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Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being

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Abstract

Despite the fact that the vast majority of the world's population identifies with a religious tradition, spiritual well-being is an often-overlooked aspect of a person's overall well-being. Existing generic measures of spiritual well-being may be useful for some purposes, but are not sufficiently specific to capture the principal ends and concerns of most particular religious communities. Moreover, many of the generic spiritual well-being measures are often inapplicable to non-theistic or non-monotheistic religions. We thus propose that the study of well-being would be advanced by the development of tradition-specific measures of spiritual well-being across different religious traditions. To that end, we provide some conceptual background and develop a set of items for a measure of Christian spiritual well-being. Within the Christian religion, the measure is intended to be ecumenical in being broadly applicable across Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions. The items for the measure were developed in collaboration with Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox theologians, pastors, priests, spiritual directors, and laity and covers the domains of beliefs, practices, service, communion with God, character, and relationships. We discuss a number of ways in which such a measure might be of use both for research purposes and for religious communities themselves to advance their own ends. We discuss the possible development of other tradition-specific measures of spiritual well-being in the context of a pluralistic society. These various measures of tradition-specific spiritual well-being may be of use in ensuring that empirical research on religion and well-being is not only of academic interest, but also serves the ends of religious communities themselves.

Tradition-Specific Spiritual Well-Being

Efforts to assess well-being have increased considerably in the past decades, with growing acknowledgment that the subjective assessment of well-being provides an important complement to more objective measures (National Research Council, 2013; OECD, 2013). Efforts have been made to assess happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, personal growth, character, mastery, social relationships, and numerous other positive aspects of well-being (Ryff, 1989; Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014; VanderWeele, 2017a). Measures of well-being that assess a range of different domains of life that are important to people help to give a sense of what is and is not going well in a person's life.

One domain that is important to many people and that is often absent from these measures of well-being is *spiritual* well-being. A recent report from the Pew Foundation noted that 84% of the world's population identify with a particular religious tradition (Pew Religious Landscape Study, 2018); 68% of the world's population consider religion important in their daily life (Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011); for many, it is the most important aspect of life. The neglect of spiritual well-being is thus an important omission in most assessments of well-being.

While certain generic measures of spiritual well-being have been put forward (Fisher, 2010; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982), and may be useful for some purposes, they are arguably not sufficiently generic to apply to non-monotheistic or non-theistic religions, nor sufficiently specific to be of principal interest to most practicing religious communities. Other, even more generic measures of spiritual well-being have been criticized on the grounds of assessing principally psychological well-being rather than spiritual well-being (Koenig, 2008; Peterman, Fitchett, Brady, Hernandez, & Cella, 2002). The principal concerns and ends of most religious communities are more specific than the forms of well-being assessed by the generic measures. Notions of spiritual well-being will vary in important and dramatic ways across religious traditions. Thus, attempting to measure these goals and ends of religious practice will arguably require tradition-specific measures.

The development of new measures of tradition-specific spiritual well-being would facilitate an enhanced understanding and tracking of how various religious communities are faring and whether they perceive themselves as making progress toward those ends which they deem as of primary importance. Such tradition-specific measures of spiritual well-being could

help supplement more generic measures of subjective well-being that are currently being used in the literature. The idea would not be so much the comparison of spiritual well-being across groups—indeed, with different tradition-specific measures this would not be possible—nor would the idea be to combine these spiritual well-being measures with those of more generic well-being. Rather, the hope of such measurement would be to acknowledge the importance of these ends of spiritual well-being to various religious communities and provide a way to assess progress toward these ends or lack thereof.

This chapter proposes such a measure of tradition-specific spiritual well-being for Christian religious communities. We provide conceptual background for the measure and describe the process of its development and refinement, along with a discussion of its potential limitations and directions for further development and use. If the approach of measuring spiritual well-being were to eventually be employed more broadly in a pluralistic context this would require the development of other tradition-specific measures (e.g., for Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religious traditions). The development of such tradition-specific measures arguably requires researchers steeped in the religious tradition for which the measure is being proposed. Given this limitation, the present authors can thus, at best, present here a proposed measure of Christian spiritual well-being, describe its process of development, and hope that this might serve as a useful model for the development of other tradition-specific measures.

