Christianity and social change:
An investigation of the public witness of the Nepali Church

By

Durga Prasad Khanal

Student Number: 21814971

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Supervisor: Prof Johannes Knoetze, University of Pretoria

Mentors: Dr Moussa Bongoyok and Dr Prasad Phillips, Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life

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DECLARATION

Full name: Durga Prasad Khanal

Student number: 21814971

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the status of the public witness of the Nepali Church in relation to the work of the Western Christian Missions (WCMs) in social development. The Nepali Church is only 70 years old and is the fruit of faithful work of the Nepali Christians whose previous generation converted to Christianity due to their close association with the WCMs in the 1950s. The WCMs in this thesis are those mission organizations who originated in the Western countries and came to Nepal as development workers to 'present the Gospel to Nepali people and build the Church'. They draw their major human, financial and spiritual resources from the churches outside Nepal.

When the WCMs came, there were not many Nepali Christians, nor the existence of a local Church. They would work hand in hand with the Nepali Christians in their workforce to minister the spiritual needs of the people as they served their physical needs. As a result, small Christian congregations inclusive of Nepali converts started to emerge within the mission centres. However, as the WCMs progressed in their work, a political change in 1960 altered their focus to social development side of the mission and thus they disengaged in proclamation (kerygma). Over time, they became less intentional in pursuing the spiritual elements of mission and immersed themselves in the social. Social work became their main domain of engagement in Nepal and thus limited involvement in the proclamation side. Later, as the time progressed with the change in the country's political environment, the WCMs believed that 'social development' was truly their best part of Nepal mission. With the WCMs focusing on diaconal services, the infant Nepali Church was encouraged to take care of kerygma.

The Church was only beginning to take early shape but was left to itself to find ways of doing mission. It was not invited by the WCMs to journey with them in their diaconal services as mission partner. Sharing between the two in terms of mission priorities, theology or resources became less visible and both took parallel mission routes. Thus, separate missional priorities for the WCMs and the local Church were drawn early on. The separate identities and objectives of the WCMs and the local Church resulted in the development of dual approach to Christian mission which has created a lasting challenge in promoting a holistic Christian public witness.

The research found that with the progression of time and expanding horizons of social services the WCMs gradually strengthened their separate identity from the local Church. This was further aided by the political environment of the country. The WCMs became more inclined to listen to the voice of those in power and comply to the ever increasing conditions than to challenge some of the limiting conditions in favour of forming a more collaborative missional partnership with the local Church. The WCMs remained content to promote diaconal service by maintaining a visible distance from the local Church in mission in order not to displease the dominant ruling class.

This research has revealed that the Nepali Church would have welcomed the WCMs' courageous approach to mission collaboration early on which would have resulted a shared role in the promotion of a better public witness. However, the WCMs hesitated to this partnership invitation.

This research brings out three recommendations to WCMs and the Nepali Church towards strengthening the public witness in the future mission partnership:

a. Each mission field is characterised by its local context which has a distinct social, political, religious, economic and cultural environment and these are not transferrable to other contexts. Nepal's mission context is characterised by religious pluralism, modernity and widespread poverty and further complicated by a dominant Hindu outlook on life. Therefore, the WCMs coming to serve in Nepal must come in humility to learn from the local context. The local Church in all its newness can offer tools and insights that can effectively promote public witness.

b. The concept of being a witness of Jesus in the public requires being close to the context where the Church exists to serve God. Therefore, the Nepali churches must operate in their own context rather than seeking to apply the mode, methods or strategies developed elsewhere.

c. The Nepali Church must come to realise that the WCMs were God's instrument in its birth. Therefore, the extension of a reciprocal partnership between the two in honesty allows God to strengthen both as equal agents of transformational mission in Nepal.

Contribution: This research points to the need for a meaningful partnership between the WCMs and the local Church. It is an inter and intra-disciplinary study attending to the fields of history, development, mission studies and ecumenical relations and proposes the following as new areas of knowledge:

- The Christian mission has a global dimension and it requires the involvement of the Church globally. The WCMs that launched Nepal mission aiming to 'build the global Church' cannot achieve this without involving the local Church.

- The diaconia and kerygma of the Christian Gospel needs to integrate as one transformative mission of the Church. The WCMs should recognize the strength of the Nepali Church in kerygma and invite it to enrich their missional presence. As well, the local Church is obliged to invite the WCMs to share their knowledge, resources and expertise in casting a strong, positive and influential public witness.

- The true mission originates and flourishes locally due to the localness of the Gospel. It is the locally created mission that is best able to address local issues holistically. In order to transform the religious pluralism, chronic poverty and increasing influence of modernity, the local Church must take a holistic approach to mission and invite the WCMs to share in reshaping missional engagement from (only) a kerygmatic ministry to a holistic ministry.

- Regardless of occasional hesitations, the Nepali society has remained open to transformational Christian mission. The governmental invitation to the WCMs in 1950s and continuous approval of their stay in Nepal has indicated the willingness of Nepal to be friends with the WCMs. As a result, the WCMs from 1950s till date have been granted permission to collaborate with different social actors including the federal governments. Therefore, there is a future potential for increased mission work in Nepal with much more freedom and cooperation from the Nepal government and the local Church.

- The Christian Church in Nepal is in its first generation. Many of those Christians who started the first Nepali churches are still alive and are rehearsing beneficial insights of early mission collaboration of the WCMs. Because of this, the new generation of Nepali Church leaders have a soft corner to the WCMs, especially those who invested in the early church developments. There is an urge and respect for the WCMs who come to Nepal as learner and partner in mission.

Key words: Social change, mission, local Church, public witness, Western Christian Missions (WMCs)

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADP - Area Development Programme

ADRA - Adventist Development and Relief Agency

CENAS - Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies

CIAA - Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority

EDPs - External Development Partners

EMB - Evangelistic Missionary Band

ESAF - Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility

FAO - Food and Agriculture Organisation

FELM - Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission

FIDA - Finnish International Development Agency

FNCN – Federation of National Christian Nepal

GBS – Gandaki Boarding School

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

IMF – International Monetary Fund

INF – International Nepal Fellowship

INGOs – International Non-governmental Organisations

LDC - Least Developed Country

MBBS - Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

MCC - Mennonite Central Committee

MGS – Mahendra Bhawan Girls School

MPI - Multidimensional Poverty Index

NCC - Nepal Campus Crusade

NCCS – Nepal Christian Community Survey

NCF – Nepal Christian Fellowship

NCFN – National Churches Fellowship Nepal

NCS – Nepal Christian Society

NEB - Nepal Evangelistic Band

NeCON - Network of Christian Organisations in Nepal

NGOs - Non-governmental organisations

NLT - Nepal Leprosy Trust

PCID - Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

WCC - World Council of Churches

WEA - World Evangelical Alliance

SDA – Seventh-day Adventist

SIL - Summer Institute of Learning

TB - Tuberculosis

TEAM - The Evangelical Alliance Mission

UMN – United Mission to Nepal

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Fund

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WCM – Western Christian Mission

WCC - World Council of Churches

WVIN – World Vision International Nepal

WB - World Bank

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

In this study, I am interested to find out how Christianity, including the Western Christian missions (WCMs) and the Nepali Church, has implanted the transforming influence of the Christian faith in Nepal's pluralistic society as a way to enhance the public witness of the local Church. How the work of the WCMs has contributed to the development and growth of the Nepali Church in a transformative way and what relational dynamics are formed and valued between them is the key focus of this study. This study also examines the experiences and expectations of the present-day Nepali Church leaders associated with Nepal Christian Society (NCS) towards the WCMs' work as an expression of the public witness of the Nepali Church.

This study discusses public witness as a key theoretical and theological concept of transforming mission of the Christian Church. The mission of the Church is to impact the society in which it is placed so that the Christian initiatives lead people to experience a newness of life flowing out from the Church. Hence, keeping the Nepali Church as the focal point of Christian public witness, this study investigates the missional relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church and frames the pattern for the future of Christian mission in Nepal.

Christian public witness is defined as 'the work of the Church in society which transforms the lives of people and helps them experience a new life through faith in Christ'. The Church's public witness is thus inclusive of both the proclamation and the demonstration (kerygma and diaconia) of the Gospel. As displayed by Christ himself, the Church is to be a gateway for people to enter into a new life and learn to walk with Jesus into that newness - which is free of sin, suffering and death.

After returning from the wilderness of temptation, Jesus taught his disciples new values that were to transform them into new people (Reference Scripture). He

pronounced blessings to those who would love mercy, peace and righteousness instead of selfish arrogance. He encouraged his disciples to be humble, hunger and thirst for what is right and to forgive their offenders and reminded them of the importance of an inner life of his followers which produces outward fruits of love and service and makes them the children of his Father. For Jesus, the true mark of greatness in the sight of God was to be humble, share one's resources with others and to promote honest and just relationships, the elements of social change as well as to proclaim the kingdom of God through faith in Christ. Jesus desired his disciples to live their lives based on what he taught and demonstrated, and encouraged them to emulate from his love, mercy and peace, the elements of human transformation. God required his people, the Church to live these inner qualities of blessedness and in this way transform their communities.

These inner qualities that Jesus taught his disciples are usually referred to as the 'transforming initiatives' (Strassen & Gushee 2003:125). Gordon (2016:1) stated, 'Living out these (Gospel) *values* means desiring for one's neighbour and neighbour's family that which one desires for oneself and family. Living out these values means bettering the quality of other people's lives spiritually, physically, socially, and emotionally as one betters one's own.' These values are at the core of the Christian Church and its being in mission. Bryant Myers (2012:88-90) proposed, 'to work for human transformation as a Christian requires taking a whole gospel for all of life and to implant Christian values in people. It is to be God's hands and feet in the community, working for the redemption of people, their social systems and the environment that sustains their life.'

These values have been taught by Christians throughout the history as the foundation of Christian living and service in community. Living out these Gospel values means sharing in the suffering and pain of others and helping to create a new environment for human flourishing. Lesslei Newbigin was one of the twentieth-century pioneers of the transformational mission theology, Of Newbigin Goheen (2001:357) said, 'For Newbigin, the goal of mission was the humanisation or *shalom* of society through the efforts of the laity, in cooperation with other social institutions that aimed at the transformation of oppressive political, social and economic structures.' This belief of Newbigin has been shared by many Christians across the

churches from the latter part of the 20th century who attempted to bring the whole Gospel message to the whole world, seeking to engage in transforming individuals and their communities through the incorporation of Christian values of love, compassionate service and justice. Hence, the core motif of the Christian mission - whether devoted to kerygma or diaconia (the evangelisation of the world or to social development) – is the creation of an environment that leads to the transformation of human societies through a belief in Christ and living in Christian values.

1.2 Motivation

As a Nepali Christian, I have witnessed the preferential treatment of society to the WCMs and the Nepali Church in the field of development and social change. The differences in acceptance and collaboration are visible: WCMs are welcomed as development partners, whereas the local Church is not counted a worthy collaborator and is uninvited to share in the domain. Society's judgement is based on the diaconal services of the WCMs. They render their community services without requiring people to attend to their Christian message; whereas the local Church is suspected of possible coercion or manipulation to convert when serving those in need. This general attitude of those outside the Church is to be understood due to a lack of consistent and mutual interaction between the local Church and the WCMs in performing their mission in Nepal. The local Church and individual Nepali Christians hesitate to readily collaborate with people of other faiths or no faith in social change. On the contrary, the WCMs do not take the faith of the recipient communities as a determining factor for receiving their diaconal services. As a result, the Nepali Church leadership faces an ongoing challenge to present a favourable public witness of the Church in society which expects the similar level of cooperation and collaboration received from the WCMs.

A clear line of separation between the diaconal and kerygmatic elements of Christian mission which started in the 1960s as the WCMs preferred social engagement without the spiritual, is visible in the Nepali Church circles. Nepal has seen the separation of the two aspects of Christian mission as social belonging to the WCMs and spiritual to the local Church. With time a belief has emerged that the social belong to those coming from outside with infinite resources, and the spiritual, not requiring a similar effort, belong to the locals. This way of thinking on Christian

mission has been persistently affecting the understanding and objectives of public witness in the Nepali Church.

The prevalence of such perceptions among all the players – the WCMs, the local Church and the Nepali society - are observed to have negatively influenced the missional presence of the local Church in social change. The Church believes that it is able to address the spiritual needs of the people because the WCMs are better placed to address the material needs. When and how such a perspective emerged and what factors caused its development in the Nepali Church has been an area of interest for me as a researcher. I am eager to examine how the WCMs' work in social development became an influencing factor for the Nepali Church to this missional thinking. As well, understanding what possible consequences – for the WCMs and the Nepali Church – this experience would bring to the public witness of the Nepali Church is another area I am interested to explore.

Over the years, some shifts have occurred in the mission praxis of the WCMs and the Nepali Church. Some of the WCMs selected for this study have sought ways to accommodate the collaboration requests of the local Church by opening some space within their structures and programmes. Notable among them are internship and theological deliberation platforms. These were intended to be used by the Nepali Christians as an opportunity to learn about the mode of Christian's social engagement. Though not enough in themselves and only short lived, these openings served as a window of the mission praxis of the WCMs.

On the other hand, churches have realised that they are not a mere spectator of the social reality unfolding before them and continue to indulge in converting people. The local churches have learnt to cooperate with their neighbours in times of difficulty so that their services reach out to those in need and transform their environment. There have been several efforts by the Nepali Church to create impactful social services such as educational and health institutions without direct involvement of the WCMs. Several social welfare programmes, including humanitarian and disaster relief as well as long-term social programmes, have also been initiated. New generation of Church leaders are not only satisfied to serve the spiritual needs of their congregation but are eager to go out to serve the social needs. Accordingly, there are some noteworthy

projects related to education, sanitation and income generation in operation that are helping to bring fundamental changes in societies.

The problem is that these initiatives of the WCMs were limited and unable to address the growing needs of mission collaboration. Hence, not significant in addressing the question of missional partnership. On the other hand, the work of the local churches in social development are insignificant compared to those of the WCMs. As a result, these mission praxis and their outputs are not dually acknowledged and therefore the social contribution of the Nepali Church is yet to be equated.

These four experiences, namely: 1. the preferential treatment between the WCMs and the Nepali Church, 2. the perception that the local Church is incapable of rendering social services, 3. The lack of acknowledgement of the local Church in social change, and 4. the hesitation of the WCMs to invite the local Church in mission collaboration, have encouraged me to explore the dynamics of missional relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church in the context of Nepal's social change and see how these two mission actors can collaborate to develop thriving public witness in Nepal.

1.3 Definitions of key terms and concepts

Given the objective of the study – which is to examine the status of the public witness of the Nepali Church in relation to social development work of the WCMs, a review of the available literature and, more particularly, the theoretical approach to be taken in this study, a number of terms and concepts have been taken into consideration. Some of the terms and concepts are one-dimensional. They do not need any definition but are self-explanatory, for example, the sex, caste, ethnicity and so on of the population under study. There are other terms and concepts which are multidimensional and therefore need explanation at the onset of this study. They are defined in the table below.

Table 1. 1: Definition of key terms and concepts

Concepts/Variables	Definition
Nepali Church	Nepali Church (Capital C) is to be understood as the community of Nepali Christian believers who are led by their own Nepali leaders in God's mission. They are the Nepali 'assembly' or 'gathering' of people of God who are 'called out' to 'serve' their community and create a venerable public witness of the Church.
Christian Mission	In this study, the Christian mission is defined as the participation in the *Missio Dei* towards the redemption of humanity and the restoration of the cosmos into its original status where God's love, peace and justice rule. Alternatively, I wish to use the terms 'holistic mission' and 'integral mission' in qualifying the social and cultural elements of the Gospel. The concept 'Christian development' (see below) is similar in meaning to the term 'Christian mission' both in the expression and the meaning of the terms. Each of these terms, however, will be explained in the chapters which follow to clarify the need for using them in this study.
Western Christian Missions (WCMs)	These are Christian mission agencies coming from the Western world and operating in Nepal as international Non-government Organisations (INGOs). Their goal is 'presenting the Gospel to Nepali people and building the Church' which they seek to achieve through social service. They draw their major human, financial and spiritual resources from the churches outside Nepal, especially in the western world.
Social Change and Development	Social change is a long-term process in which change occurs in human relationships, interactions and causes positive change in cultural relations, political relationships and institutional relations. Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change and purposes to rise in the level and quality

	of the population and the creation of income and expansion of opportunity without damaging the resources of the environment (Sid, Feb 2021). Conceptually, these are two different ideas. However, I wish to use both terms interchangeably in this research due to the closeness of the anticipated meaning of both the concepts. An explanation of these concepts and the scope thereof will be outlined at the onset of Chapter Two so that the narration thereafter clarifies the role of these concepts in this research.
Christian development	Christian development is 'working for human transformation that aims at the redemption of people and their social systems, and the environment that sustains their life' (Myers 2011:90).
Nepal Christian Society	Founded on 3 December 1996, the Nepal Christian Society (NCS) is a loose network of Nepali Christians, their churches and Christian organisations in Nepal. It operates as a meeting point for all the Nepalese Christians and provides a forum for fellowship, learning and growth to achieve a vision 'to see a *transformed Christian community for the transformation of the nation through the witness of Jesus.'*
Nepali Church Leaders	These are Nepali Christian individuals involved in various ministries of the local Church. They plant, develop and mobilise churches in ministries, thereby seeking to construct a progressive public witness of the Nepali Church in public.
Christian Public Witness	The God of the Bible created a visible universe and a visible Church to engage publicly with the political, cultural, educational, economic and ecological spheres of life, not just with the private and ecclesiastical spheres (Moltmann in Agang *et al.* 2020:16). Hence, the mission of the Christian Church is to create a positive public witness in society as the agent of God's message.

1.4 Social context of Nepal

Located in the heart of the South Asia region, Nepal is a landlocked country bordering India and China, the two emerging world powers. Traditionally, Nepal is known to have struggled with widespread poverty despite the wealth of natural resources within its boundary. The one-clan rule of Nepal, first by the *Shah* and then the *Rana* dynasties (See chapter 2 for more details on Nepal's past rulers), accumulated family resources at the expense of the masses. In 1951, a people's movement led to the overthrow of the *Rana* rule in favour of democracy. Lindell (1997:125) suggested that 'Nepali people fought against the *Rana* regime for the emancipation of the country from the prevailing social, economic, cultural and spiritual poverty as Nepal had plunged into a deep poverty trap and was known as the poorest country in the world.'

Nepal's socio-political image remained constantly poor for about five decades after the establishment of democracy in 1951. People continued to fight against the rulers for years until Nepal was declared a democratic republic in 2006. The dawn of democracy meant that people could dream of attaining social and economic development. David Gellner (2007:1) stated that 'in today's Nepal everyone believes in democracy, wants to participate in nation building and attain holistic development of the country.' The Constitution of Nepal 2015, in part 1 article 4 provisioned for the people to become its rightful citizens from a mere *raiti (*a raiti is a subject, or the one who does not have power and rights that the ruler, the kings have in society), the subjects of the rulers, and allowed them to use their constitutional freedoms, including the freedom of expression, organisation and religion. This was a remarkable change in the idea of social change in Nepal as 'it envisioned the contribution of all its citizens as rightful participants in the development of the country instead of a handful of ruling elites who had monopolised the enterprise for nearly a half a millennium from its inception' (Lal 2006:70-80). Hence, the idea of social change and development has become a significant phenomenon in Nepal in recent times and is a highly contested topic due to the history of the monopoly of a few in the processes of democratisation.

The constitutional reforms of 2015 provided for the inclusion and participation of *all* people in the decision-making process for change and national development. It was welcomed by the minority ethnic and religious communities and therefore 'the notion of collective social change and nation-building is a popular topic in Nepal'

(Bishwokarma 2013:2). However, participatory social development is painfully time consuming for any society to even get the legal reforms, laments Leonardo Avritzer (2002:47). The transitional tensions of creating legal reforms for inclusive social change and development, and the struggle to put them into practice by the minority groups have been an ongoing experience for Nepal's new democracy.

Against this historical backdrop, the people in the socio-cultural margins, including the Christian community among others, are demanding a space for inclusion in social change. The political change, on the one hand, has given rise to a hope for the masses for their meaningful involvement. On the other hand, the ruling elites continue to share the ideology of the past shaped by the Hindu philosophy which is exclusivist in nature. They have found it difficult to accommodate the hopes and aspirations of minorities for collective social change. Bishwokarma (2013:2) observed, 'The ruling class is keen to preserve its monopoly in decision making while the people in the margins are pushing for effective implementation of their demands in national enterprises'.

1.5 Religious context of Nepal

Nepal, though a secular democratic society by constitutional definition, has continued to follow a national ideology based on classical Hinduism which maintains the exclusion of people other than Hindus from the mainstream socio-economic development. Harka B. Gurung (2003:2) in his account of *Cultural Dynamics in Nepalese Politics* stated that Hindu orientation became the dominant response in the hills of Nepal since the Muslim invasion of India in the 11th century.' This outlook on life and society was adopted, expanded, formalised and canonised by the Nepali rulers at different times thereafter. According to Gurung, '*Jayasthiti Malla* (1382 – 1395) of Kathmandu, and *Ram Shah* (1605 – 1633) of Gorkha, along with the kings of Palpa and Simraunagadh (the petty kingdoms) called themselves *Hindupatis*, (the champions of Hinduism) and implemented elaborated caste systems based on Hindu ideology' (Ibid 2).

In the 18th century, the *Gorkha* king, *Prithvi Narayan Shah* (1723 – 1775), wanted to establish Nepal as an *asli Hindustan* (the pure land of the Hindus) because he believed India was no longer a pure land of the Hindus due to its defilement by the

Mughals and, therefore, wanted Nepal to have that honour. Thus when he began Nepal's unification movement, he declared it a pure Hindu kingdom (see Gurung 2006; Bishwokarma 2013:8). 'Since then,' Gurung observed, 'Hinduisation of all people residing within its border and their cultures became the *raison d'être* of the Nepalese state' (Ibid 2). He concluded:

> The formation of Nepal as a state evolved through the appendage of peripheral regions of the mountains and plains to the core of the hill realm. Hinduism constituted the state ideology while the *khasa-kura* (Nepali language) was made the official vehicle of communication. Hinduisation was accompanied by the colonisation of tribal areas and social ordering of tribes into hierarchical castes. Therefore, national identity and later Nepalese nationalism was rooted in the image of hill Hindu elites and their Nepali mother-tongue.

The promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* (the Civil Code) in 1854 brought all the people in Nepal under the caste system devised according to the *Manu Smriti*[1], one of the ancient Hindu scriptures. This *ain* became the binding social code for the Nepalis, including the non-Hindus. It categorised people of *Khas-Aryan* origin into four broad groups (*Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras*), similar to that of the classical *Vedic* model of *varnas* practised in the *Gangetic* plains (Ibid 2). It further created three basic divisions to accommodate the people other than the Khas-Aryan origin who were non-Hindu, including the tribal and other conquered minorities such as the Newar, Gurung, Magar, Rai and the Limbu. Pariyar (2003:2) stated, 'The same frame of outlook was used to regulate the Madhesi, Muslim and others outside of the Hindu fold.' Gurung (Ibid 4) concluded that the code fortified the concept of purity between the people in the diminishing order as:

a. Wearers of holy cord *(Tagadhari)*
b. Non-enslavable alcohol drinkers *(Namashine Matawali)*
c. Enslavable alcohol drinkers *(Mashine Matawali)*
d. Impure but touchable castes *(Chhoi chhito halnya naparne)*

[1] The Manu Smriti, in its verse 31 stated that Brahman, the creator, is said to have created the Brahmins from his mouth, the *Kshatriyas* from his arms, the Vaisyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. Accessed on 22 October 2022, from https://www.hinduwebsite.com/sacredscripts/hinduism/dharma/manusmriti_2.asp

e. Impure and untouchable castes *(Chhoi chhito halnya parne)*

This categorisation put the *tagadharis,* the wearer of the holy cord that included the *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*, at the summit of the Nepalese society, followed by the *Namashine Matawalis,* the non-enslaveable alcohol drinkers. These are considered pure and formed the ruling class of the time. The *Mashine Matawalis,* the enslaveable caste and those from *Chhoi chhito halnu naparnya,* impure but touchable formed the lower blocks of the pyramidic hierarchy of the Nepali society. The *Chhoi chhito halnu parnya,* the impure and untouchable castes, were relegated to the bottom of the caste system.

The placing of the *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas* at the top of the social order by the *Muluki Ain* gave automatic prominence to the belief system and world-view held by this caste in the day-to-day administration of the kingdom. Their religious outlook on life and society is termed as *Bahunbad*[2], (Brahminism or the brahministic philosophy) by Dor B. Bista, one of the early Nepali anthropologists in his book *Fatalism and Development* (1991). Brahminism ideology relegates the concepts of rights, privileges and obligations into the cosmic domain. This belief results in a lack of motivation to achieve, and a failure to keep contractual relations. It also affects problem-solving and goal-achievement behaviour because it means that a man's lot is decided not by his efforts, but by the cosmic powers. Bishnu Prasad Khanal (2019:51), in his analysis of poverty in Nepal, argued that because Nepal held this view on life and society for centuries, it continues to create unbridgeable divides among its people and perpetuate poverty, injustice and inequalities based on one's line of birth.

Though Nepal was known as the only Hindu kingdom in the world until 2006, the Nepali people had assimilated people of other religions within their societies from as early as the 11th century. A good number of Buddhists accompanied by Muslims immigrants have shared the landscape for more than a decade. Christians and other religious minorities are also a part of Nepal's present progressive society. In general,

[2] Bista defined fatalism as the core of the concept of Bahunbad. The proponents of Bahunbad believe that everything is determined in your previous life, and your hard work does not count. If you are rich and born into a high caste, it is because you did good deeds in your previous life. This notion is detrimental to the growth and development of a society. It stops from the proponents learning new things and working hard. Under this concept, the society cannot prosper.

‘Nepal has stood as a beacon of religious tolerance and coexistence for centuries. The rich tapestry of traditions and beliefs woven into the cultural fabric of this nation has fostered a unique harmony among its people.[3] The Nepali people are tolerant to each-other and a peaceful religious environment has been maintained apart from sporadic communal riots between the dominant Hindus and Muslims.

1.6 The Church context of Nepal

Christianity entered the Nepali arena in this remarkable context of poverty and caste hierarchy amid social inequalities. Catholic missionaries of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin entered Nepal through Lhasa during the reign of king Pratap Malla of Kathmandu when their Tibet mission failed. They ‘obtained royal permission in 1715 to preach the Gospel of Jesus and conduct social service’ (Lindell 1997:16; Alsop 2021:4). The following 65 years, until 1779, the Catholic fathers were successful in their mission endeavours; they preached and practised the Gospel message to the people they lived with and about 60 natives became Christian. Pandey (2003:21), in his account of *Christianity in Nepal*, wrote, ‘on 24 March 1760, Father Tranquillius blessed a new Church in *Wotu Tol* in Kathmandu under the title of ‘the Assumption of Our Lady’**.**

The founding of this first Nepali Church was the result of the missionaries’ passionate engagement in the work of social development as an inseparable aspect of the Gospel of salvation. The holistic nature of Christian mission was thus planted in the Nepali soil from the first instance of the establishment of the Church. The people who converted to Christianity experienced not only a new religion but received a different outlook on the whole of their life in society. The Church emphasised social transformation as it sought to transform the spiritual condition. It is no exaggeration to claim that the Nepali Church was born on the solid ground of holistic mission and that it sought to contribute to social change while building the Church. What was so spectacular about these early missionaries in the late 17th century Nepal was that;

> ‘The Fathers moved around among the people, socializing, being friends, helping and teaching. They worked for social reforms; helped in abolishing some superstitions; in several cases reconciled husband and wife who had

[3] Editorial of the MyRepublica, a national daily newspaper, published on 23 September 2023 with the title, ‘preserving religious and communal harmony’.

> been separated; prevented some cases of wives from immolating themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. On certain occasions, they reprimanded kings, nobles and common people for their unjust deeds, cruelty and sin, while exhorting them to repent, seek God's forgiveness and live a righteous life. They helped to negotiate peace between warring kings' (Lindell 1997:24)

The success of this first mission lasted only until 1769 when the Kathmandu Valley was conquered by the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah. Church historians such as Lindell (1997), Gurung (2003) and Perry (2007) argued that the 'new king disliked the missionaries and their work and believed that permitting them to continue with their work would harm his idea of making Nepal a 'pure' Hindu land. Therefore, he ordered the closure of the mission work in Kathmandu. On the other hand, social historians, including Regmi and Upreti, in Shrestha (2022:36-37) believed that 'the king was unhappy with the missionaries because they were loyal to the Malla kings whom he had defeated.' Further, Kim believed the new king suspected the missionaries of being spies of the British Raj in India whom he was constantly fighting. He was sure that letting them remain in his kingdom would result in greater harm.

Whatever the perception of the new king towards the mission is still to be explored. With the establishment of his administration, the king ordered that 'the grants, decrees and facilities which the missions experienced under the Malla kings to be revoked' (Kim 2023:5). These missionaries' stay in Nepal was thus made difficult. The Capuchins left for India. Native converts had to choose between following their religious leaders and staying back. The history has it that nearly half of the Nepali converts felt safe to follow the missionaries to Betiha, India (Duwal 2015:1).

The successors of king Prithvi Narayan Saha continued to expand their territories and during the course of time they fought many wars with Tibet, China and the British in India. During the same time the British Raj sought to expand into Nepali territory. 'The conflict of these two countries resulted in an Anglo-Nepali war in 1814 and 1816, and led to the heightened isolation policy of Nepal. Nepal allowed no foreigners to enter its soil and the British imposed strict rules for those wanting

to come to Nepal' (Kim 2023:6). From this time, westerners, including the western Christians were not permitted to entering Nepal. Any attempt by Westerners, including Christians to enter Nepal resulted in immediate deportation' (Rongong 2012:37). This led to a vacuum about the Christian presence and work in Nepal for about two centuries. No evidence of Christian work remains except the Capuchin missionaries' letters written to their sending organisations. No evidence of those early Nepali Christian converts and their Church in Nepal is traceable now. Ian Alsop lamented the lack of evidence of the first Nepal mission as, 'except the missionaries' letters and the little book of Padre Vito and Bālagovinda, …once Ranajita Malla held in his hands, nothing remains today to mark the devotion and the temporary influence of the Capuchins' (2021:10).

The dawn of democracy in 1951 brought some changes in the political environment of Nepal. With the end of the *Rana* regime, Nepal wanted to start a new road of nation building.

> 'In walking this new road, the people in Nepal threw the windows and doors open, joined the world family of nations, laid development plans, undertook implementing programmes and sought the help of friends in this building work. The gates of Nepal thus opened to the outside world. The Western Christian Missions (WCMs) who had been working among the Nepalis in the Indian border towns, were invited and given permission to start work in education and health sectors' (Lindell 1997:169).

After about 70 years of work by the WCMs following their arrival in Nepal, their mission focus became more social emancipation and less spiritual enlightenment, unlike the first mission effort two centuries prior. Nepal's unstable political environment between 1960 to 1990 led some segment of the ruling class to form a negative attitude towards Christianity and the work of Church. The WCMs decided to sail relatively non-confrontational road by opting only social service and letting the spiritual aspect to the growing Nepali Church. Around the same time the WCMs decided to maintain a separate identity from that of the local Church in transformational Christian mission. This resulted in the parallel routes of mission endeavours in Nepal: the WCMs engaged more in the social welfare while the new Nepali Church sought after the spiritual welfare. The frequency of sharing between the two lessened and the local Church was left to navigate its own way in Nepal

mission. As a result, the Nepali Church is small in size and influence in the public realm. Christians are a minority, totalling less than 2% of the population according to the 2021 National Census.

In the early years, the Nepali Church did not purposefully engage in diaconal ministries but focused on spiritual ministries as it was expected of them given the strengths of the WCMs in social development. Over time, the Nepali Church lacked the ability to become a keen influencer in the areas of the social development. The WCMs occupied those spaces as development experts and the local churches took on evangelization and church building. Now, the service of the local church – both the kerygmatic and diaconal - to the Nepali people is largely looked upon with question. The presence and work of the Nepali Church is often looked at with suspicion as a non-Nepali element. This has led to an insecure public presence of the Church in society.

1.7 The mission context of Nepal

The Christian Church in Nepal has only been present for 70 years. The Christian missionaries of foreign and native origins[4] who came to Nepal at the invitation of the Nepali government to help Nepal in its development endeavours laid the foundation of the Christian Church in Nepal. The Nepali Christian individuals associated with the WCMs undertook the work of evangelism and church planting, whereas the expatriate missionaries involved in the social service. In so doing, the WCMs from early on embraced the diaconal nature of the Gospel and invited the local Church do the proclamation. This arrangement between the two actors of Nepal mission seemed to have birthed the holistic nature of Christian mission in Nepal. In a deeper examination, however, the spiritual aspect of the mission was treated as something belonging to the infant Nepali Church while the WCMs immersed themselves in social service. The changing political environment, especially in 1960s influenced formatting the WCMs' mode of mission work in this way. However, their lack of persistent exploration in maximizing avenues for spiritual activities and a formidable partnership with the local Church in mission did cast a shadow on the importance of

[4] Nepali people of Indian nationality in the eastern states of Sikkim and Darjeeling, who had become Christians joined hands with the foreign missionaries to come to Nepal. Some Nepali Christian individuals, who were living in India due to the persecution at home, accompanied the missionaries to Nepal (See Rongong: 2012:34-35).

kerygmatic engagement as mission. On the other hand, emerging local churches relatively small in age and number 'believed diaconal work required large sum of financial resources and technical expertise which was not at their disposal to exploit. Nevertheless, they were free and able to render the spiritual services individually without having to find outside resources[5]'.

In this context, the efforts of the Nepali Church to bring positive witness in the Nepali society are challenged by two dominant forces. First, a strong presence of the WCMs in the social development field. They were invited to help Nepal develop and therefore undertook the work of health, education and community development by signing contracts with the government. They became the 'development partners' of the government and classified all their work as important, legal and desirable. Inadvertently, this strength of the WCMs is taken by the society to mean that the work of the Nepali Church which is small in size and reach is insignificant, unimportant and unwanted. The WCMs would devise development plans with the government and execute them and had little time helping the infant Nepali Church develop and learn God's holistic mission. Further, when the WMCs' involvement in proselytization were suspected, the WCMs declared their innocence and non-association with the Nepali Church.

Second, the WCMs, beginning from 1960s, opted a policy of separation from the local Church, especially in matters of spiritual services. A missionary with the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) in 2004 outlined, 'The WCMs opted for a policy of separation from the Nepali Church in matters of evangelism, discipleship and Church planting. They declined to take the leadership roles in the Nepali churches to help them develop by themselves.' The stance of the WCMs' leadership regarding their non-involvement in the Church meant that they are more concerned with the social and development work they implemented with the government than accompanying the Nepali Church in a transformative missional journey. The environment thus developed that the WCMs would maintain private relationship with individual Nepali Christian converts but not associate with them in public organizationally to avoid being lashed out from the watchful eyes of society. This self-imposed restriction was used by some WCMs as an opportunity to join an English speaking Church started

[5] Respondent 6 in a follow up interview. He is one of the senior leaders of Nepal Baptist Church Council and holds a key position in NCS executive committee.

for the Christian staff of the American Embassy in Nepal. This Church was in existence from as early as 1952 in Kathmandu, two years before the first Nepali Christian congregation started in Pokhara (Turkington 2019:2). The English Church served the spiritual and other needs of the missionaries associated with the WCMs. Nepali converts were unwelcome in the fellowship for fear of being caught out. The Church with the name Kathmandu International Christian Congregation, continues to cater to the needs of the missionaries associated with the WCMs and other foreigners residing in Nepal (Ibid.24).

On the mission front, the separation between the social and spiritual elements was clearly demonstrated: the WCMs would promote the social side and the Nepali Church the spiritual side (Kehrberg 2000:19, 33). The Nepali churches needed to learn the basics of Christian mission on their own due to the aforementioned position of the both. Consequently, the local Church was left seeking ways and ideas in transformational Christian mission in public witness. The lack of conceptual models to adopt in mission - because the WCMs undertook development work and no evangelism - rendered the mission of the local Church ineffective.

On the relational front, the WCMs would consider themselves superior to the Nepali Churches in matters of ideas, skills, knowledge and money which the Nepalis did not have to enable them to progress by themselves. A perception that providing financial and other resources to the churches would render the Nepali Church financially dependent on the WCMs gradually developed within the WCMs' circles and led to the widening gap between the local pastors and mission organisations.

The seeds of dualism in mission were thus subtly planted in the Nepali Church. Within a few years, the WCMs and their missionaries became true and trusted friends of Nepal because of their contribution to the national development; whereas the local Church was portrayed as an antisocial element because they preached the Gospel and converted Nepalis. A stark question emerged: Why are the Nepali Christians intent on converting fellow Nepalis to a foreign religion, while the WCMs are content undertaking development work without teaching their religion?

Today, the positive improvements in Nepal's health, education, and industrial development is credited to the faithful work of WMCs. However, no mention of the Nepali Church is made in these areas though there may be some evidences. The

wider Nepali society compares the mega projects of the WCMs with the small-scale, grass-roots services of the Nepali Church towards social transformation and quickly discards it as a hook to win people into Christianity. This has thus rendered the public witness of the Nepali Church ineffectual.

Despite growth in the recent past, the Nepali Church faces a serious question of its identity and legitimacy as a true Nepali religious institution. Strong social opposition to the Church and its mission is on the rise. There are various claims that Christians in Nepal have no agenda other than to establish western imperialism to annihilate the Nepali culture. The action of every individual Christian in helping their neighbour is mistrusted as well as their patriotism and loyalty to Nepal's cultural heritage is questioned (Panta 2015:7).

This attitude has led to a systematic marginalisation of native Christian individuals and their collective presence in the mainstream development dialogue. The national development debates are full of the needs and the potential contributions of the people of all backgrounds: the Dalits, the *Madhesis* (people residing in the southern plain of Nepal whose culture resembles that of neighbouring India), the Muslims and others. But none of these discourses include Christians as a rightful segment of Nepali society and their contribution to social change. Rai and Shneiderman (2019:84) observed that, 'since 2006, public debates over the questions of inclusion have significantly shaped laws, policy, practice and political mobilisation at various levels, but a full-fledged participation of the people other than those in dominant positions in the national development is far from achieved.' However, the rulers have time and again rejected calls by Nepali Christians for inclusive development. One example to cite here is the 6-point agreement between the Federation of Nepali Christians in Nepal (FNCN) and the government of Nepal in 2008 to guarantee a respectful burial of the Christian dead. The government hasn't implemented the agreement until 2022, according to the chairman of FNCN. Expectation of a formidable partnership between the WCMs and the Nepali Church in such a situation is naturally desirable.

1.8 The problem statement

The founding and development of the Nepali Church is the result of a passionate engagement of the Nepali Christians in the Gospel of salvation. Aggressive personal

evangelism, the outworking of the spiritual gifts and exorcism mingled with compassionate neighbourly love marked the nature of the early Nepali Church, a new social phenomenon. Those that came in contact with the Church received a different kind of life experience. Rongong (2012:79) cited a particular example in the early 1950s where:

> The people converted to Christianity experienced not only a new religion but received a different outlook to the whole of their life in society as the Church emphasised transforming people's perception of religion as a way to freedom from caste and poverty compared to the maintenance of binding codes of other existing religions'.

What could be termed a special aspect of the Nepali Church was that the early Christians seemed to understand that their host society had no concept of sacred or secular; everything under the sun was one and undividable. The concept of spiritual and worldly had no place in this social arena. What was prevalent was the concept of purity and impurity between the people of different castes. In his book, *"The Idea of Nepal",* David Gellner (2016:9) observed that the 'Kathmandu Valley (the centre of Nepal) saw itself as an island of sacredness and civilization. Its people considered themselves as the inheritors and inhabitants of a *punyabhumi*, or sacred land.' The Nepali Church took to its heart that the inhabitants of this sacred land could only be persuaded to believe in a Gospel that did not separate the spiritual from the secular/physical in its mission. Whereas, the WCMs were focused on the material development as emancipation.

The problem, however, is that there is a dearth of studies on the contribution of the Nepali Church to holistic social change. This absence of literature makes it difficult to construct a solid argument for the public witness of the Nepali Church. All people know is that the WCMs drove the social change schema while the local Church remained interested in religious activities, turned a deaf ear to the plight of the people. Gautam and Paneru (2016:231) stated that 'the Nepali Church does nothing other than always seeking to convert people into a useless foreign religion that aims to destroy "our" historical cultural values.' From the review of existing literature, there are at least three interrelated reasons which led to the problem in constructing a positive public witness for the Nepali Church.

Firstly, the WCMs and their missionaries are active in social work as legitimate development partners. After the incident of the first arrest of the Nepali Christian converts in 1960, coincided by the start of the repressive *Panchayat* regime. the WCMs prioritised the work of social development as an indirect means to present the Christian Gospel. Since then, their works in health, education, community organisation and local development have been of a high standard. The general public in Nepal is appreciative of the fruits of the missionaries' work in social change. The efforts of the Nepali Church in these areas are small and less significant compared with those funded by WCMs. Consequently, the Nepali churches focused on the spiritual transformation. This divided placement of the integral parts of Christian mission by the WCMs and the Nepali Church resulted in a general perception that the Nepali Church is negligent towards peoples' social needs.

Secondly, the absence of the Church in social development led to the exclusion and marginalisation of the Nepali Christians. Presently, the Nepali Christians comprise only a tiny minority at less than 2% of the 29.1 million people (CBS 2021). Though small and insignificant in comparison to other development actors, the Nepali Church has been trying to create its own share of space in Nepal's social change. But the Church's efforts are often overlooked by the dominant socio-political thinkers and development elites. Such an attitude has worked to limit the Church in social change and has led to its inability to draw a positive public witness.

Thirdly, further to the second problem, there is a notable absence of Christian individuals in the country's policy leadership. A study in 2016 identified only 0.58 per cent Christian individuals in the country's administrative sector of 81,000 people (Paudel 2016:1). The absence of Nepali Christian individuals in national administration and policy formation exacerbates the lack of acceptation of the Church as legitimate social organisation. The Nepali churches are uninvited in matters of social planning and development. On the contrary, they are termed as a by-product of the WCMs and not in need of recognition. It is in this gap the Nepali churches would have benefitted from a closer walk with the WCMs.

Against this historical backdrop, this study sets out to explore what roles of the WCMs contributed to the transformation of the social landscape of the Nepali society. As well, understanding the missional philosophy of the WCMs as only social

engagement from being integral becomes necessary in the context narrated here-above. Placing the 'public witness of the Nepali Church' as the central argument of this research, I want to explore on how the WCMs leadership, over the last seven decades, took the place of the Nepali Church and its mission in social development. Were there any attempts by the WCMs in helping define the ways in which the Nepali Church would create and sustain its impactful public witness? If yes, how were they helpful? If not, what the impact thereof? As well, documenting the understanding and focus of Nepal Christian Society (NCS) towards creating a strong and vibrant public witness of the Church in close collaboration with the WCMs in the future is needed to be examined.

The Church's social engagement as a public witness to the transforming grace of God is not specific to Nepal. The Church, since the beginning, has engaged in helping change harmful practices in human societies worldwide. Especially in the last 50 years, the Christian churches in Nigeria (Asadu 2020:1), Korea (Hong 2007:185), China (Lee 2009:29) and India (Snaitang 1992:151) and many other places, have played significant roles in strengthening democracy, improving education, enabling families and leading social change. These countries have experienced the importance of the Church in helping change the status of marginalised people through their active mission engagement. Robert Woodberry (2006:7) while researching the western societies found out that Christianity influences peoples' lives through increasing health, investment in family, rule of law and honesty, volunteerism, education, economically friendly attitudes, savings and by mitigating violent forms of intolerance. In this regard, the idea that the Nepali Church is called to witness the blessings of God in the public needs examining. Has the Nepali Church grasped the religious context of its host society and embraced the integral nature of mission? If yes, how have the WCMs aided to this development? If not, what caused the gaps in mission collaboration towards public witness? How such gaps could be bridged so that the local Church becomes a sustaining witness to Nepal's social change? Questions such as these will be attended to in this research and a proposal for projecting a public witness that is positive, vibrant and contagious will be made.

1.9 Research questions

Primary question: With their focus mainly on social change, what influence do the WCMs in Nepal have on the public witness of the Nepali Church?

Secondary questions:

- What is the understanding and attitude of WCMs towards the local Church in relation to social change in Nepal?
- What influenced Nepal's social and demographic changes? Has the Nepali Church obtained a membership in the over-all social change process in Nepal?
- What has been the strategy of NCS (a network of the Nepali Churches) in mission to present a public witness for the Nepali Church?
- What can NCS do to help the Nepali Church and WCMs to create a better public witness together?

1.10 Research objectives

The objective of this study is to document and explore the historical evidence of the relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church concerning the creation of a viable public witness in mission.

In summary, the objectives of this research are:

- To explore the understanding and attitude of WCMs towards the public witness of the Nepali Church in relation to social development and change
- To describe the strengths and weaknesses of the WCMs in relation to the Nepali Church regarding strengthening Christian public witness
- To document the understanding of NCS on the public witness of the Nepali Church and its organisational objectives towards it, and
- To identify areas of future mission partnership between the WCMs and the Nepali Church for a better Christian public witness

1.11 Importance of this study

This study examines the assumption that the conversion saga does not end with one converting into a new faith. Rather, it is a life-long journey of changes the new faith

brings to the convert and his/her circles of society and culture. This Christian faith in individuals and families collectively empowers the Church to set a new identity in the community. It is from this position that the present research aims to study the status of the public witness of the Nepali Church and how it has been influenced by the social change promoted by the WCMs in Nepal. Looking into the understanding, and praxis of the WCMs mission as social development, it will shed light on how the Nepali Church's mission priorities were defined and what adjustments are to be made for it to become an able change agent through its mission in the public.

In this sense, the special contribution of this study can be summarised as:

i) To help in exploring the dynamics of the relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church to understand how the former's mission focus influenced the latter's priorities in mission.
ii) To propose new and applicable principles of mission partnership between the two that can contribute to promoting contextual mission approaches and build a strong public witness of the Nepali Church.
iii) To encourage meaningful and authentic inclusion of the Nepali Church in Nepal's social change process.

1.12 Literature review and research gap

Having conducted a review of the literature available on the topic of Christianity, social change and public witness, I have concluded that despite an increase in the claims by Christians of the place and role of the Church in Nepal's social change, there is a serious lack of data that validates the claim. Although the assistance of the WCMs to Nepal's development and social change is found to be well documented (Liddell 1997; Perry; 1997; Arnett 2003, Rongong 2012; Hale 2012; Tamang 2019; Khanal 2019), there is no record to show that the Nepali Church played any part. Many Nepalis, including a segment of Nepali Christians, cite the work of these WCMs as the Christian contribution. . However, significantly these claims make no mention of the Nepali Church – all credit goes to the WCMs.

An example of this glaring absence of the place and role of the Nepali Church in social change processes was identified by the chairperson of the National Churches Fellowship of Nepal (NCFN). In a conversation with this researcher he stated that

‘The Nepali Church is at a time of confusion as well as opportunity at the same time regarding its place and role in social change. It is now high time for us to create our own mission patterns to help address social disparities so that its contribution is seen in the public arena. The time to hang in the past, to take credit for what is not rightfully ours , has to be left and a new reality of social transformation is to be created.’

It is evident from the remark above that Nepali Church is at a cross-roads regarding its public position and contribution to social change. Over the years, it has gained some important insights and tools for engaging in diaconal ministries so that its contribution to creating a new and prosperous society in which people of all walks of life live as equal citizens, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. Prioritizing this mode of mission in the long run would ease the pressure on the Church to look and behave like an indigenous Nepali religious organisation.

So, the question persists: What is the Nepali Church doing to promote a public witness of Christ in society in a relevant way? Is the local Church happy to maintain the status quo of the relationship with the WCMs or does it need to attempt bridging the existing gap? If so, how does the WCMs respond to the environment?

On the other hand, the Nepali Church is challenged to overcome the threat of fundamental nationalists who increasingly seek to keep them away from mainstream socio-political discourses. The Nepali Church needs to navigate a way between the renewed visions for public witness amidst growing challenges. The Church needs to show how a Christian’s decision to walk a new path of the Christian faith can result in their thinking, living, and acting as a social being, interacting with their neighbours and addressing the prevailing inequalities in society?

1.12.1 Christianity, social change and public witness

The central theme of Christian mission is not religion but the salvific transformation of mankind and his natural world from the experiences of pain, conflict, death and destruction. These experiences are the result of the sin of humankind in history. Sin leads human societies into greed, conflict and poverty. But the Trinitarian God as revealed in the Bible is concerned with transforming the fallen cosmos into abundant life (John 10:10). Jesus declared, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom

for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18-19 NIV). Steve Bradbury, while lecturing at a seminar of Asian Christian professionals in Kuala Lumpur in 2014, commented, 'Jesus was profoundly concerned about the physical and material well-being of those who were oppressed and exploited as well of their salvation.' This same Jesus commanded his followers to love one another and serve the needs of the people. Theologically, this love and service expressed through the Church is known as *diaconal ministry*. *Diaconia* is part and parcel of the *Missio Dei.* Both the kerygma and *diaconia* belong to the being of God and are to be understood in the context of the Church being in the mission. Knoetze (2019:6) stated, '*Diaconia* is understood as mercy shown to those who do not need to do anything to deserve it. It is the mercy of God towards mankind and creation, and mankind's mercy towards each other and creation.'

As Knoetze asserted that the calling of the Church in mission is a calling to the holistic ministry of diaconia (service) to serve peoples' spiritual and physical needs and to help them discover life in abundance within all circumstances (Ibid 2019:3). Further, Knoetze (2018:492) quoted Belshaw *et al*. saying 'the role of the Church extends beyond the material welfare of its members, and even beyond temporal concerns altogether… religious leaders are close to the poor and among their most trusted representatives. Faith communities offer health services, education and shelter to the vulnerable and disadvantaged.' These services often lead people to learn of the God who loves them in their very condition as His children.

Christian theologians and researchers have indicated how the Christian values and biblical teachings have brought significant changes in the lives of people and their communities. Thomas (2003:44) expressed that 'humanisation became the goal of mission' after global evangelical Christianity launched the Lausanne Movement. He stated, 'The challenge to work toward the achievement of a just human society was identified as the heart of the Christian message.'

But the transforming impacts of the Christian mission has a long track record that dates back to the early Church in the Roman Empire. Observing some of the key elements of the social aspect of the Christian faith in the first few centuries, Bob Moffit in his book *If Jesus were a Mayor* noted that Christians had a God who loved those

who loved him. This belief was exhibited in the life which the early Christians lived in the Roman world. 'This God was radically different from the Roman gods. The Roman gods had their own agendas and they spent much of their time fighting each other, competing for dominance. They had little interest in the people who worshipped them, and they needed to be bribed for favours' (Moffit 2004:39).

By contrast, the God of the Christians loved all of humanity. He directed those who loved him to also love and serve others. 'This was revolutionary in ancient society, particularly to the Romans. The Romans loved only those in their families and social class – or those it was politically or economically advantageous to befriend' (Ibid 39). This new God was essentially saying to his followers to love all people, regardless of blood relationship, class, political alliance or economic attachments and those who are in socially humble positions.

Moffit continued that 'the early Christians were not separated by social rank or ethnicity. This was quite different from Roman culture. Romans wondered why a nobleman would allow a slave to address him as brother (Ibid.40). Rambo claimed, thus the Church created a pattern of human relationships that had not existed in pre-Christian Rome' (1998:76). The Christians believed in a God who is merciful towards those who are meek and weak. This merciful God required that those who followed him should also practice love, care and mercy for others. Moffitt (2004:40) stated, 'Roman writers ridiculed Christians because they were merciful, especially to the poor. They could not believe why mercy and care for the poor would be a central belief and practice of Christianity because mercy was not part of life in Rome.'

Robert Woodberry, a contemporary western researcher suggested that:

> Regular church-goers have higher marital stability and satisfaction and are less likely to abuse their spouses verbally or physically. They are also more involved in their children's lives, are less likely to yell at their children, and are more likely to hug and praise them. Children that come from intact families and have higher parental involvement seem to avoid delinquency, have higher educational attainment, better incomes and more stable marriages (2006:7).

He concluded that the religious *(Christian)* people tend to have fewer mental problems, get sick less often and recover from sicknesses more quickly than people

who are less religiously active. Further, ‘they generally engage in less risky behaviour with respect to health; for example, they smoke less, drink less, use drugs less, and attempt suicide less often’ (Ibid 2). As a result, he claimed, they are more socially involved and report higher self-esteem, greater levels of happiness, less stress and more satisfying and lasting marriages and relationships - all social and emotional factors that influence health (Ibid.7). Snaitang (2004:385) wrote,

> Christians are encouraged to make a reasonable contribution towards learning the biblical teachings and to teach their fellow believers. The Protestants invested in mass education so that people could read the Bible. Thus, countries that had more religious liberty, earlier Protestant missionary activity, more Protestant missionaries per capita, and more conversions to Christianity still have higher education rates. This pattern is also repeated when compared between the provinces of the same country, for example, India, Nigeria and Kenya.

Christians are required to earn their living by labouring hard and save for those who are incapable of earning for themselves. Woodberry claimed, ’researchers in America often emphasise that Pentecostalism (a form of Christianity) may foster long-term economic growth by encouraging men to invest more of their time and money in their families. This presumably has a measurable impact on infant mortality, education of children, quality of house construction, and consumer durable goods owned’ (Woodberry 2006:2). Moving from a mere familial setting to a public setting, Costas (2006:54) suggested that Christians are encouraged to obey the rules of the country and pay due respect to the rulers as set up by God. He explained that the ‘ethnographic studies in Latin America suggest that employers often recruit Pentecostals (Christians) because employers perceive them as more trustworthy and reliable workers.’

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the Christian faith has a visible public aspect. This visibility, as a means of conveying the saving and transforming grace of Christ, is known as the public witness. This public witness is transformative in nature as it impacts people for their greater good, especially those that are poor, weak and marginalised. Kallenberg in Wilkins (2017:1170) invites the Church to enter compassionately into the experiences of the oppressed in embodied solidarity, sharing a commitment to put our bodies on the line for a more just and sustainable

world as Jesus entered compassionately into solidarity with humanity. Shaibu Abraham (2019:136), in a similar tone, warned that unless the Church is a participant in this quest [of humanising the world], it has no reason for being.

