



Participation in Religious Couple Community: A Catalyst for Joint Religiousness and Sanctification of Marriage

Ronaldo Roa Celestial
Assistant Professor, DLSU-TRED
Corresponding Author: ronaldo.celestial @dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract: This research builds on many studies conducted abroad that find different aspects of religion intersect with marriage. This is one study that attempts to analyze participation in religious couples' community as one aspect that establishes the link between religion and marriage. The study aims to establish whether such participation, something that originated in the Philippines in 1981 and in recent years has become more prevalent, is a significant factor in improving joint religiousness and in increasing or creating the perception of sanctification of marriage (proximal religious constructs) among married catholic couples. Participants of the study come from the religious extreme of the sample to prove the theory. The study uses two sets of questionnaires served to thirty Catholic couples who are married for an average of ten years, residing in Laguna province and are members of any religious couples' communities in the country for at least three years. Questionnaires using Likert scale contain items that compare the proximal religious construct of marriage prior participation and the present time that the married couples are part of a religious couples' community. The emergent data are tabulated to serve as indicators that there is the aforesaid distinction and that the participants having a religious community made a significant difference and influence in their marriage. More importantly, the data are put in a matrix that showed different empirical evidences or pathways of joint religiousness and sanctification of marriage. The study showed a glimpse of the culture of catholic marriage in the Philippines, being the only predominantly Christian country in Asia. Furthermore, it can be gleaned from the study that involvement in religious couples' community is one aspect of religion positively correlated with marital functioning.

Key words: community; religiousness; sanctification; catholic; couples; marriage

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion may play a significant role in many marriages. Goodman and colleagues cited Mahoney et al (1999) who found that many past studies of religion and marriage relied on single items distal measures such as church attendance or salience of religion to assess religious influence in marriage. They found that even studies using more sophisticated methodologies tend to focus on distal

aspects of religion such as religious homogamy and church attendance, as well as distal aspects of marriage such as satisfaction, stability and coping (Goodman, 2006).

Because most studies have focused on distal aspects of religion and marriage, the more nuanced aspects of religiosity like beliefs, values, and the processes whereby couples apply them in their marriages have rarely been studied (Goodman, 2006). Building on the research of Mahoney et al (1999), this study will focus on joint religiousness



and perceptions of sanctification of marriage which are proximal religious variables that directly reflect an intersection between religion and marriage. This study will show in empirical data the degree these proximal religious aspects are evident in marriage of some Filipino Catholic couples.

There is an additional religious aspect that will be under investigation in this study. This is participation in religious couples' community which is unique and prevalent in the Philippine context. Couples for Christ (CFC) and Family Life Apostolate (FAMILIA) are two Catholic Charismatic Renewal Groups which are religious associations or communities existing in the parishes nationwide and recognized by the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). CFC works for Christian couples wishing to deepen their faith by helping one another to revive their relationship with our Lord and to allow themselves to be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Pontifical Council for the Laity website). FAMILIA is a family life movement dedicated to bring about Christian renewal and strengthening of families in the modern world by establishing parish-based Christian communities (Family Life Apostolate website). Researcher of this study has the assumption that there is correlation between these three proximal constructs of marriage. Thus, the research questions this study seeks to answer are: Does participation in couples' community help married couples attain joint religiousness and perception of sanctification of marriage? If so, to what extent it is influential and what specifically are the evidences that exhibited the existence of joint religiousness and perceived sacredness of marriage?

2. METHODOLOGY

Participants were identified through the list of members, all residing in Sta. Rosa and Binangalan, Laguna, as provided by the leaders of the two couples' community. The researcher sent email messages to these members with the electronic copies of questionnaire as attachment. The help of the leaders was also solicited to distribute the questionnaires personally to the members. Fortunately, 31 couples responded to the invitation: 11 CFC and 20 FAMILIA. One submitted questionnaire, however, was disregarded due to gross incomplete data. Majority ages of the husbands and wives were between 40 – 49 years old. Apparently, 100% of the sample are Catholics; both couples belonging to the same religion (religious homogamy). The sample was well educated with majority having attained college level of

education for 23 husbands and 23 wives; and, a post graduate education for another 4 husbands and 3 wives. 8 couple participants were married for almost 20 years and another 9 couples for about 25 years. Participants are presently members of their religious couples' community for an average of 15 years.

In order to understand the link of participation in religious community with joint religiousness and sanctification of marriage from the perspective of those who are living it, survey questionnaire was utilized as the most appropriate methodology. The questionnaires consist of three scales formulated by Mahoney et al (1999) in their research entitled "Marriage and the Spiritual Realm: The Role of Proximal and Distal Religious Constructs in Marital Functioning." The researcher of this study added a timeline in the questionnaires: "Before" which represents the period of marriage the couple participants were not yet involved in the religious couple community; and NOW represents the current situation they are involved as members. The couple participants jointly answered each scale twice as they compared the state of religiousness as a couple and their perceptions of sanctification of marriage prior and during participation in a religious couple community.

