
Whose Vision, Which Morality? Missiological Implications of Competing Local Moralities¹

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This article explores moral diversity considered ethnographically and presents implications for cross-cultural service. It is drawn from an ethnographic study done in a Nepali village which identified the primary moral values of community peace, cooperation, and solidarity. These values were discovered to be in tension with the modern Western moral values of personal independence and advancement found in a modern consumer economy, education, democracy and in Western initiated development projects. From these observations, four implications are presented for missionaries working among communalistic people groups. These implications are, the missionary must understand the local moral order, second, the missionary must be aware of the possible presence of conflicting moral visions, third, with a changing moral vision comes a changing set of virtues and moral practices, and finally, development ministries will have an, often unconsidered, impact on the local moral order.

Introduction

Cultural diversity entails moral diversity. Richard Shweder goes so far as to define culture as “a reality lit up by a morally enforceable conceptual scheme” (1998, 157). Cultural realities are given “force” through rewards and punishments for conformity to or departure from moral expectations. It is the moral order of a society that determines what common features of a culture are taken most seriously. Understanding the moral order of another culture is critical to understanding that culture as a whole. Moral orders differ from culture to culture, and those who are from another culture must attend to the morality of their host culture if they are to relate and communicate effectively and credibly.

This paper is drawn from a study completed in 2004 in a Nepali village in Kathmandu Valley. The purpose of that study was to understand the local moral

order of this village and draw missiological implications and applications. This article will report that understanding and then draw implications for those living and serving in this village. The village will be referred to as *Shantigaun* and was principally populated by high caste Hindus. Its population, including the immediate surrounding area, was about 2800 people, most of whom were from the Chhetri caste and divided into four clans.

The method of this study included ethnographic interviews and participant observation. Interviews were conducted with adult males of the village and interview questions explored stories and characteristics of the virtuous and the vicious man. Questions also sought incidences of anger and conflict, since anger is often driven by moral conviction. Drawing on early interviews, later interviews explored accounts of moral decline in the village. From these discussions and

¹ The title of this paper is a variation of Alasdair MacIntyre’s title, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). The title of his first chapter is “Rival Justices, Competing Rationalities.” MacIntyre argues that the ethical and moral questions of our day are eliciting a wide diversity of incompatible judgments grounded in rival traditions of thought and practice. Where MacIntyre considered rival Western justices and rationalities historically, I will consider rival local moral orders ethnographically.

observations, the moral vision of the Chhetris of Shantigaun became clear.

Peace and Solidarity

A key word in the moral vocabulary of the Chhetris of Shantigaun is *shanti* (peace). Places are peaceful, villages are peaceful, and families are peaceful. *Shanti* is a common name given to girls. The action of a virtuous man contributes to and maintains peace. The opposite of *shanti* is not simply conflict but includes the ideas of being loud and making a commotion, a lack of harmony, and causing trouble (*dukkha*), worries (*piṭ*), and difficulties (*marka*). Thus, *shanti* is a more inclusive than the English word “peace” in American usage. The behaviors of a moral man leading to the *shanti* of the village are helping, cooperation, contributing to the benefit of the whole village, as well as personal control and respect. Peace involves every family in the village being tranquil and having their basic needs met. Actions that lead to the disruption of *shanti* are often described as immoral (*anaitik*) and corrupt (*bikrit*).

Peace is at the center of the moral vision of Shantigaun. Negatively this peace is described as an absence of conflict, trouble, and catastrophe. Positively, it is achieved when each person fulfills his or her responsibility and place in the community— young people respect elders; wives obey husbands; households fulfill their duties to the other households, and the people of the village together fulfill their responsibilities to the gods. Peace is embodied in a matrix of relationships in the village. Fighting among the members of the community is wrong because it is loud and disruptive of the relationships that constitute peace. Drunkenness is described as morally reprehensible because it causes conflicts which disturb the community.

Actions contributing to the peace of the community are those that keep the whole community in view. It is not enough that a person remains individually truthful, sexually pure, or good to his family. He must be an active participant in contributing to the good of the village. Of the ways that villagers may contribute to the benefit of the whole community, helping and cooperative activities were often mentioned. Helping other individuals and families is a mark of a good, moral man. A moral man helps and will not turn a blind eye to the personal needs of others in the village. One informant tells of the instruction he received from his father on helping:

He taught us not to say, “We don’t have.” If I had a hundred rupees and somebody asked for fifty, he told us to give them at least ten or fifteen. But he didn’t want us to leave them empty handed. He wanted us to help everybody.

