



In a Pandemic Are We More Religious? Traditional Practices of Catholics and the COVID-19 in Southwestern Colombia

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Abstract

The relationship between times of crisis (natural disasters, pandemics) and religious behaviour has been the subject of long debate. Theoretical models of religious coping propose that adversity caused by adverse and unexpected events instigates people to use religion more intensively. This research explores this hypothesis, comparing the effects of religious practices among people who declare themselves Catholics in the Department of Nariño, Colombia, during the coronavirus pandemic. I found that gender, the type of religious practices and the frequency of pre-pandemic participation are significant predictors of religious intensification. These findings, as well as the description of the ideas and reactions that the people of Nariño have about COVID-19, contribute to a more nuanced understanding of religious behaviours and the significant implications for the future of Catholicism in this region.

Keywords Catholicism · Coronavirus · Religious coping · Religious practices · Sociology of religion · Colombia

Introduction

Recent studies on religious behaviours suggest the correlation between fear and beliefs. The literature exposes two causal links: fear motivates religious faith and then the last one mitigates fear (Donovan 1994; Ellis and Wahab 2013; Jong et al. 2013; Jong et al. 2017; Wen 2010). The former has to do with a feeling of helplessness in the face of annihilation itself. Hence the answer is an “effort”, “imagination” (Hayden 2003; Hepburn 1992; Trevors and Saier 2010), “illusion” (Becker 1973: 202) or “desire” that encourages the idea of

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immortality, be it literal or symbolic (Cicirelli 2002; Dechesne et al. 2003; Unamuno 1989). At the base of this notion, there is generally the affirmation of the existence of supernatural beings, the practice of certain rituals and the regulation of behaviours through moral codes. The latter indicates that all this religious experience mitigates the anxiety produced by the awareness of one's own finitude. Thus, religious people would enjoy lower levels of anxiety thanks to their rites, norms, community ties and belief system (Jackson et al. 2017; Jong et al. 2017; Wen 2012).

Although there is empirical evidence of the previous relationship (Daaleman and Dobbs 2010; Harding et al. 2005), other proofs show that beliefs can also increase fear of death (Homans 1941). For example, the feeling of eternal damnation could arouse the fear of dying. From another perspective, the theory of the apprehension of death (DA) stresses that death does not always produce the same fear. This response is not directly related to the religiosity of a person but to the individual sensation of increased pain and decreased pleasures in life (Ellis et al. 2013; Falkenhain and Handal 2003). Something similar happens with other research that indicates that although there is a linkage between anxiety/fear of death and religiosity, this connection is weak. According to these inquiries, one of the errors of the studies that defend the previous correlation is that their samples do not proportionally include religious and non-religious interviewees, as well as that they do not consider gender or age differences.

With regard to religion as a form of coping, we could say that it helps to combat immediate challenges, imagine and plan diverse futures, and resist to a personal and social state of permanent insecurity (Ano and Vasconcelles 2005; Bentzen 2019; Norenzayan and Hansen 2006; Pargament 2001). Religious narratives often make it possible to think beyond the current conditions of space and time and accept the emergence of multiple worlds, senses and worldviews. Under these conditions, people can “imagine” realities or develop meanings that can limit damage or curb the sense of risk of an adverse event. However, these “imagined beings” may not necessarily be “gods or spirits” (Meerten 2009: 198). Societies have created a series of resources to deal with this instability and fallibility throughout history also to hide, normalize or distract people from their condition of finitude.¹ Notwithstanding, most of the time, these inventive processes also recreate ancient mythologies. These stories generally recall the struggle between life and death, good and evil and chaos and order. Hence, hostile events can “re-enchant” the world (Maffesoli 2004; Weber 1963) or at least allow religious rhetoric to be used as the property of the public who uses it as tales from a still-near past. This procedure is done to talk about interrogations that are not alien, but neither are they identifiable with what is literally said (Certeau 2006: 197). Hence, religion functions as a representation of certain social problems or as cultural and ethical fortress of structures that lack this, or it simply works as support for a certain power.

¹ Imagination as a form of coping allows us to make references to books, literary descriptions, paintings, cinematographic works and finally internet. All of them could be considered alternative realities to daily life or as instruments of confrontation or evasion. For further analysis, see Bittarello 2008.

