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THE HOLY SPIRIT THE ULTIMATE COUNSELOR AND TRANSFORMER FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS

A NEPALESE PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords *Nepal, Spirit-led counseling, Nepali Christians, healing, wholeness*

Abstract

Nepal is a country with cultural and religious diversity. This country has gone through much turmoil and many crises. Since the time of the Maoist insurgency up to the recent pandemic situation, people have faced various emotions, feelings, and thoughts. These sudden devastating moments have not only affected their physical wellbeing, but has in turn affected the whole being of a person. These experiences of accusation, suffering, violence, and pain have led many to sadness, worry, anger, and fear resulting in various mental disorders. Therefore, the ministry of counseling is very important in order to help people get connected to their feelings and to understand their problems. It enables people to express their emotions freely and bring a sense of positivity to their lives. For effective counseling, there is always a need for the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit. Human beings are very limited in their own ways, and it is only through the presence of the Holy Spirit

that a person can be transformed and changed. Therefore, it is important for the churches in Nepal to preach and teach about the Spirit who is a helper and brings healing and wholeness through comfort and counsel. It is the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate agent of transformation to lead people into all truth.

Introduction

Counseling is an emerging field of study and practice in Nepalese society and has now started paving its way towards the interest of people. In part this is because various events and crisis situations have led to an emergence of mental illness, although this is felt and discussed only by a few individuals. Before understanding the counseling situation in the country it is important to know about the nation of Nepal.

The Nation of Nepal

Nepal is situated between two huge countries: China and India (Khanal et al., 2005, p. 1). Despite being a small country in landscape, it has the highest peak in the world within its territory, Mt. Everest. There are about 30 million people residing in Nepal. Although the country is small, it is culturally and religiously diverse as there are many different religions, expressions, beliefs, and practices. There are more than 150 castes and sub-castes existing in Nepal, and society is based on the caste system. Nepal is predominantly dominated by the Hindu and Buddhist religions, but there are also other minority religions like Sikhism, Islam, Animism, and Christianity present. Most of the economy is dependent on tourism and agriculture as the country has an extremely rich biodiversity of plants, vegetation, and wildlife. Today, remittances, money sent home by Nepalis who migrate to different countries seeking education and employment opportunities, have become a major contributing factor to increasing household incomes and the national GDP. Education facilities were not provided to common people as late as the 1950s. Therefore, education is not considered a high priority to many people even today and we find

many students dropping out after entering into secondary and higher education levels.

Challenges That Nepalis Have Experienced

Nepalis have experienced many crises leading to turmoil in life. The Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) brought fear, anxiety, and post-traumatic syndrome disorder to the lives of people. In that decade-long conflict more than 16,000 people lost their lives, and many others were tortured, intimidated, extorted, forced to leave their houses, and abducted (Luitel et al., 2015). As a result, many people migrated to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, for safety purposes. During that time, people were fearful, worried, and devastated by the situation, and this brought uncertainty to many. Everyday there was news of people dying, of strikes, curfews, and the sounds of guns shooting and bombs exploding. Travelling from one place to another was very risky, problematic, and almost next to impossible. There were traffic strikes and lockdowns. Vehicles were not allowed to move from one place to another.

Following the Maoist insurgency, there was a massive earthquake (in 2015) that affected the lives of many people. Many experienced a big loss, and for some it became a traumatic experience. About 8,000 people lost their lives and more than 22,000 people were injured. It is said that 90% of the affected population experienced sleeplessness and a lack of attention and concentration for fear of further major earthquakes (Psychosocial Support to Survivors, n.d.). Many individuals lost family members or close friends in the earthquake. For many it was a shocking nightmare about which they avoid talking. Still today people fear that the earthquake will come back and bring destruction in the country. Many of the places that were damaged by the earthquake are still not reconstructed. As a result, fear and anxiousness are still haunting people.

Now five years after the earthquake the global COVID-19 pandemic has hit the country very hard. It has brought more psychological instability

to the lives of people. As a result, the rate of mental illness among the population has now grown higher compared to previous decades. People are finding it difficult to cope with their lives as there are uncertainties, worries, conflicts, and doubts among individuals, families, and society in general, leading people to commit suicide. In a six-month span during 2020 there were approximately 600 recorded suicide cases. Recently the second wave of COVID has made the situation worse. People are losing still more family members and friends. The fear of death is affecting people's psychosocial well-being. The country is under full lockdown again and there are no empty beds available in the hospitals nor are there sufficient oxygen cylinders for all who need oxygen. Many are waiting hours in line to receive oxygen and beds, while others are dying without finding a place for treatment.

