

Moral Decline in Teens: The Application of Contextual Theology

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In today's modern world, the decline of morality among our teenagers is very evident. Three main causes were pointed out in this study: mass media, peer pressure, and poor family involvement. With this, there is an urgent need for an effective evangelization, and this is the task of contextual theology, a kind of theologizing that adapts the context of our teens' culture. The use of contextual theology enables religious educators to use an approach which is characterized by the process of engagement. This process aims to understand first the context, together with the kind of culture that they are immersed and the meaning of expressions that they utter. After engaging, the purification of this sad reality begins by highlighting and integrating the gospel values, which is the life-giving spirit of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Finally, this paper hopes to provide for future researchers a clearer perspective on how to make an effective approach in addressing this problem. This task is an ongoing endeavor not only for religious educators but also to those who are involve in the formation of our teens' values. They can enhance and innovate the used theological techniques according to the signs of the times.

Keywords: contextual theology, evangelization, engagement, gospel values, moral decline

“DUHHH... IT'S NO BIG DEAL!” This is the common expression of a great number of teenagers today whenever they commit different kinds of infractions or misdemeanors that eventually lead to sin. Never can we trace any mark of seriousness with this kind of response. In fact, it introduces us to their world of being tolerant from such improper behavior. Tolerance, in this sense, is described as the kind of undisturbed attitude that they manifest after committing undesirable actions. They seem to be unaffected in any aspect of their being. In the context of our teenagers today, falling from immoral activities

seems to be just an ordinary experience. They are not aware of the consequences of their actions and more so, not taking serious mindfulness that this has a great impact in their spiritual growth. Lastly, they seem to ignore the fact that they are wounding their relationship with God, thus offending the one loving Creator who loved and is continuously loving them. What becomes worst is the possibility of continuously committing all these misdemeanors and making them a habit. This will be a great danger when it is already part of their system as they advance in age. Instead of acquiring virtues, they have

developed in themselves the poisonous fang of vices. Synthesizing this unfortunate situation, the decline of morality is clearly manifested. To battle this, contextual theologizing plays a vital role to stop the bleeding and control the spread of venom. According to Bevans (1992), “the contextualization of theology is the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context” (p. 3). This simply implies that this method of theologizing can be an effective counter-attack to negative human practices that were conditioned by their respective cultures. In this paper, the emphasis falls on the process of engagement, which will put human context in a critical examination for it to be purified. After having achieved this, it will eventually and hopefully leads to teens becoming faithful to the gospel values and tradition. In this case, critically analyzing the language and expressions of our subject, engaging in their own world to find out the causes of their inappropriate behavior, and formulating solutions in the light of the gospel will be the main tasks.

This paper is grounded on the qualitative type of research method. The sample was taken generally from the 320 college students of De La Salle University – Manila and De La Salle – College of St. Benilde. First, in order to be adept with the world of teenagers today, their background has to be necessarily known well. This was done by a direct observation and research on their biological nature and the variety of family orientation styles which was drawn out from the reflection papers that they submit in class. Second, another research on today’s teen culture, coupled with casual interview, were conducted regarding their slang languages and expressions, clothing, popular music, and multimedia influences like video games, MTV’s, and the use of different social networking sites. The researcher chose selected students and they were asked to enumerate these categories in their very own context. Additional information was also obtained from different teen websites. Third, in order to identify the causes of moral decline among these teenagers, a thorough research was conducted through an analysis of

different related studies like that of: “Study on the Acquisition of Sexual Information by Young People” by Courtwright and Baran (1980) which was published in the *Journalism Quarterly*; “What is Peer Pressure?” by Hartney (2011); and “The 21st Century Teen: Public Perception and Teen Reality” by Bostrom (2001). Fourth, a thorough analysis and integration on Steven Bevans’ (1992) different models of contextual theology was carried out to plan what kind of approach will be done to address the problem. Lastly, an analysis and selection of the biblical themes or gospel narratives that are concretely applicable to the issue on moral decline were applied with the integration of multimedia resources. A transcript of comments and feedbacks to the instructor from the faculty evaluating the use of video clips in religious education was also utilized to validate its effectiveness. In the end, this endeavor aims to strengthen the sense of temperance or self-control of teenagers with regard to avoiding immoral activities and thus, establishing a stronger and meaningful relationship with God.

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY IN ACTION

In the realm of theology or the art of studying and teaching about God, two approaches of theologizing are highly recognized by its practitioners: orthodox and contextual. The Orthodox approach refers to the traditional method of theologizing wherein the priest, theologian, or educator present and teach directly the Bible and Church doctrines in an academic manner. The concept is given and then later on explained for the people to understand. On the other hand, contextual theology presents a different approach. It gives a greater consideration in the context or culture of the faithful. It treats theology not just an academic or intellectual discipline. Rather, it was given birth from the practices and cultural traditions of the people living in the community. And so instead of presenting and explaining the doctrines, the educator engage first with the context of the people (culture, time, space, social change) and from there formulates ways to

integrate the gospel message. It is more effective to educate and at the same time to evangelize when the practices and cultural traditions of the people are given importance and at the same time being utilized.

To realize this endeavor, this paper follows underlying frameworks in relation to the application of the contextual theology. These frameworks are the key variables in this research to have a standard guide on how to go about the process of theologizing. In short, they serve as structured guidelines of what should be done step by step. This section is composed of: understanding the context, identifying the causes of moral decline, and purifying the context by highlighting the gospel values.