Consequently, the global pandemic of COVID-19 unpredictably re-confronts people with the instability and chaos (Bentzen 2019). Probably, in this scenario, we can observe how believers use religion to face unexpected and sudden adversity (Bentzen 2020; Pargament 2001; Smith et al. 2000).² For example, in the USA, according to a report by the Pew Research Center (2020), more than half of adults said that they have prayed for an end to the spread of the coronavirus. Two-thirds of Catholics (68%) also said that they have prayed for the end to the outbreak. According to this survey, more women than men said that they have prayed for an end to the spread of the disease. Older people are more likely than younger adults to say that they have prayed for an end to the virus. Fifty-seven per cent of those who claim to attend religious services, generally at least once or twice a month, said that they have watched religious services online or on TV.

Albeit worship places have been closed preventively, religious services have been transferred to the internet quickly and efficiently. Churches have multiplied several offline and online initiatives to overcome the disturbance caused by the coronavirus. These proposals include a variety of activities through various media, especially through the internet: rites and prayers, educational courses, messages, sermons, religious music concerts, practical information on health and social actions in favour of the neediest (Campbell 2020). These actions have not been exclusively carried out by the leaders of religious institutions but also by many faithful. Consequently, we must ask, do believers, particularly Catholics, intensify their religious practices by facing a threatening event such as COVID-19 and by doubling the religious offer?

Religious activities transferred to a virtual environment are not a new phenomenon (Campbell 2012). Online religious studies have explored this topic from different perspectives and contexts: ritual transformation, virtual temples, online religious communities, etc. (Baesler and Chen 2013; Campbell and DeLashmutt 2014; Campbell and Vitullo 2016; Cowan 2005; Hutchings 2011). However, the transfer of churches to the internet as a “pragmatic response” (Campbell 2020: 10) to this cultural change does not exhaust the diversity of religious practices during the pandemic.³ The religious experience is usually more polymorphic. Although some academic reports point out the negative effects of virtual participation in religions that accentuate the sense of community and embodiment of their practices, the growth of religious exchange through the internet is evident (Bare 2020). For example, recent research shows that one of the most searched for prayers on google in March 2020 was the “coronavirus prayer”, a prayer in which believers ask God for protection against the coronavirus, strength to resist and thanksgiving for the efforts of health professionals. The same research indicates that prayer searches increased more in the poorest, most insecure and most unequal countries, although these countries are also the most religious (Bentzen 2020).

² The use of religion in this context is not only personal but also institutional. For example, some interfaith leaders prayed together for salvation from the pandemic in Israel (April 22). Pope Francis has appeared in public several times praying for the end of the pandemic. In sum, in different parts of the world, we have seen religious leaders multiplying activities—with some eccentricities—to comfort their faithful. See Ecuadorian bishop bless people from a helicopter.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/watch-ecuador-bishop-delivers-blessing-by-helicopter/vedioshow/75075273.cms>

³ The transfer of Catholic churches to the internet is included in the concept of Ritual Online or Religion Online. Currently, most digital religion studies focus on strictly virtual communities and rituals (Online-Ritual - Online-Religion). See Miczek 2008: 145.

Therefore, although these religious transfers to the Internet play an important role as ways of coping with the pandemic, appreciating the transformations in the religious field also involves examining the ways in which believers interpret the pandemic, the information they have about it and the sources that they consult to know its evolution. This is the first element that I will discuss in this essay. Second, I explore changes in Catholics' religious practices, not only with reference to their institutionalized rituals but to individual or private exercises of their faith, as well as the means and contexts in which they are performed. In this sense, interpretative frameworks and religious practices could be taken as an epiphenomenon of the society or group that I am analyzing because spirituality answers the questions of a time and never answers them in any other way than in the same terms of such questions (Certeau 2006: 48). Finally I propose some conclusions and questions for future researches.

Methodology

This study was conducted with Catholics residing in the Department of Nariño, Colombia, a region that borders Ecuador.⁴ Its rather rugged relief is a symbol of a heterogeneous population, made up of numerous ethnic groups, and also of its historical isolation. Despite its diversity, Nariño has suffered in recent years from the scourge of armed violence, drug trafficking and poverty. On the other hand, although Catholicism has been prevalent in this area of the country, this population is undergoing a series of important transformations, which are particularly evident in the religious field through the combination of traditional and modern elements (Villamarin 2019). These conditions offer an ideal setting for an exploratory study of the impact of COVID-19 on the religious practices of Catholics.

