

‘Funerary Rites in Nepal: Cremation, Burial and Christian Identity’

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Abstract

This study explores and analyses funerary rite struggles in a nation where Christianity is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and many families have Christian and Hindu, Buddhist and Traditionalist (*kiranti*) members, who go through traumatic experiences at the death of their family members. The context of mixed affiliation raises questions of social, psychological and religious identity for Christian converts, which are particularly acute after a death in their family. Using empirical research, this thesis focuses on the question of adaptation and identity in relation to church life, within the familial and social sphere of individual Christians and within the wider society in which they live, particularly with reference to death and disposal. This research has used an applied theology approach to explore and analyse the findings in order to address the issue of funerary rites with which the Nepalese church is struggling.

For the need of adaptation, this study seeks to understand funerary rites of the host culture alongside Jewish-Christian characteristics of adaptation, especially in terms of the Nepalese Evangelical Christian context. It also poses the challenge of finding an identity in a wider cultural and societal milieu. The case studies and interviews have portrayed tripartite relationships and tensions between an individual, family and church or community at the death in a ‘split’ family where a Christian convert’s loyalty to the deceased and the family is tested. Participation and non-participation in the last rites create problems for both the church and the family, and some solution needs to be found. The study has discovered that adaptation of the funerary rites technique rather than of content could ease this tension in a ‘split’ family, and enhance a family and community reconciliation and solidarity. The mode of disposal whether burial or cremation, could be used and a theology of cremation be developed in order to provide a theological framework.