material wellbeing. The greed of both people and gods in Hindu society is a strong theme in Vishnu Prasad's narrative. His rebellion against his community and his gods in his conversion can be associated with the rejection of deference described in Section 3.3: he refused any longer to be loyal to those he felt were exploiting him.

A range of scholars have identified a continuity between traditional spirit-based forms of healing, often grouped under the heading of shamanism, and Pentecostal/charismatic Christian healing (Martin 1990, 2002; Comaroff 1985; Cox 1995: ch. 11; Peel 1968: 127-35; Kalu 2008: 175-84). David Martin, for instance, has argued that the fact that shamanism is a 'common substrate all across five continents' helps to explain Pentecostalism's explosive growth in recent decades (1990: 140). It is certainly the case that Christian healing in Bhaktapur at times bears a strong resemblance to shamanism, as in the story of Ram Devi in

Appendix 4. In its emphasis on the power of a charismatic figure to expel demons through ritual action, and on a dramatic moment of exorcism when the evil spirit is expelled, the narrative of Ram Devi is similar to narratives that might be given by those healed by Hindu or Buddhist shamanic healers.

Nonetheless, I found that the kind of dramatic exorcism described by Ram Devi is not in fact the norm in Bhaktapurian Christian healing narratives. Far more common is a gradual process of healing impelled by the prayer of groups of Christians who become close friends, rather than (as with a shaman) healing by a charismatic individual who cures the afflicted then disappears from their life. In churches, long-term moral changes in the lives of the afflicted are seen as an absolute pre-requisite for permanent healing.¹⁰³ The most significant of these changes are:

Giving up drinking and smoking.

Giving up worship of Hindu deities and associated Hindu practices, such as death rituals and eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Becoming a fully participating member of the church community, as signified by acceptance of Christ (*grahan*), regular attendance at church services and house fellowships, the giving of mutual aid to other church members, sharing the Gospel with friends and family, baptism (*baptisma*), and, after baptism, giving of 10% of one's income (*dasāmsa*) to one's church.

The fact that a permanent transformation of life is seen as a necessary part of Christian healing is what distinguishes it most clearly from shamanic forms of healing. Whereas in shamanic healing a person is expected to visit a healer on a limited number of occasions, in order to gain access to divine power through material offerings or acts of deference, in Christian healing divine power is on offer, not in exchange for once-off payments or acts of deference, but rather in exchange for a permanent transformation in lifestyle and orientation

¹⁰³ For analyses that also emphasise the place of long-term lifestyle change in Christian healing (with reference to Latin American material) see Chesnut (1997) and Smilde (2007).

(Nepali Christians call this *jiwan pariwartan* – life change). In Weber’s terms (see the Prologue), Hindu healing in Bhaktapur is primarily spiritual, whereas Christian healing is both spiritual and ethical.

7.2 Healing stories

Before outlining the typical structure of Christian healing stories in Bhaktapur it is necessary to provide some context. Gellner has summarised the various healing systems available in the Kathmandu Valley as follows:

Systems	Practitioners
1. Biomedicine	government hospitals incl. maternity, eye, teaching; (Christian) mission hospitals; private hospitals (‘nursing homes’); government health posts; private clinics; charitable clinics (occasional); ‘compounders’/pharmacists
2. Ayurveda (classical South Asian medicine, based on Sanskrit texts)	Ayurvedic hospital, some Ayurvedic health posts, Ayurvedic medical shops [In Newari the practitioners are called <i>vaidya</i>]
3. Unani (classical Galenic medical system, practised predominantly by Muslims)	One practitioner in Kathmandu (trained in Delhi)
4. Rituals	Priests (Hindu or Buddhist), monks, ascetics; offerings by individuals or households to gods such as <i>wasyadyah</i> (the toothache god)
5. Astrology	Individual practitioners (Jyotish/Joshi)
6. Imported healing cults	e.g. Seimeikyo/Reiyukai/[...] Christian churches
7. Mixed divine/Aryurveda/astrology	Tantric healers (<i>jharphuke Vaidya, janne manche, dhāmi</i>); [...] Muslim healers/exorcists
8. Divine healing (possession)	Mediums (<i>devata aune</i> [in Newari, <i>dyah waimha</i> or <i>dyahmā</i>], mostly female) and shamans (<i>jhānkri</i> , mostly male)
9. Herbal remedies/‘herbalism’	Family, relatives, midwives

(adapted from Gellner 2001: 237)

Each of the categories Gellner lists, other than number 3, are available in Bhaktapur. Among the comfortably off and educated in Bhaktapur, biomedicine is increasingly becoming the main form of medical intervention, although most members of the higher castes also place

some credence in religious healing, and resort to it if biomedicine fails (or if they believe that biomedicine will be ineffective, as in a case of suspected witchcraft). Most poorer people in Bhaktapur also use biomedicine on some occasions, depending on their resources and whether they believe an illness to have been ‘spiritually’ caused (that is by witchcraft or a hostile spirit or god) or ‘physically’ caused (this includes all non-spiritually caused ailments). For many people in the middle and lower castes, the first port of call on becoming ill will be a religious healer, who will themselves diagnose whether an ailment requires biomedical treatment or religious intervention. Most Newars, as Gellner has written, take a ‘suck-it-and-see’ approach to healthcare (Gellner 2001: 248): in the case of long-term or chronic complaints they will typically try both religious and biomedical forms of treatment.

Gellner describes the two major types of religious healer in the Newar community, *vaidya* (‘healers’) and *dyah waimha* or *dyahmā* (‘medium’; literally: ‘one to whom the gods come’ or ‘god-mother’):

Healers [*vaidya*], who are always male, are never possessed, but rather acquire their powers by spiritual exercises and straightforward instruction. Some women specialists, namely midwives, do know how to use the technique of brushing and blowing used for healing by both mediums [*dyahmā*] and (ritual) healers, but they do not set themselves up as general practitioners. For women, the only path to becoming a general practitioner is as a medium. Men do sometimes become mediums, but they are vastly outnumbered by women. Mediums are possessed, often on a daily basis, by a tutelary deity; occasionally they are possessed by other deities as well.

(Gellner 2001: 202)

In the case of Bhaktapur it should be added that in addition to *vaidya* and *dyahmā*, Newars also habitually consult *dhāmi* and *jhānkri*, who are shamans of mainly Tamang origin (Levy 1990: 338).¹⁰⁴ Gellner notes that while healers and mediums are often consulted for physical problems, ‘many problems brought to them would be classified by biomedical practitioners

¹⁰⁴ Although in some parts of Nepal the terms *dhāmi* and *jhānkri* refer to different types of healer, in Bhaktapur the terms are used interchangeably, to denote shamans usually of Tamang origin.

as primarily social or psychological, and some have no physical component at all' (2001: 203).

The typical structure of healing-based conversion stories in Bhaktapur can be outlined as follows. The convert becomes ill because of what they perceive to be black magic, visited on them by someone who is jealous or resentful. They receive some support from their families and friends in dealing with the illness, but sense that those close to them are becoming frustrated, particularly with of the cost of treatment; relationships in the family begin to break down. Seeking a resolution, the afflicted performs costly acts of worship (*pujā*) for the Hindu gods, and, more centrally, places their trust in various religious healers: *vaidya*, *dyahmā* and *dhāmi/jhānkri*. As the healers are visited repeatedly and no solution is found, the relationship between healer and patient becomes dysfunctional. The healers are seen not as friends but as holders of religious power who must be respected and paid in order that they favour the afflicted. When the desired result is not forthcoming the relationship breaks down: the afflicted person feels cheated, and resents the greed and arrogance of the healer, which they also associate with the gods for whom the healer claims to speak. They feel that the healers and the gods have no sympathy for them, but simply want to profit from them.

At this point, when traditional cures are proving unsuccessful, an acquaintance suggests that the afflicted come to church, and assures them that prayer to the Christian God will heal them. The afflicted person is surprised and touched that someone who has no responsibility for their wellbeing, and is not being paid, is attentive and eager to help. When the afflicted comes to church, they are impressed to find a group of people who appear to be focused on the healing of illness, and who speak highly of the power of their God to cure any ailment. These people are sympathetic, listen to an account of the afflicted's suffering, ask questions about it, and come regularly to the afflicted person's home to pray and sing. Many

of the people in the church will report that they have been healed from illness themselves. None of them ask for money. At some point in this initial period the afflicted will be asked to perform *grahan* (acceptance), which involves reciting a short prayer inviting Jesus into their heart (*yeshu yāta hridayay nimtā yāyegu*).

As the afflicted person continues to attend church, and to receive visits from Christians who pray for them, they find that their ailment is gradually being healed, but the healing is not yet complete, or they worry about it coming back. At this point, the people at the church will begin to press more strongly something they have mentioned before: that in order to become fully Christian (that is, to take baptism [*baptisma*] and become a church member) one must entirely give up worshipping the Hindu gods, and abandon all Hindu rites and rituals, as well as giving up alcohol and tobacco, and participating fully in church life. It is only after this transition has been made that good health will be secure.

The afflicted person then faces a dilemma. They know that if they give up traditional worship and rituals – most significantly, if they refuse to perform death rituals for their parents – they will become social outcasts in their families and in Hindu society, being guilty of a neglect which will generally be seen as unforgivable. They may also consider it very difficult to give up tobacco and alcohol, or to devote time to church. On the other hand, they believe in the healing power of the Christian God, and have come to trust the Christians whom they have met. This is the point at which returning to Hindu society will become difficult: once Hindu rituals have been abandoned, relationships with friends and relatives may be irreparably damaged. Those who at this point decide to convert take a decision to risk social ostracism in order that they can be in a place where their suffering is recognised and addressed, in a way that is experienced as healing. The inadequacy of the response to suffering which was experienced previously makes it easier for converts to feel justified in breaking with their community.

Prior to conversion, the convert will usually feel that others are not responding adequately to their suffering. The feeling that one is not being adequately cared for is associated with a breakdown in social relationships. A significant proportion of the converts I interviewed had experienced some serious social conflict prior to conversion. Social conflicts were perceived to cause suffering, and suffering itself often deepened social conflicts. Black magic, which was a commonly reported cause of illnesses precipitating conversion, is usually understood to arise from social disputes. Conflicts with families and religious healers over the cost and difficulty of treating illness were also common. Mirroring the breakdown in social relationships associated with conversion was a breakdown in relationships with the Hindu gods: in times of suffering, deities who had previously been seen with fondness and trust came to be perceived as hostile and deceptive. Disputes arising from a perceived lack of care would lead to a rejection of traditional norms of deference, both to social superiors and to the Hindu gods.

7.3 Vishnu Prasad's story: the recognition of suffering

Vishnu Prasad Ghorasaini was born in 1934 into a Farmer caste family in Bhaktapur. His family had a significant amount of land but, like most Farmers during that period, he received no formal education (he is still almost illiterate). He married at around the age of 20 and had several children, including two sons. During his early adulthood he was financially secure, working on the substantial property of fields that he inherited from his father, but he felt an intermittent sense of religious longing, which he satisfied by participating in local music groups and joining a sect called Satsang, which practised public reading and meditation on

the Hindu scriptures.¹⁰⁵ During this time he was a patron of various religious enterprises, contributing money towards a building for the Satsang group and also towards the building of a new porch and attached temple for a *bhajan* group in his locality. In the mid-1980s he started a beaten rice mill, and began to become significantly more prosperous. It was at this time that he started to feel people in his community were jealous of him, and he developed a fear that black magic would be practised against him. It was in this context that the incident which would eventually lead to his conversion occurred.

It was the day of Laxmi Puja, which is dedicated to the worship of the goddess of wealth, Laxmi. It is believed that on Laxmi Puja one should receive direct payment for any services provided or goods sold, rather than working or selling on credit. On this day Vishnu Prasad was working in his mill, and a friend came in with some paddy in order to make beaten rice. This was a friend with whom Vishnu Prasad had had a somewhat troubled history. The friend had been learning magical knowledge (training to be a *vaidya*), and had several weeks before invited Vishnu Prasad to join him at a temple outside the city at night. When they arrived there was another *vaidya* there, whom Vishnu Prasad believed to be a ‘bad’ *vaidya* (*ku:vaidya*). The *ku:vaidya* was holding a flame in his hand and shaking. This terrified Vishnu Prasad, who thought that perhaps his friend and the other *vaidya* would offer him as a sacrifice; Vishnu Prasad ran away, leaving his friend behind. The next day, his friend scolded him for leaving abruptly.

I reproduce below Vishnu Prasad’s description of what happened when his *vaidya* friend came to his rice mill on the day of Laxmi Puja, and his account of how this led to his conversion.

¹⁰⁵ Kamal, whose story I look at in Chapter 10, also had experience in Hindu new religious movements before turning to Christianity.

SNP: How did you become a Christian?

VPG: Some demons were very envious when they saw that I was earning a lot of money so they harmed me with black magic [*jitā hānay yanga bilā*]. [...] It was people who knew good magic as well as black magic [*vaidya nanag sa thajagu ku:vaidhya nang sa*]. [...] When someone learns good magic they also learn black magic to take revenge against the people they don't like.¹⁰⁶

He [the *vaidya* friend] brought some soaked paddy to my mill to make beaten rice on the day of Laxmi Puja. At that time the charge for beating one *pāthi* of paddy was only one rupee twenty five *paisā*, and at that time he already owed me ten rupees for making beaten rice for him. Because it was Laxmi Puja I had to say to him that I could not beat the rice for him on credit. I said to him that he could get credit on some other day but not on Laxmi Puja. He went to his house three or four times saying that he was going to get the money for me, but his intention was not to pay me. In the end he paid me but he became very angry and thought that I had insulted him. In revenge for that incident he did black magic on me [*hānay yanga byugu*]. He did it in order to get revenge, even though it was only a small matter, and even though he was a friend. [...]

SNP: What happened to you after his black magic?

VPG: What to say? I got ill and my illness could not be cured, not cured at all, even when I went to many shamans [*dhāmi tayedhuna jhānkri tayedhuna*]. [...] I had a problem with my back. My back is still a little bent over. Before I joined Christianity my back was bent in a complete 'u' shape but after I became a Christian it started to open and unbend. I was not able to walk. I was lying in bed for six months. My children made a ritual donation of a cow for me, because they thought I would die.

Later, because of the grace of God, someone came to my house. God sent a friend to my house with the Gospel [*su-samachār*] of God. They asked me if I wanted to join Christianity in order to get better from my sickness. I said that I didn't mind joining if I got better. I was still going to the funeral association [*si-guthi*] at that time. And I was still going to the *dāphā bhajan* [traditional music group] too. So I was in doubt as to whether to leave from all these things. I had a dilemma and I spent about two years without fully joining Christianity. So I did not get fully better. Then Ganesh Man [a pseudonym: the senior pastor of the church network his church was part of] asked me that if I was still leaning towards the old practices, if I was stepping on two roads at once [*chha nyekhe tyelālā dhaka jitā dhālaka*].

¹⁰⁶ Suspicion of having performed witchcraft often falls on *vaidyas*, who are believed to have the power both to help and to harm (Gellner 2001: 209).

SNP: Who came to convince you to go to the church?

VPG: Kedar and XX [an elder from Fellowship Church] and a *partyaini* [Nepali-speaking woman] from Pikhel village who used to come to collect grass from my field for her cattle. While I was sick I still had to go to the field and I used lie on the ground and do nothing. I used to shout out to them with a loud voice when they came to collect the grass from my field but that time I did not speak at all and they did not hear my voice. So she wondered about me and came to see me at my house to see if I was alright. When she saw me she asked about my sickness then I explained to her what had happened in detail.¹⁰⁷ Then she asked me if I wanted to join with the Lord [*prabhu*] and get better from my sickness. I replied to her that I would join if I became better [*rog lānigu khasā jyu kha dhāye dhunaka*]. Up to that time I had already spent money on hundreds of litres of alcohol for *dhāmis* and *jhānkris*. They ate up all the food from my house but did not help at all. When I decided to join Christianity I asked my family members to come too but they did not like it at all.

IG: How did you feel when you went to the church for the first time?

VPG: When I joined the church I felt a new sense of aliveness because I started to become better and better. I felt like I was speaking to a God who was living. I wasn't afraid [*magyāngā*] of being kicked out of my family. The Lord is the one who made my days better [*din bālākka byugu*]. I decided not to leave this side; I decided to give up all [Hindu] worshipping activities. [...] I felt that if my family wants to feed me, they can feed me, if they want to stop feeding me, they can stop feeding me, I will never leave this Lord [*ji thwo prabhu towtegu makhuta*]. As my sickness was cured from here, as I felt a great bliss [*ānanda*], why should I leave from here? [...]

Many demons from here and there were giving me trouble while I was still worshipping idols [*murtita*]. I was told to go to worship Bhairava and to go to many other places and I was also told to go to the place of the medium [*dhyo wo thāy*]. I separated more than ten kilograms of rice for the medium, but what could she do? So I decided not to go there anymore. I have been to many mediums' places. I was so tired from going here and there. And I went to many hospitals too. I was tired of going there too.

¹⁰⁷ A common theme in many of the conversion narratives I collected was the significance of describing one's suffering and being asked about it by others in a context that involves prayer. In house fellowships, the period for prayer requests is a time when people speak at length about their problems and are questioned sympathetically about them.

One important part of Vishnu Prasad's conversion which he did not mention in detail at this first rendering of his story, but which he talked about at length later in the interview, and on other occasions, was his relationship with his wife and children. Although Vishnu Prasad was baptised and considered himself to be fully a Christian before his wife's death in the mid-1990s, the events surrounding her death helped to cement his commitment to the Christian community and his detachment from the Hindu one.¹⁰⁸ Vishnu Prasad described the events surround his wife's death, and his subsequent relations with his sons, as follows:

SNP: What did you do at the time of your wife's death?

VPG: I did nothing. I even did not feed her the water even though other people were criticizing me for this [at a Newar Hindu funeral, mourners are expected to pour water into the mouth the deceased]. Everyone hated me as a person who did not feed water to my wife [*misā yātā he nā matwonkimhā*].

SNP: You must have gone to join the funeral, didn't you?

VPG: Yes, I went to join the funeral. I was feeling so sad that I began to cry and I was looking at my wife from the side. But I was not saying the name of the gods of that side but rather I was praying to our Lord. If I had followed that side I would had to say said 'Ram Ram' and 'Narayan Narayan' but I did not do so. I explained to our Lord that my wife had died and he should take care of her. And I begged for pardon in advance because I would have to shave my hair¹⁰⁹ in order avoid criticism from the local people. [...]

I decided to become Christian when my wife was still alive. I used to try to convince her that this God is a real god and this God has said that he will take us to heaven. So if she wants to join, I used to say, there is still time to join, but she did not come. I used to explain to her that after I started coming to church I got better and better. She said that it was because according to my horoscope good days would come, and this was why I was getting better. I used to explain to her that it was the Lord himself who had made my days strong, who had made me feel better. I said

¹⁰⁸ Funerals, and the refusal of Christians fully to participate in rituals and practices surrounding them, are often the flash-points at which tensions surrounding Christian conversion come to the fore. See, for instance, the incident recounted in footnote 141, or the story of Kedar in Section 9.3, where his refusal to shave his hair or wear white after the death of his father causes local people to blame him for an earthquake. As we saw in Section 3.2, funerals may also be times at which tensions come to the fore within the Hindu community.

¹⁰⁹ After the death of a parent, it is traditional for Newar men to wear white and keep their head shaved for one year.

to her that I would definitely stop worshipping at the temple. Even if I have to stay separately from my family I will do that; because I have been healed I have become a person who has to go to church [*ji wane mhā he jula*], I used to say. And none of my family members came to this side. There are some grandchildren who are educated but I could not make them listen to me.

SNP: Are you cooking for yourself and doing everything on your own?

VPG: Yes! I do. What to do? I feel very uncomfortable to eat the food cooked by non-Christians. If I find that food has been prepared in the name of idol worship I will never accept it.

SNP: Have you stopped attending Hindu feasts?¹¹⁰

VPG: I do go sometimes, if the inviter has assured me that they will not feed me the food touched [*bhekeseke*] by the other food that has been prepared for idol worship. If they cheat me in that matter then the curse will be borne by them. If they try to feed me that sort of polluted food then I will know immediately because our Lord has given us the eyes with which we can identify bad food. [...] When I became Christian my neighbours and relatives said that I had gone to the Muslim religion and to a foreign religion [*videshi dharmā*]. So they stopped speaking to me and other relatives also broke our relation.

SNP: If you fall sick who will take care of you?

VPG: If they do not come to help me then I expect help from the church and friends from the church. I never think of going back to them to ask them for help. Most of my fields I have already given to my sons. But they do not pay back any income to me. They wish for me to die soon. But I do not feel bad because of that. And I never think of following what they say. I used to get some income from the field as rent but since I joined Christianity they [the tenants] stopped paying me because my sons asked them to.¹¹¹ They [the sons] say that if they pay money to me it will be used as a donation to the church.

IG: What were the biggest changes in your life after you became a Christian?

VPG: The biggest change is that my sons broke their relationship with me. [...] It was also very difficult for me to give up my smoking and drinking habit so I used to use those things secretly,

¹¹⁰ As I discuss in Section 10.4, the question of feast attendance is a matter of debate in Nepali Christianity (see also Appendix 2). Almost all Christian leaders agree that food offered to the Hindu deities in worship should never be eaten; whether it is acceptable to attend feasts on Hindu religious occasions, however, is debated.

¹¹¹ I heard other stories of tenants who had refused to pay Christian landlords, and felt they could do so with impunity because of the weak position of Christians in relation to the wider community.

but later I totally gave up.¹¹² Because of the power of the Lord I came to feel that smoking and drinking was a poison and because of this I was able to give up.

What emerges first of all from Vishnu Prasad's story is its length and complexity, and the existence of different layers of memory and experience, some of which Vishnu Prasad is keen to communicate and others of which he is less eager to expose and examine. The 'official' version of Vishnu Prasad's conversion story focuses on his illness, caused by black magic, and on the power of the Christian God which is manifested in his (almost complete) healing. I heard him outline this story several times, once when giving his testimony in front of the whole church and at other times when introducing himself to others. He also outlined his story in this way, as we have seen, when asked how he became a Christian at the beginning of our interview. The 'deep' version of Vishnu Prasad's story, which emerged later in the interview and in informal conversations I had with him on other occasions, certainly included his falling victim to black magic and the power of the Christian God in overcoming this, but it also included his troubled relationships with his wife and sons, as well as with his friends and neighbours during the time he was financially prospering in the mid-1980s.

In broad terms, Vishnu Prasad's conversion can be seen as a story of several longstanding relationships broken and of several new relationships forged. Seemingly the most significant of Vishnu Prasad's broken relationships is that with the friend to whom he refused credit on Laxmi Puja. As I discussed this incident with Vishnu Prasad over the course of conversations subsequent to the interview, certain ideas emerged which are not fully evident in the portions of interview quoted above. The first is that he understood the

¹¹² The struggle to give up drinking and smoking was a common theme in the conversion stories I collected, particularly those of men. While converts would normally completely give up Hindu worship before being baptised, they would often take a somewhat more pragmatic approach to giving up drinking and smoking – sometimes, like Vishnu Prasad, continuing to do so in secret for some time after baptism (compare, for instance, the story of Kamal in Chapter 10).

witchcraft his friend had visited on him more in terms of a collective resentment of his community at his increasing wealth than in terms simply of the resentment of a particular individual. It seemed that the argument on Laxmi Puja was symbolic for Vishnu Prasad of a wider situation of jealousy, threat, and social unease. Often when discussing the incident Vishnu Prasad would emphasise that there were many people who became jealous of him when he began to profit from his beaten rice mill. He would usually describe the workers of black magic against him in the plural, as when he says above, ‘some demons were very envious [...] so they harmed me with black magic’.

A further prominent theme in Vishnu Prasad’s discussion of the incident with his friend, perhaps ironic in light of subsequent developments, is the idea that Vishnu Prasad was a more ‘religious’ [*dharmik*] person than his friend, and perhaps more so also than his community in general.¹¹³ The word *dharmik* in Newari or Nepali can be translated not only as ‘religious’ but also as ‘dutiful’ or ‘moral’: it conveys a sense of following religious traditions conscientiously, as well as of abiding by traditional moral codes. Vishnu Prasad’s sense of religious and moral superiority is evident in his refusal to give credit on Laxmi Puja, which is a matter of following tradition (*paramparā*); it is also evident in his discomfort when his friend invites him to see the ‘bad’ *vaidya* outside the city at night. This sense of superiority is related to the theme of religious ‘quest’ that appears throughout Vishnu Prasad’s descriptions of his conversion. When Vishnu Prasad was a Hindu, he was a strict Hindu, joining a sect and sponsoring religious activities. Since he has been a Christian Vishnu Prasad has been a highly dedicated in his new religious sphere, having donated a valuable piece of land for the

¹¹³ The idea that people who consider themselves to be strict and pious Hindus are in fact more likely to convert than those who are religiously indifferent is one that I will explore further in subsequent chapters. Peel (1990: 350-59) suggests something similar with reference to an African context: that religious specialists may, for intellectual reasons, be particularly drawn towards new religious movements.

building of Corinthi Church. As we will see in greater detail below, Vishnu Prasad sees his conversion in part as a quest for the ‘truth’ (*satya*), and for a God ‘who speaks’.

This double context – fear of a jealous community and a sense of moral superiority – helps us to understand the way in which Vishnu Prasad’s illness brought about a wider social rupture than simply that between Vishnu Prasad and his friend. Vishnu Prasad would sometimes express the belief that when he became ill many of the people in his community were secretly pleased at his misfortune. This neatly encapsulates his growing sense there was something awry in his community. He interpreted the lack of care in the way people responded to his suffering as revealing a moral dysfunction in Hindu society as a whole, a dysfunction which he saw as justifying his decisive break with tradition.

The way in which Vishnu Prasad talked about his wife and sons was more ambiguous than the way he talked about Hindu society more generally. He was clearly closely attached to them and when he became ill they desired for him to get better. As we saw above, his sons made a ritual offering of a cow for the purpose of his healing, and his wife speculated on the astrological causes of his improving health. However, he also felt that they did not fully understand the depth of his suffering, and that they prioritized their own needs above finding a solution for it. He once said to me that his family knew in their hearts that he had gotten better because of the Christian God, but denied it because they did not want to give up going to Hindu feasts. This was a reproach both of their lack of regard for truth and of their lack of compassion for his suffering. (The bitterness with which Vishnu Prasad spoke of his family’s lack of compassion was probably intensified by the harsh way his sons treated him after his conversion.)

Ultimately, Vishnu Prasad felt that the suffering caused by his back condition was the most significant fact in his life, and that addressing it must be his priority. This is what he is

indicating when he says to his wife, ‘Even if I have to stay separately [...] because I have been healed I have become a person who has to go to church.’ As well as failing to recognise the urgency of his suffering, Vishnu Prasad felt that his family had failed to recognise its religious meaning, as a sign intended to draw them towards the true God. He tries to convince his wife that ‘this God is a real god and this God has said to us that he will take us to heaven,’ but she is not interested in these abstract arguments, and neither are his children nor his grandchildren.

The mixture of practical and spiritual motives in Vishnu Prasad’s story can be explored more fully if we look at another set of broken relationships that his conversion entailed: those with the Hindu deities. In important respects, changes in Vishnu Prasad’s attitudes towards the Hindu deities mirrored changes in his attitude towards Hindu society: a growing fear and distrust, and a suspicion of motives such as greed and the desire to inflict pain. When I asked him what the main differences between Hinduism and Christianity were, Vishnu Prasad said the following:

The healing of sickness is the best thing about this side [Christianity]. The Lord can solve any problem you have to face. When I was following that side [Hinduism] I always had to try to find out which god could help me. But on this side there is only one God and you do not have to find the right one. [In Hinduism] you have to search for the right god and look around like a tourist to try to find the right place. I felt like someone who is drunk, one moment bending to the left, the next moment bending to the right. On the Hindu side you have to travel very far to reach the right temple and you have to walk a lot and it will make your legs tired from all the walking.

If you go to Namobuddha [a temple on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley] how long will it take? I managed to reach there in three hours. I spent a lot of time and energy when I was still practicing that religion [Hinduism] but nothing in my life was secure [*chhung he surakshā maju*].¹¹⁴ In that religion there are many gods so you do not know who is going to give to you. Maybe nobody will give anything. And those gods may harm you too if they are activated by the

¹¹⁴ The idea that in Hinduism it is impossible to have peace or security, because of the multiplicity of competing spiritual forces, was a common theme in the conversion narratives I collected. See, in particular, Section 8.4.

devils [*saitanta*] or black magicians [*ku:vaidyata*]. That is why I threw that religion away and came to this side.

On this Christian side, the Lord is asking all of us to come to him because he is taking us to heaven. But the gods from other side are ones who just eat and eat [*nayegu nayegu jakka dhāipung*]. And they even try to eat us too. And there is not any god or goddess who can speak [*bolay yātā*] but on our side there is a speaking God [*nuwāimhā dyo*]. [...] Here on our side there is a teaching that we ourselves are the shelter in which God can live. [...] When I started to go to church continuously I began to feel that yes, there really is a living god, and god speaks to me. [...] The Lord seems to speak in our hearts [*jigu manay prabhung he nuwa wo theng chwong*].

At another point in the interview, Vishnu Prasad takes a more flattering approach to the Hindu gods, offering a comparison between them and the Christian God in terms of the floors of a house.¹¹⁵ He makes this comparison in the course of describing an argument between a Christian man and some people in his locality:

The Hindu gods and goddess are also able to give to us, but they are in a middle position, they are not as high as our God [*jheemhā dhyo*]. Those gods do not have the access to heaven. They are just staying in a middle position [*bichay bichay jakka chwong pung ka*]. Some Christians were saying in public that our God is much higher than any of the other gods. Because of this they were beaten. They are not good at explaining about our God. So I suggest to them that they should show the layers or levels of God: that is, first floor [*mātan*], second floor [*chuutā*]. And I suggest to them that they should not say that our Lord is the only big one among the gods. We should explain in a comparative way.¹¹⁶

That person who was saying that Jesus is the only great god had been very sick and he was saved when he came to church. He was saying in the local area [*twālay*] that the idols of Narayan

¹¹⁵ The most common Christian approach to the Hindu gods in Nepal is to label them as demons (Nep.: *saitanharu*). This is evident, for instance, in the testimony of Daya Laxmi in Section 8.4, or in that of Kamal in Section 10.3. Meyer (1999) has explored the ‘demonisation’ on non-Christian gods in African Christianity. A somewhat more conciliatory approach towards Hinduism is taken by the prominent Nepali pastor Mangal Man Maharjan (mentioned in Chapter 5) in his book *Comparative Study of Hinduism and Christianity in Nepal* (2002). Though arguing strongly for the superiority of Christianity to Hinduism, Maharjan finds value in various aspects of Hindu practice and belief. This more conciliatory attitude is reflected on a popular level in approaches such as the one that Vishnu Prasad takes in the passage that follows. Although almost all Nepali Christians will refer in conversation to the Hindu gods as demons, when interacting with non-Christians they also find it necessary, at times, to find ways of speaking about what is valuable in their neighbours’ religious traditions, if only to avoid serious social conflict.

¹¹⁶ This corresponds with the way in which Newar Hindus view Buddhism and Newar Buddhists view Hinduism (Gellner 1992: 98-104).

and Mahadev should be swept away into the river. Because of his saying this other people got very angry and he was about to be beaten. Others said that he can be a Christian if he wants but he should not say that the idols should be swept away into the river. Later on I went there to praise Narayan and Shiva and to try to correct what he said in order to protect him from being beaten. I said that Narayan and Shiva are also big in their own areas. And I said to them that our God is supreme for us. Then they asked me how far can our God reach? I replied that they have to join Christianity to understand it all.

Sometimes I explain about the Lord's Supper [*prabhu bhoj*] and they blame me that we eat beef at the Lord's Supper.¹¹⁷ In the context of an election, one who wins will be the one who has the most supporters. In the same way the idol worshippers are in a dominating position; the world is full of them so we will not win against them when we say our God is supreme. We have to understand this. We don't eat blood because it is a symbol of the blood of our Lord.¹¹⁸ But they [Hindus] argue with us that meat is also a product of blood but we eat that. Why is that? On this I do not make any arguments but ask them to come to the church for an explanation.

Our Lord faced such a great torture and was hung on the cross where his blood was running down his body. So why should we eat blood? This is the sort of thing they [non-Christians] do not know. Anyway they are in the dominant position. They do not come to the church and are not even interested in understanding so what is the use of telling them the story of the Bible? Our Lord was such a kind and compassionate one [*karunāmhā prabhu*] that he did not even utter a single word at the time he was crucified. He accepted all the acts against him.

The way Vishnu Prasad talks about the Hindu gods, and his disillusionment with them, mirrors the way he talks about his disillusionment with healers, relatives, and friends in Hindu society. Just as he says 'I was so tired from going here and there' between healers, he says that in Hinduism 'you have to search for the right god and look around like a tourist to try to find the right place.' Just as he complains about the greed of healers, and the amount of

¹¹⁷ The Lord's Supper is a frequent subject of criticism of Christians by non-Christians in Nepal. Here, we see the common misconception that beef (which it is forbidden for Hindus to consume) is eaten at the Lord's Supper. In the story of Sushila and Ramesh in Chapter 6 we saw the better-informed criticism that at the Lord's Supper the blood of Jesus is consumed. Christianity in Nepal is sometimes referred to by non-Christians as a 'cow-eating religion' (*gai khane dharma*). In fact, in my experience, Nepali Christians, like most other Nepalis, never consume beef.

¹¹⁸ Some Christians in Nepal decline to eat blood because of Biblical prohibitions of this; see Leviticus 3: 17 and Acts 15: 20.

rice, alcohol, and money he had to give them, he says that the Hindu gods are ‘ones who just eat and eat [...] and they even try to eat us too.’ Just as he feared black magic from friends jealous of his prosperity, he talks of the difficulty of balancing devotion to one god with devotion to another, with the potential for jealousy that entails, saying: ‘those gods may harm you [...] if they are activated by the devils or black magicians.’ As Vishnu Prasad travelled from healer to healer, and from god to god, and did not see any positive results, he came to see Hindu society and the Hindu pantheon all in one light: deceptive, greedy, hostile, and threatening.

Vishnu Prasad, then, found the response to his suffering from his gods and his society to be inadequate. Christians, on the other hand, he found to be specialists in suffering. I quoted above Vishnu Prasad’s description of how the *partyaini* (Nepali-speaking woman) who used to collect grass from his field came to his house, listened to his problems, and encouraged him to become a Christian. The first thing to note about this is that the woman who introduces Vishnu Prasad to Christianity is not initially close to him in terms either of friendship or culture. She is a non-Newar, and so conversations between the pair would have been limited, as Vishnu Prasad speaks only rudimentary Nepali. They knew each other as acquaintances who occasionally crossed paths. When this *partyaini* suspects that something might be wrong with Vishnu Prasad, she takes the initiative by going to his house. Whereas he has wearied himself traveling between temples and healers, in this case the person offering healing comes to him. When she arrives at his house she does not demand anything, like the healers and gods, but rather listens: ‘she asked about my sickness then I explained to her what happened in detail’. What she then says to him is both simple and supremely confident: ‘she asked me if I wanted to join with the Lord and get better from my sickness.’ This contrasts with the complexity and uncertainty of the healing processes Vishnu Prasad has experienced thus far.