1.12.2 Studies on the Nepali Church

Few studies have been conducted to record the birth and growth of the Nepali Church but there are no literature available that document the socio-cultural contribution of the local Church in Nepal. The existing resources on the Nepali Church and the history of Christianity is scares. What exist are the studies on the developmental contribution of the WCMs in Nepal. Other studies on mission have focused documenting the reasons for conversion of Nepalese to Christianity from their old religious backgrounds and the expansion of the Church. (See for example: Perry 1997; Kehrberg 2000; Pandey 2003; Fricke 2008; Budhathoki 2003; Rongong 2012; Pariyar 2019 and Gurung 2019).

The methodological focus of Fricke (2008) and Pariyar (2019) has been to identify and report the motives for the conversion of the Tamang and Dalit segment of the Nepali people into Christianity. They were interested to study the sociological factors motivating people to convert to Christianity. They also evaluated the anticipated change realised by the Christian converts. Likewise, Perry, Pandey, Gurung and Rongong were interested in narrating the historical development of the Nepali Church in the midst of societal restriction. Therefore, neither of these approaches is helpful to gain a deeper level of understanding of how the Nepali Church is faring in the sea of social change through practising its Christian faith as public witness.

Contemporary researchers like Bal Krishna Sharma (2012), Ole Kirchheiner (2016), Ian Gibson (2017) and B.P. Khanal (2019) are interested to investigate how Christians are taking the idea of enculturation forward in the dominant Hindu cultural context without being syncretised into the Hindu rituality. Sharma elaborated on the funerary rites of different caste/ethnic peoples in the pluralistic Nepali society to admonish Christians to seek peace with their neighbours while performing the funerary rites of their dead. Kirchheiner (2016) studied the enculturation processes adopted by an indigenous Church in western Nepal. He argued, when converted to the Christian faith, the converts were ostracised by their friends and families, were cut off from their community and developed an urge to mend their ways so that they

could be relocated within the social scene. Gibson's study has documented the positive psychosocial impacts the Christian faith can bring to the converted Christians from a traditional Newari society in Bhaktapur. And Khanal (2019) investigated the roles of the international Christian mission and development agencies, the WCMs, in Nepal's physical development along with their consequences.

The resources produced by earlier writers such as Perry, Gurung and Pandey are useful for understanding the origin and development of the Christian Church in Nepal as they provide detailed descriptions of how the Christian Church started in Nepal and expanded into the Nepali diaspora. The works of Pariyar and Fricke are useful to examine the mode of evangelism championed by the Nepali Church in its surrounding. Similarly, the resources of Sharma, Kirchheiner and Gibson touch on some aspects of Christian ethics as a way of winning the acceptance of the hostile host community.

The materials produced by the WCMs are unable to detail the dimensions of public witness of the local Church in mission as they are more concerned with detailing the descriptions of their developmental support to Nepal's social change.

Consequently, these resource materials are unable to provide evidence for a serious discussion on Nepali Church and its public witness endeavours. Hence, as in insider, I propose to take a new route and examine the public witness of the Nepali Church in conjunction with the social work of the WCMs operating in Nepal.

1.13 Research methodology

Applying a qualitative research approach, this study uses a combination of oral narrative and a literature study. Firstly, it employs personal stories, conclusions drawn from the conversations and the testimonial of individuals, addressed as research participants. It applies empirical methods in gathering data since the area of study is associated with the perception, understanding, attitude, behaviours and experiences of the prospective research participants. The ideas, views, and judgements of people in relation to the research topic form the basis of argument of this study. It is, therefore, an action research based on the personal stories of the participants involved. It has employed Werts' narrative technique in gathering information, as 'narrative inquiry works with detailed stories drawn in some way from

participants, stories that reveal how people view and understand… narratives are obtained through interviewing people around the topic of interest' (2011:225). These oral narratives collected from the research participants have been critically compared to the literature on social change, development and *diaconia* of the WCMs to identify gaps in the public witness of the Nepali Church. As well, the expectations of the research participants forms the basis of invitation to the WCMs for a more formidable missional partnership in future.

1.13.1 Theoretical approach

The approach to this topic of social change and Christian public witness is based on the theories of contextual mission. With Stephen B. Bevans (2002:5) I have argued that 'a theology of mission that is not reflective of our times, our culture and our context concerns is a false theology.' Such theology becomes a mere addition to the already abounding cultural fix that cannot transform social structures nor enables the Church's public witness. After having worked many years as a missionary in Asia, Bevans concluded that theology must make a connection to the needs of the local people. Similarly, Segura-Guzman (2010:126-127) suggested that 'a good theology must be rooted in the Text, and it must at least be sustainable and appropriate for the context where it is practised. It should empower and challenge the practitioners. It must be practical for spiritual formation and cultural transformation.'

The route I take in this argument on mission is dissociated with the conservative evangelical view of the human problem as only spiritual. The conservative perspective focuses only on rescuing the human soul which is in sin and wrongdoing. Accordingly, this perspective is ethnocentric and therefore narrows the scope of Christian mission to saving souls. This view promotes the idea that God is concerned about humanity only. Conversely, the Bible clarifies that the purpose of God's mission is to redeem the whole of creation together with sinful humans (See Romans 8:21). God invites his Church to this mission through Jesus Christ. Chris Wright (2006:58) proposed, 'we have an identity and belonging to the household of God through the cross and the Gospel of the Messiah Jesus. Such an identity and belonging generates an ethical and missional responsibility in the Church and the world.

This is also a missiological study in which questions related to the perceived image of the Nepali Church in its public witness are investigated. In doing so, I have drawn

information from inside and outside the Nepali Church community to evidence a lack of wholesome understanding of the WCMs regarding their role in nurturing the public witness of the Nepali Church. Although the ecclesiological practice and theology are inseparable, the focus of this research is on the praxis as praxis often precedes ideologies or theologies. Hence, this is going to be a missiological study focused specifically on the transformational public witness of the Church in Nepali society.

And thus, the study examines the perspectives of the Nepali Church on whether the WCMs grasped the meaning and importance of being contextual in mission to promote the public witness. What are the activities, or the lack thereof of the WCMs, that indicate their participation in social change within and outside the local Church setting? The concept of integral mission or the assimilation of kerygma and diaconia as the *Missio Dei* has been used as a theoretical lens to identify the strengths and gaps in the mission of the WCMs and the resulting public witness of the Nepali Church.

This research has not included all the churches and Christian organisations present in Nepal. Neither has it embraced all the WCMs presently working. Rather, a sample of the Nepali Church and the WCMs have been taken using a purposive sampling method to focus on particular characteristics of the respondents according to the interest in this research. Accordingly, some specific information about the individuals such as leadership roles in the Nepali Church and the WCMs, personal experiences in mission and their close association with NCS are considered while selecting them for this study. A small segment of non-Christian individuals are included as research participant to document how the fields of social development, politics and academia view the collaboration between the WCMs and the Nepali Church in mission. Chapter three provides a descriptive introduction of ten WCMs selected as case studies for this study. Chapter four discusses the research context, tools and methodologies proposed as well as detailed descriptions of the research respondents.

The findings are interpreted and addressed to the present leadership of NCS, the Nepali Church and the WCMs working for enhancing cooperation towards developing a vibrant and progressively positive witness of the Nepali Church. Hence, this is going to be limited to Nepal's missional context with minimum help drawn from outside.

Nevertheless, the recommendations drawn are expected to be relevant to the Church worldwide which share Nepal's socio-religious environment.

1.13.2 Interview

In this research, I have included three groups of respondents. The first two groups of people represent NCS whereas the second group represent the secular fields of social development, politics and academia. These are treated as the key informants in this study. The third group comprises those associated with the WCMs. The first group of respondents are associated with the founding and ongoing function of NCS; they are some of the key office bearers of the organisation in the last 10 – 15 years with the responsibility of carrying out the NCS vision of 'a transformed Christian community for the transformation of the nation.' They are among the present day senior Nepali Church leaders and have some working experience alongside the WCMs during the last three decades.

The NCS group of respondents are further categorised into Church workers, development experts, political thinkers and academics based on their professional engagement. They are leading one or more departments within the central executive team of NCS and thus form a wider part of Nepali Church leadership.

Since the research topic: the public witness of the Church - deals with the perception of the people outside the Church, I have interviewed a person from each of the following sectors: community development, organizational management and academia. These are not Christian individuals by religion but have a good level of engagement in social change process and are knowledgeable about the status both of NCS and the WCMs.

In total, 15 (twelve from the Christian community and three from the non-Christian categories as above) people participated in this research. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the data for this research. A list of prospective respondents was prepared beforehand with their contact details. A level of objectivity has been reached by questioning the different types of respondents as explained above. The opinions of the respondents representing different fields of engagement is hoped to enable the researcher to construct an image of the Nepali Church that is unbiased but appealing in its public witness.

The third group of respondents represent the WCMs selected for this study. They are not involved in the detailed interviews but treated as source of information on the WCMs and their mission. The information obtained from them is used to attest to the evidences acquired from the official publications of he selected sample WCMs. Please refer to chapter three for the study of the selected sample of the WCMs and chapter four, for a detailed discussion on the sampling methods, research participants and the rationale of their selection.

1.14 Chapter outline

Chapter two of this research explores the idea of social change in Nepal in its historical context and discusses the process of social change with its various actors, methods and programmes. The works of the kings, rulers and men of influence in Nepal's historical societies have been examined as the basis for achieving desired social change. In the second part, the chapter explores how Nepal attained some of its desired changes through the work of the formal as well as informal sectors which includes civil society organisations, the media and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The discussion then leads to preparing the ground for the role of the WCMs in Nepal with an assessment of the status of social change till this day.

Chapter *three* works through the sociological theories of social change and the role of the Christian Church in attaining the modern state of social order. It explains the concept of social change through the discussion of three major sociological theories, and presents a summary of their contribution to framing the perspective of social change. Then it makes some claims that both the secular and Christian approach to social change is to create a condition of equilibrium where every human being and his environment has the opportunity to achieve their potential. Some details of the work of the Christian Church from the earliest period to the modern age are examined to make a case that, from the very beginning, the Christian Church has viewed the world around it as the arena of mission. We shall see that, throughout history, Christians have not only served the Church but have willingly served the society outside. Churches not only encouraged their fellow-believers in Christ to serve the need of their brothers and sisters in Christ but to set an example of Christian charity that surpassed the narrow understanding of Christian mission as saving he lost souls. The chapter provides a detailed description on the WCMs operating in Nepal. It then

closes by assessing the work of the WCMs in social change and their resultant impact on the public witness of the Nepali Church.

Chapter *four* presents the methodology employed to collect data from the participants in the context of their relevance to the research question. This will give the readers an understanding of the background and objectives of this study. The chapter seeks to provide a detailed background of the research and the reasons for choosing the key respondents for this study. The chapter includes a detailed note on the research methodology and provides background information on all the research participants.

Chapter five discusses the concept of Christian public witness. This chapter reviews how the Church in the modern age is to project its public witness in its religious pluralist culture. Exploring the missional practices of the Church both in the Western and Eastern societies in the twenty-first century, the chapter deals with the concepts of evangelism and mission as the forerunners of the idea of public witness. The chapter concludes by looking into the social context of the Nepali Church and various ways through which it could project a strong and relevant public witness in conjunction with the mission motives of NCS.

The sixth chapter answers the research questions by narrating and interpreting the data enumerated from the field. It presents the understanding and experiences of the research participants regarding the WCMs in Nepal's social development and how that has impacted the missional outlook of the Nepali Church. Listing some of the far-reaching changes brought about by the WCMs in Nepal's social dimension, the chapter outlines why the Nepali Church is to be grateful for the efforts and investments of the former. Then the chapter moves on to discussing how the absence of the WCMs in the ministry of the local Church led to the gaps in developing and sustaining a strong public witness of the Nepali Church. The ways in which the Nepali Church appropriated, adopted and contextualised the missional strategies of the WCMs or the lack of it has been investigated to argue the point that the missional efforts of the former must support the work of the later in enhancing the public witness.

The Seventh and concluding chapter presents the conclusion of this study. It offers some practical recommendations to the Nepali Church through NCS leadership on

promoting an effective public witness for Jesus in community. There is a set of recommendations addressed to the WCMs concerning their call to help Nepali Church as God's sent friend in mission.

1.15 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has laid down the background information and the rationale for this study. It discussed various contexts and related information to form the hypothesis that the WCMs could have been more helpful in forming and nurturing a positive public witness of the Nepali church in mission by maintaining a strong, reciprocal and official association with the local Church as partner in God's mission. The chapter has also defined the key questions to be investigated in connection with the knowledge gap as identified through the review of available literature.

The chapters that follow will bring the readers in contact with Nepal and its stories of social change in conjunction with the work of the WCMs and the local Church. Examining the place and role of the Church in social change, the rest of the chapters guide the readers through the historical shaping of the idea of witnessing for Christ in public through social change. The presence and contribution of the WCMs will get special mention in conjunction with their presence or lack thereof, with the Nepali Church and its ministries aimed at creating a strong public witness in Nepal.

But, first, we shall begin the journey by looking into socio-political context of Nepal in which the Nepali Church is called to witness. The next chapter covers a number of topics related to social change specific to Nepal and provides a thorough discussion of the methodologies applied to attain such changes.

CHAPTER TWO

NEPAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

2.1 Introduction

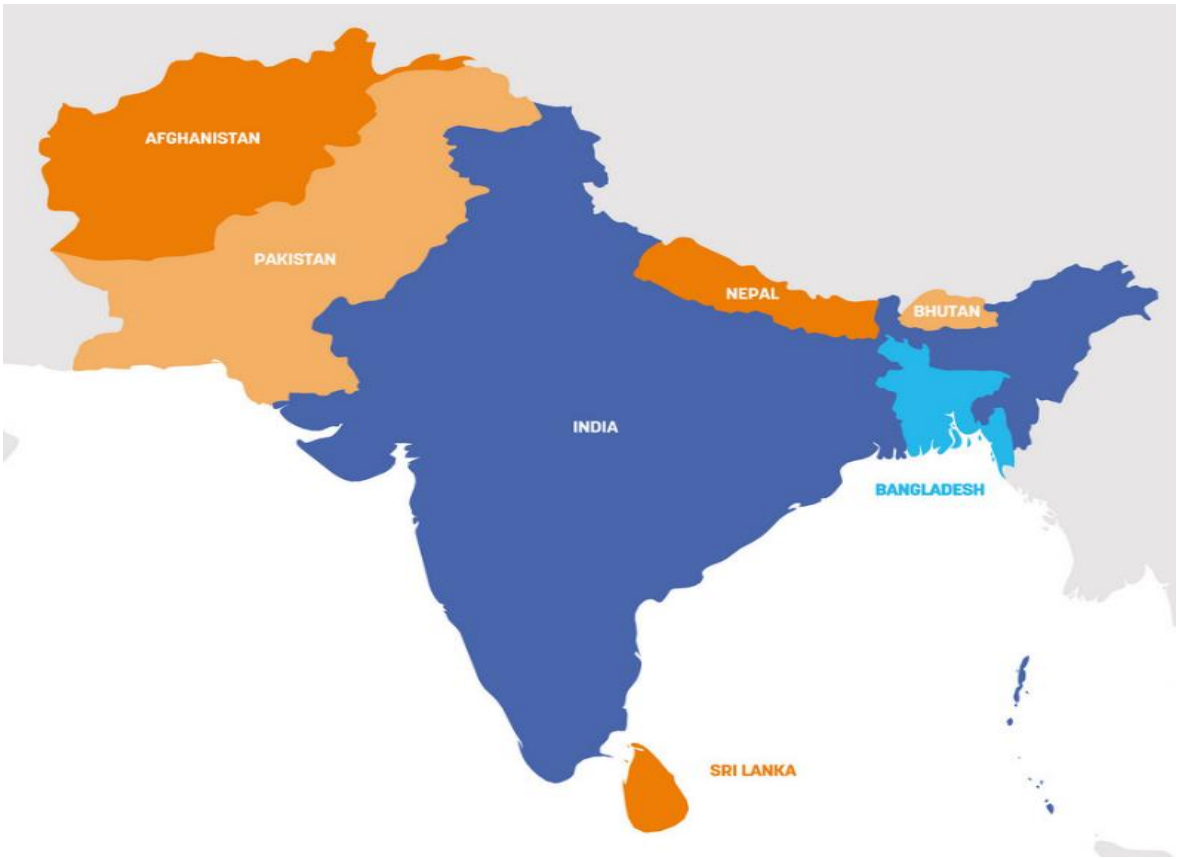
In this chapter, the readers get an opportunity to travel through the social history of Nepal. Making a note of the socio-cultural history of Nepal and its process of modernisation the chapter moves on to describe the various actors for their efforts in achieving the development dreams. The description of the changing social landscape of Nepali society is aimed at helping the readers to grasp the special characteristics that helped Nepal arrive at this stage of social change and development. Looking into some details of the formation of Nepali society and how it moulded into its present status will shed light on some of the key elements that scholars have identified to have contributed to Nepal's social change.

2.2 Formation of Nepali society

Nepal is a small country that lies between its two massive neighbours, China and India in the Asian Himalayan region. Its total area is 147181 square kilometres, with a length from east to west of 885 kilometres and a width from north to south of 193 kilometres.

It is a landlocked country and has no access to seaways. It is entirely dependent on India for its international trade as access to China is difficult due to the high mountains on its northern border.

Nepal, though very small in area, enjoys a geographical diversity with three main ecological regions. In the south, it has a narrow plain land, commonly known as *terai* (flat land) with rich soil suitable for cultivation. It is known as the grain bucket of Nepal and is the major source of food production.



Map 2. 1: Nepal in South Asia

The middle section is covered with small hills and valleys with hills ranging from 610 metres above sea level through to 2000 metres. Less than 10 percent of this land is cultivable. The northern part of the country is the mountainous, snow-covered area with the highest mountain in the world, Mt Everest at 8848 metres. Given these differences within the geographical settings, Nepal enjoys an enormous and diverse biodiversity and culture. 'There are about 6000 rivers and rivulets that flow from the mountain through to *terai.* The dense forests in the hilly region grow over 5000 species of vascular plants, 175 species of mammals and 850 species of birds' (Regmi 1999:8).

Nepal's recorded history is divided into three phases: ancient, medieval and modern (Regmi 1999:18 – 19).

Map 2. 2: Political map of Nepal

2.2.1 Ancient period (c. 900 BC – AD 400)

Researchers and scientists claim that Nepal's existence in the world is from as early as c. 900 BC when the Kathmandu Valley got its first rulers. According to Rishikesh Shah (1990:147) 'Chronicles are the only source covering the earliest period of Nepali history… it is only after the middle of the fifth century AD that a recorded history of Nepal is found.' Shah clarified, 'The chronicles are literal rather than historical compositions. If one takes the generic names given for the earliest ruling dynasties then the imaginative accounts of their adventures prove realistic enough as general descriptions of the pastoral stages of civilization prior to the practice of settled agricultural life' (Ibid.149; See also Bista 2020:14).

According to the available legends and chronicles (or, the *vamshavalis*), the Valley of Kathmandu was once a lake which was made habitable by *Manjushri*, a famous character who is credited to have cut a deep gorge in the mountain and let the water flow out. 'Geological evidence confirms that the Valley was indeed a lake at one time' (Ibid 149). Its rich moist soil must have produced a luxuriant growth of vegetation and provided ample food and ideal habitat for the wandering nomads at that time. The Valley was like a protective fort, hidden among the high hills surrounding it. These chronicles suggest that Kathmandu Valley was a centre of civilisation and attracted many settlers.

Throughout the ancient period of Nepal, the area was ruled by three powerful dynasties.

According to the legend, the *Gopalas,* a community of the *Khas* origin, kept cows in their tribal community (Regmi 1990:48). Thus, the name *Gopala* where '*go*' meant cows and '*pala*' translates as keepers. The *Gopalas* fled to Kathmandu Valley when they were confronted by the militant Moslems in the plains of the Ganges River in northern India. 'They found Kathmandu Valley, a safe place for their families and livestock and settled there' (Bista 2020:14).

Shah (1990:150) cites Kirkpatrick (1793) and Wright (1877), who, according to the chronicles, claimed that the first of the *Gopala* rulers was *Nemuni*, a saint-like figure. This ruler is credited with protecting the Valley and all its inhabitants during that period. In gratitude, people named the Valley *Nepala,* meaning, the land of Ne muni. The *Gopala* dynasty had eight kings who ruled Nepal for about 400 years (Shah 1990:150; Regmi 1999:49; Wright 2007:108). Scholars agree that the period saw only one tribe residing in the Valley which was nomadic in nature and kept livestock. These early settlers were cow herders with a very simple social and cultural life. They were concerned with the safety and well-being of their families and the livestock they kept and are credited with starting agricultural cultivation in the Kathmandu Valley. Bista (2020:14) commented, 'their culture and farming equipment were less advanced compared to those in the plains of the Ganges in India.'

In about c. 700 BC, the *Mahispal* dynasty came to prominence in the Kathmandu Valley. The name '*Mahispal*' was derived from their occupation as buffalo keepers. Bista (2020:14) believes that the *Mahispals* were of the Hindu *Khas* people. Their first king was Bhul Singh, of the Indian Rajput family (Shah 1999:150). He, along with his two sons, moved to Kathmandu Valley from Simraunagadh in the plains near Janakpur, defeated the *Gopalas* and established his kingdom on the hills of Chandragiri, southwest of the Valley. 'He was succeeded by his son as the new ruler. The third and last king of the *Mahispal* dynasty was Bhuwan Sing' (Wright 2007:109). The *Mahispal* kings were believed to have expanded the borders of the ancient kingdom of Kathmandu to Trishuli River in the west, Dudhkoshi River in the east, Chitlang in the south and Nilakantha Himalayas in the north' (Shah 1999:150). Historians claimed that the *Mahispal* dynasty lasted only 75 years. The *Mahispal*'s

social and cultural life was similar to that of the *Gopalas*: they were herders and kept buffaloes, and produced millet, barley and rice as a healthy food supplement for their people (Bista 2020:19).

Then came the *Kirat* rulers. The *Kirat* were believed to have come from Mongolia into the Nepali territory via neighbouring India and Tibet in the north and east. They first settled in the Himalayan regions east of the Kathmandu Valley. As herders themselves, they later moved towards the west and south of the Valley in search of pastureland for their livestock. But, the *Aryans*, who were expanding their influence all the way from the plains of the Ganges River in India to the hills of western Nepal, confronted the *Kirats*. Regmi (1999:19) claims that the *Kirats* could not withstand the pressure and so fled from the western parts of present Nepal to the Kathmandu Valley. The *Kirats* overpowered the *Mahispal* kings and started a long, 1581 years' rule in the Kathmandu Valley.

Bista (2020:15) believes, the *Kirat* 'developed the simple techniques of cultivation and animal husbandry learnt from the *Gopalas* and the *Mahispals* into an advanced level.' The Kirats began to exhort their power and influence in the nearby areas and gradually extended their kingdom into the eastern hills as far as the kingdom of Deveraja of Bhutan (Shah 1999:150).

Bista (2020:16) and Regmi (1999: 20) believed the '*Kirats* were the first people in the history of Nepal who combined their animal husbandry with a planned city settlement. They learnt new technologies in agriculture and began a central economic and political organisation.' Adhikari (2004:28-9) asserted, that 'the *Kirats* were the first in Nepal to trade. They traded wool and animal related goods, not within their territories, but with China and Magadh (India). The famous Indian economist Kautilya and the Chinese explorer Huen Tsang made mention of Nepal's goods traded in their countries as early as 500 BC'.

'The *Kirats* spoke Tibeto-Burman languages and are believed to have included the likes of Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, Sunuwar, Jirel, , Hayu, Gurung, Magar, Thakali, Thami, Chepang, Tharu, Danuwar, Bote, Majhi, Dhimal, Meche, Koche and others within its fold' (Bista 2020:17).

Bista includes the *Newars* within the *Kirat* family and Perry opines that the *Newari* civilisation is the most ancient in Nepal. She says, 'The *Newar* formed the basis of

the [Kathmandu] Valley's population, and although influenced over the centuries by the various immigrant groups, were ultimately able to absorb others into the *Newari* community' (Perry 1997:5). The *Newars*, a part of the *Kirat* people, remained uninfluenced by the previous *Aryan* (Hindu) culture but converted the entire community to Buddhism after they settled in the Kathmandu Valley. By this time, Kathmandu had become the seat of Mahayana Buddhism (Ibid 5). Wright (2007:113) and Perry (1997:5) further stated that 'The *Newars* developed a unique urban culture different from all the hill tribes who surrounded them.'

2.2.2 Medieval period (AD 400 to AD 1700)

The medieval history of Nepal begins with the arrival of the Lichhavi people in the Kathmandu Valley. It is not known exactly when the Lichhavis penetrated Nepal. However, the historians agree that they came from the Indian territories (Bista 2020: 20), ousted the Kirat rulers (Shah 1999:153) and began their rule in the Kathmandu Valley. The Lichhavis were Hindus, and 'brought an ardent form of Vishnu worship (king worship), the Sanskrit language and the Gupta script to Nepal. Under their rule, a succession of cultural and religious interchange happened and a synthesis of Hinduism and Buddhism began to take form in the Kathmandu Valley' (Perry 1997:5).

The Lichhavis found the environment of the Valley perfectly suited to their lifestyle. They were more organised than their predecessors in their social and cultural life. They were skilful builders and sculptors. They turned the self-sufficiency of the Kathmandu Valley towards arts, literature and craftsmanship. Under the rule of the Lichhavis, the Valley became a centre of cultural, social and political activities and established the roots of Hinduism strongly in the soil of the newly forming Nepali society (Regmi 1999:48). The profitable trade with India and China helped the development of the cities of Kathmandu and Lalitpur (Bista 2020:24).

Bista (2020:21) recounts a 'flow of Hindu migrants into the Kathmandu Valley during this period when the rise of Moslem attacks in Indian plains began.' They thronged to Nepal in search of safety and security. The Lichhavi kings provided them not only with a safe place of residence among them, but they also adopted the religious and cultural practices of the refugees. One of the most significant was the introduction of a hierarchical caste system in Nepal (Ibid 20). Perry cites Gyawali's reference that

the ‘caste system was introduced as a means of settling or fixing the place in society of the large number of refugees which had streamed in from India’ (2007:5).

Lichhavi kings are credited with establishing an education system in Nepal in the Sanskrit language, a significant development in Nepali society. They also popularised the Khas language (now, Nepali) as the medium of communication, which continues today. The other developments of the Lichhavi rulers include building several Hindu temples around the Kathmandu Valley with inscriptions of the kings and nobles (Shah 1999:155).

The last part of Nepal’s recorded medieval history began in the first century AD (Bista 2020:24). The Lichhavi kings could no longer hold onto their power as new foes emerged all around their kingdom. Petty kings arose in the west of the Valley and seized power from the Lichhavis. Their kingdom disintegrated into small principalities, and their cultural and social advancement lost significance. The Kathmandu Valley was subdued by the Malla dynasty by AD 800. Similarly, the western part of Nepal saw the rise of petty kingdoms commonly known as *Baisi* (22 kingdoms) and *Chubisi* (24 kingdoms) principalities.

A total of 14 Malla kings ruled in medieval Nepal. The most significant was Jayasthiti Malla who ruled during the fourteenth century AD. ‘He is best remembered for introducing new religious and social laws in Nepal. His laws included land ownership, caste laws and laws related to migration’ (Wright 2007:183). With Jaya Prakash Malla, the Malla dynasty ended in Nepal. He was defeated by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the king of Gorkha in AD 1768. Nepal’s medieval history closes with the rise of the Shah dynasty in Nepal.

Interestingly, a sizeable Moslem population existed in Nepal during the *Malla* rule. Scholars believe the Moslems came to Nepal from India for various purposes. One segment of them is the decedents of the Kashmiri Moslems who came to Kathmandu as traders in about the 15th century (Adhikari 1994:9).

2.2.3 Modern period (AD 1768 onwards)

Nepal’s modern history begins with the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by the Shah King in the year 1768. Prithvi Narayan, Shah of Gorkha, annexed many of the petty principalities, including the three small Malla kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley, into a greater Nepal kingdom. His unification drive expanded to Kumaon in

the west and Sikkim in the east. He and his successors maintained a strong rule in the country despite several wars fought during their rule. The modern history of Nepal is divided into four main administrations.

The first rulers were the Shah kings who took power from the Malla kings and ruled Nepal for 240 years until democracy in the 1990s. The monopoly of the Shah kings, however, was snatched briefly by the Rana family from AD 1846 to AD 1951. The prime minister, Jung Bahadur Rana (1817 – 1877) took the power away from the Shah kings and started the Rana regime. Jung Bahadur not only acquired power over the Shah kings but also conferred on himself the position of 'Maharaja' through an edict bearing the red seal (Shah 2001:88). Jung Bahadur initiated a dynastic succession whereby power was transferred to his brother and the sons of his brothers. This Rana rule lasted for a hundred and four years.

The *Rana* dynasty is recorded by many historians as one of the darkest periods of Nepali history in terms of social change and development. The government was autocratic. No public voices were heard. Any dissent was crushed immediately. The rulers focused on collecting taxes from the public and the Ranas tried to establish the caste system through the promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* (the civil code) referred to in Chapter One.

After 1951 came the third period which is commonly known as the decades of democracy. The people's revolt against the Rana regime in the leadership of the Shah king, Tribhuwan (1906 – 1955) helped reinstate the Shah dynasty but the governing power was shared between the king and the democratic powers of the day, the Nepali Congress party.

This democracy, however, was short-lived due to the ambition of the king, Mahendra, who took power and assumed rule as an unquestionable monarch. In the year 1961 AD, he dismissed the government of the Nepali Congress party and declared a ban on all the political parties in the country. The party leaders and cadres were arrested and put into prison. Those that could escape, fled to India. Thus, Mahendra consolidated all power unto himself and declared a party-less governing system called *Panchayat*.

Scholars of democracy term the *Panchayat* a dark period in modern Nepal in terms of people's freedom and participation in social change, for it brought a total ban on

political movements and public opinion. The newly born democracy was declared ‘unsuited to the Nepali soil’ and power was taken back by the autocratic king. The rulers were confined into a narrow circle by those that had access to the king and those in power. A large segment of the population remained outside the political development; the Nepali language was declared the mother tongue of the country and school education was compulsory in the Nepali medium. *Daura Suruwal*, the attire of hill Hindu Khas people was adopted as the national dress. The Hindu feasts and festivals were declared the most important events and the languages and culture of other castes and people were suppressed by force (see Gurung 2002:14).

On the positive side, the *Panchayat* is considered one of the best periods for Nepal to experience modern planned development. During this time, the king took some bold steps in reforming the categorisation of land, resettlement of people, initiating modern technological developments, and building and extending bilateral relationships with other countries (Stiller and Yadav 1993:51-83; Gellner 2016:17).

In the year 1990, yet another people’s movement curbed the *Panchayat* system. The political scenario of the democratic period after 1990 is described in detail in Chapter 1, under the section, ‘Social context’.

2.3 Cultural development

Nepal has one hundred and forty-three groups of people categorised into many castes and races. They speak one hundred and twenty-five languages and dialects (CBS: 2021). The culture is primarily Hindu at 81% of the total population in its outlook, but the people of other faiths and religious affiliations share the common identity of Nepal and the wider society has lived in an observable tolerance. Nepali society has experienced only occasional ethnic conflicts driven by political movements.

It is worth looking back into history to understand this unique characteristic of Nepali society. As described in the previous section, Nepali society is a conglomeration of people who came as immigrants and who later assimilated into Nepali society. Accordingly, Perry (1997:2-3) and Bista (2020:17) both agree that Nepali society is primarily ‘built by the migrant population that came to Nepal at various times in history

and from various locations' (see also Thapa 1995:4). It is a unique combination of people of different languages, cultures and historical origins.

Looking into the historical facts, it is apparent that the make-up of Nepali society is greatly influenced by its geographical situation. Sharing borders with China and India, the two great nations, in terms of land and population, Nepal's ancient society was drawn from people originating in these countries: the Mongoloid people migrated from the Chinese plateau of Tibet whereas the Aryans migrated from India and the west.

The distribution of Nepal's present population is close to their ancient settlements: the people of Tibetan origin occupy the northern border with Tibet; whereas the people of Indo-Aryan origin are settled along the southern borders with India. The table below summarises the tribes and their preferred settlement in pre-modern Nepal, which is still apparent despite massive migration in the last thirty years:

Table 2.1: Ethnic settlement in Nepal. Source: Adhikari (1984:10)

Tribes and races	**Areas of concentration**
Limbu	Pallokirat (Dhankuta and Ilam, the eastern hills)
Rai	Majhakirat and Wollokirat (mid-eastern hills)
Sunuwar	Area between the east of Likhu and west of Tamakhoshi rivers in the eastern hills
Newar	Kathmandu Valley
Gurung	Gorkha, Lamjung, Kaski and Syangja
Magar	Bara Magar (Satahun, Paiyun, Dhor, Gulmi, Argha and Mushikot, near western hills)
Thakali	Manang and Mustang (mid-western hills)
Tamang	Vicinity of the Kathmandu Valley
Tribes and races	**Areas of concentration**
Danuwar	Wollokirat (mid-eastern hills and valleys)

Majhi	Wollokirat (mid-eastern hills and valleys)
Dhimal	Morang (Eastern plains)
Tharu	Morang, Dang, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur (along the southern plains bordered with India)
Moslem	Kathmandu, Tanahu, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur (Most of the western plains, attached to Indian borders)
Bhote and Sherpa	Scattered through the Himalayan regions
Khas (Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, Kami, Damai, Sarki etc.)	Scattered throughout the country with the major concentration in the western hills

The preferred settlement of different people into these geographical spaces has resulted in a contemporaneous concentration of cultures and languages. As the table below shows, people of different cultures and languages are identified by their place of settlement and work to protect their shared heritage. In this scenario, Nepal has two major religious traditions – Hindu, and Buddhist – with their variants. Islam and Christianity, being minorities, are not included in this traditional social scenario, despite the fact they have been in Nepal since the 18th century.

Table 2.2: Caste, religion and cultural distribution of Nepal. Source: Perry (1997:10)

Place	Cultures	Castes, religions and languages
Western Himalayas	Hindu/Pahadi culture	Hindu religion/Hindu culture Aryan, central Pahadi languages
Hills west of Nepal Valley	Nepali/Pahadi culture	Aryan-Mongoloid ethnic mix. Hindu Buddhist-tribal religious mix. Eastern Pahadi and Tibeto-Burman language
Nepal Valley	Newar culture	Hindu – Buddhist syncretic religious mix. Mongoloid with Tibeto-Burman spoken language but Sanskrit literary language
Hills east of Nepal Valley	Kirat culture	Lamaistic Buddhism influenced by tribal religion

		Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman languages
Eastern Himalayas	Kirat/Bhotia culture	Lamaistic Buddhism Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman languages
Southern plains	Indian Hinduism	Aryan- Dravidian syncretic Hindu religious mix Hindi, along with Bhojpuri and Maithili languages

2.4 Socio-political change in modern times

Nepal remained traditional until the first half of the 20th century. The Rana family rule, in order to have absolute power over the people of Nepal, promulgated a law to bind all Nepalis under a caste code. In 1854, the code, known as the Muluki Ain (the Civil Code of Nepal), brought all the people in Nepal under the caste system devised according to the *Manu Smriti*. This *ain* became the binding social code for the Nepalis, including non-Hindus. It categorised people of Khas-Aryan origin into four broad groups (*Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas* and *Sudras*), similar to that of the classical Vedic model of *varnas* practised in the Gangetic plains (Ibid 2). It also created three basic divisions to accommodate the people other than the Khas-Aryan origin who were non-Hindu, including the tribal and other conquered minorities (the Newars, Gurungs, Magars, Rais and the Limbus). 'The same frame of outlook was used to regulate the Madhesis, Muslims and others outside of the Hindu fold' (Pariyar 2019:2).

The caste-based scheme which was the basis of national politics in Nepal was biased in favour of the dominant Hindu Hill Brahmin castes. It gave unlimited privileges to the men of this group and excluded all other people to the peripheries of social discourse. Sociologists and anthropologists who have studied Nepalese society conclude that 'Because of its origin in Hindu ideology of a hierarchical system, it maintained the status of inequalities among its people by expelling them from the mainstream political development' (see Gurung 2002:15; Ludden 2008:12). Thus, the idea of social change was monopolised by a select few. Consequently, inequality and exclusion have been reinforced on many social frontiers: caste, language, religion, geography, gender and the generation of the economy (Gurung 2002:4).

The public spaces are where people's thoughts and ideas on issues such as identity, belonging, social consciousness, development and nation-building are formed as

they interact with their fellow citizens on these issues of concern. Leonardo Avritzer in his book *Democracy and Public Space in Latin America* stated that, 'These spaces are as important as that of the state in democratic processes that these avenues allow people to thematise new issues, presenting new identities and bringing institutional innovations' (2002:39). Social thinkers agree that the public space is as vital as the national administrative political place in the formation and sustenance of a democratic society. Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2019:10) opined that 'Social forms of actions organised at the public level can still seek to broaden democracy through identification and participation of the people belonging to the non-dominant groups.'

The discussions above point to the fact that Nepal remained a primitive society until the 1950s. Through increased contact with the outside world and opening its doors to modern development, Nepal experienced a massive social change in its society. This section hereafter will look into the factors that affected the rapid social change in Nepal after the 1950s. In doing so, it will particularly examine the areas of change initiated by the government agencies as well as those from the informal sectors, including the WCMs and the local church.

Martin Hufton *et al.* (1999), N.L. Shrestha (1997), Donald Messerschmidt (1997), Harka Gurung (2002), David Ludden (2005), Dilli Raj Khanal, *et.al* (2005), Mohan Mainali (2006), and Pratyush Wonta (2006) all agree that Nepali society remained primitive until the middle of the 20th century due to the policy of the Rana dynasty to keep Nepal locked away from its neighbours. After the dawn of democracy in the 1950s, Nepal sought outside help in social and economic development. Bista (2020:1) and Perry (1997:7) asserted that the democratisation of the feudal Nepali society began to take firm steps with the dawn of democracy in 1950 when the government seriously started to think about the welfare of its people. Stiller *et al.* (1994:17) found that Nepal's 'sociological spheres began to take a new outlook only after it adopted planned development initiated after the installation of a new democratic government.' The new government, formed as a coalition between the Nepali Congress, a political party and the existing king, had a vision to transform Nepal from a poor country into a modern one by pursuing various development projects. The first five-year plan in 1956 (Lindell 1997:213; Khanal, *et al.* 2005:1) marked the beginning of Nepal's planned development.

The table below presents the important political and economic changes in Nepal's modern history.

Table 2.3: Chronology of political change in Nepal. Source: Pyakurel (2013:28 – 29)

1950-51	Rana's fall. King Tribhuwan regains control over the army and administration, interim constitution enacted
1952	King Mahendra ascends the throne
1956	First Five-year plan of economic development
1959	Promulgation of New Constitution by King Mahendra; first general election for Nepali Congress and B.P. Koirala becomes the first elected prime minister of Nepal
1960	King Mahendra dismisses the democratic government and imprisons B.P. Koirala and NC leaders
1962	New constitution is promulgated and a party-less *Panchayat* system established
1963	First election held by national *Panchayat*
1972	King Birendra ascends to the throne
1980	National referendum held; *Panchayat* won with a thin margin
1990	Democracy restored for the second time
1991	General election brings the NC into government
1994	First communist minority government formed under Manmohan Adhikari
1996	Maoists' insurgency begins
2005	King Gyanendra took over power dismissing the democratic government; Maoists come to mainstream politics through a 12-point peace accord signed between them and the 7-party alliance
2006	King Gyanendra reinstates the parliament
2007	Abolition of monarchy; Nepal becomes a democratic federal republic; new interim constitution declared
2008	Maoists win general election and form a Maoist majority government
2015	Promulgation of new constitution and the start of political instability
2017	First general election under the new constitution; communists win majority seats
2022	Second general election held, coalition government formed

2.4.1 State-led Social Reforms

It was envisioned that the first multi-year development plan of 1956 and the subsequent plans would bring changes that would help the people realise their

aspirations for social change and development. The governments thought that they must be in the lead role to deliver the people's development dreams. Of the first plan and its layout, Khanal *et al.* (2005:2) stated that:

> Like many other developing countries during those times, Nepal also pursued an inward-looking and state-led development strategy … a number of enterprises were established in the public sector. The most modern components of the industry and trade sectors were controlled by the state through licensing and quotas. Industries were protected through high tariff walls … the state-controlled distribution system was also simultaneously strengthened. Many state-owned agricultural farms were established to provide technologies and an extension of services to the farmers. A cooperative bank was established providing necessary loans to the farmers which later developed into a commercial bank. This drive was further augmented by a priority sector lending programme requiring commercial banks to invest a certain percentage of their total loan … all these interventions led to a gradual expansion of an economic structure dominated by the public sector.

Martin Hufton who studied Nepal found that:

> By the end of 1980, this (*social change*) process had amounted to nothing less than a social revolution. Even in remote areas the public deference once shown by members of lower castes to higher ones through language and gesture had largely disappeared. The old rigid rules of pollution and purification between castes were now laughed at by many people. Inter-caste marriage was still unusual but no longer unheard of … a small but growing number of educated women were now filling important jobs in the towns … (Hufton 1999:224)

What caused this massive social change in Nepal? Following a century-long feudal system, the party-less *Panchayat* system of rule which was established by the king initiated new and planned developmental activities to transform traditional Nepali society. Khanal *et al.* (2005) concluded that, first and foremost, the king's government of the early 1960s was responsible for initiating social change of this magnitude. This autocratic rule, however, did not last long and, in the 1990s, yet another people's revolution caused further political change.

In all these political power-shifting games, the demand for a sweeping social change was echoed by the people in the margin. The people in the power centres thought they could achieve such social change only through controlled processes. Hence, first and foremost, all the new political powers that came to power started to make adjustments within their power structures. They envisioned that the adjustment in the existing power structures is the prerequisite for development and other sectorial change. Several simultaneous attempts were made to achieve an equitable social change.

The planning and implementation of these changes were directly managed by the government. Thus, the plans and activities were controlled by the state allowing only a minimum opportunity for input from the informal and/or private sectors. The government implemented change by creating and strengthening the bureaucracy and political leadership. The most common changes, based on their far-reaching impacts, are briefly discussed below.

2.4.1.1 Regime change

Nepal has faced two major challenges to democracy in recent times. In the first coup, the king dismissed the elected governments and installed a new government with different objectives. Following a peaceful revolution in 2006, the monarchy was finally abolished and the political parties gained more power. On 28 May 2008, Nepal was declared a federal republic.

Three notable things were initiated in almost every regime change in Nepal. Firstly, replacing the existing constitution with a new one. With every political move, new and improved provisions for people were added to the Constitution. However, every political change tried to bring societal change within the existing political superstructures without trying to completely do away with the old systems. ‘In that direction, the Constitution of 1962 made some commitment towards economic progress and social justice. It abolished various forms of exploitation and ushered in participatory development through decentralisation and mobilisation of class organisations’ (Khanal *et al.* 2005:32). The constitution of 1990, which was promulgated by the democratic government, was specific in terms of political change and stability. It bestowed the sovereign right upon people for the first time in Nepal’s history. The constitution was again replaced by a new one in 2015 (the interim

constitution of Nepal 2007, was upgraded and approved in 2015). This constitution has provided more authority for the people in terms of their political and social inclusion.

Secondly, the new regime change worked towards setting up more constitutional bodies and national institutions in the hope of creating a check and balance on the government's development programmes. Khanal *et al.* further explained,

> The bureaucracy that developed and expanded during the autocratic Panchayat rule prior to 1990 was neither competent nor suitable to cope with the new challenges bestowed by the new changes. Thus, the new government through its new constitution aimed at reforming the existing civil service in order to make it efficient and result oriented. Accordingly, a high-level administration reform commission was formed in 1992 to upgrade the civil services (Ibid 76).

Thirdly, the regime change placed many politicians and their aides in positions of power. These were not bureaucrats nor were they planners, but they came to power through their association with political parties. They were able to secure appointments in high office without much knowledge or expertise in the related fields. This trend automatically resulted in the mismanagement of the scarce resources of the government. 'A culture of impunity over the corruption of power and finances emerged due to the exercise of nepotism' (Gautam 2015:38). The requirement to perform well because of their international financial partners (International Monetary Fund [IMF] and World Bank [WB]) who provided their resources as donations and loans, pressured the government to set up anti-corruption systems. Accordingly, the government, as per Articles 97 and 98 of the 1990 Constitution established the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). The consequent Constitutions have granted more power to the CIAA and other similar constitutional bodies to curb the mismanagement of government funds and authority.

2.4.1.2 Economic liberalisation

The attempts to stabilise the political turmoil and the consequent mismanagement of limited resources by ensuring checks and balances from the top levels were not enough to help Nepal prosper economically. Blaickei *et al.* (1980) in Khanal observed that by the mid-1970s, Nepal had transitioned into the category of a very poor

country. Over-population relative to employment opportunities, ecological collapse in the densely populated and highly vulnerable hill areas together with an increasing inability to pay for imported commodities and growing food shortages forced Nepal to face a crisis-prone situation. This dire situation prompted the Nepal government to seek help from international monetary institutions such as WB and IMF under the international aid policy of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF). 'Nepal's reforms were influenced by the donors through conditions laid down in the ESAF apart from the compulsion of synchronizing its policies with the neighbouring countries' (Ibid 33).

2.4.1.3 State-led industrialisation

When the *Panchayat* regime started, the king declared that the political parties were unable to fulfil the people's desires for prosperity and that he would deliver these promises through his new set of governance. He prioritised mega projects to help people sense the change. In an attempt to industrialise, the government borrowed heavily from its neighbouring countries and started industrial zones in which both the government and private sectors established workshops and factories. Some of the notable industries started during the early 1970s using government funding and management include Hetauda Cement Factory, Butwal Thread and Spine Machinery, Bhrikuti Paper Industry, Bansbari Leather and Shoes Industry, Janakpur Cigarette Factory, Hetauda Clothing Factory and the Himal Cement Factory. Other industries with more advanced technologies and facilities were opened during the 1980s for more efficient production.

In the private sector, the government facilitated the establishment of several factories in Biratnagar, Birjunj and Nepalgunj, the emerging towns in the southern plains, hoping to produce goods and services for export to India and other countries. These attempts, however, proved ineffective due to political interference and mismanagement of systems. As a result, most of the industries opened by the government became non-functional, adding to the liability to the government. When the democratic government was installed in 1990, thirty-eight of the government-owned industries were sold to the private sector.

2.4.1.4 Agriculture modernisation

Nepal is rich in its natural environment. The cultivation of agricultural products has been one of the largest enterprises in terms of output and sustenance of food supply and the generation of employment opportunities for Nepalis. Agriculture played an important role in Nepal's national economy as more than 70% of the population depended on this sector until late 2010. 'The main component of reform in the agriculture sector was the classification of the land along with a national drive towards land reform policy that was introduced in the year 1964' (Khanal 2005:23).

Nepal was under a feudal system of land ownership and management where feudal lords owned vast tracts of land but did not cultivate it themselves. The landlords would contract tenant labourers to farm the land. This practice kept the families of poor people as tillers and cultivators known as the *kamaiya* and *haliya.* Under land reform Acts in the 1960s, the government tried to address this situation firstly by restricting the amount of land a landholder could own and secondly by attempting land distribution, with minimum compensation, so that the *kamaiya* and *haliya* were allocated a small plot of land on which to build their own houses.

The other key area of change attempted in the agriculture sector was improvement in the supply of inputs such as modern technologies, fertilizers and improved and hybrid seeds for better crop yielding. 'Infrastructure for the irrigation facilities were developed in most of the districts in the hills and *terai* and the mechanisms were set up to facilitate the import and smooth supply of the technologies by establishing import and export companies' (Ibid 23).

Khanal *et al.* continue, 'Since the early 1980s, the government has been providing subsidies to the farmers by installing shallow tube-wells as well as electricity for agriculture. The farmers are benefitting from the subsidies in irrigation and the use of cold house storage. The other reform brought about in agriculture is hazard-free access to micro-credits for farmers' (Ibid 62). The government encouraged the establishment of cooperatives throughout the country and provided the financial sectors with incentives so that they could invest in the agriculture sector. The farmers were encouraged to form civil society organisations such as the users' groups and farmers' clubs through which the government subsidies could be channelled.

The government realised the need to modernise the agriculture sector and invited the private sector to invest to improve productivity and competitiveness. In response, the business fraternity started to invest in various initiatives to modernise agricultural practices. Furthermore, the government also established several agricultural research centres to promote research-based agro-commercialisation. Agricultural campuses were opened in different regions and financial support was provided to students for their research.

Notwithstanding all these changes and assistance, Khanal *et al.* (Ibid 63) assess that the results were less than satisfactory. They stated,

> However, agriculture in Nepal is characterised by low rates of productivity, low level of technology use and low level of commercialisation. Its growth has been constrained by inadequate infrastructure, lack of irrigation and other complementary inputs. The sector is in sharp decline in recent years despite the considerable efforts put in by subsequent governments.

Gauchan (2019:225) commented that 'Nepal's long-term agricultural development is at risk due to climate change events, outmigration of labour force, loss and degradation of lands, environmental pollution and lack of adequate holistic policy and investment framework for agricultural development'. Agricultural productivity and profitability from farming have remained low due to the low use of modern technologies, limited commercialisation and diversification of agriculture production. The government's plans to modernise have only resulted in further reduction of agriculture production. Until 2001, the rural population was more than 75%. However, migration to the urban centres has left only 17% people in rural areas by 2021 (CBS 2021).

Khanal *et al.* (2005:63) observed that the contributing factors for this decline in agricultural modernisation are 'associated with the lack of firm implementation of the policy as well as the growth of other employment sectors.' 'The other factors for the inability of agricultural reform,' they stated, 'was associated with poor implementation methods on the part of governments.' The subsidies were snatched by the elites in the villages who held large tracts of land but did not themselves work as farmers. The credit facilities were hugely misused, leaving the real farmers getting almost no credit for their production. The technology and fertilizer supply chain was poorly

managed, benefitting only the local level politicians; they hoarded the imported technologies which never reached the farmers.

2.4.1.5 Physical infrastructure development

Physical infrastructure such as roads, electricity and communications are prerequisites for the transformation of any society. In Nepal, these facilities were next to non-existent when the country entered into democratic rule in the 1950s. Lack of basic infrastructure such as road transportation, electricity, school buildings, hospitals and other services, including drinking water and irrigation systems – have been identified as the defining characteristics of poverty in Nepal. Investment in the infrastructure sector can contribute substantially to sustainable growth and poverty reduction. 'These services contribute to initiating and augmenting the modernisation process in a society and help people gain access to markets, information and power structures. As a consequence, people are better able to access education, health services and other economic activities through promoting trade and production' (Ibid 63).

However, the investments in physical infrastructure have been poorly managed and have failed to yield the desired change in the lives of people. Khanal *et al*. commented:

> The benefits of the developed infrastructures have been less than anticipated due to the lack of adequate attention being paid to the issues of governance and institutional frameworks. High levels of personal and political corruption have distorted public investment choices. Emphasis only on hardware, negligence of social conditions for the use of the developed facilities, growing capital intensity of technology, unavailable routes, places or modes of service facilities, lack of identification and involvement of beneficiaries have been detrimental in augmenting markets and promoting economic activities (Ibid 64).

2.4.1.6 Manufacturing

The state of manufacturing and production, apart from traditional agriculture production, was minimal in Nepal before 1950. What was produced and traded between India and Tibet was limited to curios and agricultural products during the

Shah's rule[6]. Reforms in this sector were thought to be the key to bringing social change when the democratic and subsequent governments took power.

The industrial policy of 1986 stated that any person seeking to be involved in the manufacturing sector could do so in any part of the country, to produce any sector of goods, except the defence sector. Khom Raj Kharel recalls that the policy further

> announced the increase of self-reliance by producing goods meeting basic needs, changed the structure of the national economy by increasing the contributions of industry to national production and raised the living conditions of the people, creating maximum opportunities for employment in the industrial sector and thus transferring surplus manpower on agriculture development and improve the balance of payment position through import substitution and export promotion (2014:45).

The policy not only encouraged nationals to seek manufacturing opportunities but also opened the ways for foreigners to invest in manufacturing sectors. Foreign investments were welcome in terms of financial transfer as well as technology. Khanal *et al.* commented,

> As progress was beginning to be seen in the manufacturing sector, the government introduced the Industrial Enterprise Act in 1992 to allow the transfer of foreign investment through a one-door policy. Licensing factories and businesses that did not harm people, and natural health required no licensing. The policies were loosened to encourage small-scale businesses. All private sector manufacturing companies were, free to operate under the provisions in the Act and that they would not be nationalised (2005:63)

2.4.1.7 Education reforms

Educating the masses is one of the key prerequisites causing transformational social change because education provides access to social services and economic sustainability. Hufton (1999:221) stated, 'To achieve the desired change, Nepal

[6] Jaga Bahadur Budha published an article entitled "Salt of the Earth: How the end of the trans-Himalayan rock salt trade led to the decline of Nepal's Himalayan community" in the Nepali Times weekly published on 9ss April 2019. Accessed from https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/the-salt-of-the-earth/ on 5 December 2022.

accorded a high priority to education and literacy programmes right after the establishment of democracy in the 1950s.'

Since the early 1960s, access to education has expanded greatly. Investment in the education sector continues to be one of the major projects of the national budget in Nepal. Reforms such as the 1971 National Education System Plan have created a much more modern and egalitarian education system with compulsory basic education. There are now 35222 elementary and secondary schools and 10 universities with more than 1400 colleges and campuses throughout Nepal. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) on its website (viewed on 23 December 2022) reporting about Nepal's education system, records that 'Over the last 20 years, Nepal has made significant progress in education. The net enrolment rate in primary schools has risen to 97 per cent.' As a result, 'Nepal's literacy rates jumped from 24% in 1981 to 53.8% in 2001 and 67.91% in 2018' (CBS 1980; 2011 and 2021)

Despite a massive investment from the government, the country's education sector continues to face many challenges. UNICEF reported in 2021 that:

> Issues that persist in education include poor quality and inequity in access, geographical remoteness, gender and socio-economic and ethnic differences. Key barriers to enrolment and attendance include poverty, social exclusion, disability, migration, child labour, social norms and gender bias. More than seven hundred thousand children aged 5-12 years are still out of school. Only half the students in grades 3, 5 and 8 meet the academic achievement criteria for the subjects of Nepali and mathematics. School attendance in early childhood education is still low at 51 per cent. There is inequity in the education sector as only 12 per cent of children from the lowest wealth quintile are developmentally on track in literacy and numeracy compared to 65 per cent from the highest wealth quintile. Very few schools meet child-friendly school standards and only 11 per cent of school buildings are earthquake-resistant.

