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Competing Visions of the Fullness of Life: Celebrity Culture, Pentecostalism, and the Question of Human Flourishing

ABSTRACT

For well over two millennia, scholars, philosophers, and ideologists have pursued the question as to what constitutes human flourishing. This paper examines two modern phenomena that make implicit claims to the fullness of life: celebrity culture and Pentecostalism. The study first examines recent scholarly attempts by positive psychologists, scholars of religion and spirituality, and contemporary Christian theologians to answer the question of human flourishing. Having analyzed the competing claims of celebrity culture and Pentecostalism, the paper critically evaluates the proposed perspectives and argues that both perspectives may benefit from a critical interaction with theories of human flourishing, but also how they may have an unwarranted (celebrity culture) or warranted (Pentecostalism) influence on human flourishing.

Keywords: Human Flourishing, Celebrity Culture, Pentecostalism, Full Gospel

INTRODUCTION

If there ever were a rhetorical question, this might be it: “Who wants to live a good life?” The answer is obviously “everybody.” Yet, as students of human flourishing have noticed since the days of Aristotle, the definition of the good life is elusive, resisting simple answers, and is based on subjective viewpoints.¹ A host of philosophies and religions have attempted to answer that all-important question, ranging from Greek philosophical schools and world religions to contemporary political and socio-economic ideologies. Despite being difficult to pinpoint, an increasing number of scholars argue that the general contours of the good life can be determined. Positive psychologist Martin Seligman argues that “the content” of human flourishing consists of “happiness, flow, meaning,

¹ Although containing slight variations in meaning, terms like “human flourishing,” “well-being,” and “fullness of life” will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

love, gratitude, accomplishment, growth, [and] better relationships.”² Miroslav Volf and his colleague Matthew Croasmun at Yale University contend that the good life can be narrowed down to a life that is (1) “led well (agency),” (2) “going well (circumstances),” and (3) “feels well (affective).”³ Harvard professor Tyler VanderWeele is more specific and lists several “domains” around which there is an essential agreement regarding their importance for a flourishing life. He lists “happiness and life satisfaction,” “mental and physical health,” “meaning and purpose,” “character and virtue,” and “close social relationships” as essential components.⁴

In this paper, I will examine two modern phenomena that make competing claims about the fullness of life, namely contemporary celebrity culture and Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism and celebrity culture are global phenomena that impact millions of people, yet have largely been overlooked in discussions on human flourishing. That these two phenomena are brought into the conversation about human flourishing is therefore of great practical and theoretical importance. In fact, I will attempt to show that both are essentially philosophies of human flourishing. Even if they make radically different claims regarding the good life, they intersect in everyday life. The larger aim is to show that established theories of human flourishing can bring a necessary critique to both celebrity culture and Pentecostalism, but also that scholars of human flourishing must better recognize the pervasive influence of celebrity culture and the important contributions a “grace-based” theory of human flourishing, like Pentecostalism, can provide.⁵

The essay will first examine current academic discussions on human flourishing, with a special emphasis on human flourishing and Christian spirituality, which will serve as a theoretical basis for the rest of the paper. In the following section, I will give an account of modern celebrity culture and its vision of the good life. The discussion will particularly address its relationship to Western culture and its obsession with self-authentication. Next, I will present human flourishing from a Pentecostal perspective, noting its relation to the fivefold gospel. The discussion will describe a Pentecostal understanding of human flourishing as a divine infusion of life that brings holistic transformation. The description of a

2 Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), 8.

3 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2019), 13–14. See also Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, “Meanings and Dimensions of Flourishing: A Programmatic Sketch,” in *Religion and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020), 10.

4 Tyler J. VanderWeele, “Spiritual Well-Being and Human Flourishing: Conceptual, Causal, and Policy Relations,” in *Religion and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020), 44.

5 The focus on Pentecostalism’s “grace-based” approach to human flourishing is not to say that other Christian traditions are not “grace-based.” However, Pentecostalism has been selected here because of its emphasis on holistic transformation.

Pentecostal understanding of flourishing will be juxtaposed with its increasing infatuation with celebrity culture, which poses a serious challenge to its original vision of the fullness of life. The paper will conclude with a discussion on how theories of human flourishing may critique celebrity culture and Pentecostalism, but also how they may have an unwarranted (celebrity culture) or warranted (Pentecostalism) influence on human flourishing.

THEORIES OF HUMAN FLOURISHING AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

This section provides an overview of theories of human flourishing and Christian spirituality as described by positive psychologists, psychologists of religion and spirituality, and Christian theologians. The goal is not to offer an exhaustive account of every possible perspective on human flourishing but to advance a general framework from which a meaningful discussion on celebrity culture and Pentecostalism can be undertaken.

The discussion on human flourishing can be traced back to ancient Greece and its concept of *eudaimonia* (lit. “good demon”). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle made happiness the ultimate goal and purpose of humankind. Happiness for Aristotle was not a subjective feeling but was achieved through acquiring virtues such as “justice, piety, and courage,” which were rationally lived out in the pursuit of the good life.⁶ Patrick Wong gives a simple definition of Aristotle’s perspective: “[E]udaimonic happiness’ is about lives lived and actions taken in pursuit of *eudaimonia*”⁷ – a perspective of well-being promoted to this day as exemplified by Lawrence B. Solum: “human flourishing involves lives of rational and social activities that express the human excellences or virtues.”⁸

Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, and Shigehiro Oishi have helpfully summed up the numerous theories of *subjective* well-being (theories focusing on individual well-being) from Aristotle to contemporary times in three general categories: “(1) need and goal satisfaction theories, (2) process or activity theories, and (3) genetic and personality predisposition theories.”⁹ They explain that the first category understands well-being in terms of “the reduction of tensions,” such as Freud’s and Maslow’s needs models, whereas goal theories state that well-being is linked to the achievement of “an ideal state or accomplish[ment of] a valued aim.”¹⁰ Drawing on the research of E. T. Higgins, Diener, Lucas, and Oishi further note

6 Patrick D. Wong, *Three Perspectives on Happiness, from Ancient to Modern: Aristotle, Adam Smith, and Martin E.P. Seligman* (Salve Regina University, 2020), 11–12.