The moral man is a contributor and that contribution has the community in view.

Contributing to the good of the whole village is chiefly seen in cooperative efforts. The labor of one family, in most cases, is not sufficient to plant, weed or harvest rice during the short window of time in which these tasks must be completed. Consequently, each farming family must depend on labor from other families to accomplish these tasks in time. My host family requested fifteen people, both male and female, to come to their fields and participate in a *ropai*. *Ropai* is a noun literally meaning “a planting” from the verb *ropnu* “to plant.” But the word in this context refers to an institutionalized cooperative effort of planting rice. Informants spoke frequently about how the good or moral man participates in cooperative efforts such as the *ropai*.

Funerals are taken very seriously because it is believed that a properly conducted funeral has a significant bearing on the successful transmigration of the deceased to his or her next life. Therefore, village responsibility in funerals is not optional, and each member lives with the expectation that, at the time of his or her death, everything will be conducted completely and properly by the villagers.

Cooperation is also required at the local religious festival. The village worships two local deities every two years and every household must send one member to help prepare the shrine. Households that do not are punished. Participation and contribution in this festival takes priority even over one’s regular employment:

If I need to go to office and have not told anybody, in such a case I will have to pay a fine, or send someone as my replacement, or I have to take leave from the office. If everyone goes on with his own work, who will work in the temple? We should not miss this kind of important work for any reason.

Cooperation is mandatory, and to not contribute to this cooperation has consequences.

Hindu religious practice, especially in urban areas, is largely a personal and individual affair with each person seeking to gain personal merit toward a better

reincarnation in the next life. Yet in smaller Hindu communities one's participation or lack of participation in communal religious rites and festivals is viewed as having consequences for the prosperity of the whole village. If one person or household refuses to participate in a village religious celebration in which all are required, he or she may be blamed for future village troubles and catastrophes such as landslides or disease epidemics.

It is morally reprehensible for a villager to not cooperate for the good of the village. One informant was asked what happens when someone refuses to participate in a *ropai* or other cooperative effort, "It does not normally happen. It is a matter of morality." But villagers do sometimes transgress the moral expectations of the community by not participating in cooperative activities, and in that event, the community as a whole takes action. "If one asked for someone to work in their field and they would not go, no one would go and eat with that family, and if someone died, they would not go to their funeral processions." Offenders are shunned by the village. Others do not eat with them, they do not help them during planting and harvesting so they must hire laborers from outside the village, and significantly, other villagers will not participate in their funeral rites. This last action extends the consequences of non-participation in cooperative efforts into the next life.

Modernity and its Discontents

The moral vision of Shantigaun is embodied in a matrix of relationships marked by cooperation and solidarity. But all is not well in Shantigaun. Informants often talked of a moral decline in the village which threatened to supplant the moral vision of peace and solidarity with another, rival vision of the good life. They used phrases such as, "But nowadays people have changed," "The bad people seem to be increasing day by day," and "[Good] people are rarely seen these days." One informant said, "It has become almost like a foreign country even here!" Without romanticizing the past, informants expressed that there was a time when the moral order was better maintained than it is presently. Analyzing this talk of decline revealed that villagers placed the blame for this decline at the feet of modernity. Three features of modernity surfaced which account for this decline: a consumer economy, democracy, and education.

In the last twenty years a greater number of consumer goods have become available in Nepal's

cities and the desire for these goods has further fueled a desire for cash. By contrast, in the village there is little cash to be gained. One informant describes the lure and the frustration that city life has for the villager: "There is entertainment in Kathmandu; the villager wants to go there, but he cannot participate in it. There is no opportunity available to him because of his home situation." That "home situation" refers to an agrarian life in which economic exchange is weighted toward goods and services and not cash required in the cities.

