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Understanding Catholic Youth Religiosity in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

The study is a multi-dimensional one that it does not only determine the level of religiosity of the Catholic youth in a developing country like the Philippines but also the variables that influence their level of religiosity as well as some of the outcomes. The survey has a total of 2,005 Filipino Catholic youth respondents from the Philippines in Luzon-North of Manila, Luzon-South of Manila, Metropolitan of Manila, Visayas, and Mindanao. The study was conducted to (1) determine the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth along the traditional lines of beliefs, practices, and attitudes, (2) identify the contextual variables that may influence the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth, and (3) establish the relationship between the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth and their psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, socio-political beliefs and participation. In terms of doctrine, Filipino Catholic youth have moderate knowledge of Catholicism and that they can explain their views to a moderate extent only. In terms of morals, the results show that respondents hold beliefs that are moderately consistent with what the Catholic Church teaches. Respondents strongly feel the presence of God in their lives and they have had religious experiences that indicate this presence. Filipino Catholic youth have ordinary spiritual experiences, which means that most of the time, they feel a spiritual connection with God and with others. The demographic variables predict religiosity and, in turn, religiosity predicts psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, and political participation.

Keyword: Filipino youth, Catholic youth, religiosity, psychosocial attributes, cultural behavior, sociopolitical participation

Introduction

Jesus, since His time, has placed children and the youth at the heart of the Christian faith. He has primarily taught how children and their humility could be a model to His disciples, that people who follow Him must be 'like children' (cf. Matthew 18:1-5; Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 9:46-48; Luke 18:15-17). Jesus has also invited the youth to come and follow Him (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30; Luke 24:13-35).

Blessed Pope John Paul II (1985) in his apostolic letter on the occasion of the International Youth Year makes a profound reflection on the period of youth, which he pointed out as a key stage in the life of every human on which the Catholic Church places special importance. He writes, "it [period of youth] belongs to the whole of that space that every man traverses in his life's journey, and at the same time it is a special possession belonging to everyone.

Recognizing the significance of (the proportion of) the youth in the Philippines, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP, 1992) considers the country "the country of the young" (p. 130), and hence declaring a preferential apostolate for children and the youth (as they have declared evangelical love of preference for the poor). CBCP also recognizes the youth as the Church's greatest resource for evangelization. Hence, they must be properly evangelized so that they can in turn properly evangelize their contemporaries.

Objectives of the Survey

The Catholic Church in the Philippines under the guidance of CBCP has a body specially designated to look into the concerns of the youth – the Episcopal Commission on Youth (ECY). ECY is tasked to undertake continuous studies and periodic research on the current situation needs of the Filipino youth and, subsequently, to write policies as well as develop formational and pastoral programs for the Filipino youth as may be deemed necessary by (arch)dioceses.

And so, in a desire to be able to identify concerns and concerns of the Filipino Catholic youth (FCY), this study was commissioned to identify the present psychosocial, cultural, and socio-political needs and concerns of the youth to be able to appropriately address these needs and to inquire on the state of the FCY's religiosity is necessary for pastoral reasons. Hence, this study was conducted to:

1. Determine the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth along the traditional lines of beliefs, practices, and attitudes;
2. Identify the contextual variables that may influence the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth; and
3. Establish the relationship between the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth and their psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, socio-political beliefs and participation.

The present survey is a multi-dimensional one in that it does not only determine the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth but also the variables that influence their level of religiosity as well as some of the outcomes of the level of their religiosity.

Framework

There are frameworks that provide evidence how contextual factors influence religiosity. Another aspect of theorizing in the area of religiosity is how it influences psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, and socio-political beliefs. These relationships are anchored on two theories of religiosity. The concept of religiosity and religious institutions in the lives of youth (Youniss et al., 1999) explains the effect of contextual factors on religiosity and religiosity as a protective factor explains the effect of religiosity on psychosocial factors (Maton & Wells, 1995). Religiosity as an institution in the lives of the youth explains that religiosity as part of the youth experience is dependent on contextual factors such as socio-economic status, family, peers, school, community, church, and church-based organizations. On the other hand, religiosity as a protective factor is a source of comfort for the youth and develops specific values, beliefs, and culture.

