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Muslim-Christian Marriages in the Philippines

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MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES IN THE PHILIPPINES: STUDIES MADE IN NORTH COTABATO. By Luis Q. Lacar. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1980. 97 pages.

The author did the field work for this study of fifty marriages between Christians and Muslims in 1969 and presented it a year later as a thesis in sociology to Silliman University. The research is carefully done and the conclusions, proposed tentatively because of the limited sampling and the narrow geographical setting, would probably still be valid today. But the validity would have to be limited to areas like those studied — Midsayap with a population 66 percent Catholic and 26 percent Muslim, and Pikit with 35 percent Catholic and 60 percent Muslim. In these places adherents of both religions live in close proximity and constantly meet one another in schools and places of employment. Thus, when the study finds that almost all these marriages turned out happy and successful after an average duration of seven years, one cannot conclude (nor does the author imply) that this would also be true in Sulu or Tawi-Tawi where the population is almost 100 percent Muslim.

After a brief introductory chapter contrasting the two social systems, the book describes the cultural and economic setting in which the investigation takes place and the questions it aims to answer. The third chapter studies the characteristics of the Muslim-Christian couples. It finds that most of those marrying were well educated people working in a white collar profession, enjoying a good income, and belonging to the middle class or upper lower class. Chapter four deals with circumstances surrounding courtship and marriage. Two facts are especially prominent: the efforts both parties made to conceal the religion of their partner from their parents and other members of the family, and the advanced age of both entering marriage — 28.86 years for Muslim men, 33 years for Christian men, 27.33 years for Muslim women, and 28.28 years for Christian women. These averages contrast sharply with the Philippine national average of 24.4 years for men and 21.7 years for women and even more sharply with Philippine Muslim custom which favors early marriage and even child betrothal.

Chapter five deals mainly with the principle motives for marrying and the most common problems met with in married life. Educated Muslim men found in the Christian woman a kind of companionship which the uneducated Muslim woman could not offer. Educated Muslim women found in the Christian man a relationship of equality which she could not hope for from the average Muslim husband. Many of the Christian women who married Muslims were teachers assigned to Muslim areas. Hence acceptance in the community and physical security had a part in their motivation. Muslim men and women also foresaw better opportunities for their children. In fact, in all these marriages the proportion of children being raised as Christians was higher than the proportion being raised as Muslims. Most of the children,

it seems, will choose Christianity or no religion.

The biggest problem for Muslim men and women after the marriage was getting used to Christian preferences in food. For Christians it was getting used to the personal habits of their Muslim partner. Neither party mentioned religion as a problem before or during the marriage. Apparently both subordinated it to marital harmony. In the marriages of Muslim men to Christian women religious practice by both parties decreased after they entered into married life.

Chapter six proposes a number of conclusions. Many of them center around the changes education is making in Maguindanao social patterns. Educated people in general increasingly resist marriages arranged by parents. Educated Muslim women show dissatisfaction with the male-dominated system of Maguindanao Muslim society. They seek in marriage not only companionship but also improvement in their status as women. Education tends to detach people from their cultural traditions and to draw them towards the culture group they regard as more advanced. This is one of the chief reasons why Muslim Filipinos take a conservative attitude towards education, especially of their women. On these grounds and because of the tolerant attitude of the community towards intermarriage of Christians and Muslims, the author believes that such marriages will become more and more common among the educated.

If the conclusions of the study can be extended to all areas where Muslims live in close contact with Christians, the Muslim world will see an increasing number of its educated class enter into mixed marriages. In Muslim countries in 1950 students of all levels formed 5.7 percent of the total population and female students 1.6 percent, but in 1973 all students had risen to 12.7 percent of the total and female students to 4.6 percent (*Anthropos: International Review of Ethnology and Linguistics* 73 [1978]: 892-93).

The book is well produced and almost completely free of misprints. The only one noted by this reviewer was on page 45, footnote 2, where "Shāfi'ite school" should be read for "Shaffil school." "Hanafite school" is preferable to "Hanafi school" in the same footnote.

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