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Chapter Five

New Paradigm Christianity and Commitment-formation: The Case of Hope Filipino (Singapore)¹

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Hope Filipino

Hope Filipino is one of the many congregations of migrants found in Protestant churches in cosmopolitan Singapore, and the largest among all the Filipino congregations of Hope of God International that originated in Bangkok, Thailand. Having started in 2000 with only three regular Sunday service attendees, Hope Filipino now has more than 700 – and it fearlessly aims to reach 1,000 by the end of 2007. Approximately 90 per cent are professionally employed while 10 per cent are domestic helpers. Women comprise 70 per cent of the total. Although primarily Filipino, the congregation is open to other nationalities, which accounts for the use of English in all interactions. In fact, a very small but increasing number of non-Filipinos are joining the ranks, most of whom are colleagues in the workplace. Several leaders are also local Chinese Singaporeans. Except for the pastor, everyone else is employed fulltime while involved in the congregation. The other local congregations of Hope Church Singapore (for example, adult, youth, Chinese-speaking), whose overall attendance reaches beyond 3,000 weekly, see the substantial contribution of its Filipino counterpart in bringing more potential members into the church. Currently, there are more than 40 weekly care groups (small communities of less than 20), up from 22 in 2004.

The strength and continuous growth of this congregation occur in light of the fact that Filipinos are mostly Catholics and are generally employed for shift-based and demanding professions in the 24/7 industries of healthcare, shipping, electronics and IT. Hence, the conversion of Filipinos and the development of their commitment are focal to the congregation's activities. What makes the phenomenon more interesting is the fact that Hope Filipino is a growing new paradigm congregation, determined to become a megachurch of migrant professionals whose many members have opted to stay in Singapore with church as decisive factor.

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Research Purpose

Moving away from the frequently studied large churches in the US, this research looks at the experience of a relatively young migrant congregation in an Asian context where new paradigm churches are increasingly changing the religious landscape. What accounts for lay involvement in the new paradigm environment at Hope Filipino? What subjectivities surrounding commitment are emerging? As contribution to the present volume, my inquiry attempts to enrich understanding of new paradigm Christianity in view of particular subjectivities and practices individuals have about religious involvement. In this chapter, I argue that new paradigm Christianity's determination to be culturally relevant in terms of its openness to new ways of doing church while maintaining an arguably strict position on Biblical standards on behavior and providing opportunities for greater involvement becomes the institutional space for the development of significant levels of commitment. This is a phenomenon that surfaces as Hope Filipino, as a new paradigm congregation, strategically addresses the issues of the migrant Filipino professional. By focusing on the subjectivity, my analysis of commitment-formation deviates from less meaningful conceptualizations of religious involvement in terms of attendance and affiliation (for discussion, see Roberts and Davidson 1984). The chapter ends by presenting a more nuanced theoretical view of new paradigm Christianity.

Because my interest is in the subjectivities concerning commitment, the method is qualitative. I conducted data gathering in early 2006 for my independent research at the master's level. Interviewees have been selected based on a balanced representation of gender, length of stay in church, leadership position, degree of involvement and nationality (local Singaporean and Filipino). A very small number of the key leaders, including the pastor, are Chinese Singaporeans who pioneered the congregation. Participant observations of major evangelistic activities, including an evangelistic Sunday service and an evangelistic care group session, complete the methodology.

Characterizing New Paradigm Christianity

Largely successful in the US and Australia and mostly in the form of megachurch movements, new paradigm Christianity's ability to draw crowds to Protestant conversion foreshadows a new form of contemporary Christianity sensitive to the needs and interests of the modern individual (Miller 1997). In his groundbreaking work, Miller (1997) looks at the massive success of its congregations in terms of their ability to be culturally relevant, which he describes as the new paradigm of doing evangelism. The main target is the modern urbanite, who, as a result of a secular environment, avoids mainstream religion (Balmer and Winner 2002). Relevance is achieved by overhauling many of the traditional practices in mainline Protestantism in light of adopting appealing contemporary culture. This explains why megachurches have thrown out images and rituals that offer any tinge of structured religiosity.

