



DARWIN RAMOS: AN EXEMPLAR OF FINDING MEANING IN LIFE

Adrian G. Cueto

Graduate Student, De La Salle University–Manila

ABSTRACT

The suicide cases and its attempt among the Filipino youth prompts the question of how they give meaning to their lives. Victor Frankl (1985) a European psychiatrist theorized that meaning in life can be found in three ways “(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering” (p.133). This study, using humanities approach aimed at analyzing the biography of the Servant of God Darwin Ramos entitled “Darwin Ramos, Master of Joy” by Fr. Matthieu Dauchez to uncover how Darwin may serve as a role model for Filipino youth in finding meaning in their lives using the lens of Frankl’s theory. The results showed that Darwin was able to find meaning in life through Frankl’s 3 ways by being other-centered. Recommendations were made in the sector of education in relation to the results of the study.

Keywords: Darwin Ramos; Meaning in life; Victor Frankl; Filipino youth; exemplar

INTRODUCTION

The rise of Filipino youth suicide

The University of the Philippines Population Institute (2022) through their “2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study, series 5” was able to discover a significant rise of Filipino youth who have “tried to end their life”. They have showed that the 2013 data which indicated “more than 574,000 or 3%” of the Filipino youth who had attempted suicide increased in 2021 with a rise of 7.5%, an estimate of 1.5 million Filipino youth (UPPI, 2022).

Within this population only “6 out of 10” seek for help, most of which are from “friends and peers (25%), parents/guardians (7%), other relatives (5%), and mental health professionals (4%)” (UPPI, 2022). The Department of Education through the testimony of its Assistant Secretary Dexter Galban affirmed these same findings in the Philippine senate for the year 2021, since he had mentioned that out of “28 million students, 404 committed suicide, 2, 147 attempted, and 775, 962 asked for the help of guidance counsellors” (Felipe, Mateo & Tupas, 2023).

Amidst this rise, the study of Lagman, Gara, Baweja and Kim (2021) have discovered by using the “2015 Global School-Based Health Survey” (p.1) that the leading predictors of attempts of suicide among their Filipino youth participants were “the use of amphetamine or methamphetamine, having fewer friends, smoking, and feeling lonely” (p. 2). Addition to these were the experience of “being bullied, drinking alcohol for the past 30 days, being female, being physically attacked, getting worried and cannot sleep, having less physical activity and less parental supervision” (Lagman, Gara, Baweja and Kim, 2021, p. 2). Moreover, the study of Quintos (2017) affirms the importance of relationships among family, friends, peers and the availability of guidance counselors, avoidance of risky behaviors and peers with suicidal tendencies in mitigating suicidal attempts among the Filipino youth.

Meaning of life among Filipino youth

This rise of suicide and its attempt among the Filipino youth now leads to the question of the Filipino youth’s meaning in life. Here are some studies that gives an overview about the Filipino youth’s quest for the meaning of life. Datu, King, Valdez and Eala (2019) indicated that among their Filipino junior high school participants those who were “gritty” (p. 872) or those who have the intense desire to do what they can to succeed and fulfill their long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007 as cited in Datu, King, Valdez and Eala, 2019) are more likely to know the meaning of their life because they are goal oriented. Among college students, Navarez (2017) discovered that at this stage their participants were seeking for their life’s meaning hence, they believe that life is meaningful. They also suggest that if students can find meaning

in their lives and gave their best to search for it, it increases their happiness (Navarez, 2017). The same findings were affirmed in the study of Datu and Mateo (2015) where it was implied that college students who can find the meaning in their lives were able to experience more life satisfaction than those who are not. This can be related to the fact that at this developmental stage students are forming their identity as a person and having found life’s meaning is a way of satisfying this need thus, leading to life satisfaction (Datu & Mateo, 2015). Furthermore, Galang, Magno, Paterno & Roldan (2011) discovered that happiness can be derived from activities that allows Filipino Junior High School students unravel the meaning of their life. Moreover, despite their vulnerability to meaninglessness because of their tendency for immediate satisfaction (Frankl as cited in Ong, 2008) Ong (2008) suggested that Victor Frankl’s logotherapy can help them find meaning in life despite experiences of depression.