With regard to the Christian religion itself, while certain aspects of spiritual well-being have been assessed quantitatively in prior measures, such as the Measure of Christian Orthodoxy (Fullerton & Hunsberger, 1982), this measure is restricted only to beliefs and does not attempt to capture spiritual well-being more broadly. To the best of our knowledge, there is no prior quantitative measure of Christian spiritual well-being proposed in the academic literature that captures spiritual well-being across numerous domains. Part of the intent of this chapter is to fill this gap.

As we describe in more detail in the "Discussion" section, we believe that the development of these tradition-specific measures are of value not only for academic inquiry, but also for religious communities' capacity to track their own growth and evaluate their own efforts at enhancing spiritual well-being, as well as allowing religious leaders to identify areas of strength and weakness and enhance understanding around the determinants of spiritual well-being with the aim of improving it. Moreover, since it is indeed the case that

so much of the world's population views religion and spiritual well-being as central, it would seem that any holistic assessment of well-being would arguably allow space for assessments of spiritual well-being as well. Thus, even in a pluralistic society, such tradition-specific measures of spiritual well-being might help supplement more generic well-being assessments.

Conceptual Background

In this section, we provide a brief description of the conceptual background underlying the measure; how, from a Christian perspective, the proposed measure of Christian spiritual well-being relates to other more general measures of well-being; and what the proposed measure does and does not capture. While some of the conceptual relations described here may be generalizable to other religious traditions, we recognize that the understanding of these relations will likely vary across traditions and thus recognize also the necessity of this conceptual work being carried out specifically for each tradition-specific measure. The comments here are intended only to pertain to the Christian tradition, and we recognize that even within that broad tradition there are likely to be various disagreements, a point to which we will return later.

We begin our description of conceptual background by examining the construct of Christian spiritual well-being in relation to more general notions of human flourishing or well-being. We have elsewhere provided in greater detail conceptualizations of human flourishing and spiritual well-being and their relations (VanderWeele, 2017a, 2020) and here give a more succinct summary to motivate the measure. We propose that *human flourishing* be understood as a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good (VanderWeele, 2017a). Within the Christian tradition, the final end of the human person is often described as some form of communion with God (Aquinas 1274/1948; Catholic Church, 2000; Westminster, 1647/2014). We might then define *eternal flourishing*, or *perfect well-being*, again understood within the Christian tradition, as final and complete communion with God. *Spiritual well-being*, in this life (which is the construct to be assessed by the proposed measure) 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 (VanderWeele, 2017a). Thus understood, full human flourishing encompasses both spiritual and temporal well-being, with spiritual well-being, from a Christian perspective, being the component that is most central, that which brings a person to his or her final end in God.

It has long been understood in the Christian tradition that temporal flourishing and spiritual well-being, while often mutually supportive, can come into conflict. For example, a sense of calling to serve the poor by placing oneself in difficult or dangerous circumstances may be important for one's spiritual well-being but may compromise health or happiness. Acting on a calling to missions work in a different region or country, may likewise be constitutive of a person's spiritual well-being but may adversely affect social relations, especially, for example, if not understood or opposed by friends or family members. The potential conflict between temporal flourishing and spiritual well-being is also seen in Christian understandings of suffering. While suffering as an experience of the loss of some temporal good is to be understood as a deprivation, it can also be the source of transformation, of change and growth, of purification of desires, of reorientation to one's final end in God (John Paul II, 1984). 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.

However, spiritual well-being and temporal flourishing will often be consonant. Health of body and mind and a set of supportive relationships will often facilitate religious practices that promote spiritual well-being. Likewise, these religious practices can contribute to temporal flourishing by developing community, facilitating mental health, shaping character, and giving one a sense of understanding, meaning, purpose, and satisfaction (VanderWeele, 2017b). A person's temporal flourishing, including their health and happiness, is not irrelevant. Christian teaching is that the created order was shaped by God to be good. However, for a person in the fallen or broken order of the world to attain his or her final end in God, some giving up of aspects of temporal flourishing may be necessary for the sake of a greater spiritual well-being. Spiritual well-being does not eliminate, but rather relativizes and ultimately transforms, the importance of temporal flourishing.

