

# INTRODUCTION

## *Christianity and the Struggle for Well-being*

### **Religions in Strife**

Whatever its origins, religious essentialism, or fundamentalism as it is normally known, claims absolute knowledge. Its clerics base their authority on it. Dogmatic assertions harden membership barriers between religious communities, limiting voluntary movement in and out of them. Yet, for many people, conversion to a particular religion may seem the only route to a better life. There is a tension between long-term loyalty and the chance to join another religion. This tension has recurred at different times and places throughout the world. It became especially salient at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the era of so-called globalization, because ideas were being more rapidly communicated than ever before. On the whole, religious balkanization prevailed. But people compared religions, and some either converted to them or set up their own.

What do people want from religion? Being able to affirm belief in extra-human superior power brings personal and collective reassurance, which normally also brings promises of spiritual and bodily well-being and cure. Healing the body as well as the soul thus becomes part of the affirmation of belief. But healing the strife between religions is rarely part of the curative liturgy.

The rise of what has come to be called Hindutva in India during turn of the century modern globalization can be set alongside the alleged growing influence of radical Islam within a country that has had a long history of religious tension but also of conversion among Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and Christian communities in the lands making up what is now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A modern focus is the disputed Jammu and Kashmir state, which has a majority Muslim population but was made part of India after independence in 1947. A more recent focus within India itself has been the issue of the Hindu Ram temple at Ayodhya, which was allegedly destroyed during an earlier Muslim invasion and which certain radical Hindus wished to

rebuild, having themselves destroyed the mosque which had been constructed on the temple's foundations.

This book does not address these complex relations of Hindu, Muslim and other populations making up an Indian politics of religion, by which, according to India's policy of 'secularism', all citizens are free to practise their own religion. These interrelationships are mentioned in order to point up a complex mosaic in which Christians figure. The role of Christianity in India may seem minor by comparison with that of other faiths, yet is evidently of sufficient concern to agitate certain Hindu activists in the country. For instance, anti-Christian pamphlets were produced by right-wing Hindu groups at the approach of Christmas 2003, and Christians celebrating Christmas were attacked by one such group, the Bajrang Dal (see *The Times of India* 24 December 2003; *Hindustan Times* 25 December 2003). The right-wing Hindu political party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), also claimed that on the eve of the same Christmas, about five hundred 'tribals' in Maharashtra state, including a local pastor, converted to Hinduism from Christianity at a VHP sponsored *sammelan* (gathering). The claim was disputed by both government and Christian authorities but may reflect the VHP self-professed programme to counter the influence of Christian missionaries in many tribal areas (*The Times of India* 27 December 2003), where people are sometimes reluctant to enter the Hindu hierarchy at a low level. In 2007 and 2008, in Orissa, the agitation, protests against conversions and persecution of the Christians by the Hindu fundamentalists brought to light the plight of those who choose to convert to Christianity over Hinduism.

The Naga peoples of Nagaland in north-east India, who are the subject of this book, have converted in great numbers to Christianity from their indigenous animistic religion, over two or three generations. Unlike the converts in Orissa and in some other areas of mainland India, however, they are sole occupants of their land and have not suffered persecution by territorial neighbours, although there have been tensions between converts and animists. The Naga clearly, then, play a role in the ongoing creation of Indian and South Asian religious diversity, having adopted Christianity in preference to Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, and so expressing their distinctiveness as a political, ethnic and linguistic grouping who stand apart from the various South Asian mainstreams.

The Naga are thus part of the wider chronicle of religious strife, while experiencing the more immediate problems of challenging and being challenged by people who support animism and those who advance the cause of Christianity. In this struggle, questions about the legitimacy and efficacy of healers from the two traditions are also religious questions: are the two sets of beliefs and practices compatible, mutually reinforcing or anathema to each other? Or are they all these things at different times? The starting point of such comparison is not in fact whether or not healers of one system are more successful than the other in effecting bodily cure, although this becomes an

important index in due course. It is rather the passion of membership and belonging, with evangelical Christians, on the one hand, proclaiming their faith of complete personal absorption and, on the other hand, animists insisting that their traditional methods are relevant for today's ills and identities, and are not always at odds with newer ones.

