

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

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ABSTRACT: The ongoing debate over the legalization of divorce in the Philippines is deeply influenced by religious, social, and legal factors, with the Catholic Church remaining a strong opponent of its implementation. Despite increasing advocacy for divorce as a fundamental right, the country remains one of the last without a divorce law, leaving many individuals in failing or abusive marriages without a viable legal remedy. This study aimed to examine participants' perspectives on the Catholic Church's stance on divorce legalization, focusing on the crisscrossing religious beliefs, Catholic moral stance, ethical considerations, and legal implications. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with individuals from various backgrounds, including practicing Catholics, legal professionals, and individuals with personal experiences in marriage and separation. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes, including religious opposition, ethical and legal considerations, and internal moral conflict. Findings revealed that while many participants upheld the Catholic Church's teachings on the sanctity of marriage, others recognized the necessity of divorce as a legal solution to protect individuals from irreparable marital hardships. Some respondents expressed internal conflict, struggling to reconcile their faith with the realities of marriage breakdowns. The study highlights the complex moral and legal dilemmas surrounding divorce in the Philippines, emphasizing the need for policy discussions that balance gospel values with individual rights. The findings suggest that while marriage remains a sacred institution, a more nuanced and compassionate approach to family law reform may be necessary to address the realities of modern relationships.

KEYWORDS: Divorce legalization, Catholic Church stance, marital dissolution, religious beliefs, legal reforms, social implications

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The debate over the legalization of divorce in the Philippines remains one of the most contentious socio-legal issues in the country. The Philippines is the only nation, aside from Vatican City, where divorce remains illegal for the majority of its citizens (Cruz, 2024). While annulment exists as an alternative, critics argue that the process is often expensive, time-consuming, and inaccessible for many individuals trapped in failing or abusive marriages (Bordey, 2023). Despite growing public discourse advocating for divorce as a fundamental right, the Catholic Church strongly opposes it, emphasizing the sanctity and permanence of marriage (Mendoza, 2024). The tension between religious doctrine and the necessity for legal remedies continues to shape legislative and social discussions on divorce.

The absence of a divorce law in the Philippines has significant implications for individuals and families. Studies show that individuals in toxic or abusive marriages experience severe emotional and psychological distress, with women and children being the most vulnerable (Garcia, 2024). Research further indicates that the lack of legal divorce exacerbates economic instability, as spouses, particularly women, struggle to gain financial independence without proper legal separation and asset division (Quismorio, 2024). Additionally, the prolonged annulment process can leave couples in legal limbo, unable to move forward with their lives or seek new relationships without facing social stigma (Casilao, 2024). The Catholic Church's continued opposition to divorce influences national policies, limiting the legal options available to those in broken marriages (Tolentino, 2024). While faith-based institutions emphasize preserving family unity, legal scholars argue that failing to provide divorce as an option denies individuals the right to self-determination and protection from marital abuse (Lalu, 2024).

Legislative developments in recent years indicate a shift in attitudes toward divorce. In 2023, the House of Representatives passed a bill on second reading advocating for divorce as a legal option, citing the necessity of protecting individuals from irreparable and abusive marriages (Abad, 2023). However, religious organizations, particularly the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), continue to resist its passage, arguing that divorce is unconstitutional and harmful to family values (Medenilla, 2019). Couples are reminded to look at marriage not as a human agreement but as a covenant between them and God. 'In the sacrament, God invites the couple to make an act of faith, not just in each other but in

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

the God who calls them to build a family' (Bishop David 2025). In contrast, studies from other countries with legalized divorce suggest that while the initial implementation may lead to an increase in divorce rates, it ultimately provides individuals with a legal framework for resolving marital disputes and ensuring child custody and financial support (Pulta, 2021). Furthermore, research highlights that nations with well-regulated divorce policies experience improved social stability and legal protections for both spouses and children (Orbe, 2024).

