

The Boundary Indefinite: Schism and the Ethics of Christian Strategy in the Philippines

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the ethical uncertainties and strategies of distinction that arise from a growing denominational pluralism of Christianity in the Philippines. It is based on research primarily conducted in Occidental Mindoro in the Philippines. Through an ethnographic and archival study of the material and linguistic practices at the heart of Christian organization, the dissertation argues that the institutional and bureaucratic forms of the Christian church become the ground upon which Christian affiliation is semiotically contested.

Although famously Catholic, the Philippines has experienced a proliferation of diverse and globally affiliated Christian denominations in the last two decades. This has produced new controversy over what it means to be Christian. In an increasingly fractious and competitive context, Christians in the Philippines are faced with the challenge of having to translate and justify their Christian identity across institutional and denominational lines. The dissertation emphasizes the centrality of the practices through which Christian groups seek to competitively distinguish themselves, while simultaneously maintaining a moral commitment to a shared sense of Christian community.

The dissertation's chapters are broken down into five specific and different engagements that Christian groups in Occidental Mindoro have with one another in their response to denominational pluralism, ranging from Bible translation, the legal ramifications of a church schism, to the missionary strategies and responses of competing churches. The dissertation examines a number of Christian denominations, including Catholic, Born Again Evangelical, Pentecostal, Methodist, and Jehovah's Witness. Each chapter examines the logistics and strategies that are at once central to the success of a church, and yet for the most part, occur out of sight of most congregants.

These chapters are organized around four analytical themes: 1) how a growing Christian pluralism has produced a collective emphasis on the nature of church organization, 2) the Christian engagement with the ethical dilemmas of competitive strategies and the logistics of organizations, 3) how language and institutionality are seen to coalesce in the mediation of divine Christian presence, and 4) how matters of visibility and concealment of church organization are themselves taken to be morally ambiguous, and yet ultimately necessary to the success and viability of mediating a divine Christian presence.

Chapter 1

Believing in Churches: Christian Plurality and the Sacredness of Institutions

“For certain institutions of men are in a sort of way representations and likenesses of natural objects.” –St. Augustine

On a Tuesday evening in 2012, about ten or eleven members of the United Methodist Church in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, gathered for a weekly prayer fellowship meeting at the elementary school that was owned and administered by the church. Most of the people there were involved in the school, either as teachers, principals, or parents, and were all active members in the UMC. We gathered in one of the classrooms, and after some shuffling around of furniture, we all sat on the small children’s chairs and formed a circle. After some collective prayers, each person took their turn in conveying their own personal prayers, after which the group would collectively focus on that single prayer. Most of these personal prayers were concerned with sick or traveling family members, or financial distress. One member of the prayer group, Angelo¹, however, had a very different prayer. An administrator at the

¹ In order to protect the privacy of those I studied, I do not use the real names of people in this dissertation unless that person is widely and publicly known. I use the actual name of organizations, except where noted, and of provinces and towns. I do not use the names of neighborhoods, however, as people could be easily identified

school, in his mid-twenties, and the choir leader in the church, when it came his turn, Angelo leaned forward in his chair, and began talking about the schism the church was currently going through. Switching between Tagalog and English, he began by praying for peace and goodwill between members, whatever their view of the schism may have been, whatever side they had aligned themselves with. He prayed that the schism would not go forward, nor indeed that any part of the church would withdraw from the United Methodist Church. “We can’t just put a new sign up outside the church!” he said, “How can we not be UMC anymore? This is our church.” As he spoke, he became more emotional, until he broke and began crying, saying that he did not understand how the church had come to this, that he did not know what would happen, and how he simply did not want this to happen.

I begin this dissertation with a brief description of Angelo’s prayer, as it highlights the central thematic of this dissertation. In understanding religion, we can talk easily of the strength of people’s religious affiliation and allegiances, and in Christianity, how church identity is evidently important to people. And yet at the same time, schematic or ideological breaks are constantly made between religious affiliation to a specific church and religious faith and belief in a broader sense. Did Angelo separate his faith in God and the manifestation and mediation of that faith through the institution of the United Methodist Church? In what ways does a religious bureaucracy, and the logistics of religious organization, enable the fulfillment of one’s faith, and how does it hinder the same? Can the organizational, bureaucratic, and institutional aspects of Christianity, really be separated from matters of faith and belief in a divine presence? To what extent can a religious bureaucracy be in itself religious? Why was Angelo crying? The schism he mentions, as I will discuss in Chapter 4,

as a result.

had nothing to do with difference in belief or doctrine. There had been no difference of opinion about the value or righteousness of Methodism, nor was it about questioning any particular person or group's sincerity of belief in God. It was about religious affiliation, church organization and bureaucracy. It was about the mediation of one's relationship to God, but a mediation that occurred through the congregational and institutional form of a church. If the schism, and Angelo's prayer, were about faith, they were about the bureaucratic administration of faith.

There are a lot of churches being built in San Jose these days. Along the main streets of what is a small but busy town, one sees newly erected churches and small chapels, even painted placards over doorways to what were originally built as offices and stores, but which are now Christian churches. Some are small traditional looking churches, constructed along an American Christian aesthetic, with pointed roofs dotting the main roads, and include new Baptist, Born Again², and Pentecostal churches, as well as older, more established denominations in the town, such as Methodist and Iglesia ni Cristo churches. Old churches are being torn down to be replaced by larger, more modern buildings. There are more prayer worships, evening services, youth ministries, outreach and missionary work than there was before. On a Saturday afternoon and into the evening, one can hear music flow out of churches, as the bands practice for services the following morning. And yet, spatially and architecturally, none of these new churches and ministries occupy the prime location of the

² I use the terms "Born Again" and "Born Again Evangelical" throughout this dissertation as these were the terms people in Occ. Mindoro used as a category of Christian practice and as a term for certain types of churches. "Born Again" and "Evangelical," used interchangeably, articulate a collection of churches and denominations that emphasize the need to be born again in one's relationship to God. At the same time, many churches that described themselves as Born Again, or Evangelical, had different doctrinal beliefs. A loose term in Occ. Mindoro, "Born Again" generally included Pentecostals and Churches that explicitly identified as Evangelical and Born Again. Mainline protestant groups, such as Methodists were not included (though they often thought of themselves as Evangelical, or disliked the term).

Catholic Cathedral by the side of San Jose's plaza, next to the municipal offices and police station. Nor do they have a church in every *situ*, or neighborhood, as the Catholic Church does. San Jose is the center of the Catholic Church in the province of Occidental Mindoro, established as an apostolic vicariate in 1983.³ The Catholic Church too has erected new buildings, next to the Cathedral, but for the most part appears to have plateaued in its architectural and expansionist endeavors.

So while it may be something of a boom time for Christian denominations in San Jose and many parts of Occ. Mindoro, there remains the overwhelming presence of the Catholic Church. Most people in the province are Catholic, with approximately one in five people identifying as having another religious affiliation⁴. Much like other provinces in the Philippines, is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which Catholicism permeates daily life in Occ. Mindoro. In San Jose, the presence of the Catholic Church is even more apparent as it is home to the cathedral, the Bishop's residence, and the seminary. From television and radio, to businesses and homes full of crucifixes and images and statues of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, to the Catholic schools and colleges, to the almost daily funeral processions through the main street of the town, to the name of the town itself, Catholicism is an inescapable fact in San Jose. But this is not to say that there is overpowering sense of Catholic religiosity. Conversations are not filled with much religious talk. Many Catholics do not attend mass very often. Rather, Catholicism it is the backdrop, institutional and otherwise, for all Christians in Occ. Mindoro.

³ Administered the same as a diocese, an apostolic vicariate is established when either there is not large enough a population for a diocese, or there does not exist a substantial hierarchy. In Occidental Mindoro, it is due to the population size.

⁴ As of 2010, 78.6% of people in Occidental Mindoro identified as Catholic. The national percentage of self-identified Catholics was 80.6% (Philippine National Statistics Office 2012). Catholic affiliation is down approximately 5% between 2003 and 2010.

At the broadest level, this dissertation is concerned with an intensifying Christian plurality and schism in Occ. Mindoro set against a long history of Catholic preeminence, and indeed a Catholic sway over shared conceptions of religion on the island. What does it mean for how one goes about being a Christian in a milieu in which there are now alternative forms of Christian practice? What does it mean to be Christian when the term itself “Christianity” is becoming a fractured and heterogeneous label? In places that have long had a plurality of Christian churches, such as the US, such a question might seem of less importance, even redundant, as the basis of Christianity has developed alongside ideologies of religious plurality and of the state. But in Mindoro, as with many parts of the Philippines, to be undergoing shifts in denominational plurality, such questions are at the very heart of contemporary religious practice.

When I first undertook preliminary fieldwork in Occ. Mindoro in 2009, my intention was to study affiliation practices, and look to the specific ways in which congregants were faced with *choosing* to be members of a particular congregation, in contrast to prior, oft-times inherited affiliation practices that were more automatic and default by nature⁵. It was this space, between faith and affiliation, which I sought to attend to in order to examine the consequences of a growing religious plurality for Christians in Occ. Mindoro. However, it quickly became apparent to me that while congregants were indeed faced with shifting affiliation practices, it was those Christians involved in the organization of churches that were at the frontline, as it were, of this engagement with plurality.

Perhaps surprisingly, then, I suggest in this dissertation that Christian plurality has been most consequential, not to matters directly related to individual faith or belief, but rather

⁵ This measure of religious choice, and the sense of reflexivity involved, is of course key to Charles Taylor’s conception of religion within a secular sphere (Taylor 2009)

to the organizational and institutional practices of Christian churches. It is this concern, with congregational identities and the bureaucratic and organizational forms of Christian mediation—from the perspective of the pastors, priests, lay leaders and administrators, as well as congregants—that I examine in detail throughout the succeeding chapters.

Denominationalism and the Christian ‘Other’

I began this introduction by discussing a Methodist’s reaction to a schism in his church. This new plurality in his Christian community that he was faced with, was playing out through legal, bureaucratic and organizational practices, and not through a discourse on faith, belief or doctrine. This schism, as with the arrival of new churches and groups in Occ. Mindoro, was implicated in how the religious “other” is conceptualized. However, it is not the condemnation of other Christians from the pulpit, nor necessarily a theological critique of their beliefs, through which the “other” here is constituted. Throughout the succeeding chapters, I take up the issue of how Christian plurality has produced a reflexive space between faith and the enacting of that faith through denominational and affiliational forms. I look at how religious actors become critically aware of how relationality between and among Christian groups is produced, elided resolved, solidified, and avoided. To this end, denominationalism is surely a practice of “othering,” whereby one engages in Christian practices with a reflexive awareness of how others are likewise engaged in a reading of denominational comparisons and contrasts.

Discourses on the “other” have, of course, thoroughly informed the discipline of anthropology from its very beginnings. These have bifurcated, if not altogether clearly, between studies of the borders of specific cultural spheres, perhaps articulated most strongly

in critiques of an anthropological project (for example, Asad 1973; Fabian 1983; Rosaldo 1993), and the examination of how a production of similarity and dissimilarity are at play “within” certain social contexts. It is to this latter literature that I wish to situate an analysis of denominationalism. While scholars such as Marshall Sahlins (1996, 1985), Elizabeth Povinelli (2002), and more recently Martin Holbraad (2012), and Eduardo Kohn (2013) have highlighted the limitations of epistemological, ontological and representational projects that have often been held as universal in quality, it is to studies that elaborate on the productive, and indeed shared practices of othering, alterity, and commensurability in constituting communities that I look to in this dissertation. This reflexive play of Christian otherness is, I suggest, in many ways at the center of theoretical explications of what denominationalism and Christian plurality may entail for the religious actors I worked with in Occ. Mindoro. For example, Gregory Bateson’s *Naven* (1936) and his framing of competitive relations in terms of schismogenesis, and Victor Turner in his early work among the Ndembu (1957), both seek to understand and locate the productivity of otherness within specific social contexts. Likewise, Rupert Stasch (2009), in his study of the Korowai of West Papua, argues for the centrality of alterity and otherness in how social relatedness and intimacy are constituted for the Korowai. In looking at the constitutive relations of religious plurality, Naveeda Khan’s work on mosque building (2012) and Courtney Handman’s recent study of denominationalism among the Guhu-Samane in Papua New Guinea (2014) are both instructive examples of how religious actors seek to mold social realities to divine concerns.

These works are of particular use in addressing religious plurality and denominationalism, as they seek to understand the role of competition in and among groups without depending on over-rationalizing discourses of an economic marketplace of religious

choice and competitive aspects of relationality, often termed “religious economies”—a lens through which a substantial number of scholars have sought to frame religious plurality (Ahdar2006; Bankston 2002, 2003; Brice 2000; Boudon 2003)⁶. There is undoubtedly an attraction to view the emergence of multiple churches in terms of an ideology of an emergent market, in which competition and alignment are central figures, but as I hope to show, the motivations of Christian schism, conflict, and competition reach far beyond what a supply-demand or rational-actor model call for. For the majority of Christians I knew in Occ. Mindoro, their idea of “success” in terms of their church was only in part related to congregational numbers, financial viability and so forth. They were as concerned with producing a Christian community that extended beyond their own reach as they were with the future of individual churches, their own included. At the same time, there was a definite ethical concern for many that the Christian community in Occ. Mindoro would begin to resemble something approaching a “religious economy” and they often sought to work against competitive iterations of Christianity and instead make determined moves towards an ecumenical Christianity. To this end, denominationalism is, for those in Occ. Mindoro, an enduring ethical concern.

Richard Niebuhr, likewise, in his famous book on Christian denominationalism (1929), frames the issue of Christian plurality directly in ethical terms of church organization, if indeed the failure of ethics. But while ultimately castigating the schismatic nature of American denominationalism, he states explicitly at the beginning of the book the irresolvable tension in how a Christian engages in material and institutional forms of Christianity and the transcendent form of God,

⁶ Two scholars that take up a “religious economy” approach in a more nuanced way are Nile Green (2011) and Stephen Selka (2010).

...for the very essence of Christianity lies in the tension which it presupposes or creates between the worlds of nature and spirit, and its resolution of that conflict by means of justifying faith. It demands the impossible in conduct and belief; it runs counter to the instinctive life of man and exalts the rationality of the irrational...organize its ethics—as organize them you must wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Christ—and the free spirit of forgiving love becomes a new law, requiring interpretation, commentary, and all the machinery of justice...place this society in the world, demanding that it not be in the world, and strenuous as may be the efforts to transcend or to sublimate the mundane life, it will yet be unable to escape all taint of conspiracy and connivance with the worldly interests it despises. Yet, on the other hand, Christian ethics will not permit a world-fleeing asceticism which seeks purity at the cost of service (Niebuhr 1929: 4-5).

For Niebuhr, denominationalism, while often articulated and defended in doctrinal terms, has its explanations elsewhere. I agree to some extent with Niebuhr here: even in situations that might be best framed in terms of Christian or denominational “conflict”, they are not often directly related to the specificities of doctrinal difference. However, this is not to say that denominationalism is not fundamentally religious, both as constituted and experienced. This idea has been taken up recently by Courtney Handman (2015), who argues for a shift in how anthropology configures denominationalism and schism within Christianity. Handman suggests that rather than viewing church schisms as more to do with the social and political than the religious (as Niebuhr would have it), we need to look at how denominational practices are at the very heart of theological and religious concerns for many Christians. This is arguably as true even if specificities of doctrine are not consistently invoked. The “sociality” of a congregation and of a church, then is not a byproduct of religious concerns, but is a religious concern. Moreover, within the context of a pluralizing Christian community, the forms that a church and congregation may take become an ever-more critical part of how one’s relationship to God is mediated. Indeed, the congregation and church become a focal

point in attempts to resolve the inherent tension between the divine and the earthly, as Niebuhr identified in the quote above.

Materiality of the Church

A number of anthropologists, over the last decade, have looked to how the Christian subject is constituted in terms of the material practices of Christianity, particularly as they relate to questions of belief and interiority (for example, Keane 2007, Engelke 2007, Harkness 2010; Tomlinson 2009). These scholars consider the ways in which the interiority of Christian faith is manifested in and through, and often in contrast to, the material world of signs. But perhaps because much of the recent anthropological literature on Christianity has studied both an array of Protestant groups and the moment of conversion, the examination of the relationship between materiality and the interiority of the Christian subject has largely been situated in terms of the *individual*. This makes sense, of course, as much Christian practice has not only emphasized the boundedness of the individual person, but has been productive in establishing the ideological foundations of “Western” notions of the delimited subject (O’Neill 2010). At the same time, as Handman (2014) has pointed out, this focus on the individual has at times overshadowed the Christian concern for the nature of the collective, primarily the church. To this end, my dissertation, in focusing as on the logistics and strategies of church organization, is not so much about locating the Christian collective in terms of the social, but instead to show how for Christians, the social is resolutely religious.

As with, for example, the ritualized aspects of Christian worship such as public prayer, I examine how the organizational forms of Christianity are likewise implicated in processes of Christian interiority and divine transcendence. This is often the crux of Christian faith—the

matching of external worldly signs with the interiority of faith. In as much as religious practices are concerned with the embodiment and pursuit of religious ideals, they are equally open to be read as signs by others. In Occ. Mindoro, where denominationalism has been foregrounded, affiliation, congregation and the materiality of the church are likewise open to be read as signs of one's relationship to God, and equally compelling to the production of religious experience, whether individual or collective. As Paul Kockelman (2011) has noted, when one engages in practices of interpretation and signification, there is *cointerpretation* or *cosignification*, wherein one is locating the self in terms of that interpretation and signification. One cannot produce signs without locating oneself in regards to those signs (Kockelman 2011: 109-10). In this light, the line of delineation between what is *done* to be Christian and what is *seen* to be Christian begins to disappear. For just as the external signs of individual Christian practice are to be read as meaningfully related to the interior subject, I suggest in this dissertation that the external signs of church organization—the institutional forms of congregational worship—are, in the context of Christian diversity, likewise open to be read as indexical of interiority.

And yet, there is a line of delineation that exists as a critical obstacle in the making of the earthly form of church organization imbued with a divine presence. For Christians in Occ. Mindoro, engaging with church administration, revealed practices essential to the nature of church collectivity. At the same time, such practices often did not sit comfortably with their conceptualization of the “religious.” Across a series of contexts, whether the translation of the Bible (Chapter 5), the legal incorporation of a church (Chapter 4), or strategizing over how best to convert others to one's own faith (Chapters 2, 3, 6), religious administrators struggled to make such practices intrinsically Christian.

The underlying question animating this dissertation then is whether the strategies and logistics of Christian work, can in themselves be imbued with God's presence. Can there be a break between the sacred and profane for a Christian? At first glance, the answer for most Christians is a definitive "no." Not only does God's omnipresence suffuse material and earthly concerns, but if one is devoted to carrying out God's work, all work is ultimately connected to that end. However, in practice, it is of course a far more ambiguous affair, as Christians are also deeply engaged, willingly or unwillingly, in broader social and political projects that have pursued delimitations of what is religious and what is not. Thus, the question that resonates through this dissertation is, what constitutes a religious act? Can the bureaucracies that often underpin the Christian organization be religious? Or perhaps more importantly, can bureaucracies be experienced as religious? For even as Catholicism doctrinally and theologically determines church organization and its hierarchy to be divine in nature, this is not necessarily the lived experience of Catholics. For example, in Chapter 6, I discuss the fallout of a Catholic Church scandal in which a radio station and financial records office were set ablaze in order to cover up the theft of Church money by a number of priests. For most Christians in the town, Catholics and Protestants alike, there was a struggle in identifying the divine in such matters of religious organization.

The Durkheimian circumscription of things sacred and profane has proven troubling for anthropologists (Goody 2010, 1961). By turns, the dichotomy is too Christian, and too loosely universal to be useful as an analytical tool, and too secular a delineation for Christians. Nevertheless, whether theologically informed and aligned with Christian concepts of divine presence, for example the "two kingdoms" doctrine (Wright 2010; VanDrunen 2009), when it has been incorporated in anthropological thinking, the sacred/profane

distinction has been more useful in looking at explicitly ritualistic practices, and even then problematic. In this dissertation, I do not try to try to find a dividing line between that which is sacred and that which is profane. Rather, I examine those settings in which Christian actors find themselves struggling with such a division—in which they find themselves working to make the ostensibly non-religious religious. This of course implies that for many Christians, there exist practices that are “non-religious.” This is true, and during my fieldwork, while people sought to articulate a divine presence in everything in their lives, this was often an abstracted view of the world, and one that was countered by everyday categorical exclusions and inclusions of what was *really* Christian. And indeed, within an explicitly Christian sphere, it was the bureaucratic and administrative aspects of church organization that appeared to exist on the dividing line of religious and non-religious. As a result, it took work for these Christians to frame bureaucracy as religious. Matthew Engelke points to such “work” done by Christians, in which they are engaging in practices that are for them at the very edge of Christianity. In discussing the design of Christian advertisements (“creatives”), he writes,

The other indexical traces of the design were equally important. Hot pink, electric blue, lime green—these were today’s colors. They gave the creatives [advertisements] what the Society hoped to be a contemporary, even postmodern feel. And the placement of the creatives also mattered. The Society might well have been able to get local congregations to hang them up as banners on church buildings and lawns. The point, though, was to locate the campaign (and hence the Bible) within the formally demarcated spaces of advertising, where one expects to find pitches for Coca-Cola and the latest Hollywood blockbusters, not the Word of God. Bible Society chose to operate in the open market, to pay for ad space just as Coca-Cola might. This was work in the Culture. By placing the creatives on beer mats and washroom panels, the Society was even toying with a fine line between the sacred and profane, purity and danger (Engelke 2013: 81)⁷

⁷ Engelke’s point here is in many ways the same as Andrew Shryock’s discussion of the “work” communities are often faced with having to do in order to conform to (and contest) prevailing representational practices of that community. We see in the Christians Engelke discusses, their recognition of such representational practices.

It is this line, not drawn as an analytical device to locate some bounded Christian sphere, or to oversimplify a secularist discourse, but to point to an ambiguous and ill-drawn line of division, that Christians themselves circumscribe their practices. Such a line, during my fieldwork, appeared through the institutional rather than the personal engagements in which Christians found themselves. Personal experiences, framed through Christian ideologies of morality, faith and sin, were much easier for people to identify as Christian. Thus, while the self could be seen to be thoroughly Christian, the institution could not.

Religious Acts

This raises the basic question: what constitutes a religious act? For those Christians I worked with, this was never an easy question to answer, but they were often faced with it. In looking to how the institutional, bureaucratic, and logistical aspects of Christianity may be imbued with a divine presence, the Durkheimian division of sacred and profane begins to look similar to Weber's distinctions of charisma and the routinization of bureaucracy. As Weber noted of "pure charisma", "it constitutes a 'call' in the most emphatic sense of the word, a 'mission' or a spiritual duty" (Weber 1968: 52). While Weber was concerned with characterizing the underlying Christian spirituality of his conceptualization of charisma as the "antithesis" of routinization and rationality, and thus contrasted it with more bureaucratic forms, he was equally concerned with examining how they merged and fed into one another. The boundaries between the two, between "charisma" and "institution," have never been as stark we might think. This is subject that Thomas Kirsch has taken up in his study of Zambian Pentecostal-charismatics, particularly in his discussion of how the charisma of their religion coalesces with their bureaucratic organization of their churches (Kirsch 2008). In looking at

how contrasts between writing and oral practices are mapped onto divides of charisma and institution, Kirsch argues that such a divide can not only co-exist, but coalesce,

The ensuing combination of Pentecostal-charismatic and bureaucratic practices thus led to what I called a ‘bureaucracy in the Pentecostal-charismatic mode’. This combination certainly gave rise to paradoxical constellations and contradictions that were not always easy to resolve...for example, the administrative coordination of religious activities such as church meetings regularly produced paradoxical tensions between its three main elements: written schedules as revelations, unpredictable spiritual events during religious practices, and the documentation of scheduled yet unpredictable practices. Yet, in the final analysis, these tensions and the concomitant conflicts did not lead to an institutionalization of charisma, but to demands for a re-spiritualization of bureaucratic practices (Kirsch 2008:245)

This tension, that Kirsch highlights, permeates, though in different ways, the work of Christians in Mindoro. Whether the institutionality⁸, and ostensibly non-Christian work that Christians engage in can be imbued with God’s presence, is perhaps ultimately irresolvable, but the tension nevertheless remains.

Such a tension, however, is not always one of the profane, secular, and institutional imposing on the religious. As often, as noted by Engelke above, Christians seek to invoke, mirror, and appropriate practices which are traditionally viewed existing outside of a Christian sphere. This might be the appropriation of a corporate model to better enable them to expand their congregations transnationally, to appropriate vernaculars in Bible translation, or discourses on indigeneity in missionary work, or indeed to appropriate the practices of other denominations, as I discuss in Chapter 6. Engaging in such projects poses a risk. As I discuss in Chapter 2, the intensification of denominational plurality in Occ. Mindoro has produced a

⁸ By “institutionality,” I mean here those practices that are put in place to consolidate, reproduce, and expand the core relationship between a person and God. In this way, the church always mediates the divine presence through institutional forms.

reflexive space in Christian practice, one in which a church must consider its own form of congregational collectivity in the face of others, and perhaps engage in competitive relationships with other Christians. It is in this space that what Andrew Shryock has termed “culture work” occurs (Shryock 2004: 282). It is a space of critique, both of the self and other. And it is within this space that the role and ethical aspect of *strategy* emerges. Similar to engagements with institutional and bureaucratic forms, that Christians strategize at all in their work sometimes risks the danger of not being truly Christian. As Josh Brahinsky has noted in his discussion of Pentecostalism and the cultivation of sensory experiences, training and strategy are taken up as markers of insincerity. As he writes,

When I describe Pentecostal training to non-Pentecostals, they often see it as evidence of false piety. Yet, the apparent contradiction between human effort and God's participation rests on a particular modern vision of religion. Instead of accessing religion through discipline and asceticism, many modern thinkers anticipate an easily evident subtext, something to look for, but not requiring any kind of honed propensities. If religion engages the sacred, they ask, can it emerge from profane organization, striving, and planning? (Brahinsky 2012: 229)

That religious practice, perhaps even God’s presence may or must be honed, trained, strategized or otherwise self-produced, is viewed by non-Christians (and other Christians) as lacking divine presence, lacking the inherent sacredness that ought to be present. And yet, Christianity always has always been deeply implicated in connecting “human effort” and “God’s participation.” For as a number of scholars have noted, Christianity is inherently concerned with the mediation of that space, between the self and God, between the worldly and other-worldly (de la Cruz 2009). It is no accident that translation, both in a specific language-text sense, as well as in a broader Latourian sense (1999), has played a significant role in studies of Christianity (Makihara and Schieffelin 2007; Handman 2010; Rafael 1988;

Engelke and Tomlinson 2007). The alignment of language and institutionality runs throughout this dissertation. For to study Christianity is in many ways to study language, due to its mediating qualities (Keane 1997a, 1997b; Robbins 2001; Needham 1972).

Occidental Mindoro

There is a neatness to the topography and population distribution in Mindoro. The island is mostly mountainous, circled by a coastal lowland region, and occupies a land area of approximately 4000 square miles (3953, 4082 with the smaller islands on its coasts included). The upland regions are inhabited by seven indigenous groups, collectively termed Mangyan, somewhere in the region of 100,000 people in total (Census figures for Mangyan populations are poor), and the lowland regions are mostly inhabited by Tagalog speaking Filipinos, but there are also a number of Bisayan speaking lowlanders. The island was divided into two provinces in 1950, and have somewhat similar land area and population densities, although until recently Oriental Mindoro had a much larger population. This lowland/upland divide that informs the life on the island reaches back not much more than a century, when Mangyan occupied the lowlands. Indeed, the island was historically so lightly populated that there was no infrastructure to speak of, and access to the island was difficult. It was not until the 20th Century, and the arrival of the US colonial administration that Filipinos from elsewhere began to populate the lowlands in any great numbers.

Aside from the lowland/upland divide that marks Mangyan from lowland Filipinos (although in Or. Mindoro, there are more Mangyan living in the lowlands) the economic division between Occidental and Oriental Mindoro has been substantial. Over the course of the 20th Century, as the lowland population of the island increased over forty-fold (from

approximately 24,000 to over 1,000,000), Or. Mindoro has been far more economically successful and has developed a much more modern infrastructure. While the main socioeconomic and trading hub of Or. Mindoro, Calapan, has become a city, and has a modern port, American fast food chains, traffic lights, and recently a shopping mall with a modern cinema complex. San Jose, the largest town in Occ. Mindoro, while undergoing substantial growth in terms of population (approximately 40,000 people in the town proper, and 122,000 in the municipality, has not developed as Calapan and other towns and cities across the country.

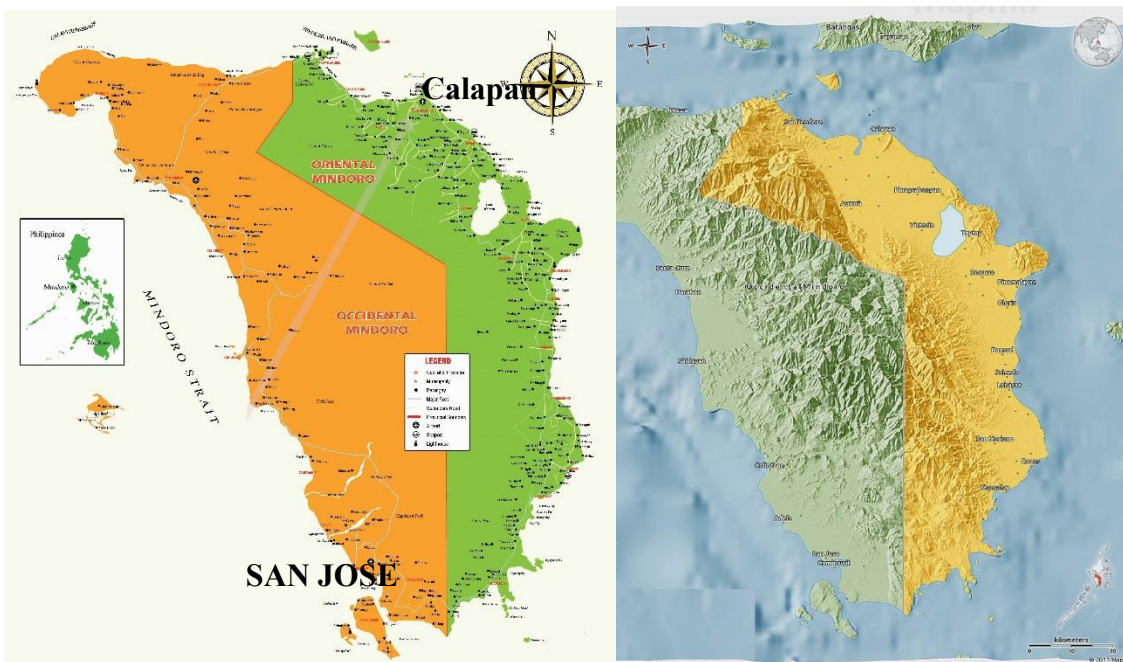


Figure 1.1 Maps of Mindoro.

Occidental Mindoro has been traditionally viewed as far less developed than its eastern counterpart, in part because Or. Mindoro exists along trade routes running between Manila and the southern part of the country. San Jose does, however, have an airport, with

flights to Manila most days of the week. This is something of a historical oddity, given that the population of San Jose would not generally support an airport. The US military built the airport in San Jose after landing on the coast of Occ. Mindoro, and establishing a base there as a point of re-invasion of the Philippines in 1944 against the Japanese forces. Interestingly, some people have suggested the airport is partially responsible for the lack of development in San Jose. As with the provinces in the north and central parts of the country, the pull of Manila has always been huge, with much movement for employment and trade occurring. But while a bus and ferry ride from San Jose to Manila can take anywhere in the region of eighteen hours, a flight takes just forty minutes. This splits the wealthy and poor in San Jose dramatically, and arguably the wealthy inhabitants in San Jose do not engage as much in the town as they would otherwise if it were not for the airport. Thus, while there is undoubtedly much money in the town, there are no real services for a middle and upper-class population. One might see expensive cars on the often unpaved roads, and large houses on leafy streets, but no restaurants or stores that would match the monetary wealth on display.

The literature of Mindoro has generally focused on the upland indigenous Mangyan groups (discussed in Chapter 2), while the lowlands have received very little attention (Schult 1991b; Agpalo 1972 are the exceptions). There are two local historians in San Jose, Rodolfo Acebes (2008) and Rudy Candelario (1982), who have been responsible over the last three decades for writing the history of Occ. Mindoro, and San Jose in particular. Much of their work has been published locally.

Christian Plurality in San Jose and Occidental Mindoro

What has caused the flourishing of Christian churches in San Jose and Occ. Mindoro? The reasons are diverse. In part, it is because the population of Occ. Mindoro is simply growing rapidly. As noted above, while the island was practically devoid of lowland Filipino Christians at the beginning of the 20th Century, the island now has over one million Filipinos, with just under half of that in Occ. Mindoro, the vast majority of whom are Christian. Such an increase in population and infrastructure, has opened the island up to missionary groups, as well as produced more urban areas, primarily San Jose in Occ. Mindoro, and Calapan in Or. Mindoro, which in itself enables more diversity of religious practice. In the 1990s, a broad increase in Pentecostal and Born Again Evangelical forms of Christianity across many parts of the globe (Lewis 2004) began to have a growing influence in Manila, a city that was always more accustomed to religious diversity than the rural provinces. These groups, however, have only begun to establish themselves in Occ. Mindoro in the last fifteen years.

This, however, is not to say that there have not been non-Catholic denominations present in San Jose before the 1990s. A UCCP (United Church of Christ in the Philippines), a mainline Protestant church, and a UMC (United Methodist Church) were established in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Additionally, Occ. Mindoro had a sizeable population of Aglipayans (discussed in Chapter 4). The 1970s and 1980s saw a small number of Born Again Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists establish a presence in San Jose, for the most part financially supported by US and Manila based churches. But these denominations remained very small, and never substantially challenged Catholicism in the province. It was not until the 2000s, that all these churches began to grow quickly. At the very northern tip of Occ. Mindoro, similar to Calapan in the north of Or. Mindoro, there has long been a greater presence of non-Catholic Christians, due

to close distance to Batangas and Manila. On the other hand, the Catholic Church has had a stronger presence in the south of the island, particularly in San Jose, where missionary outposts have long been situated in San Jose, using the town as an entry point to the indigenous Mangyan groups living in the upland regions.

Religious plurality in Occ. Mindoro, and particularly in San Jose where I spent the majority of my time conducting fieldwork, was not entirely a divisive affair. Indeed, for the most part there was a constant attempt to, if not to bridge denominational gaps, then at least to recognize a broader Christian community that encompassed a variety of denominations and affiliations. But not everyone was included, and there was an evident line collectively drawn about who was deemed Christian, and who was not. And much of the organizational work that Christian churches did was not so much to compete with other churches, but to be accepted into the sphere of communal Christianity. Most Born Again, Baptist, Pentecostal, Full Gospel, even Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses were accepted, if begrudgingly, into such a Christian circle. For those that were not affiliated with one of these groups, it was a different experience of religion altogether. Most often, they were designated a cult or a sect, in very much pejorative terms, and not a church. In San Jose, among the groups that fell into this category were Iglesia ni Cristo and Ang Dating Dataan.

This dissertation is based on 23 months of fieldwork, conducted for the most part in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, but also with regular research trips to other towns in the province, as well as in Oriental Mindoro and Manila. When I first began to work in San Jose, my first goal was to gain access to the Catholic Church. Because of the hierarchical nature of the Church, I made an appointment to meet Bishop Palang, who oversaw the Catholic Church in its entirety in Occ. Mindoro. When I first went to see Bishop Palang, I was concerned that

without his approval, my research would simply not be possible, at least with Catholics. If he did not sign off on my research, I was surely to be in trouble. As I was escorted by a priest into his residence, the bishop had just awoken from a nap and was shuffling across the kitchen. Noticeable was the large ring on his finger, and the reverence the priest clearly held for him. I was only more nervous, as the priest handed the bishop a file with a letter I had written to his office with some other documents that I did not recognize. After asking me the correct pronunciation of my name, he immediately asked me if I was Catholic. I told him I was baptized and raised Catholic, but that I wasn't a practicing Catholic. He smiled, and it was clear that I had his support for my research. If being a Catholic, lapsed or otherwise, was helpful in working with Catholics (who throughout my research were far more comfortable with me because I was a Catholic than if I were not), it was equally helpful in working with other denominations. This was for the simple reason that all these denominations, from Jehovah's Witnesses to Methodists to Pentecostals, were thoroughly engaged in trying to convert lapsed Catholics. Thus, for the most part, I was welcomed to most churches, and conducted research, to greater and lesser degrees, across approximately twenty churches. When I would approach a church, I would inevitably be invited to worshipping service, meeting, or mass, and then I would slowly become acquainted with the work and administration of the church. As with many people who study Christianity, the daytime can be one of the least busy times, as congregants and pastors, are often at work, away from the church. In many of the smaller churches, pastors and administrators are not fully employed by the church. The evenings were a different matter, filled as they are with meetings, services, prayer groups, Bible studies, and so forth. The weekends were especially busy, and one the difficulties in my research was having to choose the four or so services that I was able to

attend, and not cause offence to those I could not. While I worked more closely with some churches than others, the vast majority of the people that I engaged with in my studies understood that I was studying with other Christian groups too, even if they sometimes claimed me as their own.

This dissertation is not a survey of Christian or denominational practices in San Jose, or Occ. Mindoro. Indeed, many of the churches I worked closely with do not appear in these pages. Rather, in trying to understand the “work” of Christian churches and how they mediate the institutional forms of church and denominational organization, against a backdrop of increasing Christian plurality, I look to a set of specific engagements in which Christians in Occ. Mindoro are faced with having to translate their Christian identity across denominational, linguistic, and institutional divides.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I situate the beginnings of Christian plurality in early 20th Century through a discussion of Catholic missionary work in the upland regions of Mindoro, among the Mangyan groups. I examine how Catholic projects of conversion coalesced with the newly arrived US colonial administrations’ projects of civilizing the Mangyan. I center this discussion on a 1919 Philippine Supreme Court case, *Rubi v. the Provincial Board*, which found in favor of the administration’s right to forcefully resettle the Mangyan in lowland areas, while solidifying the government’s official use of the term “non-Christian” as the proper appellation for indigenous groups throughout the Philippines. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the Catholic archival record, and how they institutionally and logistically

shifted with the arrival of Protestant missionaries from the 1950s onwards. It was in this moment that we can see how initial religious competition and plurality in Mindoro played out through changes in logistical and organizational forms of missionary work. I then turn to the nature of Catholic missionary work in 2012, during my fieldwork, and the move away from an expansive institutional breadth of missionary work, and towards the use of “Contextual Theology” that de-emphasized traditional missionary methods and engaged more fully discourses on indigeneity and “cultural rights.”

In Chapter 3, I turn to the other side of this engagement between Catholic and Protestant missionaries, and examine religious plurality and competition from the perspective of the Protestant missionaries. My focus here is not in the conversion of upland Mangyan groups, but rather contemporary conversion of Catholics to Born Again Evangelicalism in the lowlands of Occ. Mindoro. I discuss the conversion practices of a transnational Born Again Christian group (the Jesus is Lord church) working amidst a predominantly Catholic community in Occidental Mindoro, the Philippines. I consider the critique of Catholicism that is on display, notably in the setting of church services. In particular, I address the practices whereby an explicit critique of Catholicism is wholly avoided, and where instead a set of practices that rely on a more implicit stance of valuation of Catholicism is at work. In this way, we see that the Protestant engagement with Catholicism is centered on contesting the ubiquity and dominance of Catholicism as the archetypal form of religion. This chapter centers on a simple enough empirical point: that in a new Born Again church, where the vast majority of attendees are Catholic and are being courted by Born Again Christians, for almost a year in which I was an observer no explicit or denotational reference to Catholicism was ever made. More broadly I focus on two aspects of the conversion setting; that of religious

rupture and of evangelistic *strategy*. I show how language practices related to the concepts of transparency and directness become paramount to Born Again evangelism. Unlike a recent anthropological literature that highlights the importance of rupture in Protestantism, in this context outright religious and social rupture are seen as highly undesirable outcomes of Christian conversion.

In Chapter 4, I move away from examining religious difference and the logistics of organization that has occurred in the face of a denominational “other,” and take up the issue of religious difference that occurs within a single church (albeit with the formation of a church in the process). I examine the role of religious corporations as the primary means through which the Philippine state has identified and regulated religious groups since the arrival of the US administration at the turn of the 20th century. I describe the tension between Christian views of the divine recognition of a congregation, and the Philippine state’s view of the congregation as a legal corporation. I begin the chapter with a discussion of an influential and widespread schism between the Catholic Church and the newly formed Iglesia Filipina Independiente (or Philippine Independent Church) at the turn of the 20th Century. The schism itself was a direct result (and indeed constituting of) the Philippine revolution against Spain and the Catholic orders that had become de facto state agents over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries in large parts of the Philippines. The rise of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) was halted when the Philippine courts decided in favor of the Catholic Church and ordered the IFI to return all the property, including churches, which they had appropriated from the Catholic parishes. I then discuss two court cases from 2012-13 that arose out of a schism in the United Methodist Church that I began this introduction with, and likewise turned on the matter of property ownership. It was through these cases, that the UMC pastors and administrators I

worked alongside, were faced with translating across institutional lines the nature of their church—into a corporate one. This Christian engagement with institutional and bureaucratic forms inherent in corporate regulation form the theoretical basis of the chapter.

Throughout these chapters, I show how the universality of Christian meaning is often at odds with denominational divides and contestations. In Chapter 5, I discuss in detail this issue of universality of meaning and mediation in Christianity. However, I locate my discussion, not in terms of affiliation and church identity, but instead in the practice of Bible translation. In this setting, where the matter of language is foregrounded, we see the problems of universality and specificity that are evident in denominational divides, in many ways clarified. I examine the underlying sets of Christian ideologies regarding the commensurability of linguistic forms, and indeed the commensurability of earthly concerns with divinely transcendent meaning. Based on ethnographic research at a biannual Bible translation workshop in Mindoro in 2013, during which the Bible was translated into three Mangyan languages, I argue that the degree to which the actual linguistic forms in the scriptures are divinely inspired often exists as an irresolvable semiotic problem for Bible translators. To this end, I discuss the means through which the Holy Spirit is taken as an essential mediator between the fallible work of Christian translators and the Bible as a language-instantiated form of God's presence. In the second part of this chapter, I take up the issue of "generic" language employed by Christian translators as a translative and ideological tool. I suggest that "generic" language can be viewed as a site in which multiple and often conflicting claims of language universality and purity are present.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I examine how the mediating qualities of language are aligned with the mediating quality of Christian institutionality. I return to the matter of

Catholic dominance, and challenges to the Catholic Church's ingrained relationship to definitions of religious experience and institutional practice, from both within and without the Catholic Church itself. My concern in this last chapter is to describe how Christians in Mindoro articulate and resolve the need of congregational identities and institutional forms to mediate a relationship with God. I discuss how the concept of "naturalness" and "purity" (of divine presence) is not only at work in doctrinal and faith practices, but also in the bureaucratic and organizational forms of Christian churches. I describe the Jehovah's Witnesses' attempt to convert Born Again Evangelical deaf and hard of hearing through sign language. Their view of sign language as more "natural" coincided with a view of Christianity itself being "natural." Within this frame of denominational competition, I discuss the Catholic Charismatic group, the Loved Flock, and examine how they locate themselves in terms of Catholic institutions, while appropriating the language practices (particularly "speaking in tongues") that suggest the possibility of an unmediated relationship with God. Ultimately, I highlight the tensions these Christians faced, in mediating through their churches, a divine presence.

Chapter 2

Logistical Dreams: Non-Christians and Boundaries Indefinite

Christ For the Philippines

Verse I:

Oh ye who love the Saviour, look across the ocean's foam,
Behold a land of darkness dense, enchained by cruel Rome;
Beneath oppression's rod they groan; shall we resist their plea?
O Christian, answer, "Here am I, send me."

Chorus:

The Philippines shall know
The power of Calvary's flow,
For Jesus died to set Rome's captives free;
Mohammed's chains shall break,
And pagan idols shake;
The Philippines Christ's glorious day shall see.

Verse II:

You send your prayers to heaven for China, Africa, as well;
To India, South America, Japan the story tell;
The Philippines with hands outstretched are calling now to thee;
O Christian, answer, "Here I am, send me."

