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An Introduction to the Science of Christian Flourishing: A Domain-Based Approach

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The field of Christian flourishing science remains an emerging yet essential field of interdisciplinary inquiry, integrating empirical insights from psychology, theology, sociology, and public health. This special issue advances a domain-based approach to the empirical science of Christian flourishing, recognizing that well-being in Christian life is not solely an individual pursuit but also tethered to congregational and community life. In this special issue of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, we introduce three key domains of Christian flourishing—individual, congregational, and community—examining their unique contributions while highlighting the need for empirical rigor and theological depth. Contributions include new conceptual foundations and measurement templates for assessing the individual domain of Christian flourishing, review of decade-long empirical studies on congregational well-being and clergy resilience, and discussions on the outward-facing societal impact of faith-based initiatives that transform the community-domain of Christian flourishing. This special issue is the first strategic step to lay the foundation for a holistic and empirically grounded understanding of Christian flourishing as a scientific field of study. This issue invites further research and reflection to expand the scope of Christian flourishing science and its real-world applications.

The study of human flourishing has gained significant traction in recent decades, with interdisciplinary research exploring the psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Janicke-Bowles et al., 2023; Keyes et al., 2008; VanderWeele et al., 2021). However, the unique contours of Christian flourishing—rooted in theological virtues (Long & VanderWeele, 2023), communal life, and denominational contexts—remain underexplored within the empirical scientific literature. This special issue, "Empirical Science of Christian Flourishing," seeks to address this gap by presenting an interdisciplinary framework for conceptualizing and operationalizing flourishing within Christian communities.

The journey toward this special issue is part of a broader scholarly effort that has unfolded over more than a decade. It began with conversations—over coffee, in crowded seminar rooms, at roundtables, and in quiet academic offices—shaped by a growing recognition that the science of Christian flourishing needed a more empirical approach.

In early 2023, shortly after moving from Sydney to Virginia, I sat in Tyler VanderWeele's office at Harvard, discussing an idea that had been forming in my mind for some time: Could we develop a scientific approach to Christian flourishing as rigorous as the Harvard Human Flourishing Program's framework, yet attuned to the distinct dimensions of Christian life? In many ways, this conversation was an extension of earlier debates—ones that VanderWeele himself had been immersed in for over a decade. A key turning point came in 2011, when VanderWeele and his colleague Michael Balboni began discussions on responding to Jeffrey Bishop's (2009) critique of quantitative empirical research on religion and spirituality. Bishop had argued that such research often reduces religion to a utilitarian or functional role—treating it as a coping mechanism rather than recognizing its own theological and existential dimensions. Bishop pointed specifically to Ken Pargament's RCOPE measure (Pargament et al., 2000), which categorizes religious engagement in terms of stress

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management rather than as a pursuit of transcendent truth. In doing so, Bishop suggested, the medical and psychological sciences risked absorbing religion into a secular framework that ultimately reshaped it to fit their own aims.

VanderWeele and Balboni believed that one way to counter Bishop's critique was to introduce tradition-specific (e.g., explicitly Christian) measures of spiritual well-being—ones that accounted for the intrinsic goods and theological aims of religious life. VanderWeele made this case in a 2014 panel debate with Bishop at the Conference on Medicine and Religion, and some of those reflections were included in his "Religion and Health" synthesis book chapter in 2017 (VanderWeele, 2017b). That same year, he and Balboni began developing such assessments in earnest. Kate Long soon joined their efforts, conducting cognitive interviews and focus groups within various church communities. Their work culminated in a 2021 publication proposing a measure of Christian spiritual well-being (VanderWeele et al., 2021).

