

**FREE AND CREATIVE
COMMUNAL COMPASSION:
RECONSTRUCTING A CONTEXTUALIZED
FILIPINO ETHICS OF SEXUALITY**

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Due to the increased cases of sexual impurity among the contemporary Filipino teens I felt the dire need to search for an appropriate approach in formulating a content of sexual ethic that is relevant for them. Three approaches were the subject of investigation namely: positive church norms; various cultural norms; and philosophically-oriented conception of the person. I realized that to generate a more comprehensive one, the approach should be based on the socio-cultural influences that affect their everyday life. This is where I suggest Ferdinand Dagmang's solidarity ethics of malasakit at damay which essentially embodied this quality. However, this ethic needs to be reconstructed in order to be more contextualized and non-discriminatory for these teens. Thus, a new ethic called free and creative communal compassion is presented. This proposed ethic revolves around the concepts of caring community, purified intimacy, and free and creative show of compassion.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual impurity among Filipino teens is becoming more rampant in this modern period. Various local case studies validate this claim. According to a local study conducted by Prof. Elmer De Jose (2013, 717) which describes the sexual attitudes and behaviors of a cohort of adolescents, the results revealed high percentages for both male and female adolescents who still value virginity. However, male masturbation, necking, and holding hands and kissing were found to be acceptable and there is an increase in adolescents who engaged in premarital sex (PMS) over time. The joint study of the Demographic Research and Development Foundation, Inc. (DRDF) and University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) (2014, 12) also supports this claim:

Among 19,178 young adults in the whole country reveals that one out of three teens has already engaged in premarital sex (PMS), that is from 17.8% in 1994 to 32.2% in 2013. Trend data reveals a substantial upward shift in the prevalence of premarital sex from 1994 to 2013. With increasing prevalence of premarital sexual activity comes a narrowing of the gap in the level between men and women. In 1994, 26.1% of young men had premarital sexual experience, more than double the 10.2% prevalence in young women. Two decades later, 35.5% of males and 28.7% of females have engaged in premarital sex, a difference of only 7 percentage points.

The results of the entire study showed a significant increase in the sexual activity of the youth from 1994 to 2013 in the whole country. In addition, the same study affirmed that most of the first premarital sexual encounter was unprotected from the risk of conception or STIs. Among youth who had premarital sex experience, 12.9% used a condom during their sexual initiation while 9.2% used other methods, notably withdrawal. The rest (78%) were unprotected. In spite of the prevalent case of PMS, the majority of them do not feel they have adequate knowledge about sex. Only 27.4% overall say they have enough knowledge about sex. This is the reason why many of them result in the information available on the internet for curiosity sake. In relation to unwanted pregnancy which is a consequence of this untimely sexual intercourse, the *2017 National Demographic and Health Survey* from the Department of Health (DOH) released the data stating that overall, some 9% of women from the age of 15 to 19 have already started childbearing (Don Galeon, 2018). Connected to this data were the cases of abortion where some teenage mothers decide not to continue their pregnancy because of various reasons. Rubina Hussain and Lawrence Finer (2013, 3-4) stress that the Philippines currently has one of the highest abortion rates in Southeast Asia with poor women more likely to resort to risky and ineffective methods, and to experience complications, than non-poor women. Another related consequence is the infection and spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STD). The latest data reported by DOH states that in April 2017, there were 629 persons, most of whom are millennials, who were diagnosed with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The 80% or 513 of those diagnosed with the virus belong to the 15 to 34 age group. Out of the 609 who acquired the virus through sexual contact, 343 or more than half are men who have sex with men (Joyce Ilas 2017).

These different local studies are proofs that there is indeed a decline in sexual purity among Filipino youth. The data gathered is alarming and as a response coming from an educator, there is a need to revisit the various approaches in order to determine a proposed sexual ethic that will be relevant for them. Now the big question is, can the approach be solely grounded on the traditional church's moral teachings? Can it be centered on the habits of a particular modern culture that will eventually shape the behavior and ways of teens? Can it be grounded on the philosophically-oriented and normative conception of human flourishing that will highlight the value of every person as a free, creative, responsible, and precious being? After discussing these various

approaches, I propose that a socio-cultural approach which is based from the personal experiences of teens is the one capable of addressing this issue on sexual impurity. These discussions will be the content of the next sections.

VARIOUS APPROACHES FOR THE MORAL FORMATION OF TEENS

There are various approaches that can be utilized in treating the practices of sexual impurity among Filipino teens. Each of these approaches is aimed to formulate an ethical content that can serve as guidelines for teens in making a responsible sexual decision. Let me present each one as we approach the proposed one.

1. Through positive church norms?

The traditional teaching of the church on sexual purity is derived from the principle that sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its primarily procreative and unitive purposes. This gives emphasis on sexual act treated as moral only in the context of marriage, that is, if not forced, thus condemns PMS and considers it as immoral and sinful. This is the common claim of the Church Fathers and various official documents like the *Persona Humana (PH)* (1975) which regards human sexuality as a central element of the person because it gives the person's life the principal traits that distinguish it. According to Ferdinand Dagmang (2014, 1), *PH* begs questions when it claims about the disorder and falsehood of the so-called "morals of the world" because it does not present findings to illustrate the nature or character of the alleged disorder and falsehood. He (2014, 1) further posits:

PH merely mentions that "sexual matters...today constitute a theme frequently and openly dealt with in books, reviews, magazines and other means of social communication" (*PH*). It does not, however, cite any books, articles, or conference papers; one could only guess what *PH* is referring to when it further adds that "sociological surveys are able to show" the prevalence of a moral disorder (*PHIX*). By the mere mention of "contemporary scientific research" without proper references to sources, we could only say that *PH* has no intention to enter into the rigors of research and scholarship. It seems enough for *PH* to refer to an alleged bulk of research on the "morals of the world" and then impose upon such morals the Catholic Church's "true" moral standards.