7 Wong, 12.

8 Lawrence B. Solum, “Flourishing, Virtue, and Common Good Constitutionalism,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2023): 1174.

9 Other approaches to well-being are, for example, collective and eternal well-being. Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, and Shigehiro Oishi, “Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction,” in *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 66.

10 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.

that theorists in this camp also contend that “discrepancies from one’s ‘ideal self’ and one’s ‘ought self’ lead to the experiences of negative emotions.”¹¹ As opposed to the first category, where well-being is achieved *after* certain conditions have been met, process or activity theories maintain that it is the “engagement in an activity itself [that] provides happiness.”¹² These theories claim “that people are happiest when they are engaged in interesting activities that match their level of skill.”¹³ The third category, genetic and personality predisposition theories, proposes that well-being often exists regardless of personal accomplishments, immediate engagement, and favorable circumstances. These theories suggest that when “momentary and long-term subjective well-being” are considered, “there is a substantial genetic component to it; to some degree, people are born prone to be happy or unhappy.”¹⁴ For example, “extraversion” and “neuroticism” have explicitly been shown to affect well-being.¹⁵

Having outlined the general approaches to subjective well-being, we can now turn to specific arguments advanced by positive psychologists, psychologists of religion and spirituality, and Christian theologians, who reiterate these categories but complement them in important ways, especially regarding *spiritual* well-being – a category that is often neglected but important to a majority of the world’s population.¹⁶ The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, argues similarly to Aristotle that well-being is more than “a happiology.”¹⁷ However, Seligman steers away from Aristotle’s “monistic” preoccupation with happiness and includes it in a fivefold framework of well-being.¹⁸ Seligman employs the acronym PERMA to sum up the elements of his fivefold framework: “Positive emotion,” “Engagement,” “Positive Relationships,” “Meaning,” and “Accomplishment.”¹⁹ He argues that each of these elements is measurable, contributes to well-being, and is desirable in its own right.²⁰ Moreover, his framework is multidimensional, going beyond a mere individualistic assessment of well-being to include both subjective and objective measurements.²¹ According to Seligman, PERMA should not be viewed as a model that *defines* well-being but rather *contributes* to well-being for the simple reason that well-being is a human construct that cannot be defined

11 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.

12 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.

13 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.

14 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66–67.

15 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 67.

16 Tyler J. VanderWeele, Katelyn N. G. Long, and Michael J. Balboni, “Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being,” in *Measuring Well-Being Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 483.

17 Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*, 18.

18 Seligman, 20.

19 Seligman, 20–23.

20 Seligman, 19–20.

21 Seligman, 27.

scientifically.²² Thus, the goal of positive psychology for Seligman is to “increase the amount of *flourishing* in your own life and on the planet [i.e., each element of his five-fold framework].”²³

Scholars of psychology of religion and spirituality (R/S) are not as limited to a “scientific” approach to well-being as positive psychologists like Seligman. For instance, Steven L. Porter, Jason Baehr, Tenelle Porter, and Robert C. Roberts promote a “methodological pluralism” approach that acknowledges the value of philosophical and theological approaches.²⁴ Their “methodological pluralism” is similar to a critical realist position that affirms an ontological reality beyond the empirical, while also acknowledging insights from the empirical sciences. Thus, for these scholars, human flourishing is more than a fluid social construct without roots in a metaphysical reality. Despite the two approaches’ divergent epistemological foundations, scholars of psychology of religion and spirituality argue that the two perspectives can be integrated because they have similar “aims,” “foundations,” and “emphases.”²⁵ Edward B. Davies et al. note:

The central aims of positive psychology are to advance scientific understanding of human strengths and flourishing and then use that understanding to benefit people, institutions, and societies [...]. Likewise, the main aims of the psychology of R/S are (a) to enhance scientific understanding of spirituality [...] and religion [...] and (b) use that understanding to benefit society and improve people’s lives [...].²⁶

Having surveyed numerous empirical studies of the benefits of R/S practices, Van Cappellen, Zang, and Fredrickson also conclude: “Although not all mental health practitioners may feel comfortable engaging with their client’s R/S beliefs, they may still want to consider engaging with their clients’ R/S practices. These practices, especially if they are habitual, may provide vehicles for the experience of positive emotions that can, over time, enhance clients’ mental health and resilience.”²⁷ Furthermore, integrating the two approaches could mitigate the accusation against positive psychology for being too rational and insensitive to non-Western traditions: “Increased integration of these fields would

22 Seligman, 19.

23 Seligman, 29.

24 Steven L. Porter et al., “On the Integration of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality: Logical, Normative, and Methodological Questions,” in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 38–40.

25 Edward B. Davies et al., “Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality: Transcending Coexistence to Potentiate Coevolution,” in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 8–9.

26 Davies et al., 8.

27 Patty Van Cappellen, Ruixi Zhang, and Barbara L. Fredrickson, “The Scientific Study of Positive Emotions and Religion/Spirituality,” in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 324.

enable positive psychology to enhance its scientific understanding of how people from diverse cultures and traditions draw on R/S to nurture positive emotional and relational experiences, create and sustain a sense of meaning, cultivate and enhance their well-being, and cope with and grow from adversity.”²⁸ Scholars of R/S acknowledge, however, that “personal and professional unfamiliarity with religion and spirituality,” “skepticism toward and potential bias against religion and spirituality,” and “skepticism toward and potential bias against positivity,” can create barriers to such integration.²⁹ Yet, an increasing number of scholars maintain that “the material,” “the relational,” and “the transcendent dimensions” should all be considered in scientific discussions on human flourishing.³⁰

