



The Virus and the Famous: Narratives of Religious Experience by Selected Filipino Celebrities Who had COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed our lives, whether that be for ordinary citizens or those occupying higher social status. The experience of sickness and suffering however, can give meaning and can pose a challenge to our religious beliefs and practices. This article explores in depth the experience of battling COVID-19 by selected Filipino celebrities who are a significant part of the Filipino culture and are admired by the general public. This article draws inspiration from their narratives about how they faced, struggled, and recovered from the dreaded COVID-19 disease. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the transcripts of their interview revealed three major themes: total dependence on the Divine, therapeutic social support, and sickness as purposeful and transformative. These themes may contribute to future research in the discussion of how valuable are the life lessons during such a crisis, most especially from popular personalities who are considered “models” by the public.

Keywords COVID-19 · Celebrities · Religious experience · Divine being · Social support · Purposeful sickness

Introduction

Lights, Camera, Action! This is the traditional cue to the actor at the beginning of a take during filming. In the Philippines, popular personalities in show business, politics, religious groups, and other institutions create a strong connection to the public in general. Through various media platforms, the personality and message of these celebrities are imparted which can influence either positively

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or negatively any individual. Celebrities can have a tremendous influence on the knowledge we retain, the attitudes we adopt, and the decisions we make, including those that affect our health (Hoffman et al., 2017). Internet celebrities thrive through this connection because users often crave a social network for support. Internet celebrities efficiently grow audiences through their personality and create a community of like-minded individuals (Gilmore & Fleming, 2018).

Filipinos have their favorite celebrity in various fields and usually consider them as their model—worthy of admiration and respect. They serve an important purpose in their everyday life such as entertaining them during dull moments; source of inspiration to do better in their studies and work; and motivate them toward the attainment of a meaningful life. This treatment then places the “models” with a bigger responsibility to perform at their best so as not to disappoint their followers.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, everything has changed. The everyday life and sociological ways of many Filipinos are greatly affected by the continuous lockdowns and health restrictions imposed by the government. One aspect of human interaction that became evident was how the religiosity of Filipinos was expressed in response to the pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis triggered significant changes in various religious traditions concerning their respective practices and traditions that have to conform to the absence of face-to-face gatherings (Baker et al., 2020). Just like the experience of many people worldwide, religious creeds and beliefs not only allow us to understand but they influence the meaning of many events occurring in everyone’s life. Faith or broadly understood spirituality is a force that helps to overcome the mental crisis as well as facilitate adaptation to the disease or the restrictions resulting from it (Kowalczyk et al., 2020). The faith of many Filipinos was tested but remained powerful at all costs.

It is popularly known that Filipinos are indeed “religious” people as the country is heavily influenced by Christianity. The Philippines proudly boasts to be the only Christian nation in Asia. More than 86% of the population is Roman Catholic, 6% belong to various nationalized Christian cults, and another 2% belong to well over 100 Protestant denominations (Miller, 2021). The country is currently celebrating this year, 2021, its 500th year of Christianity which commemorates the arrival and foundation of the world’s largest religion. This deep-rooted influence of religion on Filipinos played a vital role in facing the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

The country’s popular celebrities were not exempted from this catastrophe and it is for this reason that this paper is conceptualized. It was my goal to unearth their deepest beliefs, practices, and realizations after having contracted COVID-19 and how their religious convictions played an important role in their process of healing and recovery. It is important to note how the public looks up to them as a source of inspiration since they occupy a higher level of social status due to their popularity and/or excellence in their respective fields. As emphasized by Adler et al. (2021), it is especially important to focus on individuals who have greater power than the general public to shape the course of the pandemic and the public good in general. Thus, their avid followers and the public in general, who have placed them on a pedestal, can hopefully learn from their life-threatening experiences. Their testimonies then can be

a validation that faith—a deeper relationship with God—can make a lot of difference in overcoming any crucial obstacles in life.

The Religiosity of Ordinary and “Popular” Filipinos

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-colonial religion of the Filipinos was already an integral and essential part of their racial identity. The indigenous religious beliefs of different tribes is expressed through *animism*—the belief that objects, places, living, and non-creatures possess a distinct spiritual essence. Early Filipinos believed that everything, including their ancestors, fields, rocks, seas, mountains, and other natural phenomena, were inhabited by spirits known as “Bathala,” “diwata,” or “anito” which are more powerful than them. Through an intermediary of the priest known as “babaylan,” sacrifices and rituals are being offered to intercede for healing in times of sickness or request for a bountiful harvest (Reyes, 1985). Aside from their social structure, they believed in an invisible society that coexists with them and is inhabited by the spirits of their dead ancestors, deities, and lesser gods. Pre-Hispanic Filipinos honored these spirits with rituals and feast days because these supernatural beings were considered responsible for the significant events in their life (Almocera, 2005).

When the Spaniards arrived and colonized the country, there was a shift from an indigenous to a more structured and “Christianized” spirituality. There was the adoption of new beliefs and practices due to the persistent evangelization of foreign missionaries. Filipino Catholics have learned to draw strength from a wide variety of Catholic practices and attitudes to help them manage daily challenges and hardships. For the majority of Catholics, their religious faith encompasses a wealth of formal and informal options for seeking God’s help, guidance, and miracles (Lagman et al., 2014).

Being religious is tantamount to saying that they are *maka-Diyos* (pro-God). *Maka-Diyos* refers to a value that firmly connotes faithful obedience to the will of God. It is manifested in two ways—firstly, in their prosocial behavior which is characterized by a strong link toward helping in-group and close others (Batarra, 2015), and secondly, in their quality of relationship with God through active participation in various rituals, practices, traditions, and other worship activities (Cordero et al., 2021). It is evident for many Filipinos how prosocial they are especially during times of calamities. Despite the negative impact of many calamities such as numerous typhoons, strong earthquakes, volcano eruptions, and currently the COVID-19 pandemic, these always lead to Filipinos initiating relief operations for the sake of fellow and needy victims. They never fail to show the *bayanihan* spirit which remains intact even in extreme challenges. The *bayanihan* is derived from the Tagalog root word “bayan” which means town or nation. It is an ancient Filipino custom or trait characterized by mutual help and concern which has become the backbone of family and village life (Ang, 1979).

Regarding the Filipinos’ quality of relationship with God—the utmost belief in the power of prayer; the firm adherence to the Church’s doctrines, teachings, and beliefs; and the active participation in various rituals, practices, sacramental

celebrations, and other religious activities are living testament on this religiosity. There are about a hundred different fiestas and festivals celebrated in the country every year. Every town, every city, and every province honors different patron saints, which means every fiesta celebration is unique and distinct (Philippine Primer, 2019). Examples of these popular celebrations are the Feast of the Black Nazarene, *Sinulog* Festival, *Ati-Atihan*, *Dinagyang*, *Santacruzán*, Marian Feasts, and many others.

The religiosity of selected Filipino celebrities creates a strong impact not only on their respective followers but on the public in general. In their respective fields, they carried out the essential values that are supposed to be embodied by authentic models. There are different theories involved in why an individual can make a strong attachment to celebrities; one of which is the so-called parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction (PI) is defined as a one-way relationship with a person, most often of higher status, whom you know intimately but who hardly knows you, if at all. Different researchers describe PI as an “imaginary relationship” between media users and figures and can be extended to celebrities of all types (Stever, 2009). This theory can have a positive outcome wherein a follower can improve his/her well-being by making the celebrity the source of filling one’s social needs. This is true, especially for followers who do not have established social interaction interests or skills (Jarzyna, 2020).

Another explanation of this phenomenon is reflected in the “uses and gratifications theory” (UGT). It explains the reality of seeking specific media celebrities to achieve self-fulfillment (Severin & Tankard, 1997). In UGT, people use media relationships to relieve boredom, fight loneliness, or give focus and direction to their lives. Through mediated relationships, they usually find romance, understanding, inspiration, communion, and identity that provide these needs (Stever, 2009).