The model of religiosity by Glock and Stark (1965) was used in the present study. Their model indicates five dimensions of religiosity, namely intellect, ideology, public practice, private practice, and religious experience. Intellect can be viewed in two perspectives: Sociological perspective and religious construct. From sociological perspective, intellectual dimension refers to the social expectation that religious people have some knowledge of religion and that they can explain their views on transcendence, religion and religiosity. In the personal religious construct system, this dimension is represented as themes of interest, hermeneutical skills, styles of thought, and interpretation, and as bodies of knowledge. One indicator of intellectual dimension is the frequency of one's thinking over religious issues. Ideology dimension refers to individuals' beliefs regarding the existence of transcendent reality and the relationship between the transcendence and human. A sample indicator for this dimension is the extent to which a person believes in the existence of God or something divine. The dimension of public practice is the social expectation that they belong to religious communities and that they manifest their religious beliefs through their participation in religious rituals and communal activities. This dimension can be measured by identifying the frequency with which somebody attends religious services (e.g. Sunday Mass for Catholics). Meanwhile, the dimension of private practice is the social expectation that pious individuals devote themselves to God in rituals in private space. The dimension of religious experience is the social expectation that religious individuals have some kind of direct contact to an ultimate reality which affects them emotionally. This dimension can be measured based on individuals' actual experience with the Divine on how they feel God works in their lives.

These five dimensions of religiosity can be narrowed down into three with reference to the Catechism of the Filipino Catholics (1997): Doctrine, morals, and worship. Doctrine refers to the knowledge of God's word and Church doctrines (intellectual dimension and ideology). Morals pertain to one's judgment of what is right and wrong based on the natural and civil law (ideology). Worship is the practice of one's faith where individuals perform corporal acts of mercy such as helping the poor, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, and the like (private practice, public practice, and religious experience). Basically, worship is best exemplified in one's good practices as Catholics which can be summed up into two: (1) Love of God and (2) love of neighbor as modeled by no other than Jesus Himself.

Contextual Factors and Religiosity

There are several factors contribute to an individual's religiosity, namely socioeconomic status (Schieman, 2010), family (Gutierrezwin, Kirknis, Mattis, 2014), peers (Baxter, 2013), and school community (Barrett, Pearson, Muller, Frank, & 2007). These factors were selected based on studies that established their role in developing religiosity.

Socioeconomic Status. In the study of Schieman (2010), he found that persons with high socioeconomic status were reported to have lower level of religiosity that their peers with low socioeconomic status. Specifically it was observed that individuals with high socioeconomic status have a diminished attendance in religious activities (i.e. attending religious services, mass), spend less time in praying, and reading religious scriptures (i.e. Bible). In contrast, peers who have low socioeconomic status were seen to have frequent attendance in religious activities, spend more time in praying, and reading religious scriptures. This finding suggests socioeconomic status is a variable that can contribute to an individual's level of religiosity.

Family.

Similarly, the influences of an individual's family can also be a source of higher religiosity among individuals. A study suggests that the members of a family can be a source of contribution to a person's religiosity (Gutierrez et al., 2014). The strongest family member to contribute to a person's religiosity is the mother, followed by the grandmother, the father, the grandfather, the sister(s), and the brother(s) had the least influence on religiosity (Gutierrez et al., 2014).

Peers

Meanwhile, the effects of peers on religiosity were found to be positive (see Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010; Barry & Nelson, 2005). It was shown in research that college students share their religious experiences to their peers, this is because they are more open to their peers and they are more willing and comfortable to communicate their religious experiences (Barry et al., 2010; Barry & Nelson, 2005).

School

As reflected in previous findings, school can be a great influence and have an impact to students' religiosity (Barrett, et al., 2007). It was suggested that students carry the religious beliefs and practices they get from their religious services to their schools, because it is also a norm in schools to religious beliefs (Barrett et al., 2007). Meaning, if the school climate exhibits an endorsement of religiosity, students would also emit these practices and beliefs to their own life.