Despite R/S’s insistence on the importance of religion and spirituality for understanding human well-being, both from a positive and negative perspective,³¹ their insights are predominantly from an etic viewpoint.³² On the other hand, Christian scholars argue for the benefits of religion and spirituality, but they do so from an emic perspective. For instance, Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz agree with Seligman that human flourishing cannot be defined scientifically, because “[v]arious sciences can and should *inform* our reflection on the meaning of flourishing, but they cannot set its basic meaning.”³³ They rather stress that defining “what ought to be” is a task for the humanities.³⁴ For Volf and Croasmun, human flourishing is the very *telos* for theology: “We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.”³⁵ Their definition of the “flourishing life” then becomes “the good toward which humans are meant to strive. It names not so much any number of things we desire, but the ultimate goal of our striving along with the values that determine what is truly worth desiring.”³⁶ Natalya A. Cherry shares this view, but stresses the relational aspect: “How does Christianity contribute to [...] flourishing? Ideally, Christianity offers access to

28 Davies et al., “Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality: Transcending Coexistence to Potentiate Coevolution,” 10.

29 Davies et al., 11–12. See also, Juliette L. Ratchford, Mason S. Ming, and Sarah A. Schnitker, “Virtues in Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,” in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 55.

30 Andrew Briggs and Michael J. Reiss, *Human Flourishing: Scientific Insight and Spiritual Wisdom in Uncertain Times*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 23–26.

31 Gabriele Prati, “Religion and Well-Being: What Is the Magnitude and the Practical Significance of the Relationship?,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 16, no. 4 (November 2024): 367–77.

32 Although Edward Davies et al. argue for using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, their methodologies are all etic. See, Edward B. Davis et al., “Using Qualitative and Mixed Methods to Study Relational Spirituality,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 8, no. 2 (May 2016): 92–98.

33 Volf, Croasmun, and McAnnally-Linz, “Meanings and Dimensions of Flourishing: A Programmatic Sketch,” 8.

34 Volf, Croasmun, and McAnnally-Linz, 7–8.

35 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*, 11.

36 Volf and Croasmun, 12.

this inexhaustible source through intimate relationship to the divine, in the person and after the pattern of Jesus of Nazareth, exhibited in a faith working through love of neighbor as self, including (and especially) love of enemies.”³⁷ Just like Volf, Croasmun, and Cherry, VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni explain that human flourishing within the Christian tradition correspond to a “form of communion with God” that extends into eternity and defines both temporal and spiritual well-being:

Within the Christian tradition, the final end of the human person is often described as some form of communion with God [...]. We might then define eternal flourishing, or perfect well-being [...] as final and complete communion with God. Spiritual well-being, in this life [...] might then be understood as a state in which one’s life is, in all ways, oriented toward eternal flourishing or, arguably equivalently, as a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good with respect to his or her final end in God. Temporal well-being or temporal flourishing might then be understood as those aspects of human flourishing that pertain to the goods in this life, inclusive, for example, of happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships [...].³⁸

Based on this definition of eternal and temporal well-being, VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni proceed to define six categories that can be applied across Christian traditions, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, and their numerous offshoots like “Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal denominations, and perhaps even subdivisions within each of these denominations” to achieve spiritual well-being.³⁹ The six categories they propose are:

Beliefs: I believe that through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, God brought salvation. *Practice*: I intentionally take time each day to practice prayer. *Service*: I use the gifts God has given me to support the Christian community. *Communion*: I have a meaningful relationship with God. *Character*: My calling to be a Christian guides my life’s work. *Relationships*: I love my neighbor as myself [*Italics mine*].⁴⁰

Having outlined the suggestions of positive psychologists, psychologists of religion and spirituality, and Christian theologians regarding human flourishing, we note that there is significant overlap in the suggestions. All of them stress the importance of material and subjective aspects of well-being, such as positive emotions, virtues, health, meaning, and achievements. Close relationships

37 Natalya A. Cherry, *Believing into Christ: Relational Faith and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021), 5.

38 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, “Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being,” 485–86.

39 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, 487.

40 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, 492.

are also viewed as an essential aspect of human flourishing. Although positive psychologists may struggle to see the value of religion and spirituality, even these aspects have gained greater acceptance in recent times. For professing Christians, temporal and eternal communion with God is the ultimate goal and essence of human flourishing, and divine communion should manifest itself in meaningful beliefs, practices, actions, character formation, and healthy relationships. Jonathan Rowson aptly summarizes a Christian understanding of human flourishing as a “bio-psycho-social-spiritual process.”⁴¹

Although Christian theologians draw on secular theories of well-being, their conclusions should not be viewed as an uncritical adoption of secular perspectives with a Christian twist. Charles Hackney notes, for example, that positive psychologists, like Seligman, operate from an anthropological perspective incongruent with Christian doctrine. Seligman denies, for example, the doctrine of original sin, and people’s evil actions are explained as “an innately good humanity is forced into evil by bad circumstances” [...].⁴² Hackney also observes, “Much of our current positive psychology implies a telos of human functioning grounded in individualism and subjective gratification. This subjective individualistic *telos* does not fit well with a Christian view of the human condition.”⁴³ In fact, as VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni point out, “When temporal goods and the spiritual life come into conflict, the latter is to be given priority as it constitutes the person’s orientation to his or her final end in God.”⁴⁴ Thus, Christian theologians recognize the limitations of secular viewpoints on human flourishing without abandoning them entirely. This leads us to my next topic of investigation – celebrity culture, which impacts our world and enthrones “individualism and subjective gratification” as the ultimate goals of human flourishing.

CELEBRITY CULTURE AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

Celebrity culture is one of the great hallmarks of the twenty-first-century world. It is virtually impossible to escape the latest exploits or tragedies of renowned artists, athletes, scientists, politicians, and religious figures. Their stories are beamed into our lives through the ubiquitous nature of modern mass media. The influence of celebrity culture has not escaped the attention of social scientists, and the phenomenon is now scrutinized from multiple academic perspectives.⁴⁵ In the following discussion, I will summarize key concepts concerning celebrity

41 Jonathan Rowson, “Status Viatoris and the Path Quality of Religion: Human Flourishing as a Sacred Process of Becoming,” in *Religion and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020), 33–34.

