

**DISCIPLINING INTIMACY: THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EVERYDAY AND INTIMATE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT LATINOS**Nur Banu KAVAKLI<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>Altınbaş University, School of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences Sociology, İstanbul  
banu.kavakli@altinbas.edu.tr**Abstract**

Investigating the impact of Catholicism on intimate relationships among young adult Latinos, this work examines whether the role of religion has changed for this particular group. Marriage preparation classes provide a window for understanding the disciplinary power of the Church and how individuals respond to this power. Individuals' response to these programs is an indicator of their perception of the legitimacy of the Church in dictating ways of life. This research shows that the authority of the Catholic Church is in decline, particularly when disciplining of intimate lives is concerned. Selective rejection of certain teachings of Catholicism is a diffused act of micro-level resistance to the established order. Believers use their own lived experiences and practical knowledge of Catholicism to interpret the teachings of the Church. They construct a religious identity influenced by individualism, where "being a good Catholic" is determined according to own and –sometimes unique- terms of each individual. This re/de-construction of religious identity is most significant in matters of sexuality.

**Keywords:** Religion, Marriage, Sexuality, Power and resistance, Institutional control.

**MAHREMİYETİN KONTROLÜ: GENÇ YETİŞKİN LATİNO GÖÇMENLERİN HAYATLARINDA KATOLİK KİLİSESİNİN YERİ VE ETKİSİ****Özet**

Evlilik hazırlığındaki Latino göçmenlerin hayatlarında Katolik Kilisesinin yerini inceleyen bu çalışma dinin, özellikle de mahremiyet söz konusu olduğunda, değişen etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Kilisenin zorunlu tuttuğu evliliğe hazırlık kursları bu dini kurumun disipline edici etkisini ve inananların buna verdikleri tepkiyi anlamak için önemli bir alan açmaktadır. Bireylerin bu kursları değerlendirme şekli kilisenin hayatlarındaki kurumsal kontrol girişimlerini nasıl değerlendirdiklerinin de göstergesidir. Bu çalışma ortaya koymaktadır ki, özellikle cinsellik ve özel hayat alanlarında Katolik kilisesinin kontrol ve dikte edici gücü azalmaktadır. Çeşitli dini öğretilerin bireylerin tercihlerine göre kabul ya da reddi yoluyla gerçekleşen dağınık bir mikro-direnış hali gözlemlenmektedir. İnananlar kendi şahsi deneyimleri ve dini inançları üzerinden Kilisenin öğretilerini yorumlamakta ve 'dindarlığı' şahsi ve çoğu zaman özgün şekillerde tanımlayarak bir dini kimlik oluşturmaktadırlar. Dini kimliğin bu yeniden kurgulanışı özellikle cinsellikle ilgili konularda öne çıkmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din, Evlilik, Cinsellik, Güç ve direniş, Kurumsal kontrol.

## DISCIPLINING INTIMACY: THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EVERYDAY AND INTIMATE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT LATINOS

*As I stand on the lawn before the beautiful building of St. Victoria's admiring the dome covered with floral tiles, carved wood doors and stained-glass windows, the crowd starts to enter the church for the Sunday Mass. Even though I am not Catholic, Father M. had already invited me to join the Mass, kindly reminding that I am not to take Communion. St. Victoria's has a large congregation and its population increases even more for the Sunday Mass. I learnt about people driving from remote parts of LA just to join the Mass. St. Victoria's is particularly popular among those dreaming of a church wedding, no wonder considering the beauty of the church and its courtyard. I realize that the crowd is predominantly Latino. I join them, we pass through the large wooden doors and as we take our seats for the Mass I admire the interior of the church which is at least as beautiful as its exterior.*

*Banu Kavakli*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This work focuses on Catholic marriage preparation classes and the young adult Latinos who attend these classes in a downtown Los Angeles church. Investigating the impact of Catholicism on intimate heterosexual relationships among young adult Latinos, it examines whether the meaning of religion has changed for this group. In this regard, the place of marriage -as the centerpiece of family formation- in individuals' lives deserves particular attention. Marriage, as a sacrament of Catholicism, is a significant site to observe the involvement of the Church and religion in intimate relations. This is especially true in the contemporary period, since Vatican II<sup>1</sup> has made attendance at the instructional marriage preparation classes mandatory for permission to participate in a Catholic Church wedding. The Catholic Church, fighting the impact of modernity, still maintains strict teachings regarding sexuality, birth control, abortion, and divorce, while mainstream American culture, promoting individualism and autonomy of the self, poses challenges to these teachings. Marriage preparation classes emphasize the stance of the Church on these issues, along with the importance of marriage as a sacrament. Thus, marriage becomes a controversial site when the interaction between the teachings of the Church and everyday life practices is concerned. Marriage is the place where the impact of the Church as an institution 'disciplining intimacy' may be most visible.

In this regard, marriage preparation classes provide a window for understanding the disciplinary power of the Church and how individuals respond to this power. Thus, individuals' response to the content of these programs is an indicator of their perception of the legitimacy of Catholic religion and the Church in dictating ways of life. The way young adult Latinos perceive the place and importance of marriage

<sup>1</sup> Vatican II, or the Second Vatican Council, was one of the most significant ecumenical councils of the Roman Catholic Church. Held from 1962 to 1965, the purpose of the council was a spiritual renewal of the Church, and reconsideration of the position of the Church in the modern world. The bishops ordered a large-scale liberalization and modernization of the practices of the Church. Issues discussed in the council included, but were not limited to, the nature of the Church, the attitude of the Church toward non-Catholic faiths, liturgy, the role of women in the Church, and birth control (McBrien 1992; van Beeck 1985). Some conservative Catholics blame Vatican II for the decline in vocations among Catholics in the United States.

as a sacrament and in relation to their own relationship is vital to understanding how teachings of the Catholic Church affect their lives.