Despite ongoing debates on the legalization of divorce in the Philippines, limited research has been conducted on how individuals navigate the moral and religious conflicts surrounding this issue. While existing studies focus on legal and policy implications, there is a gap in understanding how religious beliefs influence personal perspectives on marriage dissolution. Additionally, little research has explored how individuals reconcile their adherence to Catholic teachings with the practical realities of marital hardship. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining participants' views on the Catholic Church's stance on divorce, providing insights into the crisscrossing of faith, law, and personal autonomy. By exploring these perspectives, this study contributes to a more nuanced discussion on divorce legalization and its broader societal impact in the Philippines. The lack of understanding by most of the husband and wife on the obligations of couples in the Sacrament of Marriage "That blessed husband of a good wife, twice-lengthened are his days; A worthy wife brings joy to her husband, peaceful and full is his life" (Sirach 26:1 and ff.).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This study examined participants' perspectives on the Catholic Church's stance on the legalization of divorce in the Philippines, focusing on the intersection of religious beliefs, ethical considerations, and legal implications. Specifically, it sought to (1) explore the reasons behind participants' support or opposition to divorce, (2) analyze how religious teachings influenced their views on marital dissolution, (3) assess the perceived social and personal consequences of divorce legalization, and (4) identify potential areas for policy discussion that balanced legal rights with religious and cultural values. By addressing these objectives, the study provided insights into the ongoing debate on divorce in the Philippines and contributed to discussions on legal reforms while respecting religious and moral convictions.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that individuals acquire behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses through observation, modeling, and reinforcement. This theory emphasizes the role of social influences, including cultural norms and religious teachings, in shaping individual beliefs and decision-making processes.

This study examines how religious doctrines, particularly those of the Catholic Church, shape individuals' perspectives on divorce. Social Learning Theory helps explain why many Filipinos strongly adhere to the Church's stance against divorce, as religious teachings and societal expectations reinforce the belief that marriage is a lifelong commitment. Furthermore, the theory aids in understanding how exposure to alternative viewpoints—such as legal arguments for divorce or personal experiences with marital struggles—may influence shifts in participants' perspectives.

By applying Social Learning Theory, the study provides insight into the ways social and religious influences shape opinions on divorce legalization in the Philippines. It highlights how learned behaviors and cultural norms affect the acceptance or rejection of divorce as a legal and moral issue.

Structural-Functionalism Theory (Parsons, 1951). Structural-Functionalism, developed by Talcott Parsons (1951), views society as a complex system in which institutions, such as religion and law, work together to maintain stability and order. This theory emphasizes the functions of social structures in preserving societal norms and regulating behavior.

The Catholic Church plays a crucial role in maintaining social stability by promoting traditional family structures and moral values. Structural-Functionalism helps explain why the Church opposes divorce, viewing marriage as a fundamental institution that supports the social fabric. The study applies this theory to analyze how religious teachings contribute to shaping policies and influencing individuals' perspectives on divorce. It also helps assess whether the absence of divorce laws serves to maintain social order or, conversely, creates dysfunction by trapping individuals in abusive and irreparable marriages.

By utilizing Structural-Functionalism, the study explores the broader social implications of divorce legalization and examines whether the Church's stance aligns with the evolving needs of Filipino society. It also sheds light on how institutional structures interact to uphold or challenge the status quo.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957). Leon Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains how individuals experience psychological discomfort when their beliefs or attitudes conflict with new information or experiences. To reduce dissonance, people either change their beliefs, justify their stance, or reject conflicting viewpoints.

Filipinos struggle with reconciling their religious beliefs with the realities of failed marriages and the need for legal divorce. Cognitive Dissonance Theory helps explain why some participants express internal conflict regarding divorce legalization. It provides a framework for understanding how individuals justify their stance on the issue—whether by

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

reinforcing their religious beliefs, modifying their perspectives to accommodate legal arguments, or experiencing shifts in their views based on personal or observed experiences.

The application of Cognitive Dissonance Theory in this study highlights the psychological tensions individuals face when aligning religious principles with practical realities. It helps explain why opinions on divorce are often complex and deeply personal, offering valuable insights into how people navigate moral dilemmas related to marriage dissolution.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore participants' perspectives on the Catholic Church's stance on the legalization of divorce in the Philippines. Specifically, a phenomenological approach was used to capture the lived experiences, beliefs, and moral dilemmas faced by individuals regarding the issue. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants from diverse backgrounds, including practicing Catholics, legal professionals, educators, and individuals with personal experiences related to marriage and separation. Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that the participants had relevant insights and firsthand knowledge of the topic. The interviews were conducted either in person or through online platforms, depending on participants' availability and preference, ensuring accessibility while maintaining ethical research standards.

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and key themes in participants' responses. The data were transcribed, coded, and categorized into major themes and sub-themes, focusing on religious opposition, ethical considerations, legal implications, and personal struggles in reconciling faith with marital realities. Triangulation was employed by cross-referencing responses with existing literature and legal documents on divorce legislation in the Philippines. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the research process. The study aimed to provide a balanced understanding of the issue while respecting participants' diverse perspectives and cultural sensitivities.

