Phenomenological Re-Construction of *Pakikiramay* as an Experience of Salvation Among Filipinos

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> *The world and human history in which God wills to bring about salvation are the basis of the whole reality of faith; it is there that salvation is achieved in the first instance... or salvation is rejected and disaster is brought about. In this sense it is true that extra mundum nulla salus, there is no salvation outside the human world. The world of creation, our history within the environment of nature, is the sphere of God's saving action in and through human mediation.*[1]

In the New Testament theme of salvation – as deliverance from death in the theology of St. Paul II Cor 1:3-5, we see how he has experienced and has become a channel of salvation to others. St. Paul's use of *paraklesis* to describe how God has encouraged him in his many afflictions served as an 'interpretative framework' through which St. Paul viewed salvation in and through Jesus Christ. God, through Christ, was a Paraclete (*Parakletos*) for St. Paul amidst afflictions.

The spill-over of this abundant *paraklesis* urged St. Paul to offer his experience of deliverance as a model for how the believers themselves could offer salvation to others. After having received encouragement (*paraklesis*) from God, Christians too could become channels of salvation to others. St. Paul himself exhorted the Corinthians to follow the lead of the Macedonians, who after having received enormous blessings

[1] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 12.

from God, contributed to the collection for the needs of the Jerusalem Church.[2] We, therefore, have shown how *paraklesis* could serve as an 'interpretative framework' in the presentation of the concept of salvation that Christians experience in Jesus Christ.

We are searching for an inculturated appropriation of the idea of salvation in and through Christ, we take inspiration from the way St. Paul appropriated salvation as *paraklesis* as an 'interpretative framework' in order to guide us in the examination of our cultural experiences. As an 'interpretative framework' this will allow us not only to discover experiences from our local context which have some kind of semblance, but also provide meaning, to these experiences.

Our culture provides many areas where the concept of being saved may be brought to light. A careful and critical examination of the Filipino culture reveals what Schillebeeckx explains as *extra mundum nulla salus.* In our critical examination, we hope to find experiences or an 'interpretative framework' among Filipinos that echo St. Paul's idea of salvation in II Corinthians 1:3-5.

The search for an 'interpretative framework' will begin with questions Filipinos ask regarding well-being, fullness of life, liberation, salvation and the like. Thus, albeit speaking in terms of Christological interpretation, Benigno Beltran sees that "reflection should take place in the light of human questions and needs and in accordance with the problems of the age."[3] This means taking into consideration "the actual people to whom it is addressed and their language and symbols" and "it must answer the questions they ask and it must have an impact on their concrete life."[4] Although speaking about Christology, de Mesa and Wostyn argue that a theology which tries to address the Philippine context will make the theme of 'liberation' central: "The question which will be asked is, first of all, a soteriological one: what meaning does Christ's message and practice have for today's poor who are searching for liberation in the midst of suffering?"[5]

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[2] See II Cor 8:1-8: "Of the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their profound poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For according to their means, I can testify, and beyond their means, spontaneously, they begged us insistently for the favor of taking part in the service to the holy ones, and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us through the will of God, so that we urged Titus that, as he had already begun, he should also complete for you this gracious act also."

[3] Benigno Beltran, "Prolegomena to Christology in the Philippines," *Diwa: Studies in Philosophy and Theology* 9, no. 1 (October 1984): 1.

[4] Ibid. See also *EN,* 65.

[5] Jose de Mesa and Lode Wostyn, *Doing Christology: The Re-Appropriation of a Tradition* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1993), 61.

Schillebeeckx also takes note of this when he tries to offer some solutions or courses of action regarding the problem of human suffering:

> In that case, it is right to take counsel from men's own experiences of suffering during the course of their history, from what they have thought about it, and from the way in which they have experienced *human salvation*. Here particularly, critical reason is not directed solely to its own reflection, but also and above all, to the critical remembrance of the human history of suffering and the way in which people, in various circumstances and against a changing background, have attempted to cope with their own suffering and that of others.[6]

With these considerations in mind, we can begin to ask: Are there expressions in the local Filipino culture that could describe how we are saved? Are there expressions in the local setting that describe the human yearning for salvation and well-being?

De Mesa and Wostyn find one of these expressions in the word *ginhawa*. This they discover in the general contrast experience alive in folk consciousness: *hirap* (difficulty, suffering) and *ginhawa* (ease, relief, rest).[7]

> *Ginhawa* exhibits a sense of realism regarding historical well-being. Because life is both imperfect and finite, *ginhawa* can never be experienced in its fullness in the world: it will always be accompanied by *hirap*, difficulty and suffering. For this reason, suffering is accepted by lowland Filipinos as a matter of fact. By the same token, one finds some relief, albeit limited and non-lasting, in any given difficulty and suffering.[8]

While *ginhawa* remains a very useful term for the Filipinos' realism, the same kind of realism becomes weak when faced with overwhelming and intolerable suffering. In fact, de Mesa and Wostyn admit this difficulty in the word *ginhawa*:

> A fatalistic attitude can develop...Without intending to explain fully the mystery which is suffering, an attitude which regards suffering as 'part and parcel of life' can obscure and undermine human responsibility and this may contribute to inhuman situations and conditions in society.[9]

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[6] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1980), 671.

[7] de Mesa, *Doing Christology*, 63.

[8] Ibid., 63-64

[9] Ibid., 67.

De Mesa and Wostyn, then, while acknowledging the usefulness of *ginhawa* as a model of the lowland Filipinos' way of perceiving well-being, nevertheless cautions against its uncritical adoption: "A judicious adoption of *ginhawa* requires respect and appreciation for its strengths and discernment and criticism for its weaknesses."[10]

We therefore notice two important points for consideration: first, the reality of suffering among Filipinos which, in *ginhawa*, is given sense and direction vis-à-vis the question of salvation; and second, its weak point or even inadequacy as a model to account especially when faced with overwhelming suffering. The second point deserves a closer attention for it challenges us to look for another model that could be deemed adequate and more suitable whereby Filipinos could make sense out of an overwhelming suffering and thus overcome an overly fatalistic attitude in life. This model should also transcend a weak and short-sighted Christology arising from a complacent and passive attitude regarding suffering. De Mesa and Wostyn already provide the challenge regarding this aspect: "Could it be that Jesus is honored as the Santo Niño because children are easily content and as the Santo Entierro because death is seen as the final 'rest' or 'respite' from this turbulent world?"[11]

Having in mind the above-mentioned considerations, we seek to inquire an adequate or more suitable model of salvation in the Filipino context that is characterized by suffering and death. We seek to find an appropriate model of salvation that could serve to express in human intelligible terms the experience of salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

In the context of the Filipino experience, this will take as an opportunity the proximity of the experience of death and suffering among us Filipinos and discover from it our idea of salvation as we grapple with our experience of death, bereavement and mourning. With the experience of death among Filipinos comes a corresponding Filipino practice that is nowhere more explicitly expressed or ritualized than in the context of death, bereavement and mourning – *pakikiramay*.