Joint religious activities questionnaire consists of 13 items to assess how often partners engage in religious or spiritual activities using a 7-point scale from never (1) to very often (7), with a midpoint of sometimes (4). These 13 items made the couple participants rate themselves in the areas or activities as follows: 1) praying together, 2) praying for each other, 3) talking together about how to live out God's will, 4) talking about personal moral and spiritual issues, 5) attending church together, 6) going to religious education classes together, 7) going to Bible study together, 8) going on spiritual or religious retreats together, 9) reading books or articles about religious or spiritual topics, 10) participating in volunteer work through religious organization, 11) talking about God's role in marriage, 12) celebrating religious holidays together, and 13) engaging in religious rituals together (e.g., fasting, meditation).

Sanctification of marriage questionnaire consists of two measures: first, Perceived Sacred Qualities of Marriage Scale to assess how much spouses perceived their relationship as having sacred qualities often ascribed to God such as "holy", "spiritual", "blessed," and so on. The scale included nine pairs of opposing adjectives namely, 1) holy – unholy, 2) inspiring – uninspiring, 3) blessed – cursed, 4) everlasting – temporary, 5) awesome – ordinary, 6) heavenly – earthly, 7) spiritual – worldly / secular, 8) religious – nonreligious, 9) mysterious – routine. This questionnaire consists of the checklist where to choose the following scale: very closely describes, closely describes, slightly describes and neutral. Second, Manifestation of God Scale which is meant to



assess the degree the couple participants perceived how God is active and present in their marriage. It contains 14 items to assess beliefs as follows: 1) God played a role in the development of our marriage; 2) God is present in our marriage; 3) our marriage is a reflection of God's will; 4) our marriage is an expression of my spirituality or religiousness; 5) our marriage is symbolic of God and what we believe about God; 6) God is part of our marriage; 7) our marriage is consistent with our spiritual or religious entity; 8) We experience God through marriage; 9) our marriage reflects our image of what God wants for us; 10) our marriage is influenced by God's actions in our lives; 11) our marriage is a holy bond; 12) our marriage represents God's presence in our lives; 13) our marriage follows the bible and what it teaches; 14) our marriage follows the teachings of our church. Again each item was rated on a 7-point scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7) with a midpoint of neutral.

Ratings for all items in each measure were summed up to create a total score.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motivations for joining the religious couples' community for the 30 couple respondents were varied. These motivations can be categorized to social, spiritual and communal. Social reasons such as "invited by a friend," "invited by our ninong and ninangsakasal," "influenced by parents." Majority of couples were driven by spiritual interests as expressed in the following words: "we want our marriage to be blessed and guided by the Lord," "for spiritual growth," "we want Jesus to be the center of married life and to be constantly reminded of God's words," "to be able to serve God," "to have a deeper relationship with God as a couple and family," "to know about the teachings of the Bible," and so on. Likewise reasons like "to seek help and prayers from brothers and sisters in the community," "to be with a community of catholic couples that would strengthen our Christian life as a family," "to experience the life in a community with the same religious beliefs," to draw strength from the prayers of community, among others, are common communal motivations.

It can be seen from the results on the joint religious activities BEFORE participation in couples' community that the total scores are closed and spread almost equally in items 1,2, 3,4,9,11,12 and 13. It shows that some couple respondents are already praying together, praying for each other, talking together, reading books, celebrating religious holidays and engaging in religious rituals together,

but other couples are not as can be seen with total scores appearing in column 1 (never). There are high scores as well in column 4 (sometimes) indicating inconsistencies for those who do the aforesaid activities. Moreover, there are high scores in items 6,7, & 8 in columns 1-3 indicating that many couple respondents were never or almost never attending religious education classes, bible study and religious retreat together. (See Table 1)

There is a marked development noticeable in the results where the scores are high especially in columns 5-7, showing that the couple respondents as part of a couples' community are NOW doing the religious activities together very often. (See Table 2)

Table 1: Joint Religious Activities (Before)

Qs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	7	4	7	6	4	2	
2		2	4	10	9	2	3
3	7	4	7	4	3	3	1
4	5	5	8	5	4	2	1
5	1			3	6	6	14
6	15	4	1	3	1	6	
7	15	6	2	1	3	3	
8	14	7	1	2		3	3
9	5	6	3	9	3	3	1
10	7	8	2	5	2	4	2
11	8	7		9	1	4	1
12	1	2	3	8	4	6	6
13	8	7	6	4		5	2

