

Dreams and the Church in Nepal

Robert Sears – PhD Candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary

Rsears777@gmail.com

According to many accounts, the church in Nepal is a vibrant, fast-growing, and largely charismatic phenomenon. Power encounter – particularly healing and deliverance – has been key to the growth of the church as well as the communal and individual identity of its members (Bhandari 1999). Relatedly, dreams have played an important role in Christian conversion, religious devotion, and worship practice – although such a topic has not garnered much scholarly attention to date. Hence, this paper will chart the importance of dreams to the Nepalese Christian community in terms of their individual and inter-individual effects by using a combination of case studies, participant observation, and descriptive statistics. With regard to the individual, this essay will illustrate how dream content often serves as a critical link in a kind of progressive power encounter culminating in conversion or greater allegiance to Christian norms. General aspects of these Nepali conversion/transformation dreams and related situational factors will be highlighted, eliciting comparison with dream-inspired conversion happening elsewhere (see, e.g., Davis and Rambo 2009). Beyond conversion/transformation of the dreamer, dreams play important interpersonal and communal functions. Dream sharing as a form of testimonial often occurs during worship services, resulting in public praise, thanksgiving, and/or prayer. Likewise, Christians will often share dreams with each other in informal settings in order to express personal revelation and/or solicit interpretation or prayer. Additionally, some “divine” or “spiritual” dreams awaken Christians’ sentimentality for “the lost” and inspire evangelistic efforts. In short, dreams serve a multiplicity of important functions in the Nepali church.