Before we set our course, we need to be reminded of our methodology. The previous Chapter constitutes the first task in the method of critical re-appropriation. This Chapter constitutes the second task, that is, to articulate the universality of the message of salvation within the framework of the Filipino interpretative-linguistic universe.[12] In order to achieve this, we will employ phenomenological hermeneutics to draw from the wide expanse of Filipino experience the pertinent data related to the theme of death, grief and bereavement. As a phenomenologico-hermeneutical *excursus*, this will not be concerned with the intricacies of defining death insofar as this

[10] Ibid., 68.
[11] Ibid., 67.
[12] Ibid., 300-301.

concept becomes a subject matter of various medical, clinical and even psychological disciplines. The aim of the phenomenologico-hermeneutical examination remains to be theological. The thesis agrees with C. S. Song when he says:

> Theology does not deal with mere phenomena, whether personal, historical, cultural or religious. It asks the theological meaning of phenomena – the meaning of Immanuel in the world, the meaning of God-is-with-us in history.[13]

Seen under this approach, death in the context of this Chapter is assumed to be a very familiar concept and remains a highly tangible reality for all peoples even among those devoid of medical and clinical background. Death is accepted readily by Filipinos as a fact of life albeit containing significant meanings as far as anthropological repercussions and theological implications are concerned. Rather than technically defining death, we will examine how death propels into action the Filipino practice of *pakikiramay* as dramatized in the various rituals, actions and meanings attached to it and how it could serve as an inculturated way of understanding salvation.

Pakikiramay as Integral Part of the Filipino Death System

In order for us to draw out intelligibly the Filipino expression of being saved, it is necessary to situate *pakikiramay* within the context of the Filipino culture. We have experienced for example, when I was prevented by my elders from going to the wake of a family friend simply because he was 'still grieving or mourning' at that time. Here we see that grief and mourning and their manifold expressions are shaped by culture. There are sets of cultural codes that need to be acted out and expressed in symbols by the whole community – both by the bereaved and by those who condole with them. Since culture shapes the way a person expresses his or her grief, every culture, in a way, creates or is called upon to create "its own death system." Robert Kastenbaum describes the death system as consisting "of a composite of rituals and beliefs by which the society attempts to cope with death."[14] Death becomes a stimulus whereby the community is called upon to react with its set of codes and rituals. The set of ritualized actions in response to death constitutes the death system. It points to "the interpersonal, sociocultural and symbolic network through which an individual's relationship to mortality is mediated by his or her society."[15] A death system is characterized by *components* and *functions*. *Components* include people (the deceased, the bereaved family, the community, funeral director, clergy and Church

[13] C. S. Song, *Theology From the Womb of Asia* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 26.

[14] Lewis Aiken, *Dying, Death, and Bereavement* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1985), 105.

[15] "Death System – Components of the Death System, Functions of the Death System," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.death reference.com/Da-Em/Death-System.html.

ministers, etc.), places (house of the deceased, cemetery, Church, etc.), times (funeral day, memorial day, etc.), objects (will, death notices, sympathy cards, etc.), and symbols (black as color for mourning, taboos and beliefs associated with death, etc.) *Functions* of the death system include warnings and predictions, preventing death, care for the dying, disposal of the corpse, social consolidation after death, making sense of death and retribution (how a society, for example views death penalty and warfare).[16]

From here, we may observe that the concept of death system is very much related to the human need for ritual which "confirms and strengthens social identity and people's sense of social location... and is an important means through which people experience community."[17] Anthropologists agree that it is in the experience of death, more than any other, that the human need for ritual is more deeply expressed:

> ... when individuals undergo the rites of separation from the world of the living, of transition from the living to the dead, and finally of reincorporation into the world of the dead. Concurrently, there is the need to ritually assist the survivors of death through their period of grief and back into the everyday routines of society.[18]

The efficacy of a society's death system is determined when it is able to discharge well its functions the core of which is to protect its members.[19] For example, when a death system is fully functional, the society no longer understands death as a subtraction of one individual member but rather "it can also challenge society's ability to hold itself together, to assert its vitality and viability after death's raid."[20]

Emile Durkheim presents a very graphic picture of the way a community ritualizes the death system:

> When someone dies, the family group to which he belongs feels itself lessened and, to react against this loss, it assembles. A common misfortune has the same effects as the approach of a happy event: collective sentiments are renewed which lead men to seek one another

[16] Robert Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, and Human Experience* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International Publishing Group, 1991), 58-73.

[17] Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 50.

[18] Michael Kearl, *Endings: A Sociology of Death and Dying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 95. See also Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, 59. Cohen uses Gluckman's argument that rituals ease tension and that "their very institutionalization and codification is testimony to the capacity of the established order to contain and defuse disorder."

[19] Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, and Human Experience*, 62-63.

[20] Ibid., 66. See also Kearl, *Endings*, 93. Kearl notes that when society institutes ritual actions connected with death it aims "to minimize death's disruptiveness – even possibly taking advantage of its functionality – social systems have evolved ways to dampen its shock."

> and to assemble together. We have seen this need for concentration affirm itself with particular energy: they embrace one another, put their arms round one another, and press as close as possible to one another. But the affective state in which the group then happens to be only reflects the circumstances through which it is passing.
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> Not only do the relatives, who are affected the most directly, bring their own personal sorrow to the assembly, but the society exercises a moral pressure over its members, to put their sentiments in harmony with the situation. To allow them to remain indifferent to the blow which has fallen upon it and diminished it, would be equivalent to proclaiming that it does not hold the place in their hearts which is due it; it would be denying itself. A family which allows one of its members to die without being wept for shows by that very fact that it lacks moral unity and cohesion: it abdicates; it renounces its existence. An individual, in his turn, if he is strongly attached to the society of which he is a member, feels that he is morally held to participating in its sorrows and joys; not to be interested in them would be equivalent to breaking the bonds uniting him to the group; it would be renouncing all desire for it and contradicting himself.[21]

This ritualization, as Durkheim describes, can very well serve as our jumping board to the phenomenologico-hermeneutical exploration of the Filipinos' expression of *pakikiramay*:

> The Filipino practice of offering sympathy to the bereaved by offering masses and prayers, sharing condolences, keeping vigil, sending flowers and helping in any other way to lighten their grief.[22]

It should be noted, at the outset, that *pakikiramay* is a highly nuanced term. Although it is now generally used in multifarious ways and expressions, nevertheless it is still limited within negative experiences of loss or sadness brought about by pain, suffering and especially bereavement (death). Thus Andres' description (or definition) limits *pakikiramay* to Filipino rituals surrounding death, which is very

[21] Barry Ulanov, *On Death: Wisdom and Consolation from the World's Great Writers* (Missouri: Triumph Books, 1996), 58-59.