The village economy, with its barter of goods and the cooperative exchange of labor, leaves the villager powerless in the cash economy of the city. Another interlocutor states, "There is no way that the desires, expectations, and wants of a son can be fulfilled in his household." The village way of life thwarts any opportunity to satisfy these wants. People, especially young people, are discontent with village life and what it does not offer them. Exposure to new clothing styles, motorcycles, movies, restaurants, and electronics in the modern urban consumer marketplace, coupled with the absence of the villager's purchasing power, incites this discontent. And this discontent leads to moral corruption. "The economy of Nepal is going down. Everyone has to earn money. And the common thinking is that everyone should be in a well-off family. So, the desire for status and money has increased corruption (*bikriti*)." The discontent that leads to corruption is paralleled by a shift in values away from what is offered by village life to what is offered by city life.

In contrast to the discontentment awakened by the new consumer economy, a good man is content. One informant told this moral story to illustrate the folly of wanting what is out of reach:

There was an ascetic who dreamed of living as other people. [In his dream] he wanted to get married and have a son. After getting married and having a son he said to himself, "My son needs milk so I will buy a cow. I will sell some of the milk and will earn money. When I get money, I will buy a horse. I will learn to ride the horse. Now I have a son, a wife, a cow, and a horse. Then I will buy an elephant." . . . Then the ascetic tripped on his begging stick and broke it. His entire dream was gone. That is why we should not go beyond means.

The one good thing the beggar had was lost when he dreamed of having what he could not get. The villager, discontented by his powerlessness in a consumer

marketplace, exchanges the shared goal of peace in community with its associated virtues of helpfulness and a cooperative spirit, for that of the acquisitive individual and the competitive pursuit of what he does not have.

In a modern consumer economy, one works to improve one's personal condition, status, and power. Work increases one's purchasing power in an economy where the accumulation of more goods is better. In the city one is surrounded by strangers on whom he cannot depend. One is an individual, independent entity that must exercise greater self-sufficiency. Traditionally in Shantigaun work was done to meet one's basic needs and to help others, and the village as a whole. To pursue the personal improvement of one's lot with no concern for the needs of others or the village is to be greedy, discontent, and morally deficient.

To be a consumer one must have cash, and to gain cash one must be employed. To be employed, family members must venture to the city. In Shantigaun, it was common for one member of a family to have a wage-earning job in the city, and in some families two or three members went to the city daily to work. Thus, an additional impact of this participation in the urban consumer economy is that a portion of the village population is removed from the village community to the city for much of each day and week.

The moral vision of peace and solidarity of the past presupposed a genuine material interdependence of the members of the community for success and survival. On the other hand, success in the consumer marketplace is in no way dependent on the once important village. Consequently, the virtues necessary for cooperation and helping required of a farmer in the village and which traditionally define the good man are being deemphasized. Making money in the city depends on one's own personal education, training, and work savvy; it is inherently individualistic. Further, there are simply fewer people available in the village who can participate in cooperative activities. Thus, cooperative efforts have become increasingly difficult to accomplish, and the genuine interdependence characteristic of the community in the past is breaking down. Community solidarity marked by a mutual dependence was becoming a characteristic of the past. One informant stated,

Now people depend on themselves more than others. Formerly, I depended on you because I took half from you. I lived on your help. Now no

one is dependent on anyone. One is able to exist through his own ability. Formerly we had to depend on others. In its absence, no one has peace and tranquility.

Another informant states emphatically that presently, "People try to meet their needs somehow by themselves," and another, "Before people used to share their problems, but nowadays they don't." Modern life with its accent on the individual and his or her independence has eroded a moral order that was built around communal virtues.

The recent, rapid, and forceful arrival of consumerism in Nepal has aroused a different vision of happiness for many Shantigaun Chhetris, a vision that is in many respects the antithesis of the traditional vision of peace and solidarity. Traditionally, the morally good man is the one who contributed to that vision. "I consider him a good man who is committed to his family and to his village." The bad man is one who does not contribute to this vision and obstructs its accomplishment through non-participation and making trouble that disrupts the community. The modern consumer economy is drawing many people, especially the young, from meaningful contribution to this vision.

A second accounting that village members often give for moral decline is politics, or more specifically, democracy. In April of 1990 a popular revolution ended the partyless monarchy, and a new constitution was drawn up that allowed greater authority to an elected representative body. The political road since 1990 has been rough. Parties have multiplied, political corruption has increased, and a Maoist insurgency has at times controlled much of the rural areas of the country at the cost of 10,000 lives.