This research shows that the authority of the Roman Catholic Church is in decline when the teachings on matters of sexuality are concerned. Young adult Catholics reject institutional commitment and prefer being 'good enough Catholics' (Wilkes, 1996). In other words, God's rules and the Church's rules are not necessarily the same. The most significant aspect of their approach towards religion is the self-construction of a religious identity influenced by individualism, where the meaning of 'being a good Catholic' is determined according to own terms of each individual.

The marital preparation program does not fully convince participants of the message that the Church is trying to pronounce. What the young adult Latinos take from marital preparation classes is very secular and material rather than spiritual. Even though the program aims to put emphasis on the sacrament of marriage, they do not receive and recount this aspect. The role of religion in individuals' lives has definitely changed. My informants make a distinction between the institutionalized religion ordained by the Roman Catholic Church and an individualized spirituality that is more informed by the principles of modernity. I argue that selective rejection of certain teachings of the Catholic Church by young adult Latinos can be regarded as a diffused act of micro-level resistance to the established order. For young adult Latinos in this research, even though it is not structured and probably not intentional, resistance is a continuous act of rationalization, especially when sexuality is concerned, that leads to the confrontation of the religiosity imposed by the Catholic Church. The same rationalization separates God/faith and the Church as distinct entities and allows for the presence and maintenance of the former without the need for and mediation of the latter.

## 2. DISCIPLINING INTIMACY

Based on a Foucauldian framework of power relations, the Roman Catholic Church is taken as a religious institution that constitutes its authority over individuals through an exercise of power on human bodies and especially their sexualities. For Foucault (1980), religion is a mechanism for controlling the function of human life. Religion, thus, is a source of power, of which authority becomes the most oppressive in individual practice when internalized as a form of self-discipline.

According to Foucault, discipline produces 'docile' bodies (Foucault, 1995). This work claims that the Roman Catholic Church controls the sexuality of its believers. It is not a system of direct control and punishment, but it works through the teachings of the Church that demand individuals serve as their own disciplinarians by making them feel guilty whenever they go against the doctrines. It is not based on a refusal or prohibition of sexuality but rather it does so by placing a control mechanism over individuals (Foucault, 1978). Foucault defines three basic characteristics of Christianity regarding sexuality: sexual pleasure is accorded the smallest possible place, procreation is primary, and sexuality is to be practiced only within religiously recognized marriage. These are power techniques intended to rule individuals in continuous and permanent ways (Foucault, 1980, pp. 137-138).

Even though sexuality is conceived as potentially harmful to the individual, the Church does not rule out one of the basic needs of human beings. Rather, it becomes the institution that is responsible for “disciplining intimacy.” In this setting, the body should function according to the requirements of the common morality determined by the Church, which is practicing sexuality within marriage, only for procreation, and devoid of pleasure (Foucault, 1978). I do recognize that the Roman Catholic Church’s attitude towards sexuality, though still within marriage, has changed radically since Vatican II. Married couples are now allowed to enjoy the act of expressing their love even if procreation is not the ultimate end of that particular action (D’Antonio, 1985). Nevertheless, that shift is not sufficient to alter the position of the Church as an institution monitoring individuals through disciplining their intimate relationships. What I will try to illustrate here is the current position of the American Catholic Church as an institution trying to monitor the lives of its believers according to the doctrines of Roman Catholicism, while at the same time competing with the mainstream American culture promoting individualism and autonomy of the self. An equally important concern is the way young adult Latino Catholics perceive the control mechanisms of the Church, and their intricate ways of resisting to or accommodating the authority of the religious institution.

Foucault argues that discipline ‘makes’ individuals by regarding them both as objects and instruments of its exercise, who are aware that every action performed can be seen (Foucault, 1995; Shumway, 1993). The source of the Catholic Church’s authority over believers resides from the idea of being subject to the omnipresent gaze of God at all times. The awareness that God sees everything instills a self-control mechanism into each individual to substantiate the authority of the Church. However, the idea of the omnipresence of God might as well undermine the power of the Church by rendering it an unnecessary institution, a redundant mediator between God and individuals. Since God is everywhere, rather than conforming to each and every doctrine imposed by the Church to get to God, individuals might choose to construct their relationship with God independent of the Church’s manipulation. Thus, power creates its own resistance.

Like power, resistance does not have a center but is everywhere. Thus, the selective rejection/modification of certain teachings of the Catholic Church by young adult Latinos are diffused and unstructured acts of resistance to the power of the Roman Catholic Church. Resistance stems also from the proposed relation between power and knowledge. The strongest critiques of the Church come from those with a Catholic education or who have read the Bible, and thus claim that they do not need the institutional interpretation of how to practice their religion and lead their lives. With knowledge, comes the power over one’s own body as opposed to complying with the institutional version. Since sexuality is central to the Church’s control of individuals, it is not surprising that they practice most radical acts of resistance in that area of human life. The teachings of the Catholic Church regarding sexuality, such as prohibition of premarital sex and methods of birth control are the ones discarded even by the most religious individuals.

Latinos constitute one of the largest ethnic groups among Catholics in the U.S. (Christiano, 1991). That makes it vital to look at religion and culture simultaneously for each particular ethnic group to understand the role of religion and culture in individuals’ lives. Catholicism and the Latino culture have a combined effect on individuals, especially concerning sexuality and marriage, where it is not possible to differentiate

the effects of each. Religion is part of cultural conditions of existence and one cannot understand culture without examining its constructs embedded in religious belief and practice (Carrette, 1999). One needs to be wary about the religious influences upon thought and practice of individuals belonging to a particular ethnic/cultural group in conducting analysis. In order to be specific about the interaction between culture and religion, I am particularly concerned with Catholic young adult Latinos. Because of the centrality of sexuality in the construction of religious power over individuals, the attention here is on young adults who are about to get married. This is the best time to analyze the influence of religious doctrine on thoughts and practices of individuals. In order to examine sexuality as a controversial site I chose engaged couples since they have to question the legitimacy of the Church's teachings on sexuality to decide whether or not to wait until after marriage to have sex or use contraceptives. A further contribution is the inclusion of the Church's attitude towards this patchwork religiosity and diminished authority by giving voice to priests, who have direct contact with the young adults attending marital preparation classes.