[22] Tomas Andres, *Dictionary of Filipino Culture and Values* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 1994), 126-127. It should be noted that the thesis uses the Filipino rendition of *pakikiramay* in an inclusive and 'representative' sense. Different language groups may have different words to express the same meaning as the one described by Andres. In Bikol, for example, the word *'damay'* is present as a root for the literal translation of *pakikiramay* as *pakidumamay*. Ilokanos use *'makipagrikna'* with *'rikna'* as the root word literally translated as 'sympathy'. The Cebuano and Ilonggo rendition *pag-unongay* has *'unong'* as root which is still the literal equivalent of the Filipino word *'damay.'*

understandable since Filipinos use the expression *nakikiramay ako!* directly only to experiences of death (grief and bereavement) and only indirectly to terrible loss, suffering and other sad or negative experiences. Filipinos hardly use *nakikiramay ako!* to express oneness or sympathy in happy or successful moments.[23] Thus, as a general description, *pakikiramay* is a value expressed in negative experiences.[24] Jocano describes *pakikiramay* as "the norm governing behavior in *times of crises*....It reflects the high premium we give to sentiments in time of need."[25]

> Those who show no concern about others in times of crisis are generally regarded as *walang pakikiramay* (no compassion). Among friends and relatives, the transgressors are ostracized. In the neighborhood, people talk about them. Reciprocally, no one will sympathize, assist or condole with them in their time of need.[26]

If we apply the description of a death system to the definition, we could already glean from it the components and functions of *pakikiramay*. *Components* of the definition include the agent, the Filipino, the recipient of *pakikiramay*, the bereaved and actions involved (offering sympathy, offering masses and prayers, sharing condolences, keeping vigil, sending flowers, and helping in any other way); while the *function* is clearly stated as 'to lighten their grief.'

As a Filipino practice, *pakikiramay* is not just one person's act towards a bereaved person or family. Rather, as an expression of the Filipino death system, it is the action of the whole community as it experiences the effects of death even of only one of its members. Thus, too, moves "from a purely individual concern to a larger context, understanding the role of death and dying in the maintenance and change of the social order."[27] This is an important point for consideration because not only do Filipinos express *pakikiramay* as a community but also the formation of Filipinos in the practice of *pakikiramay* involves the whole community.

Albeit implicitly, one may observe in Andres' description the Filipinos' readiness to accept the reality of death which immediately moves them to re-act to the occurrence of death. To accept death's reality does not mean, however, denying the shocking or revolting face of death. Even within the Filipino culture, whatever

[23] Filipinos would rather say *nakikiisa ako* (I am one with you) or *nakikisama ako* (I join you) when expressing oneness in times of joy and success.

[24] An entry of the word '*pakikiramay*' in the Google Search Engine reveals that almost all searches contain allusions or relations to death, tragedies and other negative experiences (Last Surfed: December 10, 2007).

[25] F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition* (Quezon City: Punlad Research House, Inc., 1997), 67.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

the cause of death, Filipinos frown at death's occurrence because of its effects either to the individual members of a family or to the society as a whole. Death may come to anyone, anywhere, and at anytime, but the Filipino practice of *pakikiramay* serves not only as a ready-made set of actions to be performed but also as an early warning to those who may be particularly concerned with dealing with an impending death in his or her family. This ready acceptance of the reality of death leads to a realization of one's own mortality or finitude as everyone's ordinary fate. Filipinos have a simple way of expressing this: *una-unahan lang yan!* (It is simply a matter of getting there first!).

We shall now set down the structure of *pakikiramay*.

Chronological Ritualization of *Pakikiramay*

We deem it best to re-construct chronologically the Filipino practice of *pakikiramay* so that a logical flow of ideas may also be more intelligibly drawn. We shall rely heavily on extant ethnographical studies of death, wakes, funeral and burial practices as may be available. We specially acknowledge the contributions of F. Landa Jocano and Fenella Cannell in the articulation of the Filipino rituals concerning death.[28] These two main sources are highly significant because they provide a relatively detailed account of events surrounding death and funeral rituals. However, it must be noted that an explication of *pakikiramay* will take the side of the Christian majority not only because most of the extant ethnographical studies regarding death rituals deal with the Christian majority but also because, as the thesis will argue, the Christian faith has greatly influenced the ritualization of *pakikiramay*. This does not mean, however, that *pakikiramay*, as a people's way of expressing condolence to the bereaved, is not present among non-Christians. It is simply that in this study, the Christian faith as a horizon of interpretation may not be bracketed in the re-construction of this Filipino practice.

What is consoling to know despite the varied expressions of death rituals among Filipinos is that certain basic and fundamental elements could still be discerned. The core traditional beliefs and rituals among Filipinos remain despite the onslaught of commercialism. The rituals surrounding death have been divided chronologically beginning with the time of the knowledge of someone's death.

[28] F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization: Traditional Kinship and Family Organization: Anthropology of the Filipino People III* (Quezon City: Punlad Research House. 1998) and Fenella Cannell, *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999).

1. The Announcement of Death

The ritualization of *pakikiramay* begins as soon as the death of a person is known. The announcement of death immediately commences *pakikiramay*. Although in some instances, some rituals are already in place as members of the family anticipate death in the deathbed as may happen in the case of a lingering illness of an older family member or even of a young person suffering for a long time from coma or any kind of ailment, the rituals surrounding *pakikiramay* formally begin as soon as death within a family is made known.

Jocano describes that "wailing and crying of those who are in the house" immediately follow the death of a person. These lamentations are expected as part of the ritual of death.[29] Cannell goes on to say that these lamentations constitute the primary mode of announcing death in the community "when eerie wails are likely to resound round the *barangay*."[30]

Except for those who die in hospitals where the physician's certification of death is the official information of death, the awareness of someone's death happens almost immediately for Filipinos. In cases of natural death as in the one caused by a lingering illness, as soon as somebody dies, one of the family members, usually someone at his or her deathbed contacts the relatives in case they are not around at the deathbed. Only afterwards is death announced to the rest of the neighborhood. "If the crisis is foreseen, relatives will be sent for, and the house will be full of the person's family at the time of (sic) death."[31] "Telegrams will be sent immediately to summon home children working in Manila, or other close relatives who are not at home."[32]

As we have mentioned above, any form of death comes as a shock. This is true even in cases involving death after a lingering illness. To mitigate the detrimental effects of shock, the role of the announcer of death is highly important especially in tragic cases such as accidents, military encounters and even suicide. The announcement of death follows a very prudent manner. The right to know of the death belongs first to the family members and only from them may the news spread outwards. Proper authorities know this very well so much so that in cases of tragic deaths the dead persons' names may be withheld by the police or rescuers and other responding agencies until the closest family members have been notified first.

[29] Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 146.

[30] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 143. See also Karen Pagampao, "A Celebration of Death Among the Filipino," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://bosp.kcc.hawaii.edu/Horizons/horizons_1999/celebration2.html.

[31] Ibid., 141.

[32] Ibid.

When death is not immediately known to the closest kin, the task of the announcer is often a difficult one and given to persons who are deemed competent to relate the news without endangering the life of the person to whom the information is to be announced. This is true especially when the person to whom death is to be announced is suffering from a delicate illness such as cardiac ailment, the announcement of which may induce or indirectly cause his or her death. The first thing an announcer of death should prevent is any untoward incident that may cause another death in the family. The degree of difficulty is increased the closer the relation of a person is to the deceased.

We see therefore that the community is already involved as early as the announcement of death, often beginning from the nearest of kin of the deceased and extending to the elders of the community who may or may not be relatives of the bereaved family. A prudent announcement of death may even involve some careful advice from elders in the neighborhood. In some instances, the task of announcing the death to relatives of the deceased may even be given to elders in the community who, although distant relatives, are nevertheless deemed to be competent enough to announce the death prudently to relatives of the deceased.