One of *PH* ethical arguments is founded on natural law which has an absolute and immutable value. Any violation of this natural law can lead to sinfulness. With this, we may come to think, what about those teens who are not Christians and do not subscribe to natural law; are they devoid of any way to improve their lives through autonomous choices? What about the claims of biology or psychology which are based on scientific research, do they not matter for the sexual decision of our teens? Biology coupled with

is so strong, and it can even be damaging if it will not be expressed, and this is what Freud's *sexual repression*¹ is all about. Well, this is not to say that when one reaches teenhood, he or she should have engaged in sexual intercourse because it is normal as claimed by these disciplines. This is just to emphasize that the embodied person has indeed a strong tendency to express out desires despite constraints of the norms/laws of society or the church. Are these positive norms claimed by the church truly relevant and acceptable to Filipino teens in their moral formation?

2. Through various cultural norms?

The cultural acceptability of PMS varies between cultures and a particular period of time. Traditional culture forbids PMS most especially when it comes to the issue of cultural standards and strict supervision. Teens who are involved in sex are subjected to warnings, discipline, supervision, scrutiny, or judgment by elders who strictly adhere to their traditional norms. Women, especially, are the object of strict compliance to standards and norms of purity; waywardness or transgressions are punished, sometimes violently and deadly (“honor killing” or stoning to death). On top of strict elder supervision, the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in some traditional Muslim countries indicates the heavy burden imposed on women. Purity is allegedly preserved by the FGM's consequent preventative effect of disquiet or disinterest in the practice of early sexual initiation. Other traditional societies do not resort to this very strict physicalized “numbing or closure” of feminine desire; they would impose a more social form of preventative “closure” or strict elder supervision of women. Will these practices of traditional culture still be applicable/appropriate in addressing PMS for the Filipino teens?

On the other hand, modern opinion sees PMS as somehow generally acceptable. Quoting Jean Twenge, a popular lead researcher from San Diego University, the millennials are more accepting of PMS than any previous generation (James Armstrong 2015). The culture at present is more complex and secularized where traditional standards and norms of the past are being challenged and even transgressed by more current ideas and practices. Modern societies also identify, promote, and defend distinctively modern values which would accordingly shape different or non-traditional practices, habits, and virtues. With the onset of modernity, traditions have collapsed in many places and in many aspects of human life. The modern individual is now autonomous/independent, free, liberal, aggressive, informed, etc. It follows that these teens' behavior shapes the kind of decision that he or she is supposed to make. Aside from this, they follow the various belief systems through their interaction with the people around them and the cultural environments. These belief systems may include everything – from religion and spirituality to gender, sexuality, work ethic, politics, and so on. The range of attitudes that a culture embraces on a particular topic affects the beliefs, lifestyles, and perceptions of its teens, and can have both positive and negative impacts on their growth and development. Will these characteristics of modern culture give a ticket for teens to make reasonable sexual decisions?

3. *Through philosophically oriented conception of the person?*

Another possible approach that could be the content of the moral formation for Filipino teens is the philosophically-oriented conception of the person. Since our subject concerns about Filipino teens, it is but fitting to discuss briefly how Filipino philosophy presents identity and how every person interacts with others and build relationships. Knowing the core of the Filipino will enable us to identify the factors that influence the making of sexual decisions. With this, the researcher felt the need to focus on the Filipino moral aspect by having a brief discussion on *loob* in the perspective of selected Filipino moral philosophers.

The concepts of *loob* and *kapwa* are two of the foundations of Filipino personhood and it is appropriate to talk about on these matters since they represent the internal make-up as well as the sentiments and values. The questions like what led them to engage or postpone PMS has something to do with the values embedded in them. Filipino teens consider their relationship with God as something precious by treating sex as a sacred gift. This is actually one of the most common responses coming from the students in the researcher's morality classes. Many of them also keep a harmonious relationship with their partners by not taking advantage of them and as much as possible exert a lot of effort to avoid PMS for they know that they have to wait until marriage considered to be for those who are prepared psychologically, emotionally, and financially. These characteristics are what some Filipino theologians point out in their concepts of *loob* and *kapwa*. For Virgilio Enriquez (1992), *loob* can refer to one's thoughts, moral sense, emotion, memory, and volition (*ang loob ng Pilipino ay maaaring isip, bait, damdam, alaala, bolisyon*). On the other hand, Albert Alejo describes *loob* as "not simply a corner of the heart or a storehouse of feelings, thought and memory, but a wide world of different and interconnecting relations of the self, fellow human beings, things, time, society, God, and the whole of nature." (1990, 116). But the most interesting description was provided by Dionisio Miranda (1989, 45) who explained that *loob* is the "totality of self, a consciousness of the self and also awareness of the meaning of the self. It is the interiority, the inner principle of affection, disposition, feelings, attitudes, thought, decision, and responsibility." And being the totality of self, Jose de Mesa (2014) added that the Filipino "represents a cultural tradition with its own wisdom and geniusness" (*ang Pilipino ay kumakatawan sa isang kaugaliang kultural na may sariling dunong at galing*)." The positive characteristic of *loob* then is expressed in the concept of *kabutihang-loób* or "goodness-of-will" which is practically synonymous with another Filipino term *kagandahang-loób* or "beauty-of-will." *Kabutihang-loob* is one of the core values of Filipino culture. It is mainly defined by reason or *katuwiran*. A reasonable person is one who has that sense of justice and cares for the other. Ordinary justice is basically giving what the other truly deserves and that sense of respect by acknowledging one's right. In another work, Miranda (1992, 121, 182) emphasizes:

Kabutihang-loob and *kagandahang-loob* may be considered as the root paradigms of the culture. They express our deepest and most basic

assumptions about social coexistence... In many ways *kagandahang-loob* is the quintessential Filipino value. In fact, if forced to point among the several values as the most indigenous I would probably point to this as distinctive—distinctive of the culture, i.e., the others remain important and central, but *kagandahang-loob* is something a Filipino cannot have and continue to be recognizable to *kapwa*-Pilipino [fellow Filipinos] as *Pinoy* (popular slang for Filipino/Pilipino).

As Miranda (2003, 137) further explains, this *kabutihan-loob* is “someone who has the heart not to hurt or cause any harm to the other and it always seeks the good of the other”. This is basically how some Filipino teens treat and gauge the reality of PMS that, engaging into it may cause trouble to their partners as well as their elders in the different aspects of their life. They know that there can be a possibility of losing that trust and respect to their own selves and of the people around them as well. The most feared unfortunate effects may happen too like unwanted pregnancy and acquisition of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) which can lead to the downfall of their dreams. We can see from these descriptions that the Filipino teens are capable of exhibiting excellence even in moral terms. They can manifest the ability to avoid temptation and be discriminating about the teachings of authorities. There is that strong sense of the will to overcome impurity.

Now, the concept of *loob* cannot remain as a distinct concept that is kept into oneself but it has to be expressed on the outside, that is, through others. Like what Miranda said, “*loob* needs *kapwa* even to be *loob*: its continued responding to *kapwa* is the condition for its own existence and authenticity as *loob*” (1992, 84). In the same manner, Jeremiah Reyes (2015, 82) points out also that this *loob* “involves wanting and choosing, but most often in relationship to others, to the *kapwa*.” In other words, Reyes in another article asserts that “the *loob* is known only through relationship and interaction” (2015, 148). Even your own *loob* cannot be determined by yourself in isolation, instead it is determined by how you relate and act towards your *kapwa*. Meaning, it has to be actualized in order to give a full meaning to the values that are embedded within the person, and this actualization points out to the presence of the other or *kapwa*. Enriquez (1992, 52) described “*kapwa* as the core value of Filipinos.” He further explains:

When asked for the closest English equivalent of *kapwa*, one word that comes to mind is the English word “others.” However, the Filipino word *kapwa* is very different from the English word “others.” In Filipino, *kapwa* is the unity of the “self” and “others.” The English “others” is actually used in opposition to the “self,” and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, *kapwa* is a recognition of a shared identity, an inner self shared with others.

In this statement from Enriquez, *kapwa* does not only imply a distinction between the self and the other and that these are separate entities, but they are actually and

should be in a union. This union is what makes the Filipino authentic and unique. Another description was provided by the Alejo (1990, 83-84) regarding *kapwa*:

The *loob* can potentially “widen” itself through relationships with *kapwa*. “I who am here am also there, in a hidden way, in others, and I need only to “open my eyes” or “be enlightened” to this reality for it to become true. At the same time, the boundaries of the world of *loob*—I do not know where it ends or if it can ever end. But I experience that there are times when it widens or narrows depending on my receptivity to the invitations of relationship others have for me.”

This statement on the other hand gives us the notion that even if the *kapwa* is something and should be inseparable to the *loob* to find its fullness, it still depends on the *loob* how far or great is the degree of the relationship to the *kapwa*. The closeness of the *loob* to the *kapwa* can be limited or extensive depending on how great is the trust or *tiwala* that one has. Finally, Katrin de Guia, Enriquez’s famous student, also made a thorough discussion on *kapwa*. Archbishop Ferdinand dela Paz (2008, 90) expressed his high regard for her by saying that “even though she is a German by birth, she has been more Filipino in many ways.” She made a significant contribution to the study of Filipino Psychology (*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*). *Kapwa* is a Tagalog term which is widely used in the Philippine culture when one is aiming to connect with the other person. There is one objective that de Guia wanted to achieve in explaining *kapwa*, that is, to establish a connection between and among people in order to link them rather than separate them from one another. For her, *kapwa* is a concept which “essentially looks for the fundamental characteristics in people—as human beings” (2005, 8). In her work, she provided the readers with a clearer understanding of the Filipino value system. This value system is composed of value structure and behavior patterns. The personhood of a Filipino can be assessed in terms of possession or non-possession of these values. De Guia also emphasizes that *kapwa* must be understood in the notion of a “shared self that extends the *I* to include the *Other*. It bridges the deepest individual recess of a person with anyone outside him or herself, even total strangers” (2005, 28). This concern and love of the Filipino to his or her *kapwa* is indeed unique as compared to any race. In relation to this paper, the Filipino teens’ manifestation of *kapwa* is clearly seen in how they relate to their friends and peers (*mga kaibigan at mga barkada*). Aside from their own family, this group of people plays a major role in their life since they are on the same age bracket and level when it comes to outlook and behavioral patterns. And so they have a stronger influence and are considered as one of the major *pushers* or *pullers* of the PMS activity. And of course, the Filipino teen who is in a relationship considers his or her partner (boyfriend or girlfriend) as another representation of *kapwa*. But in this kind of relationship *kapwa* is best expressed in the *pakiramdam*. According to De Guia, “the *kapwa* does not reside alone at the core of personhood but manifests in *pakiramdam* which is the pivotal interpersonal value that characterizes Filipino emotion” (2008, 4). *Pakiramdam* is the deep inner feeling which initiates a deed in every individual. A teen-lover who is in love shares his or her very self (*loob*) to the *kapwa*-