### 3. MARITAL PREPARATION PROGRAM

The Catholic Church recognizes marriage as a sacrament, one in which the husband and wife are reincarnations of Christ's love for His church. The Church sees it as more than a mere relationship, as part of God's natural order. According to Catholic teachings, marriage is a sacrament that should be received once and should not be broken. Thus, couples should be prepared for marriage in order to prevent mistakes, such as divorce. In the 1960s, divorce rates started to rise in the U.S. and now about half of all marriages end in divorce (Galston, 2000). The Catholic Church, concerned with the rising divorce rates, developed new approaches to better prepare couples for marriage and prevent divorce and distress (Williams and Jurich, 1995). Since the Vatican II Council, dioceses have required that engaged couples attend marital preparation sessions to better understand the Holy Matrimony (Kohmescher, 1999; McLachlan, 1997).

The Marital Preparation Program at St. Victoria's consists of a series of presentations spread over a period of seven weeks. The engaged couples and the presenters meet every Tuesday night for two hours, for seven weeks to discuss orientation, sacrament of marriage, parenting, liturgy planning, natural family planning, managing finances, and how to have success in marriage.

The format of the marriage preparation program varies from one church to another.

The Archdiocese requires that Catholic churches provide engaged couples with an environment to assess their readiness to marriage and understand that marriage is a covenant, a vocation, and a sacrament (Archdiocese of Los Angeles Marriage Preparation). St. Victoria's is an exception with its seven-week long preparation. In other churches, the classes take a weekend or a couple of days. Some churches offer different sessions depending on whether the couples are getting married for the first time, have been civilly or previously married. St. Victoria's offers a single preparation program for all couples irrespective of couples' previous/current marital status.

In addition to the seven-week marriage preparation, couples are also required to attend the Engaged Encounter. This is a weekend program designed to provide couples with an environment away from the interruptions of everyday life so that they can reflect on their relationship. The basic premise of the

program is “to teach a communication technique that allows couples to explore every aspect of their relationship and enrich their love towards each other” (Archdiocese of Los Angeles Engaged Encounter).

#### 4. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was conducted in a downtown Los Angeles Catholic Church, which I call Saint Victoria’s. Due to its beautiful Mexican-cathedral-like structure, it is one of the most popular sites for holding a wedding ceremony. Thus, every marital preparation class hosts young couples from all over Los Angeles County. The popularity of St. Victoria’s as a wedding church and as a Latino congregation made it an ideal location for my research. St. Victoria’s has a congregation of three thousand registered families. Every Sunday around 5000 people attend six different services. Latinos comprise about 85 percent of the congregation, which is one of the largest Latino congregations in Los Angeles.

With the consent and support of the priests, I attended marital preparation programs between March 2003 and November 2004 as a participant observer. The priests in charge of preparation classes not only allowed me to introduce my research and contact individuals, but also encouraged couples to participate in this research since they too were interested in assessing the success of the program and learn how young adult Latinos perceived it. The data come from multiple sources, the most important being 16 in-depth interviews conducted among attendees of premarital classes at St. Victoria’s. I attended five different seven-week sessions to contact young adult Latino couples. I did not apply very strict criteria in selecting participants other than ethnic origin. Since St. Victoria’s has a mainly Latino congregation, the majority of couples in every group were Latinos. In each group, out of around forty couples attending the classes, two or three of them were non-Latino or mixed-ethnicity couples. I wanted to learn about the experiences and perspectives of both women and men, therefore, I selected my participants as couples. I interviewed individuals separately to ensure maximum privacy and freedom of expression, and to compare material from each. The other group of interviewees comprises two priests, who are in charge of marital preparation classes. This component allowed me to incorporate the institutional perspective into the analysis of the relationship between the Church and its believers. All names are changed to protect the informants.

#### 5. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

My sample consists of 16 young adult Latinos, 8 men and 8 women, who attended the marital preparation program at St. Victoria’s between March 2003 and November 2004. Ages of my informants ranged from 23 to 35, with a mean age of 28. All of my informants had some college education, seven held AA degrees, four had a BA, and five completed post-graduate work. All but one, who had been in the U.S. for less than a year, had a steady employment. Three couples were civilly married during the time of the interview and the rest were engaged. Except for two couples, who have been married for more than 3 years, all others, including one of the married couples, were living in their parents’ houses. Six of them were first generation immigrants while the rest were second generations, except for one who was beyond third generation. The countries of origin varied, yet more than half of my informants (9) were from Mexico, with second most frequent country being El Salvador (4).

## 6. INDIVIDUALIZED SPIRITUALITY: DE-INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOSITY

Individualized spirituality is a common religious form among these young people. The Church as an institution is separated from everyday life, whereas faith is an integral part. However, not all of them turn away from the institutional religion. There are six parish member couples, other than these, all others are irregular churchgoers or do not take part in institutional practice at all. These individuals have well-thought explanations to legitimize their standing. One interesting point is that their negation of the Church does not result in the negation of Catholic identity. My informants do not turn to more universal forms of religious expression but hold onto their Catholic identity while modifying, stretching and expanding Catholicism to fit their own life and understanding. The basic explanation is the personal relationship they have with God without the need of the Church's mediation.

The same is true for a large portion of American Catholics, who do not accept the Church's teachings on sexuality, contraception, divorce, and homosexuality. An interesting feature of American Catholicism is that even though they pose serious criticism at the Roman Catholic Church, they continue to self-identify as Catholics (D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge and Meyer, 2001; Dillon, 1998; Hoge, Dinges, Johnson and Gonzales, 2001). Believers use their own lived experiences and practical knowledge of Catholicism to claim the authority to interpret the teachings of the Church. Thus, knowledge of religion provides believers with the power to resist the institution that claims to represent religion.