Servant of God Darwin Ramos

As per studies mentioned above, happiness, satisfaction and meaning in life have a significant relationship with one another in the context of the Filipino youth of today. In this regard, Servant of God Darwin Ramos can be one of their role models. Role models are important for human development, this is what Albert Bandura signified in his social learning theory (McLeod, 2025). In his theory, the more a person can identify with their role model the more is the likelihood that s/he will imitate his/her role models behavior (McLeod, 2025). The influence of others is also an important factor in terms of the youth’s faith development with Fowler’s (1981) theory, which implies young people ages 13-16 are seeking for role models of the faith beyond their family and community, this other role models includes people whom they encounter in “school, work, peers, society and media”. On the other hand, while young adults are becoming critical in evaluating whom they can see as their role model in the faith they are still open to learn from other perspectives (Fowler, 1981; Andrade, 2014).

The life of Darwin Ramos can be identified with most of the Filipino youth today. Together with the problems mentioned above, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023) in 2021 an estimate of “5.12 million” of the Filipino youth are considered poor and “1.58 million” are considered “food poor” or those who have no access to “basic food” needs. Darwin Ramos died as a young Filipino in 2012 due to his illness, Duchenne muscular dystrophy (Dauchez, 2021). Darwin lived a challenging life, he came from a poor family, had an irresponsible father, and had a developmental illness which he battled for almost all his life and yet despite all these challenges, the people who encountered and journeyed with him called him a “master of joy” (Dauchez, 2021). Having endowed with this title implies that despite the suffering he had experienced Darwin was able to find the meaning of his life. Hence, on August 28, 2019, the Diocese of Cubao opened a cause for his canonization to sainthood (Dauchez, 2021).

Theoretical framework

Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life

In line with finding meaning in life, Victor Frankl (1985), a European psychiatrist, theorized that more than anything else the basis of an individual's behavior is how s/he gives meaning to his/her life. His theory mostly came from his experience of suffering and the suffering he saw from other victims in the Nazi concentration camps (Wong, 2005). Frankl (1985) believes that even though some people give less importance to meaning in life, at the end of the day what they truly seek is life's meaning. He also conceptualized a state of meaninglessness termed as "existential vacuum" (p. 128) which is basically caused by boredom, when an individual has nothing to be concerned of (Frankl, 1985). Specifically, he pointed out that although life's meaning is unique to each person and is determined by the self alone there may be 3 ways to find life's meaning namely "(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, 1985, p.133).

Given this background this study aims to: (1) Distinguish how the life of the Servant of God Darwin Ramos compares to Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life; (2) Set the life of Darwin Ramos as an example for the Filipino youth in finding meaning in life.

METHODOLOGY

Humanities approach in research dwells into the study of creative materials such as literature that aims to uncover the meaning of human experience through those works (Trinidad, 2018). This study explored the humanities approach in research particularly using textual analysis of the biography of Darwin Ramos by Fr. Matthieu Dauchez, entitled "Darwin Ramos, Master of Joy." Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life were used by the researcher as a theoretical lens in discovering how the Servant of God Darwin Ramos found the meaning of his life. The results of this analysis were discussed in relation to the realities faced by the Filipino youth of today and its implications. Using the said approach and form of analysis distinguishes this paper from a book review since the researcher did not just retell what the book says but analyzed its content in a different lens. Aiming at a new way of looking into the life of Darwin Ramos.

RESULTS

Finding meaning in life by creating a work or doing a deed

According to Victor Frankl (1962, 1963, 1985) an individual can find meaning in life through a work or a deed since it allows him/her to realize that s/he can contribute something important not only for his/her own good but that of the other. Thus, life becomes meaningful if one can see how his/her work or deed impacts the life of the other.

This was also true in the case of the Servant of God Darwin Ramos. Darwin, the eldest among siblings, came from a poor family, his father was irresponsible and violent and only her mother brings food to the table by doing laundry for their neighbors (Dauchez, 2014). Witnessing the poverty of his family and willing to help their mother, Darwin together with his sister "Marimar" had the courage to help her by begging in the streets of Manila (Dauchez, 2014). The two were happy to contribute something to their family, their mother, despite her objection had no choice but to allow her children to beg to ease their family's suffering (Dauchez, 2014).

This willingness to help the family by earning something progressed by venturing to the selling of recyclable materials to junkshops, the two learned this from other street children who became their friends (Dauchez, 2014). Compared to begging what they have now ventured is actual work by scavenging (Dauchez, 2014).

