

The Flourishing of Creation as a Theological Framework for Human Spiritual Health

**International Symposium:
Spiritual Illness, the Ultimate Ailment to Be Feared:
“Do you want to be healed”? (John 5, 6):
Understanding Spiritual Health in the 21st Century,**
Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania,
4-5 November 2024

Canon Mark OXBROW* 

ABSTRACT. This paper explores the use, by a number of contemporary theologians, of the concept of ‘flourishing’ in relation to the whole of creation and humanity in particular, and examines the connection between the flourishing of creation and the spiritual health of the human race. The paper first draws on Enochic studies to understand the connection between balance and order in creation and the moral rectitude of human life and response to the Creator in ancient Jewish thought. It then contrasts this with Western post-Reformation thought in which creation is seen to exist for, and to be exploited to the benefit of, human advancement and well-being. Although this route could lead us into reflections on creation theology this paper takes an alternative route, in the company of Miroslav Volf and others, to examine spiritual sickness in the 21st century and how this can be addressed by attention to the holistic understanding of the flourishing of the whole creation. The mission texts of John 10:10 and Romans 8:19 will underpin the proposition that the ultimate objective of the *Missio Dei* is the eternal flourishing of humanity in the context of a flourishing, God-honouring universe.

Keywords: Flourishing, Creation Theology, Spiritual Illness, Enochic Tradition, Redemptive Judgment

* Revd, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. E-mail: mark1oxbrow@gmail.com

Apocalypse and Redemption

With spiritual illness being described as the ‘ultimate ailment’ in the theme of our consultation these two days, I feel it is appropriate to begin my deliberations in the apocalyptic literature of St. John the Divine where the judgement, reformation and the ultimate destiny of humankind are closely tied to the turmoil and restoration of creation. We recall that as the Lamb of God opens the seals of judgement and reaches the seventh and final seal and the sounding of the seven trumpets John declares,

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.
Revelation 8:7-9

John here draws closely on the imagery of the plagues of the Exodus tradition in developing his theme of judgement but goes further than the Torah tradition which focuses mainly on the demonstration of the cosmic power of Yahweh and the punishment of Egypt. Going beyond this, the apocalyptic focus of our first century mystic is not just on judgement but on warning and on the possibility of redemption. In each case destruction is limited to one-third. As Swete writes,

*“Here his purpose is chiefly to emphasis the partial character of the visitation. Its purpose is the reformation, not the destruction of mankind; it is charged with serious warning, but not the final doom.”*¹

I have begun with the apocalypse of John because I wanted to focus on the partial nature of the destruction of creation and the space this leave for a Christian hope of redemption², but it is also important to revisit the words of Jesus Christ himself in Mark 13 because here we are reminded even more clearly of the interrelated nature of spiritual health, human survival and cosmic destruction. A passage which begins with warnings over spiritual deception³ and ends with a call to spiritual discernment and watchfulness⁴, moves

¹ Swete, H.B. *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with notes and indices*, London: Macmillan, 1907

² After all the apocalypse of John concludes with a vision of a new creation at the centre of which stands the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2)

³ Mark 13:5-6

⁴ Mark 13:32-37

seamlessly through themes of human alienation and warfare, betrayal and persecution, and cosmic destruction⁵. And again, here, in Mark's gospel we get the opening up of the possibility of redemption. Jesus says,

*"If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them ... At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."*⁶

In this paper I wish to advance two theses, firstly that spiritual illness and the potential for human flourishing are intrinsically linked to the well-being of creation as a whole, and secondly that divine judgement is primarily about the opening up of the possibility of redemption. Up until the emergence of, what as been termed by some, our "Climate Emergency" and the growing awareness of the collapse of bio-diversity and environmental resilience, much theology (I speak primarily of Western theology) had been excessively anthropocentric, paying little attention to the holistic nature of creation. I want to suggest that it has been the sins of pride and narcissism, rather than a faithful reading of scripture that have led us to consider humanity as the sole concern of the Creator and that our own well-being, spiritual, mental and physical, can be maintained whilst at the same time ignoring or abusing the well-being of the rest of God's creation. We will return later to this assertion. At the same time, in the West, Protestant Pietism and Premillennial theology have led us down the false path of abandoning any concern for the earthly condition of men and women and the state of creation as a whole, as a lost cause, and turning our eyes instead on an 'escapist' redemption to a totally 'other' heavenly reality – a theological position forcefully rejected by the pre-eminent Anglican theologian N.T. Wright. In his text on eschatology, *Surprised by Hope*, Wright argues that Christian scripture speaks consistently of the renewal and fulfilment of all things in Christ, not the abandonment of one world in order to seek another. On the Kingdom of God he writes,