Miller (1997, 1) has identified several defining characteristics of new paradigm Christianity: up-to-date worship style incorporating elements from the music scene,

a Christ-centered theology applicable to everyday living and a social organization principally run by the laity. The operative word describing what is also known as new evangelicalism (Balmer and Winner 2002) is flexibility, the openness to new processes in doing church. As a religious movement, new paradigm Christianity not only builds new congregations but also reforms existing ones in the hope of making church appealing. One may typically find megachurches conducting Sunday services in such secular places as auditoriums or function rooms of hotels. The more affluent churches capable of constructing their own buildings reflect nevertheless mall-like architecture and interior.

Although challenging tradition, new paradigm Christianity maintains its ties with Protestantism through its central belief in salvation through Christ. The ‘focus is on “inviting Jesus into your heart” and witnessing his transforming love’ (Miller 1998, 203). Miller argues that doctrinal persuasions are usually of individual position, depending on one’s experience and exposure to the Bible:

New paradigm Christians are doctrinal minimalists. Their focus is on retelling the narratives of the Bible and seeking analogues to the experience of their members. So long as one subscribes to the basic teaching of Jesus and the practice of the early Christians, there is room for debate on the details of interpretation. The goal is for members to have a relationship with Jesus, not to pledge allegiance to a particular catechism or doctrinal statement. (1998, 203)

Miller’s proposition, however, needs to be qualified. Based on my own research, I argue that doctrinal interpretation is never completely malleable. While there might be evangelical congregations more concerned with tolerance for differences and new paradigm Christianity may be deemed so because of the continual reinvention of its practices (Guest 2004), many new paradigm congregations, including Hope Filipino, uphold particular sets of conservative positions about the Trinity, the Scriptures, and salvation, to which its members must adhere before official membership is approved, for instance. My observation turns out to be a response to Percy’s (2003) concern about the seeming theological incoherence in global Charismatic Christianity (which, inferring from his definition, includes new paradigm Christianity). At the global level, doctrinal unity may be impossible to ascertain. This is not so at the level of the new paradigm organization where statements of faith and doctrinal positions set the boundaries for individual interpretation. Such negotiation, as presented in this chapter, takes place through socialization processes of discipleship in the congregation. Arguably, what remains central is the belief in the priesthood of believers, and what is subject to cultural relevance is the manner by which the church operates.

Gap in the Literature

Observers providing case studies, mostly of prominent megachurches, have been inclined to look at congregational identity in terms of such institutional factors as entertainment technology and marketing strategies (Connell 2005; Cruz 2006). The proposition is that, because these churches are primarily concerned with gaining

numerical strength, nurturing commitment by maintaining a level of strictness among their adherents becomes impossible (Guest 2004; Connell 2005). Connell observes that the buoyant theme is 'Christianity Lite' (2005, 328), referring to new paradigm Christianity's practice of recasting conventionally aloof religion into bite-sized spiritual experience. Supporting this is Balmer and Winner's observation that the use of a music band in worship is 'probably the most visible manifestation of this pandering to popular tastes, but it is evident in everything from interior decoration and seating plans to preaching styles' (2002, 117). I argue, however, that these analyses place more emphasis on the growth of the new paradigm church as a result of its reliance on such consumerist factors as market research and entertainment technology, overlooking the agency of individuals who engage with new paradigm Christianity and how they lead to the formation of congregational identity.

Theoretical Location

In this chapter, I argue that new paradigm Christianity provides a unique space that allows for the emergence of an idioculture wherein the church is focal to membership commitment. Here, Fine's work on idioculture, which he defines as the 'system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction' (1979, 734), proves helpful in understanding community and identity in the context of commitment-formation within the group life at Hope Filipino. The key elements of group life, in this case the congregation itself, are socioemotional orientation (interpersonal relationships) and task orientation (collective objective).

