

TRAN DUY HIEU*

A SURVEY OF DIFFICULTIES OF BUDDHIST-CATHOLIC MARRIAGE IN HO CHI MINH CITY AND DONG NAI PROVINCE, VIETNAM

***Abstract:** The research is a survey of difficulties of Buddhist-Catholic marriages in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai province, Vietnam. It first introduces the setting of the survey. It explains the choice of methods (questionnaires and interviewing), questions. The research then analyses the responses of couples who are in Buddhist-Catholic marriage. It examines difficulties that many Buddhist-Catholic couples have encountered in their marriage. The last part of the research discusses the issue of conversion, which is one of the most arguable factors in Buddhist-Catholic marriages.*

***Key words:** Difficulties, Buddhist, Catholic, Marriage, Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai.*

1. Structure of the Survey

The present survey is a highly qualitative one. It targeted Buddhist-Catholic couples and tried to see if their married lives are happy and successful. The survey employed two methods in collecting data: questionnaires and interviewing. Most Vietnamese, particularly ordinary people, are not interested in writing answers in the questionnaire by themselves, but prefer being interviewed. Thus, in order to get detailed information, the survey employed both questionnaire and interview methods at the same time. It means that when seeking the responses, the researcher did not distribute the questionnaire to them, but asked them the questions listed in the questionnaire.

* College of Religious Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand.

The researcher followed the in-person interview style of data collection. It allowed potential interviewees to know the researcher's identity. Before proceeding to ask the participants for an interview, the researcher explained the objectives of the research and the reasons that the researcher had selected them for an interview. If they agreed to participate in an interview, they offer their verbal consent to contribute to the study. During the interviews, their responses were recorded with a tape recorder with their permission. Otherwise, the researcher took notes of all necessary information on a notebook.

The study sample was limited to Buddhist-Catholic couples (either the husband or the wife, or both if it was possible). The proposed study used intended sampling as well as snowball sampling. In selecting participants in group, firstly the researcher chose some people who are in Buddhist-Catholic marriage that the researcher has known well. The researcher made visits to their house, or arranges appointments with them at a certain place, which is comfortable for in-person interviews (convenience sampling). Then, the researcher asked them, as well as the Buddhist monks and Catholic priests who have participated in the survey, to introduce other cases of Buddhist-Catholic marriage (snowball sampling).

The questions for Buddhist-Catholic couples firstly asked for the informant's background, including age, gender, religion, occupation, and place of residence. This is followed by the questions about the respondents' marriage and difficulties they have encountered in their marriage. They asked how long they have been married, why they decided to choose partners even if they knew their partner followed a different religion, how their parents reacted after knowing that their children were going to marry persons of another faith, how the couple decided to adopt religion for themselves and for their children too, how they educated their children about religion, and how their intermarried life has been in general. The lists of questions are found in the appendix

The survey was conducted over a period of almost six months (January-July 2015), interviewing 200 cases of Buddhist-Catholic

marriage. The interviewees were selected at the two above-mentioned places, Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai province. The researcher interviewed 100 people who have been in a Buddhist-Catholic marriage in Ho Chi Minh City, starting from mid-January. Other 100 people were sought later in Dong Nai Province, starting from the end of April. In principle, each interviewee was treated as one case of Buddhist-Catholic marriage, whether it is the husband or the wife. If both were available for an interview, this was treated as one response. The researcher made visits to their house, or made appointments with them to meet in a place which was suitable for in-person interviews. Each interviewee was asked 10 questions relating to their marriage and the interview lasted around 15-20 minutes.

Among the 200 interviewed cases of Buddhist-Catholic marriage, 167 responses (Ho Chi Minh City: 81 and Dong Nai province: 86) shared their experiences of inter-faith married lives in an open way. Thus, the analysis of difficulties of Buddhist-Catholic marriages was mainly inferred from these 167 responses.

To conform to ethical standards of research practice, the researcher explained the aim and scope of the survey to potential respondents, and promised anonymity, and only once they agreed, the researcher started the interview. The researcher respected the interviewee's decision if he/she did not want to provide personal information in regard to his/her inter-married life.

In order to ensure confidentiality, the real names of interviewees are not used in the report. The interviewees are mentioned either by alias names or a number to protect them from being identified.

2. Analysis of Responses of Buddhist-Catholic Couples

Based on information and data from the 167 respondents, this section discusses major difficulties that have been experienced in Buddhist-Catholic marriages in the South Vietnam in general, and in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai province in particular. It will examine the difficulties accompanying Buddhist-Catholic marriage in two stages including pre-marriage and post-marriage. The discussion

first deals with initial parental resistance and obstacles resulting from the regulations of the Catholic Church on inter-faith marriage, the two first common difficulties of pre-marriage. It will examine the reasons for parental disapproval to their children's inter-faith marriage, the ways in which the children (i.e. the couple) attempt to deal with this problem and the consequences of which those couples have experienced in their marriage without parents' approval. Besides, it also discusses the obstacle about regulations of the Catholic Church on inter-faith marriage that the couples faced in their pre-marriage stage. This is followed by an analysis of the common difficulties of the post-marriage state, discussing disagreement on religious practices, disagreement over children's religious upbringing, separation, and dissents at the end of life, particularly disagreement on the proper method of funeral.

Initial Resistance from Parents and Relatives

Usually, the first and the most common obstacle that Buddhist-Catholic couples encounter is resistance from their parents and relatives. The responses to the question "*Did either of your parents oppose your marriage when they knew that you intend to marry a person of different religion?*" shows that the majority (61%) of the respondents faced their parents' and relatives' disapproval to their decision:

- Yes: 102 (61%)
- No: 31 (18%)
- Not oppose but not support: 43 (21%).

The major reason for this is that, in Vietnam, young people are increasingly open-minded about matters of religion, whereas their parents and relatives, who belong to an older generation, can be conservative in terms of religious beliefs. People usually live in religious communities where they grow up with their fellows who have the same belief as them. Therefore, the parents prefer to have their children married to one from their own religious community or at least have the same religion.

It was no problem if their relationship was merely friends. But once that friendship developed into a romantic relationship and the couple has started to think about marriage, they had possibly faced the first and most common difficulty, that is, initial resistance from parents and relatives. In Vietnam, neither Buddhist nor Catholic institution prevents their followers from marrying the person of a different religion. Thus, the resistance seems to derive from the couple's family and relatives. The initial difficulty in the early stages before their marriage was not caused by the couple themselves but it frequently came from their parents and relatives. In marriage, the children today are not obedient to such a degree that 'Cha mẹ đặt đâu con ngồi đó' (wherever the parents want the children to sit, the children will sit there) like their parents' generation had been¹. However, the Vietnamese has traditionally valued filial piety, respecting their parent's advice. To a certain extent, the children therefore should obey their parents and the elderly members of their family². Both Buddhists and Catholics also attach much importance to respecting ancestors and parents. They always express utmost respect to their parents and do not want to upset them. The children must obey elderly's instructions and get parents' permission to get married. The Vietnamese usually say 'we can get another wife or husband but not another mother or father'. Hence, it would be quite awkward if parent disapproved their children to marry people of different faith.

As is seen from the results above, the rate of Buddhist-Catholic marriages which were usually opposed by the parents and relatives in Vietnam are quite high. The respondents provided various reasons for the parents' objections. Commonly cited reasons include them, devout religious family, preventing their children's marriage from divorce, essential role of the son in the Vietnamese family, incompatible age, and prejudice against other's religion these findings will discussed in turn below.

The Reasons of Initial Parental Resistance

Devout Religious Family

The most common reason cited for the parents' objections to the children's Buddhist-Catholic marriages was that they are from very religious families. Of the 102 respondents who said they had experienced parental disapproval, 41 cited this reason. Parents or relatives who are devout followers of either Buddhism or Catholicism tend to strongly oppose their children's (or grandchildren's) inter-faith marriage. When one or both of the families are devout followers of Buddhism or Catholicism, their children's marriages were disapproved strongly by the family right from the start. The more devout the parents are, the harder they try to stop their children from marrying a person of another religion. Particularly, if the parents are people of reputation in their religious community and of good standing in a temple or a church, their objections to the children's inter-faith marriage would be more drastic. The story of the following couple is a typical instance.

The case of Tuyet and Minh:

Coming from a devout Buddhist family, Tuyet became a Buddhist when she was a little girl. At the age of 21, she met and fell in love with Minh whose family had been also devoted Catholic followers for many generations. Both sides of parents strongly opposed their marriage as soon as the couple asked permission for to hold a wedding celebration. Minh's family requested Tuyet to convert to Catholicism if they wanted to get married. In contrast, Tuyet's family objected to the conversion. Her father claimed that if the boyfriend's family resolutely asked her daughter to convert, they would ask their daughter to break up with him, in order to avoid complications afterwards. They would rather leave their daughter spouseless than give her up for marriage to a person outside their family's traditional faith. During a long time to pursue Tuyet's parent unsuccessfully, she finally accepted a conversion to Catholicism to marry Minh. Consequently, Tuyet's father had stopped his communication with her until her first child was born³.

The above-quoted example suggest that for both Buddhists and Catholics, it would be a dishonor for a family who has been devotees of a particular religion for generations, to have their children marrying a person of a different religion from the family's traditional religion⁴. The children did not promote the family's traditional religion professed by family ancestors and parents, but they also went against it. They therefore would feel ashamed of meeting other ex-followers.