beloved and this sharing signifies the oneness of their *pakiramdam*. Now if this *pakiramdam* becomes so intense and is accompanied by physical expression of intimacy, PMS can happen. This is the reason why this intense *pakiramdam* has to be managed well wherein it has to be informed by reason and accompanied by virtues like respect, creative self-expression, and self-control in order to be purified. Now, again the big question: Is this Filipino philosophically-oriented conception of the person enough to be the content of sexual ethics?

DAGMANG'S SOLIDARITY ETHICS OF *MALASAKIT AT DAMAY*

It seems that to generate a more comprehensive sexual ethics, a more expansive formulation of what would constitute as a normative ethical theory must be formulated. As I see it, it should be based on the socio-cultural influences that affect the everyday life of teens. This is where I suggest the solidarity ethics of *malasakit at damay* (MD) as formulated by Prof. Ferdinand Dagmang. Dagmang is a professor of theology in various universities in the country and also a notable researcher especially in relation to disciplines such as sociology, culture, and sexuality. I chose Dagmang's approach since it dwells on the very personal experiences of the individual without disregarding the reality of human limitations.

The word *malasakit* (compassion) comes from the Filipino term *mala-* (as if; like) and *sakit* (pain; ailment). When you say you have *malasakit* for the other, it would mean the other's pain is felt like it is your own pain, your ailment too. This would impel you to extend your *damay* (empathetic assistance) to the other, that is, solidarity because you have compassion. *Malasakit* is more like a felt compassion for one's fellow which has either a passive or active quality. It is passive if the feeling is not translated into action while it is active if translated into action. *Damay* is the actual translation of felt compassion into action. He started his argument by pointing out that there is at present a "conflict between prescribed norms and individual desires which bring some ambiguity and sometimes a provisional character to every decision-making process" (2006, 60). He (2006, 60) further explains:

If we look at today's patterns of decision-making processes involving sexual matters, the "close" opinions of peers or friends are, in the regular absence of elders, more influential to an individual's judgment. The actual face-to-face interaction and framework have greater significance to individual choice. Official norms regarding sexuality are too remote for many people, especially in more secularized and democratized settings where officials (including parents) are regular absentees in the people's lifeworld. If the Catholic Church's official teachings have not been of much relevance to traditional settings (where economic concerns, and not Church norms dictate one's action), how much more in secularized liberal-capitalist settings?

He considers the personal decision of many individuals supposedly still restrained

or influenced by the prescribed norms of elders and religion. Such elders and religion, however are regularly absent or abstract, and practically outweighed by the “here-and-now” or “in-your-face” influence of realities (friends, spaces away from home, media, modernity’s permissiveness) which, for many, are more realistic than abstract principles. How is this possible? It is because of the great density of social and cultural goods that entice or trick the problematic teen (who is also expected to rely on her less mature rational faculties). As in families suffering from affection deficit and divided by everyday work and other public pursuits of resources, the goods of affection like care and concern that can be alternately given by friends and confidants are more “moving” and sensible than the “imagined” norms of the absent elders or religious norms. The author calls this as “close judgments that come with a host of values and affective scenarios – vital goods that reside in memory than abstract norms or principles” (Dagmang 2006, 61). Emotionally-needy and desperate individuals of course may have to cling on first to other people who have the capacity to provide immediate warmth and comfort than cling on to a “cold” judgment through traditional norms. For example, a female teen who may regularly leave home (because of absentee parents or because the parents are just “physically present but emotionally absent”) may run to her boyfriend for comfort. She may be driven by her longing for consolation and affection which her parents could not provide. The boyfriend sympathizes and extends warm hugs and tender caresses. As the touching of two bodies becomes more torrid and genital, the shared passion that affords delights becomes a value that fleetingly extricates them from their problems. PMS in those cases are considered by Dagmang as a “trap for those who seek affection and warmth” (2014, 9). The proper ethico-practical way out of this predicament (for both the girl entrapped by dominating erotic entanglement and the boy entrapped in his own testosterone) is to foster this *MD* to the teens as well as to the people around them so that an authentic help can be offered: To the parents, who also need the presence of other people’s *MD*; to the problematic teen, who may be able to experience the presence of the parents who gradually feel the transforming-power of friends’ support and come up empowered themselves for their children’s sake. The project of “promoting solidarity also entails an advocacy for wholesome environments—where robust forms of intimacy may be promoted and experienced” (Dagmang 2008, 15). Dagmang calls this ethico-practical approach as an agency and community-constitutive solidarity ethics (that is, an ethics that fosters solidarity and responsibility in agency and community). It is a broader ethico-practical approach that gives primacy to “walk” even as it considers “talk” about abstract principles as something indispensable.