Verse III:

How can you hope to enter heaven if you refuse to tell
The many, many heathen souls that still in darkness dwell,
Then speed your prayers, your gifts, yourselves, or God's eternal "woe"
Will take place of His commission,
"Go"

-From *Missionary Messages in Song*, 1910. Lyrics by Cora M. Rudy, sung to the tune of "Tell Mother, I'm Here"

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Matthew 28: 18-19

“This is a study of contrasts and parallels.” So wrote the anatomist, evolutionist and sometime ethnologist Robert Bennett Bean in a 1913 article on the physiology of the Mangyan¹, in which he aligned the Mangyan physical character to the Ilongot of Luzon and to the lowland Tagalogs. Coming at the tail end of an initial flurry of scientific and state interest in the Mangyan that began with the arrival of the US administrative apparatus in the Philippines after the country was ceded to the US in 1898, Bennett’s piece, a racial and physiognomic ordering of Mangyan and Negrito groups in the Philippines, was in keeping with representations of the “primitive” current in anthropological and ethnological thought at the time². However, this was not the first, nor the last time the Mangyan would exist primarily through a lens of similarity and difference. Indeed, such categorical difference continues to be the primary means through which the Mangyan are discursively constituted in Mindoro. What this difference is, however, and what categories are employed in articulating difference, have

¹ The term “Mangyan” had yet to become synonymous with the indigenous population of Mindoro on 1903. There had been previous Spanish use of the term “Manguiane” but not in a ubiquitous sense. The term Mangyan itself, has proven a problematic one. Some early 20th missionary reports noted that people did not like the term, understanding it to be a catch-all term for numerous distinct groups, and noting it was never used by the groups themselves. Even in the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists and missionaries noted some dislike by groups themselves. However, during my fieldwork, I never came across its rejection, and while people would switch easily between the more encapsulating term Mangyan, and group-specific terms such as “Hanunoo” and “Buhid,” there appeared no resentment or dislike for the term Mangyan. I use the term here throughout, for four reasons. Firstly, as noted, those I worked with (predominantly Hanunoo and Buhid) often identified themselves as Mangyan, and found no problem in the current use of the term, noting that it was accepted and used among the groups. Secondly, the Christian missionaries used the term throughout my fieldwork, and in order to describe their view of their missions, the use of the term Mangyan reflects this. Thirdly, I am interested here in discussing how a dichotomous understanding of upland/lowland people if Mindoro developed, notably along Christian/“non-Christian” lines, and the term Mangyan was a product of this rationale. And finally, the term Mangyan itself has become a unifying identity in Mindoro for indigenous groups, especially in dealing with State and NGO actors. Ultimately I would argue that the term “Mangyan” traditionally swept aside the diversity of those falling under its appellation, but has more recently become a politically positive and unifying identity for most Mangyan people.

² Although Bennett would push for the role of racialization in science and anthropology longer than most (Bennet Bean 1932). See Stocking (1968) for a detailed and nuanced discussion of racial approaches to ethnology early in the discipline.

shifted over the course of the last century, and have seen earlier categorical differences based on physiognomy and primitiveness, coalesce with religious and social categories of difference. The role of Christianity, in particular that of missionaries, first Catholics and later Protestants, in determining how the Mangyan have been viewed in both Mindoro and the Philippines, has been a dominant and continuing one.

Christian interest in the Mangyan dates back to the 17th Century, when Spanish Jesuit missionaries began proselytizing in both the lowland and upland areas of Mindoro. Importantly, however, the conversion of Mangyan groups has been for the most part a failure. The present numbers of converted Mangyan are difficult to estimate, but it would appear that after nearly four hundred years of missionary attention, perhaps only 15% would identify as Christians in Occidental Mindoro, with 40% of Mangyan groups in Oriental Mindoro said to be Christianized.³ At the same time, there are few Mangyan groups that have not received attention at one time or other from Christian missionaries.

The Mangyan have historically been located at far end of a spectrum of primitive and civilized, and more recently (from the late 1970s onwards) within discourses of “cultural minorities” and indigeneity, by Christians, politicians, and activists alike. Superimposed upon these frames of difference, however, has been a consistent division of the Mangyan and primarily Tagalog lowlanders along Christian and non-Christian lines. As I hope to show in the beginning of this chapter, such a categorical difference, in Mindoro, wherein lowlanders

³ These figures are based on conversations with different missionary groups, in both Oriental and Occidental Mindoro. There are no trustworthy official figures regarding the Christianization of Mangyan groups in Mindoro. Missionary work among the Mangyan in has traditionally been focused more in the north-east of the island, where the OMF and the Catholic Mangyan Mission are located. This is mostly a result of ease of access to this part of the island. Since the early 20th Century, the north-east, where Calapan, the largest town/city on the island is located, travel routes from Manila and Batangas to the north, have centered on this part of the island. In addition, Mangyan villages are closer to the lowlands near Calapan, thus enabling more thorough missionary work there.

are marked as Christians, and the Mangyan groups as non-Christian, has been, and is, as much about defining what Christianity is, as it is about defining who the Mangyan are. I take up the term “non-Christian,” deployed throughout the Philippines officially from the onset of the US administration and continuing in a more informal manner up to the present, and discuss how it has been used to delineate and define both Christianity and its borders. Marking the Mangyan as non-Christian has been at the core of how Christian missionaries have conceived the nature of their work, and in many ways it has compelled them to continuously attempt to convert them, even as their work has historically failed to succeed.

The inculcation of a dichotomous boundary in which the Mangyan are defined as non-Christian, has been central to the missionary project in Mindoro. In looking at how Christianity has been used to effect categorical definitions of the Mangyan as primitive over the course of the 20th Century, I examine how missionary strategies, discourses of conversion, and the denominations involved have changed. At the same time, there remains the continuing role of the Mangyan, often as a figmental presence (their actual presence is often limited in lowland areas, particularly in Occ. Mindoro) in determining the nature of Christianity itself on the island.

By examining how the missionary endeavor in Mindoro was constituted in the early 20th Century as a binary affair, between Christians and non-Christians, I show how the US bureaucratic treatment of the Mangyan not only mirrored the earlier work of Christian missionaries, but solidified the Mangyan as objects to be Christianized. The term “non-Christian” held sway even as the US colonial government began to administer, regulate, study and otherwise ideologically assemble indigenous groups throughout the Philippines. Such a bracketing off of groups as non-Christian not only homogenized the indigenous, but also the

Christians who were seeking to convert them. This posed little problem, as historically the Philippines had been so dominated by Catholicism, that Christianity needed little in the way of parsing, and was essentially a synonym for Catholicism. But the pursuit by the US to define indigenous groups as a uniform “non-Christian” collective occurred at the same time that Christianity in the Philippines was for the first time becoming plural in its organization and practices. Arriving on the heels of the US administration, Protestant missionaries began working in the Philippines as a whole in the 1901, and in Mindoro after World War II. By the late 1950s, the “Christian” in “non-Christian” would become as tenuous as the prefix “non-.”

Prior to the denominational expansion in Mindoro, the dichotomy of Christian and non-Christian, mapped easily onto Christian conceptions of conversion. The former had faith in God, the latter did not. Or to view it in temporal terms, non-Christians were those who had *not* yet converted to Christianity. As I describe in this chapter, the Catholic missionary work, beginning in the 17th Century and continuing in a markedly similar fashion until the 1950s, was quite patchwork and standard. Lowland priests tended to venture into the uplands when they had the time, and when the weather suited. Their projects of evangelization amounted to delivering mass (albeit to people who would not necessarily have understood it); teaching the sign of the cross; distributing medals and images of Jesus and Mary; teaching prayers and the commandments, and finally perhaps sharing some stories from the Bible. The hope was that such contact would continue and baptism and church building would subsequently occur. There is a neat diagrammatic iconicity in such types of missionary work. As a number of Catholic and Protestant missionaries told me during my fieldwork, they often saw the logistics of their evangelism as mirroring the processes of conversion that proselytes underwent. For example, leaving the lowlands of Mindoro, and travelling up a mountain to a village one had

not been to before—the work involved, the breaching of boundaries, the moving from old to new—this is what Mangyan people went through themselves when resolving to accept a Christian faith.

This relationship, between missionary and missionized, between Christian and non-Christian, was complicated when Protestant groups began missionizing in Mindoro in the early 1950s, as access to the island improved. No longer did such a neat dichotomy exist. Instead, a new heterogeneity within the Christian ranks saw the shape of missionary work change. Protestant groups oriented their work as a negation of Catholicism, while Catholic missionaries themselves began to rethink their evangelistic strategies among the Mangyan. Arguably, the Catholic conversion of the Mangyan groups had been historically unsuccessful, with very few numbers of Mangyan converted in any permanent sense. The improved evangelistic techniques by a number of Protestant groups, namely the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) and the New Tribes Mission (NTM) put the Catholic Church firmly on the back foot. These groups focused much more on learning the Mangyan languages, translating the Bible, and working and living among the Mangyan for extended periods of time, thereby challenging the earlier Catholic forms of missionizing.

Subsequent to this solidification of indigenous groups as “non-Christian” in the early part of the 20th Century, there were institutional changes and an increasingly bureaucratic response of the Catholic missionaries to a perceived Protestant threat. Coinciding with theological shifts in the Church in the 1970s, that de-emphasized conversion as the only and most important goal of Catholic missionaries, and will be discussed later, the Church’s missionary work in Mindoro became a much larger and bureaucratic administered affair, with actual face-to-face evangelism afforded less priority. Thus the Catholic Church did not

necessarily attempt to replicate Protestant strategies, but countered them in interesting ways. It is possible to see an arc of Catholic institutional expansion and subsequent contraction from the archival record to the Catholic missionary engagement that was playing out during the time of my fieldwork. Important here is the shift away from straightforward evangelism by Catholics, and the criticisms from some quarters, Catholic and non-Catholic, that the Catholic Mangyan Mission has essentially become an NGO, aiding the social and political progress of Mangyan groups, but forgoing the essential religious aspect of their work.

Before I move on to a discussion of the “non-Christian”, however, I want to highlight two main strands to my argument here in relation to the administration of missionary work. Firstly, I am interested in opening up more of a space between Christian ideologies of conversion and the implementation of those ideologies. Or put another way, I want to distinguish somewhat between Christians and Christianity, missionaries and mission. I suggest that too often in the anthropological literature on missionary work and conversion, the missionaries themselves become purified instantiations of Christian ideology. In one sense, for example, to write a sentence such as “When Christianity arrived in the Philippines”, is merely a familiar metonymic shortcut. But in another sense, it collapses a Christian ideology and the people and institutional frameworks through which it is pursued, into one entity. Similarly, it assembles Christianity as a rather more cohesive whole than it might be.

The iterative, logistical and oftentimes bureaucratic practices in missionary work lead to the second element of my argument—that the presence of Protestant missionaries has reoriented the missionary focus away from conversion and towards the strategy involved in evangelism itself. As I discussed in succeeding chapters, one of my goals in this dissertation is that Christian plurality in Mindoro has forced Christians to engage with the fundamental

relationship between faith and its institutional forms. To that end, I am interested here in how the organizational aspects of missionary work among the Mangyan have become synonymous with the outcome: conversion. For the Mangyan groups themselves, competition and denominational heterogeneity among Christian missionaries has resulted in a palimpsest view of Christianity, in which one denomination replaces another. Similarly, for example, many Mangyan talked to me with some humor about how they have grown accustomed to different Christian groups arriving in their villages promising very similar things, both in terms of having a Christian faith as well as the material gains (schools, medical aid etc.) from converting, only to disappear at the onset of a hard rainy season. Such experience of Christian plurality has equally refocused Mangyan attention to the logistics of Christian evangelism, with matters of faith and doctrine often fading into the background of the missionary engagement. The question I wish to foreground here is whether such a focus on the logistics of the evangelism is any less religious than the more explicit and standard fare of missionary work? Do missionaries see the logistics, access, and bureaucracy as likewise imbued with God's presence as telling someone of the teachings of Christ?

Ultimately, I wish to show in this chapter how the study of the logistics of missionary work allows us to resituate the role of bureaucracy in Christian practice. That is, rather than viewing bureaucracy as an irreligious distancing from a core charismatic point, moment or endeavor, I suggest the theological and ideological universalism inherent in Christian missionary work gets produced through the universal qualities of administration and logistics. Bureaucracy, in this manner, is not antagonistic towards a Christian faith, but instead can mirror, and indeed embody its universalism. I try to show here that in as much as conversion indexes, and often diagrammatically iconizes Christian faith, so too may the logistical and

bureaucratic aspects of the missionary project. Max Weber's famous delineation between charisma and routinization, as discussed in Chapter 1, is useful even as it is problematic. I argue that for the missionaries I worked with in Mindoro, such a dividing line is never clear, and they do not inherently see a loss of faith in the production of bureaucracy. It is, nevertheless, a constant concern. To that end, in this chapter, I wish to highlight the ambiguities and difficulties faced by Christian missionaries in differentiating between the institutional and the religious.

The “non-Christian” Mangyan

For the most part, historical records pertaining to the Mangyan rely on a number of sketchy details recorded by Spanish colonialists and Jesuit missionaries over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries. Throughout this time, the island of Mindoro itself was lightly populated, primarily by Mangyan groups. It was not until the 20th century that internal Philippine immigration began in earnest to the island. Given that missionary reports from this time consistently articulate exasperation in approximating the population of Mangyan groups, census figures are untrustworthy at best. Nevertheless, Spanish-conducted censuses in 1878 and 1887 noted the entire population of Mindoro (without a breakdown of Mangyan groups and Tagalog speaking lowlanders) to be 19,728 and 25,154 persons respectively. The first US administered census in 1903 noted the population to be 39,582 persons overall, with 32,318 “civilized” and 7,264 “wild”. Some later analysts have estimated that the number of “wild” persons, or Mangyan were far higher, perhaps even three times as that listed in successive censuses (Gibson 1983; Lopez 1976).

My concern here is not so much to unpack the discourse on “primitiveness”, a topic

that has been dealt with substantially in anthropology (within the development of the discipline, see Stocking 1968, 1991, and in the Philippines, Rafael 2000; Brody 2010, Rosaldo 1993) but rather to look at how missionary work among the Mangyan over the 20th Century has constituted Christian practices, and in particular the role of competitive strategies among missionaries, in both lowland and upland regions. I argue that the existence of the Mangyan as “non-Christians” has informed how Christians in Mindoro, and similarly across the Philippines, have fundamentally imagined themselves and their work. Interestingly, and importantly, this has been the case for both those Christians who have worked directly with Mangyan groups, and those who have not. That is, the engagement between Christians and Mangyans, has reached beyond a practical engagement, and the presence of the Mangyan has often been enough to influence Christian practices in the lowland regions of the island. In order to understand what “Christian” is in Mindoro, one must look to its inverted other, the “non-Christian.” This term is not simply an inherited, anachronistic and representationally loaded term, but rather a term that defines the very borders of Christianity. That is, in Mindoro, to understand Christianity, is to understand what it is not.

What is in a term such as “non-Christian”? In the Philippines, the term itself attained official usage through the establishment of The Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in 1901 by the US Philippine Commission. Designed to mirror (indeed be affiliated with) the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the US (Darnell 1998, particularly chapters 3 and 7; Fixico 2012), the bureau had a dual mandate to anthropologically study the non-Christian tribes and to improve their status of civilization,

Its objects are the investigation of the little known pagan and Mohammedan tribes of the Archipelago, the conduct of systematic work in the anthropology of the Philippines, and the recommendation of legislation on behalf of these

uncivilized peoples...but the practical duties also entrusted to it of investigating the material condition of these wild peoples, and of assisting in the measures adopted for their material progress... (Prescott-Barrows 1901: 3)

As I will discuss later, such an approach to indigenous groups in the Philippines aligned easily with contemporary Christian missionary strategies at play in Mindoro. The Bureau administered and financed a vast number of studies of indigenous groups in the first decade of the 20th Century (Robert Bennet Bean's work included). As Renato Rosaldo has noted of the Bureau of this period, policies towards these non-Christian tribes "reached a peak of explicit conceptualization and systematic application" (Rosaldo 1982: 313).⁴ In a 1901 handbook for volunteers, the Bureau outlined two sets of points of interest and importance when studying the non-Christian tribes of the Philippines, including physical type, dress, social organization, tattoos and hair styles, ornaments, religious beliefs, language (including a list of 50 focal terms), warlike nature, disease, and economic exchange (see appendix for full list). Dean Worcester, chief architect of the Bureau, noted in a letter to the Governor of Mindoro, Robert Sanford Offley, that, "If I were as young and as light on my feet as you are...there is nothing I can think of which I should enjoy more than to fill in the blank places on the map of Mindoro..." (Worcester Correspondence in Beyer 1918 [B14.3: 151]⁵)

The Mangyan, like other groups, received much attention from the Bureau, but like missionaries in the 19th Century, interest in them gradually fizzled somewhat due to inaccessibility and disease—Mindoro was known among US administrators and missionaries

⁴ Interestingly, Rosaldo looks at the Bureau, and Dean Worcester, as laying the groundwork for a later fetish of primitive and untouched indigenous groups, which resulted in the famous Tasaday controversy in the 1970s that revolved around the discovery of a "new stone age" tribe, subsequently found to be fraudulent (Hemley 2003).

⁵ These archival documents were collated by Antoon Postma and are available at the Mangyan Heritage Center in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro. The vast majority of these materials are unavailable elsewhere, and the documents themselves have no title, thus I use the cataloguing numbers, in square brackets, of the MHC itself in citations.

as the “white man’s grave” (Beyer 1918 [B14.3]). Thus the Mangyan were never studied to the same extent as groups in Northern Luzon such as the Ilongot and Ifugao, or the Negritos in the central part of the country, and anthropological studies began to taper off by 1910, and did not reappear in any substantial way until professional anthropologists such as Harold Conklin began working on the island after the WWII (Conklin 1949, 1955, 1959).

Yet, while the academic aspect of the Bureau never attained the measure of its US affiliate, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, its role in the practical regulation of Mangyan groups certainly did. There had been a continuous effort on the part of Worcester, as Secretary of the Interior (for all intents, this position governed the country) and the US administration to more fully engage with the Mangyan, in order to “better their lot” and to civilize them. As archival records show, aside from questionable matters related to the design of the US intent, their administration of Mangyan groups was fraught with corruption and mismanagement.

For example, in the same letter to Van Schick that Worcester wrote of filling in the blanks of Mindoro’s map, he criticized the governor and his predecessor for not doing enough, in both studying or helping the Mangyan. He noted,

The one feature of Governor Offley’s work with which I was dissatisfied was his failure to do more for these people, and I am afraid that I must say to you that it seems to me that you have done considerably less than he did...it is high time that we began to know something about the interior of Mindoro, and that we begin to do something substantial for the people which inhabit it (Worcester, letter to Van Schaick (1910), in Beyer 1918 [B14.3]).

Indeed, as early as 1901, anthropologists, missionaries and US officials were noting that the Mangyan were often taken advantage of by lowland Filipinos, who with impunity would often contract them to work for them and subsequently refuse to pay them any wages (Beyer 1918 [B14.3]). Governor Offley himself, wrote in 1902 to Worcester, that,

These people, known as the “Manguianes”, are, in my opinion, a desirable acquisition [sic] and I shall do everything in my power to win them over; first by passing such laws as will protect them from the Filipino, who rob them on every occasion (Offley Correspondence in Beyer 1918: 179 [B14.3]).

By 1914, with little movement in their civilizing mission, and deciding that if you cannot go to the mountain, the mountain must come to you, Worcester and his successors begun to implement policies of tribal relocation to lowland regions in Mindoro, particularly in the north-east of the island, outside Calapan.⁶ These attempts to civilize the Mangyan (and the lowland Filipinos to a lesser degree) were viewed as a rejection of the previous Spanish colonial administration that focused almost solely on Christian missionization. As Offley noted in a report to the newly established Census office in Manila, “It should be borne in mind that Mindoro was used as a penal colony by Spain, and that nothing other than the erection of immense churches and converts was done to improve the condition of the people” (Beyer 1918: 186 [B14.3]). The relocation project that began in earnest in 1914 emanated from a belief that the Mangyan would be best served by integrating them with lowland Tagalog Filipinos, as well as settling them in one circumscribed area as opposed to their scattered, inaccessible villages. From letters from the Governor’s Office in Mindoro, it appeared that the US administration believed the settlements would benefit the Mangyan by protecting them from lowland abuse and corruption, enable a trusting relationship emerge between the Mangyan and the US administrators, and indeed it was believed that after the success of the first settlement outside of Calapan, by Lake Naujan, the Mangyan themselves would want to establish other lowland settlements (Beyer 1918 [B14.3]).

⁶ It is in this area, that the OMF would later work, establishing a Mangyan Bible school, and a century after these projects of relocation, that the Bible translation project occurred, discussed in Chapter 3.

Rubi et al. v. The Provincial Board of Mindoro

Nothing of the sort occurred however, and the settlement resulted in a famous Philippine Supreme Court case that saw the US regulation of the Mangyan officially coalesce with the relationship of Christianity in the civilizing process. The case *Rubi et al. v. The Provincial Board of Mindoro* in 1919, which revolved around the constitutional validity of forced settlements, was a direct result of the Mangyan settlement in Lake Naujan, established five years prior. While the official reports and letters that discussed the planning of the settlement unsurprisingly promoted the settlement in terms that were seen to benefit and protect the Mangyan, there was no discussion of the forced nature of settlement. However, by 1917, the provincial governor of Mindoro, Juan Morente, had submitted for approval under the Administration Code (essentially the US constitution for the Philippines) passage that stated,

Whereas several attempts and schemes have been made for the advancement of the non-Christian people of Mindoro, which were all a failure. Whereas it has been found out and proved that unless some other measure is taken for the Mangyan work of this province, no successful result will be obtained toward educating these people. Whereas it is deemed necessary to oblige them to live in one place in order to make a permanent settlement. Whereas the provincial governor of any province in which non-Christian inhabitants are found is authorized, when such a course is deemed necessary in the interest of law and order, to direct such inhabitants to take up their habitation on sites on unoccupied public lands to be selected by him and approved by the provincial board. Whereas the provincial governor is of the opinion that the *sitio* of Tigbao on Lake Naujan is a place most convenient for the Mangyanes to live on (*Rubi v. Provincial Board* 1919 [G.R. No. L-14078])

From the Supreme Court ruling, it is clear that a number of Mangyan people were opposed to the idea, and balked at the regulation of their movement. In a remarkable 79-page ruling that ultimately attempted to align Philippine law with US law regarding Native Americans—which begins by invoking US Chief Justice John Marshall, followed by a discussion of Daniel

Webster's view of due process, Spanish colonialism, and the Catholic Church—the Supreme Court of the Philippines decided not only in favor of the constitutional basis for forced reservations of indigenous groups, but also presented a history of the civilizing process of “wild” peoples and offered an in-depth etymology of the term “non-Christian.” The ruling solidified the state's rule over indigenous populations who were never individually or collectively identified as citizens.

There was evidently an unease with the term “non-Christian,” and eight pages alone are devoted to the adequacy of the term as the correct appellation for the primitive peoples of the Philippines. Interestingly, the ruling admits to an “awkwardness” of the term, and argues that the religious signification, and geographical signification (given that non-Christian groups traditionally occupied different regions than lowland Christian Filipinos) are alone not enough for its use as a legal term. Rather, “the reason is that the motive of the law relates not to a particular people, because of their religion, or to a particular province because of its location, but the whole intent of the law is predicated on the civilization or lack of civilization of the inhabitants” (Supreme Court Ruling). At the same time, the justices were clearly aware of the risk of religious discrimination in the use of the term, but nevertheless concluded,

We do not feel free to discard the long continued meaning given to a common expression, especially as classification of inhabitants according to religious belief leads the court to what it should avoid, the nullification of legislative action. We hold that the term "non-Christian" refers to natives of the Philippines Islands of a low grade of civilization (*Rubi v. Provincial Board* 1919 [G.R. No. L-14078]).

The deep concern with matters of appellation running throughout the ruling stands in contrast to its remarkably untroubled object—the primitive tribes of the Philippines. The uncertainty of language is not matched with an uncertainty of the categories that delimit the Mangyan

from the Tagalogs.

The US administration's interest in cataloguing and civilizing the Mangyan, however, did not coincide with a dramatic increase of missionary work in Mindoro, Catholic or Protestant. For reasons unknown, but likely to do with matters of access, the influx of American Protestant missionaries into the Philippines that began in 1899 did not reach Mindoro until the 1940s (Doeppers 1976; Clymer 1986). So while the Supreme Court and the US administration were debating the role of Christianity but not the primitive as a categorical marker of identity, Christian missionaries themselves were not present on the island. The Catholic Church, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, having been shaken by the fall of Spanish rule and a massive rise of anti-friar sentiment, retreated almost entirely from missionary work among the Mangyan. Indeed, it was not until after WWII that Protestant missionary work began in earnest, as well as a return of Catholic missionaries. But in many ways, at least in terms of the state's delineation of the "wild" Mangyan and the "civilized" lowland Filipinos, the work of Christian missionaries was already done. Through previous centuries' work and reports (circa 1650 to 1880), Jesuit, and later Augustinian Recollect, missionaries laid the foundation for a fundamental and religiously informed delineation of Mindoro's population. That is, those who were non-Christian were by default uncivilized and wild. Indeed, the similarity between early missionary reports and later US colonial reports is striking.

While this is not the place to present a full overview of the history of missionary work in Mindoro, I do want to draw some broad points of note from the limited archives that exist regarding the Catholic Church's engagement with Mangyan groups, as these Catholic policies and depictions of Mindoro align remarkably well with the US's. Jesuit and Augustinian Recollect missionaries worked among the Mangyan throughout the 18th and the 19th

Centuries, but there appeared to be little success in permanently converting many people, and eventually most effort was paid to the small coastal populations of Tagalog and Bisayan speakers, where an acceptance of Christianity was more widespread. Accessibility, lack of resources, and “piratical incursions” by “Moros” (Southern Muslims) (Report from 1885, reprinted and translated in *DIWA* 1985 [P1.12]) were the most popular reasons given for this failure in proselytizing. Interestingly, there seems to have been a concerted effort at different times to employ practices quite similar to the US administration, namely to relocate the Mangyan to lowland areas. Policies of *reducción*, and later *repoblación*, of concocting villages and towns that were connected by infrastructure to other lowland populations, proved to be failures, as the Mangyan people targeted were unwilling to move and change their lifestyles to accommodate the missionaries and Spanish officials (*DIWA* 1985 [P1.12]). Inasmuch as Catholic missionaries were for all intents and purposes administrative agents and apparatuses of the Spanish government, the archives reveal a similar focus on a limited set of practices and representations of the Mangyan. Again and again, we find in the missionary records a uniform depiction of the Mangyan: a brief description of the geography such as density of forests, inaccessibility of the mountainous terrain, and then their clothes, food, animistic practices, fear/acceptance of outsiders, and finally a minor attempt to estimate the location and size of settlements.

Such recording, cataloguing, and organization—an ideological organization of people that reached from documenting to relocating people—has been well attended to by scholars (Vergara 1995; Rafael 2000; Kramer 2006). These rudimentary exegeses of the Mangyan, not only codified them as the non-Christian, but in their repetition, placed more emphasis on the practice of missionary work than it did conversion. To work among the Mangyan, to be

engaged in the process of missionary work, often appeared more important than the actual achievement of conversion itself, of which very few mission reports and letters made note.

Protestants Begin

The centuries of intermittent missionary work among the Mangyan by the Spanish religious orders was clearly unsuccessful when compared to the overwhelming and near total conversion rate of lowland Tagalogs to Catholicism. At the same time, to view lowland conversion simply as “missionary work” or evangelism is to efface the complex political, forced and regulated nature of religious practice that occurred in the Philippines during this time period. So closely aligned with the Spanish colonial state were the Catholic religious orders that they were for all intents and purposes the governing agents and bodies of the state. This was especially true in the provinces, outside of Manila (Rafael 1988; Agoncillo 1956). The work of Jesuits and Recollect orders among the Mangyan did at times entail state-like functions, and some records suggest that much of the missionary work done was to impel the Mangyan to pay taxes (*DIWA* 1985 [P1.12]). And as we have seen, the missionaries during the 18th and 19th Centuries certainly believed themselves to be state actors, comfortable as they were in drawing up policies and plans of the compulsory movement and integration of Mangyan peoples with Tagalogs in the lowlands (For example, see the famous novels of Jose Rizal 1887, 1891).

It is somewhat surprising that with the arrival of the US colonial administration to the island, the slew of new Protestant missionary denominations did not follow in their step, as was the case in much of the country. The missionaries that did arrive to Mindoro were once again Catholic, this time the order *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD, or Divine Word Missionaries),

who took over the administration of the Catholic Church in Mindoro in the early decades of the 20th Century. Missionary work at this time was generally limited to the lowlands, but there are scant records of the Church's work at this time. Regardless, any minimal missionary work that might have occurred in the 1920s and 1930s swiftly ended when Japan took control of the island in 1942. The Japanese official policy of quasi-appeasement of Christianity in the Philippines belied practical and often violent regulation of Christianity (Deats 1968: 107; Ikehata and Jose 1999).⁷ Little has been written about the Japanese administration of Mindoro, but it has been noted that there were as few as 400 Japanese soldiers on the entire island, and they were dependent on existing structures of governance and the cooperation of elites and politicians to administer the island. However, people talked to me of a number of executions of Catholic priests by Japanese forces in the 1940s. One famous story relates to the death of Bishop William Finneman. He was apparently thrown overboard from a boat off the coast of Mindoro and allowed to drown. With his death, and with the upland region of the island increasingly becoming a safe-haven for anti-Japanese guerilla fighters after the US reclaimed the island in 1944, all missionary work among the Mangyan was ended.

Thus, in the decade following WWII, we find Christian missions beginning anew in their proselytism among Mangyan groups, with little to no institutional or administrative inheritance. There were, however, traces of Spanish missionary work. For example, Antoon Postma, a famous missionary and former SVD priest in Oriental Mindoro (who still lives among the Hanunoo outside of Mansalay in Or. Mindoro) noted in a 1967 report concerning his work with a Mangyan group that had not been approached by Catholic missionaries in

⁷ Interestingly, the Japanese administration saw the multiple Protestant denominations as overly troublesome to deal with, and attempted to unify a large number of them in the single "Evangelical Church of the Philippines." However, a number of the larger mainline churches refused (see Ikehata and Jose 1999; Desalte 2002).

living memory,

the cross is a favorite symbol of the Mangyans...and it is found embroidered on the backside of upper-garments of men or women, often in an intricate pattern...also present on the small baskets, woven and buri-palm...one can often see the younger Mangyans, boys or girls, who have themselves on the cheeks or forehead, with a piece of lipstick, in the sign of the cross...the cross is also seen as a sign to ward of evil [sic]...” (Postma 1967: 2 [P1.28]).

Other reference points of Christian influence mentioned in this report are the use of terms such as “Adan, Eba, Nowe, Hesus, Mariya, Birhin, Santo Papa, Roma, Kompesar, Simbahang Piesta, etc.,” and origin myths that appeared to be gleaned from biblical sources, and types of prayers that contained echoes of Christian worship.

For the most part, the Catholic missionaries continued proselytizing in a traditional manner. For example, in 1953, Fr. Juan Wiesneth, SVD, wrote of his recent work among the Mangyan. He begins by describing his attendance at the funeral of “the old informant of Mr. Conklin,” a man named Luyon. Unable to reach the funeral of Luyon in time, he instead stopped at another village where another funeral was taking place,

I was given a good meal and even a spoon. Hamulad [a local] asked me for a little cross, which I gladly promised him. All the Mangyans were nice and friendly, (but) any pastoral result was hardly achieved. I stayed in Manoal until Ash Wednesday, to baptize, visit the sick and teach religion to the children (of the Tagalog-Bisayan populations there). Equipped with little crosses and medals I returned to Manoal on March 8, after I had celebrated evening mass earlier in Cabalwa with good results. Monday and Tuesday were spent in Budburan and Manoal with pastoral care for the Christian population...I blessed the medals the medals and crosses, as well as the whole house, a method that since then I always repeated. With the addition, that of now, I enjoin the Mangyans to kiss the medals, and to invoke frequently the holiest names of Jesus and Mary, and if possible to make the sign of the cross. (Wiesneth 1955 [W5.2])

We find here, and throughout other records, an emphasis on medals and the material signs of Catholicism, whether a medal, a cross, or signing the cross, the celebration of mass, and a

focus on Jesus and Mary. Also, we see that it is one individual, usually a priest, left to his own devices in missionary work. Postma, two decades after Wiesneth, noted the individuality of Catholic missionary work,

The mission work among the Mangyans is done by each SVD missionary in his own way, according to his own character and ideas, depending also on the type of minority groups he is dealing with, since they are different in language and custom almost from town to town. The ultimate goal, however, is the same with everyone: to make Christ known and loved among the Mangyan. (Postma 1975 [P1.61])

Elsewhere, under a section titled “Methods Employed,” a priest working in the mountains close to San Jose, wrote,

Having no mangyan catechist, I visit the mangyans in their places and come in contact with them, show my interest for them by being kind and affable in my manners and talks, and making them understand that I care for them, giving them rice, clothes, holy pictures and instructions about our holy faith (Pacano 1953 [P2.1])

Thus, in many ways little had changed since 19th century, with priests mostly located in the lowlands, and missionary work among the Mangyan never their highest priority. At the same time, in the 1950s, there had been moves to counter this individuality, dispersed, and secondary quality of Catholic missions. The driving force for such shifts in practice, however, did not appear to emanate from concerns solely to do with conversion rates, but rather the specter of an increased Protestant presence on the island. Unlike the reports and descriptions of earlier Spanish missionaries, which emphasized the dyadic nature of evangelism—proselytizer and proselytized, Christian and non-Christian—the sudden plurality of Christian missions changed the fundamental relationship Catholics had with both the Mangyan and themselves, as what missionary work entailed began to be questioned.

In the 1950s, nearly every report written by Catholic missionaries contained some reference to the newly arrived Protestant missions. In one such report, from 1951/2, entitled, “Preparations for a Mangyan Mission in Bongabon, Or. Mindoro,” the author, Fr. Erwin Thiel, SVD, wrote of incorporating medical assistance as a means of gaining the trust of the Mangyan groups. At the end of the description, the threat of the encroaching Protestants is apparent,

We gained our influence among the Mangyans through our medical assistance that we gave them, I tend to believe that more than 100 Mangyans live in the mountains between the Alianan and Acliang Rivers. 70% of them more or less are suffering from yaws disease, “frambosia.”⁸ It is not rare to find young as well as old people. But this is far from enough, as we cannot control the sick. 2 to 3 injections are necessary in order to destroy the Spirochetes, tiny, threadlike creatures in the body. In Batangan we would need a simple, small house with a clinic, where the missionary could live for several weeks at a time giving injections and other medical help, e.g. against ringworm, to the Mangyans. In this way we would gain absolute influence among them and lead them easily to the Christian faith. Once the Protestants, who are not far away, gain access to the entire area, all our previous labors and preparations for our work will be in vain (Thiel 1951/2 [T9.2]).

He continues to discuss the religious beliefs of this Bukid Mangyan group, whom he describes as a “gentle and fearful people”. “The religion of the Mangyans is quite simple. They know nothing of one single god as creator of the world. Where things come from is not their concern. They fear the spirits of the dead, the labang.” And that “they happily wear crosses as well as rosaries, perhaps today more out of superstition, but I hope very soon rather out of a deep faith as Christians.” Thiel was well aware that there had been Catholics working in Manihala before him, and that they traveled to the lowlands in Bongabon town proper regularly. He writes, “once when I tried to explain the meaning of the large cross in the church

⁸ A skin and sometimes bone infection, essentially eradicated by the 1970s, after widespread treatment with benzathine penicillin.

of Bingabon and talk about God's kindness, a Mangyan said: 'Kaawaawa na kami walang Dios' (It's a pity we have no such kind of God)." But Thiel himself was concerned with the kind of God they might indeed have. He returns to the matter of "the Protestants" with urgency,

Manihala could also become a good Christian Mangyan community. The Protestants, - Miss Bangham, a Presbyterian missionary who had been working in China before, is their head, visiting these Bukids every week and influencing them completely with their beliefs. Next to Awang's house, - in the center of the area, - is a good place, where one could set up a tent for weeks, learn from their language and counteract the Protestants influence. If we don't start our work in Manihala now in the last hour, it will be too late. The Protestants have firmly settled in. One can reach Manihala via Tangon from Sumagui in 3 to 4 hours. I sleep in the house of Numeriano Galan and Adela Cristobal. Numeriano died August 8. - 10 meters deeper in the valley there lives the most eager, Protestant Miss Bangham (Thiel 1951/2 [T9.2])

By 1958, the problem of competing missionaries had come to inform the strategies of Catholics. In that year, Bishop Duschak requested the Catholic priests working in the upland areas to answer a questionnaire regarding their work (Koschinski 1958 [K41]). The questions on the questionnaire are six in number: Number and Location (of Mangyan); Attitude (of Mangyan towards Catholicism); Work Done (by missionary); Accomplishments (by missionary); Methods; Sects; Plans and Suggestions. For the most part, priests' responses were simple. For example, in response to "methods", one priest simply wrote, "Barrio [village] visits and house-to-house contact." Another wrote, "Friendliness, feeding them in the convento, patience. Contacting them through trusted Filipinos." What is of particular note here is the formalization and explicit concern with the new "sects." Five responses were as follows,

...Till now Protestant preachers did not try to work among our Mangyans. We

have no Protestant sects in our parish.

...Protestants seem to have good contact with them because they have one man free for such work, who can visit them regularly, learn their language and help them. Their actual results—unknown.

...Protestant Overseas Mission, foreigners, mostly tough women. They reside among the Mangyans, learn their language, are preparing to translate the Bible into Mangyan, hold weekly Bible classes and Sunday services, train Mangyan catechists (monthly salary 25 dollars) and give medical aid. So far they haven't distributed any kind of relief...More danger arises from mixed [*i.e.* inter-denominational] marriages of the Mangyans⁹

...No sects ever tried to convert the Mangyans till only recently when the Protestants drivon[sic] out of China by the Communists came over to Mindoro and established a Mission Station in a barrio of Bongabon called Salcedo and from there made contacts with the Mangyans. They are members of the Overseas Fellowship (Protestants) coming and supported by American Protestants. Having no other work in the lowlands those Protestants stayed up in the mountains the whole weeks living under tents, studying Mangyan customs and language, giving them food and clothing and winning their confidence. At present there are two sitios [small village] where the Protestant missionaries are staying: Bato and Manihala. So far they have not done extensive catechizing. They are studying tho Mangyan dialect and their writing. There are four missionaries: one male and three old ladies.

...The old Mangyan with whom Fr. Jorge was lying and eating camotes told us that one day two American ladies came and slept in his house. He said that they were also singing and praying with them, but the next day they left already and did not return anymore. So I suppose these Protestant ladies went around visiting all those places but not doing any intensive work of conversion. ([Q1. 3, 6, 7 and 8.] Collected by Postma)

In a report from the same period, a priest writes of the Catholic mission among a non-specified Mangyan group outside of Gloria, Or. Mindoro, who live close to the Bangon Mangyan groups,

The Bangons are opposite our mangyan mission—christianized by the FCM or

⁹ Even in present day Mindoro, and the Philippines, a concern of different Christian groups is when in a marriage, one spouse is forced to convert to the other's denomination. Some denominations require it, some do not. Catholics often require a dispensation, or simply permission from a priest or bishop to marry a person of a different faith.

OMF. They were several years ahead of us. They stay in the mountains with the Bangons. Their relations are not ideal. The Missionaries themselves consider us as their competition and the same is with the Bangons who try to hide before us. I contacted several Bangons and gave them food and clothings. Then Our Mangyans tried to be kind to them and invite them to stay in our Mission. Several times a meeting was announced, but so far no approach was made possible. Mrs. Nieva, my Catechist who started the Mangyan Mission for us was not able to contact them. Several times she made to the Bangons. They were hiding when she came. We found out that the Protestant Missionaries are behind this strange behavior of the Bangons towards us and our Catechists...Our plan is to extend our work also to the Bangons. The Protestants smelles this and moved the Bangons farther away into the mountains. (Brendel [B19.2])

In these responses, and others like them, we see an outline of how Catholics viewed the threat of Protestantism. Their very presence was enough to cause anxiety among the Catholic missionaries, but more than that, we catch a glimpse, albeit refracted, of the missionary strategies employed by the Protestant groups. Much more focused on converting Mangyan groups in the mountains than in contesting the Catholic domination in the lowlands, the Protestant groups were viewed by the Catholics as much more prepared to learn Mangyan languages, live for long periods of times in Mangyan villages, and incorporate Bible circulation and translation projects into their missionary work. The recommendations from Catholic priests at this time concentrated on the need for more personnel, including missionary priests and catechists, financial support and sometimes on the need of religious texts in Mangyan languages. For example, a German SVD missionary priest noted, in somewhat broken English, of Protestant sects in the mountains outside of Mansalay in Oriental Mindoro,

Since about 1953 the New Tribe Mission (NTM), represented by Mr. and Mrs. Byrd Brunemeyer started Missionwork in Benle. But they visited too other Mangyanplaces [sic] and more or less all houses of the Christians. A big number if Bibels [sic] were distributed by them. With protest, Bibels were

distributed too[sic] many Catholic. Bibels. It was to show: We have the same faith as you. We too are believing in Christ (Duschak 1958 [D10.1])

The Catholic Mangyan mission did respond to the Protestant (in particular the NTM/OMF's) production of Bibles and Christian literature, by publishing a catechism in the "Mangyan" language, actually Hanunoo Mangyan. Written in 1953, it is a diglot in form, with Hanunoo on the left and Tagalog on the right, and numbers seventy-five points, including prayers, Bible verses, and teaching questions and prompts, such as "Who is God?," "What is sin? Sin is an infraction against God," and so forth. The cover of the catechism (Fig. 1) is of note in that depicts two Mangyan at the foot of Jesus. On the reverse side of the document, the phrase "Pray for the poor Mangyan" appears.



Figure 2.1. Cover of Catholic Mangyan Mission catechism, from 1953.

The document is telling, of course, of the Catholic imaginings of the Mangyan—poor, and in need of faith and parental-like help. The catechism is easily situated within a broader and well attended to literature on the representational practices of missionaries (Meyer 2006, 2005). But it can also be seen as an early attempt to logistically replicate, and respond to the Protestant threat. In this catechism, we see an early material, and textual, instantiation of the Catholic missionary strategy, with the Protestants as the unstated interlocutor.

According to Father Winkler, who I quoted previously with regard to the Protestant Bible distribution, noted with some anger that the New Tribe Mission (NTM) were living “more or less in the expenses of the Mangyan.” Winkler records that a Mangyan woman of Benle, named Isabel, said to him that because of the NTM missionaries, “We can not afford Christ.” In the same report, Winkler notes that some Catholics had switched allegiances and joined the Protestant NTM, how the NTM turned over their work in Mindoro to the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), and that the Salvation Army, Iglesia ni Cristo, and some Bathalists were visiting, and even sometimes baptizing Mangyan people.

Winkler was quick to suggest recommendations for the future of the Catholic Mangyan Mission. These recommendations were predictable enough, and echo numerous other reports, in stating the need for more priests, more catechists, more financial support from outside the local parishes in Mindoro, the building of a dormitory in the lowlands for the Mangyan, and finally, a more centralized administration of the Mangyan Mission, taking the responsibility out of the direct control of individual parishes. Every one of these recommendations were not only in response to the Protestant groups, but replicated exactly the logistics of the New Tribes Mission/Overseas Missionary Fellowship (NTM/OMF).

The NTM, arriving in Mindoro in early 1952, had quite quickly handed their work over to the OMF. The OMF's story is an interesting one, the organization having been remarkably successful in working with other Protestant groups in the country. Originating out of the China Inland Mission, which for nearly eighty years had worked in China in direct missionary work, the OMF was established soon after the CIM missionaries had to leave China in 1950, along with the majority of all Christian groups present there. Seeing that there was a large Chinese population in Manila, the CIM decided to move many of their missionaries to the Philippines. In 1956, they had reached Mindoro, and quickly assumed control of the NTM's work. They erected a mission house in Calapan, and have continued to be an overwhelming missionary presence among the Mangyan up unto the present. In contrast to the Catholic's increased attention and repetition of the Protestant threat, in a 15-page description of their work in Mindoro in 1961, the OMF make only one direct reference to Catholicism. Indeed Catholicism is structurally dismissed. In describing their work in one lowland town of Occidental Mindoro, the author writes that "there were no known believers," meaning of course that there were no Protestants. Similarly, elsewhere there is mentioned that there are "no Christians here," again in a place where the vast majority of people were Catholic. Of course, this has been, and continues to be a striking strategy by Born Again Evangelical groups globally to distinguish between "real" Christians, and all others, in the case of the Philippines, nearly always excluding Catholics. However, there is one mention of Catholics as Christians in the description, "we know of only one professing non-RC Christian in the town" (OMF 1961 [O5.1]).