### **The Passion and the Pragmatic**

'Nagaland for Christ' and 'Jesus Saves' are familiar slogans in Nagaland, displayed prominently on public transport and on advertising banners on special occasions such as Christianity centenary celebrations in towns and villages. Such overt expressions of homogeneous Christian-ness, however, belie the underlying tensions and the ongoing negotiations between Christian and non-Christian Naga. How did this idealization of Christian homogeneity come about? By focusing on one of the many Naga peoples, known as the Angami Naga, I look at relations between Christians and non-Christians and how this division is expressed through their respective religions and healing practices. Those Angami practising ancestral worship are known as *Krūna*, while Christians are known as *Kehou-mia*. This book explores persisting traditional animistic beliefs, rituals and healing, and compares them with contemporary healing as practised by the followers of various Christian denominations. In doing so it examines the continuity of certain beliefs as well as the recent revival of some cultural traditions against a background of extensive Christianity. Such coexistence of belief and practice cannot be wholly explained in terms of religious syncretism. Indeed, the concept of syncretism here begs rather than answers questions, such as whether we are dealing with the joining together of previously separate whole traditions or with a mixture of elements variously drawn from the two religions, and whether such syncretism is recognized by people themselves. Christian and non-Christian are rather to be understood as two broad alternating streams of discourse, the one masking the other but at different times and in different guises. They are part of and only comprehensible through a history of the region, whose peoples have in different situations and times taken on cultural identities during this process of social and political change. Peoples' perceptions of their own cultural distinctiveness, their resultant cultural demarcations and essentialisms, and their preparedness to adopt and transform different presentations of themselves is therefore by no means a phenomenon associated only with late-twentieth-century global developments, but has happened before.

A historical insight into the introduction of Christianity in Naga Hills informs us of the strategies missionaries had to use to gain a foothold in the area; the disagreements and debates within the mission and between missionaries and the Naga, and those between the missionaries and the British political officers regarding 'tampering' with indigenous ways of living. Historical

events such as the annexation of the Naga Hills by the British in the mid-nineteenth century opened the Naga Hills area to outside influences as never before. Missionaries were welcomed in certain villages for opening primary schools and providing rudimentary medical care. From the correspondence of the missionaries with the American Baptist Home Board, we learn how the Naga had begun equating Christianity with education. The latter was perceived as a useful instrument to cope with and take advantage of the changing social and political situation. Although Christianity was introduced among the Angami at the end of the nineteenth century, notable conversions took place only after the 1930s. Today, almost 90 per cent of the Angami are Christian.

In the last two decades there has been a definite revival, and partly creation, of what people have come to identify as Naga culture. What were once considered 'pagan' cultural practices, discouraged by the Christian missionaries, have been revived as part of the assertion of Naga ethnic identity – a process which can be directly linked to the Naga nationalist movement for separation from India. During my fieldwork stretching over a long period, I began noticing the manner in which 'Naga culture' was being projected. The field trip in 1997 and the later visits in 2001, 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2011 made me acutely aware of the assertion of ethnic identity through this cultural revival. In 1997 preparations were in full swing in the capital town of Kohima to celebrate the 125th year of Baptist Christianity in Nagaland. The main traffic junctions were swathed in banners advertising the upcoming event. The participating villages and churches were busy raising funds by selling traditional crafts, and the youth clubs in the villages had been mobilized for cleaning up the town area. Cultural events to entertain the delegates were being planned with an emphasis on projecting 'Naga traditional culture'; the local designers had been engaged to design clothes for the church choirs using traditional textiles. In the period 1997–2011, many Angami villages celebrated their centenary of Baptist Christianity, or fifty or twenty-five years of Catholic Christianity, or the establishment of Revival churches. The larger villages such as Khonoma and Kohima designed special commemorative cloths to mark the events. One such cloth designed by Khonoma village, which depicts symbols associated with the bygone days of war and community feasting, has now become a popular item for gift giving and a symbol of Angami Baptist Christianity.