A CRITIQUE OF DAGMANG’S SOLIDARITY ETHICS

Malasakit at damay needs the full cooperation of the different institutions involved in the community or else, raw or lopsided effectivity happens which can dismantle the caring process. The framework of *MD* firmly holds its principle that a proper formation in the behavior in teens, most especially in the instilling of values, will only be achieved if there is a fully collaborative effort and support from all the involved

institutions in the community. It can have a higher degree of a positive result if the family, school, church, and the government will perform their responsibilities of letting the problematic teen feel that he/she is being cared of and that other people are concerned in what he/she is going through. The problem arises if any of these institutions fail to provide the needed *MD* for the teen. For example, *MD* is sufficiently felt by the teen from all the family members, most especially the parents and siblings. Even the extended family is able to provide it. But when the teen is in school, he/she feels so alone because of the unfair treatment of bully classmates, judgmental teachers, and even closed-minded administrators who always look at his/her misdemeanors or violations. In short, the poor teen was not able to get the same *MD* from the school as what he/she has received at home. This can also be reversed where in sometimes there is an adequate *MD* coming from the school but unfortunately, totally absent from the family. Mircea Agabrian (2007, 15) in his paradigm of social network asserts:

The connections between individuals, groups and institutions with which a person has contact and of whose support is dependent. Meaning, the capacity of sharing values and common interests enables a community to develop strong feelings of loyalty and a high level of trust among individuals. Thus the community forms a network of trust like a social support which is an imperative necessity in behavior development.

In this scenario, when there is an absence or inadequacy of *MD* from any of these institutions, the poor teen can develop a lopsided behavior which is raw and selective. He/She can behave well in the family but a contradicting character can be manifested in school or vice versa. In short, the caring process becomes less effective or even if it is working in its initial course, it will not last that long. The teen can even develop a strange feeling of hatred either to his/her family or to different school personalities. Having a feeling of hatred to others members of the community can lead the poor teen either to become rebellious and more resistant to authorities or even very vulnerable to getting hurt. With this, there can be a more possible rejection of school policies and up to the point of neglecting the teachings on morality that is taught by “judgmental” educators and administrators since the teen does not find these authorities worthy of respect or emulation. In short, if all these institutions do not perform well and *MD* is not received by the teen, the less effectivity of the caring process is always possible.

Another critique of *MD* has something to do with the possible contradiction among the institutions due to their diverse perspectives which create confusion in teens. As *MD*'s principle is grounded in the context of the community, it is sometimes difficult to establish altogether the commonalities among its members which will result in a united goal. There can be a clashing of principles and ways on how to implement its respective programs. How can the poor teen feel the needed *MD* that is supposed to be provided by the church and the government if they have contradicting principles regarding for example PMS? The church advocates total discipline of not engaging with this kind of sexual practice since it is impure and sinful while the government promotes

“safe sex” through the use of artificial contraceptives in case one cannot control anymore their sexual desires. The government points out the freedom that is embedded deep within the teen and so he/she must not be stopped of expressing that freedom most especially if it concerns about his/her very own body. On the contrary, the church does not limit its teaching with the definition that freedom is simply doing what someone wants to do. Freedom for the church is always coupled with the sense of responsibility. Meaning, do not do the things that you want if it will not result in any good not only to oneself but also to others as well. What do we expect from these contradictions? The teen obviously gets confused and caught unguarded. He/She will either take one side or simply give up both sides to avoid complications and if this happens, no caring process of *MD* is fostered.

The last critique that concerns *MD* is associated with modeling. It is better that at least majority of the members of the institutions involved have experienced in themselves that same *malasakit at damay* in order to be more credible and convincing. In a testimony of Mark Bocinsky (2017), a teen missionary who used to facilitate family retreats claimed:

Just recently, I was being overwhelmed by fears of failure and inadequacy. Past insecurities were rising up inside of me. When I was faced with various obstacles, it was hard to stay grounded in peace and see things clearly; my emotions were uncontrollable. It was like I was back in junior high! I was overwhelmed by the amount of stuff I was doing, and I felt as though I had nothing left to love my community, my girlfriend, or the people I was ministering to. It got to the point where I seriously considered “calling in sick” instead of helping lead a retreat for families one day. The last thing I wanted to do was spend a day ministering to people when I felt so down in the dumps. Nevertheless, I asked God for the strength, my community for their support, and I got my butt down to the church to lead the eight to eleven-year-old age group at the family retreat. The point was, we cannot give what we haven’t received. In order to love our families and friends, we must let God’s love flow into our hearts and overflow to the world.