Logistical Expansion

In 1958, it was clear to the Catholic missionaries that changes must be made to their strategies of proselytization if they were to successfully counter the growing success of Protestant missionaries. In response to the growing Protestant intervention, there was clearly a need for a more coherent approach to Catholic missionary strategies. In response to a number of “conventions” in which a number of different Mangyan groups, and different missions, were brought together for religious instruction and celebration, Bishop Duschak circulated mimeographs of directions to support and make uniform the practice of these conventions (Duschak 1958 [D.10.2]). He begins by describing how the convention should be located near to a *convento*¹⁰ and equidistant from each Mangyan community if possible. The atmosphere, notes Duschak, “should be cheerful, each group received by the missionary and welcomed by all, food should be prepared, different speakers ready, the whole being dominated by a kind of Pentecostal spirit.” What is surprising about Duschak’s proposal, especially in light of the Mangyan Mission twenty years later, is the explicit “religious” nature of it. He lists in detail five important guidelines and summary of what the convention should focus on. These are, “Five Fundamental Truths Necessary for Salvation,” “The Great Commandment,” “From passion to Pentecost,” “The Old and Only Religion Which Jesus Taught,” and “Promise to Study Jesus; To Live and Follow Him.” These conventions, he writes, should be entirely directed to teaching the word of Christ, and getting ready the Mangyan attendees for baptism, “After about ten conventions more, after the first fundamental one, and with some individual follow-up, baptism should be possible” (Duschak 1958 [D.10.2]).

This program for Catholic missionaries was clearly designed to organize and institutionalize mission practices, and to reassert Catholicism in the face of Protestant mission

¹⁰ The residence of a parish priest.

work. Duschak himself notes in his outline under one of the headings above, “The Old and Only True Religion Which Jesus Taught,” that mission priests should teach,

Catholic Church and sects; difference. Touchstones: Papacy, celibacy, Virgin and Saints, Cross with a body, Rosary. Only one true religion, taught by Christ, mandated to the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church. “Peter; on this rock I shall build my Church.” – Great and Influential Filipinos, Cath. –Point to different sects, even individual missionaries or ministers; present you[sic] catechists and active CA [Catholic] members. (Duschak 1958 [D.10.2])

This organization of conventions was not only an open admission of the Protestant threat, but an early attempt at administrative centralization and coordination of Catholic missionary work in Mindoro. This increased bureaucratic aspect of the mission is interesting and fundamentally different from later organizational strategies of the same group. The entire document is concerned with matters of faith, baptism, religious instruction, and catechism. The administrative ordering of missionary work is not viewed as a divestment of religious concerns. For these missionaries, there was no evidence that logistical expertise and expansion existed in opposition to concerns of faith. They were one in the same. At the same time, it is clear that logistics and matters of institutionality are foregrounded here. Not only is there an explicit acknowledgement of competition among different sects, the need to strategically succeed is the apparent goal. This simultaneous articulation of logistical strategy and matters of faith, or indeed the articulation of logistical strategy through matters of faith, was to shift in subsequent decades however, as the Catholic Church in Mindoro pursued the conversionary strand of missionary work less and less. For its critics, no longer was there a coherence between faith and institution, conversion and bureaucracy, as there is in Dushak’s articulation of missionary strategy above—there was not even a tension, as faith and the drive for Mangyan conversion had been wholly removed from the Catholic mission.

Religious Bureaucracy

The Catholic Church in Mindoro, like many parts of the Philippines, had been strongly influenced by developments in Liberation Theology in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s (Nadeau 2002; Tombs 2002). A more liberal, socially progressive approach to Christianity, explicitly concerned with challenging both the structures of oppressive governance and the permanence of poverty, a number of younger SVD at this time took on a decidedly more leftist oriented turn in their approach to the congregants and proselytes alike. While the theological, social, and indeed political consequences of Liberation Theology movements have been well attended to (Smith 1991; Pottenger 1989), my aim is to highlight a number of points here as related to its influence in Mindoro. From the 1970s onwards the Catholic Church in Mindoro began engaging in projects of “Human Development,” aimed at a more socially instantiated view of faith. In San Jose, this included forming agricultural cooperatives, Basic Ecclesiastical Communities, and assistance in training and livelihood programs.

The Catholic approach to the missionary work among the Mangyan was equally influenced by these shifts in the direction of the Church. One can see in the records from the 1980s and 1990s a distinct shift away from a focus on religious conversion and matters directly related to faith and evangelization. Instead, the Mangyan Mission became overwhelmingly focused on matters of land titles, agricultural development, education and medical assistance. In an assessment of the Mangyan Mission in Occidental Mindoro in 1987, missionary priests reported on the three phases of missionary work. Phase I included establishing friendly relationships, acquainting with surroundings and social set up, gathering

information, and learning their language and cultural behavior. Phase II included assistance in land and agricultural problems, emphasis on cultural heritage of Mangyan communities, and the strengthening of their communities, the improvement of health conditions, the incitement of interest in formal education, the assistance in promoting justice/peace, and to enrich cultural values with Christian ones. Phase III included the preparation for self-reliance, and the training of Mangyan lay leaders and chapel leaders.

Similarly, in a “proposed program” for the Mangyan Mission in Calapan in 1989, there were listed six components of the program: Education; Health; Socio-Economic; Legal; Cultural; Evangelization. In this program, not only does “Evangelization” come last in missionary priorities, but even within this approach to evangelization, more emphasis is placed on the “self-governing,” “self-nourishing” and “self-sustaining” of a Catholic faith by Mangyan groups themselves. Overall, the program presented their goal in terms of evangelization “to promote the emergence of worshipping, serving and witnessing communities, expressing themselves in their culture and accepting Christ’s message” (Mangyan Mission 1989 [M11.11]).

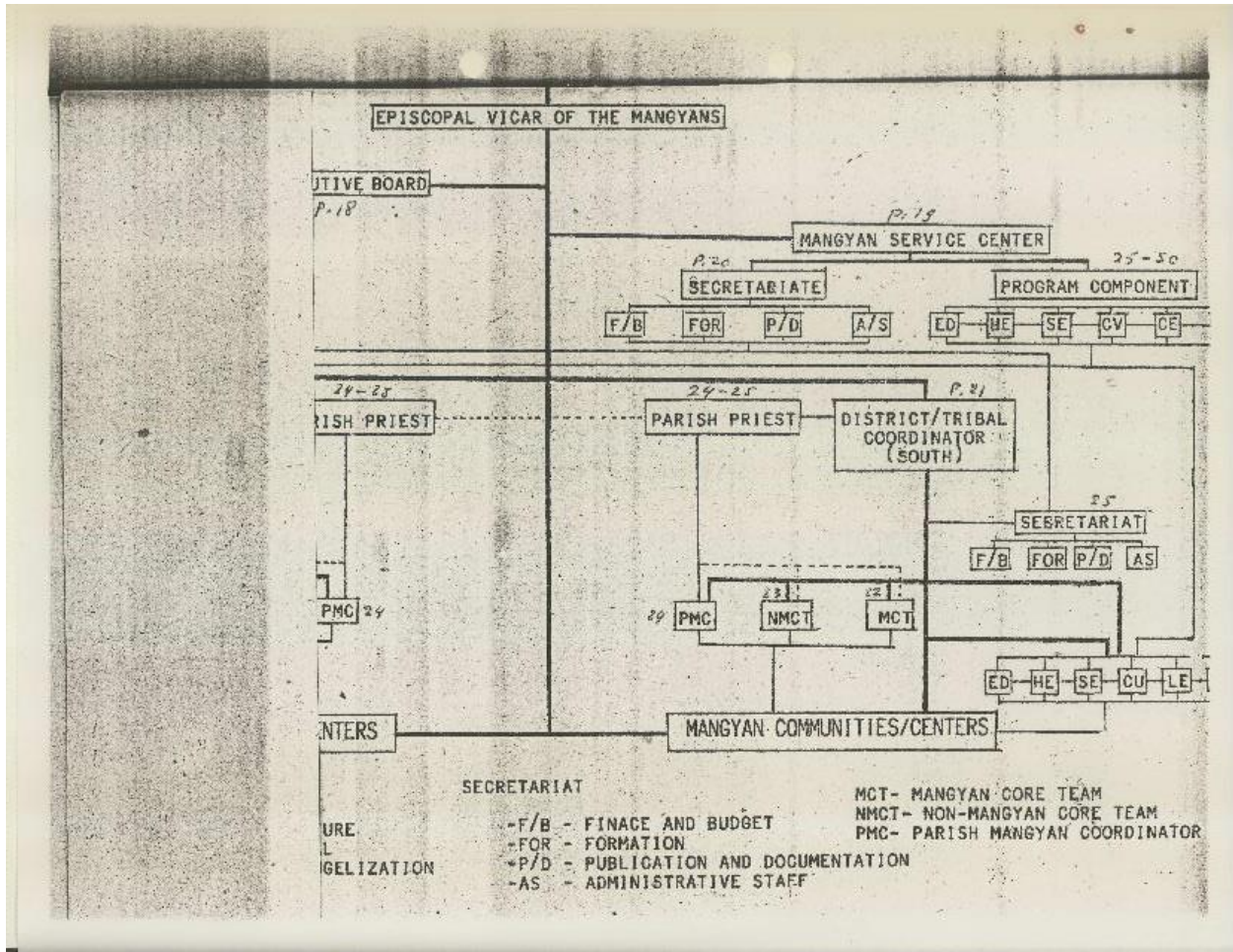


Figure 2.2 Partially obscured administrative layout of the Catholic Church's missionary work among Mangyan groups in 1989 (Mangyan Heritage Center)

What is of interest here is not only how the Mangyan Mission became remarkably more administrative and bureaucratic in the decades following Protestant attempts to compete in converting Mangyan groups, but how at the same time, direct conversion became secondary to the institutional presence of the Catholic Church in the upland regions of Mindoro. To be sure, the shift in strategy here can be scaled upwards, away from the missionary activities in Mindoro itself. The move away from conversion as the focus of the Church can be traced to Vatican II and subsequent attempts by the Church to modernize its

efforts of evangelization and shed its reputation of paying little heed to local “cultures” and concerns (Rowland 2003). Of course, much of the impetus for these changes on a global scale were to do with the challenges of contending with oftentimes much more aggressive and successful Protestant evangelization, and the historical failure to secure a Catholic faith and affiliation among the Mangyan.

The Mangyan Mission was influenced by this direction in Catholicism. Four times a year, a general assembly among the majority of the Mangyan groups, or tribes, meets in a different village. Named PASAKAMI (Pantribong Samahan ng mga Katutubong Occidental Mindoro, or the Assembly of Indigenous Tribes of Occidental Mindoro), it exists as a formal setting in which groups organize their interactions with one another, and with state and provincial actors. In 2012, I travelled with staff from the Mangyan Mission and some Buhid elders up to a village in the mountains just outside San Jose to attend a PASAKAMI meeting. Slowly, over the next four hours, delegates from each of the tribes arrived. Food was shared, and people were happy to see one another, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee and joking around. By the time the actual meeting came to order on a small outdoor basketball court, there were over fifty people present. They talked about issues facing the Mangyan collectively, such as the slow pace of getting ancestral land titles assigned to each tribe, and the threat of the Philippine government overturning the provincial moratorium on mining that would see their land denuded. A PASAKAMI meeting may take two or three days, with the meeting running long into the night. On the first day, a spokesperson from the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), the government agency that is responsible for indigenous matters, spoke to the tribes and assured them of their support of PASAKAMI and their issues. Most people present took the NCIP’s assurances of support as little more than lip

service, however.

A former priest, who now worked with the Mangyan Mission, stood to the side of the basketball court, and talked to me about the Mangyan Mission. He noted that Mangyan Mission was only here to support PASAKAMI, not to take part in it at all. He said a number of groups liked him to be there, that they could trust the Mangyan Mission. They knew that with the twists and turns of navigating inter-tribal politics, and especially dealings with lowland politicians and the NCIP, it was good to have the Mangyan Mission there. He spoke of how the Mangyan Mission had changed over the years. Financial backing had been a problem, and they had institutionally shrunk over the last decade. He was happy that the Mangyan Mission itself had moved away from evangelism, seeing the role of Catholicism and Christianity more broadly in a supportive role to indigenous needs. He himself had worked for a long time as a missionary in Kenya, and had come to see direct evangelization as something altogether too forced upon people, often lacking any real permanence in faith, and not altogether a positive practice. This was shared by some, but not all of the Catholic missionary groups, working in Mindoro. He did mention that a number of priests and indeed the Bishop himself, had recently argued for a dramatic shift against this non-evangelistic approach of missionary groups. What is the point, these priests argued, of being a Catholic missionary, of having an institutional arm of the Church devoted to missionary work, if they are not missionizing? They dismissed the current instantiation of the mission as nothing but an NGO. The Bishop, he told me, was planning on dismantling the institutional apparatus of the Mangyan Mission, curtailed as it already was, and planned to reinstitute a much more pragmatic project of missionization that would result in conversion. Thus the Mangyan Mission was located as primarily administrative even as that part of it was coming under

criticism by some in the Catholic Church. Thus, we can see the arc, or indeed proposed circle, of the institutional form of the Catholic Mangyan Mission. Developing out of what may be called traditional methods of evangelism, into a more expanded institutional presence that incorporated evangelization into a broader policy of social and cultural development, into one that did not hold conversion to be the main objective, and subsequently back to the original “traditional” form of evangelism, that emphasized conversion.

During my time in Mindoro, there were numerous Protestant churches that were working among the Mangyan. However, it was only the OMF that in any way had an institutional breath that matched the Catholic Church, and their work was for the most part concentrated in Oriental Mindoro, and not in Occidental. And they were not a church, but rather an umbrella group of sorts, supporting different churches. The groups that did engage in Mangyan missionary work, such as Methodist, Born Again Evangelical, Jehovah’s Witness, never prioritized this aspect of their practice over evangelism in the lowlands. Rather, to engage in missionary work among the Mangyan had more to do with a presentation of denominational and institutional breadth. To this end, to work in the uplands was done for the benefit of being seen to do so. It was directed to an audience in the lowlands. For many of these groups, another tension existed in terms of institutional presence that the Catholic Church did not face. That is, to work against the mediating role of institutionalized religion, and argue for a more direct relationship with God has been a calling card for Born Again Evangelical and Pentecostal groups, a subject I take up in chapter 6. In Mindoro, where the Catholic Church has so dominated the religious sphere and attained such a substantial institutional presence, indeed defined itself in such terms, the schismogenic move against such institutionalized religion has been pushed to the fore even by religious groups who have

historically been logistically and bureaucratically integrated. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses, perhaps the most bureaucratically centralized of all Protestant religious groups I encountered during my fieldwork (although not in hierarchical terms as the Catholic Church is) often presented itself as anti-institutional in Mindoro. To be seen by other Christians to be expanding, and to be succeeding, was a hugely important aspect of denominational practice in Mindoro during my fieldwork. The Mangyan occupied an important position in terms of this presentation of (denominational) self to others, and into a configuration of Christianity as expanding and bringing God to the "non-Christian." There was an evident pay-off for the churches in existing as an expansive religious force on the island. To have Catholics converting to one's church, to have schools in the lowlands, and to have ongoing missionary and outreach work with Mangyan groups, were not only the spreading of one's faith, but acts to be read by potential congregants and other denominations as a sign of one's success.

Day of the Native

After the administrative and organizational expansion of Catholic missionary work in the late 1950s and continuing up to the 1990s, by the time I was conducting my research, the Catholic Church, more so in Occ. Mindoro than in Or. Mindoro, did not have such institutional breadth as it once had. This was as true of the lowlands as it was in the uplands. This coincided with the limiting role of the Mangyan Mission. The social and livelihood programs that had peaked in the 1980s often still existed, but were not as extensive or active as they had been. In Chapter 6, I discuss in greater detail the waning of Catholic institutionality outside of its more traditional remit, but I do want to point out here that there has been a move by some Catholic missionary groups, particularly the Franciscan Missionary

Sisters, to return to a more hands-on approach to proselytization. At the same time, they do not view themselves as occupying the same missionary role as their predecessors before WWII.

The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) in Occ. Mindoro have taken up changes to missionary work in recent decades. In my conversations with the head sister of the FMM in their offices tucked away behind the Cathedral in San Jose, Sister Faye was quick to present the FMM's work as much more modern than others', and align herself with "Contextual Theology," whereby the missionary seeks to locate Christ and Christian meaning within the culture one is working. To this end, her thinking, as she said herself, was highly influenced by scholars such as Stephen Bevans (Bevans 2001, 2004; Pears 2009) who work to reconcile Christian doctrine with anthropological and scholarly discourses on culture¹¹, indigeneity, and colonialism. Sister Faye, having studied anthropology in Manila, has absorbed the tenets of Contextual Theology to the extent that she noted the Bible was not necessarily what they relied on in their missionary work, nor was the goal to push for outright conversion. "It's not for us to decide if and how they should relate to God. For all we know they already have Christ in their hearts more than us!" she noted. Interestingly, while Sister Faye articulated a missionary project that was much more in keeping with modernist discourses on indigenous rights, there was nevertheless something of a return to the old about their missionary work. Less focused on an expansion of administration, their work was visibly about missionaries, dressed in habits, working with "non-Christians". I turn now to Mangyan public performance in which the FMM sisters were involved, in order to highlight not only the difficulties and

¹¹ The concept of culture in this line of thinking, while building off of mid to late 20th Century anthropological discourses on culture, consistently takes a view of culture that is only based around, or on top of, faith. Culture, in this theology, does not produce faith and belief, but rather is produced by them. Thus, culture can be mistaken, if the belief upon which it is based is mistaken.

contradictions of this missionary approach, but how similarities may be drawn between missionary appropriations of institutionality and discourses on indigeneity.

Like many other towns in the Philippines that lie in close proximity to indigenous groups, San Jose annually celebrates “Araw na Katatubo” (“Day of the Natives”). Very much an exercise in producing a celebratory discourse of acceptance of the indigenous Mangyan groups that reside in the mountains outside San Jose, the cracks in the discourse are readily apparent. Lip-service is paid to the remarkable tenacity of the Mangyan, their closeness to nature, their role in giving an identity to the island, their kindness and indeed their vulnerability. But is also evidently condescending and paternalistic. At the same time, few people seem to care. Locals that can be bothered to attend see it simply as some activity in the plaza, maybe to stand and watch while on lunch from work or with nothing else to do. School children are sometimes encouraged to attend. The politicians see it is clearly more to their benefit, to be seen to be supportive of indigenous rights rather than actually fighting for them. Thus, they give some short speeches about the importance of the Mangyan to Mindoro and Filipino culture. And for the most part, the Mangyan groups themselves do not appear to place much weight on the day, viewing it perhaps not in pejorative terms, but hardly seeing it as productive towards any meaningful end.

The celebrations consist mostly of some posters, a speech by the mayor and some NCIP¹² workers in the plaza, free food for the Mangyans who travel down into the town, and an evening performance by some Mangyan groups in the local gymnasium. In 2012, the

¹² National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. This is the governmental agency dealing with indigenous affairs. Across the Philippines, the record and reputation of the NCIP differs greatly. In Occ. Mindoro, its reputation is somewhere in the middle, between the extremes of occupying a position of truly pro-indigenous rights to a corrupted face that sides with lowland logging and mining interests. When I first arrived in Occ. Mindoro, the local head of the NCIP was a lowland-educated Mangyan himself and was well liked and trusted by the different Mangyan groups. However in 2011 he was murdered (unrelated to his work) and was replaced by a far less liked officer.

evening performance was different than previous years, and was by far the most fascinating aspect of the celebrations. As I entered the brutalist Marcos-era built gymnasium by the side of the plaza and next to the Catholic cathedral compound, the forty or so Mangyan performers were already inside, but the Mangyan audience (friends and family and so forth) were parked outside in a large open-topped livestock truck waiting for the lowlanders to enter first. On the day that was ostensibly to celebrate the Mangyan people, this was certainly an odd image to behold. But this was a kind gesture on behalf of the San Jose authorities, to transport the Mangyan to the performance, albeit like animals.

The performance itself, composing of a multitude of short dances with a Tagalog narration, was more expertly directed than in previous years, with a professional director from Manila having been brought in to design and guide the affair. Together the dances provided both a narrative and commentary of the Mangyan experience, and was unsurprisingly concerned with their relationship with the lowlander Filipino population. The same themes of closeness to nature (the Tagalog word *katutubo*, meaning *native*, is incidentally the same term for *nature*¹³), encroachment of modernity and the value of a Mangyan perspective were apparent, but it was far smarter than the speeches earlier in the day, with the performance acknowledging that as Mangyans, they often saw “modern” Filipino culture as a corrupting force and yet, for example, still wanted cell phones. The trajectory of the performance concentrated on the experiences of losing their land to the lowlanders, having their natural resources stolen, and being mistreated at the hands of Filipino Mindoreños. As the performance moved towards its conclusion, with the Mangyan performers dressed in native

¹³ Some parallels may be drawn between *katutubo* and *Naturvolk/Kulturvolk* distinctions in early German anthropology and studies of culture. See Bunzl (1996) and Zimmerman (2010) for discussions and genealogical lineages of *Naturvolk*.

attire and the narrator summarizing the hardships and exploitation of the Mangyan, three Mangyan girls appeared in FMM habits as the narrator changed course and described how the nuns had helped raise the Mangyan from their own limitations and protected them from the dangers of the lowlanders. Interestingly, three Franciscan Missionary of Mary sisters were sitting in the front row watching, and evidently had given the performers the habits to wear. Although no sister ever explained to me how they really felt about this¹⁴, I wondered, how it felt to watch themselves be portrayed as the saviors of the Mangyan. And for the sisters, how did the performance align with watching the Mangyan audience and performers climb up into a livestock truck outside the gymnasium after the performance was completed, to be shuttled back to their villages?



Figure 2.3. Three Mangyan performers dressed in Franciscan Missionary of Mary (FMM) habits help the Mangyan rise from their torment, April 2012

¹⁴ Later one sister curtly responded, “We were just helping them out, that’s all.”

To be sure, with echoes of Taussig's *Cuna figurines* (Taussig 1993), we see the Christian missionary message of salvation alive and well, but not as it once was. Here it is embedded in a modernist discourse of indigenous rights, a discourse that is generally highly critical of such missionary acts of cultural change and "enculturation" that contextual theologians attest to, as well as representations of Christian triumphalism. Indeed, if one looks to the left of the photograph (Fig 2.), we see a Mangyan girl dressed as a FMM sister, her hands out at two Mangyan. This image, the culminating image of the entire performance is remarkably similar to the cover of the catechism produced by the Church nearly sixty years previously (Fig. 1). The FMM sisters, enacted as a substitute for Mary in their work, are now substituted by Mangyans, albeit in the garb of a Catholic sister, garb which is derived from the clothes of Mary. But for the FMM missionaries, and many like them, their work is a coalescence of two familiar discourses on indigeneity, the Christian one and the secular one, into a single narrative. It is easy enough to view this as a Christian appropriation of the more dominant, fashionable and globally circulated discourse of indigenous rights that challenges the creaky and paternalistic Christian one of old. But even if the two do not hold together, as seen in the Mangyan performance, what I want to highlight here is perhaps a basic point—that Christianity doesn't stand alone. For the missionaries, it bleeds into (or is bled into by) ostensible "other" forms of signification, discourses, and processes. Whether it is colonialism, modern bureaucracies, or discourses of indigeneity, Christian missionaries in Mindoro have consistently embraced practices that are not inherently Christian to assist their ends. Whether these practices, for Christian missionaries, can constitute a religious act, or are a contamination of Christianity, is an ethical, contested, and always shifting affair. For some missionaries, there is no necessary break between bureaucracy and the Christian missionary

act. For others, there is. It is similar with regard to the modern discourses in indigeneity that often castigate the move to interfere or proselytize among non-Christian people.

In this chapter I have tried to show how matters of logistics, strategy and institutional practice have informed religious groups' engagement with Mangyan groups. I suggest that the Christian groups that I have discussed are not immune to the oppositional categories of Christian and non-Christian, but nevertheless in practice see them as more porous than at first they might appear. Moreover, while the "non-Christian" was constituted primarily in terms of the Mangyan, it was also constituted at times by viewing practices of institutionality, bureaucracy, and administration similarly as outside the confines of Christianity.

I turn next to what many ways may be seen to be other side, or the counterpoint, of the denominational encounter discussed here; that is, how a Protestant church contests, conceives of, and competes with Catholicism. Whereas Chapter 2 was concerned with Catholic responses to Protestant incursions in the upland regions of Mindoro among the "non-Christian" Mangyan groups, the next chapter discusses the Protestant reactions to the universality and dominance of Catholicism among lowland Filipinos in San Jose. As I mentioned, much of Christian missionary practice conducted in the mountains among Mangyan groups was done so for a lowland Christian audience. Strategies, logistics and the concern for institutionality and church affiliation are likewise at play, although engaged with in very different ways. Most importantly perhaps, is the ubiquity and universal presence of Catholicism in the lowlands of Mindoro. In as much as the next chapter is concerned with how a Born Again Evangelical church attempt to convert Catholics in a rural community on the edge of San Jose, it is also about how they must deal with the fact that for many people in Mindoro, Catholicism is not only the archetypal religion, it is often synonymous with the

concept of religion itself. Thus, any project of conversion, from a Protestant perspective, must compete with such ubiquity of Catholicism, both practically and conceptually. It is in this manner that religious plurality is not simply the matter of a multi-denominational presence, but is essentially a project of definition and redefinition, of both religion and Christianity.

Chapter 3

The Tacit Christian

“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” *1 Corinthians 2: 3-4*

Near the end of my fieldwork, as I was having dinner in a mission house in the north of Oriental Mindoro, a missionary told a story about what he considered the most egregious tale of missionary work that he had come across in a long time. He wasn't sure of the missionary group or of the indigenous group, but it was somewhere in the mountains in Northern Luzon. He suspected they were Ifugao, but they could have been Ilongot or Kalinga. Upon arrival in a particular village, the Christians' interactions with the locals seemed to consist mostly of pointing out how mistaken and improper the local animistic beliefs were. More than verbally combative, within weeks the Christians had focused their attention on a large tree that grew in the center of the village and was, they were told, the pivotal material point of the local belief system. Claiming it to be a sign of the devil, however, the Christians demanded that the tree be removed. The locals protested. The Christians insisted. And then

late one night, while everyone else in the village slept, some of the Christians cut the tree down and set it alight.

In many ways it is because this anecdote is so very generic in quality, with its unspecified Christians/natives dichotomy, and vague animistic beliefs that seem to have been gleaned from the pages of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, that it raises the missionary endeavor to the level of caricature. But for many, missionaries included, it captures some essentials of what is at stake in such projects. And importantly, it highlights two important but often divergent strands of missionary and evangelistic practice: that of *rupture* and *strategy*. Both are intrinsic to conversion. In the anecdote above, we see the rupture in the destruction of a belief system (or at least the material forms of it), and strategy, wherein the Christians at least appear to self-consciously choose an evangelistic approach they deem most effective in their mission. While rupture in conversion has drawn the attention of anthropologists and missionaries alike (and does not necessarily assume a pejorative sense amongst missionaries themselves), strategy has drawn considerably less consideration. For Christian missionaries, while strategy is discussed amongst themselves, the public acknowledgement of strategy to potential converts threatens the project of evangelism, with risks of being labeled disingenuous and manipulative always looming large.

The first aspect of conversion practices that I want to take up in this chapter is that of rupture, or discontinuity. Anthropology has long situated religious conversion in terms of a discourse on social and religious continuity, or as is more often the case, discontinuity (for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Coleman 2004; Engelke 2004; Keane 2007; Meyer 2004; Sanneh 1989). As many have argued (Asad 1993; Hefner 1993; Saunders 1988), religious conversion is always about change, thus there are always aspects of rupture,

religious or otherwise, inherent in it. At a very minimum, Christianity, in its varying forms, may necessitate engagements with any number of distinct socialities including time, personhood, economics, governance and so forth, as well as an engagement with more expected but nevertheless overlapping set of thematics revolving around belief, faith, and an outward Christian identity¹. In some cases, as has been well noted upon (Cannell 2005), conversion to Christianity, particularly coming from a non-Christian background, may entail either elements or wholesale dislocation from the cultural worlds in which people live² (for a recent but fascinating play on this see Chua 2012). In this chapter, however, I look at a setting of conversion that has been less conspicuous in the anthropological canon (Coleman 2003; Csordas 1997), in which conversion entails moving from one Christian faith to another. The dislocation in this type of conversion produces a different set of anxieties and difficulties than what we often see occurring in a move from non-Christian to Christian, but nonetheless carry with it, fundamental issues regarding religious and social rupture. In this chapter I look at a context in which conversion occurs from Catholicism to a Born Again faith, focusing on how such matters of discontinuity are *explicitly avoided*. Specifically, in discursive contexts located within conversion practices in Occ. Mindoro. That is, I discuss a setting in which it is the *risk* of rupture, rather than rupture itself which is the preeminent factor in determining how people talk about religion.

¹ The literature on Christianity and social rupture in the Philippines has mostly focused, unsurprisingly, on Catholicism, and has tended to emphasize underlying practices of continuity outside of religion. Often nationalist in sentiment, this literature points not only to syncretic aspects of religious and social change, but has often presented Filipino Catholicism as a rupturing entity in socio-political terms, and as syncretic Folk Catholicism in religious terms (the work of Landa Jocano stands out here as having been particularly influential, for example Jocano 1981).

² Although as some have argued, that in cases of conversionary rupture, the relationship between Christianity and culture are often seen to be severed, with the former assuming a universality and thus at once fundamentally causal of sociality while at the same time once removed from it, with culture taking up the slack of local and social continuity (for example see Webb Keane's discussion of E.B. Tylor (2007), and Robbins (2004)).

I suggest that while there might very well be fundamental discontinuities, or rupture, embedded in the forms of Christianity that Catholics convert to, in this case, as we will see, any existence of such is not only downplayed, but the strategies employed to avoid anything in the form of discontinuity, disharmony or rupture, shape the very nature of conversion itself. Both proselytizers and proselytes engage in a series of practices, particularly language practices, which seek to avoid any overt ideological or social clash. But what is of note is that such avoidance of rupture does not negate religious critique, but rather pushes it into a more indirect and implicit territory. In this context, critique becomes wholly reliant on a backdrop of shared and unspoken views of Catholicism—the ambient aspect of Catholicism. I will argue, not only does Catholicism exist as the unmarked and ubiquitous form of religious practice in Mindoro (as with many other parts of the Philippines), its synonymy with the very category of religion itself, leads to Catholicism playing out as something of a religious archetype³. This position that Catholicism occupies in Mindoro, allows people to engage with it as an objectified religious type in linguistically interesting ways, notably in the omission of any direct reference to it, while at the same time maintaining a critical engagement with it. It is this issue of discursive omission⁴ and tacitness that I wish to explore here.

The second aspect I wish to explore here, *strategy*, an ever-present component of conversion practices, yet it is a hazardous subject-matter for missionaries to discursively

³ Not to be confused with a psychoanalytical use of archetypes, emanating out the work of Jung etc., where a “religious archetype” would connote universal, subconscious and inherent schemata that become manifest through the practice of religion. See Bloch (1979) for a (somewhat problematic) discussion of how religion may become synonymous with different forms of power and regulation.

⁴ In many respects, discursive omission may be aligned with the concept of erasure (Irvine and Gall 2000) and intertextual gaps (Briggs and Bauman 1992). Arguably, discursive omission is a type of erasure, with the focus of the erasure on the very object and concern that is being erased. Of course, as I hope to show here, the omission is never permanent, and not truly erased, as all parties are often consciously aware of what is being omitted. See also Judith T. Irvine’s discussion of the “unmentionable” and topic avoidance (Irvine 2011).

engage with in public. A difficult and loaded term, it is most associated within an anthropological context with Bourdieu's attempt to reconcile, or at least cut out a space amidst orienting structures, allowing for an individual's ability to navigate within that structure (Bourdieu 1977)⁵. In a somewhat similar manner, De Certeau's differentiation between strategy and tactic (with tactic closer to Bourdieu's strategy, and strategy closer to his structures) is useful in thinking through how Christian ideologies are navigated by missionaries in specific contexts (de Certeau 2011 [1980]). Here I focus on strategy as a counterpoint to an often perceived seamlessness between Christian ideologies of evangelism and the actual evangelist's employment of those ideologies. One can easily list off different evangelistic styles and approaches, from Jehovah's Witness' door-to-door calling, to Iglesia ni Cristo's rejection (at least in Occ. Mindoro) of any proselytism except among friends and extended family members. Yet this limits our understanding of evangelistic strategy to ideological practices inherent in the religious framework, to the exclusion of missionaries' engagements with those practices. So accustomed are anthropologists to examining the contingent and improvised aspects of native responses to Christianity, we often neglect to afford the same intricacies to missionary practice. No doubt this is in large part due to the explicit and determinant ideological component of the missionary endeavor.

For both missionaries and missionized, that there might be the element of strategy often suggests the work of Christian evangelism is disingenuous. Of course, there is little unusual in this, and parallels may easily be made with more established contexts in which

⁵ Interestingly, Bourdieu's few and minor writings that focus specifically on religion take a remarkably oversimplified and structuralist view of religious practices (though one small piece on Weber and charisma (1971) stands out in aligning well with *Outline*), for the most part emphasizing a vanishing sense of religion in the face of a secular modern, and are concerned with an instrumentalist functionality of religion within a wider social world (for example Bourdieu 1991[1977], 1987[1977]).

explicit strategic practices have long held sway, such as corporate marketing, political elections and advertising in general (for example, Lempert 2011). In these contexts, where marketing strategies are ubiquitous and accepted components of practice, there still remains the risk of accusations of disingenuousness and inauthenticity being leveled at those who strategize, and thus as much as possible, strategy tends to play offstage (Shryock2004). The communicative and processual norms, for example in political elections (Silverstein 2011; Moore 2003) contain within them a broad acceptance of explicit metadiscursive components (see also Duranti 1993). But this is not the case with Christian missionary strategies. I suggest in this chapter that within the context of evangelical missionaries and Christian conversion, there is no such acceptance of strategy (as metadiscursivity), on the part of those being converted and to a lesser extent amongst missionaries themselves. As a result the risk that strategy will contaminate the project is extreme, threatening the fundamental goal of conversion.

For the Born Again Evangelical missionary, a strategy workshop in Manila about how to better evangelize populations may be a practical and useful aspect of their work, but it also risks polluting the relationship between the evangelist and God. The claims of purity of evangelism (in that it is giving testimony of God's will), particularly among Evangelicals, assumes the existence of a neutral stance taken by the evangelist-as-mediator between proselyte and God. It is not personal charisma, charm, or work ethic, for example, which should result in conversion and acceptance of Christ as one's savior, but rather it is God's work, determined through, but unencumbered by the evangelist's self. And if the intentionality and actions of the evangelist are foregrounded in missionary work, this is more wholly subsumed under the broader category of the will of God. Thus, strategies, tactics and

marketing, so often recognized as risking claims of manipulation (or at least to be read as such), are taken to be a breach in the continuity of content and form, of sacred and profane. And if lines are indeed drawn between the sacred and profane, the explicit and self-conscious incorporation of strategy, it seems, quickly overruns them.

The debate among Christian evangelists surrounding marketing is not new, although it is becoming an increasingly thorny topic, particularly in the US, where the growing incorporation of marketing techniques in Christian church expansion has produced an equally vociferous anti-marketing strain of Christian discourse (Wren 2010; Webster 1992), one that argues that the work of the missionary evangelist is determined by the Lord, thus marketing strategies pollute the direct relationship between the proselyte (and indeed between the evangelist) and God. And for the proselyte, it is clearly an issue of authenticity and sincerity. The risk is that they feel manipulated and see the evangelist as disingenuous, is very real, and something many missionaries in Mindoro worry about. In large part this explains the lengths they often go to underplay the role of strategy in evangelism. I want to highlight this aspect of missionary work here, for while I deal with in greater detail in other chapters of this dissertation, it coincides with the attempts to avoid explicit critique of Catholicism that I outline here.

For the most part, I will discuss the attempts to build a Born Again church, the Jesus Is Lord Church, in Kulaman, an almost entirely Catholic and rural *sitio*⁶ outside of Santa Teresita, in Occ. Mindoro. Originating in some informal Bible studies in Kulaman in 2011, a small *nipa*-hut (or palm leaf) church had been built in early 2012, and by the end of that year there was a regular congregation of over thirty-five people. I wish to trace the shifting

⁶ A *barangay* is a district or ward, and the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines, while a *sitio* is geographically large enough to be a *barangay*, but has too few people.

dealings of the pastor of Jesus Is Lord (JIL), who I here call Pastor Sazon, with local Catholics, and in particular one family who early on began attending services at the church. I am interested in how, and for what purposes, Catholicism, so prevalent and indeed ubiquitous in Philippine society, so openly discussed and debated in a multitude of contexts, quite abruptly in the setting of evangelical conversion, becomes a subject that is only circuitously and indirectly approached, and thus emerges as a discourse reliant on implicit evocations and tacit references. As I hope to show, the form of addressivity (or effacement of it) that the pastor employed in this discourse is acutely dependent on a specific, but shifting, semiotic determination of the Bible as interlocutor in religious critique. And further, as noted already, I wish to elucidate how Catholicism is performed as an omnipresent but unstated backdrop in moments of conversion, and how it is this location of Catholicism that fundamentally enables and hinders certain types of critique. Thus I ask, how do Evangelicals engage with Catholicism, not as something with which they locate themselves in opposition to, that is, in a categorical manner, but as an ever-present environment in which they act? And how is Catholicism both constituted as the primary and unmarked religious category⁷, while at the same time challenged as such? Ultimately I argue that Catholicism, in these settings, is both produced and contested in this context as religious archetype.

Jesus Is Lord in Kulaman

Kulaman, a somewhat typical rural community on the outskirts of San Jose, with approximately eight-hundred people, was by late 2012, beginning to be electrified, undoubtedly a result of the upcoming national elections in May 2013. The lack of electricity

⁷ See Waugh (1982) for a detailed discussion on Jakobson and marked/unmarked categories.

was a persistent topic of conversation, with people wondering aloud if they would be included in the first batch of electrified houses, and complaining that they shouldn't have to be gracious about it, as the majority of San Jose households had long been electrified (since the early 1990s, even most rural areas have had electricity). And everyone was sure that whoever won, as soon as the ballots had been deposited work on erecting the electricity poles would cease almost immediately. Indeed they were right, and by the middle of 2013, only about one third of Kulaman was electrified, and progress has seemed to come to a halt, with bundles of power lines and steel poles lying by the side of fields. A few homes had a 12V battery that could be recharged by the highway to San Jose each Thursday for twenty pesos, and could power a light and maybe a radio or a small television for four or five days. Still, for the most part people used small gin bottles filled with kerosene and a cotton or paper wick. On Sunday evenings, while Kulaman would be dark, the JIL church stood out from atop the hill with its strong light and bellowing sounds of people singing and Pastor Sazon delivering his sermon through a microphone.

Prior to establishing a Born Again church in Kulaman in early 2012, Pastor Sazon had been a presence in the area for some time⁸. Living just thirty minutes away in Talisay, he would often lend money and purchase rice during harvest, and had long been acquainted with two or three families in the community. His original connection to Kulaman came about when one of the families began attending services in his house-church in Talisay. After some months he began conducting Bible studies in Kulaman itself. And a few months after that, one

⁸ A note here on JIL and denominational affiliation. While Sazon was at this time affiliated with JIL, he had been a pastor in numerous other Born Again churches, and never appeared to be deeply involved in the JIL organization. He received no money from the church, and while JIL, a church that originated in the Philippines, and is somewhat famous in the Philippines for having charismatic leanings, Sazon's JIL did not. In many ways, his church was generically Born Again Evangelical, similar to any number of churches in San Jose.

of the families offered him a plot of land near their house for a church. With his own money, he quickly had a small, simple palm leaf church built on the site. When I first attended the church in early 2012, there were approximately six to ten members, and by the end of the year, there were approximately thirty-five to forty. This is, by comparable examples in the area, an impressive growth. However, it was not until the early months of 2013 that five members became baptized in a ceremony by the sea in Talisay.

It is hard to say when Born Again evangelicals first came to Kulaman. The area has long been predominantly Catholic, with very few other denominations having any presence. There are one or two families that are members of Iglesia ni Cristo, and one family that lives close to the highway, that by some accounts, have been attending Mormon services for the last year or so. But mostly, Kulaman is not the focus of many religious groups, and can be difficult enough to get to, especially in the rainy season when the dirt roads become difficult to navigate. And one suspects it is simply not populous enough to garner much of anyone's attention, whether it is by religious missionaries or indeed, as the electricity problem demonstrates, politicians. However, this is not to say that Kulaman is wholly discrete from San Jose. Some of the children will go to school in San Jose, people will shop there, and most people, I would estimate, would go to San Jose at the very least, two or three times per month. The plaza in Kulaman consists simply of a 20x20ft area paved over with concrete and a broken basketball hoop. But, as in most every community, it is here that the local Catholic Church is to be found. In Kulaman, it is a small church, or better a chapel, erected in the late 1970s, and it remains the only church, of any denomination, within an hour's walk. In Talisay, the nearest town⁹, there are any number of denominations to be found, including a new large

⁹ Although Kulaman is part of San Jose, it is right on the boundary of the municipality and is actually closer to Talisay. It is part of the Talisay parish, but part of the Sta. Teresita municipality.

Mormon church, Iglesia ni Cristo, UMC, UCCP, Jehovah's Witness, Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist, and at least ten Born Again evangelical churches (including Pastor Sazon's church, which has approximately sixty members). Additionally, as with much of Mindoro, there is a large immigrant population. In Kulaman, although this is anecdotal to be sure, I would approximate that one spouse in each family did not grow up in Mindoro, and so might easily have come into contact with numerous Christian sects.

Sazon's entry into Kulaman was not the first experience the community had had with a Born Again church. There had been some outreach work and Bible studies in the 1980s, conducted by a Pastor Alvarado, from the Calvary Born Again Church in San Jose. A popular pastor, even among many Catholics, he was the founding pastor of the Calvary Church, a successor to a US based missionary church and Bible school in San Jose in the 1970s. People in Kulaman recall visits by Alvarado, who was well thought of, and at least three people I met noted that Alvarado had financially helped their children with school fees and costs. But by all accounts, his visits were not sustained in any permanent way, and after he moved to the US in the late 1980s no one from Calvary continued his visits¹⁰. Subsequent to this, a local from Kulaman and a Born Again himself with affiliations in Talisay, attempted to establish a church in Kulaman. But the church never expanded from services conducted in his house. Some people noted that it was due to his personal unpopularity rather than for any religious or doctrinal reason. But it was the remnants of this church, which lasted less than three years,

¹⁰ Pastor Alvarado's departure coincided with a difficult time for the Calvary church. Having been established by a Minnesotan based church in the early 1970s, the Calvary compound was impressively funded, with the Bible school their primary focus. However, by the 1980s, the Minnesotan Calvary decided to withdraw funding, and let the Mindoro Calvary stand alone as an independent church. What followed was a decade of struggle and turmoil for the church, in which the Bible school closed, and efforts were refocused towards church building and expansion, and the establishment of an elementary and high school. As of 2013, there are fifteen Calvary churches in Occ. Mindoro and one in Southern Luzon. It is the largest independent Born Again church in the province.

from which the Sazon-led Bible studies originated from, more than a decade later. Indeed, in conversations with Sazon concerning the history of Born Again evangelicals in the area, he would often seem to take a certain pleasure in that he was succeeding where his predecessor had failed.

Throughout the first year of the church, the weekly service at JIL was essentially a stripped down version of most evangelical Born Again services in San Jose. That is, three to five songs sung collectively (c. 15 minutes), an opening prayer by the pastor (10 minutes), an open floor for people's testimonies (15 minutes), a Bible reading or extended testimony by one of the pastor's aids or ministers (20 minutes), the pastor's sermon (40-60minutes), and one or two more songs while offerings were given, and finally a closing prayer given by the pastor (10 minutes). All told an average service would last approximately two hours. While the service in Kulaman began at 6pm each Sunday evening, Pastor Sazon would always make sure to arrive at least an hour earlier. Dismounting from his tricycle, and accompanied by two or three members from his church in Talisay, he would, without fail, remove a beaten up guitar, an amplifier, a microphone, a rolled-up set of sheets of song lyrics¹¹, a light fitting (that he would swing up over the rafter), a small 12V battery, and of course his Bible. After briefly setting up, he would walk around the church, in and among the houses grouped together nearby. He would then proceed to systematically wander, the casualness of his actions somewhat belied the conscious effort on his part to attract new church members.