At this stage, *pakikiramay* comes in the form of mitigating the effects of shock that arises from knowing the death of someone. For example, relatives will accompany the members of the bereaved family in the identification of the dead person as in the case of tragic accidents and will be a shoulder to cry on as soon as they recognize their dead.

The significance of the role of elders in the expression of death rituals as early as this stage is also to be seen in the way it cautions family members in order to prevent other deaths as will be seen in the lamentation ritual:

> During the lamentation and kissing ritual, members of the immediate family are cautioned not to let their tears 'fall on the corpse.' Informants believe that this will make it difficult for the dead person to continue his journey to the land of 'afterlife' (*kabilang buhay*). Also, it is believed by many informants that those individuals whose tears fall on the body of the corpse 'will soon follow him to the grave.' To prevent this from happening, wailing, shouting, and other forms of expressing grief are allowed but care is taken that no teardrops fall on any part of the dead person's body.[33]

[33] Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 147.

From the announcement of death, when *pakikiramay* is immediately propelled into action, the community – relatives, neighbors, and the elders – will be very conspicuous in the home of the deceased, each with his or her particular part to play.

2. During the Wake

As soon as the death of someone has been announced and known by the community, *pakikiramay* begins its full swing. Even if the bereaved family may still be in shock by this time (causing some kind of paralysis from thinking and acting) initiative from the neighborhood will enable the death system to be activated. People from the neighborhood immediately arrive to help in various ways which include among others cleaning the house of the dead, setting up the *tolda* (usually an improvised tent extending from the roof of the house of the deceased and set up using bamboo poles and tarpaulin), making the coffin (especially among the poor who may not have financial resources to purchase one from a funeral shop or in the case of a child's death where a coffin is specifically made to suit the corpse's size), attending to the bereaved family, accompanying the bereaved family to the funeral parlor for the embalming of the dead, and the like.

Jocano provides some details of the preparation of the corpse before the wake:

> As soon as the person dies, the corpse is dressed. The body is laid on a bed facing the improvised altar which is constructed for the prefuneral rituals. His hands are crossed over his stomach and a small cross fashioned out of the *palaspas* (palm leaf blessed during Palm Sunday) is held between his palms. A candle is placed over the right arm of the deceased. One member of the family lights it and then blows off the flame. This ritual signifies, according to informants, that the family has allowed the spirit of the deceased to go "on a journey to the land of the dead." Coins are placed above the eyelids in order to keep the eyes closed.[34]

[34] Ibid. As mentioned above, the rituals mentioned by Jocano are those of Catholic practices. This is understandable considering the vast majority of Filipinos are Catholics. Moreover, these rituals are highly to be seen among rural folk. What is to be noted, however, is the fact that, even if most of these practices have been relegated to commercial funeral experts (funeral parlors), the key beliefs are still held by the community. Thus, immediate family members and elders are required to be present in the funeral parlor should the preparation of the corpse be relegated to funeral experts. Besides, since many of the funeral experts are also Catholics, they readily give in to the demands and requests of the family members. They may thus not do anything contrary to popular beliefs and practices.

As soon as all these things have been set up, when the corpse has been cleansed and prepared for viewing, the wake begins. Cannell describes the commencement of the wake:

> Meanwhile, in all but the poorest of families the body will have been embalmed and laid out with hired funeral furniture in the upstairs of the house by a commercial embalmer. Bamboo poles and tarpaulins are used to form a temporary roof which extends the house at the side or the front, and a black sign bearing the dead person's name is written up on a prominent part of the structure.[35]

We should have noticed that as soon as death has been confirmed, the next phase involves the preparation of the dead. Nowadays, with the commercialization of funerary rites, most of the people will yield the cleaning and preparation of the dead to the services of a commercial funeral establishment. Many years before, we have explicitly observed the community aspect in the preparation of the dead, especially in the case of poor families where people contribute various skills in the making of the coffin, in cleaning the corpse, in making paper-flowers to decorate the place where the remains will be laid for public viewing, etc. However, although commercialization may have surrendered most of these to funeral experts, people are not prevented from helping in whatever way they can. The preparation of the *tolda*, for example, is a case in point. The erection of the extension of the house's roof to cover even the yard is made possible through the initiative of the neighborhood. People would cut down some of the bamboo poles from a neighbor's yard or borrow them from others who would be more than willing to accede to the request. As Jocano pointed out above, *pakikiramay*, although something expected from people during this time remains voluntary and "reflects the high premium we give to sentiments in time of need."[36] There would be no reasons not to accede to requests. Everybody wants to contribute in whatever way he or she can. This is formally expressed in Filipinos way of saying: *Andito lang ako/kami kung may kailangan kayo*. (I/We am/are here in case you need anything.).

While men prepare the *tolda*, women prepare the place where the coffin will be laid for viewing. They would write the names of the bereaved on purple ribbons, create decorative paper-flowers, assist the bereaved in procuring black pins and black dresses (or white depending on family sensibilities), assist in cooking for all those who help and perform other chores. Meanwhile, elders who are sometimes immediate relatives of the bereaved are always beside the bereaved family, especially with the widow or orphan, to assist them in whatever rituals the community adheres to.

[35]Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 141.
[36] Jocano, *Filipino Value System*, 67.

During the wake, the immediate family members take turns in keeping vigil, as Jocano tells us:

> When everything has been prepared, the immediate family members of the family keep vigil alternately. The nearest kin, either a sibling or a child, is requested to sit beside the body (*namamangkay*) in order to receive the contributions or *abuloy*. Another member of the family is assigned to record the *abuloy* that visitors give.[37]

The wake is a highly-developed picture of *pakikiramay*. In it are the concrete expressions of compassion, sympathy and empathy:

> In theory, a wake demands an all-night vigil, but in practice when wakes extend over as much as a week, the close relatives will snatch a few hours' sleep each night. Even so, I have never seen the last guests leave a wake before one or two in the morning, and in fact there is a strong if unverbalised imperative not to leave the bereaved family alone with the corpse for the hours of darkness, but to fill the house with light, noise and activity, while the visitors in turn must be sustained with drinks and snacks. Inevitably, though, the family will be grey and exhausted by the day of the funeral.[38]

When the body of the deceased has been laid in a conspicuous part of the house, people, beginning with relatives, congregate to view the dead. With this follow other concrete manifestations of *pakikiramay*, expressed in so many ways as: physical presence, *abuloy*, verbal expressions, help in the house, prayer vigils, and the like.

The most concrete spiritual expression of *pakikiramay* is personal presence. A wake is called a *lamay* the root word of which (*damay*) is the heart of *pakikiramay*. Those who come to the wake say *Nakikiramay ako/kami!* (literally: I am/We are grieving with you!), complete with physical expressions such as embrace and lamentation.[39] Death in its manifestation of loss, brokenness and separation is met and hopefully relieved with presence, support and sympathy. In *pakikiramay* expressed during the wake, this is shown in the way relatives of the bereaved would

[37] Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 147.

[38] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 142.