The showcasing of culture is unsurprisingly very pronounced in events oriented towards tourism. In the Hornbill Festival organized by the Directorate of Nagaland State Tourism in December 2000 in Kohima, the central theme was Naga youth dormitories, the traditional institution for socialization, allegiance to which was banned by the missionaries during the initial phase of Christianity. The popularity of the indigenous architecture and the events showcasing cultural aspects of various Naga (and Kachari) communities in Nagaland is now the focus of the annually staged Hornbill Festival. A separate site called the Kisama Heritage Village has been constructed outside the capital town of Kohima with youth dormitory huts, each depicting the indigenous

style of the particular Naga community. During the week-long tourist festival at the venue, indigenous Naga dances, games and mock rituals are performed by day, and at night a youth rock concert competition is held which also attracts participants from outside Nagaland state.<sup>1</sup>

These throw up dialectic situations. On one hand, we find the Naga projecting themselves as a Christian people belonging to a Christian state, while on the other, the public celebrations, whether religious or political, assert their Naga-ness through the display of 'traditional' art and ceremonial costume. The very aspects of Naga attire that were discouraged by the missionaries in the early phase of evangelization now hold centre stage in all public celebrations. The emergence of a Naga cultural identity redefines their supposedly intrinsic characteristics, but differentiates them from neighbouring communities and from the Christians in other parts of India. In doing so, this redefinition also provides justification for the separatist movement. 'Nagaland for Christ', a slogan popularized by the evangelists of the Baptist faith, has now been usurped by the Naga nationalists, especially the group NSCN (IM) that is increasingly emphasizing a Christian identity to the extent of calling their movement an evangelical struggle. Increasingly biblical metaphors of chosen people and chosen land are being used to justify demands to include a vast geographical area around the present state of Nagaland within an imagined or prospective homeland called Nagalim.

### **Conversion and Christianity**

This combative and assertive turn in the development of a world religion in a particular region raises questions about the consequences as well as causes of conversion, and about whether there is something distinctive about Christianity in articulating emergent nationalist sentiment and political organization. I would argue that there is little in text-based Christian theology that intrinsically leads to such assertiveness, though it is true that particular elements can be selected to justify courses of action as in any world religion. Similarly, differently chosen forms of organization among denominations may shape distinctive social and political adaptations: contrast, for instance hierarchical organization in Catholicism with the more egalitarian, but also sometimes factional, mode among Baptists, at least in recent years among Naga.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is an important generalization that we can make. This is that the inextricable association of Christian missionizing with Western colonial and technological dominance has been the basis of the development of an early kind of 'modernity'. It is a modernity which has fostered nationalist sentiment cloaked, paradoxically, in the mantle of universal tolerance and, as we shall see in the case of the Naga, attempts at political reconciliation through community healing. Perhaps in response to popular world media representations of a battle between Christianity and Islam for converts and influence in the early twenty-

first century, anthropologists have lately turned to the study of Christian conversion and its effects, having focused earlier on Islam. The anthropology of Christianity therefore proposes, and in some cases questions, its distinctiveness as a field of study. This is not to say that Christianity has not been studied ethnographically before (e.g. Peel 1968, 2000), but a concerted effort to form a niche for studies of Christianity has been a recent endeavour of anthropologists working among communities that have experienced extensive or almost total conversion from their indigenous religion to one or another form of Christianity (Cannell 2005, 2006; Robbins 2003, 2006; Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins 2008; Engelke 2007; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Keane 2007). As Robbins (2006: 285) says, Christianity is no longer a subject that elicits surprise or a blank response from anthropologists, who are more accustomed to anthropological interest in vernacular or such other world religions as Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam.