Understanding the Context

The first framework refers to the process of understanding the context. According to Guder and Barrett (1998), “a missional ecclesiology is contextual.” (p. 11). This phrase implies that the mission of the church must start in knowing the culture of the subject. The first task therefore, is to understand the context. This part presents to us the shadow of what kind of subjects, the teenagers, are we trying to examine. It gives us the idea of the genesis of the different aspects that mold our teenagers’ everyday experience. This first framework is divided into three important elements: background of the subject, understanding youth culture, and youth expressions and languages.

Background of the subject

In this initial stage, the beginning process of engagement also takes place. The educator needs to get acquainted first with the background of our subject. This background focuses on two areas: biological nature and family orientation. In the first area, the second decade is the most important in the human lifecycle (Bainbridge, 2009). The second decade of life is particularly known as the period of adolescence, the life stage of our subject. Adolescence is the period between the onset of puberty and adulthood. Biologically, the

body as a whole develops the mature proportions and contours of the adult male or female, thereby producing within the individual changed attitudes toward or concepts of the self. Being independent and self-reliant also characterized our teenagers. These different changes give us an indication that our subject’s personal makeup is a transition and at the same time transformation into another stage of life. They are considered as neophytes in this new stage. And as beginners, they have the tendency to try out new things and explore unfamiliar horizons which can be done independently, even apart from the dictates of their parents. Sadly, these “new world” includes the realm of sin.

The second area is family orientation. The expressions and actuations of teenagers today are greatly influenced by the people closest to them—their family. Teenagers today, most especially those who belong to the middle up to the upper class families in terms of economic status, are very unique in their ways. In a study that was conducted to the children of the affluent shows that upper-class children can manifest elevated disturbance in several areas such as substance use, anxiety, and depression (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). The same study identifies two sets of factors that are responsible for this disturbance: excessive pressures to achieve and isolation from parents. Regarding the first factor about excessive pressures, since majority if not all of the parents of our subject is successful in their career, no doubt they are well-off, much is also expected from their children. They should and must follow their footsteps. So the parents will provide everything they need by first sending them to expensive private schools and of course financing all their expenses. In this kind of situation and with this treatment, teenagers experience a great pressure. They too must finish their studies and have a very good job. If in case their parents saw that they are crossing the wrong path and having a difficulty in achieving this, some arguments happen and conflict arises. The second factor is on isolation from parents. In as much as we Filipinos are really family-oriented, there are instances that

parents' separation from their children occurs and becomes necessary. Some parents have to work abroad for financial reasons. Even locally employed, other parents are so busy with their work and cannot afford to have a meaningful bonding with their children. And so our teenagers are left with themselves and are isolated physically and more so, emotionally. They long for parents whom they can share their precious experiences and sentiments in school and in their everyday life as a whole. In the absence of their parents, what can we expect to happen? So they look for "alternatives" who can substitute the role of their parents. The usual alternatives that they find are of course their peers and most especially friends who sometimes are not always good influence for them.

Understanding youth culture

After familiarizing ourselves with the background of our subject, the next task is to understand the kind of culture that they are engaged in. The culture of teenagers is similarly known as youth culture. Youth culture is the sum of the ways of living of adolescents; it refers to the body of norms, values, and practices recognized and shared by members of the adolescent society as appropriate guides to actions (Rice, 1996). Certain important elements of youth culture include beliefs, behaviors, styles, and interests. An emphasis on clothes, popular music, sports, vocabulary, and dating set adolescents apart from other age groups, giving them what many believe is a distinct culture of their own (Fasick, 1984).

The kind of culture that our teenagers are engaged nowadays is very evident. When it comes to clothing, gone are the days of the "Maria Clara" type of attire worn by females wherein almost all the body parts are covered. Some teens are ready to make a fashion statement. Teenage females nowadays like to wear tight skinny or torn jeans, and sometimes very short skirt matched with either very loose blouse or see-through shirt, which really exposes their body figure. On the other hand, teenage males usually

wear cargo pants or loose shorts partnered with either tight T-shirt or polo shirt, which also show the developing body muscles, a transition from boys to men. These garment pieces of both sexes can easily be changed or even remain as they are after school and then for another activity to the playing field or to fun activities with friends. When it comes to popular music, teens of today do not care so much with the lyrics of certain songs, may it be scandalous or containing bad message. As long as they like the artist or singer and they love the melody, then it caters to their taste. Examples of this popular music are the songs of Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, Bruno Mars, Pink, and so forth. Take note, some of the lyrics and MTVs of these songs contain immoralities and are sexually explicit. Some TV programs and movies, down to the books which are considered as the fount of knowledge, also influence our subject a lot. Examples of these are the *Gossip Girl* and the *Twilight Series*. In a new study presented by parentdish.com finds:

Two thirds of fiction for teens makes sexual references that go anywhere from innuendo to full-out intercourse. "Results show that adolescent novels are replete with sex-related information, especially in novels targeted to girls," researchers from Brigham Young University write, according to the site. "These sexual behaviors range from passionate kissing and romantic ideation to sexual intercourse." "Sexual content has also increased in the movies and on television, so it is no surprise that the trends in teen literature have gone this way as well." (Kennedy, 2011, par. 2)

Youth culture is characterized not only by sensuality but also violence. Online games like *DoTA (Defense of the Ancients)*, *Crossfire*, *The Punisher*, and *Left 4 Dead* are full of violence like shooting and killing presentations. The incidence of shooting in schools most especially in USA had increased. In a report by *The New York Times* which was published last December 14, 2012, this teen culture of violence was exemplified. The report says:

The gunman in the Connecticut shooting blasted his way into the elementary school and then sprayed the children with bullets, first from a distance and then at close range, hitting some of them as many as 11 times, as he fired a semiautomatic rifle loaded with ammunition designed for maximum damage. (Barron, 2012, par. 1)

This particular incident is just one of the many tragic massacres that are caused by teenagers. These teenagers tend to be influenced with what they play online and so if not properly guided, they imitate the similar ways and strategies that these violent games expose.