The Popular Idols of Filipinos

Throughout Philippine, celebrities have been part and parcel of significant events in their respective fields which have been witnessed by the majority of Filipinos. In politics, Ninoy Aquino was a prominent journalist who became a senator. As a political rival of President Ferdinand Marcos, he was arrested during the declaration of martial law and endured 7 years of imprisonment. He was then exiled to the USA for 3 years and assassinated in 1983. His death started a cluster of events and ignited the flame of love for the country by Filipinos. This is where another popular personality rose to the occasion—Jaime Cardinal Sin.

The Catholic Church’s local head Jaime Cardinal Sin led the way for a peaceful revolution known as EDSA People Power. The success of the nonviolent struggle of the Filipino people for freedom and justice put an end to the 20-year-old Marcos dictatorship (Gorospe, 1988). Through the courageous act of convincing the public to come to EDSA and asking to support the protesters through prayers for those who could not attend, the Cardinal awakened the spirit of solidarity among Filipinos. It was such a fundamental inspiration for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation.

In local show business, Coco Martin's drama series entitled *Probinsyano* is considered the longest-running drama series on Philippine television, with more than 1,400 episodes aired as of 2021. This actor is idolized by many because of his outstanding performance and amicable personality on and off the camera. Actress Angel Locsin also occupied such stardom. She was included in the list of *Asian Heroes of Philanthropy* for raising funds to help COVID-19 frontliners in the country.

Other remarkable celebrities that brought pride and honor to the country are Lea Salonga (Music—who had major roles in hit Broadway musicals such as *Miss Saigon* and *Les Misérables*, and voiced some Disney movies); Manny Pacquiao (Sports—the only eight-division world champion in boxing; Miss Universe winners—Gloria Diaz (1969), Margarita Moran (1973), Pia Wurtzbach (2015), and Catriona Gray (2018); and just recently, Hidilyn Diaz (Weightlifting—first Filipino Olympic gold medalist). These excellent personalities undoubtedly provided joy and inspiration to every Filipino, most especially during difficult times.

Data and Methods

Data

The testimonies of six selected famous Filipino celebrities form the main data and the subject of discussion for this research. This purposive sample was chosen based on the common characteristics—have contracted COVID-19 as validated by the official positive test result from the virus; have undergone quarantine and treatment toward total recovery; have openly exposed and narrated their battle against the disease through various forms of media; and are publically popular based on the huge number of followers in their respective fields as attested by social media accounts, media appearances, and public perception. The respective transcripts of the interview were extracted from different sources such as news reports, online magazine feature articles, and official social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) of the participants themselves which are open for public information. The sample includes two showbiz personalities, a

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Religion	Occupation
Iza Calzado	Female	38	Born again Christian	Actress/TV host/model
Christopher de Leon	Male	64	Roman Catholic	Actor/politician
Alex Gonzaga	Female	33	Born again Christian	Vlogger/actress/TV host/entrepreneur
Luis Antonio Tagle	Male	63	Roman Catholic	Cardinal/prefect of the congregation for the evangelization of peoples
Bernadette Sembrano	Female	45	Roman Catholic	News anchor/reporter/TV host
Bo Sanchez	Male	54	Roman Catholic	Lay preacher/author/entrepreneur

cardinal, a vlogger, a news anchor, and a lay preacher. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants and followed by a brief description of their COVID-19 journey.

Method

This study involved qualitative research with an in-depth analysis of participants' interview transcripts so as to achieve the aims of this research. It utilizes one of the popular data analysis tools in qualitative research called *interpretative phenomenological analysis* (IPA). The IPA is a qualitative approach that aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience, and it produces an account of this experience in its terms rather than one prescribed by preexisting theoretical preconceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2015). With this approach, the researchers are provided with the opportunity to reflect upon and understand the innermost experiences of the participants. What appeals to researchers in these diverse fields is IPA's explicit commitment to understanding phenomena of interest from a first-person perspective and its belief in the value of subjective knowledge for psychological understanding (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Aside from being a data analysis tool, IPA is a very fitting research methodology in the field of public health since it focuses on exploring and understanding the experience of individuals with particular health conditions in the clinical setting in order to inform physiotherapy practice and the development of services (Cassidy et al., 2011). It is important to note that the topic of this paper is primarily the experience of COVID-19 by the participants in light of their religious beliefs. Turpin et al. (1997) recommended that six to eight participants are appropriate for an IPA study as this size allows for examining similarities and differences between individuals. As mentioned, there are six participants in this study which is sufficient enough as an acceptable IPA sample. The transcripts of the interview had undergone the four stages of IPA which are presented and described in Table 2. These IPA guidelines are formulated and popularized by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014).

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were performed under the guidance of the institution's Research Ethics Review Committee which followed the checklist involving the category of Internet Research. There is no need to make the participants' identities anonymous since all of them are local celebrities and/or popular personalities who voluntarily agreed to interviews through different media platforms: online, broadcast, and print. Their transcripts of interviews were published on these different platforms and have been widely circulated online in the public domain. Their testimonies are shared with everyone for the reason of informing their fans/followers and the public in general concerning their current condition. The information that they have provided also served as a reminder to all regarding the importance of practicing health protocols regularly during this

Table 2 Basic guidelines of IPA and brief descriptions

Stages of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)	Brief descriptions
Stage 1: Multiple reading and making notes	Close reading of the transcript several times to immerse in the data; Making notes about one's observations and reflections about the interview experience or any other thoughts and comments of potential significance; Highlighting distinctive phrases and emotional responses
Stage 2: Transforming notes into Emergent Themes	Reflecting on the source material to transform notes into emerging themes; Formulating a concise phrase (themes) at a slightly higher level of abstraction which may refer to a more psychological conceptualization
Stage 3: Seeking relationships and clustering themes	Looking for connections between emerging themes, grouping them according to conceptual similarities, and providing each cluster with a descriptive label; Dropping of 'unfit' themes; Listing of major themes and subthemes, and relevant short extracts from the transcript
Stage 4: Writing a narrative account of the study	Taking the themes identified in the final table and writing them up one by one; Describing each theme and exemplifying it with extracts from the interview, followed by analytic comments from the author/s

COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the author also gained informed consent by sending communication letters online to the source Web sites, which includes the verified social media accounts of the celebrities. All the sources were also properly cited and credited in the references section.

Results and Discussion

Appendix 1 presents the synthesized results of the data analysis using the IPA as a tool (see Appendix 1). Figure 1 visually presents the major themes arising from the conducted celebrity interviews (see Fig. 1). As mentioned, the original transcripts of the interview from the six participants are analyzed using the stages mentioned above. The first column shows a short extract from the transcript with some highlighted words/phrases implying that these are of greater significance. Before highlighting these words, it is important to note that these excerpts were read multiple times for familiarity. The Filipino language responses were already translated into English online. The second column contains the exploratory notes and comments. This is where relevant insights and thoughts are formed to describe the highlighted words. Emerging themes are found in the third column. These themes are words/phrases that express what the notes/comments represent in general. The last column then is the synthesis of what the whole transcript is trying to convey by clustering the emerging themes into major and minor (subthemes) categories. Non-relevant

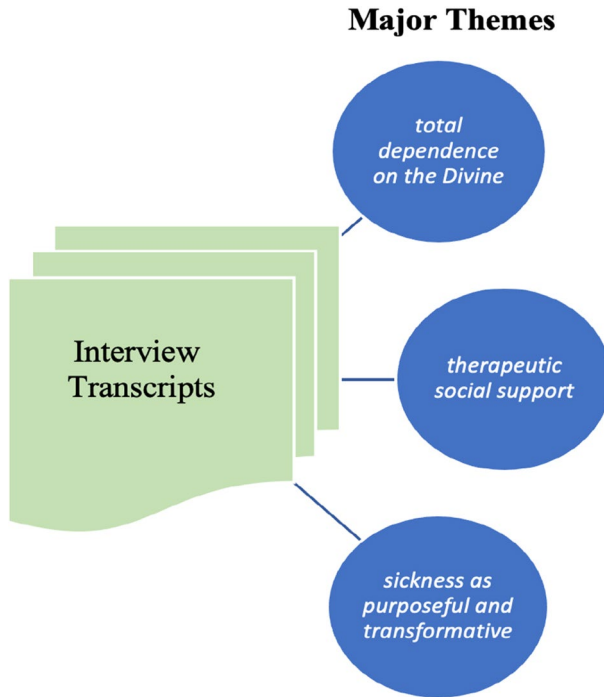


Fig. 1 An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the major themes arising from the transcripts

themes are excluded. The major themes then are rephrased appropriately, described comprehensively, and used as the focus of discussion since they are identified as the most significant themes that were drawn from the data.