The conduct of Catholics in the U.S. reveals that augmenting the individual over the institutional is the recent pattern among American Catholics. Research shows that the authority of the Roman Catholic Church is in the decline when the teachings on matters of sexuality are concerned (D'Antonio et al., 2001; D'Antonio, 1985; Hoge et al., 2001). The prevailing argument, especially among young adult Catholics, is that institutional commitment is not a requirement to be a 'good Catholic'. Rather, they prefer being 'good enough Catholics' for whom God's rules and the Church's rules are not necessarily the same (D'Antonio et al., 2001; Hoge et al., 2001; Wilkes, 1996). There is a self-constructed religious identity influenced by individualism, where the meaning of 'being a good Catholic' is determined according to own terms of each individual. In addition, this re/de-construction of religious identity is most significant in matters of sexuality.

The following responses display my informants' resistance to an organized, institutional form of religion while reserving their Catholic identity and personal relationship with God.

*I don't like organized religion, 'cause there are a lot of hypocrites, who do go to church, who are religious and yet do something bad, totally unacceptable. I'm not going to church and I'm not doing those things. So, I think I am a good Catholic. I talk to God every night. I don't need to go to church to talk to Him, He's everywhere. (Gloria)*

*You don't necessarily always have to go to church to have God there with you. He's with you all the time, as long as you communicate with Him. To me God's always with me. I don't go to church regularly but I do pray every night. (Almira)*

*Although religion sounds very broad, to me it's more my God and me. And of course, it includes the things that we do like the sacraments, baptism, marriage and confirmation, but not the people, not the human beings around religion like the priests... the Church. (Maria)*

*I see the Church more as a business, a corporation. When I go to bed I pray to God every night with my heart. I rarely go to church. God knows that I pray. I believe in Jesus and God and nothing can take that away from me. I know God and take it everywhere I go. I don't need a church. (Rosa)*

*I define religion as a belief in truth, a deity. I feel I'm part of this huge voice. And I feel that I am Catholic. However, I, like many first- and second-generation Catholics take a patchwork philosophy towards the mores of the Church. See the teachings as more or less guidelines to life. I'm not Catholic in the strictest sense of the word. I strive to be the best Catholic I can be. I truly believe in the doctrines of the Church and the teachings of the Church... However, I have to remain true to my heart as well. I have to harmonize what the Catholic Church teaches and how I feel in my heart is right. (Carlos)*

The accounts are similar when they discuss the teachings of the Church regarding sexuality. They valued individual concerns more than institutional commitment and explained how they legitimated having sex before marriage and remained true to their Catholic identity.

*That's where I say we don't follow the religion by the book. I feel like I'm a good person because I'm doing this with someone who I'm totally in love with and I respect and respects me. So when I look at the context of our sexual relationship, I feel like it's a really good thing. (Camila)*

*I think it's okay to have sex before marriage. I don't think it's okay to have sex with everybody you meet, but I think if you're engaged or if you're in a serious relationship, that may lead to marriage, I think it's okay. (Maria)*

*I don't feel like I'm going against the Church, because he's the only one. You could say I feel pure. I don't feel guilty about walking up the aisle in a white dress because he's the only one I've been with and God knows that. (Almira)*

The accounts of my informants reflect, at the same time, some particular features of Latino Catholicism. Latino culture, with its rich and hybrid origins, places its stamp on religion. Thus, Latinos do not only know God, but they know God personally. They converse easily with God, and accept the simple and tangible signs of the spiritual world (Elizondo, 1999). An incident that one of my respondents experienced is illustrative of that approach. Almira, who is not a regular churchgoer, yet a true believer, told me how her parents taught her that God is always with them, in their family, and in everything they do. Thus, she looks around her rather than going to church when she needs God.

*My friend was in the hospital, like hours from dying. I was driving and I was asking God "Is he gonna get better?" The person behind me turned their lights on and off, and then just left them on. To me that was a sign, I know God's there for me. (Almira)*

Most of my informants criticized the Church as an institutional structure especially because of the recent news regarding the sexual abuse of young children by the priests. Other sources of conflict arise predominantly in the areas of sexuality and control of human body. Premarital sex, birth control, cohabitation, and homosexuality are the most controversial issues. Abortion is the one area where everyone seems to agree; none of my informants approves of it but try not to judge those who chose to do it. Separation of God/faith and the Church is a common way of formulating their approach. For most of my subjects, God

is everywhere; they do not need the church. The Church as institutional structure does not have authority over behavior. Still, an interesting point here is the resistance to the Church as an institution but strong attachment to the church as a significant symbol of their faith. Thus, though they do not go to the Mass, they do go to a church for the peace it provides. The same argument is also valid for Catholics all over the U.S., who continue to believe that Mass attendance is a fundamental feature of Catholicism, yet do not necessarily attend the Mass regularly (Wolfe, 2003).

*I really don't believe in religion or Church. But I love being in a church, it's just so peaceful. (Jose)*

*I'm not a total practicing Catholic. I was baptized. I believe in God, I believe in Jesus. I'm not so much into church. I believe in God and pray with my heart. I don't like going to church with people who don't pray with their hearts. (Rosa)*

For my respondents, being a good Catholic is almost equivalent to being a good person.

Regular church attendance is not a requirement for either. On the contrary, some of them even criticize regular churchgoers, especially those who preach others, due to their hypocrisy. They are all in favor of measuring individuals with what they feel inside rather than what they do in terms of religious practice. Another paradoxical situation is the preference of spouses who 'have faith'. They assess spiritual closeness as a positive quality of a relationship. Even for those who intermarry, having a spouse who has faith and capable of believing in a transcendental being is important.