Preventing the Children's Marriage from Divorce

Another common reason cited for parents' resistance towards their children marrying a person of the other religion was related to the issue of divorce. Of the 102 respondents, 30 cited this reason, in all of which cases it was the Catholic side who expressed this concern in opposing to their children's intention to marry a Buddhist. Catholic parents explained that the reason they opposed their children's Buddhist-Catholic marriage was to desire their children's spousal life to be ever unshakable and never separate from each other like non-Catholic marriages. This is because, in the Catholic tradition, divorce is not allowed; once a Catholic couple are married they must remain married until death without separation or divorce. If either the husband or the wife was unfaithful to their partner, the cheated Catholic still has to keep celibate, and could not remarry. In other words, monogamy and lifelong commitment are two essential characters of Catholic marriage, protecting an everlasting martial life. Both partners therefore should profess the same faith. In one Catholic priest's words, "the Catholic marriage is more unshakable than inter-faith marriage (between the Catholic and non-Catholic)"⁵.

Thus, normally most Catholic families would not want their children to marry the person of another faith unless the non-Catholic partner was also baptized as Catholic. This means that, in Buddhist-Catholic marriages, the Catholic families' objections are usually more resolute than the Buddhist ones, and there are also more Catholic conversions than Buddhist ones. The issue of conversion shall be discussed in more detail in later sub-section of the chapter.

Essential Role of the Eldest Child in the Vietnamese Family

Another fairly common reason cited for parents' initial resistance to their children's inter-faith marriage is what they see as the essential role of the eldest child in the family. This objection comes from both Buddhist and Catholic parents. Among the same 102 respondents, 19 mentioned this reason. Due to the important role given to the son in the Vietnamese family, for example, in maintaining the family's religious tradition, the parents usually try to prevent their children from marrying people of different religion. The ways in which Catholics and Buddhists deal with this issue differ from each other depending on whether the person in charge of continuing the family line is the eldest son (where there are other sons), the only son, or the eldest grandson (i.e. the eldest son of the eldest son).

Buddhist families usually assigns the eldest son, the only-one son, or the eldest grandson (the eldest son of one's eldest son) the task of worshipping their ancestors, one of the most important traditions of the Vietnamese. Sons have traditionally been favored to maintain the family line, to do heavy and important work, and to be a shelter for their parents as they get old⁶. Although it is not mandatory, it is something of an unwritten law in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people through generations. The custom of assigning the eldest son, the only-one son, or the eldest grandson the task of worshipping their ancestors is not found in Catholic families, but it has still been upheld in Buddhist ones. Thus, the Buddhist parents prevented their son from marrying a Catholic, because they considered that if their son converted to Catholicism, there would be no one to worship ancestors and parents afterward, and therefore the family line would be lost. According to one male Buddhist respondent:

“My parent did not allow me to marry Hoa since I am not only a Buddhist but also the only-one son in the family, while Thu is a Catholic adherent. My parent worried that no one would worship the family ancestors later. Conversely, Hoa' parent side would permit her daughter to marry me but on condition that I convert to Catholicism. As a result, we could not become a

couple because of the disagreement of both parent sides. Later I met and married Hang, my present wife. She is also a Catholic girl. My parent agreed our marriage since we were in agreement that each person retains one's own faith"⁷.

As for Catholic families, the only-one son or the eldest son is not considered as person to do the task of worshipping ancestors, but is considered the heir of the family tradition, i.e. Catholicism, which has been practiced in the family for generations. The Catholic parents also hesitated to allow their daughter to marry a Buddhist who is the only-one son, the eldest son, or the eldest grandson of his family. They worried that once their daughter is married to such a Buddhist, she would become the eldest daughter-in-law. This means that she would have to help her husband fulfill his spiritual responsibility towards his family, worshipping his family ancestors. This would go against to the Catholic tradition and affect her faith considerably. Therefore, it is very hard for her to practice Catholicism and to remain faithful to her own belief when living with the husband's family.

In the traditional Vietnamese opinion in general, whether Buddhist or Catholic, the eldest child, whether son or daughter, is more important than the younger ones. This is because the eldest one is usually regarded as an example for the younger brothers and sisters to emulate. In this context, if the oldest one gave up the religion that family professes and converted to other religion for marriage, he/she unknowingly would serve as a bad example that his/her younger brothers and sisters could follow.

Parents' Prejudice against Other's Religion

Another notable reason cited for the opposition that Buddhist-Catholic couples face from their parents or relatives is parents' prejudice against the other religion. Of the 102 respondents, 15 cited this reason. Buddhists' prejudice against Catholic teaching against ancestor worship in the past is also the common reason why many Buddhist parents did not support their children's decision to marry a Catholic. The tensions between Buddhists and Catholics during the reign of the influential Catholic president Ngo Dinh Diem, especially

the self-immolation of most venerable Thich Quang Duc as well as of other monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists in the Buddhist crisis 1963 have left negative impressions about Catholics in the Buddhist parents' mind. Besides, some still wrongly believe that Catholics do not worship ancestors, a widespread practice which has been deeply rooted in majority of Vietnamese families in general and of Buddhist ones in particular. It was on the basis of these prejudices that some Buddhist grandparents and parents had no sympathy for Catholics. As a result, they usually prevented their children from getting married to a Catholic.

Incompatible Age

The last common reason cited for the opposition that Buddhist-Catholic couples face from their parents is age incompatibility. Of the 102 respondents, 28 cited this reason. Parents wouldn't allow their children to wed their Catholic partner if the couple's ages are incompatible. This is found more often among Buddhist families than among Catholic ones. As mentioned in chapter 3, astrology is an important consideration for the Vietnamese in choosing a marriage partner. However, while this practice is not found in the Catholic tradition; it is common in Buddhist families. Many Buddhist parents believe that the success of a marriage depend on ages of the couple. By consulting a fortune-teller, they make sure that the horoscopes of the boy and girl are compatible and auspicious. The Vietnamese tend to avoid astrologically incompatible characteristics between the boy and the girl such as 'Tứ hành xung' (four incompatible ages) or 'tiger year-born girls'⁸. Thus, as the survey result that's shows, those who were considered incompatible in terms of these would face opposition from their parents when attempting to marry their partner. The parents worried that if they got married, their marriage would not be a happy one and that they would separate sooner or later, or even one of the two partners would die. However, this concern is not specific to Buddhist-Catholic marriages; the same concern would be expressed by Buddhist parents when their child is marrying a Buddhist partner.

The Ways of Dealing with Parents' Disapproval

In the face of parent's strong disapproval discussed above, Buddhist-Catholic couples had to find different ways to overcome the difficulty, in order to get married. The following discusses the major ways in which respondents attempted to overcome those obstacles, namely by persuading the parents by suitable explanations, concealing the partner's own religion from the parent and relatives, leaving home to put pressure on the parents, and intentionally getting pregnant before getting married.

Persuading the Parents by Suitable Explanations

Right from the beginning, most of couples tried to convince their parents by suitable explanations, such as all religions are good. Both Buddhism and Catholicism teach people to do good and avoid evil. Within the rights of religious freedom at present, it is not always true that getting married to person of the same religion results in a happy relationship or that marrying a person of a different religion results in an unhappy relationship. 98 respondents said they resorted to this type of explanation.

One male ex-Buddhist shared his experience:

"I was Buddhist but I met and fell in love with a Catholic girl when we were the 3rd year students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City. Both the parents strictly prohibited our Buddhist-Catholic relationship when they knew we were in love. My girlfriend was very obedient to her parents, particularly her grandmother, who was seriously ill. The grandmother felt insecure about her granddaughter getting married to a person of a different faith. So, her parents resolutely asked me to convert to Catholicism if I wanted to marry their daughter, but my parents did not agreed. Since I loved her too much, I accepted conversion to Catholicism. As an educated person, I did not want to upset my parent by vulnerable speeches. In order to have my parent's consent, I had to convince them very much. I explained that Buddhism and Catholicism direct people to the

good. Buddha and God all are the Supremes who are filled with compassion. Due to the welfare of mankind, both the Buddha and the Jesus Christ wish people to have a life of peace and happiness. And, then the parent let me to decide my own marriage. We were married over 9 years ago”⁹.

The above example shows that marriage for both the respondents was objected to by their parents right from the beginning. However, thanks to their educated background, they have behaved politely toward their parents. Instead of resorting unencouraged ways that are going to be mentioned below, they tried to explain reasons and information related inter-faith issues. One convinced parent by indicating the example other inter-faith couple and making a promise of responsibility toward their own decision. And the other pointed out the same purpose of the two religions. By doing so, the parents finally accepted their Buddhist-Catholic marriage. Thus, persuading the parents by suitable explanations is the best way to have the parents’ approval of their children’s inter-faith marriage, especially in the Vietnamese culture. As a common Vietnamese sayings ‘*Lời nói chẳng mất tiền mua, lựa lời mà nói cho vừa lòng nhau*’ (courtesy costs nothing; politeness costs little but yields much; it does not cost anything to be polite).

