A Theology of Human Flourishing for Positive Psychology Pedagogy

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Research interest in human flourishing continues to grow across multiple disciplines. In this article, we suggest means by which Christian theology can inform teaching positive psychology. We survey the field of positive psychology by characterizing and distinguishing theories regarding eudaimonic and hedonic accounts of flourishing. Christian theological approaches diverge from the emphases of psychology by grounding flourishing outside of the self. Love, properly understood, links various Christian proposals regarding the nature of flourishing and circumscribes the relationships in need of flourishing: with God, with each other, with ourselves, and with the rest of creation. From this follow several pedagogical implications: (a) grounding positive psychology in love, (b) linking love of God to psychology of religion and spirituality, (c) using love to unify the study of traits, (d) including emic versions of positive traits, (e) incorporating discussion of positive institutions, (f) tempering positive psychology with a theology of suffering, and (g) using cross-cultural perspectives.

In recent years, a growing literature has explored the question, What is human flourishing? Sociologists, economists, psychologists, and philosophers have all given this question significant attention (Bok, 2010; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Fikkert & Rhodes, 2017; Graham, 2011; Haybron, 2008; Lane, 2001; Seligman, 2002, 2011; Smith, 2011, 2015). From these different academic disciplines, a variety of conceptions for flourishing have been offered, with some employing the language of "well-being" and others drawing upon the classically inspired vocabulary of "happiness" (Haidt, 2006). The shape of the more robust attempts often reflects what theologians Volf and Croasmun (2019) have called the "tripartite formal structure of flourishing life": *life led well* (agential), *life going well* (circumstantial), and *life feeling as it should* (affective). In other words, even if the accounts of human flourishing differ from one another, rich depictions attempt to posit some concern about (a) circumstances, (b) actions, and (c) feelings.

Christians face a particular challenge when constructing a vision about human flourishing. They approach this question not merely from an *anthropological* perspective (in light of knowledge about humans), but also from a *theological* perspective (in light of divine revelation and guidance; Spears & Loomis, 2009). Biblical scholars and theologians have, thus, entered the discussion about flourishing, but as much as they appropriately respect and honor insights from other academic disciplines, they have also necessarily tried to frame the question of flourishing in light of Scripture, Christian tradition, and Christian experience (Charry, 2010; Pennington, 2017b; Strawn, 2012; Volf, 2016; Volf & Crisp, 2015).

Once a Christian picture of flourishing has emerged, work remains to be done by Christians who seek to do interdisciplinary or integrative work on flourishing using Christian theology. First, departures from accounts of flourishing found in other disciplines and among other worldviews must be identified. Thus, for

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example, while there is beneficial potential in comparing Aristotle's vision of *eudaimonia* with Christian conceptions of flourishing, differences between them remain (Wright, 2012). For example, Aquinas (2008) Christianized Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* by adding Christian virtues and perfect eternal happiness in the afterlife to earthly, imperfect happiness, which resembles Aristotelian flourishing. Consequently, even when positive psychology draws on rich conceptions of flourishing such as *eudaimonia* (Peterson, 2004; Seligman, 2002), it can be challenging to bring the fullness and complexity of a Christian vision into this conversation. Second, interdisciplinary conversation requires domains of common ground to be discerned. So integrative dialogue requires recognizing similarities while retaining distinctives.

While a distinctively Christian theology of flourishing is deeply consonant with many of the topics within positive psychology, there are some important additions and adjustments that emerge from theological reflection that must inform a positive psychology pedagogy. After reviewing the primary ways of conceptualizing flourishing in positive psychology, we offer a critique from within a Christian worldview. We then sketch a Christian theological account of flourishing and show how it interfaces with positive psychological conceptualizations. We end with pedagogical implications of our conceptualization of flourishing for teaching positive psychology.