Church

Putman (2001) explains in his study that value for religion is reinforced and stems from religious ceremonies in the church. The church serves as a social institution that serves in the formation of an individual sense of religion.

Religiosity and Psychosocial Factors

The youth's knowledge, belief, and faith in God drives them to the observance of good Catholic practices by exhibiting outcomes such as psycho-social attributes, positive cultural beliefs, and political beliefs and participation.

Some of these psychosocial attributes that may be affected by an individual's level of religiosity include security, belonging, acceptance, independence, relationships, values, achievement, and recognition.

During the adolescent stage, a sense of psychosocial identity starts to develop. Marcia (1980) further explains identity as “an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history” (p. 159). The work of Marcia (1980) serves as a major groundwork for the eight aspects of defining the psychosocial aspect of the individual. Psychosocial factors are conceptualized alongside two dimensions: presence or absence of exploration, and a presence or absence of a clearly defined and stable commitment to values, standards, and beliefs. Based on adolescent responses to these dimensions, the original factors described four types of identity status: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. These factors in later studies evolved into the eight factors. The formation of these factors as part of the individuals’ identity is influenced by their concept of religiosity.

First, security is achieved when the youth feel physically and emotionally safe. Adults should provide an environment that promotes trust, honesty and respect.

Second, belonging is one of the basic needs of man; this is a condition where one feels being part of a group. Third, acceptance is a condition where a person is accepted by a group for what he or she really is. In that way, s/he develops a sense of self-worth where his/her efforts are recognized. Fourth, independence is the stage where the youth try new things, test their knowledge and skills and in the process develop self-identity and control over their lives.

Fifth, aside from independence, the youth also develop quality relationships with peers and adults. Young persons are able to receive love and support from family members, neighbors, and friends. When provided a caring environment, the youth are able to learn important values of love and respect. However, it is not solely positive values that the youth learn but also the negative ones. When faced with conflicting values like respect and arrogance, the youth must be able to exhibit the positive values and this is possible through adults’ modeling of positive behavior.

Sixth, values such as integrity (acting on convictions or standing up for their beliefs), honesty (telling the truth), caring (helping other people), equality and justice (recognizing the value of promoting equality through poverty alleviation), responsibility (taking personal responsibility), and restraint (not yielding to alcohol abuse or sexual activities) are some of the positive values that the youth should acquire to ensure their positive development.

Seventh, along with these positive values, the youth also place high value on achievement. They feel pride and joy when they gain mastery of knowledge and skills. Generally, they celebrate their accomplishments. Eighth, the youth has the capacity to enjoy life. They experience both successes and failures and are able to grow from them.

These eight factors serve as components of psychosocial aspects formed among the Filipino youth. Given the concept of religiosity as a protective factor, it is hypothesized in the study that religiosity contributes in the youths’ formation of psychosocial identity.

The Filipino youth adopts positive cultural and political beliefs, which in effect may lead them to take active part in social transformation. The cultural beliefs that Filipino youth are expected to develop include cooperation and teamwork, Filipino pride, and responsibility. Finally, on political beliefs and participation, the youth are expected to take active role in participating and making a stand on social issues. The study by Dunn (2005), demonstrated that religiosity is associated to political beliefs. The relationship is explained that religiosity promotes social involvement making individual participate in political affairs.

On the hand, the study by Lindbridge (2005) explains how religiosity influences cultural beliefs. He explains that religion can be identified as a structuralist approach to culture. Religion represents a set of cultural norms that is perpetuated in the interaction of the individual with society. Moreover, Katzz-Gerro, Raz, and Yaish (2007) showed in their study that religiosity is an important factor that shapes cultural participation. They explained further that religious individuals are expected to strictly follow a particular lifestyle reflecting a culture.