The IPA resulted in three major themes which were extracted from the transcripts of the interview. It should be noted that the minor themes are also important in the analysis since they contribute to tracing the overall picture of the participants' experience. However, the major themes epitomize the concrete realities that describe the issue as well as the situation of the participants. The major themes include *total dependence on the Divine*; *therapeutic social support*; and *sickness as purposeful and transformative*.

Total Dependence on the Divine

I thought my life was over. In those cathartic moments when I surrendered to God everything, a very unexpected thing happened to me. I saw death's face and noticed I was no longer afraid. All fear was gone. In its place was this profound trust in God's affection for me..." Sanchez (2021a).

Through our prayers and God's protection, I hope we survive all these trials. I was very prayerful. My prayers were more intense. "You gave me this. You have a purpose, go ahead." It's more of, just please spare the others. I think this will be an important reminder that after this, it should be a different life... It's not of my strength, it is all the strength of our Almighty God, who is giving it to me. ABS-CBN News (2020).

All the participants unanimously invoke the name of God during their battle against COVID-19. As implied from the transcripts of the selected participants, Sanchez highlighted that on the brink of death, surrendering everything to God took away that great fear and prepared him to accept anything, even death, since he felt the assurance that God will take care of everything. In the same way, de Leon unceasingly prayed for God's protection and depended that His strength will be the key to his own survival at that trying moment of his life.

In the perspective of contemporary social sciences, religion is characterized by a consensus of different ways which include: sharing the beliefs that constitute the body of doctrine of the group; participating in rituals and acts of devotion; acquiring religious information; experiencing changes or results in everyday life derived from the other aspects of religiosity; and experiencing direct contact with the ultimate reality (Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 2018). This "ultimate reality" basically points out the belief and intervention of God as expressed from the testimonies of the participants in this study. The presence of God is the recognition of a *transcendent* being who has the power to make a difference during a difficult situation. Koenig et al. (2012) support this claim by emphasizing that religion involves beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the transcendent, where the transcendent is God, Allah, Hashem, or a Higher Power in Western religious traditions, or to Brahman, manifestations of Brahman, Buddha, Dao, or ultimate truth/reality in Eastern traditions. The "religiosity" of the participants is seen here as their last resort of hope toward healing given the fact that the treatment of COVID-19 was not yet fully established since it was a newly discovered disease. Moved by their faith, entrusting everything to God in that crucial moment of their lives is one of the keys to survival. Thus, religion enables a realization that confidence in God's love may operate in tandem with the belief in God's guidance and involvement in daily lives and may alleviate the individual of the pressure of bearing the full burden of life's outcomes (Upenieks et al., 2021). The participants may have also realized that their "popularity" as local celebrities means nothing and is useless when placed in a near-death situation. This is where the idea of "dependency" comes into play. By necessity, critically ill patients admitted to intensive care units (ICUs) have a high level of dependency, which is linked to a variety of negative feelings, such as powerlessness (Yang, 2016). The popularity of these celebrities may bring them "power"—the capacity to be in control of any given situation, but in times of near-death experience, that power is stripped. As testified by Iza Calzado, one of the participants, "I came to that realization that, in life, all we need are the simplest and the most basic things when you're stripped off of everything, and when you're in a life and death situation...."

In recent years, interest has grown among sociologists of religion as well as sociologists of medicine about the plethora of alternative health therapies now consumed by Americans and prayer is one of these (Trier & Shupe, 1991). Prayer is an intimate act of communication to God, the Absolute, or any Higher Being which expresses one's total dependence. Praying is one of the religious/spiritual (R/S) practices that is commonly used by patients to cope with illness and other stressful life changes. It helps maintain one's faith at all times, whether it be done personally or as a community.

Positive outcomes have been identified regarding the power of prayer. In a literature review conducted on 12 studies, prayer was considered a positive factor in seven of these, and several positive effects of prayer on health were identified, such as: reducing the anxiety of mothers of children with cancer; reducing the level of concern of the participants who believe in a solution to their problem, and providing for the improved physical functioning of patients who believe in prayer. Prayer, thus, is a non-pharmacological intervention and resource that should be included in holistic care for patients' well-being (Simão, 2016). In addition, a large volume of research shows that people who are more R/S have better mental health and adapt more quickly to health problems compared to those who are less R/S. These possible benefits to mental health and well-being have physiological consequences that impact physical health, affect the risk of disease, and influence response to treatment (Koenig, 2012).

Therapeutic Social Support

I am very grateful to the many, many people who pray, assuring you that you are not alone, that's why I could say for the survival either mentally of those who go through this crisis this connectedness what we call dialogue is important, your existence depends on a rediscovery of the reality that you are not alone. Patinio (2020).

It is important to have friends who will continually check on you. Let's take one step at a time... Today is better than yesterday. Tomorrow will be better than today. We can survive this, don't be hard on yourself... My strength comes from the love and prayers that are sent to me. Sembrano-Aguinaldo (2021).

The significant role played by social support is the next major theme that the participants credited during their COVID-19 journey. Cardinal Tagle expressed his deep gratitude to millions of his fellow Filipinos who did not let him feel "alone" through their prayers and that the sense of "connectedness" assured him of the much-needed support as he deal with the infection. Sembrano also identified directly her source of strength which was no other than the love and prayers coming from other people, most especially those who do not know her personally. The realm of social support, which comes from the "kapwa" (other person), has contributed significantly toward their healing and full recovery as reflected in their testimonies.

The concept of “kapwa” is one of the essential components of Filipino virtue ethics. It is not merely a distinction between the self and the other as separate entities. Enriquez (1992) described “kapwa” as the collective values shared with the whole of humanity and the deep respect for the dignity and inherent worth of a fellow human being, and “humanness at the highest level.” This notion of connection toward others is also the common ground between the diverse doctrines and beliefs of world religions. Donovan (1984) pointed out that the Dalai Lama (the highest spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism) explained this commonality:

I maintain that every major religion of the world—Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism—has similar ideals of love, the same goal of benefitting humanity through spiritual practice, and the same effect of making the followers into better human beings. All religions teach moral precepts for perfecting the functions of mind, body, and speech. All teach us not to lie or steal or take others’ lives, and so on. The common goal of all moral precepts laid down by the great teachers of humanity is unselfishness. The great teachers wanted to lead their followers away from the paths of negative deeds caused by ignorance and to introduce them to paths of goodness.