The encounter which prompted Vishnu Prasad's final decision to abandon all Hindu practices and be baptised was that with the senior pastor of Fellowship Church's church network. The man, whom I call Ganesh Man, is one of the best-known Christian figures in Nepal, being head of one of the country's largest church networks. Vishnu Prasad relates that in response to his complaint that, after two years of attending church, he had not been fully cured, Ganesh Man asked 'if I was still leaning towards the old practices, if I was stepping on two roads at once'. Once, when relating this incident to me, Vishnu Prasad said that after Ganesh Man said this to him 'I went to get baptised straight away.' He clearly regarded this short conversation as a decisive turning point in his life.

What appears to have affected Vishnu Prasad so deeply in this encounter is the clarity and decisiveness with which Ganesh Man spoke, as well as the promise of a final resolution to his suffering which the senior pastor implied. It is notable that Ganesh Man addresses Vishnu Prasad as '*chha*', the low second person pronoun in Newari, despite his being significantly younger than Vishnu Prasad. Ganesh Man is held in very high regard in the churches he pastors, and is clearly considered to have the right to speak with such authority.¹¹⁹ Indeed, it is such decisive authority which Vishnu Prasad appears to have desired at this point in time. When he first came into contact with the church what he wanted more than anything was sympathy and solidarity in his suffering: the ordinary members of the church offered this to him, and he felt comfort, and some relief in his symptoms. However, over the period of two years subsequent to his beginning to go to church Vishnu Prasad did not feel fully cured, and his back was still very bent; he also felt his attempts to combine life in Hindu society with the exclusive demands of Christianity were becoming unsustainable.

¹¹⁹ It should be noted that the Newar Farmer caste, from which both men come, tends to be less punctilious about honorific levels than the higher castes. It still strikes me as a mark of Ganesh Man's authority, however, that he addressed Vishnu Prasad as *chha*, because others, in the context of church, would commonly address Vishnu Prasad as *chhi* (the high second person pronoun).

Ganesh Man's decisive words and promise of resolution seem to have provided Vishnu Prasad with the impetus he needed to move from a position he was finding increasingly uncomfortable.

Just as Vishnu Prasad's understanding of the Hindu deities mirrors his view of Hindu society, his understanding of the Christian God mirrors his understanding of the Christian community. One of the most interesting things in his comparison of the Hindu and Christian deities is his emphasis on the capacity of the Christian God to speak ('there is not any god or goddess who can speak, but on our side there is a speaking God'). He associates this contrast with the intimacy of the relationship between the Christian God and his followers ('we ourselves are the shelter in which God can live'). Whereas the Hindu gods are simply external objects, Vishnu Prasad is suggesting, the Christian God is an experienced inner reality. Vishnu Prasad also relates the contrast of speech and speechlessness to the notion of a 'living God' (*jibit parmeshwor*), which is a phrase used very often by Nepali Christians to describe the difference between their God and others. The notion of God being living seems to involve, like the notion of a God who shelters inside believers, the idea of intimacy, of a God whose is alive and sensitive to his followers' sufferings and concerns. I would suggest that a sense that 'the living God' cared deeply about his inner feelings was part of what allowed Vishnu Prasad to prioritise his own sufferings over traditional obligations – to adopt an ethics of inwardness.

The way in which the Christian God converses with his followers, and is alive to their sufferings, mirrors the way the Nepali-speaking woman treated Vishnu Prasad when she found out he was ill, and the way Vishnu Prasad has experienced the church community since his conversion. Such is Vishnu Prasad's trust in the Christian community that when asked what he would do if he falls ill he says: 'I expect help from the church and friends from the church,' more than from his family. At another point in the interview, when asked how prayer

cures sickness, Vishnu Prasad elides the help received from God with the help received from the church community: ‘On our side, the sickness stays maximum of four or five days, after that the demons will certain leave from your body if you pray to God for help. At those times we have to call the pastor to pray for us, or we have to go to the church.’

A more surprising aspect of the correspondence between Vishnu Prasad’s understanding of the Christian community and of the Christian God emerges from his comparison of the Hindu and Christian deities in terms of the floors of a house. What is particularly interesting in this passage from the interview is the implicit contrast drawn between the dominating power of the Christian God in the cosmos and the weak position of the Christian community in Nepal. The Christian God, Vishnu Prasad says, is on the ‘first floor’, in heaven, whereas the Hindu gods are on the ‘second floor’, without access to heaven (presumably they are restricted to the human world beneath). In contrast, in Nepal, ‘the idol worshippers are in a dominating position; the world is full of them so we will not win against them when we say our God is supreme.’

After presenting this paradox, Vishnu Prasad goes on to what might seem like an unconnected series of observations relating to the refusal of some Christians in Nepal to consume blood, which he relates to blood being a symbol of Jesus’s crucifixion. The way in which this is connected to the above paradox emerges when Vishnu Prasad says, ‘Our Lord was such a kind and compassionate one that he did not even utter a single word at the time he was crucified. He has accepted all the acts against him.’ Vishnu Prasad seems to associate the weak position of Christians in Nepal with the weak position of Christ when he was hanging on the cross. He also associates the response of Christ (‘he did not even utter a single word’) with the response to aggression that is called for from Christians in Nepal – that is, a peaceful

and conciliating response.¹²⁰ The idea of Christ's crucifixion seems to reconcile, for Vishnu Prasad, the contradiction between the Christian God's power and the weakness of Nepali Christians. Christ's crucifixion suggests that strength flows from weakness, and from suffering, with the resurrection following Christ's death on the cross, just as healing and conversion followed illness for Vishnu Prasad. This passage illustrates clearly how Christian belief has given suffering a deep symbolic resonance for Vishnu Prasad; it would not have had such resonance for him when he was a Hindu.

7.4 Conclusion

My argument in this chapter has been that a prioritisation of, or attentiveness to, the experience of suffering – both by afflicted people themselves and by evangelising Christians – is central to what draws afflicted people to churches, and to converts' experience of healing. In the context of Bhaktapur, these approaches to suffering are novel enough that they can be described in terms of the 'adoption'¹²¹ of substantially new ethical values, namely: a prioritisation of inner experience over traditional duties, and a notion of care that extends beyond one's immediate social groupings. Vishnu Prasad's narrative touched on a number of themes that I will explore in more depth in subsequent chapters. The theme of family conflict and attempts at reconciliation I explore more in Chapter 8. The counterintuitive notion that people, like Vishnu Prasad, who were strict and pious Hindus are more likely to convert than Hindus who are religiously indifferent, I will explore more fully in the Chapter 9. I suggested that suffering has a symbolic resonance for Vishnu Prasad that is not wholly negative: while

¹²⁰ See Section 8.4.

¹²¹ I discuss Robbins' concept of adoption in Section 1.2.

it is something he wants to end, it is also brings one closer to Jesus. I will also explore the potentially positive significance of suffering further in Chapter 9.

Chapter 8. Women: ethics in the family

8.1 Introduction

As is evident in the results of my church surveys (see appendices 2 and 3), women substantially outnumber men in most of Bhaktapur's churches. The predominance of women in Bhaktapurian church life is consistent with membership patterns in Pentecostal/charismatic churches worldwide (Robbins 2004b: 132); it also mirrors patterns of participation in Bhaktapurian Hinduism.¹²² The reasons for this gender imbalance are various, but one important reason is that churches provide strong support for women who face difficult situations in their families, most commonly as victims of spousal abuse perpetrated by husbands who are alcoholics or otherwise mentally disturbed. Church teaching emphasising non-consumption of alcohol, frugality with money, and abstention from interpersonal violence attracts women who wish to introduce ethical norms into their families that tend to improve the lives of women. In cases where whole families convert to Christianity, I found that it was often a woman who initiated and pushed forward this process; in Christian families, it is often women who are the most active participants in church, and who encourage male relatives towards greater commitment.

Probably the greatest weakness in my research is that, despite the centrality of women in Bhaktapurian church life, the majority of my time in churches was spent with men. The reason for this was that as a young, unmarried man, it was difficult for me to attend women's fellowships regularly, or to pursue close friendships with women my own age: to have done

¹²² If one spends some time at a Hindu temple in Bhaktapur, it will be seen that the majority of people coming to worship are women.

so would have been seen as inappropriate. I was, however, able to establish friendships with some older women: Daya Laxmi, whose story is told in this chapter, was one such friend.¹²³

My argument in this chapter is that the conversion stories of women often relate closely to internal dynamics within families, and in particular to the desire of women to reform behaviour in their families in a more caring direction. The failure of care within families that women frequently identify as precipitating their conversions is related to the discourse of moral failure identified in Section 3.2. The value of care is more central to the material examined in this chapter than the value of inwardness. Although women certainly seek to address their own suffering through conversion, I found that the language they used when describing their conversions would more commonly refer to ‘our’ suffering – that is, the suffering of a family – than to ‘my’ suffering.¹²⁴ Women are often more reluctant, and also less able, than men to convert without the rest of their families, and often wait many years to be baptised while they attempt to convince their husbands to be baptised with them.¹²⁵ Thus, while the understandings of care that women introduce into their families through conversion are in significant ways novel in comparison to tradition norms (particularly, as we will see, in their emphasis on companionship and mutuality in marriage) women’s conversion narratives also often reflect the tradition norms of care within families discussed in Part I.

¹²³ As a result of the limitations described, there is much that is important in the lives of Christian women in Bhaktapur – such as self-organisation in women’s fellowships – that I have not been able to cover in this chapter.

¹²⁴ On ‘social suffering’, see Kleinman et al. (1997).

¹²⁵ We saw in the case of Vishnu Prasad the problems that can arise for men when they convert but their families do not. We also saw, however, that Vishnu Prasad’s family was unable to prevent him from converting; if Vishnu Prasad had been a woman, it is more likely that he would have been coercively prevented from converting, or that he would have felt that to convert without his family was impossible. The story of a woman who wishes to convert to Christianity but has felt unable to do so because of the opposition of her family can be found in Section 10.4.

Birgit Meyer has shown how conversion to Pentecostalism in Ghana is frequently related to family disputes in which women find themselves at a disadvantage. Conversion, which is commonly related to deliverance from evil spirits, provides a way for women to break dysfunctional or stifling relationships with extended family members, and to express their social dissatisfaction in a culturally appropriate way. Meyer writes:

By creating room for the expression of the satanic in the context of deliverance, Pentecostals are allowed to enact otherwise forbidden or muted aspects of themselves. [...] [Pentecostal churches] conceptualise conversion in circular terms and allow their members to move back and forth through the sequence of possession by evil spirits, exorcism and possession by the Holy Spirit. In this way, members are able to mediate between indigenous attitudes towards spirits and Christianity and at the same time face the contradiction that their daily lives actually fit with neither indigenous nor modern nor Christian ideals. [...] Pentecostalism provides a bridge between individualistic and family-centred concerns and allows people to express and reflect upon the tensions between both. (Meyer 1999: 211-2)

What Meyer is suggesting is that while the impetus of Pentecostal conversion is towards individualisation – promoting an elevation of the nuclear over the extended family and giving vent to the dissatisfaction of individuals in a group-centred environment – the continued presence of evil spirits in Christian life, and practices used to deal with them, promotes a mediation between traditional and individualist modes of being.

While Meyer emphasises individualism, other anthropologists have emphasised the collective aspects of female evangelical conversion. An important study in this regard is Elizabeth Brusco's *The Reformation of Machismo* (1995). Brusco argues that Columbian evangelicalism can be seen as a form of female collective action, which aims to replace the 'macho' values of violence, drinking, and individualist self-assertion with values that are

more attractive to women, such as care within the household, frugality with household resources, and sexual fidelity.¹²⁶ She writes:

The asceticism required of evangelicals brings about changes in the behaviour of male converts, particularly in relation to the machismo complex [...]. Drinking, smoking and extramarital sexual relations are forbidden. By redirecting into the household the resources spent on these things, such changes have the effect of raising the standard of living of women and children who are in varying degrees dependent on the income of these men. [...] In reforming male values to be more consistent with female ones (i.e. oriented toward the family rather than toward individualistic consumption) the movement provides a “strategic” challenge to the prevailing form of sexual subordination in Colombia. (Brusco 1995: 5-6)

Annelin Eriksen (2007) has made findings analogous to those of Brusco with relation to evangelical churches on the Pacific island of Vanautu. Eirksen argues that there is a basic tension in Vanautu culture between values based on lateral and outward oriented relationships, which are gendered female, and values based on hierarchical and internal relationships, which are gendered male (ibid.: xvii). She shows how Christian conversion has served to increase the salience of ‘female’ value structures in Vanautu, while undermining those values traditionally associated with men. My approach in this chapter will draw both on Meyer’s insights into the relationship between conversion and family dynamics, and on Brusco’s and Eriksen’s insights into the ways that evangelical ethics may be particularly attractive to women.

8.2 *Women, spirits, and ethics*

Two particular themes emerged in my interviews with women that I want to draw out in this chapter. The first theme, which I have already noted and which I explore in Section 8.3, is the

¹²⁶ Another sense in which female evangelical conversion can be seen as a form of collective action is that it tends to provide opportunities for women’s self-organisation and leadership; see, for instance, Chesnut (1997: 136-140).

way in which women's conversions were often related to reforming ethical norms within families. The second theme, which I explore in Section 8.4, is related to the world of spirits.

The language of spirits, and of spiritual warfare (*atmik yuddha*) is important to most Christians in Bhaktapur; however, I found that the language of spirits appeared particularly prominently in the conversation and conversion narratives of women. This may be because women tend to spend more time in their local communities (not so often leaving during the day for work) and so are more exposed to the kinds of local interpersonal conflicts out of which suspicions of witchcraft arise. It may also be because, as a number of scholars have noted, the language of spirits provides women with a way of expressing grievance in a mode that is more socially acceptable than direct complaint (Fuller 2004: 233; Meyer 1999: 211; see also, for instance, Trawick 1984). In Section 8.4, rather than focusing on the claim that spiritual warfare is more important to women than to men, I will use the testimony of one woman in order to look at the ways in which Christian understandings of spiritual warfare may in fact, paradoxically, lessen the salience of spirits in the life-worlds of Christians. The reason for this lies in Christian understandings of God's all-powerfulness and benevolence, as represented most importantly in the defeat of evil by Jesus on the cross. These notions promote, relative to popular Bhaktapurian Hinduism, a more ethical as opposed to ritual, or spiritual, approach to life's problems (I use here the terminology introduced in the Prologue).

The argument of Section 8.4 is that the Christian belief that evil has been defeated by Jesus, and thus that praying Christians are invulnerable to witchcraft, allows space in which new ethical approaches to suffering and interpersonal conflict can grow. In particular, I emphasise the importance of the stress Bhaktapurian churches place on responding pacifically to aggression, and on cultivating feelings of love towards one's enemies by praying for them. These modes of behaviour are related to ideas about Christian difference: it is said that once a person becomes a Christian they should not live like those around them.

Pacifistic responses to aggression are also seen as a form of evangelism: it is said that if a convert responds with gentleness to criticisms from family and community, this will be a witness to the change the Christian God has worked in their lives (see Hagen 1998: ch.4).

The emphasis on pacifistic behaviour I explore Section 8.4 is also relevant to process of family conversion I explore in Section 8.3. As I have noted, conversion almost invariably leads to discord within families, and even if a whole nuclear family ultimately converts there is still likely to be hostility from the local community and extended family members. An important part of many of the conversion stories I collected from women involved the challenge of holding one's family together in the hostile post-conversion environment. Even when the whole nuclear family converts, it is likely that some family members will later waver in their faith: it often falls to female converts to encourage and admonish waverers. We see these themes in the story of Daya Laxmi below.

8.3 Reforming the family: Daya Laxmi's story

Daya Laxmi Khoju was born in 1955 in the village of Siddhipur, a Newar community 7 kilometres to the south-west of Bhaktapur (on the outskirts of Patan), into a Farmer caste family. She married in 1977, and moved to the centre of Bhaktapur, where her husband's house is located. She has borne three children, of whom one died. Two sons remain: one was born in 1980, and the other in 1984. When he was around 7 years old, Daya Laxmi's older son, Dilip, began to behave strangely, crying for no reason and being violent to those around him, especially his father and younger brother. This caused serious problems in the family, with Daya Laxmi's husband having to take time off work to help care for the son, and various treatments draining the family's finances. During this time Daya Laxmi was disappointed by the lack of support from those around her, in particular the relatives of her husband. After

about four years, in 1991, Daya Laxmi's husband came into contact with Christians while working as a labourer Patan; they encouraged him to come to church with his son in order to obtain a cure. Although the family ignored this advice for about a year, and Daya Laxmi was initially opposed to seeking help from Christians, in 1992 she finally decided that they should send their son to the church, which they did.

Initially, Dilip was sent to the church alone; she immediately noticed an improvement in his condition. Soon, church leaders began encouraging Daya Laxmi and her husband to attend church too: initially they were hesitant, but after the leaders prayed for them and encouraged them to start a fellowship in their house, they gradually became more sympathetic towards Christianity. Two or three months after beginning to attend church, Daya Laxmi, her husband, and her son all took *grahan*. Over the next four years, although the family were professed Christians and had given up all Hindu religious activities, they encountered various challenges that made them unsure as to whether to take the decisive step of being baptised. During this time their son's behavioural problems continued, although Daya Laxmi believed that the problems had become less severe. The son's participation in church was not always willing: his parents would pay him ten rupees each Saturday to encourage him to attend. During this period Daya Laxmi's involvement in the church was growing, and she was beginning to read the Bible; in 1997 she finally convinced her husband that they should be baptised together.

Since taking baptism, the main struggle of Daya Laxmi and her husband has been to convince their sons, in particular their elder son, to become committed Christians. Both of the sons were involved in church youth groups throughout their childhoods, but both drifted away from the church when they reached adulthood. Dilip began drinking alcohol and stopped attending church entirely, while the younger son became active in politics and maintained only a tenuous connection with the church. Both sons married, have children, and

live in a joint household with Daya Laxmi and her husband. Dilip's behavioural problems have continued into adulthood: in the early years of marriage he subjected his wife to continual violence, and also behaved with rudeness and violence towards the rest of his family.

During this time, the church gave the social support to Daya Laxmi and her husband that Daya Laxmi's husband's family failed to provide: church members visited the house regularly for fellowships, supported Daya Laxmi's daughter-in-law and remonstrated with Dilip. One church leader, in particular, who lived near their house, was extremely persistent in his contact with the sons, and eventually convinced both of them to be baptised and become committed church members. In 2008 Daya Laxmi's younger son was baptised, and in 2010 Dilip was baptised; Dilip's wife was baptised in 2009. Since being baptised, Dilip has ceased to be violent towards his wife and rarely drinks alcohol; Daya Laxmi considers his recovery to be a miracle and shares the story with anyone who is prepared to listen.

Below are some extracts from my interview with Daya Laxmi:

IG: How did you become a Christian?

DL: I became a Christian because my son Dilip [the elder son] was harmed by evil spirits [*bāmalāgu ātmā saitān tayesang syengkā byugu*] [...]. We organised *kayetā pujā* for our sons but during that ceremony witches [*boksi tayesang*] and demons [*saitān tayesang*] fed my son food that had been spoiled by black magic; it was a boiled egg and food for the offering. After having that food Dilip became ill. [...] He began to throw and break all of the things inside the house. He used to hit his younger brother too, who was less than four years old at the time. He was beating his father and his younger brother. His brother was very young but even so he was chasing him and beating him a lot.

He was behaving very badly towards them but not towards me because my horoscope was stronger than the witch's [*jigu gahra chā, wo boksitayegu gahra nāiu*] so the witch did not have the courage to harm me; that was what the healers [*vaidyata*] said to us. If I told him to he would keep quiet but no one could control him other than me.

We faced that problem for many, many years. [...] When we used to consult healers and they would advise us to use an amulet which costs 500 or 1000 rupees; we preferred to use an expensive one because we wanted to cure our son as soon as possible. That treatment went on for years and years until we had nothing left. It did not cure him. He would seem OK for a while and then become the same as he had been before. He used to cry and fight all the time and this would stop my husband from going to work.¹²⁷

SNP: Does he still make this kind of trouble for his wife?

DL: He was making it until recently, even after he married her. She has also faced a lot of hardship and trouble from him at times. He used to beat her.¹²⁸ [...] He used to nag for no reason and would cry for many hours and beat and hit others. He used to become mad over some small issue and would start to behave like a thug. He would cry for hours and would start swearing at us and using bad words towards us. [...] We used to have just one floor in this house because my husband has three brothers.¹²⁹ When he became crazy he used to break the stove and the doors. When that had reached its climax we had given up any hope of progress in our family.¹³⁰

This was going on and on in the same way, and meanwhile Dilip's father used to go to work in Patan, and someone there said to him, 'your son has suffered very much [*yakko he aye jula*], so believe in [the Christian] God' [*parameshworata vishwās yā*]. That was what we were asked. But at that time we didn't know God Christ [*parameshwor khrishta*]. [...] We had been asked years before that but we had not understood.

They used to say to him [her husband] "Oh! Your son will be cured if you bring him to the church." My husband used to tell me about this Jesus matter but I was confused and told him to ignore what others said. Who was this Jesus Christ? We did not know or care at that time. We had tried to cure him [her son] at many places and nowhere had cured him but still I was one who

¹²⁷ Daya Laxmi's husband is a labourer in construction projects in Kathmandu and Patan. This is a difficult and poorly paid job.

¹²⁸ Although I have no way of measuring the incidence of domestic violence in Bhaktapur, my impression is that it is very common. The room I was staying in in Byasi looked out onto a square with many other houses on it. I would reasonably frequently hear violent-sounding fights occurring between husbands and wives in neighbouring houses.

¹²⁹ The division of property between Daya Laxmi's husband and his brothers, which is referred to here, is an important background factor in the family's later conversion. As was discussed in Section 3.2, property divisions between brothers are a common source of discord in Bhaktapur. The division of property between Daya Laxmi's husband and his brothers was somewhat acrimonious. As noted in Chapter 7, a history of acrimonious relations with one's family or local community is a factor that makes conversion more likely. As I describe in footnote 141, Daya Laxmi's family later lost part of their inheritance.

¹³⁰ It is a common trope in conversion narratives that the convert was at the point of despair immediately prior to encountering the Christian God.

did not believe in Christ. I was opposing God [...] I was standing against Jesus. I was doing it because I didn't know him [*mha masyugu lāging*].

The problem was going on and on [...] so then I myself decided to bring him [Dilip] to this Jesus and asked my husband to bring him there. At that time I did not know whether there was a church here in Bhaktapur or not. So after a few days Dilip and his father went to the Patan church.¹³¹ We got to know XX [a senior Fellowship Church member] at the beginning. When his father took him to the church he stopped doing his bad behaviour every day and would only do it once every few days. We got a feeling of extreme peace [*shānta ekdam he data*]. We regretted that we hadn't brought him to the church earlier. We felt regret that we had not learned how to pray well. I used to cry in front of God [*parameshwora yāgu nhyone khwoyegukā*].¹³² [...]

The situation went on for some time and he [Dilip] did not believe in God fully [*bānlākka vishwās yāgu makhu*]; only I believed fully. If only I am eating then only I will have a full stomach; if someone else wants to eat I will share with them, but it will not be enough. Even then I was praying continuously for a long, long time.¹³³ And I was feeling much more peace than I had done in the past. But in the days with no moon and full moon, he [Dilip] was still behaving in a bad way. So there was no peace in the house. If we went to the fields he would destroy the paddy plants. He was just destroying our property all of the time. [...] He was doing that until he took baptism.

XX [another senior Fellowship Church member] was the one who managed to get Dilip to be baptised. My son used to scold him but he never gave up convincing my son to take baptism.¹³⁴ I was so scared to ask this daughter-in-law [Dilip's wife, who was present for the interview] to take baptism because my son might beat her if he thought it was a bad idea for her to take baptism. She faced a lot of violence from my son.

After being baptised Dilip became much better. Once both of them [Dilip and his wife] went to a training about how to have love and care between a husband and wife. Since Dilip went to that training course he has begun to love her much more than in the past. When I found that both

¹³¹ I found that some converts – particularly those who converted during the late 80s or early 90s – preferred, at least initially, to attend church outside of Bhaktapur. This would allow them to explore Christianity without the knowledge of their neighbours or extended families, and so avoid harmful gossip.

¹³² A number of female converts described to me how they would cry in front of God when praying, and described how God would comfort them.

¹³³ At times of crisis, Christians in Nepal often pray for many hours at a time, typically in a group or while fasting. When a senior member of Ashish Church suddenly fell ill, more than 30 church members met the next day in the church to pray for him. They met at 8am without having eaten, and prayed together, energetically and out loud, for more than three hours continuously.

¹³⁴ In a number of conversion stories I collected, the persistence of a particular Christian leader or friend appears as a major factor in conversion. See, for instance, the role played by Kedar in the conversion of Dinesh and Ganga Maya (Appendix 5).

of them were becoming happier and closer together, I had no words to express my happiness. Thanks be to God! I always offer everything I have to God. [Daya Laxmi begins to cry.] I understood her [Dilip's wife's] hardship because we are going to a God where people understand each other's hardship.¹³⁵ On that day when my son took baptism I was overwhelmed with great happiness. I was feeling like I could dance and dance for the whole day.

[...]

IG: Did your belief come suddenly or little by little?

DL: When I saw that my son was healed I believed fully. We did many acts of worship [to the Hindu deities] for him, but he was not healed. [...] during that time I must have cried 5 *pāthi* of tears from my eyes, child. [...] It is impossible to calculate how much money we spent. [...] We had such a hard time that I did not even have five *paisā* to spend and I had to beg for money from my brother-in-law. My relatives and husband's brothers did not pay any respect to us. No one cared about us when we became poor [*garib jula dhāyewogn sunāng yāimakhui*]. On my parents' side, I am from a rich family. Because of that I did not even visit my parents' house. It was very embarrassing to go there and ask for help.

When my son was getting better I started to believe more and more. It was five years before I took baptism.¹³⁶ In the past people didn't take baptism so quickly. [...] I began to believe bit by bit and now I believe extremely strongly [*ekdam he vishwās julakā*]. Now I feel that if someone came to kill me for believing in this Lord I would be ready to be killed. If I live, I live for God [*parameshwora yāgu lāging mwāyegu*]; if I die, I die for God. I am not sure about my family regarding this, what I say applies to me. Up to today I have never thought of leaving God. [She begins to cry.]

[...]

SNP: Did your whole family go to church at the beginning?

DL: First of all my husband and my son went together to the church. [...] There used to be house fellowship at XX's [a Fellowship church member's] house and I used to send my son to attend there. [...] We wanted to send him to church but we did not want to go ourselves. In that house fellowship Kedar *dāi*, XX and XX [church leaders] used to ask my son to bring us to the church.

¹³⁵ Similar comments are made by Kamal in Section 10.3.

¹³⁶ In many of the family conversion narratives I collected, women would wait for many years to be baptised in order that they could be baptised alongside their husbands (see, for instance, the story of Ram Devi in Appendix 4).

We used to say to our son that we did not want to come so he gave some excuse for us. We asked him to say that we were sick or had fever so we could not come to the house fellowship. [...]

Then they proposed to organise a house fellowship at our house;¹³⁷ they said they wanted to pray for me also. I was very angry that they wanted to pray in our house. Then the next time they came to our house they asked me if I had any health problems. I made up a fake sickness, saying that I had fever. [...] Then they came to our house and did some prayer for me and even though I was not ill my body started to feel much better after that prayer. I felt spiritual joy [*ātmā ānanda jula*]¹³⁸ and I began to think about believing in God. Then they advised us to run a house fellowship in our house every week for the improvement of the health of our son and for the progress of our family and I said yes, but I still was not happy with this. [...] When they began to run the house fellowship at our house I began to be familiar with the people from the church and I also attended house fellowships at others' houses. Because of this my belief increased more and more, and I became a strong believer.

[...]

IG: How did your relatives react when you became Christian?

DL: After I believed [...] I was asked not to enter my parents' house. And my mother-in-law also asked us to leave this house and refused to give us our share of the property. I replied to her that we did not mind staying the public porch [*phalcā*], because my son was cured by this God. So we did not claim out share of the house and land. My mother-in-law said to us, 'you [her son] will not wear white clothes after my death, so I won't give you my fields and property'. [...] It is impossible to compare our sons with property. I couldn't bear the death of our son. So we went to the church. It was not our choice to go there; we had to in order to treat our son's sickness. I did not want to make the witches happy by having our son die. In a matter of survival, we can choose any religion we want.¹³⁹ There are hundreds of religions in the world, so we can choose which one to follow. God has protected us, God has cured us [*parameshworang he langkā bila*], so this God is great.

¹³⁷ I described in Chapter 6 the importance of house fellowships as a means of integrating a whole family into the conversion process.

¹³⁸ The use of the term *ānanda* here implies relief and relaxation as well as joy. As can be seen in the narratives of Vishnu Prasad and Kamal, *ānanda* is a term that is used very frequently by Nepali Christians to describe their experiences. The term is also used frequently by members of Hindu devotionalist movements, such as ISKCON.

¹³⁹ Daya Laxmi articulates here an idea that is also found in Vishnu Prasad's narrative: that the imperative of relieving deep or life-threatening affliction takes moral precedence over adherence to religious tradition.

As with Vishnu Prasad, the details of Daya Laxmi's conversion emerge from her narrative in a circular way, with new details being revealed each time she re-tells her story. In particular, as we go deeper into the story, the central importance of internal family dynamics emerges, and the initial incident of witchcraft is placed in a wider context of social tension and a breakdown in family relations. In her first answer (to the question 'how did you become a Christian?'), Daya Laxmi describes an incident where she believes some witches to have cursed the food used for her son's *kaytā pujā*, which she describes as having caused his descent into unruliness and violence. *Kaytā pujā* is the time when a boy becomes a full member of his family and clan: it is thus understandable that when her son fails to recognise his duties towards his family, she attributes this to a failure in the *kaytā pujā*. As with Vishnu Prasad, it becomes clear as we see more of Daya Laxmi's story that a particular incident of witchcraft is being used as a figure for a wider situation of social tension (in the next section we will see that Daya Laxmi attributes her family's misfortunes to three different witches with separate grievances). Another echo of Vishnu Prasad's story is Daya Laxmi's suggestion that she is spiritually superior to the people around her. She notes that her son behaves badly for the rest of her family but not for her, because of her strong horoscope, and also notes, when she says that she would die for God: 'I am not sure about my family regarding this, what I say applies to me.' We also see in Daya Laxmi's story the common process of coming to distrust Hindu healers, and the gods they represent, prior to turning to Christianity (as in the story of Vishnu Prasad, or Ram Devi of Appendix 4).

The central dynamic of Daya Laxmi's conversion story is the persistently violent and cruel behaviour of her elder son towards the rest of her family, and her desire to put an end to this. The fact that it is Daya Laxmi's son's rather than her husband's behaviour that she is trying to control, and that his violence is directed not towards her but towards other members of the family, makes her story somewhat atypical: it is far more common for women to turn

to Christianity as a way of curbing the violent behaviour of their husbands, which is often related to alcoholism (although it is not referred to in the extracts given, such domestic violence figures in the stories of Sushila and Ramesh in Chapter 6, and of Ram Devi in Appendix 4). Nonetheless, what does give Daya Laxmi's story a representative quality is the fact that she sees Christianity as a way of morally reforming a volatile man within her family. As with most such stories, the conversion of Daya Laxmi's family, and eventually of her son, is a slow and torturous process, and one that would not have reached its conclusion without the energy and persistence, over many years, of a woman who is convinced that the solution to the family's problems lies in Christianity.

We learn that, while it was Daya Laxmi's husband who first made contact with Christians, it was she who first took the decision to send their son to church ('I myself decided to bring him to this Jesus and asked my husband to bring him there').¹⁴⁰ At first, we learn, Daya Laxmi and her husband wanted to treat Christianity like any other form of healing in Bhaktapur: they wanted the church to heal their son, but they did not want to attend church themselves, with the commitment this would involve ('We used to say to our son that we did not want to come so he made some excuse for us'). However, the church members (including Kedar) insist that the whole family must be involved in the healing process, and eventually convince Daya Laxmi, somewhat against her wishes, to allow them to run a regular fellowship in her house (this was also what happened in the story of Sushila and Ramesh quoted in Chapter 6, and in the story of Ram Devi of Appendix 4).

Daya Laxmi describes the decision to allow the house fellowship, and the consequent building up of relationships with church members, as a central element in her own growing faith ('When they began to run the house fellowship at our house I began to be familiar with

¹⁴⁰ Compare the story of Dinesh and Ganga Maya (Appendix 5), where it is Ganga Maya who first decides that the family must become Christians.

the people from the church [...] because of this my belief increased more and more). What is being described here is a transition from membership of a local community which is fraught with tensions, to membership of a church community which is experienced as friendly and caring. The attitude of the church also contrasts with that of Daya Laxmi's and her husband's families: 'My relatives and husband's brothers did not pay any respect to us. No one cared about us when we became poor.'

The length of Daya Laxmi's struggle to bring her whole family to Christianity must be stressed. Though Daya Laxmi became a professed Christian in 1992 and was baptised with her husband in 1997, her elder son was not baptised until 2010. Daya Laxmi describes how, in the period after they started sending their son to church in 1992, it was 'only I [who] believed fully.' Although Daya Laxmi's husband was happy to send their son to the church to be cured, he was much more reluctant than Daya Laxmi to take the decisive step of baptism, and this is why the couple's baptism was delayed until 1997. One of the reasons for her husband's reluctance is indicated when Daya Laxmi recounts: 'my mother-in-law [...] asked us to leave this house and she refused to give us our share of the property [...] we did not claim our share of the house and land.'¹⁴¹ Daya Laxmi makes it clear that she is the driving religious force in her household (in an extract quoted in the Section 8.4, she says in answer to a question about the Bible, 'in my family I am the one who knows about such things. My husband does not know because he does not have time to think about these things').

¹⁴¹ In the end, Daya Laxmi and her family were able to remain in the house they currently occupy, but they did not receive the additional part of the house and lands that they would otherwise have received (had they not converted), on the death of the mother-in-law. I interviewed another Christian from Daya Laxmi's locality who converted in the late 1980s along with his wife and children. He described to me how after he converted, and subsequently failed to perform the requisite Hindu death rituals for his father, his entire extended family, along with many members of the locality, came to his house in order physically to threaten him and shout abuse at his family; the family were subsequently forced to find new accommodation on the outskirts of Bhaktapur.

A particularly touching aspect of Daya Laxmi's story, and one that makes it somewhat unusual in the Bhaktapurian context, is the evidently close bond that exists between her and her daughter-in-law.¹⁴² She feels deep sorrow for the violence her son has inflicted on his wife, and at one point refrained from asking the wife to be baptised in order to protect her from his anger. Her joy over her son's baptism is to a significant extent a joy over the change which his baptism brought in his behaviour towards his wife: 'after taking baptism Dilip became much better. [...] When I found that both of them were becoming happier and closer together, I had no words to express my happiness.' Significantly, Daya Laxmi attributes her care and compassion for her daughter-in-law to the ethics of her newfound faith: 'I understood her hardship because we are going to a God where people understand each other's hardship.'