Many Nepalis expressed exasperation with politics over the last decade. Following the 1990 revolution many hoped that greater freedom would result in speedier development and greater equity. This has not been the case. In my conversations with Nepalis prior to leaving the country in 1996, many expressed that the country was better off with the previous partyless system under the king.

Political activity is one of the clearest examples of the influence of Western modernity in Nepal. Democracy, with its foundational concepts of equality, freedom, rights and choice, introduced many ideas to Nepal that are incongruent with native ideas of rule and authority. Although Buddhism maintains some notions of equality, Hinduism affirms a hierarchy of

being that divides humanity into qualitatively different groups by caste. Hinduism tends toward passivity and encourages each person to fulfill his or her lot in life and not pursue personal betterment. Choice is a very foreign idea to many Nepalis. Historically a person did not choose his or her own rulers, spouse, living location or occupation. After the revolution of 1990 the concept of choice received careful thought by many Nepalis. Not only were citizens given the freedom to choose their political leaders, but the freedom to choose was applied to other areas of life. One Nepali told me that since they can now choose their rulers, they should be able to choose their spouses.

Political involvement has been forced upon the residents of Shantigaun. Many of the development projects initiated by the government, NGOs, and INGOs are decided upon within the elected political machinery. If a district or ward wants a piece of the development pie, they must politically compete with other districts and wards. Therefore, most families in Shantigaun are politically engaged and aligned with some political group. One man stated, "Personally I don't like politics, but a person cannot remain aloof from politics. Directly or indirectly, he is involved in politics, but I don't like it." One's neighbors in the village are politically active, pushing their causes and projects, and this demands that others do the same if they are not to be carried along by a vocal minority whose aims may be dissimilar.

Politics is most often connected with the moral decline of Shantigaun at the juncture of increased conflict. "Now in this multiparty system every village has political conflicts." Democracy, as it has touched Shantigaun is divisive and party association has fragmented communities and threatened village solidarity.

Political candidates and party representatives visit villages with the goal of winning supporters. Party platforms are established in opposition to other parties. One gets the sense that the primary purpose of some parties is to keep other parties from gaining the upper hand. One informant stated, "No one wants others to prosper. Politics came and has caused fighting between brothers." Shantigaun traditionally sought peace and communal solidarity, but "when democracy was declared in 1990 people joined different parties and these parties polarized [the people]." For the residents of Shantigaun democracy is divisive and consequently morally corrupting.

The moral decline is not only demonstrated by the introduction of conflict and political polarization, but also by the fact that these competing allegiances threaten the cooperative efforts of the village. One informant, describing a bad man expressed,

When we make a road he will say, "It is not good." We ask him why it is not good and he would say "I will lose my land." But the real reason is that it is not his [political] party. His party is doing something else so he opposes building the road.

Political loyalty is a hindrance to cooperation in Shantigaun.

Cooperative efforts bring the villagers together for a common local cause and cement their oneness as a community. Party loyalties have made these efforts very difficult to orchestrate. A villager who helps in a cooperative project proposed by a person of a rival political group adds to the influence and clout of that party over his own. What one group proposes the others will oppose with a rival plan, "If a representative of a party brings in a proposal to solve the drinking water problem, then a different political party proposes the construction of a school. Why should I cooperate in a project proposed by a different party?" The solidarity of the village is lost.

Democracy in Nepal has allowed greater freedom, a voice for the oppressed, and fewer human rights violations. But multiparty politics proved to be divisive in Nepal and when overlaid upon a culture with a moral vision of peace and solidarity, that vision is rendered inoperative.

Education received significant attention from Shantigaun Chhetris when accounting for moral decline in the village. On the one hand, informants acknowledged the need and value of education for Nepal's development, while, on the other, they grieved the effects education was having on village tradition and morality.

Education in Nepal is modern and one feature of Nepali education that expresses this modernity is its universal availability. Historically, those who could read and write were high caste Brahmins, Buddhist monks, and government officials. Education was largely religious and conducted in the home or in small religious institutions in villages such as monasteries. Education was not an option for most. Now in government as well as private schools many castes may be represented in a single classroom, thus enforcing modern values of equality and personal rights.