Flourishing in Positive Psychology

Positive psychology has been called "the science of happiness and flourishing" (Compton & Hoffman, 2013), and notions of happiness, flourishing, thriving, and well-being (often used interchangeably, or defined differently by different authors) are central to its conceptualization (for a thorough review of psychological well-being theories, see Lambert et al., 2015). In spite of the central place occupied by these interrelated terms, no consensus has emerged regarding what these terms mean. Broadly speaking, the diverse theories that have been proposed can be divided into hedonic and eudaimonic accounts, with the former focusing on the pursuit of (subjective) experiences of pleasure and the latter focusing on pursuing virtue, excellence, meaning, and/or self-realization (Lambert et

al., 2015; Waterman, 2008). As Keyes and Annas (2009) put it, hedonia refers to feeling good, while eudaimonia refers to functioning well. It should be noted that psychological conceptualizations of eudaimonia depart from the Aristotelian tradition of viewing eudaimonia as an objective condition (in contrast to the subjective condition of hedonia) and, instead, attempt to capture subjective experiences of the activities involved in eudaimonia (Heintzelman, 2018).

Diener's (1984) long-standing research program on subjective well-being is the conceptualization most commonly used to indicate hedonic accounts of happiness. Subjective well-being is comprised of the individual's own assessment of their life (i.e., satisfaction with life), along with high levels of pleasant affect and low levels of negative affect (Diener et al., 2003). Hundreds of studies have been conducted on subjective well-being that demonstrate its importance in relationship to numerous positive constructs.

Theories offering a eudaimonic conceptualization of happiness are more abundant. In a recent review, Martela and Sheldon (2019) identified 63 different constructs that have been used to conceptualize eudaimonic well-being. Some of the best-known theories of eudaimonic well-being are Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008) psychological well-being theory, Waterman's (1990, 1993) work on personal expressiveness, and Ryan's (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan et al., 2008) original self-determination theory and later eudaimonic theory. Ryff's theory conceptualizes eudaimonia in terms of being fully functioning and identifies six core dimensions as being essential for living a good life: (a) autonomy, (b) environmental mastery, (c) personal growth, (d) positive relations with others, (e) purpose in life, and (f) self-acceptance.

Waterman (1990, 1993) conceptualized self-realization and personal expressiveness as the defining features of eudaimonia. He later elaborated on this model by identifying six elements in eudaimonic well-being: self-discovery, perceived development of one's best potentials, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, investment of significant effort in pursuit of excellence, intense involvement in activities, and enjoyment of activities as personally expressive (Waterman et al., 2010).

Ryan's self-determination theory proposes that well-being is found in the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to this theory, the fulfillment of these needs in pursuit of intrinsically driven goals are the processes through which self-actualization can be achieved and, consequently, eudaimonic well-being can be fostered. It is worth noting that this theory focuses on the needs that foster eudaimonia rather than on the dimensions that define eudaimonia, as in the other theories. Ryan et al. (2008) later built on self-determination theory to propose a model of eudaimonic living. This model proposes four central motivational concepts: (a) pursuing intrinsic goals and values; (b) behaving in an autonomous and volitional way; (c) being mindful and acting with awareness; (d) and behaving in ways that satisfy needs.

In addition to these three formal theories, eudaimonic well-being is often conceptualized as the subjective experience of meaning in life, as meaning is considered an essential indicator of eudaimonic well-being (Heintzelman, 2018). Usually this is measured as subjective judgments that people make when responding to prompts such as "My life has meaning" (Hicks & King, 2009). Some theoretical consensus has emerged with respect to meaning, with general agreement that it is comprised of three aspects: coherence, purpose, and significance (or "mattering"; George & Park, 2016; Martela & Steiger, 2016).