As Daya Laxmi describes it, a vital part of the change that occurred in her son's behaviour towards his wife was a training course the couple attended 'about how to have love and care between husband and wife'. Daya Laxmi is referring here to a training session for married couples run by the Leadership Training Department of the National Churches Fellowship of Nepal (NCFN). The training sessions – which are run in centres all over Nepal – focus on issues such as time management, domestic violence, the equality of women, and joint decision-making between husbands and wives. The approach of the course can be gleaned from some of the chapter titles of a recent book published on its work: 'Now women are viewed as equal'; 'Engaged in minimizing domestic violence'; 'Challenging the stereotypes'; 'Wife included in decision making'; 'Family ministry brings reconciliation in extended family' (Leadership Training Department 2014). The couple who direct the initiative were described to me by one Western missionary as Nepal's leading Christian feminists. I met many couples in Bhaktapurian churches who has been on the course and said

¹⁴² See footnote 46.

that they benefited from it; Kamal, whose story appears in Chapter 10, attended the course with his wife. The approach of the course fits in with a broader emphasis on what could be called ‘companionate marriage’ in Bhaktapurian churches: I often heard sermons where husbands and wives were exhorted to spend time with each other, to make decisions jointly, and to refrain from violence or harsh words towards one another.¹⁴³

While the thrust of my argument in this chapter has been that Christianity is a liberating force for women in Bhaktapur, this should not be taken to imply that there is complete gender equality in Bhaktapurian churches. While many church leaders in Bhaktapur are open to the possibility of women pastors (see Appendix 2), I did not meet any female pastors while I was in Nepal (I understand that female church leadership is more common in rural areas, where there are relatively fewer men due to outward migration). In Fellowship Church, the official position is that it is not acceptable for women to preach at Saturday services or have positions of authority over men; women do, however, speak from the front of the church in order to give their testimonies, and provide leadership in the context of women’s and house fellowships. When expressing a belief in caste equality, Bhaktapurian Christians, both men and women, will often say: ‘there are only two castes: men and women’. My argument, then, is not that churches routinely espouse notions of gender equality: rather, my argument is that churches promote norms of behaviour that tend to favour the empowerment of women within families. Probably the most important of these norms is an emphasis on non-violence and gentleness in interpersonal relationships. I explore the basis of these norms further in the next section.

¹⁴³ See Stone (1977) on the development of ‘companionate marriage’ in England from the seventeenth century; on related notions among African Pentecostals see Bochow and Van Dijk (2012).

8.4 Pacifying spirits, making space for ethics

Daya Laxmi's suggestion that she had compassion on her daughter-in-law because of the nature of Christian ethics points towards the second major theme of this chapter: the shift to an increasingly ethical, as opposed to spiritual, or ritual, approach to the problems of life. As the language of spirits pervades Daya Laxmi's narrative, it may seem odd that I am using her as an example of this shift. Before elaborating on my interpretation, I quote some relevant passages from my interview with Daya Laxmi:

SNP: Did you find out who fed the cursed food to Dilip?

DL: Yes, we did find them. We found out who those people were but we did not go to fight with them [*lwā wonegu makhu*]. Later that witch said to us herself, 'from now on I will not be able to harm you people, because you have recognised the best God [*bānlāmha parameshowra*]. Those witches and demons [*saitanta*] said to us that they will not be able to harm us any more. She even said that we have chosen the right path [*bālāng-gu lay*], we have come to know God [*parameshworata mhasikala*].

SNP: She said so without feeling any shame?

DL: Yes! She said so without feeling shame. I replied to her: 'from now onwards, who will be able to harm us? We have got a God who is capable of putting you people under this feet'. That is what I said to her, and she said 'yes' and bowed her head.

SNP: Was it a woman or a man?

DL: She was a woman not a man. Those people who harmed us were women not men. [...] My son was harmed by three witches. They are all dead.

[...]

DL: Because my son did not believe [in Christianity] in the earlier period it took a long time for him to be completely healed. [...] [During that time] I prayed a lot. Prayer is very effective but they [her family] did not believe in the beginning, so the prayer was not very effective at first. Prayer would relieve the sickness, but it would return the next day. If they had believed strongly nothing bad could have happened to us; even if witches feed us poison nothing can happen to us because of God [*boksi tayesang bikha tayā nakusāng he lagaye juimakhu parameshworang*]. God has said to us, 'rely on me and nothing will happen to you'.

[...]

IG: In Christianity we have to love our enemies: isn't it hard to do that?

DL: In the past we found it very hard to do that, but now it is getting easier for us. We have become able to tolerate this. [...] Even when our enemies curse us we bless them instead [*imisang sarā byusāng jheesang āshirvād bi-i-gu*]. We tolerate [*sahayāyegu*] them and stay quiet [*sumka chwonā*]. There is a saying of God: 'you tolerate and I will punish them.' As I have read a bit of the Bible I can tolerate a lot.

SNP: How did you become capable of reading the Bible? Did you go to school?

DL: No, I did not know how to read and write in the past but when I became a believer I began to read the Bible and I learned how to read it.

SNP: Did you go to the adult education [*praudh shikshā*] class?

DL: Yes I did but did not for long. I just went for just four or five days. When I read the Bible I read repeatedly until I understand what I have read in that chapter. I was an illiterate person, but God has taught me [*parameshworang syoung jita*]. God is also a teacher [*shikshak*]. [...] God is everything [*sabthok phukang*]. In the past I did not know a single letter. [...] I began to read bit by bit, then I became much more capable of reading. Nowadays people appreciate me for being effective at conducting fellowships [she often reads the Bible passage at fellowships]. I can read the chapters but I am not capable of explaining the meaning.

IG: Which chapters or verses from the Bible inspired you?

DL: [...] There is a saying in the Bible that you should not curse others. Also, it says in Matthew chapter 7, verse 7: 'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you'. So it is written that what you ask for from the God he will give to you. [...]

It is written that we should listen more and speak less. The meaning of that is to listen when others curse us and not to say anything in response. If we speak then we may say some wrong words, so God has told us to speak less. If we talk to non-Christians in the same way that they speak to and swear at us, then we will be the same as them, and we will not be Christians. In my family, I am the one who knows about such things. My husband does not know, because he does not have time to think about these things. He is working as a house constructor and goes to work every day and returns home very tired and goes to bed early.

[...]

IG: Can all sicknesses be cured by prayer or can some only be cured by doctors?

DL: Prayer can cure our spiritual sicknesses [*ātmā yāgu rog*]; it doesn't matter what happens with the physical illness [*sharir rog*], our spiritual sickness will go away even if our physical illness remains. We have got spiritual joy [*ātmā ānanda*], we have got peace. Also, we get to stay with God in heaven [*sworgaye chwonedata prabhui nāpang*]. So [spiritual] sickness is the important one; physical sickness comes through the body so a little bit might remain.¹⁴⁴ Sometimes we feel pain and start to pray and God gives us power [*shakti*]. It is not certain that we will cure physical sickness, but it is certain that we will cure the illness caused by evil spirits. But God has promised that he will not let the illness in our bodies become unbearable and he will help us to get better. This is what happens in practice too. So I never get unbearable pain in my body. Prayer can cure it and we get joy and peace after praying. [...]

A witch cannot stand in front of God [*parameshworaigu nhyone wo boksi chwone he phaimakhu*], the witch will immediately begin to scream. The church is extremely good for people who have been harmed by witches. Maybe for a little time, the evil spirits will resist God, but their power is nothing in front of God. There is a song where it says the evil spirits are trampled under the feet of God. Every time a person who properly believes prays they will be cured [*bānlākka vishwās yāpingsang prārthanā yāgu lani harek juini*].

[...]

SNP: How did you manage to give up being a Hindu?

DL: First we have to give up all worship of demons [*saitānta*],¹⁴⁵ isn't it? We threw all of the idols [*murtita*] in our house in the river.¹⁴⁶ [Laughs.] I did not have many idols to start with, anyway. What is the use of keeping demons with us?

SNP: Weren't you afraid to throw away the idols?

DL: Not at all. Why should we worship those stones and pieces of metal when we have the greatest God [*tahrangmha parameshwora*] with us? So I threw them in the river, saying, 'OK, go away.'

SNP: Wasn't it difficult to stop worship?

DL: It was the easiest thing for me to stop. I was very sure that I would not worship these demons any more. [...] We had to feed them food, bringing hardship on ourselves. But for our Lord you do not need to light a single incense stick. We don't need to spend even five *paisā* on

¹⁴⁴ We see here the distinction between spiritual and physical illness discussed in Section 7.2.

¹⁴⁵ See footnote 115.

¹⁴⁶ Many of the conversion stories I collected included accounts of throwing household deities into the river. This was clearly seen as a common rite of passage among Christians, and as an important symbol of exclusive commitment to the Christian God.

him.¹⁴⁷ [...] Those who perform worship [to the Hindu deities] have to feel shame in front of the Lord. It is like how we feel ashamed if someone sees us smoking. Believers never create embarrassment for the other believers. Believers try their best not to cause any discomfort for others.

In various ways, these extracts illustrate Weber's insights into the connection between monotheism and ethics, as discussed in the Prologue. In the final extract, we glimpse the distance of the cultural divide that separates Hindus and Christians in Bhaktapur. My research assistant Shamsheer, who is a Hindu, was astonished by how lightly Daya Laxmi spoke about throwing her household gods into the river, asking whether she was not frightened to do so. Her answer illustrates the most decisive change that conversion to monotheism entails, namely, the adoption of the belief that there is one God who is all-powerful ('Why should we worship those stones and pieces of metal when we have the greatest God with us?'). It is this sense that the Christian God is all-powerful that gave Daya Laxmi the confidence to throw her household gods into the river, an idea that Shamsheer finds terrifying, due to the likelihood of arousing anger in the gods. Throughout her answers to questions on a variety of subjects, Daya Laxmi constantly reiterates the supreme power of the Christian God, and his ability to defeat all witchcraft and demons (a category she now takes to include the Hindu deities).

Daya Laxmi describes how one of the witches who cursed her son admitted that she was no longer able to harm the family because they had recognised the 'best' (*bānlāmha*) God. The incident described is not implausible, as the power of the Christian God is widely

¹⁴⁷ Daya Laxmi is expressing the idea, commonly voiced by Bhaktapurian Christians, that whereas it is necessary to give material offerings to the Hindu gods in order to be blessed by them, this is not the case with the Christian god. Although Christians are supposed to pay tithes to the church after baptism, it is said that if a person is genuinely unable to pay these then God will bless them nonetheless. One elderly Newar Christian lady in a Bhaktapurian church said to me, 'for this Lord you do not need to offer anything, you just need to pray. If I don't have any money to offer to the church then I can just tell God: "I don't have any money, so I offer you my heart" (*jike deba maru jing hridaya jaka chhaye*)'.

recognised among Hindus in Bhaktapur (Dinesh, whose story is presented in Appendix 5, was advised by a Hindu relative to seek Christian healing, and this experience is not unusual).¹⁴⁸ What Daya Laxmi emphasises when she speaks about witchcraft is that she no longer fears it. Believing Christians, Daya Laxmi says, are invulnerable to witchcraft ('if they had strongly believed nothing bad could have happened to them; even if witches feed us poison nothing can happen to us').

The nature of the Daya Laxmi's understanding of the Christian God's power is clarified in her answer to my question about whether prayer can cure all types of sickness. She says, 'it doesn't matter what happens with the physical illness, our spiritual sickness will go away even if our physical illness remains. We have got spiritual joy, we have got peace. Also, we get to stay together with God in heaven.' What Daya Laxmi seems to be suggesting here is that the moral or spiritual aspect of God's power is more important than the material aspect of his power: even if prayer does not cure the physical dimension of an illness, it does not matter because the one who prays feels joy and peace, and will eventually have salvation.

The peace that Daya Laxmi feels under the protection of the Christian God, and her lack of fear of spiritual attack, helps to explain her surprising attitude towards those who curse her, or those with whom she comes into conflict. On the one hand, it is clear that she feels a sense of triumph over those who cursed her son: she describes with relish how one witch bowed her head before her. On the other hand, she emphasises several times that it would be wrong to fight with those who cursed the family, and in fact the duty of a Christian

¹⁴⁸ I was once talking to friends at the end of a church service in Bhaktapur when an elderly Hindu Newar woman came into the church, and asked for someone to pray for healing for her legs, in which she had severe pains. A group of people, including the pastor's wife, prayed for her for about 15 minutes. After this the woman started talking to some of the other Newar women in the church, and said that she had been recommended to come to the church for healing by her sons, who were both Hindus. She was very surprised when she was told that in order to obtain full healing she would have to come to church regularly and give up worshipping the Hindu gods.

is to bless them ('even when our enemies curse us we bless them instead'). Importantly, she notes that this ethical approach to relations with enemies does not come easily, and is in fact something that has to be learned ('in the past we found it very hard to do that, but now it is getting easier for us'). She attributes her ability to peacefully tolerate enmity to her reading of the Bible ('as I have read a bit of the Bible I can tolerate a lot'). She describes the process of learning to read the Bible as a process of moral learning. She attributes to the Bible the idea that 'we should speak more and listen less,' and implies that it is because she has read more of the Bible than her husband that she is able to react more gently than he to criticisms from others. Interestingly, she describes the Christian God as a 'teacher' (*shikshak*), who has taught her to read. This, like her comment about physical sickness, seems to emphasise the moral over the material aspect of God's power.

Daya Laxmi's comment that her ability to read the Bible during fellowships is appreciated by others touches on the ways in which moral learning in Bhaktapurian churches is a social process.¹⁴⁹ When she says that it was God who taught her how to read, rather than adult education classes, what she is most likely indicating is that it was in church, rather than elsewhere, that she was taught to read. It is very common in Nepali churches for older people who cannot read to be taught to do so by others, usually using the Bible.¹⁵⁰ Before and after house fellowships, one will often see younger Christians helping older Christian Christians to read the Bible. In Chapter 10 I will describe a house fellowship in detail, showing how it is an important forum for moral learning and discussion.

What we can see in Daya Laxmi's testimony, then, is that although the world of spirits pervades her experience, her approach to life problems is increasingly shaped by

¹⁴⁹ For an ethnography of moral learning in a Russian HIV treatment centre run by the Orthodox Church, see Zigon (2011).

¹⁵⁰ Many older women, and some older men, of the middle and lower Newar castes in Bhaktapur are unable to read, or are only able to read at a very basic level. See Appendix 2 on literacy levels in Bhaktapurian churches.

ethical norms learned from the Bible and church gatherings, rather than by ritual manipulations of the spirit world. The increasing salience of ethics in Daya Laxmi's life is related to her understanding of the Christian God as all-powerful and good: this has lessened her fear of spiritual attack, and so allowed her to act ethically where otherwise she would have sought ritual protection from hostile spirits.

Another thing that emerges from the extracts above is the power of narrative as a shaper of Christian identity and self-presentation. When Shamsher asks Daya Laxmi if it was difficult to give up Hindu worship she says: 'it was the easiest thing for me to stop. I was very sure that I would not worship these demons any more.' We see here the power of narrative structure as a shaper of Daya Laxmi's habits of speech, particularly when talking to non-Christians.¹⁵¹ I know from other conversations with Daya Laxmi that the process of giving up Hindu worship was in fact rather lengthier and more difficult for her than she implies here. However, the structure of the conversion narrative that Daya Laxmi had just told – with its sharp contrast between 'before' and 'after' and its emphasis on the miraculous power of the Christian God – dictated that the break in her life between Hinduism and Christianity should appear as absolute as possible, and thus that the process of giving up Hindu worship should have been simple and rapid. Part of Daya Laxmi's motive in recounting her conversion narrative was to convince Shamsher of the truth of Christianity. She knew that he had been suffering from pains in his leg, and interspersed her narrative with offers to pray for him and invitations to come fellowships.

The decisive break between 'before' and 'after' in Daya Laxmi's narrative is connected with a strong contrast between 'church' and 'world'. When explaining her pacifistic approach to inter-personal relationships, Daya Laxmi says, 'If we talk to non-

¹⁵¹ See Harding (1987, 2000) on the role of narrative-driven rhetoric in evangelical evangelistic practice in the United States.

Christians in the same way that they speak to and swear at us, then we will be the same as them, and we will not be Christians.’ Gentleness in personal relationships, then, stems not only from a sense of security given by an all-powerful God: it is also related to the narrative structure of Christian identity, where the movement from ‘before’ to ‘after’ entails a movement from ‘world’ to ‘church’, with the contrast between the former and the latter being drawn as sharply as possible. The reasons for the sharpness of these contrasts are various. They stem partly from the deep suffering, and related perceptions of failure of care, that Christian converts often associate with the pre-conversion world, thus making a sharp break from that world desirable. The theological basis of ideas about separation between ‘church’ and ‘world’ are explored further in Section 9.4 and the thesis Conclusion.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored two aspects of women’s conversion stories: first, how they relate to ethical changes within families; second, how they relate to spiritual warfare and pacifistic ethical ideas. As I noted above, there are important aspects of Christian women’s lives in Bhaktapur that I have not been able to explore because of limitations in my fieldwork experience. Using the terms introduced in Chapter 1, I would characterise changes with relation to family ethics as a ‘transformative reproduction’ of traditional values, while changes relating to pacifistic ethics I would characterise as an ‘adoption’ of substantially new values. The ways in which women often view their conversions as a way of caring for their family as a whole – through the healing of another family member, or creating a situation where vulnerable family members are better treated – corresponds reasonably closely to the traditional Newar ethics of care described in Part I. Nonetheless, the emphases on female participation in marital decision making, ending of domestic violence and alcohol

consumption, and ‘companionate marriage’, are distinctive enough that the changes described can be characterised as transformative reproduction. The Christian emphasis on abstaining from violence and harshness in speech is not unique in Bhaktapur – groups such as ISKCON and Om Shanti also place a strong emphasis on non-violence. However, the ideas of praying for one’s enemies and cultivating feelings of love for them is certainly distinctive in the context of traditional Bhaktapurian ethics, and so I would characterise the development of these ideas in Bhaktapurian churches in terms of adoption.

Chapter 9. Leaders: ascetic vocations

9.1 Introduction

In the last two chapters I examined stories related to healing, by far the most common path to Christianity in Bhaktapur (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 2). In this chapter I explore a category of stories in which healing is less likely to figure: those of church leaders. The conversion stories of church leaders illustrate in some respects the themes explored in Section 4.3, where I examined how communism can provide a means for traditionally privileged groups to reconstitute their moral authority, through an elevation of the values of intellect, integrity, and social service. In this chapter, I will show the influence of similar values in the leadership of Fellowship Church. Another similarity between the stories of Christian and communist leaders is the presence of a sense of personal calling or vocation, a sense that one has been singled out from the generality of people to perform a special task.¹⁵² This coupling of a desire to serve with a sense of personal superiority brings together the values of care and inwardness, in a way that echoes, in a stronger form, some of the themes Vishnu Prasad's story in Chapter 7.

The subject of power relations within Christian communities has been taken up by a number of anthropologists. We saw in Chapter 1 that Talal Asad interprets the Christian institution of penance as a 'modality of power', through which 'the collaboration between dominators and the dominated [can] be effected' (1993: 98). A similarly Foucaultian approach has been taken by Ruth Marshall (2009) in examining Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Marshall argues that certain features of Pentecostal discourse create a chronic instability in

¹⁵² For the story of Narayan Man Bijukchhe's 'conversion' to communism, see Appendix 6.

Pentecostal governance, which provides an environment in which exploitative leaders and a politics of vengeance thrive. She writes:

In many ways, Pentecostalism expresses a negative political theology, whether one understands this terms in its sense of a theology of sovereignty or as a theology of community. With its emphasis on individual salvation, interiority and affectivity, coupled with its incipient messianism, it has great difficulty in either founding an authority that commands and may embody divine will, or creating the foundations of a political community. [...] [T]his indeterminacy facilitates the staging of new powers. On the one hand, there is a growing bid for pastoral monopoly over spiritual authority and increasingly theocratic tendencies. On the other, there is an engagement with the demonic that, rather than resolving the problem of radical insecurity and founding a new politics of living together, gives rise to a politics of settling scores and vengeance. (ibid.: 165)

Similar concerns about the authoritarian and reactionary tendencies of evangelical power structures have been voiced by anthropologists studying evangelicalism elsewhere in Africa (Gifford 1991, 1993), in the United States (Ginsburg 1998; Crapanzano 2000), and in Latin America (D'Epinay 1969; Bastian 1993; Chesnut 1997), as well as by anthropologists studying the global evangelical scene as a whole (Brouwer et al. 1996). Crapanzano (2000), for instance, argues that US fundamentalist leaders use literalist interpretations of the Bible to underwrite their personal authority; Chesnut (1997) describes Pentecostal churches in Brazil as 'authoritarian assemblies'.

Something of the instability of governance and pastoral power-seeking identified by Marshall is certainly present in the Nepali church. I noted in Chapter 5 that the influx of foreign denominations and prevalence of church splits is a generally shared concern in the Nepali church (we will see these concerns voiced again in the sermon in Section 9.4). As the leadership of churches is not (as with most priestly roles in Hinduism) hereditary, and as there are often not well-established processes for choosing leaders, there are often disputes in Nepali churches over who should assume positions of leadership. These disputes frequently lead to church splits. It is not uncommon to find churches of less than 20 members, most of

whom may be from a single family whose elder figure has been denied a leadership position in a former church. Another source of friction is money: as there are usually very limited resources with which to pay church leaders, disputes over pay levels and compensation for expenses, such as petrol, are commonplace. It is also true that church leaders, in accordance with the hierarchical norms of Nepali society, tend to be honoured to an extent that Westerners, and indeed some Nepalis, may find uncomfortable. To this extent the situation in Nepali churches resonates with the findings of Marshall. However, the spiritual domination, financial venality, and politics of vengeance Marshall depicts do not correspond with my experience in the Nepali church.¹⁵³ What I found in Nepali churches was organisational instability coupled with a culture of honouring leaders that reflects wider cultural norms. I did not, in the churches I got to know well, find anything that could be described as authoritarianism.

As a consequence of this, I will examine church leadership as an ethical vocation rather than simply as a means of exercising power. My approach can be clarified with reference to Weber's concept of 'inner-worldly asceticism'. It is my contention that church leaders in Bhaktapur often resemble Weber's ideal type of the inner-worldly ascetic, in their energetic pursuit good works in the hope of salvation, in their sense of moral superiority to those around them, and in their tendency towards a rationalism that rejects the values of society at large. Weber defines inner-worldly asceticism as follows:

Salvation may be viewed as the distinctive gift of active ethical behaviour performed in the awareness that god directs this behaviour, i.e. that the actor is an instrument of god. We shall designate this type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterised by a methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation, as "ascetic". [...] The concentration of human behaviour on activities leading to salvation may require participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them) on the basis of the individual's

¹⁵³ For various responses to Marshall's book see Marshall et al. (2011).

piety and his qualifications as an elect instrument of god. This is “inner-worldly asceticism”.
(1978: 541-2)

Weber (1930) most famously applied the concept of inner-worldly asceticism to Calvinists in post-Reformation Europe: the search of Calvinists for assurance that they were elect, Weber argued, caused them energetically to pursue accumulative success in order to demonstrate this election. He also gives the concept a wider application, identifying several general characteristics of the inner-worldly ascetic. First, the inner-worldly ascetic has a tendency towards virtuosity: motivated by the search for salvation, he or she will pursue their vocation with great energy and dedication (Weber 1978: 542). Second, believing him or herself to be chosen by God, the inner-worldly ascetic will strive to surpass in virtue the generality of people: this could be described as ethical virtuosity. Third, the inner-worldly ascetic is a rationalist, ‘not only in the sense that he rationally systematizes his own conduct, but also in his rejection of everything that is ethically irrational, esthetic, or depending upon his own emotional reactions [...]. The distinctive goal remains the alert, methodical control of one’s own life and behaviour’ (ibid.: 544).¹⁵⁴

In this chapter I examine the life and ministry of Kedar Shrestha, the pastor of Fellowship Church, who resembles Weber’s model of the inner-worldly ascetic more closely than perhaps anyone I have ever known. Kedar is a man of exceptional energy and single-minded commitment. He attempts to evangelise virtually everyone he comes into contact with: this makes for frequent social discomfort (not least for my Hindu research assistant), and sometimes leads to significant inconvenience, or worse, for Kedar himself (he was once arrested and imprisoned for proselytising). When I began interviewing people from Fellowship, I was very struck by how his name appeared prominently in the great majority of

¹⁵⁴ On Pentecostal/charismatic asceticism see Robbins (2004b: 127-30). On Hindu asceticism in Nepal, see Hausner (2007).

conversion narratives I collected: in many cases (as in the narratives in appendices 4 and 5) he plays a decisive role. While not every leader in Bhaktapurian churches, nor in Fellowship, resembles Weber's model of the inner-worldly ascetic as closely as Kedar, he exhibits in crystallised form qualities that tend also to be present in other leaders. This inner-worldly asceticism illustrates both inwardness, in a sense of personal chosenness and vocation, and care, in a sense of moral commitment to help others (including those who are from social groups distant to one's own).

9.2 Two types of leader

When interviewing Bhaktapurian Christian leaders,¹⁵⁵ I found that their stories tended to fall into two distinct yet overlapping categories. First, there is the category of those who have previously embraced communist ideology, whom I call 'intellectual converts'; second, there is the category of those who have previously embraced strict or more demanding forms of Hinduism, whom I call 'ethical converts'.¹⁵⁶ What these categories of people share is a history of search for a transcendent goal that puts them in tension with the society around them. Their past commitments predispose such converts to be critical of the religious practice of society in general: while for the communist this practice represents superstition and masked class interest, for the strict Hindu such practice is insufficiently rigorous and devoid of full understanding. The tension that a history of commitment to transcendent aims is likely to have caused with family and friends, who lack commitment to these aims, may also predispose a person to conversion: as in the stories of Vishnu Prasad and Daya Laxmi, a

¹⁵⁵ I define a leader as anyone who holds a position of responsibility in church, such as a pastor (*pastar*), elder (*eldar*), deacon (*dekon*), evangelist (*pracharak*), leader of a fellowship, or member of the church committee (*church samiti*). Leaders in Nepali churches are often referred to collectively as *aguwā* – *aguwā* is a Nepali word meaning 'guide' or 'pioneer'.

¹⁵⁶ These categories are ideal types.

background of personal conflicts makes it more likely that a person will risk the social ostracism associated with conversion. In that they both involve intense commitment and a sense of personal separateness, both ‘intellectual’ and ‘ethical’ conversion can be understood in terms of inner-worldly asceticism. Nonetheless, intellectual converts tend to exhibit more strongly the rationalist element of inner-worldly asceticism, while ethical converts tend to be more preoccupied with moral virtuosity than with rationalism *per se*.

Intellectual converts tend to emphasise the rationality of Christian belief with reference to the reliability of the Bible and the contrast between polytheism and monotheism. They contrast the implausibility of events described in the Hindu scriptures with what they take to be the historical character of events described in the Bible. They will also emphasise the transcendent and unitary nature of the Christian God as opposed to the human-like and multifarious nature of divinity within Hinduism. They suggest that the multiplicity and unreliability of the Hindu gods makes Hindu worship necessarily insecure and imperfect, while the singleness of the Christian god makes him more knowable and more reasonable in his actions. Intellectual converts often define themselves as rational and educated, in contrast to the superstition of the majority. Dinesh, whose narrative is presented in Appendix 5, is a good example of an intellectual convert, as is Yogendra, the pastor whose narrative I referred to in Chapter 6. There are also elements of the intellectual convert in Kamal, whose story I examine in the next chapter.

The relationship of intellectual converts to the ethics of suffering tends to be complex. On the one hand, a background in communism will predispose a convert to be sensitive to the sufferings of the poor: I attended one church in which the pastor, a Dalit and former communist activist, railed against the caste system in a style that would have been appropriate to a Maoist rally. On the other hand, converts with a communist background often see themselves as rational and scientific, and will thus be reluctant to place too much

emphasis on miraculous healing. Though I did not meet any church leaders who explicitly denied the possibility of such healing, I did notice that intellectual converts would frequently place more emphasis on direct care for those who were afflicted, and on abolition of caste and gender prejudice, than they did on exorcism or prayer against evil spirits. Thus intellectual converts wish to alleviate suffering, but do not perhaps engage with the *experience* of suffering to the extent that those who are more focused on prayer do.

Whereas intellectual converts tend to emphasise rationality, ethical converts tend to emphasise moral virtue. An ethical convert will normally have conceived of themselves before conversion as someone who is *dharmik* – a word that connotes religious devotion, moral virtue, and the fulfilment of social obligation. At the time of their conversion, they may have come to believe that Hindu society fails to live up to the highest moral standards, and see in Christianity a higher standard of morality. This morality will often be understood in terms of care for those who are sick and suffering; it may also be understood in terms of stricter attitudes towards drinking, smoking, and interpersonal violence. The attitude of ethical converts can be called ‘works-based’, in that it associates true Christianity with moral virtue, and promotes a demanding moral standard for church members. This works-based ethic is often associated with a vivid sense of the reality of eternal salvation and damnation.

The approach of ethical converts to suffering is distinct from that of the healing-focused majority, but closer to that of the majority than the approach of intellectual converts. For ethical converts, as for the healing-focused, the experience of suffering is laden with meaning. While the healing-focused, as we have seen in the last two chapters, will typically interpret illness or suffering as being caused by evil spirits, the ethical convert will more often interpret suffering, particularly suffering in his or her own life, as an experience sent by God to draw them towards himself. Ethical converts will often boast of the sufferings they have undergone for the sake of their faith, and mention the rewards that suffering Christians

will be given by God in heaven. Suffering acquires for ethical converts a positive value: both as an educative experience and as a basis for future reward. In what follows I will examine how Kedar, who falls into the category of ethical converts, connects his own understandings of suffering with those of his congregation by placing healing in the context of a broader spiritual war between good and evil; this war includes not only the battle against spirits that cause illness, but also the struggle for personal moral improvement. The ultimate aim of this struggle is not physical health but salvation.

9.3 An ethical convert: Kedar's story

Kedar Shrestha was born in 1953 into a high-caste Newar family in Chautara, a town roughly 30 km to the north-east of Bhaktapur. After finishing school he gained a job in the civil service, and worked in various places around the east of the Kathmandu Valley. In 1983, when he was working in Charikot (60 km to the east of Bhaktapur) his wife, with whom he had two sons, became seriously ill; they went to Kathmandu to seek treatment. At this time, he came into contact with Christians, who helped the family. Although Kedar's wife died (he soon remarried), he had been impressed by the Christians, so he began visiting church fellowships and studying the Bible. Around this time he was appointed to a government job in Bhaktapur. He was baptised at Fellowship Church's sister church in Patan in 1986, and after several years his second wife was also baptised. Kedar quickly assumed a church leadership role (first in Patan, then in Bhaktapur after Fellowship was established in 1988) and became one of two elders at Fellowship. In 2000 he quit his government job in order to work full time for the church, as an evangelist (*pracharak*). In 2006, Kedar was ordained as the pastor of Fellowship, a position he currently holds.

The following are extracts from my interview with Kedar:

IG: How did you become a Christian?

KS: A family member of mine [his first wife] became very ill. The situation was very serious but our relatives did not care for us. At that time a Christian came and was very helpful to us. And he asked what they could do to help. In fact, they had come to see another patient who was staying next to us. That was how I started to know Christians. After we got to know each other they kept coming to see us quite often and gave us tracts and prayed for us, but I did not know anything about what they were talking about. Later they said to me that whatever help we needed they would give us.

I found it very unusual that, while my own family was not taking care of us at all, some people we didn't know started to give us whatever help we needed. Because of this I was very curious to know about them: about who they were and what they did and why they wanted to help us. They said to me that they would provide anything: money, blood, a vehicle or anything else. And they helped me with all those things. Afterwards I started to find out about them and who they were.

I started to visit them and whenever I went to see them I used to put *tikā* from Pashupatinath [a major Hindu temple near to Kathmandu] on my forehead, because I was a religious [*dharmik*] person.¹⁵⁷ I used to have a feeling that I was also a religious [*dharmik*] and serving [*sewā yāimha*] person. Before I went to see them I used to visit different temples and put on *tikā*. At that time I was working in the District Administration Office in Charikot. Later, I was transferred to the Bhaktapur CDO [Chief District Officer] office, because of a promotion. After I came to the Bhaktapur office I went to see them again and again. They did not explain about themselves clearly, because I was working at the CDO office [they were concerned that he might be a government spy].

As I was very curious to know about them, I started to investigate. They did tell me that they were Christians. They sometimes took me to house fellowships. Later on they gave me a Bible

¹⁵⁷ Protestant Christians in Nepal generally refuse to take *tikā*, which is a common symbol of blessing within Hinduism, and an important part of numerous formal, ritual, and festival occasions in Nepal. Often, the refusal to take *tikā* on ritual occasions can be a flashpoint for family conflict. The popular Nepali television programme *Tito Satya* ('Bitter Truth'), in an episode aired on 15th November 2012 on Nepal Television, dealt with the situation of a family where a young Christian man refused to take *tikā* from his sister on the occasion of Bhai Tika, an important event in the Hindu festival year. The programme dwelt on the distress this caused the sister, and culminated in a scene where the mother of the Christian man berated him for his insensitivity, eventually causing him to concede that he was in the wrong. The comment from his mother that was portrayed as touching his conscience was: 'the greatest religion in the world is to make others happy' (*arulāi khushi banāumu nai sansāramā thulo dharma ho*).

and I started to read it. At the beginning I could not understand the Bible. They did not explain to me clearly about it. But, slowly, I started to go to church. I started to go to church in Patan. [...]

I was baptised in 2043 VS [1986/7 AD]. It took two or three years for me to become a Christian. Even after I became a Christian my [second] wife was still not Christian. She was trying her best to bring me back to her place [Hinduism] and I was trying my best to bring her to my place [Christianity]. This struggle went on for three years. I said to her that I was definitely not going to worship idols and I would certainly become a complete [*pura*] Christian, and if she did not become a Christian then the family situation would not be comfortable [*jā machini*]. I said that if she looked eastward and I looked westward it would not be a good thing because [...] we would have quarrels all the time. We quarrelled until midnight over this [...] I said to her, if she did not like it, she should leave me, but I would not leave this Lord. I said I would not force her to be a Christian but she should come to church and try to understand it and then decide on her own. [...] Even then she did not give up her behaviour.

After some time, we both went together to the church and she used to put *tikā* on her forehead and then wipe it off when she reached the church. But the mark of the *tikā* was still visible on her forehead. As an old woman in the church saw that mark on her forehead she immediately slapped my cheek and scolded me because I had not been able to make my wife a Christian and I was going to go to heaven alone. When she saw the old lady slapping my cheek my wife felt very hurt. She realised that I was slapped because of her. She felt it was an insult to the reputation of her husband that she could not tolerate. In the end, that incident made her into a believer.

In 2043 VS [1986/7 AD] I went to take a training called NLT, run by Campus Crusade in Siligudhi in India.¹⁵⁸ During the training we started to pray for all those who were not yet Christian. We prayed in her [his wife's] name too. We did 24 hours of prayer. [...] All of the people who were prayed for then became Christians afterwards. My own older brother and his wife did not become Christian but all the rest of those who we prayed for became Christian.