As time progressed, Darwin is already experiencing the consequences of his developmental illness, at the age of 7 he can no longer support himself and needed the help of others just to move (Dauchez, 2014). But his willingness to help their family did not fade, despite his situation even though against his own will he begged again at a train station in Pasay, many commuters pitied him and

earned more compared before (Dauchez, 2014). He was happy but after his mother had known this, she was disappointed and told Darwin to stop begging but his irresponsible father saw it as opportunity to earn more hence, he continued despite his mother's refusal (Dauchez, 2014).

It is clear from these accounts that Darwin, despite the circumstances of shame, indignation and being benefited by his irresponsible father, had wanted to work or had begged to help his family and mother. Earning money under these circumstances was not what Darwin really wanted but was forced to do so because he is thinking of his family. Thus, it became meaningful. He was able to realize at an early age that his life's meaning does not only revolve around himself but his family. This was clearly emphasized with what he said to the staff of Tulay ng Kabataan foundation when he was encouraged to stay with them: "I would love to, you know (said Darwin). But my family: my brothers and sisters and my mother need the money I earn every day" (as cited in Dauchez, 2014, p. 33).

Finding meaning in life by experiencing something or encountering someone

Frankl (1985) stated that when someone had experienced events where "goodness, truth, beauty, nature and culture" (pp. 133-134) are found this helps a person determine the meaning of his/her life. In addition, meeting someone who out of love, shows appreciation for a person, the way who s/he is, leads to meaning in life (Frankl, 1985).

The life of Darwin Ramos was full of people who had allowed him to experience, goodness, truth, beauty, and love. Starting from his own family, his friends, the community who took care of him and most importantly his friendship with God.

Even though his father was irresponsible and they lived in poverty Darwin was still able to experience goodness, truth and love from his mother, Erlinda Ramos. She had worked hard to compensate the irresponsibility of their father: "It was mostly Erlinda who had to support the family. She managed to do the laundry for a few neighboring families while looking after her children and earned just enough money to feed everyone" (Dauchez, 2014, p.7). Darwin also witnessed her mother's love for them when for multiple times she had rejected the idea of Darwin and his sister "Marimar" begging just to help her, particularly when Darwin was already ill (Dauchez, 2014). Another instance would be the pain of letting Darwin be taken care of by the Tulay ng Kabataan foundation, it was a painful decision for her, but she needed to agree for Darwin's health (Dauchez, 2014).

Another key person in his family was his sister, Marimar. She was the faithful companion, playmate, and helper to her brother when they begged in the streets of Manila, in selling of recyclable materials to junkshops together with Darwin's begging at the train station to earn something for their family (Dauchez, 2014). She was also instrumental in bringing his brother to the Tulay ng Kabataan foundation so that he would be taken good care of (Dauchez, 2014).

Another set of people who were important in Darwin's life, with whom he experienced goodness, truth and love were his friends. One of which was a security guard at the train station with whom Darwin patiently listened to with his stories (Dauchez, 2014). When he moved into the foundation he had befriended "Elmar" who protected him from other children who bullied him (Dauchez, 2014). Another friend from the foundation was "Estin" who was his faithful companion and friend when he was transferred to a more specific group of children with special needs. Estin was an abused child and could not speak but despite of this he and Darwin became good friends and took good care of Darwin (Dauchez, 2014).

The community of the foundation itself was an experience and encounter valuable to Darwin. The community led by Fr. Matthieu Dauchez, the nurse assigned to care for him whose name was "Joseph," his fellow children and all the staff of the foundation were very supportive of him and took good care of his every need. From the start of his stay, when he battled the symptoms of his illness, in his hospitalizations and at the very end of his life, they were all there for him. He had witnessed in them not only people who are trying to help him in his condition but saw in them a second family. This was exemplified when he was asked by one of the staff if he considers one of the children in the foundation as a friend: "He's not my friend, he's, my brother! He felt deeply that the foundation was a family and did not take fraternal bonds lightly" (Dauchez, 2014, p. 72).

The most important friendship that Darwin had in his life was his friendship with God. It was his mother who had introduced him to God through their prayer life as a family (Dauchez, 2014). They practiced daily prayers and in times of difficulties Darwin always cling to God for help and guidance and even prays for his irresponsible father (Dauchez, 2014). Darwin saw in God not only a sovereign refuge but someone whom he can identify with in his suffering as Darwin said: "Jesus, you will be my best friend." (Dauchez, 2014, p.10).