There is a popular maxim that my Latin professor in the seminary taught us which was instilled in my mind, *nemo dat quod non habet*, that is, “no one gives what he doesn’t have” or simply “you cannot give what you do not have.” It is better that the different members who are involved in the caring process of *MD* are fully equipped with this same virtue so that they can whole-heartedly and inspiringly deliver the needed help. This basically means that they have personally experienced having received *MD* in one way or another at one point in their lives. The phenomenon of the so-called “wounded healer” as explained by Noga Zerubavel and Margaret O’Dougherty Wright (2012, 482) is the best descriptor of this situation:

It is an archetype suggesting that healing power emerges from the healer’s own woundedness, and that the wounded healer embodies transformative qualities relevant to understanding recovery processes. The

healer's own past or present wounds can facilitate empathic connection with clients which can be therapeutic. Thus, the more healers can understand their own wounds and journey of recovery, the better position they are in to guide others through such a process, while recognizing that each person's journey is unique.

With their personal stories and testimonies of pain and suffering, these wounded healers of the community will serve as models of sacrifice and strength for the problematic teens. On the other hand, if none of these members of the community were simply coming from unexperienced setting and did not have any experience of *MD*, then it would be difficult for our teens to be influenced by them. It is basically because both parties will not be able to relate or share one's common experience. It is like two poles running in the opposite direction.

RECONSTRUCTING DAGMANG'S SOLIDARITY ETHICS: *FREE AND CREATIVE COMMUNAL COMPASSION*

In my personal perspective, there is a need for reconstructing Dagmang's solidarity ethics of *damay at malasakit* as pointed out in the limitations discussed above. This is not to disregard its characteristics but a matter of enhancing it so that it will be more suited and contextualized in addressing practices of sexual impurity among Filipino teens. Thus, I will call it as *free and creative communal compassion*. Before discussing the "new face" of this sexual ethic, let me highlight first the essence and relevance of the philosophy of compassion which I will use as the basic framework of this renewed ethic.

Quoting the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, Timothy Madigan (2000) explains that compassion or *Mitleid* (fellow-feeling), is the real basis of morality, rather than rational rules or God-given commandments. Moral behavior consists of an intuitive recognition that we are all manifestations of the will to live. This view of Schopenhauer is actually a reaction to Immanuel Kant's *categorical imperative* which emphasizes that a person's own behavior should be in accordance with a universal law. Kant (1993, 30) formulated this as "act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law." This concept denotes the presence of an unconditional requirement which is absolute and that must be obeyed in all circumstances. For Schopenhauer (1995, 7) this is a manifestation of selfish egoism which cannot have any moral worth. Morality for him is based on compassion which is considered as the immediate participation in the everyday suffering of another without any consideration for oneself. He also argued that *Mitleid* as a desire for another's well-being is possible only if another's misery becomes directly the same sort of incentive as my own misery. As David Cartwright (1988, 561) puts it, "that is, just as experiences contrary to my will are painful and move me in ways to relieve my pain, in having *Mitleid* towards another's misery the other's misery assumes the same status as my own by moving me to relieve it." What does this mean? This basically implies that if

one's action has the purpose of just benefitting oneself then it can never be considered as worthy and moral one. A compassionate person in the lens of Schopenhauer has the same feeling with the person who suffers. In short, it is never for self-satisfaction but other-centered.

Though considering Schopenhauer as "the only serious moralist", Madigan (2000) referred to Friedrich Nietzsche to be a great critic of compassion by treating it not as a virtue but a form of weakness. Quoting Michael Ure (2006, 69), Nietzsche considers *Mitleid* not as an affective bond with the other, not as a sign of living for others, but a veiled means of restoring self-affection at the other's expense. It is actually hiding one's own mask of envy. Cartwright (1984, 98) supports this claim of Nietzsche by saying that our pity is viewed simply as our concern for others, our "benevolence" our simple respect for the moral law but these suggest, masks and veils behind which lies the truth. Yet it is the veils and masks which Schopenhauer and Kant use to assess the worth of action and characters. Nietzsche (1974, 270) best expressed this thought:

... all such arousing of pity and calling for help is secretly seductive, for our "own way" is too hard and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, as we do not really mind escaping from it-and from our own conscience-to flee into the conscience of the others and into the lovely temple of the "religion of pity."

Equating compassion with pity, Nietzsche asserts that if an individual shows pity to the suffering it brings nothing but contempt and simply regarding them as worthless beings. Encouraging them to confront their unfortunate situation is much better than to be compassionate of their situation. Drawing inspiration from these two great philosophers, I will utilize a characteristic of their respective idea of compassion by picking up Schopenhauer's unselfish concern with the one suffering and Nietzsche's sense of encouragement in facing the everyday trials in life. Integrating the two together, I will describe my framework of compassion as the virtue of unconditional concern to those in need through providing firm encouragement in confronting one's unfortunate situation. Now, this compassion must have definite treatment which includes the notion that sexual impurity must be seen in the lens of social interaction and has to be experienced within the community who manifests a caring intimacy.

Sexual impurity like PMS is seen in this paper as a product of *social interaction*, of shared meaning given by teens to their sexual expressions. This is the starting premise of this reconstruction. PMS should not be seen as an individual's direct or outright disobedience of a moral law or God's commandment but one has to consider first how it happened. Having this in mind, since it was born out of social interaction, there is a need to identify the different elements surrounding the situation that has also magnified individual passions or desires. The involved institutions within the community that are considered as sources from which a particular behavior or reaction is formed must be determined.

