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THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION: GOAL AND JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores resources within the Christian theological tradition that recognize happiness in earthly life while also preparing Christians for ultimate happiness through union with God. Two resources explored in the article are the appreciation of happiness in Jesus's ministry and its engagement with Greek philosophy. After exploring these resources, the article turns to Aelred of Rievaulx, the great medieval theologian, to investigate how moral virtue, transcendent happiness, and earthly pleasure are harmonious parts of a holistic Christian vision of happiness. Finally, after examining Aelred's contribution, the article considers how this integrated view of happiness can help us to think through the problems of happiness in our lives today.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, happiness, Aelred of Rievaulx, scripture, philosophy

INTRODUCTION

There is a tension in the Christian tradition about the meaning of happiness. Some view happiness solely as eternal peace in the presence of God, while others expand it to include the particular joys and pleasures encountered along life's journey. Should human beings live their time on Earth in a state of self-abnegation, or should they allow themselves to experience, and even celebrate, earthly pleasures? Will there be feasting in heaven? Can we celebrate with a joyful sound the beauty in the created order as well as good food, bodily pleasure, excellent craftsmanship, or athletic skill? Is feeding the poor part of saving them? Can Christians love the earth as they love God and neighbor? These are some of the questions provoked by the tradition.

This article explores resources within the Christian theological tradition that recognize happiness in earthly life while also preparing Christians for ultimate happiness through union with God. I will first explore the appreciation of happiness in Jesus's ministry and its engagement with Greek philosophy. I will then turn to Aelred of Rievaulx, the great medieval theologian, to help us to see how moral virtue, transcendent happiness, and earthly pleasure are harmonious parts of a holistic Christian vision of happiness. After examining Aelred's contribution, I will show how this integrated view of happiness can help us to think through the problems of happiness in our lives today.

SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF HAPPINESS

The Christian scriptures of the New Testament primarily use the Greek word *makarios* to refer to happiness, blessedness, or fortune. While these meanings could refer to either earthly enjoyment or

heavenly bliss, the use of *makarios* in the Gospels suggests that it refers to transcendent happiness after death, in communion with the divine. Two extended passages in Matthew and Luke, more familiarly known as the "Beatitudes," speak of what it is to be happy or blessed.[1] Both likely reflect the experience of early Christian communities in a time of anxiety, persecution, and want. For that reason, they speak of happiness in much more spiritual terms and profoundly downplay the significance of earthly blessings. The Matthew version reads thus:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It is possible, however, to approach the blessedness or happiness of earthly pleasure in the Christian scriptures through a look at Jesus's ministry in the Gospels. The beginning of Jesus's public work is associated with a visit to his hometown synagogue, where he reads from the prophet Isaiah. He chooses a passage about *shalom*, a vision of deep and transcendent happiness:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."[2]

This passage is widely understood as Jesus's own mission statement, and as a vision of the kingdom of God or the reign of God or, in more popular language, what heaven on earth looks like. It is very much focused on people who understand themselves as made in the image of God, and on the healing of human deprivation and woundedness of all sorts—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

This comprehensive approach to happiness and healing—spiritual and earthly—can be seen in Jesus's ministry. His public work is most essentially focused on feeding, healing, and teaching people—in that order. The goods of this world are essential to happiness and therefore a blessing. Jesus's contemporaries criticized him for what was perceived to be his inattention to the law, and they charged him with being a glutton and a drunkard. Most of the alleged ways in which Jesus violated religious law had to do with purity—eating with or speaking to those considered unclean or inappropriate, or healing the sick on the Sabbath. Jesus's general response was that the law is made for improving human relationships with God, oneself, one's neighbors, and creation.

Jesus himself enacted the ancient prophetic visions of "heaven on earth." A short piece from Isaiah captures this vision, as the heavenly banquet:

> On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the

1 Luke 6:20–26; Matthew 5:3–12. Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version translation.

2 Luke 6:20–26.

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> shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.[3]

This vision is reproduced in the flesh through Jesus's prophetic ministry—beginning with jars of water turned to wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee; in the ministry of repentance and reconciliation around Zaccheus's banquet table; and, in his final moments with his disciples, proclaiming the heavenly banquet where he would be united with God, his disciples, and all humanity.[4] Oddly enough, the passage from Isaiah is frequently read at funerals, as though this vision of *shalom* is only possible in the afterlife. It reflects the tension between this-worldly and otherworldly happiness in many strands of the Christian tradition.

