



**ANALYSIS OF THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF CHINESE CHRISTIANS DURING
THE EPIDEMIC PERIOD
-BASED ON CHURCH, SACRAMENT, AND ESCHATOLOGY-**

Renzhong Cui,

Philosophy and Religious Studies of Minzu University of China

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is a severe test for people around the world. In macro terms, it has far-reaching effects on global politics, economics, culture, and other aspects. In micro terms, it brings significant spiritual trauma to humanity. China is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, with different social groups having their significant spiritual characteristics. Under the pandemic background, these differences are significantly magnified. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the spiritual state of Christians during the epidemic period by combining the pandemic background and Christian group factors, using the dimensions of church, sacrament, and eschatology in Christian theology, in order to understand the unique spiritual characteristics of this group and open up a new perspective.

Keywords: Epidemic period; Christians; Church; Sacrament; Eschatology.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major blow to China and the world, with serious negative impacts on all aspects of society, including soaring unemployment, intensified social conflicts, mounting debt crises, increased bankruptcies of enterprises, and accumulating banking risks, etc. On the one hand, this is another major blow to the already sluggish world economy. On the other hand, the all-around obstruction of social benign operation by the pandemic has led to intensified social conflicts and daily social problems such as supply-demand conflicts and employment pressures are exceptionally magnified. The economic recession caused by this crisis is different from previous crises in history. The world economic crisis in the 1930s was mainly caused by insufficient market demand, and the economic stagflation in the 1970s was mainly caused by the supply side. However, this crisis affects both supply and demand simultaneously, resulting in a decrease in total income and output. The resulting economic recession can only be alleviated after the epidemic is effectively controlled. On the other hand, the negative impacts of the pandemic on the material world have extended to people's spiritual world. The most significant negative impact of the pandemic is the serious disruption of people's daily life order.¹ The jobless and the unemployed feel a bleak future. The disease sufferers appreciate the fragility of life. Those who lose their loved ones experience mental anguish and the agony of physical confinement causes inner turmoil and distress. During the pandemic, various psychological problems are highlighted, either accumulating on an individual or becoming a collective phenomenon. This undoubtedly requires further analysis and reflection. China is a multi-ethnic country, which is the analysis of our social structure from an anthropological perspective. From a different perspective, China is also a country composed of believers and non-believers of religions, and believers of different religions can be further divided into Christians, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, etc. Depending on their religious beliefs, even different denominations, the impact of the pandemic on their spiritual state shows different characteristics and content. This article mainly selects the Christian group and analyzes their spiritual state during the epidemic period through the dimensions of church, sacrament, and eschatology in Christian theology.

1. The role of ecclesiology in the spiritual adjustment of Christians

In Christian theology, the theological discourse of ecclesiology is generally referred to as the doctrine of the church. The nature of the church, the church's essence, and its work have always been at the core of ecclesiology. Initially, the early church did not pay much attention to the doctrine of the church, and even the Eastern Church did not recognize the potential importance of ecclesiology. This changed after the conversion of Emperor Constantine, when some theologians began to juxtapose the Roman Empire and the Christian Church. Competition between the Church Fathers of Rome and Constantinople, in particular, deepened people's discussion of ecclesiology. After the Donatist controversy and the deepening development of ecclesiology by the Reformers in the 16th century, the content of ecclesiology today is very rich, and there

¹ Zhu Qigui, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on the World's Major Economies and China's Countermeasures", Chinese Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Shanghai Jiaotong University, 2020 (5).

are still many disputes.²In short, this is a timeless issue. From the moment a person becomes a Christian, they enter the church and become a part of it. They will spend their entire lives from conversion to death in the church. Therefore, ecclesiology is a core theological resource that shapes Christians, and includes the formation of Christian spirituality.