The proposed measure is intended to assess the construct of Christian spiritual well-being, understood, as already described, as a state in which one's

life is oriented toward eternal flourishing or as a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good with respect to his or her final end in God. As a measure, it can, at best, only assesses what is humanly assessable and, in the case of the present proposed measure, assessable by self-report. There are thus certainly aspects of spiritual well-being, understood as we have described, that are important but that cannot be included in the measure. The presence and operation of God's grace might be thought of as a central component of spiritual well-being in this life (Garrigou-Lagrange, 1999; Westminster, 1647/2014), but it is not one that can be readily assessed by human capacities. The measure will thus, of necessity, have important omissions. As any assessment of an abstract concept, it will not be wholly adequate. It will not capture the fullness or complexity of the underlying construct. For reasons alluded to in the introduction and revisited in our concluding discussion, we believe that some measure will be preferable to no attempt at quantification at all, but the limitations of the approach and the acknowledgment of what cannot be measured is, of course, important as well.

Process of Measure Development

In this section we provide a brief description of the process of development and refinement of the proposed Christian spiritual well-being measure. The authors initially proposed six domains of Christian spiritual well-being in light of the preceding conceptual considerations. These six domains were beliefs, practices, service, communion with God, Christian character, and relationships. The domains thus include (i) cognitive components (beliefs) with the items principally following historic Christian creeds, supplemented by a statement on the Scriptures; (ii) practices to sustain Christian faith and commitment including prayer, learning, service attendance, sacraments, reflection, and confession; (iii) service, including helping those in need, supporting the Christian community, the sharing of one's faith, and financial or material giving; (iv) communion with God including various relational, experiential, and cognitive aspects; (v) character with reference to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (Aquinas 1274/1948; Pieper, 1966), but also reference to a sense of calling and to growth in holiness; and (vi) relationships including love of others, forgiveness, and spiritual social support. Within various spiritual theologies (Garrigou-Lagrange, 1999; McGinn, Meyendorf, & Leclercq, 1986) each of these is seen as contributing

to a person's movement toward his or her final end in God. The domain constituted by communion with God is arguably that which comes closest to approximating the final end itself. However, with spiritual well-being understood, as we have described, as a state in which one's life is oriented toward eternal flourishing or as a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good with respect to his or her final end in God, each of the other domains is important in that orientation and movement toward that end.

After discussion among authors, an initial set of items was proposed within each of the domains. The domains and sets of items were sent out for feedback from various Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox theologians, spiritual directors, priests, pastors, and scholars. Feedback was solicited with respect to the overall conception of the measure, including the domains, the specific item wording, and any important potentially assessable aspects of Christian spiritual well-being that were absent from the proposed set of items. Item wording was refined in response to feedback, and new items were added in response to suggestions pertaining to what was missing and how the item set might be supplemented. The authors undertook several rounds of such feedback from a diverse range of sources. An interdisciplinary group of scholars likewise provided similar feedback. Finally, feedback was obtained through a series of focus groups in both Catholic and Protestant settings. Focus group members likewise provided suggestions on specific item wording, on the overall conceptualization, and on what might be absent. The authors finalized the proposed set of items following three such focus groups.

A decision was made to keep the proposed measure ecumenical, with the hope of being applicable to the Christian faith across Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions. In each of these different Christian traditions, a slightly modified set of items and wordings might be preferable. Nevertheless, it was thought that it would be more desirable to develop a measure that could be employed across multiple contexts than to provide numerous slight adaptations. Moreover, within the Protestant tradition, the pursuit of more specific denominationally tailored measures might then result in a proliferation of such measures across Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal denominations, and perhaps even subdivisions within each of these denominations. There is of course tension between a measure ideally shaped for a specific religious community versus one that is broadly applicable. We recognize that the very decision to pursue a tradition-specific measure of spiritual well-being for the Christian faith itself constitutes a move toward specificity from more generic spiritual well-being measures

(Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; Peterman et al., 2002). We do not think there is a right, a wrong, or an ideal, level of specificity. A particular decision entails a set of tradeoffs. The decision here to pursue a measure of Christian tradition-specific measure of spiritual well-being while still attempting to encompass the major traditions within the Christian faith was shaped by the perceived need for a measure that had Christian ends in view, but with the hope of broad adoption.