*It is the story of God's kingdom being launched on earth as in heaven, generating a new state of affairs in which the power of evil has been decisively defeated, the new creation has been decisively launched, and Jesus' followers have been commissioned and equipped to put that victory, and the inaugurated new world, into practice.*⁷

⁵ Mark 13:7-27

⁶ Mark 13:20,26

⁷ Wright, T. *Surprised by Hope*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007, 217

This present created universe which God has from the first moment declared 'good'⁸ needs no replacement, but rather waits in eager expectation for the revealing of the sons of God when creation itself "*will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God*"⁹.

Having quoted a 21st century Evangelical theologian in support of my thesis I now step back two millennia to reconsider these issues from the perspective of the Enochic tradition.

Enoch : The Watchers' Rebellion and Corruption of Creation

The Enochic tradition is almost unknown in Western theological debate but has remained central to Christian praxis as well as theology within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as well as in some other Orthodox traditions. In a recent publication, Bruk Asale examines the canonical status in Christian scripture of 1 Enoch, in particular, and concludes that "*1 Enoch was considered as Scripture, or inspired, by the early church and apostolic fathers. ... Some Church Fathers held 1 Enoch as inspired Scripture not only because of the book itself, but more importantly because Jude considered it to be Scripture.*"¹⁰ In this paper I am not so much concerned to argue the scriptural reception of the Enochic tradition but rather to explore it's teaching on the unique connection that exists between moral and spiritual failure and the disordering of creation.

The background to the concerns of Enoch is the ordering of creation in Genesis 1. Christian (and Jewish) Scripture opens with the statement, "the earth was without form and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep"¹¹ which is immediately followed by the oppositional statement "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters"¹² which leads into the ordering of creation through separation¹³, gathering¹⁴, production¹⁵, creation and naming.¹⁶ The creation of God is an ordered creation. Chaos is banished and good order, representing the reign of God, is established. Enoch is taken in his vision to inspect, to measure and to know the order of creation and to observe the disorder, the destruction, caused by the fallen angels, the Watchers.

⁸ Genesis 1:10 et al

⁹ Romans 8:19-21

¹⁰ Asale, B.A. *1 Enoch as Christian Scripture: A study in the reception and appropriation of 1 Enoch in Jude and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Canon*, Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020, 58

¹¹ Genesis 1:2a

¹² Genesis 1:2b

¹³ Genesis 1:4, 7 and 14

¹⁴ Genesis 1:9 and 10

¹⁵ Genesis 1: 11-12 and 24

¹⁶ Genesis 2:19-20

The Watchers in Enoch are those angelic beings tasked with the knowledge of creation, its origin, its nature, its regulation, its telos and with the maintenance of order in creation through astronomical, meteorological and geographical phenomenon. Each angel has their own specific responsibility, for example, for wind, frost or hail.¹⁷ In contrast to the fallen angels who bring chaos and destruction, the good angels harmonise all existence, heavenly and earthly.¹⁸ As David Jackson notes, “*the Book of the Watchers begins with a strong and unqualified statement on the regularity and dependability of God’s created order (1 Enoch 2:1-5:3). As we trace this theme throughout the literature, we note a contrast between the emphasis in the Book of the Watchers on cosmic regularity and the various accounts of cosmic rebellion elsewhere. ... The original regularity of the cosmos as described in 1 Enoch 2-5 forms the basis for condemning all subsequent deviations.*”¹⁹ An important observation for this particular study is the nature of these deviations and the nature of the salvific role proposed for Enoch.