2.4.1.8 Reform in health services

Reform in the health sector is similar to that of education in Nepal. There has been a steady improvement in the life expectancy of the people; the average life expectancy

reached 71.45 years in 2021, compared to a mere 34.26 years in 1950[7]. The Department of Health Services annual report 2021 stated that there are 6546 hospitals and health facilities in Nepal which means an average of 4447 people per hospital. The National Medical Council has a total of 30133 Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) and specialist doctors registered. This means every doctor averages 965 patients.

The prevalence of communicable disease is high in rural areas with poor access to health services. As the data above shows access to health services is difficult for the poor and marginalised. The informal and private sectors have become involved in the health sector due to the lack of government facilities. They have commercialised the vital health services causing the poor and vulnerable to remain outside of the basic health services. The statistics above indicate that Nepal has much to do to achieve improvement in the health sector.

2.5 Assessment of the government reforms

Despite the formal sector reforms initiated by the government from 1950 to 2020 through the implementation of the Fifteenth National Plan (2019 – 2024), Nepal remains ranked among the least developed countries. The national plan aimed to graduate Nepal into a 'developing country' by the end of 2022. However, the objectives were not achieved due to political instability and lack of adequate development/reform measures. The National Planning Commission, the government's key actor to lead Nepal's overall development efforts, commented that

> Despite several transformational changes which occurred on the political front in this period, achievements in economic, social and modern transportation and infrastructure development sectors have not occurred as expected. The goals set by the plan have not been achieved as planned in the areas of economic growth, production and productivity, industrialisation, quality education and health, clean and pollution-free environment, and good governance (2020:24).

[7] https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/NPL/nepal/, viewed on 23 February 2023.

Pyakurel (2015:18) admitted,

> It is unfortunate that although dozens of innovations with varieties of economic strategies and programmes were introduced during the long period of economic experiments (1961 – 1990), no visible impact could be realised by the people at large. The country continued an inward-looking economic policy during most of the 1980s… although economic growth continued at 4.8 per cent, the private sector investment was low and foreign investment was absent simply because of the inadequate investment environment and high taxes.

Adhikari *et al.* (2005:27) pointed out that different segments of society anticipated that the democratic government would concentrate on better outcomes and delivery to fulfil people's goal of prosperity. It was hoped that elected governments would succeed in developing a vibrant economy by engaging in modernisation of agriculture and rapid development of the health and education sectors. It was thought that the government would focus on commodities and service areas in which the country had competitive advantages. People aspired to access modern facilities such as roads, electricity and improved communication, as well as the provision of schools, health posts, water supply and housing facilities and a guarantee of employment. However, the government reports stated that the last seven decades of planned development have delivered little to the Nepali people. Discrimination, inequality and exclusion based on ethnicity, gender, caste and class have not been fully eliminated, however they are decreasing. 'Important achievements have been made in sectors including education, health, drinking water and social security during this period. In the infrastructure sector, significant progress has been achieved in road transportation' (NPC 2020:25).

The report acknowledged that there is a need for further effort in developing physical infrastructure, including hydroelectricity and air transportation. There is a need for result-oriented implementation through short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans to address the growing expectations of the public and to develop Nepal as a prosperous country' (Ibid 26).

Despite a reduction in absolute poverty, a large segment of the population remains under the poverty line. Increasingly, young people are going abroad for employment due to a lack of employment opportunities at home. The industrial sector's

contribution to the economy has declined, while the trade deficit has remained high. Remittances have increased the economy by boosting foreign exchange reserves. Although some progress has been made in socio-economic development including social security, inclusion and environmental protection, Nepal remains poor and underdeveloped.

2.6 Informal sector reform initiatives

In Chapter Three we will discuss that social change is not always a linear process; it has diverse starts and ends in unexpected destinations. As such Nepal's social change has taken many routes which are not easily predictable. The Nepali public was not a mere spectator of the government reforms. It sought to challenge the stereotyping of changes sought by the government and took to devising other plans for development and social change.

As a consequence, several attempts for social reforms were initiated by people outside the power base. Though they were spontaneous and not organised like those of the government, they facilitated some lasting changes in Nepal's society. The government, in the early 1990s, realised that it was incapable of reforming the social conditions by its efforts alone and therefore opened ways for the civil society and the informal sectors to become partners in the reform process. The government-owned industries were opened for public ownership. Non-governmental development organisations (NGOs) were encouraged and market-based economic reforms were devised. During this period, hundreds of community-based groups and civil societies started to lead programmes for social and economic change. Martin Hufton *et al.* in *People, Politics and Ideology* (1999) made an extensive study of the initiatives taken by the informal sector for social change and development in Nepal. These informal sector initiatives have played an important role in challenging the status quo and pushing people towards social change. A few such informal sector initiatives are discussed below.

2.6.1 Rise of the middle-level intellectuals

With the change of regime in the 1950s, a surge in the social ranks towards reforms was observed. People experienced freedom of organisation and speech and began to organise themselves for social causes. Thus the political change led to community-

led social change. The middle-level intellectuals, who had some level of community influence, began to be seen in the public spaces. Hufton *et al.* (1999:225) commented that the rise of the professional middle class was a new feature in Nepali society during that period. 'This group emerged after the referendum of 1980 and gained prominence in society. It had the privilege to enjoy the limited freedom within the *Panchayat* system and soon went on to form the backbone of the democratic movement of 1990' (Ibid 225). When the democratic government succeeded the *Panchayat* in 1990, the middle-class people rose to social and political power and became an influence in changing public attitudes towards the political power centres. They became influential in the opening of several kinds of professional groups such as the Nepal Medical Association and the Nepal Engineers Association. These groups were powerful in putting forward demands for the welfare of their members and had the power to bring the government into negotiations.

2.6.2 Influence of media and newspapers

The emergence of the Nepali press, especially after 1990, influenced the social and political transformation. Weekly newspapers associated with the competing leftist and other political ideologies began in the major cities including Kathmandu. Hufton *et al.* (Ibid 225) commented, 'These newspapers, along with the older ones, criticised not only the *Panchayat* system openly but also the king and his families. The government was unable to deal with it adequately; sometimes it imposed a total ban on the newspapers and at other times it brought about strict measures... These obstacles seemed only to encourage a more productive environment.'

2.6.3 Movements for democracy

In the 1980s, changing attitudes towards the political movement were observed. Amidst the growing resentment toward the *Panchayat* in Kathmandu, people everywhere were motivated to join the political movements of their choice. Though the government planned crackdowns on political gatherings, it was only sporadic. This further encouraged grassroots movements in local politics. People would organise themselves under the banner of a political party, usually the one fighting against the regime. 'Though the political parties were under strict rule, they were allowed to carry on their activities in the remote villages' (Ibid 226). But, by the late 1980s, the government loosened the ban on anti-government political sentiment and

encouraged political movements. This was partly due to the pressure asserted by India and other neighbouring countries after the referendum in which the *Panchayat* won by a very thin margin.

2.6.4 Opening of I/NGOs

The 1990s were a golden age for the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Under the new multi-party government, NGOs proliferated offering development packages. One notable NGO was the Humans Rights Organisation of Nepal. It worked in partnership with Amnesty International and was instrumental in raising public awareness on the issues of human rights abuses and the remedy thereof. Likewise, NGOs of a political and development nature were allowed to establish and implement their activities in the community. Outwardly, most of these organisations ran community development activities, but inwardly they played a major role in educating people on their political rights as citizens. Hufton *et al.* (Ibid 226) observed, 'Their money and programmes educated/empowered the people to question the rulers over their failure to transform society out of poverty and backwardness.'

2.6.5 The foreign factors

Until the 1950s, Nepal had no formal relationship with its international neighbours, except the United Kingdom, India and Tibet. Nepal not only barred its people from outside exposure, but also put restrictions on the foreigners. The Rana rulers thought that the only way to keep their independence was to disassociate with the foreigners.

However, this attitude of the Nepali rulers changed after the First World War. During this war, Nepal wanted to benefit from links with the British East India Company and when an invitation came, Nepal sent ten thousand *Ghurkha* soldiers to help the British army. The Nepali recruits fought the World War in the Middle East and Europe. Despite many casualties, those who survived came home with new knowledge and insights gained in the foreign lands. This new knowledge was wisely tapped by the new government of the democratic era and coincided with the political change of 1950 when Nepal wished to enter into global relationships. The result was a massive change in its diplomatic relations.

> Nepal became a friend of its neighbour, China, as well as receiving membership in the United Nations. This followed Nepal's diplomatic relations with the United States of America and India. These new relationships brought financial aid to the Nepali people, together with the political influence of the West. As well, these new relationships opened ways for Western development organisations, including Christian faith-based organisations, into Nepal to assist it in its social change processes (Hufton 1999:260).

It is common knowledge that Nepal is now an aid-dependent country. It has been receiving foreign aid for more than 60 years through foreign governments, multi-laterals and INGOs, collectively referred to as External Developmental Partners (EDPs). Lindell (1997:125) noted that the revolution against the Rana regime resulted in significant changes in Nepal. When the new government was formed, it had no option other than to catch up with its international neighbours in terms of social and economic development. He opined, 'In order to have a share in this rate *(of development)* Nepal, started to invite foreign investments in the country.' These EDPs have been in Nepal for the last six decades helping in programme design and implementation in a range of areas including, education, community development, health, infrastructure development and human rights. The WCMs are an important segment of this EDP and are having a big share of Nepal's social development enterprise from as early as 1950s.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the paths Nepal took toward social change. Nepal entered into its modern period relatively late in the world arena. The Shah and Rana dynasties which ruled Nepal for more than 240 years kept Nepal unexposed to the outside world in the hope of maintaining their absolute rule over the masses. However, Nepal was touched by the democratic and independent waves that swept the continent of Asia in the latter half of the 20th century. In the process, the Nepali people fought against the autocratic rule and achieved democracy. It is after the democratic age of 1950 that the governments took self-designed steps to achieve social and economic progress and launched reforms in several areas. The reforms of the government were targeted towards a quick fix of the issues that had lingered for centuries. Unfortunately, the government reforms were unable to achieve most of

their development and change targets, resulting in dissatisfaction among the people. In response, people launched movements against the governments, resulting in regime change more than once.

The regime change provisioned the private and informal sectors to launch targeted reforms. National institutions were opened and international aid agencies were invited. We shall see in the next chapter that the WCMs and other social development agencies mingled in the flow of development workers to land in Nepal with their programmes in social change and development.

Nepal has been fortunate to have the support it received from its international friends in its development drive. In the words of Kul Chandra Gautam (2015:39), Nepal has made 'impressive progress in human development, women's empowerment, communication, civil society activism and private sectors after 1950.' In these positive changes, Nepal received strong support from its international development partners, including the WCMs.

The next chapter will guide the readers to several sociological theories on social change and how the Christian Church has taken centre stage in the grand scheme of social change historically. As well, it brings the readers to a closer look into Nepal's social change process through the involvement of the WCMs. The discussion on the arrival, expansion and contribution of the WCMs in Nepal's social change will add an interesting area of knowledge for those new to this topic. As well, the reflection on the missional focus of the WCMs in Nepal would enable the readers to identify how global Christian mission enterprise could mould their priorities in relation to enhancing the public witness of the local church.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN SOCIAL CHANGE

3.1 Introduction

The concept of social change is intriguing; it has drawn secular thinkers and theologians alike into a long debate as they define the phenomenon. Sociologically speaking, social change is any change in the state of a society from its previous form. It is value-free and its results are often beyond human control. It can produce either positive or negative outcomes. However, most of the early social thinkers such as August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx believed that social change is a necessary process for human societies, and it should result in the betterment of their social relationships. They believed human social relationships change to achieve a better state of civilisation.

The secular argument deny the role of a spiritual element in social transformation. However, this chapter will make a point of the religiousness of Nepali society (Sharma 2001:297; Gellner 2016:11) and its welcome to religious activism, especially of the WCMs in shaping the society for a change that is inclusive in nature and holds development and progress together.

In the pages that follow, we will skim through the accounts of social engagement of the Christian Church during its early and medieval history and see how it helped shape the society into what it is today. The chapter makes some inferences as to the core mission priorities for the Christian Church of our age and finally, the chapter closes by assessing the contribution of the WCMs in Nepal's social change development. It sheds light on the relationship between the WCMs and the local church to see if the former had any influence, either positive or negative, on the public witness of the latter.

3.2 Social change

Human societies are not static; they have changed from their earlier shape to adopt innovations. The history of human civilization is the story of many changes; the man

in the primitive community accepted the new inventions and ultimately let himself be adopted by those new technologies. The term ‘social change’ indicates a change that can take place in human interrelations and interactions. Rao (2005:484) explained that ‘society is a web of social relationships and social change means a change in the system of social relationships.’

Social thinkers in the past argued in one way or another to define social change and its impact on human lives and their surrounding environment. M.E. Jones in Rao (2005:484) says that ‘Social change is a term used to describe variations or modifications of any aspects of social processes, social patterns or social organisations.’ However, in the words of Swami *et al.* (2018:75) ‘Social change is a change in established patterns of social relations or change in social values or change in structures and subsystems operating in society.’ Hence, social change is driven mainly by human actions. These actions can come in the form of immense community development and programmes to bring public education, health and welfare to new sections of the population. These actions lead to a re-evaluation of traditional cultural life and a questioning of old customs and attitudes to man and his world. Likewise, Majumdar described the idea of social change as ‘a new fashion which either modifies or replaces the old, in the life of people or in the operation of society’ (Rao 2005:484).

Rao (2005:484) quotes MacIver and Page, who said social change is a ‘process responsive to many types of changes; to change in the manmade condition of life, to changes in the attitudes and beliefs of men and to the changes that go beyond the human control of the biological change as simply a change in human relationships.’ In a different tone, Swami *et al.* (2018:3) consider social change primarily as the ‘restructuring of human social institutions and social conditions; family, community, consciousness, religion, political systems, financial institutions, culture, science and technology, organisations, settlement systems and structures of authority, power and decision making.’ They further explain that social change happens ‘through a number of factors - various processes of governmental reforms and activities, technological advancement, media, natural calamities, climate change, new discoveries, religious and political goings-on, or simply by the process of natural development and human growth’ (Ibid 45).

Social researchers aspire to see social change as progress, development and enhancement of human life on earth along with its social conditioning. However, social changes are not always welcome in the results they bring. The anthropogenic actions of wars, global warming and changes in the ecological atmosphere also result in social change. But these changes are undesirable because they cause destruction. The changes in the natural world are equally capable of causing changes in human social relations; societies change dramatically due to natural phenomenon such as floods, droughts, fire and other causes.

3.2.1 Theoretical perspectives on social change

Social change is a complex phenomenon; it has always attracted the interest of great sociological thinkers. The cause-and-effect relationships of sociological changes are not easily calculated as innumerable factors lead to different types of social change. It is not within the scope of this chapter to see all the theoretical perspectives and their strengths and weaknesses in detail. However, it will be useful to have a look at the major sociological thinking to arrive at a conclusion for our purposes: evolutionary, conflict or functionalist.

3.2.1.1 Evolutionary perspectives

Evolutionary perspectives of social change assume that societies change from simple beginnings into complex forms. August Comte, the father of modern sociology, together with other early social thinkers, believed social change meant progress towards something better than the present state and that human societies achieve this progress through a unilinear way, meaning in a straight line of change (Rao 2005:495). They believed that social change takes humans and their societies to positive and beneficial outcome, leading to the highest level of civilization.

The main argument of the evolutionary perspective is that all human civilizations are within a universal evolution process. This process takes these societies from their primitive setting through several development stages, culminating in civilization of the Western type. Comte, the advocate of unilinear social change perspective, argued that all human societies go through their first stage of development which he calls the theological stage through the metaphysical stage to the positive stage (Ibid 495). L.H. Morgan, on the other hand, termed these stages as savagery, barbarian

and civilization, indicating that the societies in the past were undeveloped and uncivilised (Abraham 1982:295).

The evolutionary perspective of social change was influenced by the evolution theories of British thinker Charles Darwin. Ritzer opines that Herbert Spencer popularised the Darwinian theory of organisms and emphasised that society was growing progressively better. He adopted a view that social institutions like plants and animals, adapted progressively and positively to their social environment. This view entails that 'society must have evolved from a too simple and primitive stage to the too complex one' (Ritzer 2000:34). The evolution theorists even believed that society itself is an organism and applied Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' principle to argue that 'the Western societies survived and evolved because they were better adapted to face the conditions of life' (Rao 2005:496). This perspective is known as social Darwinism.

Emile Durkheim, another evolutionist, believed societies change because they are trying to achieve a 'moral density'. He opined that societies change in the direction of greater differentiation, interdependence and formal control under the pressure of increasing moral density. He advocated that 'Societies evolved from a relatively undifferentiated social structure to a more differentiated social structure with a maximum division of labour giving rise to an organic solidarity' (Ibid 496).

This evolutionary perspective on social change was popular during the 19th century and early 20th century because this approach to describing social change in the patterns of social Darwinism provided a convenient justification for colonial rule over primitive societies. The spread of Western culture over millions of people in more primitive societies as a means of developing and changing societies towards a superior standing in global human civilization was aided by these perspectives. Those who advocated this approach to social change were 'insensitive to the primitive culture and were prone to championing the Western culture as the ultimate destination of human civilization' (Ibid 496). However, evolution thinkers advocated that every human society must obtain the Western standard of civilization without providing any convenient theory or path to achieving this goal. Therefore, Ian Robertson was quick in pointing out that this approach to defining social change was based on a faulty foundation. Achieving the Western standard of human civilization

is not the ultimate goal of every human society because, according to him, ‘every culture is unique in itself and its various cultural elements are incomparable to others’ (Ibid 496).

The proponents of this perspective gave importance to the ethnocentric way of thinking, giving all credit to economic and technological advancement as the only source of social change. They completely neglected the roles of the non-human elements in a social environment. Taking the Western civilization as the ultimate goal of human evolution and social change, the evolutionists were unable to do justice to other forms of progress and development. However, discoveries about ancient Eastern and primitive civilizations by sociologists and anthropologists indicate that ‘These societies were already better off compared to the Western civilization in terms of strong trade, commerce, and use of technologies’ (Ramachandra 2008:220).

Further, studies have shown that Western civilization is not the ultimate ideal situation every human society aspires to. Rather, each human civilization evolves into a more advanced or progressed form by adapting to the emerging environment around it. Cultures give and take from one another, meeting their own need to adapt and function in ways that suit their needs. ‘This thinking has given rise to the perspective that societies do not change by taking a linear path. Rather, they undergo a multi-linear change process; social change can take place in many different ways and the change in one society need not follow the pattern of the other’ (Rao 2005:496).

3.2.1.2 Conflict perspectives

Conflict theorists deny equilibrium and order in societies and propose that societies change as the result of forces producing instability, struggle and social disorganisation. They assume that every society is ‘subjected at every moment to change and that every society experiences at every moment social conflict’ (Ibid 498). They believe that not only human actions, but all other elements contribute to social change.

Karl Marx, the most influential thinker among the conflict theorists, in his *The Communist Manifesto (1848)* famously said that all history is the history of class struggle and violence is the midwife of history. He described social change as the

result of class struggle between the rich and poor. ‘Since the two major social classes, the capitalists and labourers have mutually hostile interests they are in conflict’ (Ibid 499). Accordingly, history is the story of the exploiter and the exploited. This conflict repeats itself off and on until capitalism is overthrown by the workers and a socialist state is created. Hence, the important issue to remember here is that a conflict perspective assumes society is basically dynamic and not static. Strassen and Randall (1974:12), concluding from the Marxian perspective on the role of conflict in social change, said

> The change from feudalism to a different type of social system can be understood only through an investigation of the stresses and strains within the system. Conflict leads not only to ever-changing relations within the existing social structures, but the total social system undergoes transformation through conflict.

Hence, conflict theorists consider conflict as a normal element of society and that the existing conditions in any society contain the seeds of future social change. They stress the importance of conflict in social change. George Simmel, quoted by Rao (2005:499) claims ‘conflict is a permanent feature of society and it causes a process which binds people together in interaction. It encourages similar interests to unite together to achieve their objectives. Conflict in a continuous nature, helps society remain dynamic and ever-changing.’

The conflict perspective of Marx has remained intact although many modern conflict theorists, like Dahrendorf and Coser, reject the idea of a utopian social system – an assumption that the world will be classless where people will share in their relationships as equals - advocated in The Communist Manifesto. Dahrendorf, for example, developed a theory of interest group conflict in which change is seen to inhere in differential authority relations which produce conflict and change through the opposition of interest. Coser likewise believes that the ‘change comes as competition rises for the scarce resources of power, wealth, status and position’ (Strasser and Randall 1974:31).

3.2.1.3 Functionalist perspectives

The functionalist believes that it is not through change but through attaining a balance or an equilibrium a society achieves its ideal stage. ‘Many of the functionalists initially

did not like the idea of a change. They disliked the idea of conflict and dynamism and shifted their attention to social statics and social stability' (Rao 2005:497). Emile Durkheim, the proponent of a functional perspective on social change opined that 'Society is a system of interrelated parts where no one part can function without the other. These parts make up the whole of society and if one part changes, it impacts the society as a whole' (Hurst 2021:1). However, Talcott Parsons, one of the leading functionalists, held that a society naturally moves toward a state of homeostasis. According to his equilibrium theory, 'Changes in one aspect of society require adjustments in other aspects. When these adjustments do not occur, equilibrium disappears, threatening social order' (Rao 2005:497). He opined that society is able to absorb disruptive forces while maintaining overall stability because it constantly strains for equilibrium or balance. According to him, the change is not something that 'disturbs the social equilibrium, but something that alters the state of the equilibrium so that a qualitatively new equilibrium results' (Ibid 497).

Parsons in Abraham (1982:183) believes that two processes are at work for social change. A single institution, such as a family, serves many functions to help bring social order. It performs reproductive, educational, socializing, recreational and other functions. Whereas in complex societies, different institutions function to serve the societies' variety of needs.

The attempts by the functionalists to explain both social statics and social dynamism gained popularity in the 1960s, especially in the United States, as it rejected the burgeoning communist ideology. Critics argued that functionalists minimise the effects of change because all aspects of society contribute in some way to society's overall health. They said that functionalists ignore the use of force by societies powerful enough to maintain an illusion of stability and integration.

3.2.3 An assessment of sociological perspectives on social change

Defining social change is a daunting task; as no sociological theorist has provided an exact explanation of this phenomenon to satisfy others. Each of the social thinkers has attempted to define it using a particular perspective as above. The sociological perspectives described above have their strengths and shortcomings in explaining the grand scheme of social change. On the one hand, they provide simple and concise explanations of the causes and effects of social change from a particular

standpoint, enabling the readers to grasp the roles of various elements in social change. On the other hand, they have argued from a narrowed lens, trying to emphasise the superiority of humans over all other elements of society in change. It is not our task to justify their sociological theories in social change as we are only concerned about the various theories which attempted to explain social change and the result thereof. Nevertheless, it is within the framework of our discussion to explore in more detail the idea of social change and see the nature and characteristics thereof. A few observations from the review of the sociological perspectives are summed up below:

- Despite clinging to a certain theoretical perspective, all social thinkers agree that every social system is changing all the time. Hence, social change is continuous. Society is undergoing endless changes from the dawn of history, down to our days; its changes are endless, and these cannot be stopped. Society is also not something static. Rather it is going through various kinds of changes. Societies will keep on changing, forming and reforming norms and values so that humans and their environment will be able to adapt to their needs in ways that help them achieve their goals.

- It is often said that the term 'change' is the only thing that remains unchanged. A society's change denoting social change is temporal, not permanent. Rao (2005:484) observed that 'Society exists only as a time-sequence and it is always becoming, not being. Hence social change is a process, not a product.'

- Social change is a human change. Social change involves the human aspect more than anything else. Humans play a key role in changing the status of their societies. They innovate new things, renovate existing behaviours, patterns and structures and reject old ways of life. In this process they keep their society in a state of constant change, affecting the social system by their actions and being affected themselves by the changes they create.

- Sociological theories deny God in social change. However, social change is God's agenda as much as it is of men. Changes in social elements and relationships occur through divine interventions. The God of the Bible who brought the universe into being acts through history to establish his rule (Proverbs

3:19; 2 Samuel 22:8; Psalms 65:5 -13). For Christians, who believe in a supernatural God, social change is not purely the result of human actions.

- The social scientists of post-Enlightenment modernisation have ignored religion in the process of social change. Woodberry (2012:1) expressed his disappointment that 'In broad histories and comparative analyses, religious groups are pushed to the periphery to let the important historical changes be directed by "secular" actors and forces.' Dambar Khatiwada (2014:1) sounds right when he argued 'Religion gives importance to faith and hence neglects the evidence needed for validation whereas science puts weight on practice and therefore lacks the ability to equate religious experiences.'

Historically, religion is an expression of the collective consciousness of human beings that has created a reality of its own through forming beliefs, rituals and practices which have exhorted a massive influence on the social change processes. Religion as a social institution has been a powerful organising and socialising force in almost all societies. Allen (2002:39), in his commentary on Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912)* argued that 'Durkheim acknowledged the fact that religious beliefs are not illusory, but they rest upon concrete experiences like those of the sciences.' Durkheim himself believed that religion is real; it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. This was true not only for the aboriginal societies but for all societies. Therefore, 'Religious faith must be justified, and while faith must take science into account, science alone will always remain insufficient; faith is an impetus to action, while science is always fragmentary, advances slowly, and is always incomplete' (Ibid 40).

Max Weber, another influential social thinker, gives credit to religion, especially Protestant Christianity, in shaping peoples' image of their own and their world which affects their views, interests and actions. Weber's stand was that a particular set of actions is the product of a particular value and belief system. Ram Kumar Budhathoki (2003:6) stated 'Weber claimed that Protestantism can be seen as the main cause of the evolution of Western capitalism.'

In this age of reason, science and technology, a talk on religion in social change might sound irrational, foolish and superstitious. But, realising the size and growth of Christian religious movements everywhere, intellectuals should be concerned about

its social and economic impacts, leading to social change. Therefore, looking at the Christian Church's possible role in the creation, recreation and formation of societies to their better state is a necessity to validate the claims of Weber himself. In the section below, we will make a quick review of the involvement of the Christian Church in the history of social change.

3.3 The Christian church in social change

Theologically speaking, the idea of social change is God's agenda: He is actively at work in the human world to cause a change towards his will for his creation. Christian literature attested that God's will is to establish joy and peace on earth, bringing the fullness of life to his creation. This idea of the fullness of life is associated with the picture of the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament and the kingdom of God in the New Testament. The social relations in the Garden of Eden prior to the entrance of sin are described as the state of 'shalom'. David Gilbert (1975:81) defines shalom as 'a social happening, an event in interpersonal relations… in which God is working in his mission. Shalom involves the realisation of the full potentialities of all creation and its ultimate reconciliation and unity in Christ.' In Christian discourses shalom is a social activity with the involvement of God. In Shalom, God rules on earth where his people live in harmony, doing no harm to each other and caring for the other elements of God's creation. It is a state of fullness of social relationships where evil is conquered by good and human beings reflect the purposes of God. Human suffering is eradicated and the earth is transformed into God's kingdom.

The Kingdom of God, therefore, is a state of joy, peace and happiness. In Christian literature, we find the institution of the 'Church' as the main agent through which God works to establish his kingdom on earth. The Church is therefore the main channel through which God exercises his rule on human beings and his environment. Knoetze (2019:148) asserted that 'God uses his Church to attend to those living on the margins and from the margins, like the poor. This calling of the Church is a calling to the holistic ministry of *diakonia* to serve people's spiritual and physical needs.'

In the section below we look at the Christian Church as a social institution which leads social change. Throughout history, Christian values and biblical teachings have brought significant changes to human societies. The Christian churches not only preached the Gospel of salvation of the soul, but also contributed to changing the

status of the people in their societies. From its humble beginnings in Jerusalem in the first century, the Christian Church has embraced the truth that the world and in particular human society is the arena of its mission of transformation. This is precisely so because Jesus, whose teachings are the foundation of the Church, commanded his disciples to go to Jerusalem, to Samaria and to the end of the world to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Acts 1:8). The Christian Church, from the beginning, maintained an intimacy with the world about it. This was both a command of their Lord and a necessity to keep alive the message of hope they had received. David Batson (2001:XI) in his book *The Treasure Chest of the Early Christians* stated that;

> Followers of the Jesus movement in the days of its infancy and early youth were acutely aware of the struggle to survive in an increasingly alien environment and therefore of the necessity to establish their credibility as socially and religiously conscious people with the message that needed to be heard.

The paragraphs below show us how the Christian Church, as an institution of God's transformative authority engaged with the social realities and witnessed social change in history.

3.3.1 In the New Testament

Jesus and his apostles demonstrated that the community of believers should respond to issues regarding human need - justice, poverty, illness and oppression. The New Testament writings indicate that the early Church at Jerusalem showed the love of Jesus by caring for the social needs in the community. Part of the life of this early church was for the believers to bring their possessions to the apostles who distributed them according to the needs of the people (Acts 2:42 – 27; 6:1- 6). We see this practice continued in the writings of the early church leaders and historians.

The Christian Church during New Testament times expanded the Jerusalem practice of community welfare. They gathered in the homes of individual believers to worship God and to serve people. They had no church structures or salaried pastors needing the resources collected by the Christ-believers. They did not have costly programmes to operate which allowed them to commit their financial and material gifts to people in need in their community. The practice of giving and sharing within the churches commonly happened at their love feast gatherings, when the Lord's Supper was

celebrated. People brought whatever food and other provisions they wished to donate. From what was brought, a meal was shared (1 Corinthians 11:33). 'The excess was immediately gathered up and overseers and deacons took it out into the community to distribute to the poor, the disabled and to prisoners. This giving provided for all within the Christian community but was not restricted to them' (Alexzander 2010:18).

3.3.2 The Early church

The history of the early church shows how the believers maintained the practice of serving people in need. Giving alms, helping the sick, defending the helpless and fostering human dignity were all ways of witnessing to the saving love of God. The early church took the teaching of Jesus to love one's neighbour so literally that it became a pattern of social involvement to share food and resources (Acts 2:42 – 47). The Jerusalem model of caring for the community and sharing with the less fortunate in the community was replicated wherever the Church expanded. Examples of the compassionate involvement of the Christian Church in helping change the social condition of its time for creating a better society are worth looking at.

Justin Martyr (AD 100 - 165), an apologist and a defender of the Christian faith in Asia Minor, wrote a letter to the Christian community of his time in which he advised that those who are well-off and willing to help people in need would be encouraged to do so. They could contribute as much as they want to the well-being of the Christ-believers and those needing help.' Alexzander, in his article *The Early Church's Practice of Giving,* noted that Martyr thus instructed the Church 'to collect and deposit all sorts of materials so that the overseer uses it for the care of orphans and widows, for those who are suffering want arising from illness or any other cause, for prisoners, and for travellers' (2010:17).

The practice of giving for the benefit of others was a part of the life of the Church. Believers and their elders were advised to, 'Give to all the needy in simplicity, not hesitating as to whom you are to give or not to give. Give to all, for God wishes his gifts to be shared among all' (Ibid 17).

In the time of Tertullian (AD 155 – 220), another church historian, there was already a system to raise funds for social spending. Tertullian wrote about how the money was collected in the Church.

> Even though we have a kind of cash box, the money does not come from admission fees, as when one buys a membership or position in a society. That would be like "buying religion". Rather, every man contributes something once a month, or whenever he wishes to, and only if he wishes to, and if he can; for no one is forced, but everyone gives his share free-willingly' (Ibid 18).

These contributions were called the deposit funds of fellowship with God. These were not spent on banquets or drinking parties or gluttony. According to Perkins (2019:1) 'They are used to feed and to bury the poor; for boys and girls without means and without parents to help them…for shipwrecked sailors; and for those doing forced labour in the mines, or banished on islands, or in prison, provided they suffer for the sake of God's fellowship.'

Lactantius (AD 250 – AD 320) was another important church historian in documenting the social engagement of Christians as a part of their fellowship with God. He later became an advisor to the Roman emperor Constantine I. Lactantius was passionate about showing his Christian brothers and sisters the model by which Christians should behave in society. He considered all people as one family, created and sustained by God. He wrote,

> Therefore, it must be considered an abomination to hate another human, no matter how guilty he may be. For this reason, God has decreed that we should hate no one, but that we should eliminate hatred. So we can comfort our enemies by reminding them of our mutual relationship. For if we have all been given life from the same God, what else are we but brothers? …because we are all brothers, God teaches us to never do evil to one another, but only good—giving aid to those who are oppressed and experiencing hardship and giving food to the hungry (Alexzander 2010:19).

The writings known as the Apostolic Constitutions show that offerings were set apart for the support of the sick, infirm, poor and disabled. It referred to Christians as ''doers of good works, exercising a general supervision day and night, neither scorning the poor nor respecting the person of the rich; they must ascertain who are

in distress and not exclude them from a share in church funds, compelling also the well-to-do to put money aside for good works' (Ibid 19).

The good news of salvation is the salvation of individuals and their communities from the grip of personal and structural sin which often results in the pain of poverty and suffering. The early church took this message literally and influenced the contemporary society through involvement in selfless giving to alleviate such suffering (Moffit 2004:40). The Church's benevolent activities became a force within society, and according to Batson (2001:26) the social involvement of the Christians was so praiseworthy that 'Religious matters were a secret no more but openly discussed at all levels of society, and religious life, which was a fundamental part of everyday life, was as free of the vicissitudes of fortune as any other aspects of human experience.'

The Church's involvement in extending the life-saving initiatives was one of the key reasons why Christianity swept the Roman Empire initially and later, the Western world. Rodney Stark, a professor of Sociology and Comparative Religion asserted that one of the primary reasons Christianity grew so rapidly within the Roman Empire is because of the works of mercy carried out by followers of Jesus, especially during several devastating epidemics (Stark 1996:74-75). According to Stark, Cyprian, a bishop of Carthage, considered the plague something of an opportunity for light to shine in darkness, even though Christians themselves were not spared.

Cyprian counted the time of pain and suffering as an opportunity to extend the mission of the Church in the community. In AD 251, when the entire city was under the grip of a terrible pestilence, he wrote an amazing letter to encourage believers to continue in their service of the people in the city.

> These times, people were suffering badly which seems horrible and deadly, but it helps in searching out the justice of each and every one and examines the minds of the human race; whether they will care for the sick, whether relatives dutifully love their kinsmen as they should, whether masters show compassion for their ailing slaves, whether physicians do not desert the afflicted (Stark 1996:81).

Cyprian exhorted the members of the church saying that 'Though this deadly situation has contributed nothing worthwhile for us, it has especially accomplished

this for Christians and servants of God that we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death' (Ibid 81)

He further exhorted the believers,

> Our brethren who have been freed from the world by the summons of the Lord should not be mourned, since we know that they are not lost but sent before; that in departing they lead the way; that as travellers, as voyagers are wont to be, they should be longed for, not lamented . . . and that no occasion should be given to pagans to censure us deservedly and justly, on the ground that we grieve for those who we say are living (Ibid 81).

Stark reported that another bishop, Dionysius of Alexandria, also viewed the plague as a time of great public witness for the Christian community. Many Christians exposed themselves to the disease while caring for non-believers and lost their lives as a result. Around AD 260, Dionysius wrote: 'Most of our Christian brothers showed unbounded love and loyalty. They never tried to spare themselves from the dangers but thought only of one another. Not fearing the difficulties that lay ahead, they took charge of the sick and attended to their every need and ministered to them in Christ' (Ibid 82).

Dionysius contrasted the response of Christians to the crises with how the pagan population around them responded. Stark noted the heathen's behaviours as,

> At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape (Ibid 83).

It is apparent that the Christian Church operated as a socially conscious organisation from the days of the apostles. Batson (2001:29) further argued that at the 'outset the caring work undertaken by the churches in protecting its own vulnerable members like widows and orphans seems to have contained the best model and somehow it worked as an influential factor in the appeal and consequent expansion of Christendom.'

Stark further states that there is compelling evidence from pagan sources that the manner in which Christians responded to the epidemics was generally characteristic of their behaviour. He wrote:

> A century later, the emperor Julian launched a campaign to institute pagan charities in an effort to match the Christians. Julian complained in a letter to the high priest of Galatia that the pagans needed to equal the virtues of Christians, for recent Christian growth was caused by their 'moral character, even if pretended,' and by their 'benevolence toward strangers and care for the graves of the dead'. In a letter to another priest, Julian wrote, 'I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galileans observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence.' And he also wrote, 'The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us' (Stark 1996:84).

As the Church expanded into the Roman Empire, the Christian communities gained prominence as a community of people who cared for others at the expense of themselves. The rulers and nobles could not but praise the benevolent acts of the churches in society. It so exalted the public witness of the Church in the Roman Empire that in the third century, Constantine, the Roman emperor gave the churches the responsibility of administrating grain distribution to the famine-struck people in his empire. Batson claimed that 'The churches became the new city centres around which urban life started to evolve' (2001:109).

As the Church grew in number and space, the Church's involvement grew also in the daily life of people in its surrounding community. Especially in times of great plagues and other calamities, the public witness of the Church strengthened greatly. Batson further comments,

> A minor persecuted fraction of the Galileans, meaning Jesus' followers, through their committed action in social change processes, soon became an indispensable group of people in the ancient society. They took Jesus' broader vision of embracing the whole brotherhood of mankind in which a renewed Israel, the Church would be the catalyst for the final establishment of the Kingdom of God (Ibid 43).

3.3.3 In the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, the Church was self-absorbed, forgetting the examples of its past in serving their neighbouring communities. This occurred when Christianity became the State religion, persecution ceased and the churches began to receive significant financial support from the State. 'The Church leadership then turned its focus from serving the needy in the community to building churches, establishing salaries for its clergy and organizing elaborate programmers' (McDowell 2006:74). With money came many dangers and drawbacks for the Church.

Corruption within the Church hierarchy became rampant with the concept of public sales of indulgences, a form of certificate for the remission of punishment for temporal sin while the Christ-believer awaits in purgatory (the gate-away to heaven according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church). The theology of indulgence was based on the concept that 'Even though the sin and its eternal punishment are forgiven through penance, divine justice demanded that the sinner pays for the crime either in this life or in purgatory' (Douglas 1974:508). 'This was part of the penitence process introduced early in the 3rd century' (Cross 1983:700). 'The first indulgences were intended to shorten times of penance by substituting periods of fasting, private prayers, almsgiving and monetary payments that were to be used for religious purposes. Later in the 11th century, Pope Urban II granted the permission of its mass sale in the First Crusade (1097 – 1098) and subsequent popes offered indulgences on the occasion of the later Crusades' (Douglas 1974:508). 'After the 12th century the indulgences were more widely used, and abuses became common as they were put up for sale to earn money by unscrupulous clerics' (Cross 1983:700).

The Church fought to establish its supremacy in society, claiming its heavenly authority over the kings and nobles. The Catholic Church denied recognising the authority of the State over its affairs. Instead, it assumed that the Church was supreme and therefore beyond the rule of the State. 'The debate accelerated so long that the relationship between the Church and State went from bad to worse. It took more than two centuries to fix the problem, when in 1962, the Roman Catholic Church made modifications in its theory of church-state relation through the declaration of Vatican II' (Cross 1983:700).

In these dark periods, the Church was not without a hope to cling to; the saints of God, deep within this darkness were bearing the shining light of the power of the Gospel that transforms communities. Lynch and Adama (2014:208) stated that 'A great number of Christians, *both from the clergy and layman*, in the Western churches started to discover the emotional power of the New Testament. In the Gospels they found a loving God, who sent his Son to live in poverty, to die in great suffering on behalf of humankind and to rise in glory.' This New Testament story was not new; in fact, it was read many times. But, during the Middle Ages, when the Western Church was in the grip of powerful men who abused authority, people began to relate more of this aspect of the Gospel. Lynch and Adama call this a New Testament revival.

> These revivals reached all levels of society, including some peasants, lower-class urban people and especially women… very pious lay people had become monks or nuns to provide an ordered setting in which to intensify their religious practices…. Many lay people sought a more intense and personal religious life while remaining in the secular world, perhaps married, and even earning their own living (Ibid 221*).*

The revival Christians not only challenged the malpractices within the Church, they brought the Church back to society with the message of Jesus, the master of all good things. The Christians were committed to doing good in the face of the growing evil in society by looking for authentic faith, worship and service to humanity. According to Ana (1977:81):

> They not only preserved their classical faith in Jesus, but also maintained a tradition of Christian charity. They began providing assistance to the suffering, help to the needy, consolation to the mourners was put in practice. These actions later merged into the social institutions such as orphanages, hospitals, hostels and schools.

The revival in the Medieval Church encouraged people to seek more of the spiritual life and its dimensions. The followers of this new experience were not content with the regular life at the churches; they sought new experiences as fulfilment of their new inspirations. As a result, a number of groups emerged from the Church and broke away from the structured church life, adopted a different style of living faith in

society. These groups established their own management orders, systems and structures, often in contrast to the prevailing church systems. It is beyond the scope of this research to make a review of all these groups. However, a brief mention of a few such groups is helpful for us to see how the Church created a role for itself in the social dimension as public witness.

Monks and the monasteries

The Christians who aspired to follow the Saviour like the apostles of the first century, adopted the life of a monk. They imitated the New Testament stories of how the believers sold their possessions and gave to the apostles for distribution to the needy (Acts 4:35). They believed that there was hope of a reward in heaven for giving up their ordinary life and embracing the call to follow the way of their Saviour (Matthew 16:24; 19:21). Many Christians, both the priests and lay people, denounced their earthly life-patterns, including family status and possessions, and adopted a life of poverty. 'They formed groups of themselves and communed in a monastery. This way of life, called monasticism, imposed rigors and privations but offered spiritual purpose and a better hope of salvation' (Lynch and Adama 2014:215).

Monks and nuns in their monasteries not only devoted themselves in spiritual exercises but performed many practical services.

> They housed travellers, nursed the sick and assisted the poor. The leaders of the monasteries assumed the roles of the advisers to the local rulers. Not only that, the monasticism also offered society a spiritual outlet and ideal with important consequences for medieval culture as a whole…Further, the monasteries encouraged literacy, promoted learning, and preserved the ancient literature, music and art (Sorabella 2013:1; Lynch and Adama 2014:231).

The wandering preachers

The spiritual revival became so intense in the Medieval Church that many people, including priests and nuns, embraced the life of a wandering preacher. They gave up their earthly possessions and imitated the life of the apostles of the first Church by living in poverty. Lynch and Adama (2014:215) stated that

> They adopted as much as possible the life of Jesus and the apostles. Imposed upon themselves the condition of poverty and preached repentance to all. It is no wonder that these travelling preachers brought a complete turnaround of people's ideas on property and prosperity – not only within the Church but also beyond its control. It is worthwhile to note that this movement started when the Western churches, Church leaders and other Christian institutions were beginning to enjoy the advancement of the European enlightenment and prosperity… There were some within the Church that disliked the preaching and lifestyle of these preachers. But, the preachers were able to exert such a power upon the Christians that many turned to their way of life and contributed to the well-being of the people in the margins (Ibid 216).

The servant of the sick

Lynch and Adama expressed that 'At a much humbler level of society, the religious ferment led to the creation of hospitals and leper houses' (Ibid 231). Giving as charity to the poor and needy was already an integral part of the Church. In the middle – ages, the well-off laymen had, for a long time, put some hope for salvation in the phrase, 'Charity covers a multitude of sins' (1 Peter 4:8). There was also a long tradition of monks providing charity to those in need.

The monasteries also distributed food to the poor who came to their gates. Lynch and Adama (Ibid 231) continued:

> The hospital became a common feature in the urban landscape. The medieval hospital, often called in contemporary language 'God's House' was a rest home for the aged, a place for the temporarily ill to recover, a final bed for the terminally ill or a residence for the blind. In many places, the hospital personnel were organised as a small religious community, living under the Augustinian *Rule*, calling one another brother and sister, wearing a simple habit and carrying out a simple round of daily prayers that was intentionally designed not to interfere with the care of the patients.

3.3.4 After the Reformation

After the age of Reformation in Europe, the Church renewed its passion for spiritualism without neglecting the social elements of the Gospel. The well-known

Protestant leaders of the time such as John Wesley, Charles Finney, General William Booth and the group at Wheaton College, who are regarded as the first founders of Western Evangelicalism, were not in favour of only evangelism. Conversely, they were the first evangelists to engage in social change through preaching, evangelism, church planting and social action on behalf of the poor and needy.

John Wesley, who was one of the firebrand evangelists of his time 'taught that people must be Christians in both word and deed, by which they were to express the love of God through good works' (Alexzander 2010:20). Wesley not only preached about works of mercy, he also practised what he preached. Alexzander attested to the fact that John Wesley

> Lived very modestly and gave all he could to help the poor. He visited people in prison and provided spiritual guidance, food and clothing to them. He spoke out against slavery and forbade it in the Methodist church and in his circle of influence. He founded schools in London, Bristol and Newcastle and published books, pamphlets, and magazines for the education and spiritual edification of people as well as taught and wrote about good health practices and even dispensed medicine from his chapels (Ibid 20).

Wesley believed that Christians could not have authentic personal holiness without social holiness. Wesley's influence on his contemporary society was of great importance. His letter to William Wilberforce, a man who had been converted under Wesley's ministry and who was a member of [the English] Parliament, concerns his opposition to slavery and encouragement for Wilberforce to take action for change. 'Wilberforce acted on Wesley's conviction, and as a result, the British parliament outlawed England's participation in the slave trade' (Ibid 21).

It is important to see how other Protestant evangelical leaders of that period worked on the principles of mission which was both spiritual and social in its totality. We especially note Charles Finney, Jonathan Blanchard and William Booth among many others, as the leading practitioners of social engagement. They worked to lift people out of poverty and marginalisation in the pre-industrial West. Their passionate drive towards helping people experience the life of Christ in its fullness in an unjust and poverty-stricken society boosted the public witnessing of the Church.

Charles Finney, an American evangelist and a social reformer, is known as the father of modern revivalism. He was a great preacher of the Gospel: he led several revival campaigns across America and involved in the anti-slavery campaigns. He was one of the first voices for women's rights. His work is described to have 'released a mighty impulse toward social reform' (Ibid 21). His work was praised because

> The whole community was stirred. Religion was the topic of conversation in the house, in the shop, in the office and on the street... Grog shops were closed; the Sabbath was honoured; the sanctuaries were thronged with happy worshippers; a new impulse was given to every philanthropic enterprise; the fountains of benevolence were opened, and men lived to good (Ibid 21).

Jonathan Blanchard founded the very well-known conservative evangelical Wheaton College. Prior to moving to America, he served as the vice-president of the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1843. In his time as a pastor, he was recognised as a social reformer. The eradication of slavery was at the centre of his Christian activism.

William Booth founded the Salvation Army, a famous Christian movement. He was a renowned evangelist of his time. Together with his wife, Catherine, Booth served in some of the poorest corners of England at the time, helping drunkards free themselves from their addictions, advocating for a respectable work environment for the mine workers and decent care for poor children. He established homes for homeless people and helped them resettle in agricultural farms. He initiated homes for fallen women and released prisoners, started providing financial and other aid for the poor, and established agricultural training centres. He is known for laying down schemes for poor men's lawyers, banks, clinics, industrial schools and even a seaside resort. His wife became well known as an outspoken voice and labourer for women's rights.

3.3.5 The Great Reversal

As we move into the 20th century, a strong emphasis on the need for Christians to engage with the social issues of their time and minister to those who suffered came to a somewhat sliding halt in the Western Church. At this time, the Western

enlightenment movement revived a Greek philosophy of dualism which separated spirit and matter, and this soon influenced the Church's approach to mission. The result was that the North American churches became biased towards preaching the Gospel as the supreme task of the Church, and unwittingly relegated the social mission to secondary importance. The Gospel proclaimers dominated the mission fields, and serving the needs of the people became less important. Evangelism and church planting preceded the work of mercy and justice. Christian missions broke away from their historical roots of evangelism and social involvement and once again took a narrow path. Pastors and church workers were regarded as above others and the Church withdrew itself from public witnessing.

Next came the evangelically minded Methodists, and the Arminian theology which identified the need for a personal conversion as paramount to transformation. They believed conversion of the individual and resulting sanctification would lead to a spirit-led life free from the desire to sin. Society would then be changed as the individuals became sanctified. On the other hand, their drive to evangelism over social concern was influenced by an increasingly individualistic culture that was engulfing American societies.

William Johnson, in his article *Great Reversal: Whatever happened to Evangelical Social Action (2016)* described that the early Puritans in America played a key role in consolidating the Church into evangelism. He stated:

> Their 'Covenant Theology' inspired them to set up the Kingdom of God, the new Israel, in America. Their regenerate lives and laws were based upon God's law; they hoped this would transform the American culture and usher in the millennial Kingdom. After this, Jesus would return. The law of God would be the law of the land.

This attitude in the evangelical circles in America completely divorced social action from the mission discourses. The influence was so intense that according to Johnson, 'In September of 1923, the General Assembly of the Nazarene Church demolished with one blow the Boards of Home Missions, Foreign Missions, Publication and Church Extension and took away all discretionary authority over financial matters from other boards as well' (Ibid 1). Evangelicals in all denominations changed their position in the period thereafter. The Episcopal Church in New York

shifted the use of their facilities and resources from community outreach to sole use by their parishioners'.

John Stott, in Alexzander (2010:22) reasoned that:

> Evangelicalism became a reactionary movement and reduced the mission of Jesus to those activities associated with proclamation, dogmatic theology and spiritual practices of personal piety. The Bible schools, seminaries, pulpits and Church power and resource centres in the West dictated the direction of mission emphasis, the international face of evangelical witness also changed. By the 1950s several generations who had been raised under the champions of the Great Reversal, were unaware that their beliefs and practices as related to social involvement were, in fact, a radical departure from the original evangelical tradition.

In a way, the Christian Church by the early 20th century witnessed a division between those that call themselves liberals and those that claim to be conservative. 'The liberals virtually abandoned aggressive evangelism and conservatives increasingly focused their attention on evangelism and Church planting' (Poudyal *et al.* 2017:84). Many theologians have termed this shift in the Church towards the proclamation of the Gospel at the expense of the public element of the Gospel, a demonstration of Christian mission through social action as the 'Great Reversal.'

3.3.6 The recovery of holistic mission

The 'Great Reversal 'did not last long. The Christian Church in the Western world began to see the need to be involved in the social dimension of their communities. The decline of morality coupled with the emergence of various social evils forced the Church to rethink its mission priorities. By the 1970s, the "Great Reversal" itself began to turn around. In 1978, theologian and historian Walter Unger in Alexzander (2010:23) wrote:

> By the turn of the century, evangelicals moved almost entirely out of the sphere of ministering to social needs, leaving these concerns to the "social gospellers" and "liberals". Now, however, after many years of preaching a truncated Gospel, the contemporary evangelical movement appears to be moving toward a more practical morality which unites active evangelism with compassionate social concern and involvement.

The past fifty years have witnessed a remarkable change in evangelical attitudes towards the mission of the Church. Evangelical Christians have re-emphasised the place of society in the life of the Church and its mission. Poudyal *et al.* (2020:3) in their book *Integral Mission: God's Plan for Nepal* quote Rene Padilla expressed,

> All over the world an increasing number of Christians, both as individuals and as churches, have become convinced that in their life and mission they are called to keep Jesus' Great Commission and Great Commandment together. No longer are they inclined to accept that the mission of the Church can be reduced to proclaiming the Gospel for the sake of saving souls and planting churches.

The Lausanne Congress in 1974 was attended by Evangelical Church leaders from across the globe. They discussed the mission of the Church and put forth a thesis which paved a way for both the theological and practical dimensions of the Christian mission. Poudyal *et al.* (2020:3) comment that 'It truly established social involvement as a dimension of the evangelical understanding of mission.' They further opined that the Lausanne Covenant 'affirmed that both evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of our Christian duty.' Commenting on the role of the Lausanne Congress in the revitalisation of the social mission of the Church, Padilla stated that 'social involvement had finally been granted full citizenship in evangelical missiology' (Ibid 3).

The integral relationship between preaching the Gospel and serving the people in the community was thus reaffirmed as the mission of the Christian Church. More recently, evangelical development agencies met in 2001 in Oxford and formed the Micah Network. The Micah Network agreed to call this new idea 'mission integral', indicating the inseparability of the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel. The gathering produced a statement called 'The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission'.

The Micah Network website reads;

> Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear

> witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task. (Viewed on 5 April 2022).

The term integral mission has been established to denote the holistic nature of Christian mission. The concept integrates both the proclamation of the good news of Jesus and demonstration of the love of God through caring actions in communities. The Christians' involvement in their societies through social action to cause positive social change thus gained prominence in the global church, especially in the Evangelical Church circle. Therefore, the Christian Church strongly defends holistic mission as indispensable to God's mission and claims that the Church is called to be the replacement of Jesus in a given community, doing what he would do, going where he would go, and teaching what he would teach.

The return of the social element or the social action of the Christian mission is not limited to the Evangelical Church only. The ecumenical movement led by the World Council of Churches (WCC) has promoted the place of social action in the spiritual mission of the Christian Church. The 10th assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2013 affirmed the indispensable place of social action in the mission of the Church. *New Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism of the WCC* (2013:2), describes that

> God, the giver of life who sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation… invites us into the life-giving mission… to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth… the church is commissioned to celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3.3.7 The transforming initiatives of the modern church

Understanding Jesus's concerns towards the well-being of the people in social margins and fulfilling their spiritual, material, economic or educational needs should motivate Christians to engage in a social change process. Poudyal *et al.* (2020:6)

said that to follow Jesus in this mission is not limited to doing normal church business. It is to enter into the realms of the political, the revolutionary, and into the possibility of spiritual warfare which leads the Church to become a catalyst for social change. The imitation of Jesus' way of engaging in the lives of community involves a deep and abiding interest in the poor and needy and the transformation of the unjust social structure – the avenues of public witness.

