



**Perceptions and Reactions
of Rwandan Christians To
COVID-19: A Case Study of
Muhanga District**

Françoise Niyonsaba

MAJAM | Volume 6, Issue 1

4. Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case Study of Muhanga District

Françoise Niyonsaba

Abstract

At the time of writing this essay (June 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic in Rwanda is part of the ongoing global pandemic of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus was confirmed to have reached Rwanda in March 2020. In Rwanda, the pandemic affected all sectors, including religious organisations as all church buildings were closed for many months, beginning on 14th March 2020. The varied perceptions and reactions of Christians in the southern district of Muhanga regarding COVID-19 is the focus of this descriptive essay. The data for the research were collected through desk reviews, interviews and participant observation. The interviews were done with key respondents purposively selected from church members and ministers. The essay concludes by highlighting how the Church Mission is responding to the pandemic in Muhanga district and across Rwanda at large.

Key words: *Pandemic, COVID-19, Eschatology, Eschatological signs*

Introduction

The coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease that was first discovered towards the end of 2019 in the Chinese province of Hubei in Wuhan. It then spread to other countries across the globe.¹ This is not the first coronavirus to attack human beings in the world. We can mention that of 2002/2003 in Guangdong, China called SARS-CoV (SAEVERE Acute Respiratory Syndrome) which was thought to come from bats and pigs and passed on to humans. The infected people were above 8,000 and 774 died. In 2012, there was another virus in Saudi-Arabia named MERS-CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) thought to have originated from camels. It infected 2,400 and 858 died. The third is SARS-CoV-2 named Coronavirus disease 2019.² SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is thought to have first jumped from an animal host to humans in Wuhan, China.³ So, within the first three months of 2020, the disease had ravaged the entire world, killing thousands of people, and leaving several others infected and/or bedbound.⁴ The socio-economic lifestyle of the world was affected with the most immediate intervention of social distancing prescribed for all people as a way of decreasing the spread of the disease. Staying at home became the new normal as a strategy to limit people's exposure to the virus. Several economies all over the world went into a total shutdown. Curfews were imposed in many countries and religious places of worship were closed.⁵ To further understand the global significance of the Coronavirus disease, it is important to explain the concept of "**pandemic.**" There must be an epidemic before a pandemic. The term epidemic has been used since antiquity to mean any disease that kills many people quickly in an unpleasant and arbitrary way regardless of age, gender, religion, race, nationality and/or health status of the victims. When an epidemic is experienced in several parts of the world at a given time, it is then categorised as a pandemic.⁶ Therefore, a pandemic is defined as an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.⁷ The severity of a disease is not one of the defining elements of a pandemic, but the scale and geographical coverage of the disease.⁸ Therefore, by 11th March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic because it had spread to over 110

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...

countries and territories around the world. Over 118,000 registered cases had been reported.⁹

The sudden occurrence of pandemics has often been traumatising for societies all over the globe with the initial search for answers more often associated with religion. This has been true of the major pandemics that the world has ever faced like the Black Death, Spanish flu and HIV/AIDS.¹⁰ Therefore, a complex relationship between religion and pandemics has existed for a long time. The occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic has yet again revived the debate about the positioning of religion and religious ideologies on pandemics.¹¹ The debate proves the significance of religious explanatory models in understanding disease apart from biomedical advancements. Although COVID-19 had become an international emergency, there was a poor understanding of the disease among health professionals and a great deal of disagreements among scientists regarding its cause and origin.¹² It is no wonder, therefore, that African Christians raised a wide range of reactions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper is aimed at exploring the perceptions of some Rwandan Christians on pandemics, especially on COVID-19. The paper examines how pandemics affect the Christian faith while considering how Rwandan Christians are responding to the virus (both in their talk and in their actions) vis-a-vis how they have responded to pandemics before. Overall, how the virus is reshaping African Christianity is highlighted.