Socioemotional orientation is reflected in Miller's observation that 'individuals gravitate toward communities with some cultural resonance for them' (1997, 79). New paradigm Christianity's flexibility in doing church allows for the adoption of relevant practices that build and reinforce socioemotional orientation with members and new believers. Twitchell (2006) comments, for instance, that men find the megachurch as a hiding place.

Serving as the congregation's task orientation (Fine 1979), the commitment to life-transformation is manifest in the organizational arrangements wherein personal development is cultivated, for instance, the small care groups, and in the case of Hope Filipino, one-on-one shepherding. Miller points out that 'converts are going to maintain loyalty to institutions that rigorously pursue the task of life-transformation' (1997, 79). He also confirms that 'words such as *discipleship* and *accountability* are heard at every turn ... More mature Christians *disciple* younger converts ...' (1997, 76). So, despite the apparent casualness in new paradigm Christianity, the relationships within the institution can be demanding, a critical element in instilling loyalty (Miller 1997; see also Ianaccone 1994). Describing contemporary evangelicals in America, which include new paradigm churches, Shibley (1998, 83–84) points out that, although they are world-affirming in adapting to secular lifestyle, 'these congregations provide a distinct identity and relatively clear guidelines for organizing a new life', the postconversion lifestyle. However, Miller's discussion on the postconversion lifestyle, which I argue informs the congregational identity

in new paradigm Christianity, is rather limited. This inquiry on the meaning-making processes of individuals that inform the identity of Hope Filipino locates itself within intrinsic congregational studies (Guest, Tusting and Woodhead 2004).

Commitment at Hope Filipino

In the experience of Hope Filipino, the postconversion lifestyle entails a process of commitment-formation that reorganizes one's worldview concerning individual aspirations and ministerial calling.² In the ensuing quote, Allan, an IT specialist in Singapore and simultaneously involved in Hope Filipino, summarizes his mindset in fulfilling his roles as shepherd in mentoring younger Christians and as care leader to one of the many small groups of professionals in the congregation:

For me, it's about being there all the time. Opportunity, you take every opportunity you can grab. You are committed that through you, the Lord will be able to accomplish what He wants in people's lives. I am always there, even if without enough sleep, even if I lack the time, being always ready to go, to serve, to share what I can in order to be a blessing to other people.

Allan's statement reflects Hope Filipino's understanding of commitment in terms of sacrificial action in order to 'serve in the Kingdom of God'. Although the 'Kingdom of God' is employed to refer to the solidarity of Christians around the world, it is in colloquial terms the church organization, nuanced in Hope Filipino's vision statement: 'To fulfill the Great Commission in our lifetime by building strong and Biblical people to plant strong and Biblical churches in Singapore, the Philippines and all over the world.' This intriguing subjectivity concerning sacrificial action for the congregation is an identifiable ethos among the members and leaders who, except for the local pastor, are lay and currently working as fulltime professionals.

Individuals are socialized into such understanding through discipleship activities done at various levels starting with the care group. Two care groups form one unit, which with other units forms a sub-district. A sub-district is part of a district. Originally, the subdivisions were based on geographic location in Singapore, but today, one big district may be composed of individuals from all parts of the country, who nevertheless share similar professional backgrounds. Lay leaders in the form of the pastor, district leaders, sub-district leaders, unit leaders and care group leaders oversee and facilitate activities. As evangelism is done at the care group level, individuals, both regulars and guests, primarily locate themselves in a particular care group, seen in how, for instance, members and leaders are seated together during the Sunday service. In addition, everyone is being 'shepherded' (if already an official member) or 'followed up' (if a new convert) on a one-on-one basis by a Christian of

2 Such reorganization occurs after conversion. In the event that one is already a Protestant prior to affiliating with Hope Filipino, what possibly occurs is 'alternation' in which one embraces a supposedly more meaningful framework for Christian living (Barker and Currie 1985). In my analysis, then, the subjectivity surrounding commitment points to a postconversion (or postalternation) lifestyle.

acknowledged maturity. Opportunities to lead, say, a new care group, or shepherd another individual, arise as membership increases.