Jacob Thomas in reviewing the Christian engagement in social action declared that humanisation became the goal of mission after global Evangelical Christianity launched the Lausanne Movement. He continued, 'The challenge to work toward the achievement of a just human society was identified as the heart of the Christian message' (2003:44). He quoted John Wesley saying that Christianity is essentially a social religion; 'To turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it' (Ibid 8). Thomas continued that if the Church turns a blind eye to the injustices around it, the world will turn a deaf ear to everything else the Church tries to say. In other words, he stated, 'Authentic evangelism cannot shun the ethical challenges of today's world' (Ibid 63). He concluded that changing the structure of society is a part of the evangelical mandate (Ibid 63). This deliberate action towards changing the status of society for the better is essentially a move towards establishing social change through public witness.

The Church's role in social change through influencing social norms, values and the development of national democracies in the First world is well documented (Latouratte 1999; Woodberry 2002). However, the Church in the South Asian context has also played important roles in contributing to positive social change. The place and role of the Church in social change, especially after colonial rule, has been well documented (see Hedlund 2004). Ranger (2008:IX) pointed out that many scholars have enthusiastically noted the important roles Catholic and mainline Protestant churches played in democratic transitions throughout the Global South during the third wave of democratisation, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s. With the conclusion of colonial rule in Asia, Africa and Latin America the concept of Church becoming one of the key players of social change has gained momentum. David Chang (1968:761) showed how Singapore developed into a great country by accepting people of all races, religion and colour. The Chaozhou province in the

Peoples Republic China has a similar story in creating an environment for the minority Christian population in its drive for social transformation. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee (2009:69) noted that the Church leaders integrated Christianity into the state-building process to initiate social reform, mediate warlord conflicts, provide welfare and reconcile their religious and national identities.

3.4 The WCMs and Nepal's social change

Long before Nepal officially opened to the westerners after the closure of the Catholic Church in Kathmandu in the 18th century, the Christian churches in Europe and America were sending bands of missionaries. 'Several of these missions would have liked to enter Nepal but had to be content with working around the Nepal India border areas because they were unwelcomed into the kingdom' (Rongong 2012:29). William Carey, one of those early European missionaries gets a special mention in Nepal's mission history though he never came to Nepal. His work in the Serampore College in Calcutta (now Kolkata), India had a lasting impact to the Nepali people. He was among the first western missionaries to translate the Bible into the Nepali language. Of him Lindell (1997:46-7) wrote,

> In the year that the Christians evacuated Nepal (1769) William Carey began preaching the gospel in England. He became strongly awakened to the biblical teaching that it was the duty of Christians to bring the gospel of God to all peoples of the earth. He offered to go to India as a missionary. This man had remarkable gifts of mastering languages. He laboured hard and produced the very first Nepalese version of the New Testament in 1821 which was called Nepala.

By the turn of 19th century, more missionaries came and began their work among the Nepali people in the Indian towns bordering with Nepal. The Scottish mission established Eastern Himalayan Mission in Darjeeling. 'The mission started a few schools in the hilly towns of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim. These educational institutions served the Nepali people who had migrated as agriculture workers and had settled there' (Rongong 2012:33). The mission's work expanded into evangelism and church planting and 'by 1880 five churches had been planted with their pastorate officiated by the local Christians converted from the Lepcha and Nepali communities. With the help of the Eastern Himalaya Mission, the Christians in Darjeeling started

the ‘Gorkha Mission’ in 1892 to bring the Gospel to the Nepali people in Nepal’ (Ibid. 34).

In 1913 the Assemblies of God started to work among the Nepalis in the town of Rupaidiha, south west of Nepal by establishing a mission centre. The mission would contact Nepalis who went to India for various reasons and share the gospel message. By 1921, the mission established a school and a chapel in the town where Nepali students read and conducted devotional activities. Later the mission was successful in planting a church in Nepalgunj, the border city where Nepali converts provided the church leadership’ (Khadka 2004:2).

Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bihar, a local initiative under the leadership of Santhal Mission Norway, sent Indian missionaries to east Nepal for mission work. In an interview with this researcher, the bishop of Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church reported that these missionaries mainly undertook to provide education to socially and economically marginalised Santhal people. Alongside they shared the gospel massage and as a result, a church was inaugurated in Morang district in 1947[8].

Nepal Evangelistic Band (NEB) was another WCM stationed in Nautanuwa, close to the town of Bhairahawa. The band had been formed by the British missionaries and their Nepali converts in India. The band provided medical and education services to the Nepali community living in India of whom many accepted Christ. ‘The band moved to Pokhara, west Nepal in 1952 as the first Protestant Christian mission upon receiving invitation to help build hospitals and health services’ (Hale 2012:3-15).

As outlined here above, the Christian church among Nepali people started while there were no Christian individuals inside the country, among a diaspora community across the Indian border. Perry (1997:30) commented, ‘many of these Nepali Christians had their families and forefathers in Nepal and they time and again tried to immigrate to their homeland with the ‘good news of salvation’ to their beloved. They were barred from doing so because they were Christians’.

3.4.1 The WCMs in Nepal

With the end of the Rana regime in 1951 Nepal needed the help from all possible

[8] See the Lutheran World Federation’s webpage. It has asserted to the bishop’s claim at: https://lutheranworld.org/news/nepal-celebrating-80-years-gods-grace

sources globally to enhance its modern development. Along with other international development entities, the WCMs stationed in the Indian towns were invited to work in Nepal. Since, their only desire was to share the Gospel to the Nepali people and build the Church, they seized the opportunity at once and embarked into Nepali territories. Sada (2005:7) observed that this new political environment enabled these WCMs in India to enter Nepal along with the indigenous Nepali Christians. He wrote,

> Education with social service, bird expeditions linked with medical care, a vision and call to those working along the border of Nepal in India, and the return of indigenous Christians to Nepal to share the Gospel of Christ are some mentionable history. They were united by the desire to live among and assist the people of Nepal (Ibid. 8).

Once into the Nepali territory, the expatriate missionaries of these WCMs involved in social development while the Nepali Christians in their workforce shared the Gospel and established churches.

The Roman Catholics were the first WCMs to come to Nepal. The Jesuit priests came in 1951 and immediately became known as the champions of modern education in Nepal (Messerschmidt 1997:177). Then followed NEB, later International Nepal Fellowship (INF), in 1952. They selected Pokhara, west Nepal as the centre of their work and soon became known for their medical services, especially in caring for the lepers (Hale 2012:44). The missionaries associated with the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) came in 1954 and started community development works. They initiated works in education, community health and industrial development. Shrestha (2015:145) notes that, 'some of the best known schools and hospitals in the country were the ones managed by UMN. But most importantly, UMN championed in establishing the first hydropower project in Nepal with modern technology.'

Next came The Leprosy Mission (TLM) in 1957. Youth for Christ followed in 1967. Some of the last WCMs that came to Nepal were the Summer Learning Institute (SIL), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Finnish International Development Agency (FIDA) and World Vision International (WVI).

It is worthwhile to note that since the late 1960s, a variety of WCMs were working in Nepal. They vary according to their purpose, operational management and mission

objectives. Therefore, before discussing the work of the selected WCMs in Nepal's social change and their impact in the public witness of the Nepali Church, it is useful for us to define the idea of 'Western Christian Missions' discussed in this research and differentiate them from others. Based on the functions performed, all the WCMs working in Nepal can be broadly categorised into three major groups: 1. Organised Missions, 2. Firebrand Preachers, and 3. Invisible Missionaries. A brief overview of all these types is provided here as a way to differentiate between them and focus on those selected for this study.

1. ***Organised Missions***. There is a good number of WCMs working in Nepal as organised missions. All of them are registered as International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs) and operate to assist Nepal in its social development. They total 35 of all 230 INGOs working in Nepal[9]. These organisations have a visible presence within Nepal and work in close collaboration with the three-tier governments of Nepal and conduct developmental activities. They prioritise support for the informal sector with financial and technical aid in close coordination with the local government. They maintain one or more offices in Nepal and report their work to the Nepal government and other stakeholders on a regular basis and, in turn, obtain permission to work in Nepal. They adhere to Nepal's law in their work and implement the Nepal government's policies in management procedures. They are accountable to the people they work for and are responsible to carry on governmental directions in all their developmental activities.

   These are called organised mission agencies. They operate in Nepal as the mission endeavours of the western churches with the objective to 'share the gospel and build churches' through diaconia. They draw most of their financial, human, technical and spiritual resources from their sending churches. As the INGOs, they do not associate with the local churches on official terms; however, they encourage their local and expatriate staff members to join local churches where possible. They are not directly involved in evangelistic

[9] These numbers are derived from the Social Welfare Council. It is the Nepal government's agency to regulate the work of international and national NGOs.

activities and do not lead churches though witnessing and practicing their faith is unrestricted (Hale 2012:15).

In this research these are termed as WCMs and defined as 'those Christian missions operating in Nepal as INGOs. Their goal in Nepal mission is to present the Gospel to Nepali people through social service. They draw their human, financial and spiritual resources from the churches outside Nepal.'

2. ***Firebrand Preachers***. The firebrand preachers are those who come occasionally to Nepal on a tourist visa to hold evangelistic crusades or open-air Gospel events. They link with individual Nepali Christians and operate in a narrow circle of friends. They do not have permanent residence in the country and their activities are uncoordinated with the wider stakeholders. The money and other resources they bring to Nepal are used to promote their mission brands or personality. In general, the Nepali community is unaware of the impact of their work, except sporadic proselytization. Most of these preachers work on their own; there is little sharing between them and the wider Nepali Church. They do not seek to relate with the WCMs working in Nepal but maintain an informal relationship with a selected number of Nepali Christians who work as local coordinators.

   The work of these preachers does impact some section of the Nepali Church but provides little help in the wider scheme of social change. As well, there is little input from their work in the development and strengthening of the public witness of the Nepali Church. On the contrary, they unintentionally promote financial mismanagement, cause rifts and splits among the local churches and help in the proliferation of new denominations, a survey[10] found.

3. ***Invisible Missionaries***. These people seldom come to Nepal but operate their Nepal mission from their home country in the West. They pick one to two Nepali Christian individuals as their contractors and mobilise their resources

[10] This researcher had conducted an informal survey in 2013 to see what impacts these preachers make on Nepali society and the Church. The pastors interviewed showed that crusades by these preachers mostly attract Christian individuals and that less than 1% people experience any kind of transformation.

> through them to accomplish their objectives. No records could be found on how many of these invisible missionaries work in Nepal due to the nature of the relationships between the local Christians and the missionaries. They receive the reports of their financial and other resources invested in Nepal through their personal contacts. 'It is revealed that most of these reports sent overseas are untrue, spreading a wrong message among the western churches, missions and other societies' (NCCS 2022:iii).

The second and third groups of missionaries have a relatively shorter presence and influence in Nepal compared to the first. Their finance and other assistance to Nepal is used privately by the recipients for their own purposes, such as operating privately-run educational institutions, orphanages and Church-based old-age homes. These have contributed very little to social change in Nepal due to the lack of a robust plan and reporting mechanism. Such activities are often conducted under a different name for reasons related to safety or privacy of the funders. This pattern of investment of western resources remains under the radar of those responsible for making policies and they are not included in the government records.

Therefore the focus of this study is the first category of the WCMs. Finding how the second and third group of the Western mission operate and what impact their work brought to Nepal and to the Nepali Church will require another study as this is outside of the scope of current endeavour. Therefor this research has taken ten of the WCMs of first category as a case study to identify their roles in social change and enhancing the public witness of the Nepali Church. In order to assess the WCMs' impact on the public witness of the Nepali Church, this researcher has completed three different activities. First, conducted a thorough review of their official publications and webpages. Second, five of the organizations' present leaders were interacted in person. Third, major reports and project data retrieved from the governmental and other sources assessed. Information collected from all these sources were analysed to answer the key question: How have the WCMS with their focus on social development influenced the public witness of the Nepali Church?

Before jumping into the discussion on whether there were any positive impact of the WMCs on the public witness of the Nepali church in mission or lack thereof, it would be useful to travel through short history of WCMs in Nepal beginning from their arrival

in the 1950s. Accordingly the section below has attempted to document the socio-political environment of Nepal and how that shaped the work of the WCMs and their role in promoting the public witness of the Nepali Church.

3.4.2 A brief history of WCMs in Nepal

We have discussed about which are the WCMs taken as sample for this research along with the purpose of their coming to Nepal. We have drawn a clear line between them and other western mission organisation working in Nepal. In the section hereafter, we will make a quick review of the mission movement in Nepal from 1950 until the present day in connection with Nepal's political change and how it affected the work of the WCMs regarding the local Church. As well, the section will make an assessment on how the 20th century shift in global missional practices impacted the WCMs' Nepal mission priorities.

3.4.2.1 The early years (1951 – 1959)

The religious and social environment of the 1950s was tolerant towards the WCMs and Christians in general. As no Nepali Christians were recorded inside the country, the government had no clue about how it would react to them. Upon extending the invitation to the WCMs, the government was interested more on the funds and technical investment of the WCMs than their religion and dually encouraged the missions to invest in Nepal's social development. The invitation letters sent to the missions had no clues on restricting them practicing their Christian faith and witnessing about it; the conditions laid out for the WCMs were simple and straightforward (Lindell 1997:142). They were invited as development professionals operating on Christian ethics. Such an environment encouraged the WCMs to release their Nepali staff in the work of the Church. As a result small Christian worship centres started in and around the mission stations in Pokhara, Kathmandu, Tansen, Baglung and Gorkha where the missionaries of INF, Jesuit and UMN started their developmental work (INF 1971:110 – 114; Rongong 2012: 58; Hale 2012:63). During these early years, the missionaries faced no incidents of harassment, persecution or imprisonment for witnessing about their faith to the Nepali public. Only occasional social or familial oppositions was faced by the Nepali Christian staff of the missions (INF 1971:111). On the contrary, as Hale (2012:62) narrated, 'the missionaries along

with their Nepali colleagues were spotted caring for the sick, praying for the weak and helping people read the Bible in their mission stations.'

The WCMs worked hand in hand with their Nepali colleagues to establish and nurture the infant churches. The missionaries worked in the background as health and technical experts, Nepalis accompanied them shared about their faith to those that they came in contact with. Mission partnership in diaconia and kerygma was beginning to take roots. Unfortunately, by 1960, Nepal entered into a political turmoil and caused disruptions in many social fronts, including the work of the WCMs and the Nepali Church.

3.4.2.2 The *Panchayat* period (1960 – 1990)

The year 1960 marked the early demise of the baby democracy in Nepal when King Mahendra grabbed the executive power in his hands by ousting a democratic government. He not only imprisoned the political leadership but also suspended constitutional rights of the people. He introduced a new constitution and declared Nepal a 'Hindu State', and thus put an end to all forms of religious freedom. The small number of Nepali Christians scattered across the country all of a sudden became isolated and terrified. Their movement and fellowships were in question. And, the first arrest of the Nepali Christians took place in 1960 in Tansen west Nepal. 'A pastor and eight believers were imprisoned on charges of conducting baptism of these new believers (INF 1997:10). No expatriate missionaries were imprisoned in this case. However, the local authorities suspected their involvement in the entire incident. The news of the arrest spread across the mission centres and a cautious approach to relating with the Nepali Church was adopted.

In spite of the watchful eyes of the authorities and restriction on open preaching of the Gospel and in some cases persecution, the number of Nepali converts grew steadily. The Gospel continued to penetrate communities as God worked through the ordinary people to fulfil his mission. Then the WCMs and their pioneering missionaries were required to play some roles to ensure that the Nepali converts are encouraged to continue their newfound faith in Christ. The context demanded that the WCMs work towards building local Church leadership as 'they could not directly be involved in managing churches as their work agreement' (Pandey 2003:41). The WCMs and their Nepali friends began to pray and meet together to discuss how they

could help the growing Church in Nepal and organised a gathering of all the Christians in the country. The first such gathering took place in 1960 in Bhaktapur, attended by 29 Christians, most of whom were expatriate and associated with the WCMs. The meeting decided to formalize the gathering and thus Nepal Churches Fellowship (NCF) was formed. Earnest Oliver, one of the leading missionaries of that time in Pandey (2003:41) was quoted recalling that 'the formation of NCF was the most significant event in the first ten years of the Church in Nepal'.

Cindy Perry (1993:97) wrote,

> During the next 10 years the Church grew more and more independent of mission influence…there was also a dynamic evangelism explosion. The burgeoning small fellowships drew strength from one another through NCF annual conferences. By mid-decade the NCF formed evangelistic teams to tour the country… and the Church grew in strength, maturity and numbers.

Perry mentioned that during this period more Christian groups, known for their evangelistic flavour, made their entrance to Nepal. Notable among them were the Wycliffe Bible Translation (in 1966). Youth for Christ came in 1967. The Operational Mobilization started its work in 1968. These and many other mission organisations – both the socially minded and evangelism inclined - obtained permission to work in Nepal. Lindell (1997:254) opined that the government was generally welcoming the WCMs and allowed them to freely work. 'It was not until 1976 the WCMs, working as Christian NGOs were asked to not be involved in proselytising the Nepali (Ibid. 270). Perry noted that a special situation of lack of mission collaboration began to be observed then. She (1993:98) wrote, 'the WCMs worked hand in hand with the government on approved development projects and the Nepali Church was clearly set on an independent course' (Ibid 98).

In this way, the WCMs distanced themselves from the local churches in mission collaboration. The Nepali Church found its own way of carrying out its missional engagement as evangelism. The WCMs stayed behind, let the Nepalis lead their Church and missional engagements. With this position, the WCMs' formal collaboration with the Nepali Church ceased.

3.4.2.3 The democratic era (1990 onwards)

With the dawn of democracy in 1990, people's rights were restored, political parties were freed and participatory democracy was in motion. The Panchayat Constitution which had restricted religious conversion from their traditional religious affiliation was replaced by a democratic Constitution which protected the people's rights to freedom of expression. People's rights to religions were restored and the Christian individuals imprisoned by *Panchayat* were freed. The change in the environment for the Christian Church after the democracy is rightly described by Sharma (2012:108). He wrote, 'during the decade of 1990s Nepali Church experienced some freedom in regards to the practice and propagation of their faith as the nation was declared a multiparty democratic nation… During this and the decade of 2000, several Christian denominations entered Nepal.'

A significant shift in WCMs missionary movement was observed during this period. The WCMs hesitated to use the opportunity provided by the political change towards forming a more workable collaboration with the Nepali Church though they had been challenged by the local Church to reconsider their way of mission work in Nepal. Despite the invitation from the local Church along with a favourable political environment, the WCMs remained within the *Panchayat* code of conduct and declined to partner with the Nepali Church in mission. The situation demanded some other actors fill the gap.

Consequently, new missions with clearly observed denominational identities started their work in Nepal directly instead of sending their missionaries to the established WCMs. The mainline denominations such as the Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Methodists began their work officially independent of the established WCMs' (Ibid. 108). Some of the churches established earlier by the Nepali Christians which knew no denominational differences, took denominational memberships and thus Nepali Church entered into an era of denominational difference.

The Constitutional freedom of the democratic government after 1990 was used by the Nepali people in forming political and religious affiliations and groups. Nepali churches involved in evangelizing towns and villages with next to no legal restrictions and newly arrived international denominational and evangelical Christian mission

groups shared in the missionary activities. As a result, Church grew both in size and service but also in identification of denominationalism.

Describing the present political environment of Nepal George Evers (2005:567) commented,

> In spite of the ongoing civil and social conflicts in the country the living and working conditions of the Christian churches have improved considerably during the last decade, giving them many opportunities to engage in social, educational and missionary activities. The growth of the Christian influence in country is amazing as more and more Christians have taken leadership positions in churches, institutions, development organizations and it gives a ray of hope that in future Christianity will be able to sink lasting roots in Nepal's soil.

The organized WCMs, who pioneered the mission work in Nepal, stayed behind. They continued with their social developmental works and the spaces created by the change in Nepal's political transformation were not utilized to provide a mission partnership the growing Nepali Church was looking for. Consequently, as Sharma (2012:108) rightly pointed out that the immature Nepali Church fell into two interrelated and equally difficult problems. First, many independent churches established by the Nepali people of Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds joined the mainline denominational churches with all their peculiar rituals. Second, the management of these internal intricacies of denominationalism barely provided time and resources for these churches to think upon their public witness in mission.

3.5 WCMs selected as sample

In Chapter one, we have defined the term WCMs and the objective of their Nepal mission. As such, these are the Christian mission agencies coming from the Western countries and operating in Nepal as INGOs. Their goal is 'presenting the Gospel to Nepali people and building the Church' which they seek to achieve through social service. They draw their major human, financial and spiritual resources from the churches outside Nepal, especially in the western world.

The Social Welfare Council (SWC), Nepal's government's agency for coordinating the non-governmental development partners, has listed 230 International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) operating in Nepal in the year 2022. The

majority of these INGOs come from Western countries, while a small segment is from Asia. The key areas of involvement for these Western organisations, according to SWC, has been in the field of education, children's rights, health, rule of law and policy influence as well as local governance.

Of the 230 INGOs operating in Nepal, a total of 35 are Christian faith-based. Their official documents declare their faith and inspiration in the Bible for their work in social development. Their documents and correspondence narrate their missional nature and the association with the Church in their home countries. They bring financial aid to Nepal through their church networks in the West. These include some of the very first WCMs during the 1950s. Of the 35 WCMs, there are ten who identify themselves as evangelical Christian development agencies and have formed a network among themselves called the Forum for International Christian Agencies in Nepal (FICAN). Their document state that they are 'committed to being an example of Christ in mission and working in close collaboration with the Nepali churches[11].' The other 25 WCMs operate as any other INGOs to support Nepal in its development programmes without being explicitly a Christian missionary organisation. According to the official website of one organisation, they are solely devoted to the service of the poor, most disadvantaged and marginalised people irrespective of caste, creed, ethnicity and nationality.[12] They invest their time and resources to help Nepal improve its education, and collaborate for poverty alleviation, quality health and social development without aiming to contribute to the development of Christian Church in Nepal.

We have selected these ten WCMs, the members of FICAN, as case studies in this research on the basis of their declared roadmap to mission endeavours as 'being an example of Church in mission and working in close colligation with the Nepali Church.' (See above). An overview of these organisations, along with their operational objectives and how they relate and work with the local churches in the promotion of Christian public witness is presented in the section hereafter.

[11] Forum for International Christian Agencies in Nepal (FICAN) Constitution.
[12] https://www.caritasnepal.org/. Accessed on 20 Nov 2022

3.5.1 International Nepal Fellowship (INF)

International Nepal Fellowship (INF) came to Nepal in 1952 as the first Protestant Christian medical mission (Arnett 2002:25; Hale 2012:5). It came to Nepal as a consortium of different missions known as the Nepal Evangelistic Band (NEB). The members of NEB, prior entering Nepal, were stationed in the Indian town of Nautanuwa located in the south-western border of Nepal. The band members had been selectively serving the physical as well as spiritual needs of the Nepalis who visited the town for various purposes. The NEB had only one desire: 'to bring the Gospel of Jesus to the people of Nepal' (Hale 2012:111). Its website reads, 'INF exists to bring life in all its fullness to Nepal' (viewed 22 December 2022).

The vision for this work began to formulate in India in the 1930s, before Nepal was open to outside people or influences. While working among the Nepali people in India, the INF faithfully waited and prayed that one day they would be working in Nepal. When the opportunity knocked the NEB entered Nepal. By early 1970s the NEB evolved into INF, transforming it from a mere vision of two British ladies to a global partnership of all the major western churches and denominations (Hale 2012:110)

In the last 70 years, INF's major contribution has been in the area of leprosy rehabilitation, tuberculosis treatment and in more recent years, community development and disaster response. During its early years, the INF maintained a close link with the churches around Pokhara. In fact, the development of churches around Pokhara are attributed to its leprosy rehabilitation work as narrated by Hale;

> Day after day the believers met and prayed for one thing after another… Patient's smears, after being positive for years, suddenly became negative. People struggling with sin confessed their sins and were restored. People with evil spirits were delivered. Many patients and staff accepted Christ during this time. (Ibid.100)

During the early 1970s INF became more and more involved in cooperative ventures with the Nepali Government and expanded its work in the western Nepal. This expansion coincided with the stricter treatment of the Nepal Christians associated with INF in their Church related work. More and more expatriate specialist were

required to collaborate with new projects in partnership with the government. Their close standing with the governmental systems obviously pressurised them to minimize Church contacts. On the other hand, the churches established earlier were being led by the Nepali converts with minimal involvement of the expatriates. All these emerging factors caused them to exert only a minimal and an informal relationship with the Nepali Christians. As of today, it is a Christian faith-based social development organization and maintains no formal relationship with any of the Nepali Church in mission collaboration.

3.5.2 United Mission to Nepal (UMN)

Established in 1954, UMN is a cooperative effort between a large numbers of Christian organisations from nearly 20 countries on 4 continents (Lindell 1997:269). It operates in Nepal as an INGO. UMN's webpage reads, 'It strives to address root causes of poverty as it serves the people of Nepal in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ'. It works in close coordination with the Nepal government in addressing the issues of health, education and community development. UMN works in 'less developed areas of the country, building partnerships that lead to healthy, strong and empowered individuals, families, and communities' (viewed on 15 November 2022).

UMN runs two rural hospitals: one in Tansen, west Nepal and the other in Okhaldhunga, the eastern hilly district. In addition to these, it manages community development work in six locations, known as clusters. Its hospitals provide preventive and curative health care to more than one hundred and forty thousand people annually. These hospitals are known as mission hospitals and provide affordable medical support to poor and marginalised people. UMN's annual report in 2022 stated that its funding is Church-based which comes from 16 different countries in the West.

Though UMN maintained a strict rule about abiding by the governmental agreement in its developmental work and not got involved in the work of evangelism and church management from the onset of it work, during the early days, their expatriate and Nepali staff had influence in the founding of churches in Bhaktapur, Butwal, Gorkha, Kathmandu and Palpa. However, UMN has followed a policy of separation from the

Nepali Church in matters of preaching and teaching people about the Christian faith and managing local churches.

3.5.3 Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM)

Founded in 1859, FELM is an agency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. FELM currently works in 30 countries. As one of the largest Finnish civil society organisations working in global development, it also receives funding from Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the European Union.

FELM started its mission work in Nepal through UMN in 1977. 'FELM missionaries worked in the field of out-patient health care… hospital work, administration, in the development of agriculture and in teaching. The aim of FELM is to proclaim the Gospel and to make Christ known, both verbally and through the witness of Christian lives' (Ihamaki 1987:92).

In the year 2009, FELM opened its own office in Nepal to carry out its development activities. FELM's official webpage states that 'Working in partnership with local NGOs FELM implements development programmes in health, livelihood and psychosocial support to persons with disability. Through these programmes it prioritises work for the poor and most vulnerable community in Nepal. For FELM, these include small land-holding farmers, their children, the people going for foreign employment and those affected by disabilities' (Viewed on 5 December 2022).

One of the leaders of the organization in conversation with this researcher said, 'FELM's sole purpose of being in Nepal is to help Nepalis attain better social, economic and mental status. FELM's local developmental partners include those founded in Christian faith. These partners, however, are not missionaries in their objectives; they provide services in health, education and disability rehabilitation, and do not involve in promoting the business of the churches'.

3.5.4 World Vision International Nepal (WVI Nepal)

World Vision is a child focused organisation. It is driven by Christian values and works in relief, development and advocacy to contribute to the transformation of the lives of children around the world in vulnerable situations. Its official webpage, viewed on 15

Dec 2022, read, ‘WVI aspires to serve children and families in the most vulnerable places regardless of their religion, age, gender, ethnicity, class and caste’.

WVI Nepal is a part of the World Vision International. WVI started its long-term development programme in Nepal in 2001 ‘to contribute to the well-being of children’. At present, WVI Nepal has long-term development programmes in fourteen districts across six provinces of Nepal. World Vision carries its developmental activities through its Area Development Programme (ADP). ‘ADP is our primary approach to carry out transformational development in the community. ADP is a long-term development programme in which World Vision works with the poor and its partners in specific, defined, targeted geographical locations to address micro and macro poverty issues’ reads the World Vision Nepal website.

World Vision’s developmental programmes are implemented in communities through mutual partnerships with established community organisations such as NGOs and schools. Its website reads, ‘WVI Nepal believes that partnering with others is a key factor in bringing about lasting changes in communities. Accordingly, we partner with government, community groups, local NGOs and the private sectors and adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to recognizing important roles in creating sustainable change.’

3.5.5 Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)

ADRA is the global humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It partners with hundreds of thousands of churches globally in which there are more than 20 million people as members. It is the world’s largest integrated healthcare and education network. According to Sharma (2019:2), ADRA started to work in Nepal in the year 1987, and since then has been working in the fields of health, livelihoods, education and disaster risk management.

As with other INGOs, ADRA partners with local communities, organisations and government and delivers relevant programmes and builds local capability for sustainable change. Since 2020, ADRA Nepal is present in 60 of the 77 districts of Nepal where it prioritises serving people in need regardless of their ethnicity, political affiliation, gender or religious association.

ADRA Nepal's website viewed on 5 December 2022, stated that it works with communities through community and health-strengthening approaches; with the government bodies through advocacy, to demand generation, capacity building; and with other like-minded organisations to empower effective partnerships.' It further read, 'ADRA Nepal supports vulnerable communities, in particular marginalised groups and women, to attain better livelihood opportunities by hands-on training in agricultural technologies, innovative practices to improve resilience to climate change, small hold farmers connected to value chains, development of community multi-use water supplies, increased yields and sales, cooperative savings and credit groups and climate change education and resiliency actions.'

3.5.6 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Established 100 years ago by Anabaptist groups in North America, MCC is an international relief, development and peace organisation with a mission to share God's love and compassion for all by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC first began sending volunteers to Nepal in 1956 and eventually shifted to directly building the capacity of local partners. The vision of MCC Nepal is greater dignity and opportunity for marginalised people by accompanying local partners to develop and implement programmes based on the priorities of the communities they serve. MCC's projects are focusing on peace building, social inclusion and environmental care.

Its webpage viewed on 5 December 2022 read 'MCC supports the efforts of local partners in the sectors of food security and sustainable livelihoods; water and sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and health, including mental health; rural education and youth empowerment; and emergency disaster response.'

3.5.7 Tearfund Nepal

Tearfund is a Christian charity founded in the United Kingdom. It partners with churches in more than 50 of the world's poorest countries to tackle poverty and injustice through sustainable development. Tearfund's official webpage viewed on 5 December 2022, reads 'Thousands of people needlessly suffer and die every day because of poverty. But that's not God's plan for the world. And God is calling you –

all of us – to reach out to people in greatest need. We partner with local churches and organisations who have a crucial role to play in the places worst affected by poverty.'

Tearfund has been working in Nepal since 1970 and is currently partnering with eight organisations across the country. Following the earthquakes in 2015, Tearfund launched an emergency aid operation and became one of the first organisations to rebuild permanent, earthquake-resilient homes. 'The National Reconstruction Authority of Nepal is using Tearfund's shelter approach as a model for all the earthquake-affected areas in the country', its website stated. Tearfund's longer-term development work is increasingly focused on the mid and far west of the country where poverty is highest, prioritising marginalised people such as women and groups considered 'lower caste' by their society.

TF's Nepal works towards the promotion of 'integral mission' in and through the local churches so that the people in communities are able to experience the fullness of life God intends for them. 'Through these partnership, TF aims at brining churches out of their comfort zones of spiritual services to the real work of community transformation through investing in the lives of poor and needy', stated a programme leader in an interview.

3.5.8 Summer Institute of Learning (SIL) Nepal

SIL is a non-profit organisation working in the field of language development. It serves language communities worldwide and builds capacity for sustainable language development for people and their communities. The SIL webpage viewed on 5 December 2022 stated, 'To date the organisation has completed linguistic investigation in over 2,590 languages representing over 1.7 billion speakers in nearly 100 countries', its official document attested. 'Founded in 1934, SIL seeks to serve all, without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethno-linguistic background.'

The webpage stated that it first started to work in Nepal in a formal agreement for linguistic research with Tribhuvan University from 1966-1976. In 2008 it began to support the Central Department of Linguistics in their Linguistic Survey. In 2011-12 SIL Nepal signed agreements with the government of Nepal to implement multilingual

education programmes, mother-tongue-based adult literacy programmes, linguistic surveys, orthography and dictionary development and language documentation.

SIL Nepal's overall objective is to assist ethno-linguistic communities in developing a series of ongoing, planned actions that ensure that their language continues to serve their changing social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual needs and goals. The work of SIL includes partnering with local NGOs in the translation of Nepali literature, including their religious literature, into local languages and dialects. Their webpage further read, 'SIL believes that every person has worth and that worth can be affirmed through language development, and we believe language development will contribute to social harmony and will help minority ethno-linguistic communities more fully integrate into broader society.'

The SIL outgoing country director in a conversation with this researcher was hopeful that the literatures developed throughout the years would be used by all Nepalis, including those in the local churches to preserve, develop and expand their languages and help people read, write and retain their cultural heritage.

3.5.9 The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM)

Founded in 1890 by Fredrik Franson, TEAM is a missionary training and sending organisation. Its missionaries work in more than 200 countries including Nepal. TEAM's mission as stated in its official webpage, viewed on 5 December 2022, is 'to partner with the global Church in sending disciples who make disciples and establish missional churches to the glory of God.' TEAM came to Nepal in 1968 and started its first medical work in Dadeldhura, in the far west region. The TEAM's work in the health sector lasted nearly forty years until the hospital was handed over to the government of Nepal as per the agreement of 2013.

TEAM continue to send missionaries to Nepal to assist in the health and development sectors and they associate themselves with local NGOs to render their service to the most vulnerable segment of the Nepali community.

3.5.10 Finnish International Development Agency (FIDA)

FIDA is a Finnish faith-based organisation. It works in global missions, community development and humanitarian aid in 45 countries and aims to bring hope and a

better future to all nations - especially to children living in poverty. 'FIDA works in close cooperation with local NGO partners to achieve its mission which is to share the love of Christ and mobilise churches for holistic ministry to achieve its vision of a sustainable transformation that gives marginalised and unreached people strength to overcome hopelessness, eradicate poverty and transform their communities', read its official website viewed on 5 December 2022.

3.6 The WCMs and the public witness of the local Church

The section above documented the areas of the WCMs' involvement in Nepal as development partners. Since the 1950s, these organisations have contributed to Nepal's development in immense measure in the areas of health, education, peace building, disaster risk reduction and child development.

The arrival of the WCMs also resulted in the birth of the first Nepali Church. Hale recorded that 'When INF entered Nepal, it already had a Nepali-speaking man from India as a pastor. Their team had other Christian converts from Nepal as members of staff' (2012:22). These Nepali-speaking Christians were to assist the missionaries in their pursuit of medical work and to conduct the Church started on their premises. In this way, the Nepali Christians who accompanied the missionaries became the first Nepali Church workers in Nepal.

The INF remained associated with the Church established through their influence for a long time. However, as the mission work expanded, the missionaries spread far and wide and slowly the connection between the mission and the Church diminished. A senior leader at the Ramghat Church in Pokhara recalled that 'with time, the government set stricter laws for the missionaries. They were unable to maintain close ties with the Church. As well, the growth of Nepali Christian converts began to take the Church work forward without much involvement of the missionaries[13].'

Unlike the story of INF, other missionary organisations had no Nepali Christians in their first Nepal arrivals. UMN remained separate from the local Church in Nepal right from the beginning. A report outlined at least two reasons for UMN's separation from the Church. Firstly, the Nepal government prohibited UMN from involving in the

[13] A prominent Christian leader in Pokhara who grew up amongst the missionaries from his childhood and spent most of his time working with them stated that the Gospel seeds were no doubt brought in by the WCMs. He gave this opinion to the researcher in a personal communication, conducted on 19 May 2022.

Christian activities in an organized way and to spend the project-designated funds on work related to the Church. Secondly, UMN leadership accepted that they should not seek to influence the local Church's business but let the Nepali people lead their own church (UMN 2003:93).

The story of other WCMs described above followed the path UMN developed and did not share in the ministry of the local church. They devised their development priorities themselves, without the involvement of the local Church, and maintained a separate interest in the mission work. These WCMs sought to contribute to the social well-being of Nepal and did not prioritise closer ties with the Nepali Church. They received all that was needed – finance, technology and human expertise - from their home countries to carry on their work in Nepal. The WCMs believed building working relationships with the local Church and Nepali Christians was not in accordance with the government's directive though there were no specific rules to discourage this except during the Panchayat regime.

These WCMs, therefore, did not interact with the local churches in matters of Christian witness. The outcome is that there are no formal partnerships directed towards the promotion of public witness between the churches and the WCMs operating in Nepal. They have separate identities and priorities: the WCMs involved in social work and the local churches in spiritual activities without influencing the other.

During the 1990s and 2000, a few more WCMs started to work in Nepal's social development. These came purely for the development work. Except Tearfund, most of them were not much concerned about the status and the ministries of the Nepali Church. The Teafund sought to encourage churches to get involved in community development through its Christian faith-based NGO partners. A few conclusions can be drawn on what led the WCMs to refraining a closer walk with the Nepali Church and how this decision has influenced the public witness of the Nepali local Church. These conclusions are dually attested by Bhoj Raj Bhatta (2002), Bal Krishna Sharma (2012) and Ram P Shrestha (2012) in their work - all present day prominent Nepali Christian scholars. These conclusions also reflect the shifts in global missionary practice of the 20th century.

First, following from 1932, the global missional debates leaned towards social services than kerygmatic involvement (See section 3.6.6 for more discussion on this). In his article '*brief history of methods and trends of missions'* Don Fleming of the Liberty University (2009:22) stated that,

> The theological and methodological differences (social emphasis especially) led to breakdown of any attempt at unification among mission efforts. In 1932 a move to favour social action rather than conversion became the chief aim of the (Christian) missions.

Shrestha observed the influence of this missional thinking on the work of the WCMs in Nepal. He (2012:115) stated,

> 'The WCMs were well financed to preach the Christian Gospel and start a global Church in Nepal. But they chose not to do that. Instead of using the Church's workers, they brought in skilled manpower for social development activities… they spent all their resources in health, education and industrial development. The conclusion is that the WCMs believed in their good works speaking for their mission.'

Second, the WCMs that came to Nepal had seen how the Western missions entrenched themselves and local believers in South India, where, without understanding the local context, they usurped the leadership roles and brought harmful practices into the Church. One such practice was to set separate churches for the Dalits and other caste people. The WCMs that came to Nepal were aware of the dangers of stepping into the unknown. Sharma (2012:111) narrated that,

> The expatriates who came with these missions (the WCMs) were perplexed by the complexities of religious and social structures of the Nepali people. They found the people to be very simple but loaded with religious beliefs, rituals and ceremonies and tried to orient themselves with the knowledge of local culture… but nothing was formally done or written with regards to their response to cultural and religious issues of the Nepali people.

Involving oneself in religious conversations require at least some level of understanding on how Nepali people take their religion and cultural practices. The WCMs and their expatriate missionaries were faced with the difficulty of unpacking the intricacies of religiously pluralistic Nepali society. The WCMs were thus hesitant to enter into this area of unknown.

Third, the WCMs were aware of the treatment of the Capuchin mission by the Shah kings in the 18th century. Through their base in India, they had made friends with the Nepali people who would share about their own history to the WCMs. This association might have helped the WCMs to define their mission as social engagement rather than direct evangelism. They came prepared not to create tension by their open involvement in Church related activities.

This background knowledge on global and Nepal's mission context led the WCMs to minimize their pace in the work of holistic mission. The events following the first arrest of Nepali Christian converts added to the cautious mission movement and ultimately prompted them to maintain a separate identity from that of the local Church.

This observable separation between the WCMs and the local Church has continued despite a significant change in the socio-political environment of Nepal. The WCMs remain happy doing what they came to do – the social work - and were not interested to extend a helping hand to the growing Nepali Church. 'As a result Nepal witnessed the divided presentation of the two integral parts of Christian mission: the WCMs adopted social action and the Nepali Church committed to spiritual actions' (Johnson 2002:10).

This arrangement meant that the WCMs excelled in community development and the Nepali Christians in their Church work with minimal contact between the two. The outcome was that the Nepali Church did not augment the work of the WCMs, nor did the WCMs greatly contribute to the Church. The lack of collaboration between the two to define Nepal's mission priorities resulted in mission becoming compartmentalised instead of transformative.

Fourth, as identified above, the early WCMs such as INF and UMN were ecumenical in nature; they embraced a great variety of Western Churches into their fold and declared themselves as united missionary movement. They had been cautious to not introduce their denominational differences into the growing Nepali Church. However, their prolonged disassociation with the local Church created a vacuum in ministry which was slowly utilised by the denominational churches during the 1990s. As Sharma (2012:106) observed, 'emerging Christianity had to accept the missionary offer in denominational identity, burial practices and so on.' The WCMs were unable to exert their ecumenical influence into the Nepali Church due to a non-negotiation

stand on their missional priority as diaconia. The gap was used by other evangelistic minded groups, who did not share in the philosophy and work of these WCMs in ecumenism. Kehrberg (2000:172) rightly pointed that such (denominational) partnering were done indiscriminately and were unhelpful in the longer run.'

Fifth, with the arrival of mainline or denominational Churches, the Nepali Church is influenced to promote denominationally specified forms of ministry. Now, the focus of the Church is turning inward than outward society. The transformative power of the Gospel is now presented within the denominational wrappers and the outcome is more on reforming of the Church structures than transforming communities. A growing schism within churches and their practice of mission along the denominational lines are pushing the public witness to an unrecognizable corner. Further research will be required to gauge the impacts of denominationalism in the Nepali Church and its public witness.

3.7 Conclusion

We saw that the Christian Church as an important social institution has the responsibility not only to fulfil its regular Church activities, but has a special mandate from Jesus Christ to bring God's will to humanity. We saw how the early Church established a new way of life through their acts of mercy to those needing it. The communal magnanimity of the Christ-believers through sharing their possessions influenced the broader community. The leaders of the early Church encouraged the community of Christians to help those in need by any means available to them.

The Lausanne Occasional Paper (2009:5) in Section 64D rightly stated that the Church as a transformed society 'is intended by God to be a sign of his kingdom, an indication of what human community looks like when it comes under his rule of righteousness and peace'. It further commented that the Church is 'both called out of the world to be an alternative society under the rule of Jesus but also, empowered by the Spirit, sent into the world to be a blessing to those who do not belong' (Ibid 12*)*. This act of blessing the world transforms it into a community of shalom, the kind of community God wants for his people. Called out of the world to God himself as His people, the Church is then sent into the world with His commission to love their neighbour as themselves. History shows that the Church has been a catalyst and a

centre of societal change, bringing transformation to societies by working through individuals.

However, the story of the WCMs and the Nepali Church shows a different picture. The WCMs came to establish the kingdom of God in Nepal and have been successful in helping Nepal achieve its development aspirations in health, education and child well-being and have obtained a place among the development partners. Their choice to not officially partner with the Nepali Church in mission created a vacuum in the drive to promote public witness. As well, the lack of efforts by the WCMs in developing an ecumenical outlook of the Nepali Church in mission has led to the fruition of the denominationalism in the Nepali Church.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Qualitative research attempts to search social realities created by the social, cultural, historical and individual environments of our world. As such, the research is designed to take into account the knowledge, experience and understanding of the people in the research environment. Therefore, the research is not the enterprise of the researcher alone, but the outcome of the synthesis of the information acquired from the world around, especially the people who enter into it as research participants. Therefore, the researcher enters the world to find solutions to the problems that have been identified from the collective responses of the people in society. This results in an adequate presentation of the context and the people involved in the study.

From the outset, this chapter presents a simple but clear thread of social, political, religious and Church context for this research. These background narrations then lead to the main question to be discussed. The narration then moves onto describing the research methodology adopted in this work. As Vyhmeister and Robertson (2020:149) suggested that the research methodology is nothing but a 'clearly laid route by which one goes onto finding and presenting the answers to his/her research questions.'

In this research, I have adopted an action research methodology after a careful review of the qualitative research methods. They include grounded theory (Wertz 2011; Lapan *et al.* 2012), action research (Greenwood 1999; Kemmis 2014; Thanavathi 2017) and narrative analysis (Webster and Mertova 2007; Wertz 2011) among others. I found that the action research methodology allows me to continuously engage with my research participants throughout the process of data collection, interpretation and conclusion by allowing space for their feedback and reflection. This methodology also allows me to come back to my respondents to check if the recommendations are actionable, and the results are useful in the direction the research points. As well, this research design enables me to become one among my research respondents who are concerned with the social

phenomenon under consideration and does not identify me as an external expert on the subject (see Kemmis *et al.* 2014:4).

I made some modifications in the design to meet the specific purposes of my study because adopting the action research design in its entirety would lead me to accept my research participants as the co-authors of the research findings (Swinton and Mowat 2016:236). This research is not teamwork but is a collaborative effort between me and my respondents who provide assistance in the form of information. Their information forms only a part of the whole process. They may be the ones to test/act on the recommendations given but they cannot come back with their reflections once the study is completed. Allowing such a cycle of action and reflection would lengthen the timeframe and the project would not be finished in the time stipulated.

Nevertheless, the key elements of action research design are applied. The respondents were kept engaged in the process of data interpretation and articulation. This was enabled through continuous feedback. They will also be encouraged to act upon the recommendations and enter into a discourse for modifications of the actions suggested – possibly for the next rounds of research.

This research has used grounded theory and narrative theory in the data analysis and interpretation phases. The information acquired from the respondents has been processed through the use of coding and thematizing methods, a foundational aspect of the grounded theory (Heath & Cowley 2004:146). The narration of people's stories in their lived personal and social contexts is taken into account because people develop the narratives of their life experiences and develop them into stories. Stories are a powerful tool to tell the history and of change. Webster and Mertova (2007:22) stressed that the 'narrative is a tool for transfer of knowledge. It helps us to understand and to communicate new ideas.' They further opined, 'We encounter practices in the present, at a point of intersection of past and future, but we must understand them as part of a process of change . . . the business of understanding practices will require us to tell stories about how they evolved and with what purpose' (Ibid 21). Therefore, this research has used the personal stories of my research participants for at least two purposes. Firstly, to construct meanings of the social realities from their lived experiences so that the hypothesis under consideration is tested. Secondly, to carve some directions towards negotiating social standing and

the public witness of the Nepali Church. This is precisely to direct the findings to influence the practitioners of this study.

The chapter closes by discussing the research universe, the sampling processes and methods. As a basic action research, it provides short biographical sketches of all the respondents (in this research the terms 'respondents' and 'participants' are used interchangeably) interviewed for this research.

4.2 Research context

The social context of this study is that of constant change and development. Nepal's social movements of varied kinds have agitated the political spaces over the past three decades. 'These movements are often termed as people's movements and they are mostly focused on bringing changes and adjustment in the prevailing social and economic spaces for the purpose of self-rule from the dominion of upper-class and caste power structures' (Misra 2010:I, Pradhan and Valentine 2019:881).

According to Neelakanthan *et al.* (2016:7),

> Power in Nepal has consistently been allocated to a few people associated with particular castes, classes, religions, ethnicities and gender. The pattern of power allocation continues today as the people and institutions with power include political leaders, often representing traditional power structures and with strong networks; the political parties and the factions within them; the leadership of the Nepal Army; some politically connected members of civil society; and the media.

The society, due to its historical make-up, has designated more power to the people in upper-castes or upper-class groups. They exercise more power than others in the peripheries – those people are often defined as marginalised groups. The powerful ones take central roles in defining social norms and practices. These include men in political as well as religious leadership. Neelakanthan *et al.* (2016:7) conclude that these power structures have evolved 'historically through state formation and, more recently, through the war and the peace process'. The majority, including groups such as the Madheshis, women, Dalits, ethnics and non-Hindu religious groups, have experienced marginalisation as a result of power control by a small group of people. Notable power shifting games fought on the strength of social mobilisation, were the first and second People's Movements of 1990 and 2006, as well as the subsequent

Madhesh movement of 2008. While the movement of 1990 helped restore democracy from an autocratic monarch, the 2006 movement ensured that Nepal became a secular republic state. The Madhesh movement, commonly known as *Madhesh Andolan*, was primarily ethnic in nature and laid the foundation for Nepal's federal restructuring.

Another historical fact of significance to this study is Nepal's great cultural diversity. Nepal contains a great multitude of diverse groups, each with their peculiar cultural and social practices. Gurung (2010:1) narrates that,

> The racial, ethnical, cultural, linguistic and religious diversities have characterised Nepal as 'the ethnic turn-table of Asia.' This diversity is unique in Nepal's context as it adds to the beauty of social harmony amidst heterogeneity.

The down side of this cultural diversity is that the people in the social and political margins feel betrayed by the power centres due to the inequitable development of Nepal. If Nepali society is to achieve comprehensive social change and development, this negative aspect of society cannot be ignored. Gurung (2010:4) points out that currently, the impoverishment and marginalisation of indigenous peoples and other marginalised communities in Nepal results in social exclusion. Neelakanthan *et al.* (2016:3) found that 'exclusion was a key cause of the 10-year war between Maoist insurgents and the Nepali state, and advancing inclusion has been central to efforts to building peace'.

4.3 Research methodology

In this research a qualitative research methodology has been used due to the nature of the topics being researched. The primary question, 'What is the influence of the WCMs with their focus mainly on social change and development on the public witness of the Nepali Church' deals with the experience and assumptions of the people in the Nepali Church. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how members of the Nepali Church understand, experience and define meaning of mission partnership and public witness. Understanding the processes of experience and interpretation of social reality of the people involved in the study is best captured by the tools and techniques applied in qualitative research methods rather than the quantitative methods. The qualitative research method, as defined by Swinton and

Mowat (2016:28) is ‘open-ended and has a range of perspectives and is narrative based… It involves the utilisation of a variety of methods and tools which enable the researcher to explore the social world that individuals and communities inhabit.’ This methodology is proposed to find out how people, through their personal and social experiences, are giving meaning to the status of public witnessing by the local church in relation to the WCMs in Nepal. In order to find the perspectives and attitudes of the Nepali individuals who are either associated with the WCMs or operate as a distant observer, this study explores the interests, situations and practices of the research participants.

Heath and Cowley (2004:142) argued that ‘Social interactions create meaning and shaping of society via shared meaning.’ The question of the public witness of the Church is without doubt a social phenomenon which needs to be placed within the human relations and interactions between social organisations such as the WCMs and the Nepali Church. The impact of witnessing pushes us further to the wider society where the Church is expected to exert its influence. This idea of presenting the aggregation of people’s imaginations, perceived understanding and interpretation calls the researchers to use the qualitative method argued by Swinton and Mowat (2016:28). As such, this study has explored the trend of WCMs in Nepal and the overall impacts they exerted in the formation of the sustained public witness of the Church.

4.3.1 Research design

This study uses action research design to explore the relationships between the Nepali Church and the WCMs working in Nepal to gain a deeper understanding of the outcome of their interrelationship in shaping public witness. Defining action research design, Swinton and Mowat state that ‘it is a method of inquiry and form of practice that encourages controlled and focused change using the knowledge and expertise of those involved in the research setting. And it seeks to build a community and address issues in and through communities’ (Ibid 235). The social-psychologist Kurt Lewin coined the term ‘action research’ in the 1930s (Greenwood 1999:9). McDonald (2012:37) stated that ‘Lewin embodied the philosophy that people would be more motivated about their work if they were involved in the decision-making about how the workplace was run and introduced the term ‘action research’ to denote

studying a social system while attempting to impart changes at the same time and emphasizing the importance of client-oriented attempts at solving particular social problems'. Kemmis *et al.* (2014:8) wrote that,

> Lewin became acquainted with the traditional research methods and aimed to transform social research practices away from treating the informants as mere data providers. He proposed that they are the real observers of social life unfolding before them and that they can become the researchers in their own fields. Lewin's approach introduced many of the modern ideas of action research: a process of participation, the democratic impulse of involvement, and the contribution to social change.

According to Swinton and Mowat (2016:253), action research covers a broad range of strategies that are dedicated to the integrated production of knowledge of the implementation of change. Consequently, action research is capable of addressing a practical problem by generating new knowledge.

Swinton and Mowat (Ibid 236) suggested that researching the real-world problems via action research is 'about making a contribution that can lead to real and lasting change… as it enables the researchers to seek to empower practitioners to improve their practice by recognizing how they can contribute to their own learning' Greenwood (1999:118 - 9) stated 'On a more ethical level, the aim is to underpin the democratic values in society.' The interrelationships between the concepts, the philosophy and practices of mission, and the anticipated outcomes of the relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church are treated as the central themes. The purpose of this research is to seek to improve these relationships to create a positive public witness by the Church. This research design helps to explore the complexities of these relationships to help the Nepali Church.

Heath and Cowley suggested that any piece of research does not begin with a blank: a researcher starts with some prior knowledge, even though that might be a half-truth. They go on to explain that,

> There is a tension at the heart of qualitative research between the presentation of data and its interpretation as no researcher would claim to enter the field completely free from the influence of past experience and reading. Even if this were possible, ignorance is not synonymous with

> generating insider understanding. Attending to the data cannot ignore prior understandings (2004:142).

Therefore, in this research I have used my previous knowledge of the topic and my respondents' knowledge as they have valuable experience and knowledge from their own lived environment. I am aware that my respondents are at the heart of the field under investigation as many of them are part of the present-day Nepali Church leadership. Those who are not Christians by religious affiliation but are closely related to the work of the WCMs are aware of the perceived roles of the WCMs in the area of public witness. It is through the lens of their perspectives and interpretations that I undertake the test of my hypothesis. This process of drawing conclusions provides me with an opportunity to engage my respondents throughout the data analysis and interpretation phases, making this research the result of the combined knowledge of all involved. At the end of this research my respondents cease to be a mere informant but emerge as the co-workers in identifying new knowledge and practices. This is achieved through establishing an ongoing communication through which they are invited to provide feedback on the data analysed. Their prior knowledge of the issue is affirmed and confirmed through this ongoing feedback system.