42 Charles H. Hackney, *Positive Psychology in Christian Perspective: Foundations, Concepts, and Applications* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 40–43.

43 Hackney, 40–43.

44 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, “Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being,” 486.

45 Katarzyna Bronk, *Stardom: Discussions on Fame and Celebrity Culture* (Boston: Brill, 2020), vii.

culture, and especially how it is shaped by individualistic Western culture. Having outlined its theoretical framework, I will focus on how celebrity culture promotes a vision of human flourishing that challenges and is often in direct conflict with religious theories of well-being.⁴⁶

The origin of contemporary celebrity culture is often associated with the explosion of mass media at the end of the twentieth century.⁴⁷ However, the roots of the phenomenon can be traced to antiquity,⁴⁸ but more specifically to the rapid societal changes in the West at the end of the eighteenth century as noted by Sharon Marcus: “Modern celebrity culture began not with Hollywood, nor with the Internet, but in the eighteenth century, when the modern meanings of the words ‘celebrity’ and ‘star’ first became widespread.”⁴⁹ The immediate background to the rise of modern celebrity culture was the Enlightenment, which created a split between “the rational” (the empirical and the logical) and “the irrational” (the metaphysical) as well as a deep-seated skepticism of religion and dynastic authority. Individualism and democratic structures filled the vacuum that was left by priests and royal families. Scientists, artists, and entrepreneurs now joined the ranks of the privileged few, many of whom became household names or “celebrities.” Celebrities thus became a substitute for the loss of the sacred, a humanistic “re-enchantment” of the modern age.⁵⁰ However, Sharon Marcus notes that celebrity culture would not have arisen without the simultaneous growth in literacy, the increase in leisure time, the invention of photography, and the Romanticism of the nineteenth century. These developments allowed newspapers to incorporate visual ads and promote the latest celebrity to an ever-increasing market.⁵¹ P. David Marshall can therefore conclude that “The distinctive discursive quality of the celebrity is derived from its emergence from the twinned discourses of modernity: democracy and capitalism.”⁵²

Before addressing celebrity culture and its connection to human flourishing, it is also important to acknowledge the drastic turn toward an individualistic consumer culture after World War II, which Charles Taylor has

46 The theoretical framework is based on insights from the following article: Tommy Davidsson and Truls Åkerlund, “Elvis Has Entered the Building’: Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture,” in *Pentecost, Pentecostalism, and the Making of World Christianity: Essays in Honor of Allan H. Anderson*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

47 Pete Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, Religion, Media, and Culture Series (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 42.

48 Aviad Kleinberg, “Are Saints Celebrities?: Some Medieval Christian Examples,” *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 393–97.

49 Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

50 For an in-depth argument that modernity was not “disenchanted,” see Joshua Landy and Saler Michael, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

51 Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity*, 10–11.

52 P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Second edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 4.

famously labelled as an “age of authenticity.” Taylor understands the “age of authenticity” as a continuation of modernity but an even greater rejection of outside authorities in favor of oneself: “I mean the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.”⁵³ Taylor explains here that rather than understanding oneself as part of a larger community, the individual becomes the project that has to be realized. Based on insights from Eva Illouz, Davidsson and Åkerlund observe that the “emphasis on the self [becomes] a *therapeutic* discourse, involving a division between the self and society and prompting us to create our individual identities, with desires to be recognized, categorized, and even controlled, all in the name of freedom.”⁵⁴

Celebrity culture thrives in a capitalistic and individualistic environment, but to understand how celebrity culture impacts human flourishing, it is crucial to first know its essential elements. Marshall notes that most studies of celebrity have focused on “the elevated individual.”⁵⁵ These studies often enquire about what “traits” or personal circumstances caused the person to become a celebrity.⁵⁶ They also stress the negative side of celebrification, such as being objectified and victims of voyeurism. Other studies are not as preoccupied with the celebrities themselves but emphasize the structures that produce celebrities. Pete Ward, for example, emphasizes mediation: “A celebrity is [...] a person who is mediated. Mediation describes the complex ways in which, through technology, media industries and social relationships, individuals are actively engaged in processes of production, representation and consumption.”⁵⁷ This is not to say that Ward is focusing exclusively on mediatization. On the contrary, Ward argues that:

Celebrity Worship is fundamentally about the self. [...] Media processes generate an association between audiences and celebrities that are charged with an energy. This energy does not simply come from the processes of production and representation, it is also generated by the different ways in which individuals and groups choose to make sense of themselves in relation to celebrities.⁵⁸

Ward’s point here is that the audience is not an innocent bystander but the object and a direct contributor to celebrity culture. Chris Rojek observes that the

53 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 475.

54 Davidsson and Åkerlund, “‘Elvis Has Entered the Building’: Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture,” forthcoming.

55 Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, 4.

56 Marshall, 4.

57 Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 1.

58 Ward, 5.

recent trend in celebrity studies is to view the phenomenon post-structurally, or as the interplay between the celebrity, the media producers (the structures), and the audience.⁵⁹ Sharon Marcus summarizes this perspective succinctly: “Celebrity culture is a drama involving three equally powerful groups: media producers, members of the public, and celebrities themselves. Media, star power, and public opinion alone cannot create celebrity, but their interactions can and do.”⁶⁰

Having established the historical origins and essential features of celebrity culture, we can now turn to its role in shaping modern society’s understanding of human flourishing. Pete Ward uses the analogy of the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece and Rome to explain the contemporary phenomenon of celebrity culture. The analogy is not far-fetched since celebrities are commonly referred to as “gods,” “goddesses,” “divine,” and “icons.” However, celebrities are not real gods, but “sacred figures that reflect versions of our own selves, painted as divine.”⁶¹ Celebrities are individuals who are shaped by savvy media producers to become visual aids of our deepest desires, values, and longings to encourage material consumption that promises to fulfill these longings. Thus, celebrity culture promotes a vision of the flourishing life according to a consumerist culture, such as personal wealth, influence, purpose, reputation, and potential for shaping culture and society. Such a vision is in stark contrast to a religious understanding of flourishing that emphasizes virtues like humility and moderation, service for the greater good of the community, and eternal rewards rather than immediate personal gratification.