Over the years, VanderWeele had seen the field evolve first-hand through his pioneering work on human flourishing (e.g., Global Flourishing Study; VanderWeele et al., in press). We both agreed that while broad flourishing models were useful, they often lacked the theological depth and contextual sensitivity necessary for understanding Christian life. I left Harvard that day convinced that this was not only a worthy pursuit—it was the next step in my life's work on advancing cross-cultural approaches to human flourishing. I was not alone in this vision. Over the next several months, I reached out to colleagues across different universities, pulling together what I affectionately called the "12 Apostles" of Christian flourishing—a diverse group of scholars, scientists, and practitioners, who had been working on related themes, often in isolation. Some were psychologists, others theologians, sociologists, and epidemiologists. They came from Regent University, Harvard University, Baylor University, Biola University, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)—some of whom are co-authors in my paper contribution to this special issue. Each brought a unique perspective, and together, we started to form a blueprint for what would eventually become the Christian Flourishing Science field.

The Birth of a Christian Flourishing Science Lab

Shortly after my meeting with Tyler, we launched a Christian Flourishing science lab (known as the Abundant Life Flourishing Program) at Regent University to investigate what flourishing looks like within Christian communities. Our goal was simple but ambitious: to study and promote flourishing in over two billion Christians worldwide. To do this, we needed first to develop a robust scientific framework for conceptualizing and operationalizing Christian flourishing, one that accounted for the lived experiences of believers across different denominational contexts.

The first step was to gather scholars who had already been thinking about these issues. We hosted monthly webinars featuring colleagues such as Pamela King, Kate Long, Matthew T. Lee, Elizabeth Hall, Chris Adams, Loren Toussaint, Laura Upenieks, Robert Emmons, Brandon Vaidyanathan, John Swinton, Donnie Davis, Steven Standage, and many others who had done pioneering work in the field. These discussions were lively, often spilling over into email threads and follow-up Zoom meetings where we debated definitions, measures, and methodologies.

By the summer of 2024, we were ready to take things to the next level. We organized the first-ever Christian Flourishing Summer School at Regent University, an inward facing workshop-type event designed to communicate pockets of research in this emerging field. In hindsight, calling it a "Summer School" rather than a "Conference" may not have been the best marketing decision. The turnout was modest, but the intellectual caliber of the attendees was impressive. Scholars from Harvard, Baylor, Biola, Duke, VCU, and institutions in Canada, England, and Germany joined us for intensive roundtable discussions, presentations, and workshops on faith, well-being, and the future of Christian flourishing science.

One of the most meaningful aspects of this event was the presence—both in spirit and scholarship—of Paul T. P. Wang, a dear colleague and supporter of the Abundant Life Flourishing Program. Though he had registered for the Summer School, health issues prevented him from attending, and shortly after the event, we received the heartbreaking news of his passing. This special issue is dedicated to

his memory. He not only wrote on suffering but walked through it with unwavering faith. His legacy and vision of a flourishing life continues to inspire this work.

Flourishing and the Church: A Collaborative Vision

While the planning for our summer school was taking shape, parallel discussions were happening at Harvard and Baylor, culminating in the launch of a joint initiative between our three universities: "Flourishing and the Church" (Long et al., 2024). This project sought to bridge the gap between empirical research and the lived experiences of Christian congregations. The goal of the project was to "build on the work of many existing programs and initiatives to explore multidimensional aspects of Flourishing and the Church with the aim to promote growth and flourishing of the Church in the 21st century and beyond" (Long et al., 2024, p. 5).

But there is a part of this story I have not told yet. My friend and colleague, Kate Long, was instrumental to the development of this nascent field. VanderWeele introduced us, knowing her interests and previous work with faith organizations. Upon our initial Zoom introductions and meetings, I realized that her heart for a flourishing Universal Church was not only driven by her passion for research as a public health researcher but also her sacred calling to "serve the Church" in her words. We had grown up in the Church, seeing its challenges and triumphs up close. That shared experience shaped us. We did not just want to serve the Church; we wanted to tell its story—the story of its lasting impact, of faith meeting science in a powerful way. That passion gave birth to "Flourishing and the Church" initiative, and subsequent developments, including but not limited to taking a domain-based approach to the work. As a psychologist, I had been trained to focus on the individual as the object of scientific inquiry. But Long opened my eyes. She helped me see that Christian flourishing is not just experienced at the individual level alone—a common limitation in much of the existing psychological literature—there are congregational and community levels to the phenomenon. And with that realization, our work expanded in ways I had never imagined. And so, we took a domain-based approach that recognized the interconnected roles of individuals, congregations, and communities in shaping a thriving Christian life.