Empirical work supports the distinctiveness of hedonic and eudaimonic types of happiness, while also showing that they are highly correlated (Gallagher et al., 2009; Keyes et al., 2002; Linley et al., 2009). However, the theoretical vagueness of psychological conceptualizations of eudaimonia has been an ongoing point of criticism (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Huta and Waterman (2014) noted that eudaimonic concepts are sometimes used to refer to correlates of eudaimonia rather than to eudaimonia itself and definitions focus on different categories of analysis, including orientations (orientations, values, motives, and goals), behaviors (behavioral content and activity characteristics), experiences (subjective experiences, emotions, and cognitive appraisals), and functioning (indices of positive psychological functioning, mental health, and flourishing).

In attempting to bring these together in a coherent way, Martela and Sheldon (2019) suggested a model in which eudaimonic motives and activities (values, motivations, goals, and practices) lead to psychological need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), which, in their turn, lead to subjective well-being.

A word should be said about Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of well-being, given its popularity. PERMA stands for positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Seligman emphasized that the PERMA constitutes "the *elements* of well-being, not...a *new* kind of well-being" (p. 333, italics in original). In arriving at the PERMA conceptualization, Seligman (2011) identified five components of well-being that are chosen for their own sake and that predict satisfaction with life. In speaking of the elements of the model, he stated that they "contribut[ed] to well-being, but none define[d] well-being" (p. 15). The model was built, not on the basis of explicit theory, but on the basis of two empirical criteria: that the element is pursued for itself and not in service of some other goal, and that the element statistically predicts satisfaction with life. It should be noted that the choice of these criteria does reveal a kind of implicit theory, for example, in its prioritizing of satisfaction with life as a marker of well-being. There was no attempt to align it with either the hedonic or the eudaimonic tradition. In fact, it includes elements of both, as positive emotions captures the hedonic element and Engagement and Meaning are clearly related to eudaimonic concepts. In arriving at PERMA, however, he also encouraged researchers to continue searching for additional important components, emphasizing again the lack of a formal theory of PERMA (Seligman, 2018). Consequently, PERMA is not a theory of well-being, but an empirical model of some of the elements that are pursued for themselves and that lead to well-being, narrowly defined as satisfaction with life. A number of other more recent authors have also taken this atheoretical approach to conceptualizing well-being (e.g., Su et al., 2014; VanderWeele, 2017).

Theological Critiques of Flourishing

We offer two primary critiques of the views of flourishing presented above: the grounding in the self versus in divine revelation, and the

inadequate telos or goal of these secular flourishing accounts. As is evident in the theories reviewed above, contemporary secular accounts tend to ground flourishing in the *self*, in one's self-actualization and enrichment, resulting in a significant limitation from a Christian perspective. Since, from a secular perspective, there is no transcendent source outside of the self that provides a norm and no revelation that reshapes the imagination, often (though not always) the highest good is reduced to developing autonomy, self-reliance, and accumulation of resources and skills (Volf & Croasmun, 2019). All such accounts are vulnerable to being self-referential, self-guided, and overly subjective. As articulated by Kapic (2019),

> Unfortunately, the North American mindset is dominated by individualistic assumptions. In particular, it assumes that you—in your own internal world, based on your own private instincts—have all you need to decide what is good, both for the world and for yourself. Under this way of thinking, no one should presume to tell me what is good for *my* body, *my* relationships, or *my* vision of the happy life. Instead, I should be free to collect as many resources as possible—educational, financial, and otherwise—and use them in service of my own goals and ambitions, so long as I don't interfere with anyone else's personally chosen goals and ambitions. All outside authorities and moral codes are seen as illegitimate intrusions into this realm of private freedom. In real life, of course, an ethic of extreme self-determination never really produces a life of love, community, and purpose.

Positive psychological theories can be susceptible to this inordinate emphasis on the self, especially in the popular imagination where it becomes a version of positive thinking or a self-improvement program.