5.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. What is your view on the legalization of Divorce in the Philippines?

Theme: Divergent Perspectives on the Legalization of Divorce in the Philippines

the theme of Divergent Perspectives on the Legalization of Divorce in the Philippines highlights the diverse and often conflicting views among respondents regarding the issue. While many responses reflect a strong adherence to Catholic teachings that oppose divorce, others acknowledge its necessity in cases of abuse and irreconcilable marital conflicts. Some respondents remain undecided, torn between religious beliefs and personal or professional experiences. The responses indicate that the debate on divorce legalization in the Philippines is deeply rooted in religious, ethical, social, and legal considerations.

Sub-Theme 1: Religious Opposition to Divorce. A significant number of respondents expressed opposition to divorce, citing religious teachings and the sanctity of marriage. Many believe that marriage is a sacred, lifelong commitment and should not be dissolved. One respondent stated, *"I am against the legalization of divorce because, in the first place, why would you marry that person if you intend to divorce them? It is against the law of the Church, and marriage is sacred and must be respected in all means."*

Similarly, another respondent emphasized the Catholic doctrine that *"No one can separate what God has put together. Only death can separate the two."* This statement aligns with the biblical teaching that marriage is an unbreakable covenant. Another respondent reinforced this perspective, saying, *"As a Catholic, couples should have a way of fixing marriage problems as evidence of putting God at the center of their marriage. If God is at the center of the relationship, every problem is just a challenge to make the couple emotionally and mentally strong."*

One respondent highlighted their belief in the moral obligation to preserve marriage, stating, *"It should not be implemented. If a married couple wants to separate, I believe it would be better to opt for an annulment."* Another suggested that the annulment process should be reassessed and improved instead of legalizing divorce, arguing that *"The government should reassess the annulment process and requirements so that couples in distressing marriages, such as those involving violence against women, can escape their misery. The annulment process in the Philippines is time-consuming, and while waiting for the court's decision, the couple is burdened with pain."*

These responses illustrate that religious beliefs remain a dominant factor in opposing divorce, with many seeing it as a violation of moral and spiritual principles. The call for annulment reform suggests that while they oppose divorce, they acknowledge that some legal mechanisms should exist to address failed marriages.

Sub-Theme 2: Ethical and Practical Considerations for Legalizing Divorce. Despite the strong religious opposition, some respondents support the legalization of divorce, particularly in cases of abuse and irreparable marital conflict. One respondent stated, *"Legalization of divorce is not really bad at all because it can help those people who changed their mind for some reason. It also*

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

depends on the situation. For example, there is a wife who is physically abused by her husband and she cannot bear the pain anymore, and divorce is really the way in order for her to escape."

Another respondent emphasized that keeping individuals trapped in toxic marriages is more harmful than divorce, explaining, *"As an individual living in the Philippines, I have mixed feelings about the legalization of divorce. On one hand, I believe that couples who are in toxic or abusive relationships should have a legal way to end their marriage. Staying in such relationships can be harmful to both partners and their children. Legalizing divorce could provide a means for people to start fresh and lead happier lives."*

One respondent framed their position within a broader social and legal context, stating, *"The legalization of divorce in the Philippines is a necessary step towards providing individuals with the freedom to end irreparable or abusive marriages. It can offer a way out of toxic relationships, promoting personal well-being and safety. However, the decision should be made with careful consideration of its potential impact on family structures and societal values, balancing personal freedoms with cultural and religious sensitivities."*

A related perspective recognized both sides of the debate, stating, *"The issue of the legalization of divorce in the Philippines is complex and highly debated. While divorce is currently not legally available to Filipino citizens, recent developments indicate that there is ongoing discussion and consideration of the issue within the government."*

These responses indicate that while religious doctrine remains a major influence, there is growing awareness of the need for divorce as a legal remedy for abusive or failing marriages. Supporters of legalization often frame their stance in terms of human rights, safety, and individual well-being.