The essential role of “kapwa” is thus a key point for rendering social support which can contribute to healing. Healing is described generally as the process of becoming sound or healthy again after getting sick. However, a broader definition of it is referred to the process of bringing together aspects of one’s self, and body–mind–spirit, at deeper levels of inner knowing, leading toward integration and balance with each aspect having equal importance and value (Dossey et al., 2005). This definition implies that healing does not only concerned with the physical and mental aspects of the person, freeing from a particular disease, but rather considers his/her “wholeness.” With this, healing then may not only come from the prescribed medicine and the treatment procedure by the physician but since it considers the “wholeness” of the human person, it can be achieved by taking into consideration the physical, emotional, and psychological/mental aspects. All these other aspects can be drawn in, by one way or another, through the provision of social support from the “kapwa.”

Social support is generally described as any process through which social relationships might enhance health and well-being (Leahy-Warren, 2014). It is extended by an individual through relationships with other individuals, groups, and the community. In the physical aspect, social support, whether from a valued individual or trusted group, has caused to enhance immune function and reduce the physiological consequences of stress. In 1905, Dr. Joseph Pratt, an internist from Boston, gathered a group of tuberculosis patients together to educate them about hygiene concerning their illness. This “support group” provided early evidence of the power of this group in physical health and healing (Towey, 2016).

In the Philippines, similar social support groups are established in major hospitals such as the Lung Center of the Philippines COPD Support Group which is aimed at the treatment of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), the Positive Action Foundation Philippines, Incorporated which is devoted to helping with the person living with AIDS (Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), and the Philippine Cancer Society (PCS) with 22 support groups that present information, provide comfort, teach coping skills, help reduce anxiety, and provide a place for people to share common concerns and emotional support, especially for cancer patients and their families (Philcancer, 2014). These sample groups do not only assist patients in their needs related to their disease but also offer regular counseling to relieve patients from the stigma of their condition. With this, the patients are motivated to manage well their chronic conditions by sticking to the treatment regimen and gained a sense of empowerment and hope for possible healing.

In terms of the emotional aspect, social support can offer empathy, concern, acceptance, or encouragement to the person who is undergoing any kind of crisis. Mentor (2015) called this linkage between the two aspects as socio-emotional which can span the spectrum of how people interact with others to how they manage communication or cope with adversity, and stress, establish a positive relationship, and the capacity to develop relationships with peers, oftentimes through communication. When a struggling person receives encouraging and motivating words from others, most especially from a relative or a person of authority, that person can feel unloaded from a heavy burden. The person realizes his or her value/worth, since special attention is freely given by the other party.

Social support also helps in alleviating the effects of emotional distress and can enhance self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to the love and respect for oneself that are generated by individuals based on self-evaluation and the perceived respect, support, and approval from others to function (Li et al., 2021a, 2021b). It can also help in establishing “attachment”—a secure emotional bond between people over time and space (Ainsworth, 1979). When this bond is settled, the person feels comfortable amid pain and suffering.

In the aspect of psychological/mental health, social support from different sources can buffer the negative effect of low levels of resilience on mental health, especially in a brand-new context, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is based on the stress-buffering model (Li et al., 2021a, 2021b). The stress-buffering model asserts that social support protects against or moderates the detrimental effects of life stress on mental health (Cohen, 2004; Thoits, 2011).

Resilience, on the other hand, is being adaptive to a stressful experience. Filipinos are known to be resilient by nature, and this is proven during the many natural disasters that have hit the country numerous times. On average, 20 typhoons visit the Philippines annually and leave trails of devastation in their wake which proves the very vulnerable position of the Philippines in terms of disaster vulnerability. These disasters do not only result in physical injuries and material damage but also psychological harm. Despite the country’s situation, the people keep their good disposition in everyday living (Ang & Diaz, 2018).

Social support may also come from the various activities offered by other individuals or groups that would help the patient divert his/her attention to these alternative

and fruitful “distractions” than just focusing on the sickness or the unfortunate situation. This support from others can help the patient minimize anxiety and thus, prevent falling into depression—a psychological disorder, with several implications for physical health as well, that has been seriously damaging human health in modern society (Chong et al., 2020). It usually happens when negative thoughts, ill feelings, and inappropriate actions become rampant and uncontrollable. In synthesis, Southwick et al. (2005) posited that positive social support of high quality can enhance resilience to stress, help protect against developing trauma-related psychopathology, decrease the functional consequences of trauma-induced disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and reduce medical morbidity and mortality.

Sickness as Purposeful and Transformative

The bottom line, it made me realize, in this pandemic, we should stop thinking about ourselves. We should start thinking about other people. It’s not about you, it’s about the people around you... Ganal (2020).

May I share? I live very differently today. Because I know that thread can snap anytime, for the first time in my life, it’s natural for me to live in detachment, humility, and sacrifice. When I wake up early each morning, I’m blown away by grace. I inhale and almost laugh. “I’m alive. That means You still want me to serve today,” I tell God, “I will lead the way...” Sanchez (2021b).

“There must be a reason behind this sickness and lessons to learn!” This statement of realization capsulizes the last major theme of the study. Gonzaga expressed the unconditional value of becoming responsible for one’s behavior, that each one of us must consider the effects of our actions not only on ourselves but most especially on the people around us. She highlighted the value of social responsibility after having discovered the purpose of contracting the disease.

On the same note, Sanchez vowed to continue his service to God and others by leading them to the right path in life. His outlook on life was transformed due to the near-death experience. Sickness is indeed an avoidable part of life but just like other kinds of human experience, it leaves us lessons regarding realities in life and all the more, hopefully, transforms us into someone better.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In the religious sense, health is characterized as having a life that is directed to God and that includes the goods and goals that are received and attained, respectively (Messer, 2011). Good health is a resource to support an individual’s function in wider society, rather than an end in itself. A healthy lifestyle provides the means to lead a full life with meaning and purpose (TFP, 2020). Disease or sickness, on the other hand, is an abnormal condition of an organism that interrupts normal bodily functions, often leads to a feeling of pain and weakness and is usually associated with symptoms and signs (Biology Online, 2021). The absence of disease, physical or mental, is generally proof of good health. In the same way, the absence of good health implies that the person is sick or has a disease.

Religion can provide things that are good for health and well-being, including social support, existential meaning, a coherent belief system, and a clear moral code (Eckersley, 2007). Given coping with one's illness, it can provide a reasonable framework to enhance coping resources, facilitate access to social support, and promote social integration (Siegel et al., 2007). Religiousness allows people to understand the meanings of events as part of a broader purpose or project, through the belief that nothing happens by chance and that events in life are determined by a superior force. This behavior can lead to personal growth, gain more wisdom, balance, and maturity (Dull & Skokan, 1995) if the superior Being is perceived as benevolent, loving, and compassionate; but if this is seen as a punishing act of a superior force who has determined everything about their life, then it usually worsens the condition of these patients. Thus, sickness is seen as purposeful given the religious beliefs and traditions of every member of the group.

The different religious traditions also considered sickness as a form of human suffering. Their respective perspectives reveal the central and enduring role that suffering is seen as an inevitable and inalienable part of corporeal existence. It is experienced by individuals and by groups and the suffering of one person impacts those around them, their families, and their communities. In each faith tradition suffering tends to be regarded as a disruption or disharmony—of the body, of the self, and, in South Asian traditions, of cosmological order (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016).

However, Christianity also highlights that suffering is not simply a natural consequence of sin but has an intrinsic value, that is, it causes transformation. During the celebration of the first World Day of the Sick on 11 February 1993, Pope John Paul II proclaimed: “In the light of Christ's death and resurrection illness no longer appears as an exclusively negative event; rather, it is seen as a “visit by God”, an opportunity “to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a civilization of love” (John Paul II, 1993) - which was based upon an earlier *Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris* (John Paul II, 1984). During this pandemic, those people experiencing fear, suffering, or illness often experience a “spiritual renewal” in which the development of spirituality will create a mature attitude based on truth and freedom (Kowalczyk et al., 2020).