Concealing the Partner’s own Religion from the Parents and Relatives

Another method cited by the respondents to avoid initial parental disapproval is to simply hide the religious background of their partner from their parents. When bringing their partner to their parents’ home, some people did not inform their parents of his/her partner’s religious identity. If the parents asked, they usually answered that his/her partner performed ancestor worship. 8 respondents said they behaved this way. One male Buddhist respondent explained his experience as follows:

“My family is Buddhist. Particularly my father is also a member of the Communist party. My parents always keep a resolute viewpoint about not allowing the children to get married to a Catholic¹⁰. So, when I met and fell in love with a Catholic girl, I

lied to my parent that she had no religion, and that her family practiced ancestor worship. Even when the two families met each other, my parent did not know her real religious identity. My parent only discovered the truth when they went to her house to ask to her family about the wedding date. They were very surprised to see the altar for worshipping the Jesus Christ at their home. My parent was so furious at our lie that they left her house shortly afterward. Although my parent did not accept our marriage, I finally decided to marry her without their approval. I accepted to convert to Catholicism for marriage. On our wedding celebration, my parent and some relatives did not participate in the ceremony performed at church”¹¹.

In Vietnam, there have no difficulties and complications about the marriage between Buddhists or Catholics and people who practice ancestor worship. Both Buddhists and Catholics perform the practice of ancestor worship or respect at home. Those who only perform this practice adapt themselves to other religions easier than the Buddhists and the Catholics because there are not disagreements of religious differences. They often accept conversion to other religions for marriage, particularly when they marry the Catholics. Thus, in cases where Buddhists marry Catholics and vice versa, couples may be afraid of initial parental disapproval of their inter-faith marriage. Some couples often lie to their parents that their partner is not Buddhist or Catholic but only practice ancestor worship. Buddhist and Catholic parents easily allow their children to get married to people whose family only worships ancestors.

Leaving Home to Put Pressure on the Parents

In order to put pressure on the parents to accept their inter-faith marriage, some people moved away from home for a while. 5 respondents said they attempted to deal with their parents' disapproval in this way. According to a female Catholic respondent:

“At the beginning, my husband's parents prohibited him from marrying me since I am a Catholic. Having explained and attempting to persuade them many time unsuccessfully, he left

home for several months. Afraid that he might have un-matured thinking, leading to negative actions such as suicide, they tried to find him everywhere and finally accepted our Buddhist-Catholic marriage”¹².

Today parents do not completely determine their children's marriages, but the parents' ideas have still been observed in some extent. The action that the children strive to get married to people of another faith regardless of parents' disapproval, even leaving home to put pressure on the parents, goes against traditional moral values of the Vietnamese family, and actually is not encouraged by most people. However, some people tended to resort this way so that having the parents' approval of their inter-faith marriage. This shows that they were not mature enough to think the matter thoroughly. Since they were young the parents worried that their children would be easy to be impacted by negative temptations outside the family, corrupting the young. The longer the children left home the increasingly anxious the parents were. Thus, no matter what the reason is, this way is not a good one.

Intentionally Getting Pregnant before Getting Married

In order to make sure they can get married, some respondents said they had intentionally got pregnant before marriage. This is against the stance of both the Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics, who do not support premarital sex. In this situation, the parents, especially the girl's family, had no alternative but to accept the couple getting married as soon as possible, to avoid causing shame/disrepute on their family. 3 respondents said they had resorted to this way. For example, one male Catholic respondent says:

“The two families lived in the same village and knew each other well. My family are Catholic; whereas, my girlfriend's father is a devout Buddhist. He is an active leader in Buddhist activities every Sunday at the local temple. She also attended such activities as a little Buddhist girl. Realizing that she was in love with me, her father strongly opposed to our relationship. He forbade my girlfriend to get in touch with me again. However,

under her father's objection, we intentionally got pregnant. It was only the solution that would make her father let her marry me. We have been a husband and a wife for 6 years"¹³.

In today's society, although the Vietnamese are not quite strict towards premarital sex as in former times, people still do not encourage this. Therefore, pregnancy before marriage whether that is accidentally or intentionally also is not encouraged. Buddhism holds no strong views either for or against it, but advises people should adhere to the traditional concept, maintaining chastity until the nuptial date. To Catholics, premarital sex is a taboo and can be considered as committing adultery. Furthermore, those who have resorted this way are too young and are not highly educated to see its corollary. They do not realize how consequence of their pregnancy before marriage and what will happen if either one of the two parents continue to prohibit their marriage. Thus, this is un-encouraged resort.

Consequences of Buddhist-Catholic Marriages without Parents' Approval

Although they managed to become a husband and a wife, some of the couples who married without getting their parents' approval, had to endure severe consequences during their marriage. The respondents mentioned two common consequences, namely, being treated badly as becoming the daughter-in-law or son-in-law in the partner's household, and being abandoned by parents and family.

Being Treated Badly as Becoming the Daughter-in-Law or Son-in-Law in the Partner's Household

This normally involves disagreements between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law over differences of religious practices. 18 respondents were in this situation. The story of a female Catholic is one of those cases.

"I am a Catholic, but my husband is a Buddhist. We have been married for more than 7 years. We agreed that each person retains one's own. Because my husband is the only-one-son of the family, and his father had died since he was young, we have

lived together with his mother in the same house. Disagreement between my mother-in-law and me usually happened due to religious differences. She usually complained about my going to church every Sunday, not going to temple with my husband, not helping her to clean and light incense on the Buddha's altar on the 1st and 15th of lunar month, not kneeling down and kowtowing in front of the Buddha's altar and ancestors' altar, particularly on his father's yearly death anniversary....."¹⁴.

This shows that a Buddhist-Catholic marriage without parents' approval seems to be badly treated more often than a marriage that is approved by the parents. It usually happened to the daughter-in-law rather than the son-in-law since the norm after marriage is that the daughter-in-law comes to live with the husband's family. While living in the husband's family, potential problems such as disagreements over religious practice between the daughter-in-law and their husband's parent frequently occur. The problem of disagreements over religious practice will be discussed in more detail later

Being Abandoned by Parent and Family

The last consequence is that despite all the effort they made to deal with their parents' strong opposition, some people ended up being abandoned by their parents and family. For example, some faced abandonment because they gave up their own faith and converted to their partner's religion. This made their parents or grandparents in the family furious, which was expressed in actions such as not attending the wedding celebration, and more severely, not accepting the newlywed as members of the family. The couple had to leave their family home for a self-reliant life. 4 respondents said they had faced this consequence. According to a female Catholic respondent:

“My husband was a Buddhist follower. On the day he presented me, a Catholic girl, before the parent as his life partner, his mother had no objection, but his father strongly opposed our relationship. He used tough measures to threaten to break off relationship with him if he continued to love me. But my partner showed a great resolution to keep this love for nearly 6 years,

and then married me without his father's approval. Consequently, his father did not attend our wedding celebration. He also stated that since then he had renounced Tien as his son, and did not admit me as his daughter-in-law, either. After a rather long time living together, my father-in-law had started to talk with us. Now the situation is better"¹⁵.

Those who tend to face this situation mainly came from devout religious families in which the parents have good standing in a temple or a church and reputation in their religious community. As mentioned earlier, the more devout the parents were the more strongly they opposed their children's inter-faith marriage, especially if that the family has been a devout Buddhist or Catholic adherents for many generations. Marrying people of another faith goes against family tradition, evoking shame and humiliation with their ancestors and co-followers. However, the possibility of the parents softening their attitudes and coming to terms with their marriage was available if the children determinately remained in their marriage. Out of 4 respondents, the researcher finds no cases that they were still in a very bad relationship with their parents. Initially, the parents would react harshly such as abandoning or not admitting status of their children and the newlywed as well. Sooner or later the parents eventually accepted those marriages. But their acceptance was merely '*bằng mặt không bằng lòng*' (willing speech but unwilling heart). Thus, it would be more often that the newlyweds were treated badly or in estrangement situation.

Obstacle on Regulations of the Catholic Church on Interfaith Marriage

Having dealt with objections of parents in the family, the next difficulty that Vietnamese Buddhist-Catholic couples encountered is that accompanying the regulations of the Catholic Church on inter-faith marriage, particularly the requirement for the non-Catholic partner to conform to Catholicism. Of the 167 respondents, 73 said they had been in this situation. If either the Buddhist or Catholic side does not want to convert to their partner's religion; each person gets to

retain their own faith. However, regulations of the Catholic Church, specifically the one concerning the special permission the couple should obtain to enter into inter-faith marriage, could create tension for the Buddhist side. As explained in detail in chapter 3, according to the regulation of the Catholic Church, in order to marry a Catholic, the couples are first required to get a special permission from the local bishop. In addition to this, the Buddhist side also has to attend the marriage preparation classes. In principle, their wedding ceremony must be held at church. A few cases have been done at home but it must be carried out according to Catholic rite and presided over by a priest. This has put many Buddhist-Catholic couples in a dilemma between the Church and non-Catholic families¹⁶.

The regulations that Buddhist partners should attend marriage classes and that their wedding should be held in a church tend to dissatisfy many Buddhist families as well as the partners themselves. Buddhist partners, unless they have agreed to convert to Catholicism, are not usually interested in learning Catholic teachings, even if that is needed to get married to a Catholic. Buddhist parents, on their part, are not interested in participating in particular Catholic rites in a church since they are Buddhists. Thus, some Buddhist parents and relatives sometimes decide not to attend the part of their children's wedding ceremony that takes place at church. They only join in the customary wedding ceremony that is held at home, which involves the practice of paying tribute to family ancestors. According to the experience of a Buddhist man of getting married to his Catholic partner:

“Before marriage, we dealt with objections of the parents of both sides. My parents tried to prevent me from getting married to my girlfriend since she is a Catholic. As for her family, they also did not allow their daughter to give up her own religion. Afterward, my parent accepted our marriage with conditions that each person remains one's own faith, that I should not attend marriage classes, that the wedding should not be held in church but outside, and that my children should not be baptized in the

Catholic tradition but follow Buddhism. Her family angrily opposed those conditions, since these completely went against regulations enforced by the Church. Those conditions have been always a matter of controversy to both family sides. At the end, in order to marry her, I accepted conditions set by the Church on inter-faith marriage, but I did not convert to Catholicism. This certainly dissatisfied my parent. They did not attend our wedding ceremony carried out at church, but only guided us to perform the ancestral ritual at home”¹⁷.