1.1 The assurance of Christ's presence in the heart

A figurative expression is that "the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side created the church," which indicates that Christianity believes that Jesus Christ created the church with his own body. Wherever he is, his church is there. Therefore, the fact that Jesus is present with the church is an important understanding of the essence of the church in Protestantism. However, many theological perspectives have arisen regarding Christ's presence with the church. The Second Vatican Council made the unique contribution of affirming the sacramental nature of the church. "Lumen gentium" proposes that in Christ, the Church is like a sacrament –a sign and instrument of fellowship with God and of unity among all people. Some theologians have further elaborated on this, such as Karl Barth, who believes that the existence of the church is to allow Christ to be present in a historical, visible, and concrete form with the world.³ Visible signs such as the Holy Communion, as instituted by Jesus when he broke bread and gave his disciples the cup the night before being crucified, express Christ's presence with the church across time and space. As Christians, when they receive the Holy Communion or other sacraments, they will feel from the depths of their hearts the unity between Christ and themselves. Therefore, even faced with the rampant COVID-19 pandemic, they have no fear because they firmly believe that Christ is present with his church, and with themselves. Karl Barth believes that the church is a fellowship that responds to the preaching of God's Word. Therefore, when God's Word is preached correctly and willingly received by people, the church immediately exists as a gospel covenant. Bultmann also advocates understanding the essence of the church from the perspective of preaching the Gospel, proposing that the Word of God is inseparable from the church, which is established by the Word of God. Christians are in the church established by the Word of God,⁴ and have to follow the path of life according to the Word of God. As the Psalms say, "For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Psalms 56:13) Therefore, since Christians walk in the path of God and in the light of life, they naturally have less fear of the shadows of disease and death brought by the pandemic. They believe that the end of God's path will not be threatened by the darkness of death. Brazilian Catholic theologian Leonardo Boff has his own pneumatological understanding of the church, believing that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and has the role of constructing the church. Therefore, the church is primarily the spiritual body of Christ, and is not limited to any existing system. This pneumatological understanding of the church allows people not to be limited to the concept of the church as an organizational structure. Christ, through the Holy Spirit's presence, is omnipresent, not limited to any specific religious

² Alister E. McGrath: "An Introduction to Christian Theology", translated by Zhao Chengyi and Shi Hengtan, Beijing United Publishing Company, 2017, pp.417-423.

³ Ibid, pp.428-429.

⁴ Ibid, pp.430-431.

place. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, some religious places have temporarily closed. Some Christians feel disappointed and sad, seemingly severed from the church. However, Christians who embrace this pneumatological understanding of the church do not have many negative emotions because they see that the closed places are only some religious venues. As Christ is present with his church through the Holy Spirit, they are also present in this same way. It can be seen that the pandemic has had some unique effects on the spiritual state of Christians that are different from those of non-Christians. Furthermore, even within Christianity, different understandings of the sacramental nature, gospel preaching, and pneumatological emphasis of the church have given rise to different tendencies of spiritual development. However, the fundamental existence of the church provides a perfect haven for Christians in the storm of the pandemic. To be in the church or become the church means to be under the protection of Christ. In summary, as the two verses in the Bible state, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:19-20). All the above-mentioned different understandings of the essence of the church cannot deny the solemn guarantee made by Jesus to Christians, that as long as they follow his teachings, he will be with them until the end of time. Such a fundamental guarantee greatly strengthens and comforts the fears and worries of Christians in the pandemic.

1.2 The Spiritual Dependence of Fellowship

Before the Second Vatican Council, Catholic theologians commonly understood the Church as a "perfect society", as Adolf Tankler interpreted it: (1) a society that does not make mistakes; (2) a perfect society; (3) a society with a teaching institute; (4) a monarchy church. This theory of the Church emphasizes its institutional structure, and naturally defines the Church from a visible perspective - a system of management and behavioral norms. This shows that the Church is an unequal fellowship, where priests receive authority from God, while ordinary believers do not. Their responsibility is to respect and obey their superiors. The Second Vatican Council brought about new thinking in this theological field. As Lanna believed, the institutional framework that applies to specific historical periods may not be appropriate now, and the Church must be free to complete its sacramental mission in a new historical framework.⁵ Luther and Calvin, two reformers, both acknowledged the institutional elements of the Church, but they believed that the Gospel elements were more important. In the teachings of the Protestant Reformation, believers are all priests.⁶ In fact, fellowship can be understood from vertical and horizontal aspects, referring to the relationship between God and believers, and the relationship between believers. In the former case, it is certainly an unequal relationship. Christianity believes that humans were created by God but fell from grace, sowing the seeds of sin. God had to accomplish His redemption plan through His love for His son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, in front of God, all people are sinners and need to look to Jesus on the cross and complete reconciliation with God through the grace of Jesus' sacrifice. As for the latter, believers

⁵ Ibid, p.432.