The deviation of the fallen angels in the Enochic canon is three-fold, spiritual as a rebellion against God, moral in their illicit sexual relationship with human beings, and cosmological in their neglect of their God-given role as regulators of creation and their deliberate distortion of creation by, for example, “bringing down” the sun, the moon, the stars and the constellations to be worshiped alongside idols.²⁰ Hahne, commenting on 1 Enoch 80:2-8 stresses, “*the delicate relationship that exists between moral obedience and the cosmic order. When sin increases among humans and angels even the balance of nature is upset. ... The point is not that natural law is fickle, but that the normally structured order of nature will be seriously corrupted by sin.*”²¹ By referring to moral fault as ‘sin’ Hahne has by implication introduced the third connected element, the spiritual, the breaking of the divine-human covenant, into the three-fold impact of the action of the fallen angels.

This binding together of spiritual, moral and cosmic implications of rebellion is further strengthened in 2 Enoch. Andrei Orlov comments,

¹⁷ 1 Enoch 60:17-19

¹⁸ 2 Enoch 19:4

¹⁹ Jackson, D. *Enochic Judaism: Three defining paradigm exemplars*, Library of Second Temple Studies, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004, 49.

²⁰ 3 Enoch 5:7-9

²¹ Hahne, H.A. *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation. An Exegetical Study of Romans 8:19-22 in Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Doctoral dissertation, Toronto: Wycliffe College, 1997, 168

One of the notable features of the mysteries of creation that Enoch receives directly from God, a facet which is absent in other early Enoch writings, is a tendency to link cosmological realities with human anthropology, and more specifically, with elements of the human body. In this conceptual move, the familiar Enochic tendency to connect cosmology and the moral condition of humankind takes a new turn. ... signif[ying] that the corruption of human nature through the violation of moral codes in its turn may lead to the corruption of cosmological realities since they represent the archetypal elements from which the human body was once created.²²

Throughout the Enochic tradition, in contrast to the disruptive impact of the actions of the fallen angels, Enoch is given a salvific, or healing, role. In his visionary tour of the divine realms Enoch is constantly taught to observe, to measure and to record the workings of creation. In 1 Enoch 12:3 he is described as the “scribe of righteousness” and Andrei Orlov unpacks this role as, “*transferring and sharing divine knowledge that can restore order and harmony*”. Orlov continues,

The purpose of Enoch’s recording routines is not to compose entertaining stories for public amusement. He does not create a product from his own imagination, rather he transmits the knowledge of others. ... Clearly, Enoch is envisaged as a scribal mediator, one who uses knowledge for the rectification of creation. The idea that Enoch’s writings will bring harmony and righteousness to humankind is a leitmotif in the earliest Enochic booklets.²³

The purpose of Enoch’s mission is clearly salvific for both humanity and creation as a whole as it seeks to return both to the divine order.

Our reflections on Enoch could take us into the contemporary urgent field of environmental theology but our concern in this paper is rather with human flourishing so we must leave the former to others.²⁴

Patristic understandings of human flourishing

I am, not a patristic scholar myself, but it is important in this context to gain some understanding of how the Church Fathers and Mothers understood the ‘ultimate sickness’ of humankind and where routes to a recovery of spiritual health and flourishing might be found. I rely therefore firstly on the Anglican patristic scholar, Christopher Beeley, who writes,

²² Orlov, A.A. *Divine Mysteries in the Enochic Tradition*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023, 147-149

²³ Orlov, A.A. *Divine Mysteries in the Enochic Tradition*, 195

²⁴ See for example, Stuckenbruck *Words from the Book of Enoch on the Environment* in Esler, P.F. (ed) *The Blessing of Enoch: 1 Enoch and Contemporary Theology*, Eugene OR: Cascade, 2017, 111-127

Paul's confession, which stands in opposition to the many so-called gods and lords of the nations, is that the one God and the one Lord Jesus Christ together are the source of all things and the aim of human life (1 Cor. 8:5-6). Theologians across the patristic period followed the same line of thinking when they looked to Jesus as the one in whom true life is to be found. As Maximus Confessor comments, Christ crucified and risen is nothing less than the principle of creaturely existence. Although we do not normally view things that way—one must be “initiated” into this mystery—for the cardinal theologians of the patristic period, Jesus Christ is the basis of human life and the very rationale of the entire universe. To inquire into the nature of human flourishing, then—what it means to live a good life individually and socially, to thrive, to have a sense of purpose, and to know joy in the midst of life's challenges—is, in the mind of the early Fathers, an invitation to see Christ as the source, the definition, and the means of a life worth living.