However, critiquing the idea of an anthropology of Christianity as a sub-discipline as proposed for instance by Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins (2008: 1139) and Cannell (2005, 2006), Hann (2007) writes that the authors of most recent monographs have in fact focused on those societies which have been of 'traditional' anthropological interest and that, even when studying Christianity in the West, they have been interested in anomalous or marginalized rather than mainstream Christian groups (Coleman 2000; Cannell 2005). Of course, much depends on the idea of mainstream here, for, as Jenkins shows in his aptly titled study, *Religion in English Everyday Life* (1999), Christianity may be socially understated in England but is in fact widely implicit in rural and small town life through local activities, ceremonies and symbolism, and through a concern for what he calls 'human flourishing'. Still, Hann's critique points up the major concern in the anthropology of Christianity with relatively recent cases of widespread conversion in societies still able to remember a past dominated by pre-Christian practices. The Naga are certainly one such society.

I did not set out to make this study of the Naga a contribution to the anthropology of Christianity. My fieldwork in Naga society began in 1985 with an interest in traditional healers, especially in relation to an important pre-Christian festival called Sekrenyi concerned among other things with bodily and spiritual health. But some of the healers had converted to Christianity and it was relevant to understand the role of Christianity in their healing practices. One could say that my research at the outset and throughout has focused on Naga as a people, including its healers, some of whom are Christian. Some anthropologists make a similar claim when they say that they study not Islam but Muslim society, or people who happen to be Muslims, among whom healing is a facet of their daily lives as well as their religion. That said, it became clear that I could not study Naga healers without also following the path of Christianity among them, understanding why some joined the religion and why others did not.

Here, it seems to me that what is really at issue in much of the anthropology of Christianity cited above is the process of conversion and the play of motivations, incentives, inducements, encouragements, directives and constraints operating among the various actors in a history of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts. The notion of conversion is clearly broad. It may sometimes be taken to imply change from one absolute state to another, or it may be regarded as fragmentary and full of stops, starts, reverses, advances, contraction and outreach. Moreover, Christian conversion as studied by anthropologists has nearly always had global connections, and continues to have such connections, even though many Christian communities now emphasize the indigenous nature of their church. Regional flavours, so to speak, have come to characterize Christianity in India (and elsewhere) as shown by anthropological studies of Christianity in Southern India by Caplan (1987), Mosse (1994, 1996, 2006) and Viswanathan ([1993] 2010).

The paradox of a world religion becoming made up of different regionally shaped versions points to the changes it may sustain in the process of its global transfer. Thomas Csordas (2009) focuses on the transportability of religions, the 'means by which they traverse geographic and cultural space' (ibid.: 5) and the global nature of such travel. However, what the innovative collection does not fully explain nor provide insight into is the agency of the 'transporter' and that of the recipient, and the criteria for selection – who selects, and what is being selected for, in this transnational transcendence?<sup>3</sup> What, then, can a new religion offer, and what is appropriated by the converts? An overview of missionary strategy quickly demonstrates that 'civilizing' and 'educating the pagans' were at the top of the agenda. So-called modernity was expressed as new lifestyles, and through the introduction of practices of hygiene, biomedicine, different (though not always better) skills of vegetable gardening and animal husbandry, and, as part of educational instruction, a capacity to argue and debate with colonial and postcolonial authorities on the latter's terms, as we shall see among Naga. Modernity, as an increasingly pervasive and nominally coherent worldview, thus became intertwined with Christian conversion (see van der Veer 1996), at least by those with the authority to pronounce on it.