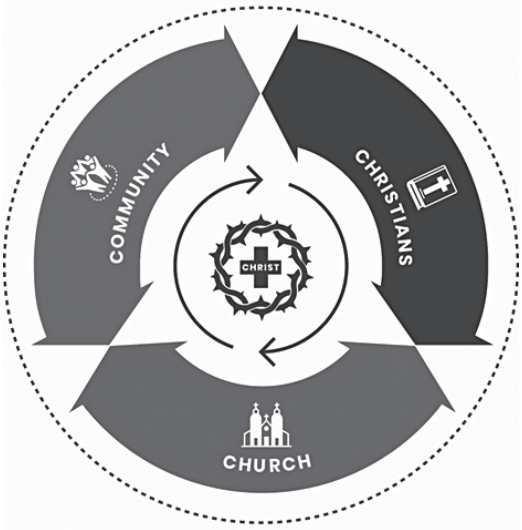
Domains of Christian Flourishing

Flourishing is often discussed in broad, secular terms—happiness, life satisfaction, mental and physical health (e.g., Butler & Kern, 2016; Diener et al., 2010; Janicke-Bowles et al., 2023; Keyes et al., 2008; Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017; VanderWeele, 2017a). But Christian flourishing goes beyond this. It is embedded in theological, social, and cultural contexts that define and sustain it (Long et al., 2024; VanderWeele et al., 2021). There have been notable attempts to engage with the concept of Christian flourishing from a theological perspective (e.g., Kapic et al., 2023; Pennington, 2017; Pennington & Hackney, 2017; Messer, 2013; VanderWeele, 2024; Volf & Blair, 2016; Volf & Croasmun, 2019), or ideas closely related to flourishing such as integral human development (e.g., Maritain 1936/1996; Paul VI, 1967; Benedict XVI, 2009), or more classically grounded notions of happiness in God as the end of human life (e.g., Aquinas, 1274/1948), offering valuable contributions to this nascent field. These scholarly works have provided rich theological insights on human flourishing. However, while these contributions lay important conceptual foundations, they often remain theological reflections rather than operationalized for empirical investigations, thus, limiting their broader academic and applied impact. Scientific progress hinges on the ability to measure constructs reliably—without measurement, even the most profound ideas remain largely theoretical. I commend these above-mentioned theologians for laying the groundwork and planting the seeds that will continue to grow into a more evidence-based science of Christian flourishing. This special issue marks a strategic step in advancing these efforts by grounding empirical research in theological perspectives, ensuring that Christian flourishing is not only a theological ideal but also a scientifically measurable and operationalizable construct.

Therefore, to truly capture the Christian experience, we must consider the domains through which the Christian life flourishes. A domain-based approach to Christian flourishing recognizes its multidimensional nature, providing a structured framework for examining Chris-

Figure 1

Domains of Christian Flourishing



tian flourishing as distinct but interconnected domains across individual, congregational, and community levels (Figure 1). This requires moving beyond individualistic and secular well-being models of flourishing to consider the interconnected roles of the multiple flourishing domains in shaping a thriving Christian life. As such, Christian flourishing is tethered to the contextual antecedent conditions, shaped largely by culture, community, and theology—all of which cannot be fully captured through universalized, etic metrics alone (VanderWeele et al., 2023).