To sum up, celebrity culture is a modern phenomenon that arose during the eighteenth century but gained even greater traction after World War II. It feeds off the cultural turn toward the self and promotes a vision of the good life that is centered on immediate gratification in the present. Celebrity culture is not limited to the elite or the privileged few but is sustained by deep-seated values in Western society and effectively promoted by a savvy media industry. I now turn to a phenomenon that promotes a competing vision of the fullness of life – one that does not emanate from the self but from God Himself, yet which has been influenced by the pervasive presence of celebrity culture, namely Pentecostalism.

PENTECOSTALISM AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

Walter Hollenweger is famous for claiming that Pentecostalism is best understood not in terms of creeds and rational explanations but by its “black roots,” emphasizing, for example, orality, narrative theology, and witness.⁶² A

59 Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 43–45.

60 Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity*, 3.

61 Pete Ward, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2011), 3–6.

62 Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 18–19.

helpful window into a Pentecostal understanding of human flourishing can thus be found in its hymnodies or personal testimonies. Although numerous examples could be given here, Tom Anderson's testimony, printed in *The Apostolic Faith* in February 1907, serves as a good example:

Beloved, I was saved about 17 months ago from a wretched life. When I called on God, He heard my prayer and saved me instantly. What convinced me of the reality in salvation, was the peace that came into my heart. The desire for opiates went out immediately, and I was cured of the drug habit. The Lord has also healed many others of the drug habit. And God has healed my body, after being afflicted over six and a half years. When all physicians failed, the Man Christ Jesus healed me. The devil had me bound hand and foot for years. Thinking myself wise, I became foolish. But, beloved, God sent His transforming power through the Blood of Jesus and burst all the shackles, and shook off the handcuffs of hell, and today I am a free man in Christ Jesus. Then He sanctified me wholly and gave me a clean heart. Then He baptized me with the Holy Ghost on Jan. 22, at Azusa Mission. Dear ones, all I live for is Christ. I sold out, body, soul, and spirit to Him. My desire is to point souls to the bleeding Lamb of Calvary that takes away the sin of the world. The Holy Ghost, the third person of the Trinity, speaks through me in the languages of the nations whenever He chooses. And He is now engaged in pulling the rope which rings the joybells of heaven in my heart. And there is a revival going on in my soul continually, and the choir is singing and praising God in the unknown tongues. The Holy Ghost is the leader and is well qualified. He came from the college in heaven. Beloved, it is no more I but Christ. To Him be all the glory.⁶³

Anderson's passionate testimony describes all but one of the five theological themes that Pentecostals view as part of the "full gospel," namely, Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptizer in the Spirit, and Soon Coming King – only the Soon Coming King is missing.⁶⁴ He mentions being "saved," having received "a clean heart," being "cured of a drug habit," and having been "baptized with the Holy Ghost" with accompanying "tongues of the nations" (*xenolalia*). Pentecostals have spent large amounts of ink describing and defending each of the elements of the

63 Tom Anderson, "Pentecostal Testimonies," *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles, CA), vol. 1 no. 6, February 1907, 8.

64 It is not surprising that the emphasis on the Soon Coming King is missing, since the theme does not involve a personal experience but an overall theological framework that integrates, interprets, and provides it with a missional focus. See Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 58–121.

full gospel,⁶⁵ but in the zeal to defend the validity of the full gospel, a crucial aspect tends to be overlooked. Anderson's testimony is first and foremost an account of a transformed *life*. He talks about "peace" flooding his heart, being "free" from the bondage of Satan, being completely "sold out" for Christ, having the Spirit "ringing the joybells of heaven in his heart" leading to a continuous inner "revival," and to a new purpose in life, which is "to point souls to the bleeding Lamb of Calvary." His account is ultimately about human flourishing. Ulrik Josefsson's study of early Swedish Pentecostal spirituality confirms that human flourishing or "the abundant life" (John 10:10) was indeed their main focus:

The Pentecostals did not regard their faith as a system of belief. Obviously there were decisive doctrines that one agreed upon, but the faith was much more than the doctrine. The Christian life was not understood as a mode of conduct. Obviously there were patterns of behavior that were both typical and normative, but the faith was much more than the behavior. Not even the ecstatic moments and the experiences were regarded as the essential core of the Christian life. Obviously there were experiences that were sought after and assumed, but the faith was more than the experiences. Instead one regarded the faith as a whole, a life. This life was not any kind, but a life in relationship with God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit, an abundant life.⁶⁶

Since the Pentecost message was about human flourishing in this life as well as in the next, it shared no resemblance with docetic forms of spirituality that created a dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, and the eternal and the temporal. Pentecostal spirituality emphasized both the "already" and the "not yet." According to Pentecostals, the inbreaking of the Spirit into our everyday lives (the "already") transformed not only spiritual lives but physical lives as well. Pentecostals believed that the full gospel restored spiritual blessings that had been lost throughout church history, and these were spiritual, like salvation and sanctification, but also physical, like deliverance from diseases, addictions, and the effects of evil forces. Even a spiritual experience like the Baptism in the Holy Spirit had to be "evidenced," either by speaking in tongues or a life of love, demonstrating that the spiritual and the physical always went together. The experience of the full gospel was also perceived as a foretaste of the life to come (the "not yet"). Jesus was coming soon, which promised an even greater abundance of life than could

65 One of the first, and most important academic contributions, regarding the full gospel is Donald W. Dayton's *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). Dayton does not address this key theme. A more recent theological examination is Wolfgang Vondey's *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full gospel*, Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology (London, England: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017). Vondey, on the other hand, underscores that *living* the full gospel is the heart of Pentecostalism.