Education is also individual. Throughout the rigorous examining process, an individual succeeds or fails alone (in principle) without support from one's community. But further, the curriculum is secular and weighted toward math, science and technology. Education in developing nations is, understandably, intended to contribute to development.

Modern education implemented in the developing world is typically out of step with local values, and this is indeed the case in Shantigaun. In addition to being market-oriented, secular, individual, and universally available, it further removes students from the local context, thus weakening the enculturation to community values they might have received in the village.

Welch argues that the influence of globalization through education has resulted in the weakening of collective values. He states, "Perhaps the most impressive effect of globalization in education is its divisive economic impact, while the principal effects of post-modernity tend towards a commodification of culture and an individualized detachment from collective values" (2001, 485). The influence of education in Shantigaun cannot be separated from other features of modernity. Education is related to employment and the removal of members of the community from the village to jobs in the city. It is related to politics and the critical thinking required of the democratic process that is new to Nepal.

Most Shantigaun Chhetri informants affirmed the positive value of education and would not suggest that education be done away with. Indeed, some looked back at a time of no education and described it as a time of limitation, social oppression, suffering, and hard labor. Ironically, education is seen as good because it has brought economic prosperity and independence:

Formerly people were uneducated and imitated the steps of others. Before we had to depend on others. I was uneducated. I had nothing even for clothing. I had no earning. You had everything. So, if you described black as white, it was right. It was because I was uneducated, and nothing mattered. I had financial plight because of lack of education. Now education has shown the light and they are well off. Why should I depend on you anymore?² I can earn some money and do

everything. Education has shown me the way. So even if I choose to walk my own way, it is all right.

This is a telling statement. The communalism and its associated values that characterized traditional life in Shantigaun seems to have been bracketed. Education has challenged dependent relationships, and in their place, households have learned the ability to manage their own crises without assistance, and this shift is assessed as a change to be celebrated.

The collective values that go along with the traditional vision of solidarity grew out of the genuine material need of villagers to help one another in order to survive. Virtues of helping and cooperation were important because villagers depended on one another. With the social changes furthered by education and the related economic and political changes, these virtues are rendered more and more irrelevant due to the lack of a justifying social context which previously accented them as crucial to village survival. Thus, the virtues of helping and cooperation are threatened to become moral relics of the past reflected upon in language of "how it used to be." There is a sense of loss at the hands of modern education in Shantigaun, yet education is regarded as a good and necessary thing. It has brought the community from ignorance, blind obedience, and domination to independence and freedom.

Os Guinness described modernity recently as "the great solvent."² The erosive effects of modernity in Shantigaun are evident. The response of the Shantigaun Chhetris to this erosion was varied. As the above quote illustrates, some welcome the change and are ready to abandon the traditions of the past. In one conversation on the religious practices of doing fasts and rituals for the salvation of deceased fathers and grandfathers, a young man broke in and said, "This is an old saying. This is only superstition." This assessment is becoming more common among young people who see these traditional practices as irrelevant to modern life. It had been common to interpret crisis and trouble in individual households and in the village as the action of an angry household or village deity. But young people interpret their world differently looking to closer-at-hand material and human explanations of problems.

Others respond by adjusting tradition to modernity. One informant compared Hinduism to "a loose bird

² Personal conversation February 2009.

in an open environment.” The community should accommodate a new modern world. One informant stated, “Modern Chhetris should be able to live in an open environment with a broader outlook and become modern.” Another said that change is necessary if the community is to avoid the fate of the dinosaurs. But he went on to state that change should be slow, and it should be slow in order to avoid disturbing others; giving trouble to others. Here is the vision of peace and solidarity. As values change there should be no upsetting campaign for a cause, no upfront challenge to the traditional ways. Instead, change should be in slow, peaceful increments.

One way that villagers adjust to modernity is to selectively practice their tradition and separate traditional social practices from morality. Villagers compartmentalize different arenas of life, separating them into distinct areas with differing obligations. This compartmentalization is itself a feature of modernity. Traditional practices and even religion are negotiable and may undergo significant changes, but more importantly, these have ceased to be the standard, or at least the primary standard, by which one is assessed as good or bad.

And there are those that grieve the moral decline in the village. They identify the consumerism, political process, and education as culpable in this decline and condemn them. For them the price paid for participation in modernity is too great.