[39] The root word of *pakikiramay* is *'damay.'* A careful analysis of *pakikiramay*, however, points to a deeper meaning than 'being with' or 'suffering with' as the English sympathy may express. That only those who have gone through an experience of grief and have recovered from such may express *pakikiramay* points to the more genuine meaning that the thesis aims to draw. *Pakikiramay* is thus closer to the meaning of the English 'encouragement' whereby one stands beside a suffering person not to share with him or her the suffering he is also experiencing but 'to strengthen him or her.' People may not be able 'to strengthen' the suffering if they are not strong or have not been strengthened themselves.

not leave the widow alone lest she wallow in grief.[40] Those who go to the wake may inquire from the widow or any immediate family member the manner of death. The immediate family members often relate stories surrounding the last days or hours or minutes of the deceased and even connect these to premonitions they experienced before the death of their loved ones.

Stories people tell regarding the life of the deceased are an important feature of the wake. People at the wake often tell stories about the deceased as Cannell observes:

> Bicolanos do not value the dramatic expression of relieving of grief, but they do think it natural for the experience of bereavement to be often talked about and asked about. The question I asked people about their bereavements were almost never reluctantly answered; but they were answered with calm, sometimes even with smiles; the strong emotions they described were usually conveyed not so much by tone of voice as by the content of the story itself, and by the idioms of mourning and mediated separation between the living and the dead...[41]

This ritual often has value in the way it somehow explains meaning of someone's death thereby minimizing or mitigating the shock that the bereaved family feels, especially in the case of tragic deaths.[42]

Abuloy or monetary contribution is the most concrete material expression since a wake entails financial expenses on the part of the bereaved family. Death not

[40] "In the gathering of community at a funeral, the essential connectedness of our lives is revealed. While we have been robbed of relatedness and are threatened with brokenness, through coming together to remember and honour the person who has died, we affirm the vitality of our bonds with others. We support the bereaved mother, bringing our presence and perhaps gifts of food and practical help, to sustain and comfort her. There is solace in community, in the mere presence of others connected to the loss. There is solace in withstanding the power and violence of grief together. As the legacy of a lifetime is made explicit through the eulogy, we grasp both the spoken and unspoken bonds which support and connect us in our daily existence." See Graeme Clark. "To the Edge of Existence: Living Through Grief," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:http://www. phenomenologyonline.com/articles/clark.html.

[41] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 142.

[42] "To grieve is also to dwell in reminiscence and memories. Often, we do so in the presence of others. It is partly through our conversations with family and friends, and sometimes with people we hardly know, that we "make sense" of the death of a loved one. As we tell our story, we do our reckoning with the legacy bequeathed to us. It is through sitting with others, recalling the good times and the bad that we shape our changing relationship with the other and move through grief. By dwelling here, exploring the meanings of our loss, our self-reflection is deepened. We define and discover ourselves in the context of our attachment to the other and to the legacy we have been left." See Clark, "To the Edge of Existence: Living Through Grief," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www. phenomenologyonline.com/articles/clark.html.

only robs the family of somebody who earns for the family but is, in itself, a very costly ritual and which, for so many families would be very difficult to get through without the help of the neighborhood.[43] Even for those who may expect monetary benefits from the government (as in the death of a government official, SSS members, soldiers, police personnel and the like) they may still need money to defray daily costs pending the approval of funeral benefits from government institutions.

Ordinarily, the funeral expenses are not paid immediately and the period of the wake may provide the bereaved family opportunity to collect as much money as needed to defray the cost. While the length of the wake may entail more expenses, this also provides a lot of opportunities. The length of the wake is dictated not only by the needed time to wait for relatives who may be in the cities, provinces or abroad but also by economic reasons. Small time gambling which generate additional 'income' may be tolerated by the bereaved family.[44] People may even be suggestive of its toleration if only to help the bereaved family. The *tong*, a voluntary and minimal share of the winnings that players in the gambling allot, undoubtedly, helps the bereaved family in so many ways.[45]

Although, the length of the period of wake is determined by practical reasons, the most common of which is to provide as much time needed for relatives and even distant friends to gather for the funeral,[46] this may not, however, be prolonged unduly without the advice of experts especially as they (experts) determine the number of days a corpse may be safe for public viewing.

The period of wake also becomes the venue for closest kin to gather and talk about issues surrounding the death of the person such as: the manner of interment, (whether inhumation or cremation); the manner of spending for the funeral arrangements (whether the more affluent family member assumes everything or there will be equal shares among siblings); and settling of property disputes as may arise in cases where the deceased has left properties with or without a will.[47]

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[43] "For most Filipinos, dying may already be considered a luxury. But when death in the family comes (as it always comes unexpectedly), it is almost a luxury that most Filipinos cannot do without." Yna Soriano, "Dying for a Cost," *Philippine Post Magazine* (November 2001), retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.philpost.com/ 1101pages/dying1101.html.

[44] Ibid. "In urban poor communities, *saklaan* or card betting is resorted to for fund-raising. Some even place their dead and tables for the *sakla* players right in the middle of the street."

[45] In recent times, there had been abuses regarding this as, for example, in the cases involving syndicates conducting wake for a deceased in order to generate money from gambling.

[46] "The family usually holds a wake that can last from three to seven days, depending upon the family's decision or if they are still awaiting the arrival of family members from overseas." Cathy Guballa, "Grief in the Filipino Family Context," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web:http://www.indiana.edu /~famlygrf/culture/babaoguballa.html.

[47] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 142. Cannell also observed that "a death will almost always provoke property disputes... if a parent has not allocated a property division during their lifetime..."

As in the announcement of death, the role of the elders in the traditioning of rituals surrounding death is very much felt during the period of the wake. Cannell provides a vivid description of the many taboos that the community needs to be prevented from doing or beliefs that the community has to adhere to:

> Whether because of the influence of Teresita's elderly sister, family tastes, or because of Auring and Clara, many more *palihion* (taboos/ beliefs) were kept and spoken of than one usually observed in San Ignacio. From the moment of Teresita's death all mirrors were turned to the wall, and everyone was told not to wash or comb their hair until at least a night after the funeral. Children did not perform *bisa*, the usual way of showing respect by pressing an older person's hand to your forehead: and during the endless washing-up which accompanied the feeding of the visitors, plates could not be stacked up to drain. As usual in Bicol, no one was allowed to sweep the house while the body was still inside. All these things were to prevent there being 'others following after'; i.e. to prevent other deaths within the same house.[48]

Another death in the family is often viewed as caused by not following certain rules and guidelines surrounding death. Thus the elders' task of reminding the bereaved family of things to be done and cautioning them about taboos to be strictly avoided has this purpose in mind, namely, preventing other deaths within the immediate family and the community.

The bereaved family would expect a mammoth crowd on the last night of the wake. "The last night of the wake always draws the biggest crowd of people; even those who have paid one visit already should pay another if the dead person is close to them."[49] Closeness to the deceased is often a gauge of the visit. Thus, very close relatives even stay for the duration of the wake. Some people, however, put much importance on the last night of the wake so much so that they schedule their visit on the last night.

Even if the status of a deceased is gauged by the number of attendance during the wake, almost all wakes for the dead are teeming with people, who come to extend condolence to the bereaved family. Never mind if they come for gambling, because even their mere presence at the wake evokes a feeling of solidarity that the bereaved family needs to lessen the grief.

[48] Ibid., 146.
[49] Ibid.