*When I say faith, I say faith in God. I'm not saying whether you're Catholic, Buddhist, Jewish, or Christian as long as you believe in God. The faith part, that's very critical, whether he's Catholic, that just happens to be that way. (Camila)*

*I think marriage is something very important, also something very sacred, something deep and solid. I think in marriage being religious is important, believe in whatever faith. (Pablo)*

The separation of faith from the institution is explicit in the account below. Carlos defines himself as a good Catholic and had a Catholic education, yet he feels free to ask for a total renovation of the Church.

*I don't agree with a lot of the things that the church teaches. The doctrines I believe [are] like Jesus Christ, sanctity of communion and of marriage, the Pope. I do believe it's the only Church that has direct relation to Jesus Christ. The doctrines I don't agree with seem to be more administrative. I think it's time for [another] Vatican council, to recognize and adapt to changes since 1968. (Carlos)*

## 7. RELIGION AND THE SELF

Classical secularization theory asserts that both the public influence of religion and private belief are destined to disappear in modern societies (Berger, 1969; Gorski, 2003).

However, in recent years, secularization theory has been contested. Instead, scholars suggest that formal religious institutions are not disappearing but changing form and becoming an ethical ideal without the need of a building or an institution (Hervieu-Leger, 2000). Religion is changing form in the modern

social context; however, in the case analyzed in this paper, the change is not due to the absence of ties to traditional religion. On the contrary, Catholicism is an important component of identity definition both as religious upbringing and as a significant aspect of the Latino culture. Yet, the individuals raised as Catholics experience a metamorphosis of religion in their own lives.

Even though Catholicism provides the plane on which religion is to be practiced, it is no longer the institutional version as ordained by the Roman Catholic Church, but an individualized version based on the beliefs and practices of each individual along with the requirements of modern life. They do not necessarily refer to this modified form of religion they practice as anything different from Catholicism. There is no replacement or denial of the belief in God and Jesus Christ, or other fundamental doctrines of Catholicism. In contrast, these ideas are emphasized even by those who make a ruthless criticism of the Church as the organized form of religion. These young individuals construct their own understandings of religion, yet continue to believe in a supernatural being.

*I believe in God. I am not gonna say the same for the Church. I was raised a Catholic. I consider myself Catholic. But as far as the Church, especially religion, I think there are more religions in this world than happy kids! (Jose)*

*To me religion represents God and Jesus Christ and what He said we should do, it guides my life. I don't see it as organized religion with the priests and the pope. It's more personal to me, although religion sounds very broad, to me it's more my God and me. (Maria)*

These personal constructs are not entirely different from Catholicism but are attempts to individualize the belief system with varying degrees of modification without the intent of a structural transformation of the official version. Thus, this new religious condition does not indicate a decline of religion or religious institutions, but rather signifies an emergence of new forms of religiosity that are individualized and rationalized. My respondents mentioned the importance of individual agency and consciousness in evaluating the teachings of the Church.

*I was raised Catholic but I'm not... I have my own mind. (Gloria)*

*I don't think the Church should make itself responsible for anything, because we're adults, we're responsible for our own actions. (Camila)*

*Religion is basically my personal relationship with God. I go to church to hear what they have to say and then come to it on my own conclusion. (Alberto)*

Alberto's statement is particularly interesting, because he and his wife attended a Christian (non-Catholic) church for four years and decided to go back to their own 'roots' when they started disagreeing with the teachings, such as not having any kind of relation with non-members. Jose carries rationalization and individual choice to an extreme level so as to compare the church to a nightclub.

*That's what I call myself, a part-time Catholic. I'm a Catholic cause I do all the stuff, and I know about Catholics and I don't like some of the stuff they do, that we do. The way I see a church is, I compare it with a nightclub. You have a choice, either go to a nightclub or go to church. Church is a nice place, night club is a nice place, too. This is an option. It has nothing to do with my relationship to God. (Jose)*

Individual consciousness enables resisting both the institutional authority and being constructed as docile bodies. Resistance, in this context, is not surrendering to transcendental values without questioning. My respondents do not question the centrality of God, but the authenticity of the Church. For the young adult Latinos in this research, resistance is a continuous act of rationalization that leads to the confrontation of the religiosity imposed by the Catholic Church. The same rationalization separates God and the Church into distinct entities and allows for the presence and maintenance of the former without the need for and mediation of the latter.

*Religion is important, believing in God, having faith and praying. Church, honestly, I don't even have a church. The other churches don't make me feel in unity. (Fernando)*

*The faith you have in God is just what I believe, the relationship you have with God is so big. But as far as religion, I don't believe in religion or the Church. I don't believe that religion is the way to get to God. (Jose)*

These people are trying to reconcile religious teachings and individual life in the modern context. This reconciliation entails transforming rather than disregarding the religious content by replacing religion with 'ethics' as a source of morality (Touraine, 1995). Under such circumstances being 'a good person' becomes equivalent to being 'a good Catholic.' Except for Fernando and Cesar, who required regular church attendance, all of my informants including Pablo, who was about to become a priest before he met his current fiancé, defined a good Catholic as a good person.

*I define myself as just one person trying to make it the best way I can, in a religious Catholic upbringing. As long as you give it your best try, and be the best person that you could be then you will make it to heaven. (Alberto)*

*Loving everyone even sinners. I'm not gonna despise people because they're not in my religion. That's what makes me a good Catholic because it is teaching you to be a better person. (Luisa)*

*I think I am a good Catholic. Because I'm following, I'm not condemning other people, which is what the Church does sometimes. I don't like organized religion, cause there are a lot of hypocrites, who do go to church, who are religious and yet they are doing something bad, totally unacceptable. I'm not going to church and I'm not doing those things. So, I think I am a good Catholic. (Gloria)*

*I consider myself a good Catholic, of course not someone that follows it by the book. I consider myself a good Catholic because in my terms that means trying to just be a good person. (Camila)*

## 8. MARRIAGE: TILL DEATH DO US APART

Marriage is the aspect of life that every participant said was as important as faith itself.