The last and the most important aspect of analyzing youth culture at present is about social interaction. Socializing, establishing friendship, and courting or dating is usually done nowadays not only through personal encounter but by online chatting with the use of different social networking sites. According to a new report by Tiffany Kaiser, 95% of teens ages 12-17 use the Internet, and 81% of them use social networks. The rest of the findings report:

As of 2012, about 94% of teens who use social networks have a Facebook profile, and their average number of Facebook friends is about 425. Twitter and Instagram are the second and third most used social networks, with 26% and 11% of teenage users respectively. While Twitter is far behind Facebook, it has made great progress. In 2011, only 12% of teens used Twitter. That number bumped up to 26% in 2012. No data was available for the percentage of teen Instagram users for 2011, but it managed to jump ahead of many other social networks that have been around longer. Fourth place went to MySpace with 7% of teen users in 2012 (down from 24% in 2011), YouTube in fifth place with 7% of teen users (up from 6% in 2011), Tumblr in sixth place with 5% of teen users (up from 2% in 2011) and Google Plus in seventh place with 3% of teen users. Those at the bottom of the list include Yahoo, myYearbook, Pinterest, Gmail, and Meet Me. (Kaiser, 2013, par. 3)

Having this data, we can see that a big part of teens' world today revolves around social media. In my everyday observation with the students, especially in Facebook, it is already a habit for them or a part of their regular schedule to go online. Having almost a thousand of friends in FB who are also my students, I am a witness to their different forms of socializing. There are some who are less serious and simply want to get updates about their friends while others are very eager to post their everyday experiences. Courting through the use of FB is also evident. There are some guys who express their emotion to the opposite sex by posting sweet remarks. On the contrary, there are also teens who use FB to criticize others, which can lead to the point of bullying the people they do not like. Some issues regarding social media will be discussed thoroughly in the next parts of this paper.

Youth expressions and language

Based on the research and casual interview that was conducted about the popular expressions and slang languages of teenagers, there are many terms which are unfamiliar to adults. Parents, teachers, and other elders feel the need of establishing good communication with teenagers but that will be impossible if they cannot understand clearly their language and expressions. Slang is a kind of language consisting of very informal words and phrases. This is quite unfamiliar to elders but for our teens, it is the kind of language which can really express what they feel and makes them "in" into their own world. Table 1 below presents the selected popular expressions and slang languages that are used worldwide. It includes their corresponding meaning or symbolism.

Majority of these selected popular expressions connote negative meanings. This is the reason why there is a great need for every theologian to understand these words so that he or she will not be at a loss and can make the necessary adjustments when trying to understand the world of our teenagers.

Table 1*Popular Teen Expressions with their Meaning*

Popular Teen Expressions/ Slang Language	Meaning
Totes Cray-Cray Amazeballs	Short for “totally,” implies “duh!” More than crazy, especially popular among fashion girls Out of this world, blow your face off fantastic
BFF Bounce Chillin’ Dope Fly Hater or h8er Hardcore Ho My bad OMG! Sick or Ill Tight	Best Friends Forever Means to leave Means relaxing Means cool or awesome Boys tend to refer to girls they think are good looking as ‘fly’. This is in reference to someone who just hates everything, even their friends. It is someone who is so pessimistic that a teen is tired of hearing from them. Means something is intense. Generally said about something that is a good experience, but also used when something bad is happening to a friend. Whore It means ‘my mistake’. An abbreviation for “Oh my gosh or Oh my god!” No, this no longer means someone doesn’t feel well. It’s used as a description of something or someone who is cool or awesome. Means close in relationship
Tool Wanksta Chillaxin Crashy Crunk	Refers to someone who is stupid or a geek. Refers to a person trying to act tough, but isn’t really pulling it off. cross between chillin’ and relaxing. Crazy and trashy. Not considered to be good. cross between crazy and drunk. Some teens use this term to mean cool.
Blast Cheesy/Cheesey Dork Gnarly Good off/Goof around Gross Hickey Hooky/Hookey Jack Jerk Lame Make out Rock Suck / It sucks	a great experience, a very enjoyable time of very low quality; not stylish or tasteful a socially awkward person extreme (in either a good or bad sense) waste time, play around disgusting, very unpleasant a mark on the neck or face caused by a lover biting or sucking the skin, a love bite (in phrase <i>play hooky</i>) to stay away from school or work without permission to steal a stupid person bad, weak, of poor quality to hug and kiss, possibly with some petting to be great, excellent be very bad
All-nighter	intense time or bout of study or work
Blow someone away Bombed Hook up Jock Mickey Mouse Party animal Puke Smashed Space cadet Weed	overwhelm or excite someone intoxicated by alcohol or drugs meet or associate; can also refer to a sexual encounter one who’s concerned with being macho or very masculine in appearance or manner unimportant, trivial, or irritatingly petty someone who loves parties vomit drunk someone who appears to be out of touch with reality tobacco, a cigarette; often marijuana