Jesus's rebuttal to the charge of undue this-worldly enjoyment was: "[H]ow can the wedding guests not feast when the bridegroom is with them?"[5] He speaks of himself as a bridegroom and the faithful community as a bride, who join in a marriage or remarriage between God and humanity—reuniting the creator with created—and of the rich bounty that such a union brings.[6] It is a profound and ultimate vision of happiness.

Much of the Christian debate around happiness in the centuries since Jesus has concerned the locus of happiness, both physical and temporal, and what is required to achieve happiness. Happiness does have something essential to do with the direct experience of God's presence; it also has something to do with the experience of God's blessing in the form of this-worldly "goods." Those goods include food, drink, clothing, shelter, liberty, peace, family, meaningful work, community, and a general state of well-being. *Shalom* is still one of the best shorthand ways of speaking about this vision of a restored and ultimately happy world. *Shalom* includes the happiness of all members of the community.

THE ENGAGEMENT WITH HAPPINESS IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

The Greek tradition of ethical philosophy, which had a significant influence on the developing Christian tradition, similarly presents tensions between earthly happiness and eternal, transcendent happiness. Sometimes, the balance weighed in favor of one view of happiness to the detriment of others, as in the Stoic tradition. In other cases, happiness was understood in a more comprehensive and concrete way, as in the work of Aristotle.

The Greek tradition (and other Western philosophical traditions) addresses two sorts of happiness. One, *eudaimonia*, literally means "a good spirit," and it refers to right ways of living—in other words, to virtue, and to the ways in which right application of virtue in ethical living produces a happier society. The wisdom tradition of the Bible is about eudemonic aspects of happiness. The other kind of happiness is *hedonia*. It is about pleasure—the root means "sweet"—and it includes the kinds of earthly blessings just discussed. In English, we know this root as the word *hedonism*, but the modern connotations of excessive pleasure seeking are a later development.

The Stoic tradition teaches that happiness is exclusively a function of a virtuous character and life, that it is within the control of an individual and simply a matter of will. Stoics believed that

3 Isaiah 25:6–8.

4 John 2:1–11; Luke 19:1–10; Matthew 26:29.

5 Matthew 9:15.

6 See esp. Matthew 25:1–13; Ephesians 5:25–32.

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happiness came through living in accord with nature, in the sense of accepting or adapting to what nature provides. They denied that happiness had anything to do with *hedonia*. In modern parlance, to be a Stoic means to be unmoved by pleasure, pain, or grief, and this connotation is an apt reflection of the tradition's basic philosophy.

The Stoic concept of virtue has to do with passionless existence—a view of life and perfection that had consequences for the Christian view of God. Scholars may recall the Patripassian controversy about God, in which it was asserted that God's nature is unmoved by suffering,[7] as one clear instance in which Stoicism shaped early and developing Christian theology. The thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas later averred that ultimate Christian happiness consisted solely in the intellectual contemplation of God.

Happily, this apathetic view of God is not characteristic of all strands of later Christian theology, and it is at some odds with Hebraic understandings of God as one who hears the cries of wanderers in the wilderness and, being moved, responds. We could also point to the parallel story of Abraham arguing with God about the divine intention to destroy the city of Sodom on account of its lawlessness. Abraham demands of God, "[W]ill you withhold your arm if I can find fifty righteous persons in the city? How about forty-five? Forty? Thirty? Twenty? Ten?" God finally agrees not to destroy the city if even ten righteous human beings can be found.[8] This view of God as responsive to suffering and touched by human need parallels an approach to happiness, like Aelred's discussed below, that emphasizes the earthly and temporal side of happiness.

The theological view of God's *apatheia* finds its counterpoint in the early strand of Christian theologizing that views happiness as a rejecting or an overcoming of the passions. The varieties of Gnosticism have somewhat different emphases, but all are more or less ascetic and reject the value of *hedonia*. Many full-blown versions offer a radically dualistic understanding of reality, in which the goal of life is to escape from material reality in favor of spiritual reality, which is the only possible locus for happiness.

Aristotle's approach to ethics opposes this passionless and world-rejecting view, and his understanding of happiness includes both virtue and sufficiency of physical or external goods. It is a good deal closer to the Hebraic view, and it undergirds much of the medieval theologizing about happiness.