Individual Domain

At the individual level, human flourishing has traditionally been studied through universal frameworks that apply to all humans, regardless of culture or religion (e.g., Diener et al., 2010; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011; VanderWeele, 2017a). While useful, these models often miss the uniquely Christian dimensions of well-being. Christian flourishing must be understood through the values and lived experiences of Christian individuals rather than imposed external criteria. Existing well-being frameworks (e.g., PERMA, self determination theory, etc.) often emphasize autonomy, personal fulfilment, and subjective well-being, which, while important, may not fully resonate with Christian worldviews where community, service, and spiritual richness take precedence over self-actualization (Markus, 1991). Instead, Christian individuals often view flourishing as an interdependent pursuit, where meaning is derived from relationships, spiritual commitment, and a sense of divine purpose rather than purely personal achievement (King & Boyatzis, 2004). For Christians, flourishing is about joy in suffering, meaning through service, and resilience through faith (Counted et al., 2025; Long & VanderWeele, 2023). While health and financial well-being are key components of secular flourishing frameworks (e.g., VanderWeele, 2017), their significance may differ for Christians, particularly in contexts where material hardship does not necessarily equate to a diminished sense of purpose or joy. Research suggests that chronically ill Christian adults, for example, often experience heightened spiritual struggles but also draw on religious coping mechanisms to sustain their well-being amidst suffering (Cowden et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2022).

The individual domain of Christian flourishing has been explored through two complementary contributions—Counted et al. (2025) and Park et al. (2025)—each offering distinct yet interconnected perspectives. Both papers provide conceptual clarity and measurement templates, one emphasizing an emic approach rooted in theological virtues and the other an etic approach grounded in psychological theory. Counted et al. (2025) took an emic approach by grounding their individual flourishing model in a Christian biblical framework, emphasizing the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love as the foundational spiritual strengths or anchors that sustain and support six key dimensions of a flourishing Christian life: contentment, health, meaning, character, relationships, and stewardship (see Counted et al., 2025).

The model in Counted et al. (2025) is particularly important because it reflects an insider perspective on Christian flourishing, recognizing that these theological virtues are not merely independent constructs but rather work in tandem as an interdependent constellation shaping human flourishing. Their contribution includes both a context-sensitive framework of the Abundant Life and a 12-item measure (Christian Flourishing Index) designed to assess this individual domain of Christian flourishing.

Complementing this emic framework of Abundant Life, Park et al. (2025) adopted a deductive approach, offering a psychometrically validated items of 3 x 4 matrix of Christian flourishing framework at the individual domain (see Park et al., 2025). This model is deduced around the affective-behavioral-cognitive (ABC) framework, where agapic love serves as the central organizing principle. According to Park et al. (2025), agapic love orientates the Christian individual toward "doing the right thing (behavior), for the right reason (cognitive/worldview), while experiencing the right emotions (emotion)" (p. __). This approach aligns with psychological models of well-being, making it broadly applicable across contexts.

Both measures (i.e., 12 items, Counted et al., 2025; 20 items, Park et al., 2025) could be used alongside VanderWeele's (2017a) 12-item measure of temporal flourishing for comparative purposes, opening avenues for further research on how Christian flourishing interacts with broader conceptualizations of well-being. A key distinction between these two measures lies in their theological emphasis and epistemology. First, Counted et al. (2025) conceptualized the individual domain as a constellation of faith, hope, and love—three theological virtues that actively transform the six dimensions of Christian flourishing: contentment, health, meaning, character, relationships, and stewardship. In contrast, Park et al. (2025) centered their model around a single theological virtue—love—integrated within the ABC psychological framework, emphasizing affect, behavior, and cognition as core elements of Christian flourishing. This focus does not diminish the broader scope of theological virtues, as Aquinas (1274/1948) regarded love as the form of all virtues, the virtue that perfects and animates the others. However, Counted et al.'s approach reflects an emic biblical articulation, whereas Park et al.'s model offers a more universal psychological lens. And despite their different emphases, both frameworks remain sensitive to the context of the Christian faith. Counted et al. (2025) adopted a theologically holistic, multidimensional approach, integrating multiple Christian virtues to demonstrate their collective impact on Christian flourishing. Park et al. (2025), on the other hand, took a targeted, virtue-specific approach, using love as a focal point within a structured psychological framework. Rather than being competing perspectives, these models function in an "and/both" fashion—each offering unique strengths that, when used together in various contexts, provide a more comprehensive understanding and measurement of Christian flourishing at the individual domain.