It is also important to note that obstacles in inter-faith marriages sometimes arose, not because of the regulations of the Catholic Church themselves, but because of the perspective of a certain priest who is in charge of advising the couple regarding their marriage. Rev. 11, a Catholic dignitary at Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, said “in the diocese of Xuan Loc of Dong Nai province, some priests still keep a rather strict point of view on giving special permission for inter-faith marriage. This is because some Buddhists who have a favorite view on Communism usually show strong reactions from which they would never convert to Catholicism in order to marry a Catholic. Correspondently, some priests had no sympathy for such an attitude, and they did not give special permission”¹⁸. However, as mentioned above, the current Church regulations do not require a Buddhist to convert to Catholicism in order to marry a Catholic.

According to Catholic teachings on inter-faith marriage, by marrying without the special permission, a couple is directly setting a bad example. And by participating in the wedding ceremony of such a couple, Catholic participants are indirectly making a bad example¹⁹. As Rev. Do Duc Luc, a Catholic dignitary at Xuan Loc diocese said “these Catholic participants in such a wedding celebration would bear the sin of ‘*vạ*’ (involvement). As a punishment, those who have attended such a wedding ceremony would not be allowed to take the Holy Communion for several months. This punishment is still strictly applied in Dong Nai province, but not in Ho Chi Minh City²⁰. Of the 86 respondents who have been married in Xuan Loc diocese of Dong

Nai province, 11 were in such a situation. Their wedding took place outside church without the special permission. Therefore, most of Catholic guests, and even their parents and close relatives did not come to the ceremony share the newlywed's joy. They were also reluctant to maintain contact with the newly-married couple because they were concerned about being accused of involvement. For example, one Catholic woman shared her experience of marrying a Buddhist without her parent's approval and the special permission.

"I am a Catholic. My present husband and I were class-mates at the university. We much felt in love each other, but his mother did not support our relationship since she was a very devout Buddhist. Several years after that, she agreed our marriage but on condition that her son shouldn't follow Catholicism. He shouldn't observe conditions and regulations on inter-faith marriage set by the Church. My husband is the only-one son in the family, so he always obeyed his mother. It was due to my love for him that I accepted his mother's conditions for getting married to him. As for my family, I said to my parent that I would not renounce Catholicism and also would not convert to Buddhism. But they were also angry about my decision since our marriage definitely wasn't granted the special permission by the Church, and our wedding ceremony was also not allowed to perform in church. On our wedding day, not only my parent and relatives but also many of my Catholic friends did not come to share joys with us. At that moment, I felt very sad, but I had to endure such consequence because that was my own choice. Since then my family and some close relatives remained distant due to my married life. They believed that I was no longer a member in the family. Until our first daughter was born, then my mother began to visit us. Now, the relationship between the two families is improved. My parent sometimes comes to my husband's house to visit their granddaughter. We also bring our daughter to her grandparent's house. As for religious activities, I no longer go to church because of being excommunicated. I sometimes go to temple with my

mother-in-law, but I do not take refuge in the Triple Gems as a Buddhist, because inwardly I feel that I am still a Catholic. Although my mother-in-law always wants our daughter to be a Buddhist, my husband and I agree that let our daughter to decide her own religion when she has grown up”²¹.

This seems to happen only in Catholic communities. 11 respondents found themselves in this situation and all of them are Catholics. Due to getting married to a person of a different religious faith, without parental approval or the special permission from the church, some newly married couples were pushed away from the Catholic community. This behavior mostly has happened in Xuan Loc Diocese of Dong Nai province, where Catholic adherents have still been afraid of the sin ‘*vạ*’ (involvement).

Disagreement of Religious Practices

Another disagreement that Buddhist-Catholic couples sometimes encountered in their marriage is on whether Buddhism or Catholicism would be dominant in their family, and if so, which one. Normally, at first the husband’s religion would dominate in the family since the newly-married couple had to live with the husband’s family for a period of time. However, when the newly married couple moves to a separate house of their own, they start to notice more differences in their religious practices, i.e. between Buddhism and Catholicism. Out of the 167 respondents surveyed, 63 said that they had experienced this difficulty in their marriage.

One of the common disagreements over religious practices between the two persons is whether the altar is to be set up to worship Buddhas²² or Jesus Christ²³. It would be no problem if both the husband and the wife professed the same religion. But, if the couple had agreed to retain their own faiths, how to set an altar in their house sometimes created a difficult situation, since each person only wanted to worship the main object(s) of worship in his/her own religions, that is, Buddhas or Jesus Christ. This issue was dealt with in four different ways, namely, setting an altar in accordance with the husband’s religion, setting altars for both

religions, not setting up an altar at all, and replacing the existing altar for a new one after their partner passed away.

- Setting only an altar for the main object of worship in husband's religion (39 respondents)
- Setting up two separate altars in the same house, one reserved for worshipping Buddhas, and the other reserved for worshipping Jesus Christ (5)
- Not setting an altar for worship (3)
- Replacing the existing altar for a new one for with the main object of worship in the wife's religion after the husband died (11 respondents).

The responses show that, in the Vietnamese family, whether the couples live in the same house with the husband's family or have been lived in a separate house, the husband's religion tends to dominate over the wife's one. Setting up two separated altars in the same house sometimes happened, but placing both the Buddha and the Jesus statues on the same altar was unseen.

What is notable is that some female respondents said that they have replaced the initial altar set up in accordance with the husband's religion with a new one for the wife's religion, after the husband passed away (11 respondents). In these cases, the husbands kept their promise to the conditions regulated in the special permission, so that they let their wives and all children or one of them to adhere to Catholicism despite they strongly remained in Buddhism. But there was only one altar for worshipping the Buddha in their house. So, after the husbands died, the wives would replace that existing altar for a new one for worshipping the Jesus Christ. The following case of a Catholic widow is an example of this situation.

“My husband is a Buddhist and I am a Catholic. We were married 12 year ago. We had three children, two sons and one daughter. The eldest son professes his father religion, and the rest two younger children adhere to my religion. At first we often quarreled with each other over the problem that he set the

altar for worshipping the Buddha in our house while I could not. He said that letting me and two of our children follow Catholicism was the biggest concession in his life, much to his parent's dissatisfaction. He did not want to make them more angry by seeing two altars in the same house. Due to the family happiness, I did not require any more. Unfortunately, my husband died 3 years ago. Since he was still a Buddhist, I invited Buddhist monks to perform his funeral according to Buddhist rites. After his funeral, I brought the Buddha statue and Buddhist objects which my husband had once worshiped to temple. Now I am able to set an altar for worshipping the Jesus Christ at home"²⁴.

Another common disagreement over religious practices between Buddhist-Catholic couples is over the amount of time, effort, and money that each devoted to practicing their own religion. This tended to lead to complains, and quarrels between the spouses. 6 respondents said that they had experienced kind of disagreement. According to one female Catholic respondent:

"I am a Catholic follower. Going to church every Sunday morning and on important events are common. But my husband usually complained about it. Because I am a member of the choir at church, I have sometimes spent much time to practice hymns reserved for Mass at church. This was not dissatisfied. He complained that I saved more time for activities of church than taking care of the family"²⁵.

In seriously cases, after a long time living together and experiencing many instances of such disagreement, some Buddhist-Catholic couples sometimes ended up criticizing the religion of each other. They brought up the two religious founders and their teachings in a conversation in negative ways, to hurt each other. Out of how many respondents, 5 said they had experienced such a serious disagreement.

Disagreement over Children's Religious Upbringing

Disagreement over children's religious affiliation and religious education

is one of the most common causes of strife in Buddhist-Catholic marriages. Having overcome obstacles of the parents' strong disapproval and of the Catholic Church's regulations on inter-faith marriage, many couples were able to get married with the congratulations of many people. But after a few years of living together, the real task of building a successful marriage would begin, and frustrations start to set in, particularly when their children are born. The religious identity of the children, the appropriate time for deciding the children's religious identity, and who is going to decide the religious identity of the children are always main issues leading to quarrels between the two people.

The following are the responses to the question "*Which religion do your children profess?*".

- Buddhism: 27
- Catholicism: 98
- Both religions: no
- No religion: no
- Other choice: 42
- ✓ One child professed the father's religion and one child professed the mother's religions: 14
- ✓ let the children decide their own faith when they group up: 17
- ✓ Not yet decided: 11

The issue of children's religious identity is easily settled if either the husband or the wife converted to the partner's religion before or during marriage. The couple would profess the same faith, and the children therefore would believe in their parent's one²⁶. Out of the 167 respondents, 86 had the same religion as that of their partner, and hence made their children follow their common religion.