⁶ Mirad J. Erickson. Introduction to Christian Theology, translated by Zhigang Chen, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2012, p.497.

are essentially equal, all being the children of God, without high or low distinctions. In real life, the division of labor in the Church is only for the continuation of this Gospel ministry. The baptizers and those who pass the bread and cup are not higher or better than those who are baptized and receive communion. They accept their guidance because of the authority of Jesus Christ behind them, so they are not obeying people, but obeying God. Overall, whether emphasizing the institutional or Gospel factors of the Church, Christians recognize that the Church is a fellowship. From the vertical relationship between God and man, God and man have made a covenant of salvation, and the validity of this covenant lasts until the end of the world. Obviously, Christians do not regard the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as a condition that interrupts, suspends, or terminates this covenant. This belief supports them to endure the pandemic and to face the occurrence of unfortunate events with a calm heart. From the horizontal relationship between people, believers are not in a superior-subordinate relationship, but in a relationship of serving and being served. Based on this idea, Christians find their position in this fellowship, just as they find their position in society. In this position, they complete their own mission and find a sense of belonging and achieve their value in life.

1.3 The Pure Heart as Sanctity

During the reign of Diocletian over the Roman Empire, the Christian Church experienced varying degrees of persecution. He ordered the burning of Christian books, the destruction of Christian churches, and some Christian leaders were forced to surrender their books, known as "Traditores" -people who submitted (their books). These people were allowed to participate in holy orders, which caused the anger of the Carthaginian Christians, causing them to break away from the church and gain the strong support of the local Africans, resulting in the Donatist movement (named after the African church leader who led the split, Donatus). They believed that a bishop who had apostatized could not perform valid sacraments, but the Catholic Church believed that through repentance, a bishop who had apostatized could still perform valid sacraments.⁷ This debate not only caused discussion of the schism in the church, but also raised another theological issue - the sanctity of the Church. Augustine's response to the challenge of the Donatists was that the Church is not the holiness of Christians, but that of Christ. The Church is a "mixed body" composed of saints and sinners. He used the analogies of casting a net and separating wheat and tares to illustrate his point, catching different fish in the net, and wheat and tares growing together but only being separated at harvest time to not harm the wheat.⁸ The 16th-century Anabaptist movement was also an attempt to answer the question of the sanctity of the Church. In order to reconcile the theoretical holiness of the Church with the sinfulness of its members, they expelled members who violated the standard of holiness from the Church.⁹ In addition, another view holds that the Church itself is not holy, but that it and its members are sinful until the end of days when it will finally be purified. If one wants to understand holiness correctly, it is insufficient to associate it with terms such

⁷ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, translated by Chengyi Zhao and Hengtian Shi, Beijing Joint Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 420-421.

⁸ Olson. *The History of Christian Theological Thought*, translated by Ruicheng Wu and Chengde Xu, Peking University Press, 2003, pp. 279-281.

⁹ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, translated by Chengyi Zhao and Hengtian Shi, Beijing Joint Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 427.

as morality, nobility, or purity. This is the error of using secular standards to judge Christian standards and creating links that may lead to misunderstandings, such as those made by the Donatists, Anabaptists, Augustine, and even Calvin. First, the Church is holy because Christ is holy. Second, the Church is full of sinners, and this is the true purpose of redemption. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Finally, the definition of holiness is separation. The Church separates itself from the world and becomes a testimony to the fallen world, spreading the gospel to the world. Some Christians understand the COVID-19 pandemic as a punishment from God for this fallen world. On the one hand, it makes them realize that the world has deviated from the right path in dealing with many events, neglecting its morality and the rule of law, and turning a blind eye to the fate of humanity. On the other hand, they also see themselves as sinners and actively seek to become holy in the Church, aspiring to become qualified Christians and a testament to the world. In other words, they bring the power of being an example to the world. During the pandemic, this is manifested in patient compliance with epidemic prevention measures, careful attention to personal and family health protection, and active service to society through donations of money and goods.