The sample of this research included people over 18 who declare themselves Catholics and who currently reside in the Department of Nariño. Considering the limitations imposed by the coronavirus pandemic and with the interest of saving time, financial resources and energy, the data collection was performed through a convenience sampling strategy based on a non-reasonable and non-probabilistic choice. The questionnaire was designed through a google form that was shared on various Facebook pages.⁵ In total, 1192 people responded to the survey during the month of May.

Even if the results are not easily generalizable due to the strategy through which the sample was selected, this procedure has served to obtain information promptly and at a low economic cost. This qualitative research uses an exploratory-descriptive design that aims to discover the incidence of this pandemic on the religiosity of Catholics in this region of Colombia. Predefining the categories in a comprehensive and representative way allows us to specify the fundamental elements through which these people create an image of the pandemic and to identify changes in their religious practices. Despite the fact that the questions do not completely exhaust the scope of the subject in

⁴ For further information: Castillo & Jurado, 2014; Fals, 2010; Gobernación de Nariño 2020.

⁵ Despite the advantages of online surveys: low cost and they can be conducted in a short period of time. Some researchers depicted some disadvantages related to the sampling, response rate and non-respondent characteristics. See Prasad Nayak and Narayan 2019.

question, grouping them into two sections and having pre-established options allow us to measure statistically with some precision the various dimensions of this phenomenon. The analysis and interpretation of the data are intended to verify the intensification of religious practices in relation to the threatening conditions produced by COVID-19. The relevant results will be highlighted trying to delimit what challenges emerge for Catholicism in the future (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16).

The distribution of the sample into structural categories is as follows: (a) sex: women (635), men (555), other (2); (b) age: 18–29 years (139), 30–49 years (565), 50–64 years (255), over 65 years (9); (c) residential area: rural (67), urban (452), city, more than 100,000 inhabitants. (421); (d) educational level: primary education (7), high school (457), technical education (195), university (533); (e) marital status: married (461), separated/divorced (58), free union (126), single (523), widowhood (24); (f) labour status: unemployed/pensioned, disabled (23), students (212), home (128), day labourer (3), worker—private employee (permanent) (289), worker—government employee (191), employer (35), own-account worker (311).

Results

Catholics and COVID-19

Among the interviewees, there is a great consensus of opinion on the evidence of the pandemic. About 91.78% maintain that it is a virus that produces various affections in the human body, while only 3.78% affirm that it is an invention of politicians. Although, a relative majority (54.87%) indicates that COVID-19 is a reaction of nature to abuse perpetrated by human being, there is a tendency to attribute its origin to a non-natural element: created in a laboratory (49, 58%), a global conspiracy (37.58%) and a strategy of the pharmaceutical companies to earn money (27.01%). In relation to the religious and existential dimension of the pandemic, 30.03% believe that it is being part of the prophecies of the end of the world, 25.67% that it is divine punishment and

Table 1 Of the following options, which statements represent what you think about COVID?

	I agree	I do not agree	I do not know	Total
<i>A virus created in a laboratory</i>	49.58%	20.47%	29.95%	100%
<i>It is an invention of politicians</i>	3.78%	82.47%	13.76%	100%
<i>It is a virus that produces various affections in the human body</i>	91.78%	3.52%	4.70%	100%
<i>It is part of a global conspiracy</i>	37.58%	26.43%	35.99%	100%
<i>It is a pharmaceutical strategy to earn money</i>	27.01%	38.34%	34.65%	100%
<i>It is a reaction of nature to the abuse perpetrated by the human being</i>	54.87%	19.55%	25.59%	100%
<i>It is a divine punishment</i>	25.67%	62.84%	11.49%	100%
<i>It is part of the prophecies that predict the end of the world</i>	30.03%	49.66%	20.30%	100%
<i>A time of grace to change what is wrong</i>	69.38%	24.50%	6.12%	100%

All tables are own production.