However, the attempt to develop a measure applicable across Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions thus entailed certain challenges. Various potential items concerning devotional practices with respect to the saints, for example, were excluded because this is not a part of most Protestant practices, even though these items were suggested by Catholic and Orthodox reviewers and focus group participants. Reference to explicit frequency with regard to Scripture reading, emphasized by some evangelical focus group participants, was left more ambiguously worded and included in the more general statements about efforts to "learn more about my faith" since the manner in which the Scriptures are read, received, and taught vary across these traditions. Reference to frequency was likewise absent from the statement about participation in the sacraments and the Eucharist since these practices vary considerably across different Christian traditions. Instead emphasis was placed on the sacraments or the Eucharist being "an important part of my Christian faith" as this would constitute a relatively shared understanding. More generally, there was some tension throughout with regard to preferred item wording across members of Catholic versus Protestant focus groups. While such preferences were manifest as well with feedback from priests, pastors, theologians, and spiritual directors, the preferences emerged even more strongly with lay community members and parishioners. The authors tried to achieve a compromise in navigating these item wording preferences and to avoid any wording which elicited persistent confusion or puzzlement. Such compromises were again necessary in the attempt to keep the measure of Christian spiritual well-being ecumenical across major Christian traditions.

In spite of these efforts toward inclusiveness, we recognize also that some of the proposed items may not be viewed as appropriate in certain liberal mainline Protestant denominations. Christian communities that do not emphasize historic creeds may not see the belief items, for example, as appropriate. We acknowledge that not every item would be seen as constituting *spiritual well-being* to every group that self-identifies as Christian. However, through

the process of development and refinement just described we believe that there are very substantial portions of those who identify with the Christian faith for which the items would constitute a reasonable spiritual well-being assessment. In light of the extraordinary diversity within Christianity, a truly universally acceptable measure does not seem possible. In settings in which some of the items presented here are not viewed as appropriate, they could be modified or set aside. For many, however, we believe the full set of items may be viewed as useful and suitable.

Proposed Measure of Christian Spiritual Well-Being

Following the process of development just described, the proposed items for the spiritual well-being measure across the six domains of beliefs, practices, service, communion with God, Christian character, and relationships are given here. There are 30 items total; each of the six domains has between four and six items. The items themselves might be scored from 1 to 7, with specific anchors corresponding to 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 5 = Slightly Agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree. Alternatively, if space is limited with regard to including various anchors, the items might be scored from 0 to 10 with 0 = Strongly Disagree to 10 = Strongly Agree. Further research following data collection efforts will consider the advantages and disadvantages of these different scoring strategies. Depending on the intended purpose or use of the measure, the individual item responses may be of interest, item scores might be averaged within domains, or the domain means or item responses themselves might be averaged to form an overall summary measure. The 30 items are as follows:

Beliefs:
   I believe in one God as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
   I believe that through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, God
      brought salvation
   I believe that God brings grace through the Holy Spirit and the Church
   I believe Jesus will return to fully bring life everlasting
   I believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament guide us to
      salvation

Practices:

I intentionally take time each day to practice prayer.

I regularly devote time to learn more about my faith.

I regularly attend church services.

I participate in the sacraments such as Eucharist or Holy Communion as an important part of my Christian faith.

I regularly reflect on my life to understand what I have done wrong and how to improve.

Confessing my sins is an important part of my spiritual life.

Service:

I help those in need as a way of living out my Christian faith.

I use the gifts God has given me to support the Christian community.

I tell others who are not Christian about my faith.

I give financially what I should and use my resources in ways that advance the kingdom of God.

Communion with God:

I have come closer to God through my prayer and spiritual practices.

I intentionally seek God's presence in my daily life.

I am growing in my understanding of who God is.

I have a meaningful relationship with God.

God loves me and cares about me.

Christian Character:

I always have complete faith in God's plan of salvation.

My hope in God directs all of my desires and actions.

I love God above all else.

My calling to be a Christian guides my life's work.

I try to actively improve good habits and combat sinful ones.

I allow the Holy Spirit to guide me in growing holiness in life.