Sources: <http://www.gurl.com>
<http://parentingteens.about.com>

<http://www.englishclub.com>
<http://www.simalixia.com>

Identifying the Causes of Moral Decline

After having a concrete and sufficient knowledge of the context, the second framework now is tasked to determine the causes and influences of such decline of morality in our teens. If the first framework provided us the shadow of what kind of subjects we are treating with, this next part will uncover this shadow and gives us a clear view of why these teenagers are behaving that way. A survey of 2,000 American adults performed by Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates for the Culture and Media Institute reveals a strong majority, 74% believes moral values in America are weaker than they were 20 years ago. Almost half, 48% agree that values are much weaker than they were 20 years ago (Bozell, 2007). In another survey, the preliminary results of the 2000 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth validated another moral decline among teens (Josephson, 2013). These are the highlights of the result:

- Lying is pervasive. 92% of the high school students lied to their parents in the past 12 months, 78% lied to a teacher, and more than one in four say they would lie to get a job.
- Cheating is common. 71% of the high school students admit they cheated on an exam at least once in the past 12 months (45% say they did so two or more times).
- Stealing is committed by nearly half of boys and a third of girls. 40% of the high school males and 30% of the high school females say they stole something from a store in the past 12 months.
- Being drunk in school is a concern. Nearly one in six of the high schoolers and one in ten middle schoolers say they've been drunk in school during the past year.
- Getting drugs is easy. 66% of the high schoolers and nearly a quarter of the middle schoolers say they could get drugs if they wanted to.
- Getting guns is easy. Nearly half of the high school students and a quarter of the middle schoolers say they could get a gun if they wanted to. More than 10% of all students say they actually took a weapon to school in the past year.
- Hitting is rampant. 70% of the middle school students and 68% of the high school students say they hit someone in the past year.
- Feeling safe is rare. More than one in three students in all age groups say they don't feel safe at school.

In an article published by *Journalism Quarterly*, peers and mass media are the powerful agents in the acquisition of sexual information among high school and college students (Courtright & Baran, 1980). And so in this section, the causes of such behavior are focused on three major factors: mass media, peer pressure, and poor family involvement.

Mass media

Mass media is one of the major culprits that causes morality decline among teenagers. It is described as any of the various technologies by which information reaches large numbers of people. Examples of this are television, radio, movies, newspapers, and the Internet. One popular and very relevant form of mass media is social media. Social media are basically the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist, Bäck, Heinonen, & Halonen, 2010). In another article by Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, they defined social media as a “group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Web 2.0 is a new version of the World Wide Web and refers to cumulative changes in the way web pages are made and used. The popular blogs, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and video sharing sites like Youtube, Metacafe and Dailymotion are some examples of Web 2.0. There is no doubt that teenagers of today

are deeply immersed in these different forms of social media. In a research conducted by Chris Crosby, the co-founder and Managing Director of Socially Active, a popular online site regarding social issues, he stated:

In America, various reports suggest that about eighty-three percent of American youth use their phones for email, mobile internet and texting. The report further states that these American teens send and receive text messages 144 times a day. If the teens are not texting, they are usually on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter where they chat, share photos and video and participate in gaming. (Crosby, 2012, par. 3)

Of course there has been positive effects of social media to our subject but the focus on this paper are the negative ones. Regarding television programs, the amount of time children spend viewing television and the extent to which the content viewed is sexual in nature is related to the initiation of sexual activity (Peterson, Moore, & Furstenberg, 1991). What does this mean? The sexual content of TV programs can affect a lot the onset of sexual awareness of teenagers. Meaning, they have the possibility to apply these to themselves. In another study about the influence of Music Television (MTV) on teenagers, the result of the attitude survey suggested a potentially powerful influence of popular music and MTV, especially on attitudes towards violence and premarital sex (Greeson & Williams, 1986).

Another related research examined family environment and gender as moderators of a hypothesized relationship between exposure to rock music videos and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior. The result of a survey of 214 adolescents revealed a stronger association between permissive sexual attitudes and behavior and reported exposure to music videos for females than for males. (Strouse, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Long, 1995). The next form of social media in this modern time points out to the emergence of social networking sites as the most-widely used social medium for teenagers. Facebook, with

one billion users, is still the most popular social network (Hernandez, 2012). In an article posted by Brandon Gaille, the CEO of the internet marketing company ByReputation.com, he explained:

Overuse of Facebook can make you too aware of yourself and self-conscious. This could have an overall negative impact on your life and relationships. You might feel pressured to be always funny and entertaining, feel stressed about missing an important update, or worry about reconnecting with people you really want to avoid. Over analyzing posts will lead to reading too much into what someone means and can lead to feeling insecure. On Facebook, declaring your relationship status means putting everything in public, and can become awkward. For example, what if someone updates their relationship, but their partner doesn't? The comments that people make can potentially hit a nerve and cause jealousy in a relationship. (Gaille, 2013, par. 8)

Lastly, the arena of Instagram is quickly on the rise. Frommer (2010) defines Instagram as "a simple photo-taking and photo-sharing app that has taken over Silicon Valley and is filling our Twitter feed with fun, cute photographs" (par. 2). Although its positive effect is clearly manifested like fast, easy, and efficient photo-sharing, the negative ones cannot be discounted. In an essay written by Henry Yelkin (2012), he stated:

Social networking sites such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram are changing the youth's focus from productive activities, to the indulgence of their adolescent egos. Many teenagers growing up today have chosen to pursue accomplishments that hold no meaning, such as getting 100 likes on their photos. What is worse is that the youth subconsciously know that having this-many followers or that-many likes will get them nowhere yet they still devote so much of their time to social networking sites. These social networking sites take a psychological toll, as well as a toll on their social lives. It also leaves people prone to other dangers such as cyber bullying. (par. 1)

From all these studies and researches on the effects of mass media and most especially social media, one clear conclusion is formed – its overuse and unreasonable treatment contribute a lot in the decline of morality of teenagers.