At first glance, there appeared to be a certain aimlessness to the pastor's movements, simply engaging with whoever was sitting outside their house, or walking by. Some houses he would enter, others he would stand outside of or in the doorway. At times he would take a

¹¹ All songs in JIL in Kulaman are in Tagalog, as opposed to the more common mix of Tagalog and English songs found in Born Again services in San Jose.

coffee and some sweet bread if offered to him. But after some weeks of attending and talking to Pastor Sazon, it became quite clear that there was a certain tactical aspect to all of this. And far from being inconsequential or supplementary to the service, Sazon viewed this time as central to his work. Essentially it was his evangelical mission in practice. But it is important to note here that at the core of this evangelizing was a subtlety of action and a consistent downplaying of the purpose at hand. When viewed in light of other missionary work that the people of Kulaman and San Jose in general are witness to, there is a clear circumlocution of standard evangelistic practices at work. For example, compared to that of Jehovah's Witness' or Mormon missionaries, where the missionary stands out in dress, speech, and occasion, and where the approach at proselytism follows, for the most part, an overt house-to-house pattern, Sazon's approach often countered the expectations of what evangelism looks like.



Figure 3.1. Pastor Sazon standing in front of the JIL Church in Kulaman

This was important, in that for most people in Kulaman and San Jose, a basic

assumption of proselytism is that it is presented as just that, proselytism. That the composite aspects of a social dynamic involved in evangelism may be easily read by participants as iconic markers of evangelism itself, is an important feature of the practice for participants on both sides of the encounter. The ability to distinguish and discursively locate what falls, and does not fall, within the realm of evangelism has more generally been taken to be a cornerstone of evangelism (Coleman 2000, and for example, see Susan Harding's discussion of evangelical rhetoric (Harding 2000)). For the evangelist, being able to locate evangelistic work outside of normal acts of sociality, enables one to conduct and assess one's fulfillment of a primary Christian responsibility; to spread and give witness to the Lord's word. And of course, for the would-be proselyte, the similar ability to read evangelism *as* evangelism, on the most basic of levels, allows one to choose whether to engage as a willing participant or to opt out.

For many Born Again Christian groups, in the Philippines as elsewhere, the failures of simply giving witness or testimony, or indeed "shotgun evangelism", in which the nature of the evangelistic act is made explicit, has, since at least the 1970s, seen the introduction of a more nuanced approach, or at least one that is less categorical, and aiming to downplay the strict divide between the evangelistic and non-evangelistic aspect of a Christians' life. Thus friends, family and co-workers all may become potential proselytes. But as many Christians have attested, this has been the source of much consternation, as the nature of relationships become doubled up with scales of social motivations and intentionality (note here how negative critiques of this type of evangelism replicate the critiques of the marketing strategies of direct sales companies such as Avon and Mary Kay Cosmetics who wholly embed financial transactions within social relationships (Wilson 2004; Grumke 2001). Sazon's approach may

be located within this strand of thought, in which the presentation of the evangelistic act is coupled with any number of social performatives that are intended to downplay that very evangelistic act that is the determinant focus of the social engagement.

Thus it was never the case that the people of Kulaman did not recognize Sazon first and foremost as a Born Again pastor, and a pastor that wished to convert them. This much was clear. But still, it is important to explicate in some manner the ends to which Sazon attempted to downplay, if not his role as evangelist, then his outward presentation as such. However, it was not the case where he is evangelizing by stealth. Unsurprisingly, as he noted himself, he was attempting in large part to avoid a clash of opinion, or the collision of faiths; that is, to pit Born Again against Catholic. Thus what was manifested in these instances was the avoidance of a fundamental comparability, as Sazon sought to diminish and minimize a distinction between Catholic and Born Again faiths. In a sense then, not only was there no articulation of an antagonism between two faiths, but their existence as fundamentally objectifiable entities was drastically lessened through Sazon's evangelistic strategy.

Week in week out, it would play out the same; Pastor Sazon would greet people, perhaps engage in some small talk about the weather or the rice crops. He would then, smiling and laughing, shift the subject matter to attending church. "You should attend the church" he would say, "You're very welcome to join us". He would ask people if they believed in God. The almost obligatory response of "yes, of course"¹², would lead him to his next question of whether they attended church that morning. Whether a person replied in the affirmative or not,

¹² It is the most uncommon of occurrences to find a Filipino outside of the main cities that would claim any form of atheism or agnosticism. In my two years of fieldwork, I came across only one person who said they did not believe in God, and even then they attended church quite regularly, mostly out of obligation to his family. However, amidst generally educated circles in Manila, for example, one is likely to find a spectrum of religious beliefs that would mirror their Euro-American counterparts.

he would try to persuade them to attend, never quite accepting their disinterest or refusal, but would after some time move on if still they refused or their discomfort grew all too apparent. Much of the time, they would say that they were busy, but perhaps they would attend the following week. It would be rare that he would be met with an outright refusal, although this did happen, and was usually the result of an explicit anti-Born Again sentiment that a minority of people were always happy to express¹³. But for the most part both everyone involved avoided any contention whatsoever, and many people clearly felt pressured into attending, if simply out of politeness. And importantly, as noted, he would always stress the lack of religious difference between Catholicism and Born Agains. “One Christ”, he would say, “it is all the same” when a person might reply to him that they were Catholic. Again, this statement, “One Christ, it’s all the same”, is both the drawing of equivalency, and the avoidance of it, but strictly along the lines of a Born Again faith, in that the focus is already on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, as distinct from institutional forms of Christian practice. He is not arguing that Catholicism and Born Again are commensurate with one another, although this is his ultimate goal. But rather, in this first instant of the evangelistic process, his aim was to do away with, or at least diminish, religious identities altogether.

Big Faith

This approach of eschewing a direct distinction and comparison between Catholic and Born Again faiths, while at the same time fundamentally arguing for a comparability of the

¹³ I will deal this elsewhere in greater detail, but criticisms of Born Again churches most often emanate from a pro-Catholic stance, but not always so. In general, for those with anti-Born Again sentiments, criticisms were mostly concerned the self-interest of the Pastors. That theirs was a money-making endeavor; taking advantage of the needy and poor. Of course, most people were quite willing to lay the same accusations, if not at the Catholic Church, then at least at many of its clergy. When viewed in a pejorative light, the Born Again pastors took on a travelling salesman character.

Born Again faith to Catholicism, continued in Sazon's sermons. For almost a year, even as Sazon worked hard to attract Catholics into the church and maintain them as congregants, he was all too aware that their affiliation to Catholicism was an ever-present aspect to the service. And yet for such an amount of time, to have been actively trying to convert a roomful of Catholics without ever mentioning it was somewhat striking. But as noted, this is not to say that Sazon did not engage with Catholicism in a substantial way.

Perhaps the most fundamental means through which Sazon established the comparability between Catholicism and JIL (as token of Born Again), was through establishing a spectrum, or better a continuum of faith. Rather than presenting Catholicism as incorrect or false, or positing JIL as the true faith, as the months passed he began to talk in terms of more and less faith, or 'big faith', and of growing closer to God. At such times, he would also minimize his reference to Born Again or evangelical practices, and of course would always stop short of directly criticizing (indeed, as noted, even overtly referencing) the Catholic Church. Instead he would talk of "shallow faith" (*mababaw panampalataya*) of "deeper understanding" (*malalim na pagkilala*). He would ask, "Do you want to accept that you are lacking of faith and you want to fill your lives with honesty?", "Do you want to come closer to God?", "Do you want to know God more fully?", and "If your understanding is just a little, if your understanding is just the Lord who you should not be afraid of...you will not serve the Lord."

This sounds unremarkable enough, and arguably in almost all strands of Christianity, particularly those associated with Born Again and Evangelical churches, ideas converging on the ability to grow in one's faith and attaining a personal relationship with Christ are perhaps the most standard of utterances. However, in this context, what normally would be taken to be

at best universally expressed sentiments, at worst platitudes, take on a more pointed and combative meaning, and essentially are a means to engage, albeit in a tacit manner, with Catholicism. Again, what appears to be at stake are three intents: 1.) to omit mention and “direct” critique of Catholicism; 2.) diminish the categorical opposition between Catholicism and Born Again by pursuing a continuum of faith; 3.) establish a Born Again faith as a superior and stronger than Catholicism. There are clearly some contradictions here, and it was the strategic reconciliation of such contradictions that Sazon was engaged in. Also, it may be noted that in Occ. Mindoro, and in the Philippines more broadly, there is not such an apparent discourse on some religious groups being more or less religious. When religious difference is voiced, outside of the conversion setting, most likely it is indeed through claims of falsity and inaccuracy, and of corruption of faith and belief.

As already mentioned, when approaching people Sazon foregrounded a shared nature of Christianity, dismissing denominational divides as the doings of man rather than God. *One God, one Christ. Same.* Depending on how one sees it, he is striving here for a project of wholesale commensurability, or indeed the purification of comparability amongst Christian practices, or else the inability to even begin such a project. He would implore people not to become overburdened with definitional and theological issues, but instead to focus on Christ alone, an interesting and simultaneous negation and affirmation of religious divide, conferring as it does favor to Born Again worldview.¹⁴

Gradually, however, as a person would become more regular in their attendance, Sazon would begin ever so slowly to mention differences. From time to time, for example, when visiting a house before service, he might very gently suggest that their statues (a

¹⁴ I will write elsewhere in greater detail regarding the assertion of a Born Again faith as the *anti-religion*, stripped and purified of institutional forms.

multitude of which are found in most homes) inhibit their faith, or entreat them to read their Bible and not pay mind to other religious things, whether composed of talk or material, for it is the Bible that is the intermediary between them and God. Or that they should not drink or smoke. But again, no mention of Catholicism would ever be made.

It is this omission of Catholicism that was the most striking aspect of Sazon's work. Whether in his sermons, his Bible studies (earlier on in his work in Kulaman), house-to-house visits or indeed in casual conversations with churchgoers, he would refrain from any commentary on the Catholic Church. It is this point that I wish to draw attention to. That is, to be surrounded by Catholics, to be a former Catholic himself, with the entirety of his work being the conversion of Catholics, it was at the very least a notable strategy. But he did, as noted, broach the denominational divide, however a delicate subject it seemed to be. It was clearly a necessity, for without it Sazon did not have a church. He not only needed to confer a falsity of belief onto Catholic teachings without causing offense, but also to produce a distinct identity for JIL. And of course, among those in attendance there would have been a varying opinions of Catholicism, and vary degrees of willingness to depart the church.

Throughout his sermons and prayers, Pastor Sazon would underscore the concept of 'togetherness'. But interestingly, time and again, he blended the idea of togetherness with the Lord, and the idea of togetherness as a congregation. Thus slowly, and obliquely, the notion of a Born Again faith (one emphasizing the link between the individual and Christ) comingled with the notion of a *Jesus Is Lord* congregation, without either explicitly questioning or disparaging the Catholic congregation that they would have been members of.

Sazon

I want to briefly outline Pastor Sazon's career experience of Christianity here, as it has some import for the evangelistic strategies he employed. Born and raised Catholic outside of Batangas in Southern Luzon, he converted to Born Again Christianity in his twenties after getting into a drunken fight and receiving serious injuries to his head including a fractured skull. After the fight, as he recounted to me, he was consumed with anger, and after his friends killed the man who had hurt him he felt no diminishment in his anger. It was around this time that he was befriended by a Born Again pastor and quite quickly accepted Jesus Christ as his savior. He had never been very religious before this, and neither had his family, but they all were at least nominal Catholics and would have attended church. His experience of moving from Catholicism, even if in somewhat of a lapsed version thereof, to Born Again, is not only common, but appears to be arc of the majority of Born Again pastors in Mindoro. There were very few Born Again pastors I encountered in all my research that were not formerly of the Catholic faith.

It was in Bible school that Sazon, of course, learned the theological and doctrinal backbone to his faith. In my conversations with him, however, he never told me of learning particular strategies of conversion, but I wouldn't have expected him to tell me because of his concern of being accused of manipulating people. Rather he emphasized how he learnt to focus on the Bible when talking to people, the importance of testimony (his and those he was speaking to) and of bearing witness. After Bible school, Sazon became something of an itinerant minister, moving from church to church, mostly in Mindoro. But having a young family, he settled down and became the permanent pastor of a church affiliated with the Philippine Missionary Fellowship, a group that had begun small-scale missionary work in

Mindoro in the 1960s and is presently the second largest independent Born Again church¹⁵ in the and remained the pastor there for nearly twenty years. There is some discrepancy as to the reasons for his departure from this church: some say it was over money or over personal disagreements with the board of trustees of the church, others say he was unpopular with the congregation, he himself deflected such accusations and said it was due to his urge to shift from pastoral work to church planting. At any rate, leaving this church in the early 2000s, he took a more exacting evangelistic approach to his ministry. Since leaving that church, he has had affiliations with three other churches, all similar in doctrine. The first was a church in Talisay that split from the United Methodist Church (UMC). At that time, likely 2002, the local government was allocating land to churches, and the new UMC offshoot was granted a plot of land directly across the road from the UMC. The group that split was actually quite small, in and around thirty people, and consisted primarily of two large families. While the split from the UMC had nothing to do with doctrine and was more political and personal in nature, the new church decided to cast aside its Methodist roots and become a Born Again church (albeit, and somewhat oddly named St. Peter's). It was this series of events that led them to inviting Sazon to be their pastor. However the congregation failed to grow, and another split occurred in which one family left, and soon there was no church to speak of. After briefly becoming a pastor with the Church of Nazarene, and establishing a church on the north of the island, Sazon returned to Talisay and established a Jesus Is Lord church in his house. Interestingly, his association with JIL appears somewhat tangential, in that he receives no salary or financial aid in church building or support, and thus his bureaucratic relationship with the church is minimal. Indeed, JIL is famous for being a charismatic church, with

¹⁵ By "independent" I mean here a church, or group of churches not originally affiliated with a transnational missionary group. In Mindoro, for example, there is a wide presence of Assemblies of God and Foursquare.

Pentecostal aspects to their service. However Sazon's JIL churches (Talisay and Kulaman) have nothing in the way of those associations. Further, his church, while incorporated with the SEC as an affiliate church of JIL, does not title ownership or regulation of the property or corporation/church to JIL, thus in a legal sense, really has no connection to the mother church, centered in Manila¹⁶. Sazon did note that there is a fellowship of JIL pastors every two months or so in the Mindoro, Romblon and Marinduque region, but it is informal, and he often does not attend. In this sense, Sazon is very much his own man, an autonomous actor in the religious milieu of San Jose, but at the same time somewhat removed from the community of Born Again pastors and community leaders. Thus Sazon was an "old hand" as it were, and occupied something of an elder-statesman role, which lent itself to a more metadiscursive role on the techniques employed by different evangelists.

The Pangan Family

The Pangan family began attending the JIL early on. Geralyn, a widowed mother in her fifties, thin and small, wearing gold signet rings (wealth on the fingers, practically, as they disappeared and reappeared regularly as per visits to the pawn shop in San Jose) and short black and grey hair, she lived with two adult daughters in their late twenties, both unmarried. One of the daughters had a four-year old daughter herself, but the father, a Canadian she had met while working in Manila, had no involvement with the family. Aside from the two daughters Geralyn lived with, there was another daughter who lived in San Jose, and a son

¹⁶ The church in Kulaman is not incorporated as of yet, and Sazon does not hold anything in the way of land title, or rights to the land or church. The church plot, as noted, was donated by a member of the original Bible study, while Sazon paid for the building of the church. There is nothing unusual about this at all, and given the nascent state of the church, it would be very soon to self-incorporate or establish a land title. There are any number of businesses, churches and schools that while establishing land rights, even after decades would not have an official land title to their property.

who lived in Kulaman (and whose wife, from San Jose, was Born Again and infrequently attended services in San Jose at the Calvary Church), across the fields that they owned and farmed together. His house, visible from theirs, was smaller and made from *nipa*, whereas the main homestead was recently built and consisted of concrete cinder blocks and a corrugated tin roof. It was, as they said, a work in progress, and the house was large enough, with four rooms, no flooring, only tamped down earth, and no window frames as of yet. But still, as houses in Kulaman go, its concrete walls set it in the above-average bracket.

They would rarely all attend JIL services, but at least two of them could regularly be found in the church each Sunday evening. They would never give testimony, and preferred to sit near the back. From my earliest conversations with them, usually over coffee after a service, they were insistent on proclaiming their Catholicism. And indeed, their house, like most, was littered with statues and images of the Holy Mary. In discussions concerning religion, they would often echo Sazon, noting “One Christ, it's the same God” as a means of explanation of their attendance at JIL. They told me how they liked Pastor Sazon, how he would call to their house every week and invite them to church. Their house was just down the road from the new church. They would often go to mass¹⁷ in the small Catholic chapel in Kulaman. Or sometimes they would take a tricycle to the parish church in Talisay¹⁸. There was an evident tension to the Pangans' situation that they themselves admitted. Sazon had, some months previously, encouraged them to be baptized in the church and they balked at the idea (as did most other JIL attendees, and there had been no mention of the matter for nearly a

¹⁷ While there are distinct words for *mass* and *service* in Tagalog, both etymologically derived from Spanish, *misa* and *serbyiso*, in practice, the differentiation is not made as there is a specific verb for attending church in Tagalog, *magsimba*, which is far more common than employing the noun form. Sometimes, the pastor would employ the term *meeting*.

¹⁸ Kulaman, while part of the municipality of San Jose, is part of the Talisay parish.

year). Their reasoning against conversion was the same as most people. Firstly, they were simply Catholic. They were born and raised in the Church, and it mattered little if one attended mass or not. You were Catholic. Secondly, they disliked some of the prohibitions that the Born Agains pursued, such as those against smoking, drinking and gambling, even though they themselves engaged in none of those activities. And of course the prohibition against religious statues always perturbed them.

As I got to know the Pangans better over time, they began to speak more of their relationship to JIL, and elaborate on the ambiguous situation they found themselves in. It often seemed they had become embroiled in the conversionary moment simply because they lived along the road going to the church. As already noted, Sazon could be somewhat forceful and intrusive in his manner, especially when proselytizing. The Pangans' response to him, like that of many others, seemed to center on an aversion to confrontation. So when he pushed them to attend church, they would likely have done so, if just to be polite¹⁹. But they would also sometimes pretend that no one was home when they heard him arriving. The four-year girl, however, was simply terrible at keeping quiet. The family were sincere in their belief in God, and they most definitely identified themselves as Catholic, but had no animosity whatsoever to Born Agains. At the same time, they would have been happier if the JIL had never arrived in Kulaman in the first place, or at least had arrived on a different road than

¹⁹ Much has been written about the role of politeness and temper in Filipino culture (for example, Andres and Ilada Andres 1987; Salazar 1981). While most of this literature misfires along predictable lines of reductionism and list-making of cultural values and national attributes, it is undoubtedly true that there is, as a general rule, a higher level of discomfort with antagonistic interactions, at least within public settings. From negotiating prices in the market to office politics, one is unlikely to witness antagonistic conversational interactions in the Philippines. Any number of terms have been employed in describing Filipino social interaction on a type level, with "politeness" and "friendliness" perhaps being the most common, and "Smooth Interpersonal Relationship (SIR)" often assuming the responsibility for a more theoretical label (early examples include de la Costa 1967, De la Torre 1978), but I would suggest that it is more a tendency to assume a conversational stance that aims towards an avoidance of direct instantiations of confrontation rather than some fundamental form of conciliation.

theirs. Quite quickly after Sazon first came knocking on their door, theirs became a struggle to manage their attendance at JIL with their identity as Catholics. And as the months went on, invoking the “one Christ” rationale might have benefited Sazon’s needs, but it failed to ease the position of the Pangans.

Idolatry and *Daniel 3*

For all of Sazon’s discursive omission of Catholicism, most congregants were quite aware that integral to his sermons was a critique of the theological orientations associated with the Catholic Church. I choose here as an example of perhaps the most frequent and effective means through which Sazon did so. That is, through his sermon. Daniel 3 concerns the erection of a ninety-foot golden statue on the plain of Dura in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar (one assumes of himself, but perhaps of his father (Collins 1984)), his demand that all worship it, and finding only three young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refuse to do so²⁰. Burnt alive for their defiance, they did not die and they did not burn. As Pastor Sazon related it to his congregants during service²¹:

²⁰ The first two chapters of Daniel are concerned with how the three Jews mentioned here, along with Daniel himself, were taken to the court of Nebuchadnezzar, trained in the ways of the court and taught to read and write the Babylonian language. The names of the three Jews were changed on arrival to the court from Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Daniel’s name was changed to Belteshazzar, although he does not figure as a character in the third chapter.

²¹ I will discuss Biblical translation elsewhere in greater detail, but the Bible that Pastor Sazon used was *Ang Biblia*, a Tagalog translation from the early 1900s. This is somewhat unusual as the *Magandang Balita*, a translation of the *Good News Bible*, is by far the most common to be found in Tagalog regions in the Philippines. There are some estimates of well over 95% of all Bibles read in Tagalog speaking areas being the *Magandang Balita*. Pastors who were trained in English would tend to rely more closely on the NIV, but use the *Magandang Balita* for readings in services. *Ang Biblia* is often found in diglot form next to the English *King James*. Although it is not actually a translation of King James, it is the closest there is in Tagalog, and assumes the same position. That is, it likewise is often taken as an authoritative version, as well as being more poetic and classical in its language. However, many people suggest that modern Tagalog is further removed from the older Tagalog of *Ang Biblia* than is modern English from that in the *King James* Bible. Others suggest *Ang Biblia* is not so much “classical” Tagalog, but rather simply outdated, and indeed was never a good translation in the first place, with multiple errors, convoluted structures, and even grammatically incorrect Tagalog. In a different chapter I will discuss in detail the attempt at a new Bible translation in Tagalog, *Ang Salita ni Dios*. For some, Pastor Sazon’s use of *Ang Biblia* was a taken as a sign

The King was a mighty person, and he had the statue built for him. And they adored the statue, *and it was said* that he invited all the leaders in the town. And he told them, “I am commanding all the people in all countries, wherever they have come from, whatever their languages and dialects, to lay down before this statue when they hear the trumpet and flute and all other musical instruments. And whoever does not follow this commandment will be thrown into the fire.’ And when the musical instruments rang out, everybody who heard this sound knelt down and adored the statue; this statue that was built by King Nebuchadnezzar. That is, except for three men, three friends. These three friends: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These three young people were captured in Jerusalem. The Jews surrendered to their enemies. Why did they do so? Because, like all others, they too learned to adore the statue. They learned to marry people who adored the statue as well. And they were convinced to adore the god and goddesses. The Lord got angry with them. The Lord gave Israel to her enemies. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temples were destroyed. The people were captured, especially the young people, and they were sent to Babylon as slaves. And with them were the three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The people said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “Long live the King! You have commanded us to kneel down before the statue and adore it, whoever among us who has heard the sounds of the instruments, and you have said also that whoever will not follow this commandment will be sent to the fire”.

So what do you think? Why did these young people not follow the commandments of the King? Because they knew whom they are adoring and who is their God. If you know Jesus Christ and you have strong faith, if you know Jesus Christ you will have strong faith. And you will not be like a wave, dancing in the wind. He is just following the law of the wind, whatever the direction of the wind is. But if you know Jesus Christ, you will be consistent in your faith. You will be firm in your faith. But if you just have a little understanding of your God, you will be like a wave. You will be a slave. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they knew their God. Thus, they did not adore the golden statue.

While this excerpt of a sermon does not read in any way particularly remarkable, it was clear to all that this story, as related by Sazon, was directed towards the subject of Catholicism and idolatry. And by no means was this infrequent. Sazon would regularly employ Biblical stories in analogical form that were aimed towards discussing Catholicism, without flagging its subject matter. He would often read from the Bible or paraphrase a story

that he was old.

or verse, and leave it standing alone without comment and without context (for example, Isaiah 40, Jeremiah 13, Exodus 20 etc.). Sometimes there would be a slight smile, perhaps a hint of recognition, but as often not. It should be noted, these were asides to the main thrust of his sermons that for all intents and purposes were similar in manner to many other pastors', wherein the Bible is read, reported or summarized, and subsequently contextualized for the congregation. I quote in length his rendering of Daniel 3 in part because he did provide commentary afterwards, while maintaining an ommissive stance with regard to Catholicism. That Biblical narratives may be appropriated for different purposes in specific contexts is anything but unusual, and indeed it may be argued that the incorporation of Biblical passages in a service always includes some analogical component, but what is of note here is how easily the analogical form was successfully employed and read as such without being flagged by Sazon as such. That is, Catholicism was indexed without any explicit reference to it.

But in what ways are the denotational norms of religious critique being employed and circumvented here? I would argue that Sazon is, if not subverting then pushing to an extreme, an acknowledged form of interlocution with the Bible. Sazon employs not only Biblical authority outright but plays with the relational stance therein between him and the text, some of which are arguably intrinsic to most if not all Born Again services. The merging of both pastor and Bible as authoritative voice within a service setting is the norm, with all manner of entextualizing practices at play (Silverstein and Urban 1996), usually with a pastor employing the Bible as singular textual authority, but providing an in-context supportive mode of authority, not unlike more widespread and general relationships between talk and text that incur an ideational asymmetry ("it is true! It says it right here in black and white etc...").

In what is perhaps the most common example of entextualization, reported speech, in

this case the Bible, carries with it elements of a language ideology that forefronts the value of clarity, denotational reference and truthfulness, perhaps best collectively termed transparency (for example, Keane 2002; Haviland 2003, and for the role of ambiguity in sacred text exegesis, see Trawick 1988). Yet, there is an amplification of the normative positioning of Biblical recitation/reporting here in sermonic speech. Normatively, wherein the Bible is implicated as source authority and ground for a pastor's articulation, instead the Biblical text, in reference to Catholicism, is here enacted as and substituted for Sazon's own voice. This is achieved by leaving his rendering of *Daniel 3* open-ended and untouched by further commentary on idolatry.



Figure 3.2. A Catholic woman attends JIL with her family.

This is not to say that all manner of genres (Baumann and Briggs 1992), heteroglossic voices (Bakhtin 1981), and differing forms of addressivity (Harkness 2010; Keane 1997) are not likely to be found in any other Christian service, yet in this instance, Sazon, while

paraphrasing the Bible, does not clarify or make explicit his point in ways one would expect, indeed he does not assume the role of authoritative mediator of the Bible, which again is the norm in Born Again services in the Philippines. Most commonly in fact is a reading/rendering of a Biblical verse or passage, followed by exegesis that contextualizes Biblical meaning. There is a tendency to produce this type of arc of revelation or disclosure, moving from the Biblical text as universal meaning, and then subsequently to pastoral exegesis as in-context meaning. The mode of addressivity and genre function in the context of a service usually follows this form of including the Bible. Most congregants in JIL have not read the Bible in detail, nor until recently had one²², and for the most part find Sazon's contextualization more useful than an actual reading of Bible itself. Somewhat ironically, given the conversion here of Catholics to Born Again Christianity, there is the expectation of Biblical mediation. What Sazon does is contextualize Daniel 3 in terms of stronger faith while leaving the matter of Catholicism unmentioned. Thus, on the matter of Catholicism (and idolatry), Sazon seeks to attenuate his presence, ceding authority to the Bible, and taking full advantage of the role of addressivity embedded in practices of Bible reading during Born Again Evangelical services, particularly sermonic readings. That is, with regard to Catholicism here, Sazon attempts to efface his role in the delivery and interpretation of Biblical meaning (*i.e.* don't shoot the messenger).

There is, as I have already noted, a fundamental categorical play that Sazon is making, throughout his evangelistic practice more broadly, and specifically here in his retelling of Daniel 3; Catholicism is presented as an inferior faith to Born Again, but notably of the same type. Thus the continuum of faith that Sazon invokes in his retelling of Daniel 3 (to not be like

²² I will discuss this in greater detail elsewhere, but San Jose in early 2012 was flooded with free Bibles, collectively provided by the Born Again churches in San Jose and the Philippine Bible Society in Manila.

a wave, to be strong in faith, to really know Jesus etc.), works hard at avoiding any difference in category or type when it comes to religious differentiation. There is a vulnerability in taking this line in relation to conversion and religious difference. Does one create a religious “other”? Or does one avoid doing so at all cost? For Sazon, the most important part of such a continuum is that the two faiths do not exist in opposition. He struggled hard to do so. In house visits with potential congregants, when he would find them more than willing to criticize Catholicism, he would avoid making any similar assertions himself. Yet in my conversations with him, he could become quite passionate in his advocacy, not only for a Born Again approach to faith, but in his criticisms of the Catholic Church. He truly believed that Catholicism was a corruption of Christianity. As with many other Born Again pastors, he was far more comfortable with praising Islam than he was Catholicism. But then, as a friend in San Jose once remarked, Muslims have never claimed to be Christians.

I want to suggest that it is not simply a strategy on the Sazon's part, to avoid offense or openly attack the beliefs and practices of Catholics, but instead he is engaging with a discourse that produces Catholicism as the unmarked category of religion in San Jose. While he is avoiding a framework of oppositions, binary or otherwise, of Catholic versus Born Again etc., he is also thoroughly engaged in a discourse in which Catholicism is acknowledged to be the fundamental and ubiquitous category of religious experience. This often worked to his advantage, where a proselyte is able to turn away from Catholicism without it being an explicit “conversion” with the necessary sense of rupture that such an event connotes. For Sazon, the ultimate conversion it seemed was for a person to arrive at a Born Again religious identity without, as it were, ever really leaving a Catholic one. This is, of course, in stark contrast to many of his Born Again counterparts, who emphasized such

rupture in conversion, by marking the time, date and place of one's acceptance of Jesus as one's savior.

But unlike other Born Again pastors, who not only proclaim Catholicism as oppositional to Born Again, but assume that they are not even categorically of similar type, with Catholicism a type of religion, and Born Again Christianity not, Sazon, as noted, takes a different tack. However, all are similarly involved in producing Catholicism as the backdrop form of religious practice. Again and again, in a multitude of conversations with Born Again practitioners, a noted approach to Catholicism was evident, all dependent on a tacit understanding of Catholicism. A wide range of linguistic, primarily semantic practices were employed, through which the issue of Catholicism (and more broadly religious difference) was indirectly broached (including, perhaps unsurprisingly a consistent use of the subject pronoun *they* as the unnoted Catholic, constant references to institutionalization, and perhaps most interestingly, the term *religion* itself to denote the failures of Catholicism, such as the oft repeated and bumper-sticker phrase "Christ, not religion," a matter I take up in more detail in Chapter 6, whereby religion and Catholicism are often taken to be synonymous.

These utterances are semiotically indexing Catholicism, drawing in a wide range of ideological stances that depend on a universally shared understanding of Catholicism's role as religious archetype. Of course, and this is what is of interest here, is the general reliance on implicitness and indirectness. This inclusion of a discursive technique of indirectness is of course, calling upon a shared knowledge, and a shared expertise of a specific context-bound meaning. Thus it is reliant, not on any particular view or opinion of Catholicism, but a shared knowledge of its position as religious form vis-à-vis a broader social context in which religious practice occurs.

However, as some have recently argued (Lempert 2012, Philips 2010, Silverstein 2010, but see Goffman 1983 for an early exposition on the problems of indirectness, and Grice 1991[1975] and Keenan (Ochs) 1977 for a discussion of conversational implicatures), “indirectness” is a troubling analytic. As Michael Lempert has noted, “perceived ‘indirect’-ness may just be an artifact of an ideological commitment to denotational explicitness” (Lempert 2012, see also Irvine 1993). While indirectness may be taken to be performed against, or stand in contrast to implicit assumptions concerning communicative norms (as per Grice, one “flouts” norms), “direct” speech conversely is often stripped of more context bound contingencies. As can be seen in Sazon’s employment of forms of indirect speech, he is as equally dependent upon such shared norms as any denotationally explicit rendering of a critique of Catholicism would be. His “indirectness” here, does allow him, however, to attenuate or efface full authorship of the critique. This deflection of authorship, in taking up indirect aspects of addressivity and muddling the voices of speaker and text (pastor and Bible), deflects accusations of overt denouncement of the congregants’ faith and religious affiliation. At the same time, his condemnation is bolstered by encoding it within Biblical authority.

At best it seems “indirectness” here is, as Michael Silverstein has suggested, a ‘cover term’ for a range of discursive practices that are universally in place already, and are simply “indexically marked uses of language that are consequential for users insofar as they are filtered through a local ethno-metapragmatics” (Silverstein 2010: 338). Essentially then, all categories of “direct” and “indirect” speech are very much folk (or native) categories. I would suggest that the ethno-metapragmatics at play here specifically involve the shared conceptualization of Catholicism. For all the problems associated with “indirectness” as a

linguistic and pragmatic category, and as an analytic tool, that “deep, if not fathomless category” (Lempert 2012), to quote Lempert again, there is a need for something approaching it, as marker for the sets of discursive practices we see here.

The Pangans’ Block Rosary

Throughout October in many parts of the Philippines, in the early hours of evening, one is likely to see any number of curious small processions of people along the side of streets of the towns and cities. Holding candles and flowers and a statue of the Virgin Mary, singing a hymn or reciting a prayer, they are curious if only for the fact that they often last only twenty meters or so, as they exit one house only to dip into the next. This is the “block rosary”. A catholic ritual that some suggest has its origins in the 1950s across the Philippines, as a response to Protestant-evangelical encroachments in Catholic areas, it is not unique to the Philippines, but perhaps most widely popular there. Essentially an elaborated form of the Catholic rosary, its primary purpose is to draw communities together by focusing on enunciating one’s devotion to Catholicism and to the Virgin Mary. Not only is it designed to do this, but to do so in a very public manner. The processions, however short²³, are always highly visible.

Each evening, a statue or image²⁴ of the Virgin Mary circulates, and a rosary and a number of other prayers (some specific to the block rosary, some more general), hymns and a litany, are recited and sung in the house where the image stands. The actual recitation of

²³ In rural areas the procession can of course be quite long, depending on the dispersal of houses and participants. I partook in processions ranging from twenty feet to over a mile.

²⁴ More commonly a statue of Mary is used, and while there is a wide variety of statues, for the purposes of the block rosary, a statue of approximately 2-3 feet is used. It is only in poorer areas that a framed picture would be used instead. In Kulaman, they used a picture. But even then, some people wondered aloud why they could not use a statue.

prayers and hymns can be very fast, with the children expertly attuned to the quick shifts in the call and response aspect of the ritual. After the prayers, a small procession leads the image to the next house where another set of prayers and rosary is recited, after which it is customary for there to be some simple food, ranging from softdrinks and bread, to cooked food such as pancit. The image then spends the night in that house, and is moved the following evening, and so on for the entire month. The size and make-up of the people in a block rosary differs, but it is often made up of many children, especially in poorer areas where the food is a major draw. The numbers usually range from eight to fifteen individuals. If there are more, most likely they would split and create another “block”. The parish, and in San Jose, the Cathedral/Vicariate, maintains an administrative overview of the block rosaries. Lists are handed in by local lay leaders with the names, addresses and numbers of houses that will host the Holy Mary. At the beginning of the month, there is a mass and blessing for all the statues and images of Mary in the Cathedral. All the lay leaders bring their statues and place them at a side-altar, which are blessed with an aspersion (sprinkled with holy water).

In most neighborhoods, a limited number of people, mostly women, generally organize all lay Catholic activities. This is of no surprise, as the Catholic Church is famously delimiting in those practices associated with women, and those with men. The assigned and imbalanced aspects of gender in the Church, such as male priests and female nuns, are only the most formalized of gender roles, but pervades the entire practice of Catholicism. Those who organize the block rosaries might also conduct the nine days of prayers, or novena, for the dead, aid in masses as altar servers, cantors, lectors and acolytes etc. and have other prominent liturgical responsibilities in the church, as well as actively participate in numerous Church organizations. And they will commonly be a voluntary catechist.

After I had become good friends with the Pangan family, one of the daughters, Elsa, would often introduce me to people in Kulaman, and give me advice on who to talk to while giving me rundowns on the news and bits of history regarding the church in the area. She would also help me in my interviews (and as it turned out was a far better and more comfortable interviewer than I ever managed to be). One afternoon in October, after visiting a local retired catechist, we traipsed back through the rice fields to Elsa's house to eat. Her mother appeared quite upset. She related to us how her sister-in-law had been shouting at her, and that rumors were now circulating in Kulaman that the family were Born-Again, and no longer Catholic. "She kept calling me crazy", said Geralyn about her sister-in-law, she told me 'you keep on attending JIL, but that isn't your church! You are Catholic! But you are attending JIL as well. You're crazy, really insane! Why would you do such a thing?...Maybe next time you'll be there at Iglesia [ni Cristo]!"

She proceeded to tell me how there had been a number of run-ins with her sister-in-law, and how it was true that she had told the sister-in-law that she wouldn't attend JIL anymore, but at the same time felt under pressure from Pastor Sazon to do so. She felt caught between different people, and was frustrated because she wasn't overly concerned with attending the church anyway, "I told her we are just attending the church there, because we just want to find out if the teachings and doctrines are the same there as Catholic. And I told her not to judge us, because she is not attending the church. They're not attending the church themselves, not even Catholic! That's why they were saying all that to us, because they are not attending any church, not even Catholic."

Gerlayn had had this argument numerous times with her sister-in-law, a woman known to be something of a trouble-maker and gossip, who would often tend to exaggerate problems

and differences among people. It was not the sister-in-law that she was worried about, however, but rather the risk that she would start spreading rumors about the family around Kulaman. “But I told her that I don't care”, said Gerlayn, “why does she keep questioning me on why I'm attending JIL? And it doesn't disturb her, she's not being forced to attend, so if we're attending, did we ask her to join? We are just attending because we are investigating all the churches, because they are just the same. Everything is about God, and that's not bad. And she refused to accept my explanations, and just kept on insisting we're crazy, 'You are all crazy, you're attending JIL!'.” She continued, “And I told her, why are you not attending church then? But according to her, she already has a church in her house and says she has an altar”. But Geralyn suspected no altar existed. At any rate, she had never seen it.

The consequence of this argument between Geralyn and her sister-in-law was not immediately apparent, and the family seemed to brush it off, annoyed and a little concerned that people might be talking about them, but equally dismissive of the sister-in-law's view of the matter. However, some days later Elsa told me that Ate Reyes, the catechist and organizer of the block rosary informed her that they couldn't have the block rosary in the Pangans' house if they were attending JIL. This was all quite upsetting for the Pangans. They were embarrassed. They believed they had done nothing wrong, and many people (over forty people at this point) were also attending services at JIL. Geralyn told me she was sure this was started by her sister-in-law, and that everyone had started gossiping about their family, accusing them of converting to JIL.

The Pangans quite quickly decided that they would stop attending JIL immediately. But this was easier said than done, with Pastor Sazon sure to try to persuade them otherwise. After notifying Pastor Sazon of their decision, he seemed to not take it too seriously and still

called to their house each Sunday. But this was of no use to the Pangans. They needed to break away with more clarity. Even being visited by Sazon seemed to risk a breach with a Catholic identity. Geralyn organized to go to the pastor's house in Talisay to explain to him in detail why they could no longer attend. However, on the day of the meeting, Sazon did not turn up, and instead she spoke with the assistant pastor, Ate Narisa. By all accounts the conversation went smoothly with no ill will, and the issue appeared to be settled. Pastor Sazon no longer called to their house, and indeed, less than two weeks later, the block rosary was held in the Pangan home. No mention of JIL was made, and it seemed there were no lasting consequences for the Pangans for having attended JIL in the first place.



Figure 3.3. Block rosary in Kulaman. Ate Reyes is to the left, center is one of the Pangan daughters.

However, their departure from JIL seemed to mark a shift, not only in tone, but in the role Catholicism played as a denotationally explicit topic. Quite suddenly, Catholicism was openly discussed. The following Sunday, as the sun went quickly down and Kulaman went

completely dark except for the small JIL church atop the hill, as people crowded in and stood by the little doorway, the buzz of the microphone gave way to Ate Narisa, who stepped to the pulpit, crying ever so slightly with a tremor in her voice. She addressed the Pangans' departure,

I am grateful to the living God because our activities are continuing here in this place. I am also thankful to the Lord for his love. I really feel his presence. I am really thankful to the Lord because with his love, I really learned to love, because before I found it difficult to be good to my enemies. When I had no relation to him. But now, for those who are angry with me, I can't have any anger. I am not angry with them. If we really follow his commandments, and our fellow men see we are following the commandments. It is said by God, that blessed are those people who are cursed and those who are allegedly liars, because the spirit of truth will be in them. That's why sometimes I am lonely. Because during our home visits, with someone who had been attending the meetings. But there was someone who was mocking her, and saying bad words about what she was doing. So I know I am not the only one feeling the love of God. I know that everyone is feeling the same. We should feel the love of God in our everyday activities, even if someone will mock us, or if they say something against us, even if they say that we are insane. Don't be angry with them. You know, I really experienced that when I was told I am insane. And that was by my father! And my father said to me that I am going insane, because they are attending a beautiful church, unlike me, I was attending a church where the roof is full of holes, where it drips when it rains. But the Catholic Church is elegant. But with this kind of church I really found the love of God despite the appearance, so I continue to attend. So let us continue no matter what happens, even if we are sometimes mocked by others, and let us pray for them. And for those members who are being mocked, let us pray for them that they will be strong enough to face that kind of incident. And let them continue their faith in the Lord in this place. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters who are experiencing such mocking. You know they always address us as insane and crazy, that is why they are deciding to leave. You know brethren, everywhere there is the devil. Everywhere, there is someone who will contradict or oppose the word of God. Because not everyone believes in the word of God. That's why we should overcome whatever challenges that may come our way. We should have a strong faith with God. Even before we have religion, yes, who among you had religion before? I know that we had religion, but we never felt the presence of God. Although we have this kind of church, I know we are feeling the presence of God, and the power of God is with us. That is why we should be strong. We have so many brothers and sisters who are not present today. Are you not sad? Who among you are feeling sad today because once there is somebody or some member who is not present today? That is why we should be strong with our faith. Especially today as the Lord said his coming is nigh.

This testimony breached a number of previously held norms of tacitness in the JIL regarding Catholicism. Ate Narisa continued the format of emphasizing a continuum of faith, but pushed

further by mentioning both Catholics and people who do not believe in the word of God. Most interesting of course was that the previously unmentioned Catholicism was now mentioned, only to be replaced with the Pangans themselves as the unnamed subject matter. The actual departure of the Pangans appeared to solidify other people's commitment to JIL. Before this, in my discussions with those who attended service, they were for the most part equivocal in their relationship to JIL, and almost stubborn in their identification as a Catholic. But now, a number of people, in their testimonies each week, would openly discuss Catholicism and their new relationship with JIL. In early 2013, within three months of the Pangans' departure, there were a series of baptisms by the sea in Talisay.

In one sense, the Pangans' departure saw not only a move from the implicit to explicit, but a collective will to make the rupture of conversion unequivocal. One can see Sazon's attempt to avoid such rupture as either a success or a failure. Did his strategy of discursive omission of Catholicism work, in that it enabled the congregation to slowly come to terms with their new religious identity, or was it a failure in that explicit critique of Catholicism began to make inroads into his service? Interestingly, a year after the departure of the Pangans, he at least seemed to have succeeded in having JIL accepted by the community as a distinct but valid church. The same woman, Ate Reyes, who informed the Pangans that they could not have a block rosary while attending JIL, was also the catechist in the elementary school in Kulaman. Although I write about the institutional dominance of Catholicism in Chapter 6, I just want to note that Catholicism is the only faith taught in public schools, and most parents assume these religious classes are mandatory and part of the school curriculum, when in fact they are not. Thus, throughout my fieldwork in San Jose, there were often students of different faiths in the Catholic classes. In these religious classes, everyone,

whatever their religious faith might have been, was expected to recite Catholic prayers, make the sign of the cross and otherwise enact Catholic doctrine. As a result of this, whether one is Born Again, Mormon, Iglesia ni Cristo or Muslim, everyone in Mindoro knows the Hail Mary, the Rosary and the basic theology of Catholicism. In something of an astounding shift, in a religious class for elementary school children seven months after the departure of the Pangans, Ate Reyes not only made mention of JIL, something she never would have previously done, but did so in an open and accepting manner. Thus the first church other than the Catholic Church had established itself in Kulaman:

Ate Reyes: We should make the sign of the cross before our prayer, that prayer [pointing to a poster with the words of *Ama Namin (Our Father)* pinned to the blackboard]. That's right, *Ama Namin*. And before sleeping, who here prays before they sleep? Oh! Nobody raised their hand except Kevin! Ok, remember you should always do the signing of the cross before praying. Anyway, in the other sect there is no signing of the cross. Who among you are attending meetings at the Born Again, there at Pastor Sazon's? In ours, in Roman Catholic, we sign the cross. As you can see in the picture the child is doing the sign of the cross before he prays. So let's go back to *Ama Namin*. What is *Ama Namin*? That's right, it's a prayer. Who taught us the prayer? Jesus. Jesus was the first who taught...