Relationships:

I love my neighbor as myself.

I have forgiven those who have hurt me.

There are people in my life with whom I talk to about deep spiritual matters.

There are people in my community who regularly support me in my faith.

Short Form of the Measure

Alternatively, as a very brief short form of the Christian spiritual well-being measure, one item might be selected in each of the six domains as follows, with scoring as described previously. Future research following data collection efforts will assess whether other choices of the single item for each domain might be preferable from an empirical standpoint. The current proposed six items for the short form of the Christian spiritual well-being assessment are as follows:

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.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have proposed a preliminary measure of tradition-specific spiritual well-being applicable to the Christian faith. The measure is intended to be broadly ecumenical across Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions and across the domains of beliefs, practices, service, communion with God, character, and relationships. It is intended to capture, albeit relatively crudely, a person's orientation to, as understood by the Christian faith, one's final end in God.

Further research will focus on collecting data on this measure in different Christian and church contexts. The distribution of responses will be assessed, the psychometric properties of the measure will be evaluated, work will be done on assessing the advantages and disadvantages of different scoring strategies, and the measure will eventually be used for the purposes of tracking, assessment, and evaluation in some of the ways described here.

Specifically, we believe the measure may be of use and interest to Christian communities in different ways. One straightforward way in which the measure may be of interest to religious communities is as an assessment

tool: as a means by which a pastor or priest or other religious leader could assess the perceived spiritual well-being strengths, as well as areas in need of attention or care, within a community, congregation, or parish. For example, this may be useful in determining what aspects of spiritual life to focus on in teaching or in the development of new programs. A second potential use may be the assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of various programs or new efforts that are put in place to foster spiritual growth. This could be done within the context of a before-and-after study or, more ambitiously, a randomized trial. While the general form of a randomized trial with a traditional "treatment" and "control" group may be unacceptable in the context of many religious community settings, randomization of, for example, two different types of spiritual retreats or a wait-list randomization (e.g., randomization to participate in the program either now or later) may, in some contexts, be considered acceptable. In any case, such designs may help evaluate the efficacy of the proposed program and activities and do so using a set of outcomes, captured by the Christian spiritual well-being measure, that are closely aligned to the goals and ends of the community itself. A third potential use may simply be as a tool for individual self-reflection. The process of providing responses to the proposed measure's various items may provide opportunity for self-reflection and self-evaluation, and the measure may be used as a guide for decisions on further efforts or changes in life or on seeking support. The measure could be used for this purpose on a single occasion and might also be useful for identifying and exploring changes in spiritual well-being over time.

The measure is based on self-report and, as such, is subject to the usual limitations of self-report. The items themselves may be interpreted differently by different individuals, and the scoring (e.g., what constitutes a "6" versus a "7") might likewise be interpreted differently across persons. This makes comparisons across individuals or across communities potentially problematic. Nevertheless, for the uses just described the self-report nature is not necessarily problematic. Despite the measure employing self-reporting, it may still be useful for a religious leader to get a sense of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of a community. In the context of a randomized program or intervention evaluation, self-report biases will be balanced across groups by randomization itself. For the purposes of reflection or the tracking of an individual over time, likewise the self-report nature of the measure is not necessarily problematic. The appropriateness of a measure depends on its use, and, for these various uses, the measure might often be

appropriate. However, even in these aforementioned contexts, due caution is needed. Programs or activities that make participants more aware of the possibilities of growth, high standards or aspirations, the spiritual lives of the saints, or the need for humility may end up altering an individual's interpretation of the scores themselves (e.g., individuals might rate themselves lower on a variety of items after studying the life of an important faithful historical figure). In contexts in which this may be an important component of the program to be evaluated, further caution in interpretation is certainly warranted. Relatedly, a person might, for a period of time, not feel particularly close to God and yet through this process be experiencing a deepening of their spirituality, an experience which, in its more extreme forms, is sometimes referred to as a "dark night of the soul" (Saint John of the Cross, 1585). For all of these reasons, interpretation of results must be handled carefully. However, the hope and intent of the measure is that it be used by religious communities in many of these aforementioned ways while maintaining awareness of the caveats and limitations.