3. In the Funeral and Burial

Although we have placed different headings to the stages, it is to be noted that the mourning rituals surrounding *pakikiramay* cannot be accurately divided into stages. *Pakikiramay*, after all, is a holistic cultural experience. In the case of the funeral, for example, there seems to be no clear demarcation between the last day of the wake and the funeral as far as the number of people in attendance and as far as tasks performed by each and every community member are concerned. For some cultures, though, the funeral service "is usually the centerpiece of the entire process."[50] In the Filipino context this is also true inasmuch as the funeral appears to be the climax of the whole death system. In the funeral, the rituals surrounding death, the separation between the living and the dead, and the affirmation of social organization are much more pronounced, as Jocano's description attests:

> On the scheduled day of burial, the corpse is prepared for interment. Relatives, friends and neighbors come to attend the funeral rites. Depending upon the arrangement with the town officials, the church and the cemetery caretaker, burial can take place either in the morning or in the afternoon. Funerary rites associated with bringing the corpse out of the house vary from village to village, or even from one family to another in the same village. On the whole, however, most informants agree that before the coffin is moved out of the house, the members of the family say the prayer for the dead. In some places, the coffin is not brought out directly through the main door; it is carried out of the window.
>
> The position of the corpse, as the casket is brought out, is an important matter which needs the careful attention of the members of the family. The head of the deceased must not face the direction of the door or of the window through which he is carried out; the remains of the deceased are carried out of the house feet first. In some places, the widow, children, or any member of the immediate family must not help carry the coffin out of the house. If this prohibition is not observed, the transgressors will become ill and die, following the deceased.
>
> As soon as the coffin is brought out of the house, a member of the family or kin group throws a pail of water over the stairs or window which the corpse has passed. This is said to "wash away the smell of death so that the living members will not follow or the house will not

[50] Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, and Human Experience*, p. 220.

> be haunted by the spirit of the dead man." The corpse is taken to the Church for the funeral mass and then to the cemetery for interment. Before the body is interred, small children of the deceased, if there are any, are lifted over the coffin seven times, starting from the left side to the right and back.[51]

Here we could see that the rituals about the separation of the living from the dead become more pronounced since it is during the funeral day that the deceased will be 'physically' separated from the bereaved family.

Cannell provides a similar and highly descriptive picture of the day of the funeral:

> On the following day (after the last night of the wake), the funeral car and the musicians will arrive at an arranged time. The car is usually an imitation of the white American Cadillac, often somewhat battered, but the musicians are local and almost always drunk. They comprise saxophone, trumpet, a Bicol variant on the trombone, and drum, always playing the same sad but pompous march tune for every funeral....Funeral processions (*dapit*) walk from the barangay to the town center for the Requiem Mass: this takes about three quarters of an hour and is a slow, hot business. After the Mass, the procession then walks again to the *Kampusanto*, which is situated outside the town, for the burial. Unless given a special fee affordable only by the wealthy, the priest never comes to the burial.[52]

The ritual *dapit* or funeral procession from the house of the deceased to the Church and to the cemetery (*Kampusanto*) provides a fitting image of accompanying not only the deceased to the burial place (*huling hantungan*) but also the survivors, becoming an abundant source of solace and support.

After the burial, people who joined the *dapit* come back to the house of the deceased for a meal – *merienda* or lunch or *merienda cena* depending on the time of the interment. The long procession from the house to the church and to the cemetery will be tiring, even exhausting for some, so much so that it is customary for the family of the bereaved to prepare food for the people. Rituals will have to be observed by all who joined the *dapit* like washing of hands before entering the house of the deceased and finishing the meal within the house of the deceased. Bringing of food from the house of the bereaved family is proscribed in order to prevent other deaths in the community.

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[51] Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 149-150.
[52] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 143.

Close relatives of the bereaved family will stay in order to help in cleaning the house, washing dishes, preparing the altar for the *misteriohan* which, in some cases, starts in the evening of the day of the funeral.

4. In Periods of Transition

Kearl describes the funeral service as "the culminating rite of transition and heralds the period of incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead and the reincorporation of the bereaved into the world of the living."[53] This idea originated from Arnold van Gennep who described mourning as a "transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning)."[54] Metcalf and Huntington vividly describe this phenomenon:

> Kin are contaminated by death because they partake in the death. Each severed relationship leaves a living person that much reduced: a social and psychological amputee. Of all relatives, the widow is the most disfigured. Like the dead man, she must undergo a liminal phase during which her identity is readjusted. To a lesser extent, the entire community goes through a period of redefinition.[55]

Since death temporarily separates the bereaved family from the mainstream of society, the death system itself provides rituals by which the bereaved family is brought back or re-integrated into the life of the society. In *pakikiramay*, Filipinos observe this in the form of commemorations: after nine days of *misteriohan*, forty days and after a year (*babang luksa* or lifting of mourning).

In *pakikiramay*, we observe that the bereaved family is not left alone after the funeral. Cannell notes that "the observances relating to death are not completed with the funeral."[56] With the guidance of elders who assisted from the time of the announcement of death, the immediate family of the deceased will have to attend mass every day and hold a mystery for the dead in the evening.[57] This latter practice, done without the priest, is called *misteriohan* as Cannell describes: "these *misteriohan* are small, family affairs, and the priest is never involved."[58] Recited or sung in the afternoon or evening, *misteriohan* starts a day after the funeral and continues for nine

[53] Kearl, *Endings*, 99.

[54] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 147.

[55] Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 82.

[56] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 156.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

days (novena).[59] "Another mystery is held one month afterwards and then each year on the anniversary of the person's death."[60]

After undergoing these periods of transition, especially after the *babang luksa*, the bereaved family is re-integrated into the life of society. The rituals surrounding periods of transitions thus function to gradually lift the mourning from the bereaved family. The lifting of mourning is graphically expressed in the wearing of normal clothes by the members of the formerly bereaved family.

The re-integration to the normal life of society is the core idea in the periods of transition. Just as the whole community accompanied the bereaved family in all the stages of mourning and bereavement so the community will also welcome them, albeit, now with a changed status (widow, widower, orphan, etc.) to the normal life of the community. When all these stages have been properly gone through, they are now capable of expressing *pakikiramay* to whomever will experience bereavement.

Significance of Key Practices

Having thus presented the rituals surrounding *pakikiramay* as practiced in the context of death among Filipinos, it is now incumbent upon us to distil significant elements that would enable us to argue how *pakikiramay* becomes a channel of salvation for the bereaved Filipinos. Here we see the significance of ritualization where societies provide acceptable ways for people to behave in a disturbing situation or life crisis such as death.[61] In this way, the over-all significance of rituals surrounding death is aimed towards society's life and functions.

Most anthropologists point out that "social customs associated with burying and mourning the dead serve a variety of purposes."[62] Among the key purposes anthropologists name are: disposal of the body; help to the deceased in afterlife activities; and re-affirmation or re-arrangement of the surviving social group.[63] Stephenson simplifies this into society's two basic tasks in the face of death: (1) removal of the physical remains which serve as a health threat to the group, and (2) presentation to the group of an understanding of death that will reintegrate the social

[59] Some families, however, begin the *misteriohan* even during the period of the wake usually coinciding with the first night of the wake.