Another feature of this ethic is the concept of the *community*. The family (parents, siblings, and other relatives), friends/peers, church (pastor/churchmates), school

school (teachers, classmates) and the government (officials) comprise the participants' community. It is in the community that they should be able to feel the sense of belongingness or rejection, appreciated or criticized, loved or hated, and where their values are caught and shared. It is in the community where they should be able to pour out their sentiments whenever they feel happy or disappointed with the different events of their everyday life. It is in their presence within the community and at the same time the presence of the community in their life that defines who they are and what they can do. In short, the community has the power to make or break them in one way or another. The participants learn from the members of the community and it is where the moral values are caught and shape their teenhood. The life-enhancing community is the basic Christian environment that all members must commit totally to bring the power of lasting change for modifying societal structures and edifying individuals. Nevertheless, a disoriented community may also negatively influence and bring frustration to people. In frustrating times, the partner (boyfriend/girlfriend) may become the "mis-recognized" savior and last source of hope. If the members of the community do not provide a wholesome approach and reception to a confused teen, then there is the bigger possibility that the latter will persist in following his/her own desire or the partner's advice. The PMS issue cannot be redressed simply by having a one-on-one counseling from professionals. This could be effective for some time but will give a lasting result. It has to be addressed by and within the members of the community with consistency and regularity.

An essential quality of the community is the experience of *caring intimacy*. Intimacy does not just imply the state of having an intense and widely shared enthusiasm for something in times of difficult or confusing circumstances by our teens. It is practically the needed warmth and felt the support that can eventually ease the pain and fill the emptiness that confronts many teens. It is the show of empathy from significant people in their lives. In its general sense, intimacy refers to the level of closeness between partners. In the context of this study, it involves both emotional and physical closeness and openness of the partners with each other and also to the people around them. It is obvious in the behavior of the participants that having a high level of emotional intimacy with their partners results to a deeper expression of physical intimacy or in short a higher possibility of engaging in PMS which in turn disregards the personal virtues and constant exhortations of parents. On the other hand, having a high level of emotional intimacy with the community, the group of people which has a stronger caring influence like the family, can postpone sexual activity and value the parents' constant reminders. This is what we may call as caring intimacy—one that does not just constrict the meaning of intimacy on just two lovers-individuals, but expands it to include others to compose a caring community. Intimacy indeed plays a very vital role in the sexual decision of our teens. The different sources of intimacy must be felt by them so that they will not look for it solely in the arms of their partners which sometimes could be a threat to engage in PMS. It is also important to note that intimacy can be provided not only by their partners but the people who surround them most especially their families, relatives, friends, peers, etc. If the presence of these people is not felt by the confusedteen then one has to make sure that one's relationship with the partner is based on mutual

respect.

Lastly, the proposed ethical content of this ethic should be *malaya* (free) at *malikhain* (creative). Being *malaya* or “free” in the application of *malasakit at damay* is having an open, respectful and non-judgmental attitude toward teens. In order for it to be effective, those involved in the community should consider the inner sentiments of teens about their claim on suppressed freedom. Some teens expressed their disapproval either on their family traditions or the strict church’s norms about sexual engagement, that: it is a disgrace to the family’s reputation if one of its members was involved in unwanted and untimely pregnancy because of PMS most especially without having obtained a college degree yet; and it is absolutely unacceptable to engage in sex before marriage or if not married since it is what the church teaches, thus a violation of God’s law. These sample instances are thought by some teens as obsolete, irrelevant, and a limitation to their sexual rights. This does not mean that the involved institutions in the community will tolerate whatever they want or think up to the point of just neglecting time and again the traditional norms of their family and the church. The first step in *malayang malasakit at damay* is to recognize first that most of these teens are *millenials* or actually already *centennials* or belonging to the Gen Z/iGen.² They are products of a capitalist society that affects so much their personal development. As Diana Oblinger (2003, 37) describes it, “they learn so much from their environment which is characterized by modern advancement in technology.” And so it is not an impossibility that their behavior is shaped by the current culture and society. In *malayang malasakit at damay*, the content of sexual ethic does recognize the freedom in teens to express their sexuality. The next step is to form in the identity of these institutions not the strict imposing of the norms/rules but an open presentation of all the possible consequences of the teens’ sexual decisions so that the essence of responsibility in their action will be inculcated in their hearts and minds. The concerned caring community must always emphasize the three sources of the relationship of the teen involved – self, others, and the Creator. It is like telling them that if they will engage in untimely sexual intercourse, will it bring goodness or be beneficial to themselves, to others, and their relationship with the Creator? About the role of responsibility, yes they have exercised their sexual freedom but is it a creative and responsible kind of freedom? For the researcher, responsible freedom is very much different from the concept of freedom with responsibility. The former implies a mature and careful exercise of freedom while the latter means choosing what is wanted and then being responsible for the consequence. The latter means practically this way: that it is alright to engage in PMS as long as both or either one of the partners can handle the responsibility (*kaya ‘kong panagutan ‘yan/paninindigan natin ‘yan basta ‘t magkasama tayo*) of being a mother or father in case there will be pregnancy or even if their parents will disown them. As long as that is what they like, then why not do it, they love each other anyway. Is this the real essence of freedom? Is it only being ready to accept the consequence after the action? On the other hand, responsible freedom is not waiting for the result of the action but a careful consideration of the possible consequence even before actualizing the sexual decision. What does it mean? Since in case they find out that the negative consequences will outweigh their own reasons for justification for sex, then

they will have a second thought of doing it, thus, they will learn to prioritize things that are of greater value than what their physical desires dictate, like the concern for their families or their education or their future. If ever they have done it and failed, a discriminating or judgmental kind of treatment would not help erring teens. Just like Jesus who did not condemn the adulterous woman, the show of *MD* should be redemptive and transformative and this leads us to the second characteristic – *malikhain*.