The reliance on revelation rather than the self to inform conceptions of flourishing results in what Charles Taylor (2007) referred to as an "unbridgeable gulf between Christianity and Greek philosophy" (e.g., Aristotle) on this question of flourishing (p. 17). There will always be similarities, but also unavoidable distinctions or even tensions with secular accounts of flourishing. Taylor (2007) wrote,

> God wills ordinary human flourishing, and a great part of what is reported in the Gospels consists in Christ making this possible for the people whose afflictions he heals. The call to renounce [ordinary forms of flourishing] doesn't negate the value of flourishing; it is rather a call to centre everything on God, even if it be at the cost of forgoing this unsubstitutable good; and the fruit of this forgoing is that it become on one level the source of flourishing to others, and on another level, a collaboration with the restoration of a fuller flourishing by God. (p. 17)

Put differently, because of Christian assumptions about (a) a Triune Creator, (b) human creatures as both physical and spiritual beings, (c) the problem of sin, (d) the hope of redemption in Christ, (e) the ongoing presence of the Spirit, (f) the significance of a community of faith, and (g) expectations about the future, Christian definitions of the "good life" or flourishing will inevitably look different from those of other worldviews.

A second critique involves the goal or telos of flourishing. While eudaimonic well-being might be seen as more compatible with Christian formulations of flourishing than hedonic accounts, the Christian formulation of *eudaimonia* differs from Aristotle's because it posits a different conception of being whole/complete/perfect (*teleios*), which is shaped by a different goal or end (*telos*) of virtue (Pennington, 2017b). Whether Jesus is calling disciples to be "perfect" as the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48), or to give away their possessions in order to be perfect (Matt. 19:21; Jam. 3:2), the vision of fullness or completeness is not simply "a long list of hard moral commands dutifully obeyed but a character formed by overflowing generous love" (Wright, 2012, p. 108). Divine love received and then extended reshapes the Christian vision of flourishing. Right relations with God, others, and the rest of the creation is the fullness as well as the end of the Christian hope.

This vision, for example, is exemplified in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" that begins with Beatitudes. As Jonathan Pennington (2017b) and others have ably argued, one might more faithfully translate "Blessed" (i.e., *makarios*) as "Flourishing." Thus, for example, "Flourishing are the poor in spirit because the kingdom of heaven is theirs" (Pennington, 2017b, p. xv). Unexpected links are made between what at first might appear counterintuitive pairings: Flourishing does

not simply go with mercy, peacemaking, and righteousness, but also with sacrifice, solidarity and religious persecution (Holladay, 2012). According to Taylor (2007), what is distinctive is that there is "some higher good" that is "beyond flourishing" for Christians (p. 20). And, yet, this higher good is also what frames ultimate or full flourishing. "In the Christian case, we could think of this as agape [love], the love which God has for us, and which we can partake of through his power" (Taylor, 2007, p. 20). We experience divine benevolence; then, as Christians, we are called to embody and extend that benevolence to others (Luther, 1989).

This vision of divine love reorients our perception of life (circumstantial), informs our actions (agential), and shapes our affections (feelings), encompassing all the categories identified by Volf and Croasman (2019). These three domains align substantially with a commonly used frame for positive psychology. The psychological study of human flourishing as represented by positive psychology has been framed by its founder, Martin Seligman (2003), as encompassing three "pillars": positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Life feeling as it should (affective) overlaps with positive experiences in psychology; life led well (agential) encompasses strengths of character and traits; and life going well (circumstantial) is facilitated by positive institutions that enable structural and social flourishing.

Christian Flourishing:
A Theory Centered on Love

Various proposals for framing flourishing have been put forward by Christian scholars, such as shalom (Wolterstorff, 2004) or God's home (Volf & Croasmun, 2019). Similarly, multiple facets of biblical imagery (e.g., temple-garden, priest, royal/king, peace) and vocabulary (e.g., ʾašrê-, makarios, teleios, šālôm) are relevant to shaping a Christian vision of flourishing. We cannot survey all of these concepts here, but suggest that love (agape), rightly framed, remains the cornerstone upholding even these other attempts. Throughout the Christian tradition, as exemplified by Augustine but upheld by many others, love has played a central role in determining Christian accounts of flourishing (Volf, 2013). For example, the most frequently cited biblical text by Augustine (Burns, 1999) is

Romans 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). He employed this text paradigmatically to point back to creation and forward toward consummation: this love (re)connects the human to God and neighbor, all the while reorienting self-love and repositioning one's relation to the earth (Canning, 1993; Williams, 2016).