A global web of modern strands exists in which Nepal and Shantigaun Chhetris have become active participants. These strands take the form of satellite TV, educational curriculums, international aid agencies, consumer products, and democratic process.

Participation in this global web has introduced a rival vision of the good life which threatens the traditional communal virtues of helping and cooperation which have traditionally defined the good person.

The Missionary among the Moralities

Four challenges to the mission task surface from a context of competing moralities. First, the Christian missionary must understand the local moral playing field in order to establish cultural credibility. Pursuing this understanding must be part of the task of doing mission. The missionary is to communicate a moral message and encourage moral transformation. A moral message, if it is to be given a hearing, must come through a messenger of moral credibility. To gain that credibility, the missionary must *morally* be all things to all people within the boundaries of a biblical ethic. He or she must, “commend [him or herself] to everyone’s conscience before God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Wayne Dye (1976) and Robert Priest (1994) have contributed to this discussion, and I draw on their thinking here.

The human conscience is a created ability to render moral assessments. The conscience works to accuse or defend a person’s action as well as inform a person’s assessments of the actions of others. All people of all cultures have this ability. But the conscience is formed. It may be weak or strong (1 Corinthians 8:7-12),³ rendered insensitive (1 Timothy 4:1-3),⁴ and the consciences of different people may come to different assessments (1 Corinthians 10:27-33).⁵ The conscience is informed and formed by truth or by falsehood or simply by what one is accustomed to;

³ 1 Corinthians 8:7-12 (ESV): ⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

⁴ 1 Tim 4:1-3 (ESV): ¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:27-30 (ESV): ²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—²⁹ I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

culture plays a significant role in shaping one's conscience. Priest explains,

Humans enter the world in a curiously unfinished condition. They must be taught what they should and should not do. Guardians of morality (most notably parents) in every culture expend great energy in teaching and instilling correct moral sentiments and values in their children. Such norms, sentiments, and judgments become internalized in conscience—which in turn serves to constrain behavior. . . . Conscience is shaped by meaning, norms, ideals, and values which are themselves culturally variable. (1994, 295)

If conscience is the clay, then culture, society and family are the hands that form it.

Shantigaun Chhetris are traditionally a communalistic people. The health and stability of the whole have a higher priority than the moral condition of the members of the village considered individually. A moral man is one who contributes to the betterment of the whole. The conscience of the Shantigaun Chhetri has been shaped by the vision of peace and solidarity which considers important the acts of helping and cooperating. Traditionally, he experiences the condemnation of his conscience when he turns a blind eye to the needs of the village and he condemns others for doing the same.

A cross-cultural missionary living in Shantigaun must conform to the communalism of the village expressed through the values of helping and cooperating. But the missionary may be from a culture that values individual responsibility and self-reliance. Stewart and Bennett describe American culture and its independence and self-reliance:

Americans talk fondly of “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” to become “self-made men” (and women) Although rugged self-reliance lives on mainly in the movies, Americans abroad are often quick to . . . fault the foreigner who shows no desire to be self-reliant. (1991, 136)

The foreigner and the host culture are playing by different moral values that grow out of differing moral visions. One is playing basketball and the other is playing football and each is crying foul for the play of the other.

Recognizing that the conscience of the missionary and that of the cultural native may differ, Dye states

that, “Behavior that I think natural may violate his conscience; things that violate my conscience may not be an issue for him” (1976, 34). Priest then draws the implication, stating that, “In an intercultural situation each interactant will thus tend to condemn the other morally for behavior about which the other has no conscience” (1994, 297). For Shantigaun Chhetris participating in a web of dependent relationships is viewed as a moral ideal. To be self-reliant and shun helping brings condemnation and isolation. Living a quiet life and minding one's own business is not enough to gain moral credibility.

Further, the missionary is tempted to identify his moral sensibilities with those of the scriptures, and not recognize how those sensibilities might find their source not only in the Bible, but also in his or her home culture. Thus, the missionary may not be able to separate what is scriptural from what is cultural. The missionary learned to express biblical injunctions in ways that are culturally appropriate in his or her home culture, but these applications may not be appropriate in another culture. The special problem confronting the missionary is the tendency to condemn native behavior as a violation of a *biblical norm* when the native behavior may not be that at all. Consequently, he may condemn behaviors affirmed as right and moral by the native conscience and these behaviors may be valid cultural expressions of biblical norms.