Sub-Theme 3: Internal Conflict and Indecision. Some respondents expressed internal conflict, struggling to reconcile their religious beliefs with their personal experiences or professional observations. One respondent stated, *"I am torn between my belief as a Catholic and as a healthcare practitioner who witnessed clients and patients who grew up in a home where there is constant dispute between a husband and wife. As a Catholic, I respect and honor marriage. Therefore, I still don't have a concrete stand regarding the matter, yet I am praying for God's guidance and enlightenment for the policymakers."*

Another respondent, acknowledging the complexity of the issue, stated, *"I shall base my opinion on the current circumstances when it comes to the legalization of divorce in the Philippines. From the perspective of the Church, divorce is a sin. Because once you enter married life, you make a commitment to stay together till death do us part. Outside of the Church, I might agree on the legalization of divorce in the Philippines because there are husbands who abuse their wives and don't provide for their families."*

One respondent admitted to being uncertain about their stance, saying, *"My stand on the legalization of divorce in the Philippines... Generally speaking, divorce is a highly emotional procedure that calls for both delicate handling and legal expertise."*

These responses highlight a significant moral and ethical dilemma, where religious doctrine clashes with the practical realities of marriage breakdowns. This internal conflict is particularly evident among those who have direct experiences of failing marriages or work in fields where they witness the effects of domestic disputes.

Sub-Theme 4: Broader Social and Legal Context of Divorce. Several respondents addressed the broader historical, religious, and societal factors influencing the divorce debate in the Philippines. One response noted, *"Legalizing divorce in the Philippines is complex, involving historical, religious, and societal factors. In the religious aspect, some churches don't allow divorce since children will be the ones who experience difficulties in life. On the other hand, there are churches in other places or countries that allow divorce."*

Another respondent remarked, *"Generally speaking, divorce is a highly emotional procedure that calls for both delicate people skills and legal expertise. Marriages can be ended legally through divorce, often known as the dissolution of marriage. Each separated spouse retains their own counsel during the divorce process, which is handled by family law attorneys."*

One response described the potential consequences of divorce, stating simply: *"Negative."* Another respondent pointed out that divorce can lead to social and family complications, stating, *"The Catholic Church believes that marriage is a permanent union established by God and that divorce goes against this understanding. Remarriage in the Catholic Church is only possible after obtaining an annulment."*

These responses situate the divorce debate within a larger framework, recognizing that it is not merely a personal or religious issue but also a legal and social matter that affects families and communities.

The discussion on divorce legalization in the Philippines reflects deep divisions among respondents, shaped by religious, ethical, legal, and personal perspectives. While staunch opponents emphasize the sanctity of marriage and propose improving the annulment process instead of legalizing divorce, supporters argue that divorce is necessary for protecting individuals from abusive and irreparable marriages. Others remain undecided, recognizing both the moral implications and the practical need for divorce laws. Thus, absolute divorce was a law in the Philippines until the Civil Code was enacted, which only allows legal separation.



Figure 1. Theme and Sub-Theme on participants view on the legalization of Divorce in the Philippines

2. What are the possible impacts on you and the families on the stance of the Philippine Catholic Church on the legalization of divorce?

Theme: The Impact of the Philippine Catholic Church's Stance on the Legalization of Divorce on Individuals and Families

The theme "The Impact of the Philippine Catholic Church's Stance on the Legalization of Divorce on Individuals and Families" highlights the diverse opinions regarding how the Church's opposition to divorce affects people's lives. Responses reveal concerns about family stability, religious adherence, and societal consequences, as well as the challenges faced by individuals in unhappy or abusive marriages. While some respondents emphasize the potential negative effects on family structures and moral values, others recognize that the Church's opposition may leave individuals without legal recourse in harmful relationships. Thus, the absence of a legal civil divorce remedy should in fact be an additional reason for couples to think twice or thrice before entering into a civilly-binding marital commitment, precisely because of the value we put on the family as foundation of society.

Sub-Theme 1: Concerns About Family Breakdown and Social Issues. Many respondents expressed concern that the legalization of divorce would negatively impact families, particularly children. They fear that divorce could lead to family disintegration, social instability, and the normalization of marriage dissolution. One respondent warned, *"There will be a lot of children in the streets because there is no family, and the sacredness of marriage will be normalized and lost."*

Another respondent reinforced this perspective, saying, *"Many families will be broken. Children will be the first ones to be affected, as their parents will easily get separated. This situation can negatively affect the emotional and mental aspects of children."* Similarly, another shared, *"There are numerous consequences to the legalization of divorce in the Philippines. Children may grow up without parents and, in the future, might experience bullying because they are from a broken family. They might not be able to pursue their dreams due to a lack of financial support."*

These responses suggest that family disintegration and child welfare are primary concerns for those who oppose divorce. The belief that children thrive best in intact families underpins the argument that divorce could create long-term emotional and financial struggles for young individuals.