Peer pressure

The second cause of our subject's moral decline points out to peer pressure. Hearing this term "peer pressure", one may think that it is an abused phenomenon when it comes to teenager's problem on morality but there can really be no other term that can exactly describe such reality. Peer simply refers to someone who is of the same age, education or social class. In an online article posted by Elizabeth Hartney (2011), a renowned psychologist who specializes in addiction and concurrent disorders in teens, she further elaborated:

Peers are people who are part of the same social group, so the term "peer pressure" refers to the influence that peers can have on each other. Although peer pressure does not necessarily have to be negative, the term "pressure" implies that the process influences people to do things that may be resistant to, or might not otherwise choose to do. So usually the term peer pressure refers to socially undesirable behaviors, such as experimentation with alcohol and drug use, rather than socially desirable behaviors, such as academic success, although it could be applied to either, and either could be a positive or a negative experience for the individual. (par. 1)

As it was mentioned in the previous section of this paper, when parents or family members are nowhere to be found, our subjects look for an "alternative" which can fill in the role that is usually performed by the family. These are commonly the peers or friends who also share the same world and sentiments like them. Of course, not all peers or friends are bad influence but one cannot set aside the result of many studies regarding its negative influence. Peer pressure is often cited as one of the great causes of teens' moral deterioration. Perceptions of peer pressure

were significantly associated with dating attitudes, sexual activity, and use of drugs and alcohol, but not with relationships with parents (Brown 1982). These undesirable activities usually happen because of the strong influence brought by ill-mannered peers. If a teenager does not want to give in with the request of his bad peers, possible "frame-up" condition arises. There is the possibility of not including him or her anymore in the social group, considered as an outcast in the clan, or even branded as "killjoy" (KJ) or "out of this world". So the pressure is very high. The unfortunate teenager is put in a dilemma where belongingness seems impossible to happen. If there are no parents to turn to and still no peers or friends to be with, then where else can our lowly subject find comfort. To avoid this scenario, our subject has no choice but to give in, be one with the social group, and in the end, committing immoralities.

Poor family involvement

The last major factor which causes the downfall of teenagers' moral disposition is poor family involvement. The family is the smallest unit of the society where an individual first experience love, belongingness, and develop in his being a variety of values. This is the usual description that many Catholic schools teach. This fact gives us the impression that in the absence of our teens' very own families, particularly their parents, it will not be that easy for them to live a moral life. The values which are considered as the essentials of living morally depend so much with what our respective families can offer and inculcate in us. According to a study made by Meg Bostrom (2001), much of the public's critique of teens revolves around parents' perceived inability to be involved with their children and teach them the right values. We owe from them a big part of what we are at present and who we will be in the future. And so what will happen if teenagers lack that degree of involvement with their families? It is like a soldier going to a war without any weapon, thus, going through life without the courage to confront problems.

There are many studies today that discuss the importance of the role of parents to adolescents. The benefits of parental monitoring and limit setting are also emphasized within these studies (Luthar, 2006), with poor parental monitoring clearly linked to negative outcomes in adolescence, such as antisocial behavior, substance use and sexual risk taking (Hayes, Smart, Toumbourou, & Sanson, 2004). The involvement of both parents to their children also matters. Many families today are incomplete, either the mother or the father is not present due to different reasons. Whatever reason is given, still the consequence implies that the more guardians are there to guide our children, the more is the possibility for them to be directed and do appropriate actions. Adolescents living in single-parent households are more likely to engage in deviant activity than are youngsters living with both natural parents, or in single-parent, extended households, allegedly because the presence of an additional adult provides greater control of youngsters' behavior (Steinberg, 1987). From this study, we can see that both parents are very essential to perform the task of guiding their children to the right path. Without the involvement of one's family, teenagers loses their sight in doing what is right and good. Since the family is the first institution that molds their moral dimension of their being, its absence will enable them to be weak and unprepared in facing the different challenges in life.

Purifying the Context by Highlighting the Gospel Values

Having understood the background of the context and determined the causes of its anti-gospel character, the last and most important task now is to purify the context in order to stop this sad reality. This will be done with the use of contextual theology. The process of purification will be done by going back to the causes of teens' moral decline and then highlighting the gospel values and Church teaching within their own context.