The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach which involves the analysis of textual materials and respondent views to understand their concepts, opinions and experiences based on non-numerical data.¹³ The research was based on a descriptive research design which refers to a systematic description of the situation or the phenomenon under study by responding to the questions of what, where, when and how.¹⁴ Data for the research were collected using the techniques of desk review, interviews and participant observation. The interviews were done with key respondents purposively selected from church members and ministers. Since there was no predefined sample, the data were gathered up to the natural saturation point beyond which no more new information was acquired. The natural saturation point was marked by duplications and redundancies in the data.¹⁵ The paper is presented around three main sections. The first section consists of describing the pandemics in the Bible. The second section analyses the perceptions of

Françoise Niyonsaba

Christians in Rwanda on COVID-19. The last section is concerned with the role of the church in Rwanda in response to COVID-19.

Pandemics in the Bible

A longer view of history reminds us that we are not the first community to experience and reflect on life during a time of plague or pandemic. Given the presence of religion in most human communities throughout history, it is not surprising that reflections on pandemics often begin with God. Plagues and diseases on such a scale feel biblical in the sense that they are beyond the normal and therefore supernatural in some way.¹⁶ One of the earliest records of plagues comes from the Hebrew Bible. Reading the biblical book of Exodus, there are plagues that Moses (or God) released on Egypt when Pharaoh would not free the enslaved Hebrews. In that ancient narrative, a plague served two functions: it is divine punishment for injustice, and an assertion of religious power in the battle between Egypt's gods and the God of the Hebrews. Throughout history, humans have sought explanations for things that are beyond our normal control or understanding. While God is often credited as the sender of plagues or pandemics, it is usually to teach some moral lesson.¹⁷ The general belief among many is that disasters carry strange messages. Often these messages propose that people have some responsibility for their present suffering. Such a belief may encourage one to understand the causes of catastrophes so that they can be avoided in the future. It also suggests that disasters such as a pandemic can teach people something about how life should be lived. The Bible contains many stories of God-sent illnesses which typically communicate punishment for wrongdoings.¹⁸

In the Bible, there are records of plagues, pestilences, or pandemics killing people. For example, in Leviticus 26:25, when Israel falls into covenant violations, God says, "I will send pestilence among you." In 2 Samuel 24:15, God sends a pestilence that kills 70,000 Israelites because of David's ill-conceived census. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah speak of God sending plagues, for example, in Ezekiel 14:21 and 33:27, and Jeremiah 21:6, 7 and 9. In Revelations 6:8, the pale rider" kills a fourth of the earth with the sword, famine, and pestilence. In Psalm 91:5-6, a great psalm of protection, the psalmist says that we will not fear the terror of the night, the arrow of the day, the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that comes at noon.¹⁹ The Old Testa-

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...

ment, therefore, shows that God used severe diseases to punish people due to their rebellion against him; these include boils (Exodus 9:8-12); meningitis (Ps 106:29), leprosy (Numbers 12:9-15) to mention a few. It is also clear that God is able to remove or stop the pandemics or plagues and can also use His people to accomplish this (Numbers 17:12-15). Apart from the diseases or plagues as God's punishment, the bible also presents the possibility of the righteous people being attacked by the same as a trial of their faith to challenge their trust in God. There is an example of Job in the Bible who was said to be "was blameless and upright" (Job 1:1), but he was afflicted with painful sores (Job 2:7-8). Job, however, stayed strong in his faith. This dual usage of plagues or pandemics by God in the Old Testament—to punish God's people or to try the faith of the righteous—may lead us to the same conclusion as the Preacher who said, "time and chance happen to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11b).

In the New Testament account, different diseases were mentioned even in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry—infectious and non-infectious diseases alike. Some would, no doubt, have come from microbes and viruses but others came from demonic powers (e.g. Matthew 4:23). Some other passages in the New Testament include pandemics, wars, and earthquakes as part of the signs of the end of time (which will culminate in the second coming of Jesus) (Luke 21:11; Revelation 6:8). Yet, other scriptural passages seem to say that in spite of the occurrences of the aforementioned signs, the end would be yet to come (Matthew 24:3-22; 2 Timothy 3:1). In addition, 1 Thessalonians 5:3-4 says that when people are saying "There is peace and security," Jesus will return like a thief. So, what we learn from the New Testament is that pandemics and other signs mentioned in the Bible are not the definitive signs of the end; moreover, even as far back as the time of Jesus on earth, these challenges were already in existence.