Table 2 Through which mass media do you inform yourself about what is happening with the pandemic? You can select up to three options

	%
<i>Newspapers and magazines (online)</i>	29%
<i>Newspapers and magazines (printed)</i>	1%
<i>Radio</i>	33%
<i>Television</i>	82%
<i>Facebook</i>	72%
<i>Twitter</i>	8%
<i>WhatsApp</i>	52%
<i>Youtube</i>	9%

69.38% accept that it is a time privileged to change what is wrong. If this information is decomposed into other variables, it is observed that sex, age and study title determine some trends in the responses. For example, among those who think that the virus is produced in a laboratory, 64.32% of men agree with this statement in relation to 36.85% of women. Furthermore, at an older age, participants tend to agree more with this idea: 46.56% (18–29 years old), 49.55% (30–49 years old), 52.94% (50–64 years) and 55.56% (> 65 years). With a higher study title, the percentage of those who agree tends to be lower: 71.43% (primary), 61.05% (high school), 58.46% (technical) and 36.21% (university). When considering the statement that the pandemic is part of the prophecies that predict the end of the world, 51.65% of women disagree in relation to 40.54% of men. At a younger age, participants tend to disagree more with this argument: 62.26% (18–29 years), 50.35 (30–49 years), 29.41% (50–64) and 66.67% (> 65 years). The same happens with a higher study title: 58.54% (university), 37.95% (technical), 44.86% (high school) and 14.29% (primary education).

The predominant mass media for our population is a traditional channel, the television (82%); however, Facebook appears second (72%) and then WhatsApp (52%). Radio reaches 33% and newspapers and magazines (online) 29%.

Most of the sample (72%) prefers to take advice the information that comes from the authorities and government institutions (national, regional or local). Health authorities

Table 3 What sources do you consult to stay informed about COVID-19? You can select up to three options

	%
<i>Government authorities and institutions (national, regional or local)</i>	72%
<i>Health authorities</i>	49%
<i>Scientists or academicians</i>	18%
<i>Journalists</i>	32%
<i>Leaders of opinion</i>	3%
<i>Religious leaders</i>	3%
<i>Relatives and friends</i>	21%
<i>Influencers</i>	0.5%

Table 4 What is your priority right now? (Check only one option)

	Man	Woman	Other	Total
<i>To help those most in need</i>	0.90%	2.05%	50.00%	1.59%
<i>My emotional balance</i>	2.16%	5.51%	50.00%	4.03%
<i>Employ and incomes</i>	67.57%	1.73%	0.00%	32.38%
<i>The relationship with God</i>	4.68%	17.17%	0.00%	11.33%
<i>My healthy</i>	21.26%	66.61%	0.00%	45.39%
<i>Family unity and tranquillity</i>	3.42%	6.93%	0.00%	5.29%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

(49%) as well as journalists (32%) are also important sources. Finally, friends and family (21%) are also consulted about the pandemic and with a lower percentage, scientists or academicians (18%).

With regard to the priority of people during this period of confinement, most women (66.61%) select health as first option in relation to 21.26% of men. On the contrary, they opt for work and economic income (67.57%) and women 1.73%. Another important item for women is the relationship with God (17.17%), for men only 4.68%.

Hope is the most recurrent attitude for 43.15% of women compared with 10.81% of men. In the opposite direction, 44.86% of men selected fear and 32.97% anxiety respecting to 23.15% and 16.85% of women, respectively. On the other hand, 14.02% of women said that they are anxious along with 7.75% of men.

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Women participated in the mass more frequently, for example, around 45.20% of them did it once a week, compared with 15.50% of the men. With quarantine, women's daily participation intensifies slightly (from 19.84 to 21.10%), although the percentage of those who did not (from 4.88 to 12.60%) also increases. Among men, participation decreases: those who participated once a month (42.70%) are now only 4.14% and the percentage of those who did not participate grew from 1.62 to 36.40%.