G.F. Mills, who familiarised the idea of dialectical spiral action research through his title *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher (2011)* developed a model that shares some common elements of qualitative research methods. It involves: a. Identifying an area of focus (the problem identification); b. Data collection; c. Analysis and interpretation of data; and, d. Develop an action plan' (Nurani & Rosyada 2015:111). This model proposes to connect these four elements in a linear process by which an action is proposed by the researcher for the research participants to act upon. The generation of new knowledge, according to this model, takes place outside of the data analysis and interpretation processes, in the form of recommendations (actions) acted and lessons learnt from them.

Mills' model is cyclic in nature and moves back and forth between the problem and action. This model is suitable for improving class-based teaching, and learning programmes of teachers and their students (Nasrollahi *et al.* 2012:1879). However, this model has a limitation in the process of data analysis and presentation of the findings as the researchers are disengaged from their research participants after the

data collection is completed. ‘It supposes that the actions proposed will be taken to act and that new ideas are brought in the form of a problem’ (Nurani & Rosyada 2015:110).

The model applied in this study resembles the reflective action research design. The reflective research design includes critical reflection of the information obtained through the research participants and ‘it offers a radical alternative to knowledge development as a collective, self-reflective inquiry for the purpose of improving a situation in a community or in a marginalised group of individuals’ (McDonald 2012: 46).

The diagram below presents the methodological design used in this research.

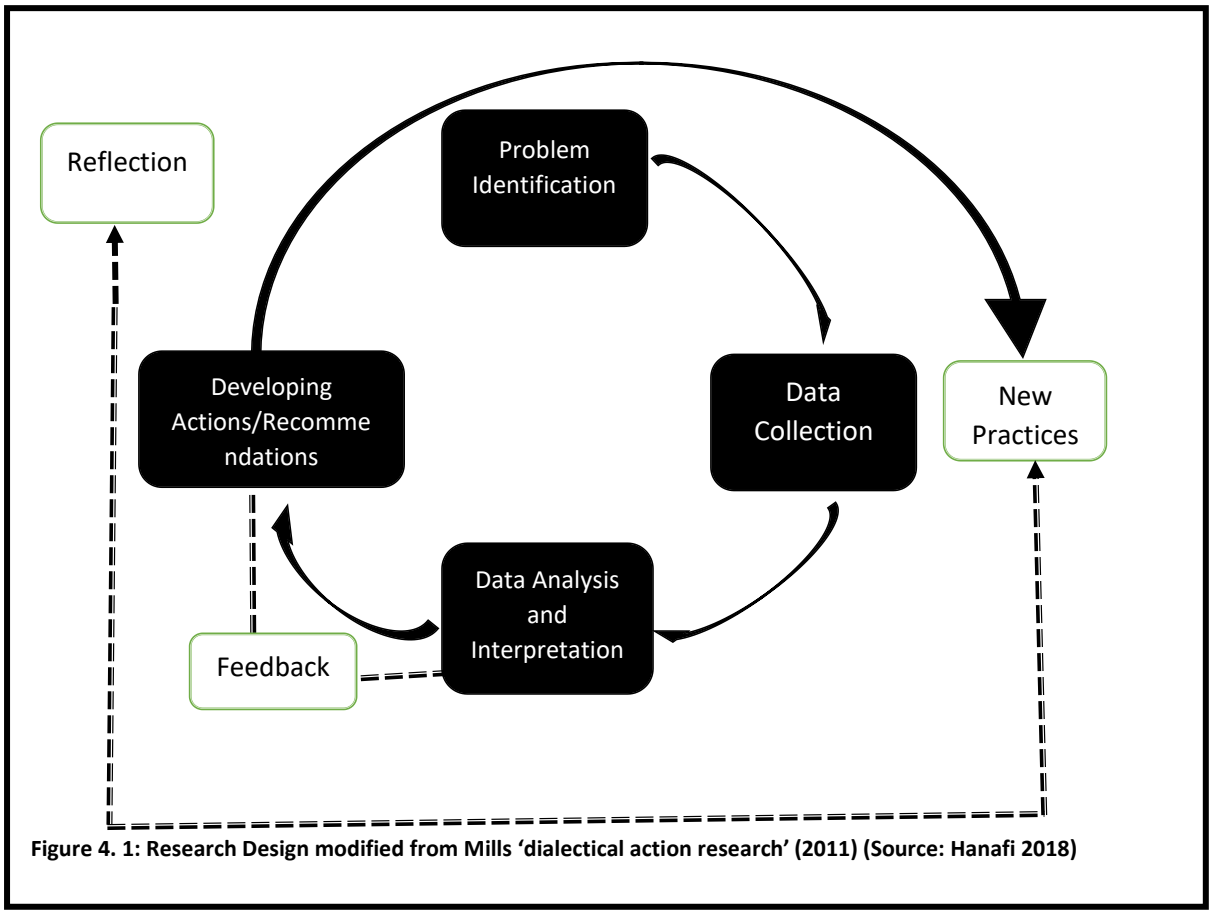


Figure 4. 1: Research Design modified from Mills ‘dialectical action research’ (2011) (Source: Hanafi 2018)

This design takes the researcher through four stages: problem identification, data collection, data analysis and interpretation and developing actions in the form of recommendations. The researcher makes contact with the respondents as he engages himself with the data analysis to clarify and gain new insights into the

information obtained previously. In this way, the research participants are encouraged to remain engaged in the process by providing their feedback as the data interpretation progresses. The actions recommended from the analysis of the data are expected to generate practical actions for the research participants and their wider community because of their relationship with the community. These are connected through a thicker arrow and denote that these are the major fields of action research.

In this study, the research participants are kept engaged in the data analysis and interpretation stages through provisioning a feedback mechanism. This two–way communication between the researcher and his participants is maintained until the actionable recommendations are drafted. The finalisation of such recommendations includes the information and feedback received from the participants.

The dotted lines on the extreme outside which connect the blocks ‘new practices’ and ‘reflection’ indicate that there is constant practice and reflection on the actions recommended. These activities are then expected to encourage the research participants and their wider community to reinvestigate the key issue of the community to improve understanding and practices. ‘This process is aimed at helping the research participants and their universe to modify their thinking and actions’ (Swinton and Mowat 2016:236) with the aim of improving the public witness of the Nepali Church in society.

4.3.2 Study population

Lapan *et al.* (2012:83) stated, ‘Study populations are always chosen in relationship to the study topic and their expected contribution to the study.’ Since this study is about finding the real picture of the public witness of the Nepali Church, the study population is primarily the Nepali Christian Church leadership. The Christian respondents were selected as the source of information from the leadership of the present-day Nepali Church as they hold senior positions in churches, denominations, Christian faith-based organisations and the Nepal Christian Society (NCS). Through their long-term association with these Christian entities, they are able to provide knowledge of the past as well as an assumption for the future of the Church’s public

witness. They are expected to play influencing roles in helping enhance the public witness of the Nepali Church because of the positions they hold.

The Church in Nepal is a new phenomenon and its growth is viewed with interest by other social actors. The political leadership is aware of the impact the churches are making on the overall functioning of Nepali society and some of them are concerned about the treatment the Christian population has received from others. However, mainstream politics has been biased towards the Church and its activities, including the services to the people in need.[14] Therefore, having a political voice in the area of the WCMs' influence on Nepal's social change and its perceived connection with the Nepali Church can positively contribute to the discussion of the topic.

The Nepali academia is aware of the growing presence of the WCMs in Nepal's' social development. 'There is a sound knowledge of the contribution of the WCMs and the Nepali Church in society. But people do not speak publicly about them because of the domination of Hinduism' observed one of my respondents who heads the Sociology and Anthropology department at the Purwanchal University.

Nepal's social development sector has a long history of sharing the social change philosophies of the WCMs as the latter were part of the first development assistance that came to Nepal. The development practitioners have much to contribute to holistic transformation due to their long association with the WCMs as INGOs.

The population segments described above are brought together in this research to access their first-hand knowledge of the subject. They are the ones to provide the primary information about their experience, feelings, and attitude towards the WCMs and how their presence in social development has impacted the public witness of the Church.

4.3.3 Study site and timing

This study is conducted in Kathmandu in the Kathmandu Valley. It is the national capital of Nepal. As the centre of national administration, it holds the power to

[14] The BBC published an article with a title 'Christians targeting the birthplace of Buddha. The article is a presentation of interviews of a missionary couple, a Nepali Christian leader and a prominent Hindu politician. The politician was heard saying that the Christians are targeting to destroy Nepali culture and tradition. The link: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-64235873.amp?fbclid=IwAR0dhoc5Bsxh7a2V77qlJ0FH46s_6ejmEwFd-mg1liQug6axUVpYb50YGoc

regulate the country, including the WCMs and the Nepali Church. It is here that most of the intellectuals, including the leaders of the WCMs and the Nepali Church are based and operate in the country. In this way, Kathmandu exerts great power in social change and development as its decisions impact the rest of the country.

The ten Western Christian mission organisations selected as case studies for this research (see Chapter 3) are based in Kathmandu. Their work is primarily planned and executed from here. This setting was useful for me to establish a working contact with the research participants.

The churches are concentrated in Kathmandu. Their mission and other programmes take shape in their Kathmandu headquarters and go onto action in the villages and towns. The Church leadership in Kathmandu exerts a powerful influence over the churches in the rest of the country and their plans and proposals get precedence in the churches. A recent Church Survey reported that Kathmandu Valley – which is divided into three districts, Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Lalitpur - alone has 872 churches. This is exactly 11.24% of the total number of Christian churches in Nepal (NCCS 2022:13).

The description above provides solid evidence that Kathmandu has significant power and authority over the work of the WCMs and the churches in the country. In like manner, Kathmandu is also the centre of political and educational thought due to the concentration of policy makers and educationists within it. The federal government exercises its rule from the Kathmandu Valley, and the parliament and judiciary are also centred here. The prevalence of universities in other districts is outnumbered by those established and functioning in Kathmandu.

These characteristics make Kathmandu the desired location for this research. Also, being a resident of Kathmandu and having a good knowledge of these characteristics from my past experiences of relating and working with a number of WCMs and churches, has been a factor for the selection of Kathmandu as the research location.

This study is conducted as an academic persuasion. A long-term project, framed within the period of three years from 2021, the aim was to complete in the year 2024. The preliminary activities such as proposal design, obtaining university approval and

registration were completed in 2021, whereas the field work and data analysis were conducted between 2022 and 2023.

4.3.4 Sampling

The research participants for this study were determined using purposive sampling. Etikan *et al.* in their article, *Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive sampling*, observed that through this technique the researcher deliberately chooses the participant based on the perceived qualities s/he possesses. They said, 'Using these techniques, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience' (2015:2). The sample selected for this study not only agreed to participate but were confident in contributing to the subject under consideration through their past experiences. As such, the sample taken for this research is not representative of the entire Christian population of the country. Nor do the non-Christian respondents succinctly represent their fields of engagement. However, a number of qualities and characteristics were considered before determining why they should become the provider of information for this study.

4.3.4.1 The distribution of the Church and Christians

The National Christian Community Survey (NCCS) 2022 reported that there are 7758 churches in Nepal. These churches hold 683261 Christian individuals in them. The table below presents the distribution of churches and the Christian population in Nepal according to the provinces.

Kathmandu, in the Bagmati Province, has the highest number of churches with the largest congregations in terms of their members.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Nepali Christian Church and Christian population, source: (NCCS 2022:10 – 11)

Name of the Province	No of Churches	% of Churches	No. of Christians	% of Christians
Far-western	588	7.57	58,894	9
Karnali	406	5.23	39,693	6
Lumbini	948	12.21	84,604	12

Gandaki	839	10.81	82,113	12
Bagmati	2,704	34.85	258,562	38
Madhesh	306	4.65	20,886	3
Koshi	1,912	24.64	139,089	20
Total	**7758**	**100**	**683,261**	**100**

4.3.4.2 Types of Christian churches in Nepal

There are different Christian groups and denominations at work in Nepal. Nearly half of all the churches in Nepal are linked with one of the following national denominations and are influenced accordingly in their faith and practices. However, a good number of churches claim independence. They have their own way of developing Church leadership and are seldom related to such denominations or groups in their practices. As the data below shows, five different denominations claim a good number of churches associated with them.

1. *Pentecostal Churches* – Pentecostals are a group of Protestant churches that 'trace their origins to a religious revival that began in Topeka, Kansas, USA in 1901' (WBE 1994:267). It is the largest Church group in Nepal. According to an informal estimate, there are 3 500 Pentecostal churches in Nepal.
2. *Baptist Churches* - Baptists are members of a large Protestant Christian group who reserve baptism (a religious act of taking an oath by immersing oneself in the water) for persons who affirm their faith in Jesus Christ. Baptists are organised in separate groups in Nepal among whom the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC) is the largest. The NBCC website claims to have 238 churches and 239 mission points under its administration (viewed on 26 January 2023).
3. *Presbyterian Churches* – The Presbyterians are one of the largest group of Protestant Christians in the English-speaking world. The Presbyterians have

been one of the fastest growing Church groups in Nepal since 1990. L.B. Tamang, a pastor working with the Presbyterian Church in Kathmandu informed this researcher that there are 375 Presbyterian churches in Nepal under its umbrella, in which there are 80000 Christians.

4. *Roman Catholic* – There are less than twenty Roman Catholic churches in Nepal. In 2020, these churches encompass 7000 members according to Bishop Anthony, who holds the most senior position in the Catholic Church in Nepal.

5. *Independent Churches* - There are other churches which deny any link with the denominations listed above but claim to function on their own. The NCCS reports that there are more than 2500 independent churches in the country[15].

4.3.4.3 National Church organisations and their coverage

There are three active national Church networks in Nepal. The oldest of these is the National Churches Fellowship Nepal (NCFN). Established in 1962 to provide fellowship to expatriate Christians associated with the WCMs and newly converted Nepali Christians, NCFN changed into a national Church network in 1982 and started to provide membership to the Nepali churches. It has close to three thousand local churches spread all over the country as its member churches, reads its official website (viewed 26 January 2023).

The other national Christian network is NCS. Founded in 1996 to accommodate the independent and denominational churches that did not associate with NCFN, NCS acts to provide a 'common platform' and a 'fellowship' for the churches in Nepal. Its website reads that 'Over 4000 Christian groups that include local churches, Church groups and denominations, theological colleges and Christian organisations are its members' (viewed on 26 January 2023).

The Federation of National Christian Nepal (FNCN) is another national Church network. Established in 2008, it is the youngest of the three and specialises in advocacy for the rights of the Nepali Christian community. Its official website reads, 'FNCN is working for the causes of existence, identity, human rights and for other national issues for the Christian Community in Nepal and follows the government to

[15] The NCCS survey team in 2022 found that there are more than 2 500 churches which declined any links with any of the church groups and denominations.

implement secularism' (viewed on 27 January 2023). It has a little over 200 local churches as members.

Having made the above analysis, the participants selected for my research are representative of the population under investigation. In addition, the following grounds further qualify them as the best samples:

i. The Kathmandu Valley in the Bagmati Province of Nepal has the highest number of churches and Christian individuals. The Kathmandu Valley represents a minimum of 38% of the Nepali Christians. As the centre of the Churches' and WCMs' administration the leadership in Kathmandu is able to represent the issues and problems of the Christians across the country.

ii. The NCS is the largest Church network in terms of its membership. It is also an inclusive organisation in terms of its member churches and denominations. Unlike NCFN (which, claims to be an independent and indigenous Nepali Church group), NCS is a common platform of more than 4,000 churches and Christian organisations. NCS's membership includes the churches and Christian organisations under NCFN and FNCN networks. As well, the leadership of NCS is drawn from all existing Church groups and denominations. These characteristics of NCS make its leadership a suitable participant for this research.

iii. Related to this is the membership of NCS which covers the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Orthodox and Independent as well as the Catholic churches. This inclusive nature qualifies NCS and the people in its leadership as suitable respondents for this research.

iv. The non-Christian participants selected for this research are experts in their respective fields. They were approached for the reasons of their knowledge and association with the WCMs as well as their availability and willingness to contribute to the subject under discussion.

The qualities and characteristics outlined above helped to prepare the list of the research participants with their contact details. The initial contact list of 30 people included six non-Christian respondents. After consulting with the research

supervisors, the list was reduced to 15 people. The list of 15 people was further adjusted after the first round of contacts as five of the original candidates, including three non-Christian professionals, declined to be involved in the interview. The final list of 15 individuals as below (section 4.3.6) was determined after they agreed to assist by providing the information required for this subject. Short biographical notes on each of my research participants are provided under Section 4.4.

4.3.4.4 Nature and sources of data

This study used both primary and secondary data. The secondary data were taken from published books, journals, articles, dialogues and reports from the government as well as other agencies. The literature reviewed included data obtained from short films, YouTube videos and interview podcasts of the people as well as those freely available materials on the internet.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to obtain the necessary primary information from the respondents (see Annexe 1). The questionnaire included open-ended and close-ended questions. This was a purposeful move as keeping all the questions open-ended would lead to the gathering of unnecessary data which ultimately required discarding. Most of the questions were framed with multiple options for the respondents to tick (√) their choice. This has helped to manage the data from the first instance of the interview. The close-ended questions, however, provided an option in which the respondents could share their personal feelings and observations. These are then recorded as special comments. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents to say whatever they thought was appropriate to satisfy the questions.

The research has used the primary data to draw the majority of conclusions, for the respondents were individuals directly associated either with the Nepali Church or WCMs. They were not distant onlookers, but often the lead influencers of the social realities being researched.

4.3.4.5 Research tool: Interview

This research used interviews, the basic qualitative data collection tool. It enabled the 'direct and face-to-face interaction of the researcher with the respondents who are the members of the study population' (see Lapin et.al. 2012:70).

A semi-structured questionnaire was taken to the respondents for their responses. The researcher was present in person to assist the respondents in order to obtain real information. To preserve the purity and authenticity of the information, the researcher immediately recorded all the answers received from the respondents on his computer and replayed the recording to the respondents before leaving the interview space.

The researcher interviewed several non-Christians so that the research findings are not influenced by the views of the Christians only or vice versa. This deliberate action is expected to ensure a balance and objectivity of the research outcomes. The table below gives a snap-shot of the demographic characteristics of the respondents selected for this research.

Table 4. 2: The list of research participants and their descriptions

Gender	Male	Female	Third gender	Other	Total
	12	3	0	0	15
People groups	Dalit	Janajati	Madheshi	Other	
	1	5	1	8	
Age	Below 50	50 – 60	Above 60	Other	
	4	6	5	0	
Religion	Hindu	Christian	Atheist	Other	
	3	12	0	0	
Education	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Other	
	3	7	5	0	
Occupation	Church	Develop-ment	Politics	Academia	
	7	3	3	2	
NCS affiliation	Yes	No	Others	Others	
	12	3	0	0	
WCMs affiliation					
	8	7	0	0	

As can be seen in the table above, the respondents selected for this study fall mainly into two major categories, namely the Nepali Christian leaders (80%), and the non-Christian professionals (20%). The respondents are further categorised based on their field of professional engagement, ethnic background and other social criteria. As such, those involved in the Church make up 47% whereas those involved in national politics are 20%, social development fields 20% and in academia 13%. Regarding gender, there are 80% male respondents whereas 20% are females.
At 53% of the group, there are slightly more Brahmin and Chhetris (indicated as 'others' in the table above), followed by Janajatis (ethnic) at 33% and Madheshi and Dalits at 7% making up The ethnic and/or caste composition of the respondents.

4.3.4.6 Informed consent and anonymity

All the research participants involved in this research are educated individuals. They were comfortable answering the question both in Nepali and English languages. They were requested to sign an Informed Consent Form in the English language. This was a requirement of the ethical committee of the Pretoria University. The respondents who used email to respond to the questions were also required to sign the form or provide their consent to use their signature (respondents 8 and 15). A sample of the informed consent form is provided in Annexe 2.

4.3.4.7 Data recording and thematizing

The data acquired through interviewing the research participants were taken through a number of stages of processing before attempting to interpret them.
Firstly, the raw data collected were replayed in front of the respondents before leaving them. This was to ensure that I was able to capture exactly what they said. The respondents agreed to the request to be involved again if their further input was required on the information provided.

Secondly, the audio records were played for accuracy and confirmation when the interviews were transcribed into MS Word files. The information on the MS Word files was then copied into MS Excel files to generate themes. Then the data in the MS files were taken through the process of creating themes according to the questions.

Several aspects were considered while generating the themes for further explanation. For example, what is the information suggesting? Or what aspect/s of the problem is the data referring to? Who is saying what and how might their response be relevant to the question under discussion? What specific issues are the data referring to and how are these going to affect the interpretation and presentation? Identifying these themes was helpful in the process of drawing conclusions and recommendations.

4.4 Research participants

Fifteen individuals, who formed the core of this research participants, were interviewed in this research. Together, the research participants hold a range of professional positions and Church backgrounds. They are some of the first-generation leaders of the Nepali Church and have a thorough understanding of the topic under consideration. They also formed the core of NCS leadership.

They represent not only NCS and the Nepali Church but are experienced politicians, academics and social development practitioners. They have been exerting power and influence in the wider Nepali society and helping to garner attention to the Nepali Church from the public and policy implementers alike.

The non-Christian participants have been in their field of engagement for more than a decade. However, this does not imply that they literally 'represent' their community in their field of involvement. Rather, through their professionalism, they have influenced their fields with noteworthy practice and publications. Their inclusion in this study is aimed at understanding a 'secular' perspective on the public witness of the Nepali Church in association with the work of the WCMs.

The ten WCMs (See an introductory descriptions of these in chapter 3) are taken as representatives of all the thirty-five WCMs working in Nepal. Their selection as sample is based on their *'declared missionary mindedness and expressed solidarity with the Nepali Church in mission.'*

A brief introductory profile of each of the research participants is presented here with a view to establishing the validity of this research enterprise.

Respondent 1

My first respondent, 52 years old male, comes from the *Badi* community. *Badi* is one of the poorest Dalit communities in Nepal, marginalised from the mainstream social framework and underprivileged. He was born on 25 November 1970 in mid-west Nepal and grew up without knowing his legal father because of the victimisation of the Badi community. Before he knew his legal father, on his 12th birthday, he lost his mother and was living with his maternal uncles. As an orphan, his childhood was not a happy one. Without proper parenting, he soon fell into bad habits. He took up drinking alcohol and stopped studying.

He heard about Jesus during his late teens and believed in the God of the Bible. He believes his life was turned around after coming to faith in Jesus and claims that God provided him with abundant blessings in life including the desire to study again. He succeeded in passing his school exams and later had the opportunity to do a master's degree in sociology. He became the first person from the *Badi* community in Nepal to achieve this accolade.

He started his professional career in 1990 as an administrative assistant in a government office. He then went on to become a senior manager of an HIV and AIDs support programme with a WCM. He had many other opportunities to come in contact with the WCMs and their developmental works in Nepal.

He specialised in community health and went on to work as an HIV and AIDS consultant for several development organisations. He has published two outstanding research papers on his community. His work reflects the social and economic condition of the marginalised groups.

During his professional engagements, he received a number of prestigious awards from the Nepal and Indian governments in recognition of his service to humanity which includes *Dr. B.R Ambedkar National Sewa Shri Social Service Award*.

In 2015, he started an NGO to champion the case of his own community. He is a development professional and committedly serves the health and education needs of the children and the economic empowerment of Dalit women. Furthermore, he became engaged in national politics and believes that politics should drive the agenda of social change. He believes a transformed national politics is inevitable for the emancipation of all the marginalised and socially excluded communities,

including his own. He is a member of the Lumbini Province committee of the *Janata Samajbadi* (meaning, People's Socialist) Party, the fifth largest political party according to the election results of 2022. His party has been winning seats in the federal as well as local elections from as early as 2018 and has been in government.

He is interviewed as one of the political respondents and he is addressed as respondent number 1.

Respondent 2

My second respondent is a 53-year-old woman. She comes from the upper caste Brahmin family. Born and brought up in the plains of west Nepal, she became Christian at the age of 20 in 1990. After her conversion, she married a man who ultimately went on to become the pastor of a local Church in Kathmandu where she serves alongside her husband.

She acquired her formal education from the government school in Nepal and went to South India for her bachelor's and master's degrees in theology. Returning from India, her family settled in Kathmandu to assist a local Church. Her family served that Church for 11 years until 2002 when they left that Church to start an inner-city ministry as the Lord called them. She and her husband founded a new Church in the heart of Kathmandu city and serve the inner-city population. Their Church continues to grow in various ministries. They continue to serve the needs of the Church and its surrounding community by engaging with different social groups and institutions.

She is involved in several Christian faith-based organisations, including the women's branch of NCS. Since 2015, she has been on the executive committee of NCS and leading the women and prayer ministries as the coordinator. She is an active member of the mother's group in her community which takes the issues of abuse, including domestic violence and violence against women. She works to empower mothers and children on the issues of human rights, health and community well-being.

She has no direct involvement with the WCMs working in Nepal although she is aware of their work in the country. She is familiar with the kinds of missions that come to Nepal and the types of services they render to society and she is thankful for that. However, she feels the missions could have done much more to help the Nepali Church mature in its mission given the position and resources at their disposal. She looks forward to playing a key role in NCS towards helping the Church in Nepal to develop a good relationship with the major stakeholders for social change.

She is approached for this interview as a female Christian leader who has a formal relationship with NCS. As such, she represents the general church view and will be addressed as respondent number 2.

Respondent 3

My third respondent is a high-caste individual. Born and brought up in the central part of Nepal, he comes from a powerful family line. He has acquired a Master of Theology (MTh) from the Philippines and a PhD in health management from Thailand. He has been one of the long-term teachers in theology and social development in secular as well as theological colleges in Nepal and renders his intellectual services to a number of universities in Asia and America as a PhD thesis examiner. His area of interest includes lecturing on research methodology and educational management. He has been instrumental in the founding and ongoing management of hospitals, health posts and higher educational institutes that include four community hospitals, three public and one private school and two NGOs. These organisations continue to provide their services to people in specialised fields.

He served in high-ranked positions for several WCMs and founded a Church each in Hong Kong and Kathmandu.

He was instrumental in organising the growing Nepali Church into the network of NCFN during this involvement. His managerial expertise is well recognised by Christian as well as other circles, including the national bureaucracy. He exerts a positive influence in Nepal's bureaucracy and political leadership through his decade long involvement in the social and educational service sectors. His inputs in the field of hospital management have been highly appreciated by those in government agencies. He has been a key individual in starting two community schools in remote western hills villages. These schools continue to educate the children of underprivileged Nepali parents.

He has been an influential advocate of holistic mission in Nepal. Through his involvement both in the Church and in social service, he has gained a balanced mission theology. He calls it 'holistic mission' and has been able to influence the contemporary church leadership on the concept and practice of integral mission.

In 2018, he was appointed a member of the exploration team to conduct a feasibility study for the Mid-western University. His team submitted a plan for the Gandaki University in west Nepal. The government of Nepal is working towards establishing this university where he hopes to contribute as one of the leaders.

He played an instrumental role in the founding of the Nepal Christian Society (NCS) during the early 1990s. His long-term involvement in NCS and his subsequent services to the Nepali Christian community gives him an edge by which he continues to exert a strong influence among Nepali Christian intellectuals. Accordingly, his experience in managing community schools, hospitals and other educational institutions, including the universities, means he is in high in demand by Christian organisations and other stakeholders.

He is both an academician and a development expert due to his past involvements but in this research, he is approached as a Nepali academician who commanded a very strong connection with a number of WCMs in Nepal from as early as 1970s. He will be addressed as respondent number 3.

Respondent 4

My fourth respondent is a 43-year-old woman of strong character who is a leader from Kathmandu. She serves in one of the largest churches in Kathmandu Valley and leads the women's branch of the Church. She has a bachelor's degree in theology from the Philippines and a master's degree in sociology from Nepal.

In her initial career, she worked with Nepal Campus Crusade (NCC) as a Church planter. After leaving the NCC in 2013, she started to work for Veritas College Nepal, an informal theological education network. With her husband, she became the training coordinator for Veritas Nepal for four years.

Presently she is part of a Church-based leadership training programme in Kathmandu where she teaches family relationships, psychology and Christian education. She also heads a network of Christian Educators in Nepal and imparts her knowledge in Christian education. Her network trains and equips young Christians and Church leaders in child-friendly learning practices and produces contextual resources for the local churches. Her passion is to see churches devoted to discipleship making so that the families remain strong in faith and action to influence society for Christ.

She maintains a very close connection with the WCMs in Nepal. She has shared in the work of many Western missionaries during her involvement with NCC and Veritas. During her association with these missionaries, she learnt that the

missionaries were beneficial to Nepali society in terms of their ideas and technologies. She thanks the missionaries who dedicatedly served the basic needs of the Nepali people. However, she feels the missionaries did not remain true to their call when their motives were questioned by the authorities. She advises the WCMs to learn from the locals in their drive to help and not to impose their superiority.

She serves on the central committee of NCS along with her husband who leads the department as coordinator for developing a strong Christian movement among civil servants. With her husband, she has been instrumental in reaching out to the civil servants with the Gospel message and forming them into a strong witnessing community. She is selected for this interview because of her role as a female Christian leader working to promote Christian education as a way to establish the concept of a holistic mission. She is addressed as respondent number 4.

Respondent 5

The fifth respondent is a 44-year-old emerging Christian leader in the city of Bhaktapur, east of Kathmandu. Born and brought up in the eastern hills, he migrated to Kathmandu at an early age with his parents. He founded a Church in Bhaktapur in 2004 and serves as its pastor.

He started his Christian involvement in 1998 as a youth leader in NCFN and in the year 2000, he took the office of treasurer of the youth wing of NCFN which he left in 2003, upon completion of the term. After leaving NCFN, he gathered a team of energetic youth and started a Church in the inner city of Bhaktapur in 2004. As the Church grew in size and ministries, he adopted the pastoral role in 2007. Alongside his Church role, he taught in the Joshua Training Centre (a short-term Bible school) from 2009 – 2014 in Kathmandu.

During the same period, he obtained training in reconciliation and community peace mediation. In the year 2015, he joined NCS as a central committee member and currently coordinates the prayer department of NCS.

In 2017, he became the national director of a pastoral training institute that trains lay leaders. He continues to hold this position and trains scores of local churches in community engagement as mission.

He is an emerging Christian writer and published two titles on contemporary pastoral issues in Nepal. His books have been widely read by the Nepali-speaking Christian community.

He has no direct involvement with the WCMs and their missionaries. Nevertheless, he is knowledgeable of the mission movements in Nepal and the Nepali society's attitude towards them. He believes the WCMs followed the Lord's will to come and help Nepal in its development. He also believes that the WCMs could have been straight forward in their missional convictions when signing agreements with the government of Nepal. They could have been more active in helping the Church learn from their experience and imparting skills relevant to the Nepali Church.

He was approached for his response as the NCS representative and will be addressed as respondent number 5.

Respondent 6

The sixth respondent is a 50-year-old man. Born and brought up in the eastern plains of Nepal, he was influenced by communist ideology at an early age. Son of a prominent communist leader, he quickly gained fame in his circle of friends because he denounced discrimination based on caste, gender and economic grounds. His communist association took him to the lower ranks of the Maoist Party, one of the governing parties in the present coalition government. He remained a committed party cadre until 1995. His search for the meaning of life driven by communist activism led him to faith in Christ. In a local church in his village, he found the true practice of socialism as inspired by Jesus and the Bible.

Upon completion of his school education, he joined the ministry of the NCC and became involved in the evangelisation of campus students. During this engagement, he opened a centre in Kathmandu where students who had financial and accommodation needs could take shelter. This centre continues to provide affordable accommodation for students unable to rent flats themselves. While with the NCC, he entered the Church planting ministry and was in charge of Kathmandu Valley until 2006.

His passion for the ministry led him to accept the role of a pastor in a Church in Kathmandu in 2006. He has continued to serve in the same church.

He became an executive member of NCS in 2015. In 2022, he was elected as the undersecretary of NCS. Furthermore, he remains in the leadership team of one of the largest Baptist churches in Nepal since 2018.

A passionate and skilful community facilitator, he travels widely within the country to train and empower churches in social engagement. He is grateful to have the opportunity to associate with some of the WCMs working in Nepal's social development. He attributes learning important personal and organisational lessons through his association with the WCMs and their missionaries. He is thankful to the WCMs for rendering their services to the Nepali people. He appreciates the missionaries for their efforts in helping Nepal change. However, he is disappointed that, of late, the missionaries are trying to take leadership roles in the Nepali Church. He thinks the local church must be a learning place for the missionaries rather than them teaching the locals in mission.

He was asked to respond to the research questions as the NCS executive member as well as a known Bible teacher and is addressed as respondent number 6.

Respondent 7

The seventh respondent is a 67 year old woman from Kathmandu. She became a Christian through the work of the first Nepali Church in west Nepal which had an influencing relationship with INF, one of the first WCMs in Nepal. Starting her career as a junior secretary in a research company in the early 1980s, she worked almost three decades in Nepal's social development field.

She started her development activist career as early as 1980 by joining a French NGO that worked in primary healthcare. Her career led her to three other WCMs, and when she retired in 2019, she was the country director of one of the oldest WCMs operating in Nepal.

After her retirement from her formal job, she served on the elder's board of a local church in Kathmandu which has more than 150 branches (or daughter) churches spread all over the country. She is one of the senior leaders in this Church and plays

an important role in developing mission leaders. Apart from the Church involvement, she engages with a number of other organisations, including Christian faith-based organisations and works as a teacher, a facilitator and an adviser.

She is one of the first Christian female leaders on the NCS executive committee. She used to coordinate the works of the women's wing in its early days. As the role required, she travelled widely to train and empower Christian women in ministry, within and outside Nepal. Presently, she conducts periodic training for Christian women in NCS network and equips them in mission. She is also an acclaimed female strategist in social development in Nepal.

As a person who has had a lengthy working relationship with the WCMs, she holds an authoritative position regarding the presence and work of the Western missions. She is appreciative of the older generation of missionaries for living an exemplary missionary life. She knows many of the missionaries who risked their well-being by their involvement with the local churches to help them serve the needs of the poor and unfortunate regardless of their organisational position. She recounted that many of those missionaries paid the price in terms of their eviction from their work and the country. She believes the Nepali Church could have achieved a higher position in Nepali society had the spirit of the WCMs and their missionaries remained with the new generation of missionaries. She laments that the very core of what it means to be a missionary is dying out quickly.

She is thankful that the government allowed the WCMs to help in social development in the country. She believes that without their sacrificial help Nepali people would still be very poor and backward. She was approached for this research due to her authoritative presence in the social development field in Nepal as well as her long-term association with the NCS. She will be treated as the development expert and addressed as respondent number 7 in this research.

Respondent 8

The eighth respondent is a 55-year-old Christian individual who holds the position of district committee member of the Nepali Congress party. Born and brought up in a village west of Kathmandu, he has been an active member of the party since his early youth.

After completing school education in his village, he shifted to Kathmandu to pursue his medical studies. After graduating from the medical academy, he went on to become a health worker in a health project managed by a WCM organisation. In a long journey of 15 years with that organisation, he oversaw a number of projects in community health and contributed to the well-being of rural people in Nepal.

In 2003, with like-minded people, he started an NGO to provide development assistance to the poor. He designed programmes on specialised community health services and organised development assistance for the rural villages outside Kathmandu. For 15 years, he led the organisation and was responsible for a variety of community development programmes in hundreds of villages in Nepal. His projects included helping to deliver drinking water, community sanitisation and livelihood improvement for small land-holding farmers to child-friendly school education. His organisation continues to serve the basic health and livelihood needs of the rural communities in the country.

Having completed his PhD in health management, he has moved to senior level politics from his many years of social development experience. He believes that community development programmes succeed in transforming communities only when they are backed by able and visionary political leadership. He sees himself more as a politician, passionate to lift the poor and needy out of poverty. His involvement in the development sector over the years has helped him organise local communities for advocacy on issues of health, education and human rights.

He is an able development strategist. As such he is involved in training and empowering the younger generation of politicians and development workers. He holds senior positions in a number of organisations, including those that are Christian faith-based. He has been associated with the NCS over the last five years and provides organisational capacity development support to the organisation.

He had the privilege to directly associate with the WCMs in his early professional career. He believes the missions have been a crucial part of the social change in Nepal through imparting their money, muscle and mastery over modern technologies. The modern infrastructure developed in the country would not have been possible without the involvement of the WCMs, he opined. In his opinion, the

rural Nepali communities should be thankful for the services they received from the technical as well as financial resources of the West. He is equally discontent that the WCMs went alone in their drive for development, leaving the Nepali Church behind. He hopes the mistakes of the past become lessons for the future of the WCMs in Nepal.

He was involved in this research as a local politician and is addressed as respondent number 8.

Respondent 9

The ninth respondent is a 54-year-old man. He is a long-term communist political activist. Born and brought up in a traditional high-caste Hindu family, he was dissatisfied with discrimination based on caste and gender from his early teens. He found a respite from the discrimination in communism which was sweeping Nepal during the 1980s and 1990s. He became a member of the district committee of the communist party when he was 17 years old.

He left school to pursue his political idealism and soon found himself protesting the *Panchayat* regime. During the people's movement of 1990, he was thrown into prison for a week. His political ideals were shattered when the new democratic government followed the old autocratic regime in leading the country.

Dissatisfied with communism, he turned to the Bible. As he read it, he found the true picture of socialism in the biblical stories. He felt the Bible was truly showing him the path of social idealism which he was pursuing. Convinced that the biblical teachings are the best option to achieve social justice and development, he accepted Christ as his personal Saviour in 1991.

He left his political ambition and dedicated himself to acquiring an education and obtaining his master's degree in political science. After that, he went on to complete master's degrees in mass communication and theology.

He returned to his political activism in 2008 by registering a new political party. The new party denounced communism as its ideal but adopted a Bible-based political route. The biblical teachings permeated his party structures and directives. He was able to gather a large number of followers from the Christian community and other

minority religious and ethnic groups and, in 2009, his party went on to win one seat in the federal parliament of Nepal.

In 2013, he became the principal of a theological educational institute in Kathmandu. Breaking the trend of having only theology education in a Christian institute, he started to offer the students a dual degree. Nepali theological students for the first time were able to obtain degrees both in theology and social sciences from the Nepali university. His institution formally entered into partnership with a national university so that the students could enrol for a secular degree alongside their biblical studies.

In 2020, he obtained his PhD from North India in holistic mission. He is an acclaimed author and writer within the Nepali Christian community and his authorship sheds light on contemporary political and church issues. He lectures in Christian development and mass communication and has exerted political influence both in the Christian and general community.

He has been a trend setter in the field of Christian political thought as well as in a theological education approach in Nepal. His party continues to exert a level of influence in national politics, especially in the issues of religious freedom, inclusion and integrated social development. He has encouraged other theological colleges in Nepal to opt for a dual degree for their students so that they are qualified in theology together with the national education system.

He is a Christian politician and was involved in this research to provide his political observation on the public witness of the Nepali Church in relation to the WCMs. He is addressed as respondent number 9.

Respondent 10

My tenth respondent is a 55-year-old man. He is a church worker by profession. He joined a WCM in early 1994 and remains with it until today as its country director. The organisation is known globally for its evangelistic work.

He comes from the west of Nepal where he grew up in a high-caste Hindu family. After completing his school education, he went to Korea for foreign employment. When working as an IT expert, he heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ from a girl and later surrendered his life to Christ. Upon his return to Nepal, he took up the missionary portfolio and entered into a pastoral role in east Nepal. His Christian

ministries involve starting the first network of churches in a city in east Nepal to leading NCS, the largest Nepali Christian network organisation.

His mission convictions make him one of the outstanding evangelists and he engages in the field of Bible translation, audio and visual evangelism and Church planting. His passion for sharing the Gospel with the unreached people has led him to situations of arrest and imprisonment.

The Church he started in mid-1990 has grown into an indigenous Church movement and has 32 branch churches in the country. He oversees the various ministries under this church network and contributes to a number of other Christian organisations and Bible training institutions.

His association with the international organisation committed to evangelism makes him feel the WCMs working in Nepal are far from being a missionary organisation in the purest sense of the word 'mission'. He feels the WCMs are not living their convictions because they shy away from sharing the Gospel alongside their development work. He believes the WCMs could have formed a strong relationship base with the Nepali Christian community and share in their ministries as equal partners for holistic transformation of the people they serve. It saddens him that the WCMs have been directing all the foreign money, expertise and willingness onto a barren land because they have not understood the nature of the society they came to assist. Instead, he opined, the WCMs should be prepared to serve the local churches in mission and make the first contact with the churches. This would have guided the WCMs in terms of deciding where to work and with whom and in what social sectors.

He is approached in this research as one of the NCS leaders and asked for his ideas and opinions on NCS and the future of the Nepali Church in relation to public witness. He is addressed as respondent number 10.

Respondent 11

My next respondent is a 68-year-old man. He is a prominent Christian leader in Nepal and serves in the pastorate of one of the largest churches in the country. He is one of the few people who had the opportunity to lead NCFN and NCS as the president. He comes from the *janajati* background and has acquired a Master of Theology degree.

Born and brought up in the south-western plains of Nepal, he started his professional career as a primary school teacher. He joined a global movement of Christian evangelism in 1990 and worked as its Nepal director for more than 15 years. Since he left the mission in 2005, he has continued to pastor a Church in Kathmandu.

Serving in various Christian organisations, he has gained a good standing among the Nepali-speaking Christian community. He currently oversees the secretariat of his Church which has more than 140 daughter churches across the country. He is a known Bible teacher in the Nepali-speaking Christian world and has been in the executive position of well-known national and international Christian organisations including a few of the WCMs.

His association with the WCMs gives him the confidence to critique their work and approaches to mission. He is thankful for all the support the WCMs rendered to poor Nepalis. He thinks the missionaries were in a better position to set an example of integral mission given their social and cultural acceptance in Nepal than the indigenous people. He had hoped the WCMs would work with the growing Christian Church to journey in their social development activities. His ambition was that, together, the two would drive a national transformation movement. He observed, the missionaries associated with the WCMs were too occupied with their agreement with the government and consequently narrowed their movement and work to social development. Nevertheless, he suggested, the Church in Nepal should remain thankful to the WCMs despite the inability of the later to extend a hand of partnership in mission.

His contribution to the founding and functions of NCS from the very beginning is accepted across all boards in Nepal. He is approached to give his opinions on the WCMs as one of the leaders of the NCS and he is addressed as respondent number 11.

Respondent 12

The other individual approached for this research is a 45-year-old development worker. Born and raised in a middle-class Hindu family in the south-eastern plains of Nepal, he migrated to Kathmandu to pursue his studies. Pursuing his doctoral degree

in organisational behavioural management, he has written widely on the subject of good governance, organisational leadership and strategic development.

His involvement in the social development field started twenty years ago. Serving with Save the Children, (a Western secular development organisation) he excelled in organisational development and good governance practices for NGOs and his professional engagements extend from the secular to the Christian faith-based organisations addressed as WCMs in this research.

A passionate social activist, he has helped found several functional self-help groups through which he works to empower the people in the margin, especially women, children and other rural communities. He is a guest lecturer in the department of development management at Tribhuwan University and holds a lecturing engagement with other educational institutes in Kathmandu.

He presently directs a livelihood project under a well-known business house in Nepal as its corporate social responsibility officer. His project helps small-holding Nepali farmers to maximise their agricultural produce for commercialisation. His passion for the local (and marginalised) communities' ability to transform their environment through grass-roots organisation and strategic policy intervention fuels his development involvement.

In general, he acknowledges that the social work of the WCMs in Nepal is praiseworthy and commendable. The rural society has benefitted from their work in infrastructure development in health, education and agriculture modernisation. However, he is suspicious of the Western missions misusing their development resources as a tactic to lure poor people to Christianity. He believes that the WCMs should be open in declaring their intentions publicly rather than promoting Christianity stealthily.

He is approached as an expert in social development and is addressed as respondent number 12.

Respondent 13

My thirteenth respondent is a 49-year-old environmentalist. Upon completing his university education in the USA, he returned to Nepal to pursue his childhood dream of lecturing. For three years, from 2003 to 2006, he worked as a teacher in the School

of Engineering Management at the Kathmandu University. Through organising educational tours for his students, he witnessed first-hand the poverty and environmental degradation that affected the rural areas of Nepal... He concluded that his academic knowledge was not being fully utilised by lecturing a small number of students and sought to become more involved in helping communities through the development sector.

Accepting a job as a livelihood advisor, he joined a renowned WCM. During his fourteen years of engagement with this organisation, he became a fan of *diaconia*, the Christian philosophy of service in love. He loved the way the WCMs prioritised serving the needs of the most vulnerable but hated the distance the missionaries maintained between them and the community they served.

A skilled radio journalist through his hobby, he is a good communicator of information, including his ideas on development and social change. He is thankful to have a working association with the WCMs but, conversely, he is equally unhappy that the missionaries retained their superior mentality and failed to learn from the locals. He observed that the WCMs' portrayal as the authority that 'knew all' and that the recipient community 'must not ask a probing question' was the most damaging aspect of the missionaries. He recommends that the WCMs and their missionaries adopt a more humble and receptive attitude and be open to learning from those that are seemingly illiterate and under-developed.

He believes that the Christian-value-based community development approach is the remedy for the moral downgrading in society although he is not a Christian believer himself. He respects the missionary spirit demonstrated by the early missionaries, however, he laments that the current missionaries are not following their predecessors. He regrets that the institutions founded by the WCMs are now non-functional due to the lack of able leadership. He believes that the missionaries should have done more to teach leadership skills and expertise to the local people rather than focusing only on providing finance and technologies.

He is approached as an expert in social development and is addressed as respondent number 13.

Respondent 14

Another respondent is a 67-year-old university professor. Raised in a traditional *Madheshi* family in central south Nepal, he obtained his master's degree in sociology and anthropology from Tribhuwan University in 1976.

He began his professional career as a research assistant in the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), a research wing of the Tribhuwan University assisted by a Western missionary organisation. It was during this time he learnt the basics of community development and how the social power structures enable or hinder social change. This research engagement with the university brought him in contact with the WCMs and their missionaries.

Currently, as the sociology department head of a reputed college in Kathmandu under the Purwanchal University, he has taught students for over 30 years about Nepal's policy and social development. From his association with the Westerners, including the Christian missionaries, during his work as a research assistant, he acquired a new set of life-skills such as planning and organisation, negotiation and presentation.

His association with the WCMs has enabled him to value the massive support the missionaries provided in education reforms in Nepal. He appreciates the efforts of the WCMs over the years in helping change the course of the education sector in Nepal.

He relates to the style of communist ideology of social change promoted by the WCMs in Nepal which he believes Marx learnt from the Bible. He considers that the WCMs are neutral towards their religious affiliation and, instead, are faithful to their commitment to the Nepal government. From his experience, he felt that the missionaries were committed to helping Nepalis achieve progress and change rather than leading them to become Christians. He would welcome more missionary involvement not only in education but also in other development sectors with their advanced technology and mind-set.

As an academician, he was requested to provide his observation in the field of education and leadership development and the missionaries' contribution. He is addressed as respondent number 14.

Respondent 15

The fifteenth person interviewed for this research is a 60-year-old man. He is a Christian convert and has been in church-related work for over 30 years. Converting to Christianity during his teenage years in North-east India, he began his first job as a pastor with a Baptist mission in Nagaland.

While working in India, he felt the Lord was calling him to mission in Nepal. Upon arriving in Nepal, he settled in Pokhara, in western Nepal and founded a Church in 1998. As the Church grew, his mission expanded beyond the church work into communities. He soon joined a Church-based NGO to launch social development. This organisation worked in primary education, community health and livelihood improvement for the poor and marginalised people through the local church. Here, he learnt the importance of involving social work with spiritual work and, since that time, he has been involved in a number of other development organisations as an advisor.

He has been serving in the leadership team of NCS since 2017. Through this association with NCS, he has become aware of the Church's situation in the country and the presence and work of the WCMs.

He has learnt that the churches are part of society and that the Christ-believers are to provide a taste of God's kingdom in their neighbourhood. He has developed a deep passion to enable Christian individuals so that they can model the holistic nature of God's mission in their daily living. He takes this as his mission mandate for Nepali churches and continues to teach the same across the churches.

He does not have any direct involvement with the WCMs working in Nepal and does not know much about them. However, he has observed their work in the community and how this has benefitted Nepal. His ambition is to have the missionaries work alongside the Nepali churches in their social work. He believes this partnership would enable the Nepali Christians to learn the power of public witnessing through social change.

He is approached to provide his observations on the Nepali Church and NCS. He is addressed as respondent number 15.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the socio-political and church context in which this research is undertaken.

It details the research method applied in this study and provides information on the study environment. The description of the sample taken for this study is aimed at enabling the readers to grasp the approach taken by the researcher to complete this study. The chapter concludes with a biographical sketch of all fifteen respondents selected for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRISTIAN PUBLIC WITNESS

5.1 Introduction

The Christian Church in this twenty-first century is mandated to witness Christ and his salvation to the people; however, it is influenced by a combination of religious pluralism, liberal politics, individualism and growing attraction to modernity. The Church's missional initiatives contrast with the spirit of careless individual atheism of the West and the hostile religious extremism of the East. Advancement in the fields of education, technology, transportation and social engineering has advanced cultural sophistication. People are not content with the things of the past but are constantly seeking to improve life and achieve more. Cultural diversification supported by modern technology has enabled humans to achieve more compared to the past, and the old ways of witnessing for Christ in public need re-examination.

The call to 'preach the Word' will fall on deaf ears unless the modes of Christian witness are shaped in the context of the society the Church is witnessing to. In this chapter, we will revisit the concept of public witness as one of the ways of doing mission effectively. We will look into the contesting ideas and ideologies of our age that are engulfing people and their societies which drag them outside the reach of Christian public witnessing. On the other hand, we will present a case on how the Church has struggled to identify the best means of presenting the Christian Gospel to people as it works out of traditional missional patterns. The modern church has come to a stage where it must look at existing practices and appraise its public witness so that its witnessing is relevant, acceptable and result driven.

Christopher Wright (2010:21) rightly argues that the 'Church is the guardian of the apostolic witness'. As such, God has chosen the Church, as he chose Israel to proclaim his message of redemption to the world (1 Chronicles 16:24 – 26; Isaiah 12:4; Mark 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:23). It is through the Church that God wants to be glorified in the world (Mathew 5: 16; 16:18). Therefore, public witness is a call to the Church to be that guardian, and a united voice which calls the world to listen to the

invitation to the family of God's people through the presentation of the Gospel. This chapter reviews the meaning and scope of public witness and assesses the ways in which the Nepali Church can truly be a witness for Jesus Christ.

5.2 Christian witness

After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his disciples and told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24:46 – 49). Jesus knew the Old Testament pattern of God's call to Israel to witness about him to the nations around them. According to Wright (2010:20) 'Jesus simply echoed the Old Testament words of God to the people of Israel (Isaiah 43:10-12). Here, Israel was supposed to be the people who bore witness among the surrounding nations to the reality of their God. In response, the nations would come to know who God really is from the testimony of those to whom he entrusted the task of witnessing.' Following the Old Testament pattern of witness, Jesus 'entrusted the truth about himself to those who had personally witnessed him - witnessed to his life, teaching, death and resurrection' (Ibid 21).

These biblical narratives lead us to believe that 'The reign of God needs eyewitnesses, those who can see it happen before their eyes' (Mangalaraj 2014:9). This tradition of witnessing (telling, declaring and showing others through practical actions) about God has been handed down to the Church through Jesus himself. His promise of sending the Holy Spirit to empower his disciples to witness was fulfilled in Jerusalem when the disciples were waiting in prayer (Acts 1:8). The descending of the Holy Spirit empowered them to become the witnesses of the message of salvation of the sinful world – beginning from Jerusalem, through Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The books of the New Testament are filled with examples of the people who boldly testified about Jesus – through their words and actions. (Mathew 28:19 – 20; Mark 16:15 - 18). They preached Christ Jesus and performed acts of faith so that those who heard the Gospel could see and believe the kingdom of God manifested on the earth.

The apostle Paul declared that he would witness to the new life in Christ without shame because ‘It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile’ (Romans 1:16). The New Testament writers through their letters instructed the Church to live in such a way that those who slander them might see the goodness of God displayed through their community living (1 Peter 1:22). Berry (2017:214) stressed that the ‘authenticity of Christian witness relies on its being faithful and unconditional, hence targeting the intellectual and the existential dimension of human beings.’

In the Bible, the concept of witness is used primarily in a juridical manner. 'The task of Christian witness is to serve the faith with a humble spirit and the whole strength of their heart and understanding’ (Berry 2017:216). A witness, according to Brian de Vries of the Christian Study Library, ‘is a person who has a personal knowledge of an important reality and who is willing to make public testimony to the truth of that reality.’ Therefore, a witness is someone who witnesses something as an eyewitness. ‘The bearer of the witness is not just an objective observer, a disinterested reporter or a narrator who has no stake in what happened. But to be willing to bear witness, like bearing or shouldering a burden, you have to be involved in the event’ (Mangalaraj 2014:10). Berry (2014:410) continues, ‘to bear witness … means ‘to swear, attest or testify’. In the absolute sense, according to Budiselic, to bear witness means to be ‘willing to face martyrdom for the sake of faith’.

The concept of witness has three elements imbedded in it. It has a distinct message – the message about the life and the work of Christ, the Messiah that carries an invitation to the recipient. It has a messenger – the people chosen by God to declare his goodness through the use of their words and lived experience. And, it has a recipient – the people or the community to whom the message is witnessed. These three elements are bound together as inseparable in Christian witness. ‘The fact of these three elements of Christian witness compels Christians to enter into a dialogue as a means of witness’ (Ibid 410). Berry (2017:225) recalled that, at the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples ‘You too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning’ (John 15:27) to signify that to become a witness of Jesus is not only to know him but also to contemplate the incarnate Word that existed since the beginning. Here they were to acknowledge the fact that ‘we have seen with our

own eyes and watched and touched with our own hands, the word of life… and become faithful disciples and follow Jesus till the end' (Ibid 225).

Richard V. Peace in Budiselic (2014:410) reminds us that 'During the first century, Christians sought to share their faith in Jesus, and their talk about Jesus to others was the act of a witness.' Therefore, the 'logic of becoming witnesses', as per Berry (2017:226) 'has two tasks involved. The first one is that of evangelisation, of pure witness to the faith and the charity of Christ, and secondly, to influence the earthly sphere of humanity.' Further, the biblical message of Christian witness, as per Wright in Budiselic (2014:407) is that

> The large story speaks about God's relationship with this world. Accordingly, this story claims that the world is essentially God's world, and it's a good world, but its gone wrong, and evil has infected it in all sorts of ways which modernism really didn't want to take account of and which postmodernity has partly seen but then has wallowed in because it's got no answer. Because the answer is that God, the creator, has rescued the world from evil and is rescuing it from evil. That's why we need the death and resurrection of Jesus at the centre of every Christian retelling, and every Christian challenge.