As his best friend Darwin was always excited to know more about Jesus and this was shown in their catechism classes: "He was also happy to see the chaplain for catechism in his household who told them about Jesus, his friend, and Darwin discovered and rediscovered moments of the life of Jesus that nourished his prayer" (Dauchez, 2014, p. 63).

Darwin by means of prayer through Eucharistic adoration always made sure to have time with his best friend together with his friends at the foundation:

Sixty children from various households gathered every Friday in the presence of Jesus the Eucharist. They prayed together and confided their joys and pains. Estin would push the wheelchair of his protégé up to the entrance of the chapel, then he would carry him into the oratory and sit him comfortably against the wall. Darwin would join his hands that he had laboriously put on his knees and close his eyes. (Dauchez, 2014, p. 66).

With these people around him, Darwin despite of poverty, pain, suffering and illness was still a person of joy, gratitude, humility, and other-centeredness (Dauchez, 2014). He did not forget to smile, to say thank you and care for the people around him (Dauchez, 2014). Having these kind of reactions in such situations simply implies that these people were not just companions on the journey but key agents for Darwin to realize the meaning of his life. They served as role models to Darwin in finding reasons to be joyful, grateful, humble and other-centered despite the gravity of the situations. He was able to find meaning in the worst of situations because he had someone who is by his side to confront those challenges.

What they did to Darwin motivated him to uncover his capacity for joy, gratitude, humility and other-centeredness. In turn they too were inspired by Darwin to do so, a common remark by Fr. Dauchez, the author of Darwin's biography. This was evidenced by the remark of Estin at Darwin's funeral as he said to Fr. Dauchez with a smile "Darwin, langit" (p. 83) (Darwin is already in heaven) which the priest immediately agreed to (Dauchez, 2014). It became a two-way process which could lead to the point that Darwin with his significant others genuinely loved each other. As Frankl (1959) puts it, it is only through an experience love that a person can uncover his potentials because of the love shown to him/her, which makes him/her realize that someone believes in his/her capacity and potentials as a human person which in turn inspires him/her to actualize them in life and find meaning in it.

Finding meaning in life by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering
Frankl (1959) acknowledged that there are circumstances in life that "cannot be changed" (p.112) like unavoidable suffering. But he also argued that despite of such desperate situation one can still turn it to something meaningful by the attitude that a one chooses to act upon it (Frankl, 1959). In short, the situation is unchangeable but the way an individual reacts to it through his/her attitude can be changed which in turn could lead to meaning (Frankl, 1959). He also clarifies that it does not imply that suffering is a "necessary" (p.113) ingredient to realize meaning in life instead what he points out is the fact that even in suffering one can still find meaning. Which implies the "unconditionality of meaning" (p.114) that despite of an uncontrollable situation such as unavoidable suffering meaning can still be found.

The life of Darwin Ramos is filled with unavoidable suffering. He lived in poverty, had a degenerative disorder (Duchenne myopathy), was bullied, and faced a spiritual battle (Dauchez, 2014).

Unavoidable suffering due to poverty

As stated earlier, Darwin lived a life of poverty they lived in a "small slum on the south of Manila" (p.7) both of his parents met there until they have their own children (Dauchez, 2014). They lived in a garbage dump with makeshift houses which are not suitable for living (Dauchez, 2014).

Added to this is the presence of his irresponsible and violent father whose only concern is himself and his vices: "alcohol, drugs and gambling" (p.8) and not his family (Dauchez, 2014). This in turn gave Darwin and her sister Marimar the courage to beg (even with his illness) to help their mother (who was strongly against it) in sustaining their family (Dauchez, 2014). They were also forced out of their home in the slums and was forced to live in the streets (Dauchez, 2014). Hence, with their poverty and with the fact of Darwin's lingering condition, even though it was painful for her and with Darwin, Darwin's mother, Erlinda allowed her son to be taken care of by the Tulay ng Kabataan foundation (Dauchez, 2014). The reality of their family's poverty cannot be avoided even he is already at the foundation. When he was visited by his family at the foundation, he had the impression that Marimar had involved herself in street prostitution just to help their family, he greatly disagreed with this and reprimanded his sister...