Many of the members of Hope Filipino who have now taken up leadership responsibilities have decided to stay in Singapore because of the church. Furthermore, the congregation has seen two of its members give up their profession to become exploratory missionaries to Brazil. Two are in the process of leaving in 2007. The emergence of this kind of commitment becomes an intriguing phenomenon given the existing assessment of new paradigm churches as consumerist and, hence, undemanding.

Underpinning Elements of Commitment-formation

Hope Filipino's ability to facilitate worldview reorganization initially rests on its ability to engage with the issues of the migrant Filipino in attendance. Such sociocultural resonance develops within the flexible institutional space in new paradigm Christianity. Shibley (1998) describes this flexible institutional space as the world-affirming character of contemporary evangelicalism, which arises, according to Miller (1997), out of the countercultural attitude of the founders of new paradigm churches in America in the 1960s. At Hope Filipino, however, there is no historically based anti-establishment attitude pervading the discourse. What emerges is a straightforward engagement with the issues of the migrant Filipino professional.

Hunt (1997, 91) explains that the success of the Anglican congregation he studies in the UK lies in addressing 'the middle class concerns with continual personal growth and fulfillment of spiritual potential' that can be traced back to the influence of Vineyard, which Miller (1997) considers to be a new paradigm movement in the US. For Hope Filipino, the engagement is similarly practical. In discussing this, I employ the two elements essential to group life: socioemotional orientation and task orientation (Fine 1979). To these I add a third element, opportunities for greater involvement in the form of 'serving in the Kingdom of God'. When these three are considered, one gets a richer view of new paradigm Christianity.

Socioemotional Orientation

The local pastor has identified three important matters to help the Filipino cope with the demands of Singapore living: punctuality, as Filipinos are known for tardiness; financial responsibility, as they have the tendency to be debt-ridden; and management of emotions, as they are away from spouses and families. The last two are typical issues of the migrant Filipino professional, although I focus on the last one as it is most strategically addressed by the congregation. The importance of emotional support for new immigrants has also been identified in Korean Christian churches in the US (Kwon, Ebaugh and Hagan 1997).

Kinship relationships formed in the care groups and shepherding arrangements help Filipinos cope with emotional difficulties. For instance, the usual point of entry for guests is the Matthew Care Group gathering, wherein invited friends are

introduced to the rest in an atmosphere of games and food. Once they are comfortable with the 'family', the succeeding gatherings conduct a presentation of the gospel. Furthermore, female shepherds are often called 'nanay', Filipino term for mother. Interestingly, family-orientation as a Filipino value is also employed in the formation of social capital in Asian American religions (Gonzalez and Maison 2004).

Jerebel's narrative reflects a typical story among current members who decided to join Hope Filipino because of the available relationships. I quote her narrative at length:

Actually, back in the Philippines, I was anti-Christian. If anyone would ask me to come to a Christian church, I would readily tell them that best of friends who talk about politics and religion become best of enemies. I respect your religion, you respect my belief. Let's talk about another topic. That was because I saw the Christians in the Philippines singing in the streets, reading the Bible but I felt their actions were hypocritical. But I was a religious person. I would always lead the rosary and prayer. I would go to a Catholic church regularly on top of the Sunday Mass. To the point that I really wanted to be a nun. When I came to Singapore, my housemates met Daphne [a pioneering Chinese Singaporean at Hope Filipino] and other Christians. Then they came to our place. We were actually doubtful of their motives. They were bringing us food and a lot more. When they invited us to attend church [there was no Filipino congregation then], we went with them. After that, when they came back to us, we tried to avoid them. But they still came back. And so I joined them. And I noticed that at Hope, even if I was alone, I felt I already had a family after service. All of a sudden, I knew a lot of people! And during that time, there were people following up on me. They would come to our house to discuss the Word of God – without missing a weekend. I realized that this was the church where I got family, where they helped me grow, read the Bible and know about God.