And later,

Ate Reyes: That's why you should be silent and not be noisy. But Shirley, you should attend meetings. In your church. I know that because I've been talking to Pastor Sazon. And even for you kids it must be your attitude to go to the church every Sunday. Very good. But the others are in the field [pointing to the pictures] what do you think is happening? Why in the field, instead of attending the church...

Conclusion

While almost everything I've described in this chapter is unsurprising and unremarkable in itself (a Bible story, an emphasis on the strengthening of faith, a pastor talking to people before a church service, a block rosary and catechist teaching Catholic

doctrine...one would struggle to think of more mundane examples of Christian practice), when viewed together, I argue, display a pattern of circumlocution of religious difference that is essential to the practice of conversion at play. Do we place the weight of explanation here alone at the feet of ‘politeness’²⁵ or verbal taboo? I’m wary to do so. I do not think it accounts for all that is at stake here, and as I noted previously, there is little in the way of taboo in criticizing Catholicism in the Philippines. Also, this is not all the doing of Pastor Sazon. Everyone involved aligns themselves with the tacitness that is at play. It is not simply *his* strategy of proselytism, but collectively *theirs*. Indeed, in the Catholic response, we too see a tacitness in the very teaching of catechism, consolidating the identification of Catholicism with the very category of “religion.”

I want to suggest here, that whether understood as avoidance of religious and social rupture/discontinuity or evangelistic strategy, the only means through which this type of tacitness, of circumlocution of Catholicism in particular, can succeed is in large part due to the role of Catholicism as the presumed backdrop of religious practice. It is the knowledge and practice of Catholicism shared by all, which enables such type of linguistic activity. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, Catholicism and religion coalesce as token and type. And for Pastor Sazon, for example, to contest Catholicism is a dangerous game, for to contest Catholicism in an explicit manner, is in many ways to contest the very fundamentals of religion.

Up until now, I have focused on denominational conflict and competition between

²⁵ As with “indirectness”, politeness is a problematic term, encompassing all manner of social interactions, discursive and otherwise, and risks a cross-context miss-match of intentionality.

Catholic and Protestant churches, and the concepts of denominationalism and affiliation that emerge in this context. In the next chapter, I examine how affiliation and the bureaucracy of religious organization are foregrounded within a single denomination—the United Methodist Church. As I have discussed thus far, the issue of strategy, logistics and organization pose specific sets of problems for Christians, in that while such practices are embedded in Christianity, they nevertheless raise ethical concerns to how the relationships between congregant, church, and God should be mediated. I take up the matter of a schism in the UMC in the Philippines, and specifically the issue of bureaucracy as existing in opposition to Christianity, in a more direct manner. It is to church organization that I look, but instead of examining how internal administration has developed alongside belief practices, I examine how the corporate form of organization that is the preferred means through which the Philippine state identifies and regulates religion, is seen to counter the divine nature, and purpose, of the Christian congregation. In this manner, it is not Catholic and Protestant, or Christians and non-Christians, which occupy the religious and denominational divisions, but rather two parties in the same church (although resulting in the formation of a new Methodist church, Ang Iglesia Metodista sa Pilipinas (AIMP)). And yet, there are underlying similarities among the missionary work that occurred over the course of the 20th century in Mindoro, the JIL conversion of Catholics in Kulaman, and the national schism that the United Methodist Church is undergoing. That is, how are bureaucratic and organizational qualities of Christian groups reconciled with the divine relationship between God and self? What scales, and what types of religious “self” can there be? Can the church collective be a divine unit, can the corporation, indeed, can the nation? As I will discuss, the development of the religious corporation in the Philippines was occurring throughout the period of Catholic missionary

work and the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. Not only did the American administration shift the terms of governance over indigenous groups and the Philippine polity, but changed the definitional terms of what a congregation and church were.

Chapter 4

Schism and the Religious Corporation

“For first of all when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it” *1 Corinthians 11:18*

Introduction

In late 2012, I sat on the veranda of the parsonage behind The Good Shepherd United Methodist Church in San Jose, drinking coffee and discussing with Pastor Lito his trip to Palawan the following day, an island about six hours away by boat. Sitting in his vest and boxer shorts and rubbing his belly, he was a little nervous about the trip. The United Methodist Church (UMC) had recently schismed across the Philippines and tensions were particularly high in Palawan. Moreover Pastor Lito found himself in a difficult position. In the early 1980s he had been a pastor for three years in Palawan. At that time, the UMC was in its infancy as a denominational presence on the island, and had yet to develop the full institutional and corporate apparatus associated with the UMC in the United States and urban regions of the Philippines. As is common among many churches and denominations, the fifteen UMC churches in Palawan had collectively purchased some rice fields as an investment in 1984. However, because a district and annual conference (the administrative

units of the UMC¹) had yet to be established on the island and the churches had yet to incorporate with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)², the leadership of the churches agreed to place the land in Pastor Lito's name. This was quite normal and posed little problem as he was well liked and respected by the church members. By the time Pastor Lito left Palawan to be assigned elsewhere in the country, he was the legal owner of three land titles in Palawan, amounting to just under twenty hectares.

Twenty-five years later, no one had thought to have Pastor Lito sign the land titles back over to these conferences. But in 2010, when a scandal involving the bishop overseeing Mindoro and Palawan erupted, the UMC in the Philippines quickly began to schism. Over 200 churches had joined the new schismatic church Ang Iglesia ng Metodista sa Pilipinas (AIMP) across the country by 2013. The churches that had left the UMC and joined AIMP in Palawan were the same churches who were involved in purchasing the rice fields in the 1980s. . Pastor Lito was now about to travel to Palawan to sign the land back over to the church. But he faced a peculiar dilemma: who should he sign the land titles over to—the UMC or the AIMP? Who actually owned the land?

In this chapter I look to church schisms, and the role of the religious corporation in

¹ The United Methodist Church is organized into a four tier system of administrative units, with each unit known as a "conference". The smallest conference is the District Conference, which might have 15-30 churches in it. Above that is an Annual Conference, which is regional in size, and usually has 40-100 churches in it. The Annual Conference is the basic and most important unit in the UMC. Next is the Central conference, which is national in organization. And finally there is the General Conference, which administers over all UMC churches globally. Most commonly, church property is owned by the Annual Conference, but in extreme situations can be owned by the District Conference, or held in trust by the Central Conference. Occidental Mindoro is a District Conference, but a very small one and contains only fifteen churches. It is part of the South West Philippines Annual Conference (pronounced SWAA-PACK), which also includes Oriental Mindoro, and the islands of Romblon, Semirara and Marinduque. This is in turn part of the Philippine Central Conference. Each District Conference meets once a year (that is, the conference has a conference), as does the Annual Conference, while the Central conference meets biannually, and the General Conference meets quadrennially in the USA. Further the Philippine Central Conference is divided into three episcopal areas, each with an assigned bishop, elected at the Central Conference.

² Unlike with the SEC in US, after which the Philippine SEC is based, all corporations in the Philippines must register with the SEC.

Christianity in the Philippines. I begin by describing how the introduction of the modern corporate form by the US colonial administration at the turn of the 20th Century was inextricably linked to the problems of the Catholic Church's considerable land ownership, and the US administration's attempts to dispossess the Church of their holdings. I then turn to perhaps the most significant Christian schism in Philippine history, which resulted in the establishment of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente in the wake of the Philippine Revolution in 1896, overlapping with the US's engagement with the Catholic Church. I look at how the schism between the Catholic Church and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, much like the UMC/AIMP schism, played out over contestations over property. This schism not only impacted on the shape of religion in the Philippines (its ultimate failure secured Catholicism's dominance in the modern Philippine state), but it laid the legal and corporate groundwork for how the state presently relates to religion in the Philippines. While the centrality of Catholicism in the role of Philippine history is rightfully given prominence in the historiographical literature (Tan 2008; Harris 2011; Schumacher 1991; Zaide 1979), a straight line is too often drawn between the force of Catholicism's presence during the Spanish and pre-revolutionary period to its continued influence in 20th and 21st Century Philippine society. Such a line belies the fact that Catholicism came very close to eradication as a dominant form of Christianity in the country directly after the Philippine revolution and the arrival of the US.

It is within this historical context that I then take up the matter of the UMC/AIMP schism, and examine two court cases that resulted from the schism and the fallout in the UMC. However, firstly, I wish to frame the religious corporation in a more broad sense of religious bureaucracies and administration.

The Religious Corporation

While a growing body of work has centered on religion vis-à-vis the state and the promulgation of secular ideologies (Asad 2003; Connolly 2008; Hirschkind 2013, 2012; Mahmood 2011 and specifically in the Philippines see Pangalangan 2011), indeed by now it is a mainstay of anthropological conceptions of religion, the same cannot be said of the religious corporation. This is a somewhat surprising. To be sure, the corporate form is rarely foregrounded in religious practice, with religious groups often eschewing anything that appears to have the touch of the corporate about it (generally aligning instead with narratives of a bottom-up, grassroots-like movement).³ Nevertheless, it is often forgotten that the corporation is the predominant form through which the modern secular state constitutes religious practice⁴. From the perspective of the Philippine state, for example, no articles of incorporation simply means no religion. In this sense, while for Christians, the recitation of biblical verse is an emblematic practice of Christianity (although see Engelke 2007), the bureaucratic backdrop and organizational apparatus of a church is not necessarily so. One is arguably as ubiquitous the other however, and both are evidently constitutive aspects of modern forms of Christian worship. To be sure, the frustrated sacristan sitting in a toner-

³ In the Philippines, as in many places, the narrative of becoming is hugely important to a church identity. This applies equally to large denominations and smaller independent churches. Larger denominations tend to advertise themselves with pride at how vast their congregations reach, but still attempt to present themselves as a “grassroots” movement, something which is seen to stand in contrast to bureaucratic and corporate forms. In the Philippines, as discussed in Chapter 6, the Catholic Church is described by many as the most institutionally invested of churches, ever the contrasted religious form. Institutionalality for evangelical groups is often framed in as being in continuous state of becoming.

⁴ Undoubtedly this is a result of the focus on the individual. This comes from numerous directions. Late 20th Century theorists of secularism and the state have pursued, for the most part, the individual as the site of governance. In terms of religion, this has resulted in a deserved but often limited focus on the individual as religious subject (for example, rights to worship). At the same time, an increasingly fruitful literature within anthropology on Christianity has sought to locate the proliferation of Protestant forms of Christianity, which often hinges on the configuration of the relationship of individual to God. However, as I argue here (and see Handman forthcoming 2014.) religion, particularly in the Philippines, is nearly entirely practiced in groups, with group (e.g. church) formation at the foreground of God’s relationship to self. And it is the group, and more often than not the church (at least for the state) that is the basic religious form.

scented back office filling out SEC forms of church incorporation does not occupy the doctrinal, ritualized or visible elements of, say, Pentecostal glossolalia or a Catholic baptism. But what constitutes a religious act? In this chapter I argue that to take seriously the religious consequences of the bureaucratic and administrative aspects of Christianity, foregrounded in practices of incorporation, allows us to think anew about persisting and stubborn dichotomies such as the sacred and profane, and the secular and religious.

The foregrounded practices of worship (what for all intents and purposes “look” like religion), I suggest, belie the importance of the organizational forms of churches. As I discussed in the first chapter, this is in many ways a result of early social theorists, notably Weber, Troelstch, Niebuhr and Durkheim, who often explicitly argued for the importance of the institutional and bureaucratic aspects of religious practice, but in doing so severely delimited them from other aspects of what is carried out under the rubric of religion. To this end we need to resuscitate the bureaucratic within the everyday practice of Christian practice, but in doing so shift away from oversimplified narratives of “rationalization”, “modernity” and “secularism” as related to institutional organization of Christian communities.

It is quite clear that the corporate form is inherently embedded in Christian practice in the Philippines. Christians tend to have an interesting view of it, however, judging the corporate form as a later add-on or some state-imposed codicil to enable a transposition of religious forms in secular settings, albeit with some infrequent but dramatic influence on church activities. The corporate form does allow transposition. It is this corporate form that enables an across-the-board commensurability of organized religion. In this sense it is generic. It is the basic template of the religious group; it is wholly open to circulation and reproduction, exportable and importable, and fungible across vastly different religious

settings. Whether we look to a standalone megachurch in middle-class Manila, a small rural house church in Mindoro, or a transnationally connected congregation that dots the entire country, the corporation allows the state to view them all as essentially the same entity.

But talk of templates, models and steadfastly commensurable forms assumes a neutrality of purpose (and indeed nature) in the corporation itself. In some ways this is true. While even a cursory examination of the Philippine legislative record relating to religious practice reveals the contours of the religious as it relates to the individual (we find explicit discussions of individuals' relationship and rights to worship, belief and morality etc.) (Coquia 1974; Ruiz Austria 2004), the same cannot be said of the religious corporation. Rather, in looking at how the religious corporation is defined and regulated, one would be hard put to see the religious in it at all. The Philippine state relies on a remarkably basic, pared down and ultimately unspecified corporate model for conceiving of group-level religious organization. But this is not to say that the corporation is merely a representation of religious practice, translating it into a form more manageable for the state, leaving religion itself alone. Although it is clear that unlike a private business that identifies itself primarily as a corporation, a Christian church will never identify in a like manner (a matter I take up in Chapter 6 with regard to Christian interpretations of institutionality). Such a view of the religious corporation, as simply translating the religious into the secular, as I discuss in this chapter, is at least in part due to the relatively recent introduction, in the early 20th Century, of the modern corporation to the Philippines. As I argue, religious actors themselves often see the corporate form as adverse to their cause, and contrary to their view of what constitutes religious practice. They see the corporate form not as a dispassionate and unspecified form, one that is amenable to any end, but rather one that even if viewed only as a template contains

within it an internal logic that is at odds with true religious practice.

But how do we get to the religious corporation when religious actors for the most part dismiss its centrality to their ends? One way for sure is by looking at the church schism. The two are wholly intertwined. Whether originating in matters doctrinal or otherwise, it is perhaps always surprising how little matters related to the divine actually figure in most schisms. The modern church schism inevitably plays out in a legal setting with disputes over property and church assets at the fore. And arguably it is here that we find religion in its most profane of instantiations. Stripped of sacred practices, beliefs, and pietistic motivations, the religious is ostensibly purified of any complicated sociality that points to matters outside of the secular, and in this way is envisioned by the state in its truest state of *corpus*, its body of people: the religious corporation.

In order to examine the implications of the corporate form, I take up the issue of church schism and property disputes, and argue that the mediation between corporate and religious forms in a legal setting results in a foundational tension in how religious practice is defined. On the surface this tension is easy enough to identify. On the one hand the Philippine state legally recognizes religious groups primarily as corporations, while on the other religious actors themselves do not. Instead, they view the religious group, most often in the form of a congregation, as a far different entity, and one that is wholly concerned with divine intention. To this end, the congregation is motivated by attempts to achieve a perfected form of Christian sociality. Thus, for these religious actors, the confines of the religious corporation contains within it is a basic if legally authoritative misrecognition of the religiously congregated.

Of course, to distinguish so clearly between the corporate and the religious is

ultimately untenable (even historically, away from the Philippines, the corporation and the religious have always been intertwined (Berle and Means 1932; Davis 1905) but I take such a dividing line as an entry point into the struggle that religious actors see in their endeavors to navigate church schisms. For the Methodist clergy I worked with, for example, who were in the midst of a bitter church schism, there was a fundamental difference between the legal view of religion from the perspective of the state, and the on-the-ground or *in situ* religious practice they experienced. Their problem then can be seen to be the generic quality of a corporate view of religious groups. For them, the religious corporation delineates, not the minimal social and economic relationships of a church (as a template should), but instead erases the primary relationships with God, collective motivations and internal logics that create and sustain a religious congregation. We find the same in the first modern church schism that occurred during the Philippine revolution in the early 20th Century between the Catholic Church and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. That schism, while often overlooked in the historiography of the Philippines, informed both the legislative approach to church schisms up to the present day as well shaping the nature of religion in the country overall.

The United States, the Catholic Church, and the Corporation

In many ways, as the US administration arrived in the Philippines in the closing days of 1898, so too did the modern corporation. The US legally established the primacy of corporations in Philippine law in 1902, with more elaborated legislation following in 1905 (Pangalangan 2010), but the first administrative body of sorts, the Schurman Commission, had already opened the doors to US commerce in 1899. Unsurprisingly, this early legislation mirrored US corporate law itself. While religious corporations (in the US and the Philippines)

occupied a minor part of corporate law overall, it was the problem of religion, in the form of the infamous religious orders (Jesuit, Augustinian, Dominican and Recollect), that demonstrated for the American administration the need to render many of the financial and social entanglements of the Philippines in corporate form (Escalante 2002). In this manner, religion and the corporation came crashing together in a unique way.

The problem of religion presented itself to the Americans on two specific fronts, but both connected to the question of the Catholic religious orders: firstly, the large swathes of agricultural land owned and administered by the religious orders; and secondly, actual ecclesiastical property owned by the religious orders and the Catholic Church. The role of the religious orders in the governance and corruption of Philippines has been rightly afforded a centrality in explaining in part the motivations of the Philippine revolution against Spain in 1896 (Clymer 1986). For many Filipinos, the religious orders (more commonly referred to as the friars) had for over a century been the face of Spanish rule. The orders not only controlled the churches throughout the Philippines but had famously become its largest landowners (generally the highest quality land in the country and approximately 10% of all cultivated land in the Philippines) and in control of much more (Escalante 2002). Since the Spanish had colonized the Philippines in the sixteenth century, their inability to sustain a substantial government and military presence had led them to grant much of the practical control of the colony to the religious orders. Thus the expulsion of the religious orders from the country was central to revolutionary objectives (Villaroel 1999).

When the US took control, the majority of the friars had left the country (or at least their haciendas and parishes), retaining (quasi-)ownership of the land and churches, but leaving a large number of parishes in the hands of the Filipino clergy (or secular priests),

trained outside of the individual orders. Dealing with the religious orders was not a simple matter. It was clear to all, including McKinley (and later Roosevelt), Taft, and the Schurman Commission and later the Taft Commission, that the best solution was to rid the Philippines of the orders as landowners. This made sense. Not only would it quell Filipino resentment against the US, it was the first step in reorganizing the administration of the country that suited the US. With the religious orders present in the country, the US administration was clearly hampered in what it could achieve. However, on the domestic front Taft and newly elected president Roosevelt were fearful to alienate Catholic support at home. To simply confiscate the friar lands and banish the religious orders from the Philippines would have surely resulted in calls of anti-Catholic motive on their part (Grunder and Livezey 1973; Escalante 2007). The US arrival had also opened the doors to a massive influx of Protestant missionaries, adding to suggestions of an anti-Catholic sentiment held by the US administration. Aside from such fears, the US were bound by the Treaty of Paris in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the US (Escalante 2007). The treaty guaranteed that private property rights were to be respected in full.⁵ Thus, Taft and Roosevelt were caught in a bind between fulfilling Filipino expectations of banishing the orders from the country while at the same time avoiding any controversy with Rome and US Catholic groups. Taft decided that the best way forward was to purchase the lands from the religious orders.

This is where the corporate form and religion came to coalesce. As early as 1894, even before Manila had fallen and the Spanish departed, the religious orders, particularly the Dominicans, had attempted to divest themselves of their properties while maintaining control over them (Escalante 2013, 2002; Endriga 1969; Villaroel 1999). In this fascinating moment

⁵ Although in truth, given the sheer dominance of the US military over Spain, one could imagine the US renegeing on parts of the treaty without fear of any reprisal.

of the development of religious corporations, the religious orders, seeing anti-friar sentiment and a revolution on the horizon, and fearing a complete confiscation of their property, begun transferring their property to shell corporations in Hong Kong, Vietnam, Spain and England (Villaroel 1999). The Dominicans had first sold the property to a company established in Hong Kong which was subsequently dissolved only for the property to be sold again to a corporation in Haiphong, Vietnam in 1899 named “The Philippine Agrarian Development Company Limited” soon after replaced by a Manila based company (after the US established legislation concerning corporations) named ‘The Philippine Sugar Estates Development Company’ (Villaroel 1999). This enabled them to deny owning any land in the Philippines while maintaining practical and financial control over the properties. One must keep in mind that at this time, the mismanagement and corruption in the religious orders were severe. The Schurman Commission, established by the US immediately within a month of assuming control of the Philippines with the goal of establishing basic legislation and recommending future policy, had become a soapbox for the articulation of anti-friar (if not anti-religious) sentiment (Barreto 2007; First Philippine Commission Report 1900), taking the US administration somewhat by surprise. The first time the US administration really learnt about the corporate aspects of the religious orders was when the orders themselves gave testimony to the Commission. Unsurprisingly they were ambiguous and unhelpful in their explanations of their corporate structure and ownership of Philippine lands. For example, the following is just a short excerpt of the testimony in August 1900, of the Very Rev. Francisco Araya, representing the Recollectos regarding their land title in San Jose in Mindoro⁶:

⁶ Indeed, the land title in San Jose, the largest uninhabited title held by a religious order became the focus of a US congressional inquiry that expanded into an entire examination of the US policy towards the purchasing and re-selling of the Friar’s lands.

Q: Are you to sell it to a corporation?

A: A representative of the order has made an agreement to sell to an American in Madrid, Mr. Christy.

Q: Is that Mr. Christy to form a corporation?

A: He is the representative of a corporation.

Q: And in that new corporation I suppose the order is to obtain some shares of stock?

A: The sale has not yet been concluded, of course, but an absolute sale is contemplated...the hacienda in Inmus was sold to a corporation in 1894, in the province of Cavite, 11,000 hectares. It was sold to a Spanish corporation organized to develop agriculture in the Philippines.

Q: Now in that stock corporation I suppose that the order owned a majority of the stock?

A: This Spanish corporation in turn sold this hacienda to an English corporation called British Manila Corporation Company Ltd.

Q: Was not Mr. McGregor the representative of this company?

A: Yes sir; Mr. McGregor is the representative of the English company, and he has come here to see the estate, and I believe some documents have been sent to the Washington Government and in turn forwarded here to General Otis; but of that I do not know.

Q: Now, in that English corporation the order owns how much stock?

A: Yes, sir; it owns stock.

Q: In other words, this establishment of a corporation was for the purpose of interesting other people in the property and at the same time of enabling the order to obtain a regular income and be relieved from the burden of collecting the rents and managing the property?

A: The sale has been made absolute.

Q: Yes, but of course if you own a majority of the stock you obtain control of the corporation?

A: The sale to the English corporation was absolute.

Q: Yes, but does not the order have some stock in that corporation?

A: I can not say definitely what proportion of the stock we own, but we do own a certain proportion. (*Issue 190 of 56th Cong., 2d sess. Senate, 80-89*)

This is fairly representative of how the religious orders engaged with the Commission, claiming rights to their lands when it benefited them, employing the inscrutability of shell corporations to deflect both the responsibility of ownership and the criticisms of landlord corruption that came with that, and using the space between individual persons and the corporations they represented to their advantage. In this manner, the corporate form, while introduced by the US in order to achieve clarity of religious organization had in fact been used to achieve the opposite.

But the real inscrutability that the religious orders achieved was through their own institutional structure. That is, it was the organization of the Holy See itself that proved the most difficult to navigate. Early on in US-Catholic negotiations, Taft himself fell afoul of such inscrutability. In 1902, Taft, then Governor of the Philippines, traveled to Rome to discuss with the Pope the purchasing of the friar lands and wholesale withdrawal of the religious orders from the Philippines. While it was not explicitly a meeting between two sovereign states, if he was to achieve his goals of a Philippines without the corrupt presence of the friars, it was, he believed, the Vatican that would enable him to do so swiftly (Escalante 2007; Baldwin 1902). Interestingly, Roosevelt, communicating through a letter by the then Secretary of War, Elihu Root, noted how this was not a sovereign meeting but rather one of private interests, “Your errand [trip to Rome] will not be in any sense or degree diplomatic in its nature, but will be purely a business matter of negotiation by you as Governor of the Philippines for the purchase of property from the owners thereof” (Baldwin 1902: 3). But this

is where we find a misrecognition of the corporate form, this time on the part of Taft and the US. While Pope Leo XIII agreed in principle to the sale of the friar lands (disagreeing with Taft only on purging the country of any presence of the religious orders), it became clear quite early on that the Pope denied having the type of executive control over the orders that Taft assumed he did. As Rene Escalante notes, “The Americans were mistaken in viewing the Holy See as a corporation that owned the friar lands” (Escalante 2002:104).

There is of course a built in ambiguity to the organization of the Catholic Church, and this episode displays it vividly. Leo XIII claimed that while Rome held jurisdiction and regulatory power over all Catholic property and over all religious orders part of the Holy See, this did not negate the orders’ individual right to act as corporate bodies in their own right (Escalante 2007). Unsurprisingly, this makes little sense. If one has regulatory power over both property and the owners of the property, one is able to force said owners of property to divest themselves of it⁷. But this opaqueness of institutional structure which Taft fell victim to, only accelerated the impetus to corporatize the Philippines. This mistake on Taft’s part, to mistakenly assume the Catholic Church followed the lines of management of the modern US corporation, was essentially the last time the Philippines would see a non-corporatized Christian presence in the country. After negotiations over the friar lands moved to Manila, the Philippine Commission had to deal not with the Catholic Church as one entity, but with the

⁷ Indeed this is the case. The Holy See is capable of alienating any church property (even outside of any civil law within a given nation state) if there exists a specifically outlined “just reason” (Chapman 1999: 735), of which it would clearly seem the situation relating to the friars’ presence in the Philippines definitely applied. As Escalante suggests, Leo XIII’s refusal to do so was most likely to placate the Spanish government at the time. But note that there seems to be some disagreement not only on the law here but what actually happened. For example, Villaroel writes that just prior to the fall of Manila to the US in 1898, the Dominicans “had taken steps to protect their properties by requesting the Holy See permission for the Province [similar to an archdiocese] to alienate them in case of extreme danger of losing them by confiscation or expropriation” (Villaroel 1999: 271), and that this was done. In this case it would have been the Province that sold the properties on to private corporations.

Pope's representative, each of the religious orders, and of course the holding firms and shell corporations.⁸ What is of note here is that we see the corporation introduced as an outside template of organization. The corporation exists outside of assumed forms of sociality and is used to quite instrumental ends. And further, in each instance the corporate form is tethered to the issue of clarity and inscrutability. And perhaps most importantly, as I will discuss later, the corporation is seen to better deal with the material forms of religion, primarily questions of property ownership. As we will see in terms of church schisms, the corporate form is taken as the primary link between immaterial aspects of congregational Christianity and its material practices (most evident in practices involving property).

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Iglesia Filipina Independiente)

As with the Friar Lands, the Philippine revolutionaries saw the ecclesiastical structure of the Catholic Church as a challenge to Philippine independence (Achutegui and Benard 1971; Whittemore 1961). While the seeds of a national Philippine church independent of Rome can be traced to at least as early as 1896, it was not until 1902 that a number of the revolutionary leaders (primarily Isabelo de los Reyes and Gregorio Aglipay) formally schismed from the Catholic Church. At this stage, the American government was far more concerned with the land holdings of the religious orders and maintaining peacefulness in the country, and were thus not as engaged with the matter of the church schism as they might have been. But the causes and immediate actions of the Catholic Church in response to the new church were similar to their reaction to the friar land crisis. Not only did they deny any

⁸ Escalante (2002) among others, refers to these corporations as “holding firms” but it is not clear that these firms held stock in other corporations. Rather it appears that these were simply shell corporations, with no assets or operations other than to establish a quasi-legal ownership structure of the lands disassociated from the religious orders.

corruption and in turn paint the revolutionaries as the violent and corrupt force, unrepresentative of any Filipino majority, they maintained their right of ownership over ecclesiastical property long after they had left the jurisdiction. A large majority of Filipino priests (who were already in control of the churches) supported the new church (called Iglesia Filipina Independiente, Iglesia Filipina Independiente, or the Aglipayan Church). The Catholic Church was immensely weakened in its institutional presence and in the next three years (the numbers are sketchy in this regard) the Aglipayan church grew at an enormous speed, with approximately 25% of all Filipinos joining the new church within three years and continuing to expand. These growth in membership came all at the expense of the Catholic Church (Achutegui and Bernad 1971; Doeppers 1976).

The growth of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente was wholly dependent upon its taking control of the Catholic churches. Few if any new churches were built, with the funds to do so simply not available. But with massive numbers of congregants switching their allegiances, alongside the Filipino priests, it made sense to occupy the churches. Across the country, most towns only had a single church, and it was of course Catholic. If both the congregants and the priests were now affiliated with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, what should they do? Build a new church and leave the Catholic one standing empty? According to them, and to the leaders of the new church, the Catholic Church was not an institution separate from its members (Mojares 2013; Wise 1965). A church is always constituted first and foremost by its members, even if this occurs outside of a visibly legal framework. Again, this is at the very heart of how the corporate form relates to religion, and we see the same view of matters a century later in terms of the UMC/AIMP schism, whereby religious practices are deemed to supplant any legal structuring of a church as a social entity.

McKinley, upon taking control of the Philippines, had announced both publicly and privately that there was to be separation of church and state in the new colony, fashioned exactly as it was in the US⁹. However, this proved far more difficult given how closely the Catholic Church had coalesced with the Philippine state during the Spanish regime. Nevertheless, the US administration chose to step back, in as much as it could, from deliberating on the Catholic Church's right to its property in a post-revolution and now US administered colony. It chose to allow newly established courts to determine final ownership. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, the case was clear cut. They had, through their orders, built, managed and owned all ecclesiastical properties. Whatever the current state of collective animus against the Church, this did not affect their right to ownership of their properties. They argued that not only had the Spanish government legislated their right to ecclesiastical property, but the Treaty of Paris had secured all property rights of private individuals, associations, societies and companies (Achutegui and Benard 1961b).

But the new church, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, argued the opposite on a number of fronts. Firstly, they argued that the large majority of ecclesiastical property had been funded by local municipal taxes (this was true and little in the way of Spanish funds ever paid for the building of churches), and had been built with Filipino labor, often indentured and unpaid. In this respect they believed that however the Catholic Church and the Spanish government had legislated the matter, one could not suddenly deny the social existence and motivation of religious practice. Secondly, they argued that ultimately the local municipal governments had always had ultimate ownership of church properties, viewing them not as

⁹ The short lived Malolos Constitution of the Philippine Revolutionary government also secured the separation of church and state, though hotly debated during its negotiations, and perhaps ironically signed in a Catholic church (Pangalangan 2010).

private property of the Catholic Church but collectively owned by its congregants, at the parish and diocesan level. And even if this were not the case, the Catholic Church and the Spanish government were so intertwined that ultimately the Spanish government owned Church property (Achutegui and Benard 1971; Wise 1965). If this were the case, with ownership occurring at the municipal or state level, the Treaty of Paris ceded all government and public property to the US government. And if the US were now the owners, well, they could not simply gift such property to the Catholic Church. Not only would this deny the separation of church and state, but would be highly discriminatory against other religious groups. And finally, and most importantly, they believed they simply had the moral right. This was key to the entire manner through which they framed the religious corporate form. To view religious congregations primarily as a set of private legal relationships was the antithesis of how they sought to locate Christianity in Philippine society. To view Catholicism as a corporation was to renege on fundamental agreements of what a religious collective was. Furthermore, while the Spanish government and the Catholic Church had for centuries spoke of the Catholic Church as a national church, not merely a religious denomination, no longer was there any mention of the Catholic Church as having any responsibility or identity in this regard. Now the Church was to be taken as a juridical person which enabled it to act in a private manner.

Taft himself was initially supportive of the Aglipay and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. As with the friar lands, he firmly believed that any sustainable future the Philippines might have could only occur without the oppressive presence of the Catholic Church (in its quasi-government role) that was currently in place. And ultimately he wanted the pacification of the colony (and the civilizing introduction of US business interests of

course), and could not see that unfolding without a stark definition of the role Catholicism played in it. In an initial and seemingly clumsy move, on the advice of the Attorney General, he issued a “Proclamation on Peaceful Possession” in early 1903. In it he stated that whoever presently possessed church property was to be legally treated as the rightful owner until the courts had finalized the matter. As Achutegui and Benard argue, this proclamation was a complete misreading of how legal ownership was understood, and rather than protect rights of ownership, it suddenly posed the threat to any churches still in the hands of the Catholic Church with being chased off their property (Achutegui and Benard 1961a: 328). And indeed it did appear to set off a spate of churches changing hands, often forcibly.

As the Iglesia Filipina Independiente continued to grow apace, and with property ownership still a critical matter, the Philippine Commission passed legislation that effectively gave the courts the responsibility to provide a solution. A number of cases were at the time before a number of different courts, but it was *Barlin vs. Ramirez* that effectively ended the controversy. In this case, first appearing in a lower court, was a typical example of the schism. In 1901, when the Spanish priest, Father Barlin, of a religious order, left a local church in Camarines Sur, a Filipino priest named Father Ramirez took administrative control of the church. As news of a new independent Filipino church became widely known in the town, a municipal town meeting was held, and the local government, the townspeople and Ramirez all voted to leave the Catholic Church and become members of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (although it had yet to incorporate itself). When Barlin, acting on behalf of the Catholic Church ordered Ramirez to hand back the church, he refused. The Supreme Court, in ruling for Barlin, clarified four points of why the Iglesia Filipina Independiente had no right to possession of church properties. Firstly, Ramirez only had the right to administer the church

on behalf of the Catholic Church as an employee. Once he left the church, he forfeited this right. Secondly, although the municipality had provided land and labor in the building of the church, they did not have any claim to ownership. Thirdly, the claim that the Spanish government were formerly owners of the property and thus this was passed to the US after the war was not true. And fourthly, the argument that the Catholic Church had no legal personality in the Philippines was not accepted.

What we see here, through each of the arguments of the *Barlin vs. Ramirez* case, is not only the Supreme Court delivering an opinion against the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, but a fundamentally different way of constituting what religious practice is. As with the UMC (and indeed the AIMP to a lesser degree) a century later, for all the numerous arguments the Philippine Church made, both in *Barlin vs. Ramirez* and in other cases¹⁰, underpinning their motivations was always the concept of a religious groups as being constituted first and foremost by the members themselves. Whatever form the membership took, that is the form the church takes. In this manner, the formal institutional shape of a church derives from the (informal) relationality that is at play between and amongst members. This is where the tension lies with assuming a corporate view of the religious congregation, in that the relationality of the congregation is seen to derive instead from the corporate form.

In the end, the loss of all its property crippled the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and its precipitous decline essentially began with the Supreme Court decision in *Barlin vs. Ramirez*. Although it continues to exist as a very minor denomination in small pockets of the Philippines (Pastor Lito's parents had actually been members of the IFI, but finding no IFI church when they moved to Mindoro became Methodists), no alternative "national" church

¹⁰ *Barlin vs. Ramirez* was a leading test case of sorts, with numerous local courts waiting for it to be resolved before judging on similar cases.

emerged to contest the hegemony of the Catholic Church.

Scandal and Schism in the UMC

The issue of property ownership had come to define the schism between the UMC and AIMP quite soon after it began in 2010. Part of the problem was that while Methodism, both in the Philippines and most other countries are well used to churches splintering, accepted practice deems that if one leaves the church, one leaves the property also and begins anew. But the new AIMP saw things differently, and actively sought ownership and financial rights to much of the UMC's property and holdings, no doubt in part due to the hostile nature of the schism. While most divisions in Methodism in the Philippines have centered on doctrinal and organizational differences, the AIMP originated in a different context. Instead it was formed by a UMC bishop after he was implicated (though never actually found guilty by either a civil or UMC court) in a sex scandal in 2010.

The schism not only came to revolve around property holdings, but importantly how ideas of religious community and organization are more broadly transposed (and indeed fail to transpose) into a legal and corporate setting. I focus here on two legal cases in Bataan province between the AIMP and the UMC (from 2011-2013), as well as the ramifications of the schism in Occ. Mindoro. The fallout of the schism continues unabated, and as recently as late 2013 when I was last in Bataan, property disputes and violence were still occurring. The schism has drawn on discourses on Philippine nationalism and the autonomy of Methodism and Christianity more broadly in the Philippines, as well as a discourse on ethical aspects of the financial nature of religious organization. Importantly, as I will show, the discrepancy in how the institutional actors in the UMC and the congregants approached the issue of schism

and autonomy and church identity overall has proved decisive in how events played out.

The first I heard of the schism was when a friend, a UMC member, showed me a leaflet arguing for members to leave the UMC and join AIMP in December 2011 (although at this point the AIMP did not strictly exist and was only incorporated in December 2012). He only knew of events because his mother was a lay leader in the church and very much involved in discussions over The Good Shepherd's (the UMC church in San Jose) future. In Mindoro, the majority of congregants knew very little if anything at all concerning the establishment of AIMP, and the discourse on the schism existed primarily among clergy and lay leaders. As related to me by numerous pastors in Mindoro as well as at the Manila headquarters, the main thread of the dispute is agreed upon. In 2010 an assistant of Bishop Tangonan claimed that he had sexually assaulted her. Tangonan denied the allegations, and the matter was sent to the Judicial Council of the UMC in the USA. The matter of this council comes up again and again throughout the schism, and occupies an interesting but legally difficult position with regard to Philippine corporate law, more of which later. The nine members of the Judicial Council, while determining the facts of the case, placed Bishop Tangonan on paid suspension. However, he defied the suspension and continued to serve in his role as episcopal bishop for the Manila Episcopal Area¹¹. One of the primary responsibilities of a Bishop is to lead the Annual Conferences' meetings each year. The Judicial Council demanded that Tangonan refrain from acting as Bishop and appointed an interim bishop, Bishop Arichea. Tangonan once again disputed the authority of the Judicial Council, and refused to travel to Georgia in the US for a hearing on his future role in the

¹¹ The Manila Episcopal Area includes the Southwest Philippine Annual Conference (primarily Mindoro), the West Philippine Annual Conference (primarily Palawan) and the West Middle Philippines Annual Conference (primarily Bataan).

UMC. The period of time where Tangonan was acting as a bishop outside of the authority of the Judicial Council was approximately eight months, during which all of the annual conferences met.

Tangonan had actually been something of a surprise to most people when he was elected first in 2008. Although widely popular in parts of the UMC (particularly in Palawan and Mindoro), he was also seen to be a controversial figure from the beginning, as he was younger than most bishops and more active in his pursuit of reforms to the administration of the UMC. His supporters claim that the sex scandal was simply an attempt to smear his reputation and they had long expected some attempt to oust him from the bishopry. They argue that even if there were truth to the scandal, by UMC law such matters are to be confidential until resolved. However, both the UMC in the Philippines and the Judicial Council in the US publicly released details of the accusation, causing widespread outrage among both his supporters and opponents. Further, it is generally agreed that Tangonan, long a critic of the financial and the transnational corporate organization of the UMC¹², was labelled an activist, and was causing some upset in his calls for church reform. Such reforms were met with resistance by the other two bishops and their supporters. The matter of the scandal was never formally resolved as Tangonan resigned from the UMC in late 2011.

During the time of his suspension, Tangonan began publicly planning his own breakaway Methodist church. However his role in the UMC was very much ambiguous during this time. In the provinces of Bataan and Palawan, he organized annual conferences (the actual yearly meeting of the conference), although the UMC rejected that he had any

¹² Many members, especially pastors and administrators, believe the UMC in the US has taken advantage of the Philippine church, providing little to no funding for churches and programs, paying high salaries to bishops, while leaving local pastors throughout the country to financially fend for themselves. Further, some suggest that the Philippine UMC actually loses money through its affiliation with the US.

authority to do so. As a result, the conferences began to split (culminating in the UMC in Bataan conducting two annual conferences taking place and resulting in a lawsuit, to be discussed later), and so began complicated and often violent claims of ownership over church properties.

The District Conference in Occ. Mindoro early on in 2011 had a meeting in which they voted on whether to leave the UMC and join Tangonan, even though at this point no actual church had been established or incorporated. While Occ. Mindoro had been a strong base of support for Tangonan, the vote went 17-16 against leaving, with the majority of pastors in support of exiting the UMC and lay leaders in the main wishing to remain¹³. As other districts and annual conferences did not take a vote during 2011, matters related to the schism were less exacerbated in Occ. Mindoro (and the SWPAC overall) than in other areas (primarily Palawan and Bataan, but also Zambales) and remained more administratively coordinated.

Autonomy and Nationalism

Tanganon's move to break away from the UMC was complicated by similar moves within the UMC to become independent from the US administration of the church. The issue of autonomy in the Philippine UMC has long been a divisive and politicized affair¹⁴. Dating

¹³ An essential component of the UMC structure (and Methodism more generally) is the involvement of both lay leaders and clergy in church organization, and in the UMC all conferences, district, annual and central, there exists equal representation between clergy and lay members.

¹⁴ The *Book of Discipline* (Paragraph 570) outlines five types of relationships that a Methodist church may have with the UMC:

“Churches located outside the boundaries of the jurisdictional conferences and which have entered into relationship with or have agreements with The United Methodist Church, including that of sending representatives to General Conference of The United Methodist Church are described as follows:

1. *Autonomous Methodist Churches*

a) A self-governing church of the Wesleyan tradition and which may or may not have entered into the Act of Covenanting with The United Methodist Church.

back to at least the 1970s, the UMC in the Philippines has sought to become autonomous from the UMC, specifically becoming an “affiliated autonomous Methodist church” (AIMP does not have affiliation in this way, and is simply an “autonomous Methodist Church” with no formal relationship to the UMC General Conference). The UMC, originating in the US,

b) Autonomous Methodist churches are not entitled to send delegates to the General Conference of The United Methodist Church.

2. *Affiliated Autonomous Methodist Churches*

- a) A self-governing Methodist church in whose establishment The United Methodist Church or one of its constituent members (The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church or its predecessors) has assisted and which by mutual agreement has entered into a Covenant of Relationship (in effect from 1968 to 1984) or an Act of Covenanting (see 573) with The United Methodist Church.
- b) Each affiliated autonomous Methodist church shall be entitled to two delegates, one clergy and one layperson, to the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in accordance with 2403.1b. They shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges of delegates, including membership on committees, except the right to vote. Such a church having more than 70,000 full members shall be entitled to one additional delegate. At least one of the three delegates shall be a woman. The bishop or president of the affiliated autonomous Methodist churches may be invited by the Council of Bishops to the General Conference.

3. *Affiliated United Churches*

- a) A self-governing church which is formed by the uniting of two or more denominations, at least one of which shall have been related to The United Methodist Church or one of its constituent members (The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church or its predecessors).
- b) Each affiliated united church shall be entitled to two delegates, one clergy and one layperson, to the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in accordance with 2403.1b. They shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges of delegates, including membership on committees, except the right to vote. Such a church having more than 70,000 full members shall be entitled to one additional delegate. At least one of the three delegates shall be a woman. The bishop or president of the affiliated united churches may be invited by the Council of Bishops to the General Conference.

4. *Covenanting Churches*

- a) An autonomous Methodist church, an affiliated autonomous Methodist church, an affiliated united church, or another Christian church which has entered into a covenanting relationship with The United Methodist Church through an Act of Covenanting as described in 573 and in the 2000 Book of Resolutions (adopted 1992).
- b) The Act of Covenanting does not warrant that the covenanting churches shall be entitled to delegates at the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, or at the equivalent body of the covenant partner.

5. *Methodist Churches with Concordat Agreements*

- a) Other Methodist churches which have Methodist heritage in common with The United Methodist Church or one of its constituent members (The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church or their predecessors) and which have entered into concordat agreements in accord with 574 with the purpose of manifesting the common Methodist heritage, affirming the equal status of the two churches and expressing mutual acceptance and respect, and creating opportunities for closer fellowship between the two churches, especially on the leadership level.
- b) Such concordat agreement, with the exception of The Methodist Church of Great Britain (see 13.3), shall entitle the two churches to the following rights and privileges:
- (1) The two churches, entering a concordat relationship, shall each elect two delegates, one clergy and one lay, to be seated in each other's General Conference or equivalent bodies with all rights and privileges. The agreements with the Methodist Church of Mexico and the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas shall be honored.
 - (2) The host church shall make provisions for hospitality, including room and board, for the delegates of the other concordat church. Travel and other expenses shall be the responsibility of the visiting church.”

had throughout the twentieth century expanded across the globe. However, most countries in which the UMC had succeeded in establishing itself progressed to an affiliated autonomous relationship with the UMC. This allowed them to be financially, administratively, and indeed doctrinally independent from the UMC. For example, Methodism, particularly those church missionary groups that would later become the UMC, has been very successful in South Korea. However in the 1930s the Korean UMC became autonomous, that is, no longer administered by the UMC (or its antecedent bodies). It is now the Korean Methodist Church (KMC), which retains affiliation to the UMC, allowing them to send delegates to the General Conference every four years, and maintain a shared view of global Methodism.