Being *malikhain* or “creative” in the application of *MD* is having an intervention or engagement with the teens that are out of the ordinary. As members of a community who were created in the image and likeness of a creative God, we can be creative enough just like the Creator who in the first place has given us the privilege to become co-creators. We do have the capacity for this. There are instances wherein teens become unmindful, bored, and even forgetful about the value of the gift of sexuality that they have. That is why there is the possibility of it to be abused and neglected. Just like in the different stages of sexual development, after the bewildering exploration of its beauty and being hooked to its pleasures, sometimes teens get disappointed by its limitations, by its do’s and don’ts. But no matter how limited these pleasures are, teens still get excited by the delights it offers (especially to males) and they become oblivious of the strong tendency in human nature for concupiscence. As lust lurks, unmindfulness and negative consequences leap out which compromises the creative value of their sexuality. This is where the virtue of *malikhain* comes in. Being *malikhain* or creative in exercising *MD* is presenting them relevant, engaging, and imaginative/mind purifying programs that will hopefully have a transformative effect on them. When teens feel so bored of waiting for the right time to engage in sex, a relevant type of *MD* can be shared with them. Since most of them are very much hooked into modern technology, a traditional way of diverting their attention would hardly matter or make a difference. It has to be relevant and timely, something that will really catch their attention and make them dwell on it. The relevance of the program will arouse their interest for greater participation. The proposed sexual ethic should not only be relevant but must also be engaging. It has to cater to the teens’ different aspects of personhood – physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. It must consider their differences, strengths, skills, talents, uniqueness, and so forth. Remember that they should not remain as spectators but they themselves should be the actors or protagonists of their life. If they are engaged in a high level with the program, they will exert much effort on it because they enjoy it and they will see the positive effects later on. Lastly, to exercise *malikhaing malasakit at damay* is to invite them for a regular mental exercise that is purified. The aim of this activity is for them to stimulate their imagination that will enable them to develop a positive disposition/outlook in life. Teens’ imagination is so powerful and their psyche is filled with a combination of positive and negative elements that can drive them to act. This is the reason why there is a need for them to be trained in how to use their imagination properly without falling into the trap of impurity and sensuality.

CONCLUSION

In synthesis, the crafted sexual ethics of *free and creative communal compassion*

is composed primarily of fundamental characteristics that comprise the most personal experiences of the participants about their sexual decision of either engaging or postponing PMS. First, it should be noted that PMS is a product of social interaction among individuals. Then the establishing of a *caring intimacy* must be the concern of the intervention for it provides an immediate warmth because of the emotional and physical closeness to the poor teen that is characterized by respect and chastity. When the bond has been established, then *malasakit at damay* must play its part. It is letting the poor teen feel that there are people who share their sentiments and they are very willing to journey with them in every way. *Malasakit at damay* will now offer and provide concrete programs that will promote and give importance to the free and creative components of the teen's humanity. This is to ensure that the intervention will be relevant and lasting for them. And of course, this would not be possible if the ground or seedbed will not be laid down – the caring community. It is the community, comprising of different institutions which will be the arena of this cooperative and helpful interactions. The united and caring community, bound by a common goal, in spite of its diversity, will challenge these teens to make a sexual decision that is reasonable, not forced but freely given, for they would have to believe that it is the right decision to make.

NOTES

1. *Sexual repression* is part of *psychoanalysis* which is a set of theories that is used in curing depression, anxiety, and mental disorders. Freudian psychoanalysis believed that people could be cured of these different disorders by confronting in reality the unconscious thoughts and motivations in order to gain insights. The aim of psychoanalysis therapy then is to release repressed emotions and experiences, that is, make the unconscious conscious. It emphasizes that “sexuality is not received biologically as a package and but it arrived in a highly observable process of construction. See Saul McLeod, “Psychoanalysis,” *Simply Psychology*, <<http://www.simplypsychology.org/psychoanalysis.html>>, 21 June 2017 and Raewyn Connell and Willard Dowsett, *Rethinking Sex: Social Theory and Sexuality Research* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 57.

2. Currently, five generations make up our society. Each of those five generations has an active role in the marketplace. Depending on the specific workplace, the workforce includes four to five generations. Here are the birth years for each generation: Gen Z, iGen, or Centennials: Born 1996 and later; Millennials or Gen Y: Born 1977 to 1995; Generation X: Born 1965 to 1976; Baby Boomers: Born 1946 to 1964; Traditionalists or Silent Generation: Born 1945 and before (See The Center for Generational Kinetics, “Generational Breakdown: Info About All of the Generations,” in *CGK*, <<http://genhq.com/faq-info-about-generations/>>, July 22 July 2017.

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38 DALMACITO A. CORDERO JR.

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Submitted: 6 July 2018; revised: 26 October 2018