In Christian witness, 'The Christian wants to engage in a world even if the Christian spiritual order is no longer the law of the whole of life, and where the Church is somehow being fenced off' (Berry 2017:225). But Christians engage in the act of offering the Gospel to the world because the Gospel is to be offered to others as a gift of God through us (the Christians), not forced upon anyone. The witness to this Gospel of God is by invitation not obligation' (Horst & Paul 2015:16). Therefore, the message of Christian witness has to be relevant to the recipient community; the messenger must use the socio-cultural contexts of the recipients to proclaim the Gospel truths in ways that the recipients receive it willingly. We can learn from the apostle Paul this way of presenting the Gospel to the world in his Athenian engagement (see Acts 17).

Paul knew he was commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the good news of a God whom the Athenians had not known. Kopan and Litwak (2014:10) stated,

> Paul used their language and quoted their poets in the process of proclaiming the story of God's action in and for the world… He approached his audience carefully and cordially, perhaps complimenting them on their religious devotion, and told them about the one true God who had demonstrated his concern for and expectations of humans by raising Jesus from the dead.

This biblical incident guides us to the fact that Christian witnessing must be done in a manner that touches the societal context of the recipients and challenges them to think differently about life and the giver of life himself. Kopan and Litwak (2014:9) again opined that

> The apostle Paul also lived in and carried out his evangelism in a multicultural setting in the first century. From Jews to Gentiles, elite to poor, slaves and slave owners, many rights for men but few rights for women, olive-skinned Jews or native Ephesian Gentiles to dark-skinned Ethiopians, the Greco-Roman world was a huge mixture of races and ethnic groups. There were many religions practised —from the imperial cult of emperor worship, to temples for the traditional Greek pantheon, to the secret rituals of the mystery religions—and there were all manner of theological views. There were devout worshippers of Asclepius, a god of healing and at the same time a growing trend that held these gods, if they existed at all, to be irrelevant. The Roman Empire was filled with beliefs in evil spirits and magical practices one might use to protect oneself from these spirits. Among some, the ideas about deities were modified as people, not least those in Athens, constructed philosophies to live by and understand the world.

Budiselic (2014:401) suggested that this way of Paul's dealing with the Gospel message and the recipients is called the fulfilment theory, according to which the 'witnessing task was to humbly enquire and identify points of contact in non-Christian religions and use them to draw adherents of other faiths toward the full revelation of truth found in Christ'.

Jesus himself had set an example of using the people's social and cultural settings to explain the kingdom of God. He spent his life moving amongst the people. Horst and Paul (2015:59) recorded that Jesus:

> …travelled around Palestine mingling with the people. During his journeys he stayed as a guest with those who received him (Matthew 8:14; 9: 27-28; Mark 3:20; 7:24). He was known to take part in the customary religious and family festivities of the people. Thus, he aroused suspicion and indignation among the spiritual leaders of his time (Matthew 9:10 – 13; 11:20). Once, at a wedding celebration that had gone on for several days and had run out of wine, Jesus found a way to provide more (John 2:1 – 12).

The apostle Paul did the same in his mode of witnessing. Budiselic (2014:407) quotes N.T. Wright, according to whom:

> The Gospel message (Paul preached) offered a challenge to the pagan world in many ways. Firstly, paganism constantly identified God with objects or forces within creation itself. Contrary to this view, the apostle Paul with his Gospel message stood against the divination of creation and the multiplicity of gods with news of the one true God. Secondly, the Gospel message challenged paganism at the level of cult. The Gospel message directly challenged the belief in many gods of every sort and for every purpose, claiming that Jesus crucified and resurrected is the final truth and the only way for salvation and the restoration of creation… Fourthly, Christianity viewed paganism as a self-destructive view of being human, and offered a genuine way of humanity through new life in Jesus by the Spirit. Fifthly, against the essentially ahistorical world-view of paganism and the golden age dreams … Christianity offered its hearers a story in which the whole cosmos is *going somewhere.* The creation has a beginning and an end. And finally, the Gospel offered an implicit challenge to the major pagan philosophies of the Roman world.

This act of witnessing to Christ and his message is generally understood either as ‘evangelism’ or ‘mission’ in the context of global Christianity and these terms are interchangeably used to denote witness in Christian circles even if the theological minds greatly differ in defining them (see Kirk 1999:19 – 20). Going into the details of these terms and their meanings is not within the scope of this study. However, we shall have a general look at how people make connections between these terms in mission.

The word evangelism, derived from the Greek word *evangelizō*, means 'to announce good news' and the verb and the noun form of this word (translated 'Gospel') appear 125 times in the New Testament. Another word for evangelism, *kērussō* (translated "proclaim" or "preach"), appears 59 times. This indicates that evangelism involves verbal proclamation of the good news. Micah Global calls this the 'proclamation side of the Christian Gospel' (Poudyal *et al.* 2017:4).

The Greek word *apostellō*, meaning 'to send' refers to God sending people to announce his work of judgement and redemption. These announcing, proclaiming and sending acts all point to the fact that Christianity is 'a religion of witness' (Budiselic 2014:399).

These terms 'witness', 'evangelism' and 'mission' indicate that the mission is at the heart of the Christian message and this message is to be proclaimed publicly. The public witness of the Church involves witnessing about Jesus and the kingdom of God on earth via proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel.

According to David J. Bosch (1991:9), these characteristics of Christian witnessing make the Christian faith intrinsically missionary in nature. 'The mission sees all generations of the earth as objects of God's salvific will and plan of salvation…it regards the 'reign of God' (which has come in Jesus Christ as intended) for all humanity.' This understanding of the Christian faith is not an optional extra: for no Christian is exempt from making Christ known to his world and neighbours. 'This urge to witness about the God of the Bible and his goodness makes Christianity missionary by its very nature' (Ibid 6). Webber (2001:12) went a step further to affirm the idea of Christianity being the missionary religion and says that the 'purpose of the Church in God's world is to embody the Christian message, to proclaim it, to enact it and to anticipate God's eschatological rule when all will be under the reign of Christ. In brief, the Church is a witness to God's mission.'

Bosch (1991:9) continued, 'The Church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the Gospel, but through the universality of the Gospel it proclaims.' The universality of the witness of the Gospel invites the Christians 'to re-discover the freedom in order to profess their faith not merely at the margins, but at the heart of their own culture and in the world at large' (Berry 2017:212).

In explaining the task of the Church in public witness, Sunquist (2013:284) said, 'The Church exists to proclaim and show the saving work of God to all who live, to every tongue, and tribe and nation. The Church as the body of Christ, is pointing to the Father, and living sacrificially for the sake of the world—a world that is still in rebellion.' Through this proclamation, the Church invites the world to believe, to see and to be saved from its sin of rebellion against God. This invitation, the witnessing of Christ's grace is a force within the Church and every Christian individual. Berry (2017:216) quotes Karl Rehner who said 'Surely real faith ought to burn! It ought to drive us on to the streets wanting to convince others, not out of arrogance or superiority, but out of the certainty of a meaning found and experienced a happiness.' He confessed that:

> To work for the kingdom of God and to bear Christian witness is fostering a sense of belonging and of being loved. This is possible through one's openness and disposition toward God as well as being a *living-expression* of God's love for all. Witness means loving unconditionally. In practical terms, it requires an intimate connection between the virtues of faith and love. Christian witness (and faith to that extent) would be senseless, unless they are grounded in (divine) love. It leads to belief in the God of Jesus Christ and to salvation through the power of the Spirit (Berry 2017:222).

Therefore, it is a privilege and joy for Christians to give an account of the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). This sharing of the hope and salvation 'must be offered in the form of a contemporary and respectful dialogue' (Budiselic 2014:399). Because the people in the world 'yearn for a radiant and attractive witness that instils inner peace and consolidates fraternal communion… People want to see a credible and demonstrable connection between faith in God and the prospect of his reign on earthly creation' (Berry 2017:214-6).

5.3 Social setting of public witness

The Christian witness does not take place in a void, neither is it divinely provisioned without involving the people in the Church in society. God mandates the Church, his chosen people to bear witness to his goodness to the world around them. Witnessing for Christ and his saving grace is accomplished with the people in the community.

This involves understanding the people – whom we have called the *recipient of the Gospel message* and their cultural situation.

The world in which we live today is characterised by diverse social and cultural elements. Kopan and Litwak (2014:8) observed, 'The situation in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the twenty-first century prompts us to ask, how we can authentically and effectively present the message of Jesus to those around us?'

To answer this question appropriately, we must understand the context in which we are to witness. Bosch (1991:10) says that the Church's missionary engagement in our time is with the realities of injustice, oppression, poverty, and discrimination, and that 'We find ourselves in a truly apocalyptic situation where the rich get richer and the poor poorer, and where violence and oppression from both the right and the left are escalating.' These new dimensions of our society 'consider the biblical message to be an irrelevant fairy tale, intellectually weak and perhaps even dangerous. Caricatures and false impressions prevent people from considering the Christian faith to be a viable, robust intellectual and spiritual alternative' (Kopan & Litwak 2014:31).

The Christian message has to be relevant to the social and cultural setting in which the Church witnesses as it was during the time of Jesus and the apostle Paul. Costas suggests that this socio-cultural setting is the 'public sphere' of society where evangelisation happens. It is in this public sphere 'that human need is most overtly and nakedly revealed. It is there where women and men are most conscious of their human predicament and vulnerability, and where their solidarity in the face of sin and death is most clearly revealed' (Costas 2002:63). And, 'the Church-in-mission cannot close its eyes to these realities' (Bosch 1991:10). Sunquist (2013:286) warned, 'A Church that does not face the need for ongoing conversion or transformation is no longer a signpost of the Kingdom… such an institution no longer functions as a Church of Jesus Christ'.

In the sections below, we shall journey through at least three social spheres wherein the Nepali Church is to witness the Christian Gospel publicly.

5.3.1 Religious pluralism

In December 2012, the Pew Research Centre reported that worldwide more than eight-in-ten people identify with a religious group[16]. The report stated that there were 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children around the globe, representing 84% of the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion. The same source claimed that today there are more than four thousand religions recorded with adherents of every tribe and ethnicity. However, the majority of the word population belongs to one of the five major religions in the world: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

David Bosch (1991:483) stated that today 'Few Christians anywhere in the world find themselves in a situation where coexistence with other religionists is not part and parcel of their daily life.' These people accept that there are a hundred different ways people can have access to God and deny only one way as the Christians claim. 'This reflects a commonly held view that belief in one path to salvation is narrow-minded and arrogant' (Kopan and Litwak 2014:45).

These observations are true to Nepal's religious make-up. Nepal is a religious kaleidoscope; it recorded the adherents of 10 religions in its 2021 national population census. Of the ten, the four world religions have a considerable number of followers. The census reported that there are 81.3% Hindus, 9% Buddhists, 4.4% Islam and 1.76% Christians of the 29,164,578 people living in Nepal (CBS 2021).

These facts help one conclude that Nepal is, in the truest sense, a religious pluralist society. The adherents of these religions live out their life and cultural practices daily in the public sphere. The spirit of religious pluralism permeates society and, by the same token, the Nepali public sphere maintains that there are many different paths to salvation or spiritual liberation, not just one. As Kopan and Litwak suggested, in such an environment it is 'arrogant to say that Jesus is the only way of salvation' (2014:45). How then, can the Church in Nepal prepare to witness in such a cultural context?

Budiselic (2014:403) recalled how in the last few decades the Church (especially in the West) has undergone a significant shift towards a softer Christianity, which emphasises life and ethics rather than faith and doctrine. He observed, 'A traditional

[16] Pew Research Centre website: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18

exclusivist position becomes more and more abandoned in favour of inclusive or even pluralist notions of the relationship between Christianity and other religions… This change is best seen in the fact that more and more speech about Christian witness includes reference to pluralism'. This is an indication of a growing urge for religious coexistence and dialogue. Budiselic gathered that there are two ways Christians should witness about the Gospel in the context of religious pluralism. Firstly, 'We need to accept the fact that there are some salvific elements in other religions, though they may be utterly different from the one depicted in the Bible. Secondly, we must treat the people of any faith and no faith with genuine respect in our act of witnessing' (2014:401). These attitudes can pave the way for a meaningful dialogue with people of other faiths or no faith.

Over the last two decades, the Nepali Church has undergone changes. In the past, Christians uttering the names of the gods and goddesses of other religions or associating with people of other faiths was unthinkable. The Nepali converts were strictly admonished to separate themselves from the idols and all that is associated with them. They were advised to completely separate their relationships from the things of the past. The new converts took the matter so seriously that they burned religious objects in the open and attempted to defile the holy places of other religious communities. The resulting conflicts roused negativity towards the Christian converts. The enmity grew to such an extent that coexistence was impossible and the Christian converts had to leave their community. A clear line of separation between Christians and the people of other faiths was emphasised and observed. No mutual social exchanges were possible. The Christians, in the eyes of Hindu adherents, became the followers of a Western religion and had no interest in preserving the culture of Nepal. This tendency continues in the political mind-set[17] although the Christians have been working hard to regain a public realm of coexistence and dialogue.

On the other hand, the first generation of Nepali Christian converts was met with serious social and cultural consequences especially after the inauguration of the Panchayat rule in 1960s (see Rongong 2012:77). The social and familial

[17] A senior leader of a communist party on 14 February 2023, in addressing a political gathering in Kathmandu remarked that Christians are working to destroy Nepal's cultural peculiarities, which are incomparable to other societies, in an organised manner and that they must be prevented.

persecutions born out of this intolerance led Christians to think of themselves separately. The social relationships between the Christian converts with their wider society became less visible as the former were ridiculed for their new religious practices. Ole Kirchheiner (2016:106), who did his PhD on the relationship between the Nepali Christian converts and their society has narrated several stories from the 1970s and 1980s where Christians were persecuted based on cultural practices or the lack thereof. Rongong (2012:152 – 167) lists 85 instances of mistreatment, arrest and other forms of persecution of Christians during the 1980s because they preached or practised Christianity and disregarded the local culture.

The attitude of the Nepali Church towards its host society is slowly turning positive. There are instances of cooperation and collaboration on various important fronts, including religious peace-making, especially after 1990. Kirchheiner found that:

> It is conclusive that Christians' attitude and approach to the traditional religious people is not negative and that they in no way have become isolated as a Christian group of people… Christians are treated like most other traditional religious people, although there are exceptions as there are Christians who prefer Christian company and also prefer Christian friendships instead of cross-religious companionship. Some are even uneasy being among traditional religious people and they gave specific reasons for that, but no one seems to have become segregated from the Nepali people. The fact that there, after all, are different approaches to cross-religious companionship does not seem to divide Christians. This kind of tolerance is interesting and is connected to the Nepali Christian people's self-determination factor (2016:304).

Budiselic, citing Christian *Witness in a Multi-Religious World* jointly developed by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in 2011, observed that Christians need to learn about and understand others' beliefs and practices. They need to acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good in them' (2014:405). Kitchener's observation above indicates that Nepali Christians are leaning towards this suggestion and opening ways for a meaningful dialogue with their religious neighbours.

5.3.2 Modernity

In defining modernity Toning (2014:2) quotes Griffin saying:

> The spread of rationalism, liberalism, secularisation, individualism and capitalism, the cult of progress, expanding literacy rates and social mobility, urbanisation and industrialisation, the emergence of the urban middle (capitalist) and working (rural and proletarian) classes from a feudal structure of society, the growth of representative government and bureaucratisation, revolutionary developments in communications and transport, geographical discoveries and imperial expansion, the advance of secular science and ever more powerful technology and technocracy.

Nepal first came into contact with modernity in the 1950s when Westerners came to Nepal as development experts. The Westerners introduced Western modes of life, philosophy and cultural artefacts which the traditional Nepali society saw for the first time (see Carney and Rappleye 2011:1). Nanda Shrestha, a Nepali scholar recalled a rather dramatic scene when a village in west Nepal first encountered modern technology:

> When some citizens of Pokhara heard the roaring sound of an approaching airplane, it caused an incredible commotion. I vividly recall racing down with my friends to the pasture (as it descended) . . . When the airplane landed, pandemonium broke out. We were clamouring to touch it as if it were a divine creation sent to us by God. Some wondered how something so big could fly while others searched in their Hindu religious tradition to see if they could identify some divine figure resembling that airplane. They sure did find one: the Garuda, the eagle-like Hindu mythical bird, the heavenly vehicle of Vishnu, who . . . is the universal god of protection, the Saviour. We had noticed another facet of development. Not only could *bikas* (development) cure the sick, but it could also fly like Garuda, carrying *bikasi* (who develop) around the country (1997:53).

While Shrestha, Carney and Rappleye believe new, modern practices in education and social development were the result of influences introduced by the West, Dahal (2022:2) concludes Nepal's health sector was equally influenced. Thus, development accompanied modernity in Nepal. Another influence on modernity in Nepal occurred when the British East India Company in India hired Nepalis Gurkhas into the British

army. While fighting for the British government, the Gurkhas were exposed to new ideas from the West. Thapa (2022:57 – 8) opined that those soldiers who survived and returned home brought the philosophy of modernity into Nepali society.

A notable consequence of modernity is the weakening of traditional religious cultures; the introduction of the Western mode of life and the idea of consumerism among the younger generation conflicted with what was then a rather feudal Nepali society (Carney & Rappleye, 2011:6). As a result, according to Kopan and Litwak (2014:42), 'modernism took over the new generation who began to believe that truth is a social construction and that rationalism has precedence over religions.'

Rationalism promoted by modernity defies anything that is absolute truth which cannot be experimentally confirmed. This means that rationalism glorifies man's reasoning ability to understand truths and obtain knowledge over and above sensory experiences and divine revelation which is fundamentally opposite to Christianity. According to Budiselic (2014:403) rationality means that:

> For every sphere of human life such as ethics, morality or religion, human reason is the final arbiter which defines what is good or bad, right or wrong. All that leads us to the question of whether Christianity can offer a witness about God that will be acceptable to modern rational men? … Christianity is a result of God's revelation, and as such, it is not acceptable to a modern rational man.

Kim, in Budiselic (2014:408) argues that 'Witnessing based on facts, rationality and logical reasoning is no longer seen as a way to know God.' He added, 'What is needed is a generation that is full of the experience of the Spirit, because the Spirit leads to the Son, who reveals the Father.' Therefore, for Christian testimony to be relevant in the context of a growing spirit of modernity, it should be inclusive of what God is doing in our societies as part of his redemption plan and what is 'being manifested and established in our midst' (Ibid 409). Such a witness can indicate the very purposes of God in establishing his kingdom on earth.

5.3.3 Widespread poverty

The 2021 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report stated that 17.4% of Nepali people live below the internationally recognised poverty line (2021:12). The same

source reported that 39.5% of people in Karnali Province are poor – by far the highest – followed by 25.3% in Sudurpashchim Province and 24.2% in Madhesh Province. Bagmati Province has the lowest number of poor people at 7% (Ibid 12).

Agricultural spaces are being reduced every day due to urbanisation driven by government programmes. The remaining cultivable land is turning to unproductive areas as more and more people migrate to cities in search of employment, health and education facilities. The unpaid or subsistence nature of much of this agricultural work places women outside the formal workforce and negatively affects the health and education of children. The official webpage of the Legatum Prosperity Index in 2021 ranked Nepal 114 out of 167 countries in its overall performance in reducing poverty. The country's economy remains dependent on agriculture, remittances and tourism. All these sources of the country's economy are now near to non-functional due to the prolonged effect of the coronavirus pandemic. Nepal is unable to sustain its food needs and relies on imports. It spends triple the income generated from its gross exports meaning that Nepal is increasingly reliant on international aid and borrowing which is unsustainable in the long term.

In recent years, the young and economically active population has been emigrating, leaving behind the young, the old and the weak who cannot contribute to the national economy. Remittances from those working overseas have increased but these have not been used to increase productivity. The 'brain drain', together with internal political instability, is noticeably affecting the economy.

Despite the richness of the environment and biodiversity resources, the country is highly vulnerable to climate change due to its geography. Nepal has experienced a range of climate hazards. 'More than 300 people are killed by water-related disasters such as floods, landslides and glacial lake outburst floods annually and property worth millions of dollars is wasted due to poor management of climatic disasters. Of the total loss in natural calamities, 80% of property loss is experienced due to climatic hazards', reported the International Institute for Environment and Development (viewed on 12 March 2023).

These circumstances place Nepal among the least developed countries in the world. As discussed in Chapter Two, Nepal's attempted poverty reduction programmes have suffered from a serious lack of contextual planning and redistribution of the

gains. The 40th plenary of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly in November 2021 unanimously endorsed the graduation of Nepal from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category. The resolution said, 'Nepal will graduate from the LDC category by December 2026 and until then will continue to receive all concessions and support measures as an LDC[18].'

The Nepali Church is a socio-religious institution born within this poverty. Nepali Christians are drawn from people who have experienced poverty and deprivation and therefore the Nepali Church could be called the Church of materially poor people. The Christian converts are pushed further into the poverty trap because of their conversion as the dominant society views them as outsiders. The Christians, however, are called to live differently, unlike their previous life (Ephesians 4:17 – 24; Galatians 5:22 - 23). This newness of life drawn from the Bible and not from the poverty-stricken world around calls the Church to witness to Christ and his message of salvation. The Church needs to point to the God of the Bible who is 'a father of the fatherless, defender of the widows, and a God in His Holy habitation' (Psalm 68:2). God does not side with the wealthy, but he is intimately connected to those who are vulnerable to poverty, exploitation and abuse, and works on behalf of them by redeeming them from their poverty to a place of joy and honour (Psalm 32:6 – 7; 34:4 – 9). God chooses to be amongst the poor which means that God is present in the social and historical context of poverty.

How can the Church express its godly attitude towards the poor in society? Mathole (2005:83) explained:

> God's love is expressed through God's deeds of grace in pardoning those who are sinners, who do not deserve his graciousness. The poor are also summoned to receive God's forgiveness because they are also sinners who need God's pardon. The same love that sanctifies through God's grace that has been abundantly provided through Christ redeems them from all forces of darkness. It is this love that redeems them from poverty, from the deprivation that is wrongly imposed on them, and from the injustice that violates their human rights.

[18] Published on 25 November 2021, in the Kathmandu Post, a national daily newspaper in Nepal.

In public witness, the Church is to emulate the biblical truth about this God who does not forsake the poor, but sides with them to redeem them from their poverty. Jesus was born into a poor home. His parents worked as carpenters and he had no home of his own nor possessions during his earthly life. Yet, he was not concerned with his lack of possessions. Instead, he preached the wealth of God in saving the fallen world where poverty no longer rules over people.

John Stott, in his famous volume 'Issues Facing Christians Today' (2003), outlined how the Church can be effective in witnessing God's riches in poverty. He suggested that the Church will need to emulate the life of Jesus on earth. Jesus was not concerned in accumulating material goods. Instead, he encouraged his disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mathew 6:33). The Church in our times needs to reflect on the life of Jesus and the early Christians and emulate them as depicted in Acts 2:42 – 47' (Stott 2003:273-276).

5.4 Dimensions of public witness

Christian witness takes place in the public sphere of the community. The people in the community are the primary recipients of the good news of salvation as Jesus himself commanded his disciples to 'go therefore and preach to all nations' (Mathew 28:19). Jesus Christ did not establish the Church to be an institution to cater for the needs of its members but he created a community of his disciples who would engage themselves in witnessing the good news of salvation (Mark 10:15). Therefore, the Church does not exist for its own purpose but to witness about Jesus and his message in the public spheres. Sunquist (2013:286-7) emphatically argues that:

> The *raison d'etre* of our Church, its true richness and real value is neither in its structure nor in its hierarchy, neither in its theology nor in its spirituality. Its true richness lies in its missionary engagement, evangelistic witness and *diakonal* action. We should remind ourselves that mission does not come from the Church; the Church acquires its real nature, unique identity and true vocation from mission. Hence a Church becomes Church when it fulfils its missionary calling.

Further, Sunquist (2013:315) suggested that 'Christian witness is a broader category that includes evangelism, but also includes other actions or relationships that testify

to God.' The Christian Church acted in testifying to God throughout its history by being involved in evangelism, social action and advocacy. The sum of all these actions qualifies the expression of mission for the Church.

Since the beginning of the early church, the faithful have witnessed for Jesus despite persecution. It has never been an easy path for Christians to witness. In various cultures, the Church has grappled with the prevailing social and cultural realities and adapted to the people and their situations in witnessing effectively. We saw how the apostle Paul adapted to the Athenian community and its practices. We learnt how Peter, a disciple of Jesus reached out to the Gentiles to witness. The stories of numerous other apostles convey the same message to us – witnessing for Jesus to the people in their own setting.

In many ways, modern society is more complex than in the past and this presents new challenges for the Church in its public witness. Summing this up, Herting in Budiselic (2014:412) confesses that the:

> Christian Church is faced with the challenge to offer a witness that will be contemporary and adjusted to the current mindsets of the people, but in the same breath remain orthodox – biblically sound and faithful to the revelation of Jesus Christ. The challenge is huge because due to some modern influences, in some aspects Christianity has lost the concept of Christian faith as a public truth which relates to all people and has importance not just for individuals, but for society and the community as well. Christianity cannot claim less than that because to confess Jesus as Lord, means that Jesus is not only Lord of certain individuals or the Church, but the Lord of creation.

The social positioning of the Church makes the Christian message a public enterprise, which is to be shared and heard in public. Herting recommends that 'The Church is called to return to the public square, re-engage in public issues and re-discover itself as a transforming agent in an ever-changing context' (Ibid 412)

The New Testament has clearly outlined how the Church can return to public witnessing. It has shown that the Church has a minimum of two different ways to witness for Jesus in the community. Firstly, through the demonstration of the power of God over the evils in human society. This is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit when the Church comes in unison to pray and worship God. The act of

prayer and worship, in pure reverence to God, leads Christians to share the Gospel through evangelism. Evangelism, as we shall see later, is a divine act accomplished by human wisdom. Telling the people that God loves them despite their way-wardness is enabled by the Holy Spirit and supported by the Word of God. Secondly, the New Testament calls the followers of Jesus to love their neighbours as themselves in fulfilling the second greatest commandment (Mathew 22:35 – 40). This loving occurs when the Church is committed to the values and principles of the Bible. Godly living leads Christians to realise that loving one's neighbour means advocating on their behalf to ensure their human worth and dignity. This may also lead to working to provide social and humanitarian assistance.

The section below outlines a few ways by which the Church can witness effectively in public.

5.4.1 Prayer and worship

The act of prayer and worship of God is an avenue of public witness. Christians pray and praise the God of the Bible openly because God is not hidden from his creation. He revealed himself to humanity through his Word and natural creation. He created a world that is good and beautiful, independently of a human presence. The sun, moon, stars, waters, mountains, hills, weather, as well as vegetation, animals, birds and sea creatures - He made them all. 'God did not create the world and then abandon it; but rather chooses to dwell in it and make it the arena for his work' (Gruchy 2004:1). The picture of God in the early chapters of Genesis is, as Robert White wrote, 'of a workman labouring hard: of honest days' work and rest at the end of the week: of satisfaction at a job well done, with the repeated affirmation that it was good' (2006:2). The book of Genesis alone has over 200 references to *Elohim* – the almighty God who created and sustains the entire universe.

There are over 40 verses in the Old Testament and 17 in the New Testament that remind us of God's ownership of the universe. We read, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and the world and they that dwell therein' (Psalm 24:1). As a response 'the creation sings anew every morning in multiple harmony' (DeWitt, 2008:86), and declares awesome wisdom of God. According to Brown & Powery (2013:8) Christian prayer and worship is an act of public witnessing. They state 'Christians worship a public God—one who acts in human history in its gritty material,

social and political dimensions.' Therefore, the Church is a witness in public through the practice of prayer and worship 'as its two basic purposes for its existence' (Sunquist 2013:281

Brown and Powery (2013:5) consider that,

> Authentic Christian praise is inherently critical public social rhetoric… preaching in the Church engages matters of concern to a public that overlaps with, but extends well beyond, the gathered Church. Still others understand Christian worship as a set of practices that bear upon the public lives of worshippers, including their attestation to Christian faith in word and deed in a variety of ways.

They question the validity of Christian prayer and worship if it fails to reflect critical awareness of the positions it occupies amid the vectors of power and privilege in real time and place. They asked, 'Can praise of the Risen Lord of the new creation ever be authentic if it does not challenge those institutions and systems that presume lordly power (Ibid 7)?' Sunquist (2013:281) is confident that 'worship increases our power, for in worship we rightly place ourselves before God… Empowerment is not the purpose but the by-product of praise. We become who we are meant to be, and who we are meant to be is a glorious community of glorious individuals reflecting the image of God to the world.'

Therefore, Christian worship is not just a spiritual act, having no real connection to the world outside the Church. It is 'not even a sociological or psychological event', stated Sunquist, 'It is a deeply and fully human and divine event that is centred on the Trinity and the incarnation. In worship, we are invited into the very presence of the Triune God to honour and proclaim redemption through the Son' (Ibid 297).

In a similar vein, prayer is a means of public witness. Praying for peace and order is a biblical mandate. The prayers offered in the churches not only include those for the Church but those who govern our societies. The apostle Paul encouraged Timothy, his disciple to intervene in the social realms with prayer. He admonished, 'I exhort therefore, that, first, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto

the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:1- 4). Prayers offered during public worship have been powerful in bringing God's blessing to communities and setting apace the change of leadership. John Stott (2003:76) recalls how the prayers offered by Christians have resulted in regime change in the Philippines. Pandita Ramabai's intercessory prayer in her hostel resulted in the liberation of women and those in the lower castes in twentieth century India (see Chakravarti 2003:537). There is other evidence of churches interceding in prayer for change in social and cultural practices.

The Lausanne Movement stated:

> We call upon our churches to take much more seriously the period of intercession in public worship… to invite lay people to share in leading, since they often have deep insight into the world's needs, and to focus our prayers both on the evangelisation of the world and on the quest for peace and justice in the world… We long to see every Christian congregation bowing down in humble and expectant faith before our sovereign Lord[19].

The Christian prayers are offered to God on behalf of peace, justice and salvation of the world – an inclusive act of public witnessing. Therefore, 'Prayer is an indispensable part of the individual Christian life and to the life of the local Church' (Stott 2003:77). The place of prayer is bringing God's interventions in human sinful affairs and bringing them back to the purposes of God has a long tradition (see Daniel 9:21 – 24).

There is a wonderful relationship between worship, prayer and public witness. Sunquist (2013:284) remarked that 'Witness brings people to faith and brings them to worship the Triune God, and the worship moves people to confession, repentance and then out to witness.' Therefore, witnessing without worship is in vain. Brown and Powery (2013:7) call upon Christians to discern the presence of God and participate in the ongoing *Missio Dei* in their public lives through prayer and worship.

5.4.2 Evangelism

Public witness includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions. Bosch (1991:10) explained that 'Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to

[19] https://lausanne.org/gatherings/issue-gathering/the-international-consultation-on-the-relationship-between-evangelism-and-social-responsibility-2

those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion… inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others.' Therefore, evangelism is an invitation given to the people in the community by those in the Church. Sunquist (2013:317) clarified that 'It is not a demand for certain behaviours but it is an offer, a gift, an opportunity'. This opportunity is given to the Church as the body of Christ and invited to take the message as an invitation to the world to come, see and experience the saving grace of God. The invitation is not done in a coercive way, nor is it conducted violently. It is presented to the people as the plain truth of God and his plan of salvation. It is the listeners, or the recipients who have the ultimate decision to make; either to accept the invitation and join the community of Christ or to reject it. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation in its Occasional Paper Paragraph Four stated that:

> There are many incentives for evangelism. To begin with, there is simple obedience to the Great Commission, and to the Lord of the Great Commission, to whom all authority has been given (Matthew 28:18-20). Then there is the terrible knowledge we have that human beings without Christ are lost or "perishing" (e.g., John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18), and our earnest desire in love is to reach them with the Gospel before it is too late. Another powerful motive is zeal or "jealousy" for the glory of Christ, whom God has super-exalted so that every knee should bow to him and every tongue confess him Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

The above document, describing evangelism and how this enables the public witness of the church, further states:

> To evangelise is to spread the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord to persuade people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross and

> identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.

The Lausanne document invites the global Church to be convincingly involved in evangelism to fulfil the mission. It states that going out to our community and evangelising, or witnessing, to the saving act of Christ to the people around is essential to fulfil the mission Christ entrusted to his Church. It states, 'The Church's universal mission derives from Christ's universal authority… He gave his people power for witness as promised and sent them out to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

5.4.3 Christian living

Another dimension of witnessing Christ in public is to live governed by biblical ethics. Jesus commanded his disciples to set a different living standard in the community. The beatitudes laid out in the Gospel are the principles on which an individual Christian should build his life. These beatitudes are corporately lived by the Church, the community of Jesus's disciples.

Jesus further required that his Church must be a community on the earth that does not flow with the current but sets a different pattern of life. In the Gospel we read: 'and seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:3 – 10 NIV)

The Disciples of Christ are expected to hear these principles and build their lives around them. These principles become the ethical guidelines for Christians in their personal and corporate lives. Public witness becomes a fruit of the Spirit once

Christians and their Church begin to demonstrate their true identity as children of God lived in the parameters of the beatitudes (Andrews 2008:8).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set yet another high standard for his disciples to follow in their communal life. He said: 'you are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; nor it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Mathew 5:13 – 16).

Ian Shaw (1998:11) pointed out that

> Jesus's words immediately imply a description of the world in which we find ourselves. It is a world tending always to decay and pollution. Left to itself it goes downwards and not upwards. But this world is not to be left to itself. Every Christian is to act as salt, hindering the decay and pollution, and seeking to bring individuals and structures under the preserving influence of God's truth.

The Church is expected to take Jesus' words literally and strive to set a standard of Christian living. Sunquist (2013:289) noted that the 'earliest community (of Christians) resulted in a public witness earning the good reputation they had among their neighbours, and this resulted in many more coming to faith and joining the community'. He summarised ten characteristics of the first Christian Church at Jerusalem which set them apart from the rest of the community.

These characteristics can be put in this order:

- They repented of their sins and gave and received the forgiveness of sins and offences
- They centred their lives in Jesus Christ in all they did
- They resisted the cultural sins and lived a holy life
- They accepted baptism as a sign of removal of old sin and entrance to a new life
- They devoted themselves to the teachings about Jesus Christ in the context of worship

- They entered into a corporate worship and celebrated the Lord's Supper and prayed
- They shared their goods, especially with those who lacked the basics of life
- They spent time together and ate meals in each other's homes
- They garnered respect in their communities
- They increased in number as more and more people came to faith through their practical witnessing to the public

The Christian Church thus set a different ethical standard by living their faith in God. The Church in subsequent ages followed the ethical standard of the first Christian community. In the third century, Tertullian remarked on how Christian behaviour is different from pagan culture; this difference became a witness to the surrounding society. He is quoted in Sunquist (2013:302) saying:

> But look at the Christians! There you have quite another story; not a man of them is ashamed of [accusations], not a man regrets... If he is denounced [as a Christian] he glories in it; if he is accused, he does not defend himself; when he is questioned, he confesses without any pressure; when he is condemned, he renders thanks.

Holding these special characteristics as life's principles make the Christian Church a distinct entity in society and provide an environment for public witnessing. In the words of Hughes (2010:52), 'The Church is both called out of the world to be an alternative society under the rule of Jesus but also, empowered by the Spirit, sent into the world to be a blessing to those who do not belong.' Sunquist (2013:292) further noted, 'A Church that is growing in holiness is attractive to people who are trapped in sin and see no hope of change'. But the Church must not feel content to have obtained these special characteristics and live as if the goal is attained. Conversely, the Church should understand that the 'Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt-cellars; its place is to be rubbed into the secular community, to stop it going bad' (Shaw 1998:11).

The Church becomes a living witness for Christ when it takes the steps to spread the newness of life acquired from maintaining the ethical standards of Jesus into the

broader society. Therefore, promoting Christian values within the Christian community and outside takes the Church out into the public arena without having to persistently proclaim the evangelical message. 'The Christian ethical living, which respects the people of other faiths and no faith genuinely promotes community dialogue and leads the way towards effective public witnessing' (Budiselic 2014:402).

5.4.4 Social action

Christian prayer, worship and ethical living have been some of the most effective dimensions of public witness. However, these alone do not complete the whole circle of the mission of the Church in public as these are often limited within the Christian homes or in the Church. There is one more dimension of public witness, social action. The Church should embrace the idea of social and structural change in order to be sustainable in its effort to public witness. The social and cultural structures need to not only proclaim Gospel, but also demonstrate the Gospel through acts of love and mercy.

The concept of social engagement has been desirable since the emergence of the Lausanne Movement in 1974. The liberation theologies of the South American Christians and the counter reaction of the conservative evangelicals of the North bred a fertile land for the birth of social Gospel, an idea that 'the mission neither favours evangelism alone nor is social service alone sufficient' (Buckley & Dobson 2010:33).

Buckley and Dobson (2010:31 – 32) commented on social engagement that,

> At the most basic level, the social Gospel (engagement) asks Christians to be concerned and invested in the world around them. It asks Christians to have compassion for the hungry, concern for the sick and empathy for the enslaved. The Gospel takes seriously the call of Scripture to care for widows and orphans, the destitute and the oppressed. It asks us to put our faith in action by taking seriously the needs of a broken, hurting world.

The majority of the churches around the world, regardless of their denominational status has accepted the call of the historical 1973 Evangelicals for Social Action Proposal to become involved in the social spheres of society as mission. The document, commonly known as the Chicago Declaration, states,

> Because of the hope we have in the Gospel, we dare to commit ourselves to the kingdom of God and oppose the demonic spiritual forces that seek to undermine the reign of God in this world. Because of our faith, we dare to risk and seek the future that God has promised, and we give ourselves to works of love… We commit ourselves to sacrificial and loving engagement with God, with all other Christians, and with a needy world. We commit ourselves to share the good news of Jesus Christ, by living and announcing the Gospel of the kingdom, so that all may come to know, love, and serve God (Sider 1994:2).

The Lausanne Movement in 1974, adopted the Chicago Declaration and developed it into a global call to the Church in social action. The Beirut Working Group in 2010 thus concluded:

> As Christians called to live out our discipleship in a world of brokenness, we confess that we have been complicit in that brokenness but also that we are empowered by God's Spirit to participate in its redemption. Such participation includes … being present with those who suffer, and caring for God's creation so that our lives, churches and communities reflect the implications of our confession that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (Schirrmacher 2010:206).

This Lausanne call has permeated the evangelical Christian world. In the words of Norman and Odotei (2019:32), the 'proclamation of the Gospel is inconsistent with the full mandates of scripture and the examples of Jesus' earthly ministry if, at the same time, the Church ignores needs and injustices in a broken world'.

Christians around the world have engaged themselves in the service of the poor, the needy and the oppressed through the local churches and some of them have championed the case of gender or children's rights or poverty alleviation. Others have invested heavily in social and structural changes for people in need.

Social action is the key to bringing about social change through witnessing in the spheres of the social, cultural and economic realms. Therefore, social change and public witness are closely linked. The social engagement of the Church in public witness is exclusively attentive to the poor, the needy and the oppressed and directed at creating conflict in the status quo of our society. In the words of Sanatombi *et al.* (2012:33) 'Witness to the truth of the Gospel meant conflict.' It aims to shake the

structures of injustice and alienation. Its goal is to shatter the walls of division between and among human society that restrict the power of God to sustain his creation in an equitable environment. It desires to create a condition in society that can welcome and experience the fullness of life Jesus came to offer (John 10:10).

Witnessing, however, is not to neglect the wealthy, the well-off and the oppressors at the expense of the poor and needy. The wealthy are also the children of God and need God's love and mercy. The people caught in the poverty trap as well as those that cause such misfortune are both the object of God's redeeming love. Therefore, the mission of redemption is for all.

The ultimate purpose of Christian witness is to create a new humanity which can exhibit the Kingdom's characteristics. Bosch (1991:28) wrote, 'Christ embraced both the poor and the rich, both the oppressed and the oppressor, both the sinners and the devout. His mission is one of dissolving alienation and breaking down walls of hostility, of crossing boundaries between individuals and groups' (Ibid 28).

Therefore, Christian public witness should seek to create a condition for human society that keeps no individual alone and excluded from the community God intended them to belong. Thacker (2017:189) opined that 'If any section of the population is excluded from participation in the life of the community, even at a minimal level, then that is a contradiction to the concept of the common good and calls for rectification … the common good requires all of us to consider all in the pursuit of human development.'

Thomas (2007:108) concludes that 'while speaking against the structures of poverty and injustice the Christians are not to be a voice of division among the human societies. Rather, we are to be a unifying voice that is generally concerned for the whole of the society and not just make appearances when confronted with the issues that bother them.' Given the modern context where varying degrees of godlessness are exhibited, how can the Church promote its public witness in a way that builds communities and not destroy them? Budiselic (2014:407) has asked, 'Can our Gospel be accepted as a non-offensive message to our modern hearers?' He responded, 'No. Because no matter what world-view or philosophy is on the throne, the Gospel message will always be offensive and provocative – in a positive way of

course…because God stands in judgment over the … harmful thoughts of this present evil age.'

Witnessing to Christ in public in all sincerity and honesty through word and deeds is what is asked of the Nepali Church as it is poised to seek participation, inclusion and a stake in social change.

5.5 Nepal Christian Society (NCS)

NCS is a national Church network. 'Founded on 3 December 1996, NCS is a common platform for all Nepali Christians, their churches and Christian organisations in and outside of the country and it operates as a meeting point for all the Nepalese Christians and provides a forum for fellowship, learning and growth' (Khanal 2020:3). NCS's motto is to be the united voice of the Nepali Christians in defence of their faith, integrity and service to the people.

NCS operates to achieve its vision which is to see a 'transformed Christian community for the transformation of the Nation through the living witness of Jesus' and labours to equip the churches to effectively engage in the transformational mission. NCS's Constitution lays out that its mission is to become 'a voice of all the Nepalese Christians in and outside the country in matters related to the expression of their faith in words and deed and seek to create a common platform of all the churches, Church groups, denominations, Christian organisations and individuals who believe in the apostolic creeds. It works to represent and safeguard the Christian community in the areas of local and national policy formation and development. It aspires to become a platform for fellowship, prayer and mutual cooperation for all Nepalese Christians in collaborating for the transformative mission of the Lord Jesus Christ in Nepal.'

NCS, has been working to achieve four main objectives as outlined in its Constitution. They are summarised below:

1. *A meeting point:* All the churches, para churches, Christian organisations and individuals come together as formal and informal networks and relationships, to have fellowship, share common issues and extend mutual support to each other. NCS provides that platform.

2. *Common voice:* Share common issues of Christian communities; national and social issues and particularly the issue of human rights and justice, advocate/lobby the government and other stakeholders. NCS becomes that voice.
3. *Information and communication*: Retrieve, organise and disseminate information related to the churches, Church groups, organisations and other communities of concern. NCS facilitates the flow of information.
4. *National and international networking:* Facilitate the formation of formal and/or informal networks among Churches, Church groups, para churches and social organisations and individuals within Nepal and outside and work together on issues of partnership. NCS operates as a network hub.

Its constitution reads that 'In NCS, we hold the unity of life and the integrity of Christian faith in our mission'. There are six core values NCS is determined to promote as a way of life for all members, associates and well-wishers. They are: unity, fellowship, service, partnership, forgiveness and respect.

NCS is committed to serve the holistic needs of the Nepali people. Its priorities in mission is to empower pastors and leaders to carry on the transformational Christian witness of the Church.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the concept of Christian public witness in the global setting which has resulted in a significant change in its cultural spheres. The local Church in Nepal has also been witnessing for changes in the public arena where it is mandated to effectively witness through its various ministry activities. We looked into a number of ways whereby the Church can be relevant in its public witnessing. The Christian leadership in the Nepali Church will need to consider the areas discussed above if the Church is to witness effectively in Nepal's changing social and cultural contexts, namely pluralism, modernity and widespread poverty.

In the next chapter, we will review the data acquired from the research participants and learn how the Church can promote Christian public witness in Nepal. The next chapter will explore the dimensions of the relationship between the WCMs and the

Nepali Church in relation to strengthening public witness by analysing the data collected through fieldwork. It will also assess the role of NCS in helping the Church to be an effective public witness for Jesus.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WCMS AND THE NEPALI CHURCH AND PUBLIC WITNESS

6.1 Introduction

The anticipated goal of the Christian message is not that people hear it proclaimed, or understand it principally at an intellectual level. 'Its aim is that the proclaimed message would be received and enact its effective work at the deepest level of the human spirit, shaping the hearts and minds of people so that a new life of Christ would so animate their character that they truly become like Christ' (Gushee 2010:22). People, who follow Jesus Christ as their Saviour and become like him should witness about this transforming experience.

In the last chapter, we discussed the meaning and components of Christian public witness. We saw how the Christian Church throughout history has kept the public witness aflame amidst difficult circumstances. We looked into current missionary enterprise and the different challenges the Church must overcome to become an effective public witness for Jesus. In this regard, we observed that the Church should work in an environment of religious pluralism, modernity and poverty. Accordingly, this chapter outlines the missionary activities of the WCMs in Nepal and describes the specific experiences and expectations of the Nepali Church leadership in the former's social involvement and its anticipated impact on the public witness of the latter. In doing so, this chapter presents the key findings of the research on major aspects of the WCMs' work and their impact on the public witness of the Nepali Church.

6.2 Data collection and analysis

At this stage, a quick recap of the methodology and tools applied in this research is helpful to get a firm understanding of the nature of the data and their analysis.

Firstly, this is action research which, by definition, seeks to enter into an issue or a problem to enable the practitioners to improve their knowledge and skills so that they work towards enhancing the results. Reason and Bradbury said that 'it is not so much a methodology as an orientation to inquiry that seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues. Rather, it links practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing' (Nicodemus and Swabey 2015:1). Therefore, this research is focused on generating a new way of evaluating the relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church towards enhancing public witness.

Secondly, action research is concerned that the people involved in the study increase the effectiveness of the work in which they are personally engaged. 'This is achieved by examining the particular dynamics present in a local setting, taking a specified action within that setting, and evaluating the results of that action' (Ibid 3). This research has engaged the leaders of the Nepali Church who have a reasonable amount of give-and-take relationship with many WCMs (as discussed at length in Chapter Three) and have drawn lessons that benefit both in paving ways towards effective public witness. The conclusions from the data analysis aim to facilitate a meaningful and fruitful relationship between the Nepali Church and WCMs in future.

Thirdly, action research methodology is applied with the people or community who have first-hand knowledge and experience of the issue under investigation. These people or community are addressed as practitioners. This concept allows the researcher to use the purposive sampling method in respondent selection. Because of their lived relationship with the topic under discussion, they are also called the research participants. Therefore, the participants were selected for this research based on their prior experience of the key issue being investigated. They hold some authentic attitude to the major problem under consideration and are enabled to respond better through the process of interview involvement. The major question being researched is a lived experience of the respondents, and their responses help in redefining the outcome of the issue.

Fourthly, action research is useful in situations that can help the participants affect the result of the issue at hand through creating a shared knowledge between the

researcher and the research participants. This enables the researcher to dig deep into the thoughts and ideas of the participants and build a path for the betterment of the situation in future. Therefore, the participants have taken a lead in sharing their ideas and the expectations of the issue at hand. This is to enable them to navigate a new way of exerting a strong public witness in community.

Finally, action research seeks not only to suggest better techniques or ideas for the future but also to consider improving the practices at hand. In this research, an attempt is made to examine the current parameters of the relationship, especially between the WCMs and the local Church in mission to bring lasting changes in the practices of both.

6.3 Major findings

The five sub-sections below present the findings from the fieldwork. Section one discusses the social contribution of the WCMs in Nepal and outlines the areas of their investment for Nepal's social change. The second section brings out the observations of the research participants on the disengagement of the WCMs in the affairs of the Nepali Church. Third section documents the Nepali Church's perceptions on how the WCMs understood the place of the local Church in their Nepal mission. The fourth section discusses the NCS and its understanding and practice of public witness. Finally, the fifth section records the respondents' suggestions to the Nepali Church and the WCMs towards forming an effective and mutual collaboration to promote the public witness of the local Church.

The observation and opinions of the research participants are critically reviewed, analysed, interpreted and presented on each of the themes discussed. The presentation of the primary data and their meanings are backed by the secondary information acquired by the review of published documents which concern both the WCMs and the Nepali Church. Additional comments on the participants' observations are supplied by the researcher himself when such is required to clarify the status and the roles of the two Nepal mission actors – the WCMs and the local Church.

The data presented in graphs and charts are derived from the frequency of responses. Since this is not a quantitative study, the readers would do well in paying

attention to the personal opinions and observations of the respondents as presented on each of the key themes rather than on numbers and figures.

6.3.1 The WCMs and Nepal's social development

As discussed in the second chapter, Nepal is an aid-dependent country and has been receiving development support from bilateral organisations, INGOs and other global development partners. The WCMs working in Nepal make up a good part of that aid community. The annual spending of one such WCM in 2018 was 33 billion Nepali rupees (approximately US$ 25 million)[20]. All thirty-five WCMs operating in Nepal's social development contribute a similar volume every year, making a total of US$ 875 million annually. The aggregate annual spending of the ten selected WCMs in Nepal is approximately US$ 250 million.

The most obvious factor that the research participants observed is the developmental contribution of the WCMs in Nepal's social and economic sectors. The WCMs poured significant finance, technology, and human expertise to help Nepal surmount its underdeveloped status. The respondents quickly identified numerous development initiatives of the WCMs, some of which were related to them in different ways. These initiatives were centred on social organisation, health and education facility development and technological development in Nepal.

The chart (6.3.1) followed by the narration in the next page presents how the research participants think the WCMs helped Nepal in its development pursuits. Of the total respondents, 26% said the WCMs contributed to the field of health; whereas 22% pointed to education as the most significant contribution of the WCMs. Another 14% said the WCMs contributed significantly to social development whereas the development of physical infrastructures was the WCMs' best contribution for 12%. Finally, 10% of the participants were inclined to appreciate the missionaries' contribution to the development of Nepali leadership in bureaucracy and other fields, followed by the 7% who acknowledged the contribution of the WCMs in the birth, growth and development of Nepali Christianity (see chart 6.1).

[20] UMN annual report 2017.

Health

As can be seen in the chart, 26% of the research participants pointed to the WCMs' excellent support in helping to establish Nepal's health sector.

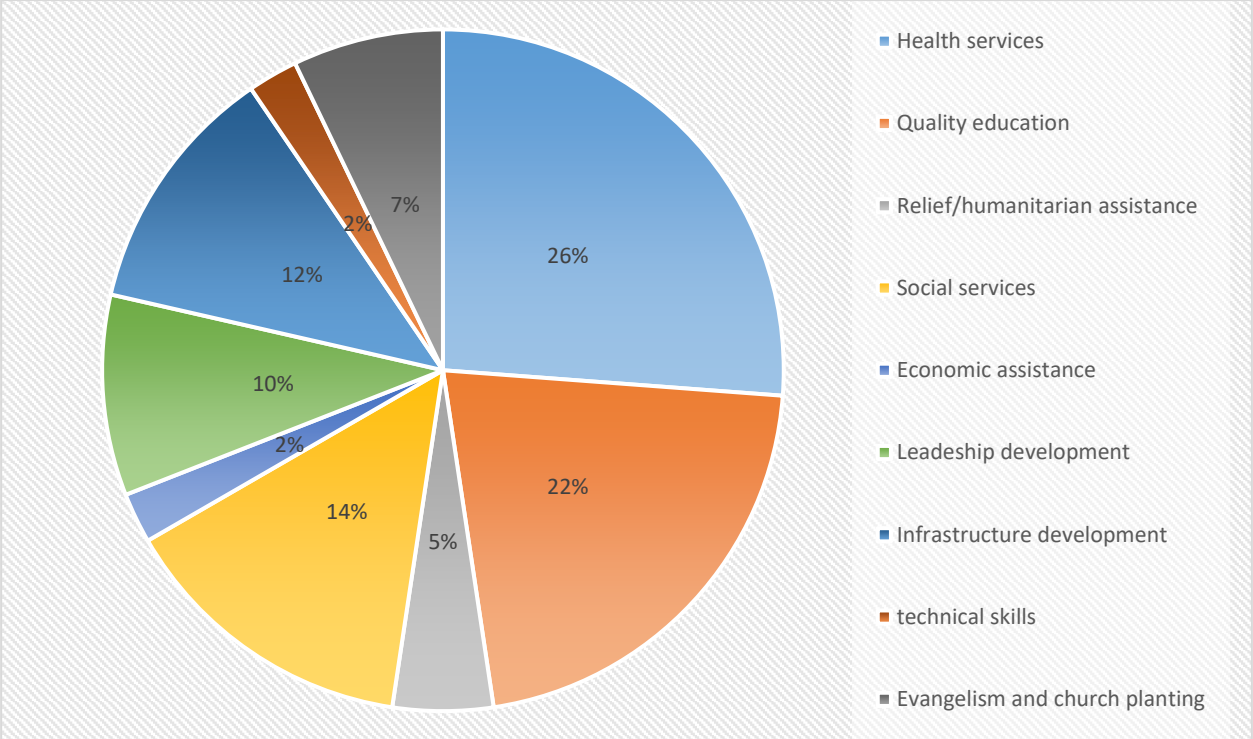


Chart 6:.3.1 Western Christian Mission's development assistance to Nepal

The participants cited a number of past and present health facilities developed by the WCMs which continue to provide better health care services to the Nepali people. When Nepal was still using homoeopathic methods of curing the sick, it was the WCMs that introduced modern medical education and allopathic medicine in Nepal (Marasini 2022). The trend of establishing village health centres and hospitals continued with the arrival of the WCMs and, during the 1960s and 1970s, health facilities boomed across the country as many of the WCMs were invited to contribute to develop Nepal's health sector. Lindell (1989:42) cited a government letter to UMN in which the following conditions were laid out for starting and managing a mission hospital:

1. All expenses for the establishment of a Hospital at Tansen and the Maternity Welfare Centres in Kathmandu are to be borne by the mission.
2. The staff for the centres and the Hospital should be drawn from Nepalese citizens as far as possible and they should be properly trained.