66 Ulrik Josefsson, *Liv och över nog: Den tidiga pingströrelsens spiritualitet* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2005), 13–14. See also, Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, 12.

be experienced in “the already.” The blessings of salvation, sanctification, healing, and Spirit baptism would reach their full measure in the “not yet.” Although the blessings of the full gospel were received personally, Pentecostal spirituality was not individualistic. Andy Lord notes, “Pentecostal ecclesiology may have been influenced by evangelical individualism but has been strongly communal from the start because of its pneumatological orientation. The fellowship of the Spirit into which Pentecostals were integrated was seen as inclusive and crossing the social and racial lines that existed at the time [...], although these ideals were not always realised.”⁶⁷ Frank Macchia also points out that, even if the experience of Spirit baptism was individually received, it was always in a communal context.⁶⁸ Thus, Pentecostalism offered warm and inclusive fellowships, albeit not always as healthy or inclusive as advertised.⁶⁹ It should also be noted here that early Pentecostals underlined the necessity of abstaining from the values and temptations of this world to continuously live the abundant life. A strict holiness code was placed on attendees, and “worldly” activities like sports, theatre, gambling, smoking, and dancing were vilified. Such activities did not produce the kind of character that squared with the hope of the Soon Coming King, and books with pithy titles like *Idag lek – i morgon tårar* (today play – tomorrow tears) were written by Pentecostal leaders like Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974) to warn of their dangers.

From this short description of Pentecostal flourishing in light of the full gospel, we can note that it was holistic. For Pentecostals, well-being was both physical and spiritual, and experienced in community. Healing from a destructive past, current sicknesses, and intimate fellowship with the Lord were all promised in the full gospel. Deep affections of joy and peace also followed in its wake. Pentecostals were also given a new purpose in life, which was to share the promises of the full gospel to a dying world. The purpose was enhanced by a belief in the sudden return of Christ that would usher in the Age of the “not yet” with all its blessings. Thus, Pentecostal flourishing manifests many of the key ingredients of human well-being as outlined above: meaning, purpose, health, affections, virtues, fellowship, spiritual vitality, and last, but not least, a strong vision of eternal flourishing. Its rejection of “worldly” joys might correctly be criticized as an unnecessary rejection of the material world, but the “guardrails” were set up so that the ultimate source of well-being, spiritual well-being, would not be jeopardized. Celebrity culture, with its goal to enhance one’s influence, prestige, wealth, and power in this life, was therefore regarded as the very antithesis of a flourishing Pentecostal life.

67 Andy Lord, “Ecclesiology: Spirit-Shaped Fellowships of Gospel Mission,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 291.

68 Frank D. Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020), 11–58.

69 See for instance, Truls Åkerlund and Karl Inge Tangen, “Charismatic Cultures: Another Shadow Side Confessed,” *Pneuma* 40, no. 1–2 (2018): 109–29.

The abovementioned explanation of Pentecostal flourishing could perhaps be applied to the movement's first years, but not anymore. Today's situation is significantly more complex and exhibits the influence of celebrity culture. Harvey Cox noticed in 1995 that a change was taking place in the Pentecostal movement:

Today, at least in America, many Pentecostals have become terribly comfortable with "this world." They started out in a faith that brought hope to society's losers and rejects. Today, some of their most visible representatives have become ostentatiously rich, and some even preach a gospel of wealth. [...] Pentecostals also started out teaching that the signs and wonders that took place in their congregations were not some kind of spectacle but harbingers of God's new day. But today, some Pentecostal preachers seem so obsessed with the techniques of rapture that they have forgotten the original message.⁷⁰

Cox describes here how celebrity culture has crept into the movement and influenced key leaders, taking them away from Pentecostalism's original message. The truth of the matter is that celebrity culture was part of the movement from the very beginning, although to a much smaller degree, and it is no longer merely a feature of American Pentecostalism but of global Pentecostalism.⁷¹ This is not to say that the original Pentecostal vision of human flourishing no longer exists; it is just that it is more difficult to find in a world saturated with celebrity culture.

From the abovementioned discussion, we see that Pentecostalism is, in essence, a Christian tradition that promotes a holistic view of human flourishing. Its emphasis on the full gospel leads to a spirituality that does not separate the spiritual and the material and envisions a life of abundance that is experienced in community. As we will see further below, its understanding of the good life is "grace-based," but the abundant life can be jeopardized by engaging in worldly activities. Moreover, as Harvey Cox points out, the increasing presence of celebrity culture within Pentecostalism provides a serious challenge to its original vision of the good life.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Based on our study so far, I would like to conclude by proposing that theories of human flourishing may bring a necessary critique of celebrity culture's and Pentecostalism's visions of human flourishing. At the same time, I want to point out that scholars of human flourishing ought to better consider celebrity culture's pervasive influence as well as the importance of "grace-based" theories of human flourishing, especially for Christian theorists. I will end with a brief suggestion of

70 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 1995), 16–17.

71 Davidsson and Åkerlund, "Elvis Has Entered the Building": Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture," forthcoming.

how Pentecostalism can deal with the increasing presence of celebrity culture in its midst. The discussion will be both actual and potential, as well as theoretical and practical. The discussion will thus include both positive and normative arguments.