When I returned to my office in Bhaktapur, an officer called from the crime investigation department said that he knew everything about my trip to Siligudhi.¹⁵⁹ [...] While I was on that training course a woman foretold my future, saying that I would have to face many problems and

¹⁵⁸ Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as Cru) has played an important role in the development of Christianity in Nepal. Many of my informants, particularly those in leadership positions, reported having attended training sessions run by Campus Crusade. Many also reported either using or experiencing the Campus Crusade-developed evangelistic technique known as 'The Four Spiritual Laws' (see footnote 92). Various people also reported having seen 'The Jesus Film'. The Jesus Film is a 1979 film depicting the life of Christ, which has been dubbed into numerous languages and widely distributed around the globe by Campus Crusade. Versions of the film exist in both Nepali and Newari, and screenings of the film are a common evangelistic technique in Nepali churches.

¹⁵⁹ During the pre-1990 period, it was common for Christian leaders in Nepal to travel to India for training.

I would have hardship in my life later on; she was prophesying [*bhavishwavnā yānā*] my future. But she consoled me, saying that I should rely on God [*parameshwor*] and he would be with me always. She was saying that while speaking in tongues [*anya bhasha*].¹⁶⁰ She translated that *anya bhasha* later to show what she meant. [...] After I returned my father died in 2045 VS [1988/9 AD]. [...]

I did not shave my hair and did not wear the white mourning clothes for my father's death. Because of that they [people in Bhaktapur] found out that I was a Christian. Then they started to blame me for the earthquake that happened in 2045 VS. They said it happened because I had stopped respecting the gods. They even accused me of being an atheist [*nāstik*]. In fact Christians are not atheists.

After that the CDO [Chief District Officer] threatened me, saying that I had to leave Christianity, otherwise he would fire me from my job.¹⁶¹ From then they started to make me trouble for me at my workplace in any way they could. In secret they wrote a letter to people at a higher level saying that they should fire me because I was a Christian. But the head of police advised them that they should transfer me from Bhaktapur rather than to fire me from my job. So I was transferred from that office to the Home Ministry in Kathmandu.

Once in 2052 VS [1995/6 AD] I went to see the Chief Justice and his wife gave me *prasād* flowers after they had done a big act of worship for Narayan [...], but I refused to receive those things and said that I am a true Christian [*paripakkomhā christian*]. He appreciated me because I became a Christian with a true understanding of what Christianity is. And he criticized those who become Christian without knowing about it. At that time there was a rumour that people from Korea were distributing free tickets to go to heaven.¹⁶² They were saying that Jesus is coming to collect all those who are going to heaven. So the wife of the Chief Justice asked me if I was planning to go to heaven in this way. I replied to her that the rumour was not true and that Jesus

¹⁶⁰ While speaking in tongues is not generally practiced at Fellowship Church, the leadership of the church does not reject the possibility or validity of this spiritual gift (see Appendix 2). Leaders at the church say that they do not encourage speaking in tongues because, although valid instances of speaking in tongues do exist, the practice of speaking in tongues can provide an opportunity for 'show-off' (*dekhāwati*) behaviour.

¹⁶¹ I found that government office-holders often suffer negative consequences at work if they convert to Christianity, though this is probably less the case now than it was in the 1980s and 1990s, when being a Christian was less common.

¹⁶² In my experience, the country that sends most missionaries to Nepal is South Korea. South Korea has a thriving evangelical and Pentecostal movement (see Martin 2002). One South Korean missionary told me that South Koreans tend to be more comfortable than Western missionaries with the centrality of spirits and healing to Nepali Christianity. Philip Jenkins has written that 'South-South evangelism represents one of the most impressive phenomena in contemporary Christianity: the topic cries out for a major book-length survey' (2011: 16).

would not come in that way because it is written in the Bible that he will appear in a cloud at the time of his second coming.

[...]

IG: Do you have the gift of speaking in tongues?

KS: I am interested in gaining that gift but interest is not enough. It is a gift from God himself. If God wanted to give me all five gifts he would give me all five.¹⁶³ But it is not a big thing. Doing work for God is itself a gift. If you able to bring someone to the Lord and make them a believer in the Lord, a person who used to be worshipping idols, this is a great thing [*sung manu murti pujā yānā chwongmhāsita parameshwor yātā vishwās yākegu wo tahrāng ni*]. [...]

[...]

SNP: What have you gained and lost in coming from Hinduism to Christianity?

KS: Hindu gods and goddesses are all frauds.¹⁶⁴ Each and every god and goddess has more or less that character. In the Bible it is said that you must not even speak their names. Should I show it to you right now? [...] Let's see [he looks through a Bible], Exodus 23 verse 13. The Lord asked us, 'Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips'. People can do black magic [*mantra tantra*] to Hindus but they cannot do any black magic to Christians as long as they believe in the Lord. Hinduism is like a children's toy [*machātayagu khelaunā*]. [...] When the Bible was tested by a computer for its reality in comparison with other religious texts it was found that the Bible is 99.9% real and true, but the other religious texts were not more than 15% true, they are mainly imaginary [*kalpanik*].¹⁶⁵

Perhaps the most striking fact about Kedar's narrative is that he converted to Christianity after his first wife *died*, despite the prayer of Christians, rather than after an incident of healing. In this sense his story could be described as an anti-healing narrative: whereas for most converts, it is the demonstration of God's love and power in healing which brings them to conversion, Kedar seems to feel the presence of God most strongly at times of

¹⁶³ See 1 Corinthians 12: 4-10.

¹⁶⁴ The idea that the Hindu deities are dishonest and tricky appeared in many of the conversion narratives I collected; both Vishnu Prasad and Kamal make comments along these lines.

¹⁶⁵ The idea that the Bible is historically reliable, whereas Hindu religious texts are not, is commonly voiced by Nepali Christian leaders and intellectuals (see, for instance, Dinesh in Appendix 5).

suffering and hardship. His interpretation of his sufferings is represented by the words spoken by the woman who prophesied his future in 1986: '[she said] I would have to face many problems and I would have hardship in my life later on [...]. But she consoled me, saying that I should rely on God and he would be with me always.' Here, Kedar associates hardship with reliance on God and with personal chosenness, indicated by God having given the woman a message to speak about his future, and by God being with him always. Kedar's words echo those of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12: 7-9, where Paul says that God has given him a thorn in the flesh in order 'to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations [given to me]'. Kedar cited this passage to me when talking about his sufferings on a different occasion.

For Kedar, the experience of suffering provides an opportunity for the believer both to demonstrate the superiority of Christian ethics and to witness to the truth of Christianity by patient and faithful endurance. The events surrounding the illness of Kedar's first wife influenced him towards Christianity not because Christians were successful in healing his wife, but because he was impressed by their care and compassion. What particularly struck him was that the Christians seemed prepared to help people with whom they had no familial or social connection ('I found it very unusual that, while my own family was not taking care of us at all, some people we didn't know started to give us whatever help we needed'). For Kedar, this unfamiliar ethical code seems to have had the force of a revelation. He was at the time a strict Hindu, who considered himself to be highly virtuous ('I used to have a feeling that I was also a religious and serving person'), and yet here were people who seemed to have a moral code more demanding and service-oriented than his own. He seems, instinctively, to have felt that his own place, as a virtuous man, was among these people. We also see here how a perception of failing care within Hindu society, a discussed in Chapter 3, predisposes people to the adoption of new ethical codes.

Kedar's conception of himself as an exceptionally virtuous man shapes the way that he describes his ministry. In conversation, Kedar makes frequent reference to his work for the poor and disadvantaged, including his building of a room behind the church for an old man whose family would not care for him, his work with disabled children, and work for a Christian housing charity called Habitat for Humanity. Nonetheless, the most important good work, in Kedar's view, is to make new Christians ('if you able to bring someone to the Lord [...] this is a great thing'). This is something in which he has been very successful, as I described in Chapter 6.

The two main episodes of hardship that Kedar describes in his narrative are structured to illustrate how his own perseverance and dedication have had the effect of positively influencing people who are initially hostile. His second wife, we learn, struggled hard to bring him back to Hinduism, and even brought him to the point where he suggested that they should separate rather than have a household that was religiously divided. Like Kedar before his conversion, she used to come to church after having received *tikā* in Hindu worship. The scolding of her husband which resulted from this is what Kedar says convinced her to become a Christian ('she felt it was [...] an injury to the reputation of her husband which she could not tolerate'). The fact that she cared so much about Kedar's standing within the Christian community suggests a certain admiration for his perseverance in remaining part of that community, and an anticipation that his involvement in the community would be permanent.

Kedar's narration of his meeting with the Chief Justice and his wife follows a similar structure. His refusal to take *prasād*, which might have been expected to cause offence, in fact prompts the Chief Justice, who is presumably struck by Kedar's bravery, to praise him for the depth of his faith. The Chief Justice's contrast between Christians who 'become Christian without knowing about it', and Kedar who has a 'true understanding' of Christianity, may be

an oblique suggestion that while most Christians (as is generally assumed in Nepal) convert for material gain, Kedar's Christianity cannot be selfishly motivated, otherwise he would not so recklessly have risked offending a powerful person for the sake of his faith. This interpretation is borne out by the comment of the Chief Justice's wife which immediately follows, that 'people from Korea were distributing free tickets to go to heaven'. Kedar rejects this picture of Christianity as motivated by a desire for easy gain, refuting it with reference to the Bible.

The fact that, in his own life-story, Kedar emphasises ethics and dedication to truth rather than miracles, should not lead us to the conclusion that he depreciates or is uncomfortable with the practice of healing. On the contrary, alongside his demanding ethical outlook Kedar also adheres to a frank and energetic supernaturalism. This supernaturalism is central to his ministry. A particularly dramatic account of a Christian exorcism can be seen in Ram Devi's narrative in Appendix 4: it will be seen that Kedar, who here plays the role of the exorcist, fulfils his task with great energy and immediate effectiveness. Although healing is usually not as rapid or dramatic as this, many people at Fellowship Church will testify to the power of Kedar's healing prayer. He prays with vigour, usually holding a Bible to the head of the person he is praying for, and sometimes physically shaking them. Such prayer is one of the primary bases of Kedar's success in ministry and his position in the church. Kedar has a deep faith in the effectiveness of prayer, as is witnessed by the fact that immediately after he attributes his wife's conversion to her concern for his reputation, he goes on to describe how during a training session 'we started to pray for all those who were not yet Christian. We prayed in her name too. [...] All of the people who were prayed for became Christians afterwards.' We see, then, that, as is common among ethical converts, Kedar emphasises the moral or spiritual aspect of Christianity more than its rational aspect.

Although he is not a rationalist in the sense of being uncomfortable with the supernatural, Kedar does place a strong emphasis on religious understanding and knowledge. We have seen how in the context of describing his meeting with the Chief Justice he suggested, by citing the words of the Chief Justice, that he has a deeper understanding of Christianity than other Christians. Most of all, Kedar's emphasis on religious understanding can be seen in his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bible, which he demonstrates at every opportunity. In the final part of the extract above he cites a passage from Exodus in an attempt to convince Shamsher, my research assistant, that the Hindu gods and goddesses are 'frauds'. He also claims that a computer test demonstrated the Bible to be 99.9% accurate, in contrast to other religious texts, which are mainly imaginary. He suggests that Christianity is more intellectually serious than Hinduism, describing Hinduism as a 'children's toy'. In the next section I will further examine the ways that Kedar uses the Bible, in the context of a sermon.

Kedar's emphasis on the hardships he has suffered is very typical of Christian leaders in Nepal. Christian leaders who have been in prison are often eager to describe their experiences in detail (as in the testimony of Yogendra in Chapter 6), and sometimes produce written accounts of their imprisonment. Timothy Rai, a Nepali pastor who was imprisoned for proselytism in 2000, wrote a book on his experiences, concluding it in this way:

[...] the Lord, in His wisdom, brought good out of the injustices of Rajbiraj [the town where they were arrested]. [...] Our suffering was little compared to that of Christians in many parts of the world, but it was for the sake of Christ. We suffered because of those who oppose Him. We know that suffering eventually turns to glory. Throughout our stay in prison, we constantly prayed for God's blessing on the town of Rajbiraj. Tearfully, we prayed that the blessing of Rajbiraj would not only touch the hearts of people across Nepal, but also flow into India and Bihar [...] we believe that God can still do more than we ask or think. (Rai 2003: 111-12).

The way that Rai conceives of glory flowing from suffering is significant. The primary focus of Rai and his friends when they were imprisoned was to pray for the people who had had

them imprisoned: the people of the town of Rajbiraj. By using suffering to impel Rai and his friends to love their enemies, and to pray for them, Rai is suggesting, God is creating a witness to the power of Christianity that will lead to the spread of the Gospel. Interestingly, I found similar lines of thought when I interviewed communist leaders who had been imprisoned during the pre-1990 period. For instance, Buddhi Kumar Gosain,¹⁶⁶ an NWPP leader imprisoned in Jumla in 1982, described to me how his and his friends' endurance in prison helped to inspire others to communism in both Jumla and Bhaktapur.

Kedar's emphasis on the alleviation of suffering through material assistance as well as healing prayer is increasingly representative of Christian leaders in Nepal. As described in Chapter 5, medical work was central to the Christian missions that came to Nepal after 1950. In recent years, as they have expanded and grown in income, Nepali churches have increasingly adopted formal or semi-formal programmes of social service. Fellowship Church looks after an old man on a charitable basis; there is also much informal help given to church members by other church members at times of need (if a church member has a serious medical problem, other believers will often help them to pay the hospital bills). The church I researched in Sanga maintains a 'children's home': this involves the maintenance of ten orphaned children, who sleep in the church building and are fed, clothed, and cared for by the family of the pastor. I came across a number of larger churches, such as the Assemblies of God church in Banepa, or Koinonia Church in Patan, that maintain sizeable residential care homes for the elderly. These developments are consistent with the global turn towards social action among charismatics and Pentecostals identified by Miller and Yamamori (2007).

Although many Nepali Christians I met expressed the common view that politics is a 'dirty game' (*phohor khel*) that it is better not to get involved with, I did find among some

¹⁶⁶ I use his real name.

Christian leaders an interest in influencing the political process. This is related to social justice concerns, as well as a desire to defend the interests of Christians as a group. I met several Christian leaders who were active members of political parties (Dinesh of Appendix 5, for instance, is active in the Unified Communist Party of Nepal [Maoist]). In 2013 I attended a large conference in Kathmandu, which the press were invited to, where Christian leaders attempted to put forward a unified voice on political issues. Their approach could be described as moderately leftist. Policies were advocated supporting improvements in education, the empowerment of women, the reduction of corruption, an end to caste discrimination, and the promulgation of a secular constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion. The last issue, in particular, is one that is of vital interest to Christians: like other religious minorities in Nepal, such as Buddhists,¹⁶⁷ Christians are anxious that Nepal should remain an officially secular state, which is what it was made by the Interim Constitution of 2007 (prior to this, Nepal was officially a ‘Hindu Kingdom’). As of February 2015, a new permanent constitution has yet to be promulgated.

9.4 Ethics and salvation: Kedar’s sermon

I quote below from a sermon Kedar delivered to his congregation at a time when there was a serious dispute in the church, relating partly to financial matters.¹⁶⁸ Most sermons in Fellowship Church are considerably less harsh in tone than this one; nonetheless, the sermon expresses in unusually intense form some important aspects of Kedar’s moral outlook.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ See, for instance, Leve 2002.

¹⁶⁸ For reasons of privacy, I am unable to go into the details of this dispute.

¹⁶⁹ The sermon was delivered in Nepali, as are all sermons in Saturday services in Fellowship Church (every church I visited in Nepal held their Saturday services in Nepali). However, when a house fellowship is held that includes only Newars, the fellowship will often be held in Newari, particularly if there are older Newars present.

According to Jeremiah 8:27: “[...] the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,” says the Lord, “with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.” In fact the king Nebuchadnezzar was not a believer so why was he given that power? Do you know? He was chosen to punish those who did not follow the rules given by the Lord. According to Jeremiah 8:37: ‘the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city and take it and burn it with fire.’ [...] According to Exodus [20: 5-6]: ‘I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.’

If we spend our lives well God will take care of us, but if we spend our lives badly God will not listen to us, even when we pray to him as much as we can, hitting our heads against the wall. It is not right to tear your clothes to show how much you love God: you should tear your heart instead to show how much you love God. We can see in Mark 35:3: ‘For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.’ Jesus does not want to harm or destroy anybody. Please read Jeremiah 6:12: “And their houses shall be turned over to others, fields and wives together; for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land” says the Lord.’

[...]

You should feel ashamed when you do bad deeds, but even though people do bad things they do not feel ashamed. This world is standing on embarrassment [*lāj*], shame [*sharam*] and religion [*dharma*]. Today, we are different people than we were in the past. We used to be idol worshippers [*murti pujak*]. Today, we are separate [*alagga bhaera*] from the idol worshippers and every Saturday we come to church. We pray to God. We used to be people who said *jaya* [‘long live!’] to the [Hindu] gods, now we worship [the Christian] God [*parmeshwor*]. So from now onwards we have to walk in new ways [*nayā chālharu*] and avoid the old ways [*purāno chālharu*]. We have to pray to God in order to understand what his wish [*ichchhā*] is, before he brings us to punishment [*danda*].

According to the Bible, the worst thing a person can do is indulge themselves too much in making money. According to Hebrews 13:5, ‘Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”’ According to Luke 11:28: ‘blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.’ According to Proverbs 13:20: ‘He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.’ According to John 12:47: ‘if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.’

[...]

Today, in churches [...] the truth has been lost [*satya kurā harāirākhkechha*]. Today the four parties got together and made the Chief Justice the Prime Minister of Nepal. Together, the parties have an 80% majority. But the other parties, who represent only 20%, are making turmoil [*ganjāgol bhadragol*] in the country.¹⁷⁰ The same kind of turmoil is happening in churches too. Every church has a quarrel. In every church there is a difficult matter [*apthyāro kurā*]. In every church the truth is not spoken. This sort of situation is going on in churches.¹⁷¹ Things that are untrue are accepted as truth. People are greedy for money [*rupaiyā paisāko lobha*]. Because of this, God is becoming furious [*parameshworako krodha āirākhkechha*]. ‘Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand’ [2 Chronicles 36:17].

The main purpose of today’s sermon is to say how you can spend your life according to God’s wish. We have to please God. As we are the children of God we should not do bad things. If God becomes angry what can we do then? How can we be saved from that? If it is difficult to save oneself from human anger how can we save ourselves from God’s anger?

It is close to the time of Jesus Christ’s Second Coming [*yeshu khrishtako dosro āgaman*]. So if we do good things we will get a place to stay in heaven. [...] At the time of the second coming there will be a great growth in people giving false teaching [*jhutho shikshā*]. At the moment there are lots of false teaching people coming from lots of different places. I was caught two times by these false teaching people. One group said that I should worship the sun god. One group said that we should worship the ‘*mātā*’ goddess.¹⁷² That is why it is said [in the Bible] that there will be many false teaching people arriving before the second coming.

[...]

[Preparations are being made for the Lord’s Supper.] If someone has done things that are disliked by God, it is not OK for them to take the Lord’s Supper.¹⁷³ But if you stop taking the Lord’s Supper one time after another you will be separated from God. So do not do wrong things

¹⁷⁰ This sermon was delivered in March 2013, just after Nepal’s Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi was sworn in as the country’s prime minister. The appointment of Regmi was a compromise between the major political parties, and was opposed by parties on the far left.

¹⁷¹ This resonates with the comments of Ganesh Tamang in Section 5.2.

¹⁷² Kedar is referring here to the World Mission Society Church of God (WMSCOG). This South Korean-founded group, which has a large church in Bhaktapur, teaches that in addition to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is a God the Mother (*mātā*) – they believe that God the Mother is a woman living today in Korea named Jang Gil-ja.

¹⁷³ Most evangelical churches in Nepal practice ‘open communion’: that is, any baptised Christian who is in right standing with God may take communion (in the Catholic Church, in contrast, only Catholics may take communion). What Kedar is referring to here is the teaching that any Christian who is in a state of unrepentant sin should not take communion, based on 1 Corinthians 11: 27-8.

over and over again. If we admit that we are the children of God then we will not become greedy and we will not be trapped by greed for money.

The sermon opens with a series of violent images of God's punishment of those who disobey him, drawn from the book of Jeremiah. Kedar points out that even though King Nebuchadnezzar was an 'unbeliever', God used him to bring judgement on those who had disobeyed him. He then goes on to present a more hopeful image from the book of Mark, where Jesus says that 'whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.' Jesus, he says, does not want to harm anyone. The sermon, which was given on the day of the Lord's Supper (which is held once per month at Fellowship Church, and for which the whole congregation gathers in a single service), is structured around the tension between God's righteous punishment of sin and the promise of blessing and relationship with God for those who obey his will.

After reading the Bible passages, Kedar paints a picture of general corruption in the world, from which Christians are called to separate themselves. In the world, he says, 'even though people do bad things they do not feel ashamed'. He reminds the members of the congregation that they chose to separate themselves from this world ('today, we are separate from the idol worshippers'); a consequence of this separation is that Christians must live differently ('from now onwards we have to walk in new ways and avoid the old ways'), and find guidance for life not in imitation of the world but in prayer ('we have to pray to God in order to understand what his plan is'). Prayer, Kedar suggests, should be its own reward, because it constitutes relationship with God. He quotes a verse from the book of Hebrews which enjoins the faithful not to be covetous, because God has said 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'. Here, the eternal joy of relationship with God is contrasted with the fleeting joy of worldly goods. This is an ethic of inwardness, where connection with God is direct and

internal, resulting from a clear conscience and right intention. The inwardness of Kedar's ethic is expressed when he says, 'it is not right to tear your clothes to show how much you love God: you should tear your heart instead to show how much you love God.' The contrast is between an outer world that is irredeemably corrupt, and an inner world that is pure if one's conscience is clear and in right relationship with God.

The church, Kedar suggests, has gone astray by reflecting too closely the greed and discord of society in general. He compares the situation in the church to Nepal's political situation, where a discontented minority cause turmoil for the whole country. Kedar associates the corruption of churches with three things: greed, interpersonal conflict, and a lack of truth.¹⁷⁴ Kedar's focus on failure to speak the truth – which emerges also in his mention of the growth of 'false teaching' – again suggests the inwardness of the ethic he is preaching. Just as Kedar was faithful to what he saw as the truth, even in contexts where this may have harmed him (as in his meeting with the Chief Justice), so he demands of others that they must adhere strictly to the truth even if this may result in worldly disadvantage (the disadvantage that he has in mind in this instance is primarily financial). Kedar's demand that believers do not consider their own advantage, but rather seek relationship with God as an end in itself, is particularly astringent in this sermon and would normally be expressed in considerably more moderate tones, with allowance made for the idea that God may heal or otherwise bless those who are faithful to him. However, in the context of this sermon, where Kedar feels that the basic norms of Christianity have been challenged, he expresses his own ascetic philosophy with full force.

The link between the Kedar we see in the conversion narratives of others, who energetically promotes Christian healing, and the Kedar we see in this sermon, who preaches

¹⁷⁴ Kedar speaks of 'churches' in the plural, but is likely thinking primarily of his own church – this, at least, is how most people in the congregation interpreted the sermon.

a doctrine of ascetic self-sacrifice, can be found in the vivid awareness of the reality of eternal salvation and damnation that punctuates the sermon. For Kedar, healing, though important, is not an end in itself but rather part of a wider spiritual battle between good and evil, which resolves itself ultimately in judgement at the time of Christ's Second Coming. Healing, for Kedar, has value not primarily as a way of improving people's worldly lives (though he does wish to relieve their suffering), but as a way of defeating the evil spirits which have power over them, consequently liberating them to seek God and be saved. Kedar's belief in the imminence of the Second Coming, which he mentions in the sermon, is an important part of his worldview, which he refers to often. It is Kedar's sense of the imminence of judgement which seems to give him the preternatural energy that has enabled him to bring scores of people to faith. It is clear to Kedar that at this time of judgement people will be judged by their works: people who do good things 'will get a place to stay in heaven'; people who do bad things will face a fiery judgement prefigured by the wrath of God in the passages from Jeremiah.

Robbins has noted that millenarianism occurs unevenly within global Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity (2004b: 121); he has also explored the connection between millenarianism and ascetic morality in the case of the Urapmin (2004a). I found that belief in the imminence of the Second Coming was common among Bhaktapurian Christians, though few would hazard a guess as to how soon it would occur, and focus on it as was not as intense as Robbins describes it as being among the Urapmin. There were two primary contexts in which I heard Christians discuss the Second Coming. The first, as in the sermon above, was when the corruption of the world was being discussed: people would often cite political corruption, wars, and, as above, the rise of false teaching, as indicating that the Second Coming was imminent.¹⁷⁵ The second context was that of evangelism: it would often

¹⁷⁵ See Matthew 24: 3-8.

be said that it is important to convert to Christianity soon, because one never knows when the Lord will return. I also heard it said that when the Lord does return, those who are not believers will be consumed in a lake of fire.¹⁷⁶ What these uses of the idea of the Second Coming illustrate is that the narrative disjunctions between church and world, and between before and after conversion, which I discussed in Section 8.4, are related to a larger Biblical narrative in which Christians place themselves. In particular, the idea that Christ is coming soon gives an urgency to injunctions to moral transformation, and a sense of reality to the idea that church and world will soon be definitively separated.

The presence of so-called ‘false teaching’ (*jhutho shikshā*) that Kedar mentions is an increasing concern among mainstream¹⁷⁷ evangelicals in Nepal. Groups usually placed under this label include: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, and the World Mission Society Church of God (WMSCOG) (see footnote 172). I attended a meeting of Bhaktapurian church leaders on the problem of false teaching. They discussed their own experiences with ‘false’ churches and agreed on the content of a leaflet that would be distributed in churches around Bhaktapur: it listed false teaching groups, described their beliefs, and provided Bible verses contradicting their various doctrines. What particularly interested me about this meeting was seeing how the presence of groups with differing theologies serves to increase the importance of doctrine as an aspect of Christian identity. For instance, at this meeting the doctrine of the Trinity (*trieb*) was discussed at length, as this is denied by WMSCOG, which is the largest false teaching group in Bhaktapur. Subsequent to the meeting, I heard various leaders at Fellowship Church mention the Trinity during sermons; prior to the meeting, I had never heard mention of the term *trieb* in a sermon.

¹⁷⁶ See Revelation 21: 8.

¹⁷⁷ See Section 5.3.

9.5 Conclusion

Some of the problems that may arise from Kedar's emphasis on the damnation of unbelievers will be seen in Section 10.4, where a Hindu woman at a house fellowship complains about this approach, suggesting that it contradicts the Christian emphasis on love. The way the young man leading the fellowship responds to this illustrates the diversity of approaches within the leadership of Fellowship Church. Nonetheless, it should be remembered by the reader disturbed by the violent imagery of Kedar's sermon that Kedar is a much-loved pastor and an extremely successful evangelist. There is plainly something in his personality and worldview that is attractive to a significant number of people in Bhaktapur. I have suggested in this chapter that Kedar's identity as Christian is inextricably bound up with his identity as someone who follows a more rigorous moral code than society in general. At a time when there is a widespread perception of moral decline, and a sense that traditional figures of authority are exploitative and untrustworthy, such a man is likely to be attractive to many.

The ethical changes described in this chapter can, in the main, be described in terms of 'adoption'. Kedar's stringent emphasis on the primacy of the individual conscience, and his ethic of care towards those with whom he has no prior relationship, are novel in the context of Bhaktapur's traditional culture. An important theme in this chapter, as in the previous, has been ideas about separation between church and world, and between pre-conversion and post-conversion life. Leaders, like Kedar, tend to emphasise these separations more strongly than others. They also tend to be more conversant with 'normative' Christianity – that is, the Christianity of the Bible and evangelical theology – than others. Because they spend a higher proportion of their time in the church community, and because they have more opportunity to study Christian scripture and theology, it is easier for leaders, than for other believers, to give substantive reality to the idea of a profound break between Christian and non-Christian life.

Chapter 10. Youth: God and modernity

10.1 Introduction

A number of scholars have noted the ambivalence of the relationship between Christianity and modernity (for instance, Robbins et al. 2008). While Christianity is often seen as a force for modernisation in the developing world, in the contemporary West it is more often seen as an antagonist of modernity. In this chapter, I will approach Bhaktapurian Christianity not as a cause of, nor as a form of opposition to, modernity, but rather as a way of dealing with some of the ethical problems that modernisation throws up. In Bhaktapur, it is for young people that the problems of modernity present themselves most acutely. Most of the cultural practices seen as ‘modern’ (*adhunik*) – consuming Western films and pop music, using the internet and social media, ‘dating’ as a precursor to marriage – are, in Bhaktapur, associated mainly with people under 30. It is the allegedly selfish or immoral character of such activities that older Bhaktapurians are partly thinking of when they talk about moral decline. Rapidly changing norms and practices also create anxieties for young people themselves. How, they wonder, are they to approach new cultural forms which appear to have been imported from outside and yet are now becoming normative? For those among the young who are morally serious – those who have something of the moral passion seen in Kedar in the last chapter – Christianity can provide an attractive way of approaching these problems.

Mark Liechty has described the anomie¹⁷⁸ that characterises the lives of many middle-class youths in the Kathmandu Valley. He writes,

¹⁷⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines anomie as ‘absence of accepted social standards or values; the state or condition of an individual or society lacking such standards’.

One of the most common themes [in his research among middle-class youths] been the anxiety that arises from, if not a new, then a heightened sense of social “competition” – a competition often played out in the commodity realm, thereby driving more and more people deeper and deeper into the cash economy. What I have called a kind of “prestige inflation” in Kathmandu is related to a large and rapidly growing consumer field. [...] [W]hile the competition may produce “losers” [...] it does not really produce “winners”. [...] Ultimately, middle class membership is not about fixed rank but about *claiming* and *maintaining* a place in the ongoing debate. (Liechty 2003:114-5)

The anxieties of those who are heavily exposed to Western culture are intensified by the fact that while ‘a “Western” model or image of modernity is [...] the object of intense local desire [...] an ideologically weighted global politics of “development” and “progress” places Nepal [...] in the structural position of modernity’s opposite’ (Liechty 2003: xi). If anomie among middle-class youths is intense, then anomie among those who are less advantaged is likely even more so. A barometer of dissatisfaction among disenfranchised youths can be found in the radical and often violent nature of communist student groups, who have large memberships and regularly bring the whole of the Kathmandu Valley to a standstill by calling national strikes (see Snellinger 2005).

While, to my knowledge, only a limited number of anthropologists have focused specifically on the topic of ‘Christianity and youth’ (for instance, Burdick 1993: ch.5; Cole 2010; Wolseth 2011), it is possible to see in the anthropological literature that youths in various parts of the world have adopted Christianity as a way of dealing with moral problems associated with modernity. A vivid description of such strategies is given by Jenifer Cole in *Sex and Salvation*, an ethnography of young women in the city of Tamatave in Madagascar. By charting the lives, on the one hand, of young women who enter the sexual economy, and, on the other hand, of young women who convert to Pentecostalism, she shows how these contrastive paths are in fact responses to a common set of ‘modern’ problems. These problems Cole associates with ‘disembedding’, by which she means dislocation from local

social matrices and associated increases in social and consumer competition and inequality (2010: 50). Cole describes the process of Pentecostal conversion as follows:

When Tamatavians say that women suffer the most, they refer implicitly to the problems created by Tamatave's ferociously competitive social world, where those who have less to give are less firmly embedded in networks of *fitiavana* [love or affection], where those who are poor are mocked, and where everyone wants to be "considered". [...] At first, Pentecostalism attracts [women who are socially excluded] because it offers a prosperity gospel according to which Jesus Christ bestows material goods and physical well-being on those who embrace his teachings. [...] This desire to obtain resources through prayer, however, is only one moment – and perhaps not the most important – in what may turn out to be a much longer process of engagement with a religious community. Eschewing the secular economic striving that is so important to life in Tamatave, Pentecostalism offers believers alternative ways to experience their interactions with others. Ultimately, it offers a different conception of what it means to be a person and of how the person relates to her social world than the common wisdom that predominates in the aspiring, yet struggling households of Tamatave. Pentecostalism promotes an intense, and, these women say, deeply satisfying relationship with Jesus. (2010: 153-4)

Although Cole does not explicitly use the language of ethics here, it is evident that what she is writing about would be understood by her informants, at least in part, in terms of the adoption of new moral codes. As well as attempting to separate themselves from the atomising social competition that characterises their wider social environment, young Pentecostal women in Tamatave attempt to forge new types of relationships based on new ethical ideals. The relationships include not only those with community and church, but also that with Jesus.

Cole's mention of the 'intense' Pentecostal relationship with Jesus brings us to an aspect of evangelical life that neatly encapsulates the ambivalence of Christianity's relationship with modernity: ritual.¹⁷⁹ As I suggested in Section 5.3, Protestant theology tends towards the valorisation of personal experience as a route to knowledge of God. What

¹⁷⁹ Robbins (2004b: 126) notes the dearth of studies of Pentecostal/charismatic Christian ritual.

characterises evangelical ritual life, and charismatic/Pentecostal ritual life in particular, is a searching after intense experience by which the presence of God can be felt in the believer's life. This is evident both in exuberant styles of worship and in emotionally intense forms of prayer such as speaking in tongues or exorcism. Rather than viewing this ritual exuberance as a form of rebellion against a 'disenchanted' modernity (see, for instance, Anderson 1979: 223), it makes more sense to see it as drawing on a particular strand of modernity: that which Robert Bellah has termed 'expressive individualism'. With reference to expressive individualism in its European and American form, Bellah *et al.* write:

Expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized. This core, though unique, is not necessarily alien to other persons or to nature. Under certain conditions, the expressive individualist may find it possible through intuitive feeling to "merge" with other persons, with nature, or with the cosmos as a whole. Expressive individualism is related to the phenomenon of romanticism in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European and American culture. In the twentieth century, it shows affinities with the culture of psychotherapy. (Bellah et al. 2007: 333-4)

Bellah's expressive individualism is in some respects close to Taylor's concept of inwardness, though it emphasises more strongly the valorisation of emotion and feeling. For this reason, I shall use the term 'emotive inwardness' to denote the phenomenon Bellah identifies. What charismatic and Pentecostal ritual does, I suggest, is provide a forum in which emotive inwardness can be expressed, while also channelling the emotional energy produced by this ritual in distinctive ethical and ascetic directions. The dynamic that can exist between emotive forms of worship and ascetic ethics has been explored by Robbins (2004a).

As Tanya Luhrmann (2012) has shown in her ethnography of Vineyard churches in the United States,¹⁸⁰ an emphasis on intense feeling and individual experience in relationship with God can be associated with an image of God that emphasises love and mercy over judgement. Luhrmann describes how the Vineyard grew out of the American ‘Jesus People’ movement of the late 1960s, and 1970s, which was associated with the counter-culture, and had a strong following among former hippies. She identifies the Jesus People movement’s primary aim as the ‘quest for a closer, more personal God’ (ibid.: 15). The central qualities Luhrmann finds in this God are non-judgemental love and magical power:

The remarkable shift in the understanding of God and Jesus in the new paradigm churches of modern American Christianity is the shift that the counterculture made: toward a deeply human, even vulnerable God who loves us unconditionally and wants nothing more than to be our friend, our best friend, as loving and personal and responsive as a best friend in America should be; and toward a God who is so supernaturally present, it is as if he does magic and as if our friendship with him gives us magic, too. God retains his holy majesty, but he has become a companion, even a buddy to play with, and the most ordinary man can go to the corner church and learn how to hear him speak. (ibid.: 35)

Luhrmann associates the shift described here with ‘the democratization of intense spiritual experience’ (ibid.: 35); she also sees it as an attempt to manage the religious doubts created by modern cultural pluralism (ibid.: ch. 10). The ‘new paradigm’ Christianity Luhrmann describes has influenced young Christians in Nepal.