Attention to human flourishing in relation to Christ runs from the beginning to the end of the patristic period—from the teaching and witness of the martyrs, the apologists' attempts to recommend Christianity to its cultured despisers, and the great hermeneutical and ascetical synthesis of Origen, to the intensification of Christian practices in the emerging monastic movement and the major theological syntheses of the fourth century and beyond.²⁵

In his article Beeley then goes on to explore this patristic theme in terms of Christology, Theosis, and the practice, in Christ, of love and peace. We see here a pattern of life being lived in order and harmony with creation and with God, but a harmony which can only be achieved in so far as that life is being lived, individually and corporately, in Christ, for as Paul reminds us at the start of Ephesians, it is only ‘in Christ’ that all things in heaven and on earth are held together.²⁶ And in Colossians he states boldly that all things in heaven and on earth were “*created through and for Christ*” and that Christ’s eternal purpose is that He should “*reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.*”²⁷

John McGuckin picks up the same theme in Gregory of Nyssa in terms of the ‘radiant fullness of purpose, of creaturely human being’. He writes,

On the part of Gregory of Nyssa ... we see a concern to clarify what metamorphosis involves. The eschatological New Kairos of deification, he suggests, will not be a posthumous supercession of human nature, rather a passing beyond the current limits of human nature, by and in the same nature, whose metamorphosed

²⁵ Beeley, C.A. Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology, Pro Ecclesia Vol. XXV, No. 2, 2016, 129

²⁶ Ephesians 1:10

²⁷ Colossians 1:16-20

transcendence is co-terminous with its glorification in a bounded infinity. The restricting limitations that were once imposed on human nature by long ages of its common experience as a “nature that was separated from God,” will be lifted, in Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding, by the admission of the creature into the radiant fullness of the very purpose of creaturely human being, which is intimate communion with the endless mystery of the Life-Giving Presence²⁸.

In the early centuries of the Christian faith we see then a firmly established conviction that humanity may flourish not by escaping this difficult world but by entering into an “intimate communion with the endless mystery of the Life-Giving Presence”, by finding our true humanity as we lose ourselves in the life of Christ.

Protestant Reformation and utilitarian views of creation

As an Anglican it is often assumed by others that my theological position will be that of a reformed Protestant but in this debate I would rather lay claim to my Anglican heritage to be found in the Catholic and Celtic traditions which informed early Anglican theology just as much as the later influences of the European Reformation. I say this because I have little or no sympathy with Protestantism when it comes to post-Reformation creation theology which takes a largely utilitarian approach²⁹ based on the, often misunderstood, Genesis command to Adam and Eve to “fill and subdue the earth” and “rule over” every living creature,³⁰ rather than the subsequent command to “work with it and take care of it”.³¹

There is no space for a full exploration of Protestant creation theology in this short paper but we cannot escape noticing the damage that has been done to creation and to our own human flourishing by centuries of “subjection” and “ruling over” when what was, and still is, needed is “working with” and “caring for” creation. Far too often humanity has entered into a mindset in which human flourishing requires, and justifies, the exploitation of every usable natural resource and the subjection, and even extinction, of other species, and,

²⁸ McGuckin, J.A. *Eschatological horizons in the Cappadocian Fathers* in Daly, R.J. (ed) *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, Brookline, MA: Baker Academic, 2009, 20

²⁹ Utilitarian here is not being used in the technical sense as in the Christian Utilitarianism of William Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), although there are connections, but rather to indicate a mindset that prioritises the use of resources at hand to maximise the good for oneself, one’s community and humanity generally.

³⁰ Genesis 1:28

³¹ Genesis 2:15

through slavery, even our own species. We are only just beginning to learn that we do not flourish when we gain subjection over insects with insecticides and plants through genetic modification but rather we flourish when we can learn the ways of co-existing and co-flourishing with the whole of creation, and ultimately with God. We come right back to Enoch who wrote down for his successors and heirs the ways, the measurements, the rhythms of divine harmony in creation, so that they could adjust to these, live in peace with creation and discover true fulfilment in life.