Rechanneling mass media

The Catholic Church had been very vocal regarding the negative effects of mass media to our society, particularly to our youth. In 2009, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI made a striking remark about mass media in his appearance in Rome:

“It recounts, repeats and amplifies evil, making us accustomed to horrendous acts, desensitizing us and, in some ways, poisoning us,” he said. “This poison makes our faces darker and makes us smile less, stopping us from greeting one another or making eye contact. Benedict also accused the media of exploiting the desperate while failing to celebrate everyday goodness. “Every now and again, people who are usually invisible end up on front page or on our television screens, and they are wrung for every last drop, until the news and their image no longer attracts attention,” he said. (par. 3-5)

With this statement, there is a dire need for the purification and rechanneling of mass media. And so the question lies now on how can the educator stop the moral decline of teenagers? How can our subject develop in themselves a disturbed attitude after committing undesirable actions and not simply being tolerant of their immoralities? The goal of contextual theologizing is to change culture radically through the convincing power of the gospel. Bevans (1992) added that the gospel, “rather than being a list of doctrines or moral principles, is conceived as a story to be told and witnessed rather than something to be argued for abstractly”. (p. 121). The narrative on Peter's denial of Jesus hopefully serves as a very fitting purifier of the context. In using this narrative, since the world of our teenagers revolves around mass media, the theologian plunges into the same arena in order to purify it. Let us take a look first this story:

Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside

at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself... Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. (John 18: 15-18, 25-27 NIV)

The purpose of choosing this gospel narrative is primarily to let teenagers realize the pain they cause Jesus every time they disobey Him with their undesirable acts. This shows the parallelism between Peter's denial of Jesus and the indifferent behavior of teenagers. Just like Jesus who called Peter to follow Him to become a fisher of man, teenagers are also called by Jesus to follow Him, to live a moral life. As Peter did the task of being an apostle of Jesus, he is the "rock", strong and firm in his love for Him, always ready to defend Him against the Romans. Our teens, in their childhood years, surely expressed their sweetness to Jesus with the guidance of their parents such as being baptized, reading Bible stories, celebrating their First Communion, attending Mass, listening to catechetical instruction, and so forth. Then here comes Peter being put in a difficult situation which led him to deny Jesus. Our subject, upon reaching the period of adolescence, learns to disobey Jesus with their wrongdoings. Peter did not deny Jesus only once or twice but thrice. These teens in the same way offend Jesus not only once but repeatedly. Offending Jesus over and over again is like hammering deeply the nails in the hands and feet of Jesus, it is adding insult to injury. This is the reason behind the use of this narrative. It is to let teenagers feel that it is not an ordinary experience to offend God over and

over again with their sins. It must be inculcated in their hearts and minds the reality that what they are doing deeply hurts God, the God who called them, who loved them since the day they were born. But this parallelism does not end here. Jesus reinstated Peter, forgave him and showed confidence in him by giving such responsibilities. Jesus told Peter, "Feed my lambs", "Take care of my sheep", and "Follow me!" Our teenagers too must feel the unconditional mercy of God so that they will not lose hope to change for the better. God will always love them no matter what it takes. God will never give up on them. The theologian must emphasize too that after God's forgiveness from their wickedness, the responsibility given by God continues, that is to live in accordance to His will. And so that is a characteristic of the countercultural model, it is not a one-step process but a continuous endeavor.

Now, since we have identified the gospel truth (*Peter's Denial of Jesus*) which purifies the context, the next task is how to incorporate it with the use of mass media which is the first cause of our subject's moral decline. There are many ways to incorporate the message of our gospel to mass media. The theologian can show a variety of films about the life of Jesus which surely includes the scene on Peter's denial and this should be highlighted. One can also make an entry by means of a blog regarding the message of the gospel. Since teens are always into social networking sites, he can also post in Facebook and Twitter some inspirational quotes, messages or the biblical passage itself about the gospel theme. Posting the picture of the gospel scene in Instagram can also be a possible way. In the aspect of music, one can have a song analysis in class regarding the gospel theme. There are actually very nice songs about this gospel truth like *Peter's Denial* from the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar* and composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber; *But Still You Loved Me* by Emily Snyder, and *Song of Peter's Denial* by Ryan Brown. Lastly, the most effective technique nowadays is the use of video clips. A video clip is a small section of a larger video presentation. A series of video frames are

run in succession to produce a short, animated video. This compilation of video frames results in a video clip. (Russell, 2012). Current research and surveys present different reasons why the audio-visual language is very effective in the classroom setting. Let me give emphasis on three reasons: First, audio-visual language like video clips help to develop a positive emotional response to reality (Eilers, 2009). The tears in our eyes and the sense of hope can be understood if we have watched how Nick Vujicic found his life still meaningful in spite of having no arms and legs. Our intense emotions can be handled the right way and prevent from making a wrong decision by drawing the inspiration from these inspirational video clips. Second, audio-visual materials also enhance student's comprehension because this multimedia conveys information through two simultaneous

sensory channels: aural and visual. The students learn by watching moving images and at the same time listening to their messages through the sound they produce. Marshall (2002) pointed out in his studies that "people will generally remember: 10% of what they read; 20% of what they hear; 30% of what they see; 50% of what they hear and see" (pp. 7-8). For sure, the comprehension skills of the students will be on a higher note brought by the dual entry points of the messages coming from video clips. Lastly, the use of video clips increases student motivation, focus, and enthusiasm in their studies. Since they are into social networking sites, based from my experience, there are times that teens requested me to post in Facebook the video clip that I have shown in class and upon checking the next day, almost all of them hit the "Like" button and majority of them gave their