However, in cases where the parents stuck to their own religions, the problem of deciding the children's religion was much more serious. Among the 71 respondents who said each person remained with one's own religion, 43 had disagreement concerning the

children's religious identity and 28 easily agreed on the matter. Out of the 43 respondents who had disagreement concerning the children's religious identity, 29 made their children follow their own religion, followers of Catholicism tend to this more often, 14 let one child profess the father's religion and the other child the mother's religion. They did this because on the one hand the Buddhist partners tried to keep their promise with the Catholic partners that letting their children to be baptized; on the other hand they wanted to have one child who can preserve the family tradition, worshipping ancestors later. If there are more than two children, normally at least one child profess Buddhism and the rest children follow Catholicism.

Typically, the Buddhist partner who decided to remain Buddhist did not keep their promise to join the Catholic partner in the children's religious upbringing in accordance with the special permission. Instead, they attempted to teach Buddhism to their children and make them worship the Buddha with them. On the other hand, the Catholic partner has an obligation to do everything in his or her power to raise the children in the Catholic faith. Thus, both the husband and the wife, whether they are Buddhist or Catholic, would be interested in imparting aspects of their own religion to their children. They wanted to teach the children about their own religious traditions. Both wanted their children to participate in events and holidays associated with the religion they themselves are part of. Neither wanted to make concessions to their partner in this regard.

In some cases where the parents have stuck to their own religions the religious affiliation of their children was decided in such a way that one child followed the father's religion, and one child followed the mother's one. Normally, the son was asked to profess his father's one if the father was a Buddhist. This is because, as mentioned above, the son, particularly the eldest one, was regarded as the person who will have to undertake the role of worshipping family ancestors as well as upholding the family tradition. If the father is Catholic, it is expected for the son to follow his father's religion, since in the Vietnamese context, 'men have more right than women'. Out of the

14 cases in which one child professed the father's religion and one child professed the mother's religion, 12 established a clear distinction between the Buddhist members and Catholic members of the family in terms of religious activities; the Buddhist parent and one child would sometimes go to temple on special Buddhist events, while the Catholic parent and the other child regularly go to the church on Sundays. Only 2 respondents stated that they sometimes joined the activities of the other religion.

The result shows that the total number of children who professed in Catholicism was also bigger than that of children who professed in Buddhism. It might be attributable to the following reasons. First, as stipulated in the Catholic Church's regulations concerning the granting of the special permission, both Buddhist parent and Catholic one have to promise to raise their children in the Catholic tradition²⁷. Second, there were more women than men who converted to Catholicism in marrying their Catholic partner. The third reason, which is related to the previous one, is that women tend to follow the husband's religion in raising their children. The last reason is that when a child is born, he/she would be baptized in Catholic tradition, following the Church regulations. It means that such a child was identified with the Catholic faith right from the start. This is well reflected in the survey result quoted above: 98 children were baptized in the Catholic tradition when they were born.

While the majority of respondents have decided their children's religion to be either Catholicism or Buddhism at an early stage of their lives, some have dealt with the issue of children's religious identity in a different way. They are willing to let their children decide on this matter when they grow up. Among those who chose the option 'other', 17 respondents said they will 'let the children decide their own faith when they grow up', and 11 respondents said that they haven't decided yet since they do not have any children yet, so they haven't thought about their religious identity. A female Buddhist staff shared his opinion about letting the children to decide their religious faith themselves:

“I am Buddhist, my husband is Catholic. Right from the beginning I had known that his religion was different from mine. But I did not care much about our religious differences, more importantly, we truly loved each other. My husband is descended from a Catholic family in which his parent are very strict on their belief, but he is open-minded on religious matter. Before coming together as the husband and wife, I did carefully find out a lot about issues and stories of the marriage between the Buddhists and the Catholics, so I knew how to prepare our marriage better. As for my husband, he has only asked me to go with him to church for learning the teachings of marriage preparation as well as asking for the special permission according to Catholic requirement. He never asked me to convert to Catholicism since he loves me very much and respects my own faith too. Furthermore, he knows I am working at the Vietnam Buddhist University where I daily meet and work with many monks and lay Buddhists. He usually comes to visit me at my working office, there he also joyfully meets and talks with monks. Now we have a 6 years-old daughter. Regarding her religion, we have an agreement that we will let the children decide their own faith. We do not want to decide our daughter’s religious identity when she is still too young. When she grows up, she is able to adhere to Buddhism or Catholicism, depending on her own choice. At the moment, she sometimes goes to temple with me and sometimes goes to church with his father”²⁸.

The respondents who gave the children the right to determine their religious faith mostly come from better educated background, and a good standing in society. The couple in above story is evidence. The husband is a teacher at a high school while his wife is a staff of a Buddhist university. Due to their good educated background, they think about religious issues more open-mindedly; they do not care much about religious differences, but the true love is more important to them. So they usually resort to each person retaining their own faith, and respecting the partner’s religion. In other words, good

education and respect are the factors that made them decide to let their children choose for themselves at a later time. Thus, it is better that the parents should leave the children the freedom and right to follow the religion that they like best. It is the same as marrying. Parents' decision on their children's religious identity from their early age is not different from the problem of arranged marriages which more common in former times, but is not supported by the Vietnamese young today²⁹. Drawing from the experience on the problem of arranged marriage, the parents should play the role as the counselor who gives advices and informs good things of each religion, and then let them to decide the faith for themselves.

Separation Due to Religious Differences

One of the biggest difficulties that Buddhist-Catholic couples that can encounter in their marriage is the problem of separation or divorce. According to the responses obtained, some Buddhist-Catholic marriages did not work because in addition to social reasons such as adultery, disagreement over money, incompatible personalities, and/or family violence. The couples could not overcome the above-mentioned disagreement on religious difference, and that led to separation or divorce. This creates an extremely difficult situation for them and their families, because the Vietnamese are inclined to attach significance to the family repute, conjugal affection, and particularly ties between parents and children. In some cases, in order to avoid bringing disrepute to their family, although the married life was breaking up, the couple still lived together. This may be the reasons why many couples who are in difficult marriage do not choose to divorce. Some couples have lived separately without a legal divorce since they were afraid that divorce would have negative impacts on their children. Others would obtain a legal divorce in court, but, notably, they would never raise the reason of different religion for their divorce. A lawyer explained his experience of dealing with divorce cases thus:

“During 13 years working as a lawyer, I solved a number of divorced cases, but I did not find any case in which the couple

raised religious difference as the reason for their divorce because of different religion. It was because the matter of religion is very sensitive, and it was considered unpersuasive as a reason for filing for a divorce. However, in fact this problem has happened. Normally, the most common reason for divorce was incompatibility of viewpoint. So, one of such incompatibilities might be religious disagreements in their inter-faith marriage, leading to broken marriage and divorce”³⁰.

Furthermore, divorce is not supported by either religion and or its community as a whole. Buddhism does not specifically prohibit divorce, but does not support it, either³¹. In the Catholic tradition, as mentioned above, marriage is a lifelong commitment, and divorce therefore is not allowed. Despite this, there have been a number of cases of divorce of Catholics in general and of Buddhist-Catholic couples in particular. If divorced, Catholics usually no longer go to church. Therefore, the Church does not know the actual situations surrounding the divorce of its followers; it does not have the statistic of inter-faith marriages which end in divorce. According to the Rev. 12, who is in charge of the field of interreligious dialogue at the Pastoral Center in the Ho Chi Minh Diocese,

“In reality, there have been many inter-faith couples who have encountered disagreements and difficulties in the family because they follow different religions. As a result their marriage was broken after a period of living together. But after separating from each other, they no longer go to church or at least to report the situation to the priest. Recently, the Pastoral center tried to do a survey of inter-faith couples in order to find out how couples in inter-faith marriages have been doing after 5 years of living together. But the study was unsuccessful, because separated couples no longer go to church”³².

Dissents at the End of Life

Difficulties and problems in Buddhist-Catholic marriages are not only encountered before and during early periods of marriage when raising children, but also appeared when either the husband or the wife,

particularly those who converted to their spouse's religion for marriage, got older or was nearing the end of life. According to the survey result, 9 respondents, including 5 ex-Catholics (1 converted to Buddhism and 4 gave up Catholicism but did not convert to Buddhism) and 4 ex-Buddhists were in this situation. However, ex-Buddhists and ex-Catholics experienced this kind of difficulty in rather different ways.

As for ex-Buddhists, if the husband was a Buddhist and converted to Catholicism, he, towards the end of his life, would usually express his desire for one of his sons, particularly the eldest son, to profess Buddhism. In so doing, he would feel secure that at least he had someone who would be in charge of worshipping their family ancestors which would include himself after his death. Faced with the prospect of their spouse's passing, the wife no longer seemed to be very strict about sticking to one (i.e. their) religion as a family; they easily accepted the converts' desires. Thus one child converts to Buddhism before his father's death. This would help the father feel secure on the remaining days at the end of his life.

On the other hand, ex-Catholics, at the end of their lives, would feel conscience-stricken and guilty because they had given up their faith in order to get married to their Buddhist partners. Their conscience was troubled between their original religion and the one they had converted to. When they got older, they desired to return to their original religion, Catholicism. A 65-year-old male Buddhist says on his deceased wife:

“My former wife believed that once she showed her repentance and turned back Catholicism, God would forgive her sins, her soul would be saved in the heaven of God”³³.