Congregational Domain

Beyond individual experiences, Christian flourishing is shaped by congregational life, where faith communities serve as important sites of social, spiritual, and moral development (Long et al., 2024). Churches are not merely places of worship; they function as support networks, educational institutions, and moral communities that profoundly influence the well-being of believers (Lim & Putnam, 2010). While existing research on flourishing positions close social relationships as a determinant of well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2025a, 2025b), Christian flourishing requires a broader conceptualization—one that includes fellowship, corporate worship, and pastoral care as key relational dimensions (Long et al., 2024; VanderWeele et al., 2021).

Congregations also play a formative role in shaping moral character, reinforcing virtues that sustain both individual and community flourishing (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). Unlike Aristotelian moral frameworks that emphasize individual virtue ethics, Christian moral development is often tied to community stories, shared rituals, and theological teachings that transcend personal moral reasoning (Miller, 2017). This community-oriented shaping of virtue aligns with research suggesting that religious institutions foster social capital and moral cohesion (Singh et al., 2020), strengthening believers' resilience and commitment to prosocial behaviors (Umberson & Montez, 2010). And there is no better person to comment on the congregational-domain than Leslie J. Francis, with his over four decades of psychological research on congregational studies. He provided his own research perspective on the congregational domain of Christian flourishing, integrating empirical theology and social science to explore how faith communities sustain well-being.

Francis (2025) defined the congregational domain as "the local physical presence of the Body of Christ within the community," (p. __), sug-

gesting that flourishing churches must balance spiritual vitality (ministry of the Word and sacrament) with social engagement. His "multiplex church" model challenges rigid congregational structures, advocating for different entry points into faith communities to prevent disengagement (e.g., through activities, events, relationships, place). His decades-long empirical work on church-leaving has identified 15 key reasons why individuals exit congregational life, with more emphasis on the need for inclusive, adaptable, and socially connected churches. The multiplex model encourages church-switching rather than leaving, guiding individuals to congregations that better aligns with their spiritual needs. This requires churches to see each other as collaborators rather than competitors, referring potential church-leavers to partner churches. Ultimately, Francis has called for interdisciplinary and multiplex approaches to congregational flourishing that are sensitive to generational and demographic differences, ensuring that congregations remain both spiritually vibrant and socially relevant.

Complementing this perspective, Adams et al. (2025) examined clergy well-being as an essential aspect of the congregational domain. Drawing on their flourishing in ministry framework and current ongoing work through the Mental Health and the Church Initiative, Adam et al. reviewed the resilience of clergy, a group often overburdened by role complexity and high expectations within the congregational domain. Adams et al. (2025) argued that flourishing clergy sustain their well-being through a strong professional identity, purpose-driven work, and supportive relationships within their faith communities. However, they also highlighted the significant challenges that threaten clergy sustainability, including role overload, social isolation, and self-sacrificial tendencies that can lead to burnout. Their review of their extensive program of research on flourishing in ministry showed the importance of resilience-building practices, such as job crafting, contemplative reflection, and mentoring, as essential tools for clergy well-being. These practices not only help clergy maintain their own flourishing but also directly impact the health and vitality of the congregations they lead.

Both Francis (2025) and Adams et al. (2025) have made it clear that congregational flourishing extends beyond worship and doctrine; it is intricately tethered to the well-being of its leaders and the social structures that sustain community life. Their work has emphasized that a flourishing congregation is not simply a product of sound theology but also of healthy relational dynamics, leadership sustainability, and the availability of social and spiritual resources. This simply means that flourishing within the congregational domain cannot be detached from the structural conditions from which it unfolds, including access to resources, opportunities for spiritual transformation, good leadership, good liturgy or doctrine, and structural stability—echoing VanderWeele's (2019) community well-being framework.