HUMAN FLOURISHING AND CELEBRITY CULTURE

It would be inaccurate to claim that celebrity culture does not tick several boxes that could be perceived as a flourishing life. Wealth, influence, purpose, reputation, potential for shaping culture and society, and fan relationships are all aspects associated with a flourishing life. But what is missing? Celebrity culture revels in self-indulgence and rarely, if ever, emphasizes the importance of classical virtues like justice, temperance, prudence, and charity. Rojek observes that celebrity culture produces the opposite of a virtuous society: “people are becoming ruder in public, more concerned with acclaim than integrity, more preoccupied with self-esteem, and fixed upon narrow, selfish, emotional, and material wants than the realization of the public good.”⁷² In fact, as noted about “goal and need satisfaction theories,” under which celebrity culture belongs, the constant mirroring between oneself and one’s favorite celebrity is a recipe for disaster. Rojek highlights, for example, three “neurotic [and] obsessional disorders that derive from celebrity culture,” such as “Celebrity Worship Syndrome,” “Star Paranoia,” and “Narcissistic Personality Disorder.”⁷³ Life’s unpredictabilities and disappointments also tend to mar vain hopes of fame and glory. Moreover, the fellowship created by fan clubs and associations does not place any normative ethical standard on participants beyond uncritical loyalty and adoration of the celebrity, and a minimal expectation of communal behavior. It can never become the inclusive and accepting environment that, for example, a *healthy* religious community can provide.⁷⁴ Celebrity culture is not even good for the celebrities themselves or their immediate family members, since they are forced to comply with the inauthentic image of themselves created by the media industry.⁷⁵ Rather than thriving, they can lose themselves in the process: “Like the sign, the celebrity represents something other than itself. The material reality of the celebrity sign—that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation—disappears into a cultural formation of meaning.”⁷⁶ From a Christian perspective, celebrity culture has no vision of flourishing beyond this life. Volf and Croasmun describe the futility of such a narrow vision: “When the means for life have become the ends of life, the dog has started chasing its tail. The resources we think we need to live the good life are competitive goods. It is not just that it is better to have more of them than to have less; we need to have

72 Chris Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 6.2012

73 Rojek, 4–5.

74 Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 3–6.

75 Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences*, 123–27.123

76 Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, 56–57.

more of them than our competitors do: more wealth, better education, more fame, better looks, [. . .].”⁷⁷ VanderWeele also highlights the disparity between celebrity culture and a Christian understanding of flourishing: “Religious teachings can conflict with the desires for certain pleasures in certain contexts, can conflict with what are perceived to be [. . .] certain freedoms, and may be in tension with desires oriented principally toward the self rather than toward others and God. But, within a Christian understanding, when conflict arises, deference is to be given to spiritual well-being.”⁷⁸ Thus, neither Christian theories of well-being, psychology of religion and spirituality, nor positive psychology regard Western society’s narcissistic preoccupation with the self as a viable road to flourishing.

Although celebrity culture is not a viable road to flourishing, failure to recognize celebrity culture’s ubiquitous impact could also have its consequences. Chris Rojek notes, for instance, “how the fads, fashions and preoccupations of celebrities [have entered] the popular lifeblood.”⁷⁹ Celebrity culture is, therefore, not something that can easily be observed from a safe distance, but an essential part of our society. Recognizing that secular theories of well-being cannot scientifically define what a flourishing life “ought to” look like, as Seligman, Volf, and Croasmun correctly assert, it is fair to assume that the dominant paradigm of well-being will take the shape of the vision closest at hand and most effectively promoted by the media industry, namely, celebrity culture. Consequently, scholars who promote a *different* vision of the flourishing life must come to terms with the enormous uphill battle they are facing and construct creative and appealing substitutes. Although the individuals who have managed to promote a counter-narrative to contemporary celebrity culture are few and far between, the late Pope Francis (1936–2025) demonstrated through his life and actions what such a life could look like. His sincere faith, his outspoken rejection of wealth, prestige, and power, and his preference for the poor and the downtrodden, as well as his concern for the creation, exemplify what a flourishing life could look like that does not have the self as its ultimate goal.⁸⁰

HUMAN FLOURISHING AND PENTECOSTALISM

The most glaring difference between a Pentecostal view of human flourishing and most other theories of well-being, including some Christian approaches, is that it is “grace-based.” According to Pentecostals, true holistic transformation only takes place when the Spirit infuses divine life. Such transformation can be sought in contemplative prayer, waiting, and intense supplication, but it is ultimately a

77 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*, 22.

78 VanderWeele, “Spiritual Well-Being and Human Flourishing: Conceptual, Causal, and Policy Relations,” 47–48.

79 Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences*, viii–ix.

80 Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, *Pope Francis: Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio* (New York: New American Library, 2013).

divine gift of grace (charismata). VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni argue that “The presence and operation of God’s grace might be thought of as a central component of spiritual well-being in this life [...], but it is not one that can be readily assessed by human capacities.”⁸¹ They are certainly correct in their assertion that grace-based theories cannot be scientifically verified. However, since they implicitly employ a critical realist view of reality, it is difficult to understand why their six categories for promoting spiritual well-being rely so heavily on individual effort and “measurable categories,” particularly when a faith-based theory of well-being presupposes divine agency. If a general theory of spiritual well-being should be developed, it cannot merely be framed around the benefits of individual and corporate religious practices. It is precisely here that I believe Pentecostalism’s “grace-based” and holistic theory of well-being can make its greatest contribution to *Christian* theories of well-being. The testimonies of Pentecostals witness to the fact that an abundant life (John 10:10) is available through a sovereign work of God through the Spirit, which radically transforms every aspect of human flourishing, including the temporal, the spiritual, and the hope of the eternal. The abundant life that Pentecostals point to is thus ontologically and relationally different than anything that can be found on earth. It also stresses the futility of trying to achieve this abundant life through personal means. Even cultivating classical virtues would not match this lofty goal. Moreover, it has the potential to overcome and reframe the two greatest obstacles to a flourishing life on earth, namely, sin and suffering. Consequently, Pentecostalism underlines the centrality of God as the ultimate agent and source of all true well-being, a fact that must not be overlooked by Christian theories of human flourishing.