Perceptions of Christians on COVID-19 Pandemic

Spirituality in the context of healthcare is a relatively new field of scholarship which is becoming increasingly important. In recent years, research has shown that religious beliefs and practices are associated with various aspects of health, such as the ability to cope with the disease, recovery after hospitalisation and a positive attitude when faced with such a difficult situation like a health crisis.²⁰ In general terms, spirituality is often defined as the search for a higher sense

Françoise Niyonsaba

with regards to religion or belief in God.²¹ Most societies have successfully learned to differentiate suffering from moral dilemmas. While times of convenience and comfort often causes a lack of reflection on such harsh realities of life like pandemics, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused distinct human responses and reactions which have both strengthened humanity and awakened an awareness of the fragility of our human existence. The lesson in humility which COVID-19 brought to humanity coupled with the feelings of powerlessness and fear²² have forced on humanity a critical reflection on the pandemic—often in light of people’s religious inclinations.

In this section, therefore, the analysis of the interviews conducted with church leaders and church members on their interpretations of such calamities as the COVID-19 pandemic is presented. Christians from different denominations in Rwanda have different reactions to the pandemic. While some lean towards the school of thought that pandemics are a means of divine punishment or curse because of people’s disobedience (referencing biblical passages like Leviticus 26:14-16; Isaiah 26:20-21; Numbers 11:31-35; 21:5-7 among others), others see pandemics as eschatological²³ signs (referencing biblical passages like Luke 21:11 and Revelations 6:8—to mention but a few). Some others also consider calamities or pandemics as a challenge of Christian faith (referencing the story of Job in Job 2:1-10). Likewise, the reactions of the respondents on the preventive measures for the spread of COVID-19 is varied. Some specific responses are presented below.

The respondents (UFTM and YVUW) stated that the pandemic of COVID-19 is a punishment from God. UFTM argued that people are committing sins more intensively, thus necessitating God’s decision to punish all of humanity. “That is why it is a pandemic. It is rare that one disease attacks the whole world. I can confirm . . . that this is [a] punishment from God.” UFTM submits. YVUW likewise posited that COVID-19 is a punishment from God because people are going deeper in committing sins.

There are many strong sins that are done here on the earth, so God needs people to open their eyes and seek [Him]. It is like other epidemics in the Bible; when people disobeyed God, He [would] send calamities to awaken people. For example, Leviticus 26:25; Numbers 14:12, and other passages in the Bible.²⁴

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...

In the same vein, the respondent MGN, who is a church minister, reports, “many Christians where I am serving are saying that the pandemic of COVID-19 is the punishment from God because of people’s disobedience to God. This won’t stop until people turn to God.” He mentioned a prophet who said that God told him that COVID-19 is just the beginning because there will come another more severe calamity after COVID-19 since the people of God are yet to turn back from their sins to God.

On the other hand, there are respondents who argued in a different way; the respondent MSN who is also a church minister says,

This pandemic is not a punishment because, before punishing people, God warns them about their sins, and when they repent, He forgives them (as in Jonah 2:1-10). [However, for COVID-19,] God didn’t announce anything to His people before punishing them.²⁵

In addition, another respondent, AKM, concluded that COVID-19 cannot be a divine punishment because those who are dying are not greater sinners than others. In his words,

We lost our church members who were good Christians, but they passed away! [On the other hand,] we have wrongdoers around us but they are not the [only] ones [dying]; even the righteous are [being] killed by COVID-19.²⁶