The studies presented showed evidence of testing how religiosity explains cultural and political beliefs. It is hypothesized in the study that levels of religiosity influences the formation of cultural and political beliefs.

This framework of understanding the youth’s religiosity is dynamic in that the context such as demographics, socio-economic status, family, school, peers, Church, Church-based organizations and demographics shape the youth’s religiosity which result in their psycho-social attributes, cultural beliefs, and political beliefs and participation.

Method

The respondents for the survey were limited to Filipino Catholic youth, i.e. between thirteen to 39 years of age, single, and permanent residents. Multi-stage probability sampling was used in the selection of the sample from the (arch)diocese to the parish level and convenience sampling at the household level. The survey has a total of 2,005 respondents from Luzon-North of Manila, Luzon-South of Manila, Metropolitan of Manila, Visayas, and Mindanao.

The study's instrument consists of five sections: (1) Socio-demographic profile, (2) religious beliefs and practices, (3) psychosocial attributes, (4) cultural beliefs, and (5) sociopolitical beliefs and participation. The questionnaire was administered to the sample (arch)dioceses primarily by means of group administration, and, in exceptional cases, individual administration or guided/structured interview.

Findings

The study suggests that Filipino Catholic youth have moderate knowledge of Catholicism and that they can explain their views to a moderate extent only. The respondents' beliefs are consistent with Catholic teachings. The results show that respondents hold beliefs that are moderately consistent with what the Catholic Church teaches. Eighty percent of the participants go to Mass at least once a week, 36 percent pray the Rosary on a regular basis, 28 percent attend prayer meetings at least once a week, 29 percent visit the Blessed Sacrament often, and 27 percent go to Bible study regularly. Going to confession is done less frequently, with 50 percent of the respondents saying they go to Confession a few times a year. Similarly, participants participate less frequently in retreats and recollections, with 47 percent saying they do these activities a few times in a year. Pilgrimages to religious sites and the Stations of the Cross are done less regularly, at least a few times in a year. Personal prayer is done most frequently; 55 percent do this several times in a day. Meditation is also done frequently, with 23 percent of respondents saying they do this several times a day. Reading the bible, praying novenas, praying the Rosary, and visiting the Blessed Sacrament are performed less frequently than personal prayer and meditation. Less than 15 percent of respondents indicate that they read the Bible and pray the Rosary on a daily basis. Less than 10 percent of respondents pray novenas and visit the Blessed Sacrament daily. Participants strongly feel the presence of God in their lives and they have had religious experiences that indicate this presence. They identify strongly with other Catholics. Filipino Catholic youth have ordinary spiritual experiences most days. This means that, most of the time, they feel a spiritual connection with God and with others. When asked about how close they felt they were to God using a four-point Likert scale, the participants said that they felt very close. Prosocial behaviors are actual acts or deeds (not confined to mere desire or idea) that are clearly intended to enhance the welfare of others. Examples of prosocial behaviors are volunteering work and services, donating goods and money, and being available to others who need their time and counsel. Persons with prosocial behavior willingly help others and go out of their way to help. Participants exhibited moderate prosocial behaviors ($M = 3.16$, $SD = .35$). In terms of sense of agency, which refers to whether the youth acknowledge having some sense of control in their lives, the participants show a moderate sense of agency ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.40$). Communion refers to the extent to which the youth show caring, benevolence, and friendliness towards others, as well as respect and esteem. The results show that Filipino Catholic youth exhibit a low to moderate level of communion ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.28$). Initiative is the desire to do things on one's own while taking responsibility for one's actions. The participants show a moderate level of initiative ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .42$). The life satisfaction of Filipino Catholic youth was measured using Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). Based on Diener's suggested interpretation, the respondents' mean score ($M = 5.13$, $SD = .98$) indicate that they like their lives and feel that things are going well. Of course their lives are not perfect, but they feel that things are mostly good. The top five risky behaviors that the youth engage in are getting drunk (25%), surfing prohibited sites on the internet without supervision (18%), excessive computer gaming leading to lack of sleep or socialization (17%), being out of school (16%), and cutting classes frequently (15%). Cultural beliefs indicate whether a person subscribes to collectivist or individualist beliefs in terms of responsibility, achievement, social welfare, religion, and affiliation. Higher scores (ranging from 1 to 4) indicate a collectivist orientation. Among the five dimensions of culture, participants were found to have a more collectivist orientation for social welfare ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .41$). The lowest mean score is for religion ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .39$), indicating that the respondents perceive the practice and expression of religion to be more of a private and personal