What are these truths and freedoms all about? The truth is that sickness and death, like suffering, are a permanent part of life and will always be. The negative impact of COVID-19 is experienced worldwide and causing more people to suffer regardless of race, religion, gender, or societal status, anybody can contract the virus. Even if one is healthy until reaching old age, death will still come in due time. A mature attitude concerning freedom is described as realizing the limitations of our bodies as well as our actions. We are mortal beings and with this, “living each day as if it is our last” is an attitude worthy to have regardless of one's religious belief. The true essence of freedom is considering the effects of our actions not only on ourselves but on others. Suffering, then, as caused by sickness enables us to transform our deepest perspectives regarding the realities of life and motivates us to rehabilitate and turn away from evil, thus leading to renewal and conversion. For Christians, Cordero (2021) emphasized that the most significant reality is girded toward a good God who created us as ‘by nature’ to be good. The experience of suffering gives us the chance to go back and rediscover this goodness.

In addition, this theme of “sickness as purposeful and transformative” can also be associated with the noble work and sacrifice of healthcare workers (HCWs) during the pandemic. The majority of the respondents expressed their high regard and appreciation for these frontliners whose dedication to their everyday duties is worth emulating and it also brought a kind of transformation to them as well. The celebrities were able to realize there are indeed people who can ‘go beyond’ in performing their duties and even risk their lives for the good of their patients and public health in general. With the HCWs example, the sick can have a clearer understanding of the purpose of life and everyone can be transformed into having a renewed and meaningful perspective in life.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the small cohort size. On the other hand, since the data analysis tool utilized IPA, a small size of six is acceptable due to the in-depth nature of the qualitative analysis tool. The study also focused on local celebrities and some cultural factors that may be distinct from other foreign ones which had influenced their beliefs and behaviors in battling the dreaded disease. With this, the themes are not to be treated as general representations. Also, it may be difficult to determine if the same themes are also evident or will play a factor in other religious groups or atheists. The religiosity of the respondents may have been so evident wherein this may not be the same reaction for other patients/celebrities who are affiliated with other religious groups.

Conclusion

The discussion here is not comprehensive, and further research is needed especially concerning other relevant principles/theories involving how religious beliefs affect one’s disposition during a crucial health crisis. In the same way, more discussions are needed regarding the extent of influence celebrities have on their followers, most especially in terms of religious influence. Still, I hope that the narratives of experience by the participants in dealing with COVID-19, motivated by their religious beliefs, and coupled with the extracted themes—total dependence on the Divine, therapeutic social support, and the purposeful and transformative effects of sickness—are significant enough to contribute to this growing literature about how culturally famous celebrities faced such a crisis, which, in turn, can create a significant influence on their followers who always look up to them as “models” in society, thus worthy of inspiration.

Appendix 1

See Table 3.

Table 3 Synthesis of results using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Original transcript	Exploratory notes/comments	Emerging themes	Clustered themes
<p>Participant # 1: Iza Calzado</p> <p>Interview Transcript:</p> <p>Hello, everyone. It's been a while but I thought I'd update you all. I'm currently hospitalized for pneumonia and so, I was tested for Covid-19 and I've been waiting for the results for several days now... I did not know if I could have been exposed to someone who had COVID-19, but in the back of my head, I knew that there was a strong possibility that I might have it. The fear was there, but so was denial; I kept trying to downplay what was happening... It's been a challenging time for me but it cannot compare to the frontliners who have cared for me and to whom I am so grateful. My heart goes out to everyone in these trying times, especially those who risk their lives every day to care for their loved ones</p>	<p>Informs the public about one's unfortunate health condition</p> <p>Anticipates a positive laboratory result from COVID-19 due to symptoms</p> <p>Expresses gratitude for the great effort of frontliners in taking care of those who are sick during this crisis</p> <p>Gets confused why such sickness can be acquired by a healthy person like her</p>	<p>A feeling of accountability for public information regarding one's health condition</p> <p>Preparing one's self to battle the possible viral infection</p> <p>Recognizing the noble role of healthcare workers, especially during this pandemic</p> <p>Realizing that sickness is always a possibility and can happen to anyone despite one's good status in life</p>	<p>Major themes</p> <p>Sickness is purposeful and necessary for a deeper understanding of life's realities</p> <p>Human connection/support as an essential need toward recovery</p> <p>Realization on the mortality of life</p> <p>God takes away one's fear and initiates the process toward healing</p>
<p>Why me? I'm healthy. I'm young. And maybe that's why. And then immediately a voice says in my head, 'Why not?' That's when I kinda knew that I was being handpicked perhaps to experience it, understand it, have my realizations that are very necessary for life, and give me more purpose, perhaps... I was so shy to get a COVID test because I knew that the testing kits were few and far between. This was the first week, isn't it? I felt that if I went to the hospital and get tested, people might say they prioritized me because I'm an actress... all these things were in my head, and that's the last thing I wanted...</p>	<p>Does not want to receive any "special treatment" for being a famous celebrity</p> <p>Points out the "not so strict" policy of the hospital by letting the husband accompany her for some time</p>	<p>Believing in the equal/fair treatment of all patients regardless of social status</p> <p>Emphasizing the moral support coming from her husband that somehow helped a lot in handling the difficult situation</p>	<p>Minor themes</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Original transcript	Exploratory notes/comments	Emerging themes	Clustered themes
<p>I wasn't alone. I was patient #878. I think they started implementing really strict rules afterward... My husband was with me all throughout. When we got the test, it was like seven days after... for that whole time, they never asked him to leave. They just asked him to please wear PPEs. I was very happy that my husband was there... I was not in complete isolation because my test results did not come in until halfway through my confinement, which was why my husband was able to stay with me. I was too weak in mind, body, and spirit to do things on my own; I would have really struggled if he wasn't there...</p>	<p>Feels grateful and secured because of the husband's full support</p>	<p>Having developed the virtue of patience as time passed by</p>	<p>Noble work of healthcare workers</p>
	<p>Manifests the ability to endure the unfortunate situation</p>	<p>Appreciating the healthcare workers for being so responsible in fulfilling their job</p>	<p>Anxiety comes into play before and during COVID-19 infection</p>
	<p>Feels grateful for having been taken care of by good healthcare workers</p>		<p>Social status should not matter in receiving an equal opportunity for health care</p>
	<p>Expresses gratitude for the overwhelming support of family, friends, and even strangers</p>	<p>Reiterating the big help of human connection and support from the people who care about her</p>	<p>Health is indeed wealth</p>
		<p>Realizing the mortality of life, that, health is wealth</p>	<p>Optimism and hope are necessary virtues for health management during crucial moments</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Original transcript	Exploratory notes/comments	Emerging themes	Clustered themes
<p>When you're in the hospital, you take things one day at a time. There will be good days and there will be bad days—it is a roller coaster ride. I was fortunate to be in a good hospital with amazing doctors and nurses taking care of me. When I was in the hospital, I was not completely 'there,' I had my phone with me, but it was just too much for me to have to respond to people—I had so little energy at the time. My loved ones were constantly reaching out, but there was also an outpouring of support from strangers. There are still so many messages that I am yet to respond to, and I am trying my best to get to as many as I can, but I would like to take this opportunity to tell everyone who has been so kind that I am so grateful</p>	<p>Reflects on things that matter the most when put in a life and death situation</p>	<p>Optimism and hope are contributory elements in managing one's condition during crisis</p> <p>Highlighting the role of virtues in the battle against trials in life</p> <p>Showing concern for the sick and the healthcare workers through praying for them</p>	<p>Living a purpose-driven life</p> <p>Prayer is needed for the sick and their loved ones</p> <p>Social responsibility to prevent the spread of the virus</p>
<p>Thinks positively and remains hopeful despite some negative distractions</p>	<p>Realizing again the mortality of life</p>		
<p>Refers to love, respect, and health as important values amid the crisis</p>	<p>Hoping to live a purpose-driven life with the guidance of God</p>		
<p>Asks to pray for the sick and their loved ones, as well as for the medical workers</p>	<p>Appreciating God for another shot of life and being the source of direction in life</p>		