My informants emphasized that they desired to get married because they were in love. The primary reason for their union is not marriage but love, marriage comes secondary as a symbol, away to seal their love for each other. They consider a Catholic marriage as the only natural way to proceed because of the requirements of their culture and expectations of their families. More importantly, it is the best way to prove the strength of their love by getting God's blessing and making a life-long commitment in front of God.

When I asked them to define an ideal marriage, my informants did not refer to a religious understanding where the couple prays together or grows by receiving a sacramental grace, but they all accentuated communication, respect, trust, understanding, working together and love. As often as love, work is recounted as the most important component of a relationship. Couples need to work together and work for each other in order to have a good marriage. Most of the young couples want to establish their marriage as an independent, distinct, and central unit, not under the influence of any authority, be it the family or the Church. My participants' definition of good marriage is not exclusive to Catholicism, but more universal and secular. They referred to aspects of modern companionate relationship.

*I guess two people that really communicate, when married will share everything, communication is the foundation. (Cesar)*

*Communicating, doing things for each other, loving each other, being supportive, trust. Communication is the key. (Jorge)*

*Communication, trust in each other, responsibility, working together and loving each other. It's like a partnership, dependent on each. Marriage to me is spending the rest of my life with him. (Almira)*

Companionate marriages are based on emotional and sexual intimacy. The ideal marriage partner is a best friend and sexual partner in a setting where couples mutually understand and work out to please each other (Hirsch, 2003; Jamieson, 1998; Skolnick, 1991). In the contemporary society, where personal satisfaction and emotional fulfillment are keys to intact relationships, companionate marriage symbolizes couples sharing emotional intimacy and working as a team (Schwartz, 2000). Characteristics of companionate or peer marriage are cited in the accounts of my participants when they talk about an ideal marriage or their own relationship.

*I think that in a good marriage communication, respect, trust and the support of each other's own lives. We worked at it, and we keep working on it. (Camila)*

*They communicate, they work together. They respect each other and give each other time. (Isabella)*

*A good marriage is a couple that works together. That can be passionate towards each other, understand each other and be compassionate. Communication and listening is a very important thing. (Fernando)*

When I asked about the meaning of marriage they discussed the religious aspect of marriage. Based on this religious understanding, every individual expressed her or his desire to get married once and stay married for the rest of their life. The religious aspect of marriage revealed itself when my informants talked about the differences between a church and a civil marriage. Even though there are striking differences in terms of what each type of marriage signifies, a church marriage is regarded more as a requirement of the Latino culture to get God's blessing than as a desire to represent the love between Christ and His church. My informants do not distinguish between a wedding and a marriage. A church wedding symbolizes and is an inseparable part of the church marriage, with the ceremony and the meanings attached to it whereas a civil wedding is not even mentioned. Civil marriage is a legal necessity, yet it does not entail a wedding ceremony, a rite of passage to marriage like a church wedding does.

*Being Catholic, it's very important to go out of the house in front of God. The other (civil marriage) to me is just signing a paper. (Isabella)*

*I just believe that you can marry just the civil way and we in our hearts ask God, personally yourself and God just blesses our marriage. God is everywhere, right. So, we don't really need a church. But I guess it's the way we, Mexicans, do it. (Jose)*

*For me a serious marriage is to the Church. It's where you're before God. I wanna make the commitment to my wife and to God. But civil, I respect it but I personally wouldn't do it. (Fernando)*

*Church marriage is forever, in the eyes of God. You can cut off the ties easily [with a civil marriage]. I wanna get married forever. That's why I wanna get married in the church. It means something to me. (Gloria)*

The relationship between marriage and spirituality is constructed in terms of love. However, it is not in terms of the sacramental love that Christ had for the Church but the love between man and woman strengthened with God's blessing. This aspect is especially significant in the accounts of Rosa and Carlos, who are civilly married for more than two years but will also get married in the Church.

*Something will absolutely change when we get married in the church. Right now, we're committed to each other. It's just me and her right now. After we get married it'll be me, her and God. He's gonna be a part of our covenant. (Carlos)*

Marriage is the one field where the influence of religion is strongest. Even for individuals who do not agree with the practices of the Catholic Church, a religious marriage symbolizes something like the absolute experience of religiosity. Thus, the central aspect of marriage is not the religious ceremony, which is more of a formal requirement, but what comes after that, a lifelong commitment to each other with the spiritual support provided by God. Almost all the participants referred to the classes as a good source of information about marriage, especially concerning finances and natural family planning. Strikingly, there was no religious content in their accounts. What they take from marital preparation classes is secular and material, rather than spiritual.

Respondents said they liked the presentation on finances the most because it was interactive. This session was the only one where couples sat in a circle and shared their experiences of managing finances with the rest of the class. The content has nothing to do with religion or the sacrament of marriage. Father M. told me that they decided to include finances when a former attendee of marital preparation program came up with the idea and volunteered to give the presentation. This session provides information on managing credit cards, establishing credit history, and financing a house. It is noteworthy, if ironic, that the most secular of all sessions turns out to be the most popular one. The respondents perceive these as lectures, very instrumental and devoid of spirituality. Some of the couples stated their bias towards classes in terms of content and mandatory nature. Yet they were more positive about the content after attending the classes. They seemed to be surprised not to hear religious preaching. The classes put emphasis on marriage being a sacrament, but young adults do not receive and recount this aspect of the classes.

*The information they gave was really good. We paid closed attention to it and it was good. (Isabella)*

*I liked pretty much all. They were very productive. They give you good advice on certain problems that you're gonna have. And, they just give you options to solve those problems. I think they did help me. (Jose)*

*The classes, they were okay. I was also glad that they didn't preach. I kind of felt like I was wasting my time, I'd rather have somebody professional. Some of the stuff made sense but it's just common sense though. (Gloria)*

## 9. THE IMPACT OF LATINO CULTURE: CHURCH MARRIAGE VS. CIVIL MARRIAGE

At various points, especially when marriage and family life are concerned, Catholicism and Latino culture have an intertwined effect on individuals' lives. When asked about the significance of getting married in the church, most of my informants referred to a cultural requirement and ethnic identity rather than a religious one. For Ramon and Maria, who have been married civilly for six months yet continue to live with their families, it is a cultural issue.