The argument of this chapter is that young Christians in Bhaktapur tend to hold to an image of God that emphasises his love over his judgement; this image of God, I argue, is related to the intense forms of worship that attract young people to churches. The characteristic image of God I found among young Christians was not so much the ‘buddy’ or

¹⁸⁰ The Vineyard movement is a charismatic evangelical denomination with more than 1,500 churches worldwide. For an anthropological examination of the emerging church movement, which shares many traits in common with the Vineyard movement, see Bielo (2011).

‘best friend’ described by Luhrmann, but rather an image of God as ‘loving father’. This image points towards two important aspects of Christianity among young people in Bhaktapur. First, it indicates the function of Christianity as a response to feelings of alienation and lostness, which arise from an absence of accepted social standards. A sense that God is close to them, and cares for them, and that the church community also does this, was a prominent theme in the conversion narratives of young people. Second, the image of loving father indicates the role of Christianity in providing moral guidance for young people facing dilemmas thrown up by modernisation, in relation to issues such as dating, work, and the use of intoxicating substances. The conversion story of Kamal, which is the focus of this chapter, illustrates both of these claims. The form of inwardness that is evident in young people’s conversion stories tends towards ‘emotive inwardness’, as defined above. The type of care that is important in youths’ stories tends to be that associated with friendship and community in a group of like-minded peers, more than that associated with healing, or care for the sick.

10.2 The youth fellowship at Fellowship Church

Many churches in Bhaktapur have a high proportion of young people in their numbers (see Appendix 2). I described in Chapter 6 the significant influence the youth fellowship at Fellowship Church has on the practice of the wider church: youths usually act as MC at church services and provide the worship band; they do much of the legwork for church programmes; they are among the most active church members in outreach and evangelism.¹⁸¹ The situation is similar in many churches around Bhaktapur. The importance of youth

¹⁸¹ The youth fellowship is for church members between roughly the ages of 14 and 30. Wednesday youth fellowship meetings are usually attended by between 20 and 40 people.

fellowships in Bhaktapurian churches reflects wider trends towards activism and associationalism among young people in Nepal, as reflected in the size of communist student groups. What marks Christian youth fellowships out from political groups is their emphasis on personal ethical change, as opposed to societal transformation.

Young people, like leaders, are less likely than the average Bhaktapurian Christian to have converted because of healing. A significant proportion of Fellowship youth fellowship members – according to the estimate of a youth leader sixty percent – come from families where at least one of the parents or older relatives is Christian. In a significant proportion of these cases, including Kamal's, the young person themselves is the one who brought their other family members to faith (see also, for instance, the story of Sushila and Ramesh in Chapter 6, where it is the daughter who pushes for the family to convert). In other cases, the youths' parents were the ones who brought them to church (in only a handful of cases were the young peoples' parents Christian at the time they were born). The remaining (according to the leader's estimate) forty percent includes those who have converted, or are exploring Christianity, but whose family are still Hindus (or in a few cases Buddhists). Among all categories of youths, other than those who came to church because of the wishes of their parents, the primary reason for conversion is likely to relate to a search for purpose and moral stability in the context of anomie in which they find themselves. Where they do relate to healing, the conversions of young people tend to relate to the healing of a parent or older family member.

Sermons at Fellowship youth fellowship meetings tend to focus on ethical problems and the basics of the Bible and Christian theology. Sermons I saw on ethical topics covered the following: dating and sexual behaviour; drugs, smoking and alcohol; appropriate consumption of media; coping with tensions in the family; dealing with the stress of exams; Christian approaches to work and money; sharing one's faith with classmates or work

colleagues. Sermons on these subjects would tend towards an ascetic approach, strongly warning against smoking or pre-marital sexual contact; they would also emphasise the importance of prayer and regular church involvement as a way to calm anxiety and mental tension. I saw sermons on theological topics including: the meaning of the cross; the story of King David; the creation of the world; the meaning of Christmas; the moral teachings of Jesus. These came from a mainstream evangelical perspective (see Section 5.3), and generally emphasised the reliability of the Bible and its relevance to everyday life. The youth fellowship periodically holds retreats or day-long study sessions, during which participants focus on a particular book of the Bible.

The worship practices of the Fellowship youth fellowship can be summarised as follows. Meetings are held from 5.30pm on Wednesdays in the main church building; they last for roughly 2 hours and are structured as follows:

The youth leaders arrive roughly an hour before the fellowship begins, in order to practise music and pray together

The fellowship begins with a greeting and opening prayer; newcomers are then asked to introduce themselves

A period of 'praise and worship' (singing accompanied by music) (roughly 30 minutes)

Collection of the offering and prayer for the offering

Notices and prayer requests

A sermon or presentation (roughly 30 minutes)

A final song

Singing of the Lord's Prayer

Closing prayer

The youths drink tea together and talk, sometimes with a snack provided; those youths who have motorcycles will then give others a lift home.

This structure roughly mirrors that of the Saturday services in Fellowship Church. An important difference between the Wednesday meetings and Saturday services is that the youth fellowship's worship tends to include more 'western' style worship songs – these songs, though they are usually in the Nepali language, closely mirror American or British Christian rock songs, in their emphasis on intense personal love for Jesus and quasi-romantic tone. The youth fellowship is governed by an elected committee, which includes a chair, a deputy chair, a secretary and a treasurer.

Many youth fellowship members focus their social lives largely around its activities, and have their closest friendships within the fellowship. In addition to the Wednesday meetings, the fellowship regularly organises larger events for the purposes of outreach or recreation, and during the Christmas season meets almost nightly in order to sing carols in various locations around Bhaktapur. Fellowship members also regularly meet informally, sometimes to pray or read the Bible in pairs or small groups; they also connect periodically during the school or working day on Facebook, which many of them have access to on their phones. I found that the youth fellowship provided an impressive level of support for its members, who were often at difficult transition points in their lives. Many youth fellowship members find it difficult to find jobs after they finish education; in consequence, a significant number have either been abroad to work or pursue further education, are planning to do this, or did so during the time of my research. The prospect of moving abroad provokes much anxiety in those who consider it. The youth fellowship provides a context for youths to express their worries about this and other issues and to receive advice from their friends. Most importantly from their perspective, there is constant group prayer both for those former members of the group who are currently abroad, and for youths currently in the fellowship. I describe in Chapter 6 my own integration into the youth fellowship's dense social life.

10.3 Ethics and the character of God: Kamal's story

Kamal was born in Bhaktapur in 1984 into the Karmacharya caste (that associated with the Newar Hindu Tantric priesthood). The Karmacharyas in Bhaktapur are grouped into various grades or levels and Kamal's is one that intermarries with the Farmer caste. He underwent Tantric initiation as a child and was from this point required to perform regular worship for various 'dangerous' deities (on the dangerous deities, see Chapter 2). During his teenage years, he felt insecure in his home life and aimless in his life more generally. He also felt a religious longing, but was unsatisfied with Hinduism as he experienced it. At the age of sixteen he went to a church service in order to see a girl he was interested in. He was deeply struck by the worship and had an intense experience of God's presence: he decided to take *grahan* on that same day. It took him some time to decide to become a full member of the church, and to make all the changes in his life that were necessary in order to do this. He was baptised in 2002 and felt he had become 'fully Christian' in his behaviour perhaps a year after this.

When Kamal was baptised his family reacted extremely negatively, and his mother refused to cook for him for a time. However, after an incident in 2003, when the family felt Kamal's prayers to have exorcised an evil spirit from their house, his parents decided to convert as well, and were baptised on 2004. Kamal's younger brother and sister were also later baptised. His father now works for Fellowship Church as an evangelist (*pracharak*), and his sister is one of the most active members of the youth fellowship. Kamal moved to Japan in 2006 in order to pursue an undergraduate degree in theology at a Christian university near to Tokyo. Since returning to Nepal in 2011 he has focused most of his time on youth ministry: at the time of my fieldwork, he was the deputy chair of the Fellowship youth fellowship and also the chair of the youth organisation for Fellowship's church network as a whole. As both of these are unpaid roles, he supports himself financially by teaching

Japanese language part-time in Bhaktapur. While he was in Japan he married a Newar Christian woman from Patan, who was studying on the same course as him; he now lives with her and his daughter in the house of his parents in central Bhaktapur, where his brother and sister also live. He is studying part-time for a Master's degree in theology and wishes eventually to work full-time in church ministry.

I reproduce below the section from my interview with Kamal where he describes his conversion.

IG: How did you become a Christian?

KK: I did not go to the Church with my own purpose. When I went to the church for the first time, it was not with an interest in becoming Christian, in the Bible, or in Jesus Christ. In fact there was a girl in the church in whom I was interested. So I went to the church to see her. When I went there it was the time of 'praise and worship' [*stuti prasamsa*]. That attracted me to the church. I saw that all the people were singing with an open heart. They were singing 'Hallelujah Hosanna'. I saw joy and peace on their faces. That was what impressed me. I got a feeling of a different kind of love [*chhutai prakār yāgu patti prem*] emerging in my heart, it may have happened to because of a 'supernatural power' [*supernatural power khang dhāyegulā*].¹⁸² I received a feeling in my heart that someone is taking care of me. In fact, no one came to talk to me at that time, but I had had those feelings already. Because of that happiness and joy, I did not feel lonely.

In my family my parents used to have fights all the time, so there was no peace or joy in my house. My grandfather and uncle used to have fights all the time.¹⁸³ We were Hindus, so we had to do a lot of different types of worship all the time. We used to have fights during feasts at the time of festivals. There are many uncomfortable things in the family. I used to have a feeling that there is not real love and care in this world. [...]

I used to ask myself why was I born in this world, what was the cause of my birth, whether God existed in reality or not, if the concepts of heaven and hell were true or not, what heaven and

¹⁸² Kamal uses English here: he speaks excellent English, and intersperses his conversation with English words and phrases. Although this interview was conducted mainly in Newari, Kamal and I would often converse in English.

¹⁸³ We see here the theme of social conflict as a prelude to conversion, which emerged also in the stories of Vishnu Prasad and Daya Laxmi.

hell were like.¹⁸⁴ I was always followed by so many questions. And we did not have any happiness or peace in the family. And I was wondering about the gods and goddesses, and about heaven and hell. It is said there are 330 million gods and goddesses, but we only had a population of 28 million in the country at that time. I was wondering how there could be only a 28 million population, but 330 million gods. [...]

I used to think that if I did not know all of these 330 million gods then what was the use of being a Hindu? If you try to do even a small worship [*pujā*] for each of these 330 million gods, and if you spent one second for each one, you would need 330 million seconds and there would not be enough time in your whole life. This is why people are choosing which gods and goddesses to worship. It is like when you act respectfully towards someone, hoping that they will help you in the future. It is like acting with sycophancy [*cākari*] towards someone. So such questions were roaming around my heart and mind all the time.

I was wondering what happens after someone's death. And there was no peace in my mind because of the quarrels of my parents. When they began to fight my heart started to beat faster and faster. In their fights sometimes they would smash glasses and bottles. During their fights I used to go outside the house and stay in the public porch [*phalcā*] for hours, and return home after they were quiet.

But when I went to the church, I found that people are singing a song called 'Jesus Christ is the Lord of All [Nep.: *sabkā prabhu*], Only One God [Nep.: *ek matra parmashwor*]' . They said 'only one God', and this shocked my mind instantly. 'Only one God.' Oh! It shocked my mind because I was looking for only one God and here was the only one God.

In fact, I was very fond of the Hindu religion and I used to go to worship carrying a worship plate.¹⁸⁵ We were special devotees of Barahi Ajima [one of the 'dangerous' goddesses]; we used to have a regular worshipping duty to that goddess because we are the *achāju* [Karmacharya priests] of that goddess. We have to have the sacred thread [*jonā*] because we are *achāju*. And we had many rituals to do before having breakfast every day. But I saw that in Christianity things are easier [*āphu*] because there is only one God. There are many gods and goddesses in Hinduism. One of my maternal uncles was sick with epilepsy, and we were asked to go and worship in a temple that we had never heard of for him. We barely managed to reach the temple to worship there. In Hinduism there are many things like this. In Hinduism there are many deities, so if we

¹⁸⁴ As with Kedar, desires salvation, ethical change, and relationship with God appear prominently as motivations for conversion; a desire for healing does not figure.

¹⁸⁵ As I have noted, pious Hindus seem more likely to convert to Christianity than those who are not pious.

worship one, there is a risk that another God may be angry [*tang chāi*] with us. How can we pacify and please all of them?¹⁸⁶

I heard them singing ‘let’s lift up Jesus the King’ [Nep.: *uchālaun yeshu rājālāi*]. In Hinduism we never say any god or goddess is the king. This was the verse that inspired me towards Jesus. During my time in the church I felt like I had got someone who will care for and love me and I started to forget the feeling of loneliness. All my worries, disturbed heart, and loneliness were gone all of sudden, like those things were removed from my body. I felt that my whole body was being filled with joy and happiness. I felt like my heart became bigger and bigger, filling with a joy that no one could buy for millions of dollars [*karodang dollar nyāyegu madaigu patti*].¹⁸⁷ I had never had such a moment of joy in my life before. I felt like someone had hugged me with love [*preman*g].

But I was not thinking I was going to become a Christian that day; I did not understand anything about it. But on that very day I took *grahan*, and gained a great love for Jesus Christ. When the worship was over I met with XX [a youth leader] in the church. And he told me the Four Spiritual Laws [*char ātmik niyam*]¹⁸⁸ and invited me to take *grahan*. That was the first time I had come to church, and I took *grahan* on that very day. I did not have to think hard before I took *grahan* – I had found exactly what I had been looking for my whole life.

But even after taking *grahan*, I lived in the same way that I had before for about two years. I was going to church, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, I was living life as normal. I used to go around with my old friends and smoke cigarettes. At the same time I was celebrating Good Friday. [...] I used to smoke when there was a quarrel in my family or when I had some tension over relations with girlfriends [Laughs]. [...]

SNP: The people in church didn’t say that you shouldn’t do this?

KK: Well, they kept saying and I kept acting as before [laughs]. In the end we reach a point where we have to think about whether our activities will glorify [*mahimā yaye*] Jesus Christ or not, and then we will start to correct ourselves. In the past, I used to gather with all my friends on a Friday, and some people would buy meat, some would buy alcohol, and I used to buy cigarettes for people.

SNP: Do you still have any connection with those friends?

¹⁸⁶ The fact that the Karmacharya priests are particularly connected with the worship of the ‘dangerous’ deities may be linked with Kamal’s sense of insecurity in relation to the Hindu gods.

¹⁸⁷ In a number of the narratives I collected, converts expressed the idea of the abundance of God’s grace by saying that their newfound happiness in God was greater than anything that could be bought with money.

¹⁸⁸ See footnote 92.

KK: Not with most of them.

SNP: Did any of them come to church?

KK: None at all. I have tried my best but none of them would come. Anyway, later on I started to think about what it would do to the reputation of Jesus Christ if I smoked cigarettes. I decided that I should give up for the glory of Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁹ When I started to think in that way my life turned around completely, and I started to improve my habits. I began to think that there was someone who would thank me if I changed my life. [...] I took *grahan* in 2000 AD and I was baptised in 2002 AD. From 2003 AD I completely gave up smoking. [...]

IG: What are the most important differences between Hinduism and Christianity?

KK: When I was still Hindu I used to go to worship to the Barahi temple. That was the spiritual [*adhyātmik*] side, but the ‘practical’ [*practical*] side of our lives was very different. In Hinduism there is no inter-relation between spiritual life and practical life [*adhyātmik life wo practical life chāhin inter-related chāhin maru*]. Back then I used to go to the Osho and Om Shanti groups.¹⁹⁰ I was desperately looking for somewhere that I could get joy and peace. So I searched in many places. But Osho and Om Shanti did not seem practical. I found that they talked about spiritual life but there was no practicality. [...]

When I came to church and listened to the Ten Commandments that was very important for me. [...] I found it very logical to have the rule of resting on the seventh day, after working for six days. In Hinduism there is no rule for resting like this. Oh! So this was the reason for fights and lack of peace in my family. My father was running after money all the time and my mother was always busy in the fields, there was no rest at all. [...] So I have to thank God for making a day of rest so that the family can spend time together and develop love and care for each other. And when we have a house fellowship in our family and ask for prayer requests it means that we can all know and understand what the needs and problems of the other people are. And so we become closer to each other [*alay milāp wola*]. When we become closer with each other we gain peace [*shānti*].

And there are teachings about not doing things against others. The most impressive saying for me in the commandments is not to desire your neighbour’s wife.¹⁹¹ That was relevant to me. [...] When I was young and still a Hindu my mother used to tell me not to ‘spoil’ [*senke*] women. I

¹⁸⁹ Kamal’s emphasis on the glory of God may reflect his interest in Reformed (that is, Calvinist) theology. He is an aficionado of the prominent American Reformed pastor John Piper, and follows Piper’s writings and sermons via the internet.

¹⁹⁰ Vishnu Prasad also had experience in Hindu new religious movements prior to conversion.

¹⁹¹ I found that youth fellowships in Bhaktapurian churches would often emphasise Christian teachings on marriage and sexual ethics, as this is an area in which young people encounter many temptations.

did not understand this at the time. But now I am able to understand this. So the commandment has given me peace.

IG: How do you know that the Christian God is real and true and the Hindu gods are not? What proof is there?

KK: I have to be very careful in answering this question. There is no absolute ‘yes’ or ‘no’. According to the Bible, this is the only God. It is written that God was, is, and will be. I think the Hindu gods and goddesses might be ones who were expelled by Jesus Christ. Because they went against Christ they became demons.¹⁹² The Hindu gods have the power to bring us prosperity, but they have the ‘power’ to harm us too [*syengkegu power da*]. [...]

But we have just one God and he will only do good for us. Our minds are affected by the other gods who keep us in the dark [*andhakāra*] and prevent us from knowing the real God. These gods ‘brainwash’ us. This is why people prefer untrue things to the truth. The Hindu gods want to keep us in the dark so we will do bad things, and won’t be able to do good things. [...] For example, people go to the *dyomās* in order to get help to harm other people. I have found out that the Hindu gods I used to believe in are tricky. They don’t mind doing fraud. [...] They are self-proclaimed gods, but not real gods. I found holiness [*pabitrātā*] in Jesus but not among the Hindu gods. So the difference between these two is holiness. I chose the God who has holiness.

The various strands of Kamal’s narrative are linked together by a certain understanding of the character of God, which Kamal comes to almost as soon as he comes into contact with Christianity. When I ask him how he became a Christian, Kamal’s describes his experience of worship the first time he visited church. He was attracted by the people ‘singing with an open heart [with] joy and peace on their faces.’ This sense of social warmth quickly transforms into an intense experience of God’s love: ‘I [...] got a feeling of love emerging in my heart [...] and I received the feeling in my heart that someone is taking care of me.’ This experience occurs before Kamal had actually talked to anyone in the church. The understanding of God that Kamal comes to at this moment – as a kind of loving father who is both trustworthy and in control – is, I suggest, the key to interpreting the whole process of his

¹⁹² See Ezekiel 28: 11-19 and Isaiah 14: 3-23.

conversion. This new understanding of God provides what Kamal sees as a solution both to the social problems faces – a dysfunctional family and a wayward group of friends – and also to his lack of spiritual and intellectual satisfaction with Hinduism.

The principal actor in Kamal’s narrative, as he tells it, is not Kamal but God himself. Before coming to church Kamal is lost and indecisive: he is ‘always followed by many questions’ and wonders about the nature of the gods, the meaning of worship, and what happens after death. He feels his relationship with the Hindu gods leaves him disempowered: he is not able to perform the necessary worship for each one of them, lacking the time, and does not feel that he can trust their response to his worship, as they may be jealous of his devotion to other gods. His relationship with the gods thus becomes an outward show of deference, masking insecurity and fear; this is described with the Nepali word *cākari*, meaning sycophancy shown to social superiors in the hope of gaining favour. Kamal similarly lacks agency in his family life, and has no option but to hang around outside the house while his parents are quarrelling. Again, this situation inspires fear, with his heart ‘starting to beat faster and faster’; again, there is a threat of violence, with glasses and bottles being smashed. Kamal’s eventual rejection of deference both in his religious life and in his family can be related to the broader decline of defence identified in Section 3.3.

Even when he first comes to church, Kamal is not taking decisive action to change his life, but rather responding to immediate circumstances, following a girl he has an interest in. It is as though when he comes to church, God takes hold of Kamal in spite or regardless of Kamal’s own desires and plans: Kamal says that the feelings when he came to church may have been caused by ‘a supernatural power’. After he begins to feel God’s presence, Kamal’s language no longer expresses insecurity or indecisiveness, but rather the sense that someone else – God – is acting through him, and directing his emotional states. Rather than saying ‘I felt someone was taking care of me’ he says ‘I received a feeling [...] that someone is taking

care of me'; rather than saying 'my feelings of worry, disturbance and loneliness stopped' he says that these feelings were 'removed from my body'. These forms of words suggest that God is the one directing how Kamal feels. Throughout his account of the episode, Kamal mentions the presence of a 'someone', who is clearly meant to be God. He feels that 'someone is taking care of me', that there is 'someone who will love and care for me' and that 'someone had hugged me with love and care'. This someone is in control of what is happening, and Kamal joyfully accepts the direction of this other.

What is it that leads Kamal to accept the direction of this new God who enters his life unexpectedly? It seems, at the moment of conversion, to be an idea: the idea of God's oneness, and of his kingship over all. This idea strikes Kamal profoundly, because it seems to resolve the insecurities and uncertainties he had been feeling before he came to church: about the variousness and unreliability of the Hindu pantheon, about his powerlessness and vulnerability within his family, about his inability to direct his own life along a path he found satisfying. Kamal says that hearing the phrase 'only one God' 'shocked my mind because I had been looking for only one God and here was the only one God'; hearing the phrase 'let's lift up Jesus the king' 'inspired me towards Jesus' because 'in Hinduism we never say any god or goddess is the king'. Thus, Kamal's situation before he comes to church makes him ready to hear something new, and the particular verses he hears being sung speak directly to the things that had been troubling him; he then begins to feel, as though by a volition not his own, the power of very God he has just heard about working in his life, and transforming his emotional state.

What is the nature of the divine kingship that so moves Kamal? First, as we learn from his comparison of the Christian and Hindu deities, it is a kingship of sovereignty over the spiritual world. All other supernatural beings are under the power of Christ, and indeed owe their present position in the world to his actions: these beings are, Kamal says, the gods

and goddesses who were ‘expelled by Jesus’ for their rebellion against him in heaven. Second, it is a kingship of sovereignty over the soul of the believer: as we have seen, when Kamal comes to church it is as though God takes control of his life, determining his inclinations and emotional states. Third, it is a kingship that is holy (*pabitra*) and loving (*premi*). This quality of holiness is particularly important for our understanding of how the Christian God is understood in relation to other divinities.¹⁹³ As Kamal articulates it, the quality of holiness is the crucial thing that distinguishes the Christian from the Hindu gods: ‘I chose the god who has holiness’, he says.

For Kamal, God’s holiness consists in a number of things. First, it consists in his unwillingness to harm human beings: whereas the Hindu gods ‘have the power to harm us’ the Christian God ‘will only do good for us’. It is not clear whether Kamal means that the Christian God will never harm anyone, or whether he means simply that the Christian God will never harm Christians. The latter seems more likely, as sermons in Nepali churches often refer to the damnation of unbelievers. What Kamal is suggesting, like both Vishnu Prasad in Chapter 7 and Daya Laxmi in Chapter 8, is that a believer in Christ enjoys a higher level of security than a Hindu, who can never be sure whether one of the gods he follows may turn on him. Second, and relatedly, God’s holiness consists in his relationship to the truth. Whereas the other gods ‘keep us in the dark’, the ‘real God’ represents the ‘truth’. It is for this reason that the Hindu gods are prepared to ‘trick’ people, and may be activated by people with bad intentions in order to harm others. The Christian God, on the other hand, operates according to a code that is transparent and that cannot be manipulated by those who wish to harm others: he is separate from and above the realm of evil spirits in a way that the Hindu gods are not.

¹⁹³ See also footnote 115.

The Nepali word for holiness – *pabitratā* – has some resonances in its local context that might not be immediately apparent to the Western reader. Specifically, it is bound up with notions of purity (*shuddhata*), which are associated particularly with eating and drinking habits, and with sexual conduct and abstinence. I heard it said several times that Christ was more holy than the Hindu gods because he never married or engaged in sexual activity. This can be linked with the traditional association between sexual renunciation and holiness, as well as religious power, in Hindu culture (see Bennett 1983; Alter 1992; Weber 1948: 271-2). It also relates to more general changes in attitudes towards bodily practices and divinity that Christian conversion promotes, which tend in the direction of asceticism.

This shift may be illustrated with reference to an experience I had during Gatha Mugah, one of the most striking days in Hindu Bhaktapur's festival year. During this festival a large straw figure, representing a demon who is said to have troubled the city, is constructed in each of Bhaktapur's localities and transported to a place outside the city, where it is burned. The figure is constructed to include a grotesquely large penis (represented by a piece of wood), which has a white thread representing semen emerging from it. As the figure is carried, it is surrounded by crowds of people who jeer and swear at it, shouting '*pebho, pebho,*' which may be translated as 'fuck, fuck'. At the time of this festival I was sitting in my room, which overlooked the square where the locality's figure was constructed, with a local Christian man, a university student in his early 20s. He was obviously embarrassed by what was happening, and apologised to me for it, assuming that I would be offended by the people's behaviour, which he described, in English, as 'uncivilised'. When I asked him about the event at a later date, he did not want to say much, but did exclaim, referring to the demon, 'what kind of a god is this?' He seemed to be suggesting that the demon was an immoral and repulsive figure, and that the behaviour it provoked in the local people mirrored these qualities.

Kamal's description of his struggle change to his behaviour before (and for a short time after) his baptism, and of the changes that took place in his family life, should be viewed in the context of ideas about the holiness of God. Kamal's eventual decision to disengage from his group of friends who smoke, drink, and chase after girls is prompted by the feeling that continuing in his bad behaviour would do damage to 'the reputation of Jesus Christ'. What is being suggested is that the moral purity of Christ should be reflected in the moral purity of his followers – otherwise people will mistake the true nature of Christ. Similarly, Kamal's description of improvements in his family life subsequent to the family's conversion attributes greater care and closeness in the family to the rules laid down in the Ten Commandments. The ethical laws of the Christian God are seen to be conducive to the flourishing of family life. When Kamal says there is a connection between 'practical' and 'spiritual' life in Christianity that is lacking in Hinduism, he seems to mean something close to 'ethical' by the word 'practical'.

An aspect of Kamal's story echoed in many of the narratives I collected from young people is his description of an intense experience during worship as a precipitating factor in conversion. Whereas healing stories (as with Vishnu Prasad and Daya Laxmi) tend to involve a gradual integration into the church community, the conversion stories of young people were more likely to include a dramatic moment of conversion.¹⁹⁴ Subsequent to conversion, also, worship, and in particular worship music, figure prominently in the identity and practice of young Christians. A number of young Christians told me that what most struck them on their first time in church was that the music was 'modern',¹⁹⁵ and emotionally compelling. Much of the practice of the Fellowship youth fellowship is oriented towards the production and practice of Christian rock-style worship music: the worship band meet regularly to practise;

¹⁹⁴ Where healing stories do involve a dramatic conversion moment this tends to be an exorcism, as in the story of Ram Devi in Appendix 4.

¹⁹⁵ The English word 'modern' would often be used in this context.

several members of the fellowship compose their own worship songs; outreach events tend to be focused on worship music. Youth fellowship members are part of a wider Christian youth culture in the Kathmandu Valley, which is focused in significant part on various forms of cultural production: especially music, film-making,¹⁹⁶ and the organisation of cultural variety shows.

I attended one cultural variety show in a church on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley, which my friends from Fellowship were invited to. Youths from various churches had prepared performances that were watched with enthusiasm by an audience of several hundred. Performances included songs, dances, comedy skits, and short dramatic sketches. One performance, in particular, provoked comment among the youths I was with, comment which illustrates some of the tensions and paradoxes in the cultural lives of young Christians. A girl in her late teens did a solo dance performance to the accompaniment of a Christian pop song; the song was about love for Jesus, and some of the dance moves were rather provocative. While the younger members of the group I was with seemed to enjoy the performance, some of the older youths – the leaders – were critical of it. One called it ‘a little inappropriate’ (*bacha milay majyu*). It seemed to me that what the performance had brought to the fore, in a way that was too close for comfort, a latent theme in the cultural lives of young Christians. This is that romantic or quasi-romantic feelings are directed towards Jesus in the context of emotionally intense forms of worship (especially in worship songs), allowing young people an outlet for their passions that facilitates adherence to relatively ascetic moral standards in everyday life.¹⁹⁷ However, when these romantic feelings seem to become explicitly sexual, as in the dance performance, more theologically attuned youths

¹⁹⁶ There is a budding Christian film industry in Nepal, which, like Christian rock, is targeted primarily at young people. Many of these films deal dramatically with the problems faced by young people when they convert and their families do not. Christian film production is based mainly in Kathmandu and Patan.

¹⁹⁷ E.P. Thompson (1968: ch. 11) makes a parallel argument with relation to Methodists in 18th and 19th century England.

immediately recognise this as inappropriate. Thus father-like metaphors for God, rather than images that emphasise romantic attachment, remain normative.

10.4 God as loving father: a house fellowship

Kamal's understanding of God as a loving father – and some of the ways this is distinctive in the context of Fellowship Church as a whole – can be clarified with reference to a sermon he gave to a house fellowship two days before Valentine's Day 2013. The sermon used the occasion of Valentine's Day – which, like Christmas, is a well-known festival among Christians and non-Christians alike in Nepal – to preach on the subject of God's love (*prem*). The Biblical text for the sermon was 1 John 4: 7-21. This well-known passage begins with the exhortation 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.' It also includes the observations that 'God is love' and that 'we love Him because He first loved us.' Kamal began the sermon by outlining the history of Valentine's Day and arguing that its real meaning is very different from that commonly ascribed to it in Nepal and elsewhere. Whereas people today use Valentine's Day as an opportunity for dating and sexual indulgence, he said, the real meaning of Valentine's Day is self-sacrificing love. He described how Saint Valentine died so that Christians in the Roman Empire could marry, in imitation of Christ dying on the cross for humankind.

At the end of his sermon Kamal explained God's love in terms of the love of a father for his children. His point was that this was a deeply caring but also a jealous love – no father, he said, would be happy to see his child address another person as 'daddy' – and the consequence of this is that people should not worship any deity other than the Christian God. This line of argument provoked an interesting response from a Hindu woman in the audience. She asked why, if God loves humankind and Christians are called to love others, Christians

often tell non-Christians that they will go to hell if they do not convert, while Christians themselves will go to heaven. She challenged Kamal to produce evidence that this was the case, saying ‘no one here has gone to either heaven or hell.’ Kamal’s response to this, and the Hindu woman’s response to Kamal’s response, were revealing in a number of ways. I reproduce the exchange below:¹⁹⁸

KK: I want to highlight that we have not loved the God who loves us. We are not worshipping God or praying him, instead, we are worshipping stones, dogs, snakes, trees, and many other things as well. We have forgotten who the creator is of all those things. Isn’t it so that we are concentrating on created objects but not on the creator of the objects?¹⁹⁹ We are calling out ‘Oh Lord! Oh God!’ and worshipping them. It is like your sons and daughters are calling out ‘Daddy!’ or ‘Mummy!’ to others than yourself. Well, I have one daughter. It is like my daughter calling strangers ‘Daddy’. How would you feel in this situation?

Christian Woman: It would make my heart feel uneasy [*nuga machine*].

KK: Yes! This would hurt us right to our core heart. We are those who are worshipping other gods. In such a situation we would blame our children, saying their minds are corrupted. This sort of behaviour is sin [*pāp*]. [...] In a foreign country there is no feeling of love with others but there is a great feeling of love in our society – that is why I returned from Japan, where I spent five years. There is plenty of money, but not love. Jesus Christ came in this world to play a role as a bridge to rescue people from sins and take them to heaven.

Hindu Woman: If a Christian person talks to us in this way I never get tired of listening to it. But when people talk to us in a satirical and pinching [*ghochayeyanga nyengkibalaye*] way I do not like to listen to it. When they try to satirise or pinch us Hindus I do not like it.

KK: Yes, Yes, I understand.

Hindu Woman: You are all fully believers [Christians], aren’t you? But for those who are heading towards becoming a believer, we are threatened that if we don’t become a believer we will go straight to hell [*narka*].²⁰⁰ They even say to us that there is no way to avoid spending life

¹⁹⁸ Kamal’s sermon, and the subsequent discussion, were in Newari. I regularly attended house fellowships, and often, with permission, recorded them.

¹⁹⁹ See Romans 1: 22-5.

²⁰⁰ Most Protestant Christians in Nepal hold to the belief that all who have not explicitly recognised Christ will go to hell after death. When speaking about non-Christian family members who have died, however, it is sometimes said that these people may have recognised Christ in their hearts before death without making a verbal signal of this.

in hell if we don't become a believer. They say that we definitely go to hell. It is not right to talk in this way [*dhāye majyu ka*].

KK: Yes, Yes.

Hindu Woman: If they had not talked to us in that way and had convinced us in this loving way then we would start to become enthusiastic towards Christianity. From the very beginning they put the argument of hell. The people who try to convince us to come to Christianity put very first the argument of hell. There is no one here who has gone to either hell or heaven [*narkaye wonga womhā wo mawānsing sworgaye wong womhā thānā sung maru ni*]; there is no evidence [*pramānit maru ni*]. What I mean is that no one should try to convince anyone in this way; that is all I want to say.

KK: Yes! Yes! You are extremely right. The chapter I have chosen today is very much related to this. But you have said that there is no evidence that anyone goes to heaven.

Hindu Woman: Yes! I have said so.

KK: But we have evidence that one person has gone to heaven. If there was no evidence then there wouldn't be any Christians in the world. 2000 years ago a person named Jesus Christ was killed. The killers were the people from Rome. Jesus Christ was hanged and killed. He was buried for three days and three nights. And after three days he became alive again. After becoming alive he went to heaven. And we believers have strong a strong belief that he is still always with us all the time. That is why we always pray in the name of Jesus Christ and say that he is the living God [*jibit parameshwor*].

Regarding the threat you received from a believer it is not from Jesus Christ but from the believer who made it. Jesus never brings anyone to church by threatening them. Going to church and being a Christian is like a training or course for achieving heaven. But all those who go to church will not reach heaven. Those who have no love or faith or truth won't reach heaven.

Whenever we go around the Hindu temples we see that people are offering the *panchabali* [five offerings] sacrifice. First the goat, then the buffalo, then the duck, then the egg. Why is this sort of sacrifice being offered? Because they offer it instead of a person's own sacrifice. They believe that once a buffalo is sacrificed then our sins will be flushed out through the blood of the buffalo. That buffalo died for us; that buffalo died for us instead of us dying ourselves [...]. In fact we ourselves should have died for our sins, but Jesus Christ died in replacement of us. That is how Jesus has loved us before we loved Him. That is why we have to love to all people as much as possible.