Table 3 (continued)

Original transcript	Exploratory notes/comments	Emerging themes	Clustered themes
<p>I came to that realization that, in life, all we need are the simplest and the most basic things when you're stripped off of everything, and when you're in a life and death situation... In the grand scheme of things, you know, you will always have that. And that's why it was so important for me to make sure that I would always come from an optimistic mindset and that I would be hopeful. If there was any negativity being thrown my way, I would power block it and have people help me power block all this negativity. And so, it was hard!" Love, respect, and listen to our bodies. Health is truly our greatest wealth."</p>	<p>Reflects again on the reality that life is short Feels determined to live out God's given purpose to her Thank God for another chance to live life to the full</p>		
<p>I am hoping you all can join me in prayer for those who are currently sick and their loved ones, for every person struggling to cope in these tough times. And most especially, for the medical workers who are doing their best despite the hurdles... This is the first time that I've had to face my mortality. It is a very humbling and enlightening experience. It makes you recognize the limitations of the human body; you realize that you are not exactly a superwoman even though you are trying to be one. I am now geared towards living a more purpose-driven life. Even if that was something I thought I was already set on, my experience made me even more determined to live out God's purpose for me and to make every breath count. I'm glad it wasn't my time yet</p>			
<p>Participant # 2: Christopher de Leon</p>			
<p>Interview Transcript: I even think that when I went to the hospital, I was like, "Wow, maybe I got the virus there." There were so many people lining up for the test. It took me the whole day. This is not special treatment because of who I am. I had to wait. Then there are which did not arrive so I had to wait for the next batch. It took me the whole day for that test...</p>	<p>Speculates where the virus was acquired</p>	<p>Pointing out the uncertainty of tracing where the virus was transmitted</p>	<p>Major Themes The essentiality of God's support in facing trials and the need for healing</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 2: Christopher de Leon

<p>Emphasizes that he did not receive special treatment during the laboratory test</p> <p>Implies that being a celebrity is not a ticket for an exemption to receiving proper health services</p> <p>Showing a lot of concern to a loved one</p>	<p>Human connection/support as an essential need toward recovery</p> <p>Sickness is purposeful and necessary for a deeper understanding of life's realities</p>
<p>Very shocking and unnerving. Fortunately, my wife's result is negative. She has a weaker immune system. That is what I am praying for, that my wife will be spared because this would be very delicate. I was praying 24/7</p>	<p>Minor Themes</p> <p>Social status should not matter in receiving an equal opportunity for health care</p> <p>Family/social responsibility to prevent the spread of the virus</p> <p>Self-care is a must to avoid the virus</p>
<p>Asks God's help to spare his wife from the virus</p> <p>Stresses that having been vaccinated does not guarantee total exemption from infection</p> <p>Reminds the need to be careful in socializing with others to prevent the spread of the virus</p> <p>Shares the changes in character as brought by the sickness</p>	<p>Seeking God's support in the crucial moment of his life</p> <p>Reiterating the need for social responsibility to prevent the spread of the virus</p> <p>Accepting behavioral transformation</p> <p>Noble work and sacrifice of healthcare workers</p>
<p>You have to be careful even after getting vaccinated. You can still get infected they say, but it wouldn't be as severe. Regardless, stay cautious, because you can get other people sick. You have to be wary and mindful of the people around you</p>	<p>Hope will always be there in due time</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 2: Christopher de Leon

<p>I've been more patient, more loving than anything else, nicer to situations. There's nothing to fear but fear itself. We can overcome this. I should be better after this. You try to fix the problems of your loved ones but of course, you cannot do everything by yourself. In times of crises like this, you have to balance yourself and your loved ones</p>	<p>Hopes to end the battle in due time</p> <p>Cites the need to balance one's self and the sake of loved ones</p> <p>Feels grateful for the hard work of medical professionals</p>	<p>Remaining hopeful that everything will be well</p>	<p>Living a purpose-driven life</p>
<p>I was allowed to thank all the doctors and nurses who have been taking good care of us. We have to thank them. Through our prayers and God's protection, I hope we survive all these trials. I was very prayerful. My prayers were more intense. "You gave me this. You have a purpose, go ahead." It's more of, just please spare the others. I think this will be an important reminder that after this, it should be a different life. There should be a purpose for all of these things. It's not of my strength, it is all the strength of our Almighty God, who is giving it to me</p>	<p>Appreciating the healthcare workers for being responsible for fulfilling their job</p> <p>Expressing being hopeful again that all shall be well with God's protection</p> <p>Believing that all these trials are happening for a reason</p> <p>Appreciating God's support and grace of healing</p>	<p>Acknowledging God in prayer as the source of strength</p>	

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 2: Christopher de Leon	Credits God for the recovery and strength in his fight against the virus	Major Themes	Social concern/responsibility as a necessity for public health
Participant # 3: Alex Gonzaga			
Interview Transcript:	<p>We did contact tracing as a family. Daddy, Mikee, Sofie and I, were the last people who were tested positive in the family. We tested all our household helpers and staff here too and they were all negative. We are very surprised and sad 'coz my mom was positive too since she had a conversation with those who got positive. But luckily, she was asymptomatic. We don't want to blame people that's why I didn't divulge all the details... After a couple of days, Mikee and I started showing symptoms also. The best thing was we did quarantine right away even if we were negative. After a week, we did a retest and true enough we were positive already</p>	Establishing the concrete details of how the virus was spread in the household	
	Gets shocked to finding out that her mother was infected with the virus too	Feeling worried about her mother getting infected, too	God heals and brings enlightenment toward full understanding and recovery
Manifests concern to protect the identity of the virus spreader	Showing social concern by not shaming others despite the one responsible for the virus spread	Showing social concern by not shaming others despite the one responsible for the virus spread	Sickness is purposeful and necessary for a deeper understanding of life's realities
Avoids the spread of the virus by undergoing self-quarantine	Showing social responsibility by not becoming a virus spreader	Showing social responsibility by not becoming a virus spreader	Minor Themes

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 3: Alex Gonzaga

<p>To be honest, when I shoot outside, sometimes I'm not careful especially with my mask which is also a mistake on my part... My parents never leave the house. My dad will leave for very important matters only or if they will visit their apo. When Mikee visits us, he made sure he is safe and tested. The problem is when you're inside the house you think you're in a safe place and you put your guards down. The main point of my vlog is to remind us that there is a pandemic... I am guilty of being reckless too especially when shooting outside... I just really wanted to reiterate that we can always cancel those kinds of activities during the pandemic. I hope we can all learn from this. And if you saw me before being reckless with my mask and shoots, I am sorry. I've learned from this</p>	Admits being careless to protect oneself and others during work	Neglecting the importance of health protocols	Virus infection contact tracing
Cites family members' ways of preventing the acquiring of the virus	Asserting how family members observe health protocols	Concern for the family's health	
Points out that we are indeed in a pandemic situation and so there is a need to be cautious	Emphasizing again that health protocols are a must during this crisis	Practicing minimum health protocols is a must during this pandemic	
Apologizes again for being careless	Realizing the shortcomings regarding the proper observance of health protocols	Getting sick can cause a great negative impact on life plans	
Refers to the COVID-19 sickness as the cause of disruption for all that had planned	Manifesting great disappointment regarding the sickness	Noble work of healthcare workers	
Asks God for clarity why such unfortunate things happened	Feeling the need for enlightenment from God for such a great trial	Negligence can cause great tragedies in life	