If you want to help your family, do it with your heart, not your body...unfortunately, soon after he learned that his little sister could not extricate herself from prostitution despite his admonition. He was greatly distressed by this news. He often confided her to Jesus, asking him to do what he would have wanted to do himself: to take care of her. (Dauchez, 2014, p. 56)

Yet despite of this poverty, Darwin faced life with joy and courage. As Fr. Dauchez (2014) remarked, that when the symptoms of his illness were not yet evident, he is fond of playing "Patintero" (p.8) with the children of his age and has the attitude of "smiling and being contented" (p.8) with their life. Darwin together with his sister Marimar also find the courage to beg and scavenge to help their mother (Dauchez, 2014). This joy and courage were also manifested when Darwin was begging even with the presence of the symptoms of his illness at the train station as Fr. Dauchez (2014) stated:

Cleaners, ticket agents, guardians, all the employees of the station knew him. All were happy to find the cheerful, even if disabled, little fellow every morning. He impressed everyone with his courage and mostly his everlasting joy, despite his disease, despite his father's oppression. (p.23)

There was also a time when his father brought his younger brother at the station to elicit more pity from the commuters, he was angry inside but instead of being consumed by his anger he just enjoyed the time with his brother and played with him, displaying a joyful interaction between the two (Dauchez, 2014). This joy was also maintained by his friends at the slums who visits him at the train station (Dauchez, 2014, p.24).

Moreso, Fr. Dauchez (2014) mentioned in Darwin's biography that while he was begging at the train station Darwin had an invincible companion, since he had the practice of praying to Jesus. He saw Jesus as a companion who he can identified with in suffering. Surprisingly even he had his own suffering because of poverty, and his illness Darwin did not only pray for his own welfare but also for the poverty he witnessed in society:

He confided in Him his numerous intentions: not only his own sufferings but also those he witnessed hopelessly everyday: violent street fights for no reason, slum children well-known to him who inhaled glue to forget how hungry they were, older ones stealing for a few pesos, and the police raids whose real intentions were to get a hold of the loot rather than protect people. But what hurt him the most was to recognize some of his young neighbors in the prostitutes who hung around the station in the evening. He watched, disgusted, the sordid ballet of grown men, sometimes foreigners, hiring sexual services from innocent young people who were prisoners of this human deprivation. He could not understand why the police, so eager to chase after a child stealing a handful of fruit, allowed these men to enter neighboring hotels with children who were now nothing than objects for their sexual pleasure. (p.24)

Unavoidable suffering due to bullying

On his first day at the foundation Darwin also faced the challenge of being bullied. This is unavoidable suffering for any child particularly when one does not have a choice to whom they will be with in a children's foundation. The foundation staff did what he can to stop this bullying but when he is not around it goes back (Dauchez, 2014). In the case of Darwin this was stopped because of his friend Elmer who supported and protected him together with his other friends (Dauchez, 2014). Hence, because of this Darwin had the courage to make friends with the others and his friends grew as time goes by (Dauchez, 2014).

Unavoidable suffering due to illness

Darwin suffered from Duchene myopathy, an illness that deteriorates the muscles with an unknown cure (Dauchez, 2014). He first felt the symptoms when he was five, by having frequent falls with no reasons including a weakened body, his mother brought him to a clinic for check-up but sadly he was not diagnosed well

because of the prejudice of the doctor (Dauchez, 2014). When he was 7 the symptoms worsened and he lost his ability to walk with his legs hence he used his arms to move himself (Dauchez, 2014).

Arriving at the foundation changed the course of Darwin's life, he was well taken care of. He had his own wheelchair and was even given a specialized one that suits his condition, his fellow children at the foundation especially Estin, the staff, Fr. Dauchez and his personal nurse, Joseph were very caring to him and provided his every need.

When his condition got worst, he needed to be confined in a hospital. Fr. Dauchez (2014) narrated that there was a time that he needed to be intubated to help his breathing since manual ventilation can no longer help him, Fr. Dauchez was hesitant at first together with Darwin but even though it would be very painful for him, he accepted it since Fr. Dauchez said that it will be the only way possible to help him breathe. Because of the said intubation procedure Darwin was not able to speak again (Dauchez, 2014). Darwin also suffered from the condition of the hospital where he was admitted in, since it was a public hospital, it was crowded and the facilities were not enough for the patients hence, he stayed in a makeshift ICU room (Dauchez, 2014). Fr. Dauchez (2014) also mentioned how some of the staff and doctors of the hospital were apathetic towards them. Fr. Dauchez, the staff of the foundation and children took rounds to take care of Darwin while he was admitted in the hospital. On an Easter Sunday of September 2012 Darwin died at the age of 18, his family, friends and the community from the foundation were all there at his side (Dauchez, 2014).

