



WILLIAM WITHERSPOON LECTURE

on Theology & the Natural Sciences

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Luce Hall • 50 Stockton Street • Princeton



Stephen Pope

Professor of Theological Ethics

Boston College

Senior Research Fellow, CTI

Is Happiness the Enemy of Hope? Positive Psychology in Light of 'Christian Pessimism'

Skeptics claim that Christianity offers a way of thinking about human existence that offers happiness and hope but at the cost of promoting a delusional view of the human condition. Positive psychologists, on the other hand, criticize Christian focus on guilt, sin, and self-sacrifice for undermining both hope and happiness. Pessimists expect life to be marked by pain, suffering, and failure. "Christian pessimists" insist that we acknowledge the human fault, but does so from within perspective shaped by grace. Christian pessimism thus offers a perspective that affirms forms of hope and happiness that do not crumble under pressure. The virtue of hope sustains authentic happiness—the fulfillment and joy of a life grounded in grace.

Stephen J. Pope is a professor in the theology department at Boston College, where he teaches courses on social ethics and the intersection of science and theology. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. His publications include *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Georgetown University Press, 1994), *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and *Solidarity and Hope: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to the Christian Theology*, editor (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2008), and *Restorative Justice as a Prophetic Path to Peace*,² *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 65 (2010):19-34. He has worked for five years as a volunteer for Catholic chaplaincies in several Massachusetts prisons, and served on a variety of workshops focused on the contribution of religion to political reconciliation for Catholic Relief Services and the Jesuit Refugee Service.

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This lecture is part of the Inquiry on Religious Experience & Moral Identity run by the Center of Theological Inquiry, 2013-2014. For more information on this interdisciplinary inquiry, please visit the Center's website.