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 3: Alex Gonzaga	Appreciating God's grace of healing toward recovery	Health is indeed wealth
<p>On day 3 of quarantine, I started to realize that we got COVID and all our family plans and life milestones will be delayed. I'm trying to talk to God... All of my plans did not materialize. I want to get married with my family and some invited friends but because of this senseless thing, we got COVID. I have to change my plans. I want to get married but it is not possible and I am not sure anymore if I will continue my plans or not...</p>	<p>Feels grateful for having recovered from sickness and credits it to God</p>	<p>Reiterating the importance of health protocols</p>
<p>We survived COVID, that is why we are very blessed that we survived it and won. God healed us. "I'm very, very happy that we are one of the many people who survived COVID as a family. Consult doctors. Take good care of your body, boost your immune system, take lots of vitamins, always gargle, take a lot of rest, and start quarantine immediately once you know that a person you've come in contact with is positive. The bottom line, made me realize, in this pandemic, we should stop thinking about ourselves. We should start thinking about other people. It's not about you, it's about the people around you...</p>	<p>Enumerates the necessary ways to practice when one gets infected with the virus</p>	<p>Thinks that during this crisis, one must show great concern for others and not to one's self</p>
Participant # 4: Luis Antonio Tagle		
Interview Transcript:		Major Themes

Table 3 (continued)

<p>Participant # 4: Luis Antonio Tagle</p>	<p>I'm very thankful to God that I was asymptomatic. The doctors told me if you are asymptomatic for 2 weeks, then we can presume that you are already negative. In my case I am very grateful to the many, many people who pray, assuring you that you are not alone, that's why I could say for the survival either mentally of those who go through this crisis this connectedness what we call dialogue is important, your existence depends on a rediscovery of the reality that you are not alone</p>	<p>Conveys gratitude to God for being asymptomatic despite getting infected</p> <p>Expresses his gratefulness too for the prayers and support of others</p> <p>Cites again the importance of support from others</p>	<p>Crediting God as a major source of strength and support</p> <p>Emphasizing the importance of connectedness to others as a factor for healing</p> <p>Emphasizing again the importance of connectedness to others as a factor for healing</p> <p>Asserting that isolation is a major trial to battle during sickness</p>	<p>God as the major source of support/guidance</p> <p>Human connection/support as an essential need toward recovery</p> <p>Sickness is purposeful and necessary for a deeper understanding of life's realities</p> <p>Government's lack of support to aid the suffering people</p> <p>Minor Themes</p> <p>Reflecting that sickness is purposive which brings us closer to God</p>
<p>Getting out of the quarantine I realize that really for you to survive you need a deep, deep sense of interconnectedness, a deep sense (because) your enemy will be the feeling that you are isolated, that you are a threat now, that you don't even trust yourself, that you are a danger to yourself and you could be a danger to others and then you feel like it is better to isolate yourself and then the isolation also bothers you but it is the sense that you are interconnected, you are connected to God</p>				

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 4: Luis Antonio Tagle

Thinks that isolation also paves the way to be more connected to God	Findings the good effects of the pandemic in terms of enlightening the government leaders to do their duties well	Government's mismanagement of priority to warfare matters than public health
Sees the pandemic as an opportunity to be free from economic poverty	Stressing the fire need for government's support to aid the suffering people	Hopelessness and poverty of ordinary citizens during crisis
Points out the lack of resources that affect so much the people	Reminding the government to prioritize health and livelihood programs and not warfare matters	Compassion and love toward others
Calls out for the government's action to prioritize health services and not weapons	Insisting the need to fight the disease and not our neighbors	Peace and reconciliation amid the pandemic
	Hoping that everything will be back to normal	Christians must be true to their identity as caring children of God
	Finding again the positive results of the pandemic such as peace and reconciliation	

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 4: Luis Antonio Tagle

<p>Could the COVID-19 crisis lead to a jubilee of forgiveness of debt, so that those who are in the tombs of indebtedness could find life – untie them, release them? Many are losing their jobs, especially the daily wage earners. The lack of resources and poverty could be a tomb of many people. While we don't have enough masks, there are more than enough bullets. We don't have enough supplies of ventilators but we have millions of pesos, dollars, or euros spent on one plane that could attack people! Could we stop producing weapons... get out of the tomb and spend the money for real security...have a permanent ceasefire? In the name of the poor, let us release money for real security, education housing, and food</p>	<p>Reminds that the enemy is the pandemic and not fellow humans</p>	<p>Reminding all Christians to be true to their identity as caring children of God</p>
<p>The COVID 19 emergency urges all of us to help save lives. Our common foe is the infection, not other human beings... And we hope that when the pandemic is over (and we hope soon), that the ceasefire would continue as a way of life. This crisis could become an occasion for peace and reconciliation if we, as one human family, have the humility to accept the folly of discrimination, prejudice, domination, and violence and also the humility to choose acceptance, respect, compassion, service, and peace". Christians believe Jesus' promise to be with us always as God's peace, love, and life. He is our hope. The Church invites all Christians and people of goodwill to promote peace through little and simple acts of caring or by a compassionate presence</p>	<p>Conveys that we can all beat the pandemic as soon as possible Hopes that the pandemic will bring peace and reconciliation to all Reiterates that being a Christian means to care and be compassionate to others</p>	

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 5: Bernadette Sembrano

Interview Transcript:

I just wanted to inform you that I tested positive for COVID. I was shocked since I do not have any symptoms. I feel healthy. No symptoms at all. But we have a mandatory RT-PCR test at work, so when it came out, I got shocked. Sharing this story so that we can save more lives. Let's pray for each other. God bless us all

Announces to the public that she was tested positive for COVID-19	Informing the public regarding health status	Major Themes	God as the major source of support/
Feels shocked for the result since she does not feel any symptoms of the disease	Showing great awe of having infected with the disease despite asymptomatic	Guidance	
Asks God for help and support from others through their prayers	Requesting for God's guidance and support from others	Human connection/support as an essential need toward recovery	
Shares the reason for coming out so that others will be enlightened	Manifesting great concern and responsibility toward others so as not to spread the virus	Sickness is purposeful and necessary for a deeper understanding of life's realities	
I am coming out so that others will be enlightened. Many times, we think that only those who are weak and coughing have the virus but many are asymptomatic like me. We can be endangering the lives of the people around us and the lives of our loved ones	Emphasizing the need for isolation if one is infected with the virus	Anxiety is a serious effect of the pandemic but one can overcome it	Minor Themes

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 5: Bernadette Sembrano

<p>Get vaccinated... I still believe that we can thrive and outsmart the virus. We know what to do and with God's mercy, I got tested and was isolated at once. Please practice the health protocols because we are not doing it just to protect ourselves, we are doing it to protect our loved ones</p>	<p>Stresses that being asymptomatic can endanger more others</p> <p>Encourages others to get vaccinated</p> <p>Asks others to practice health protocols for the sake of loved ones</p>	<p>Pointing out the necessity of vaccination and the practice of health protocols</p> <p>Acknowledging anxiety during the pandemic but can be overcome with happiness</p> <p>Having figured out completely how to win against anxiety</p> <p>Practice health protocols for the sake of loved ones</p> <p>Being happy, exercise and music are effective ways to battle anxiety</p>	<p>Transparency concerning real health condition</p> <p>Vaccine necessity and encouragement to lessen hesitancy</p>
<p>I have anxious moments—but I choose to be happy—and it starts with having a grateful mindset... I slept at 5:00 AM... Anxiety is real. You have to deal with it. True... you should beat it. So, what helps is breathing exercises even early in the morning, inhale... exhale... and what you're hearing is music, it's my best friend. Last night was meditative music, today it was upbeat... you have to help yourself. Every time I focus on my work, my anxiety is gone</p>	<p>Feels anxious but tries to overcome it by having the willingness to be happy</p> <p>Adds doing 'exercise' and listening to meditative music as ways to overcome anxiety</p>	<p>Appreciating the great work of healthcare workers</p> <p>Unconditional job and care of frontliners such as the healthcare workers</p> <p>Isolation affects one's perspective</p>	<p>Proper disposition in facing the personal trial of isolation</p>
<p>Thanks to medical workers for the care and being instruments toward recovery</p>	<p>Acknowledging the importance of human connection toward healing</p>	<p>Proper disposition in facing the personal trial of isolation</p>	<p>Proper disposition in facing the personal trial of isolation</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 5: Bernadette Sembrano