Shantigaun Chhetris, consistent with their vision of peace and solidarity, give moral priority to behaviors of helping and cooperation. The Bible also exhorts believers to create a genuine caring community and to serve those both within the community of faith and without. Unity among believers is expressed in the Bible as an important priority. However, more individualistic cultures such as those of the West do not give priority to these biblical commands. Therefore, a danger for the missionary who is seeking moral credibility may be to see the helping and cooperative activities of the village as quaint cultural practices, and to fail to see their moral significance as well as their importance. To avoid condemnation as well as to relate and speak with moral credibility, the missionary must adapt to the moral context within which he or she seeks to serve (2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 5:11).

A second challenge to the mission task is an implication of ministering in the context of contested moralities. Thus far we have considered the importance of the missionary “fitting in” with the moral context of his or her host culture. But that moral

ground may be a battlefield on which rival moral visions are at war. Because of social changes, traditional values may have been challenged for good or ill by a new set of practices that have given rise to different values which are incompatible with the old. In just two generations, Nepalis have been drawn into a consumer economy, divided by politics marked by democracy and universally available education, surrounded by a foreign news and entertainment media, and encountered an international presence in the form of tourism. As a result, traditional life is fading. Consequently, a further challenge is that this adaptation is to a changing culture under the pressures of modernity. Adaptation to a new host culture is adaptation to a moving target.

One entailment to these rapid changes is that a variety of symbolic meanings may be ascribed to the foreign missionary by the host culture. Middle aged and older informants saw the changes toward modernity as a decline and not an advance. "If it goes on declining like this it may become a very big problem." Further, some informants claimed that Western influence was to blame for this moral shift. One informant stated, "People learned lots of things from the Western world. And from these things corruption (*bikriti*) entered here." In this context the missionary must ask, "What do I, as an outsider, represent to the different groups in this society?" Before he or she says a word or establishes a lifestyle among Shantigaun Chhetris, the missionary has a symbolic meaning which may help or hinder him or her in the accomplishment of the missionary task (Lee 1990, 337). In Shantigaun the missionary will be assigned different meanings by different groups in the village. To those who value the traditional moral vision of peace and solidarity, the missionary may be seen as an influence toward further moral decline and consequently an enemy. For others in the community, the missionary may represent nontraditional modern values which they have embraced in part or in whole. The missionary may be wealthy compared to those he or she is seeking to serve, and therefore represent a species of prosperity and economic power that some cultural natives desire. The missionary may represent political positions or personal freedoms that stand in contrast to those held by an older generation. The symbolic meaning of the missionary is contested. He or she must recognize that there are preconceived meanings that will be assigned to him or her and proceed with care knowing that an identification with one group in the community may be interpreted as

taking "sides," which may alienate the missionary from another group.

A third challenge for the missionary to consider is the changing understanding of the virtues of a good man and the implication of this change upon the communication of the gospel. The traditional Shantigaun Chhetri moral vision of peace and solidarity expressed itself in practices of helping and cooperation. These practices in turn gave rise to a set of associated virtues such as generosity, sacrifice, humility, etc. These virtues grow out of the real material dependence of the members of the community upon one another. Under the influence of modernity, a new set of practices and virtues have been introduced which are contrary to the old practices and virtues associated with dependence.

In contrast to previous generations, young people now attend school to be "successful." Success has been redefined in terms of employment, income, economic power and independence. Competitive school practices that continue into competitive professional life teach that success is an individual affair. The student and employee succeed on their own because they are smart or more accurately, more clever (*chaluk*), than others. The virtues arising out of this new context are individualistic. The good man is personally disciplined in his studies and professional life. He is able to take advantage of relationships to secure good employment. He is competitive. He is single-minded in his pursuit to personal success in school and job. And, significantly, the *telos* of one's life has changed. In a communal society the common good took precedence; in individualistic societies one's personal good is the priority. MacIntyre states, "Cooperative activities presuppose some degree of *shared* understanding of present and future possibilities" (1999, 74, emphasis added). In the individualism of modernity, shared possibilities have been marginalized as irrelevant, and individual possibilities are rendered a practical necessity to attaining one's personal good. The community good is no longer the prioritized good it once was.