In the Philippines, the Central Conference began in the 1970s the process of becoming autonomous with affiliation. While it appeared autonomy had broad support, it never came to fruition, due mostly, it seems, to bureaucratic missteps on the part of some annual conferences, such as not recording the votes at annual conferences correctly and reporting votes on time. Most pastors I discussed this matter with believe that it was the General Conference that was trying to willfully damage the Philippine cause for autonomy and independence from the UMC, as it has been of utmost importance that the UMC has an administrative presence in Southeast Asia so that it may identify itself as having a global reach.

These early attempts at gaining autonomy ebbed and gave way to other more immediate concerns in the 1990s and early 2000s. It must be noted that the process of gaining affiliated autonomy is long and difficult, and generally takes eight to twelve years to achieve, mostly due to the fact that one has to submit a request for autonomy to the General Conference before one can take votes at the annual and central conferences, and subsequently

submit these votes for ratification once again to the General Conference, which of course only meets quadrennially. But the difficulties here are specific only to pursuing autonomy through the UMC administration. One can simply break away, at least in theory, quite quickly and easily. This is what AIMP had hoped to do. The difference would be that an affiliated autonomous church still sends delegates to the General Conference and maintains a substantial relationship to the UMC. This is the most common affiliation that exists for dominant national forms of Methodism around the world.

There had been much talk about autonomy among the pastors in the lead up to the SWPAC Annual Conference in Mindoro in May 2012. It had been agreed at a previous Central Conference in 2010 that there would be a push towards beginning the process of affiliated autonomy once again. The Annual Conference of SWPAC was taking place in 2012 in Occ. Mindoro in Talisay, a town just thirty minutes by motorcycle from San Jose. While in the district of Occ. Mindoro, the fifteen pastors see each other regularly, travelling up and down the island for any number of reasons including budgetary meetings, baptisms, religious celebrations and so forth, the Annual Conference allows them to see friends that otherwise they might not see for one or two years. While the Annual Conference establishes a number of committees dealing with organizational aspects of the church, perhaps the standout part of the conference is the appointment of pastors to churches. With the UMC having an itinerant pastoral system, wherein a pastor can be moved to a different church every two-three years, the Annual Conference always has an excited energy to it, as pastors find out their new appointments. In 2012, people were even more roused and animated than usual. For the three days of the conference, as near a hundred people wandered around the church grounds eating and chatting, most conversations revolved around the issue of autonomy and the church

schism.

The schism propelled the issue of autonomy onto center stage for the pastors, for as Bishop Tangonan exited the UMC in 2011 in establishing a new Methodist church, he did so under the banner of autonomy. This undoubtedly garnered him support among a large swathe of pastors, who had been pushing for autonomy for many years and were frustrated with the relationship to the US, feeling that the Philippine UMC was being financially hindered and overly administered by the US UMC. But it also muddied matters for those remaining in the UMC. To take a stance of pro-autonomy had now shifted. If one was so pro-autonomy, many asked, why not join AIMP? It was difficult to be both anti-AIMP and pro-autonomy (a situation many pastors in Mindoro found themselves in). Equally, for many, because of the establishment of the AIMP, they were increasingly turned off by the idea of autonomy, and felt that now one must show loyalty to the UMC, whatever problems there might be in that relationship. Thus at the Annual Conference in Talisay, most pastors were aggressively pro-autonomy, to the extent that they said they did not care whether it was affiliated or not, they just wanted to leave the UMC. At the same time however, a number of pastors and lay leaders (always equal in number to the pastors) appeared to be uneasy with such an extreme move.

When I attended the Annual Conference in Talisay, it was evident there was much unease and indeed excitement at what would happen. Bishop Arichea arrived to head up the conference early on the first day, and his presence made everyone even more aware of what was facing them. For it should have been Bishop Tangonan. Arichea himself had been pro-autonomy before he became interim bishop, and in his address to the conference called for calm, and of course loyalty to the UMC. However, on the third day of the conference he was pushed to take a vote on autonomy. With overwhelming support, and loud cheering, the

motion to pursue autonomy at the Central Conference was upheld. However, within a month, matters appeared to become increasingly extreme. A number of pastors were no longer satisfied to wait for the long drawn-out process of the Central Conference, and then onwards to the General. They wanted autonomy now. In discussions with a young pastor in the north of Occ. Mindoro, who at the time was the treasury officer of the district, she spoke of the pastors' uncertainty about how the push towards autonomy would play out. She believed that if the Central Conference rejected the motion to become autonomous, the Annual Conference (SWPAC) would itself move immediately to become autonomous, without affiliation. The problem she said was that it was often unclear who owned the church property, the Annual Conference or the Central Conference (quite common in poorer areas. See ft. 10). As a result of this uncertainty, she said a number of the churches in Occ. Mindoro were in the process of self-incorporating, thus whatever happened, the church and congregation could remain intact¹⁵. With this move, the corporate form suddenly became a buffer against the fallout of the schism, protecting them both from the AIMP and indeed the UMC.

The Book of Discipline

In something of an astounding act of making the profane take the form of the sacred, the UMC is organized according to a single text, named *The Book of Discipline*. This book is revised with amendments at each General Conference, but is essentially a stable document.

¹⁵ That Occ. Mindoro is one of the poorest and underdeveloped provinces in the UMC and the Philippines only complicated matters, as many churches hold land rights but not land titles, a common occurrence in poorer parts of the country as land ownership often begins with simply squatting in an area. While President Marcos reevaluated the squatting rights in the 1980s, and attempted to ease the pathway towards legal ownership, it created a two-part system of ownership, one of land rights and one of land titles. One can apply for land rights easily, which protects you from state intervention in your property and somewhat from private counter claims to ownership, however you are limited in how you can act in terms of the property, such as selling and donating, and land rights can usually be overturned by a wealthy counterclaimant to the land. But gaining a land title is often too expensive for many.

Running approximately eight hundred pages, it covers in detail everything from the UMC constitution, the doctrinal, social and theological positions of the UMC to the organization, management and responsibilities of conferences. It also includes a chapter on the ownership of church property. But *The Book of Discipline* is a peculiar document. While it aims to be a global document, and is written to account for all UMC churches worldwide, it is peculiarly American in its design, notably in the corporate organization of the churches and conferences. Interestingly, the UMC does not actually own any property itself (that is the UMC proper or the General Conference) but rather annual and central conferences (and sometimes district conferences) hold property. *The Book of Discipline* states that in titles of incorporation and land titles, a carefully worded trust clause should be inserted that makes clear that the property is being held in trust for UMC, that is, it will always have succession rights to the any property.¹⁶ The UMC prefers that property is owned by an annual conference (the basic body of the UMC), or failing that the central conference or an individually incorporated church. In Occ. Mindoro, and the Philippines more generally, the UMC administration does not like individual churches self-incorporating, as it is seen to deny some trusting element of connectionalism, the organizational ideology that is at the very heart of the UMC doctrine of church membership. Thus when Occ. Mindoro churches began to self-incorporate, as religious societies, this was in many ways a move against the UMC, although many pastors saw it as a safeguard of their identity, unsure as to whether the UMC in the Philippines would

¹⁶ The trust clause is as follows: “*In trust, that said premises shall be held, kept, maintained, and disposed of for the benefit of The United Methodist Church and subject to the usages and the Discipline of The United Methodist Church.*” For a non UMC entity, it is “*In trust, that said premises shall be used, kept, and maintained as a place of divine worship of the United Methodist ministry and members of The United Methodist Church; subject to the Discipline, usage, and ministerial appointments of said Church as from time to time authorized and declared by the General Conference and by the annual conference within whose bounds the said premises are situated. This provision is solely for the benefit of the grantee, and the grantor reserves no right or interest in said premises.*”

even exist within a year.

In this manner, the corporate form was employed as a protection device against the bureaucratic actions of the UMC as a transnational institution, even as the legal and corporate view of Christian practice was viewed as imposed from the outside. And it is of note that the issue of autonomy was viewed by many members through a lens of nationalism that was, many argued at implicitly at the heart of the schism.¹⁷ As I suggest later in this chapter, with regard to both the AIMP and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, nationalist explanations (pro-autonomy) for the schism were deeply connected to concepts of religious practice that exist outside institutionally and structurally orchestrated forms. In each case wherein nationalist tendencies are visible, we find it set in opposition to the corporate and legal representations of Christianity.

Schism in Bataan

Bataan is perhaps now most (in)famous for the death march of World War II, and it is true that the province, narrow as it is, is indeed defined by that road. As one travels through the province, one moves up and down the road where the march took place, with small, hand-painted signs in each town noting how many miles the men had walked by that particular point. But then Bataan was always more influenced by the American presence in the country than many other provinces. Since the US took control of the Philippines in 1898, Bataan (due in part to its closeness to Manila, its slightly cooler temperature and quality soil) had been a focus of the US administration, and of course its missionary zeal. While Occ. Mindoro has

¹⁷ Although it must be noted that two earlier schisms in Methodism in the Philippines, in the early 1900s and after World War II, were also dominated by a nationalist discourse, with the UMC famously maintaining its links to the American institution (Tizon 2002).

fifteen UMC churches, with the largest church (The Good Shepherd in San Jose) having a congregation of approximately one-hundred, Bataan has over a hundred UMC churches, with numerous churches having over a thousand members. Indeed, in this region Methodism and other mainline Protestant denominations challenge Catholicism as the dominant form of Christianity. Thus, while the same legal and organizational structures exist in Occ. Mindoro as in Bataan, Occ. Mindoro is perhaps the smallest and poorest of conferences, while Bataan is the largest and wealthiest.

Throughout my time in Occ. Mindoro, in my discussions about AIMP and autonomy, people inevitably mentioned Bataan, and how awful things had gotten there. I would constantly hear stories of pastors fighting, of barricading churches, of court cases, and general bitterness among Methodists there. This surprising as Methodists, somewhat like their counterparts in the US, are hardly known for their factionalism and violence, and instead are generally characterized as more middle-class, liberal and prudent. That is to say, if one was to read about Methodists in the newspapers in the Philippines, it was likely because they were protesting the destruction of slums or mining companies, but certainly not beating each other up. Although I had met many of the pastors, lay leaders and deaconesses from Bataan, I had not actually visited to where the disturbances had occurred.

When I did travel to Balanga, one of the larger cities in Bataan, to look at the records of court cases relating to the schism, it was the first time that I had seen churches carrying the letters and logo of AIMP. With large posters and notices on both AIMP and UMC churches denouncing the other, large padlocks wrapped around the gates, and often groups of men standing outside for security, it was clear the schism was a heated affair. I had assumed that people had exaggerated the altercations and discord among the Methodists. However, as I

stepped off the bus and entered into a Jollibee, a Filipino fast-food restaurant, to meet a UMC pastor who had grown up in San Jose, he immediately told me of how he had just come from an altercation. Some AIMP people had forced their way into a UMC church just fifteen minutes away. The church, which also included a small elementary school and parsonage, had remained under control of the UMC, although they had moved the students to another location. The pastor who had been there since 2010 had refused to leave the parsonage even though he had left the UMC and joined the AIMP in 2011. But the pastor was in his seventies and had always been difficult and something of a contrarian. The previous day he had finally agreed to leave, but had returned that morning to collect his things. Arriving with another AIMP pastor and two helpers, they pushed their way through the gates, and quickly went upstairs to the parsonage, began breaking the remaining furniture, and then went into each of the six small classrooms, removing the doors and air conditioners. When a young UMC pastor asked them to stop, one AIMP pastor pinned him against a tree and started choking him, shouting and threatening him to stay quiet. When we went to the church that afternoon the people there were still clearly shaken up by the encounter. Thus the court cases that were a result of the schism played out amidst a very tense situation. Indeed the court itself is located only minutes' walk from UMC and AIMP churches.

Civil Case No. 9738

West Middle Philippines Annual Conference, Inc. versus. Marlon delos Reyes, et al.

The schism in Bataan primarily resulted in two civil cases, one of which was an intra-corporate dispute. This case revolved around the organization of the 2011 Annual Conference of the West Middle Philippine Annual Conference (WMPAC, often pronounced WUM-PACK). As the scandal surrounding Bishop Tangonan grew throughout 2010 and early 2011,

it became clear that there would be a schism and that the Annual Conference was going to be the setting in which it played out.

As previously noted, the episcopal bishop formally organizes and leads the annual conference, always to be held in the month of May. In 2010, it was agreed that the 2011 Annual Conference for the WMPAC would be held on May 12-14, 2011 at a church in Luacan, in Bataan. However by April 2011, the church was splitting, and the pro-Tangonan faction did not recognize the position of Bishop Arichea as interim bishop (as a replacement for Tangonan) and wanted to postpone the conference for two weeks while they could request a “neutral bishop”, as they knew there was little chance of having Bishop Tangonan himself head the conference. Arichea and the pro-UMC faction denied their right to postpone and went ahead with the conference. However, over the course of April and early May there was much miscommunication, with the pro-Tangonan supporters informing churches that the conference was postponed.

When Arichea and some of the pro-UMC faction arrived at Luacan church, they found the locks changed, and a large banner hanging on the church announcing that the conference had been postponed until May 29-31. As a result, the conference attendees decided right there and then to drive to another church in Orani (where the clash occurred on the day of my arrival in Bataan the following year) and conduct the conference there. Again, as previously noted, perhaps the primary purpose of an annual conference is to appoint lay leaders and pastors to administrative roles. At Orani, the conference stripped the pro-Tangonan supporters (who did not attend the conference) of their roles. Importantly this included stripping them of their positions on the Board of Trustees of the WMPAC and as pastors of UMC churches.

The pro-Tangonan faction held their conference on May 29-31 and essentially did the

same thing, stripping the pro-UMC faction of their positions in WMPAC. The court case, brought by the Pro-Tangonan faction against twelve pastors (essentially those who attended the Orani conference), contained three actions. They were as follows: 1.) That the appointments made at the Orani conference were null and void; 2.) These appointments of the “bogus conference” caused a number of churches to split in half, and forced the churches to hand over their financial books, and should be returned (this action also included accusations of violence towards some church members); 3.) The defendants continuously misrepresented their goals and attempted to persuade congregants to split off from the plaintiff’s churches.

The court sided with the WMPAC against the defendants, and declared the conference at Orani as null and void for want of a quorum (and it is true that the postponed conference did have more people than the Orani conference and more members of the original Board of Trustees present). And secondly, the court declared all actions, resolutions, Orani elections of delegates to the Central and General Conferences and appointments of pastors as null and void. Thus, the AIMP won, but in claiming itself to be the WMPAC of the UMC. Of course, what is interesting here is that the UMC claims that the WMPAC here is not the WMPAC at all. However, there is no doubt that the members of the pro-Tangonan faction involved here in the case were members of the Board of Trustees at the time of the 2011 Annual Conference in Orani, and according to them, at the postponed and legitimate conference. Thus, the case came down to their right to hold a conference without a bishop. And indeed, *The Book of Discipline* does state that if a bishop is unavailable, the Board of Trustees may appoint an elder pastor to head the conference. This is what the pro-Tangonan faction claimed they did, and that Bishop Arichea defied the resolution of the corporation’s officers and members of the Board of trustees to postpone it to May 29-31, 2011. In the court transcripts, both excerpts of

The Book of Discipline were included as was a judgment from the UMC Judicial Council (acting on behalf of the Council of Bishops of the General Conference) that stated Bishop Arichea had full and sole authority to organize the conference and declared the Orani Conference as the valid one. However, the court sided with the pro-Tangonan supporters as being rightfully representative of the UMC in this matter. Interestingly, in his answer, the Judge accepted *The Book of Discipline* as the authoritative code of administration of the UMC, and in this particular matter the WMPAC. However he disagreed with the right of the Judicial Council of the UMC to arbitrate the matter (who as noted clearly sided with Arichea and the Orani conference).

If this was not complicated enough, the pro-Tangonan supporters (re-)incorporated themselves as the WMPAC, even though they had already decided to leave and form a separate church. Indeed, in a certain manner, they did so with their articles of incorporation, which explicitly stated “That the incorporation of the WEST MIDDLE PHILIPPINES ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, INC. is not forbidden by competent authority or by the constitution, rules, regulation or discipline of the United Methodist Church.” These articles of incorporation, submitted each year to the SEC, are usually exactly the same as the previous year, and in practice are simply a renewal of incorporation, with payment to the SEC. However, in 2011, two articles of incorporation and payments were made to the SEC, both by official members of the Board of Trustees of the WMPAC. But now, the clause above was included in one of them (normally in an annual conference’s articles, the opposite of the above clause is included, that is, it explicitly states that the corporation is indeed bound by the rules and regulations of the UMC). The SEC, it appears, simply accepted both articles and payments and filed both, without making any

determination as to which one was valid and which one was not. Thus when it came to court, not only could both sides claim to be the true representatives of the WMPAC and the UMC, but the pro-Tangonan faction, in winning the case, were able to control the WMPAC without having to submit to the Judicial Council of the UMC in the US or be bound by *The Book of Discipline*.

In truth, in any reading of the court documents of the case, it is clear that the plaintiffs in the case (the pro-Tangonan supporters acting in the name of the WMPAC) legally outplayed the UMC. The UMC pastors were shocked that they lost the case, and suspected there was corruption involved (in the Philippines one expects a case such as this to be resolved in not less than eight months—the ruling was handed down in less than forty-eight hours).¹⁸ Also, the leader of the pro-Tangonan faction was Frank Zuniga, a charismatic and powerful lay leader in the UMC in Bataan. He was also one of the most successful and famous lawyers in the Philippines, and had been involved in a number of the country's most famous cases in recent times (including the Maguindanao or Ampatuan massacre where fifty-eight people, mostly journalists, were murdered by the side of a road in 2009). Zuniga was clearly more talented than any lawyer the UMC had at their disposal, and most UMC pastors I discussed this with readily agreed that this was in large part the reason they lost.¹⁹ For the UMC pastors, the courts relied in external forms of religious identity, resulting in a denial of what constituted religious affiliation, in this case simply adherence to the UMC.

¹⁸ Also, in reading the case papers, it is easy to be confused, and if one did not have a broader understanding of the UMC and the situation, it is difficult to even identify who the WMPAC is, as both parties claim to be representative of the corporation. There are also at least two mistakes in the defendants' counter claim and the judge's ruling. For example, in one part it reads that the defendants attempted to postpone the conference, when it was the plaintiffs that did so.

¹⁹ Frank Zuniga went missing shortly after this case in 2012, and has not been seen since getting into an unknown car in Balanga. It is assumed he has been murdered. AIMP members and supporters accuse the UMC of having him murdered, but this, in my opinion, seems very unlikely, although the timing of his disappearance was unfortunate for the UMC.

Civil Case No. 994

West Middle Philippines Annual Conference, Inc. versus Bepz Methodist Church, Inc.

The civil case revolving around the conference of 2011 laid the foundation for all further actions on the part of Zuniga and the pro-Tangonan faction. The next case, brought by the WMPAC against the Bepz Methodist Church was directly related to the previous case (CC 9738). Interestingly however, while the plaintiff here was the WMPAC, it was essentially the *other* WMPAC, that is, it was the defendants in the last case against the WMPAC who were now the plaintiffs. This case, brought against Bepz Methodist Church, Inc. in early 2013, revolved around ownership of the Bepz church. The WMPAC (the pro-UMC faction) claimed that Zuniga and the pro-Tangonan faction incorporated the Bepz church in 2012 as Bepz Methodist Church Inc., formerly a UMC church, and donated the church and its property to Bepz Methodist Church Inc. on behalf of the WMPAC. Thus, the last case established the rightful authority to of Zuniga and other board members to act on behalf of the WMPAC, and so they claimed they had the right to donate the church property to anyone they wished, in this case the newly incorporated Bepz Church. The UMC and the WMPAC denied that they had any right to do so. Again, the UMC was shocked that the judge ruled in favor of the defendants in this case. They argued that the defendants had no right to act on behalf of the UMC or WMPAC, and had by this time incorporated and joined AIMP. And even if the court found they had a right to act on behalf of the WMPAC in the previous case, by this time (almost a year later) had no right to do so as they were openly acting as members of a different church.

In the articles of incorporation of the Bepz Methodist Church Inc., it is stated that the church is affiliated with “the autonomous Methodist Church of the Philippines”, an early form

of AIMP. Zuniga countered the WMPAC's claims, stating the "Defendant vehemently denies par. 1 that 'the Plaintiff is duly organized under Philippine Laws'. The individual persons behind the plaintiff herein are not legitimately recognized under Philippine laws by virtue of Court Order issued by Branch 2 of the Regional Trial Court, Third Judicial Region, City of Balanga, Bataan on the matter of Intra-Corporate Controversy Decision" and that "the truth is that the plaintiff is a bogus corporation that claims and illegitimately uses the name of "West Middle Philippines Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, Inc." pursuant to the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church-USA and was not the corporation legitimately registered in the Securities and Exchange Commission as the West Middle Philippines Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, Inc."

While it is easy to argue that Zuniga was lying here, and that those acting on behalf of the WMPAC were legitimate, in that they had the full support of both the UMC in the Philippines and the Judicial Council of the UMC in the USA, Zuniga and his supporters argued that, in essence, the UMC was not the UMC. They themselves were the UMC here in Bataan. Although they were leaving the UMC, they believed it was the congregations themselves that constituted the church, and no other organization. In this manner, they believed they had every right to donate and incorporate churches as they saw fit. As noted earlier in this chapter, while it has been traditional in Methodism and the UMC in particular that if a group wishes to leave the UMC, they are free to do so, although church property remains with the UMC, Zuniga and pro-Tangonan supporters (by this point AIMP) believed this should not be the case. They believed a church was naturally incorporated through their religious identity as a congregation and community, and only affiliated with the UMC. And that further, neither the Central Conference nor the General Conference had ever invested

money in the churches or aided in their purchase. This lack of top-down support, of course, has always been a primary motivation in moving towards autonomy in the first place. For them, if the UMC gained control of the church properties, it was nothing but a land grab and could be framed as a US based organization stealing church property away from the congregations who actually owned it. On the other hand, the UMC pastors in Bataan argued that even if this were a valid argument, there was no consensus in the churches, and AIMP were the ones who were stealing property, as it was against the will of many congregants and their leaders.

The Misrecognition of the Religious

How then do we locate the religious corporation in terms of religious practice? In both schisms we see the corporate form employed for practical ends, and it is obviously embedded in the modern constitution of Philippine Christianity. However, we also see a fundamental tension emerge in which religious actors deny the ability of the corporation to successfully represent (or indeed orchestrate) religious practice. At its core, these religious actors see a misrecognition in the religious corporation of what constitutes religious practice and basic church organization, and thus always see the corporate structure of their church as something to shy away from. Arguably this rests on the state's inability to codify the nature of the religious collective, in this case the Christian congregation. While these cases revolved around questions of collective ownership, in the end, they are not actually about possession or the legal ownership of property. Rather they are concerned with the moral ownership of a certain type of religious sociality. If the corporate form is the (perhaps failed) transposition of religious sociality into a legal and secular setting, the property at issue can be seen to be the

transposition of the immateriality of religious motivation into material form.

While the materiality of religious practice has been recently dealt with in a substantial manner (Keane 2007, 2006; Engelke 2007; Cannell 2005) it is worth remembering that at the very core of definitional concerns relating to religion is the difficulty in relating the semiotic ideologies essential to religious intentionality and the materiality of religious organization. Even Weber, in setting down to establish the internal workings of religion (Weber 1978 [1922]), was faced with a number of difficult dichotomies, dominant of which is that of the material and immaterial. For example, even in determining the nature of the most “basic” form of religiosity, animistic worship, we find him struggling with the visible and invisible, the real and unreal, the seen and unseen, the symbolic and the natural, the concrete object and so forth,

“This is not the place to treat extensively the diversity of possible relationships between spiritual beings and the objects behind which they lurk and with which they are somehow connected. These spirits or souls may “dwell” more or less continuously and exclusively near or within a concrete object or process”. But on the other hand, they may somehow “possess” types of events, things, or categories thereof, the behavior and efficacy of which they will decisively determine. These and similar views are properly called animistic. The spirits may temporarily “incorporate” themselves into things, plants, animals, or people; this is a further stage of abstraction, which is scarcely ever maintained consistently, spirits may be regarded as invisible essences that follow their own laws, and are merely “symbolized by” concrete objects” (Weber 1978 [1922]: 402)

The organizational aspect of Christianity is similarly difficult to situate in terms of materiality. Are the institutional aspects of Christianity here to be seen as the material forms of religious intentionality? The result of religious practices? Or indeed determining of those religious practices? Each of these narratives have their proponents, however in each the material organizational forms (arguably perfected in the religious corporation) delineates the two. But

while the religious and the corporate might appear to be strange bedfellows,²⁰ it is perhaps better to view them not as two distinct forms, but rather view the religious corporation as the simply the attempt at a generic form, or template of Christianity. Rather than view the (often irreligious looking to be sure) instrumentality that is visible in the employment of the corporate form, whether by the state or religious actors themselves, the generic²¹ always enables itself to be appropriated to different ends. But for all the usefulness of the generic form, it nevertheless reveals a tension, if indeed a threat to ideologies of value. In its ability to circulate widely, and in its universality, the generic always threatens to divide form from content, and for the religious congregation, no such thing can be possible. For the plural face of Christian denominationalism belies the fact that Christian alterity can only ever be temporary. Doctrinally, and divinely, there should necessarily be a generic Christian form. But there is. And in this instance, it is the corporation.

Conclusion

In Bataan, churches continue to change hands, mostly outside of a legal setting. In 2013, the UMC believed that after losing approximately half of their churches to AIMP, churches were beginning to return to the UMC fold, through “both legal and physical means”, which is to say, both AIMP and UMC supporters are still involved in threatening each other, stealing and barricading property. Also, a publicity campaign by both sides is in full swing,

²⁰ Although note the literature on the role of religious societies in the development of the modern corporation (Davis 1905; Berle and Means 1932).

²¹ Whether actual material objects or relational interactions of the generic (Fehervary 2013 , Moore 2003).

with public talks, pamphlets, door-to-door calling and of course speeches from the pulpit, that attempt to sway congregants in their support. Both sides accuse each other of underhandedness and criminality. By all accounts, for all Methodists in Bataan, their worship is entirely colored by the schism.

This is not the case in Occ. Mindoro, where for the most part UMC congregants have little to no knowledge of the schism whatsoever. It is a discourse that is occurring only at the level of administration. Indeed, the anti-autonomy leaders in the UMC in Occ. Mindoro accuse the pro-autonomy leaders of keeping the matter secret and not opening up the conversation to include everyone involved in the church. During my fieldwork in Occ. Mindoro, pastors never appeared as emotionally invested in the schism as their counterparts in Bataan, Palawan, and particularly at the UMC headquarters in Manila. My visits to the headquarters always ended up in conversations with pastors and administrative assistants to the bishops where they became quite angry at Tangonan and AIMP. During one visit, as I sat with Bishop Arichea's assistant (formerly Tangonan's and a long-term pastor himself) in the Bishop's office, I told him that it seemed to be far calmer in Mindoro. He laughed and said that it just looked differently in Mindoro, "It all happens at such high levels there. It always did. There's five or six very powerful people there, mostly lay leaders, that control everything." "The Small Gods of Mindoro," he said, "they believe they control everything. We can never tell what will happen there. Did you know that the pastor who incorporated AIMP was a pastor in Mindoro? He left the UMC, signed the incorporation papers, became a founding member of AIMP's Board of Trustees, and then returned to the UMC. It makes no sense there in Mindoro." He laughed again and said if I wanted to really know how upset people here were at Tangonan, to follow him. He jumped up and walked quickly into the

boardroom, where on the back wall photos of all the bishops, present and former, were hung. “Look”, he said at the evident gap between the photos where only a nail and a dusty outline of a frame remained, “however many times they put the photo of Tangonan back, someone else takes it down...for a while they used to turn it around and have him face the wall, but now they just take it down.”

Nevertheless, it did appear that Mindoro had escaped the chaos of the schism, and after the Central Conference in December 2012 voted down a resolution for autonomy, it did not look like SWPAC itself would move to leave the UMC. This turned out not to be the case however. For almost thirty years, a Korean UMC pastor, Pastor Yu, has lived and worked in Mindoro. Having been a church pastor for many years in Oriental Mindoro, more recently he has worked specifically as a missionary on the island. Fluent in Tagalog and dedicated to Methodism in the Philippines, he has been remarkably successful in raising money from the Korean Methodist Church (KMC) for the UMC in Occ. Mindoro. In 2010 he secured money from the KMC to build a church in the north of the island, and in early 2012, building began on a second church. In September 2012, Pastor Yu and four other UMC pastors, the Good Shepherd choir and youth fellowship, some lay leaders and five visitors from the Korean Methodist Church stocked up a hired bus with air fans, a new drum kit, and other items for the new church about two hours from San Jose in the foothills of the mountains to celebrate with a church blessing. However, as the rains grew too heavy and the roads flooded, we had to stop. The Korean visitors huddled together under the covering of gas station as the bus driver and pastors discussed whether they could proceed or not. For over an hour, the Koreans stood there looking outwards into the rain and muddy roads, rolling up their pants and pointing with aghast at the rats running away from the flooding and into the rice fields on each side of the

road. We turned around and the blessing for the new church was rescheduled. Within a year, in May 2013, the church that the Korean visitors paid for but did not get to see, became the first church in Occ. Mindoro to leave the UMC and join AIMP. The Korean Methodist Church has demanded legal recompense.

I move away now from the specificities of denominational conflict and matters of affiliation, and turn instead to a Bible translation workshop in Oriental Mindoro, in which the Bible was translated in a number of Mangyan languages. Perhaps the most important and difficult issue for Christians engaged in this religious milieu in which Christian plurality is increasingly foregrounded is coupling the universality of Christian meaning and mediation with the particularities and divisions of congregational identities. While these problems of mediation are evident in the organizational forms of Christianity, as discussed in the chapters thus far, it is possible to see these problems clarified in work of translation, in which language itself becomes the ground upon which the perfection of divine mediation is sought. As I have noted, the logistics and organization of Christian practice continuously highlights the role of language, whether it is for the purposes of the legal articulation of a congregation, or the successful conversion of Catholics or indeed “non-Christians.” Through an examination of the work of Bible translation, we can see how the concept of Christian universality, and the mediation of a divine presence, through language, are made explicit. If the concept of universality is at play in Catholicism’s dominance of religious categories and experience in Mindoro, and likewise in the corporate form of religious organization discussed in Chapter 4, it is perhaps clarified most distinctly in terms of eliciting the divine language of the Bible itself.

Chapter 5

Bible Translation, the “Generic,” and the Search for Pure Language

“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” *Zephaniah 3:9*

Introduction

The “olive and mango” problem, as one Philippine Bible translator put it to me, is the old but enduring problematic of language equivalency within Bible translation. How does one translate *olive*, mentioned throughout the Bible, in cultural settings in which there are no olives? Does one leave the term untranslated and maintain fidelity to the original biblical texts, or does one find a similar object-concept and indexical modality in the target language but one that is not mentioned in the source texts? For the indigenous Mangyan groups on the island of Mindoro in the Philippines, unsurprisingly the lexical item “olive” and the tree itself have little in the way of denotational or connotational value, unlike its material and symbolic role in biblical societies¹. Should one then view the Bible not as a text bound by the

¹ Of course, most modern Christians do not live within the geographical confines of Biblical societies. However, while the olive might similarly exist outside of, for example, a Scandinavians milieu of connotational value, the historical relationship with multiple translations of the Bible have undoubtedly lent the term (and object) a locatable symbolic value.

specificities of its language but rather as a repository of sacred meaning that reaches beyond language?

This dilemma in perpetuum is often framed by translators as one of literalism over context (or “formal equivalence” (literal) versus “dynamic equivalence” or “functional equivalence” (contextualized)) (Nida 1964; Carson 2009)². Whether one’s fidelity should be to the most literal rendering of the source text into the target language, or whether one should try to capture a more contextualized linguistic form and “meaning,” is an ever-present tension in Bible translation. An attempt at a denotational correspondence comes with the underlying expectation of a certain symmetry between the source and target languages, and stands in contrast to translation projects that attend to the complex and multiple indexical modalities that form a broader semiotic rendering of the text. Which one should be privileged, of course, depends on nothing less than the role one assigns to the underlying relationship between language and God. For Christian translators, the question thus arises: Does God have a language, or is he forever mediated by it?³

In this chapter, I discuss the practices of SIL Bible translation in Oriental Mindoro in the Philippines.⁴ Twice a year, approximately ten Christian members of three ethnolinguistically distinct Mangyan groups travel from the mountains to the lowlands of

² As Carson (2009) notes, while translation theories in English have diverged in the last two decades from dynamic or functional equivalence, more recently moving towards an incorporation of “relevance theory” and cognitive linguistics (for example the work of Dan Sperber (2002; 1997), for Bible translators working among language groups that have no history of Bible translation, this theory of dynamic equivalence has remained the guiding and foundational approach to translation.

³ Arguably one of the most fruitful lines of study in recent anthropological work on Christianity has dealt with the mediation of God through language. The work of Coleman (2000), Keane (2008; 1997), Engelke (2007), Robbins (2001; 2004), and Harkness (2013) are of particular note.

⁴ SIL International (formerly the Summer Institute of linguistics) and its US based sister organization Wycliffe Bible Translators are together the world’s largest non-profit Christian NGO that translates Christian literature, particularly the Bible, into languages that have no history of such literature. It is their stated intention to aid Christian missions by providing a Bible in all spoken languages.

Mindoro where for a month they work with an equal number of Christian linguists, translators and missionaries to translate the Bible into the Hanunoo, Western Tawbuid and Eastern Tawbuid languages.⁵ In the first part of the chapter I examine the dilemmas Christian translators face in their work, and how the practice of translation reveals underlying sets of Christian ideologies regarding the commensurability of linguistic forms that move far beyond claims of vernacular and grammatical correctness. I argue that the source-to-target directionality in Bible translation is complicated both by the day-to-day practices of translation and the underlying questions concerning the authorship of the Bible itself. The theopneustic⁶ aspect of the Bible as source-text and the determinations of the degree to which the actual linguistic forms in the scriptures are divinely inspired often play out as an irresolvable problem for Bible translators. To this end, I discuss the means through which the Holy Spirit is taken as an essential mediator between the fallible work of Christian translators and the Bible as a language-instantiated form of God's presence. It is this role the Holy Spirit occupies as language mediator that reconstitutes how language is seen to communicate the universality of the Holy Word.

In the second part of the chapter, I take up the work of Eugene Nida, arguably the most influential translation theorist for SIL translators in Mindoro, and discuss the issue of "generic" language. In particular, I focus on the use of denotatively "generic" terms as a translative and ideological tool. I propose that rather than viewing claims of "generic" language as implicitly stating that there exists language merely stripped of specificity, the

⁵ There has never previously existed a full Bible in these languages, although by 2009 the New Testament in each language had been completed. Additionally, these translators are working on a new Tagalog translation of the Bible.

⁶ That is, directly inspired by God. As I discuss later in this chapter, the degree to which biblical language, as source text, is inspired or authored by the Holy Spirit, has not only been a contentious issue (Price 2009) but one that is central to how the practice of Bible translation itself is understood.

generic can instead be seen as a site in which multiple and often conflicting claims of universality and purity are at play. Moreover, the concept of generic language may be seen as implicated in ideas of text circulation and conversion. I look at how for Christians the unique form of divine (co-)authorship of the Bible leads to an intertextual and semiotic break between the translative process as evidenced by the workshop, and how that text is subsequently taken up by the intended readers, in this case by Mangyan Christians. Although translators often express their goal as one of recension and of rendering a text that is linguistically and socially embedded within the “target” (or receptor) culture, their translation work is also an attempt to purify and dislocate the biblical text from any and all cultural specificity, thus enabling it to exist and circulate as a universal text. Ultimately, I argue that the use of generic language by translators is an earthly attempt to mirror, and indeed enable, the universality and circulation of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration in language. In this manner, I suggest the concept of generic language has been neglected by language analysts as an ideological site of interest as it plays an important role in how we understand the relational values assigned by the reader to text.

Translating Christianity

Anthropologists have long sought to locate projects of translation in a wider set of social and intertextual practices, with the work of Benjamin (1998) and Bakhtin (1992, 1986) serving as important cornerstones of the literature. Additionally, there have been moves both toward and away from viewing social forms and practices of sociality in terms of “translation” itself (Asad 1986; Clifford 1982). Because the work of Bible translation has so often occurred within settings of Christian missionization and colonialism, it has been to those

settings that scholars have looked in order to elucidate the broader complexities of translation practices (for example, Keane 2007; Hanks 2010; Jolly 1996). While we may view these translation practices intrinsic to Christian missionary work as embedded in large-scale projects of social and religious change, perhaps the most fruitful aspect of this literature has been a focus on how translation practices themselves have effected change in the “target” languages and cultures (Brodwin 2003; Rafael 1988; Schieffelin 2007). For example, Matt Tomlinson (2006) has shown how Methodist translators were responsible for shifts in the meaning of *mana*. As he notes, “Besides nominalizing ‘mana’ in the Bible, Methodist missionaries reconfigured people’s imaginations about the invisible world, placing Jehovah atop the pantheon of gods and displacing ancestral spirits into the realm of ‘devils’ and ‘demons.’ In doing so, they rendered the invisible sources of earthly power both more remote and potentially more dangerous. Missionaries, in short, reshaped ideas about the potential for effective human action” (Tomlinson 2006: 179). Likewise, Bambi Schieffelin (2007) has argued that unlike the structured and fixed nature of certain missionary-dictated Christian practices in Bosavi, the practices of Bible translation were instead “unstable [and] heteroglossic” and resulted in “hybridized, translocated, and dislocated language forms and practices” that substantially transformed local vernaculars (Schieffelin 2007: 140, 145). As this literature shows, whatever the specific theories of translation at play, Christian translation practices engage ideologies of language as both prescription and proscription (Keane 1997, Rafael 1988). Additionally, there is the important though understudied facet of how the practice, or indeed event, of Bible translation itself is taken up in the receptor cultures (Handman 2010; Rutherford 2007). Throughout this literature we find the irresolution between ideas of universality intrinsic to Christian doctrine coupled with the missionary need

to work through vernaculars foregrounded in the work of Bible translation. And it is in this tension between the vernacular and the universals of Christianity that we see a distinct discourse related to the purity of language emerge.

The Workshop

The Bible translation workshop in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro was funded primarily by SIL International and Wycliffe Translations and occurred in Calapan due to the presence in the town of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), a non-denominational Protestant missionary organization. The headquarters of the Philippine (and Southeast Asian) OMF was established in Calapan in the 1950s, with a large American-styled house built on a hill overlooking the ocean. While the OMF is now considerably smaller than in its heyday in the late 1960s, the house in Calapan remains the primary center of the OMF's work in Mindoro. Moreover, the early work of the OMF is still visible as a large swathe of the Mangyan population that is located in the mountains on the north of the island (where Calapan is) has been Christianized along Baptist and evangelical lines. The OMF missionaries were some of the first to begin translations of a Christian literature into Mangyan languages (Davis 1998) and by the 1970s New Testament translations had begun.

With Western-styled gardens, a fully staffed kitchen serving Euro-American food (freshly baked whole wheat bread, milk, butter, honey and black tea—all items one would be hard put to find in most parts of the Philippines), and a library that ranges from Christian literature and linguistic work on Filipino languages to John Grisham novels, there is a missionary-colonial feel to the OMF grounds. Aside from being the OMF headquarters, the house is also something of a B&B for Christian pastors and missionaries travelling across the

island. The OMF provided housing for the translators in the main house and a smaller house on the grounds, as well as the space for the workshop itself, which was held in a nearby Mangyan school and dormitory built by the OMF in the 1970s and 1980s where the Mangyan translators also stayed.⁷

The Bible Workshop was headed by a Wycliffe translator named Samuel. In his sixties, short and Minnesotan, Samuel exploded with energy in every activity he engaged in and moved between every translation. Having lived in the Philippines for over thirty years, he had worked as a Bible translator his entire adult life with SIL and Wycliffe. Married to a Filipina, Marianne, also a translator, he spoke over six Filipino languages and was the only translator at the workshop who had near fluent Hebrew and Greek. In this regard, he directed all three translations, both ideologically and practically (he often cast the final decision on word choice, for instance). An American couple, Louis and Annie, both PhDs in linguistics and professional Bible translators in their fifties, although not officially affiliated with SIL or Wycliffe, worked on the Eastern Tawbuid and Hanunoo translations. Arthur, a former English OMF missionary who with had lived for over a decade among the Taubuid groups in Occidental Mindoro, also joined the workshop. Although he was no longer a missionary he was the only English speaker fluent in Western Tawbuid.

A usual morning of the workshop would proceed by us having breakfast together in the OMF house before going to the workshop at the Mangyan school, some people walking, some cycling and some taking tricycles. Those in tricycles would carry the eight large SIL

⁷ While this separation of the American (and European) translators and the Mangyan native speakers in living arrangements suggests a spatial assertion of common missionary/native tropes of preferentiality and disparity of treatment, I am wary to make such a claim in this setting. There are numerous and varying reasons why the Mangyan remain separate from the translators throughout the workshop, including the desire to cook their own food as well as privacy.

laptops. The laptops were laid out along the three long tables and benches that each group huddled about, shaded by a concrete awning. After a prayer and the singing of two or three Christian songs in Tagalog and Mangyan languages, translation would begin at 8am sharp, break for lunch and finish at 5pm. This was the routine six days a week, except on Saturdays when translation finished at 1pm.

Mediating Fidelity

I want to focus here on some typical aspects of the translation practices that took place while working on the Hanunoo texts to show how the problem of fidelity was ever-present. While SIL translators in general aim for “dynamic” or “functional” rather than literal or “formal” translations, nevertheless matters of fidelity consistently arise. During the workshop, Annie, one of the American translators, worked with Cora, a young Hanunoo woman in her early twenties. While Cora grew up in a Hanunoo village, she received her schooling in the lowlands of Oriental Mindoro, was fluent in Tagalog and Hanunoo, and had a reasonable grasp of English. As with the other languages, the New Testament in Hanunoo had been completed, and the translators were presently working on the Old Testament. Over the course of four years, five people had drafted twenty-eight of the Old Testament books. Ten books had been drafted in the late 1980s, but it was agreed by all that these were so badly done that they needed to be redrafted entirely. Annie herself was competent in Tagalog, but had little if any Hanunoo.

Annie and Cora sat together at one of the long tables, each with a laptop with the SIL *Paratext*® software. This software enables one to simultaneously view a verse in numerous Bible editions, as well as displaying the original Hebrew and Greek together with a gloss in

English⁸. The actual Hanunoo draft contained notes and suggested revisions by different translators who have previously worked on the text. Each translator had their own favorite translation to which they often looked. Annie favored the *New Living Translation (NLT)*, although she noted that it is far from a literal translation and its use is limited to a broad directing influence.

Annie had the Hanunoo verses organized vertically on the screen, with two Tagalog translations, the Ilonggo, three literal English (formal equivalence) and three meaning (dynamic or functional equivalence) based translations, and some explanatory notes, but no Hebrew or Greek. Cora's screen had a similar screen setup although the Tagalog translations were understandably more prominent than the English. Everyone at the workshop agreed that the Hanunoo was by far the easiest to translate (after the Tagalog). The draft was good, the Hanunoo translators were more practiced, and as a result they often sped through a book of the Bible in perhaps one or two days. The Eastern Tawbuid men working as translators were not nearly as comfortable with English or Tagalog as their Hanunoo counterparts, nor were they with the process of translation overall. As a result, the Eastern Tawbuid translation was much slower and it could take an entire month with five people working together to complete some basic edits to a book, with sometimes as little as six or seven verses taking up the entire day.

On this day, Annie and Cora began with Proverbs 21, and looked at the Hanunoo draft already entered into Paratext®:

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord like channels of water; he turns it wherever he wants (*New English Translation [NET] 2005*).

⁸ Translators usually chose to have eight or so different translations in front of them but would closely look at two or three at a time.

Ti kaisipan manga hari parihu sa sapa pag-amparahun PANINUUN kay pagbulus inda.
The mind of[a] king same to river of control LORD to flow it

Pag-amparahun niya inda angay sa kay kagustahan (Hanunoo Draft Translation 2013).⁹¹⁰
Control his flow now to his wanting.