experience, rather than a collective one. Overall, the participants have a mean score of 2.63 (SD = .19), which implies beliefs that are more individualist than collectivist. Respondents' political participation was also measured using a four-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate that respondents exhibit greater political participation. On the average, participants seem to participate in political concerns to a moderate extent (M = 3.10, SD = .37). The survey also aimed at identifying the contextual variables that may influence the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth and establishing the relationship between the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth and their psychosocial attributes. To be able to do these, a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was performed.

Based on the model fit indices, the data fit the model because the APC and ARS are less than .05 level. Also the AVIF is less than .5. This implies that the demographic variables predict religiosity and, in turn, religiosity predicts psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, and political participation.

Gender, age, occupation, religion of parents, socio-economic status, and father's educational attainment are significant predictors of religiosity (all p-values < .05). Females exhibit higher religiosity compared to males. Older Filipino youth appear to be more religious compared to the younger youth. Youth whose parents are both Catholics seem to be more religious compared to those who have parents with different religions. As socio-economic status increases, religiosity of the youth also increases. The youth whose fathers have higher educational attainment appear to be more religious than those whose fathers have lower educational attainment. However, mother's education is not a significant predictor of religiosity.

Religiosity, on the other hand, significantly predicts psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, and sociopolitical participation. In particular, those who have higher level of religiosity also have more positive psychosocial attributes (prosocial behaviors, sense of agency, communion, initiative, and lower risk behaviors). Religiosity is also a significant predictor of cultural beliefs, indicating that participants with higher religiosity have more positive cultural beliefs. Finally, religiosity significantly predicts sociopolitical participation; that is, those who exhibit greater religiosity are more likely to participate politically.

Summary and Discussion

The study was conducted to (1) determine the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth along the traditional lines of beliefs, practices, and attitudes, (2) identify the contextual variables that may influence the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth, and (3) establish the relationship between the level of religiosity of the Filipino Catholic youth and their psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, socio-political beliefs and participation. In line with these objectives, the present survey's questionnaire consists of five sections: (1) Socio-demographic profile, (2) religious beliefs and practices, (3) psychosocial attributes, (4) cultural beliefs, and (5) sociopolitical beliefs and participation. The survey had a total of 2,005 youth respondents from Luzon-North of Manila, Luzon-South of Manila, Metropolitan of Manila, Visayas, and Mindanao. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. In terms of doctrine, Filipino Catholic youth have moderate knowledge of Catholicism and that they can explain their views to a moderate extent only.
2. In terms of morals, the results show that respondents hold beliefs that are moderately consistent with what the Catholic Church teaches.
3. In terms of practices, the respondents go to Mass at least once a week, pray the Rosary on a regular basis, and visit the Blessed Sacrament often. Going to confession is done less frequently, about a few times a year. Personal prayer is done several times in a day.
4. Respondents strongly feel the presence of God in their lives and they have had religious experiences that indicate this presence. They identify strongly with other Catholics. Filipino Catholic youth have ordinary spiritual experiences most days. This means that, most of the time, they feel a spiritual connection with God and with others. The respondents said that they felt very close to God.
5. The demographic variables predict religiosity and, in turn, religiosity predicts psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, and political participation. Who is the Filipino Catholic youth then? He or she is one who knowledgeable of their faith, particularly the central beliefs of the Catholic Church. He or she can also moderately explain them to others. He or she attends the Mass every Sunday and says his or her personal prayers daily, but only occasionally prays the rosary and goes to confession once a year. He or she most likely attends to public practice of religiosity with friends or his or her mother.

