

Introducing The LaB: Journal of Positive Psychology Agapology and Spirituality

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I, Noel, was born into a close-knit, deeply religious African family where faith was the cornerstone of our lives. Growing up in one of the poorest regions of my country, I witnessed firsthand the relentless grip of poverty, chronic disease, and the daily struggle for survival. These early experiences etched themselves deeply into my heart—shaping both my fears and my aspirations. As a young man, particularly during my college years and eventual move to Europe, I found myself wrestling with a haunting question: Why are Africans—both in the continent and in the diaspora—so often poorer than other ethnic groups?

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That question became a calling. It sparked not just reflection, but research. It gave rise to a scholarly and spiritual journey, and ultimately, the birth of this journal: *The LaB*.

About the LaB Journal

The LaB: Journal of Positive Psychology, Agapology and Spirituality is dedicated to inspiring and equipping a new generation of thinkers, scholars, and practitioners from Afro-descendant and marginalised communities across the globe. Through both academic and accessible tools, we aim to promote the embodiment of **bliss**—a state of holistic well-being—and to empower communities to create a ripple effect of healing, resilience, and transformation.

We particularly prioritise publishing work that contributes to the flourishing of Afro-descendant communities globally. We seek interdisciplinary interventions that challenge conventional structures and cross-institutional boundaries, welcoming critical scholarship in political economy, critical race studies, decolonial thinking, post-structuralism, and beyond. Contributors should align with the journal's ethos and vision, as outlined in our manifesto. Our commitment to open-access publication ensures that this work reaches beyond academia, empowering real-world application and global impact.

Why LOVE? Why Now?

Our debut issue is devoted to a concept that has reshaped my understanding of well-being, pain, and purpose: the LOVE Model—a new psychological and spiritual framework for human flourishing.

As a child, I feared pain and death, but longed for a life of love, peace, and prosperity. That longing matured into a central inquiry: *What is the role of adversity in our pursuit of love and bliss?* This led me to develop the concept of Agapology—the study of agape (divine love) and its powerful intersection with adversity and human flourishing.

Through years of reflection, research, and ministry, I discovered a profound truth: adversity can deepen spiritual hunger, and when met with divine love, it opens the door to true and lasting well-being. In this model, bliss transcends fleeting happiness. It is a state of deep fulfilment across the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual realms.

The LOVE Model identifies four key virtues that emerge through secure divine attachment:

- Linkedness: the feeling of unconditional belonging and spiritual connection.
- Opulence: the confident trust in divine provision and self-worth.
- Valory: a purposeful, God-aligned life that brings peace and fulfilment.
- Equanimity: the faith-driven resilience to transform suffering into growth.

These virtues are sustained by agape—the wellspring of divine love—and often awakened through hardship. This leads to the principle of Differential Bliss Receptibility (DBR): adversity sensitises the soul and increases its capacity to receive spiritual nourishment, ultimately cultivating a fuller experience of flourishing.

What This Issue Offers

In this issue, we document a journey of empirical exploration and spiritual insight, demonstrating how divine love, nurtured through adversity and spirituality, unlocks a holistic state of bliss. The featured articles form a compelling narrative—from theoretical foundation to empirical application and tool development.

Featured Articles

1. Positive Effects of Adversity on Religiosity, Spirituality, and Depression: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis.

This review spans 23 years of research to reveal how adversity can enhance religiosity and spirituality, reducing depression and promoting resilience. It introduces the concept of *differential spiritual*

receptivity—the idea that suffering can open hearts more deeply to the sacred and foster long-term psychological healing.

2. Positive Role of Adversity and Suffering in the Relationship Between Spirituality and Flourishing.

In this original research study, findings show that individuals with strong spirituality may experience *more flourishing under high stress* than in low-stress conditions. Rather than undermining well-being, adversity here becomes a crucible for character formation, deeper faith, and sustainable flourishing.

3. The Moderating Effects of Religious Coping on the Relationship Between Spirituality and Flourishing Under High Adversity.

Focusing on Tanzanian participants, this study explores the impact of religious coping styles. Positive religious coping significantly enhances the benefits of spirituality during adversity, while negative coping compounds stress and reduces well-being. These insights have vital implications for culturally sensitive pastoral and psychological care.

4. LOVE: A New Psychological Model of Bliss

This conceptual article outlines the LOVE Model, synthesising theology, psychology, and attachment theory to create a new framework for flourishing. It redefines bliss as a divine, virtue-driven state enabled through agape and adversity. This piece lays the groundwork for a new discipline: Agapology.

5. Validation of the LOVE Assessment Tool (LAT): A Pilot Study of Reliability and Validity

To measure the four pillars of the LOVE Model, this final article introduces the LOVE Assessment Tool (LAT). Psychometric testing confirms its reliability and validity, offering a robust instrument for research, counselling, education, and spiritual development across diverse populations.

As you read through this inaugural issue, may you find not only intellectual insight but also spiritual invitation—a call to embrace divine love, to transform adversity into purpose, and to live a life of deep, enduring bliss.

With hope and vision,
Editorial Collective