Annie looked to Cora, who read it silently and then read the English and Tagalog versions *Ang Magandang Balita (AMB)* and *Ang Salita ng Dios (ASND)*, looked back to the Hanunoo, nodded that it was good and that there was no need for any changes.

Proverbs 21:1 was easy, with Cora making no suggestions to alter the draft. If Annie was unsure, she would usually ask Cora to translate the verse into Tagalog, and if Annie agreed that the Tagalog aligned with her view of the verse, they would move on to the next. Neither Annie nor Cora was a native Tagalog speaker. However, if Annie saw that Cora was entirely certain of the Hanunoo, she would often move on to the next verse without asking for a rendering in Tagalog. It is important to note here is that while Cora had good conversational English, she herself tended to look to the Tagalog translations on the screen without paying too much attention to the English versions, unlike Annie who would do the opposite.

Proverbs 21.2

All of a person's ways seem right in his own opinion, but the Lord evaluates the motives

⁹ Compare to a formal/literal version, *New English Translation [NET]*, what Annie called "extreme form based, and clunky though reliable." While I also include the *NET* translation in-text, I include here the other Bible translations that the translators were using.

NET: The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord like channels of water; he turns it wherever he wants.

CEV: The Lord controls rulers, just as he determines the course of rivers.

TEV: The Lord controls the mind of a king as easily as he directs the course of a stream.

KJV: The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

ASND: (note the similarity, even on a lexico-semantic level, between Tagalog and Hanunoo) Kayang hawakan ng PANGINOON ang isipan ng hari na gaya ng isang ilog pinaagos niya ito saan man niya naisin.

AMB: Hawak ni Yahweh ang isip ng isang hari at naibabaling niya ito kung saan igawi.

¹⁰ I appreciate the difficulty and indeed irony here in providing an English gloss for the Hanunoo in a piece that is concerned with the problems of a semiotic mediation of language through translation practices. Although I received help with glosses from translators at the Mindoro workshop, I am ultimately responsible for the English gloss provided here.

(*New English Translation* 2005).

Mahimu mag-isip kita hustu yi gid ti tanan nita pagbuwatan, dapat ti
PANGINUUN
Owner think you(pl.) correct already very the every we actions , but the LORD

lang ti makahatul nu unu gid kanta pag-isipun (Hanunoo Draft Translation 2013).¹¹
only the to judge upstanding if what very our thoughts/contemplation

When Cora translated this into Tagalog for Annie, Annie was unhappy with *pag-isipun*. Annie would have easily recognized the root *isip* from Tagalog, and she would have understood it as being close to *pagisipan* (contemplation) and *pag-iisip* (the mind). She stopped Cora and they began looking to the English, Hilagaynon (Ilonggo), and Tagalog translations. Cora recalled that the verse was very similar to Proverbs 16:2, and they looked back to that also (*Mahimu mag-isip kita hustu yi gid ti tanan nita pagbuwatan, dapat ti PANGINUUN lang ti makahatul nu unu gid kanta pagkaibgan* (Pr. 16:2)). Here *pag-isipun* was not used for what was the same Hebrew term, but instead *pagkaibgan*, again very similar to the Tagalog word for friendship, *pagkakaibigan* (however in older Tagalog the root *kaibigan* was also connected to meanings associated with *inclination*). The Hiligaynon (Ilonggo) translation previously completed by Samuel and his team used *motibo*, which could be more easily glossed as motivation. As one can see from the English and Tagalog translations (see note 6), *heart* and the Tagalog equivalent *puso* are commonly used. But as Hanunoo see no metaphorical connection between heart and moral integrity, they chose to take a more “literal” stance in this case. But Annie did not view this simply in matters literal and figurative. She also viewed the stripping away of

¹¹ *NET*: All of a person’s ways seem right in his own opinion, but the Lord evaluates the motives.
CET: We may think we are doing the right thing, but the Lord always know what is in our hearts.
TEV: You may think that everything you do is right, but remember that the Lord judges your motives.
KJV: Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.
AMB: Ang akala ng tao lahat ng kilos niya’y wasto, ngunit si Yahweh lang ang nakakasaliksik ng puso.
ASND: Inaakala ng tao na tama ang lahat ng kanyang ginagawa ngunit puso nila’y sinasaliksik ng PANGINOON.

the *heart* trope as moving towards a position of the generic. That is, the trope in this context was understood as added specificity. I will return to this later, but one can see even here how the concept of generic is not only at play, but for purposes other than ones of (non-)specificity. In this instance the generic became synonymous with “literal.” In the end Cora and Annie decided on *pagkaibgan* (friendship).

Some thirty minutes later, Annie found herself frustrated with Proverbs 21:10, and had difficulty in explaining to Cora her issue with the subject/object perspective.

Proverbs 21:10

The appetite of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor is shown no favor in his eyes (*New English Translation* 2005).

Ti manga daut pag tawu magkaibug lang gid pirmi magbuwat daut
 The of(a) bad/evil of person want/desire only/just very always actions bad

unman sida magkaawa sa kanda kaparihu (Hanunoo Translation 2013).¹²
 no them pity/pitiful to them both/each other/neighbor

The problem here for Annie was the difference in perspective between different translations. This was important to her. For her, there was an essential difference between, for example, the *CEV* “Evil people want to do wrong, even to their friends” and the *KJV* “The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbor findeth no favour in his eyes”. Was the verse to be understood from the perspective of the wicked/evil people, or from the neighbor? Annie wanted the verse to emphasize the point that the neighbor shall receive, in a general manner, no pity from the evil person, and not that the evil person, as in the *CEV*, desires to do evil

¹² *NET*: The appetite of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor is shown no favor in his eyes.

CEV: Evil people want to do wrong, even to their friends.

TEV: Wicked people are always hungry for evil; they have no mercy on anyone.

KJV: The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.

AMB: Ang isip ng masama'y lagi sa kalikuan, kahit na kanino'y walang pakundangan.

ASND: Gawain ng taong masama ay lagging masama at sa kanyang kapwa'y wala siyang awa.

upon his neighbor. However, Cora was not sure what she meant. Annie admitted that the English translations were somewhat evenly split on the matter of perspective here, but warned of the appearance of an equal ratio. Often, she noted, even new translations will follow older versions, so the decision might only have been made once. In this sense, she said, there is an element of “telephone” or “herd mentality” about Bible translation. Thus, it can often look like there are more versions than there really are. After trying to explain to Cora the differences in her opinions of the various texts, Cora suggested:

Ti daut tawu unman may miawat sa kay kapirihin.
 The evil person not/does not there exists no help/favor to towards the other.

But Annie again found problematic the direction inherent to *sa kay kapirihin*, which locates the evil person (*daut tawu*) as the subject. Cora again had trouble understanding her.

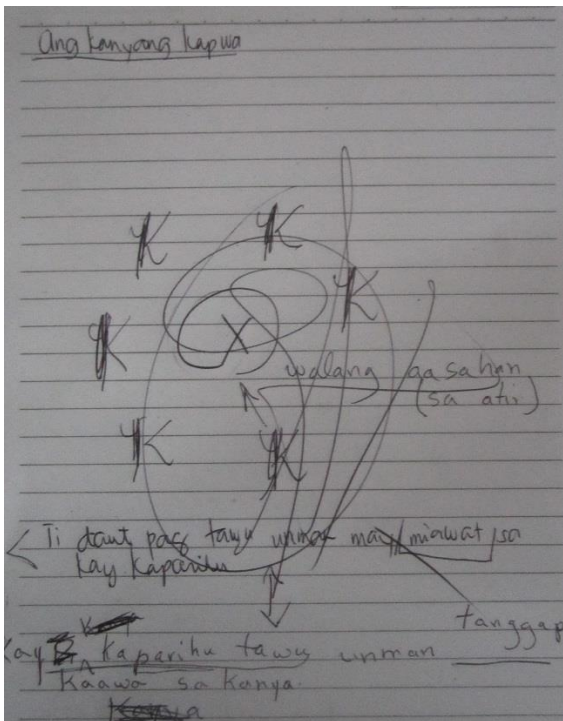


Figure 5.1. Translation notes, between Annie and Cora

Annie began drawing on a notepad K's (for *kapwa*, neighbor/other) and X (for the evil

doer), trying to explain to Cora the directionality she wanted in the sentence. One can see in Fig. 1 that at the top is written *Ang Kanyang Kapwa* which is itself a difficult term to translate as the common term for neighbor in Tagalog, *kapitbahay*, is more literal in its meaning, signifying “next-house.” *Walang aasahan (sa ati)* might be best glossed as *not to expect (they)*. Again, one can see Annie’s attempt to shift the perspective. Likewise, Annie wrote out *Kay* [inserted *kanya* later but subsequently removed it] *kaparihu tawu unman _____ kaawa sa kanya*. Annie then suggested *tanggap* (to receive) for the blank space, to which Cora replied that it was the same. Annie disagreed, but it was to no avail, and Cora once again repeated *ti daut tawu unman may miawat sa kay kapirihin*, maintaining the evil doer as the subject focus. And thus, after twenty minutes, the original draft suggestion remained in place and they moved on to the next verse.

We can see in the interaction between Annie and Cora how there is an opposition in translative fidelity: Annie’s fidelity to the biblical text, and Cora’s fidelity to the Hanunoo language. Indeed this opposition is repeated again and again throughout all the translations at the workshop. While this maps easily enough onto a source-to-target type of translative mediation, I suggest here that these fidelities (to biblical text exegesis and language) —and indeed source and target themselves— are instead cover for a far more complex and competing set of ideas concerning translation. Among these are universal, generic, and pure forms of language, commensurability of linguistic forms (in these cases lexical and semantic, but also grammatical forms such as parallelism), and perhaps the more overarching issue of biblical authorship and inspiration. Cora was concerned throughout with an idea of “natural” Hanunoo language. Of course this is unsurprising; her participation in the workshop was itself undertaken to make sure that the text read and sounded “right”.

Yet even when the overarching goal was to achieve a vernacular Bible, the translation practices often presented conflicting ideologies of fidelity and naturalness. Cora's sense of "natural" language was only applicable to the extent that it did not contradict fidelity to the biblical text. In Annie's discussions concerning fidelity to the original intention of the scriptures, she would often speak of the universality of a biblical language, even as she sought to transform that universality into specific vernaculars. On one level this was obviously a conflict. But it also speaks to the nature of the divinely inspired word, and the view of the Bible as having a communicative universality outside its specific vernacular instantiations (Handman 2010; Rutherford 2007). That is, the biblical meaning is universal in that it transcends cultural specificity. While this line of thought is most often pursued by Christians in terms of the universality of Christian practice, it is also an issue that shines a light on the translative nature of biblical language itself.

Purity of Language

One problem of translation often revolves around the nature of the "original" biblical texts, the autographa. If these are (co-)authored by God, or divinely inspired, are translations similarly so? In addressing this problematic, the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978) has become a foundational document for North American Evangelical Christian views on the role of divine inspiration in the writing of the Bible (Allert 1999), and one that many Philippine Protestant groups also accept. Emanating from heated debates and discord among evangelical Christians in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Chicago Statement* was designed to be the preeminent and unifying expression among Christians believing in the inerrancy of the Bible. However, the document itself, in discussing the inerrancy of the scriptures, tackles the matter

of language and form in an interesting manner. For example,

“So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed... Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed. Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.”(CSBI 1978)

This “different sort of action” for the translators in Mindoro would be in keeping with their view of “dynamic equivalence” (Nida 2002, 1964). They view their work as applying scriptural meaning into another language, which no doubt muddies the view of what scriptural language itself entails. Indeed, while viewed in the context of the debates concerning biblical inerrancy in the 1970s, the *Chicago Statement* clarifies much, it is another matter entirely when the practice of translation is tackled. The *Chicago Statement* notes that “no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa”, but also that “no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader ‘wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim. 3:15)” (CSBI 1978). Are we then to assume that every translation destroys at least some meaning? This is a matter that many Christians, including those I discussed the matter with in the

Philippines, felt ambiguous about. While most Christians agree that translations are not inerrant, at the same time they do not view a translated Bible as a mistranslation. Rather Bible translation is viewed as an ongoing project that attempts to align language most closely with God's inspiration, or indeed God's language. In this manner it is always a project in becoming, never achieving. The language of translation approaches but never becomes God. Or put another way, God is the Word but not the translated word. For the Bible translators in Calapan, there was a difference in what was determined to be *equivalency*, and in what might be described as *commensurability*. While they aimed for equivalency of translation between source and target languages, this was not to say that they saw the original biblical language in the texts as commensurable to the Mangyan languages (or English or French etc.), as that was the inerrant language of God. The original language of the autographa were inspired while the Mangyan Bible texts were not, nor would any translation be. In this sense, as we have seen, equivalency entails something of a decoupling of the idea of language from meaning. At the same time, however, the translators as Christians, saw their work as being led by the Holy Spirit. The work of translation itself was inspired, if not the language.

Searching for Equivalence

Five years ago a translation committee had been formed to agree on the approach to the Old Testament translation. This committee, consisting of the publishers, the translators and the Christian elders from Hanunoo tribes, agreed on the tone and style, as well as some explicit issues that inevitably arise in each translation such as the use of Yaweh, Jehovah and the capitalized LORD, the inclusion or exclusion of the Deuterocanonical for Catholic worship (excluded in these translations), and whether to attempt a more poetic and rhyming

rendition of the Psalms. For these Bibles, they chose a more vernacular rendering. All of this was consistent with SIL approaches to Bible translation. While dynamic and formal equivalency were the terms most often discussed by Arthur, the head translator, and the other translators, as Courtney Handman has noted, the cornerstone of the SIL translation methodology is the concept of “heart language” (Handman 2007). This concept captures well both the approach to translation and the desired end product. Not only does “heart language” refer to the native first language of a person but also to the manner in which the Bible and God’s word should be communicated to a person.¹³ In this sense, language not only conveys meaning but the inspiration of God. Over lunch one afternoon, Arthur spoke to the translators of wanting the Bible to be for the Mangyan what the Bible was for its original readers, echoing Nida. In effect, this was his argument for moving away from a formal or literal translation. He was “pro-mango” as it were, and saw little point in producing a translation that was in a native language but still not meaningful in that native culture. At the same time, he was wary of diluting the inspired word of God and felt constrained in how far he could shift such indexical modalities across languages.

Indeed, while it had been agreed by the committee that these translations (Hanunoo, Eastern and Western Tawbuid) should be “original” translations (that is, from the original Hebrew and Greek), in practice they aimed to have a text, in terms of form and style, that fell somewhere between the *New International Version (NIV)* and *Today’s English Version (TEV)*, otherwise known as the *Good News Bible*. However, there was some confusion over the “original” nature to the translations. Some translators at the workshop claimed they were

¹³ Although as Handman notes, the SIL prioritizes language groups over speakers; an interesting alignment of the Christian emphasis on individual salvation and relationship to the Bible with a translators emphasis on groups and populations (Handman 2007: 173-177).

undertaking original translations while others informed me that the first drafts were from Tagalog for Eastern and Western Tawbuid, and from Hiligaynon (or Ilonggo) for the Hanunoo. The difference in thinking here, I suspect, was a difference in definition of what an “original” or “new” translation entailed. It seems a number of the translators, particularly Samuel, had been involved in a “new” translation into Hiligaynon and Tagalog, and that these were the bases for the Mangyan translations. Thus he saw the Mangyan translations as a continuation of those first translations. This mediation between multiple languages, both in terms of this issue concerning originality and the SIL Paratext® software, not only obscures the directionality that underlies the translation process from source-to-target, but also how the language of the autographa are comparable to the language of translation.

Eugene Nida, Meaning and Form

For SIL and the other translators at the Calapan translation workshop the work of Eugene Nida (2002, 1975, 1966, 1964) dominated their ideologies of translation. It was Nida who coined the term “dynamic equivalence” and sought to promote dynamic equivalent translations among Christian missionaries and translators. Simply stated, Nida promoted a view of texts as objects that attain meaning most fundamentally through their relationship to the broader culture and language in which they exist, where “translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style” (1975).¹⁴ Thus, he argued against a formal lexical and

¹⁴ Nida actually used Hiligaynon as an example for the preference of a dynamic equivalent translation, “It is assumed by many people that the repetition of a word will make the meaning more emphatic, but this is not always the case. For example, in Hiligaynon (and a number of other Philippine languages), the very opposite is true. Accordingly, one cannot translate “Truly, truly, I say to you,” for to say “truly, truly” in Hiligaynon would really mean “perhaps,” while saying “truly” once is actually the Bible equivalent.” (Nida 1966: 12)

semantic mapping of texts from source to target languages, and instead sought to focus on the reception of the meaning in the target language. However underlying this view of language and translation remains the universality of the biblical message. Nida wrote often of the universality of biblical concepts such as God, prayer, saint, patience, forgiveness, and so forth (1966). It is the problematic of language, not of message, that for Nida assumed prominence. As Birgit Meyer has pointed out, “Although [Nida] is aware of the fact that meaning might be changed through translation, his purpose is to achieve translations that mirror the original meaning as closely as possible. For him, transformation of meaning is a problem that should be reduced to a minimum, rather than an unavoidable to be studied” (1999: 80). While one might argue that the problem of equivalency between languages is indeed true of all translation projects (thus the ubiquity of statements such as “well one really ought to read Thomas Mann in the original German” etc.) the issue of equivalency, and commensurability, of linguistic forms is not only heightened but fundamentally irresolvable when one text is divinely inspired and the other is not. The relationship between meaning and the language of the divinely inspired text, in this case the autographa, simply cannot be transposed into another linguistic context. It is more than a problem of denotational or connotational equivalency.

However, Nida would not necessarily have agreed with this view and instead in his theory of biblical translation he pursued a decoupling of meaning from form. For him, a dynamic equivalent translation entailed the mapping of concepts (or of meaning rather than form) (Nida 2002) that are intrinsically extractable from the source texts and communicable across cultures. But, as he would be the first to admit, such a project is inordinately difficult to achieve. This is visible even on a lexical plane. For example, in the draft of the Tagalog (*Ang*

Salita ng Dios (ASND)) Psalm 71: 3, the issue arose as to how to translate *command[ment]*. The draft contained *niloob* but *ipag-utos* and *ginusto* were also suggested. While the terms might very well be glossed as commanded or commandment, the difficulty was that *ipag-gusto* has connotations of a more military-style order whereas the translators preferred a broader view of command and commandment that they believed was the intention in the Hebrew. Or, for Psalm 71:10, the matter of whispering was discussed and proved problematic. The draft contained *nag-uusap-usap*, which may be glossed as to talk or discuss. As one of the translators noted, “we should use whisper [*nagbubulungan*] but in Tagalog it doesn’t have...whispering in English can be associated with being poetic and secretive, but not in Tagalog.”

In the Eastern Tawbuid translation, it is possible to see that even single lexical items raise much broader issues of a semiotic nature concerning not only translation but the indexical properties of lexical items as related to basic religious stances. Nida argued that this is how translation should work (Nida 2002, 1964). In his reckoning, translators remain oddly neutral in their stance towards their own language and the target language. Not only do source and target languages become necessarily equivalent (admittedly with problems), but the translative process is inherently intermediate and productive of no new semiotic form. But this is clearly not the case. For example, in the translation of Psalm 34:7 in Eastern Tawbuid, the term for *fear* became a somewhat problematic term. The lexical item for fear in Eastern Tawbuid is *limu*, but Arthur did not want to use this word because it has not only been commonly employed in the broad sense of *fear* (as we would understand it in English) but it was also used to mean fear of spirits prior to their conversion to Christianity. He did not want the same term that had been applied to animistic spirits now to be applied to God, and they

searched for another word. In the end, Arthur argued for *fagsugun*, which would be better glossed as *respect*. But the three native speakers from the Taubuid village that were also working on the text with Arthur had no problem with *limu*. This goal of having the translator exist as a neutral, and ultimately effaced intermediate in translation corresponds to another matter, that of circulation. While the translators were well aware of the narrowness of readership that these translations would garner, the ability of circulation and the universality of the text they were producing were ever-present concerns. It was often for this reason that the translators turned to the concept of generic language.

The Specific Generic

Proverbs 21:16

The one who wanders from the way of wisdom will end up in the company of the departed (*New English Translation* 2005).

Kamatayan ti patabgan tawu mag-aman sa kadunungan (Hanunoo Draft Translation 2013).¹⁵
 To die the destiny person refuse to wisdom

Above is an example of where the metaphor was stripped away and replaced by what many of the translators termed a more “generic” language. So where, for example the King James (*The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding*) and the NET (*The one who wanders from the way of wisdom*) include the trope of wandering away from wisdom, this was not included in the Hanunoo (though Samuel’s Tagalog translation (*ASND*) did include the figurative use of wandering). As Arthur, a translator for the Western Tawbuid text, noted when

¹⁵ NET: *The one who wanders from the way of wisdom will end up in the company of the departed.*

CEV: If you stop using good sense, you will find yourself in the grave.

TEV: Death is waiting for anyone who wanders away from good sense.

KJV: The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

AMB: Nawawala't nalalagas, kapag ito'y nahanginan, nawawala na nga ito at hindi na mamamasdan.

ASND: Ang taong lumilihis sa daan ng katarungan ay hahantong sa kamatayan.

discussing the translation of Psalm 32:6, “To be faithful to King David, or to be faithful to Tawbuid, it’s always a tension. If I’m fully faithful to King David, I’ll just give them the Hebrew, but if it reads like a newspaper it’s probably missing something that King David wanted to convey...it’s never ending, that tension.” Examples abound, for instance in the Tagalog translation of Proverbs 107:9 where *hungry* was replaced with *desire*.¹⁶ This was also framed by Samuel as making explicit what was implicit in the text. Thus for the famous *camel through the eye of a needle* passage (Matthew 19:24), they used the term for animal. Here then, the generic is aligned with explicit, unlike earlier when it was aligned with literal.¹⁷

But what exactly is meant by generic, particularly in terms of language? It is a concept that is employed by language speakers in everyday usage, but in this way it is surprisingly neglected in anthropology and is perhaps most often associated with language development and the concepts of subordinate and superordinate prototype categories in linguistics (Carlson and Pelletier 1995; Croft 2004; Leslie 2007; Mannheim and Gelman 2013). In this manner the generic is taken to be the basic category onto which other levels of specificity are applied (Croft 2004). Nida himself took a similar view and wrote often of the ubiquity of “higher-level generics” in all languages and worked against common perceptions that “primitive” languages had few abstracted and umbrella vocabularies (Nida 1966, 1964). However, Nida was more wary than the Mindoro translators of employing target language generics when faced with lexical inequivalencies.

¹⁶ The translation of the Bible into Tagalog was somewhat separated from the other three translations. Samuel, having led the translation for over ten years of a new Tagalog Bible for the publishing house Biblica, was fired from the translation after they pushed for early publication and he resisted, believing there were still serious issues with the text. After Biblica published the Bible as *Ang Salita ng Dios* (The Word of God) in 2010, and resulting criticisms of the text, Samuel and his team were vindicated, and subsequently rehired to finish their work.

¹⁷ Nida argued for replacing metaphors, specifically this instance regarding the camel, with a simile, not the generic as Arthur would have it (Nida 1966).

Outside of linguistics, two of the more interesting anthropological employments of the term are Robert Moore's (2003) discussion of brand genericide, and Krisztina Féherváry's (2013) recent examination of generics as related to socialist and post-Soviet materiality. For Moore, the generic is the decoupling of object and specificity, in this case between product (material and otherwise) and originating brand producer. Similarly, Féherváry notes that the generic label on consumer goods, as commonly understood "simply identifies a product, conveying nothing more than its use value...it offers no contextualization of the item beyond its existence on the store self" (Féherváry 2013: 117). And yet, for both Moore and Féherváry, the inclusion of the generic within semiotic contexts does not stop there. The generic will always convey, in its material instantiation, much more than non-specificity. But even in terms of the common understanding of generic, there are obviously two ways to view it. On the one hand, we can see the generic as being without specificity (food over fruit, fruit over apple, apple over Braeburn, with each less generic than the previous). On the other hand, however, we can understand the generic as encompassing subsets of specificity (*apple* includes not only Fuji, but Braeburn, Jonagold and Honeycrisp as well). In this way, the generic can be seen as either *including* or *excluding* specificity. As I argue here, it is the "inclusion" or better the "enabling" of specificity within the generic that propels the Bible translators to employ such language.

In a similar vein, Marilyn Strathern (2014), in a discussion of relationality focuses on the role of generic kinship concepts and terms. Viewing generics as abstracted types employed both for purposes of inclusiveness and opacity that may give recognition without specificity, she notes there is nothing inherently vague about generics. Rather, "Generics are rather more than metaphorical extensions of ideas calling out for concrete expression" (Strathern 2014:

14). With regard to the Mindoro Bible translation, the generic was employed for purposes beyond non-specificity. As already noted, the generic was viewed both in terms of literalness and explicitness (“removing a metaphor,” for example). At the same time however, the translators often spoke of the generic in terms of the breadth of specificity, in that they viewed the generic as encompassing a wide range of interpretations rather than excluding them. Thus the generic was viewed not so much as a compromise between different exegetical renderings as it was a form that enabled the reader to interpret God’s words themselves. In this manner, the generic does not exclude specificity, but encourages multiple specificities and points to a translation that is inclusive.

Instead of being an overarching set, including all specificities if type, or indeed the negation of specificity, I suggest here that for the translators the generic assumes a correlation with the concept of universality. For it is often specificity that hinders both the linguistic and material circulation of the Bible. Without specificity, the generic Bible is viewed by the translators as purified of potential problems of meaning and rendering the biblical message in the target heart-language. And importantly, for circulation, there will be no matters of difference in interpretation, for it will be devoid of difference of interpretation when placed next to other translations. For example, one concern for the translators in Mindoro was that while their Bible would be the only translation available in each Mangyan language, a Mangyan pastor who read Tagalog might find discrepancies between the two. They wished to avoid any contradiction with other versions, especially in settings where Christians were unacquainted with a world of multiple and differing Bibles. While it is true that “mango” or some other local fruit might correlate better to the biblical meaning they intended to impart to the reader, it would be limited both in its circulation and its intertextual position relative to

other biblical translations.¹⁸

Effacing the Work of Translation

Through this process, the generic was seen to enable better circulation of the Bible. It is of note that the translative process, while always directed towards an in-practice reading of the text, relates to matters of language mediation differently than the presumed reader of the final text. For in its most common uses in Mindoro, the Bible itself is rarely seen to be a translation at all. It is simply the material instantiation of the Bible. In a similar manner, when one lays their hand on a Bible in a US courtroom and swears upon it, one is swearing not on an intrinsically erring translation, but simply on the Word of God. Matters of mediation are not included in the semiotic relationship established between the translated word and God; rather, the relationship is collapsed and a single instantiation remains. Thus we may view the work of the translators as a project that is dependent on certain ideologies of the mediation of language, but one that the reader experiences little of. Of course this is by no means a ubiquitous outcome. As Courtney Handman has recently argued, among the Guhu-Samane in Papua New Guinea, not only was the work of SIL translators foregrounded in religious practice there, but was taken up and often continues to be viewed as a transformative event in their experience of Christianity (Handman 2010). Similarly, Danilyn Rutherford has noted how the translated Bible has been foregrounded in Biak social practices, becoming a material site in which concepts of foreignness are mediated and how “imported words [of the translated Bible] seemingly could serve as ‘proof,’ the mark of a confrontation in an alien realm” (Rutherford 2007). However, among the Mangyan, the target readership of these

¹⁸ In the end the translators did not actually choose a generic term to replace “olive”, but rather the calque “ulibu”, closely related to the Tagalog term “oliba”.

Bibles, there appeared no such transformative purpose placed on the translations of the New Testaments that are already in circulation. Rather the translative process is effaced.

In practices of Bible hermeneutics and exegesis (Radmacher and Preus 1984; McLean 2012) common to the Christian translators and on display in the workshop, I suggest that the generic (especially as related to vernacular forms), because it is seen to be less mediated through linguistic specificity, is enacted as a gloss for universality, thus aligning with the intentionality of the Holy Spirit. The generic achieves in an earthly form what the Holy Spirit does divinely; a universality of meaning that reaches beyond the specificities of particular languages. In other words, the transduction¹⁹ (Silverstein 2003; Keane 2013) of a semiotic modality does not carry with it the traces of that transduction. Rather it becomes an instantiation of the original. Thus we see a break between the rendering of the Bible in Mangyan languages and the circulation and use of those texts. Due in large part to the unique authorship of the Bible, the target language in this context becomes for all intents and purposes the source language, as the translation is inherently the objectified and instantiated “Word of God.” A straight line, in denotational and exegetical terms, links the reader to the inspired word of God. In this scenario, the source text and the ideologies contained within it (divine authorship) cannot but be translated without the guidance of the Lord.

But I argue that it is not simply a matter of materiality overwhelming the practices of production, but rather the claims to universality intrinsic to the practice of translation itself; it is the effacement of translation aided by the employment of generics. Unlike other texts, I

¹⁹ I use the term “transduction” here to emphasize the expansive semiotic modalities in which translation practices occur outside of strict denotational correspondence between languages. Michael Silverstein (2003) takes “transduction” to be a “process of reorganizing the source semiotic organization (here...denotationally meaningful words and expressions of a source language occurring in co[n]text) by target expressions-in-co(n)text of another language presented through perhaps semiotically diverse modalities differently organized” (Silverstein 2003: 83)

suggest the process of Bible translation is not one of clear semiotic transduction; the mapping of one language (within certain forms of cultural and semiotic modalities) onto another (with commensurable but different forms of cultural and semiotic modalities). Within the pursuit of dynamic and functional equivalent translations we see that the idea of “language as a repository of culture” is rampant; however, it is only truly ever seen to be the case on the side of the target language. For the relationship between the original biblical texts and their original contexts (the source) is unique when viewed through the Christian lens of authorship-to-text. For many Christians, the Bible is distinct from the cultural milieu in which it was written. The Bible, as Word, might be instantiated in language, but there is nothing cultural about it. It is God’s word. Somewhat paradoxically, while “language as repository of culture” might exist as a stated goal of translation, the employment of generic language is as much about the purification of the biblical text as it is about transducing entire semiotic modalities.

For Christian translators, such as Cora and Annie, the Bible is located differently as a translated text-artefact. While the translation of the Bible into Mangyan languages is produced through ideologies of denotational explication (even with an eye to other in-context semiotic modalities), these translators also assume a certain role of author-to-text relationship that is unique, and one that is concerned instead with the purification of language. In this sense, the employment of generic forms of language achieves both. It is the purification of language, removing God’s word of local and cultural specificity. For in the end, the generic is seen by the translators to both enable the translation of semiotic modalities while at the same time purging translation of specificity.

In the next and final chapter, I examine how concerns over the “purity” of divine mediation are resolved by different Christian groups. As I discussed in this chapter, the

specificity of language poses a dilemma for the universality of Christian meaning. Such a dilemma is likewise apparent in how Christians view their own organizational forms as occupying a mediating role between the Christian congregant and God. In taking seriously the specificities of religious difference that are increasingly engaged with daily in Mindoro, how do Christian groups organizationally engage with the concept of a universal divine presence? In the next chapter I wish to bring together a number of themes discussed thus far—religious difference and competition, the resolution of bureaucratic and institutional forms with Christian mediation, and the attempt to attain a visible and successful institutional and congregational presence in the Christian community. Further, I wish to return to the matter of Catholic dominance. In the face of growing Christian plurality, how has the Catholic Church conceptually and doctrinally engage with religious plurality in Mindoro? If individual Christians in Mindoro are engaged in a projects of seeking purity in their relationship with God, what role do congregations and organizations play in attaining such purity? What purity is there to be found in the institutional practices of Christianity?

Chapter 6

Ecclesia Pura

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:27

In July 2011, as the schism, discussed in Chapter 4, between the United Methodist Church and Ang Iglesia Metodista sa Pilipinas was playing out, the interim bishop, Daniel Arichea, gave his episcopal address to the Annual Conference in Mindoro, held in Rozas, Oriental Mindoro. While the conference was filled with talk of the schism, Arichea chose to begin by addressing a wider issue concerning the UMC—its institutional structures,

We are over-organized. Our total membership does not match our organizational structure...the main motive for a reexamination of our organizational structures should be missional. The question then that we should be asking is: how best can we be organized in order to maximize our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christi for the transformation of the world? How best can we use the resources gifted to us by God in order to fulfil our role as the people of God in the Philippines in this day and age? How best can we model ourselves after our Lord who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people? In sum, how best can we be the church?

In many ways this is a fair representation of how the institutionality of a Christian church is framed by Christians in Occ. Mindoro. That a church may be “over-organized” suggests that

the organizational aspects of a church are not inherent in the nature of the church itself—that is to say, it is somewhat to the side of the intrinsic motivation of a congregation. At the same time, there exists a tension, if indeed a paradox of sorts, as the bishop cited above a direct line between the organization of their church as the best model of their Christian faith. It is to this tension, between the intrinsic and extrinsic nature of the institutional forms of Christianity in Occ. Mindoro that I turn to in this chapter. In particular, I look to the inter-denominational critiques of one another, revolving most often as they do around talk of institutionality.

Institutional breadth for a church in Occ. Mindoro is a double-edged sword. While it might be a sign of success and growth, of prevailing in God’s work, it might also be a sign of corruption, materialism, and fundamentally impeding both a divine presence and congregants’ ability to have an unmediated relationship to God. As a result, depending on the setting, most of the Christians I worked with at times emphasized their institutional success and breadth, while at other times tempered such a view of their church. Thus, I take up the circulating rhetorics of “institutionality” as it applies to critiques of denominational divisions, and highlight the tensions and ambiguities that come with articulating institutional forms of Christianity in Occ. Mindoro. Courtney Handman’s recent work on the Guhu-Samane in Papua New Guinea, speaks to this issue of denominationalism and institutionality, in which she argues that not only can schisms and denominational conflict *not* be bracketed off from Christian subjectivities and belief, but that the very nature of church organization itself is a transcendent concern for Christians. In taking up the concept of the “remnant” church, she argues that denominationalism and schismatic churches can be located in the fundamental interest Christians have in determining a perfected earthly state, not only of the self, but of Christian collectives (Handman 2015).

I begin with a discussion of Jehovah's Witnesses' (JW) proselytism through sign language, and show how language and institutionality coalesce as problems of mediation, between the Christian subject and God. I show how some JW members came to understand sign language as "natural" and unmediated like spoken languages. Through ideologies of sign language that emphasize its "naturalness", they framed Christianity itself in similar terms of naturalness. I show how these intersect with an intentional and competitive push among JW to increase their membership among deaf and hard of hearing. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how "speaking in tongues", or glossolalia among Pentecostals, while famously existing as an instantiation of unmediated language and divine presence, in San Jose is attached to a broader critique of Christian and denominational institutionality. In the third part of the chapter, I compare this Pentecostal glossolalia to an informal Catholic group, the Loved Flock, and their appropriation of Pentecostal and Evangelical practices, as well as their struggle to identify themselves in terms of Catholic orthodoxy. Ultimately, I argue that while churches' critiques of institutionality tend to not to be overly motivated by doctrine and theological concerns, there is a deep and widely held concern over the nature of church organization, and its role in the mediating of God's presence on earth. The perfection of one's church is not seen as wholly antagonistic to institutionality however. As with language, these Christian groups see institutionality and bureaucratic prevalence as obstacles, and yet obstacles that are somewhat inherent in the navigation of divine transcendence. And while they work to perfect the form of their church, they do so not for earthly purposes, but for transcendent ones. Moreover, not only can Christian ideologies of language be aligned with ideologies of institutional mediation, but as I discuss in terms of sign language and glossolalia, it is through ideologies of language itself that Christians are engaging with the

nature of the institution.

Sign language, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mediating of the Divine

When I first visited San Jose in 2009, for preliminary fieldwork, it turned out my apartment was just across the road from the Jehovah's Witness new Kingdom Hall. I attended some meetings, and became friends with three or four members. As it happens, I once lived next door to a Kingdom Hall in Dublin, but I never had a chance to interact with members. As I began attending the Kingdom Hall in San Jose, it was the first time I got a sense of what the meetings entailed. I had assumed the door-to-door evangelism of Jehovah's Witness' was something of an overblown cliché, limited mostly to US discourses on Jehovah's Witnesses, and even then perhaps more apparent on US television than in everyday life. I was surprised then, that even in their meetings JW members apportioned thirty minutes to a "service meeting," wherein members would practice and rehearse how to approach strangers and tell them about Jehovah. The Kingdom Hall in San Jose, like most other Kingdom Halls, is not only stripped of the iconography of a Catholic church, as Protestant churches are, but the very notion of a church is itself eradicated. Instead, on the simple dais, to the side, are two chairs and table. It was here that week in and week out, members would take turns pretending to knock on a door and approach another member sitting at the small table, pretending as if they were entering the other's home. Other members would chime in on how to approach the person more easily, or better express their views. "Don't spend so much time on Catholicism," one member once said to another, "talk about our beliefs first." Another disagreed, wondering aloud if it was better to situate themselves in terms of Catholicism, given that that is what most people in the town believed in. I was fascinated by this. In that I was setting out to study

the behind-the-scenes “work” of Christianity, it wasn’t so much the preaching, evangelism or even conversion that interested me, but rather the training and teaching of methods, the administration of it. And here they were, practicing and learning how to engage in the famous Jehovah Witness’ door-to-door evangelism. And it was in “public,” or at least embedded in their weekly and collective worshipping. No other religious group had been so forward in their administration.

However, after attending some meetings in 2009, I got the sense that some of the elders of the church, while initially friendly, were not altogether comfortable with my presence, especially if I had no intention of becoming a Jehovah’s Witness. So when I returned for my fieldwork proper in 2011, I didn’t set out to study the Jehovah’s Witness’. Instead, I focused on growing my network in the Catholic Church, and trying to get a sense of what different Born Again Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were in the town. In those early days of fieldwork, after an initial flurry of activity, I worried a little at how empty my daily calendar was. I was told that there was a special needs school, what I call here the CHESC school¹, in the town and that it was run by a Born Again couple, who had established it in the 1970s. I visited them, and quickly came to be friends with them, and with the teachers and students there. After a conversation with Pastor Arnel, the husband of the couple and director of the CHESC school, we were talking about sign language. Like many people, I had little experience with sign, but had always liked the idea of learning it. He said that he could teach me. There were one or two other people who were interested too, a young woman thinking of training to become a teacher in special needs, and a man who worked at a local Coca-Cola bottling factory and was just fascinated by the language. We began to meet on

¹ In order to protect the privacy of those involved in the school, I do not use the real name of the school.

Saturday afternoons at the school, when the children who stayed in the small dormitory behind the school would watch cartoons in the television room, or play music in another room. Over the next couple of months, some new people came to this free and informal class, while others fell off, or only came intermittently.

On one of these Saturday afternoons, after our class and as I was talking to some of the students, I was surprised when I saw two members of Jehovah's Witness wander into the school. I hadn't seen them in nearly two years and had forgotten their names. But they remembered me, and we began talking. They had heard I was back in town, and asked why I had not attended a meeting. Perhaps, I wondered, I had exaggerated some aloofness I had sensed with the elders and some of the Jehovah's Witness' community when I had first come to San Jose. We talked briefly, and I asked what they were doing here at the school. They replied they were just handing out some literature and teaching Bible stories to the children. They said goodbye, and I promised I would visit them, and maybe attend a meeting soon at the Kingdom Hall.

The interaction intrigued me, as it was rare to come across such ecumenism in the town. But when I discussed this with the pastor and his wife later, I learned they were perturbed by the Jehovah's Witnesses visit to the school. They had been here before, said Mam Arnel, his wife, the principal of the school. The Jehovah's Witness' had first come into the school without seeking permission. But there was no big fight, said Mam Arnel. She and the Pastor and Mam had told the Witnesses that if they did come into CHESC and talk to the children, there was to be "no doctrine." I said that they had told me they just wanted to tell Bible stories to the children. Mam Arnel waved at me in dismay, "they drop in doctrine! They believe Jesus is a little god!"

The school, Pastor Arnel told me on a different day, was non-denominational, and open to all Christians, although they had no Iglesia ni Cristo students. But there were Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists, and children of many different Born Again churches. At the same time, the school was Christian, and had prayer meetings and Bible reading for students each day. The school itself was an interesting anomaly in Occidental Mindoro. While the public school system in the Philippines claims to provide special needs education, or SPED (SPecial EDucation), where it is necessary, in practice this is not always the case. In San Jose, there were SPED teachers in two of the public schools, but their attention was often divided between special needs students and the general student population. There were on average five or six special needs students in each of these public schools. The CHESC school, on the other hand, was entirely devoted to special needs, with over a hundred students. However, while they were accredited by the Department of Education, they were not financially supported by the government, and thus always struggled for funding, and were dependent on a Dutch NGO for the majority of their income. The school building and amenities did not match the majority of schools in San Jose, but the vast majority of parents preferred their children attend CHESC, where the entire focus of the school was directed towards special needs. All types of disabilities and special needs were catered for at CHESC, ranging from slight to severe disabilities, intellectual and physical. Taking in children from all over Occ. Mindoro, the school mainly attracted lower-income families, who could not afford to send their children to a school in Batangas or Manila, and often simply couldn't afford to take care of them at all. One sort of "speciality" CHESC had was for deaf and hard of hearing students. When I was there, there were fourteen to nineteen deaf students. This might not sound like a high number, but given that the public school might have one or two deaf

students, CESC was central to the teaching of most deaf and hard of hearing students in the province. Moreover, students who had graduated from CESC would often return to socialize or help out in some manner. To this end, CESC was the center of a deaf network in San Jose, with the vast majority of deaf children in Occ. Mindoro educated there.

Religion through Language

So what were the Jehovah's Witness' doing at CHESC? It turned out that as I was beginning to learn Sign in late 2011, the Jehovah's Witness' were doing the exact same thing across town. As I was to find out later, there had been a decision high up the in the leadership in the Jehovah's Witness in the US, that beginning in 2012 there should be a global push to convert deaf and hard of hearing students. Classes in sign began across the globe, and it was no different in San Jose. There were two Jehovah Witness' in the north of the Mindoro, in the town of Mamburao, about a six hour drive from San Jose, who could already sign, and they showed a number of members in San Jose the basics. Additionally, the central administration of the Jehovah's Witness at the Branch Office in Manila, forwarded books and DVDs. When the two members strolled into CHESC, they were beginning this project of attracting deaf students.

Soon after I had met the two members at the school, sharp words, apparently, were exchanged between them and the Mam Arnel, and they did not return to CHESC. This did not hamper the former's enthusiasm however. Aside from taking classes in Sign, I was becoming increasingly interested by the nature of Sign in San Jose. What was most interesting to me was that students at CHESC were learning Signed Exact English (SEE). This variant of Sign

is somewhat controversial in itself, as it mimics the grammar of English, unlike most forms of Sign. Proponents of SEE argue that it helps students learn how to read, while others suggest that not only is this not true, but that it hampers students' development of "spoken" Sign, which becomes slow and cumbersome when trying to ape the grammatical constructions of English. Further, opponents to SEE argue that it is simply an ideological bias of spoken over sign languages. While personally, I was more likely to side with opponents of SEE, students themselves never appeared to give it much thought, and were quick to change SEE to their own needs quite quickly. To this end, their SEE came to be very similar to ASL (which at any rate is what SEE is based on).

But I was interested in an altogether different aspect of the children's sign language at this time: that in addition to Sign, they were learning English. None of them could read, or lip-read Tagalog/Filipino—the language of their families and community. In San Jose, while most people have some English, it most definitely skews upwards in terms of class. And poorer people might have no English beyond a couple of words or phrases. These children, mostly from such backgrounds, did not share the language of their family. Again, this language bubble was also why CHESC became a social hub of deaf people.

This focus on Sign, oddly enough, allowed me an entryway into the Jehovah's Witnesses, which was not there previously. The five or six members that had taken up the cause to learn and proselytize in Sign, were far more comfortable with me than perhaps the elders and some of the community were, and I accompanied them on Bible studies and preaching among deaf and hard of hearing people, while at the same time they would visit my house and would conduct Bible study with me. At this time, as their work among the deaf was only beginning, four or five members would combine Bible studies with prospective converts

in their homes with a continued search for new deaf individuals. It was a strange enough practice, as they would say to me, for example, that there was a young deaf girl living on a certain street, and we would go and try to track her down. The door-to-door knocking, in this manner, was less about introducing Jehovah's Witnesses to those who opened the door, and instead questions such as "Do you know any deaf people living near here?" and "There is a young man who is deaf that lives near here, right?" On one such occasion, a JW member, her young daughter, and I went to find a young deaf girl, who lived in one of the densely-populated squatters neighborhoods. We knocked at the door, and the girl's mother answered, but the girl herself went out the back of the house, trying to avoid the unwanted attention it seems. The JW followed.