A theology of subduing and ruling over creation has not only brought large swaths of creation close to distinction and our planet to crisis point, but it has also given human beings a totally false approach to discovering the fullness of life that we crave. A neglect of the rhythms and harmony of life lived in human and divine community has led us into a sterile individualism which leads us down the false road of self-actualisation, directed by a sea of self-help books and social media influencers which is fast turning us into a narcissistic society unable to see anything beyond our own wants.

Thankfully the thin veneer of self-actualisation and individualism fed by materialism which has been used to disguise the, deeply Godless, malaise of humanity is beginning to crack revealing once again a deep hunger for authentic human flourishing. I now turn to a brief description of some of the new movements seeking to address this hunger, to bring healing to the ‘ultimate sickness of humanity’.

Contemporary “Floursishing” movements

The first movement I want to address is often referred to as the “Mind, body, and spirit” movement. Its origins are hard to define but some time around the 1960s three shifts took place in how European and North American populations set out to address their sense of sickness, unease and mental fragility. The first of these three shifts was an increased interest in alternative medical interventions from homeopathy to osteopathy and acupuncture. Secondly we see an attempt to de-clinicalise mental health care, moving away from drug treatments, with their inevitable side-effects, and seemingly barbaric treatments such as ECT (Electro-convulsive therapy) and blood letting, to counselling and so called “talking therapies”. The third shift in this triplet was an increased interest in spiritual matters outside traditional religions and drawing on religious traditions from Asia and the East. This was the era, for example, when we began to see Hari Krishna bands on the streets of London, Yoga classes in local

community halls, and teachers of transcendental meditation gathering bands of disciples around them. Gradually, during the closing decades of the twentieth centuries these movement coalesced and entered the mainstream of society. Many sick people then looked not to their doctor or priest for healing, but rather to their homeopathist, therapist or spiritual guru.

In 2001 Marie Krueger wrote,

Patient dissatisfaction may be one of the reasons why thousands of conferences are being offered each year, on topics ranging from spiritual growth, to self-growth, to direct experience with complementary medicine practices. Many individuals attend conferences to find out what the “hype” is all about regarding this movement. Others may be attending these conferences in hopes of seeking answers to their unanswered questions and “untreatable” ailments by modern healthcare standards.³²

Krueger goes on to suggest that this movement may have arisen partly because of a failure of medical practitioners to pay attention to the whole human person rather than just the disease itself, but I would also want to ask whether it is points to a failure within our churches to understand and address the deep sickness of contemporary society.

Since the turn of the millennium, over the past quarter of a century, this Body, Mind, and Spirit movement has become a permanent part of society’s approach to well-being and human flourishing in most western countries with regular conferences, a mountain of self-help books, and a sea of online guides and advice centres. As part of their missional outreach at least one Anglican mission agency now regularly attends Body, Mind and Spirit gatherings to offer a Christian approach to healing through prayer, “holy habits” and the reading of sacred scripture. This approach to mission is controversial but seems to meet a need at long queues build up, next to homeopathic stalls and sellers of crystals, waiting for prayer and Christian teaching.

More recently much attention has been paid, at least in my own context in Britain and in the USA, to what is called “mindfulness”, an essentially secular concept which some practitioners have seen as having its Christian manifestation in the Pauline theology of the reception of the Mind of Christ³³, although I would maintain that the two are in many respects radically different concepts.³⁴ I

³² Krueger, M.B. *Identifying the movement with no name: an evaluation of the 2000 UW-Stout Body, Mind and Spirit Conference*, The Graduate School of University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2001

³³ 1 Corinthians 2:16

³⁴ See the discussion of this point in Reynolds, S.G. *Living with the Mind of Christ: Mindfulness in Christian Spirituality*, London, UK: Darton, Longman, and Todd, Ltd., 2018

personally became more interested in understanding this movement when five years ago a priest in Oxford, the city where I live, left his pastoral ministry to work fulltime as a mindfulness consultant. One of the earliest manifestations of this movement was the 'Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction' programme advocated by Kabat-Zinn³⁵ in 1990 as a treatment for both psychological and physical ailments. In their review article in 2006, Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman, suggest that, "*Mindfulness ... is more than meditation. It is "inherently a state of consciousness"*³⁶ *which involves consciously attending to one's moment-to-moment experience*". They go on to develop a model of mindfulness built on the three axioms of Intention, Attention and Attitude. In their paper published in the Journal of Clinician Psychology they claim for their model that,