But you may wonder how we can love our enemies? We can do so by sacrificing your interest for them and tolerating whatever comes from them. And another way is to pray for them. If they are the people of Jesus then Jesus will work on them and they will become better but if they are not the people of the God then they never become better.

Hindu Woman: Thanks be to the Lord! [*prabhu yātā dhanyabād*]. Millions and millions of thanks! Five years ago I said that I would recognise God [*parmeshwor*]. I had a great desire to do that, and I used to come to church often, but I was not able to go ahead due to my family's disagreements. My husband's brothers and their wives blamed me that I planned to go to church in order to escape religious duties after I had finished the marriage of my daughter.²⁰¹ So it made me uncomfortable towards the church. I am still planning to come to the church. It has been five years since I believed in my heart in God. [...] I am not able to come to the church but I have belief [*biswas*] in my heart. Whenever I go out of the house, I always pray and give thanks to God. So I wish that I could go to God and recognise him. [...] I wish that God would convince them [her family] so that they would agree for me to come.

It has been five years since I began to persuade my family to come to church, and it seems as if they are a little convinced [...] and they may come soon. It has been five years since they stopped sacrificing animals and birds inside the house at my request. [...] It was my family's turn to give the *guthi* [clan funeral association] feast so I made a request to the members of the *guthi* to stop the sacrifice of a he-goat. I said to them that if they sacrifice the goat I am not going to prepare the worshipping plate [to worship the *guthi* god]. I am the one who is obliged to prepare the worship plate. After my decision the members of the *guthi* organised three or four meetings. That problem is solved and finished. From my turn onwards the members of the *guthi* stopped sacrificing he-goats. Now they are only using an egg instead of sacrificing a goat. In this way the family have gradually been coming to know God in their minds and hearts. I hope that they will recognise God as soon as possible. And I hope that they will be able to go forward towards God. Thanks be to God.

Christian Woman: I also hope that your wish comes true as soon as possible.

The first thing to note about this exchange is that Kamal responds to the Hindu woman's challenge with a narrative. Before the women interjects, Kamal has been telling a

²⁰¹ This is an accusation that is often levelled at Christian converts by their families: that they are converting in order to avoid their religious duties – in other words, for an easy life.

story about his own life – how he returned from Japan because he felt no love there. The woman’s challenge itself appeals to the question of experience: there is no evidence for the Christian view of heaven and hell, she says, because ‘no one here has gone to either heaven or hell.’ Kamal takes her up on this point, saying that there is someone ‘here’ who has been to heaven: this is in fact Jesus. After referring to the death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven of Jesus, Kamal says: ‘we believers have strong a strong belief that he is still always with us all the time. That is why we always pray in the name of Jesus Christ and say that he is the living God.’ Kamal’s implicit argument is this: it is by integrating their own lives into the story of the life of Jesus that Christians come to know the truth of what Jesus teaches; during prayer Christians experience the living presence of God in such a way that they become assured of the truth of Christian teachings. I have highlighted in other chapters how conversion stories are an important means of evangelism for Christians in Bhaktapur. Here, we see Kamal attempting to evangelise someone with reference to a story about himself integrated into a story about Jesus.

The second notable thing about the exchange is the connection between Kamal’s understanding of God as a loving father and the idea of Jesus as a sacrificial substitute for humanity. I noted in Chapter 7 how Vishnu Prasad draws a parallel between the suffering of Jesus and the sufferings of Christians in Nepal: here, again, we see the notion of Jesus as a co-sufferer – one who shares the suffering of humanity. Kamal expresses this idea of co-suffering when he compares the places of sacrifice in Hinduism and Christianity, saying: ‘[Hindus] believe that once a buffalo is sacrificed, our sins will be flushed out through the blood of the buffalo. [...] In fact, we ourselves should have died for our sins, but Jesus Christ died in replacement of us. That is how Jesus has loved us before we loved Him.’ Here Kamal extends his image of God as a loving father from the jealousy of a father (with his reference to children calling non-fathers ‘daddy’) to the self-sacrifice of a father: the father as one who

cares so much for his children that he is prepared to lay down his own life for them. At the beginning of the sermon, in a passage that I did not quote in the extract above, Kamal said that the meaning of Valentine's Day is that 'a person died for his love.' This captures something important in Kamal's idea of God as loving father: it is an idea that encompasses the notion of self-gift, where a person empties themselves of their own concerns and takes on those of another, thereby becoming intimate with another's deepest needs. This is close to the concept of care as acknowledgement of the other explored in Section 1.4.

A fascinating thing about the exchange is the change in attitude that occurs on the part of the Hindu woman. Whereas she starts by criticising Kamal and other Christians in strong terms, she ends by thanking God (apparently, the Christian God), and by describing her own desire to become a Christian, which she has had for more than five years. The thing that seems to provoke her change of heart is Kamal's interpretation of the respective meanings of sacrifice in Hinduism and Christianity. In her final monologue, the woman describes her struggle with her family over her desire to become a Christian in terms of a struggle over the issue of animal sacrifice. She describes how she convinced her family to stop performing animal sacrifices in their house, and how she convinced the members of her clan funeral association to stop sacrificing a goat at their feasts. She interprets these developments as indicating increasing sympathy towards Christianity: 'in this way,' she says, 'the family have gradually been coming to know God in their minds and hearts.'

It is significant that the woman took her stand on the issue of sacrifice, rather than on that of worshipping Hindu gods in general. She implies that she still in fact conducts some worship to Hindu gods, mentioning that she is responsible for preparing the worship plate for the funeral association feast. This may indicate a number of things. First, it may indicate that she senses that the issue of sacrifice is at the core of what distinguishes the character of the Christian God from that of some the Hindu deities. I noted in Chapter 2 how sacrifice is

required to feed the ‘dangerous deities’, and to give them power. The approach of the Christian God to sacrifice, as Kamal interprets it, is an exact inversion of this: rather than requiring the sacrifice of others to survive, the Christian God sacrifices himself so that others may survive.

Second, and relatedly, it may indicate that the woman has been influenced by discomfort over the morality of sacrifice that extends beyond Christians in Bhaktapur. We saw in Chapter 2 that Hindus in Bhaktapur often feel uncomfortable over the morality of sacrifice, and that members of groups such as ISKCON abjure sacrifice completely, replacing, like this woman’s funeral association, non-meat substances for meat in Hindu rituals. Perhaps the woman felt that giving up sacrifice was a realistic starting point in the process of Christianizing her family, because it was something that not only Christians but also Hindus who are influenced by ISKCON and Om Shanti do.

The broader significance of the exchange between Kamal and the Hindu woman is as an illustration of the divide that sometimes separates younger and older Christians in Bhaktapur. This relates to both theology and methods of evangelism. As I illustrated with reference to Kamal in the previous section, young Christians tend to emphasise the love of God over his judgement. Among older Bhaktapurian Christians, and particularly among older leaders, God’s judgement tends to loom larger: this is evident in Kedar’s sermon in Section 9.4, and also in the mention the Hindu woman makes of people who threatened her with the prospect of hell. Kamal says: ‘regarding the threat you received from a believer, it is not from Jesus Christ but from the believer who made it’. Here, he is implicitly criticising those in his church who evangelise in a threatening way.

Although youth fellowships tend to promote a relatively ascetic ethics, I found that younger church leaders do tend to be more flexible in their ethical teachings than their elders.

For instance, on the question of to what extent Christians may participate in Hindu feasts and festivals, differences tend to fall along generational lines. A Bhaktapurian friend of mine who is completing a course at one of the most prestigious theological colleges in Patan described to me how he was set an essay on the topic of ‘Christianity and Hindu Festivals’. In his paper, my friend argued that the approach of many Nepali pastors to Hindu feasts and festivals – advising church members not to attend at all – is too strict,²⁰² as attending these events will help to maintain good relations with family members and may provide opportunities for evangelism. He is careful to note, though, that Christians should not participate in idol worship, or eat meat sacrificed to idols. My friend is in his early 30s and is employed full-time by a medium-sized church. His views seem to me to be representative of younger Christian leaders in the Kathmandu Valley: I would predict that the approach he advocates will become more influential in the future.

10.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have emphasised the importance, for young people, of a particular image of God: ‘God as loving father’. I have explored the role this image of God plays in combatting feelings of loneliness and anomie, and also in promoting the adoption of new ethical codes. I have highlighted the importance of worship music, and have noted some inter-generational shifts in theological emphasis and evangelistic practice. In some ways, the growth of Christianity among young people in Bhaktapur is illustrative of wider religious trends. Other new religious movements, which emphasise ethics over tradition and ritual, and promote emotionally intense forms of worship, such as ISKCON, Om Shanti, and Theravada Buddhism, are also particularly attractive to the younger and more educated (see Toffin 2013:

²⁰² For the range of pastoral views on this topic, see Appendix 2.

ch.5). Nonetheless, in Bhaktapur at least, the scale of Christian youth culture dwarfs the scale of young people's participation in these other new religious movements. I would speculate that part of the attraction of Christianity for youths is the radicalness of the break with traditional culture it entails. Although images of God comparable to those found among young Christians are present in other new religious movements,²⁰³ what is unique about Christianity, in the Bhaktapurian context, is the way it demands exclusive allegiance to a single God, and the rejection of all others. Thus, young people converting to Christianity have a sense of making a profound break with their pre-conversion lives – if they have been dissatisfied with these lives, such a break will be attractive. Throughout this chapter, I have emphasised the significance of the differences between the images of God dominant among young Christians and those dominant in traditional Bhaktapurian Hinduism: these differences are such that the shift from one set of images to another can be described in terms of 'adoption'.

²⁰³ For instance, in the benevolent images of Krishna emphasised by ISKCON.

Conclusion. Theology, narrative, and Christian difference

James Laidlaw writes that the anthropology of ethics should not be seen as a new sub-discipline of anthropology, but rather as ‘an integral dimension of the anthropological enterprise as such’ (2014a: 2). Throughout the thesis I have attempted to integrate a concern for ethics – ‘questions of the rightness and wrongness of actions, of what we owe to each other, of what kind of persons we think we are or aspire to be’ (ibid.: 1) – into my ethnography of a particular Christian community. I have argued that the distinctive ethical orientations of churches in Bhaktapur have played a central role in the recent upsurge of Christian conversion in the city. These ethical orientations, I have suggested, are particularly distinctive in two respects. First, they display a tendency towards inwardness, which I define as an attentiveness towards and ethical prioritisation of inner experience. Second, they place great emphasis on the necessity of caring for others: this care is understood to extend beyond traditional boundaries of family and community, and is practised mainly through social presence and prayer. What brings these two values together is a focus on suffering: both as a valuable experience, which may draw the individual to God, and as an intolerable burden, which it is the duty of Christians to relieve. This focus on suffering relates both to the core symbols and doctrines of Christianity – most importantly, to the defeat of evil by Jesus on the cross– and to the local context, which is characterised by a cultural unsettlement related to collapsing norms of deference and familial duty. I explicated the concepts of cultural unsettlement, inwardness, and care, and their relationship to suffering, in Chapter 1.

While recent social developments in Bhaktapur are not sufficient to explain the size and character of the city’s Christian community, they should be seen as a necessary condition of the church growth that has taken place. It was my purpose in Part I (chapters 2-4) to

demonstrate this. What has occurred in Bhaktapur over the last five decades has been a profound unsettling of traditional social norms, which is related both to socio-economic developments and to movements that have aimed consciously to undermine these norms. The most consequential of these movements has been communism. I suggested in Chapter 4 that, while the NWPP has successfully undermined norms of caste deference, its attitude towards norms of communal solidarity and ritual continuity has been far more conservative. The conservatism of the NWPP notwithstanding, norms of communal solidarity and ritual continuity *have* been undermined, most notably by the development of individual property rights in land, increasing levels of education, and the penetration of global media and consumer goods. While property rights, education, and consumerism may provide access to sources of status (*ijjat*) that are communally validated, they also promote forms of behaviour that violate traditional norms of social appropriateness and shame (*lajyā*), as we saw in Chapter 3. This has led to a widespread sense of moral decline and ethical unease. One kind of response to this unease can be found in modernist Hindu movements, as described in Section 2.4. Another type of response can be found in Christianity.

In Part II (chapters 5-6), I explored the ways in which Nepali and Bhaktapurian Christianity have interacted with wider historical and theological currents, some of which are global in scope and some of which are more local in provenance. In Section 5.2 I described how Nepali Christianity emerged from the evangelical Protestant culture of nineteenth and twentieth century north India. I went on to describe how the political and cultural conditions Christians encountered in Nepal – such as state persecution and a popular religious culture emphasising this-worldly benefits – shaped a number of the distinctive features of Nepali Christianity, such as its predominantly non-denominational organisation and its emphasis on healing. In Section 5.3 I placed Nepali Christianity in relation to various streams within global evangelical theology, and suggested that most churches in Nepal are best described as

charismatic or Pentecostal. I explicated the concepts of atonement and conversion as they are used in evangelical theology, and suggested that the importance of conversion narratives in Nepali churches is connected with a more general Protestant emphasis on personal experience as the theatre of salvation. In Chapter 6 I described Bhaktapurian Christianity in the context of the historical struggles of Christian evangelists to make inroads in the Newar community of the city. I showed how the growth of Christianity among Bhaktapurian Newars depended centrally on the activities, from the late 1980s, of a small group of high-caste Newar converts from outside Bhaktapur, who attempted to present Christianity in a way that would be acceptable to the city's Newar community. Focusing on the example of Fellowship Church, I described how Fellowship's pastor pursued a strategy of evangelism among middle and high-caste Newars. I also described my own experiences in the church.

In Part III (chapters 7-10), I explored the ways the values of inwardness and care play out in the lives of various categories of Christians in Bhaktapur. In Chapter 7 I suggested that the process of healing, which is central to Bhaktapurian Christianity, can be understood in terms of the recognition of suffering. I mean by this that Christian healing depends on the ethical priority given to the relief of suffering by Christian communities: some of the most central activities of churches are befriending the sick, praying for them, and caring for them. When afflicted people are integrated into a community that places so much weight on the experience of suffering and its relief, they come also to place more weight on their own experience: this provides them with a new ethical framework that may justify breaking free of traditional religious and family obligations. In this chapter I paid particular attention to a theme that is important in many of the conversion narratives I collected: that a breakdown in relationships between a convert and those around them often comes prior to conversion, typically being related to a perceived 'failure of care'.

In Chapter 8 I explored an aspect of Bhaktapurian conversion that is almost as central as healing: the tendency for women to be the initiators of family conversions, often for reasons relating to violent or uncaring behaviour by male family members. This behaviour is often interpreted in terms of sickness or demonic possession, and so fits partially within the framework of the healing described in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8 I emphasised the length and difficulty of the struggles women often face in convincing their families to convert; I also explored the ways that women may understand conversion as reintroducing an ethic of care into their families. In addition, I examined the ways that ethics may overtake spirits as the primary framework for approaching suffering and interpersonal conflict; I related this to Weber's insights into monotheism and ethics.

In chapters 9 and 10, I examined the two categories of Christian who are most likely to convert for reasons other than healing: leaders and youth. In Chapter 9 I used Weber's concept of inner-worldly asceticism to explore the ethical aspects of church leadership. After identifying two common pathways to conversion among leaders (the path from communism and the path from strict Hinduism) I explored the life of Kedar, the pastor who has played a central role in the growth of Fellowship Church. I emphasised Kedar's sense of ethical superiority and vocation, and the demanding moral change he requires in converts. I also explored the ways that his demanding moral code, and practice of healing, is related to an emphasis on eternal salvation and damnation. In Chapter 10 I explored the life of Kamal, a young man who is in some respects similar to Kedar, in that his conversion was related to a desire for a meaningful vocation allied with demanding ethical transformation. As I explored Kamal's life and ministry, however, significant differences emerged between the two men, which can be related to broader generational cleavages in Bhaktapurian churches. I found that among young Christians in Bhaktapur there is a strong emphasis on intense experience in worship, and that this, in turn, is related to an understanding of God that emphasises love

over judgement. This emphasis, which is related to broader trends within the global evangelicalism,²⁰⁴ is becoming increasingly significant in Nepali churches because of the centrality of young people in the general ministry of many churches.

In order to conclude, it makes sense to ask what Bhaktapurian Christians themselves might think of the interpretations I have put forward. I believe that my emphasis on ethics would be readily intelligible to most Bhaktapurian Christians; indeed, I often heard Christians describe Christianity as being primarily an ethical system. One member of the Fellowship church committee said to me: ‘Christianity is not a religion but a way of changing your lifestyle [*christianity dhāyegu dharma makhu ki lifestyle change yāyegu*]. The main thing is to help people in need.’ Bhaktapurian Christians would also readily recognise my emphasis on suffering. I commonly heard it said that such-and-such a person would not come to faith until they faced some problem in their life.

There are two aspects of my thesis where I think a Bhaktapurian Christian might find cause for criticism. First, they would probably wish that I had written less about social conditions and practices, and more about God and Jesus. Second, and relatedly, they would probably be uncomfortable with some of the parallels I have drawn between movements in Hindu society – most notably ISKCON and the NWPP – and Christianity. Bhaktapurian Christians typically deny that there are any similarities at all between Christianity and other religions: for them, there is a stark division between the church, which is saved, and the world, which is heading for damnation.

While the assertion of complete Christian difference is not the same thing as a reality of complete difference, the fact that a community identifies itself as different is likely to have consequences. We are led here to the question with which Fenella Cannell introduced her

²⁰⁴ I refer here to the ‘new paradigm’ Christianity described by Luhrmann (2012); see Section 10.1.

edited collection *The Anthropology of Christianity*: ‘what difference does Christianity make?’ (2006: 1). This question can be seen as the major problematic of the anthropology of Christianity, and the crux of many important debates within and about the field. Probably the most prominent critic of the anthropology of Christianity as such is Chris Hann (2007, 2012, 2014), who has argued that demarcating a field according to the category of ‘Christianity’ promotes ‘idealist’ methodology and ‘Christian exceptionalism’. He writes:

I would characterize the dominant trend of the present phase [of the anthropology of Christianity] as a reaffirmation of more idealist approaches, strongly influenced by postmodern styles of writing. [...] The challenge would be to integrate the “institutional” and/or “power” concerns of previous writers to explain why particular ideas are taken up and have an impact at particular times. A few authors do this to varying degrees, but others present rather loose descriptions and then wrestle with issues of agency, modernity and temporality in very abstract ways. In doing so, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, they usually end up endorsing “Christian exceptionalism”. (Hann 2007: 405)

Hann’s basic argument is that in most ethnographic situations, it is not ‘Christianity’ as such that will be of decisive importance, but rather factors relating to institutions or power: the primary focus of anthropologists, he is suggesting, should be on social and political phenomena, rather than ideas. While he is certainly right that in order to explain the timing and scale of Christian conversion analysis of such factors is crucial, I would submit that the character of Christian ideas may also be a significant explanatory factor, as I hope I have demonstrated in this thesis. Furthermore, explanation is not the only task of the anthropologist: anthropologists aim also to describe and translate particular life-worlds as they are experienced ‘from the inside’. In order to do this, attention to ideas is surely vital; this is as much true when studying Hindus, Buddhists, or Muslims as it is when studying Christians.

In the remainder of the conclusion, I wish to argue that ‘Christianity’ as such is a valid object of study for anthropologists; I will make this argument with reference to the

discipline of theology. Robbins (2006) has written that there are three ways that anthropologists might fruitfully engage with Christian theology.²⁰⁵ First, anthropology may ‘study the role of theological ideas in its own formation’ (ibid.: 286). Such an approach has been pursued by Asad (1993), Sahlins (1996), and Cannell (2005, 2006). Second, anthropologists may ‘read any given piece of theology as data that can inform us about the particular Christian culture that produced it’ (ibid.: 286). Robbins notes such an approach in the work of Harding (2000), Crapanzano (2000), and Coleman (2000). The third type of approach, which Robbins himself has pursued, is to ‘imagine that theologians might either produce theories that get some things right about the world [that anthropologists] currently get wrong or model a kind of action in the world that is in some or other way more effective or ethically adequate than their own’ (ibid.: 287). In Section 5.3, I employed the second type of approach; here, I will pursue both the second and the third.

I wish to suggest that trends in twentieth century theology associated with the work of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas – which may be identified variously as Anabaptist, pacifist, or narrative theology – can help us to understand both the ethnographic reality of Christian communities (including that of Bhaktapur), and to develop approaches to these communities that theorise more effectively the role of Christian ideas in Christian life. I have selected the work of Yoder and Hauerwas because it concerns centrally the distinction between ‘church’ and world’, which I have identified throughout the thesis as an important component of Christian identity in Bhaktapur. For Yoder and Hauerwas, the central task of the church is not to impose its ideas on the world as a whole; rather, the task of the church is to ‘be the church’ – to be a community that is distinguished from wider world in its commitment to following teachings of Jesus in a manner as uncompromising as possible.

²⁰⁵ For journal special issues exploring the encounter between anthropology and theology, see Robbins and Engelke (2010), and Fountain and Lau (2013).

This commitment to a significant degree of separateness between church and world is characteristic of the Anabaptist tradition from which Yoder wrote, and is related to the themes of pacifism and narrative that are prominent in both theologians' work.

Yoder argues in the essay 'Peace without Eschatology?' (1998; first published 1971) that the necessity of Christian pacifism stems from God's refusal to redeem the world coercively. The cross represents, for Yoder, a principle of self-giving that submits to evil for the sake of love; redemption is worked not by a divine capture of coercive institutions but rather by an offer of love that human beings are free to accept or reject. He writes:

Jesus' interest was in people; the reason for his low esteem for the political order was his high, loving esteem for concrete people as the object of his concern. Christ is *agape*; self-giving, nonresistant love. At the cross this nonresistance, including the refusal to use political means of self-defence, found its ultimate revelation in the uncomplaining and forgiving death of the innocent at the hands of the guilty. This death reveals how God deals with evil; here is the only valid starting point for Christian pacifism or nonresistance. The cross is the extreme demonstration that *agape* seeks neither effectiveness nor justice and is willing to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience. (1998: 147)

Yoder contrasts the principle of non-resistance evident in the life of Jesus with the theologies that arose after the conversion to Christianity of the Roman emperor Constantine, in the early fourth century. Constantinian theology, Yoder argues, involves 'a confusion between the providential purpose of the state, that of achieving a "tolerable balance of egoisms" [...] and the redemptive purpose of the church, the rejection of egoism in the commitment to discipleship' (ibid.: 153). One part of the accommodation of the church to the world that Constantinianism involves is the acceptance that there is such a thing as 'just war', which Christians may participate in; Yoder sees such an acceptance as violating the teaching of Jesus. For Yoder, then, the principle of Christian pacifism or non-resistance is intrinsically linked with a strong separation between 'church' and 'world', and in particular between the church and those institutions in the world that exercise political power.

The work of Hauerwas has built on that of Yoder by demonstrating that the kind of ethics Yoder proposes are only intelligible if Christian convictions are understood to be narrative, rather than universalising or rule-based, in character. The most common objection to Christian pacifism is: ‘what would happen if everyone pursued this course?’ The response of Hauerwas is that Christians do not propose universal moral principles, but rather tell a story or narrative that the listener is invited to enter into. He writes:

The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stories that constitute a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community. Christian ethics does not begin by emphasising rules or principles, but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God’s dealing with creation. [...] My contention is that the narrative mode is neither incidental nor accidental to Christian belief. [...] The fact that we come to know God through the recounting of the story of Israel and the life of Jesus is decisive for the truthful understanding of the kind of God we worship as well as the world in which we exist. (1983: 24-5)

Hauerwas understands the narrative character of Christian convictions to be closely connected with their ecclesial character: that is, Christian convictions grow out of presence within communities where the Christian story is told. He writes: ‘The church is where the stories of Israel and Jesus are told, enacted and heard, and it is our conviction that as a Christian people there is literally nothing more important we can do’ (ibid.: 99-100). Christian ethics arise from the fact that ‘the telling of that story requires that we be a particular kind of people if we and the world are to hear the story truthfully’ (ibid.: 100). The first ethical task of the church, according to Hauerwas, is not ‘to make the world more peaceable and just’ (ibid.: 99). Rather, ‘the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church – the servant community. Such a claim may well sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world’ (ibid.: 99).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Aside from Yoder, the major influence on Hauerwas’s formulation of narrative theology been Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre sees Christianity (and other systems of thought) as arising out of a ‘tradition’, which he

What, the reader might wonder, has all this to do with the anthropological study of Christian communities, or with the Christian community in Bhaktapur? Although the work of Yoder and Hauerwas is well-known among educated Christians in the English-speaking world, it is not my claim that the impact of their writings has been such that they would form an important topic of anthropological study in themselves. Rather, what I am claiming is two things. First, that Yoder and Hauerwas's pacifist interpretations of the New Testament bring out important themes in that text that are noticed and received by Christians in diverse contexts. By drawing out the logical implications of Christ's non-resistance to violence, Yoder and Hauerwas can help us to see the wider implications of pacifistic sentiments voiced by Christians, and to connect these sentiments with other aspects of Christian practice and belief. Second, I wish to claim that the writings of Hauerwas, in particular, can help us not only to understand the content of Christian belief, but also to theorise *how* Christians believe.

Throughout the thesis I have highlighted the importance of pacifistic ethics in Bhaktapurian Christianity; the theology of Yoder and Hauerwas can help us to connect this with other elements of the ethnography. In Chapter 7, I quoted Vishnu Prasad as saying, in the context of recommending a peaceful approach to relations with Hindu neighbours:

Our Lord faced such a great torture and was hung on the cross where his blood was running down his body. [...] They [Hindus] are in the dominant position. They do not come to the church and are not even interested in understanding, so what is the use of telling them the story of the Bible? Our Lord was such a kind and compassionate one [...] that he did not even utter a single word at the time he was crucified. He accepted all the acts against him.

Vishnu Prasad is making an association between pacifistic ethics and Christ's non-resistance to violence on the cross. Yoder's work, quoted above, helps us to see that this idea is not simply

defines as 'an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined' (1988: 12). Like Hauerwas, MacIntyre emphasises the ways in which intellectual convictions are embedded in social practices (see MacIntyre 1981, 1988, 1990). For a discussion of MacIntyre in the context of the anthropology of ethics, see Laidlaw (2014a: ch.2).

dreamt up by Vishnu Prasad; rather, Vishnu Prasad is receiving the New Testament in a way that resonates with the theologies of Christians diverse cultural contexts. Vishnu Prasad says of Hindus: ‘they do not come to the church and are not even interested in understanding, so what is the use of telling them the story of the Bible?’ This may seem like an insignificant off-hand comment, but, read alongside the observations of Hauerwas quoted above, we can see that Vishnu Prasad is saying that in order to hear the Christian story open-mindedly it is important for people to hear it in the context of a church community; this is also the point that Hauerwas was making. In Chapter 8, I quoted Daya Laxmi as saying:

It is written that we should listen more and speak less. The meaning of that is to listen when others curse us and not to say anything in response. [...] If we talk to non-Christians in the same way that they speak to and swear at us, then we will be the same as them, and we will not be Christians.

We see here the connection, also drawn by Yoder and Hauerwas, between pacifistic ethics and separation between ‘church’ and ‘world’: in order to live in a pacifistic way, Daya Laxmi is saying, it is necessary to separate oneself from the social patterns of society in general. In this context, the work of Yoder and Hauerwas directs our attention towards the fact that pacifistic ethics and a separation between church and world are closely connected in the experience of Bhaktapurian Christians.

Another theme I have highlighted throughout the thesis is the importance of narrative as a shaper of Christian practice and experience; the work of Hauerwas can help us to theorise the place of narrative in Christian life. I noted in Section 1.2 that Robbins makes a distinction between belief as assent to propositions (‘believing that’) and belief as commitment to something or someone (‘believing in’). Robbins argues that, for most Christians in most contexts, belief as commitment is more important than belief as assent to propositions. I would suggest that narrative theology, as formulated by Hauerwas, can help us to deepen and develop this insight. Not only does Christian belief commonly take the form of a commitment; it

commonly takes the form of commitment to a person – God or Jesus – who is known through reading or hearing Biblical narratives, within the context of church communities. Although narrative is obviously important to belief in diverse Christian and non-Christian contexts,²⁰⁷ it is arguable that narrative has particular importance in the context of evangelical Protestantism.²⁰⁸ The reasons for this are twofold. First, as I argued in Section 5.3, Protestant theology tends towards a valorisation of personal experience as the route to salvation and knowledge of God. Second, the Bible is the ultimate source of theological authority for evangelicals, and is central their worship and everyday practice:²⁰⁹ the Bible is, in large part, a collection of narratives. What the church community does is to provide a context in which these two things – personal experience and Biblical narratives – can come together. In churches, people learn to place their personal experiences within a larger narrative outlined in the Bible. From this process of learning, emerge individual conversion narratives.

The presentation and analysis of conversion narratives formed the backbone of chapters 7-10. I chose to present my ethnography in this way in order to highlight the central role of narrative in Bhaktapurian church life. I repeatedly drew attention to the importance of narrative structure in the way Christians experience their conversions and present them to others. In Section 8.4, I noted the significance of narrative structure in the way Daya Laxmi presents her abandonment of Hindu worship when speaking with my research assistant, in the context of an attempt to evangelise him. A central reason for the importance of narrative in Bhaktapurian church life is the emphasis Bhaktapurian churches place on evangelism. As with Daya Laxmi, when Kamal is trying to convince another person of the truth of Christianity, he turns to

²⁰⁷ Hauerwas (1984: ch.1) himself explores this point.

²⁰⁸ For an anthropological examination of the significance of narrative in evangelical Christianity, see Stromberg (1993).

²⁰⁹ For an ethnography of evangelical Bible study in the United States see Bielo (2009).

narrative. When responding to the woman who said that there was no evidence for heaven, he says:

[...] we have evidence that one person has gone to heaven. [...] 2000 years ago a person named Jesus Christ was killed. The killers were the people from Rome. Jesus Christ was hanged and killed. He was buried for three days and three nights. And after three days he became alive again. After becoming alive he went to heaven. And we believers have strong a strong belief that he is still always with us all the time. That is why we always pray in the name of Jesus Christ and we say that he is the living God.

Here, we see a perfect example of how Christians place their own narratives within a larger Biblical narrative. Kamal tells the story of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and places alongside this an assertion that Christians constantly experience the personal presence of Jesus, thus having assurance that he is still alive. Kamal tells this story in the context of a house fellowship: a community of largely sympathetic listeners, who group together in order to persuade non-Christian participants of the truth of the Christian story.

What theology can offer the anthropology of Christianity – and what it cannot – can be clarified by examining some non-Christian religious groups in Nepal that have parallels with Christianity. One group that has significant similarities with Christians is Hindu renunciators, as described by Sondra Hausner (2007). Dumont (1980: Appendix B) famously argued that the Hindu renouncer is an ‘outworldly individual’, in contrast to the non-individualistic householder of ordinary Hindu society. Hausner’s ethnography highlights the ways that renunciators in fact ‘live very communal lives’ (2007: 197); it also shows that renunciators commonly reflect deeply on and are articulate when talking about their own experience, placing a value on this experience that could be described in terms of inwardness. Probably the most important similarity between renunciators and Christians in Nepal is the way in which suffering is seen to prompt a decision to take a religious path that places the individual outside the structures of ordinary society. Hausner describes how some of her informants were led to

renunciation by problems such as difficult marriages (ibid.: 161), and notes that renouncer society ‘offer[s] alternative community structures for people who are not welcome in householder society or who do not fit in elsewhere’ (ibid.: 19).

An aspect of Hausner’s study that makes for particularly interesting comparison with Christianity is her examination of the practice of *tapas*, meaning ‘physical hardship and sacrifice’ (ibid.: 152). She writes:

The discipline to live in defiance of bodily obscurations, such as sensory indulgence and mental disturbance, is the *tapas* of yogic life. The physical hardships that renunciators require of themselves [...] bring about a higher state of awareness, renunciators told me, and with it, detachment from the material plane. [...] Finding a mid-point between thinking of the body as a burden and thinking of the body as a divine tool was at the heart of discussion I had with *sādhus* [renunciators] on the nature of embodiment. For the *sādhus* with whom I spoke and lived, *tapas* was not so much a singular action as the discipline of living that mid-point. *Tapas* is that practice of *yogī* life which maintains a tenuous balance between abhorring the body and indulging it. (ibid.: 152)

The tension described here mirrors, in some ways, a paradox I have explored in Christian thought: that suffering seen both as something spiritually valuable and as an intolerable burden that should be lifted. Nonetheless, Hausner’s ethnography also illustrates that the differing theologies of Christianity and Hinduism have important consequences for the experience of suffering. She explores how the dualism of classical Hindu thought – the idea that ‘the body [...] is a transient casing of the higher soul’ (ibid.: 156) – leads to an emphasis on voluntarily embracing austerity as a means of overcoming the illusion of embodiment. Bodies for renunciators are valuable as ‘vehicles, vessels and tools for religious clarity’ (ibid.: 180): they are means and not ends in themselves. In Bhaktapurian Christianity, in contrast, while ideas about the value of suffering are present, the emphasis of most Christians is on physical healing, rather than on embracing austerity. I would suggest that this emphasis is connected, at least in part, with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, which holds that salvation does not involve

the separation of body and soul, but rather the restoration of the body and soul together as part of a new creation.²¹⁰

Another religious movement in Nepal that parallels Christianity is Theravada Buddhism. Nepali Theravada, as Lauren Leve describes it, parallels Nepali Christianity in its elevation of ethics over ritual, and in its claim to rationalism and egalitarianism. Leve writes: ‘Theravada Buddhism has represented itself as uniquely egalitarian, resolutely rationalist, and fundamentally ethicizing in orientation. [...] In the place of Vajrayana ritual and symbolism, modernist Theravada posits an ethicized universe and it emphasizes conscious understanding and insight as the means to do right’ (2002: 846). This ethicising approach is associated with inwardness, in the sense of an emphasis on individual conscience over social tradition:

In Nepal today, religion no longer commands Theravada Buddhists to respect the judgment of the community, nor does it instruct them that their chief ethical duties lie relation to family, deities, ancestors, and kings. Instead, the pious are exhorted to make their own decisions about ritual and right, and to vigilantly monitor and discipline themselves. This attitude represents a sharp critique of Newar civil society and the socio-moral codes on which it is based. (ibid.: 852)

Nonetheless, as Gellner and LeVine (2008: 220) note, the Theravada devotees that were the focus of Leve’s research represented the most ambitious and spiritually rigorous end of the Theravada spectrum in Nepal; the Theravada movement as a whole is in fact more closely integrated into ordinary Newar social life than Leve’s comments would suggest.

The theological pluralism that is a strong feature of traditional Newar religion (see Gellner 1992: ch.3) seems to have been carried over into much of the world of Theravada. As Gellner and Levine (2008: ch. 8) describe, most Newars who practice vipassana, a popular Theravada meditation technique, see it as compatible with tradition ritual life; they focus on the ‘quieting of passions’ (ibid.: 220) necessary for the successful conduct of ordinary life,

²¹⁰ See Cannell (2006) on the place of embodiment and materiality in Christian thought.

rather than on achieving spiritual perfection or a direct path to enlightenment. Thus, we see that while Theravada, like Hindu renunciation, has significant parallels with Christianity, theological factors make for equally significant differences. While the theological pluralism of Newar Buddhism and Hinduism means that becoming a Theravada devotee does not usually entail a decisive break with traditional ritual and family life, the distinction between church and world in evangelical theology, alongside other factors, means that Christian conversion usually does entail such a break.