Rwandans may call COVID-19 divine punishment or curse because of the prevalent culture of dealing with misfortune or calamities that are thought to come from the supernatural world in the matter of the wellbeing of people and their relationship with deities or ancestors. When there is something wrong, traditionally, Rwandans used to seek its causes and solutions from seers or the witchdoctors. Julius Adekunle argued that, traditionally, Rwandans believe that when the living family members fail to take care of their ancestors or when they neglect any of the traditions, the ancestors can cause misfortune or calamities in the lives of the family members. In that case, the sacrifices are made in order to appease the ancestors. Goats or sheep and drinks such as banana beer or sorghum beer should be offered by the family. In the worldview of many Rwandans, therefore, a witchdoctor is the one who should

Françoise Niyonsaba

discover what causes a bad situation and offer the remedy.²⁷ In spite of Christianity being the professed religion of most Rwandans, this traditional worldview still seems to be more prominent.

Speaking on the eschatological implications of COVID-19, the respondent KRG submits,

This pandemic of COVID-19 is among the signs of the end of times because Jesus himself told his disciples that there will be pestilences in different areas of the world (Luke 21:11). This is one of the many signs Jesus mentioned and we have seen almost all of them. We don't know the time of Jesus' coming but all these are the signs that the time is near.²⁸

On the other hand, the respondent AKZM expressed his strong doubt that this is the sign of the end of time because, even in the times of Jesus' earthly ministry, there were pandemics, epidemics and terrible diseases but people continued to live with them and the world did not come to an end. Even outside of the Bible, there are other calamities that the world has undergone; there is the example of the Spanish flu in 1918-1920. It is not improbable that during the time of the Spanish flu, people might have thought that it was the end of the world! However, normalcy eventually returned after that pandemic and life continued. Specifically in Rwanda, there had been strong famines which had taken away the lives of many people; there was the genocide of 1994 against the Tutsis, and other many other examples. These were all events of eschatological proportions, yet, after those calamities, good times returned. AKZM therefore proposed that Rwandans and, indeed, all of humanity, can be strong and believe that good times will come again after COVID-19.

Other respondents NIY and TH argue that we are in the time of the end and that the COVID-19 pandemic is the confirmation. They base their argument on the biblical passage in Daniel 12:4 which says, "...Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." They believe that COVID-19 is from a virus made by physicians in the laboratory—either willingly or unwillingly—in their quest for more knowledge and new discoveries. They were also of the opinion that the virus could have been made as a result of some ill motives of some rich people in the world.

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...

Besides the divine punishment/curse and signs of the end of time rhetoric, some other Christians in Rwanda affirm that the COVID-19 pandemic had been prophesied in some Christian circles, the fulfilment of which is now playing out. The respondent MKDL, for instance, said,

God told us that there will be a strong calamity that will cause all people to suffer. Everyone will stay at his/her home, no one will be free, and no one will get to rescue others. So, stay strong and be righteous because I will protect you.²⁹

She added that she initially imagined a major war that will claim many lives and lead to a crippling fear that will rob everyone of their freedom as the interpretation of the prophecy, however, she now strongly believes that the COVID-19 pandemic is what God was prophetically speaking about. In the same vein, the respondent MGN argued that the prophets in his church were saying that the pandemic is what they have prophesied; they refer to COVID-19 as the beginning of the fulfilment of their prophecy, and that there is yet another more terrifying calamity yet to come. They suggest that what God wants to teach His people is yet to be fully understood because the people of God continue to burden their hearts and refuse to repent. They added that they knew this because God has told them this before. Yet another respondent, MSJ, stated that similar claims about the pandemic as a fulfilment of prophecy was expressed in his church, however, he disclosed his suspicion of such a belief since none of the so-called prophets stated precisely what would happen rather than generic prophecies about a catastrophic time set to come upon the world. Indeed, many have thought of the fulfilment of such prophecies to be through political issues like wars or economic issues that will lead to famine. MSJ added that these so-called prophets are divided among themselves; while some of them are saying that COVID-19 is what they predicted, others are saying that the calamity they prophesied about is yet to come.