Generally speaking, whether the deceased person has converted back to his or her original religion, there sometimes arises problems after their death concerning what kind of mortuary rites are to be performed for them. There would usually be no problem if the convert had made careful recommendations to their partner and children before dying, for example, that their funeral rituals should be carried

out in accordance with their own religion, when they passed away. However, there were several cases in which the convert did not leave any recommendation, and this often led to a serious disagreement between the two families over the method of funeral rites for the deceased. The traditional Vietnamese used to prefer burial to cremation after death³⁴. Buddhists tend to cremate rather than to bury. They believe that if they were buried their soul would be difficult to reborn because of attachment to their physical body. Inversely, Catholics prefer burial because they believe in physical resurrection of the body at the end of time. However, with the today's development of cremation service, especially in urban areas where the burial space is limited and expensive, the Vietnamese Catholics are more inclined to cremate their deceased family members rather than burying them. After cremation, Catholic ashes are usually kept in Catholic churchyards. Buddhist ones are usually kept in temples rather than in cemeteries. So, the disagreement between the two families also included where to bury the convert or where to keep their ashes after cremation³⁵. A 53-year-old female Catholic respondent explains her experience of dealing with funeral rites for her deceased husband thus:

“My former husband was originally a Buddhist. He had converted to Catholicism to wed me. After marriage, he never complained to me about my religious activities at church, but he never went to church. Both of our sons were also baptized when they were born. Unfortunately, my husband suddenly died 2 years ago. During his funeral, there were arguments between my husband's family and me. They thought, although my husband was an ex-Buddhist (i.e. Catholic), that in reality he had no longer been a Catholic for long; his funeral rites should be carried out according to the Buddhist tradition. They wanted to invite Buddhist monks to do the funeral ritual. And his corpse should be cremated and his remains kept in the temple. But my children and I did not accept such an arrangement. We have the altar for worshipping Jesus Christ at home and usually perform prayers to God. We could not have Buddhist services taken

place within our house. In the end, we invited a Catholic priest and some adherents coming my house to baptize my recently deceased husband again, and the funeral rites were performed according to Catholic tradition. This dissatisfied my parents-in-law and some of my husband's close relatives. They therefore did not attend any funeral rites. Then, they often come to visit his grave afterwards since my husband's corpse was buried in the community cemetery but not in the Catholic one"³⁶.

3. Conversion in Buddhist-Catholic Marriages

Conversion in inter-faith marriages in general and in the Buddhist-Catholic marriage in particular is a highly sensitive issue. Whenever conducting interviews with religious leaders of the two religions, particularly Catholic priests, and with the Buddhist-Catholic intermarried couples, they oftentimes seem uncomfortable about giving their responses to this issue. In their opinions, conversion was a voluntary decision of either the husband or the wife who wanted to convert to their spouse's faith.

However, they did not want to talk much of the fact that a high proportion of Buddhist who married a Catholic have converted to Catholicism for the purpose of marriage. Among the 167 cases of Buddhist-Catholic marriages surveyed, the numbers of Buddhists who have converted to Catholicism, Catholics who have converted to Buddhism, and those who have remained in their faith are as follows³⁷:

- 87 cases in which the Buddhist converted to Catholicism (52%)
 - ✓ Males: 31, females: 56
 - ✓ Before marriage: 73, after marriage: 14
- 9 cases that Catholics converted to Buddhism (5%)
 - ✓ Males: 3, females: 6
 - ✓ Before marriage: 2, after marriage: 7
- 71 cases that they remained in their own faiths (41%)
 - ✓ Males: 41, female: 30

✓ Catholics: 39, Buddhists: 32

✓ Before marriage: 48, after marriage: 23

Difference of Attitude toward Conversion between Buddhists and Catholics

The responses quoted above show that there are considerable differences between Buddhist and Catholic attitudes towards conversion in inter-faith marriage. There are far more cases of conversion to Catholicism and most of them took place before marriage, whereas, conversions to Buddhism before marriage are very few. This is because of the regulations that the Catholic Church sets on inter-faith marriages. There are no regulations in Buddhism that would render a marriage of a Buddhist invalid if both or either the husband or the wife does not take refuge in the Triple Gems. So, the procedure of wedding ceremony of a Buddhist marriage is not different from that of an inter-faith one, unless it takes place in church, and/or the Buddhist has converted to Catholicism. When a Buddhist marries a Catholic, their wedding ceremony can be carried out at temple or at home. The marriage is blessed by monks according to Buddhist rites, but it does not require the Catholic part to convert. Conversely, according to the Catholic tradition, a sacramental marriage is only valid when the two persons were baptized and are married by a Catholic priest. A Catholic can marry a Buddhist who is unbaptized in the Catholic tradition, but they first need to receive special permission from the bishop. Such marriages will be valid marriages but not considered sacramental marriages. Thus, the rite of their wedding ceremony differs from that of a sacramental marriage. In other words, in order to be sacramentally married in the Catholic Church, both must be baptized as Catholics. It means that the Buddhist partner has to convert to Catholicism before marriage. Due to those reasons, conversions to Catholicism are always larger in number, and they usually take place before marriage.

Generally speaking, the Vietnamese Catholic followers tend to stick to their own faith better than Buddhists; they seldom renounce

their religion. This seems to be partly because giving up their religion is considered a serious sin among Vietnamese Catholics. Thus, to Vietnamese Catholic families, particularly in Dong Nai province, the first criterion that parents have in choosing their children's husband or wife is that he/she must follow the same religion, i.e. Catholicism or if not, the person has to convert to Catholicism. They tend to be concerned that their offspring would lose the Catholic faith if they married a person of another faith³⁸. The family of the Catholic partner therefore tends to use all means available to keep it up in the family. If they could not persuade the Buddhist partner to convert to Catholicism for marriage, the Catholic at least tried to remain in their own faith. The Catholics who remain adherent to Catholicism also promise to do all in their power to have all children baptized and brought up in the Catholic tradition. The Buddhist party in the marriage does not have to make the same promise, but is informed of it, and every effort is made by the Catholic side to make sure that Buddhist partner in the marriage truly understands the promise which their Catholic partner has made. In Buddhism, on the other hand, there seems to be no rules or guidelines which stipulate that a Buddhist must hold on to their faith as much as they can.

The difference between Buddhist and Catholic attitudes toward religious affiliation in marriage seems to be part of the reason that among the 167 Buddhist-Catholic couples surveyed, 91 Buddhists converted to Catholicism, while only 9 Catholics converted to Buddhism. This shows that conversion for marriage was one clear factor that makes Catholic adherents increase considerably, expanding the Catholic Church and community. Meanwhile, it is undeniable that Buddhism has lost some of its followers to Catholicism through these Marriages. As said earlier, conversions in Buddhist-Catholic marriages are technically based on voluntary decision, and not due to a religious obligation in either tradition. However, in reality, the spirit of observing practices of their own faith in Vietnamese Catholic families is so resolute, that this makes them ask the Buddhist party to convert to their religion before marriage. This suggests that the Catholic family and

community have contributed significantly to the problematic nature of some cases of conversion in Buddhist-Catholic marriages.

Thus, even in the cases where the Buddhist partner ‘voluntarily’ converted to Catholicism for marriage, it is possible that this ex-Buddhist spouse continues to keep their association with their original religion even after marriage. In some cases, one of them, normally the husband, might accept baptism for the sake of ensuring a Catholic marriage ceremony, but would not really uphold the Catholic faith. Over the extensive period of marriage, some of such husbands started to neglect his duty to go to church on Sundays. Gradually, they no longer went to church but practically converted back to Buddhism. Among the respondents who converted to Catholicism for marriage, 13 stated that they converted back to Buddhism not so long after their wedding. According to one male Buddhist respondent:

“My family are all Buddhists, but my older brother and I got married to Catholic wives. My brother agreed to convert to Catholicism for marriage due to the request from my sister-in-law’s parents. Not long after marriage, he became uninterested in going to church on Sundays as well as religious activities in the Catholic tradition; he officially left Catholicism and returned to Buddhism. At the beginning, there were many quarrels between the couple since he had been unfaithful to Catholicism. Then they came to an agreement that each person retains one’s own faith. And if the children were born, let one child profess Buddhism and the other professed Catholicism. Similar to my brother’s situation, 5 years after my brother’s wedding, I also married a Catholic girl. At first, I agreed to convert to Catholicism in order to have a wedding ceremony at church to fulfill my wife and her family’s desire. Afterward, I also left Catholicism and returned to Buddhism. Now we have two daughters. The eldest one adheres to her mother’s faith (i.e. Catholicism), and the younger one adheres to mine (i.e. Buddhism). Importantly, I have always told my wife and the two daughters that later on when I died; they should not hold my

funeral in church, but that my funeral rites should be performed according to the Buddhist tradition”³⁹.

Both brothers experienced the same sequence of events, conversion into Catholicism, return to Buddhism, and raising their children in the two different religions though is not common. The cases in which the ex-Buddhist husbands returned to Buddhism after marriage frequently occurred. To Catholics, this is not a good act and sometimes it is strongly condemned by the Catholic community. It is because the Buddhist partners are not faithful to Catholicism. This shows the Catholic parents that requiring people of another faith to convert to Catholicism in marriage seems to be ineffective; they sometimes convert to Catholicism merely for marriage but not for true belief in that religion.