<p>One thing about COVID, you don't want to infect people, right? Many people are kind, even strangers, thank you very much. Talk to your doctor, have someone you can trust. Just want to say-- THANK YOU for keeping me strong and keeping me company during my isolation. This means a lot</p>	<p>Credits friends who are very supportive and source of strength</p> <p>Expressing the presence of God as the primary source of healing</p> <p>Stressing again human connection as essential toward recovery</p> <p>Choosing to fight for love instead of fear</p>
<p>It is important to have friends who will continually check on you. Let's take one step at a time... Today is better than yesterday. Tomorrow will be better than today. We can survive this, don't be hard on ourselves</p>	<p>Cites again the presence of God as the source of guidance and strength</p> <p>Feels grateful for the support of family and friends during her isolation</p> <p>Admits that being afraid affects her current disposition</p> <p>Finding the light of hope amid the challenges of getting the virus</p>
<p>My strength comes from the love and prayers that are sent to me</p>	<p>Considers the essence of hope as the more relevant virtue amid suffering</p>
<p>God is with you—enjoy this date with Jesus. Feel his presence in your breath. Hold his hand as you breathe in. Smile! My family has been living on the KINDNESS of neighbors and friends for the past few days. We are isolated but not short of people who care. By all means, take it, embrace it...</p>	

Table 3 (continued)

<p>Participant # 5: Bernadette Sembrano</p> <p>BE GRATEFUL. This nourishes not only the body but also the soul Days ago, the word “POSITIVE” elicited much panic and fear in me. It still does- but now more than ever I want to fight for love over fear, and claim what positive is—and praying for LIGHT and HOPE. At this very moment, as I am writing this. All is uncertain... but your kindness, thoughtfulness, prayer, generosity and steadfast support, and LOVE is shining brightly in our lives</p>	
<p>Participant # 6: Bo Sanchez</p>	
<p>Interview Transcript:</p> <p>I just received my test results. I have COVID. I have a slight fever and cough. Almost everyone in my family has Covid too, though some are asymptomatic. I'm sharing this to also encourage everyone that it's okay to tell people about it and seek prayers... Do you have Covid or does your family has Covid? Let's pray for each other. God is with us. I know this is a difficult time. But with Him by our side, we will overcome</p>	
	<p>Major Themes</p> <p>God as the major source of support/guidance</p>
<p>Receives the sad news of having acquired COVID together with family members</p>	<p>Accepting the sad reality of contracting the disease with other relatives</p>
<p>Decides to share the news to the public to seek prayers</p>	<p>Expressing positivity to overcome the sickness with God's grace and support from others through prayers</p>
<p>Believes that healing will come with the main support coming from God</p>	<p>Human connection/support as an essential need toward recovery</p>
<p>Promises prayers too for those who are undergoing trials</p>	<p>Death is a fearful reality but trusting God is the key</p> <p>Sickness is purposeful and necessary for a deeper understanding of life's realities</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Participant # 6: Bo Sanchez	Minor Themes
<p>I will just pray for the emotional trauma you may be experiencing right now. With adequate psychotherapy, you will get over this in about 3 years.</p> <p>To all those who have been praying for my healing, I'm deeply grateful. To all my close friends who call up daily, send stuff, and love me forever—thank you. To all those who sent me medical tips, advice, videos, etc., thank you too. I learned what to eat, drink, smell, and how to sleep, breathe, and fart. Kidding aside, most were great. I used some of your advice and was blessed. To all those who sent "stuff"—like meds, vitamins, lots of food—My family says thank you</p>	<p>Expresses overflowing gratitude for the prayers of healing coming from those concerned individuals</p> <p>Appreciating again close friends and other concerned individuals for their prayers and untiring support</p>
<p>Cracks joke amid the unfortunate condition</p> <p>Narrates his experience of difficulty in breathing but improving after a day</p>	<p>Humor can ease a difficult situation</p> <p>Manifesting being hopeful and patient after a day of physical suffering</p>
<p>Cracks joke amid the unfortunate condition</p> <p>Narrates his experience of difficulty in breathing but improving after a day</p>	<p>Humor lightens up the heavy feeling caused by any sickness</p> <p>Hope and patience amid suffering</p>
<p>Cracks joke amid the unfortunate condition</p> <p>Narrates his experience of difficulty in breathing but improving after a day</p>	<p>Unconditional job and care of frontliners such as the healthcare workers</p>

Table 3 (continued)

<p>Participant # 6: Bo Sanchez</p>	<p>My good news... Because the whole day yesterday, until the entire night, I needed an oxygen machine to breathe well. But this morning, I feel better and need less of it now. Also, it appears my two-week-long fever is finally ending soon. I still have, but very slight. (I'll let you know when it's finally over.)</p>	<p>Pays tribute to his doctor for the job well done</p>	<p>Conveying optimism toward recovery</p>	<p>Optimism toward gradual healing</p>
<p>My devoted Doctor—with the help of a lot of our friend Doctors—has been such a special gift from God. May God reward you as only He can. But most of all, I'd like to honor my gorgeous 24-Hour Nurse. Her love for me makes me want to get well. I love you, Sweets. I married the right girl. My two boys who visit me, walk me to the backyard for some sun, and tell me stories—I love you guys. To our house staff, who love me so much, thank you</p>	<p>Credits his wife, kids, and house staff for their love and support</p>	<p>Showing concern for others who are also sick by asking for prayers</p>	<p>Concern for others who are also afflicted with the virus</p>	
<p>And yes, I'm getting better. My heart still bleeds for my dearest friends who have covid and are suffering so much more. If you pray for me, please pray for "Bo's Prayer List" as well</p>	<p>Feels grateful for gradually getting well</p>	<p>Acknowledging human mortality as life's reality</p>	<p>Untiring service to God and His people</p>	
<p>Asks to pray for friends who are suffering because of COVID-19</p>	<p>Expressing total dependency in God when the time of death comes</p>	<p>Expressing the enormous joy of having recovered from sickness</p>	<p>Manifests fear and serious concern regarding the reality of death but assures everyone that surrendering everything to God is beneficial to accept it whole-heartedly</p>	

Table 3 (continued)

<p>Participant # 6: Bo Sanchez</p>	<p>SURRENDER YOUR FEAR OF DEATH. Many people are afraid to die. It's always been our number one fear. Why? We don't know WHEN we will die, HOW we will die, and WHAT will happen AFTER we die. Because we're afraid of death, we sweep the idea of dying under the rug of our busyness... But death is death. We cannot sweep it under the rug of our shallowness. Because one day, it happens. All of a sudden, we sense death walk beside us... This was my experience with Covid. There were nights when I thought my life was over. In those cathartic moments when I surrendered to God everything, a very unexpected thing happened to me. I saw death's face and noticed I was no longer afraid. All fear was gone. In its place was this profound trust in God's affection for me</p> <p>May I share? I live very differently today. Because I know that thread can snap anytime, for the first time in my life, it's natural for me to live in detachment, humility, and sacrifice</p> <p>When I wake up early each morning, I'm blown away by grace. I inhale and almost laugh. "I'm alive. That means You still want me to serve today," I tell God, "I will. Lead the way..."</p>
<p>Describes the refreshing feeling of being given another chance to recover and live</p>	<p>Committing one's vow of serving God and His people given the great blessing of having a renewed life</p>
<p>Stresses God's kindness and generosity for the grace to serve again</p>	

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Human and Animal Rights This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by the author.

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