In a personal experience in the prayer room where this researcher was involved as a participant observer shortly after the government allowed church buildings to be reopened for public worship, a prophetess prophesied that reopening church buildings for public worship may be the idea of the government but that it was not of God because “the time is not yet.” She added that it is God who brought the COVID-19 pandemic so that His people may seek

Françoise Niyonsaba

Him. “However,” she continued, “since God’s people are not seeking Him but rather seeking earthly things, . . . God is going to send another serious calamity. COVID-19 is the beginning; there will be another severe disaster but God will protect the righteous people and everyone who seeks God.”

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Church and on the Christian Faith

The pandemic is undoubtedly a challenge to the church and to the Christian faith. MSJ, a respondent, argued that the pandemic has really challenged the faith of Christians and thus, revealed their level of Christian maturity. In his words, “It shows how Christians are strong and standing in their faith; it also shows what knowledge Christians have on the present life and future life.” The pandemic is also challenging the way the word of God is being taught among Christians. These said, it is a known fact that the challenges of the pandemic is not exclusively towards Christians; it challenges the whole community, and indeed, the whole world.

The respondent NBH noted that some Christians have given up on their faith because of the pandemic as they no longer attend or participate in church activities as they used to do before the pandemic, while some others claim they are no more Christians having lost their hope in God who, according to them, left them when they needed Him most. Such realities no doubt affect the church in general.

On the other hand, some respondents affirm that the pandemic has aided the development of their faith. ELMK, for instance, argued:

This pandemic made me stronger in faith, because it pushed me to pray more than I did before and asked God how I should behave. I came to understand that the church is not a building, but my heart and body is the temple of the living God. I came to realise that I can even have worship service in my house. I came to know that God can talk to me without waiting to gather in the temple with others. I realise that trusting God is the important thing in the Christian life. While I have seen many Christians lose their trust in God—including some preachers and prayerful people who are saying that God has left us—I can say like Job that “I will maintain my innocence and never

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...

let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live (Job 27: 6).³⁰

Likewise, ENST, another respondent, added:

This time of the COVID-19 pandemic has actually strengthened my faith; it has made me realise that God has power above all powers, knowledge and wisdom of all human beings. Humans tried their best to stop the pandemic but they failed because they trust in themselves; what if they trust God? This might be over [already].³¹

ENST added that the pandemic came as a temptation to Christians and posited that many Christians fell for the temptation by abandoning their righteous ways to seek help from others rather than God. The same respondent agreed, however, that there are other Christians who remain in the way of righteousness.

When COVID-19 was declared to be a pandemic by the WHO in March 2020, some preventive measures were put in place including hand washing/sanitising, social distancing, no shaking of hands, face masking and, eventually, vaccines were introduced. Christians in Rwanda reacted in various ways to these measures. When churches reopened on 28 July 2021 having been closed since 15th March 2020, the preventive measures raised various reactions. With regard to hand washing/sanitising, Christians appreciate it in general because it is an hygienic practice. Likewise, face masks tend to be appreciated since they also protect against dust, however, some find it challenging to wear a face mask during a worship service, especially during the time of singing and preaching which could take a long time. Indeed, there are some people who refused to come to church because they do not want to wear masks.³²

With regard to social distancing and no hand shaking, these measures were highly criticised by Christians in Rwanda. A respondent, MSJ, mentioned the awkwardness of seeing one's fellow Christian with whom one used to sit together now sitting 1 or 2 m away. In addition to that, it is not easy for Rwandans to avoid hand shaking because it is a well known gesture of greeting alongside hugs—the sign that you love and are pleased to see the one you hug. More than that, Rwandan Christians take Paul's admonition in Romans

Françoise Niyonsaba

16:16 very seriously—“greet one another with a holy kiss.” (It is noteworthy that “holy kiss” is translated in Kinyarwanda Bible as “holy hug.”) In the same vein, another respondent, KMH added that Christians where he is serving regard COVID-19 as being an anti-Christ because it prevents fellow believers from holy hugs and makes them greet one another “like Rastafarians,” he added.