Of course, the experience and reasons for conversion itself are unlikely to be understood by the converted through a singular and coherent notion of modernity. Individuals have their own specific and often highly varying reasons for conversion. They may simply follow relatives, friends or loved ones into the church or a different sect. Or their reasons for conversion or change of church may be glossed as being 'rational' choices, as has historically characterized Christianity: why worship through a priest or other human intermediary when another church allows you to communicate with God more directly?; or why direct resources to outward appearances when humble personal submission to God is all that is required? – and so on. Or there may be seen to be other advantages in conversion or changing one's sect. Smilde (2007: 7) recalls being

told by one acquaintance that her reason for leaving the Catholic church was due to a 'better deal' being offered by the evangelical church when the family moved from a small town to the bigger city of Bogota. What constitutes a better deal will itself vary according to needs, wants and what is provided, but indicates the undeniable pragmatic aspect of many such choices, involving perhaps improved educational or biomedical access and entitlement. Of course these material benefits are not necessarily viewed as such but may well be couched in genuinely felt emotional responses, such as the pull of spiritual intensity and performativity of prayer in one church as against another, which happens also to be associated with such benefits. Obtaining advantage through conversion or changing sects does not, after all, by itself devalue piety, provided that the sanctity and sincerity of worship are shared by the Christian community as a whole: one's commitment to God moves with one, ostensibly regardless of improved circumstances.

The support offered by the various church organizations, their sometimes varying liturgies, the relative attractiveness of their modes of worship, and interpersonal influences thus variously occur as factors in conversion and in changing allegiance from one sect to another. Now, while it is sometimes possible for a convert or outside analyst to identify the interpersonal, aesthetic-emotional, rational and material factors in individual decisions, as evident in Smilde's example, it may in practice be difficult to distinguish them as separable motives. After all, the viability of a religious system generally depends on motivations remaining mutually embedded and opaque, lest belief be reduced to challengeable propositions. That said, people do talk to each other about their and others' conversion or changing sect membership, as happens among the Naga, and in so doing present a kind of panoply of reasons for preferring one church or sect to another.

How does this portrait of a plethora of individual conversions making up the panoply square with Joel Robbins' (2004) examination of conversion through the Paulin category of rupture, which he explains as a break from the past? He exemplifies this through the stark contrast of 'before' and 'after' in the lives of the converts in the small community of Urapmin in Papua New Guinea. Robbins and colleagues sympathetic to his position are of course perfectly aware that the 'radical discontinuity', allegedly created by Christianity (Cannell 2006: 14) and understood through the 'trope of rupture' (Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins 2008: 1144–45), is in fact always in tension with continuing pre-Christian spiritual practices and theories of society. But they insist that there is ineluctable movement through Christianity to sociocultural transformations, transcultural engagements and even language, which permanently transcend local structures of action and conviction. They claim that to stay with the counter-argument that people can accommodate both pre-Christian and Christian beliefs in indefinite syncretistic continuity is to deny that people can enlarge their orbit of discussion and understanding, and learn anything new.



Some discomfort has been expressed with regard to the notion of rupture. Hann and Goltz (2010: 7) suggest that this model of radical discontinuity may well fit Robbins' use of Protestantism as his ideal type, but it jars with the case of the Eastern Christians who, by contrast, emphasize continuity in their representations of themselves. If, then, the trope fits some but not all versions of Christianity, this challenges any tendency to think of the religion as sufficiently homogeneous in its effects on people's perceptions to warrant such generalizations, or at least opens the door to suggestions that we look at its non-religious contexts as being more important in determining how the religion is viewed by its adherents than its intrinsic properties.