A fourth challenge concerns the impact of development ministries upon the local moral order. With the acceleration of mission participation in humanitarian aid and development from the last quarter of the twentieth century, little attention has been given to the impact of development on the local culture. Ayres describes this inattention:

Developmentalism, it is argued, delineates development as a process and an outcome that is evolutionary in its frame of reference that denies historicity, that is universalist, and that is Eurocentric or West-centric. In short, it ignores the pervasive influence of local historical and cultural factors that affect the development process. (Ayres 2000, 447)

The focus of development has been on strategies that will better the physical condition of a population. Education has been an important part of these strategies. Universally available education in Nepal is a recent occurrence and has been largely structured by foreign aid organizations with the goal of helping Nepal develop. The difficulty with this is that the local cultures are not given serious consideration in the curriculum or its execution. Even more foundational to the vision of development, as Ayers points out, is that it is West-centric; what constitutes development remains assumed and uncontested.

Christian mission efforts should explore development without developmentalism. Mission efforts seeking to improve the physical condition of groups should give careful consideration to the impact these efforts may have on local values and morality. A comparable situation was addressed by Harriet Hill who provided an account of the decline of the sexual morality of the Adioukrou in Africa. She identified several contributors to this decline, and one of them was urban based education (Hill 1990, 331). Modern education is individual, and so weakens the value of corporate solidarity. Further, modern education brings forward the goal of enabling independent participation in a consumer economy and with it the incongruity of participation in community cooperative efforts. Have Christian educational efforts uncritically accepted Western secular development models? Developmentalism is an ideology that begs for careful scrutiny from the light of a biblical worldview. This is not a suggestion that the church abandon wholistic ministries. Acting Christianly examines the motive, the act itself, its means, and its end, including considering unintended ends or consequences.

Conclusion

To act morally is to act humanly. But diverse cultures do not follow the same moral script. In a new host culture, the missionary may walk onto a stage in which the actors are using a different moral script that

follows a different story line, grounded in a different moral vision, along with consequent values and expected behaviors. His or her mission task is to relate and serve with credibility on this stage. To do so the missionary needs to understand the moral script of his or her host culture along with its values and behaviors. This investigation of the moral world of Shantigaun Chhetris has sought to do just that.

Traditionally, the moral priorities of Shantigaun Chhetris are peace (*shanti*) and cooperation. Peace is at the center of the moral vision of Shantigaun Chhetris and cooperation is a contributor to that peace. Being a moral priority means that peace and cooperation are controlling values for the community. There are other moral values held by the community but these stand at the top of a moral hierarchy. Other moral values must bow to *shanti*. This study also revealed that the traditional moral priorities of Shantigaun Chhetris are threatened by modern life that characterizes the city. Modern life in the city demands independence, personal advancement, democracy, and personal power in a cash-based economy. Shantigaun is a community of contested moralities.

It is in this context of contested moralities that the missionary must make informed decisions about adapting life and service. With what moral script will the missionary seek to identify? What adaptations to life and service should be made? How will he or she communicate a gospel of hope in the midst of moral change and confusion? What are the implications of wholistic ministries for local values and virtues? These are questions that arise when rival moralities meet.

The demand upon the missionary is to navigate moral waters that hide rocks and reefs that might shipwreck life and ministry in a host culture that is not his own. The apostle Paul navigated such waters. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 Paul stated that he became all things to all people in order to win some. For Paul this meant crossing moral boundaries well established in his own culture. To eat what Gentiles ate, and to eat with them, was for the strict Jew morally abhorrent. The moral script of the faithful Jew was self-evident needing no justification. Ritual purity was a controlling moral priority that needed no explanation. Enculturation naturalizes these boundaries. Moral boundaries are "felt" in one's soul. It is the mature laborer that is free to become as one without the law to win those without the law. Paul was careful to state that this did not mean moral license. He was under the law of Christ; he would do nothing to offend his Savior.

The Christian missionary is called upon to exercise just this freedom that comes from the gospel. But as for Paul, it is a freedom exercised with knowledge. Paul knew the moral landscape of the cultural world in which he labored. The missionary is called to also pursue that knowledge with intentionality.

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