While battling with his illness Darwin had shown distinct attitudes of courage, hope, other-centeredness, joy and gratitude. Upon feeling the symptoms of his disease Darwin did not hold back and had the courage in helping his family through begging at the train station (Dauchez, 2014). Even though they were exploited by his father, particularly in his illness, Darwin still had the hope that one day his father would change for the better (Dauchez, 2014). This hope was also exemplified as he embraced the life of being part of the foundation, that he has still the chance of living a joyful life despite of his illness, this was seen in his willingness to learn new things in their classes at the foundation together with their catechism classes: "He was eager to learn, and Ana, the foundation's teacher, was impressed with the determined, sometimes even imperious, curiosity of the little fellow in his wheelchair. Darwin wanted to understand everything, to be amazed" (Dauchez, 2014, p. 63).

Despite of his suffering due to illness Fr. Dauchez (2014) remarked that Darwin remained other other-centered:

Witnessing one of the biggest scandals in the world knows, innocent children suffering, I am torn apart. I would like Darwin to feel all the affection I have for him, instead it is him who exudes love. I would like him to draw courage from me, but his generous spirit is catching. I would like to support him in his hardship; he inspires me. His weakness is my strength. (p. 31)

Another evident attitude portrayed by Darwin despite his illness was joy. Fr. Dauchez (2014) for multiple times would mention the smile on Darwin's face at his stay at the foundation and in the most painful stages of his illness at the hospital. This was beautifully expressed when he wrote down something:

Using my support again, he scribbles a few more words on the right of the page. Masayang-masaya aka. "I am very happy." He drops the pen and points at the short sentence to ensure I am taking him seriously. Then he offers me a beautiful smile. I am wordless and quickly wipe the tears in my eyes. I was not expecting those simple but profound words: I read them again and again. In the way we see things in our world, Darwin has nothing left to be happy Physically or emotionally. His body makes him suffer and there is a little hope of recovery. He should be in despair, but instead mysteriously, he expresses joy. I do not doubt for one second the authenticity of this joy: an inexplicable joy that plunges us into a mystery beyond comprehension. (Dauchez, 2014, p. 61)

Darwin's joy was partnered with gratitude. This was consistent throughout his life. He was thankful to his mother, to his friends at the foundation, the staff and Fr. Dauchez for all the kindness they have shown him. It was a consistent attitude throughout his life even amid suffering:

Darwin takes a deep breath, which is a huge effort, to be able to speak. And then he tells me very slowly but as loudly as he can, knowing the pain he is in: Thank you for everything, Father. Thank you. That is all. That is what he wanted to tell me. Those few words resume his life. A thanksgiving. He endlessly repeated these words, "Thank you," when we visited his household, when an educator passed by him, when his friends

pushed his wheelchair, or when there were visitors to the foundation. Darwin always impressed those who met him with his kind words and large smile. That evening, even as he began his Holy Week, he did not fail to say those two words. Even if talking is excruciating for him, he wants to say, "Thank you." He is not complaining about his pain, nor asking for anything. All those efforts for the simple "Thank you." A free word, a smile directly from the heart. Divine exhalation. (p.6)

Fr. Dauchez (2014) believes that Darwin was able to display such attitudes despite of suffering because he looks up to Jesus as role model and has seen his suffering as a mission:

Darwin has always accepted without fatalism the evolution of his disease that he calls his mission. His infirmity and his sufferings have a meaning, he is aware of it. I remember the day when Darwin told me: "You know, Father, I think Jesus wants me to hold on until the end, just like what He did." He was expressing his edifying comprehension of his "mission" and was walking in the steps of the One who had suffered like him. And if he was not too sure of the path to follow, he was absolutely convinced that he would not be discouraged, leaning on the stick of perseverance, hand in hand with Jesus Christ. (pp. 38-39)

Unavoidable suffering due to spiritual battle

Darwin's close relationship with Jesus also implied that the devil wants him to despair, amid his hospitalization Fr. Dauchez (2014) mentioned that on the Thursday of his Holy Week at the hospital Darwin seemed terrified at something and the priest had felt that Darwin is pleading for prayers for he is battling with someone:

Darwin is clearly experiencing a terrible spiritual battle in broad daylight, like some of the biggest saints of the hagiography. The devil does not even bother to hide when dealing with such pure soul. His biggest deception, which is to pretend he does not exist, has no effect on such a heroic child. Desperation is the last battle left. Doubting the friendship of the One who has always been with him on his earthly pilgrimage. (p. 40)

It was tough battle as Darwin continuously stares at the ceiling with fearful eyes but fought valiantly through prayer as Fr. Dauchez prayed with him and had given him the extreme unction (Dauchez, 2014).