Regarding the vaccine, there have been some negative reactions among Christians. A respondent, KMR, stated thus: “This pandemic is a lie; it doesn’t exist. It is rather the trick of the Illuminati group as they intend to put the number of the beast “666” on people’s forehead.” Another respondent added that the COVID-19 vaccines are for the benefit of some rich people from western countries who are trying to insert a microchip in people’s bodies in order to control the world. Such conspiracy theories are not unique to Rwanda alone but are being popularised through WhatsApp broadcasts across the continent of Africa and beyond.

How Church Mission in Rwanda Is Responding to the Challenges of COVID-19

The mission of God in Africa and, indeed, anywhere, is not only about saving souls but also involves social matters. People who have been evangelised also need to improve their standard of living. In other words, the church in Africa needs to take action in *evangelism through deeds* and not only *through words*.³³ More than ever, the church in Africa needs the ministry of caring for the body—a work that requires human beings distributing material goods to the less privileged.³⁴ In light of this reality, therefore, different churches in Rwanda have responded to numerous social, economic and health challenges even during the pandemic. Notably, all the churches complied with the total lockdown directive of the Rwandan Government, which inevitably limited the opportunity for pastoral care for many people, including those who have been infected with COVID-19. Christian social responsibility has been seen in the response to COVID-19 as churches and faith-based organisations made substantial donations in kind to the health efforts of the government. Some provided food around the country to support people who are affected by COVID-19 (see Figures 1 and 2).

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...



Figure 1: Church leaders of Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, Gitarama Presbytery giving food to the families affected by COVID-19



Figure 2: Compassion International in collaboration with Protestant Communities in Rwanda offering food to people affected by COVID-19

Françoise Niyonsaba

As such, the church plays a complementary role in supporting the effort of the Rwandan government to contain the effects of COVID-19 through donation of funds and health-related facilities to the government and through pastoral care. Many churches provided public health information within their media outlets and sermons and prayers can be understood in psychological terms within a behaviour-change theory developed to explain and predict health-related behaviours, particularly in regard to the uptake of health services. It is a specific form of a health-belief model, in which public health messages are part of a framework of Christian theology and communication. Furthermore, by way of sensitization, churches offered different trainings to church leaders or other Christians to teach people how they should reduce the spread of COVID-19 and take care of infected people (see Figure 3). These trainings were offered by medical doctors in collaboration with the church and the government.



Figure 3: Ecumenical training of religious leaders on COVID-19 infection and prevention through the Centre for Training and Documentation of Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

Conclusion

To sum up, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people from every sphere of life—including politics, socio-economics and religion. In Rwanda, a broad range of perceptions of and reactions to the pandemic has been observed including prophecy-based and eschatology-shaped interpretations of the pandemic. While the church has not been inactive or silent in responding to the pandemic (for instance, through charitable activities, partnerships with Christian charities and in educating both clergy and laity on COVID-19 infection and prevention as demonstrated in this essay), a major need was observed—a need for such teaching and discipleship that is rooted in the African worldview and able to respond to the questions that the pandemic is causing adherents of the Christian faith to ask. The lack of such an *apologetic* and *African* defence of the doctrines of the Christian faith has made some Christians lose their faith in God because of the hard times ushered in by the pandemic. The pandemic has therefore highlighted the responsibilities of the church both to prioritise biblical teaching through every available means as well as being at the forefront of ministering hope to everyone in practical ways, especially to the disadvantaged.

Author Bio



Rev. Françoise Niyonsaba is a Church Minister in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.

-
1. Muhammad Adnan Shereen et al., "COVID-19 Infection: Origin, Transmission, and Characteristics of Human Coronaviruses," *Journal of Advanced Research* (2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jare.2020.03.005>.
 2. Shereen et al., "COVID-19 Infection."