*In June we got married. But we're still living at separate houses. I want to live together, but it's not good if we live together before we get married in the church and her family opposed. (Ramon)*

*I was born and raised in El Salvador. Being raised in the Catholic religion, I know if I'm gonna get married, I'm gonna get married in the Catholic Church. My culture is mostly influenced by the Catholic Church, everything comes from religion. (Maria)*

*They say that marriage is a piece of paper. But to me, because I'm Catholic, I think it's something that has to be done. And it's in our culture. I can't just say "I'm gonna live with somebody, goodbye." Everybody in our culture is like that. (Isabella)*

*Because it is our tradition and my faith to be married through the church, I didn't really see another way. Particularly in Mexico, it's how you normally get married. (Camila)*

The decision to get married in the church is one of the many aspects of the lives of my informants influenced by the Latino culture. Living in a city like Los Angeles, where Latinos constitute the largest ethnic minority group, the impact of the culture is even stronger. Latinos have a strong commitment to family, and this aspect of Latino culture remains significant though some others fade away with successive generations in the U.S. (Hurtado, 1995). Thus, for my informants, a church wedding is not only a religious requirement, but also a responsibility towards their families and their cultural/ethnic groups.

## 10. LOVE IS DIVINE

The absence of the controls exercised by social norms signify the presence of a subject, who is in a relationship and wants to enjoy it over and beyond what is permitted or forbidden. It is due to love that individuals become the creators of their self rather than being functional elements of the social system (Touraine, 1995). Illouz (1997) states that love evades conventional categories within which the current economic and political system has been conceived and stands against the social order writ large. I argue that love has the same effect on religious categories. Romantic love is destabilizing because it challenges regulatory mechanism of a social group or a religious order. It signifies the desire of the individual for a

model of sovereignty above and against the claims of the social order. Romantic love displaces the sacred from proper religion to its own domain and becomes an authority in its own right (Illouz, 1997). In a sense, love becomes divine. Romantic love provides the means to construct an alternative self. It becomes a new source of power, along with and often against institutionalized religion that cannot be bounded, controlled or modified by a higher authority, such as the teachings of the Church.

With respect to the above framework, love, relationship and marriage are the sites of human life where the attempts of individuation are so significant that having an intimate relationship constitutes a source to criticize religious order (Gole, 2000). For the young couples, a romantic relationship is one of the sites through which they can criticize and go against religious norms. Love is such a powerful source that it compels a change of belief and practice even if individuals do not publicly admit that. A good example is one of my informants, who stated that she and her fiancé postponed sex until after marriage because of the requirements of Catholicism and Latino culture. Yet a later interview with her fiancé revealed that they were having sex and using a birth control method not approved by the Church. A romantic relationship is the single most controversial site when the clash of Catholic teachings and the requirements of everyday life and individual desires is concerned. This conflict between theory and practice paves the way for the rise of a new Catholic subjectivity where individuals re/de-construct the teachings, especially those regarding sexuality that hinder their self-expression. Love, thus, creates a space for intimacy and privacy, resisting the control of the personal by the institutional. It constitutes a challenge to the normalization of only one particular mode of sexuality, the one constrained by the legitimate Catholic marriage. All informants were having pre-marital sex and were not necessarily concerned about it. Yet, they all mentioned the centrality of love and being committed to their partner in explaining why they were not feeling uncomfortable about it.

*You're always kind of leery as far as how the Church feels about sexuality, I know premarital sex is not approved by the Church...I feel, it's not a sin. Your judge is God to me, and if God knows in my heart that she is the only one in my life then I think that's what love making is. The presence of love...if you're just having casual sex then there may be something wrong there, but if you're making love to someone as an expression of your love, then I think it's okay with God. (Cesar)*

*I definitely see sexuality as the ultimate course of intimacy. I think that to be a healthy couple, you should be able to have that healthy sexual life... that's where I say we don't follow the religion by the book. (Camila)*

## 11. SEXUALITY AND BIRTH CONTROL

Sexuality is not a major component of the marital preparation program. It is discussed in the session on the sacrament of marriage where consummation of the relationship is cited as a requirement for the sacrament to be fulfilled. In this brief discussion, Father M., who has been presenting this lecture for the last six years, noted the importance of the couple's "coming together as one" for a healthy marriage, yet no further conversations were held while I was attending the classes.

The issue of sexuality comes up once again towards the end of the program, when 'natural family planning' techniques are introduced. This presentation is made by a Catholic couple specialized in teaching the technique. It is one of the most intense sessions focusing on harms of artificial birth control methods. It encourages couples to abstain from sex on certain times to prevent pregnancy. Even though few of my informants were impressed by the detailed presentation and wanted to learn more about the technique, many others were hesitant about its safety.

My informants did not think that sexuality was a field that the Church could intervene. Religious rules do not apply there. Not a single couple complied with the Church's teachings and waited until after marriage to have sex. Even if some couples agree with the Church's teachings on premarital sex and birth control, they do not apply these rules and have no problem with this.

These couples tend to defend these teachings for the betterment of the society and considering their own children. Sex between partners is perceived as an important component of a good relationship. They all believe that sex is an important act of intimacy and expression of love that brings the couple together. Like premarital sex, my informants approved and practiced birth control as an act of individual choice. Birth control is assessed as a matter of the couple's decision, more as an issue of health rather than religion.