In our account of Christian flourishing, we pick up on this historically-salient theme that places love as a central guiding principle and that presents a stark contrast against the contemporary backdrop of self-enrichment-based flourishing. Jesus said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Matt. 16:25). Again and again, one reads of "picking up your cross" and following the sacrificial example of Christ who gave his life for others (Matt. 10:38, 16:24; Luke 9:23). The apostle Paul argued that sacrificial living for the sake of others is the expression of Christian love received and extended, thus, representing expectations of faithful flourishing as God's children: "Let love be genuine ... love one another with brotherly affection...Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Rom. 12:9, 10, 13). Rather than mere sentimentality, however, this love must be understood in a robustly biblical and theological way: It must be a holy love, a just love, an active or agency-affirming love, and a love that manifests the significance of emotions without being reduced merely to emotion.

While "love" is the key to a Christian account of flourishing, it is a particular account of love that is shaped by the Christ event and embodied by the community of faith. This flourishing love is always grounded in the love of the Father who gives the Son and Spirit so that his divine love might be seen, experienced, and then extended to his world. Secular self-referential accounts of flourishing struggle to make sense of absorbing pain or difficulty on account of others (even if intuitively valued), whereas the Christian narrative unapologetically assumes humans were made for others: God, neighbor, and the earth. Because sin has distorted those relationships, Christian flourishing may appear counterintuitive: It values humility above the self-refer-

ential, it values sacrifice rather than personal abundance, and its temporal horizon is different because it does not accept the fullness of flourishing until the future resurrection.

The centrality of a particular vision of love that governs and guides this Christian account of flourishing leads to another distinctive of a Christian view of flourishing: an everlasting temporal framework. Consequently, "The Christian story of our potential transformation by agape [love] requires that we see our life as going beyond the bounds of its 'natural' scope between birth and death; our lives extend beyond 'this life'" (Taylor, 2007, p. 20). A hypothetical question may prove helpful in making this point: Are there any ways in which a Christian presently dealing with cancer might imagine that, even in the midst of the pain and difficulties, they are in some ways experiencing flourishing? Given historical, empirical, and anecdotal evidence, there is reason to believe the answer might be "Yes." This is because in this present "fallen" world, Christian beliefs and practices appear to offer a particular perspective for constructing an account of what we will call "foretastes" or anticipations of flourishing even in a fallen world.

According to the Christian tradition, a person experiences Christian flourishing as their relation to God, neighbor, self, and the rest of creation exemplify love: divine love received, participated in, and then extended to others. Having received God's love as a gift of divine benevolence, believers now respond to that love in our attitudes, affections, and actions. Within the basic fourfold relations (God, neighbor, self, creation), *receiving* and *extending* this love provides a reasonable matrix for fairly understanding a Christian conception of flourishing in this present life.

The wholeness of Christian flourishing derives from right relations, first with God and then by consequence with the rest of God's creation (i.e., neighbor, self, earth). According to Augustinian accounts, "The supreme good which makes human beings truly happy [i.e., flourishing]...consists in love of God and neighbor and the enjoyment of both" (Volf, 2013, p. 16). Or, as Augustine himself writes in *The City of God*, the happy or flourishing life is one that is "the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and each other in God" (Augustine, 1994, p. 409).