Task Orientation

Such socioemotional orientations constructed in the group life (Fine 1979) allow for the individual's life-transformation that in effect is a socialization process to establish the behavioral expectations of and affiliation with the congregation, and ultimately membership. Here, life-transformation, in Fine's (1979) framework, comes in as the task orientation at Hope Filipino. Behavioral expectations are adjusted to biblical standards. Miller observes that 'new paradigm Christians believe that they are continually being humbled and transformed and that it is through daily interaction with God's word that they are given direction' (1997, 130).

At Hope Filipino, however, the process is not completely independent. One's understanding of the Scriptures is shaped in the discipleship contexts of shepherding, care group and the Sunday service, where the church's values are reiterated to both member and new believer, whose conversion takes place by 'accepting Jesus'. Maturity is seen in how the individual concedes to the principles and practices of the congregation and how he/she accounts life details to his/her leader, most likely the shepherd and care leader, depends on the constant interaction available in the discipleship contexts. Official membership simultaneously becomes an individual declaration and a public recognition of one's identification with the community.

With socioemotional orientations and behavioral expectations established in the process of life-transformation through constant interaction in the care group and shepherding, possibilities of free-riding is minimized despite the size of the congregation. This substantiates what Miller (1997, 76) considers to be the 'structure of mentoring and accountability'. The pastor explains:

We want the people to realize that when you become a member, you are saying that you are one of the family. The family matters. It's just the members who can be part of it. Before the person becomes a member, we'd know the character, lives, needs of the people because it's not so much about coming and going [to and from the congregation].

Helen, a domestic helper to an expatriate household, who now serves as care leader to a group of professionals, recounts her experience being 'discipled' at Hope Filipino:

When I received Christ in the church, the leaders never stopped from following up on me. Doctrine, 18 lessons, how to grow as a Christian – all these were discussed in shepherding. I was encouraged in shepherding. Also, this might be the church that has most number of meetings and teachings! Seven days a week, if possible. And then there's the informal follow up, as when they call you up on your handphone. When they called me, they shared the word and they rebuked me too because I was quite tactless. So I was also being corrected.

Greater Involvement

As individuals carry on with the life-transformation process at Hope Filipino, they are entrusted greater responsibilities, such as being part of the care leader's core team handling discussion, leading worship, facilitating group dynamics or even shepherding another person. Functional ministries such as Children's Church and Music Team are also available for participation, granted that the interested individual is first involved in his own care group, where discipleship is essential.

As an individual's involvement in the congregation broadens, one's value-orientation encompasses a scope beyond the self. Shepherding, for example, requires that personal attention shifts to another believer, most likely a recent convert in the care group.

Doing evangelism, which is a strong ethos at Hope Filipino, is another form of expansion of one's value-orientation beyond the self. The global outlook of proselytizing articulated in the vision begins locally, usually by inviting outsiders to care group or church service, understood as 'evacs', shorthand for evangelism. Interviewees have enumerated different ways of accomplishing this, depending on their care groups' targeted individuals: introducing themselves to Filipino passersby along cosmopolitan Orchard Road, going from house to house and even playing tennis with them on weekends. Asked how his care group does evangelism, a male leader explains:

We have many ways of doing evangelism. But we always pray for the place first. At one time, we went from flat to flat. And we even went into one to pray for the people inside, hoping that God will answer the prayer. When there's a big event in church, especially if

it's Christmas, we go to Lucky Plaza [the shopping center famous for being the hangout for many Filipinos] to invite people to church. Then we have sports evangelism designed for one month. First week, we just play tennis and we don't mention anything about religion. Second week, we play, then we mention one thing about God. Third, [we talk] about God and who we are in the church. Fourth, we invite them to care group. Usually, the fourth week is Matthew Care Group, which is non-threatening for people to get to know one another. Sports evangelism caters for those who work in aerospace, men who are uncomfortable when you start talking about Bible, church or religion.