*Intentionally cultivating nonjudgmental attention leads to connection, which leads to self-regulation and ultimately to greater order and health. Through the process of re-perceiving, we are able to attend to the information contained in each moment. We gain access to more data, even those data that may have previously been too uncomfortable to examine. ... Through this process, dysregulation and subsequent disease can be avoided.*³⁷

This final sentence interests me in the way that it links disease with dysregulation, sickness with a lack of order. This takes us back to the Enochic concern with the divine orderliness of the creation and its relationship with human morality and flourishing. My concern however, with the pursuit of mindfulness is that it brings with it a narcissistic concern for personal well-being and fulfilment with no reference to the flourishing of the whole creation and the worship of God the creator. The *theotic* reception³⁸, on the other hand, of the Mind of Christ, retains the concern for salvific reordering and healing but with a theocentric rather than an anthropocentric focus.

I want to turn now to a Christian theologian who addresses the issue of flourishing, well-being and health, in this much wider theocentric context.

In publishing his book, *Flourishing*,³⁹ in 2015 Miroslav Volf, the Croatian theologian known for his work on memory, reconciliation and fulfilling living, added the sub-title "*Why we need religion in a globalised world?*". Having looked

³⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J. *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain and illness*, New York, Delacorte, 1990

³⁶ Shapiro, S.L., Carlson, L.E., Astin, J.A. & Freedman, B. Mechanisms of Mindfulness, Journal of Clinical Psychology Vol 62 Issue 3 (March 2006), 374

³⁷ Ibid. 380

³⁸ Reception of the Mind of Christ as an integral part of the process of *theosis* (or sanctification).

³⁹ Volf, M. *Flourishing: Why we need religion in a Globalised World*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015

at two contemporary movements towards flourishing that are essentially secular, although sometimes adopted by Christians, I want to turn now to Volf's global vision for a flourishing human community which is clearly grounded in Christian theology but seeks to transcend religious divides. To be clear he is not here advocating some sort of united world religion but rather suggesting that there are, within all world religious traditions, elements that make them sympathetic to the clearly Christian vision that he spells out.

The book begins with a critical analysis of contemporary globalisation and suggests that,

World religions press globalisation in its current form on two main issues. The first directly concerns ordinary life. Does globalisation contribute to life going well for all people, or does it favor some, allowing them to amass power and wealth while the great multitude bear the burdens of abject poverty and environmental degradation? The second relates to the transcendental realm. Does globalisation contribute to the general flourishing of people, or does it seduce them with false promises of happiness while trapping them in an endless cycle of work-and-spend and sapping their lives of deeper meaning and more complex enjoyments? The answers to these questions are the key to religions' responses to globalisation.⁴⁰

After a careful critique of globalisation and its capture by scientific materialism and power politics, Volf goes on to explore how religions are often tempted to retreat to the realm of personal and private spirituality whilst neglecting their role in the public sphere. He writes, "*Religions structure relationships between people and craft cultures, rather than merely shaping the interior lives of individuals and their private practices. World religions aim at adjusting people's public lives as well as their private ones to the unseen order.*"⁴¹ Notice here again the reference to the Enochic theme of adjusting our lives to the 'unseen order' of creation.

Volf reaches the climax of his argument as to why we need religion in a globalised world when he writes:

Explicitly or implicitly, world religions insist that stretching out to the divine realm isn't something human beings do or don't do depending on whether they are religiously inclined or not. Reference to transcendence isn't an add-on to humanity; rather it defines human beings. That's the structural restlessness of human hearts. When we come to "rest" in the divine – when we come to love God

⁴⁰ Ibid. 44-45

⁴¹ Ibid. 65

and surrender to God in faith ... the relation to the divine becomes the axis of our lives. It shapes how we perceive ourselves and the world, what desires we have and how we are satiated. For world religions, life lived only on the flat plane of this-worldliness is too caged, too hollow, too "light"; to be free, full and flourishing, life must be lived in relationship to the divine, which gives meaning, orientation and unique pleasure to all our mundane experiences and endeavours.⁴²