In some respects the idea of rupture can be applied to Naga conversion, at least within the broad sweep of recent history, and since the Second World War especially. After all, we need only to retreat two or three generations to a past when few Naga were Christian and when those aspects of modernity mentioned above were subordinated to a powerfully predominant animistic worldview. But, as we see in the following chapters, while conversion can indeed be seen as a historical break with the past at a certain level of abstraction, it is also, and more immediately from the viewpoint of people who interact with each other, a series of overlapping acts of conversion and changing church membership, of competition between churches, and of conflict between burgeoning Christianity as a whole and important remaining aspects of animism. Phenomenologically, this is the experience of patchy continuity more than a clean rupture, of everyday struggle against the broad sweep of history too remote to be immediately visible. That is to say, some religious ideas are discarded while others accommodate each other and sometimes overlap in indigenous theological analysis, doing so not in any linear sequence but through forward and backward loops and at different times from each other. The rupture that did take place was surely more to do with the change in the political situation, with the British period of colonization, the subsequent annexation of Naga villages and the banning of inter-village warfare. A decline of associated rituals and with this the inability to earn merit through warfare, as well as a totally different power equation that colonial administration brought, stifled traditional Naga aspirations for achievement and so created a gap which missionary education and evangelical activities filled with varying degrees of success, but not to the extent of snuffing out all lines of animistic explanation and practice.

The Christianizing process as such was, then, far from smooth. For instance, although Christianity among the Naga gained a foothold through education and medical work, it also experienced several setbacks, including diffidence and what was called 'backsliding' on the part of converts, and the subsequent disbanding of some churches and schools due to missionaries' differing opinions as to what being a Christian meant. Some sought strict discipline by trying to ban the drinking of local rice beer, the curative sacrifice of animals during illnesses, and the participation in many communal activities, as well as

by seeking to change traditional ways of clothing the body. Complicating internal differences among Naga as well as between Naga and missionaries, some new converts even took on this puritanical behaviour in order to distinguish themselves from their 'pagan', animistic fellow villagers, for instance replacing rice beer with black tea as among the Ao and, later, other Naga groups.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the early period of Christian conversion in the Angami area, converts objected to the efforts of Reverend Supplee, the American missionary, to set the melody of the translated hymns to Angami folk tunes, as it reminded them of the 'heathen' lives that they were no longer part of (Pesey 2003: 153). However, reinforcing my suggestion that Naga Christianity is a process of twists and turns, there has since been a reversal, with the Catholic church in Angami Jakhama village introducing hymns sung to indigenous folk melodies, some churches compiling their own song collections, and some combining folk melody with indigenous hymnody based on Bible translations. A kind of remaking of the past in the present also occurs in recent attempts to explain indigenous concepts of divinity through analogy with Christian concepts, as for instance in Ao's (1994) *Tsungremology: Ao Naga Christian Theology*, in which he discusses points of similarity as well as departure.

In the Naga context, then, it may not be helpful to view conversion through the lens of absolute rupture or radical discontinuity, or even as expressed by people as a break with the past. It is not that the idea is necessarily wrong but that it does not tell us much and, moreover, diverts focus away from the very present conflicts of affiliation, loyalty and interpretation between which people navigate. I sympathize with the point made by James and Johnson (1988) that the study of Christianity should start from adherent's interpretation of their experiences, and not reduce it to politico-economic explanation. But we do need to identify those situations, as among the Naga, where political and economic factors are strongly associated both with widespread Christian conversion and with a kind of rewriting of indigenous theological ideas and practices seen sometimes as antithetical to Christianity, but increasingly seen as complementary. The increase in the number of converts during the Christian revivals in the 1950s, '60s and '70s does in fact coincide with the marked strengthening of the Naga nationalist movement and the brutal Indian Army action against villagers to quell or curb the armed insurgency in the area, while later attempts at political peace making draw on a combination of Christian and indigenous religious appeals, including those of animistic healing. The Christian concept of healing soul and body, and the work of traditional healers – including those who adapt to the church – thus come together, despite their differences, in this spirit of reconciliation. The routes taken among Naga to reach this position, and their possible success or failure, are the subject of this book.