Construction of Worldview

With opportunities for greater involvement, the 'Kingdom of God' then becomes an experienced reality seen in light of the congregation. The local pastor explains:

The value I impart to the Filipinos about commitment to church is that we are involved in church activities more than we need to go to work. The rest of the time, we are involved in the lives of the people, care group, shepherding ... The value I always teach is that you are first a Christian, then you are a nurse. You are not a nurse and by chance you are a Christian. Because you carry the name of Christ, you serve God fully first.

This clearly exemplifies what Hunt (1997, 80) considers as 'construction of a worldview' which is important in motivating and supporting 'radical attitudinal or behavioural alteration in terms of the movement's goals and priorities'.

The construction of this worldview that privileges the congregation a central position effectively leads to a 'ritualisation of everyday experience' whereby 'practice and experience evident in services are evident in everyday existence' (Coleman and Collins 2000, 324). Members, for instance, rent a flat together and convert it to a 'ministry house' that allows use for discipleship functions such as shepherding and care group gatherings. Consequently, the everyday life distinctions between public religious and private domestic become blurred.

Furthermore, such understanding of commitment leads to restructuring of lifestyle patterns. Testimonies of personal sacrifices are recounted, such as of lay leaders doing shepherding with a health-care attendant even if just at the gate of the latter's nursing home because of curfew restrictions. Arguably, the most manifest example of restructured lifestyle patterns is in how many have opted to stay in Singapore because of the church. In Singapore, work experience is considered merely a career springboard for many health professionals who want to earn higher in such places as the UK and Australia. Francis, a male unit leader, explains:

Usually, my commitment is being tested when it comes to major decisions in my life. For example, in my career path. Am I going to follow the worldview or the Biblical view? The view of the worldly man or the view of the Christian? In terms of career, I receive less here in Singapore compared to what I will receive in the UK or US. Four-fold, five-fold our salary. But what made us stay? Because we know that what we are doing for the Lord is more valuable. If you love God, you view the things around you differently.

Here, personal ambition is subjected to the greater calling of ‘building the Kingdom of God’. With this consciousness, many of the lay leaders recognize the necessity of evangelism beyond Singapore, as when Sheila, who sees herself involved in church-planting in the future, says:

enthusiasm for evangelism in my unit is incredible. And it will not stop. If your heart is for evangelism, you will continue doing it. So we would saturate all these MRT [train] stations. But granted that you have invited everyone, would you stop? God said, all nations. So one nation after another.

The value attached to personal profitability has clearly been transferred from one’s personal economic gain to the life-conversion of another person. Moreover, witnessing behavioral transformation not only motivates older members to carry on. The ‘joy of seeing lives changed’ refocuses one’s response to personal dilemmas. Leaving the congregation, either when tempted by opportunities abroad or when compelled by internal conflict, becomes a costly choice because of the investments made in relationships therein. This, interestingly, is an extension of Kanter’s proposition that ‘commitment should be stronger ... if investment and its irreversibility are emphasized’ (1968, 506). Furthermore, the irreversibility is reinforced in how violations of this norm among leaders do not go unchallenged. A unit leader explains her conviction:

If they want to leave Singapore for another country, ultimately they need to check their heart motive. Is this really about continuing the work God has placed in their hands or because they want to pursue their career? If they are leading people here and they want to serve God, why do they have to go there? Unless they are going on a mission, and that is the purpose. So when they go there, it’s not really for God, it’s for their career. And we have a lot of people who did that who eventually turned away from God.

Locating New Paradigm Christianity

The flexibility in doing church, as when one conducts Matthew Care Group or sports evangelism, points to my contention that cultural relevance is an achievement at Hope Filipino. Such openness to new practices explains why Miller (1997) considers new paradigm Christianity a postdenominational movement, in which rigidity gives way to relevance.

It is this flexible environment that provides space for individuals to be comfortable with the process of life-transformation. Eventually, the individual may assume greater responsibilities in the congregation, which leads to the possibility of commitment-formation as reorganization of worldview, whereby lay participation becomes spontaneous and ‘commitment to a particular ministry grows out of an individual’s personal experience’ (Miller 1997, 138). Such postconversion (or postalternation) lifestyle informs Hope Filipino’s congregational identity.