3. The Hospital at Tansen and the Welfare Centres in Kathmandu should be handed over to the Government of Nepal after five years.
4. The distribution of medicine and treatment of all patients should be free.

The government had the same attitude to all other WCMs; they had to abide by these conditions until they handed over the facilities to the government. Many medical centres and hospitals established by the WCMs are still in operation some of which are still under the management of the WCMs. Those health facilities managed by the WCMs are acclaimed by most. 'They provide better medical care with a minimum cost whereas the facilities owned privately are expensive and those managed by the government are much less effective in serving the needy' (Jigyasu: 2023:1).

Health clinics and hospitals became the hallmark of the WCMs in Nepal because the government wanted their specialist's services for the Nepali people. UMN came with a medical facility each in Palpa, Gorkha, Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Okhaldhunga (see Rongong 2012:53). INF excelled in tuberculosis (TB) treatment, disability rehabilitation and leprosy rehabilitation in Pokhara, Jumla, Surkhet and Banke (Arnett 2002:25). Teams' medical work in far-west Nepal treated all sorts of physical ailments of the poor and neglected. The hospital managed by the Adventists continues to cater to the health needs of the people in Kavre and the districts east of it.

Hospitals, nursing homes and outpatient medical clinics started and managed by the Adventists, UMN and INF continue to blend their medical services along with preventive community health care. These depend on support from outside Nepal, especially from the churches in the Western countries for equipment, finance and specialists' services. The research participants were aware that these health facilities excel in serving the needy with a minimum of facilities at their disposal. My respondent 8 worked for one of the WCMs in its community health project in the early 1990s in a village south of Kathmandu for more than a decade before starting his own NGO to advance community health. He recalled how, during his tenure, the villagers had not experienced modern medical systems until his team was able to organise medical camps for the villagers and treat their health issues. He narrated, 'The mission health facilities were proactive in caring for the villagers. They provided the basic health information to the rural villages through their staff members.' Inspired by his experience as a health expert, he later initiated a health-related NGO believing

> Without good health, a family and its community cannot prosper economically or socially. It is important to help people keep healthy so that they can be involved in financial activities. Our NGO aims at creating healthy families through our preventive as well as curative health services.

My respondent 1 worked at an HIV and AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome) programme during 2008 – 2009 at Nepalgunj. It is a border city in the southwest of Nepal. That programme was run by a WCM. During his employment, he observed that:

> A lot of Nepali migrant workers used to be infected by the virus while they lived and worked in India. Our facility provided both preventive and curative care for those infected and affected by the virus. Had not this facility been established and treated the people that go to and come from India, a huge number of Nepalis would have contracted the virus.

The leprosy rehabilitation programme managed by INF in Pokhara and Surkhet treated 28871 patients in the year 2021-22. Its disability rehabilitation programme continues to collaborate with the local government units to conduct community scans and a basic treatment plan. In the same year, INF's disability rehabilitation programme served a total of 20000, according to its annual report. In its annual report of 2021, the SDA's hospital provided healthcare services to 130437 people. UMN's hospitals in Tansen and Okhaldhunga served a total of 137789 people with various health problems in the year 2022. The Team's hospital in the far-west of Nepal was handed over to the local government in 2017 and is no longer managed by the mission.

These figures support the research participants' claims about the significance of the health contribution by the WCMs. The data accumulated over the years since the 1950s indicate how important the health support of the WCMs has been for modern Nepal.

Education

The development of formal education in Nepal can be credited to the work of the WCMs and their missionaries. The Rana rulers had prohibited Nepali people to read and write for fear of a public revolt. They monopolised the educational sector and

closed schools where people could be educated. There was only a handful of *Gurukuls*, a community school owned by the upper caste people for their children to learn the *Sanskrit* language. These schools did not enrol the children from other castes. There was only one higher educational institute in Kathmandu by the year 1951 when the Rana's were forced to concede their power to democracy (see Messerschmidt 1997:153). Marshal Moran, a Catholic father was instrumental in establishing a school on the outskirts of Kathmandu in 1951 which provided the first opportunity for Nepalis to experience Western modern education (Ibid 177). Other WCMs then opened schools and learning centres. including Luitel School in Gorkha, Gandaki Boarding School in Pokhara and Mahendra Bhawan Girls School in Kathmandu (Sharma 2009:43). The waves of democracy enthused the locals to also start schools, and within a few years the thirst for learning exploded. By 1954 there were more than 1,200 primary schools, 83 high schools and 14 new colleges, recorded Huge B. Wood (1959:430).

The community learning centres as a point of non-formal education were also opened by the WCMs in distant places. The non-formal education points started by UMN in Dailekh, Mugu and Karnali became learning hubs for women. In later years, organisations such as WVI–Nepal, FIDA, SIL and FELM were all involved in the development and promotion of inclusive formal and non-formal education in Nepal. These learning centres later became instrumental in raising public consensus for social change, community leadership and democratic movements, especially for Dalits, Madheshi and women.

The research respondents were aware of how important the contribution of the WCMs in the pursuit of educational development of Nepal has been. 22% of the respondents chose this contribution of WCMs as the most praiseworthy. Respondents 3, 9 and 14 had the opportunity to lead some of the most impactful educational movements started and operated by the WCMs.

Respondent 3 who has a long track record of working in the education reform sector, was involved in the establishment of two community schools in Lamjung, a remote district north-west of Kathmandu. His association with the WCMs encouraged him to become involved in the management of an NGO that worked alongside the missionaries in the field of formal and non-formal education. He acknowledges that his

‘long-term association with the missionaries encouraged him to pursue higher education for himself and contribute toward the development of quality educational services for the people in the margins.’ He went on to become an educational planner and was co-opted by the government in the management of a university in Gandaki province. He credits all his achievements in the field of education to the work of learned Western missionaries that came through the WCMs. However, he is critical of the lack of a mission orientation in the missionaries of later years. He commented,

> For me, educational attainment is the right of all people regardless of their caste, colour or religion. But the missionaries who came after 1990, were negligent about the educational needs of the upper caste and were biased towards the Dalits and the ethnic community. As a result, the WCMs created a big gulf in society and helped to nurture inter-caste conflict.

He believes that being outsiders to the social reality of Nepal, the WCMs should have asked for guidance rather than act as experts in public education. He thinks that the WCMs made a mistake in promoting the rights of one caste or group of people over another in their ignorance of the context.

My respondent 14 is a non-Christian individual. He works as the head of the sociology department of a college in Kathmandu affiliated with the Purwanchal University. He fondly remembers the twofold contribution of the WCMs. Firstly, they installed in him the desire to achieve higher and better education. Secondly, he appreciates their contribution to the development of the education system in Nepal.

In his early career, he had the opportunity to associate with the missionaries of the WCMs. He fondly recalls his first experience of working and learning with the Western missionaries:

> Right after my graduation, I joined Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) as a research assistant. CNAS as a research arm of Tribhuwan University was instrumental in identifying social research themes and projects. The team I assisted was comprised of intellectuals from Nepal and abroad and was commissioned to conduct sociological studies to determine the need for quality education in high schools and universities. The team leader was a German, associated with a WCM organisation. He was seconded to Tribhuwan University. His passion for research on formal education was so inspiring that he led the team with utmost diligence. His

> techniques to get into the right kind of data and ability to interpret them were of a high standard. I was left to wonder why such an experienced person would come to Nepal and work with that level of passion when he had all the comforts of the world at his disposal in his own country.

Recalling his learning journey with the missionary, he recounted:

> The missionary would always encourage us to get into the depth of the topic we researched and would praise us when we were doing our job better. He challenged me and my team to respect the processes of educational attainment and aim for higher individual development and not to discard the possibility of changing society through education. I followed all of his advice and imitated his way of handling research topics. Soon, I was noticed by Dr Dilli Ram Dahal, a distinguished Nepali sociology professor. He apprenticed me for more than five years in the field of research and university education. I learnt so much from him that I committed my life to the betterment of higher education in Nepal. Since then, I have been researching, lecturing and managing various higher degree programmes at Tribhuwan University and Purwanchal University.

He continued:

> I remember the contribution of this research team towards the improvement of higher education in Nepal. The inputs given were implemented in the development of context-relevant teaching and learning methods and the preparation to equip human resources. Their work had such a long-term impact that many of the current human resources in the Nepali universities are the product of missionaries' assistance.

He recalls how the mission schools started by the Catholic and other WCMs have hugely contributed to the development of learned professional Nepalis. He stated,

> Many of my colleagues in the Nepali universities had been educated in the mission schools in Kathmandu and Pokhara. They demonstrate the highest level of competency in their fields of research and education. They have been the principals, deans and vice-chancellors in colleges and universities. The bureaucratic workforce and those who led I/NGO works during the 1980s and 1990s were mostly educated in the schools operated by the WCMs. I see them and take pride in working with them. Most of these learned individuals remain within their religious traditions and never converted to Christianity. They were

> never forced or coerced to accept the religion of the missionaries. I think mostly the missionaries were positive as they remained within their parameters and agreed with the government and did not take advantage in converting people. Those that blame the missionaries for converting Nepalis to Christianity have not understood the real value of service to humanity the missionaries gave. I am one such Nepali who benefitted from a fellowship with the missionaries and remained a committed Hindu.

During the 1960s, the Summer Institute of Learning (SIL), another WCM came to Nepal and focused on developing language and linguistics. Partnering with the Tribhuwan University and other governmental agencies, it contributed to the development of non-formal educational materials and promoted a culture of reading and writing in remote villages. Since then, it has been one of the forerunners in helping Nepal's language and learning and has been implementing numerous programmes on multilingual education, mother-tongue-based adult literacy, linguistic surveys, orthography and dictionary development.

Respondent 9, who serves as a principal of a theological institution in Kathmandu, is appreciative of the investment of the WCMs in the development of Christian and theological education in Nepal. Conversion to Christianity fuelled in him the desire to explore how the missionaries enabled the early Nepali Christians to read and write. In this pursuit, he documented biographies of several first-generation Christian leaders. There are other Nepali Christians who have penned the life of some notable first-generation Nepali Christians.

One account about the late Tir Bahadur Dewan, who was one of the first Nepali Christian converts in India, reads. 'After his conversion to Christianity in India through the missionaries' health care service, he went on to become the first Nepali to lead a local Church inside Nepal' (see Shah 1993:2). He was from the *Rai* tribe, an ethnic community in the eastern mountains. The Rais were isolated from educational attainment as the handful of community schools operating in those days were open to the children of upper caste people only. Tir Bahadur had only learnt the alphabet when he first met the missionaries in Jogbani, India. 'While under the medical care of the missionaries, he was encouraged to enrol in a Bible school' (Khanal 1998:39). He felt terrified at the thought of going to a Bible school with the ability to only read

and write the Nepali alphabet. Nevertheless, he attended the training run by the missionaries and in 1938, was baptised and committed his life to the work of Christian ministry (see Shrestha 2012:196).

Tir Bahadur remained with the missionaries and assisted them in their work in India. When the missionaries received a call to start their work in Nepal, he accompanied them to Kathmandu and started to oversee a Church in Bhaktapur. 'Not only did he become the first Nepali pastor, but he was instrumental in installing a passion for learning in the people he pastored' (Ibid 197).

Thomas Hale (2012:7 – 8) narrates a story of an ordinary man named Daud Mashi who is remembered as an individual of extraordinary accomplishment due to his ability to compose folk-tune Christian hymns. He was from one of the marginalised castes in West Nepal and became a Christian while under medical treatment at the hands of the missionaries in India. At an early age he was infected by polio and had become lame. He went to India in search of a job and found himself taking refuge with the missionaries at Nautanuwa. There he received his physical treatment and the Gospel of eternal life. He learnt how to read and write the Nepali language from the boy's school started by the missionaries and soon became an itinerant singing preacher in the mountains of Nepal.

Respondent 9 thinks that there was some contribution by the WCMs in the development of Christian theological education during the early 1960s and 1970s. He observed,

> The initial push for the finance, textbooks and the opening of short-term training centres in India where the Nepali converts could obtain basic Christian education was praiseworthy. In later years, the WCMs allowed a few of their expatriate staff members to teach in the Nepali Bible schools in their spare time. They not only taught lessons, but also mentored the first group of Nepali theological teachers. Their input in this sector is remembered with gratitude by many over the years.

The respondent is unhappy that the WCMs have not continued their previous ardour towards the development of Christian education in Nepal. Despite the opportunities following the change of political leadership, the missionaries have not helped Nepalis to achieve more in this field. He observed:

> However, the missionaries have not felt the need to change their way of dealing with the local theological institutions and their teachers. They still think the locals must continue to look to them for models or guidance. The WCMs have not recognised a significant change in the context between when they first came and the current time. They cannot continue with their old thinking. They should abandon the mentality of getting Nepali students into conventional theological education systems promoted in the West. Rather, they should be willing to learn with the locals because of the better local knowledge they possess.

Infrastructure development

The other aspect of the missionaries' contribution to Nepal's social change is in the development of physical infrastructure. When the WCMs first came to Nepal, there were barely any modern facilities such as roads, bridges, hospitals or schools. A few aristocrats in Kathmandu had the privilege of driving private vehicles but they had to depend on India for basic health and educational facilities. The WCMs established village clinics and health posts wherever they started their work. Then followed the establishment of community learning centres and schools. Now, most of the schools developed by the WCMs are handed over to the Nepal government as per the agreement. These facilities continue to provide quality services to the people of Nepal.

Tara Shrestha (2015:143) records how the WCMs excelled in transforming the face of industrial development in Nepal. He narrates a story of a hydroelectricity project and opines that, had the WCMs not initiated such work, Nepal would have waited many years to get electricity. The hydropower projects in Tinau, Jhimruk and later in Khimti became the game changer in terms of exploring the possibility of clean energy in Nepal (Ibid 45). These projects were started by the WCMs in support of the Nepal government.

The WCMs in their agreement with the Nepal government had to accept a condition which said the WCMs would be responsible to establish their facilities, hire experts and manage their expenses. The government had no obligation towards the function of these facilities except to ensure the work was not disrupted for political reasons. And, ultimately, the WCMs had to hand over all their projects to the Nepal government after a certain number of years of operation. Sharma (2009:44)

remembers how the WCMs 'invested a massive amount of finances and technical resources in developing the physical infrastructure of schools, hospitals, rural roads and electricity in Nepal.'

My respondents quickly identified some of the existing infrastructure initiated by the WCMs such as the Patan Hospital in Kathmandu, the Gandaki Boarding School in Pokhara, the Karnali Technical Institute in Jumla, Green Pasture Leprosy Treatment Centre in Pokhara, Lalgadh Hospital in Dhanusha, St. Xavier's School in Kathmandu, Butwal Power Company in Butwal, Anandban Leprosy Hospital in Lalitpur, Community Hospital in Okhaldhunga and others which continue to provide services to the Nepali people. Many of these facilities are still under the management of the WCMs.

Leadership development

Ten per cent of my respondents saw the contribution of the WCMs in the development of Nepali leadership in various fields such as advocacy, health, bureaucracy, education, NGO management and the Church.

Respondents 1, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 14 had been in key leadership positions in their field of engagement. They had accepted the opportunity to be a part of the WCMs' leadership development programmes in the past either as employees or students. None of them obtained this opportunity because of their Christian faith as many of them were not Christians when they first came in contact with the WCMs. Respondent 1 is a Dalit activist who champions the case of Dalit rights. His advocacy work for the rights of marginalised people in Nepal is acclaimed nationally. He recalled,

> I have been a passionate campaigner for the rights of marginalised people from the beginning. But my association with a mission organisation in the field of HIV and AIDS gave it shape and required skills. I learnt how rights can be permeated with love and care for the victims and the oppressors from the philosophy of the missionaries who were inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus. I learnt the importance of keeping the hope of restoration of the oppressed as well as the oppressors in advocacy so that the society we aim to create has ample space for both to share in life and flourish.

Respondent 3 is an education expert. He had a very long association with the WCMs. His ability to establish and manage community schools as non-profit organisations of high quality he is admired. He believes he learnt about servant leadership through his association with the missionaries and credits some individuals who came as servants to the cause of the Nepali people and sacrificed all their comforts. He is often challenged to serve the needy as the missionaries did.

Respondent 7 led one of the WCMs as its director for several years. During her tenure, she was responsible for leading over four hundred Nepali and expatriate staff. She reminisced,

> I saw the true meaning of what a mission or a missionary means from the life of my international colleagues in the organisation. They were on the extreme side of the meaning as you would see them prioritizing the needs of the community they served over their own desires and would spend hours and days serving the needy. I am indebted to the level of commitment shown by them in their call to service to the poor and needy. I acknowledge that the opportunity to lead them as their leader was a massive honour entrusted to me. I am indebted to my colleagues for helping me to excel in the job.

Presently, she serves as an elder of a large Church in Nepal. Her Church has over a hundred and thirty branches spread across the country and over a hundred leaders whom she mentors. She continues to render her service to her Church but also provides a reasonable amount of time to mentor young people in their professional carrier.

Respondent 8 worked with the WCMs during his youth. He recalled,

> I have been a political activist since my early youth. I contested in a local election when I was still under 20. My passion for political leadership remains intact even today when I am in my fifties. But my leadership understanding and practice have had a major shift after my association with the WCMs and their missionaries. They had a significant impact on my own development as a leader. The WCMs not only provided me with a job but moulded me into the role of a good leader.

His political affiliation with one of the ruling parties in the current coalition has won him a position in the district committee membership. He uses this position to influence

the policy and practices of the party and seeks to embed Christian values in the party line.

Respondent 9 worked alongside the WCMs in the development of a holistic curriculum for Nepali theological institutions. He has been working to embed theological education into the national curriculum in the hope that the theological graduates can get into government jobs[21]. He opined,

> I observed how the students from the theological institutions where conventional theology is taught, struggle after graduation for three reasons. Firstly, there are not enough churches where fresh graduates serve. Secondly, the existing leadership of the Church is still reluctant to fully concede the ministry to the graduates. And thirdly, they do not have the ability or skills to step outside the Church into a new profession. The results are the fractions in the churches and increased frustration in the youth.

His institution caters to this need by enabling the students to acquire practical skills for social mobilisation alongside theology education. He regrets that the WCMs, despite their initial drive for theological training, have failed to work alongside Nepalis in advancing context-relevant theological education that equips students to lead transformative professions.

My respondents' stories consistently attested to the importance of the WCMs' contribution to leadership development in Nepal. Arjun Tamang (2021:50 - 54) documented that from 1954 to 2000, UMN alone established and managed nine educational institutes across the country. These institutes prioritised education access to those from poor and marginalised communities. Some of these institutes enrolled only girls and provided them with higher education. 'From 2004 until 2018, UMN worked with community schools, learning centres and the government schools in twelve districts of Nepal. Through these projects, it provided educational support to 4,691 Nepali students, assisted three hundred schools with libraries, and computer labs, and trained thousands of teachers' (Ibid 60 – 63).

A UMN expatriate missionary, in an informal conversation with the researcher said,

[21] Christian theological education is unrecognized in Nepal. As a result, the theological graduates are ineligible to enroll in the higher classes and are unable to apply for government or private sector jobs. They have to limit themselves within the Church work or opt for foreign employment.

> In those days, when learning was beginning to attract the public interest, our schools were the only facilities, apart from the Catholic schools and those owned by wealthy Ranas, to educate the poor and marginalised people. We are proud to see a number of high-class managers, leaders and government officials today who were educated in the schools we started.

He continued,

> Apart from assisting in formal education, the WCMs excelled in developing technical skills in the Nepali people. The hospitals, hydroelectricity projects, agriculture and animal husbandry programmes all contributed to the leadership development of Nepali individuals through scholarships, apprenticeships and internships.

The stories of the research participants and the data cited above are sufficient to attest to the invaluable contribution of the WCMs in developing leadership qualities in the Nepali people all over the country in various fields of engagement.

Evangelism and church planting

As shown in chart 6.3.1 above, 7% of my respondents said the WCMs helped in the spiritual activities such as the promotion of evangelism and church planting. Respondents 1, 9 and 12 were appreciative of the efforts the WCMs put into the spiritual ministries in the early period despite the socio-cultural difficulties. We have seen that among the WCMs working in Nepal, those that came during the 1950s had a greater level of involvement in the kerygmatic activities alongside their developmental work. Mark Arnett (2003:138-143) recorded how the early INF missionaries became a part of a Church in Pokhara. He recalls the INF's role in getting an expatriate teacher to the 1974 NCF conference. The conference not only had the first anointing of three Nepalis into the Church leadership but also laid the foundation of a theology and practice of being filled with the Holy Spirit in the Nepali Church.'

During this period, the expatriate missionaries would conduct prayer meetings along with the Nepali Christian staff unrestricted by the authorities. Though the government and society knew about the Christian status of the missions, the missionaries were not limited within their agreed assignment but were free to pursue their individual interests and to witness about their faith (Lindell 1997:254-55). The government

knowing their Christian identity, welcomed the WCMs to carry on with their projects and extra-curricular activities. And, the expatriate missionaries were not asked why they would involve in the Church.

The WCMs involvement in the work of the Nepali Church continued unhindered until an arrest of the Nepali Christians took place in Tansen, west Nepal in 1960. A pastor along with his new believers whom he had baptised were arrested on the charge of conversion and put into prison. The arrest sparked a sense of fear in and among the WCMs. The WCMs and their expatriate missionaries took defensive position and asked the Nepali Christians to do the Church work on their own.

The believers put into jail were released later with a warning that they should not be found in similar act of religious conversion. Thence, the government authorities began to pay attention to any and all the Christian activities in the country. Some other acts of arrest and communal harassments of the Nepali Christians were reported. In all these, some expatriate missionaries were required to answer to the local authorities on their suspected role in Christian activities and a few of them were asked to leave the country. Despite all these incidents taking place, none of the WCMs had to terminate their presence in the country, nor any of their missionaries imprisoned for preaching the Gospel or teaching about Jesus (Arnett 2003:144).

This first Christian arrest influenced the attitude of the then government towards the activities of the WCMs. The local authorities started imposing stricter rules for the movement of the expatriate missionaries and eventually, in 1978 the central project agreement saw a clause ‘requiring the members of the mission to confine their activities to the achievement of the objectives of the institutions to which they were assigned… The clause intended to hinder personnel from involvement in political activities and what a later agreement called proselytizing and other activities which are outside the scope of assigned work (Lindell 1997:257; See also Shrestha 2012:80). Shrestha (Ibid.34) cited a similar condition laid out for INF. He further stated that the agreement signed with the Nepal government became the binding cord and, the WCM believed that abiding by those agreement was the only way to continue with their mission work; they thought the clauses were unbreakable (Ibid 83).

The data showed that from then on the WCMs distanced themselves from the Nepali Church. They strictly discouraged organisational and financial involvement with the local churches, even though some of them were established within their compounds. Shrestha quoted an incident where Tir Bahadur Dewan, one of the first Nepali pastors, said,

> Our Church was within the mission compound and from the beginning I had requested the mission to buy a piece of land outside the compound and shift the Church. The request was turned down. Now the missionaries have left us and we still are unable to purchase a plot of land to build our Church. We run our Church in a rented place (Ibid 80).

In responding to the question on why the WCMs did not contribute to the Church project, one missionary was quoted remarking this: 'we do not encourage investing in land and building. Rather, we want to develop biblical knowledge and practical skills in the Nepali Christians. But the Nepali churches prioritise developing infrastructure' (Ibid 82). Other WCMs who came to Nepal during the 1970s and 1980s, followed the conduct of the older ones in their dealing with the Nepali Church; they shared very little with the Nepali Church in terms of promoting the Christian witness.

In conclusion, the majority of the research participants agreed that the social contribution of the WCMs is commendable. They are grateful that the WCMs invested significant time, resources and energy into Nepal's social change. However, they regretted that the WCMs' contribution to the cause of evangelism, church development and public witnessing is negligible in comparison despite the fact that the early missionaries had contributed to the birth and initial growth of the local Church.

The following section presents the respondents' understanding on why the WCMs opted a policy of non-involvement with the local Church in their Nepal mission.

6.3.2 Reasons for the WCMs' non-involvement with the local Church

In the previous section, we observed that the WCMs remained focused on their social work and barely considered the Nepali Church, especially after 1960s. The observation of the research participants was attested by the examples presented that

question the lack of mutual partnership with the growing local Church despite their repeated claim ‘to be an example of Christ in mission and work in close collaboration with the local Church’. The WCMs distanced themselves from the affairs of the local Church but never clearly communicate the reasons for choosing such position. On the other hand, the local Church never wanted to understand the reasons that led the WCMs’ separation from the normal church work. A state of lack of communication thus emerged: the churches would wait in anticipation for collaboration but the WCMs took to a new route in their mission work. ‘The result was growing suspicion between them and in the community outside. The community would suspect the WCMs being indirectly involved in the cause of the Nepali Church whereas the churches believed the WCMs did not really care about them ’ (Tamang 2021:64).

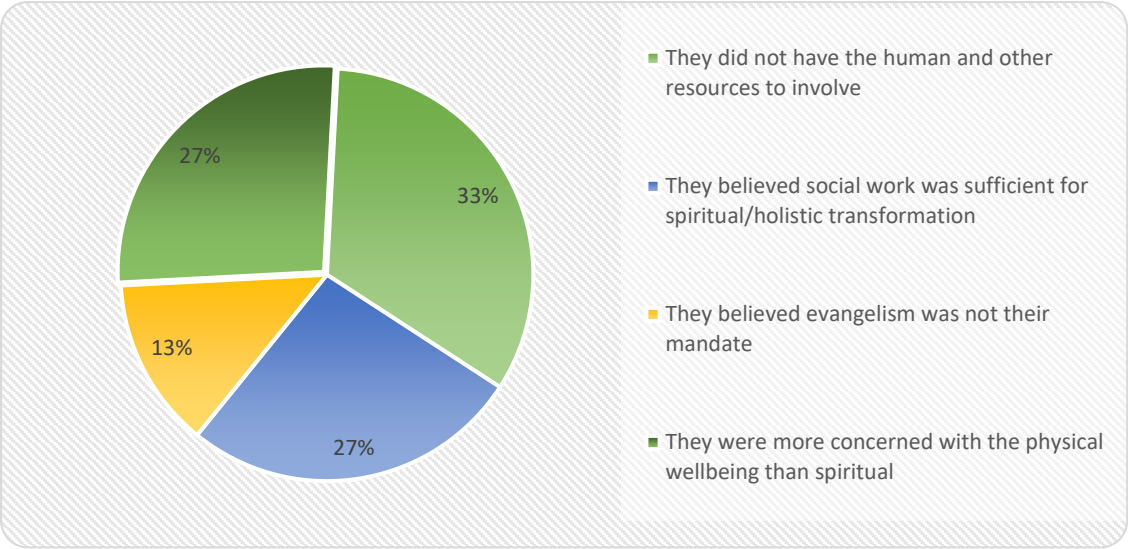


Chart 6.3.2 Rasons for the WCMs’ non-involvement with the Nepali Church

My respondents were asked to provide their observations as to what caused the WCMs’ separation from the Nepali Church. Of the total 33% considered that the WCMs did not have the human and other resources to be involved in the life of the local Church. Respondent 6 said that,

> The WCMs did not come as Church workers but as experts in health, education and community development. This clearly defined the direction and motivation of the WCMs and their engagement with the Church in Nepal. They had a definite role and the candidates chosen to fulfil those roles would not necessarily have the skills, passion and ability to engage in Church work. On the whole, these skilled people behaved as superior to those working in the

> Church. Consequently, the WCMs missed an opportunity to journey with the Church.

Respondent 2, who assists a pastor in a Kathmandu Church, remarked that:

> The missionaries with technical expertise would count their service as service to God and limit themselves to their profession. When the individual missionaries visit the Church on Saturdays (when Nepalis have corporate worship) they would not perform any spiritual activities. They would sit, listen and not seek to contribute to the ministries. We used to think the missionaries know more than us in Church-related stuff and wanted them to lead us. We found that many of them know very little about how to run a Church. This situation made us realise that most of the missionaries coming to Nepal have no spiritual background, nor do they have basic education in Church and ministries.

These observations of the respondents were attested by those associated with the early WCMs including a senior leader of Ramghat Church. He is a son of a Nepali Christian who followed the INF missionaries from India to Pokhara.[22] In an interview with this researcher, he outlined two reasons for the absence of INF in the affairs of the Church. First, the first batch of INF expatriate missionaries included only women. These were trained as health professionals and not used to doing church activities. Second, the expatriate missionaries who followed them to Pokhara lacked training in Church ministries. They were invited not to lead churches but to develop health projects of the mission.

Lindell (1997:245-46) on the other hand, provided the following as the main reason for UMN's non-association with the early Nepali Church:

> As a united agency of different Church tradition, UMN had defined its statement of faith and church orders which was wide enough to allow for variety of faith and practices…the parent churches have not entered into Nepal but men and money have been sent to another mission – United Mission. So within the country all the workers belong to the United Mission, find their status through it and work for its aims and purposes…It meant that the missionaries in Nepal are not to extend the properties, management and churches of their sending bodies.

[22] Ramghat Church is said to be the first ever church established in Nepal. It was stated as a fellowship of expatriate and Nepali Christians working for INF in 1952.

As shown earlier in this research, the other WCMs entering Nepal during the 1990s came purely for the development work. They did not aim to promote the kerygma of Christian mission but social service. A representative of Tear Fund Nepal stated, 'we are here not to plant churches neither to provide theological trainings. These are works of the Nepali Church. We are here to help churches to serve their community in the strength of their faith.' Tear Fund's 2016 – 2022 strategic document stated;

> Tearfund aims at working with the Christian communities and organizations in enabling the Church in Nepal to become an agent of holistic transformation. It ensures that the Church communities are made aware of the issues or problems facing their communities and are provided with knowledge, skills and capacity to educate, motivate and encourage people including their congregations to contribute to the welfare of the poor people in their surroundings. Churches in the target locations envisioned and empowered… will be able to lead the people in their own development. They will be encouraged to reach out with love and support to the needy communities.

Another 23% of the respondents believed that the ten WCMs studied in this research substituted their social work for spiritual mandate and believed this was enough for people to see and experience God's kingdom. One of my respondents (Respondent 10) remarked:

> The philosophy of most of the missionaries in these WCMs was that material inadequacy was the major cause of poverty in Nepal and they must contribute towards the physical well-being of the poor so that they can realise the goodness of God. They believed good works expressed through the actions of love and mercy made them whole. However, the WCMs could not differentiate between the values of the two. Yes, the natural or physical needs are important but the most important one is the spiritual need and seeking only to satisfy the material needs is insufficient to lead people to transformation.

He continued and opined that the missionaries coming to Nepal in the later decades missed a balanced philosophy of mission. They concentrated only on social work, but did not put it together with the spiritual side. Sharing the Gospel with the recipient of good works helps to point towards God. Without the Gospel message, good works alone can never lead people to God. He questioned:

> Actually, what is the sustainability and the impact of the investment in schools, hospitals and other social sectors at the expense of evangelism? These development initiatives have just helped in maintaining a status quo in Nepal's feudal society – those with social and political power have benefitted from the WCMs' investments. The poor and marginalised are still languishing outside. People are still poor, restless and seeking a way of salvation. How has their input translated into the well-being of the poor people whom Jesus came to save and to serve? For me, the missionaries got their philosophy wrong as far as their mission in Nepal is concerned. They could have supplemented this deficiency through a close tie with the Nepali Church when their direct involvement in the spiritual side of the work was not possible. We need to equally promote the proclamation side of mission as we promote the social work.

Respondent 5, who pastors a Church in Bhaktapur, is appreciative of the WCMs for investing in Nepal's social change. He thanks the WCMs for going out to remote places like Karnali to build schools and hospitals. However, he feels the WCMs were not careful about the future of the Nepali Church and of their own by this substitution. He said:

> I am glad that the WCMs supported the Nepal government in its development endeavours. But, did they ever stop for a moment to reflect on the message they were giving to the public by their spending? Now the question posed to us by society is: Why aren't you, the Nepali Church, building hospitals or schools for us when the Western Christians were able to accomplish so much? They ask, why do you, the Nepali Christians, preach your religion to us when your missionary friends did not care about the religions of the people they served?

He continued:

> These are genuine questions the Nepali Church must face. The community does not care about which philosophy led the WCMs to labour on social development in Nepal. Nepali Church was not taught that these social actions of the WCMs were God's gifts so that the people could see and know a benevolent God who loved them. I feel, the WCMs were not clear and direct about their intention of conducting development activities and were deferential to the government. Now, we are to answer for the WCMs when we

> were hardly consulted on the priorities of the missionaries. We do love our neighbours and want to help them materially as much as we can. But we are a poor Church in terms of financial capabilities and we cannot build dams, hospitals or schools as the missionaries did and are doing. This difference of mission approach poses a question of the integrity of the Nepali Church. This is going to be a tough challenge for the Nepali Church for many years to come. The missionaries could have been a bit more careful in considering the situation of the Nepali Church and the future implications of their social projects on Nepali Christians.

Thirteen per cent of my respondents opined that the WCMs lacked passion for evangelism, whereas another 27% thought that the WCMs placed more emphasis on their agreement with the government so that they could remain in Nepal. They said that the WCMs were not prepared to challenge the agreements by being visible with the local Church and related activities even when such opportunities came knocking, especially after the democratic era of 1990s. These observations are further reinforced by Shrestha (2012:79 – 83) in his account of the WCMs in Nepal.

Shrestha (2012:80) provides four examples that support the observation of my respondents about the mission's non-involvement with the Nepali Church. Firstly, the conditions imposed on visas for the missionaries relate to the functions of the WCMs. 'The Nepal government never provided a visa for the post of a pastor or other position related to religion. All the missionaries that came to Nepal came as technical experts and were involved in their prescribed roles… any breach in the agreement would result in being blacklisted or possible visa cancellation' (Ibid 82).

Secondly, from the very beginning WCMs declined to provide financial support to the local churches. The earlier Bhaktapur incident set the tone for the financial relationship (Ibid 79). This stance of the WCMs has remained intact regardless of some individual missionaries personally contributing to the financial and other needs of the churches based on their personal relations. A missionary holding a key role in one of the WCMs in a personal communication informed this researcher, that 'Finances can cause dependency. We prefer investing in practical education and skill building because skills and abilities bring independence.'

Thirdly, the Western missionaries lacked cultural sensitivity towards Nepali society. The Nepalis strictly adhered to their cultural norms and practices and followed the

untouchability rules based on caste. When the so-called low caste people converted to Christianity in Bhaktapur, the WCMs encouraged them to join the Church along with the upper caste Newars. This incident caused many Newar converts to leave the Church and their Christian faith altogether (Ibid 82). 'In another instance', he continued, 'The missionaries encouraged the Nepali converts to change their names into Western sounding Christian names such as John or Peter. These names were unfamiliar to the listeners and ultimately discouraged people from associating with the Christian converts' (Ibid 82).

Fourthly, the WCMs had confusing organisational policies towards the Nepali Church. While at the organisational level the WCMs would not associate with any of the churches and their works, the individual missionaries would maintain personal relationships. The policy of one WCM read, 'At the organisational level, we do not relate to the Nepali Church. We do not plant churches nor do we support the development of the Nepali churches. We seek to strengthen the global Church by serving the needs of the people in the name of Jesus and His spirit. We set up our Christian witness through our social works' (Ibid.83). It is unclear how the lack of partnership with the local Church and its ministries would qualify the WCMs to 'contribute to the strengthening of the global Church in mission '

With the progression of time and increased demand for their development assistance, evangelism and Church related activities became less and less prioritised for the WCMs. It was up to the individual missionaries to decide their church involvement as the WCMs would not do so organisationally. Consequently, the WCMs lacked the initial fervour for church work as developmental priorities occupied their being in Nepal mission.

6.3.3 Nepali Christians' understanding about the WCMs' attitude toward the Nepali Church

The restrictions imposed on the WMCs about their involvement in the religious work, especially after the 1960s became the sole reason for their non-involvement with the Nepali Church. This conduct of the WCMs led to some conspicuous questions from the local Church as: how could the WCMs become an example of Jesus' mission by overlooking their need to engage with the local Church in witnessing to the saving grace of God? How could the public witness of the Church be strengthened without an active

involvement in the work of evangelism? How could the WCMs qualify their claim of contributing to the strengthening of the global Church without making an impact in the life of the local Church? These questions are not new and raised by the Nepali Christians alone, but have been poised to the WCMs by the missions themselves from as early as 1980s (See Lindell 1997:256, 261).

A deeper inquiry with existing literature and my respondents revealed that there are some additional factors which influenced the WCMs' attitude regarding partnership with the Nepali Church its mission.

The chart below (6.3.3) is a representative of the key observations of my respondents on the question why the WCMs did not work with the Nepali Church in mission.

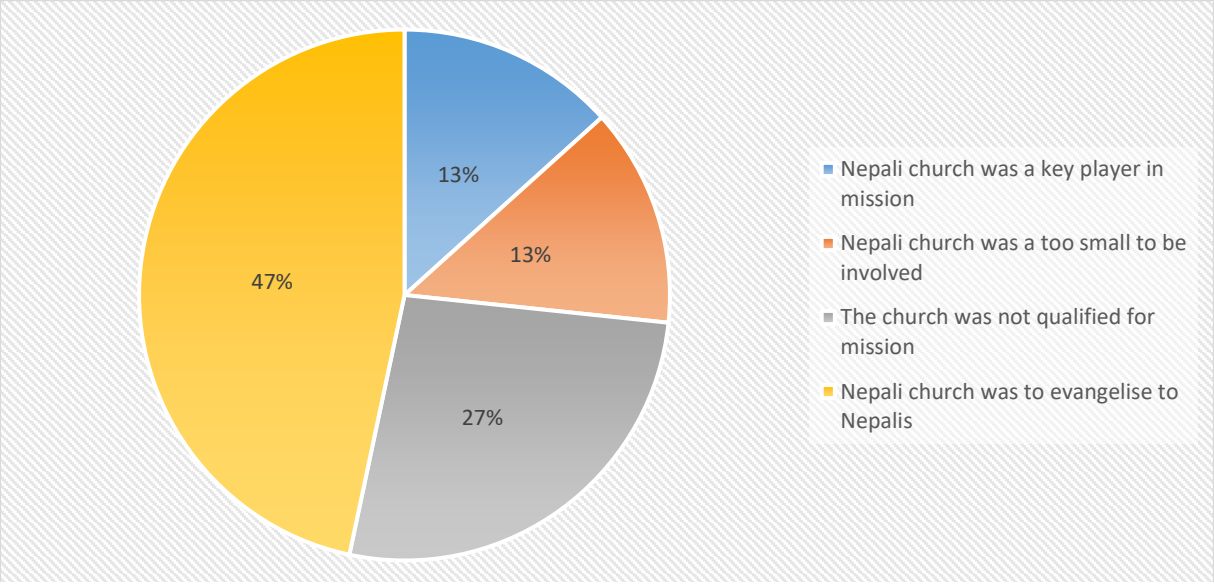


Chart 6.3.3 WCMs' attitude towards the Nepali Church

Thirteen per cent of the respondents agreed that some WCMs regarded the Nepali Church as a worthy partner in mission. They said, 'some of the WCMs did seek to walk alongside the Nepali Church in fulfilling their call to bring the kingdom of God to Nepal. This was particularly true to the first group of the WCMs. Those came later were more or less disengaged in the work of the local Church. This segment, however, was too small to affect the thinking of most of the WCMs.' Another 40% observed that the WCMs considered the Nepali Church too small to become a partner in their work. 'They would not find the strengths or capabilities in the Nepali Church that make them a worthy partner' they explained. Respondent 3 commented

that ‘this attitude came into play early on when the Nepali Church sought a place in the mission with the WCMs. The WCMs’ leadership thought the Church was too small to contribute meaningfully in mission endeavours.’

A majority of the respondents at 47% said that the WCMs had developed a strong belief that the Nepali Church should undertake the spiritual side of mission because they had undertaken the work of development. This arrangement looked the best option given the political environment of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the majority of my respondents believed that a ‘lack of mutual sharing between the two in assigning the tasks of mission rather sowed the seeds of a duality in Nepal mission.’

Respondent 10 and 11 worked as national directors for two different para-church organisations in Nepal. During their tenure in late 1990s, they sought to collaborate with the WCMs in furtherance of the holistic mission and approached the WCMs for partnership. They had believed the WCMs had all that was necessary for mission partnership - people, skills and finances and thought that the WCMs must have set aside a portion of their income for the cause of evangelism and Church planting as their objectives attested to. However, they saw no such signs. Their desire for partnership was unmet as the WCMs remained focused on their development work, paid no serious attention to the invitation and declined the call to mission partnership. Respondent 10 remarked,

> I started to see no difference between a mission organisation and a secular development organisation when I saw no passion or programme in them for Church ministries. Their projects were focused on social development and none of these accommodated the needs of the local Church. They were more concerned about not displeasing the government rather than helping the Church in its mission. How can someone claim credit for what he has *not* done? This question applies to the WCMs as far as their Christian mission in Nepal is concerned.

He believes that the WCMs lacked the boldness required in mission. ‘They were easily swayed away by the desire to remain in Nepal in the name of mission.’ In his opinion, ‘a true mark of being in the mission is the willingness to risk everything for the sake of the Gospel. In this way, we can show people receiving our services a way to know Jesus.’ He continued:

> Without the verbal proclamation of the Gospel, good works alone do not lead people to experience salvation. The WCMs could have assisted the local Church to accomplish this task and offer from their knowledge and resources when they were unable to accomplish this themselves.

Respondent 11 is unable to understand why the WCMs remained uninvolved with the Nepali Church in mission even when the environment had provided the opportunity. Though he appreciates the stance of the WCMs on evangelism being part of the local Church business, he wonders how an infant Church (in terms of age and abilities) could accomplish the task without the necessary help from its capable partners, the WCMs. He stated,

> In theory, the WCMs' refusal to engage in the spiritual part of the mission (evangelism) is praiseworthy. For mission to be successful, it must be led by the local churches not by outsiders. We have seen how the missions led by outsiders failed in India and China. But, shifting responsibility does not mean that you abandon the task to someone who is not ready to accept the call. You do not expect an immature baby to swallow solid food, do you? The WCMs should have taken a route through which to empower the local Church in mission instead of asking it to accomplish the task alone.

He continued,

> In such a situation, the best thing the WCMs could have done was to come beside the suffering church, join hands with them in mission and supply the necessary educational, managerial or financial support. Leaving a global task to an immature local Church is beyond accomplishable.

He does not understand why the WCMs have continued to maintain this attitude to the Nepali Church even after the change in Nepal's socio-political environment. He said,

> The democratic governments, especially after 1990 have guaranteed religious freedom and ensured human rights for every citizen. The country has become a secular state and people are free to exercise their religion. Preaching the Christian Gospel is no longer a national offence. Neither is it a forbidden taboo. However, the WCMs were still confined under the same old conditions set years before. I welcome the WCMs to reconsider their priorities in mission and seek closer collaboration with the Nepali Church in public witness.

Respondent 15, who serves a Church in west Nepal once served on the board of one WCM. During his time on the board, he realised the mission implemented its development projects through local NGOs as formal partners. He was inclined to know why the WCMs did not have local churches as their project partners. One spontaneous response he obtained was that 'the government does not allow the WCMs to partner with churches but to partner with those organisations that have a legal position with the government. Since churches are not recognised as legal organisations, the government does not permit the WCMs to exchange finance and other resources with them.' (See also, Shrestha 2012:100). The response continued, 'we are helping in social development and the churches are preaching. In this way, together we are fulfilling the mission mandate.'

Respondent 2 has a similar experience in relation to the WCMs' position towards the purpose of the Church. She feels the response was proof of a status-quo the WCMs wanted to continue. 'The churches are making their voice heard in public and are demanding legal recognition. Churches are individually and collectively developing a social image. They are trying to seize public spheres as equal actors in social change. They should be encouraged by the WCMs in their drive to do public works. Their knowledge, resources and other expertise should be utilised in helping churches learn and develop into competent social institutions,' she remarked.

Respondent 4 opened another dimension. She feels the WCMs could have been more open to encourage young and qualified Christian youths into their workforce and prepare them for leadership roles for the future. She believes the WCMs could offer youngsters some trainings and job-on-the-training and help them learn leadership roles from the experience and expertise of the missionaries. 'However, the WCMs do not create such opportunities for young Nepali Christians, she observed. She suggests that the WCMs prioritise hiring qualified Christian youngsters into their workforce.

Her observations are corroborated by Tamang (2021:86) who found that the WCMs recruit their Nepali staff from a local labour market which comprises only minimal Christian individuals. The statistics of the WCMs on their workforce further confirms this observation as of March 2023, 14% of FELM's entire workforce is made up of

local Christian individuals, while INF has 35%, WVIN 25% and UMN 35% Christians respectively. [23]

These observations indicate at least three separate but interrelated reasons which influenced the attitude of the WCMs towards the Nepali Church. First, the WCMs have not negotiated with the government over their priority in Nepal. Rather, they have been accepting all of the terms and conditions without a question (See Lindell 1997:260-61). This approach needs to be challenged and changed by the WCMs to improve the future of partnership in Nepal mission.

Second, because most of the senior management positions in the WCMs are filled by Western employees, only a few Nepali people reach to top management. Of those few Nepalis, only a fraction would be Nepali Christians who would have the power to influence decisions affecting Nepal mission. This situation needs to be adjusted so that more qualified and mission-minded Nepali Christians are at the executive level with grass-roots knowledge of the country and can assist the WCMs in mission partnership.

Third, the WCMs need to reconsider on how to strengthen the local Church in mission by supplying mature and effective leadership rather than taking it away. This can be achieved through careful planning of leadership development programmes that benefit both parties.

It was interesting to listen to what Respondent 2 said,

> We are greatly thankful to the first missionaries that brought the Gospel to Nepal. If not for them, Nepali people would have waited many more years to hear the Gospel of salvation. In this regard the Nepali Church will be forever thankful to the WCMs. They showed courage to bring Nepalis converted in India in their company to work in the first churches. However, they did not continue the spirit with which they first engaged in Nepal mission. Slowly they separated the mission components between evangelism and social action and ultimately left the kerygma to the local Church. Through this classification the WCMs inadvertently controlled the Nepali Church in mission. It was like birthing a child and abandoning it. The consequence of such separation

[23] These data were made available to the researcher by the senior management of the respective organisations.

> created a space for the mainline churches to start their denominations in the growing Nepali churches.

The other 80% of the respondents had a slightly different view. They thank the WCMs for this separation early on. According to Respondent 5 and 6 the early separation between the WCMs and the local Church became a good thing in the end, though it was painful in the beginning. They said,

> The separation of paths was painful in the beginning as the Nepali Church had no guidance or model to turn to when it was needed the most. It can be said that the separation actually put the Nepali Church into a situation of trial and error as it struggled to navigate its mission priorities. The WCMs and their missionaries can never claim the credit for building the Nepali Church. This separation of missional objectives and priorities continues until today as no WCMs invite the Church into their strategic discussions. Nor do the churches invite the WCMs in setting their mission priorities. What exists between them is a parallel way of working with minimal sharing and occasional fellowship. The WCMs continue to do what they came to do – social development - and the Nepali Church does what it feels it must do as a local Church.

Respondents 7, 8, 10 and 11 were of the opinion that it was God who allowed the separation to happen in the first place. Respondent 10 remarked,

> Had it not been God himself causing this, the WCMs would have created a different form of Church in Nepal. We would not have had an indigenous look in our churches. Who knows how hard we would have fought with them to separate ourselves like many Asian churches are doing today. No doubt, the first generation of our leaders struggled to find the right way of doing mission because there was no help coming from the WCMs. But the labour of our seniors has paid off and now we can proudly claim to have built an indigenous Church. Therefore, I rather thank the WCMs for causing a deep pain by setting us aside from their mission priorities. Now the wounds are healed and the Church is stronger in its indigenous mission.

The WCMs continued in their social development pursuits and remained uninvolved in the business of the local Church even though the country's religious and political outlook had gone through significant changes. Lindell (1997:257) commented that from the later part of the Panchayat era the government was not trying to confine the missions only to their agreed projects. On the contrary, they were allowed to involve in variety of works

ranging from bird-watching to studying the butterflies, to stamp collection, to photography, to painting and drawing and to hiking in the mountains. In these and many other activities, the missionaries were given absolute freedom. As a result, some have written extensively about Nepal and its people and others took part in national celebrations.' Despite all these, the parallel working of the WCMs and the Nepali Church in mission continued, with little sharing between the two in strengthening the public witness of the Church.

.....

A moment of ice-break

The socio-political scenario of Nepal had significant changes over the years. The *Panchayat* regime was overthrown and replaced by a democracy. The society was becoming more open and tolerant towards the Nepali Church, and the WCMs gained more acceptance in community. However, contrary to the expectation of the local Church, the WCMs continued to do their normal social development work. Except for individual missionaries, the WCMs remained unconnected with the local Church as far as the expectation of a more coordinated mission partnership was concerned. The expectations were not addressed, and as a result, the Nepali Church was disappointed with the WCMs for not changing their way. In 2004, the Church leaders collectively developed a position paper in which they asked the WCMs reasons for not involving in the work of the Church in mission.

In summary, the position paper raised the following as the major concerns of the Nepali Church towards the WCMs:

- The Nepali church is the work of the sovereign God. In his time he brought the gospel to Nepal through the WCMs. They first sowed the seeds of the Christian faith. We acknowledge God's working thought their life despite the difficulties they were in. The WCMs have done well to remain behind the scene in the early period and letting the Nepalis lead the Church (See also, Rongong 2012:58).

- The WCMs' role as development workers have long been recognized. Now is the time to change that identity and create a new and true Christian identity[24],

[24] One of the key leaders of the Nepal Baptist Council who served as the vice-chairperson of NCS from 2010 to 2017, in an interview with this author emphasized that unless the WCMs recognize and reclaim their

a true missionary identity and collaborate with the Church in mission. It is now time for the WCMs to show solidarity in mission because the environment has changed and there is enough space for the WCMs to partner with the local Church to strengthen its witness.

- The Nepali Church has accepted the WCMs as co-workers in mission despite the neglect it has experienced over time. We ask of the missions to create rooms within their structures for the Nepali Church and its mission towards forming a meaningful mission cooperation.

One of the early missionaries with UMN, who had worked in Nepal for 30 years until his retirement in 2014, in personal communication with this researcher said,

> The position paper caused the WCMs an unease about how they should behave in Nepal mission. We felt pressed between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the government was watchful that we did not promote Christianity but do social development projects. On the other, the Church was unhappy to see us disengaged in mission. Then we were challenged to take a different look at Nepal's mission reality.

The position paper worked as an ice breaker of the status quo between the WCMs and the Nepali Church. The WCMs then used some channels to communicate with the Nepali church so that a negotiation is found. Upon considering the mission environment locally and globally, the WCMs unanimously decided to open themselves to learn about the Nepali Church and its mission for possible partnership. The incident prompted the WCMs to make some adjustment in their thinking towards the local Church. In the late 2000s some structural changes were made within the WCMs as a way to respond to a meaningful collaboration in Nepal mission. Here, a quick mention of them is useful.

- ***A culture of learning together.*** The WCMs recognized the Church was ready to come along and involve in learning platforms. They began to organize conferences where the leaders from the churches could attend. The topics

Christian roots and identity, they are going to miss the opportunity to collaborate in building the Church in Nepal.

discussed appealed the Church as these encouraged them to learn about social change process. 'UMN took the first step in organizing a vision conference 2004. It was the first meeting of this kind where the churches became the sole participants and found an opening to learning integral mission' (Tamang 2021:68). The example was followed by other WCMs. They began working with UMN to identify such opportunities through which a twofold purposes is achieved: churches could learn new mission opportunities and the WCMs get to learn about the Nepali Church.

- ***Promotion of Christian faith-based NGOs.*** The years after the 1990 democratic movement in Nepal is known as the decade of NGOs. Thousands of NGOs were created to lead 'community transformation' activities. Learned Christian individuals and their churches also started new NGOs. The WCMs like UMN, INF, World Vision, FLEM, SIL, FIDA and others created new criteria within their management to involve Christian faith-based NGOs as project partners. In the year 2009 – 10, UMN had 12 Christian faith-based NGOs in its partnership roster of 88 (UMN 2011:9). World Vision, Tearfund and FELM followed the suit and opened the way for the Christian faith-based NGOs to become project partners.

- ***Internship and apprenticeships initiatives.*** The number of young Christians wanting to excel in the professional fields was growing but the churches lacked the knowledge and skill to help them. The WCMs realising their capacities, began taking Christian youth into their organizations as interns. In 2007, UMN created an internship programme. Soon, INF and World Vision adopted the programme and together they trained more than three hundred young Christian professionals.

These initiatives of the WCMs, though some of them has a short existence[25] were observed to play a positive role in at least three areas of the perceived mission

[25] The practice of the WCMs' having Nepali Christian faith-based NGOs as project partners has stopped. Instead, a collaborative learning platform by the name of Integral Mission Forum (IMF) has been created. Its leadership confided to the author that IMF is an informal network of national and international Christian faith-based development organizations and it serves as a learning and sharing platform in Christian development practices within Nepal and globally. These platforms are inviting the local Church leadership as participant observers.

partnership. Frist, the learning platforms were enthusiastically utilized by the churches to learn about the nature and praxis of Christian development. The WCMs, in turn, were able to initiate and build relationship with the Nepali Church leadership. A reciprocal relationship thus started and an environment of mutual learning began. Second, the training and learning exposure to the young Christians was appreciated. The trained young people went unto become good managers and leaders within the churches and other sectors and a portion of this workforce ended in serving within the WCMs. Third, the theological deliberations became a foundational work towards the development of holistic curriculum for the Nepali theological institutions. My respondent 9, who leads a Bible college in Kathmandu said, 'the development of holistic mission curricula in the Nepali Bible colleges was possible with the ongoing collaboration between the Nepal and expatriate theologians representing a few WCMs in Kathmandu.'

All of my respondents acknowledged the benefits of these initiatives. They were happy that the WCMs were becoming aware of the missional needs of the Church. For them, these openings were a sign of the willingness on the part of the WCMs about the possibility of future partnership in Nepal mission. They felt these new openings were able to create a closer link between the WCMs and the local church.