Pedagogical Implications

In this section, we note pedagogical implications emerging from a Christian vision of flourishing. An emphasis on the priority of love and on the four categories of loving relationship that constitute human flourishing interface with the typical frameworks of positive psychology in productive ways. First, we recommend grounding the entire enterprise of positive psychology in a love-based Christian vision of flourishing. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman (2011), stated that "the topic of positive psychology is well-being,...the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and...the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing" (p. 13). Given the overarching nature of flourishing in setting the agenda for positive psychology and the influence conceptualizations of flourishing have for all other topics in positive psychology, our first pedagogical point is that helping students to get the concept of flourishing right is essential. A Christian vision of flourishing must be presented along with prominent secular theories, and the points of departure, along with their implications (some of which we outline below) should be emphasized.

Second, we recommend exploring the fruitful ways in which grounding all love in the love of God raises the possibility of incorporating the psychology of religion and spirituality into teaching positive psychology in ways that are not typically done. Flourishing is related to a growing sense of and appreciation for Divine benevolence (e.g., grace, love, forgiveness, approval, mercy). An awareness of and trust in such divine benevolence is thought of as the heart or even the definition of "faith" (Calvin, 1960). To experience divine forgiveness requires faith, since such benevolence is invisible and, therefore, not empirically verifiable. The resulting change in orientation, feelings, and actions does provide material for empirical investigation. According to tradition, when such life-giving benevolence is experienced, it normally then affects how one views and treats others (which includes the self); "We love because he first loved us" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, 1 John 4:19). Divine benevolence always and necessarily provides the foundation for the other three relationships. For example, forgiveness from God is meant to manifest in loving forgiveness of others, even our "enemies."

Researchers in positive psychology are beginning to explore domains relevant to relationship with God, such as gratitude to God (e.g., Krause & Hayward, 2015) and trust in God (e.g., Hook et al., 2021). Other aspects of relationship with God in the psychology of religion, such as attachment to God, have also been studied in relationship to character strengths, implying a theoretical connection between relationship with God and relationship with others, as evidenced by relational virtues (e.g., Jankowski et al., 2022). A Christian vision of flourishing that sees God's love as the cause of other kinds of love suggests promising avenues for further research.

Third, we recommend emphasizing love among the many positive traits one might investigate and using the centrality of love to explore interconnections among the traits. Positive traits, usually called character strengths in the context of positive psychology, overlap substantially (though not entirely) with what have traditionally been called virtues. Many of the virtues are interpersonal in nature, characterizing loving relationships. While Jesus summarized the call of Scripture and the entire law when he declared, "'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Mark 12:30-31; Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18). The connection between loving God and loving others was made explicit by the Apostle John: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, 1 John 5:2-3; cf., John 14:21, 15:14).

Fourth, we recommend supplementing traits regularly covered in positive psychology with their emic Christian versions, such as eschatological hope (Witvliet et al., 2022) or Christian intellectual humility (Hill & Hall, 2018). Christians are those who experience the life-giving power of the Spirit, which produces fruit (e.g., Ps. 1:3; Matt. 12:33; Luke 8:14-15; John 15:2-5, 16; Rom. 6:22, 7:4-5). This fruit is a classic way to fill out the concept of Christian love (cf., 1 Cor. 13). The Apostle Paul summarized the Christian teaching thus: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith-fulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Gal. 5:22-23; cf., Rom. 5:1-5; Col 3:12-17; 2 Cor. 6:4-7). Augustine imagined that all of the fruit could be understood as different ways of appreciating the one true reality of love, although Thomas Aquinas worried that Augustine in this way might be losing the distinctives of the virtues (Wilken, 2003). Whatever one decides, it is universally understood by Christians that this fruit (i.e., virtues) is the result of God's presence and power, even if bearing such fruit may also require human agency. Therefore, signs of Christian flourishing will likely frame the increase in love for God and neighbor in terms of people (imperfectly) experiencing a greater awareness of and participation in these characteristics outlined above (e.g., love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

Fifth, we recommend exploring the implications of Christian flourishing both at the individual and at the institutional and societal levels. In our experience, it is easy to neglect teaching positive institutions. So much in positive psychology is done in the other two domains (i.e., positive traits and positive experiences), and the study of positive institutions seems to go beyond psychology (at least into industrial/organizational psychology, if not sociology). This neglect, however, can reinforce individualistic and gnostic visions of flourishing already prevalent within our culture. The theological account of flourishing shows that positive psychology covers just one part of human flourishing, without addressing other vital areas, such as economics, medicine, politics, etc. From a theological standpoint, the fourth category of flourishing love is manifest as people have an increased awareness of their dependence upon creation and the broader social structures of which they are a part. Flourishing requires healthy interdependence with God, others, and the rest of creation.