For this, I argue that commitment-formation that places the Kingdom of God central value at Hope Filipino serves as its congregational identity or idioculture which becomes a valid outcome within the flexible institutional space of new paradigm Christianity. Hope Filipino’s ability to reorganize one’s worldview is

achieved as a result of its engagement with the practical concerns of the migrant Filipino, the presence of high-demand mechanisms of accountability overseen by lay leaders and the opportunities for participation whereby one's attention is transferred to another, making the Kingdom of God a tangible reality.

The possibility of commitment-formation in new paradigm Christianity highlights the conceptual limitation in Becker's (1999) congregational models, which, as he admits, does not include the phenomenon of megachurches. Arguably, new paradigm Christianity is in itself a unique congregational model in terms of its openness to continuous re-appropriation given different environments around the world. Lyon (2000), for instance, briefly contrasts American churches with Korean megachurches in terms of their perceptions of wealth. To identify congregational idiosyncracies, empirical focus is called for. Although Becker proposes to drop the particularistic view of congregations in favor of identifying institutional commonalities, Guest (2004) argues for a balance by including in the analysis local contexts to understand congregational life. This becomes even more necessary in trying to understand new paradigm churches given unique contexts, as in the case of the present inquiry's newly emerging congregation of overseas workers in an Asian setting.

Commitment-formation at Hope Filipino needs careful analysis. On one hand, one may expect such worldview reorganization only in sectarian religious organizations. Tipton observes that alternative religions such as the millenarian Christian sect he studies in the US unify 'private life, work, and interpersonal relations within a single system of moral meanings' (1982, 239). Its members who came out of drug addiction, for instance, are building a physical structure where everyone will relocate in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming.

But on the other hand, the continual reinvention of practices in new paradigm Christianity to appeal to contemporary society may be seen as a largely loose spiritual environment that potentially breeds divergence. Guest (2004) argues for this when he observes that in a Church of England congregation that has embraced a contemporary evangelical spirit, sustained attendance is achieved as a result of public tolerance for various evangelical leanings, from the liberal to the conservative. Strict moral discourse is limited in private interactions so as to 'suppress forces which have previously provoked disinvolvement' especially among the 'elective parochials' whose affiliation with the congregation is temporary because of labor force mobility (2004, 83). With this, Guest (2004, 82) reminds the reader that 'beliefs and values are often heterogeneous, even within so-called "evangelical" congregations' among which he includes successful megachurches.

While this chapter does not provide representation of global new paradigm Christianity, I argue that a closer look at new paradigm congregations is necessary to comprehend its distinctiveness as a religious phenomenon. It is rather dismissive to assume, as suggested in Guest (2004), that new paradigm Christianity's propensity for reinvention and its greater concern for tolerance over divergence, are the only bases for its success. Neglected in the local analysis are opportunities for life-transformation and greater involvement, signifying levels of strictness with regards to faith issues that inform behavioral expectations. With this, one may locate new paradigm congregations such as Hope Filipino in the middle of Tipton's and Guest's propositions presented above because of their ability to offer cultural relevance and

discipleship mechanisms. The strength and future of new paradigm Christianity, which is arguably an extension of Charismatic Christianity (Percy 2003), lies in its ability to balance strictness and appeal.

One may articulate the uniqueness of new paradigm Christianity through the framework of detraditionalization within the religious milieu. Woodhead and Heelas (2000) describe new paradigm Christianity as less radically detraditionalized in the sense that it balances individual experience with biblical authority. Individual experience speaks of the engagement with the issues of the people. Miller (1997, 184–185) argues that the American new paradigm churches are addressing the deficit in ‘human community’ largely among the baby boomers whose countercultural values rally against the conventions of mainline denominations. Picking up Guest’s (2004) proposition about the importance of local contexts, which becomes more important given the flexible environment within new paradigm Christianity, one sees the distinctiveness of commitment-formation at Hope Filipino.

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