I would conclude that in order to understand Christianity in Bhaktapur, it is necessary to look both to general trends in Nepali religion and society, and to the specifics of Christian theology. Bhaktapurian Christianity is part of a wider tendency in Nepali society for people who feel they have been failed by the social groups they are part of to seek religious solutions to their problems involving separation from these groups. It is also part of a broader culture of religious healing, which stems, in part, from a lack of affordable biomedical healthcare. Bhaktapurian Christianity also reflects wider trends towards modernist forms of religion that stress ethics over ritual, and self-identify as rational and egalitarian. This trend is connected with a wider breakdown of traditional hierarchies of caste, age, and gender in Nepal, as reflected in the growth of communism, young people's associationalism, and the increasing education of women. Nonetheless, having spent many months among Bhaktapurian Christians, I do not feel that such observations come near to encompassing the most significant facts about the lives of the people I met. Rather, the specificities of Bhaktapurian Christian experience can only be grasped with reference to Christian theology, as it is received in the local cultural context. The most important parts of this theology, for the majority of the people I met, were those relating to the way God meets people in a place of suffering, and draws them out of this suffering. The key Biblical narrative here is the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of

Jesus. In individual conversion narratives, this pattern of affliction followed by redemption appears again and again.

It seems appropriate to close not with my own words but with those of a Bhaktapurian convert. Sushila, whose conversion is described in Chapter 6, described to me a vision she had, where God appeared in a white form and comforted her. I suspect that some readers will find the incident, as recollection of actual events, hard to credit. I wish to record that having become part of a Bhaktapurian Christian community, having worshipped there and heard there many stories of suffering and redemption, I came to affirm narratives such as this as true.

I received a vision [*darshan*] of God. After he [Sushila's husband] was in that accident, I needed to cry every day non-stop. I cried every day as a routine. One day, when I was crying, God [*parmeswor*] came in front me and said, 'Oh! Daughter! You do not need to cry from this day onwards' [Nep.: *chhori āja bāta timile runu parne chhaina*]. Because he said this to me, and gave me this vision in a white form, I did not have to cry because of this problem anymore.

Appendix 1. The caste composition and demography of Bhaktapur

Nepal's national censuses do not collect information relating to the Newars' internal caste system, so the best information available for Bhaktapur is that from a survey carried out by Robert Levy in the mid-1970s. The tables below shows the results of this survey. The nineteen caste levels used by Levy are derived from those identified by Gutschow and Kolver (1975: 56-58). The levels, which apply to the Hindu Newars who make up the great majority of the households, '[group] together castes who are endogamous and can share boiled rice, but will accept only beaten rice and water from members of the [level] below them. Water cannot be accepted from members of [Level XIII] [...]. [Level XIV] and those below are untouchables' (Gutschow and Kolver 1975: 56).²¹¹ At a higher level of generalisation, Levy distinguishes between Level I, who are Brahman priests, levels II and III, who are merchants and shopkeepers, levels IV to XII, who can broadly be described as Farmers,²¹² Level XIII, who engage in activities that are borderline polluting, and levels XIV to XIX, who engage in activities that are unequivocally polluting (Levy 1990: 98).²¹³ In the text of the thesis, when I refer to 'high-caste Newars' I am referring to levels I-III, when I refer to 'Farmer caste Newars' I am referring to levels IV to XII, and when I refer to 'low-caste Newars' or 'Newar Dalits' I am referring to levels XIII to XIX. The Farmers, as defined above, are the majority group in Bhaktapur. According to the information in Table 1 below, in the mid-1970s 66.5% of Bhaktapur's households were Newar Hindu Farmers. In 2007 Krishna Hachhethu (2007: 73) estimated that 60% of Bhaktapur's population was of the Farmer caste. Table 1 shows the household numbers found by Levy for Newar Hindu households; Table 2 shows the figures found by Levy for non-Newar Hindu households.

²¹¹ It should be noted that customs in marriage are now considerably less strict than they were in the 1970s. Hindu Newars in Bhaktapur will now often consider marriage within the broader groupings of Level I, levels II-III, levels IV-XII, Level XIII and levels XIV-XIX. Nonetheless, people are still very aware of the traditional caste levels, and take them into consideration when arranging marriages. Customs in eating have relaxed along similar lines to those of marriage, with people typically being happy to eat boiled rice with those in the broader groupings identified.

²¹² Some of these groups, as can be seen in the table below, have other specialised activities in addition to farming.

²¹³ An alternative, six-bloc model of the Newar caste system, which integrates Hindu and Buddhist Newars, has been proposed by Gellner (Gellner 1992: 46; 1999: 17); this has been applied to Bhaktapur by Gutshow and Michaels (2008: 23).

Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics (2014) has published a detailed breakdown of Bhaktapur's demography, based on data from the 2011 national census. The 2011 census recorded Bhaktapur Municipality's population as 81,748 (up from 72,543 in 2001), of whom 79.2% were Newars (down from 88.2% in 2001). The municipality-level breakdown of the 2011 census does not include data on religious affiliation, but the 2001 census found that within Bhaktapur Municipality 88.7% were Hindus, 10.7% were Buddhist and 0.6% were affiliated to other religions (Hachhethu 2007: 70) (I comment on the systematic under-reporting of non-Hindu groups in Nepal's national censuses in Section 5.2). It should be noted that Bhaktapur Municipality, which is an administrative unit, covers a larger area than the 'core city' of Bhaktapur as it is defined for ritual purposes. Though there is no data as to the population of this core city, Robert Levy estimated during the mid-1970s that the population density of the core city was 117,000 people per square mile, which is considerably higher than the population density of New York. For a full analysis of demographic trends in Bhaktapur, see Hachhethu (2007: 69-71).

Table 1

NUMBER OF NEWAR HINDU HOUSEHOLDS IN BHAKTAPUR CLASSIFIED BY CASTE LEVEL		
Level	Caste (and traditional caste occupation)	Number (Total = 6460)
I	Brahman (priest)	32
II	Chathariya Shrestha (ministers, courtiers, astrologers, assistant priests)	677
III	Panchthariya Shrestha (merchants, Tantric assistant priests, para-priests)	247
IV	Tini (para-priests)	2
V	Farmers, or Jyapu (first group) (farmers)	1,867
VI	Tamā (coppersmith)	19
VII	Kumhā (potters)	419
	Awā (masons)	99
VIII, IX	Farmers, or Jyapu (second and third groups) (farmers)	1,420
X	Chipi (merchants)	466
XI	Cya (farmers and para-priests)	5
XII	Dwin (farmers and para-priests)	1
XIII	Borderline clean groups	437 (total)
	Gatha (gardeners and mask bearers)	56
	Bha (funeral priests)	19
	Katah (cutters of the umbilical cord)	2
	Calan (funeral torch bearers)	16
	Khusa (litter or palanquin bearers)	1
	Nau (barbers)	46
	Kau (blacksmiths)	27
	Pun (painters)	25
	Sāmi (oil pressers)	160
	Chipa (dyers)	82
	Pasi (washers)	3
XIV	Nae (butchers)	177
XV	Jugi (purity specialists, tailors)	57
XVI	Don (musicians for funerals)	4
XVII	Kulu (drum-makers)	1
XVIII	Pon (sweepers)	90
XIX	Halahulu (drifters and beggars)	1

Adapted from Levy (1990: 97 and 625-9), and Gutschow and Kolver (1975: 55-8). See also Gutschow and Michaels (2008: 23).

Table 2

NUMBER OF NON-NEWAR HINDU HOUSEHOLDS IN BHAKTAPUR CLASSIFIED BY CASTE LEVEL		
Level	Caste (and traditional caste occupation)	Number (Total = 6460)
1	Sakya Buddhists (goldsmiths)	260
2	Misra and Bhatta Brahmans (priests)	26
3	Matha priests (priests)	6
4	Gaine (musicians)	7
5	Sarki (shoe-makers)	6
7	Muslim (bangle makers)	3
8	Dhobi (washers)	2
9	Other ethnic groups (Tamang and Indo-Nepalese)	129

Adapted from Levy (1990: 97 and 625-9), and Gutschow and Kolver (1975: 55-8). See also Gutschow and Michaels (2008: 23).

Appendix 2. Bhaktapur church survey results

Towards the end of my stay in Bhaktapur, I conducted a survey of all the churches in the area surrounding the city. The survey had two purposes: first, to obtain approximated quantitative information on Bhaktapur's churches (which is presented in the below); second, to provide an opportunity for me to meet with various pastors in Bhaktapur and converse with them in a general way (the results of these conversations cannot be reduced to tabular form, but helped to build up my general ethnographic picture of Bhaktapurian Christianity).

One other survey has been conducted of churches in Bhaktapur. This was the nationwide survey conducted by DAWN Nepal in the mid-2000s (DAWN Nepal 2007), which include data relating to Bhaktapur (I refer to the DAWN survey in Chapter 5). The survey report's breakdown of its findings gives results for Bhaktapur district as a whole, which covers an area considerably larger than the city of Bhaktapur, which was the focus of my research. The results of the survey are, however, worth summarising, as a background to my own findings. The survey (DAWN 2007: 96-8) found that, as of 2005/6, there were a total of 39 churches in Bhaktapur district, with a total of 5,619 baptised believers (in Bhaktapur municipality, it found 12 churches and 1,437 baptised believers). Of these 5,619 baptised believers, 2,181 were adult females, 1,517 were adult males, 1,006 were youths (age 16-25), and 915 were children (aged below 16). The survey found that 82% of pastors were working full-time and 5% were working part-time (13% did not respond to this question); it found that 23% of pastors had 0-1 years of training, 15% of pastors had 1-2 years of training, 3% of pastors had 2-3 years of training, and 28% of pastors had more than 3 years of training (31% did not respond to this question). It found that of believers over 6 years old, 24.9% were unable to read or write, 4.4% were able to read but not write, and 70.3% were able to read and write (0.4% did not answer this question). While the overall numbers of believers and churches found by the survey seem to me, and to church leaders I asked, somewhat low (the Bhaktapur Church Association, which does not by any means include all of the churches in the district, currently has 49 members), the relative proportions of men and women, and the high proportion of youths, fits with my own findings.

My own survey was more in the way of a rough sample than a systematic collection of exact quantitative data (I did collect precise quantitative data with relation to the 3 churches that were the focus of my research – see Appendix 3). Using the membership list of

the Bhaktapur Church Association, which has 49 members, and also a list of various churches that were not members of the association, which was compiled for me by a pastor friend, I set about surveying as many as I could of the churches in and around Bhaktapur municipality. I decided not to be strict about delimiting the boundaries of where I surveyed: there are many churches that are just outside the official municipality boundary that nonetheless define themselves as being in Bhaktapur, and have many members who live in the centre of Bhaktapur. As can be seen in Map 3 of Appendix 8, there are no churches at all within the historic city boundaries of Bhaktapur; rather, churches cluster on the outskirts of the city. To have collected exact membership data relating to all of the churches in the vicinity of Bhaktapur would have taken several months and a team of researchers (it is also questionable whether many churches would give their membership lists to people they did not know well): I did not have the time or resources to do this. Rather, what I did was to meet the pastors of churches around Bhaktapur and present to them a number of questions, about membership and other matters, which they answered there and then, usually by giving an estimate rather than exact figures. This method does not, of course, yield very precise data, but it does give enough information that general impressions may be formed on such matters as male-female ratios, caste composition of church membership, and theological orientations of churches.

Not all the questions I asked the pastors were reducible to tabular form (I asked questions about such matters and the pastor's personal background and the circumstances of the church's foundation). Below, I record the questions I asked that are reducible to tabular form.

- 1) What year was the church established?
- 2) Does the church own its own building/room or rent a building/room? (O = owns; R = rent)
- 3) What caste group is the pastor from? (H = high-caste Nepali speaker [Brahman/Chetri]; N = Newar; D = Nepali-speaking Dalit; T = Tamang; O = other)
- 4) How many baptised believers does the church have?
- 5) How many people regularly attend Saturday services at the church?
- 6) Would you describe your church as Pentecostal, evangelical, or something else? (P = Pentecostal; E = evangelical; O = other)
- 7) Is your church part of a network or denomination? (Y = yes; N = no)
- 8) Does your church practise speaking in tongues? (Y = yes; N = no; O = occasionally)

- 9) In addition to the pastor, how many leaders (elders, deacons and other *aguwās*) does the church have?
- 10) Is it OK for women to be pastors? (Y = yes; N = no)
- 11) What percentage of conversions at the church are because of healing?
- 12) Is it acceptable for a Christian to attend Hindu weddings or feasts? (Y = yes; N = no; S = sometimes)
- 13) When someone dies, do you bury or cremate? (B = bury; C = cremate; B/C = bury or cremate)
- 14) What percentage of church members are illiterate?
- 15) What is the caste composition of the church membership?
- 16) What is the gender composition of the church membership?
- 17) What is the age composition of the church membership?

The answers given to questions 1-14 are summarised in Table 1; the answers given to questions 15-17 are summarised in Table 2. It can be seen that, including Fellowship, Corinthi, and Ashish churches, a total of 23 churches were surveyed. Other than Ashish Church, which is in Sanga, all of the churches surveyed are located in the area around the city of Bhaktapur, in the locations indicated in Map 3 in Appendix 8. In the map I have not indicated which church corresponds to which location, for reasons of anonymity; it will also be seen that Map 3 includes the locations of various churches in Thimi and elsewhere that were not included in the survey.

A number of things can be gleaned from the data in Table 1, with relation to the 22 Bhaktapurian churches surveyed. Perhaps the most striking thing in the data is that of the 22 Bhaktapurian churches surveyed, 13 were founded in or after 2005. This indicates a very high level of church growth over the last decade. It also indicates that the relatively conservative numbers given by the DAWN Nepal survey in 2007 (12 churches and 1,437 baptised believers in Bhaktapur municipality), assuming that they were accurate at the time, certainly underestimate the situation with regard to the present. Adding together the numbers of baptised believers given to me by the 22 Bhaktapurian churches surveyed (where a range is given I take the lowest number, and where a number was not given, I take the number of

service attenders), I found a total of 2,725 baptised believers in the churches surveyed in Bhaktapur. Adding together the numbers given for regular service attenders (where a range is given I take the lowest number, and where a number was not given, I take the number of baptised believers), I found a total of 2,992 regular service attenders in the churches surveyed in Bhaktapur. It should be stressed that these numbers are approximate estimates, not precise data. Protestant church leaders in Nepal normally classify their churches as either evangelical or Pentecostal, depending on whether the church stresses speaking in tongues:²¹⁴ of the 22 Bhaktapurian churches, I found that 10 classified themselves as Pentecostal, and 10 classified themselves as evangelical. I found a high level of openness to the possibility of women pastors, though all the churches I surveyed have male pastors. Most churches report a high proportion of their converts having converted because of healing. The majority of churches prefer burial to cremation, and many churches have a high proportion of illiterate people in their congregations.

Several things can be gleaned from the data in Table 2. First, the most numerous ethnic groups in Bhaktapurian churches are Newars, Tamangs, and Nepali-speaking Dalits. Second, almost all Bhaktapurian churches report that there are more women than men in their congregations. Third, many churches in Bhaktapur have a high proportion of their congregation under 30. All the estimates given on these topics are very approximate in nature. However, they are sufficient to indicate general trends, if not to provide precise numbers.

²¹⁴ Churches that self-define as evangelical could usually best be described, in comparative terms, as charismatic; see Section 5.3.

Table 1. Answers given to questions 1-14.

Church	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14
1	2010	R	U	30	40-50	P	N	Y	2	Y	60%	N	B	50%
2	2006	R	N	140	80-90	E	Y	N	1	Y	50%	S	B/C	5%
3	2007		U	174	170	P	N	Y	8	Y		Y	B	25%
4	2009	R	O	52	40-50	E	N	O	7-8	Y	70%	Y	B	25%
5	2005/6	R	D	40	55	E	Y	N	3	Y	100%	N	B	80%
6	2005	O	U	200		E	Y	O	7	N	70%	Y	B	2%
7	2007	R	T	40	80	P	N	Y	3	Y	50%	Y		
8	2007	O	N	32	50	E	N	O	7	Y		Y	B/C	5%
9	2008/9	R	N	18	22	E	N	N	5		80%	Y	B/C	40%
10	2001	R	U	55-60		P	N	Y	5	Y	50%	N	B	5%
11	1995	O	N		130-150	E	Y	N	4	Y	80%	S	B/C	20%
12	2003	O	D	75	80	P	Y	Y	5	Y	80%	S	B	30%
13	2005/6	R	N	60-70	30-35	O	Y	N	7	N	99%	Y	B	70%
14	1991/2	O	U	150	180-185	P	N	Y	5	Y	80-85%	S	C	20%
15	1990	O	N	350	500-600	E	N	O	7	N		Y	B	20%
16	2000	R	U	100	50-70	O	N	Y	9	Y	75%	S	B/C	15-20%
17	2004	R	B	125	180	P	N	Y	13	Y	90%	S	B/C	10-20%
18	2005/6	R	O	115	220	P	N	Y	6	Y	80%	Y	B	9-10%
19	2010	R	D	80	150	P	N	Y	1	N	60%	S	B	40%
20	1953/4	O	T	500		P	N	Y	6	Y	80%	Y	B	20%
'Fellowship Church'	1988	O	N	210	150-60	E	Y	O	13	N	60%	S	B/C	5%
'Corinthi Church'	2007	O	N	49	30-40	E	Y	O	3	Y	80-90%	Y	B/C	30-40%
'Ashish Church'	2004	O	O	261	250-300	P	N	Y	6	Y	80%	Y	B/C	50%

Table 2. Answers to questions 15-17.

Church	Q15	Q16	Q17
1	Mainly Dalit and Newar	60% women	Under 30 = 40% Over 60 = 5%
2	95% Newars	55% women	Under 30 = 35-40% Over 60 = 2-3%
3	Mainly Newar and Tamang; also Dalit, Brahman, Rai, Limbu	70% women	Under 30 = 60% Over 60 = 5%
4	80% Brahman and Chetri, Dalit 10%, 5% Newar, 5% Tamang	60% women	Under 30 = 20% Over 60 = 15%
5	60% Newar, 30% Dalit, also Tamang and Rai	75% women	Under 30 = 30% Over 60 = 0%
6	25% Tamang, 10% Rai, Limbu and Gurung, 10% Dalit, 3-4% Newar, 8-9% Brahman and Chetri	80% women	Under 30 = 60% Over 60 = 1%
7	50% Newar, 40% Tamang, 8-10% Dalit	65% women	Under 30 = 60-65% Over 60 = 15%
8	40% Tamang, 30-35% Newar, 5-6% Dalits, also some Brahmans and Chetris	50% women	Under 30 = 65% Over 60 = 10%
9	Mainly Newars, Gurungs and Tamangs	80-90% women	Under 30 = 30% Over 60 = 0
10	30-35% Dalit, 10-15% Newar, 5-10% Brahman and Chetri, 3% Tamang	60-70% women	Under 30 = 40% Over 60 = 2-3%
11	80% Newar, 8-9% Tamang, 3% Dalit, 1-2% Brahman and Chetri	60% women	Under 30 = 45% Over 60 = 10%
12	99% Dalits, 1% Newar	80% women	Under 30 = 50% Over 60 = 20%
13	50% Tamang, also Dalits, Rais, Limbus and Magars	80% women	Under 30 = 20% Over 60 = 0
14	80% Newar, Tamang 10%, Brahman and Chetri 10%	60% women	Under 30 = 60% Over 60 = 5-10%
15	60% Newar, 20% Dalit, 10% Tamang	65% women	Under 30 = 45% Over 60 = 20%
16	30-40% Tamang, 20% Newars	60% women	Under 30 = 50% Over 60 = 30%
17	40% Dalit, 30% Newar, 20% Tamang, some Brahmans and Chetris	70% women	Under 30 = 60-70% Over 60 = 2-3%
18	15% Newar, 2-3% Dalits, some Rai and Tamangs	75% women	Under 30 = 35% Over 60 = 5%
19	90% Dalit, some Tamangs and Newars	70% women	Under 30 = 50% Over 60 = 10%
20	Mainly Tamang, also Dalits and Newar	60% women	Under 30 = 30% Over 60 = 30%
'Fellowship Church'	See Appendix 3	See Appendix 3	Under 30 = 40% Over 60 = 15%
'Corinthi Church'	See Appendix 3	See Appendix 3	Under 30 = 30-40% Over 60 = 5-10%
'Ashish Church'	See Appendix 3	80% women	Under 30 = 40% Over 60 = 15%

Appendix 3. Detailed description of the memberships of three churches

While the survey results above, as I noted, represent only estimates given by pastors, and are thus highly approximate, I was able to obtain more exact information about the memberships of three churches. These were the churches I worked in over a long period of time; because I had gained their trust, they were happy to share their membership lists with me. The membership lists themselves contain names and other private information, so I will not reproduce them here. Rather, what I have done, with the help of my research assistant, is to use the lists, along with our personal knowledge of the members of the churches, in order to work out exact figures for the caste and gender compositions of the churches. I discuss the significance of the data below in the body of the thesis.

‘Fellowship Church’ has a total of 210 baptised members, of whom 99 are male and 111 are female. The caste composition of this membership is as follows:

Table 1

Caste Level	Number of people	Percentage of church	Clan names	Male/female ratio
Chathariya Shrestha (Newar)	30	14.3%	Kakshapati, Raya, Jonchhen, Lakhe, Khingbanjar, Pradhananga, Amatya, Shrestha	18/12
Panchthariya Shrestha (Newar)	63	30%	Balla, Vaidhay, Shreshtha, Pradhan, Munakarmi, Khagi	28/35
Farmer (Newar)	34	16.2%	Twaina, Chaguthi, Gumangju, Nagarkoti, Kurung, Ghemosu, Jyakhwo, Karmacharya, Suwal, Maharjan	17/17
Kumhā (Newar potters)	16	7.6%	Prajapati	9/7
Dalit (Newar)	14	6.7%	Khadgi, Shahi	3/11
Other Newar	2	1%	Silpakar, Bajracharya	2/0
Brahman (Nepali-speaking)	1	0.5%	Ghimre	0/1
Chetri (Nepali-speaking)	20	9.5%	Pokharel, Karki, Thapa, Khadka, Pande, Rokka, Dulal	7/13
Dalit (Nepal-speaking)	18	8.6%	Sunar, Sunuwar, Pariyar	8/10
Tamang	9	4.3%	Tamang, Ghalan, Lama, Yonjan	5/4
Other	3	1.4%	Rana, Das, Chaudhari	1/2
Total	210	100%		99/111

‘Corinthi Church’ has a total of 49 baptised members, of whom 21 are male and 28 are female. The caste composition of the church is as follows:

Table 2

Caste Level	Number of people	Percentage of church	Clan names	Male/female ratio
Panchthariya Shrestha (Newar)	1	2%	Munakarmi	0/1
Farmer (Newar)	19	38.8%	Gwachha, Goja, Kabu, Byanju, Suwal, Khoju, Tyatal	8/12
Brahman (Nepali-speaking)	3	6.1%	Paudel	1/1
Chetri (Nepali-speaking)	5	10.2%	Bogati, Katuwal	3/2
Dalit (Nepal-speaking)	16	32.7%	Biswakarma (Bika), Magrati, Pariyar	6/10
Tamang	3	6.1%	Tamang	2/1
Other	2	4.1%	Giri	1/1
Total	49	100%		21/28

‘Ashish Church’ has a total of 261 baptised members. Exact information on gender composition was not available, as the church membership list is organised on the basis of households. The caste composition of the church is as follows:

Table 3

Caste Level	Number of people	Percentage of church	Clan names	Male/female ratio
Panchthariya Shrestha (Newar)	21	8.1%	Shrestha	n/a
Farmer (Newar)	10	3.8%	Awal, Dangol	n/a
Brahman (Nepali-speaking)	1	0.4%	Subedi	n/a
Chetri (Nepali-speaking)	18	8.9%	Mahat, Khatri, Bhandari, Thapa Kshetri, Karki, Khadka	n/a
Dalit (Nepal-speaking)	119	45.6%	Pariyar, Dulal, Rokka, Shreemali, Achami, Ramtel, Bayalkoti, Surakhet, Selwal, Surakheti, Khadgi, Biswakarma (Bika)	n/a
Tamang	20	7.7%	Tamang	n/a
Magar	63	24.1%	Rana Magar, Thapa Magar, Thapa, Ale, Gelang	n/a
Other	9	3.4%	Bhujel, Majhi, Chaudhari	n/a
Total	261	100%		n/a

Appendix 4. Ram Devi's story

Ram Devi was born in 1963 in Thimi (a town on the western side of Bhaktapur) into a Farmer caste family. She is married to a man from the Farmer caste and has two sons and two daughters. After becoming mentally disturbed subsequent to birth of her youngest daughter, Sapana, in 1992, and unsuccessfully seeking treatment from various religious healers, she and her husband encountered Kedar, the pastor of Fellowship Church. After Kedar exorcised her, and she took *grahan*, Ram Devi experienced healing (she took *grahan* along with her husband in 1993). Ram Devi was baptised along with her two daughters and elder son in 2001; her husband and younger son have yet to be baptised. Ram Devi is a member of Fellowship Church. In Extract 1, Ram Devi describes the events surrounding her taking of *grahan* in 1993, in particular, how she got ill and how Kedar exorcised her. In Extract 2, Sabina, Ram Devi's eldest daughter, describes the family dynamics surrounding the conversion process. She describes how, although Ram Devi's husband took *grahan* and periodically attends church, he has declined to be baptised because he is reluctant to give up drinking and separate himself from Hindu society, in particular his funeral *guthi*. She also describes how her elder brother and grandparents drifted away from Christianity.

Extract 1.

IG: How did you become a Christian?

RD: In the past I knew nothing about Christianity. I used to just work in the house, caring for, educating, and feeding my children. Sapana was born in Dashain and I became insane [*behos*] in Dashain. [...] Right after she was born I became mad.

On that day I had to clean our whole house and had to repaint the floor [with red clay] too. We had some cows, and we used to milk a few of them and sell the milk in Kathmandu. That day I was boiling milk and waiting next to the kerosene stove for the milk to boil. When I thought the milk was boiled I let some air out of the pot to see if it was boiled. Sapana was with me and I was afraid that she might touch the boiled milk. So I was trying to take her onto my body to carry her. When I was trying to pull her up to carry her, suddenly a big puff of air [from the pot on the stove] hit the side of my head. It was a very strong hit, so I still have a mark on that spot. I heard

a sound like when you swing a stick very fast through the air. [...] After being hit by the air I felt very dizzy, and it felt like the house started to move around.

Then I asked my father-in-law to collect my daughter Sapana, and he came to collect her. I felt very sick and asked him to take me to the ground floor and feed me a last drop of water before I died. Then he went out and asked for help to carry me to the ground floor. A few neighbours who were playing cards in our courtyard came to help my father-in-law to carry me down to the ground floor. I saw two people came to our house to help, and I asked them to feed me some water and explained to them that I felt like my breathing was going to stop and I was going to die, so I asked them to call my husband. Then I became unconscious and started to become abnormal. Sometimes I was conscious and sometimes I was not.

One day I even threw my daughter Sapana into thorn bush; she was injured and her body was covered in blood. That is what some people told me. I was taken to the *dyomā*, *dhāmi* and *jhānkri* for treatment. We had to pay 5000 rupees for one visit to the *jhānkri*. A lot of solutions were tried for my treatment. Somebody even went to the cremation ground to worship at the night. I was taken to the mental hospital for treatment and was given some medicine, but it did not work at all. The medicine would help me for a day, but the next day I would be the same as before. My husband thought that it was a physical [*shariryagu*] sickness. But I went to get treatment from *dyomās* too. We had hired a room in Kathmandu so that I could be treated there conveniently. We went to many different *dyomās*. One *dhyomā* hit me with the stick made of sugarcane. She hit me in the eyes and I was bleeding from my eyes so my husband became very angry with her and took me back home. I was taken to a *phakeer*²¹⁵ in the Suryavinayak area too. It seemed that I was OK after we went there but when we returned here I was the same as before.

One morning I was taken to the *phakeer* again and he said that I was getting better and I was sent back home. On the way back we had to catch the trolley bus from Suryavinayak [...]. Then I began to cry a lot so many people came to see me and asked my husband why I was crying. People started to guess many reasons why I might be crying. Kedar *dāi* also came to see me crying, because it was the time for everyone to go to the office. This is why Kedar came to see me. I was crying very loudly so everybody's attention was drawn towards me. I was crying and calling for my father, saying that he should come to fetch me soon. Kedar *dāi* used to have a shop in that place. So he came out from the shop to go to his office. I was wearing a lot of golden jewellery on my body. When Kedar *dāi* saw me crying he asked my husband why I was crying and asked if I had lost some valuable thing. Then he said that this was not the case and I was crying because I was mad.

²¹⁵ This refers to a Muslim healer.

Kedar said that if I was mad we should go to church and believe in the true God Jesus Christ [*churchay nu parameshwor yāta vishwās yā, sāncho, satyamha parameshwor yeshu khrishta kha dhāla han*], and then I would certainly be cured. He even said that nothing could cure my sickness other than going to church. Because of what Kedar *dāi* said my husband found that what he was saying was like the words of a god [*dhyo nang nuwātheng nuwāta dhāla*]. Then he decided to take me to this place [the church]. Kedar was saying that he doesn't take any money at all, he just asks for belief [*vishwās jakka*].

Then they decided to take me to Kedar's apartment, but it was almost impossible to take me because I was refusing to go there. Anyway, they took me by force to his house. They took me first of all onto the floor of the terrace, but I started to cry again so they took me to Kedar's room and started to pray for me. During prayer, Kedar asked the spirit who was possessing me who it was. Then she [the evil spirit] said that she was known to our whole family. She even said that she ate up one of my sons [Ram Devi had a son who died]. And she said that no one could heal me. She was asked why she wanted to make trouble for me. In reply she said she was planning to steal an aluminium container from my house, and she came to the house, but somebody saw her, so she didn't have an opportunity to steal it, so she was angry and she made me mad. And she explained that she had already stolen many things from my house.

After this explanation Kedar *dāi* started to press on her face with the Bible [*bible nang khwāle ki khwāle dāla han*]. Then the witch said that she was feeling very tortured so she wanted to leave, saying 'I will leave, I will leave' [*ji wane bi-i, ji wane bi-i*]. Kedar was holding my hair, [Kedar's wife] was holding my legs, and Kedar's mother was holding my arms while Kedar *dāi* was praying. At the end, I became unconscious and lay down on the floor. After saying amen [*āmin*] I went to lay down on the floor. Then my family thought that I was dead. Then my sister-in-law started to cry very loudly because she loves me very much. Then Kedar and his mother consoled my sister-in-law, saying that I was not dead. Then Kedar and his family started to cover my body with a warm blanket and lit the electric heater too. After a while I woke up and felt normal and my body was very light like it was empty and I felt comfortable too [*ji purā hosay datakā alay jiu he halukā kā*].

I found that I had become very lean and thin. My face seemed unusual even to myself. When I was still sick, I burned my daughter Sapana with straw on the top floor of our house. I used to leave my house during the night. [...] When I returned home from Kedar's house my sister-in-law explained to my mother-in-law what had happened at Kedar's house and said that it was even treatment free of cost. Then father-in-law and mother-in-law said that I have to be sent to that place regularly and many times until I am fully cured. On the afternoon of the same day I felt a bit dizzy [*jhumma juyā wola*]. So I went again in the afternoon and in the evening too to

Kedar's house in order to be prayed for. And on third day I again felt the same type of dizziness that I felt before so I asked my husband to take me to Kedar's house, but he did not listen to me. Soon after I again became mad and began to break things in the house and I even pulled out all the electric wires too. When I took *grahan* I started to feel normal again.

SNP: When did you take *grahan*?

RD: When I was taken to Kedar's house after I became ill again. After I took *grahan* God helped me in many ways. One day I was in my field to water in the chilli plants and at that time a big snake appeared and came towards my legs and I said 'Oh Lord! Oh Lord!' [*he prabhu, he prabhu*] and 'Lord, please save me' [Nep.: *phabhu malāi bahcāunus*]. I fainted and fell down on the ground. Instead of attacking me the snake went back into its hole and I started to become conscious and I gave many thanks to the Lord for saving my life. [...]

One day I was going out from my house to church but all of sudden I felt that someone was trying to stop me. I felt it was an evil spirit [*saitan*]. It was early in the morning. Then all of sudden I heard the sound of God and he said that I should not be scared of him and he will follow behind me and I should walk in front [*chha hane hane nu ji lyune lyune woye*] and go towards the church. The Lord gives me great power.

SNP: What did God look like?

RD: I saw him like the light of the sun during the night. He speaks to us and says that he is always with us [*chhang-gu sāthay nhyābalayeng jee da sāthay dhāikā*]. People see him in different forms. But I saw him that way. Since I saw him I never feel scared of anything. I am not even scared of a dead body.

Extract 2.

IG: When you became a Christian, how old were you?

Sabina: I was maybe four or five years old. I was quite small at that time. Sapana was three months old.

IG: Are you the oldest?

S: No, there is my older brother. He not coming to church nowadays. At first all our family members went to church, but later there were some problems and my older brother and father left church and stopped coming. And we are continuing to go.

SNP: I have seen your father in church though.

S: Even when he comes to church it is just physical attendance. He does not come with his heart. The main reason he does not come is the community and friends, and also his eating and drinking habits. He doesn't mind if others go to church but he won't go himself.

My older brother knew everything about the church and about the Bible too. He knows the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and has even given sermons in church, but he still does not want to come to church. It became very difficult for him to believe. I don't know why. Maybe he has got a problem with drinking and smoking. And he seems to be worried about his death because he says that after he dies he wants the *guthi* people to come to collect him, he is not sure that the church people would do that. That is one of the main problems for him. Also, the people in society criticise Christianity and say that Christians are atheists and cow eaters. They actually know that we don't do this but they still say it. And they complain that married women do not put *tikā* on their foreheads. But we wear all of the ornaments apart from *tikā* on our heads.

My father likes everything about the church but he says that after his death he wants the *guthi* to collect his body. This is the only complaint against the church he has. I think it is just a made-up excuse [*bahānā*] from my father. He drinks sometimes. All of our neighbours suggest that he should go to church but he doesn't go to church.

SNP: Why do your neighbours suggest to him to go to church?

S: He used to cause us great suffering because of his addiction to alcohol and the neighbours used to say that he shouldn't behave like that because our family is Christian. The neighbours said that Christian people do not drink alcohol so they were surprised that he drank so much alcohol. But you see we cannot drag him to church when he does not want to come. But we always pray in his name. Sometimes he comes to church and listens to the sermon but he just ignores it. It goes in the left ear and out of the right [Nep.: *eutā kānale sunnu hunchha ra arko kānle udāunu hunchha*]. He doesn't care about it. So we will let God change him rather than changing him ourselves.