*According to the church, many things I do are wrong. I don't see them wrong when using contraceptives, according to the church, it is wrong. But there's nowhere in the Bible that says you can't use contraceptives! (Alberto)*

*If you're using it properly and there are two people that really love each other, I don't see anything wrong with them using methods of birth control that have not been pre-approved. (Cesar)*

*They only approve the natural method. I don't think it's practical these days. It's better to take other birth control methods that are probably more effective. I think they should change that as it's different from a hundred years ago. (Maria)*

*We use birth control right now, pills. I know it's against the Church and it's against our religion to use birth control, but I think I would've taken them anyways. (Almira)*

An important feature of the subject is its attempt to reconcile sexuality and individual life in a context where restrictions -such as religious doctrines- control minds and bodies (Touraine, 1995). My informants, all of whom were having premarital sex, made such reconciliation by valuing individual over the institutional, prioritizing personal desires over religious teachings.

## 12. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE<sup>2</sup>

When I asked the priests about their major focus in the marital preparation program, they mentioned a spiritual preparation for marriage in the church. For them, spirituality does not only mean prayer but a holistic sense of readiness to receive marriage as a sacrament and as a sign of God's grace to be incarnated

<sup>2</sup> From the very beginning onwards, the priests at St. Victoria's have been very supportive of this research. They have been offering the marital preparation classes for quite a while now, but never had the chance to receive feedback or assess the success of the classes in terms of how much of the message they were trying to convey the couples were actually receiving.

in the couple's love towards each other. In addition to this primary objective, the Church is also concerned about rising divorce rates, and tries to secure intact marriages by providing couples with information on how to deal with potential problems.

The priests regard the preparation program as "a prime time for having interaction with the couples and inviting them to see a dimension of the Catholic marriage that by themselves they don't see." In addition, they were frustrated to realize that except for a few, most of the individuals attending the classes did not extract that particular aspect.

The priests realize that getting married in the church has different meanings for the couples and the Church. For the Church, it is more than getting God's blessing and should be accompanied by a life-long commitment to the Church, as well as to one's spouse. Yet, they also realize that for many people it is just an act of expressing their Catholic identity without necessarily coming back to the church after the wedding. One of the priests explained this by a lack of interaction between the Church and its believers, especially when the services the Church can provide to married couples are concerned.

*There's a lack of interaction you notice probably if there's anything, the Church is so lacking in skills, in advertising skills. But we have such product, and this product is good for you. Sometimes we presume that people would come, they would know, if they had problems they would come. I guess the Church has to market its services also, its products, its services. (Father J.)*

In order to overcome this problem and draw more of the young couples to the Church, the priests at St. Victoria's decided to redesign their marital preparation program so as to emphasize the sacramental nature of marriage and the importance of keeping your ties to the Church to have a stable marriage and life. The priests are also well aware of the argument that believing in God and being a good person is sufficient to be a good Catholic. Father J. related this to the impact of the American culture where individuals become "supermarket Catholics" and pick out the aspects of Catholicism that are most appealing to them rather than "being fully convinced of what it means to be Catholic and practice everything." Father M. agreed that the individualistic culture has a role in it, "people do not let their children make their own decisions about their nutrition, yet they let them starve spiritually."

The Church also notices that many of its believers are not following the teachings on sexuality. In one of the sessions that I attended, the priest referred to premarital sex as a sin that should be avoided, yet he continued by stating that it would be a lesser sin if engaged couples, who are determined to get married in the church and to make a life-long commitment, have sex.<sup>3</sup>

According to Father M., the transformation from a "pastorally insensitive" to "pastorally sensitive" stance is a reason for that statement. The Church does not want to alienate or offend anybody, yet it is not strong enough in trying to communicate the values. Both priests agree that the Church needs to reach out to the community and advertise the products and services they provide to enrich the lives of its believers. They also recognize the need to revise the marital preparation program to have a better interaction with the couples and have them more involved in the process.

<sup>3</sup> This explanation was met with a wave of laughter in the class. Later, when I asked my informants how they felt about that statement, they mentioned that they were relieved, but were also surprised to see that the priests were not preaching. Ramon, who has been in the U.S. for less than year, put it this way: "It surprised me because they (the priests) didn't talk about relations...I think they suppose that all the couples that attended to these classes, are having sexual relations."

### 13. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role of religion in individuals' lives has changed. My informants make a distinction between the institutionalized religion ordained by the Roman Catholic Church and an individualized spirituality that is more informed by the principles of modernity. I argued that selective rejection of certain teachings of the Catholic Church by young adult Latinos can be regarded as a diffused act of micro-level resistance to the established order. For young adult Latinos in this research, even though it is not structured and probably not intentional, resistance is a continuous act of rationalization, especially when sexuality is concerned, that leads to the confrontation of the religiosity imposed by the Catholic Church. The same rationalization separates God/faith and the Church as distinct entities and allows for the presence and maintenance of the former without the need for and mediation of the latter.

American religion is going through a radical transformation. One observes a deinstitutionalization of Catholic religiosity, which is replaced by an individualized spirituality.

Previous researches document that a large portion of American Catholics does not accept the Church's teachings on sexuality, contraception and divorce. However, even though they raise serious criticism at the Roman Catholic Church, they continue to identify themselves as Catholics. Believers use their own lived experiences and practical knowledge of Catholicism to interpret the teachings of the Church. The most noteworthy aspect of their approach towards religion is the construction of a religious identity influenced by individualism and modernity, where the meaning of "being a good Catholic" is determined according to the own terms of each individual. The criterion for being a 'good Catholic' is secularized, so that rather than following the teachings of the Church and practicing religion regularly, maintaining a stable relation with God and being a 'good person' is sufficient. This re/de-construction of religious identity is most significant in matters of sexuality.

The secularization of marriage and the emergence of companionate relationship brought about with modernity create a space for romantic love to challenge the regulatory mechanism of the religious institution, especially when the teachings on sexuality are concerned. The idea of marriage promoted by the Catholic Church is quite distinct from young adult Latinos' perception of marriage. Whereas the Church accentuates the importance of marriage as a sacrament, they draw attention to companionship as the central aspect of marriage. Marriage is secularized in the minds of young adult Latinos, for whom a Catholic Church marriage is more a conduct of the Latino culture than is an essential component of ideal marriage.

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