With this abnormality and instability in living, many Nepalis are going through a challenging situation. Many Nepalis have experienced depression at least once in their lifetimes although very few go for counseling or consultation. Most often people do not share the difficulties that they go through and hide it within themselves. From childhood they are told to be silent and not to share their problems to anyone outside of their families. From childhood, children are asked to control their emotions so staying quiet and keeping all their problems within their own four walls becomes their mindset.

There is a famous song in Nepal, particularly emphasising the emotions of men, that says, "*Logne Manchhe Bhayera Runu Hunna Re, Mardako choro le Ashu Jharnu Hunna Re*" (Translation: A man should not cry; a strong person's son should not shed his tears). This strongly expresses the emotions that must be controlled and should not be shown in front of others. If a man cries in front of others, people immediately respond to him by asking, "Why are you crying? You are a man and you have to be bold. People are watching you." Some people even go to the extreme saying, "If you cry, people will question your whole manhood."

On the other hand, as Nepali society is a patriarchal society, women still have a secondary position in the family. Hindu scriptures strongly say that women are always under the headship of men. A passage by Manu, as stated in an article on the Status of Women in South Asia, says, "During

her childhood a woman depends on her father, during her youth on her husband, her husband being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near relatives of her husband” (Bhushan & Sachdeva, 2014, p. 210; Mazumdar, 1954, p. 57).

One day a foreign friend asked, “Why do women in the midst of troubles stay silent in Nepal?” No answer was apparent at that moment. It seems, however, to be related to a woman’s personality, which is dependent on the background in which she was born and brought up. In Nepal, the social context and cultural influence play an important role in the development of a people, especially women. From childhood they are discouraged from sharing their problems outside of their families, therefore, they feel shy and prefer to stay silent even if they are facing troubles. This results in misunderstanding, conflicts, inequality, violence, and even separation in the family. Unlike in western countries, the sharing of emotional difficulty is considered taboo. As a result, persons who develop a mental illness are often stigmatized by others and their mental illness is compared to being “mad.” This in turn forces people to hide the difficulties they experience and not to share them with anyone or go for treatment.

Counseling and Mental Health in Nepal

The concept of counseling and mental health is very new in Nepal and receives little attention. The Nepalese government has allocated 3% of its national budget for health, out of which approximately 1% is spent on mental health (Jordans et al., 2007, p. 58). Traditional and religious healing methods are commonly practiced in Nepal with decades of “evidence” of underlying beliefs that spirits and spirit possession causes mental illness (Tol et al., 2005, p. 327). Even though in 1947 a course in psychology was introduced in the Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus affiliated with a university in India, it was not a full course, but was offered only at the intermediate level as a part of philosophy. It was only in 1966 after the establishment of Tribhuvan University that psychology was offered as an academic subject at the intermediate

and bachelors level in four different colleges. It was only in 1980 that a masters level course in psychology was introduced (Dangol, 2018). Consequently, many colleges and universities initiated short-term courses on psychosocial counseling. This has created an awareness on the part of the greater Nepalese society for the welfare of people. As is evident, the concept of counseling for mental health is a very new area of practice in Nepal.

The Challenges of Nepali Churches

Christianity is an incredibly young religion in Nepal, having begun only after the 1950s. There were very few Christians in Nepal until the 1990s, when small congregations started to emerge in different parts of Nepal. Christians were not allowed to preach and conversion to Christianity was strictly prohibited. People were severely persecuted, and a few were imprisoned because of their faith. The church started to experience freedom only after the new form of government was instituted. Then, people received freedom to profess their religion openly and Christianity grew rapidly. Even though the growth of Christianity was rapid it is still considered a minority religion.

The majority of Christians in Nepal are either converted or first-generation Christians, with most of their families and relatives still immersed in other faiths. Christians face challenges as the families of converts to Christianity do not accept and agree with the faith that the converts profess. They suffer physically, mentally, socially, and financially. They are humiliated in family and society for accepting a new religion (Wingate, 1999, p. 112). Converts also face the problem of identity as they struggle with their dual identity, i.e., an identity in the church as a new creation in Christ, and an identity outside the church as a member of a family and society. In 2017 Nepal passed an anti-conversion law that prohibits conversion from one religion to another. In fact, no one is to attempt to convert someone from another religion. These are just some of the examples of struggles that Christians in Nepal are going through.

Christians are not exempted from any of the other devastating events that the country goes through. Being part of the society, they too struggle in life and are not able to share their struggles with those around them. They hide their pains, discomforts, and daily tussles within themselves, and within the four walls of their houses, because when they share their feelings and struggles sometimes their faith is questioned. When Christians face difficulties in life people (often other Christians) start judging and condemning saying that because of their difficulties they might have committed sin, or that their faith in God is not strong. Sometimes they even begin to doubt their faith in God.