However, secular and religious theories of well-being can teach Pentecostals the value of aesthetics and other pleasures of life, such as art, culture, education, sports, and relaxation.⁸² Pentecostals can also learn to better appreciate “worldly” accomplishments like promotions, graduations, athletic achievements, and perhaps even retirement after a long life of service. General theories of well-being can therefore provide Pentecostals with a more balanced view of human flourishing, which has tended to overemphasize spiritual well-being at the expense of temporal flourishing. Even if Pentecostals have not been entirely absent from areas that promote greater political, socio-economic, and ecological justice,⁸³ a deeper understanding of human flourishing could also lead them to make important strides in these areas.

81 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, “Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being,” 487.

82 See, for instance, the important work of Steven Felix-Jäger in regard to art and aesthetics: *Pentecostal Aesthetics: Theological Reflections in a Pentecostal Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics* (Boston: Brill, 2015).

83 Geoffrey W. Sutton and Martin W. Mittelstadt, “Loving God and Loving Others: Learning About Love from Psychological Science and Pentecostal Perspectives,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, no. 2 (2012): 159.

CELEBRITY CULTURE AND PENTECOSTALISM

As noted above, celebrity culture has had inroads into Pentecostalism since its inception. The simple reason for this is that Pentecostalism was never insulated from its surroundings. Leaders who exemplified the right “orthodoxy, (right praise/belief), orthopraxy (right practice) and orthopathy (right affections)” to use the terminology of Steven Land,⁸⁴ and actively exercised gifts of power like divine healing, prophecy, and word of knowledge, were “celebrified” in the movement even though their spirituality was supposed to be radically egalitarian.⁸⁵ Simon Coleman has noted that the situation is not significantly different today in the Faith Movement, and several of their leaders are treated as modern-day saints.⁸⁶ Studies from South America and Africa show that the celebrification of Pentecostal leaders is now a global reality.⁸⁷ One of the most constructive insights for Pentecostals to remedy this problem has, in my opinion, been advanced by Simon Chan, who writes:

The challenge that Pentecostals in the twenty-first century face is twofold: How do they keep Pentecostal spiritual fervor alive without being bound to the past and ending up in a spiritual ghetto? Concurrently, how can they be open to the future without surrendering to the culture of this world? Pentecostals are facing the same twin challenges faced by older traditions: *ressourcement* (a return to the sources) and *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date), the two key processes behind Vatican II.⁸⁸

According to Chan, Pentecostals must keep one eye on the past, so that they do not abandon their rich and unique spiritual heritage for a more acceptable form, but also keep another eye on the present, so that their spirituality does not become irrelevant. Chan thus claims that “What is needed is a better theology that makes better sense of the distinctively Pentecostal experience.”⁸⁹ My suggestion here is that a more profound understanding of Pentecostalism as a vibrant spirituality of human flourishing, rather than a theological system to be defended, could not only bring *ressourcement* but also *aggiornamento* to a movement struggling with an increased presence of celebrity culture.

84 Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, 13.

85 Davidsson and Åkerlund, “Elvis Has Entered the Building’: Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture,” forthcoming.

86 Simon Coleman, “Transgressing the Self: Making Charismatic Saints,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 417–39.

87 Cristina Rocha, “Global Religious Infrastructures: The Australian Megachurch Hillsong in Brazil,” *Social Compass* 68, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 245–57; Kelebogile T. Resane, “Simon the Sorcerer Offered Them Money’ (Acts 8:19): Some Pentecostals Have Gone Commercial Instead of Evangelical,” in *The Use and Abuse of the Spirit in Pentecostalism: A South African Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2020), 93–113.

88 Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*; 38 (Blandford Forum, U.K.: Deo Pub., 2011), 1–2.

89 Chan, 4.

Pentecostalism has had little impact on celebrity culture. A few “super-celebrities” like Justin and Hailey Bieber and Denzel Washington have found their way into Pentecostalism.⁹⁰ Denzel Washington is quoted as saying, “it’s not talked about in this town but that doesn’t mean people in Hollywood don’t believe.”⁹¹ However, religious faith might not be as undercover in Hollywood as Washington suggests. Celebrities like Tom Cruise, Madonna, and Mike Tyson are known for their belief in Scientology, Jewish Kabbalah mysticism, and Islam. Pete Ward notes, however, that celebrities are known for treating religion as most other things associated with celebrity culture: “The religious self is free to choose, to edit, and to combine, across religious traditions and non-religious sources.”⁹² Thus, religion just becomes another dish at the self-fulfilling buffet, and it is unlikely that Pentecostalism will be treated differently. This was not the case for celebrities who joined the despised rank of “holy rollers” in the past. When celebrities became Pentecostals in the early days, they often had to renounce all their worldly prestige and influence, and in extreme cases, undergo humiliating psychiatric evaluations to ensure that they had not lost their mind, as in the case of Danish actress Anna Larssen Bjørner.⁹³ Those days are long gone. For Pentecostalism to have a greater impact in today’s world, and especially with the younger generation within its ranks, who is significantly exposed to contemporary celebrity culture, it must continuously and unashamedly testify, like Tom Anderson, that the question of human flourishing is answered in the experience of the full gospel, while not ignoring the important contributions that positive psychology, psychology of religion and spirituality, and other Christian theories of human flourishing can bring.

90 Andrew Pulver, “‘It Took a While, but I’m Here’: Denzel Washington Is Baptised before His 70th Birthday,” *The Guardian*, December 23, 2024, sec. Film, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/23/denzel-washington-is-baptised-before-his-70th-birthday>; Portia Berry-Kilby, “The Christian Faith of Justin and Hailey Bieber,” *Premier Christianity*, accessed May 18, 2025, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/the-christian-faith-of-justin-and-hailey-bieber/17313.article>.

91 Pulver, “‘It Took a While, but I’m Here.’”

92 Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 92.

93 Nikolaj Christensen, “Anna Larssen Bjørner: A Drama of Institutionalization and Independence,” in *Empowered Voices: Scandinavian Women in Early Pentecostalism* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2024), 93–113.

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