2. The Harmonization of Christian Souls through Sacraments

The Christian Church did not show much interest in sacraments during its initial few hundred years. It was only during the time of Augustine that people began to discuss sacraments extensively. Augustine believed that sacraments were symbols that had some relation to the things they represented. In the first half of the 12th century, Saint Victor's Hugh of Saint Victor revised Augustine's definition of sacraments, stating that they consisted of four essential elements: natural or material elements, resemblance to the represented thing, the power to represent the represented thing, and efficacy. However, Hugh's definition failed to satisfy the seven sacraments that the Church had reached a consensus on, particularly confession, as it lacked a material element. As a result, Peter Lombard removed the element of natural or material elements from the definition. This definition was widely used until the Reformation period, when the reformer Luther only recognized two sacraments: baptism and Eucharist. He believed that the two essential elements of sacraments were God's Word and external sacramental signs.¹⁰

2.1 Efficacious blessings

In the overview of the debate between Augustine and the Dominicans, the debate surrounding the influence of the sacrament ministers' own factors on the effectiveness of the sacraments is reflected. This debate can be briefly summarized as "effective because of the sacrament minister" and "effective because of the sacrament performed". Innocent III believed that the merits of the priest had no bearing on the efficacy of the Eucharist, and the ultimately basis of sacraments was God's Word. This view was also held by mainstream Protestant theologians in the 16th century. The commonality between these two views is that they both acknowledge the efficacy of sacraments, i.e., the efficacy of sacraments is indeed able to benefit the spiritual life of

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 447-449.

Christians. The main difference in the understanding of the efficacy of the sacraments between Catholicism and Protestantism can be summarized as “sacraments confer grace” and “sacraments represent grace”. The former believes that God bestows grace in the sacraments, which means that grace is the “cause”, but not the “ultimate cause”, which is God. The latter believes that sacraments are merely signs of grace. For example, baptism should not be considered as the sole means of receiving rebirth.¹¹ Those who agree with the former view attach great importance to the performance of sacraments. Moreover, the emphasis on sacraments is closely related to the era in which they are applied. Faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, such Christians will need the efficacious blessings provided by the sacraments more than ever. During the performance of the sacraments, they feel the grace bestowed by God, as in the case of the Eucharist. After eating and drinking, Christians believe that they have received blessings from God, which removes their physical illnesses and makes them stronger. Those who agree with the latter view may not attach as much importance to the performance of sacraments. However, sacraments as signs of grace can also play a certain role in life. This will be elaborated in the following sections. It is worth noting that the characteristics of the sacraments cannot be discussed in isolation from their context or use. For example, belief in becoming a Christian is related to baptism, which cannot be viewed independently as grace or signs. They are two sides of the same coin and are mutually interconnected.

2.2 Symbolic Comfort

As mentioned above, the Protestant perception of sacraments is primarily as signs of grace, recognizing only baptism and communion as sacraments. Protestant theologians emphasize the concept of trust, acknowledging human weakness and the difficulty of truly trusting in God. The existence of sacraments is thus meant to compensate for such weakness by providing tangible, visible signs of grace, allowing individuals to feel the presence of God and receive His guidance. This ensures and accommodates the faith of fallen humanity. The spread of the pandemic will inevitably lead to loss of life and property, and depression is also prevalent among Christians. This experience of gloom poses a serious challenge to their faith, prompting them to question the authenticity and significance of their beliefs. They may question why Jesus, who is remembered as a kind and loving figure, would allow the pandemic to take away so many lives. Is Jesus Christ, in whom they trust, still the one who grants grace? The pandemic environment is a demonstration of the sacraments’ compensatory effect on human weakness, and when people begin to doubt their faith, the sacraments appear as visible and feasible signs of grace, strengthening the faith of Christians. For example, in the communion, believers actually feel the assurance of God’s promise to save themselves through the act of breaking bread and drinking wine. By recalling the salvation work of Jesus Christ and looking forward to what Christians hope for – the second coming of Jesus Christ – recalling and hoping, Christians are able to dispel the depressive mood brought about by the pandemic, rejuvenating with enthusiasm and faith. At the same time, in the administration of the sacraments, Christians also feel a sense of belonging. For them, the sacraments are like a certificate of Christian fellowship. The fellowship formed by God’s people is like a big family, where believers feel the love of God and others, find their position and belong to this community.