Focusing on the Angami group, whose area was the heartland of Second World War battles, the book looks as much at concepts of the body, disease and illness, curative rituals, and the lives of healers as it does at contemporary

Christian healing as practised by Pentecostal and Revival churches (including both Catholic and Baptist). Together, these concepts and narratives provide the outlines of Naga debate in an idiom of national well-being, cure and common cultural identity, despite continuing conflict. So, animistic healers argue with those of the church. Villages, clans and sub-groups fight over the refusal of Christians to support non-Christian events, or over different church loyalties. Churches themselves compete with each other, or oscillate in their support for, or opposition to, the nationalist militia. But this language of argument, to use Edmund Leach's memorable phrase, in fact sets the terms for talking about the needs and future of the Naga peoples as a whole. For by highlighting so openly what divides them, Naga can talk also about how to heal the divisions. Healing people's bodies, minds and interpersonal relationships, and healing the bloody conflicts between Naga nationalist factions, become metaphors of each other. Whether the talking results in a solution is another question which has been addressed elsewhere in the world where, as in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there have been attempts to quell vengefulness and seek peace by healing the wounds of war. Among Naga, the driver here is the quest for cures, with Christianity as the vehicle.

### **Plan of the Book**

The story opens in chapter 1 by showing how the Naga peoples, geographically separated from each other by mountain, river and forest, speaking often markedly different Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects, and with cultural differences arising from similarity, were thrown together in a new and perhaps greater sense of ethnic self-consciousness through the interventions of British colonialism in this part of north-east India. Politically part of India and yet ethno-linguistically and culturally closer to South-East Asians, the Naga stand out as already linked in diverse directions to peoples and areas beyond their immediate homes, with Christianity now playing an increasing role in their nationalistic demands for autonomy or independence, as described later in the book. The modern process of globalization is thus in part a continuation of this people 'ever-in-the-making'. Set apart from mainland India and enjoying a distinctive sociocultural status, much exoticized in early European accounts of them, they enthusiastically and rapidly adopted Christianity, while retaining fundamental animistic beliefs, rituals, methods of healing, and traditional modes of village and clan organization. This is not however static sociocultural syncretism but a dynamic playing out of the tension between movement towards ideas of nationhood and divergent pulls of competing interests. The histories of Naga Christianity and nationalism are thus intertwined, culminating in recent years in nationalists actually appropriating the religion as a banner of their cause.

Some of these divergent interests are explored in chapter 2 through the persisting pantheon of Angami beliefs and practices which now permeate the lives of both Christians and non-Christians. Comparing them with those described in J.H. Hutton's monograph (1921a), we see the ingenuity with which Angami have adapted them to present circumstances, often in the face of opposition by both missionaries and Angami Christian converts, and against the background of variable nationalist views on the place of animism and Christianity in the independence struggle. In particular we see the close relationship between Angami religious beliefs and their ideas about the causes of disease and illness, including concepts which cut across religious boundaries and set up a discourse on moral behaviour.

Beginning with the Naga view that animism thrives on action, chapter 3 gives detailed accounts of the place of these ideas in life-cycle rituals, those performed at times of illness and disease, and at an annual festival of the Angami called Sekrenyi, which combines several themes: repairing body and soul, purification, initiation to adulthood, and the well-being of the people. Moreover, in this celebration of the Sekrenyi festival, Angami customs and beliefs about their origin and migration are reinforced, thus making the festival an identity marker for the Angami as a whole and not just a parochial event. The festival is explicitly about the renewal of life and health and so, being a communal event, speaks to the participants as a whole, Christian and non-Christian, and establishes the contours of Naga self-concern that goes beyond conflicting village, clan and separatist loyalties.

Traditional healers have in some cases joined the new churches while others have remained outside. Together, however, they straddle animistic continuity and the reglobalizing reach of Christian healing and biomedicine. Chapter 4 therefore enters the lives of Angami traditional healers, of whom there are various types, ranging from herbalists to diviners, all with their own methods of treatment and ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge. Beholden to past practices alongside new methods, those who have converted to Christianity have retained the services of various possessory spirits which are regarded as vital assistants in their work.