Sub-Theme 2: The Church's Stance and Its Influence on Marital Decisions. Several respondents highlighted the role of religion in guiding their perspectives on divorce. Some maintained that faith should be prioritized over societal changes, while others recognized the internal conflict between religious beliefs and real-life marital struggles.

One respondent explained, *"I believe that my faith is guided by my personal relationship with God and not influenced by societal issues. However, the legalization of divorce might set a precedent for more couples to marry impulsively or throw everything away over petty reasons."*

Another shared their religious struggle, stating, *"Honestly, I'm really confused right now because, if we base it on the Bible, marriage is not just a contract or a game that is easy to break. I believe marriage is sacred and a lifetime commitment. But at the same time, I also know that some circumstances may justify divorce."*

This internal conflict highlights a key tension in the debate—many individuals recognize the need for legal separation in certain cases but remain hesitant due to deeply ingrained religious beliefs.

One respondent emphasized the impact of the Catholic Church's stance on personal decision-making, stating, *"The Church's opposition to divorce influences societal attitudes and family dynamics. It prioritizes marriage preservation over individual well-being, making it essential for families to find a balance between their religious beliefs and personal health."*

Another added, *"The stance of the Philippine Catholic Church against the legalization of divorce could significantly impact both individuals and families. It may restrict the legal options available to those in broken or abusive marriages, potentially leading to prolonged suffering and lack of recourse."*

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

These responses illustrate that while religious teachings play a crucial role in shaping people's views on divorce, they also create moral dilemmas for individuals facing difficult marital situations. The lack of legal alternatives due to the Church's influence on government policies remains a pressing issue for those who support divorce.

Sub-Theme 3: The Emotional and Psychological Impact of Divorce and Marital Conflicts. Some respondents acknowledged the pain that comes with divorce but also recognized that staying in a dysfunctional marriage may be worse. One shared, *"Legalization of divorce pains me because, as a daughter, I always dreamed of having a complete family. I know that once parents decide to divorce, the family will never be the same. It creates a gap, a wall—boundaries that are hard to reach."* Another echoed this sentiment, stating, *"Broken family, unhappy family, unhappy marriage, and domestic violence—these are the realities that people in struggling marriages face. The emotional and psychological toll can be heavy on both the couple and their children."*

At the same time, some respondents argued that forcing couples to remain married can be just as damaging. One person emphasized, *"All relationships can fail. We are human. We make mistakes. Sometimes, we end up with the wrong person, and we often realize it when it is too late. Why would anyone want to be trapped in an unhappy marriage? It won't do anyone any good—not the husband, not the wife, not their kids or relatives. Let them go and start a new life."*

These responses highlight the emotional conflict surrounding divorce—on one hand, divorce can lead to broken families and emotional struggles, but on the other hand, staying in an unhappy or toxic marriage can cause significant emotional harm.

Sub-Theme 4: The Call for Change in the Church's Stance. A few respondents suggested that the Catholic Church should reconsider its strict opposition to divorce. One respondent expressed hope for change, saying, *"I hope the Catholic Church will now have a change of heart and be with us on this issue."*

Another respondent recognized the need for legal solutions while respecting the Church's influence, stating, *"I respect the Church's decision. Perhaps it is a sign of the times, as the annulment process in the Philippines is time-consuming and burdens couples with pain."*

Others pointed out the need for balance between religious teachings and practical realities. One participant shared, *"The legalization of divorce in the Philippines is a necessary step towards providing individuals with the freedom to end irreparable or abusive marriages. However, the decision should be made with careful consideration of its potential impact on family structures and societal values, balancing personal freedoms with cultural and religious sensitivities."*

These responses suggest that some individuals hope for a more compassionate approach from the Church—one that acknowledges both the sanctity of marriage and the struggles of individuals in failing relationships.

The Philippine Catholic Church's stance on the legalization of divorce deeply impacts individuals and families, both positively and negatively. While many respondents emphasize concerns about family disintegration and moral values, others highlight the Church's influence on legal and personal decision-making, restricting individuals from seeking divorce even in harmful marriages.

The emotional and psychological impact of remaining in unhappy marriages is a recurring theme, with some respondents calling for the Church to reconsider its opposition to divorce or to improve the annulment process. The complexity of the issue is evident, as individuals grapple with the tension between religious beliefs, legal constraints, and personal well-being. Hence, the bishops of the Philippines took note of the provision in the 1987 Philippines Constitution, "No matter if our families are not perfect, perhaps we should be proud to the strong witnessing value of having a provision in the Philippine Constitution that says, "The State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development. (Art XV, Section 1)".