When Aristotle considered human happiness, he thought about it along the lines of two different kinds of goals for human life: *theoria* and ethics. *Theoria* refers to intellectual effort, ratiocination, or rational contemplation of goods (not physical substances, but concepts or ideals), causes, and effects. Ethics has to do with the application of virtues to social and political systems. The one is about individual thought, the other about living in community. Aristotle believed that the highest end of human life was contemplation of the good, and in this he did not mean God. According to some strands of Aristotelian philosophy, it is possible to achieve true happiness without attention to the moral virtues of daily living. That minimalist understanding may verge on caricature, but it is clear that the happiness associated with *theoria* does not require ethics in the sense of political or social engagement. Yet Aristotle himself did not exclude the importance of the experience of enjoyment—pleasure is indeed a component of *theoria*. Christian theologians like Aelred would take up Aristotle's comprehensive approach to happiness in earnest.

7 For further exploration, see Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009).

8 Genesis 18:22–33.

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AELRED'S THEOLOGY OF HAPPINESS

These Greek philosophical traditions, lost for a time after the rise and fall of Rome, were rediscovered in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries through encounters with Muslim scholarship. Considered alongside one another, the Greek and Christian traditions again revealed both parallels and radical distinctions.

Aelred, the English abbot of Rievaulx (1110–1166), is an exemplar of this period of Christian theologizing. His discussion of happiness is exceedingly well developed and resists any tendency toward over-simplification.[9] He balances God's gift and grace with human psychology and effort, the eternal goal with the earthly journey.

Happiness for Aelred is a gift of God's creative grace. It is a return to the paradise of Eden and a raising-up into friendship with God and one another. Aelred insists that human beings are created for good, expressed in happiness and fulfillment, and that this good is their natural and intended condition. He begins from the Genesis stories of creation, noting that human beings have both bodies and souls, that they are both thinking and social creatures. He reads the second creation story to insist that they are created for friendship and equality, as the second human being was created from, or alongside, the first. God is the ultimate source of human happiness, and every human experience of happiness is ultimately God's good gift.

Like most other theologians of his time, Aelred distinguishes between a kind of ultimate or true happiness that is only possible in the afterlife, and a happiness that is possible in this life. Yet Aelred is noteworthy for the positive value he places on mortal happiness, and for his understanding that such happiness can be achieved and experienced.

Fundamentally, happiness is a matter of choice. Despite the despoiling of human happiness in the fall, the great sin of separation told in the second creation story about Adam and Eve, restoration is possible and has indeed been accomplished in the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ. The important point is that human beings must participate in God's work willfully and intentionally, in body and spirit, in order to experience happiness in this life.

Acknowledging that the memory, vision, and intent to recover that initial happiness in the garden remain in human beings, Aelred nevertheless recognizes that human beings cannot restore themselves to that garden through their efforts alone. They require the love and grace of God, and God's influence and aid, to choose the good and move toward greater happiness.

Aelred develops this basic vision of restoration and tranquility into a remarkable framework for discussing happiness and the road home toward that original, happy, prelapsarian state in the Garden of Eden. Much depends on human choice, divinely guided. His approach begins with body and soul (which for Aelred meant the seat of memory, intellect, and will). The body provides sense data, and the soul perceives reality through those sensations, organizes them into patterns and compares them with earlier experience, and then distinguishes what is experienced from what it knows and remembers of truth. Finally, the soul chooses and the body acts. Virtue and ultimately happiness result from choosing truth and good.

In all of this, God is always at work. Having created the human being capable of choosing the good, God encourages the good choice and gives the power or grace to choose well in the face of temptation. Sin results when power of choice is ill-used, and justice results when choices are well made.

We can see some of the major concerns for Aelred as he repeatedly refutes ancient theological errors or heresies. He insists that the body is not intrinsically evil or sinful (contra Gnostic or

9 This section draws on John R. Sommerfeldt, *Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness* (New York: Newman Press, 2005).

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other dualist positions, which take their cue from Stoicism). For Aelred, it is the soul, tasked with the responsibility of choosing the good, which is the seat of sin or virtue. Bodily impulses may be inadequately regulated, or memory may be tainted by previous experience of wretched choices, but the will is a larger problem. Aelred would have remembered Paul's lament about conceiving the good but being unable to choose it, or the gospel lament that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."[10] The challenge is familiar to most of us, whether we are faced with a second helping of a gourmet dessert, an exquisite bottle of wine, or the sensual allure of adultery. Paul is also explicit about this being a matter not of thinking but of will:

> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.[11]

When the will is functioning well, and we are making good choices, the result is justice. And those good choices and works, encouraged and made possible by God's grace, eventuate in happiness. Ultimately, happiness is a gift that is unachievable without God.