Although counseling is visible in Nepalese Christian churches, the concepts of counseling are mostly based on advice-giving and are limited to providing instant and readymade answers to people who are facing problems. But counseling is more than just providing advice. It is necessary for people to connect and to understand the problems that others are going through. By doing this counseling helps people deal with distress by providing them emotional support, compassion, and empathy. This attention enables one to express emotions freely and bring a sense of positivity in the lives of people. While providing pastoral care and counseling is essential in Nepal it is important to provide not just advice but counseling that makes use of the skills and spiritual resources that make pastoral counseling different from other counseling practices that may focus on self-attainment or self-satisfaction.

The Importance of Spirit-led Counseling

There are many theories and therapies that are oriented to clients and to their own self-understanding. These therapies are good for developing self-value and self-esteem in a person as they focus on the physical, mental, and social dimensions of living. But those therapies are not sufficient for a complete transformation, for healing and wholeness, as they very often do not deal with the spiritual aspects of a person's life. Today, a major part of secular counseling has become simply resolving conflicts between people and building relationship with self and others,

and seem to have forgotten the whole being of the person, including the spiritual aspect.

Spirit-led counseling is objective in nature. It moves beyond subjectivity and secular humanism and helps to see one's pain and suffering in the light of eternity and God's unfolding plan. This in turn helps a person to receive new meaning and purpose and to be filled with renewed joy and sense of meaning in life. Unlike secular psychotherapies, Spirit-led counseling focuses on the spiritual dimension as seen in the person's relationship with God, self, and others. In other words, it emphasizes both the vertical and horizontal relationships of humanity.

Spirit-led counseling aims towards the sanctification of the soul. It is an intervention from a sovereign God who continues to commune with each person to bring about the healing that is often needed within relationships. In doing so it relies on the power, truth, and fruit of the Holy Spirit that can transform and empower persons to be who they can be in Christ. As such, Spirit-led counseling deals with wholeness and holiness. Howard Clinebell says that spiritual healing and growth is the core task of counseling. According to Clinebell, understanding humankind's fundamental spiritual needs is essential in counseling as it helps persons to enjoy an open, growing relationship with God, and enables them to live growthfully in the midst of the losses, conflicts, and tragedies in life and in the world (Clinebell, 1984, pp. 107, 116)

The Holy Spirit as the Ultimate Agent of Transformation for Healing and Wholeness

There is a need for the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit in counseling because everyone goes through both developmental and accidental crisis situations in life. These calamities come up at different stages of life. They often come unexpectedly, suddenly bringing chaos into a person's life. Therefore, there is a need for divine intervention in the situation, because as a counselor, a person has his or her own limitation, and each individual should know that when the counseling session is going on, the Holy Spirit is ever present. With the help of the

Spirit a person does not need to stay in the crisis, rather he or she can be delivered out of those situations.

The concept of Invitational Posture (IP) in the Christian Wholeness Framework (CWF) very well exhibits the role of the Holy Spirit while providing counseling to the client. This approach says that it is not only the counselor who is dealing with the problem presented, but the Spirit is present in the counseling session. It is ultimately the Holy Spirit who brings transformation in the lives of individuals towards wholeness. The IP clearly demonstrates the attitude of the helper toward the person seeking help. It is not pushing, pulling, coercing, deciding for, carrying, or rescuing (Nikles & Nikles, 2010, p. 64). Rather, a counselor accompanies clients on their healing journey, believing that God is with them in the midst of the counseling situation. This symbolic posture of being with the client shows just how the Spirit is always there in a supportive way to bring healing and wholeness in the lives of counselors and in the lives of those with whom they work.

As Christians, we need to believe that it is the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate agent of transformation for healing and wholeness in Nepal. It is very important for a person to reconnect to God in order to receive wholeness. There are many stories from believers saying how their family's problems were minimized and disappeared after accepting Christ, how many people were able to leave their bad habits and receive complete healing in their lives. The Holy Spirit indeed brings self-realization in people's lives and this is a gradual way to self-recovery and self-discovery of who they are in Christ. It is the Spirit who shows the truth that helps us to realize our true state. It is the Spirit who ultimately helps a person to connect to God and connect to others. Truly, Jesus' promise of sending the Holy Spirit as a counselor and comforter is an important aspect for people (John 14:15ff).

Summary

The churches in Nepal preach and teach that the Spirit is a helper who is always by our side and is always ready to guide and lead us. The power of the Spirit is experienced by Christians in Nepal in a supernatural way. The

Spirit has brought transformation in their lives. It has drastically changed, convicted, and healed them. And it is because of the Spirit counselors can be available to listen to people with compassion, love, and empathy. Counselors are limited in their skills, knowledge, and attitude, thus they need the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate counselor and transformer for healing and wholeness of a person. As the Bible clearly says, “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (*The King James Bible*, 1957, John 16: 13). I strongly believe that Spirit-led counseling is important.



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