In fact, God has changed him a lot. Once he went to take part in the in the feast for worshipping the family deity and ate some food [that had been offered in worship], because he could get that food for free. After he returned from that worship and feast he started to vomit for two days and he was unconscious for two days and it was like he was almost dead. Then we decided to control him in a dramatic way, so we went to meet a tuberculosis doctor and requested him to say to our father that if he drinks alcohol again he may die. In fact, my father was not suffering from tuberculosis, but we did it for his sake. We told a small lie for his sake. Then he tried to control his drinking habit. And he completely give up drinking alcohol, smoking, and

eating other bad foods for three months. After three months, he again gradually started but he did not do it as much as before.

When our grandfather and grandmother [her father's parents] were coming to church, we used to have thirty or forty people in our house fellowship. We used to hold it on the top floor which was wide and open at that time. It is small now because of our separation [of property] from our uncles. Now our grandparents have passed away. The whole family went to church continuously for about two years. Then our grandparents started to get involved with the Narayan sect, and started to go to them. They stopped eating meat and didn't drink any alcohol there. But they used to accept *tikā* and *prasād* there. And he [her grandfather] used to stay in the house fellowship while he had *tikā* on his forehead and the other people would complain to him that he should not sit in the house fellowship with *tikā* on his forehead, because Christians should not do that. He was never baptised. After the complaints started in the house fellowship people started to leave it, one person after another. Now we only have a small number of people who come to our house fellowship.

Appendix 5. Dinesh and Ganga Maya's stories

Dinesh Pradhananga, a Chathariya Shrestha Newar, was born in 1958 in the town of Panauti, 12 kilometres to the south-east of Bhaktapur. He attained a Bachelor's degree in history and geography at the Bhaktapur campus of Tribhuvan University before qualifying in law in Patan. After working for a time as a teacher, he gained a position in a bank, which led to posts in various places around the Kathmandu Valley; he was eventually appointed in 1996 as manager of a bank in Bhaktapur. He married in 1980 and has two sons. Around the time Dinesh was appointed to his job in Bhaktapur, he began to suffer from severe stomach pains. It was then that he came into contact with Christians, and the sequence of events that would lead to his conversion began. Dinesh and his wife both took *grahan* in 1998, and they were baptised in the same year. Soon after being baptised, Dinesh took on a leadership position in Fellowship Church. In extract 1 I quote from my interview with Dinesh about his conversion; in Extract 2 I quote from my interview with his wife, Ganga Maya, about the same series of events. The reader will notice that while Dinesh emphasises the intellectual aspects of his conversion, and the way in which his Christianity developed from his communism, his wife concentrates entirely on Christianity's healing power.

Extract 1.

IG: How did you become a Christian?

DP: I was suffering terribly from stomach ache. It was terrible pain and impossible to bear. So a staff-member of Campus Crusade, who used to live near our house, came to pray for me. When I was suffering from stomach ache, some of our neighbours came to see me and one of them told us that the prayer of Christians could heal my stomach. Then he called at our house to pray for me. An old man from our local area who is like my father-in law, in [closeness of] relationship, advised us to call that Christian man in order to heal me.

IG: Was that man also a Christian?

DP: No, he was not. Soon after that Christian man came and prayed for me I started gradually to feel better. And that person asked me to come to the church the next day. [...] I went on next day and sat there for a while but I started to feel 'bored' when they started to pray in language that

was impossible to understand [*bararara hāla hayo prārthanā yagu bor lagejulā chhu hagu chhu hagu*].

IG: It was like speaking in tongues [*anya bhāshā*]?

DP: Yes! It was speaking in tongues. We had never heard this sort of language or been to such places so I did not feel like going there any more. Then that [Christian] man came to my house and asked why I did not come to church. I replied that if he would give me a Bible to read and study then I would be able to understand about the Bible, and I would then come to church again. Then he gave me a Bible and I started to study it, but understood nothing [*bible adhyayan yāyedhuna* [...] *chung he bujhaye maju*]. I had been studying the Bible continuously for about six or seven months when Kedar *dāi* came into contact and he made me listen to the gospel according the Four Spiritual Laws²¹⁶ [*chār ātmik niyankhang susamācār nyengkala*], then he came in contact regularly. And he took me to his church and I went to his church for few days but I did not want to go there regularly either.

IG: Why?

DP: I did not want to go but he [Kedar] lives near my house, so he was running after me tirelessly saying to come to church [*alay wong chāhin thānāsang juguling littu liyo nu nu dhālaka wong*]. Then it came to a situation where there was no way for me to avoid going to church [laughs]. [...] He asked me to come to church again and again, and eventually I went there [*alay nu nu nu nu dhāla wānedhuna*]. Even when I started to go, I was not regularly going on Saturday. I used to go only on every third week. Meanwhile I went to a training session in the month of Bhadra, called LTI [Leadership Training Institute; run by Campus Crusade for Christ] which was three days training. The training was about how to convey the gospel to others. After having that training I started to go to the church regularly.

IG: In which year did you take that leadership training?

DP: It was in 2055 VS [1998 AD] [...]. Even when I was a Hindu I was one who did not worship idols [*jhee hindu jusānang ji chāhin murti pujā mayāimhā patti ka*]. I used to feel ‘bored’ when someone told me about bowing to the gods, or doing other sorts of religious activities, or going for pilgrimages [*jitā wo dhyo bhāgiyāyegu ugung thugung yāyegu tirth varta wānegu dhālaki jitā bore lagaya juiguka*]. At that time I was a kind of atheist who believes that there are no gods; it was a kind of ‘scientist’ ideology [*ji ubalay ek kisima yāgu nāstik theng atheka ji parameshwor he maru dhāimhā patti thwo scientist bichārdhāra*].

²¹⁶ See footnote 92.

Then I realised that Jesus Christ is the light of the world [*alay yeshu christ chāhin sansār yāmhā jyoti kha*]. I realised that people should study about Jesus Christ. Where do you study about Christ? It is in the Bible. That is why I studied the Bible. When I was young I knew that Jesus Christ is called the light of the world. It is surprising that someone is called the light of the world [*sansārayāmhā jyoti dhāyamhā yāng thwo achammāmhā he kha*]. But no one could know why he is called the light of the world without reading the Bible. In general, normal people only know that Jesus Christ is called the light of the world, and that Buddha is called the light of Asia. But they do not know why they are called so. Those other people do not know what Jesus is like, why he came to the earth, why he died, and how he became alive again.

I studied the Bible and understood that this was the right path to follow, and realized that Jesus Christ is the only God. This is the right God [*parameshwor*] to follow. He is the one who created everything. After having this realisation I started to go to the church regularly and, within six or seven months, the church gave me a leadership position [*churhay wāngāgu chha sāt mahinā lipā jītā aguwā nang dayekalaka*]. I started to go to the church regularly and started to work as a leader [*aguwā*], to handle the church accounts, and to go here and there to convey the Gospel.

[...]

DP: When I was till Hindu I used to try my best to avoid taking *tikā*. When I put *tikā* on my forehead I started to feel itching on my forehead. So I immediately removed that *tikā* from my forehead.

IG: When you did that, didn't your family complain?

DP: They didn't scold me but they did wonder about my behaviour. If they wanted to put the *tikā* I used to request them to put just a few grains of rice *tikā* on my forehead. Even those two grains of rice also made my forehead itch. People go for pilgrimage and go to various temples, but I didn't like to do that. Sometimes I accompanied them but I did not go inside the temples to worship the gods. Whenever I was meant to offer some food, money, or things for death rituals I did not do that but gave the same things to poor and needy people instead. I am bit of a follower of communist theory.

IG: Which party do you belong to?

DP: In fact I am a communist. And in terms of my party I belong to the United Maoist Party. [...] I have been active in the Civil Servant's Union for the Maoist party.

IG: How did you become attracted by communist ideology?

DP: Because in the communist system people get equal facilities and are honoured in an equal way, but this will not happen in a capitalist system. So this was the main reason to be a communist. According to what is said in the Book of Acts, property should be held in common by all.²¹⁷ This is why it is believed that when Marx invented communism he was inspired by the Book of Acts.

[...]

IG: Mostly people come to church because of their sickness, isn't that right?

DP: Yes! Most people come to church for that reason.

IG: Apart from coming because of sickness, for what other reasons do people come to church?

DP: In general, Christians are the people in the world who have progressed most. Most scientists in the world are Christians, because the God in whom they have believed is the right God [*amisang viswāsa yamhā thik parameshwor*]. Most of the Christian countries are the most developed in the world. In comparison with the texts of other religions, the Bible contains factual things [*megu dharmayāgu khān swoya aki bible chāhin bāstavik khān da*]. It consists of truth and facts [*satya, tathya khān*]. Other religious texts are difficult to believe in, and are things that have been imagined [*kāalpanik khan*]. Whatever is said in these texts is not believable. But in the Bible it is mainly true facts. It is said that the best-selling book in the world is the Bible. [...]

In other religions, there are not many practical things [*byābahārik khān*] but on this side there are more practical things. In other religions there are more traditions [*paramparā*], but in the Bible there are more practical things. In other religions there are not scientific things, as there are in the Bible.

[...]

SNP: What are the main differences between the Hindu side and the Christian side?

DP: I think it is the matter of guardianship. On the Hindu side one cannot feel that there is somebody who is a guardian but in Christianity the Lord is a guardian [*akhe abhibhāwak maru theng ch Wong thakhe abhibhāwakatwo da*]. Here there is only one guardian, but there are many there, so to whom do we promise *bhākal*?²¹⁸ If you do *bhākal* to one god another might be disappointed with you. But on this side, once you believe, you can rely on him and put your hope in him. If you worship Ganesh, then Bhimsen might be angry with you, things could go in this way. On this side God is 'only one' [*parameshwor only one jula*].

²¹⁷ See Acts 2: 44-5.

²¹⁸ The promise to make an offering to a deity if a particular intention is fulfilled.

Extract 2.

Ganga Maya: We married in 2042 VS [1980 AD] and he became a believer in 2055 VS [1998 AD]. The sickness from which he suffered, from which we became believers, has not returned to him, which is a very noticeable thing. Some other diseases cause problems for him sometimes, but never that one. [...] This house was new and only one storey tall, so at that time we were staying outside of Bhaktapur. We were thinking of coming to this house to stay for few days, because we had a desire to stay in the new house. Sometimes we would come here to stay for three days at a time. [...]

That evening I prepared some food to eat. [...] As I gave him the plate, all of sudden he said that he had an extreme pain in his stomach which he could not bear. He could not hold the plate and was about to drop it on the floor. He started to tremble [...] then he collapsed and started to sweat a lot. His body became yellow and cold too. Then our two sons started to cry, and so did I.

My sons went to call an old man who used to live right behind this house; he is distantly related to us too. My sons called him grandfather. I was holding him [Dinesh] and that grandfather came to our house and looked at him. Soon, many other people also gathered here; they came because they saw the two boys crying and going out to get help. In the crowd, someone suggested to us to bring him to the hospital, and someone suggested to us to bring him to the healers [*vaidyatā*]. He looked like he was dead. Then this old man said that there was a person who was a Christian who came to pray for people, and maybe he could do so for Dinesh. There was no option to say no, because we would do anything for him to survive. So I said OK.

When the people from Campus Crusade came to our house they asked us if we would believe when they prayed. We said that we didn't mind believing anything so long as he was cured. Then they started to pray and asked him [Dinesh] to say amen [*āmin*] at the end of prayer, but he was in an unconscious state so he could not say it. Then they immediately started to pray for him for a second time, and asked him to say amen at the end of prayer and this time he was able say amen in a soft voice and he even opened his eyes. Then they again prayed for third time and this time he became much better and sat on his own without our help. They did a miracle for us [*chamatkāra he yanga bila*]. Because of that we were very pleased with these people.

On that night we were very afraid to stay at this house because it was our very first day staying here. [...] We all wondered what would happen to us. The next day, we felt that he [the man from Campus Crusade] had helped us a lot so I wanted to pay him some money for his great service. So I went to buy some nice food to feed him, and we invited him to come to our house again on next day to thank him and feed him and to give him some money too. He came to our

house on second day and ate some food that we offered him. He again prayed that day in the same way as he did on first day. And before he left I asked him to take 100 rupees and he became angry with us. He said that everything was done by God [*parameshwor*], and he did nothing, so we should thank God rather than him. And he advised me to buy a Horlicks energy drink for him [Dinesh], to make him stronger.

Then we went away from this house because we found it risky to stay here. When I went consult with the astrologist he said that someone had put a curse on us [*hāneyangahagu dhaka dhāyohalāka*]. After hearing that we became very scared to return here, so we did not come here very often for about a year. When we returned here on ‘father's day’²¹⁹ he again fell sick, exactly as he had done a year before. It happened when he was having dinner. If I was not there at that moment he could have died on that day too. As we knew by then that praying could heal sickness, our children immediately went to call Kedar *dāi* because the person from the last time had already left this area, because he was only here in this area in relation to Campus Crusade. Before he left he told us about Kedar *dāi*, and said that we should contact him and get help from him if we faced the same problem in the future.

So our elder son went immediately to call Kedar *dāi* at 10 o'clock at night. When Kedar *dāi* came here he also prayed three times, and he [Dinesh] became conscious during the third prayer. And the next day I made a request to him [Dinesh] that he must not do any more [Hindu] rituals, and he should believe in this side because this side had saved us [*jing chhing a chung he yāye mwola chhāya dhasa jheetā thuking yanga he jyuguling dhaka dhāyā*]. The Dashain festival was soon after, so he [Dinesh] did not want to go to church then, but after this we were going to go to the church. Kedar *dāi* dropped by here quite often and asked us again and again to come to church. Kedar *dāi* has a habit of asking people over and over again to come to church.

²¹⁹ A day in the Bhaktapurian Hindu festival year when fathers are honoured.

Appendix 6. Narayan Man Bijukchhe's story

The following is an extract from my interview with Narayan Man Bijukchhe, where he describes how he became a communist. I outline Bijukchhe's life in Section 4.3.

IG: How did you develop an interest in left-wing ideology?

NMB: During the year 2010 VS [1953/4 AD], my father was staying in Guar, in Rautahat, for the purpose of a tax collection contract. I also went with him to Gaur. And I went to school there. My father had a rented room and the landlord himself was a communist.

IG: He was a communist?

NMB: Yes! He was. His name was Lil Raj Upadhyaya. He was communist and he had some children who were taught by a Muslim teacher. That Muslim teacher was also a communist. I started to be familiar with these children, and there was a library [...] where we used to go together after we finished school. And the librarian was also our teacher. When I visited that library I used to ask for inspiring books [*joshilo kitāb*]. The librarian used to give me books that said how sons should be and how daughters should be. I used to get books related to the First and Second World Wars, and to the heroes of these wars. And I used to read about the theory of Darwin.

One day, we all had a lunch together with that Muslim teacher, and I was asked to give him a piece of onion; I cut the onion and dropped the piece of onion onto that Muslim's plate without touching him. Then I was asked that why I dropped the onion in that way. I replied to them that I should not touch the Muslim because I was of a higher caste. Then the other children said that they would complain to their father about what had happened. I was called upstairs to the room of Lil Raj and interrogated as to why I did that. I replied that he was a Muslim. Then he asked me what would happen to me if I touched him. Would I become yellow or red, he asked me. I replied 'no'. But I said that it would be sinful [*jing alay pāp lāi dhāyā*]. Then he asked what sin is. But I did not have any reply for that question. [...] Then he said to me that I had a remnant of old thoughts and that these should be removed from me. [...]

One day I asked my teacher about him [Lil Raj], and he said that he was a communist. Then I asked what a communist was. Then he replied that communist means those who do not follow religion [*communist bhanyā dharma namānne*] [laughs] [...] Because of those thoughts and sayings I started to think about everything from a viewpoint of scepticism [*shāngka*], as Buddha

talked about [*Buddha dhāyao tatheng harek chij yātā shangkāyā drishtring swoyema dhāyegu*]. So I started to see everything in a sceptical way. [...]

IG: At that time how old were you?

NMB: I was perhaps 13 or 14 years old. [...] And, next to my room in Gaur, that landlord had a big room, and he used to organize meetings in the night, and I was asked to make an artificial cough when someone come to the house while they were having that meeting. And on the next day I used to see the newsletter in the local newspaper where slogans were written that said ‘give us work and bread or else leave the government’. And I was also asked to write these slogans on pieces of paper. In the end I found out that they were peasant political activists. At that time we did not have any money to buy blank paper, so we used to write on used newspaper. [...]

There was a printing press, named Gandhi Adarsha Press, in Bairganiya, India, which is on Nepal's border. Sometimes I was asked to take some draft papers to give to that press to print, and asked to collect them after printing and take them to Gaur. I had to bring those materials hidden inside my clothes. We were so young that no one used to suspect us. And I used to stick posters on walls too. [...] There was a flood in that area that very year. So the peasants were suffering very much from the flood. They had no food to eat and no place to stay, so they made some demands to the government for relief materials and to be excused from taxes. It was a sort of peasants' movement and I was partially involved in that movement. That had an impact on me and that was how I was attracted towards political activities, through the peasants' movement. [...]

IG: You are from a middle-class family so how did you develop sympathy towards the peasants and the poor?

NMB: I got that idea because of the character of humanity [*mānabi gun wo mānabatā wong yang wo bichār wola*]. I saw many poor people who had no food to eat, and I thought that it would be better for them to have some food to eat too. That was how I build up my sympathy towards them. [...]

Once there was a programme where Nepal's Great Poet Laxmiprasad Devkota and the dramatist Balkrishna Shamsher were invited to explain about their travel in different countries such as the USSR, China and so on. When they spoke at that programme they explained about the good governmental system in those countries. I was inspired by this towards those communist countries. And I was inspired to be a poet and attracted towards literature too. So I composed a poem on the next day and showed it to my teacher.

One day I was walking around Chochhen area [in Bhaktapur] and I saw a library named Baudhik Vikas Mandal [‘Intellectual Development Gathering’]. I went there and asked if I could

become a member, and they said ‘yes’, and I became a member, for which I had to pay 12 *paisā* as a membership fee. After becoming a member of that library I ask them to give me an inspiring [*joshilo*] book. They gave me a book called *How to Become a Communist* [*Communist Kasari Banne*]. I took it and started to read at home, but I understood nothing of that book. Then I asked them to give me some books about the lives of different respected people. I got some biographies of Mao Tse-tung and some Nepalese dignitaries, and biographies of martyrs and leaders from different countries. They were simple to read because they were written in the Nepali language.

In Tulachhen [in Bhaktapur] there was an institution named Jan Adhyayan Mandal [‘People’s Study Gathering’] where we used to have free lectures every Saturday. Sometimes we used to have debates on the theme of ‘should one smoke cigarettes or not?’ One person would say it is good to smoke and another would say it is not. And another theme was ‘should one keep pets or not?’ and ‘should one watch films or not?’ and ‘should one drink alcohol or not?’ We used to organize a literary conference every month, and we would recite poems, and read stories, essays, and articles too. [...]

IG: How old were you at that time?

NMB: Maybe 14 or 15 years old. [...] When I reached class 10, one day I was taken to a big white house in Nag Pokhari [in Bhaktapur] by my friends. I was told that I could have a tuition class there; later on I found that Tulsi Lal Amatya [a leftist politician] was staying underground there. I joined the tuition class for which I used to pay one rupee fifty *paisā* per month. In the class I was taught English, Geography, Economics, and few other subjects too. After the class the teacher used to ask us to ask him questions, if we had any desire to ask. I used to ask if gods existed or not [*alay nyenegu kha dyo da la ki maru*]. There was a picture of Shiva, which was hanging on the wall. In that picture, a fountain of water was coming from the head of Shiva, so I asked if that could possibly happen or not. Was that a true picture or not? Then that teacher replied to us that it was just a painting and a decoration, but it was not a true thing [*khāli shringār jaka kha: thwo satya makhu*]. In that way I started to see everything in a sceptical way.

Soon after, my family found out that I was going to that white house for tuition classes, and my father asked me to stop going to that Rana’s house. I said I was going for a tuition class, so why should I stop going there? My family said that they were communists, so I should stop going there. Then I asked my friends what communist means. The friends replied that they did not know. Then Tulsi Lal moved to another place. [...]

Later on, an institution was formed in Bhaktapur known as the Jan Adhikar Suraksha Samiti [‘Human Rights Security Committee’]. That committee started to publish some leaflets against the government. Because of this, some members of that committee were arrested by the government. They were kept in the jail situated in Durbar Square in Bhaktapur. I was asked to

deliver some books to that jail, when I went to school. When I collected those books I started to read for the whole night, and the next day I delivered to them to the jail. When I started to read those books I found that they were all communist books. After reading those books I started to understand some of them. And I gained some knowledge about what communism is like.

IG: Were there books by Marx and Engels among these books?

NMB: One book was called *In The Name of Religion* [*Dharmake Nām Par*]. In that book it was shown how people are exploited in the name of religion.

IG: Did you think at that time that protesting against religion was an important thing to do?

NMB: Not in that way. The Jain and Buddhist religions were considered to be a materialistic religions. We were taught that what is, is true, and what is not, is not true [*chhu da wo satya chhu maru wo asatya*]. [...] There are good things in the Hindu religion too [*hindu dharmakhay nang bānlāgu chij ta da*]. The Buddhist religion is true and scientific. In the Hindu religion there is caste and superstition, which are not right [*hindu dharmay jātbhāt da andhavishwās da uking wo majyu ka*] [...] Hinduism is the religion of the kings [*hindu dharma dhāyegu jujupinigu dharma kha*], and of the rich people and rulers. The Buddhist religion is the religion of the poor [*buddha dharma dhāyegu garibtayegu*].

Appendix 7. Description of interviews

During my time in Bhaktapur I conducted 67 recorded interviews; of these, 28 were with Hindus and 39 were with Christians. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Bhaktapur and Sanga, though I also conducted a few interviews in Kathmandu, Patan, Jumla, and other locations. I also conducted a significant number of informal, non-recorded interviews, during which I took notes. Recorded interviews would typically take the form of an extended life-history interview. The informal interviews were generally shorter: they would often take place after church services or in house or youth fellowships, when I would ask people about their lives and how they became Christians. I also conducted brief informal life history interviews with all of the Bhaktapurian pastors to whom I spoke when conducting the survey described in Appendix 2.

The table below summarises key information relating to 34 Christians with whom I conducted extended life-history interviews. The people in the table are not all of the Christians whom I interviewed: rather, I only included those where the recorded interview contained sufficient information for me to fill in the table with reasonable completeness. To interviewees to whom I did not directly refer in the text of the thesis, I have assigned a number; for those interviewees referred to in the text, I have given the pseudonym used in the text.

The sample of 34 people that appears below is not large enough that secure conclusions can be drawn from the data. When making, in the text of the thesis, generalisations about such things as the reasons people convert, and how family conversion works, I have drawn on the much wider range of conversion stories I collected in informal conversation, in addition to the conversion stories of the people in the table below. My primary aim in presenting the table is for the reader to obtain a general sense of the types of people I talked to, rather than for them to be able to discern general trends within Bhaktapurian Christian life. Nonetheless, a few significant trends in Bhaktapurian Christianity can be glimpsed in the data. First, it can be seen that the great majority of the people in the sample converted because of healing: 13 converted because of the healing of themselves, 10 converted because of the healing of a family member, and 11 converted for other reasons. Second, the significance of whole-family conversion can be seen: 27 of the people in the sample are of wholly Christian nuclear families.

The reader should note a number of things about the data in the table. When I refer to ‘Dalit’ in the table, I indicate Nepali-speaking Dalits, not Newar Dalits. Changu Narayan is a village to the north of Bhaktapur: the people in the table who live there are members of Corinthi Church. Palanse is a village to the east of Sanga: the people in the table who live there are members of Ashish Church. Below is a numerical list of the information included in the table: the numbered lines below correspond to the numbered columns in the table.

1. Interviewee number or pseudonym
2. Gender (M = male; F = female)
3. Marital status (M = married; U = unmarried)
4. Year of Birth
5. Caste
6. Occupation
7. Place of residence
8. Year of *grahan*
9. Year of baptism
10. Church leadership position, if any
11. Is the whole of the person’s nuclear family also Christian? If married, nuclear family signifies spouse and children; if unmarried, nuclear family signifies parents and siblings. (Y = yes; N = no)
12. Primary reason for conversion (H = healing of self; FH = healing of family member; O = other)

Table summarising information relating to 34 Christian interviewees

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	M	M	1963	Chetri	Journalist	Jumla	1992	1995	Deacon	N	H
2	M	U	1989	Magar	Tourism	Sanga	1998	1998		Y	FH
3	M	M	1936	Newar Farmer	Farmer	Sanga	2005	2005		Y	FH
4	M	M	1962	Magar	Pastor	Sanga	1987	1987	Pastor	Y	H
5	M	M	1975	Dalit	Pastor	Bhaktapur		1993	Pastor	Y	H
6	M	M	1957	Newar Farmer	Apartments Landlord	Bhaktapur	1992	1993		Y	H
7	F	M	1987	Tamang	House wife	Bhaktapur	2006	2007	Women's leader	Y	O
8	M	U	1991	Newar Farmer	Carpenter	Bhaktapur	2008	2009		N	O
9	M	M	1950	Giri	Retired driver	Changu Narayan	2008	2008		N	FH
10	F	M	1954	Dalit	Farm labourer	Changu Narayan	2007	2008		Y	FH
11	F	U	1986	Newar Farmer	Student	Bhaktapur	2001	2001	Women's leader	Y	FH
12	M	M	1979	Newar Farmer	Pastor	Bhaktapur	2000	2001	Pastor	Y	FH
13	M	M	1971	Panchthariya Shrestha	Farming	Bhaktapur	2010	2010		Y	H
14	F	U	1992	Dalit	Tailor	Changu Narayan	2005	2006		Y	H
15	F	M	1982	Chetri	Church service	Palanse	2005	2005	Women's leader	Y	FH
16	M	U	1990	Magar	Dishwasher	Palanse	2006	2006		N	O
17	M	M	1959	Panchthariya Shrestha	Lawyer	Dhulikhel	1990	1992	Church committee Member	Y	H
18	M	M	1965	Panchthariya Shrestha	Crane operator	Bhaktapur	1986	1990	Deacon	Y	O
19	M	M	1950	Chathariya Shrestha	Retired civil servant	Bhaktapur	1997	1999	Church committee member	Y	H
20	M	M	1955	Newar Farmer	Pastor	Patan		1975	Pastor	Y	O
21	M	M	1971	Dalit	Jewellery maker	Bhaktapur	1995	1996	Deacon	Y	O
22	M	M	1969	Newar Farmer	Farmer	Bhaktapur	2004	2005		Y	O
23	F	M	1954	Newar Carpenter	Carpenter	Bhaktapur	2010	2010		N	H
24	F	M	1969	Newar Farmer	Farmer	Bhaktapur	2003	2004		Y	O
'Vishnu Prasad'	M	M	1934	Newar Farmer	Farmer	Bhaktapur		1995		N	H
'Kedar'	M	M	1953	Chathariya Shrestha	Pastor	Bhaktapur	1983	1986	Pastor	Y	O
'Kamal'	M	M	1984	Newar Farmer/ Karmacharya	Language teacher	Bhaktapur	2000	2002	Youth leader	Y	O
'Ramesh'	M	M	1963	Panchthariya Shrestha	Retired bank worker	Bhaktapur	2000	2001		Y	H
'Sushila'	F	M	1966	Panchthariya Shrestha	House wife	Bhaktapur	2000	2001	Women's leader	Y	FH
'Dinesh'	M	M	1958	Chathariya Shrestha	Retired bank manager	Bhaktapur	1998	1999	Deacon	Y	H
'Ganga Maya'	F	M	1963	Chathariya Shrestha	House wife	Bhaktapur	1998	1999		Y	FH
'Ram Devi'	F	M	1963	Newar Farmer	Farming	Thimi	1993	2001		N	H
'Daya Laxmi'	F	M	1954	Newar Farmer	Farming	Bhaktapur	1992	1997		Y	FH
'Yogendra'	M	M	1959	Chathariya Shrestha	Pastor	Bhaktapur	1979	1980	Pastor	Y	O

Appendix 8. Maps (including church location map)

Below are three maps. Map 1 shows the location of the Kathmandu Valley within Nepal. It also shows the three districts that make up the Kathmandu Valley: Kathmandu District, Lalitpur (Patan) District, and Bhaktapur District. Map 2 shows the location of the city of Bhaktapur in relation to the cities of Kathmandu and Patan.

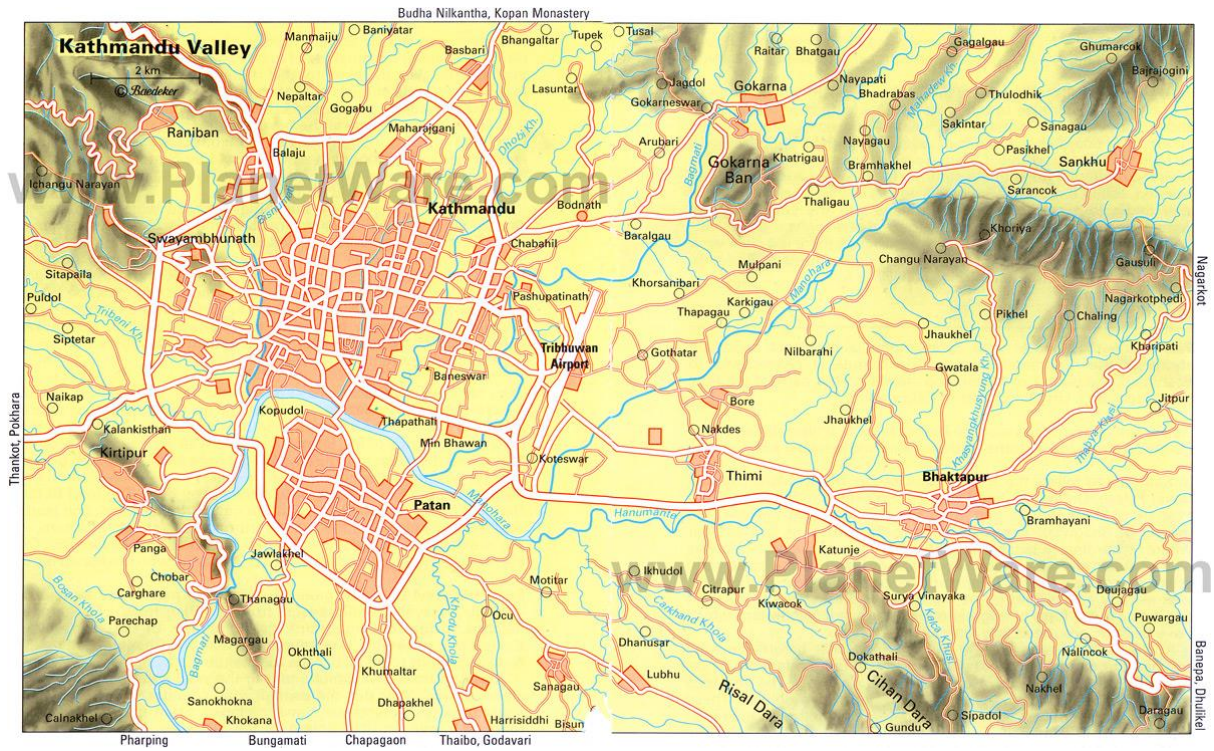
Map 3 shows the locations of churches in the area surrounding Bhaktapur. The map shows 26 churches in the immediate vicinity of Bhaktapur: 22 of these were surveyed in the church survey discussed in Appendix 2. The map also shows churches located in Thimi, and in various other locations.

Map 1



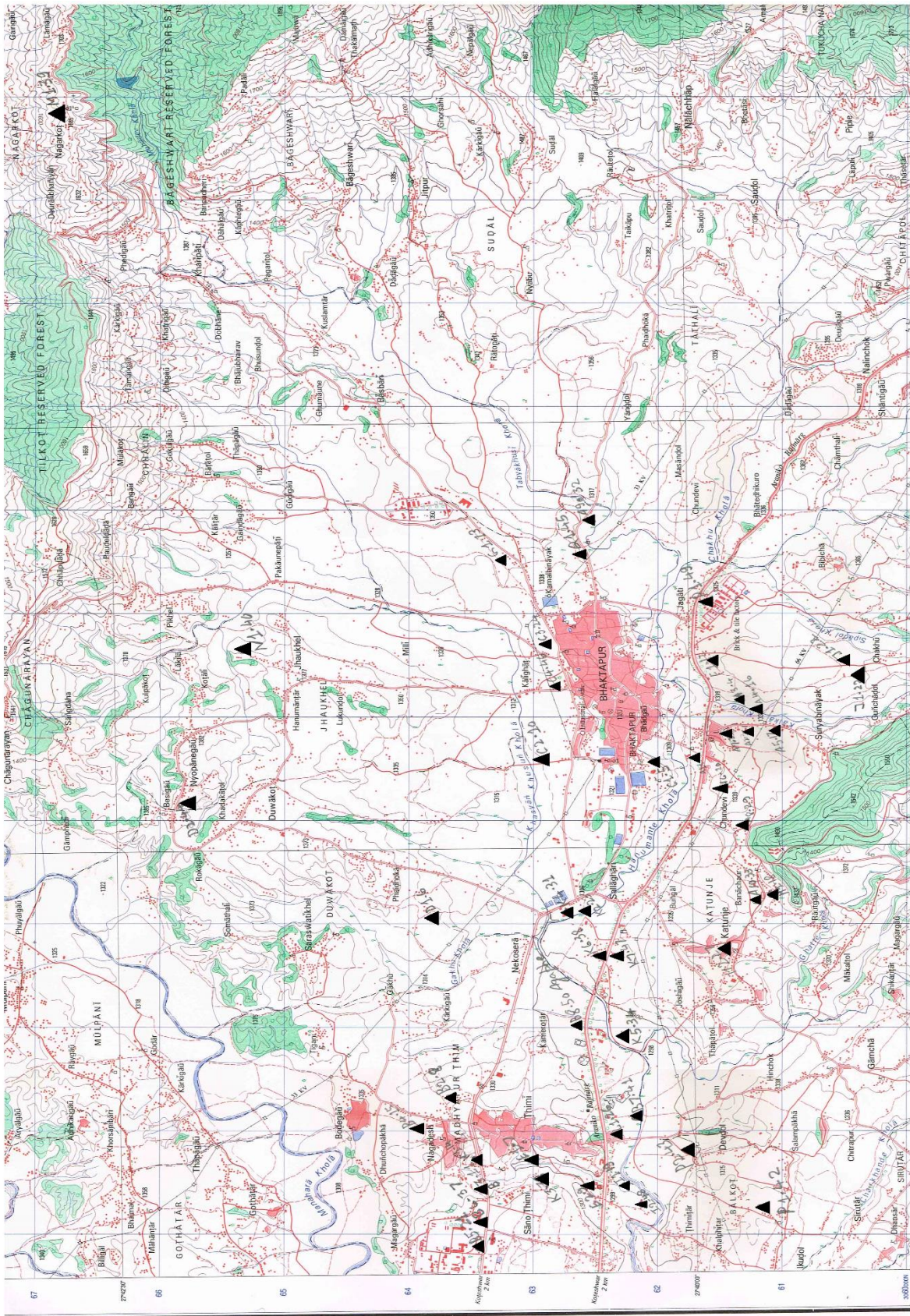
Source: <http://imgarcade.com/1/nepal-city-map/>

Map 2



Source: <http://www.planetware.com/tourist-attractions-/kathmandu-nep-cn-k.htm>

Map 3



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