HOW AELRED HELPS US LIVE IN CHRISTIAN HAPPINESS TODAY

Aelred teaches that human alienation from God keeps us from happiness. Human intellect is marred and often assumes that happiness lies in inadequate or impossible things, people, or places, rather than in God. This is classically understood to be the sin of pride or idolatry—believing that one's own solitary knowing is the fullness of the truth, and that something other than God can be worthy of our complete intention and attention. The answer to this lapse is humility—the proper understanding of oneself as creature, yet also bearing the image of the divine and capable of choosing relationship with ultimate good.

The ability to love rightly is also affected by the fall. Our bodily sensations lead us to seek fulfillment in lesser goods, or our memories fail to recall us to the larger good. Aelred understood that loving well is about perfecting the will and learning to choose to apply our emotions in an effective, happy, perfect, or blessed direction. He notes the traditional distinction between loves—between self-centered love and other- or God-centered love. The one leads to misery, the other to happiness.

This approach to happiness does not exclude emotion and passion. The emotional content of what is popularly called love is important in Aelred's understanding, but it is not required for loving, happy choices. He notes that affection can increase our connection to the object of love and to God, and indeed increases our happiness. The ultimate end of perfect happiness includes our capacity for passion, emotion, and feeling, as well as our rational and volitional functions.

The capacity to love and the ability to experience love are, ultimately, primarily about choice rather than about emotion. Love in this sense has a volitional and intellectual content; choosing well leads to good (loving) deeds, which eventuate in happiness. Notably, the body plays an essential part in accomplishing those loving deeds—the whole person is called into happiness.

The Christian life of happiness is ultimately Godward. A brief mathematical excursus, admittedly an exercise in *theoria*, helps as an analogy. We often think about happiness as a scalar, a number—maybe from one to ten, in the sense of an answer to the question, how happy are you today? We can also think of happiness as a vector, a directional quantifier: How does happiness increase

10 Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; 2 Corinthians 12:6–8.

11 Romans 7:15, 18b–20.

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when you move Godward? The deeper understandings of happiness move into at least a four-dimensional tensor field, and it is probably appropriate to think of ultimate reality and ultimate happiness as participation in a multidimensional field of the good, particularly if we can conceive of God as infinite dimensional love. Human beings generally experience happiness in four or fewer dimensions, but we do get glimpses of the "more." We participate in that more as we choose to move more deeply into interconnectedness—with God, neighbor, the created order, and our true self. In Aelred's approach, that means acting virtuously, with truth and goodness, in all the relationships of our lives. In the Christian tradition, a cosmic understanding of that interconnectedness is called love or sometimes compassion.

The tradition holds up three loci for love and loving expression: self, God, and neighbor. Jesus summarizes the law of love thus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[12] Together, these loci of loving lead to happiness. When we love like this, Aelred writes, "[t]his is peace, which is a kind of foretaste which will feed you on the way, and fill you completely in your homeland."[13] Earthly life may not be as satisfying, happy, or peaceful as life transcendent and eternal, but it points the way. Living in happiness and love, now, is a sign of things to come, a sign to look for and heed, for when we recognize this earthly experience of bliss, we have a foretaste of the eternal. The vision of perfect happiness, the goal toward which human beings labor is, Aelred writes, ultimately fulfilled in God. As the fourth-century theologian Augustine of Hippo put it, "[O]ur hearts are restless, O Lord, until they find their rest in you."[14] It is clear that heart, mind, and soul all participate—though it is important to note that the traditional understanding of heart is as the seat not of emotion but of volition. Aelred speaks of ardor in loving both God and neighbor—of a burning passion for and toward the beloved—and he invokes a great deal of sensual imagery to insist that bodies and incarnate existence are essential to happiness.

Human beings seek happiness in this mortal life and beyond it. Aelred's vision of happiness transcends and includes both. He envisions heaven, perfect bliss, as a community engaged in the banquet that satisfies all human want, as souls engaged in contemplation of, or communion with, their creator. In this state, all that was deformed or wounded in the fall is healed: the intellect, memory, and will function as they were created to do; the body is healed of all infirmity, senescence, and mortality through the saving work of the incarnation and resurrection; and the blessed, beloved community is gathered in friendship with each other and with God. "The happiness of each belongs to all, and the whole of the happiness of all belongs to each."[15] Those bodies individually and communally become a body of justice and happiness.

That sort of existence in justice and perfect peace is another way of speaking of *shalom*, or the reign of God. The ancient prophetic vision of restored humanity, living in right relationship with God, other human beings, and all of creation, is what the Christian tradition calls happiness. It signals the restoration of dignity to all creatures, a perfection of creation. That perfection is mandated in Jesus's words, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."[16] The pursuit of

12 Matthew 22:37, 39.

13 J.-P. Migne, ed., *Sermo de oneribus* (PL 195:422c); Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 68.

14 Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 3.