These collaborative avenues existed only briefly. The majority of the WCMs studied in this research have closed these openings citing different reasons, including financial constraints. The collaborative learning platforms between the WCMs and the local Church are becoming thin as WCMs are drawn more into the development work than collaborative learning in mission.

The short lived collaborative experience have been observed to ease the tension between the two mission actors at least for the time being. It is not within the objective of this research to gauge how this openness of the WCMs develop further into mission partnership between the two. How can such collaborative actions of the WCMs be utilized for the furtherance of the Christian public witness in Nepal? These are important questions and require further research.

6.3.4 Christian public witness and NCS

NCS, as the largest national Christian network, has been selected as a case in this research. It is selected for three purposes: Firstly, to understand the experience of NCS leadership concerning the organisation's role in empowering the Church in public witness. Secondly, to identify key gaps where the next generation of NCS leaders must focus to create a conducive environment for a wholesome public witness. Thirdly, to understand how it perceived the roles of the WCMs in Nepal mission in the future.

We saw in the fourth chapter that 80% of the respondents selected for this research represent NCS as its current or past leaders. They are responsible for carrying out the organisational vision of 'transforming Nepali society through the transformation of the Nepali Church.' The NCS mission is to 'create a common platform of churches and work with all in promoting the transformational ministry of the local Church.'

It was revealed that the NCS leaders are less than content with the efforts NCS employed to create a better public witness of the Nepali Church. They collectively conceded that NCS was unable to provide a blueprint for the churches to use to establish a viable public witness in the community. They are aware of the gaps created in mission by the WCMs in their drive for social transformation. In responding to the question, why NCS has been unable to work in this direction, respondent 3, who is one of the first leaders to start the NCS in 1996, said,

> I confess, from the beginning NCS did not think in that way. We were limited by our experience and understanding of helping the Church in doing better in mission. We were occupied with managing inter-church or inter-denominational conflicts in our drive to create a united Nepali Church. Therefore, all our energy in the initial days was spent helping the Church to become an accepted entity within the Christian community and hardly had time to look outside. Also, we were content that the WCMs were doing what a Church was expected to do in serving the needy. We counted them as our partners and didn't bother about the consequences.

Respondent 5, who has been in the NCS central committee since 2017, stated that,

> NCS was no different from the rest of the Nepali churches in understanding the mission priorities. We were a collection of Church leaders who carried similar kinds of mission experiences. We had no exposure nor learning on

> holistic mission until recently and we were happy being a network of like-minded people. We have been learning the requirements of Christian public witness recently and are examining the impact of the separation between the WCMs and the local Church in mission. We are becoming aware of the demands that society puts on us and are learning to change ourselves to be Good Samaritans in our community.

Respondent 6, who is one of the key members of the present NCS executive team stated:

> We became an inward-looking organisation and did not seek to expand our horizons into society and politics. We were happy with conducting spiritual training as the demand arose from member churches. In this way, we almost forgot to equip member churches in social engagement as witnesses. We drew away from national politics; we kept ourselves closed in prayers and never thought of going out as one of the capable responders in times of emergencies. We had a somewhat imperfect image of what the Christian mission was and kept ourselves busy with reading the Scriptures and praying for the welfare of our community. It was only in the last two decades that we have been drawn into the practical aspect of Christian ministry. We are beginning to enrol the social element of the Gospel into our ministries. And, as NCS, we are more aware of our future roles in promoting public witness of the Church.

Respondent 10, who has had the opportunity to associate with all three major Christian networks (See section 4.3.4.3 for more on these networks), responded:

> Our problem was in reading the Scriptures with only spiritual eyes. We would interpret the biblical stories in such a way that our worldview of society became distorted. We would only do the things that had spiritual significance and relegate what we considered material. We had that luxury initially because the WCMs had taken the social aspect of mission mandate. We were encouraged to behave in that way. That, for me, is the problem which besets us today. We need to mend our way of interpreting the scriptural mandate to fulfil the great command through obedience to the Great Commission.

These remarks are duly attested by the scales assigned in chart 6.3.4 b, which presents the respondents' understanding of NCS and its role in public witness. The chart suggests that NCS has a huge role in equipping member churches and negotiating with the WCMs in promoting the public witness in society.

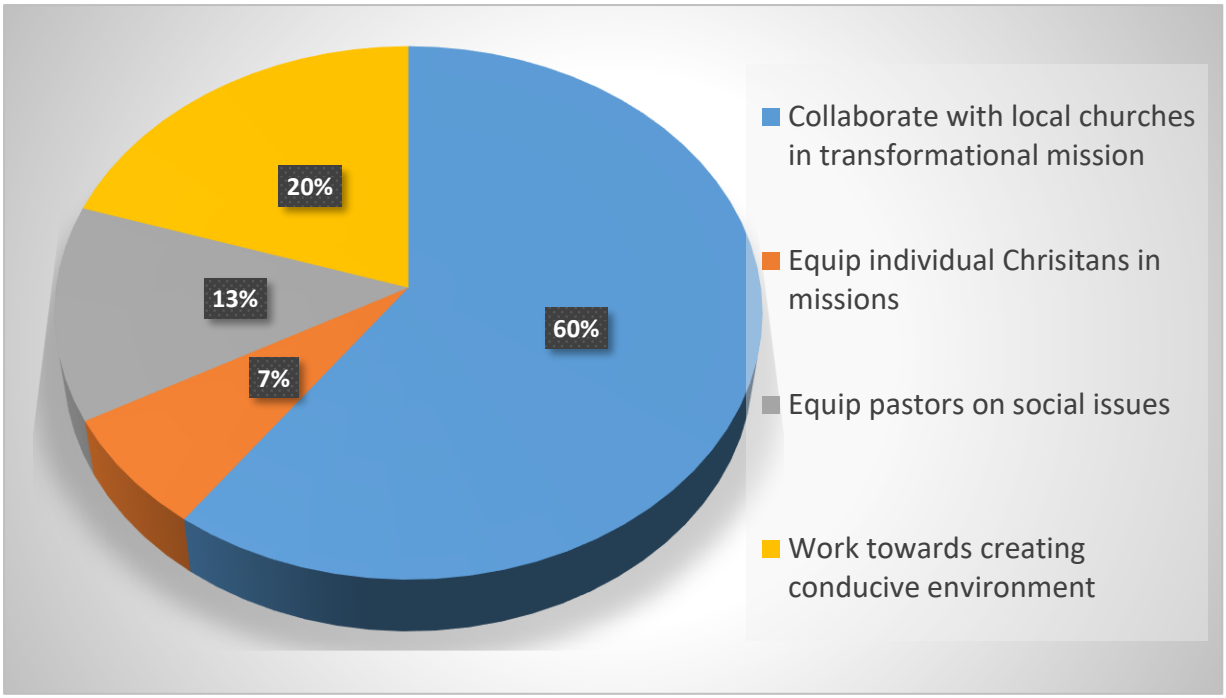


Chart 6.3.4 (a) What should NCS do to promote the public witness of the Church

As can be seen in chart 6.3.4.a, 40% of the respondents supported the idea that NCS work selectively with member churches to envision them for public witness, whereas the majority at 60%, opined that it must collaborate with all the local churches in issues of their common concerns in society and enable them to project a vibrant public witness. Several possibilities are suggested to NCS for its future focus on public witness. These are discussed in the paragraphs hereafter.

As for the majority of research participants (53%) the Gospel can shape the organisational institutions and principles of human society and therefore the Church should engage in social change as public witness. Respondent 9 said,

> The Bible made no mistake in outlining how Jesus preached the Gospel of the kingdom and showed it by signs and wonders. The Church is commissioned to follow Jesus in its mission mandate to imitate Jesus and

> his way of presenting the Gospel message. In mission, the Church should make no distinction between preaching the spiritual message and demonstrating practical action. The mission becomes whole when the churches carry evangelism and social action without distinction. The problem in the Nepali Church, however, was that the seeds of dualism were planted from early on; The WCMs would not involve in the kerygma whereas the Nepali Church did not know how to serve the material needs of the people. NCS, as the biggest network of churches has to work towards bridging this gap by helping the WCMs and the local Church understand each-others needs in public mission.

Respondent 6 further observed,

> The WCMs' stance to only undertake social development with no Church involvement was not helpful for the struggling church in its public witness. The two could not formally partner and provide leadership when the Church was still small and under persecution. When we needed help the most, we had to look to other sources of help. Now the situation has changed. There are no tough restrictions for expressing one's faith. NCS has the opportunity to initiate a dialogue where both the WCMs and the Nepali Church can enter to discuss their roles in strengthening public witness.

Another 33% of the respondents stated that the Gospel contains important social elements for the organisation and the development of human societies and the Church should promote these elements in its mission endeavours. Respondent 15 declared that,

> The problem with us, NCS and the Nepali Church, has been the inability to penetrate our society with our witness. From the beginning, we learnt to pray and preach. We were not shown how a materially poor Church like ours could become involved in community service. We did not have surplus resources to give away as the WCMs had. They would decide how best to use their resources without consulting the Nepali Church, nor did they prioritise any material help through the local churches. Thus, we learnt only to speak the word and not preach the work.

But respondent 4 had a different take on this. Instead of being remorseful about the past, she was hopeful of the future. In her opinion,

We should not regret the past but be thankful that the Lord allowed such hardships to our forefathers of faith. They learnt how to be relevant in society in their walk of faith and witness. They have shown us some examples of being the right witness in Nepal and we should look to their legacy in mission rather than that of others.

A follow-up question was put to discover the respondents thought on the status of the public witness of the Nepali Church. They were requested to choose on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 represented a very weak status of the public witness and 10 indicated very strong. The chart 6.3.4.b, below presents the scales the respondents gave.

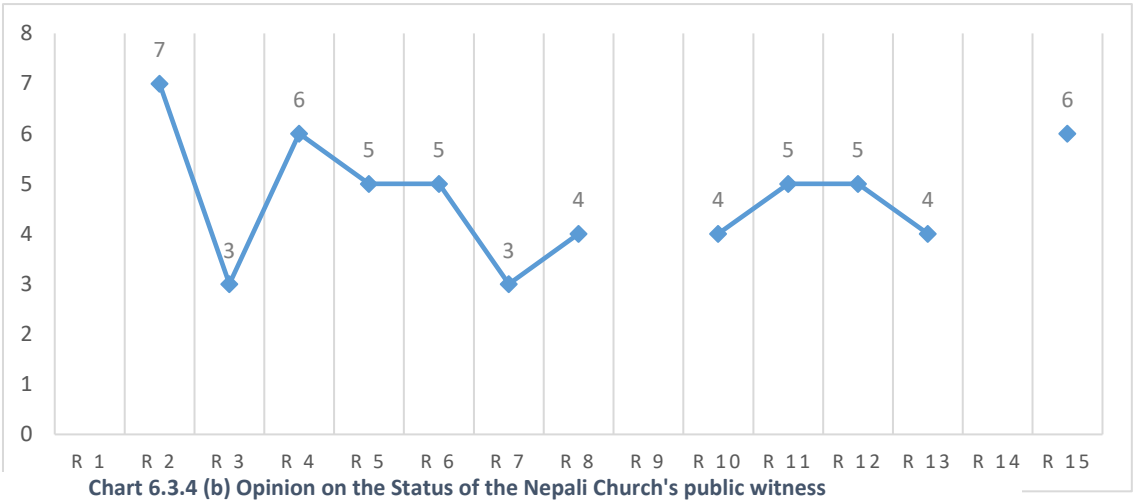


Chart 6.3.4 (b) Opinion on the Status of the Nepali Church's public witness

As is evident in the graph above, the majority of my respondents saw the status of the public witness of the Nepali Church below the satisfaction level. They all wanted to tick 10 on the given scale, but were truthful in measuring the scale based on their personal experience and observation The respondents gave at least one reason for ticking a particular mark on the given scale as below. Respondents 1, 9 and 14 declined to give a scale or an explanation for their omission.

- Respondent 2 who gave 7 out of 10 on the scale expressed, 'I don't know exactly how the Nepali Church fares in its public witness in society. As for my church which lies in an inner city, its relationship with society is good. We have been successful in witnessing to the public. We have been gaining a level of acceptance in society. Local politicians invite us to their programmes.

Community groups such as Mothers Groups invite and involve us in community works. We have developed a good relationship with our community and feel they like us being in their midst. I wish NCS work towards enabling all the churches to enjoy their community like we do.'

- Respondent 3, who gave 3 out of 10 explained, 'from the beginning we learnt a partial Gospel; the WCMs took over the practical side while we mastered in the proclamation side. We learnt to prioritise our mission as evangelism and church planting. At the same time, we lost the social works aspect of Christian mission. This imbalance in mission has not been overcome. We need to learn the whole Gospel, preach it by word and deed and recover the true witness of Christ and his Gospel in our community. NCS as the largest Church network must devise ways to restore this holistic mission in its member churches.'

- Respondent 4, who gave 6 out of 10 said, 'The first generation of Christians were shunned away from the community for their Christian faith. They were treated as outsiders and were never considered important in the community. However, our generation is much more integrated into the community. This coming together has taught us interdependence. Some segments of society are beginning to appreciate Christians and the local churches for contributing to positive change in society. My prayer is that God will help those of us in NCS to achieve inclusion within Nepali society.'

- Respondent 5, who gave 5 out of 10 expressed, 'The churches in rural places are more accepted than those in the cities. The village Christians are friends with their neighbours. The government units acknowledge the presence of the Church in the community and occasionally approach it for collaboration. Christians have improved not only their spiritual life but also their social work and economic life. Many of the churches are learning to promote the social elements of the Gospel and relationships with various community stakeholders are improving. I recommend NCS to learn the small acts of mercy from these village churches and embed those in its mission priorities.'

- Respondent 6, who ticked 5 on the scale thinks the churches at the local level are putting great effort into relating with their community and their efforts are paying off as an increased level of sharing and collaboration is observed. He said, 'However, we still have a long way to go in achieving social and political recognition at the national level. We need to acknowledge that our current leadership hasn't been able to represent the churches and their position to the national political leadership. Christians and churches will remain outside the social goodwill until we are able to influence the politics of our society. NCS, as a national body of the Churches must also seek to build a theology of political engagement.'

- Respondent 7, who gave 3, supported the views of Respondents 5 and 6. She agreed that the churches in the villages are far better in their presence in society than in cities. She said, 'Those of us in the cities have failed to live the life of Christ. In particular, our leadership has not lived out the unity of Christ and his Church. We have developed heathen-like behaviours and we followed power and position, not Christ. Instead of the Church teaching the world, we are being questioned by the world. This needs to improve if we are to authentically promote public witness. NCS will need to make visible readjustments in its leadership management and setting the priorities right if we are to become a true witness of Gospel.'

- Respondent 8 who gave 4 on the scale of 10 explained, 'The Nepali churches from the beginning learnt only evangelistic activities. We prioritised preaching, praying and church activities and did not learn how to serve the needs of our community. This was not intentional but the spontaneous actions of our leaders. Even today, society views us as those who only preach and preach but don't practice love. However, this picture of the Church is gradually changing and we are learning holistic mission. We are moving towards a society where we can witness in love and action. We are not there yet, but we have begun to walk towards establishing a positive witness for the Church in society. I think NCS has to capitalise this positive aspect and build its transformational mission on these solid foundations.'

- Respondent 10, who gave 4 out of 10 said, ‘Society takes the Church as a negative entity due to our failure to demonstrate the virtues which we preach at the top of our lungs. We have been negligent in promoting the love of God through our whole being in the community, though we exemplify it in our Christian homes. NCS has to take heed to these negative aspects and promote the practical aspects to help churches win the favour of neighbours and make public witness strong.’

- Respondent 11, who thinks the status of public witness of the Nepali Church is underperforming, gave 5 on the scale of 10. He feels there is a big gap between the community needs and the resources in the churches, neither have the churches been able to identify the right kind of opportunities to bridge those gaps. ‘Witnessing to Christ in evangelism is still good but we have not been able to connect well with the needs of the people around us. For a long time, we believed that was the role of the WCMs and not ours. May be the time has come for NCS to learn from the past and help churches grasp their mission holistically,’ he explained.

- Respondent 12 is a non-Christian individual. He gave 5 out of 10 on the scale. He observed that there are some notable contributions by the Church to Nepali society. He said, ‘I have seen how small churches in the villages are impacting their societies by small acts of mercy. They have been instrumental in bringing access to health and financial literacy and are good organisers of the people around these issues. I have seen how community projects with the leadership of Christian individuals performed better compared to others. This may be because of the motivation they get from the Bible. I noticed the churches in the villages are better connected with their community than those in the cities. This connection provides them with a good opportunity to contribute to social change. Therefore, churches should not separate themselves from the community as most of them do today. They need to be open in relationships, learn from their fellow beings and strive for the betterment of all in society regardless of their religion. NCS can learn from these small churches in being a change agent in Nepal.’

- Respondent 13, who gave 4 on the scale said, ‘Now the churches have come of age and it should shame them not to help their non-believer neighbours. Given the amount of resources in the churches, they should be a step ahead of other stakeholders and lead community transformation movements. For me, the local churches are not like the temples or mosques in terms of their relationships and resources. The churches have what it takes to change society. But they overemphasise evangelism than social work. They must overcome this harmful mentality and improve their visibility in society through good deeds. It is said that there is no offence in doing good and nobody sues you if you intend good for others. NCS is in a great position to promote a balanced approach to social transformation with the elements of gospel.’

- Respondent 15, who gave 6 on the scale sees the status of the public witness of the Church improving. He observed that, ‘We are learning to balance our mission in society. We have slowly learnt that we must not offend our neighbours by our actions (like burning idols or naming other’s gods in public). Instead, we have learnt the value of coexistence and collaboration. We are part of our society and we must seek ways to work together with them. We are teaching our people how to become a better community through the inspiration of our faith. We as NCS leaders should not forget the fact that by respecting others we are given respect.’

These observations reveal that NCS has come to a stage from where it is expected to exert a good influence in the lives of member churches in building positive public witness. As suggested, it can learn from the member churches, especially those small villages churches, on how to better relate and work with the wider community in mission. The local churches as attested by many of the respondents, enjoy a positive environment in mission. They are better connected with their society and play an influencing role for social change. NCS leadership may do well in learning from these members.

Secondly, as a national network of churches, it has the space and authority to work with the WCMs on behalf of the member churches. Instead of sitting back and lamenting for the past lack of collaboration, the NCS leadership has to start negotiating with the WCMs on how to share in Nepal mission. Such initiatives will

result in better sharing and learning of each-others and may lead to healthy mission collaboration towards the public witness. The WCMs leadership will find it reasonable to enter into a healthy mission discussion with NCS, a united body of Nepali churches.

In the next section we document the suggestions of the research participants to the WCMs on how they can be part of the public witness of the Church in mission

6.3.5 Suggestions to the WCMs for future mission partnership

The respondents were requested to suggest ways for the WCMs to help the local Church strengthen its public witness. The following chart (6.3.5) presents the suggestions from the respondents regarding the expectations of the Nepali Church from the WCMs in enhancing Christian witness in Nepal. They agreed that, in the future, a stronger partnership between the two is required for the growth and development of transformational mission. They opined that the public witness of the Nepali Church would remain marginal unless the two collaborate as equal partners in Nepal mission.

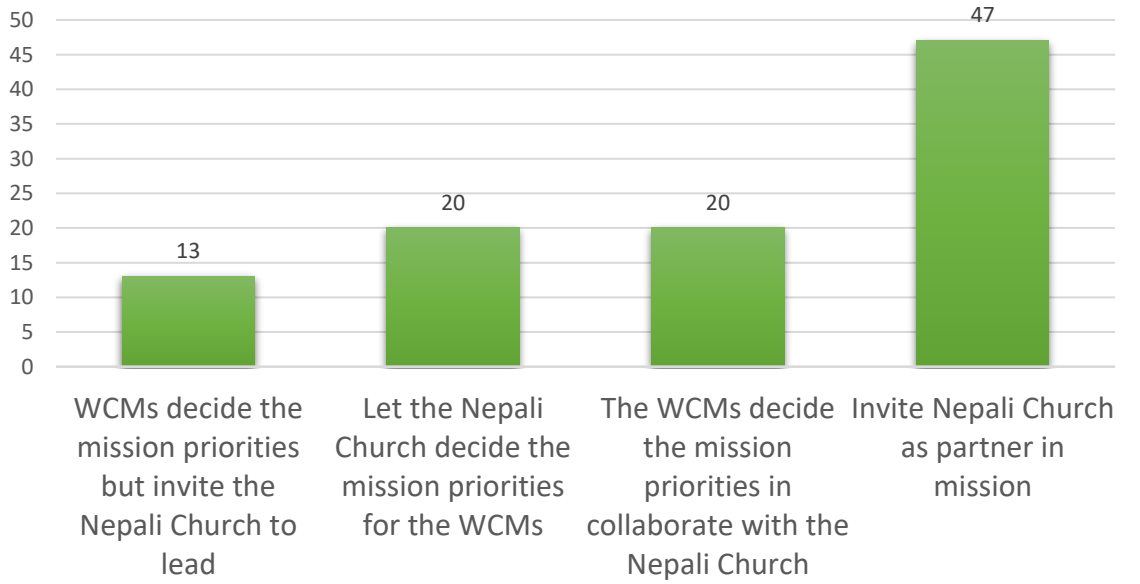


Chart 6.3.5 Suggestions to the WCMs for future mission partnership

As chart (6.3.5) above indicates, 13% of my respondents said that there is no other way for the WCMs than to invite the local Church to lead the Nepal mission. This is

rather a radical call for alteration in the mission practice of the WCMs. In the similar note, another 20% opined that it's time for the WCMs to allow the local Church to decide their mission priorities in Nepal. Respondent 6 said,

> Until now, the WCMs conduct their Nepal mission independent of the local churches. We were waiting for them to consider us, the local church, as legitimate partners in mission. We did not demand, neither did we complain, but in prayer we waited patiently for an invitation. They were hesitant in reaching out to us. The Nepali Church is now no longer in its infancy. By the grace of God, we would need to lead the Nepal mission and not the outsiders. The WCMs should invite the Church to help them identify the mission priorities and follow the lead of the local Church.

In a similar tone, Respondent 4 observed,

> We are the second generation of Nepali Christians and we know our mission context well. We have learnt from our elders how we must work to impact our society with the Gospel. Therefore, without much exaggeration, we are the people God wants to use to win Nepal for Christ. We must accept this as a responsibility rather than a right and look to God for his empowerment. We invite the WCMs to enter into a deliberation with us to redesign Nepal mission priorities.

At 67%, the majority of respondents call for a meaningful partnership between the two for the furtherance of the public witness of the Church. Respondent 8 stated,

> Thus far, the WCMs have been leading the social mission. As far as my opinion, they have not fully justified how their social engagement fulfils the mission pursuits in Nepal. Further, it is a partial mission until it accommodates the preaching of the saving grace. We acknowledge that the WCMs have begun to invite the Nepali Church to learn from them. However, a more reciprocal relationship has to be developed in which the WCMs also learn from the Nepali Church. The WCMs should realise that the Nepali Church can be an equal partner in mission and seek to build a special relationship of trust and collaboration.

Respondent 12 said that the Nepali Christians need to abandon a recipient's mentality and challenge the churches to take chances, not in the spirit of pride but in an attitude of gratitude, to lead by example both in the Church and in social service.

Respondent 13, in a similar spirit stated, ‘I believe that the Nepali churches have grown in their knowledge of what the WCMs do. It is time to shake off the mind-set that causes the churches to hide in the shadow. I know there are churches that have ample experience and resources to start transformative community services. In fact, some are already leading by example.’

Respondent 14 advises Nepali Christians not to romanticise the past social achievements of the WCMs. He said, ‘those are great achievements. However, they are history. The Nepali Church needs to create a history of its own in mission. Therefore, churches must stop idealising the past but look for the opportunity to help the WCMs in Nepal mission as an able partner.’

.....

These responses indicate for a need of further work between the WCMs and the Nepali Church in negotiating formidable mission partnership focused towards enhancing the public witness of the Church. On the one hand, the WCMs’ leadership must consider ways to accommodate the local Church in their social mission, on the other, the Nepal Church is equally responsible to welcome and accommodate the WCMs in Nepal mission. The considerations expected by the Nepali Church leadership of the WCMs fall mainly into four domain as:

- The WCMs devise ways to take in qualified Nepali Christians into their workforce and mould them into missional leaders in the future. With such learning exposures, the new Christian leaders would take the mission priorities forward and enable the WCMs to be contextual in their pursuit of Nepal mission. Such an opening would enable a reciprocal learning between the Nepali and expatriate workers and lead towards a shared vision for Nepal mission. (Responded 4, 5, 6 and 15)

- The WCMs avail their qualified human resource to involve in deliberations taking in the Nepali churches. By such a provision, the WCMs would not only learn about the pressing needs of the local Church but also connect their home churches with the issues priority in Nepal mission. (Respondent 3, 7, 9, 10 and 11)

- The WCMs consider taking the NGOs or other social entities managed by Nepali churches as partners in mission and provide them with technical and financial resources. Such a provision would enable the local Church take lead in addressing the social issues and bring it closer to the community. Such a closeness with the community would provide the Church with the opportunity to be effective in public witness. (Respondent 1, 8, 13 and 14)

The respondents expressed that there is equal responsibility, if not greater, on the part of NCS, to enable the WCMs be impactful in the public witness through their social services. As narrated above (see section 6.3.4 for details), the NCS is expected to enter into a negotiation with the WCMs whose aim is to 'build the global Church in Nepal' and open a way for future collaboration in Nepal mission. The respondents identified the following to be the priorities of NCS:

- NCS, being the leading Church organisation in Nepal, should refocus its priorities in mission. As indicated above, NCS has not been able to overcome its perception of Christian mission as only spiritual. Now, the time calls for its leadership to change the focus of the organisation from internal to external priorities as well as adopt the secular into its spiritual ministries. Instead of remotely depending on the WCMs to take charge of the social mission, it must seek to engage in national policy towards inclusion and social change. (Respondents 7, 10, 11 and 12)

- NCS, as the largest network of the Nepali Church, has the responsibility to understand the missional needs of its member churches. As discussed in the sections above, the churches face immense pressure to look and behave as an authentic Nepali religious entity. In this direction, however, small churches in the remote places, have set new examples of being in mission with purpose; they have achieved a place in society by their involvement in social happenings. These churches are no longer an outsider in their community. They share and lead transformational initiatives for their societies. NCS should learn from such experiences and enable rest of the member churches become effective in holistic mission practices. (Respondents 4, 5, 6 and 8)

- NCS, as the legally recognised network of Nepali Churches, has the opportunity as well as the responsibility to invite the WCMs to continuous interactions in framing Nepal mission priorities. Its extended reach of churches form the federal to local levels gives it the space and power to engage in theological and missional deliberations with all the WCMs aiming to 'present Christ in Nepal'. NCS must not wait for the WCMs' invitation but take initiative to lead from the front in defining Nepal mission priorities and practices. (Respondents 3, 13 and 15)

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the key findings of this research from the information gathered from the respondents. The findings presented as numbers, charts and comments all aimed at the WCMs, NCS and the Nepali Church, all intended to enhance the public witness of the Nepali Church. The research respondents, the majority of whom make up the current Nepali Church leadership through their presence in NCS, have expressed a deep concern for the future of the mission and the public witness of the Church. They have provided suggestions to NCS and the WCMs towards improving collaboration with the local Church in transformational mission. The anticipated relationship between these two for the promotion of holistic mission and strengthening the public witness depends much on the attitudinal condition of both, as the respondents indicated. They are all concerned with the present status of public witness and aspire to see this improve with stronger collaboration between the WCMs and the local Church in Nepal mission.

The next chapter of this study draws these conclusions together as recommendations to the WCMs and NCS for the furtherance of strong public witness of the Church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

This research was conducted based on a hypothesis that the past relationship between the WCMs and the Nepali Church in the development, promotion and maturation of public witness was below the expected level. This hypothesis has been ably supported through two levels of assessment as here:

Firstly, a review of mission practices promoted by the WCMs in Nepal was undertaken. In this research, the missions and missionaries are defined as those Western Christian organisations that came to Nepal after 1950. Their goal in coming to Nepal was to 'bring the salvation of Jesus Christ to the Nepali people and contribute to the building of the global Church'. More than thirty-five Christian organisations are operating in Nepal as the government's development partners. Of these, ten were selected as a case study for this research. These have been discussed in detail in chapter three. A review of these WCMs and their work in Nepal was made through a series of interviews with their senior leadership accompanied by a careful review of their official publications. The review revealed that after the political change of 1960, the level of cooperation of these WCMs with the Nepali church in promoting public witness was below the expectation of the Nepali Church.

It was found that due to the increase in the instance of societal and legal persecution of the early Nepali Christians, the WCMs separated themselves from the identity and mission focus of the local Church. From then on, the WCMs considered themselves an expert in diaconal mission compared to the local Church. The consequence was that WCMs could not show a clearer picture of transformational mission to the newly established Nepali Church. Further, the separate identity and priorities hindered a meaningful partnership and reciprocal relationship between the two in constructing the public witness.

Secondly, the primary information gathered and analysed from the research participants who form the present leadership of the Nepali Church identified that the present socio-political landscape of the country has undergone significant change to enable a close partnership between the WCMs and the local Church. But the old ways of doing mission remains intact in the WCMs and renders them unable to pave ways for missional partnership with the Nepali Church. The past practices should be discontinued in favour of exploring new ones which allows both the WCMs and the Nepali Church to form a better partnership towards creating and sustaining a better public witness.

The data presented in this research indicates a desire for change on the part of the local Church leadership. They are eager to build a collaborative approach in mission to promote stronger public witness. However, the problem persists in how to communicate the desires to the WCMs so that both are aware of the situation and act towards maximising the opportunity in mission. On the other hand, the WCMs have also begun to make some structural changes within their mission practice to accommodate the needs of the local Church in mission. The invitation in learning forums, the theological deliberations and leadership development initiatives started a decade ago needs to continue in expanded form to include strategic future leadership. NCS, as the national Church network, has the opportunity to help create a sustainable channel of communication between the two and provide leadership is mission collaboration.

7.2 A recap

Looking back, this research is the result of a thorough process applied to find the causes of the poor presentation of the public witness of the Nepali Church. To arrive at this conclusion, this study made an extensive survey of two different concepts: Firstly, the phenomena of social change and the place and role of the Christian Church in it. In Chapter Three, we reviewed the major sociological perspectives on social change and how this process created space for social institutions, including the Christian Church for its contribution. We explored how the Christian Church was at the core of major sociological changes in history, permeating it with a distinctly Christian character. While the Jerusalem Church set a pattern of care for the widows, orphans and foreigners out of their resources, the Christian Church in later ages created and led movements that had lasting influence on social reforms. The life and

letters of the Church Fathers reflect the command to 'love your neighbour as yourself' as they admonished the disciples not to flee the woes of society but to engage in defeating the social and cultural evils manifested during the hard times. The Church in the medieval age fought not only the social evils but also challenged the malpractices within its structures and thus set a pattern for the Church of our age to follow in fulfilling the mission mandate to 'preach the Gospel and teach them to all that I taught' (Matthew 28:19 – 20) and hold the public image intact.

A chronological sketch of Nepal's social change in conjunction with the arrival and work of the WCMs was accomplished where we discussed Nepal's sociological landscape from the inception of the country until the modern age and outlined how the WCMs came to be one of the major players in social change. In doing so, we presented a selected number of WCMs as cases to document their contribution to Nepal's current status of change. The readers will come to understand the WCMs' philosophy and approach to mission in the political context when they stepped into Nepal's mission field. It has presented the factors leading to the WCMs in maintaining a sole purpose of social development but neutrality towards the local Church and how that impacted the public witness.

Christian public witness is another major sub-topic discussed in this research. As shown in chapter five, each mission context is unique in itself and models for public witness developed elsewhere are inapplicable and ineffective in other environments. Also shown is how the Western churches are grappling with the issues of homosexuality, migration and environmental degradation which are entirely different from what the Nepali Churches are now facing. In Nepal's mission context, these issues are still outsiders whereas religious pluralism, increasing modernity and widespread poverty are drawing attention. The chapter has outlined a suitable approach, among many given, for the Nepali Church to adapt and excel in developing a strong and influencing public image.

In the sixth chapter, I have presented the major findings of the research in the form of charts, numbers and observations of the research participants. These have answered the major research question: With their focus mainly on social change, what influence do the WCMs in Nepal have on the public witness of the Nepali Church? The status of the public witness of the Church was identified below

expectation as proposed in the hypothesis. The place and contribution of the WCMs towards strengthening the public witness of the Nepali Church have been discussed and found still in need of improvement.

NCS and its members, as the key leaders of the present-day Nepali Church are encouraged to work towards two distinct but interrelated areas for the promotion of a strong and viable public witness of the Church. Firstly, they should create meaningful conversations with the WCMs to share in Nepal mission priorities. This approach will lead to a reconsideration of the WCMs in their future endeavours. It will help the local Church to be more confident in reaching out to the WCMs in holistic mission collaboration. On the other hand, NCS should learn to prioritise the social aspect of mission as equal to the spiritual one from their association with the WCMs. This mission partnership is certain to create a more holistic image of the Church in the community.

7.3 Knowledge contribution

Data analysed and presented in this research has generated five major themes. These themes can be said to be the new contribution to the existing body of knowledge in contextual Christian missiology. These are presented as below:

a. ***Mission is universal and therefore a global mission partnership.*** The Christian mission has a global dimension as the God of the mission himself is universal. The Christian mission is such a global phenomenon that it requires the involvement of the Church globally. One Church in one place is never successful in completing this global task; the completion of this global mission requires collaborating with the Church everywhere in mission. The WCMs that launched Nepal mission aiming to 'build the global Church' cannot achieve this goal without involving the local Church in context. Neither can the Nepali Church achieve that by ignoring the existence and work of the WCMs in Nepal. Therefore, a hand of partnership for this global mission is a way forward. Nepal needs to see the transformative power of Christian mission conducted in a spirit of unison between the social and spiritual aspects promoted by the two as equal mission pasterns.

b. ***Mission is holistic (Integral).*** Social and spiritual needs are integral to mission, not one or the other. The crux of the evangelical movement after the launch of the Lausanne, is the assimilation of physical and spiritual elements into the very mission of God. However, the mutual accommodation of these elements is far from fully realised in Nepal as the WCMs keep social and the local Church spiritual. These two need to meet in a conducive environment and merge as one mission with the power to move mountains. The WCMs must seek to learn from the local church the elements of spiritual mission and work toward accommodating spaces for the local Church in their mission. On the other hand, the local Church must dare to step out of spiritual confinement and seek to learn about the social elements of mission from the WCMs.

c. ***Mission is locally driven.*** In the observation of Andrew Kirk (1991:19), the concept of Christian mission being a West-driven agenda has gone through a significant change since the turn of this century. The same idea was echoed by Andrew Walls (1996:9 -10). He stated 'Third World theology is now likely to be the representative Christian theology' and indicated the emergence of localness of Christian mission. These statements accept that true mission originates and flourishes locally. It is the locally created mission that is most able to address local issues holistically. In order to penetrate the host society, the local Church must take socially oriented actions, borne out of a passion for mission and not look to outside models. Such missionary vision has the potential to enable the Church to start a transforming journey that is context-relevant and acceptable. Allowing outsiders to determine local mission priorities can increase the chances of getting the priorities wrong. In the case of Nepal mission, a mismatch in the mission focus between the WCMs and the local Church needs to be overcome. This gap can be addressed when the local Church leads the mission priorities and take the WCMs as collaborative partners. This would also save the possible conflict of interest between the two as mutual sharing helps re-align local mission priorities.

d. ***Nepali society is open to transformational Christian mission.*** As observed by Lindell (1997), Fricke (2008), Sharma (2012), Gibson (2017), Kirchheiner (2018), and Shrestha (2022), regardless of occasional

hesitations, the Nepali society in general has remained open and welcoming to the transformational Christian service. The governmental invitation to the missions (Shrestha 2012) and continuous approval of project agreements (Arnett 2003) have been recognised as positive gestures by all the WCMs working in Nepal. Letting their individual missionaries involve in variety of works other than agreed projects, is a welcoming move of the recipient community. The WCMs from 1950s till date have been granted permission to collaborate with different social actors including the federal governments. Occasional cases of the missionaries' visa cancellations for various reasons, including some suspected religious involvement, should not discourage the WCMs to seek further work in Nepal and collaboration with the Nepali Church in mission. Therefore, the future of mission work in Nepal is looking bright (Evers 2005).

e. ***Nepali Church is new and learning.*** The Christian Church in Nepal is in its first generation. Many of those Christians who started the first Nepali churches are still alive and are rehearsing beneficial insights of early mission collaboration between the two. Because of this, the new generation of Nepali Church leaders have a soft corner to the WCMs, especially those who invested in the early church developments. There is an urge and respect for the missionaries who come as learner and partner in mission. The respondents of this study have expressed a desire to collaborate with the WCMs and learn from their expertise and believe sharing of such resources would result in Church being able to project a vibrant public witness in society.

7.4 Recommendations

Criticism is not unusual for a society in general. As such, the researcher documented how the Nepali society criticises the Church for being an outsider. Further, the WCMs criticise the local Church for lacking enthusiasm for diaconia whereas the local Church criticise the WCMs for being ignorant about spiritual priorities. These attitudes are not going to be helpful in building the kingdom of God. Instead, a constructive, positive and practical way forward is necessary to solve this problem.

Such an attempt leads to a better mission collaboration geared towards strong and influential public image of the local Church in Nepal.

The WCMs' works over the years has created many impacts on the Nepali society and the local Church (see chapter six). These impacts need to be further scrutinised to see how they are supportive of the local Church in terms of developing positive public witness. Therefore, it is not unwise to make some recommendations based on the findings of this study to relevant stakeholders – the WCMs, NCS and the Nepali Church in general - for improving the public witness. The recommendations for each of the cases studied are made with the hope of encouraging effective roles in enabling a strong and positive public witness in Nepal.

1. ***Mission dynamics and relations are contextual***. Christian mission is context-specific; local contexts determine the shape or approach to mission. Each mission field is characterised by its local context which has a distinct social, political, religious and economic environment and these do not necessarily resemble that of other contexts. This claim may be challenged as not new in the global mission enterprise. However, the research has found that Nepal's mission context has been different from the expectation of the WCMs. Its religious pluralism, dominated by a Hindu outlook on life and profession, and the inability of the prevailing social and political power to negotiate with other faiths in matters of social well-being are all new areas for the WCMs to delve into and modify their mission endeavours.

   The missionaries coming to serve in Nepal (or in any other minority context) must not come with methods and tools developed elsewhere, but come in humility to learn from the context as each mission's contexts are unique in themselves and require a flexible approach. The local Church in all its newness but abreast knowledge of its location can offer the WCMs the tools and insights towards effective public witness.

2. ***Christian public witness is increasingly local and challenging.*** The concept of being a witness to the saving grace of God in the public requires being close to the context where the Church exists to serve God. Therefore, the Nepali churches must turn their attention to their own context rather than

to the mode, methods or strategies developed elsewhere and learn what constitutes Nepali society and its elements that can be approached as a mission field. As discussed throughout this research, the Nepali Church is lacking a model of holistic mission for its public witness. It is urged, therefore, to get involved in the public sphere with the WCMs as forerunners in the field. Since bearing witness to the love of God in the community requires the Church to step outside the comforts of spiritual activism, the Nepali Church must learn to read and reflect the diaconal engagement of the WCMs.

This change of approach in mission is certain to enable the Church to get a better connection and collaboration with the WCMs and their existing resources in mission.

3. ***Local leadership in mission is desirable*.** There is a desire in the Nepali Church to overcome a public accusation of being tagged with the WCMs when in reality there is a no formal relationship between the two. The same tension is prevalent with the WCMs. The general perception in society that the Nepali Church is a by-product of the WCMs makes it hard for the WCMs to openly relate with the local Church. This further hinders the local Church in constructing its own image and witness in mission. This needs to be addressed through a closer and stronger mission relationship.

.....

The data presented shows that the Nepali Church is inclined towards a closer and reciprocal relationship with the WCMs. The local Church leadership is open to embracing the WCMs as co-workers in mission. This closeness will solve the issues of the blame game in two ways: Firstly, the WCMs would no longer be accused of their hidden involvement in the business of Church. Instead, they can openly collaborate. On the other hand, the local churches can have more direct access to the WCMs and can benefit from their dedication, service and resources for the furtherance of public witness. In doing so, the local Church can take leadership in Nepal mission while the WCMs can support and enable the locals in transformational Christian journey.

7.5 Possible areas for future research

This research was focused on investigating the experiences and exactions of the Nepali Church towards the WCMs in relation to the status of the public witness, in the context of their social work. As such, this research touched only those aspects of the WCMs that related to the Nepali Church. However, during the course of this research a number of important issues have been identified needing further research as delving deep into these topics was beyond the scope of this research. The following five themes emerged from this study as possible areas of further research.

1. This research has attempted to investigate the public witness of the Nepali Church in relation to the social development work of the WCMs from a Nepali perspective. It would not only be interesting but very important to assess the perspective of the WCMs operating in Nepal and understand how they view their role in contributing to a stronger public witness of the Nepali Church. How would they evaluate the mode of their mission as well as the NCS' mission in Nepal?

2. This research has used a Christian approach to investigating the works of the WCMs and the Nepali Church in social change. Looking into this theme from a non-Christian Nepali perspective might add to the validity of the mission work in Nepal. As well, understanding a secular perspective on the mission collaboration between the WCMs and the local Church might be very useful for the future of mission partnership in social change.

3. Nepal, like many other countries in the world, has experienced different kinds of Christian missions. Three special types of missionary engagements have been identified in this research (See chapter three). This research, however, has studied only ten WCMs as INGOs operating in Nepal as organised development agencies. The other two categories are the Firebrand Preachers and Invisible Missionaries. Finding how these types of mission orientation have served to promoting public witness in the Nepali Church would be helpful in the future endeavours of the Church in mission. Investigating the use of their mission strategies, finances and the maintenance of local contacts would

be useful for devising appropriate mission relations between the WCMs and Nepali Church.

4. As described in chapter 3, the gaps in collaborative partnership between the sampled WCMs and local Church was dually utilised by the denominational churches after 1990s. Their arrival has not only created denominational lines but also caused split and confusions in the Church (Sharma 2012: 120). An explorative study on the outcomes of denominational practices and their implications for the WCMs and the Nepali Church in mission towards public witness would be useful.

5. This study only mentioned a few initiatives of the WCMs towards accommodating the growing interest of the Nepali Church for missional partnership (see chapter 6.3.3). These adjustments within the structures of the WCMs, though only for a short time, were welcomed by the Nepali Churches. However, finding whether such adjustments have been useful for the furtherance of mission collaboration between the two would require further research. As well, documenting the lessons learnt by the Nepali Church from using the generosity of the WCMs would definitely add to the ongoing discussion on mission collaboration towards setting a strong and influential public witness in Nepal.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a recap of the entire research by briefly presenting the research question and the methodology applied to investigate the hypothesis: *the social development inclination of the WCMs was less contributing than desired to the formation of strong public witness*. It has laid out a few recommendations for both the Nepali Church and the WCMs, geared towards missional collaboration. Both would benefit from reviewing and applying these recommendations for bettering their mission practices. In closing this research, I would like to suggest that we study a story from the Gospel of John where Jesus invites the men in the community to partake in the supernatural miracle he performed.

Citation of the story of Jesus and his dear friend Lazarus would illustrate the argument clearly (see John 11:38 - 44). Here, Jesus is the one who performs the

miracle when he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus, being the only Son of the living God had the power to untie the grave clothes of Lazarus when He called him to life from the dead. However, Jesus did not do that himself. Rather, he asked the people watching to 'take off the grave clothes from him'. In this way, Jesus invited human partnership in his miracle. While Jesus himself was able to perform all these miracles, yet he invited men to partner with Him and enabled the local agency to participate in the public witness of God's power.

Christian mission for transformation is in no measure inferior to the miracle of Jesus. The global Church is commissioned to perform life-saving miracles in the communities it serves. This miracle-working requires accepting mission partners. The WCMs, being the ones who have the power to perform the miracle alone, can invite the Nepali Church to partner with them in 'untying the grave clothes'. In this way, they can create opportunities for the Nepali Church to be involved in life-giving mission together with them. This may also lead to a lasting and meaningful relationship between the two in promoting a transforming public witness of the Nepali Church.

Finally, it is no secret now that the WCMs are the forerunners and trendsetters in global missionary movements. The story applies to Nepal as well. The local Church is indebted to the WCMs for the sacrifices they made to bring the Gospel to Nepal. However, with political change in 1960, the WCMs were unable to hold the same fervour of missional zeal and confined themselves in the narrow lane of governmental agreements. Thus they distanced themselves from the proximity and cooperation of the local Church. As one respondent commented,' this was ordained by God. Had God not permitted it, He would have not have raised the army of local churches in Nepal and depended on outsiders to accomplish the task of social transformation.' Indeed, God allowed this separation early so that the local Church could rise to the challenge and create its own place in mission.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Nepali Church, in humility appreciate the WCMs for their boldness to sow the seeds of the Gospel in Nepali soil. Moreover, the Nepali Church needs to accept the missional call and join hands with the WCMs and become an able partner in social transformation. Thus, a culture of missional

collaboration can form and together they can create a positive and powerful public witness of the Nepali Church in mission.

ANNEXURES

Annex 1: Semi-structured interview Questionnaire

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Semi-structured interview questionnaire

Researcher: Durga Prasad Khanal (Divya); Student Registration no. 21814971

Programme: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

University: University of Pretoria, South Africa (In Partnership with Oxford Centre of Religion and Public Life – OCRPL)

Research Title: Christianity and Social Change: An Investigation of the Public Witness of the Nepali Church

1. *This interview schedule consist of 4 sections*
2. *Kindly respond to all the relevant questions*
3. *Mark with "X" where relevant*

A. Personal information

Name		Gender	
Age		Education	
Ethnicity		Religion	
Occupation/profession		Designation/ Organization	
Work/Ministry experience (Please list all your ministry and/or professional experiences, including your observations in the occupation/ministry you accumulated)			

B. Opinion about social change *(All category respond)*

1. How do you define social change?
    i. Change in old social relationships and formation of new ones
    ii. Change in physical appearance of social structures and establishment of new social order
    iii. Change in existing laws and policies towards inclusive and prosperous society
    iv. Change in approach and mode of social behaviours
    v. Any other …….
2. How do you define development and how does it affect social change?
    i. Development is advancement in physical infrastructures of country and it causes societies to prosper
    ii. Development is progress and change for all in a society, leading to freedom of choice and social equalities
    iii. Development is efficient, effective and accountable governance
    iv. Development is integrated improvement in the lives of people
    v. Any other
3. Who, according to you, are the key players of social change in Nepal?
    i. Kings, rulers and political leadership
    ii. Religious organisations/churches and their followers
    iii. Development partners, including I/NGOs and their programmes
    iv. None of the above
    v. Any other, please list …….
4. How would do you define the role of religious organisations in social change in Nepal?
    i. They aware, educate and mobilise people for better social systems
    ii. They challenge bad practices and promote virtues
    iii. They launch development programme of their members and equip them to be better persons

iv. They are indifferent to social realities and remain unengaged
v. Any other ……..

5. How do you define the role of the Church (church in general) in social change in Nepal?

vi. Church is a part of society and it is required to contribute to its positive change
vii. Church is God's plan of change and it is required to lead actions for social change
viii. Church is a community of 'called out' people and they have no role in social change
ix. Church is the model of ultimate human society and it is required to create that human condition in society
x. Any other ……

C. Opinion about the Foreign Christian Missions[26] in social change in Nepal

1. Why do you think the foreign Christian missions worked only as development workers and not as Church workers?
    i. They did not have the human and other resources to involve in Church ministries
    ii. They believed social work sufficiently leads to spiritual/holistic transformation
    iii. They believed evangelism and Church planting/management was not their mandate but of the local people
    iv. They were more concerned with the physical wellbeing of people than their spiritual wellbeing
    v. Any other ……..
2. What is the contribution of foreign Christian missions in Nepal's over all social change in the last 70 years? Please list up to 3
    i. …….
    ii. …….
    iii. …….

[26] Here, the Western Christian missions refers to those missionary organisations that have come to Nepal to assist its people obtain the holistic transformation and have a legal recognition as national or international nongovernmental organisation (I/NGOs)

3. Are there any negative influences of foreign Christian missions in Nepal? If yes, please list up to 3.
    i. On the Nepali society
        1.
        2.
        3.
    ii. On the Nepali Church
        1.
        2.
        3.
4. What is your understanding of the role of the foreign Christian missions in the birth, growth and development of the Nepali Church?
    i. The missionaries were concerned with their social mission and played no role in the birth of the Nepali Church and its mission
    ii. The missionaries prayed and worked alongside Nepali converts and shared in the Church ministries
    iii. The missionaries actively involved in evangelisation, Church planting and its mission
    iv. The missionaries were concerned about the wellbeing of their missions and the missionaries than the wellbeing of the Nepali Church
    v. Any other …….
5. What are your experiences about the foreign missions' understanding of the role of the Nepali Church in social change?
    i. Nepali Church was a key player in social change and therefore they helped the Church to work towards it
    ii. They believed the Church was too small in size and capacity to work towards social change and therefore overlooked its potential role in it
    iii. They believed the western missionaries were qualified player is social change and didn't bother to invite and involve the Church in it
    iv. They believed the Church's calling was to evangelism and Church planting and therefore ignorant and ill-equipped for social change.

v. Any other …….

6. How did the non-involvement of the missionaries' in the Nepali Church in mission affected the public witness of the Nepali Church?
    i. The western missionaries remained behind the scene and controlled the mission of the Nepali Church
    ii. Nepali Church was free of their influence and excelled learning the mission on its own
    iii. Nepali Church became an indigenous entity and was readily accepted as one of the social institutions
    iv. Nepali Church struggled to navigate its way of defining mission priorities
    v. Any other ……
7. How do you think the foreign Christian Missions should have taken the role of the Nepali Church in social change?
    i. The Nepali Church mandated to evangelism and saving souls whereas the missions were called for social change
    ii. The Nepali Church is God's agent for social change and the missionaries should have invited the Church to lead in this
    iii. The Nepali Church is God's choice for establishing God's kingdom in Nepal and the missionaries should have partnered with it
    iv. The Nepali Church is God's way of transformation and the missionaries should have equipped in transformational mission
    v. Any other …….

D. Opinion about the social mission of the Nepali Church and Nepal Christian Society (NCS)

1. How do you define the 'public witness' of the Church?
    i. Gospel can shape the organisational institutions and principles of human society and the Church should engage in social change
    ii. The Gospel contains important social elements for the organisation and development of human societies and the Church should promote these in its mission

iii. Gospel has no authority in the public discourse of human society and therefore the Church should not involve in these avenues
iv. Church is not the centre of social discourses/relationships but of spiritual wellbeing only and Christians must not strive to assert an authority in public
v. Any other ……..

2. How do you rate the public witness of the Nepali Church in society? Give a mark from 1 – 10 – one being the poorest and 10 being the strongest). Please explain your answer.
3. What challenges you can identify in the mission of the Nepali Church concerning its public witness? Please list up to 3.
   i.
   ii.
   iii.
4. Who is responsible to create a strong/thriving public witness/identity of the Nepali Church?
   i. The Nepali local churches and their leaderships
   ii. The leadership at the bigger denominations and larger churches
   iii. NCS and other organisations similar to it
   iv. The foreign mission organisations and their missionaries
   v. Any other ……..
5. What should be the mission focus of NCS in future in terms of strengthening the public witness in Nepal?
   i. Collaborate with Church leadership to promote the social elements of the Gospel
   ii. Support Christian individuals in various professional engagements to take centre stage in Church's mission
   iii. Equip the Church leadership to expand their influence to social spheres than only in the churches
   iv. Create environment for dialogue among the leaderships of churches and other social entities
   v. Any other …….
6. How would you advise the foreign Christian missions towards strengthening the public witness of the Nepali Church?

i. Invite the Nepali Church to lead the missionaries in Nepal missions
ii. Enable the Nepali Church to decide Nepal mission priorities
iii. Create space within your systems for the Nepali Church to collaborate in Nepal mission
iv. Act as an able partner of the Nepali Church in Nepal mission
v. Any other ……..

Annex 2: Letter of introduction and informed consent for participation in academic research

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT
FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title of the Study: Christianity and Social Change: An Investigation of the Public Witness of the Nepali Church

Researcher: Durga Prasad Khanal, Student number 21814971, University of Pretoria, South Africa

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You are hereby cordially invited to participate in an academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, namely **the place and role of the Church in Nepal's social change.**

Each participant must receive, read, understand and sign this document *before* the start of the study. If a child is 7-17 years and is requested to participate in a research study, the parent/legal guardian must give consent. Children from 7-17 years are also required to sign an assent form.

- **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to **document the knowledge, experience and attitude of people towards the Nepali Church and its public witness in relation to the Western Christian Missions with their focus on social change and development in Nepal.** The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a

summary of the study's findings on request. No participants' names will be used in the final publication.

- **Duration of the study:** The study will be conducted over a period of **4 years** and its projected date of completion is **May 2024.**
- **Research procedures:** The study is based on **primary source of data** that will be collected by **interview** through the use of **semi-structured questionnaire.**
- **What is expected of you:** You are expected to respond from your knowledge, experience and understating to the interview questions related to of the main theme of this research.
- **Your rights:** Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The respondent as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.

- **Confidentiality:** All information will be treated as confidential and will not be shared to others, except to the university, without prior permission from you. Also, the identity of the participants will be kept anonymous in requested.
- The relevant data will be destroyed, should you choose to withdraw.

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.

I understand that I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Contact number of the Researcher:

_____

VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named

_____ and his/her relatives, the letter of informed consent. The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Annex 3: Ethical clearance certificate

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Theology and Religion

Research Office
Mrs Daleen Kotzé

25 January 2022

NAME:	Mr DP Khanal
STUDENT NUMBER:	21814971
COURSE:	Doctoral
DATE:	25 January 2022
APPLICATION NUMBER:	T101/21

This letter serves as confirmation that the research proposal of this student was evaluated by:

1) **The Research committee**: This applies to all research proposals
2) **The Research Ethics committee**: This applies only to research that includes people as sources of information

You are hereby notified that your research proposal (including ethical clearance where it is applicable) is approved.

Prof E van Eck
Chairperson: Research committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

Prof T van Wyk
Chairperson: Research Ethics committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

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