Chapter 5 asks how and why Christianity was introduced by the American Baptist Mission to Naga Hills. Material from correspondence and memoirs of the missionaries reveal their strategies of evangelization. It is then shown which aspects of Christianity attracted the Naga, how education and biomedicine came to play a vital role in the acceptance of mission activities by some Naga, and why conflicts occurred between Christian converts and non-Christians. Of particular importance is the sometimes uneasy relationship that existed between missionaries and British colonial officials and, later, the exile of American Baptist missionaries by the newly independent Government of India for expressing political sympathy with the emerging nationalist movement, itself fostered through earlier exposure of Naga British army recruits to Europe and elsewhere during the First and Second World Wars.

Chapter 6 introduces a case showing how the monopoly of the Baptist Church was challenged when a Catholic mission was given permission by the Government of Independent India to enter Naga Hills in the early 1950s. Gradually other denominations, especially Revival churches, made inroads. Keeping in perspective the proliferation of different denominations among the Angami and the choices available to people, chapter 6 discusses contemporary Christianity among the Angami. I explore the reasons for conversion and for switching allegiance from one church to another. Giving a comparative account of liturgy in the churches of different denominations, I then examine the differences as well as the similarities among them with respect to the reasons people give for their faith in a particular church. In some cases church revivalism ‘indigenized’ worship by associating the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit with the pre-Christian spirit pantheon, so further complicating the divisions between Christians and non-Christians, including healers.

In chapter 7 it is shown how the different healing ideas and practices of animism and Christianity, and biomedicine through Christian missions, reconcile their initial differences and come together as a plural medical system, which is used by both Christians and non-Christians and is finally accepted by the church. At the same time, Christianity is increasingly turned to as the only likely source of healing the violence resulting from the warring factions of the Naga nationalist movement.

The Conclusion takes up the theme of political reconciliation through Christianity’s emphasis on healing through forgiveness. The church’s collective appeals for peace, however, come up against the recurring nationalist factional vengeance, based primarily on an opposition between those who seek only political autonomy within India and those arguing for total sovereignty. The violence moreover partly runs along the lines of rival Naga social units, ranging from tribe to village and clan, having also been experienced first at the hands of the colonial British and, later, the Indian Army opposed to secession. So while a plural healing system successfully reconciles Christianity and the traditional religion, the church has yet to heal the history of conflict between factions. A dilemma is whether its appeals for forgiveness can be unconditional or must be preceded by apology or confession in order for there to be national peace.

## Notes

1. The site is now also used for other secular gatherings such as meetings of the Bamboo Development Board, and since 2009 it has a permanent museum devoted to the Second World War Battle of Kohima. See also Kikon (2005) for a critique of the Hornbill Festival.
2. See Ranger (2008) and Lumsdaine (2009) on essays exploring the link between organization of evangelical Christianity and democracy. In Fernandes’ article in this collection, the divisiveness of the Baptist church councils in north-eastern India hinders steps towards getting the insurgents to agree a common peace policy. Compare also the different responses to authority and leadership among Angami Baptists and Catholics (Peseyie 2001 and

Orapankal 1999). See also Bautista and Khek Gee Lim (2009) on the relationship between Christianity, conversion, nationalism and the State in Asia. See also Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, 1992).

3. Personal discussion in February 2010 with Thomas Csordas, in which he agreed that the question of selectivity and agency could legitimately be included in a critique of the book.
4. In 1989, after a concerted effort by the Naga Mothers' Association, with support from the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, the Nagaland state Government implemented prohibition on the sale of alcohol in the state. Alcoholism has been a problem in Nagaland, but prohibition has been criticized as boot-legging is now rampant. Among Christian converts some are puritanical and do not consume alcohol, but for many it is a drink that they consider they can enjoy with impunity, just like Christians in the West.