¹¹Ibid, pp. 452-453.

2.3 The Power of Example

Whether it is the efficacy of blessings or the symbolic comfort, the entire process of administering the sacraments is inevitably accompanied by Christians' review of the deeds of the prophets, Jesus, and the saints, especially their strategies for dealing with difficult situations. These examples on the road of life cross the boundaries of time and space and in the administration of the sacraments, Christians truly feel the strength these examples bring to them. These examples of the ancient saints actually provide specific guidance for Christians in the pandemic. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his precious son Isaac, he believed that "And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together" (Genesis 22: 8). From this, Abraham was named the "Father of Faith," and Christians learn faith from him. When Philistine Goliath insulted the Israelite army, and all the Israelites were afraid and ran away, shepherd boy David used a sling to defeat him and took his head (1 Samuel 17: 41-51). Christians learn courage from David. When the Pharisees and Herodians questioned Jesus about taxes, he used his wisdom to answer, "They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21). Christians learn wisdom from Jesus. In summary, recalling the ancient saints in the administration of the sacraments provides Christians in the pandemic with the power of example.

3. The Impact of Eschatology on the Christian Spirit

From the perspective of the Christian faith, time is linear rather than cyclical, with a beginning and an end. The sources that have shaped the Christian eschatological thinking are primarily the sermons of Jesus and the writings of Paul. "And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). This is a declaration that runs through Jesus' preaching career, and this easily leads people to think of the end times. Paul's eschatology shows a contradiction between "now" and 'not yet', with the "new generation" already begun, but the fulfillment of this event will only come when Christ comes again to execute judgment. The Enlightenment criticized eschatology as superstition, and Karl Marx, for example, believed that the eschatological hope of Christianity comforts those who are suffering now with future joy, causing people to ignore the transformation of the real world and the elimination of hardship. In the 20th century, eschatology was rediscovered, although the mainstream view is still "beginning-oriented", despite British New Testament scholar Charles Dodd's belief that the "kingdom of God" has already been realized. For Christians, they live in a contradiction between "now" and "not yet",¹² on the one hand, the world is constantly falling, and on the other hand, the final judgment has not yet come, which has a subtle effect on their spiritual state.¹³

¹² Jianfeng Qiu, Jinfu Chen. *Eschatology*, Holy Spirit Seminary and Theological Academy, 2016, p.10.

¹³ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, translated by Chengyi Zhao and Hengtian Shi, Beijing Joint Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 495-497.

3.1 Adaptive mentality of prophetic type

Christians believe in the prophecies of the Book of Revelation, seeing signs that the "day of the Lord" is approaching. "And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven" (Luke 21:11). The COVID-19 pandemic is considered to be the unfolding of such eschatological prophecy. In other words, the occurrence of disasters was anticipated by Christians earlier than by non-believers. Compared with non-believers, this adaptive mentality is the advantage of Christians. Faced with negative issues such as the disruption of social order, the disturbance of living habits, and the blow to income due to the epidemic, they can better cope with an adaptive mentality and avoid falling into needless panic. Even in the face of death, a true Christian should remain calm. Just as Jeremy Taylor described in his famous work "The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying", he believed that by meditating on the hope after death, Christians can overcome the fear of death.¹⁴ Many Chinese people are deeply afraid of death, manifested in their behavior by avoiding direct references to the word "death". They use beautiful words to embellish death and weaken its dark and unknown nature, such as "flying away on a crane", "ascending to heaven", "hundred years from now", and so on. However, Christians can overcome the fear of death by anticipating the final judgment of righteousness in the end times, being reunited with Jesus Christ and other saints in heaven, and obtaining eternal happiness. Imagining one's own death in the face of impending disaster can even bring comfort to the soul, achieving a constant heart in the face of the epidemic.