[60] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 156. Most would do this, however, during the 40th day of the deceased as Christians pattern the soul's rising to heaven to the Ascension of the Lord forty days after the Resurrection. See Cathy Guballa, "Grief in the Filipino Family Context," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.indiana.edu/~famlygrf/ culture/babaoguballa.html.

[61] Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck, *Letting Go: Caring for the Dying and the Bereaved* (London: Anchor Press, 1982), 61.

[62] Ibid., 87.

[63] Ibid.

group and assist in allaying the terrors awakened by the presence of death.[64] These two purposes can be further simplified into (1) as directed to the deceased; and (2) as directed to the survivors.

In what ways may *pakikiramay* be a channel of salvation to the bereaved person or family or community? We shall see this in the examination of the purposes of *pakikiramay*:

1. *As Directed to the Deceased* –
   Disposal of the Corpse and Sending off the Deceased

   a. *Disposal of the Corpse*

A very concrete purpose of the funeral process as directed to the deceased is the disposal of the body of the deceased. Despite the differences in ritual expressions, all cultures have this aim in the funeral process – the disposal of the corpse.

> The body, once a vital and loved person, has suddenly become a corpse which represents decay and rot – a thing to be abhorred. A funeral ceremony allows society to rid itself of the corpse, while retaining a respectful attitude toward the deceased person.[65]

In the case of Filipinos, as perhaps also evident in other cultures, the respect towards the deceased person remains a great factor even in the aim of disposing the corpse. The wishes of the deceased, as may be indicated in the will, are almost always followed.

It is no longer within the scope of this thesis to discuss in great detail the manner by which the remains will be disposed. It would be enough here to mention the main purpose of this ritual which is the disposal of a threat to the health of the community. The decomposition of the body calls for its disposal. Even the length of wakes is oftentimes determined by the necessity to dispose of the corpse immediately.

   b. *Prayers for the Deceased*

Here we find the faith in the Resurrection and communion of saints fully applied and adhered to by Filipinos. The Filipino Christian's belief in Jesus Christ, who died, was buried and is resurrected provides the core of all the liturgical rituals that are performed. The Rosary, masses for the dead, *misteriohan*, and the like all point to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from death as providing hope for the bereaved family and the whole community.

[64] John Stephenson, *Death, Grief, and Mourning: Individual and Social Realities* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1985), 198.

[65] Ibid., 199.

By thus praying for the deceased, Filipinos believe that the dead are now in the hands of God.

2. *As Directed to the Survivors –*
Mitigating the Social Effects of Death

That the community addresses the rituals surrounding death first of all to the dead person is understandable owing to the fact that Filipinos have a high respect even for the dead person's body. However, the main thing about the rituals is that they are not addressed towards the dead person but to the survivors, the bereaved family in the first place and the community at large. St. Augustine has this to say about funerary rituals:

> Wherefore all these last offices and ceremonies that concern the dead, the careful funeral arrangements, and the equipment of the tomb, and the pomp of obsequies, are rather the solace of the living than the comfort of the dead.[66]

Stephenson further remarks that "the funeral ceremony seeks to restate the image of death held by the society's members, to define death in such a way as to comfort the living."[67]

We can mention here at least four functions of the funeral rituals as directed towards the survivors: *(a) to achieve separation between the living and the dead; (b) to prevent other deaths; (c) practical help towards the bereaved; and presence and the re-affirmation of social organization.*

a. To Achieve Separation Between the Living and the Dead

In some ways, the community may view the death as pollution. Hence it is important to make demarcations between the living mourners and the deceased. Van Gennep explains that "during mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead..."[68] To betray this ritual is to invite confusion whereby the dead come back to the world of the living and cause harm and death. Cannell calls this the 'pity' of the dead:

> In most cases, though, the visits of the dead to those they love cannot be prevented in advance, and they are always likely to cause sickness and death. Babies wear amulets to guard against the inappropriate attentions of their dead grandparents and great-grandparents.

[66] Kearl, *Endings*, 97.
[67] Stephenson, *Death, Grief, and Mourning*, 199.
[68] Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 147.

> Anyone, adult or child, can be made sick by the 'pity' of their forebears, and anyone who struggles or cries out in their sleep should be wakened at once, as they may be suffering from *om'om*, a dream in which a dead relative asks you to go with them, which can prove fatal.[69]

Since the "dead pull the living towards them,"[70] the rituals and taboos guide the actions and behaviors of the bereaved family as a way of resisting death's pull.

More often than not, the world of the bereaved family revolves around the house of the deceased. The bereaved family or any of its members is prevented from expressing *pakikiramay* to other bereaved families before the end of the period of their grief. The bereaved family is separated from the community temporarily and will only be re-integrated after undergoing the rituals of lifting of mourning. One may view this in terms of death's pollution to people and that "those who come in contact with death are often seen by others as somehow tainted by death, and thus they are to be avoided."[71] A more positive look, however, may view this in terms of the incapacity of the bereaved family to express *pakikiramay* while in the period of mourning. Elders may not allow the bereaved family to express *pakikiramay* to other bereaved families not only because they are 'polluted' by the death in the family but also because they (bereaved family) have not been lifted out of their own mourning and thus are still incapable of really bringing solace and comfort to the other bereaved family. Should they insist on going to the bereaved they may bring to the bereaved family their own grief and pollution caused by death rather than true solace and comfort.

The role of the elders in the community (usually relatives of the bereaved family) is highly significant in this area for they help the bereaved in slowly accepting the reality of finitude and death. *Wala na siya* (he/she is not here anymore) or *Sumakabilang buhay na!* (he/she has gone to the next life) are just some examples of how they relate the separation of the deceased from the living survivors.

When this function of *pakikiramay* is achieved, the survivors are in a position to progress towards re-integration into society. When the dead is separated from the living, as happens during the funeral and burial, there is a formal recognition of the changed status: "The deceased is recognized as no longer in the world of the living but now has a new status as one of the dead."[72] On the other hand, the survivors, although still among the bereaved, may now begin to slowly re-integrate with society, albeit, also with a changed status (widow or widower, orphans, etc.). Despite this

[69] Cannell, *Power and Intimacy*, 154.
[70] Ibid., 163.
[71] Stephenson, *Death, Grief, and Mourning*, 202.
[72] Ibid., 199-200.

changed status for the bereaved, *pakikiramay* has an inherent mechanism whereby the bereaved will not forever be in the state of liminality.[73] After undergoing the periods of transition (especially after the lifting of mourning – *babang luksa*), the bereaved family is formally welcomed back to the society. After undergoing the periods of transition, the bereaved is considered 'free' from the pollution caused by death and is now 'free' to associate with the rest of society even to express *pakikiramay* to whomever may be bereaved.

b. To Prevent Other Deaths

The consoling presence of the relatives aims among others at the care of the survivors so that they may not be weakened by the grief. Thus, relatives remind them once in a while to eat and have enough sleep especially if the wake is unduly prolonged. Practical benefits of this include the health and well-being of the bereaved family. Without the consoling presence of the relatives, undue mourning may result in the death of the bereaved, as may happen, for example, to a grieving widow.