Françoise Niyonsaba

3. Jamie Ducharme, "The WHO Just Declared Coronavirus COVID-19 a Pandemic," *Time*, 2020, <https://time.com/5791661/who-coronavirus-pandemic-declaration/>.
4. Shereen et al., "COVID-19 Infection."
5. Alexander Paul Isiko, "Religious Construction of Disease: An Exploratory Appraisal of Religious Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Uganda," *Journal of African Studies and Development* 12, no. 3 (2020).
6. Andrew Cunningham, "Epidemics, Pandemics, and the Doomsday Scenario," *Historically Speaking* 9, no. 7 (2008).
7. Heath Kelly, "The Classical Definition of a Pandemic Is Not Elusive," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 89, no. 7 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.11.088815>
8. Cunningham, "Epidemics, Pandemics, and the Doomsday Scenario."
9. Ducharme The WHO Just Declared Coronavirus COVID-19 a Pandemic.
10. Cunningham, "Epidemics, Pandemics, and the Doomsday Scenario."
11. Isiko, "Religious Construction of Disease: An Exploratory Appraisal of Religious Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Uganda."
12. Akshaya Srikanth Bhagavathula et al., "Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Knowledge and Perceptions: A Survey on Healthcare Workers," *MedRxiv* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.2196/19160>.
13. Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-By-Step Guide for Beginners*, 3 ed. (London: Sage, 2011).
14. Chinelo Igwenagu, *Fundamentals of Research Methodology and Data Collection* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2016).
15. Mirella Christianna Maria Klomp, *The Sound of Worship: Liturgical Performance by Surinamese Lutherans and Ghanaian Methodists in Amsterdam* (Paris: PEETERS, 2011).
16. Robyn J. Whitaker, "God, Plagues and Pestilence – What History Can Teach Us about Living through a Pandemic," *The Conversation*, 2020, <http://theconversation.com/god-plagues-and-pestilence-what-history-can-teach-us-about-living-through-a-pandemic-146094>.
17. Whitaker God, Plagues and Pestilence – What History Can Teach Us about Living through a Pandemic.
18. Hanna Tervanotko, "How the Ancient Israelites Dealt with Epidemics — The Bible Tells of Prophecy and Rituals," *The Conversation*, 2020, <http://theconversation.com/how-the-ancient-israelites-dealt-with-epidemics-the-bible-tells-of-prophecy-and-rituals-135803>.
19. Tim Dwyer, "Plagues and the Bible," *Warner University*, 2020, <https://warner.edu/plagues-and-the-bible/>.
20. Gwenda Albers et al., "Content and Spiritual Items of Quality-of-Life Instruments Appropriate for Use in Palliative Care: A Review," *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 40, no. 2 (2010): 295.
21. Shri K Mishra et al., "Spirituality and Religiosity and Its Role in Health and Diseases," *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 4 (2017).
22. Oliwia Kowalczyk et al., "Religion and Faith Perception in a Pandemic of COVID-19," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 6 (2020).
23. The term "Eschatology" doesn't exist neither in the Bible nor in the Christian tradition. It seems that it was invented in the nineteenth century from a Greek word *eschaton* which means "the last" and *logos* which means "science." Therefore eschatology is a part of theology which deals with the "last things" (*ta eschata*). In general eschatology is the reflection on the "end" or the "last events". Cited from Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man. Vol. II Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).
24. Interview respondent YVUW
25. Interview respondent MSN
26. Interview respondent AKM

Perceptions and Reactions of Rwandan Christians To COVID-19: A Case S...

27. Julius Adekunle, *Culture and customs of Rwanda* (London: SCP, 2007), 30.
28. Interview respondent KRG
29. Interview respondent MKDL
30. Interview respondent ELMK
31. Interview respondent ENST
32. Participant observation in church and different prayer groups
33. Françoise Niyonsaba, "Mission Is Not Only about Preaching," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (2018): 459.
34. C. Oswald Hilton, ed., *Luther's Works. Vol. 28* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Press, 1973), 693.