To be running through alleyways and busy narrow streets with Jehovah's Witnesses', in pursuit of deaf woman trying to escape us, was an odd and troubling experience, to be sure. Interestingly, such tenacity in proselytizing was matched by the JW in terms of their approach to language. No other religious group that I knew in Occ. Mindoro attended to the matter of language in such an institutional manner. As is well known, the Jehovah's Witnesses make a considerable effort in translating all their literature, the Bible included, into as many languages as possible. Their relationship to Sign was no different.²

Nature and the Icon

The Bible studies JW conducted with deaf and hard of hearing people were structurally similar to those conducted with hearing people, although different literature, such as drawing

² In San Jose, the JW members learnt ASL, but by the end of the my fieldwork, the JW had actually translated their teachings into Filipino Sign Language (FSL), a burgeoning variant of Sign that language advocate in Manila are attempting to replace ASL and SEE with throughout the country. However, FSL, in 2013, was yet to reach Occ. Mindoro through any pedagogical means.

and sometimes an iPad with sign language and images were used in deaf Bible studies. Using text and pictorial images, usually from the *Listen to God* magazine, not designed with deaf and hard of hearing people in mind, a usual Bible study would begin by having proselyte look and describe what they like about the image (Figure 1.), and whether they would like to live in such a place. Subsequent to this the JW member would delve into more theological matters, specifically the difference between the beliefs of JW and other Christians. By other Christians, they were inevitably referring to Trinitarian forms of Christian belief, and thus the difference between Jesus and Jehovah would be keenly emphasized. They would also sometimes include a tablet with messages in sign language (ASL and later FSL, although, as noted previously, I never knew anyone in San Jose who signed FSL). I mention this because as I will discuss in a moment, the JW discussed the unmediated nature of sign language, and framed it in terms of being more “natural” than spoken language. However, during their Bible studies, their use of Sign was always embedded within other representational practices.

In my conversations with the JW members who worked on establishing a deaf JW community, the issue of language, and sign language in particular, were often foregrounded, and included in a broader process of engaging with Jehovah. Sitting at a plastic folding table in my apartment one afternoon with four members, drinking sweetened coffee and talking about the Bible, one member, who I here call Brother Bobby, talked earnestly of how faith was a process of discovery, not necessarily a moment of revelation.³ To this end, faith was something that may have obstacles inherent in it. One needed to transverse matters of this

³ In a somewhat similar manner, the Church of Latter Day Saints missionaries often spoke of trying to “feel” God’s presence when reading the Bible or the Book of Mormon. In their attempts to convert me, even as I was explicit in my interest in Mormonism as one that was scholarly in nature, they repeatedly asked me about what I felt when reading, and asked me to pray to God to reveal himself in me, particularly when reading Book of Mormon. But again, unlike the majority of Born Again Evangelicals, there was not the similar weight apportioned to revelatory moments in attaining faith.

world in order to find the divine. This matter of obstacles is an important one for JW, and is embedded in a JW view of language. For example, in our discussions of the Bible, the word of Jehovah was seen to be divine, however the language itself was not. The Bible, was sacred as it is the collection of Jehovah's word, but the word could be delimited from specific linguistic instantiations of it. Language, and specifically translation, is thus seen as a problem to be solved. It is a problem of mediation. Brother Bobby talked much of the Tower of Babel⁴, understanding its meaning in the Book of Genesis, as relating not only to the biblical entropy of languages in the world, but to language diversity again in terms of "obstacles."

Interestingly, however, for the JW, sign language was somewhat set apart from other languages. When we talked about Sign, and how we were all learning it simultaneously, the JW members often spoke of how "natural" Sign was. One example they gave, and undoubtedly common to students of Sign, was that the sign for "up" or "upwards" was just to point up. There was no linguistic mediation in this. But for the JW, such naturalness was not limited to deictic gestures; they saw an assuredness in the iconicity throughout the language. That is, the iconicity of sign language was what was natural. Of course, for them, such naturalness stands in contrast to the arbitrariness of most spoken linguistic signs. This is by no means an unusual take on sign languages, and as Douglas Baynton has written, the

⁴ The Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible, the *New World Translation* is perhaps most famous for its translation of John 1: 1, which reads, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was a god." The difference in this translation and most others is the "word was a god," rather than the "word was God." This insertion of the indefinite article is taken to be a dividing theological line. Without the "a", Jesus is one in the same as God, with it, he is separate. The verse relating to the Babel in the NWT reads, "Then Jehovah went down to see the city and the tower that the sons of men had built. Jehovah then said: "Look! They are one people with one language, and this is what they have started to do. Now there is nothing that they may have in mind to do that will be impossible for them. Come! Let us go down there and confuse their language in order that they may not understand one another's language." So Jehovah scattered them from there over the entire face of the earth, and they gradually left off building the city. That is why it was named Babel, because there Jehovah confused the language of all the earth, and Jehovah scattered them from there over the entire face of the earth."

oppositional character of sign language to spoken language has a long history (1996: 108-112), and the perceived connection between “natural” sign language and “arbitrary” spoken language was central to disagreements between oralist and manualist approaches to teaching sign language. Similarly, while many people believe the gestural components or additions to spoken language exist in a point-to-point iconic relationship to the world, as and such are unmediated by formalized structures of language, this is not necessarily the case (Haviland 2014, 2004, 1993). This of course relates to conceptions, on the part of JW, that the iconicity is itself unmediated, or indeed conventionalized, as are linguistic signs.

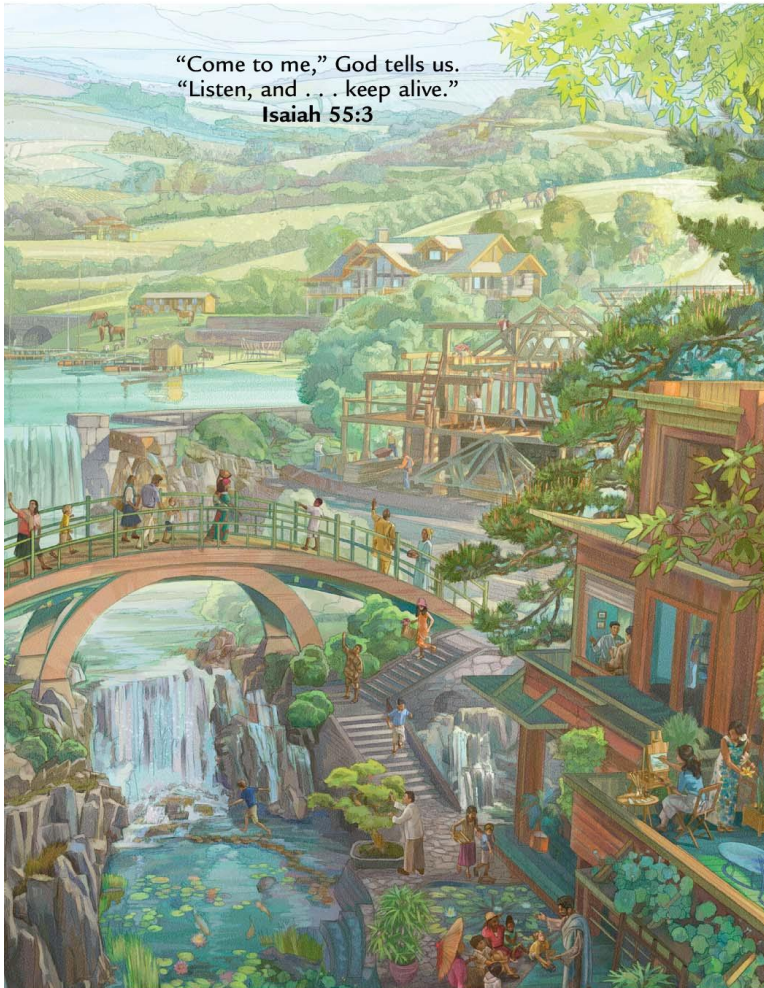


Figure 6.1. One of the pictures from *Listen to God*, used by JW missionaries during Bible studies.

While in many ways, for the JW this can be seen to be the motivating factor of gestural techniques as signs in the world in a way that linguistic signs are not. However, the interaction of sign language with Christian proselytization enabled the JW to frame sign language as natural in ways that moved beyond more straightforward language ideologies. As discussed in Chapter 3, whereby Born Again Evangelicals both negated and acknowledged the presence of Catholicism in their evangelism, the JW, somewhat similarly, assuredly opposed other forms of Christian practice, disaffirming any inadvertent sense of ecumenism in San Jose. Whether on the part of congregants or evangelists, they were nevertheless reliant on a ubiquitous backdrop of Christianity in order to proselytize. In all of their Bible studies with

deaf people, the focus was on clarifying the difference of a Jehovah's Witnesses' view of God, heaven and hell, and particularly the relationship between Jesus and God. However, unlike, for example the earlier discussion of Pastor Sazon and the JIL attempts to convert Catholics, there was no denial on the part of the JW of the presence of Catholicism and other forms of Christianity. They tackled the matter head on. Thus, in Figure 1., an example of the supplemental drawings used by JW in San Jose in Bible studies with deaf people in San Jose, Catholic priests are explicitly represented—so much so, that the entire Bible study tended to be built around the scaffold of negating other forms of Christianity. This is of particular note, as the Bible study was thus dependent on a shared understanding between proselytizer and proselyte, of what Christianity entails.

Because of the role CHESC played in educating the majority of deaf people in San Jose, and Occ. Mindoro more widely, the people the JW were evangelizing to, often shared a remarkably similar outlook on religion and Christianity. As I noted previously, CHESC was non-denominational in both its acceptance of students, and in their religious education. However, in presenting a Christianity that was accessible across denominational divides, they tended to focus on the person of Jesus alone, as this was seen to be the point of convergence among churches. However, such a focus on the teachings of Jesus, of course, resulted in a Christianity that looked remarkably like a Born Again Evangelical version. This did not go unnoticed by Pastor or Mam Arnel, and they often joked with me that this all part of the plan. For the deaf students at CHESC, there were daily prayer meetings after classes. Either Mam Arnel, one of the teachers, or one of the students, would write a Bible verse on a blackboard. Everyone, maybe ten to fifteen students ranging from six years old to early twenties, would then sign the verse. Individual students would then step up to sign it from memory without

looking at the blackboard. Altogether this prayer meeting would take thirty to forty minutes, and was very warm and informal. Often Mam Arnel would extrapolate on the verse, perhaps about how much God loved us, or how we can best understand Jesus' sacrifice in our daily lives.

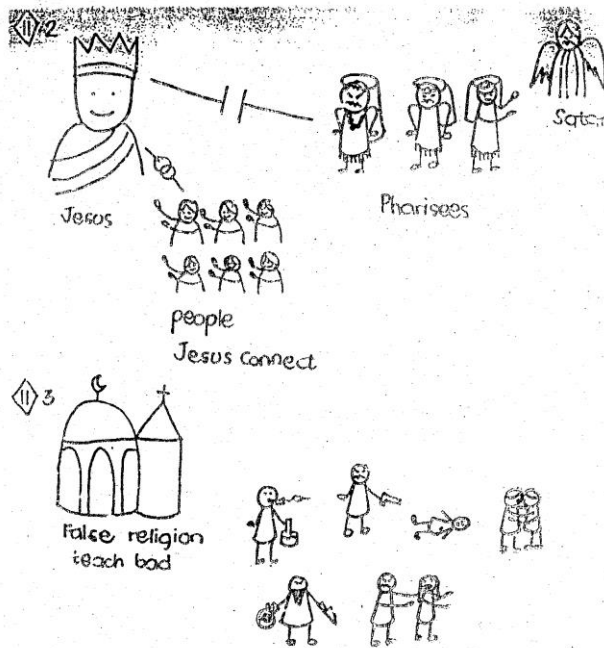


Figure 6.2. Page from a set of teaching aids used by Jehovah's Witnesses conducting deaf Bible studies. Note the sash on the figure of Jesus. The sign used for Jesus/Lord by the Jehovah's Witnesses incorporates the signing of a sash.

Parents of the students never seemed to be perturbed over any denominational divide, or pushed by the school in any direction, and appeared happy that their children were being educated in a Christian manner. The outcome of all this was that the JW were essentially attempting to convert deaf people with a view of Christianity that was either Born Again Evangelical, or something close to it. Because of the daily teachings in Christianity that the deaf students at CHESC had, the JW had to do little to no work in articulating the basics of

Christianity. Rather than having to teach the Bible, or who Jesus was, they only needed to specify the JW view of Jesus as and the question of whether he and God were one in the same. This reliance on a shared backdrop of Christianity animated their view of sign language. If we return to the use of spatial deixis, such as pointing upwards, the JW view of the sign as being naturally iconic, found a similar resonance for them in terms of Christianity. When referring to “heaven” they didn’t necessarily need to use the ASL sign for “heaven,” but rather simply when discussing Jesus or Jehovah, could point upwards. The ASL sign for “heaven” does not actually include pointing upwards, but rather includes placing one’s palms over one another in a step-like formation before flattening out the palms horizontally and forming a sign similar to that meaning “ceiling.” That the JW could point upwards when referring to heaven, is of course reliant on the proselyte’s understanding of the concept of heaven and of God. But in my discussions with JW members and these Bible studies, they saw the ease of sign language—what they glossed as its naturalness—in terms of the ease of articulating a Christian message. The naturalness of sign language was deeply implicated in the naturalness of Christianity itself. For these JW members, whether working with deaf or hearing people in San Jose and Occ. Mindoro, they were constantly working with, and against, other forms of Christianity, and yet it was the shared understanding of these forms of Christianity that reinforced its naturalness. Thus, as with sign language, for these JW members, Christianity itself needn’t be a highly mediated experience. Nevertheless, it must be mediated to some extent. Language exists as an obstacle.

Speaking in Tongues

When looking to language practices in Christianity that are perceived to be natural,

speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, is perhaps the most famous. In San Jose, speaking in tongues is not as wide or essential a practice as it is in many Pentecostal churches elsewhere, particularly in the United States. In San Jose, its practice is associated with those churches that have an explicit connection to the US, for example, Assemblies of God and Foursquare. These two Christian denominations are well represented in San Jose, with at least three churches each in the town and surrounding areas. However, the actual speaking in tongues was reserved mostly for special occasions, and occurred perhaps on a monthly basis rather than a weekly one. The anthropological literature on speaking in tongues has focused on the issue of mediation, and in particular on embodiment (Csordas 1997; Coleman 2000). I want to describe here one instance of speaking in tongues at a Four Square church (officially, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel), to suggest that such configurations of embodiment, naturalness and lack of formalized mediation (as seen by JW members with regard to formalized linguistic systems), centered on language practices and immediacy of divine presence, reaches into spatial and institutional mediation of the same divine presence.

Situated in the one of the poorer neighborhoods in San Jose, the Foursquare church was erected in 1982⁵, and since then has been surrounded by formal and informally built houses, so that now one has to follow a maze of winding and narrow pathways to reach its entrance from the main road. In October 2012, I attended a service at Foursquare celebrating its thirtieth anniversary. Pastors from other Foursquare churches in Occ. Mindoro were present, and spoke at length about their own experiences of church building, and of being a Pentecostal in Mindoro. There was a celebratory air in the church, and attendance was much

⁵ The Foursquare church has its origins in the 1920s in the US. Early on, the Philippines became one of the church's main missionary foci, and by 1927, Foursquare missionaries were working in the Philippines (Elwood 1968; Van Cleave 2014.)

higher than would normally have been the case. In some sense, the chosen date of the anniversary (it could have been anytime in the year) was aligning with Catholic celebrations that week of Mama Mary's (the Virgin Mary's) birthday, September 8th. This was often the case with Protestant churches, choosing activities to match the more ubiquitous Catholic celebrations throughout the religious calendar. Most of the evening was taken up with long testimonies from the different visiting pastors and prominent members. The most memorable of these was a testimony of a man who told of how he had been gay and had slept with five men, but had found God and had stopped. Many congregants sitting in the pews and crowding around the doorways appeared to find a connection with his story, and enthusiastically applauded when he finished. Overall, this was a far more American-styled service—louder, more excited, and celebratory.

The speaking in tongues occurred at the end of the service, which lasted just over three hours. Prayer requests were made, with people writing their prayers on a small piece of paper, which were then collected and distributed to congregants and pastors randomly. Not everyone wrote or received a prayer request; perhaps one in six people were involved. Each person took this prayer request of someone else and then would find a place somewhere in the church, not necessarily in the pews, and begin praying. Some people leaned over, some sat, some stood up straight with their arms held aloft, some faced the wall some knelt, laying their heads and arms on the back of pews. Others found a plastic chair, and knelt by that. Important here is that people broke the divide between the dais/altar and the pews. All space in the church became the same in its sharedness. The pastors were now indistinguishable from the congregants. The sense of togetherness brought about by the service rapidly shifted into one of individuality, with everyone turned away from everyone else. Of the twenty or so people

engaged in these prayer requests, only five or six people were actually speaking in tongues, while others were audible in their prayers, but were doing so in Tagalog interspersed with English. For those not engaged in glossolalia, extended and repeated sibilant /s/ in yes (“yessss”) were heard loudly in the church, common across Born Again Evangelical services, bobbing their heads up and down, lifting their hand up and down. One heard again and again, from all corners of the church “Yes, Jesus, yes Jesus,” “Yes Lord, yes Lord,” “Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus.” The prayer requests themselves were, again as was usual across different churches, focused on loved ones who were sick, as well as requests and pleas for financial security.

Amidst the cacophony of prayers, it was not always apparent who was speaking in tongues, and who was not. Many were loudly praying, others more quietly adding to the collective rumbling of the invocations, others still, standing aside and bearing witness, but not partaking. And then, in an instant, the sound of prayer would subside and voices would ebb, acoustically stripping the church of everything but the speedily repeated liquid /l/ of a heavenly language.

Afterwards, walking home in the muggy night, I asked my friend, a Foursquare member, why some and not others were speaking in tongues. She hesitated a little, and replied that it wasn’t so much the case as individuals choosing to speak in tongues, or that it was their turn that evening, but rather the gift was given to them in that instance. This, of course, is how speaking in tongues has been traditionally framed—in terms of charisma and gift (Brahinsky 2012). That for the most part, on any given occasion, approximately the same number of people do speak in tongues, does not, for the Foursquare members, negate the authentic nature of act, or gift. Similar to the JW members and their view of sign language, the role of

glossolalia in Christian practice reinforces, and is in turn reinforced by the organization forms of Christianity in which it occurs.

While much has been written about glossolalia in terms of language, both in terms of the linguistic structure of the utterances (Jaquith 1967; Goodman 1969) and perhaps more importantly the religious and language ideologies that underpin its sense of immediacy and extra-linguistic pragmatics (Coleman 2000; Goodman 1972), I argue here that the importance of glossolalia reaches beyond matters of language, divine intervention and presence, and relates directly to the role of institutional structures in Christianity as a process of mediating the divine. Mauss, early on, noted the confluence of structure and improvisation, institution and person, in the speaking of tongues. Describing glossolalia as those “jerky and mystic utterances,” and “an irregular mystical outpouring,” he firmly placed it within the definition of a rite, noting its integral place within the mass, and thus institutionally structured, even regulated as “it had to occur at a fixed time” (Mauss 2003 [1909]: 50). What I want to draw attention to is not only the role of mediation, or lack thereof, seen to be imbued in glossolalia, but that it in turn shines a light on, indeed establishes, the ideologies of how divinity is accessible to people. And how language and the institutional structures of the church, whether emanating from doctrine, or habitually established within a specific Christian community, coalesce to an extent where language cannot be extricated from the church, nor the church from language.

“Christ, not Religion” and Mediating the Church

The idea that one’s relationship to God is necessarily mediated, and that such mediation needs to be as circumscribed as possible, can be linked back to at least St.

Augustine, in terms of the “visible church” and “natural signs” (Ferriter 1998), and of course can be located at the very center of reformation and post-reformation forms of Christianity. But such forms of mediating one’s relationship to God, whether seen in a positive or pejorative light, are not always as clear cut for most Christians, at least in Occ. Mindoro. As we saw previously in relation to Bible translation, there are often irresolvable dilemmas in terms of fidelity and mediation between God and language. As the translators were oft to admit, they never saw their translations as amounting to a perfection of mediating language. In identifying the limitations of referential equivalence across languages, they were forced to make the best of a seemingly flawed process. In many ways, this is similar to how many Christians viewed Catholicism. This included Catholics themselves. As previously discussed, the Catholic Church has long been synonymous in the Philippines with Christianity, and its presence in San Jose, as with much of the country, cannot be overstated. What this presence consisted of, for many, was its sheer institutional and social presence. The number of Catholic churches and public rituals were seen to overpower the other denominations in terms of visibility. Protestant critique, notably of Born Again Evangelicals and Pentecostals, continuously sought to contest this institutional amplitude. Of course, such a critique is famously grounded in the Reformation, with Protestant sects early on arguing for an institutionally unmediated relationship to God (Keane 2007; Engelke 2007; Yelle 2012). This takes on greater force in the Philippines, when those making such a critique are wholly in the minority. A common bumper sticker and often repeated phrase in San Jose, “Christ, not Religion,” was directed squarely at the Catholic Church, and enabled other Christian denominations to succinctly criticize Catholicism, and its overlap with the category of religion, without even having to name it.

But as we saw in terms of Pastor Sazon in a Chapter 3, Catholicism can be enacted at times as a pervasive though unmarked obstacle in the way of furthering alternative forms of Christianity. While Pastor Sazon and the Jesus Is Lord Church threaded the needle of Catholicism in tacit and often subtle ways, there were churches doing the same work as Sazon that took a different approach. Another Born Again Evangelical Church in San Jose conducted Bible studies with two Catholic families in the houses that dotted the rice fields outside the town. Unlike Sazon, they acknowledged the Catholic experience and teachings of the proselytes. They used it as an entryway in Born Again Evangelicalism, and thus saw their work as a clarification of doctrine rather than replacement of it. This is where a Catholic backdrop was productive for other denominations, in that it aided their conversion of Catholics, and according to their strategy, did not risk a rupturing of Christian experience, as it did for Sazon in Kulaman.

“The Voice of Christian Communities in Occidental Mindoro”

During the time of my fieldwork, the Catholic Church in San Jose was undergoing a tremendous amount of trouble directly related to institutional and administrative matters. There are two large Catholic compounds in San Jose. Aside from the Cathedral, in the very center of the town, and the compound next to it which houses learning centers, conference rooms, a religious store, and the offices and base of two missionary orders, there is another compound not far away that accommodates the Bishop’s residence, and the seminary. But in addition to this, there are Catholic schools, more missionary bases, smaller churches, Catholic hospitals, and radio stations. In late October 2011, at approximately 1 am, the main Catholic radio station, DZVT-Radyo Totoo Mindoro, known by its tagline “Ang Tinig ng Pamayanang

Kristiyano sa Occidental Mindoro” (The Voice of Christian Communities in Occ. Mindoro), was burned to the ground. The following day, there was some confusion and much rumor. It was reported that there was also an attempt to burn down the seminary center in the compound of the Bishop’s residence. Some people said the two fires occurred simultaneously. Later it was reported that the fire in the compound had occurred three days earlier. Explanations were in short supply, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church appeared to close ranks, and withhold any information to congregants. Thus, for everyone else, no one really knew what was going on. Why the radio station, and the seminary center, in particular, people wondered. Slowly, rumors began to emerge that there was a financial aspect to it. Some said money had been stolen, and the fires were part of a cover up. The radio station was also where many financial records were kept. The chancery’s office in the seminary likewise contained important financial papers. The hierarchy within the church in San Jose (and by default, Occ. Mindoro, as San Jose is the seat of the Catholic Church in the province) by all accounts split, with half remaining loyal to the Bishop, the other half in some sort of unstated mutiny.

Every Sunday, at the end of mass in the Cathedral, a lector or priest recited a prayer calling for answers and unity in the Church because of the fire. But everyone knew that whatever was going on behind the closed doors of meetings among priests and the Bishop, was very different to the calls for truth and community that were publicly offered. The split between the priests spread, it seems, to the seminarians, and in 2012, a large groups of seminarians wrote a public letter questioning the Christian spirit of the hierarchy and of a group of unnamed priests, and quit. The seminary shut its doors soon afterwards. But even as I present this here as known fact, very few people I knew ever felt or believed they themselves were on the inside, and were incredulous at all the secrecy surrounding the fire,

and the fallout. For most Catholic congregants that watched all this from afar, there was a mixture of expected corruption in the Church, and a sadness that there was growing ill will and factionalism. The one time that the controversy became intensely public, and ignited the anger of Catholic congregants, was when one afternoon I was attending a funeral of a young twelve-year old who had died the previous week. There was to be a wedding and another funeral at the Cathedral that morning, but the priest who was to administer the funeral and wedding had not showed up. It was said that the priest was choosing to not work as part of the split between a group of priests and the Bishop and his supporters. When we arrived, the Cathedral compound was overflowing with people, unsure of what to do. With family and friends of the bride and groom milling about with mourners, it certainly made for an intense and strange tone, but one that was superseded by anger and confusion over whether a priest was going to arrive. Eventually, the funeral I was attending moved to a smaller church on the compound, and a priest, though not the one that was originally to have presided over the funeral, arrived and said the funeral mass. But it was the only time I witnessed actual anger and dismay by Catholic congregants on the scandal enveloping the Church. As it turned out, it was not until early in 2015, as told to me by friends in Occ. Mindoro, that two priests (one the former director of the Mangyan Mission) were arrested in charges of fraud, theft, and arson.

Such a controversy played well into non-Catholic critiques of the Church. For one, it had nothing to do with congregants, but rather was directly centered on the institutional hierarchy of the Church itself. Moreover, it was concerned with money, a common rebuke of not only the Catholic Church, but of many Christian churches, particularly those that are institutionally expansive. That the goal of attaining wealth was in contravention to the goal of Christian faith was so self-evident, that it needed little in the way of theological or doctrinal

explication. Aside from the Catholic Church, there were denominations that were consistently framed by others in the community as a business rather than a church. Common refrains such as “they are only interested in money,” and “they just take advantage of the poor people,” were said again and again about many churches, and indeed by Catholics, about most other denominations. This concern with financial motivation, and the representation of churches profiteering from congregants has, of course, a long history in the Philippines, notably revolving around the political and financial corruption within the Catholic Church (Blanco 2009; Cushner 1971; Sturtevant 1976; Anderson 1969).

For non-Catholics, the threat posed by the Catholic Church always moves beyond specific theological divides, and is located within the institutional and administrative working of the Church. Because of the hierarchy and organizational aspects of the Catholic Church in Occ. Mindoro are complex and vast, even for those involved, for non-Catholics, they expect that any denominational competition occurs out of plain sight, and is intrinsically embedded in the Catholic Church’s political power.

Loved Flock

For a number of Catholics that I knew in Sta. Teresita, the anti-institutional impetus of Born Again Evangelicals was compelling. That one may have a more pronounced and “direct” relationship with God, away and aside from the actual structure of the Church itself, was clearly appealing to a number of Catholics, and yet the presupposition that such a relationship must preclude one’s faithfulness to the institutionality of the Church, was not one made by all Catholics in San Jose. I suggest this speaks to an important difference in the ontologies of affiliation existent between denominations. Often falling under the appellation of

“Charismatic Catholics,” a number of Catholic groups with tangential, and sometimes tense, relationships with the Catholic Church proper, have foregrounded matters of religious media and mediation. As Thomas Csordas has noted, Charismatic Catholicism foregrounds a number of paradoxes, particularly that between ritualization and spontaneity, and importantly, institutional constraints of and personal creativity, with each existing in tension with the other (Csordas 1997: 78).

The Loved Flock Catholic Charismatic Renewal Ministry is Charismatic Catholic group that is informally organized throughout the Philippines. Its members are generally active members of the Church, but who seek to incorporate Pentecostal and Evangelical practices into the Catholic Church. Looking to Loved Flock’s relationship to the Catholic Church and Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in the Christian community of San Jose, there is also another tension at hand. That is, they distanced themselves, denominationally speaking, from the Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, while at the same time aligning themselves with Pentecostal practices writ large. The latter, this alignment and mimetic aspect of Loved Flock, was clear to everyone, particularly Pentecostal and Evangelicals I knew. Loved Flock members were always quick to declare that they are Catholic, and in general they were some of the most active attendees of mass, and worked in volunteer roles in their local churches. To this end, in no way did they reject the Catholic Church, and were not necessarily articulating a critique of the Church. At the same time, however, they also were quick to frame their relationship to God in terms very similar to Born Again Evangelicals. Their descriptions of God and Jesus were couched in language far more associated with Born Again Christians. Indeed, one Saturday evening, sitting in a pew in a small church next to the Cathedral in San Jose, one woman framed her membership in Loved Flock directly in terms

of being “born again,” and how their practices enabled people to accept Jesus as their savior. Their meetings, usually on a Wednesday and Saturday evening, involved many of the elements of an evangelical service, such as singing Christian songs with a guitar, testimonies of members of how Jesus had entered their lives, and interestingly nearly every week people would sing Hallelujah in a manner that sounded very similar to speaking in tongues, with improvised and quickly repeated /lalalalala/ sounds, if just for a minute or so. The Christian songs they sang were often from the repertoire of Hillsong Music, a remarkably and globally successful Australian arm of the Hillsong Churches in Sydney, and entirely associated with evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. Members would raise their hands above their heads and repeat “Jesus, Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Lord.” It never felt quite Catholic—even as the Loved Flock meeting began at 6pm on a Saturday evening, directly after mass in the Cathedral. We would finish up at mass, maybe thirty of us, and then simply walk across the compound to a smaller church, and begin the meeting.

I raise the matter of Loved Flock as it reveals the ambiguity of denominational difference. Often articulated along doctrinal lines, the incompatibility of certain Christian views, famously Catholic and Protestant (particularly non-mainline denominations such as certain forms of Methodism), did not always play out in practice. For Loved Flock members, enacting certain practices of Pentecostalism and Born Again Evangelicalism was in itself not a transgression of Catholicism. They identified themselves as more Catholic than many Catholics, and in order to achieve a true sense of Catholicism, one must move past the strict hierarchies of the Church. At the same time, in no way was that hierarchy denied. For the Pentecostal and Born Again Evangelicals I knew, the Loved Flock was enacting Pentecostalism and evangelicalism for Catholics who were not ready to make a break with the

Church. They viewed its existence as a mark of approval for their own work, and hoped that members of Loved Flock would eventually follow their thinking to its logical conclusion and see that Catholicism was a corruption of an unmediated relationship with God. Thus, Catholic forms of Catholic practices, such as Loved Flock, but also groups such as El Shaddai, can be seen as the apogee, or purest instantiation of Catholicism by some, and as a movement towards Protestantism by others.

Katherine Wiegele, in her study of the Catholic prosperity movement El Shaddai, argues that ideologies of transforming the self that are at the center of El Shaddai are connected to ideologies of transforming the Catholic Church itself (Wiegele 2007). While El Shaddai aligns with Christian prosperity movements, far more than Loved Flock does, in both there is an expansive view of Catholicism at play, and for Wiegele, one that is more reliant on the idioms of Catholicism than on traditional forms of affiliation that the Church itself is structurally reliant on. While my engagements with El Shaddai in San Jose were limited, and its followers were far fewer than in Manila and the parts of Luzon that Wiegele was studying in, the Catholic Church hierarchy in San Jose were somewhat ambivalent in its relationship to the group. As Wiegele has noted, there has been a begrudging acceptance of El Shaddai by the Church. I would argue it is the same in Occ. Mindoro. No doubt in part due to ceding such popular support to a group that is only tangentially related to the Catholic Church proper, it is also because of the appropriation of Catholic discourses and symbolism, away from the hierarchical structures of the Church. Such moves have informed the history of the Catholic Church since at least the 19th Century, and not only have revival sects as discussed by Reynaldo Ileto (1979) enacted similar popular movements that appropriate to different extents idioms of Catholicism, but as we have seen earlier, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, was

deeply involved in redefining Catholicism and Christianity in the Philippines.

Such shifts in Catholicism have for the most part been framed in terms of “Folk Catholicism,”⁶ or “Popular Catholicism,” although a number of scholars have shied away from such terms, such as Fenella Cannell in her study of what for others would fall under such a rubric. The discourse on “Folk Catholicism” has been a dominant one in the Philippines in the study of religion (de la Cruz 2014; Jocano 1981; Mercado 1982). As Julius Bautista has shown, the term “folk” in this regard is riven with overtones of political and social subjugation, and that discourses on syncretism and “folk Catholicism” have enabled the Catholic Church to “actively and continuously exercise an authoritative power over icons and modes of worship,” (Bautista 2010: 150). I would suggest however, that inasmuch as the “folk” here, has been used to subjugate rural and ostensibly naive Filipinos, there at the same time also an element of self-identified strength in the term, in that it aligns with social and anti-colonial movements against Catholic as well as the state orthodoxy, as for example in the work of Reynaldo Ileto (Ileto 1979). Interestingly, the leader and founder of El Shaddai, as Wiegele remarks, has publicly disapproved of the more famous aspects of folk Catholicism, such as self-flagellation and self-crucifixion (Wiegele 2005:22).

James Scott has noted, “folk Catholicism is to the New Testament and St. Peter as folk communism is to Das Kapital and Lenin” (Scott 1977: 4). For him, and many other scholars, this is essentially a matter of religious variation as well as the subjugation of people. Of course, in the Philippines, folk Catholicism can be a process that goes both ways: Catholic appropriation and adaptation of pre-Catholic and pre-Spanish beliefs, as well as Filipino appropriation and adaptation of Catholic orthodoxy for other ostensibly non-Catholic ends,

⁶ Although a number of scholars have shied away from the term. For Example, Fenella Cannell (1999) does not use the term, however much for others, the focus of her work would fit well under such a rubric.

religious or otherwise (Gowing and Scott 1968). But as Scott and most others view the matter of folk Catholicism as variation on orthodoxy, and the structural politics that is at the heart of it, the question of what is orthodox must be foregrounded. Viewed through the present-day lens of denominationalism, folk Catholicism becomes an altogether different entity, precisely because of orthodoxy. What exactly orthodoxy is, in Occ. Mindoro, is a highly contested matter. And the “folk” and “Catholic” elements of the theory, are not only debated and framed by Catholics, clerical or congregants. As we have seen, Born Again Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, among others, are thoroughly engaged in rendering and contesting Catholicism to their own ends, sometimes in overt ways. Indeed, because Catholicism has adapted and been adapted, for many non-Catholics I knew, was the reason there exists no orthodoxy. They see the matter in simply political terms, with again, the matter of Catholic institutionality at play.

That a number of scholars have looked to how idioms of Catholicism (whether under the appellation of “folk Catholicism,” “popular Catholicism,” or otherwise) are circulated, adapted, appropriated and challenged, speaks to the extent to which Catholicism is not only ubiquitous in its presence in Philippine forms of religiosity, and also points squarely to the fluidity of institutional Christian borders. Catholicism has proven itself, mostly against its institutional will, a remarkable ability to be appropriated in differing contexts. I mention this discourse on folk and popular Catholicism, as it raise the issue of affiliation and the institutionality of Christianity Loved Flock is a useful example in thinking through practices of denominational difference. Rather than viewing denominations as fixed entities, with members coalescing around distinct sets of doctrinal and theologically informed motivations, we can see tensions arise in terms of institutionality and affiliation. Loved Flock, like El

Shaddai, is often categorized as popular and folk Catholicism, and yet different to its historical antecedents, such as those movements famously discussed by Ileana, Loved Flock's moves against Catholic hierarchy can be framed in terms of commensurability with Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism. Rather than an outright rejection of the political and social institutionality of the Catholic Church, of which they are strong supporters, their rejection is one of the immediacy (or lack thereof) of a divine presence in Catholic worship. Loved Flock members view the institutional hierarchy of the Catholic Church, not as false, but they nevertheless do view it as perhaps hindering the naturalness of divine presence, even as such hindrance is at times necessary.

Conclusion

What I have hoped to show in this chapter is the ambiguity with which Christians in San Jose hold the experience of institutional forms of Christianity. I argue that such ambiguities, over whether institutionality is intrinsic or extrinsic to faith, is foregrounded in inter-denominational critique. Language ideologies, and the mediation of language, are not only seen as similar to institutional forms of mediation⁷, but are a productive means through which people consider the nature of institutionality. There are at least two ways of viewing this. Firstly, given that the institutionality of a church is its most obvious incarnation, it makes sense that it is this aspect of another denomination that one would look to in order to critique and perhaps denigrate. The Catholic Church, of course, stands apart from others in this respect. Its ubiquity, and institutional omnipresence, in San Jose, as well as the scandal as

⁷ See de la Cruz (2009), for a discussion of Catholicism and the mediation of divine presence through technological relationships.

outlined above, inevitably call for such critiques. In many ways it replays a classic version of bureaucracy whereby the visibility of its institutional forms belies the invisibility of its actions. Thus, we can frame institutionality, and its denominational critique, in terms of visibility.

There is a second way to view institutionality, and that is, as I have discussed, in terms of mediating a divine presence. The ambiguities and tension Christians identify in institutional forms that I have discussed in this chapter, I suggest, highlight the matter of attempting to accomplish the pure church, or *ecclesia pura*. For in many ways, while critiques of the bureaucratic and institutional aspects of Catholicism, and of certain Protestant churches, abound, the question could be asked: what is offered against such practices? Ultimately, it is not a relationship to God that is unmediated by language or worldly institutions, for they are in the end seen as necessary. Instead the goal is a church that is purified in form. Weber took up the term *ecclesia pura* to describe the differentiation between sect and church (Weber 1991: 492.). But at the heart of the matter is that the church, in its generic and material forms, is necessary. To achieve a pure, or purified church, is the goal of all the churches I worked with. That for most churches, they were always in a state of becoming, rather than having achieved such institutional forms of practice, emphasizes both the risks of institutionality, and its central importance in mediating one's relationship to God.

What I hope to have shown here is that the specificities of institutional arrangements of different Christian groups stand apart from more generalized, generic, and importantly, shared views of institutionality. And it is these shared views of institutionality that often provide the basis of critique. The critiques of institutionality, mostly aimed at the Catholic Church, but also at other denominations, tended away from the theologically or doctrinally

specific, and were instead broadly aimed at the corroding influence of bureaucracy and institutionality in a much broader sense. Institutionality, for these Christians I have discussed, is necessary, and not necessarily a negative force, even for those who negate the institutional forms of Catholicism. The church is natural, and the church can be pure. *Ecclesia pura* is “Christ, not Religion.” And *ecclesia pura* is not an oxymoron, but rather a perfected state, of which no church would agree to have yet achieved. Not even Catholics. At least not in Mindoro.

Epilogue

I take the title of this dissertation, *The Boundary Indefinite*, from the cartographical term to mark those territories that are contested and cannot (yet) be solidified on a map. Likewise Christians in Occ. Mindoro are faced with having to define, agree and align their denominational boundaries. If Christianity is about mediating a divine presence, what that mediation might entail, is not a straightforward matter, and in Mindoro, not even a settled one. For many Christians I knew, it is not necessarily the case that there may be a settling of denominational boundaries. To be in a constant state of becoming, both in one's faith, and in one's church, is of course intrinsically Christian. Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to show how Christians conceive of themselves in the face of other Christians, so closely similar that any difference may be of import in how a Christian community, in a greater sense, is rendered. Equally I have sought to show how Christians conceive of their faith in the face of necessary, though often risky, forms of mediation and differentiation from other Christians. They do so, of course, while trying to maintain an allegiance to a broader Christian community. I have highlighted the role of church organization and bureaucracy as forms of mediation, as these become ethically challenging aspects of Christian mediation when people are faced with changing norms of religious plurality and a multi-denominational presence. While my research focused on religious competition, conflict, and differentiation (as well as

commensurability), I always found it striking how rare it was to hear a Christian question the faith of someone else. By and large, while people might have had an intense dislike for one denomination or another, they always highlighted the church and not its members. The increasing Christian plurality in Occ. Mindoro has led to an intense focus on the mediating form of the church itself and on the nature of the congregation.

Throughout this dissertation, I have located denominational difference against a backdrop of a shared sense of a Christian community. For example, even as the Catholic Church sought to minimize the impact of Protestants in the upland regions of Mindoro in the 1950s (Chapter 2), or as the JIL attempted to convert Catholics in a rural community in San Jose (Chapter 3), or indeed as UMC members tried to prevent AIMP members from accessing church property (Chapter 4), no one ever considered the other as anything but Christian. But there are churches and religious groups who are not included in such a community. For many people, the Philippines, inasmuch as it is Christian, ought to be Islamic. As the southern provinces of the country are riven with divisions so explicitly religious and political, with moves for independence from the Philippines, it is often surprising that religious difference, between Christianity and Islam, does not dominate Philippine discourses on religion.

There are few Muslims in Occ. Mindoro. In San Jose, there are three or four large families, and some other individuals who are Muslim. Perhaps one hundred in total. And there is a mosque, tucked away deep in a network of narrow streets and houses. Most people I mentioned it to, did not know there was a mosque in town, even those who lived maybe a five minute walk away. Christians in San Jose were not concerned with Islam, and often saw the problems in the south of the country as being almost too far away to be concerned with. Thus Islam did not figure in Christian conceptions of a religious community in San Jose. For the

Muslim families, it was different. After Friday prayers one afternoon, I talked with three men outside the mosque. They said they had no problems with the Christians, but noted that they did not grow beards, to better fit in and draw less attention. Theirs was surely a drastically different view, not only of religion, but of how Christian communities come into being.

There were Christians too who were excluded from even the most basic recognition of others. When I would meet people in Sta. Teresita, and slip into my well-rehearsed description of what was studying, they would say one of two things. The first was “well if you are interested in religion, you should study the cult outside of town, Tinagong Pulong!” and the second “Okay, but don’t go to St. Augustine. Stay away from the cult!” As it turned out, it was quite difficult to get access to this apparent cult, out there on the fringes of the town, and out there on the fringes of religion. Located in a rural part of Sta. Teresita, Tinagong Pulong occupied a compound, with large fifteen-foot walls and a large iron gate. The gate stated curfew times on it. I had been told that the leader of the Tinagong Pulong, who people called “Daddy,” was a close friend of an ex-barangay captain, and that I should go through them, and not arrive at the compound unannounced. There were many rumors in Sta. Teresita about Tinagong Pulong—ranging from the extreme, for example that they had engaged in human sacrifice, to the less extreme, that members weren’t allowed leave the compound. In the end, I travelled with the current barangay captain, who told me when I visited her, that all those rumors were not true at all, and that the Tinagong Pulong were good people, and while perhaps different, never caused anything in the way of trouble for the barangay. She told me that over the last decade, the community had softened in their relationships with the greater Sta. Teresita community, and now their children attended public schools, and worked in the town. Together, her, an assistant and I travelled to the compound, and I me and talked to

Daddy. A large and friendly man, smoking cigarettes from a plastic filter, we sat and had lunch. Interestingly, he considered himself Christian. He and some families had moved to Occ. Mindoro in the mid-1990s, and set up a community here. While they didn't rely on the Bible, they believed in God, the Devil, and Jesus Christ. Yes, they had services each morning and night, in which the entire community attended, and everyone wore white robes, and they based much of their religious practice based on the interpretations of members' dreams. But they considered themselves Christians. He was not perturbed that others did not see them as Christians, and neither was he overly concerned with correcting misplaced assumptions of his community. And he did not wish to engage with or join some manner of ecumenical Christian community. But neither did he relate his community in a competitive way to other Christian groups in Sta. Teresita.

I describe here Islam as well as Tinagong Pulong in order to note that even in San Jose, there are lines of differentiation, of course, drawn around Christians as well as between them. But it has been the lines drawn between, that I have discussed in this dissertation. Even then, recognition of the religious 'other' is not ubiquitous, necessarily competitive, or indeed shared. Recognition, in part, depends on visibility. If denominationalism, and church organization itself, are a matter of earthly and divine presence, and of mediating people's engagement with a divine presence, there is the matter of how visible the organizational and logistical strategies are that underpin a church's success. As with bureaucracy, the oppositional play with visibility—at once both manifesting visibility and concealment—is located by the Christians I worked with as an issue both of agency and of ethics. So to with the strategies of Christian work. Can one let a church, in all its logistics and material forms, speak for its members—can it be read as the manifestation of a congregation's collective

intentionality? I suggest here that this is what Christians are trying to do—to enable their church to be visible and read as truly Christian—by themselves and by others. But if one must engage in practices that occur behind-the-scenes, outside of the gaze of congregants and worshippers, and outside the remit of what is generally considered Christian, does this detract from the ability of a church to be semiotically rendered in a coherent manner? Ultimately, in this dissertation, I have tried to show how denominational plurality has pushed the Christians of Occ. Mindoro to consider these questions, as they strive to answer not only *who* is Christian but *what* is Christian.

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