Community Domain

Christian flourishing does not happen in isolation. It extends into the wider community, where believers engage with social, economic, and political structures that shape their ability to thrive (Levin, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Willen, 2022). This is how the local church interacts with the broader environment. The Christian tradition has long recognized the reciprocal relationship between faith and society, where individuals and congregations serve as agents of transformation within their broader communities (Heuerwas & Willimon, 1989; Long et al., 2024). Flourishing must account for questions of power, justice, and resource distribution, as these external factors substantially impact human well-being. As such, Christian flourishing is not merely about individual and congregational domains of well-being but also about how Christian communities contribute to societal flourishing through acts of justice, service, and advocacy.

Long et al. (2025) showed how Christian communities contribute to public health, social services, and economic support in ways that shape societal flourishing. Their paper highlighted the practical role of churches and faith-based organizations in meeting basic needs, mobilizing volunteers, and advocating for policies that improve well-being. Christian flourishing is not just about individual faith or spiritual transformation but also about creating tangible, lasting change in the world. The authors argued that churches and religious groups act as powerful forces for social change by addressing healthcare, education, and poverty, citing examples of faith-based hos-

pitals, food assistance programs, and housing initiatives that serve millions each year (Chaves & Eagle, 2016; Feeding America, 2025; Habitat for Humanity, 2025). Long and colleagues demonstrated that Christian flourishing is not an isolated individual or congregational experience but a shared reality that depends on strong community bonds and practical acts of service. The authors challenged the idea that faith communities exist only for worship and spiritual development. Instead, they presented them as essential partners in building healthier, more just societies. While partnerships are important, Long et al. emphasized that the inclusion of community flourishing as a core domain of Christian Flourishing takes seriously the idea that community flourishing is not an "optional extra" for Christians to consider when possible but, rather, an essential component of what it means for the Church to flourish in the 21st century.

Christian flourishing within the community domain requires envisioning how the Church participates in God's mission in the world to bring about a transformed creation (Bosch, 2011)—one that culminates in the new heaven and new earth, described in Revelation 21 as perfectly proportioned in height, breadth, and length. The New Jerusalem's three dimensions (length, breadth, height) symbolize the three domains of Christian flourishing—individual, congregational, and communal. The length represents personal faith (Philippians 3:14) as believers journey toward Christlikeness through spiritual disciplines of faith, hope, and love. The breadth reflects the Church as a body (Ephesians 4:16), where worship and fellowship shape discipleship (Volf & Croasmun, 2019). The height points to community flourishing, where faith transforms society (Jeremiah 29:7). Like the cube-shaped Holy of Holies (1 Kings 6:20), true flourishing happens in God's presence when faith moves beyond self to church and society, forming a full expression of shalom (Nessan, 2010). This vision suggests that the flourishing of Christian communities is not merely about adapting to cultural shifts or securing well-being in present circumstances but about aligning with the eschatological reality of God's kingdom (Revelations 21).

Cultural differences also shape how Christian communities conceptualize and pursue societal flourishing through the Church's engagement with its surrounding culture (Bosch, 2011). Yet, this engagement is not passive; the Church is neither called to retreat nor to conform but to transform culture in light of God's redemptive purposes. This transformation is not solely individual or even loosely communal—it is tethered to ecclesial and missional undertaking (see Bosch, 2011). The Church forms communities of discipleship, sustains them through sacramental life, and sends them forth in an intergenerational mission that participates in God's restoration of creation. Revelation 21's description of the new Jerusalem as a city of equal dimensions suggests a theological vision of flourishing that is holistic, just, and complete. The height, breadth, and length being equal signify a perfected order, one in which human flourishing is not fragmented by cultural, social, or economic inequalities but is made whole in God's presence. This biblical image calls Christian communities to embody a form of flourishing that resists the distortions of individualism and self-determination found in secular paradigms (Counted et al., 2025; Francis et al., 2025; Kim, 2024; Long et al., 2025; VanderWeele, 2017a). Instead, it envisions a flourishing that is context-sensitive to individual Christians, structured by congregational practices of the Church and its leadership, and embedded in the community from which the Christian life unfolds. Thus, Christian flourishing must be understood within an ecclesial-missional framework—one where the Church's role in shaping culture is not merely about moral influence but about anticipating and reflecting the new creation. The Church is not only a gathering of believers but a foretaste of God's coming kingdom, where human flourishing is fully realized in perfect justice, reconciliation, and divine communion.