Table 5 What is your recurring attitude towards what the pandemic is generating? (Select only one option)

	Man	Woman	Other	Total
<i>Anxiety</i>	7.75%	14.02%	50.00%	11.16%
<i>Apathy</i>	1.98%	1.10%	0.00%	1.51%
<i>Demotivation</i>	1.44%	1.26%	0.00%	1.34%
<i>Hope</i>	10.81%	43.15%	0.00%	28.02%
<i>Impotency</i>	32.97%	16.85%	50.00%	24.41%
<i>Fear</i>	44.86%	23.15%	0.00%	33.22%
<i>Loneliness</i>	0.18%	0.47%	0.00%	0.34%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6 How often did/do the following practices before/during the quarantine? Mass

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	6.31%	15.50%	42.70%	33.87%	1.62%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	19.84%	45.20%	20.00%	10.08%	4.88%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	50.00%	0%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	13.51%	31.29%	30.62%	21.14%	3.44%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	6.49%	12.97%	4.14%	40.00%	36.40%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	21.10%	37.32%	15.12%	13.86%	12.60%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	14.26%	25.92%	9.98%	26.01%	23.83%	100%

The rosary seems to be an activity practiced sporadically by women. Roughly 28.98% pray it once a month and 26.61% very rarely. Contrary to 72.25% of men who do not and 9.73% who pray it very rarely. During pandemic, women have intensified their prayer several days a week (from 17.95 to 38.27%). The variation between men is minimal (5.59 to 10.99%). The percentage among men who do not pray it remains unchanged.

About 86.14% of the women prayed all or several days a week in relation to 25.05% of the men and 39.82% of the seconds do it once a week and 32.07% very rarely. There are no significant changes with the pandemic for these two groups.

Reading the Bible is also not a recurring practice for our interviewees. Around 28.82% of women did it suddenly before quarantine and 71.17% of men did not. During quarantine, there is a small growth in women's reading: All or several days a week (12.28 to 17.48%) and once a week (16.54 to 18.27%). In this group, the number of those who do not read it also grows (16.69 to 21.26%). Among men, there are minor variations.

The study of Catholic doctrine is a not very frequent activity among Catholics in this region. About 75.68% of men said that they never do it in relation to 31.65% of

Table 7 How often did/do the following practices before/during the quarantine? The rosary

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	5.59%	5.41%	9.73%	7.03%	72.25%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	17.95%	12.28%	28.98%	26.61%	14.17%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	0%	50.00%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	12.16%	9.06%	19.97%	17.53%	41.28%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	10.99%	5.77%	5.77%	4.86%	72.61%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	38.27%	11.97%	18.90%	19.69%	11.18%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	50.00%	0%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	25.50%	9.06%	12.84%	12.75%	39.85%	100%

Table 8 How often did/do the following practices before/during the quarantine? Personal prayer

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	25.05%	39.82%	1.80%	32.07%	1.26%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	86.14%	3.15%	4.25%	4.25%	2.20%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	50.00%	0%	0%	0%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	57.63%	20.22%	3.10%	17.20%	1.85%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	24.68%	39.82%	1.62%	30.63%	3.24%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	87.72%	3.31%	3.78%	1.73%	3.46%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	50.00%	0%	0%	0%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	58.31%	20.30%	2.77%	15.18%	3.44%	100%

women. There are no significant changes during quarantine; in fact, the percentage of non-study among women increases a little (31.65–38.27%).

This devotional practice is more common among women. About 24.09% of them did it rarely, 19.84% all or several days a week, 20.47% once a week and 23.15% once a month. Among men, 45.95% did it sporadically and 38.02% had not. With quarantine, this action is intensified in women in two ways: several or every day a week, it grows from 19.84 to 31.34% and those who do not from 12.44 to 18.90%. Among men, the option once a week increases from 4.86 to 42.16%.

This religious activity is not widely practiced by men: roughly 9.37% do it once a month, 8.11% very rarely and 75.68% do not do it. The percentages among women are different: 33.70% of them do it once a month, 29.61% very rarely, 10.08% all or several times a week, 11.50% once a week and 15.12% of them did not. During the quarantine, the figures for men do not vary significantly. Among women, it increases a little: all or several times a week (15.43%), once a week (14.65%) and those who do not it (23.94%).