Table 2

Transcript of Comments and Feedbacks to the Instructor

De La Salle University - Manila	De La Salle - College of St. Benilde
<i>This class makes me in touch with my religious side. I was able to reflect on my religion through his way of teaching.</i>	<i>Excellent. He's always prepared w/ slideshows and many things to watch.</i>
<i>He makes the lesson not boring by providing videos as examples for the lesson. The activities he makes us do are fun.</i>	<i>It's all good 😊 (happy face) He is really prepared with visuals, presentations and videos for the lesson or topic that will be discussed.</i>
<i>His visuals plus discussion before, during and after every lesson helps me as a student to understand the course better.</i>	<i>Sir Mac begins our class by praying everyday. He has different MTV prayer songs. It helps us to be spiritually attentive and focused to his lessons.</i>
<i>Sir always shows videos which are integrated in our daily lives. At the end of the class, he lets us write reflection papers in order to express what we feel, I personally think he's doing well.</i>	<i>He has a good style of teaching all set, he never used to start the lesson without pictures, videos and some materials that can help us understand the lesson in an easy way. Sir Mac is my favorite professor!</i>
<i>The transformative way of teaching was effective. His numerous videos definitely helped.</i>	<i>Sir Mac is COOL! Always prepared w/ videos and he discusses the message of what has been shown...</i>

positive comments and even discussed some of its aspects. It is no wonder that my students too were able to create very good video projects as a midterm requirement in class. In a study that I conducted last year (2012) with students in two schools regarding the effectiveness of video clips in religious instruction, a favorable result emerged. It shows that the methodology was highly appreciated by the students. The selected transcript of comments and feedbacks in Table 2 validates the effectiveness of the methodology used by the instructor.

One popular form of a short video is MTV (*Music Television*). MTVs are musical video clips that attract greatly to teenagers and they are very accessible with or without internet connection. One can upload it in Youtube and Facebook or can be also simply shown in class by just saving it in a USB stick or flash drive. An effective procedure to present MTV is by choosing an alternative popular song for teens with an appropriate message. This song will now be combined and incorporated it our gospel theme of Peter's denial. A video clip on Peter's denial can be downloaded from Youtube and inserting in it the chosen song, thus producing a MTV. The theologian can also do these in other gospel themes. He just have to make sure that a careful and comprehensive processing through class discussion follows after showing the MTV.

Pressuring peer pressure

Peer pressure is the second cause of our subject's moral decline. Teenagers who do immoral acts often want others to join them also because they feel very "in" with their respective social group. They are confident enough in their actions because joining them gives a sense of not only acceptance but also of an approval coming from the pressured peers. Those who are striving to live a moral life may receive pressure from such individuals. And so the educator has to look for a suitable gospel theme to contradict such situation. The narrative on Pontius Pilate is suited for this task. Why Pontius Pilate? Let us first recall what the gospel of John narrates about him:

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (*which in Aramaic is Gabbatha*). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. (John 19: 4-16 NIV)

Base from this gospel passage, Pontius Pilate, being the Roman Governor and supreme judge had the sole authority to either execute or release a criminal. He knows clearly that Jesus committed no crime, an innocent man. But he found himself caught in a tight situation where in he has to make a popular decision in order for the mob not to break out for revolution. If he will not favor the Sanhedrin and pacify the loud shouts of the mob to crucify Jesus, then there is a big

possibility for him to lose his position. The crowd applied political pressure on Pilate saying he was not a friend of Caesar if he released Jesus. In short, Pilate loses sight of the truth brought by this tremendous pressure, and unfortunately led to the crucifixion of Christ. Just like Pilate, teenagers are sometimes confronted with great pressure that leads them to give up their sense of morality. With this, the theologian must give emphasis on three lessons that can be learned from Pilate when theologizing. First, there are situations in life that a person is perfectly sure of what is supposed to be done and what should be avoided because no matter what angle you look at them, they are objectively wrong, then do not do it. Pilate was warned already by his wife about Jesus being a good man and Pilate himself knew that Jesus was innocent. Yet he still went ahead and followed through. Our teens are smart, they know what is right and wrong, they have undergone through a lot of values development at home and many years of Christian Living Education in school. And so when “BI” (Bad Influence) peers invite them to such bad acts, they must decide firmly not to join them. The theologian must point out clearly that a teen who is unable to join his or her peers in doing bad deeds is a very promising act that defines what kind of person he or she is—a son or daughter whose parents should be proud and who is greatly pleasing in the eyes of God. The second lesson is never surrender to peer pressure. Pilate’s decision is very popular because it pleased the Sanhedrin and the crowd but is it right? Is it lawful to condemn an innocent man? What is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right. Our teens’ world is engulfed with the idea of popularity. If you are popular, you can have many peers and friends and that makes you relevant. Now the question is, what makes you popular or how did you attain that popularity? And so the educator must instill in the heart and mind of our teens that one does not have to give up values in order to be popular and gain recognition. They do not have to make popular decisions in exchange of wrong deeds or just to please their peers. Christ is very popular

but his popularity was established because of the good deeds that he had done such as performing miracles, healing the sick, preaching about the kingdom of God, and so forth. Teens who are taking a stand for what is right and conforming to the laws of God can actually lead them to popularity. Lastly, this story on Pilate teaches the sense of responsibility for one’s misdeeds. One must not look for someone to blame when actually it is really his or her fault. Pontius Pilate made the symbol of washing his hands saying that he had nothing to do with it but he just did, by letting Christ to be crucified. Every educator must make a strong point that when one sinned against God, he or she must openly take responsibility for it. The acceptance and recognition of one’s sin is the starting process for renewal. This kind of attitude can bring out the value of remorse in oneself, which will strengthen one’s armor to combat the next battle. The problem with teenagers today is that sometimes they look for someone to blame or take responsibility with their own mistakes. Washing their own hands like Pilate can eventually lead them to feel numb and thus repeating the same misdeeds over and over again. The educator must let the subject realize that accepting one’s sinfulness is not shameful and will not make them less human. Everyone commits sins and this is a natural reality in life. The most important thing is one’s initiative to get up from these failures and return to the open and loving arms of God again.