Moving Forward: A Call for Interdisciplinary Engagement

A domain-based approach to Christian flourishing requires moving beyond individualistic and secular well-being models to consider the interconnected roles of individuals, congregations, and communities. This contextualized approach ensures that flourishing is not reduced to individual happiness, material wealth, or subjective well-being, but is, instead, understood in relation to the community structures

and theology that define and sustain the Christian vision of a good life.

Because Christian flourishing is multi-dimensional, its study must also be interdisciplinary. The individual domain of flourishing, for example, is best understood through a framework that centers on individual faith experiences, emotional well-being, meaning-making, and virtue development. Psychology, for example, provides some of the tools to measure and analyze these individual differences (e.g., Counted et al., 2025; Park et al., 2025), helping us understand how Christian spiritual strengths operate within an individual's affective-behavioral-cognitive framework. However, a psychological perspective alone risks reducing Christian flourishing to internal states or subjective individual well-being (e.g. presence of positive affect; absence of negative affect), overlooking the Christo-centric theological foundation that shapes Christian life. The congregational domain, on the other hand, requires a sociological approach, as congregations are inherently social entities shaped by group dynamics, cultural contexts, and institutional structures. Sociologists can help us understand how congregational belonging sustains well-being, how leadership and community structures support or hinder flourishing, and how social cohesion within faith communities contributes to broader societal well-being. However, focusing solely on sociological metrics—such as church attendance or social capital—without theological depth may lead to an incomplete picture, as one treats the Church as just another social institution rather than a spiritually transformative body.

If approached without sensitivity to theological and ethical concerns, there is a risk of instrumentalizing faith communities—viewing them merely as service providers rather than recognizing their spiritual and moral contributions to human flourishing (Long et al., 2024). The community domain extends beyond church walls and into broader society, which necessitates engagement with the world. Throughout modern history, Christian initiatives have long played a role in promoting population health, from providing healthcare services to addressing social determinants of health such as poverty, housing, education, and other material and social needs. Public health and other social science research can provide robust empirical insights into how religious communities strengthen well-being at a societal level (Long et al., 2025), while policy studies may help translate these findings into action. However, the community dimension of Christian flourishing is not merely about outward-facing advocacy—showcasing good works—but is, at its core, an essential part of how we understand our own flourishing as Christians and congregations, as love for others—both neighbors and enemies—lies at the heart of the Christian life.

This special issue marks an important step in the development of Christian flourishing science, but it is just the beginning. The interdisciplinarity of this field is both its greatest strength and its greatest challenge. If we are to truly understand what it means for Christians to flourish, we must bring together psychology, theology, sociology, and public health, doing so with scientific rigor, theological depth, and a respect for the lived experiences of believers. Flourishing is not just an academic concept; it is the heartbeat of Christian life. It is the abundant life that Christ promised (John 10:10). And as we continue to study this spiritual phenomenon, we invite scholars, scientists, pastors, and practitioners to join us in exploring what it means for the Church (i.e., individuals, congregations, communities) to flourish in Christ.

In conclusion, I am reminded in this very moment of Psalm 1:3: That the believer is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prosper. This image of deep-rooted growth and fruitfulness reflects the essence of Christian flourishing—grounded in faith, sustained by the love of community, and anchored in hope (Long & VanderWeele, 2023). May this work serve as fertile ground for future inquiry, ensuring that the Church continues to grow, thrive, and bear witness to the fullness of life in Christ.

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