The means chosen to carry out the above religious practices are still the most traditional. However, while 67.71% of men prefer television, 31.52% of women choose this medium. About 34.01% of women choose the Internet (social networks and other

Table 9 How often did/do the following practices before during the quarantine? Read the Bible

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	7.39%	4.50%	8.83%	8.11%	71.17%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	12.28%	16.54%	25.67%	28.82%	16.69%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	50.00%	0%	50.00%	0%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	9.98%	10.99%	17.79%	19.21%	42.03%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	9.01%	4.86%	6.85%	5.23%	74.05%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	17.48%	18.27%	22.20%	20.79%	21.26%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	50.00%	50.00%	0%	0%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	13.51%	12.08%	15.10%	13.51%	45.81%	100%

Table 10 How often did/do the following practices before/during the quarantine? Study Catholic doctrine

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	3.78%	4.32%	9.19%	7.03%	75.68%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	5.98%	12.60%	27.72%	22.05%	31.65%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	50.00%	0%	0%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	4.95%	8.81%	19.04%	15.02%	52.18%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	5.59%	4.50%	7.03%	5.59%	77.30%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	8.03%	11.18%	26.46%	16.06%	38.27%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	50.00%	0%	0%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	6.88%	8.14%	17.37%	11.16%	56.46%	100%

sites) for their religious celebrations or events in relation to 14.1% of men. Finally, 22.64% of women do it without the need of any and at home and 18.24% of men choose the same.

The usual way of practicing some religious action is together with some relatives (54.28%). However, the percentage of those who prefer to do it alone is representative (36.83%). Regarding to this option, 41.08% of men choose it compared with 33.07% of women.

Most men are oriented to practice the religious acts so that God frees them from the coronavirus (39.77%) and for fear (30.57%). Instead, women do so because these actions give them tranquillity and strength (65.04%) and because they identify themselves as convinced Catholics (19.15%).

Although 61.58% of the sample agrees with the closing of the churches, 32.80% think otherwise. About 67.87% of men are in favour of this measure compared with 54.23% of women. Those who answered no were asked to specify their motivation. Most of the answers can be grouped as follows: we have nowhere to meet Jesus; in churches we find peace; and they are sacred places.

Table 11 How often did/do the following practices before/during the quarantine? Light candles to God or the saints

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	3.60%	4.86%	7.57%	45.95%	38.02%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	19.84%	20.47%	23.15%	24.09%	12.44%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	0%	100.00%	0%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	12.25%	13.17%	15.86%	34.40%	24.33%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	4.50%	42.16%	7.21%	4.86%	41.26%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	31.34%	19.06%	17.64%	13.07%	18.90%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	0%	50.00%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	18.79%	29.78%	12.75%	9.31%	29.36%	100%

Table 12 How often did/do the following practices before/during the quarantine? Make a promise or sacrifice to ask for a favour or grace

		All or several days a week	Once a week	Once a month	Very rarely	I did not (I do not)	Total
Before quarantine	<i>Man</i>	2.88%	3.96%	9.37%	8.11%	75.68%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	10.08%	11.50%	33.70%	29.61%	15.12%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	0%	50.00%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	6.71%	7.97%	22.32%	19.63%	43.37%	100%
During quarantine	<i>Man</i>	4.14%	3.24%	9.01%	6.49%	77.12%	100%
	<i>Woman</i>	15.43%	14.65%	28.66%	17.32%	23.94%	100%
	<i>Other</i>	0%	0%	0%	50.00%	50.00%	100%
	<i>Total</i>	10.15%	9.31%	19.46%	48.74%	12.33%	100%

Discussion

Before analyzing changes in the religious practices of Catholics, I have examined their relationship to this pandemic in terms of information and reactions. The first observation that emerges is the notorious consensus of the interviewees when accepting the consequences that this virus produces in people's health. This unanimity is not as strong when considering the possible causes of the pandemic. The percentage of those who accept the non-natural origin of the virus is considerable, as well as those who religiously reinterpret this crisis.

Men are more likely to accept conspiracy and apocalyptic visions. However, academic training and youth favour the opposite trend. This tendency is linked to the fact that the most recurrent attitude among men is fear and helplessness in the face of the pandemic, and their primary concern is employment and incomes. The opposite occurs with women; they are not so in agreement with these interpretations and privilege their health, the relationship with God and claim to have hope as a fundamental attitude during quarantine.

Therefore, it is important to inquire about people's vision of the world. This set of Catholic believers does not have the same priorities, does not react the same way and does not have a single image of the virus. Hence, the response to the virus even within Catholics is not univocal. These images not only come from a particular religious tradition but are modelled by the media and the sources that they often consult. In this

Table 13 Through what means/mode do you carry out the religious activities that you have practiced during the quarantine?