Sixth, we recommend that a Christian vision of flourishing be used to bridge positive psychology and "negative" psychology. Positive psychology has long been criticized for failing to engage productively with the reality of human suffering (Fowers et al., 2017). Only when the original portrait of ordered shalom among the four relationships is recognized as "good" can the expulsion from the garden (Gen. 3) be

fully appreciated for how it has distorted and destroyed intended flourishing. The reality of sin has profoundly affected key relationships. First, humans no longer naturally or instinctively enjoy God's presence and may have feelings of isolation, distance, or judgment from the divine, *rather than* feeling/believing divine benevolence and approval. Second, sin negatively affects a person's relationships with other humans and results in relating to others as competitors or problems to be avoided (fostering unhealthy levels of independence or isolation) or tools oppressively abused (fostering unhealthy kinds of dependence), *rather than* gratefully participating in mutual life-giving dependence and delight. Third, sin distorts how people view themselves and generates extremes of self-hatred or inordinate self-praise that foster detachment or selfishness, *rather than* the self-in-relation creational design that fosters humility, contentment, and appropriate self-love. Finally, humans now often relate to the earth in terms of difficulty or adversity, *rather than* harmony and mutual dependence, and the material world is now either invested with *ultimate* importance (materialist account) or underappreciated (spiritualist account), *rather than* cherished as a gift from God that is meant to foster an environment for health, growth, and harmony.

A Christian conception of flourishing is also able to reconcile suffering with flourishing. Love frequently calls for sacrifice and suffering, which links psychological research on adversity with positive psychology in a way that is not typically done, but which has significant grounding in Christian theology. Theology affirms that suffering can yield flourishing. This suggests that a Christian approach to positive psychology ought not be merely "positive." In our experience, students are at risk of perceiving the subject matter of positive psychology as being entirely disconnected from the rest of their psychological studies. Including a section on suffering and flourishing, and exploring the relationship between these topics, allows students to more easily synthesize what they are learning in positive psychology with other areas of psychology.

Finally, we recommend using a love-based Christian account of flourishing to incorporate cultural perspectives. An important part of every course in the study of psychology is to help students understand the subject matter through cultural lenses. There is a long history of critiquing positive psychology as being deficient in its sensitivity to diversity (e.g., Qureshi & Evangelidou, 2018; Teramoto Pedrotti & Edwards, 2014). Christian flourishing is not WEIRD, that is, Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Henrich et al., 2010). As Haidt (2012) summarized the outlook, "The WEIRDer you are, the more you see a world full of separate objects, rather than relationships" (p. 113). Much of the foundational thinking regarding Christian flourishing comes from the first four centuries of the church in which African thinking predominates (Oden, 2007). In the same way, Christian theology provides a broader vision of flourishing than that of the ancient Greeks and Romans; flourishing is meant for all humans and extends beyond this present age (Pennington, 2017a). Contemporary positive psychology research is largely WEIRD. This means that Christian flourishing has the opportunity to redirect positive psychology to the findings of cultural psychology and beyond, to other present cultures and to past ones.

Conclusion

From its inception, Christian psychologists have recognized the integrative potential of positive psychology and have led empirical research efforts within this domain (McMinn, 2017). It is only fitting that theology would be thoroughly woven into the teaching of positive psychology within the Christian university classroom. As the field grows, new integrative opportunities will be revealed. Love provides solid grounding for framing and directing a Christian approach to the teaching of positive psychology.

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