A very different and more biblical textual approach to understanding human flourishing is adopted by Pennington in a 2015 paper for the Institute for Faith, Work and Economics. In this paper he looks at three biblical terms which are used to describe aspects of what we might today understand as flourishing. In his summary section he writes:

The first of these ideas is shālôm/eirēnē/peace. Shalom has many and varied uses throughout the Bible, but its consistent idea is one of wholeness that results in well-being. ... Shālôm/eirēnē paints for us a picture of what a flourishing life can look like through relationship with God. When God reigns over his people in joy and righteousness, and his children relate to him and others rightly in love, this is shālôm, both individually and corporately. ... The second in our cluster of flourishing ideas is 'ashrê/makarios/blessedness/ happiness. ... Like shālôm, the vision behind the Bible's claims about 'ashrê are not peripheral but come from the core of God's revelation. When the Bible makes claims about who is 'ashrê /makarios/truly happy and blessed, it is casting a vision for a way of being in the world that will result in true human flourishing. ... They are statements that inform us how to orient ourselves and reframe our understanding of what it means to really live the good life, to have genuine well-being individually and in society. ... Human flourishing, which the Bible can describe as 'ashrê /makarios, comes to us only through God. The third and final idea ... is that of tāmîm/teleios/wholeness. Tāmîm describes the means by which, and that state wherein, a human can experience God-directed and God-blessed flourishing, through wholeness. It is not an overstatement to suggest that the essence of God's call upon his creatures morally and spiritually is a call to wholeness.⁴³

The identification of the three semitic terms for peace, blessedness and wholeness as essential contributions to a Christian understanding of human flourishing takes us back again to the Jewish traditions of Enoch with which we began this paper and the conviction that health is deeply related to our relationship to God and our willingness to live in alinement with his created order.

⁴² Ibid. 81

⁴³ Pennington, J.T. A Biblical Theology of Human Flourishing Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, 2015 <https://tifwe.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Pennington-A-Biblical-Theology-of-Human-Flourishing.pdf> accessed 08.10.2024

The latest contribution to the development of a theology of flourishing is Vanderweele's book, *A theology of health: Wholeness and Human Flourishing*⁴⁴ published earlier this year. Vanderweele has previously contributed to secular journals⁴⁵ on this topic and has undertaken empirical research into the relationship between health, wholeness and religious belief.⁴⁶

Conclusion

This paper has set out to demonstrate a consistent witness, from the ancient Jewish scriptures of the Enochic tradition up to the current era, to an intrinsic relationship between our understanding of, and conformity to, the divine orderliness of creation and our own human health and flourishing. The inevitable implication of this understanding is that sin, a rebellion against the ways and will of God will lead in different ways to a disruption of human wellbeing, to sickness and disease and to the eventual fracturing of the relationship with God on which depends not only our flourishing but our very existence.

The argument I have been trying to make is that, despite all the advances of modern medicine, the new insights into psychiatry, and the exploration of movements such as mindfulness, much of which should be welcomed, humanity, both as individuals and as communities, will never achieve health, harmony and true human flourishing if it fails to pay attention to its relationship with its creator and the order he has built into his creation. That was the lesson that the fallen angels of 1 Enoch learnt and it is the less we learn today as communities in Spain are ravished by floods and suicide rates amongst young men in secular Europe soar.

Faith and Flourishing can never be separated, and (to be explored more fully in another paper) it is sinful pride to think that we can delink our individual flourishing from the flourishing of the whole human community, indeed the whole of the created order.

⁴⁴ Vanderweele, T.J. *A theology of health: Wholeness and Human Flourishing*, Notre Dame, ID, University of Notre Dame, 2024

⁴⁵ See for example Vanderweele, T.J. *On the Promotion of Human Flourishing*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the USA 114(31) (July 13, 2017) 8148-8156

⁴⁶ See for example Vanderweele, T.J. *Religion and health: A synthesis*. In M. J. Balboni & J. R. Peteet (Eds.), *Spirituality and religion within the culture of medicine: From evidence to practice*, Oxford University Press, 357-401