Ultimately, the responses reflect that while marriage remains sacred to many, the realities of modern relationships necessitate a more nuanced and balanced approach to divorce legalization in the Philippines.

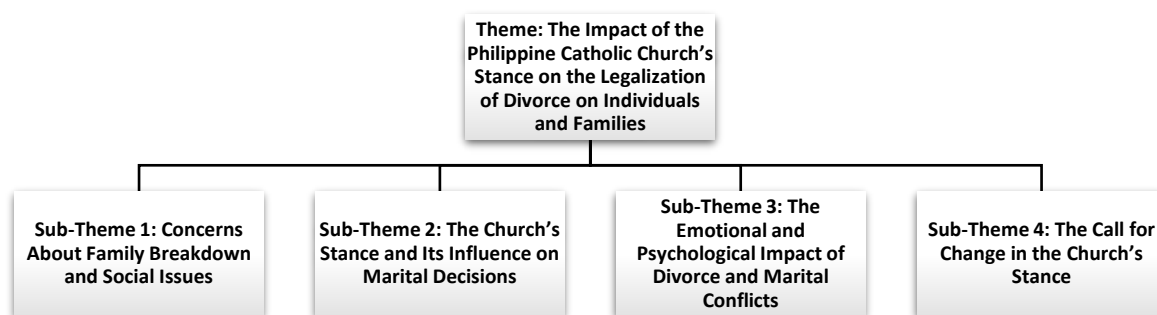


Figure 1. Theme and Sub-Theme on possible impacts on participants and the families on the stance of the Philippine Catholic Church on the legalization of divorce

3. Do you adhere to the stance of the Church? Why? In what way?

Theme: Adherence to the Catholic Church's Stance on Divorce

The theme "Adherence to the Catholic Church's Stance on Divorce" explores how individuals align—or do not align—with the Church's teachings on marriage and divorce. Responses reveal a spectrum of adherence, ranging from strong agreement with the Church's doctrine to partial acceptance, and finally, to outright disagreement. While many respondents embrace the Church's stance, citing religious principles and moral obligations, others question its applicability in modern society, particularly in cases of abuse and marital hardship.

Sub-Theme 1: Strong Adherence to the Church's Teachings on Marriage. Many respondents expressed firm support for the Catholic Church's stance against divorce, emphasizing their belief in marriage as a sacred and lifelong commitment. They view the Church as a moral authority and trust in its guidance on this issue.

One respondent affirmed, *"Yes, because they are more knowledgeable than me, and through their teachings, we learn that marriage is part of God's ordained plan. The Church knows what is best for us."*

Another added, *"Marriage is one of the Holy Sacraments of the Catholic Church. It should be given importance and treated as a treasure in every couple's life. It is a sacred union where God is involved, and it should be taken seriously and properly."*

Similarly, another response stated, *"Yes, because no one can separate what God has put together; and also, children can get the love they need from a family."*

These perspectives reflect a deep faith in the Catholic Church's moral and doctrinal authority, emphasizing the religious significance of marriage and its role in preserving family unity.

Another respondent connected adherence to broader social values, stating, *"Yes. For a stronger society."* This perspective suggests that divorce is perceived as a destabilizing force, not only for individual families but for the larger moral fabric of society.

Sub-Theme 2: Partial Adherence and Internal Conflict. Some respondents expressed partial agreement with the Church's position but acknowledged the complexities of modern relationships and marital struggles.

One individual described their shift in perspective, stating, *"I changed my mind. I would stand and follow what the Church wants. The legalization of divorce has advantages and disadvantages, and it's really hard to decide because it can cause both good and bad impacts."*

Another respondent highlighted a more pragmatic approach, saying, *"In a way, yes, by advocating that couples should still pray together and go back to scripture in times of conflict, confusion, and a chaotic household."* This response suggests a compromise—while supporting the Church's belief in marital perseverance, they also acknowledge the importance of individual efforts in resolving issues.

One respondent proposed a middle ground between faith and legal reform, stating, *"I still believe in the sanctity of marriage, but I respect those who are in the agony of marriage. Therefore, it is important to reassess the process and guidelines for filing for annulment so that couples can be granted freedom and start a new life."* This response reflects growing recognition of the practical limitations of absolute adherence to the Church's teachings, particularly in addressing the legal struggles faced by couples seeking separation.