Despelder and Strickland present a vivid picture of this:

> Although the idea that severe grief can somehow damage the heart has persisted since ancient times, Colin Murray Parkes notes that 'the fact that bereavement may be followed by death from heart disease does not prove that grief itself is a cause of death. When stress is not dealt with adequately, however, disease can result... It is important, therefore, to be aware of stress and its potentially harmful effects, and to take constructive steps to manage the level of stress in one's life. *Social support may be the key to helping the bereaved mitigate the potentially harmful effects of grief with respect to heightened mortality or morbidity following loss.*'[74]

As a corollary to the separation between the living and the dead, *pakikiramay* aims to 'prevent' other deaths. We have seen this as early as the announcement of death when the role of the announcer, a highly critical responsibility, may even be given to a non-immediate family member as long as he or she is capable of announcing the death to the family without detrimental effects, i.e., to induce or cause death to the recipients of the news of someone's death.

[73] Without belittling the intensity of grief in some cases, as for example, tragic deaths of loved ones and those clamouring for justice for a prolonged period of time, the lifting of the mourning period (*babang luksa*) actually helps the bereaved to accept gradually the loss and thus enables them to re-orient their life without the deceased.

[74] Lynne Ann Despelder and Albert Lee Strickland, *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2004), 265 (emphases added).

Moreover, the taboos within Filipino culture provide a very important function as regards death. Elders guide the bereaved towards acceptable societal actions in order to prevent other deaths. The community is well aware that a series of death within the family may be too devastating so much so that taboos and beliefs need to be faithfully and seriously taken into consideration. A series of deaths in the family is often attributed by elders to flaws or 'disobedience' to prescribed beliefs and proscribed taboos.

c. Practical Help Towards the Bereaved

Pakikiramay would remain an empty sentiment from people without the concrete aids towards the bereaved in the form of *abuloy* or monetary contributions to help the bereaved family and through prayers that help uplift the bereaved family from their state of grief.

1) Abuloy and Other Material Contributions

Because of the high premium Filipinos give to sentiments in time of crisis, generosity among Filipinos is nowhere more greatly expressed than in the case of death of a person. Close relatives of the bereaved family would be more than willing to share in whatever way they can. It would be a very bad case if one were to remain unsympathetic to the bereaved family. Those who are unable to give monetary contributions would willingly offer their services as we have seen in the setting up of *tolda*, making of coffin, cooking in the house, and doing other menial chores.

As mentioned above, death rituals are among the costliest for the Filipinos and thus there is really a need for solidarity among the members of the neighborhood and community. It is, therefore, not surprising that the *bayanihan*[75] spirit among Filipinos is immediately aroused in cases involving death of a member of a community.

Material (especially financial) contributions, moreover, are significant help towards the bereaved family who may have to start life anew especially when the deceased was a breadwinner for the family. One may imagine, for example, the death of a young military officer, who is killed in an ambush. Such death is doubly tragic for it robs the family not only of an important member but also of someone who is supposed to support the family financially.

[75] "The whole term *bayanihan* refers to a spirit of communal unity or effort to achieve a particular objective." See "Bayanihan," retrieved December 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayanihan.

2) *Prayers and Helps Towards Acceptance* of Reality of Death

Since death almost always comes as a shock, *pakikiramay* takes the form of helping the bereaved accept the reality of death. In the case of Filipino families, the presence of elders who guide the bereaved family towards acceptance of a hard reality is almost indispensable. The role of elders, as we have seen above, may even begin from prudently informing the family of the death of their loved one, especially in cases involving tragic accidents. The same group of elders may assist through prayers during the wake, and especially during the periods of transitions.

As elders, these people represent the victorious group, who have gone through the experience of grief and mourning and are now thus enabled to condole with those who presently mourn.

The prayers of the elders during the wake, *misteriohan,* or 40th day commemoration and the anniversary of the deceased revolve around the mystery of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some, if not most of the elders in the community are also trained catechists in the Parish where they belong. More often than not, they are also the ones who will contact the Parish priest and request him to say mass in the home of the bereaved or at least during the funeral.

It is also within this area that the presence of the clergy and ministers of the Church come into play. Masses offered for the repose of the dead help the bereaved family especially in a country where majority are Catholics. The more solemn the funeral mass, for example, the stronger is the belief of the community that the deceased could easily go to heaven. People who come to condole with bereaved families are quick to comment that parents who have sons as priests or daughters as nuns or religious sisters are very lucky since more often than not, daily masses celebrated in the house of the deceased and concelebrated funeral masses are considered highly effective in praying for the eternal repose of the dead. Thus, the more prayerful the atmosphere is, the easier it would be for the bereaved family to accept the reality of death and the more will they be able to lift themselves up from the state of bereavement.

a. Presence and the Re-Affirmation of Social Organization

For the Filipinos, as also the case in most cultures, death is a cutting off of relationships. *Malagutan ng buhay* for the Filipino is also "to be cut off from relationships."[76] *Pakikiramay,* then, comes as a shock-absorber to mitigate death's

[76] Benigno Beltran, *The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1987), 226.

effects to the web of relationships in the community. Stephenson, albeit speaking about the function of funeral ceremony, points to the benefits of a death system towards the larger society:

> The group's values surrounding death may be strengthened. The solidarity of the group is expressed by attending the ceremony. As the group expresses support for those who are suffering, it also promotes a reciprocity in future times of need... In this manner, an equilibrium is achieved in the group which has been assaulted by death. The larger social group reorients itself to life as bears witness to the existence of death.[77]

One would observe that *pakikiramay* as directed to the bereaved is two-dimensional: (1) as an action coming from the community, *pakikiramay* serves to 'encourage' the bereaved; and (2) as a formation process, *pakikiramay* serves to gradually uplift the bereaved from the state of mourning and gradually (through transitional periods of stages) to re-incorporate them into the community. In the first dimension, the bereaved may be simply considered recipients of *pakikiramay*. The community helps the bereaved family mitigate the shocking effects of death. Concrete material help mitigates the financial and material loss; consoling words related to the inevitable reality of death enable the bereaved to understand death as part of finitude that everyone is destined to meet someday; presence mitigates the loneliness caused by death, and so on.

However, in the second dimension, *pakikiramay* not only serves to strengthen the bereaved thereby preparing them for any experience of bereavement in the future but also prepares them to extend *pakikiramay* to whomever may be bereaved in the community. Death separates not only the deceased from the living but also separates (marginalizes) the bereaved from the community. The marginalization of the bereaved family is only temporary and is owing to the belief that the death of the person (deceased) has somehow 'polluted' them with death itself. By undergoing the rituals surrounding *pakikiramay* the marginalized bereaved family is gradually re-integrated and re-incorporated into the normal life of the victorious or cleansed community. A successful re-integration would mean that the family is now also capable of expressing *pakikiramay* to whomever is also besieged by the shocking effects of death. In this way, albeit indirectly, people who express *pakikiramay*, indeed the whole community, become teachers who train the bereaved not only in dealing with their own dead and their attempts to cope with death's meaning but also in preparing them for future expressions of *pakikiramay*.

[77] Stephenson, *Death, Grief, and Mourning*, 202-203.

Just as the first dimension comes as a voluntary and generous act on the part of the community, the second dimension will also come as a voluntary and generous act on the part of the now victorious family. In fact, the way a formerly bereaved family expresses *pakikiramay* to bereaved individuals or family/ies becomes a living proof of their victory over death, albeit simply expressed in the lifting of mourning. ❑