Difference of Conversion between Men and Women

The number of women who converted to their partner’s religion for marriage seemed to be larger than that of men. This partly shows that women are at a disadvantage compared to men in Vietnamese families, even in their religious life in the sense that they may have less freedom in choosing their own religion. Although women are usually more devout in practicing spiritual and religious activities than men⁴⁰ they often could not determine their own faith but had to follow their partner’s in inter-faith marriages⁴¹. When asked about how they decided to convert, many female respondents mentioned one or both of the two common Vietnamese sayings: “*Thuyền theo lái, gái theo chồng*” (Boats are driven by oarsmen, wives must accompany their husbands) and “*Xuất giá tòng phu*”⁴² (In getting married, a girl must obey her husband). Among the cases surveyed, 5 female ex-Buddhists respondents expressed the view that once they are married, converting to their husband’s religion is inevitable. It was for the betterment and happiness of the family that they agreed to convert to their husband’s family’s religious belief. Thus, it would be easier for Catholic families, parents in particular, to accept the conversion of their daughter if a Catholic boy married a Buddhist girl. On the other hand, it would be more difficult for a Catholic girl to marry a Buddhist boy. This is

because, as mentioned above, Catholic parents usually believe that if their daughter married a Buddhist man, she would easily lose her Catholic practices, and might even to give them up soon or later⁴³.

Correspondingly, once again, the disparity in the numbers of male and female cases of conversion increases considerably the number of Catholic adherents in Vietnam. The more women convert to Catholicism the more new adherents the Church has. This is because the mother usually has a stronger influence on the children's religious identification than the father. This is understandable, because in Vietnamese families the father seldom stays home to care for children but is away at work, typically engaging in hard labor. Whereas the mother stays home to take care of all housework, and nurture the children. Thus, mothers are in charge of education of the children. From the very beginning, they are considered the child's first teacher to teach the children what is right and good. This means that the children are strongly influenced by their mother's religious belief. Indeed in Buddhist-Catholic marriages in Vietnam, nearly all children are baptized in the Catholic Church and officially become Catholic.

Disadvantages of Women in Conversion

Intellectual standards of the Vietnamese have risen in recent years, and the level of gender equality has also improved. However, in marriage, the women still seem to be more disadvantaged and passive than men. Another of the disadvantages that women face is that once they reach thirty, their choices of partner becomes seriously limited. Thus, in Buddhist-Catholic marriage, some Buddhist women usually agree to convert to Catholicism in order to get an 'easy' marriage. Among the 56 female Catholic converts who participated in the present survey, 11 said that they converted to Catholicism for this reason. According to one female Buddhist respondent:

“When I was young, I was too busy working as a common worker at the factory. I even tried to work overtime in order to earn a better living. So, I had less time to think about marriage. At the age of 33, I met and fell in love with my present husband,

a Catholic man. At this age, I thought I had no more chances to meet another man. I agreed to convert to his religion for marriage. Initially my parents were a bit sad when I converted to Catholicism in order to marry him. But they did not oppose it since they realized that I was no longer young”⁴⁴.

Another female respondent concurs with her on the importance of compromising on the issue of conversion when one is over 30 years old:

“I have experienced two loves but both failed. My father did not allow me to marry the first person because my boyfriend was a Catholic. Later, I made friends with a Buddhist person. But there were many incompatible characters between the two of us, and I decided to say good bye with him. When I reached the age of 36, I thought I would live a single life because at that age it was difficult to find a kind man that would marry me. Two years ago, after only knowing each other for a little more than one month, I accepted to get married to a Catholic man without any of my parents’ objection. And certainly, I had to convert to Catholicism”⁴⁵.

Yet another disadvantage that Vietnamese Buddhist women face in Buddhist-Catholic marriages is the problem of unintended premarital pregnancy. This tends to make them convert to Catholicism unconditionally, in order for the couple to get married immediately to avoid bringing disrepute to the involved families. Among the responses surveyed, 8 cases were in this situation. Traditionally, premarital pregnancy was a taboo in Vietnamese society, because it was considered a violation of traditional values. Although the society has become increasingly open, people’s attitudes toward premarital sex generally remain conservative⁴⁶. As neither Vietnamese Buddhists nor Catholics support premarital sex, it tends to bring much worry as well as shame to the involved families if a young girl accidentally gets pregnant prior to marriage. Although this puts all the involved parties in an awkward situation, in such circumstances, the young girl is at the greatest disadvantage. No matter how devout Buddhists the girl’s

family is, when their daughter has become pregnant before marriage, they have no alternative but to accept their daughter's marriage to her Catholic partner. This can even involve conversion without conditions. The girl's family would also want a wedding to take place as soon as possible in order to preserve the honor of the whole of the family. This is illustrated in the story of one couple - a female Buddhist respondent who was the second daughter of a devout Buddhist, and her partner:

The two families are living in the same village; their parents had known each other well. My boyfriend was 24 year olds and I was 21, after discovering we were in love, the two families did not allow us to get married because we had different faiths. Not long after that, I confessed to my parents that we had premarital sex and I was three weeks pregnant. This news shocked both the families, particularly my parents since the problem of a girl who was pregnant before marriage was an unprecedented shame in the family. Leaving their daughter in pregnancy without a husband was even more impossible. Afraid of losing the family honor with the neighbors, they accepted my marriage and let me convert to Catholicism in order to have a marriage wedding taken place as soon as possible⁴⁷.

One of major changes in the Vietnamese Catholic Church's regulations concerning marriage is about the issue of premarital sex. Before the second Vatican Council, the Church strictly prohibited this. Although despite the increased number of the cases of violation of this rule, the Church still bans sex before marriage, they accept it on condition that the violators confess the violation. The sacramental marriage will be processed in church as normal on condition that they make their confession to the priest, and bear mental punishment such as penance and prayer. Otherwise, the wedding ceremony is not celebrated within Mass.

Impact of the Precedent of Inter-faith Marriage in the family to Conversion

One notable trend in Buddhist-Catholic marriages in Vietnam that

has emerged through the present survey is that Buddhist families that have had a family member who is married to a Catholic and has converted to Catholicism for marriage tends to have more members marrying Catholics. In certain cases, the parents or relatives of the Catholic-Buddhist couple were also in Buddhist-Catholic marriages. Hence, it is quite common for a Buddhist family to have two or three persons of the family and close relatives who are married to a Catholic. This is well illustrated in the above-mentioned example, there two brothers from the same family married Catholics. On the other hand, this is rare in Vietnamese Catholic families. Out of 85 Catholic converts, 26 cases had at least one other family member who was married to a Catholic. In the following story, based on the information provided by two sisters, Buddhist-Catholic marriage has taken place in two consecutive generations.

Their family has been in Buddhist-Catholic marriage for two generations. The family has three children, one son and two daughters. Their father is a Buddhist and her mother is an ex-Buddhist (i.e. Catholic). The eldest son adheres to neither Buddhism or Catholicism. The two younger daughters took refuge in the Triple Gems as Buddhists when they were very young. Both the daughters had actively participated in religious activities and services at a local temple since their house was very close to it. When getting mature age, Cau, the older sister, married a Catholic, and she converted to Catholicism. 3 years after that, Thu, the younger daughter, also converted to Catholicism for marriage⁴⁸.

Both of these female ex-Buddhists in this case answered “no” when they were asked “*Did either of your parents oppose your marriage when they knew that you intended to marry a Catholic?*”

Cau said “as to my parent, they did not oppose our marriage at all. It is because they have been in a Buddhist-Catholic marriage, they understand the situation, and they do not want to create any difficulty for us. As for my husband’s parents, there is no problem because I agreed to convert to Catholicism from

the beginning”⁴⁹. Thu added “there are several people in my family who are in a Buddhist-Catholic marriage, so I they have no problems about my marriage”⁵⁰.

These Buddhist-Catholic couples usually did not encounter the type of initial resistance from their parents and relatives that was discussed above; it is only the first person in the family, especially the oldest son or the daughter that faced such difficulty when they decide to marry a person of a different religion. This is probably because once the oldest child in the family had wedded the person of another faith; it was difficult for the parents to oppose a younger one’s decision to do the same.

As mentioned above, many Vietnamese parents, whether they are Buddhists and Catholics, often raised objections to their oldest children’s decision to marry a person from outside their family’s religion, as this would stop the eldest child from fulfilling their responsibility to maintain the family’s religious tradition. In marrying someone of a different religion, the oldest child would unknowingly set a precedent that their younger siblings could follow, leading to a possible discontinuation of the family’s religious tradition.

Conclusion

This research presented the findings of the survey of Buddhist-Catholic marriages in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai province, which employed questionnaires and interviews. It discussed the Buddhist-Catholic couples’ accounts of the difficulties and problems they have experienced in their marriages as well as perspectives of some Buddhist and Catholic leaders on their followers’ inter-faith marriages.

The research found that in order to be able to come together as the husband and wife, Buddhist-Catholic couples had to face five common difficulties which took place in both pre-marriage and post-marriage. These are initial parental disapproval, obstacles resulting from the regulation of the Catholic Church, disagreements over religious practices at home, disagreements over children’s religious upbringing, and dissents related to funeral services.

The most common difficulty that most couples have experienced is the parents' objection to their children's inter-faith marriage. The reasons for their disapproval are that they come from the very religious families, the parents prevent the children's marriage from divorce, they put much importance on the essential role of the eldest child who is responsible for worshipping ancestor and also the exemplary for younger siblings in the family, some parents have still had prejudices against the other's religion, and the couples' age are incompatible.

For dealing with parents' disapproval, the couples attempted to find the ways so that they were able to have their parents' support. Some tried to convince the parents by reasonable explanations. Some did not inform their partners' religion when leading them to home and introducing to the parents. Besides, some other couples resorted the ways that are more difficult, such as leaving home to put pressure on the parents, or intentionally getting pregnant before marrying.