Darwin in facing all these unavoidable suffering had indeed portrayed that even in uncontrollable situations meaning can be derived as Frankl (1959) theorized. Darwin in his courage and joy to face poverty; friendship with others despite of bullying; courage, hope, other-centeredness, joy and gratitude during illness and courage in the midst of a spiritual battle simply implies that suffering is not the last word but the attitude one chooses to face them. The hindrance to meaning is not the unavoidable suffering but the individual's reaction to it.

DISCUSSION

On Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life

It can be said that Darwin's search for the meaning of his life through these three ways overlaps in terms of his being other-centered. He was able to find meaning even in the humiliation of begging because of his love for his family. He saw the people around him as role models, hence, through his experience of goodness, truth, beauty, and love by encountering them he became aware of his potential for meaning and was also able to inspire them. Implicating a two-way mode of inspiration. He endured unavoidable suffering for the sake of his family, out of gratitude to the people who supported and was with him and as an imitation to Jesus Whom he identified with. Looking at Victor Frankl's (1959) 3 ways of finding meaning in life it can be said that all three are geared to other-centeredness: by doing something for the other, being in relationship with others and offering one's unavoidable suffering for the sake of others. Darwin did all 3 as described above and in the results of the study. This affirms Ong's (2008) study that through Frankl's Logotherapy, which includes these 3 ways of finding meaning in life can be an avenue to find life's meaning among the Filipino youth even for those who experience depression.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion the Servant of God Darwin Ramos was able to find meaning in life by becoming other-centered. This was clearly expressed as the researcher analyzed his life in from the lens of Victor Frankl's (1985) 3 ways of finding meaning in life. By helping his family in their finances at an early age through begging despite of his illness he had realized that his life is not only for his own

but for his family as well. By encountering and experiencing the love of his mother, sister, friends, the foundation, and God he was able to uncover his potential for meaning because someone is by his side and believes in him and in turn, he was also able to become an instrument of the same experience to them. With these same persons as his inspiration Darwin despite of the unavoidable suffering of poverty, being bullied, of his illness, and spiritual battle found his life's meaning as portrayed in his courage, hope, other-centeredness, joy, and gratitude.

This kind of other-centeredness that allowed Darwin to find the meaning of his life is rooted in his being a Filipino by treating the other not as other but as kapwa, as co-equal dignified person and the extension of himself (de Guia, 2005). Hence, he was able to discover the meaning of his life through his relationships with his kapwa.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study the following suggestions are based on the implications of Darwin's search for the meaning of his life to help the Filipino youth to find the meaning of their lives. Since education plays a crucial role in the formation of the Filipino youth recommendations were made specifically for this sector.

Reinforce in schools, activities that highlights the importance of one's need of support systems among one's family, friends, peers and community in senior high school both in private and public schools. As implicated in the study, the role of support systems is important for Darwin to find the meaning of his life. In this regard schools particularly in the senior high school level must promote activities that will make them realize the important role of their significant others such as family, peers and the community. This will help them face transitions in life as they now enter the collegiate life or the vocational tract. As seen in the results of the study what helped Darwin in transitioning in life from his immediate family to his journey in the foundation and in his battle with his illness are his support systems (family, friends, community, and God). Moreso, as indicated by UPPI (2022) and Quintos (2017) support systems are important persons in the life of those Filipino youth who attempted suicide, hence, this support systems must also be educated and trained so that they may realize the importance of their presence and support to young Filipinos.

Teach the life of young Filipino saints like San Pedro Calungsod and Darwin Ramos as an inspiration of finding life's meaning through religious and values education among Catholic schools. Instead of repeated subjects being taught in junior high school to senior high school Catholic schools can focus on teaching the life of San Pedro Calungsod and Darwin Ramos in the senior high school level since as said earlier this is a time of transition. In them they can have particular role models to look up to and identify with in finding the meaning of their life in the Catholic context as indicated by Albert Bandura's social learning theory (McLeod, 2025).

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