Similarly, another respondent acknowledged the challenges of real-life marital problems, stating, *"I respect the stance of the Church on marriage and family values but believe in the importance of individual autonomy and well-being. While the sanctity of marriage is vital, I also acknowledge the complexities of human relationships and the need for compassionate solutions in cases of abuse or irreparable harm."*

These responses reflect an internal conflict between religious doctrine and personal or societal realities. While these individuals still value the Church's teachings, they also recognize the necessity of legal solutions for struggling couples.

Sub-Theme 3: Opposition to the Church's Stance on Divorce. Other respondents expressed clear disagreement with the Church's opposition to divorce, arguing that people deserve the right to leave unhealthy marriages.

One respondent stated simply, *"No, because it is not right."* Another added, *"No, everyone deserves second chances."* These responses reflect a strong belief in personal freedom and second opportunities, challenging the idea that marriage should be a lifelong commitment under all circumstances. Hence, the Catholic Church Leaders suggested a partnership with government officials in providing assistance to married couples in crisis. The bishops took note of the provision in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, "No matter if our families are not perfect, perhaps we should be proud of the strong witnessing value of having a provision in our Philippine Constitution that says, "The State recognizes the Filipino Family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development"(Art XV, Section 1)."

One respondent took a compassionate approach, stating, *"I respect the Church's stance on marriage, but I believe that people should have the option to divorce if their marriage is unhealthy or abusive. While I value the idea of lifelong commitment, I think personal well-being and safety are more important. Legalizing divorce can help people find peace and start over, which can ultimately lead to healthier and happier lives."*

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

This response highlights a shift in priorities, where personal well-being is placed above religious doctrine, particularly in cases where marriages become toxic or harmful.

Another respondent questioned the practicality of the Church's teachings, stating, *"The Catholic Church does not allow for the legalization of divorce but tolerates civil divorce under certain circumstances. The Church believes that marriage is a permanent union established by God and that divorce goes against this understanding. But remarriage in the Catholic Church is only possible after obtaining an annulment."*

This response points out a contradiction in the Church's stance—while it rejects divorce, it still permits annulments, which function similarly in dissolving a marriage. The complexity of this stance contributes to the broader debate on whether the Church should reconsider its position on divorce.

Finally, one respondent called for the Church to consider the needs of victims of domestic abuse, stating, *"For me, if the Church believes in the good of all people, particularly those who are victims of violence, I would wholeheartedly agree."* This response suggests that moral and religious values should be balanced with compassion and practical solutions.

Sub-Theme 4: Religious Symbolism and Sacredness of the Church's Teachings. A few respondents emphasized the spiritual and symbolic importance of the Catholic Church's teachings.

One respondent reflected on the Church's sacred traditions, stating, *"In the Catholic Church, it is a very sacred place of worship of the True God and of Jesus, who is present in the Tabernacle under the form of consecrated Bread Hosts—Consecrated during Holy Mass and reserved in the Tabernacle for visits to the sick or for daily visitors to visit with Jesus in the Tabernacle of the Church."*

While this response does not explicitly address divorce, it reinforces the deep religious and spiritual connection that some individuals have with the Church, which may influence their unwavering support for its teachings.

The responses reflect a wide spectrum of perspectives on adhering to the Catholic Church's stance on divorce. Strong adherents fully support the Church's teachings, emphasizing that marriage is a sacred covenant that should not be broken. They believe that the Church is a moral authority that knows what is best for society. Partial adherents agree with the Church's emphasis on marital commitment but recognize the complexities of modern relationships and support reforms such as improving the annulment process. Opponents challenge the Church's stance, arguing that personal well-being and safety should take precedence over religious doctrine. They advocate for legal alternatives to help those in failing or abusive marriages.

While the Church's teachings remain a strong influence, there is also growing recognition of the need for compassion, reform, and personal autonomy in marital decisions. The responses suggest that while many still respect the sanctity of marriage, there is also an increasing call for more flexible and humane approaches to addressing marital dissolution in the Philippine context.