3.2 Positive and proactive attitude towards seeking knowledge and wisdom.

For Christians, death itself is not terrible because they rely on Jesus Christ, who has already overcome the power of death by his sacrifice. Through faith in Christ, Christians who are now part of the body of Christ can share in this victory. Those who have already believed in Christ do not permanently obtain eternal life, and scriptures such as "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7); "Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16); "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). These scriptures constantly remind Christians that they must continually perfect and purify themselves. The epidemic has sounded the alarm for Christians who can no longer indulge in sin, otherwise they will perish in sin. This prompts them to constantly reflect on whether they have followed Jesus' commandment of love, "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). If not, they must strive harder towards this goal and continually pursue personal holiness, so that they may have a share in future grace. They generally believe that experiencing suffering such as the epidemic is too difficult to endure, but compared to eternal enjoyment in the future, such sacrifice is well worth it.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jeremy Taylor. *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living and Dying*, Seedbed Publishing, 2018, pp. 63-70.

¹⁵ Renzhong Cui. *House Churches in the Epidemic and Reflections on End Times Theology*, *China Christian Studies*, 2020(02).

3.3 Misconceptions of Pessimistic

Thought The emergence of negative teachings and extreme eschatological theories are related to each other. In the Church that prevailed in the millennium before year 2000, there was a prevalent radical apocalyptic complex. Pre-millennialism is a very pessimistic worldview that believes that things in the world are getting worse and that Jesus Christ will come back soon to end everything. Under the influence of this thought, many people have developed a negative attitude towards secular matters, believing that everything will disappear soon, and thus lose interest. The pandemic has revealed signs of the end times for Christians. Some Christians see the devastation that the pandemic has brought to humanity, as well as the helplessness and despair that humans face, and have developed a pessimistic attitude. Because the Bible states, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:16-17) and "They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment" (Hebrews 1:11). They may believe that everything is vain and will ultimately be destroyed. What is the meaning of participating in this world? When the pandemic sounded the trumpet of the end times, this world will only accelerate decay and cannot be renewed through human transformation. Combining with the essence of the Church, we believe that the mission of the Church is not to transform the world and establish "God's kingdom" on earth. Therefore, it is inappropriate to associate Christians with transforming the world, and to link the positive and negative aspects of Christians with their participation in the world. The Church exists in this world, and as part of the Church, Christians are naturally closely connected with the world. Their mission is to provide a unique witness to the world, which shows that the Church and Christians have not retreated from the world.¹⁶

Conclusion

The Church doctrine, sacraments, and eschatology are all at the core of Christian theology, and placing them in the context of the pandemic provides a new perspective for analyzing the spiritual state of Chinese Christians in such an environment. The difference in the spiritual states of Christians, non-Christians, and even unbelievers is magnified by the unexpected factor of the pandemic, allowing us to glimpse its mystery. Within the Christian community, Church doctrine, sacraments, and eschatology will have different impacts on the spiritual state of Christians in the pandemic environment. With different interpretations and even opposite emphasis on Church doctrine, sacraments, and eschatology, the differences in the impact become more complex and mysterious. In terms of Church doctrine, Christians feel the assurance of Christ's presence, dependence on fellowship, and sanctification in the pandemic environment. Regarding sacraments, Christians are blessed with effective blessings, symbolic comfort, and inspirational examples. In eschatology, Christian believers develop prophetic adjustment mentality, positive striving for victory mentality, and misconceptions of pessimistic thought. In summary, the Church doctrine, sacraments, and eschatology that Christians directly or indirectly accept or

¹⁶ Hauerwas, William. *Resident aliens: life in the Christian colony*, Translated by Zhiyong He, Beijing World Publishing Corporation, 2013, pp.30-35.

participate in daily religious life fully demonstrate their existence during the pandemic, which can be observed from their impact on the spiritual state of Christians.

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