Table 2: Joint Religious Activities (NOW)

Qs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1				1	6	11	11
2					2	8	19
3				2	6	12	9
4					6	13	9
5				1	1	6	21
6		1		4	5	9	11
7		1	1	5	6	9	7
8			2	1	5	8	13
9			2	1	4	11	10
10				1	7	11	10
11				2	3	11	13
12				1	3	5	20
13			3	2	5	9	9

In Sanctification of Marriage scale BEFORE participation in couples' community, the high scores are as follows: 10 couples (33%) perceived their marriage as holy (neutral), 10 couples (33%) as inspiring (slightly describes), 14 couples (47%) as blessed (closely describes), 9 couples (30%) as everlasting (closely described), 9 couples (30%) as awesome (closely described), 9 couples (30%) as heavenly (neutral), 11 couples (37%) as spiritual (closely described), 11 couples (37%) as religious (closely described), and finally 6 couples (20%) as mysterious (neutral) and another 6 couples (20%) as mysterious (closely described). There are 3-6 couples



(10%-20%) who had negative perceptions of marriage as shown in the results.

When compared on scores with the NOW that the couples are currently involved in religious community, the results shows significant increase in perception of sacred qualities of marriage as evident with the following results: 17 couples (57%) viewing their marriage as holy (closely describes), 14 couples (47%) and another 10 couples (33%) as inspiring (closely describes and very closely describes respectively), 20 couples (67%) as blessed (very closely described), 16 couples (53%) as everlasting (very closely describes), 14 couples (47%) and another 11 couples (37%) as awesome (closely describes and very closely describes respectively), 14 couples (47%) and another 9 couples (30%) as heavenly (closely describes and very closely describes respectively), 14 couples (47%) and another 12 couples (40%) as spiritual (very closely describes and closely describes respectively), 13 couples (43%) and another 12 couples (40%) as religious (closely describes and very closely describes respectively), and finally, 10 couples (33%) and another 9 couples (30%) as mysterious (closely describes and slightly describes respectively). No couples viewed negatively their marriage except 3 couples perceiving their marriage as routine (closely describes)

Table 3: Manifestation of God (Before)

Qs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	5	2	4	12	3	4	
2	5	2	8	11		2	2
3	8	3	6	7	4	1	1
4	3	4	6	5	10	2	
5	5	3	4	7	8	2	1
6	8	3	6	5	6	1	1
7	3	3	3	10	7	1	1
8	5	4	4	10	4	1	1
9	2	2	7	11	5	1	
10	5	1	8	9	6	1	
11	6	4	3	9	6		2
12	6	2	4	10	5	2	1
13	3	2	6	11	5	1	1
14	4	3	5	12	5		1

Table 4: Manifestation of God (NOW)

Qs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	25	4			1		
2	26	3		1			
3	24	5	1				
4	19	8	2	1			
5	22	4	4				
6	27	1	2				
7	19	7	4				
8	24	4	1				
9	20	8	2				
10	23	7					
11	24	4	1	1			
12	23	6	1				
13	16	11	3				
14	19	10	1				

The results show that the scores are widespread in the 7-point scale on the perception of God being active in marriage. There are those who couple respondents who strongly agree (columns 1,2,3) and there are some who strongly disagree (columns 5,6,7). Evident in the data is the high scores in column 4 which indicates that there are great number of couples who are neutral with the perceptions of god being present in marriage. (See Table3)

In contrast, there is strong agreement that God is present or playing an active role in their marriage when they became members of couples' community. The results shows high scores in column 1,2,3 representing "strongly agree," while very few in the rest of the scales (column 4,5,6,7).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown in empirical data that participation in religious couples' community do help married couples attain joint religiousness and increase their perception of the sanctification of marriage. It can be inferred from the study that there are interconnections between these three proximal aspects of marriage. It is worth looking in future study if these aspects of marriage can translate into marital satisfaction and marital functioning. Likewise, it is good to examine also if there are negative implications in participation in couples community like whether it reinforces patriarchal mentality in relationship among others.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere gratitude to CFC couple leaders Mr. and Mrs. Jheck Josol and Mr. and Mrs. Omar Visceral. Also, to my colleague Ms. Cielo Santos for always making herself available for consultation regarding this research.

6. REFERENCES

Goodman, M.A., & Dollahite, D.C. (2006). How religious couples perceive the influence of God in their marriage [Electronic version]. *Review of Religious Research*, Volume 48(2): pages 141-155.

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Jewell, T., Swank, A.B., Scott, E., Emery, E., & Rye, M. (1999). Marriage and the spiritual realm: the role of proximal and distal religious construct in marital functioning [Electronic version]. *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 13, no. 3, 321-338.



Presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2016
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
March 7-9, 2016