Those couples who got married to people of different faith without parents' approval usually underwent three common consequences. At first, they were badly treated when becoming the daughter-in-law or the son-in-law in their partners' household. This happened to the daughters-in-law more often than the sons-in-law. Some couples were sometimes abandoned by the parents and families. And then they were also estranged by Catholic community because of not getting the special permission of the Church. /.

Notes:

- 1 Phạm Côn Sơn, Nguyễn Minh Tiến (ed), *Dụng Vợ Gả Chồng: Hôn Lễ và Nghi Thức (To Marry Somebody off: Wedding Ceremony and Its Rites)*, Nhà xuất bản Tổng Hợp Hồ Chí Minh, 2005, p. 36.
- 2 Result of Nation-wide Survey on the Family in Vietnam 2006, Hanoi, 2008, p. 28.
- 3 The story was told by a Catholic priest about the case of one of his followers' Buddhist-Catholic marriage when interviewed with him at Ho Chi Minh, 29th March 2015.
- 4 The researcher had conversations with the parents of some Buddhist-Catholic couples about the issues of marriages among Buddhists and Catholics in Dong Nai province in February 2015. Several of them shared the view that since they have a remarkable leadership role in their religious community, religious

- devotees of their local area, so a Buddhist-Catholic marriage in the family was would be unacceptable.
- 5 Researcher's interview with Rev. 10 at Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, 8th March 2015.
 - 6 Result of Nation-wide Survey on the Family in Vietnam 2006, Hanoi, 2008, p. 44.
 - 7 As interviewed with a Buddhist man, at Dong Nai, 10th January 2015.
 - 8 Ibid.
 - 9 Interviewed with a male ex-Buddhist, at Ho Chi Minh City, 30th February 2015
 - 10 This may because of Communist preconception about Catholics in the past (see more in Tran Duy Hieu, *Difficulties in Buddhist-Catholic Marriages: A Case Study in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai Province, Vietnam*, Ph. D Dissertation, Copyright of Mahidol University, Thailand, chapter 2, p.44)
 - 11 Interviewed with a Buddhist man, at Dong Nai, 19th June 2015.
 - 12 Interviewed with a female Catholic, at Ho Chi Minh City, 4th April 2015.
 - 13 Interviewed with a male Catholic, at Dong Nai, 19th June 2015.
 - 14 Interviewed with a female Catholic, at Dong Nai, 19th June 2015.
 - 15 Interviewed with a Catholic woman, at Ho Chi Minh City, 15th March 2015.
 - 16 See more in Tran Duy Hieu, *op.cit.*, chapter 3, pp. 86-7.
 - 17 Interview with a Buddhist man, at Ho Chi Minh City, 12th February 2015
 - 18 Researcher's interview with a Catholic priest at Ho Chi Minh, 29th March 2015.
 - 19 See in the Catholic Law no. 1086 and 1108.
 - 20 Researcher's interview with a Catholic priest at Xuan Loc diocese, Dong Nai, 20th April 2015.
 - 21 Interviewed a Catholic woman, at Dong Nai, 6th May 2015.
 - 22 Apart from worshipping the historical Buddha, Gotama, Vietnamese Buddhists also worship Amitabha Buddha and Avalokitesvara (Guanyin) at home.
 - 23 Beside Jesus Christ, Vietnamese Catholics also worship the Mother Mary
 - 24 Interviewed with a Catholic widow, at Ho Chi Minh City, 6th April 2015.
 - 25 Interviewed with a female Catholic, at Ho Chi Minh, 17th May 2015.
 - 26 According to Midgely, 'our relationship with religious belief has been influenced by our family, since we are product of our upbringing. Therefore, our spirituality is a product of our family of origin.' (John M. Midgely, *Decision to Love: A Marriage Preparation Program*, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 2003, pp. 109-110 .
 - 27 See more detail about the special permission.in Tran Duy Hieu, *op.cit.*, Chapter 3, p. 85 .
 - 28 Interviewed with a female Buddhist staff, at Ho Chi Minh City, 29th March 2015.
 - 29 See in Tran Duy Hieu, *op.cit.*, chapter 2, p. 47.
 - 30 Researcher's interview with a male lawyer, in Ho Chi Minh City, 22nd April 2015.
 - 31 'If a husband and wife really cannot live together, instead of living a miserable life and maltreating each other by attitude of less respect, offensive, anger, hatred, ect., they have the right to separate and live peacefully' (K. Sri. Dhammananda, *A Happy Married Life, A Buddhist Perspective*. Singapore: Dharma Propagation Division, 1987).
 - 32 Researcher's interview with Rev. 12, who is in charge of the field of interreligious dialogue at the Pastoral Center in the Ho Chi Minh Diocese, 10th March 2015.

- 33 Interview with an old Buddhist man, in Dong Nai province, 3rd June 2015
- 34 According to the burial practices of the Vietnamese, after 3 years of being buried in the cemetery, the corpse would be disinterred for reburial in a new place which is their everlasting grave.
- 35 Nowadays, all parishes in Vietnam have their own churchyard called '*Vườn Thánh*' (Holy Ground) which are only reserved for burying Catholics. As for Buddhism, only a few temples have their own graveyard. Instead, most temples in Vietnam have a separate place for keeping and worshipping ashes and picture of the deceased. Buddhist are permitted to be interred not only in the Buddhist cemetery but also in community one.
- 36 Interviewed with a female Catholic widow, at Dong Nai, 10th June 2015.
- 37 This is based on the result of the answers to question no.6 on the questionnaire: "*What did you decide to do about your religious affiliation in getting married with a person of different religion? When did you make this decision?*"
- 38 Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai, "Nghĩ Lễ, Chuẩn Mực và Tính Linh Hoạt Trong Đời Sống Gia Đình Của Người Công Giáo Ở Việt Nam Hiện Nay" (Ritual, Norm, and Flexibility in Family Life of Vietnamese Catholics in Today's Vietnam), *Cultural Studies*, No.3, 2013, p. 49.
- 39 Interviewed with a male Buddhist, at Ho Chi Minh City, 17th February 2015.
- 40 See more in Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce, *Why Are Women More Religious Than Men?*, Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 2012, pp. 62-78.
- 41 As shall be mentioned below, out of 87 respondents, 62 are women who converted to their husband's religion for marriage.
- 42 It is one of three Confucian principles of feudal rites, a long-lasting influence of Confucianism called "*Tam tông*" (one of the three subjections of a woman). These are "*Tại gia tông phụ*" (at home, a girl obeys her father), "*Xuất giá tông phu*" (in marriage, she obeys her husband), and "*Phu tử tông tử*" (if the husband dies, she obeys her son). It implies that in feudal society, the woman had no right to determine her own life but just depended on the family that was daughter to her parents, wife to her husband, and widow to her children.
- 43 Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai, *op.cit.*, p. 49.
- 44 Interviewed with an ex-Buddhist woman, at Dong Nai, 17th May 2015.
- 45 Interviewed with a female ex-Buddhist, at Ho Chi Minh City, 6th February 2015.
- 46 Mai Do, Changing attitudes toward premarital sex in Vietnam: Evidence from a National Survey, University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, p. 1.
- 47 The story was told by a female ex-Buddhist while making the interview with her at Dong Nai, 9th May 2015.
- 48 Interviewed with a female ex-Buddhist and her younger sister, an ex-Buddhist, at Dong Nai, 21st May 2015.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.

References:

1. Atitya, Jaroen (1989). *The Marriage of Catholic and Buddhist: Its Celebration and Dissolution in the Pastoral Circumstances of Thailand*. Doctoral Dissertation, Academia Alfonsiana, Roma.

2. Dhammananda, K. Sri (2007). *A Happy Married Life, A Buddhist Perspective*. Singapore: Dharma Propagation Division.
3. Horstmann, Alexander. "Living Together: the Transformation of Multi-Religious Co-existence in Southern Thailand", in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. Vol. 42(3) (October 2011): 487-510.
4. John M. Midgley (2003). *Decision to Love: A Marriage Preparation Program*, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications.
5. Mai Do, Changing attitudes toward premarital sex in Vietnam: Evidence from a National Survey, University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.
6. Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce, *Why Are Women More Religious Than Men?*, Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 2012.
7. Thich Nhat Hanh (1995). *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, Riverhead Books.
8. Thich Nhat Hanh (1999). *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*. London: Riverhead Books.
9. Tran Duy Hieu (2016). *Difficulties in Buddhist-Catholic Marriages: A Case Study in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai Province, Vietnam*. Ph. D Dissertation, Copyright of Mahidol University, Thailand.
10. Result of Nation-wide Survey on the Family in Vietnam 2006, Hanoi, 2008.
11. The Catholic Law no. 1086 and 1108.
12. Phạm Côn Sơn, Nguyễn Minh Tiến (ed). (2005). *Dựng Vợ Gả Chồng: Hôn Lễ và Nghi Thức (To Marry Somebody off: Wedding Ceremony and Its Rites)*, Nhà xuất bản Tổng Hợp Hồ Chí Minh.
13. Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai, "Nghi Lễ, Chuẩn Mực và Tính Linh Hoạt Trong Đời Sống Gia Đình Của Người Công Giáo Ở Việt Nam Hiện Nay" (Ritual, Norm, and Flexibility in Family Life of Vietnamese Catholics in Today's Vietnam), *Cultural Studies*, No. 3, 2013.
14. *The Rites of the Catholic as revised by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*. New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1983.
15. Nguyen Thanh Binh, "Age at First Marriage in Recent Years Vietnam". *Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 3 (1) (January 2012): 491- 496.