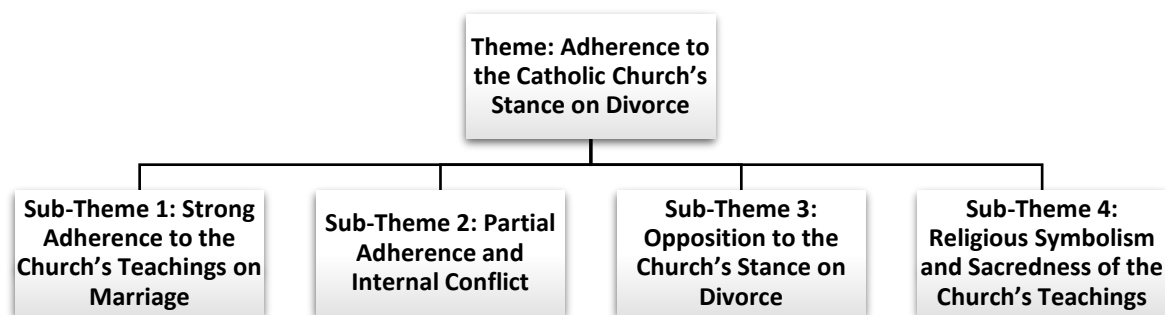


Figure 1. Theme and Sub-Theme on adherence to the stance of the Church

6.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The study reveals a deeply divided stance on the legalization of divorce in the Philippines, shaped primarily by religious beliefs, personal experiences, and societal norms. A significant portion of respondents firmly adhere to the Catholic Church's opposition to divorce, emphasizing the sanctity of marriage as a lifelong commitment ordained by God. They believe that divorce undermines moral values, weakens family structures, and negatively impacts children's emotional well-being. Many also argue that instead of legalizing divorce, the government should reform the annulment process to provide legal relief for couples in distress while still respecting the Church's teachings. For these respondents, marriage is a sacred union that should be preserved despite challenges, and the Church remains a moral authority in guiding individuals and families.
2. However, some respondents express internal conflict, acknowledging both the religious significance of marriage and the realities of abusive and irreparable relationships. While they respect the Church's teachings, they also recognize that some marriages become toxic and harmful, making divorce a necessary legal option for the well-being of individuals and families. Many respondents in this category suggest that the Church should consider a more compassionate approach, balancing religious principles with practical solutions for individuals in difficult marital situations. They emphasize that while marriage should be

Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

preserved, there must be legal safeguards to protect individuals from psychological, emotional, and physical harm in dysfunctional marriages.

3. A third group of respondents opposes the Church's stance entirely, arguing that personal autonomy, well-being, and individual rights should take precedence over religious doctrine. They assert that forcing couples to stay in unhappy marriages causes more harm than good, leading to emotional distress, financial struggles, and unhealthy family environments. Many in this group believe that divorce is a human right, and the state should separate its legal policies from religious influence. They also point out that the Philippines remains one of the only countries without divorce, highlighting the need to modernize family laws to align with global legal practices. While they respect the Church's values, they ultimately believe that people should have the freedom to leave marriages that no longer serve their best interests.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The findings highlight the complex and deeply personal nature of the debate on divorce legalization in the Philippines, where religious, moral, and social factors play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. The Catholic Church's strong influence remains evident, as many respondents firmly adhere to its teachings, viewing marriage as a sacred and indissoluble union. For these individuals, divorce is seen as a threat to family stability, societal values, and religious doctrine, reinforcing the belief that marital problems should be resolved through faith, commitment, and counseling rather than legal separation. Their stance reflects the broader cultural and religious identity of the Philippines, where Catholic teachings continue to shape moral and ethical perspectives on family and relationships.

However, the responses also reveal a growing recognition of the need for legal alternatives for individuals trapped in abusive, toxic, or irreparable marriages. While some respondents struggle with the moral dilemma of upholding religious beliefs versus acknowledging the realities of marital hardships, others call for a more compassionate and pragmatic approach. This includes reforming the annulment process or creating a legal framework that balances the sanctity of marriage with the right of individuals to seek personal well-being and safety. This perspective suggests that a more nuanced and flexible policy may be necessary to address both religious concerns and the human rights of individuals in failing marriages.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that the conversation surrounding divorce in the Philippines is evolving, with increasing calls for legal modernization while maintaining respect for religious values. While the Catholic Church continues to exert significant influence, changing social realities, personal experiences, and human rights considerations are shaping a more progressive dialogue on divorce. Moving forward, policymakers, religious leaders, and society must engage in meaningful discussions to create a balanced approach, ensuring that legal solutions exist for those in need while honoring the cultural and spiritual significance of marriage in the Filipino context.

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Views of Participants on The Catholic Church's Stance on The Legalization of Divorce in The Philippines

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