His or her He or she is generally affected by his or her gender, age, parents' religious denomination, socioeconomic status, and father's educational attainment. While his or her knowledge of their faith is of quite highly favorable level (Glock's [1962] intellectual dimension), his or her moral views (Glock's ideological dimension) may not always be in consonance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. For example, while almost all of them believe in the Holy Trinity and the virginity of Mary, more than half of them do not agree with the Catholic Church getting involved with political issues nor with the Catholic Church's position on the Reproductive Health Law. Also in terms of public and private practice, while they fulfill the obligation of attending Mass on Sunday, a few of them never go to confession.

Gender, age, occupation, religion of parents, socio-economic status, and father's education are significant predictors of religiosity. Extant literature is suggestive of women being more religious than men but it is worth pointing out that it is not gender per se (i.e. being male or female) that increases religiosity, but a 'feminine gender orientation', which is caused by, as Miller and Hoffmann (1995) point out, the long-standing association between risk-taking behavior and gender, with men much more likely to engage in high-risk behavior, especially crime, than women. Stark and his colleagues (Finke & Stark 1992; Stark & Bainbridge 1985; Stark & Finke, 2000) highlight the fact that men's general propensity to engage in risky behavior make them more irreligious than women. Older Filipino youth appear to be more religious compared to the younger youth. Meanwhile, Argue, Johnson, and White (1999) also found a similar increase in religiosity with age in an American sample. Much more, the age effect was significantly stronger for Catholics than Protestants and the lower religiosity of males was also significantly stronger for Catholics.

Youth whose parents are both Catholics seem to be more religious compared to those who have parents with different religions. Bader and Desmond (2006) have already clarified that, when mothers and fathers belong to the same religious denomination and/or they are equally religious, they are better able to transmit their religious behaviors and attitudes to their children. However, the more interesting finding they have is that, when parents send a consistent message to children regarding religion, by teaching them that religion is important and by attending church frequently, religious transmission should be more likely to occur. And so, adolescents are most religious when their parents attend church and believe religion is important.

As socio-economic status increases, religiosity of the youth also increases. However, it must be pointed out here that it is not necessarily the socio-economic status that influences religiosity but the kind of upbringing that takes place in higher socio-economic status families. Hoff, Laursen, and Tardif (2002) say that (1) lower-SES parents are less verbally responsive, more frequently use harsh punishment, and are more authoritarian than higher SES parents and (2) that positive child outcomes are associated with high verbal responsiveness, less harsh discipline, and with authoritative child rearing underlie the view that warmth, nurturance, and contingent responsiveness should be encouraged in lower SES parents. The evidence also suggests that these differences have roots outside the person, both in current circumstance and past personal experience. Specifically, parenting that is associated with positive child outcomes is associated with high levels of parental education and with an absence of financial strain, and, also, the parenting one does is related to the parenting one has received. Also, youth whose fathers have higher educational attainment appear to be more religious than those whose fathers have lower educational attainment. However, mother's education is not a significant predictor of religiosity.

Religiosity, on the other hand, significantly predicts psychosocial attributes, cultural beliefs, and sociopolitical participation. In particular, those who have higher level of religiosity also have more positive psychosocial attributes (prosocial behaviors, sense of agency, communion, initiative, and lower risk behaviors). Religiosity is also a significant predictor of cultural beliefs, indicating that participants with higher religiosity have more positive cultural beliefs. Finally, religiosity significantly predicts sociopolitical participation; that is, those who exhibit greater religiosity are more likely to participate politically.

The role of the youth in the life of the Catholic Church cannot be underestimated. It is worth ending this report by quoting Pope Francis when he recently addressed the youth, "I saw you in the procession as you were coming in; I think of you celebrating around Jesus, waving your olive branches. I think of you crying out his name and expressing your joy at being with him! You have an important part in the celebration of faith! You bring us the joy of faith and you tell us that we must live the faith with a young heart, always: a young heart, even at the age of seventy or eighty" (¶ 2).

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