Enriching poor family involvement

Poor family involvement is the last major factor that causes the moral decline of teenagers. Without the involvement of one’s family, especially their parents, teenagers lose their sight in doing what is right and good. So how should the theologian address this factor? In countering this part of the context, let us see another characteristic of a model in contextual theology called *countercultural*. This model gives emphasis on the importance of Christian practices that can possibly highlight the meaning of family bonding and thus avoiding isolation.

Aside from highlighting gospel values, different Christian practices can play a vital role in purifying the context. These Christian practices which can be in the form of family practices or traditions are also anchored in the gospel values. The educator can revitalize and enrich poor family involvement by using the Church teaching on the Eucharist. An approach to the Eucharist as a family meal and translating it in an actual meal at home, a traditional family practice that is going back to the basics of what an ideal and happy family was, is suitable for this context. Parents who lack time for their family bonding because of their work or vice versa, teens themselves who do not have enough time for their own families because of school activities and other stuffs can still find their relationships at work through the celebration of the Eucharist and then following it up with a meal together. The educator must explain clearly that there is a qualitative difference between attending the Holy Mass alone or with the family and eating in a fast food with friends or a family meal at home. A teen who is attending the Mass together with his or her family does not only receive the sacramental grace but more so, learns and develops firmly in his or her being the habit of thanking and worshipping God. They learn and salute their parents who serve as role models and good examples of being faithful Christians. Remember, when parents bring their family to Mass, they are sending a strong message to their children about who they are and who their family is. With this regular routine, teens form in themselves the importance of the celebration in their faith life as a family, thereby applying to everyday life the message of the gospel. A family meal, most especially if done at home, gives everyone the opportunity to celebrate the mysteries of life with the loved ones. Just like the Holy Eucharist wherein everyone is welcomed and the celebrant greets the faithful, each family member greets and welcomes one another to start the meal. In the Eucharist, we ask God's pardon from our sins and we receive forgiveness. In the family meal, teens also say sorry for their misdeeds and parents usually accept the apology.

We listen to the Word of God and the homily of the priest in the Eucharist while the family meal serves as a venue for teens to tell the trivial and meaningful experiences in their life, air out their sentiments and problems, and the parents' deliver their own version of caring homilies as a response, pieces of advice, and expression of their love. With a clean heart, everyone communes with God and partakes in His Body and Blood, teens also communes with the family members and shares the food out of the parents' hard labor. The Eucharist ends with the hope of continuing everybody's mission to live in according to God's will. The family meal also ends with a loving reminder for every member to be safe and take to heart the reminders of the parents. With these precious moments of being together as a family, the guidance and love that emanate from each family member are sufficient enough to enrich and uplift our teens' moral disposition.

CONCLUSION

The approach of contextual theology in addressing the problem of teens' moral decline is basically a process of purification. And this purification is done by highlighting the gospel values within the context of our teens. Our subject, the decline of morality among today's teenagers poses a big threat to the downfall of our moral world. And so to stop this, a framework based from this kind of theological approach hopes to address it. Understanding the context is the initial salvo in this process. It consists of three factors: the background of the subject, understanding youth culture, and the meaning of their popular expressions and language. The second framework is tasked to identify the causes on this moral decline among our teens. These are the mass media, peer pressure, and poor family involvement. The third and last framework is the most important stage in this endeavor. The educator is now set to challenge this hostile context and this is done by going back to the causes one by one and then using the appropriate

gospel narratives to purify it. Rechanneling the mass media is the first target. The gospel narrative on Peter's denial of Jesus is used. This story shows the parallelism between Peter's denial of Jesus and the indifferent behavior of teenagers. Peter denied Jesus three times and caused him great pain. As our teens mature, they also learn to disobey Jesus with their wrongdoings, even repeatedly. The educator enables our teens to feel that it is not an ordinary experience, but a serious matter to offend God habitually. Jesus reinstated Peter and forgave him. Our teenagers too must feel the unconditional mercy of God so that they will not lose hope to change for the better. Incorporating the message of this gospel narrative to mass media is possible. This gospel scene is inserted and integrated to media's various forms like film, video clips, MTV, and the numerous social networking sites. The second target is entitled pressuring peer pressure. The narrative on Pontius Pilate fits this factor. Just like Pontius Pilate who was pressured by the Sanhedrin and the crowd, made a popular decision to please them but clearly rejecting the truth. And so with our teens, who sometimes commit immoralities because of peer pressure, thus, giving up their values. The educator emphasizes here that what is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right. Down to the last cause, it is termed as enriching family involvement. Approaching the Holy Eucharist as a traditional family meal can bring abundance to the drought of teens' involvement with the family. The work of the educator here focuses on the importance of attending the Holy Mass as a family celebration with God as the center, and translating it with the value of eating together at home as a family. Teens and parents who sometimes lack time with one another can still feel the warmth of affection with these two traditional practices in their daily life.

Lastly, the educator must take note that this is not a constant and one-time operation but a continuous and on-going process of effective theologizing. As time progresses, new developments and issues will sprout and to match this, new approaches and solutions will be applied.

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