	Internet (social networks and other sites)	Another way	Radio	At home and without any means	Tv	Total
<i>Man</i>	14.18%	1.82%	4.05%	18.24%	61.71%	100%
<i>Woman</i>	34.01%	2.68%	9.15%	22.64%	31.52%	100%
<i>Other</i>	0%	50%	0%	0%	50%	100%
<i>Total</i>	26.59%	2.44%	7.21%	20.98%	42.78%	100%

Table 14 How do you generally practice the above activities?

	Man	Woman	Other	Total
<i>With some friends</i>	1.08%	6.14%	0.00%	3.78%
<i>With friends or relatives remotely</i>	1.98%	7.87%	0.00%	5.12%
<i>With my family (partner, children and other relatives)</i>	55.86%	52.91%	50.00%	54.28%
<i>Alone</i>	41.08%	33.07%	50.00%	36.83%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

case, it is clear that not consulting specialized sources such as scientific journals or the opinion of academics can strengthen misconceptions about the virus. What kinds of fears do the pandemic raise and how does each influence religious practices? What type of information privileges the religious interpretation of this phenomenon? What kind of information do they find on television, Facebook and WhatsApp? What social factors contribute to interpretive differentiation by gender?

The hypothesis that an unpredictable and adverse event such as the pandemic may intensify religiosity in Catholics is not supported by the findings of this research. Those who consider religious practices in general do not take into account their diversity. As we will see later, the type of religious activities could determine the frequency of participation. Furthermore, it would be important to analyze how the priorities of these people during the pandemic may or may not be linked to the intensification or decrease of their religious practices.

We wanted to avoid an instrumental interpretation of religion when considering various religious practices. According to this vision, many religious institutions evaluate the commitment of their faithful according to their participation in public rituals and official meetings. The problem with this approach is that membership in a religion is primarily defined in place-based institutional terms. The transfer of churches to the Internet is still based on this traditional vision of community. This notion excludes not only the acceptance of the concept of community as a dynamic and changing process, structured with multiple connections and determined by the personal needs and choices of its members, but also the set of religious practices that individuals carry out in domestic groups or individually (Campbell 2020).

Table 15 Why do you practice the above activities? (Select only one option)

Options	Man	Woman	Other	Total
<i>For God to save us from the Coronavirus</i>	37.24%	3.44%	50%	19.97%
<i>Fear</i>	28.62%	0.65%	0.00%	14.26%
<i>Because this quarantine has helped me to get closer to God</i>	5.17%	11.31%	50%	8.39%
<i>Because they give me tranquility and strength</i>	14.48%	63.45%	0.00%	39.51%
<i>Because I am a convinced Catholic</i>	8.12	18.69%	0.00%	13.51%
<i>By custom tradition</i>	6.37%	2.46%	0.00%	4.36%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 16 Do you agree with the closing of the churches?

	No	I do not know	Yes	Total
<i>Woman</i>	42.70%	3.06%	54.23%	100.00%
<i>Man</i>	24.25%	7.87%	67.87%	100.00%
<i>Other</i>	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Total	32.80%	5.62%	61.58%	100.00%

Comparing participation in various religious practices before and during confinement has allowed us to find basically four things: First, private or personal religious practices have a greater degree of intensification during the pandemic with regard to institutionalized rituals such as mass. Second, the intensification of some religious practices is a more visible phenomenon in women than in men. Third, both women and men who are not very practicing tend to abandon these practices during quarantine, in other words, pre-pandemic religious behaviour functions as a preacher about increasing or decreasing religious actions during pandemic. Fourth, simple and brief devotional practices are more frequent than those that require a religious official, connect online or meet in community. Similarly, religious actions of prayer prevail over those that are formative, such as reading the Bible or studying Catholic doctrine.

On the other hand, men prefer traditional media, such as family gatherings or television, to participate in some religious celebrations during compulsory isolation. In that same direction, they privilege instant and individual religious actions, such as lighting a candle. On the other hand, although men are the ones who most claim to be afraid of the pandemic, there does not seem to be an increase in religious practices among them. Hence, compared with women, they mostly accept the closure of churches.