It may be desirable also to supplement the subjective self-report evaluations that constitute the measure with additional more objectively reported questions concerning the actual frequency of service attendance, the time spent in prayer, the amount of money given, the number of people with whom one has discussed the Christian faith, the number of hours spent volunteering, etc. However, as with subjective assessments, more objective measures also need to be interpreted carefully since life circumstances can vary considerably. A larger absolute amount given to charity may not indicate greater generosity depending on, for example, the extent of one's income, the size of the family one is supporting, etc. However, the subjective measures and the more objective measures, taken together, may provide a fuller picture of spiritual well-being.

The measure proposed here was for spiritual well-being as it pertains to the Christian faith. In the introduction, we suggested the possibility of supplementing general measures of well-being with tradition-specific measure of spiritual well-being. For such a proposal to be reasonable within the context of a pluralistic society, other tradition-specific measures of spiritual well-being would need to be developed as well. We recognize that the challenges in producing a Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist measure will likely be distinct from the challenges encountered in the development and refinement of this measure of Christian spiritual well-being. No measure will be wholly adequate. Some of the challenges are likely to be similar, including

dealing with multiple traditions present within what is often referred to as the same religion, deciding on specific items and appropriate item wording, and appropriately acknowledging what cannot be assessed. It is possible that some of the lessons and challenges documented here might be useful in the development of other tradition-specific measures, but we acknowledge that many, and additional, challenges might well be quite different. The development of other tradition-specific measures may also be useful in facilitating dialogue and in clarifying differences and commonalities in the understanding of spiritual well-being and in the beliefs and truth claims of different religious traditions.

We do, however, believe that supplementing general measures of well-being with tradition-specific measures of spiritual well-being is important in evaluating human progress. As noted earlier, the vast majority of the world's population identifies with a religious tradition, and, for most, this is an important part of their daily life (Diener et al., 2011; Pew Religious Landscape Study, 2018); for many, it is the most important part. The use of measures of tradition-specific spiritual well-being would facilitate an understanding and tracking of how various religious communities are faring and whether they perceive themselves as making progress toward attaining those ends which they deem most important. Such measurement would acknowledge the importance of these ends of spiritual well-being to various religious communities. It would furthermore provide a way to assess progress toward these ends or lack thereof, and to facilitate the capacity of bringing an empirically informed case for promoting these ends into policy discussions. Such advocacy would need to likewise acknowledge the competing interests and ends of other communities and carry out these discussions in the context of a country's full political life. However, the use of such measures may help religious communities themselves in the discernment of how various government policies do, or do not, affect these communities' principal priorities. If these are the matters that many people care most about, it seems this should at least be acknowledged and taken into account in policy decisions and considerations of societal progress.

Social science research on religion has sometimes been criticized from theological perspectives for simplifying and instrumentalizing religion (Bishop, 2009; Shuman & Meador, 2002). The conception of religion and spirituality is sometimes criticized as being very thin, reductionistic, and not engaged with religion's chief concerns about God, salvation, life after death, or with specific beliefs. It is moreover argued that much social-scientific research

promotes using religion to advance health or various temporal or secular ends while in fact neglecting religion's own goals and internal goods. The research may sometimes promote the replacing of the true meaning of faith with a self-interested individualism which enlists religious faith to simply get what one wants (Shuman & Meador, 2002). From the perspective of communities of faith, these concerns are important. However, we would argue that rather than abandoning social-scientific methods in light of these concerns, a preferable approach would be to broaden the conceptualizations of religion along with the set of outcomes examined when employing such empirical quantitative methodology. The measure of Christian spiritual well-being that we have proposed here provides an outcome measure shaped by the principal aims of many Christian religious communities and may help better align quantitative research efforts with the primary ends of Christian communities themselves. The use of these outcome measures, shaped by the ends of religious communities, may allow for research that is not only of academic interest, but also of use and benefit to the religious communities themselves. The possibility of this being so would likely be enhanced further by additional and ongoing dialogue between researchers and religious communities (Balboni & Balboni, 2018; Long, Gregg, VanderWeele, Oman, & Laird, 2019; VanderWeele, 2017c). We hope that this proposed measure of Christian spiritual well-being, focused on the tradition-specific ends of Christianity itself, will help make that possibility a reality.

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