In sum, there is no strong intensification of religious practices during this time of pandemic, despite the fact that the religious offer both on the Internet and by other means of communion has multiplied. How much does the long duration of the pandemic have to do with these changes? Is religious discourse losing its validity in this area of Colombia or does popular practice still prevail over institutional practices? How much could the crisis caused by COVID-19 affect the hegemony of religious discourses and practices, especially those of Catholicism?

It has been generally accepted that events such as COVID-19 generate a greater religious response. The data provided shows that many of the practicing believers do it this way. The non-intensification of these religious practices in many Catholics makes us suppose that there are other forms of coping that would influence the decrease in religious participation. However, it should not be assumed that this process is exclusively one of recomposition. In other words, people not only have religious practices to regain their world view and maintain a sense of calm in the presence of some looming threat. This situation can also lead believers to break certain conventions of thinking, feeling and practicing religion, even away from this system of interpretation and action. Crisis, as many academics explained, not only allow a rapid change in the practical and pragmatic aspects of religious commitment, which is what we have discussed above, but also open a space to consider what aspects of beliefs and practice they represent the

core of your religious identity and community, but also to get away from that core and get closer to another (Osteen and Campbell 2020).

Beyond the theories that try to define whether religious services on the Internet can be considered rites and if they constitute churches, our questions are as follows: What will happen to religious practices after the pandemic? Will they return in masses to places of worship or will there be a decline? What will happen to the other religious practices? Probably and as Peter asserts, the “new normal” means that there may never be a complete return to the business of religion as it was before, depending on the event and location (Osteen and Campbell 2020: 59).

Conclusion

This analysis is quite modest with respect to offering certain answers on the changes in the religious practices of Catholics during the COVID-19 pandemic. I consider, however, that it can offer several guidelines towards more systematic and rigorous research on the above questions. I conclude with a series of questions and hypotheses that, in our opinion, could be fruitfully studied in the future.

In the first line, the religious interpretations of the pandemic could be studied: its ways and channels of reproduction and its relationship with daily care practices and with political treatments of the problem. For example, I saw some indication that not consulting specialized sources (i.e. sharing information not verified by a specialist through family networks like Facebook and WhatsApp) may increase apocalyptic and religious interpretations of the virus. This is not a new discovery since each individual in their innermost circles receives and transmits unconfirmed information, that is, each group usually reinforces its own vision of the world. This will help us gain certainty about this dynamic, in the context of religious accounts and social media.

Similarly, I hypothesized that the propensity to share these views of the pandemic could be correlated with older people and low levels of education. Testing this hypothesis would certainly show the old idea that lack of education is a breeding ground for the transmission of Manichean and plotting ideas. However, it would be interesting to analyze how religious leaders respond to these representations and discourses.

A third group of questions refers to possible contrasts between genders. I saw some evidence that men behave religiously differently than women. Likewise, their vision of the pandemic, priorities and reactions during this time are diverse. This could be a culture matter, namely, that religious sensibilities have been constructed intersectionally with gender roles or a simple matter of skills. Focused inquiry into these differences could help us gain greater clarity.

Fourth, I find that there is a de-intensification of religious practices during the pandemic, which is greater in institutionalized rites than in personal ones. I observe that people who practice certain religious acts with little regularity tend to abandon it during this period. Why do they do it? What will happen after the pandemic? Is there a break with your religious field of reference?

Finally, there are two broader theoretical questions. First is the question of the hegemony of Catholic religious discourse in a post-pandemic environment. As I observed in our literature review, unpredictable events suggest an increase in religious

behaviour as a form of coping. If this is not happening, at least in the study population; what is changing? Does the pandemic reveals the current loss of power of Catholicism or makes evident its constant inability to regulate the practices of its faithful? How can the Catholic Church, the epitome of a society in retreat, prosper in this period of crisis? Second is the question of the use or creation of new forms of coping. If the pandemic creates a sense of vulnerability in people or arouses awareness of finitude in them, how are people reacting? What coping or avoidance strategies are they using? This question and the consideration of the modes of living the quarantine (new forms of connection, devices etc.) have a direct relationship with the style of societies that are emerging at the moment and the discourses that govern them.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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