15 Aelred of Rievaulx, *De spirituali amicitia* 3.79, translated in *Aelred of Rievaulx: Spiritual Friendship*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010), 107; Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 116.

16 Matthew 5:48.

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perfection is the path to happiness.[17] Getting wisdom, learning the mind of God, loving neighbor as oneself—these are the pathways home.

There are aids on the journey, and Aelred points to friendship as one significant help. Friendship, in his understanding, is love expanded by intimacy. One can love one's neighbor, treat him or her with justice, and do so without affection or much internal vulnerability. We do so when we cast a ballot that may raise our own taxes in order that others might have enough to eat. There is not much intimacy in that act.

Friendship builds intimacy, and ultimately, intimacy can be a taste of divine relationship. This may be difficult for some to understand, given the American tendency to assume that all intimacy implies sexual intimacy. Knowing and being known as gifted and flawed, fearful and courageous, warty and luminous—the ongoing process of revealing one's being—builds friendship.

Friendship is an important part of the story of God's creation of humanity. The second creation story begins in the need of the earth creature (*adham*) for a friend and companion. Indeed, the other creatures also need friends suited to their capacities. Creation cannot flourish without partners and fellow participants in the dance of life. Rational creatures are capable of greater intimacy with their companions and with their creator. Happiness is not possible without the intimacy of friendship. Jesus speaks of his own intimacy with God as father and his intimacy with his earthly community:

> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.[18]

Friendship with other human beings fosters and encourages friendship with God—our love of God and our love of one another are mutually supportive and interpenetrating. Happiness is not possible without it. Aelred puts it bluntly:

> I should call them beasts, not humans, who say that one ought to live without being a source of consolation to anyone. Beasts even those who say that one ought not be a source of burden or grief to anyone. Beasts too those who take no delight in the good fortune of another or bring before no other their own bitterness at misfortune, caring to cherish no one and be cherished by none.[19]

He is never clearer than here that the life of happiness and virtue cannot be lived without engagement with others and with the world.

FINDING HAPPINESS ON THE JOURNEY TO GOD

The Christian tradition is not without important and productive tensions. The central threads of the Christian tradition understand happiness as the ultimate goal of human existence, perfected in the

17 The Bible affirms this in several passages. See, e.g., Matthew 19:21 ("If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."); Romans 12:2 ("Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."); James 1:25 ("But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing."); Wisdom of Solomon 6:15 ("To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, / and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care.").

18 John 15:15.

19 Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 78–79.

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eternal and also possible in this life. Perfection is also understood as the way of living as a follower of Jesus, as a process as well as a goal: "[B]e perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."[20]

Theologians of happiness devote considerable energy to the process of perfection—in virtue, as the loving way to live in the world, and in contemplation of the divine, that the divine will and mind might be better known. Aelred is one example, but later theologians like Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor also strive to teach the ways of perfection.

The tension between this-worldly and otherworldly perfection in happiness is constant, even though some seek to resolve the tension. A traditionally centrist understanding holds the two in constructive tension: ultimate perfection and happiness is possible only through direct experience of, communion with, or contemplation of the divine, but this real and important experience is possible for mortals and should be the focus of justice-seeking in a godly human society. In other words, communion with God may be made evident in just relationships among human beings, and between human beings and the rest of creation. We need both an understanding of the ultimate goodness of creation, reflecting the goodness of its creator, and an understanding that humanity is not self-capable of restoration to ultimate goodness. The particular Christian understanding of God become human in Jesus (the incarnation) is a way of explicating the latter.

Jesus's incarnation means that the created order is now capable of receiving or becoming the divine (through the process of divinization or *theosis*), and any theology that rejects that possibility soon becomes unchristian. Classically Christian theology holds this in tension with the understanding that even though creation is initially good, it has suffered a departure from the divine intent (sin), and that the healing of that departure has begun in the incarnation. This restoration happens through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus—and indeed, the fall is sometimes called a "happy fault," because it is understood as leading to the incarnation, the presence of God in human flesh.

Other tensions also challenge Christian definitions of happiness. We have already explored the Stoic rejection of pleasure and worldly (embodied, physical) goods as essential contributions to human happiness. The Gnostic deformation goes in the same direction and, in extreme form, results in a wholly unchristian definition.

The opposite pole is equally troublesome. If we equate happiness solely with external or physical goods, we lapse into hedonism and, in a biblical sense, commit idolatry. We deny the desirability of God as a partner in human happiness by substituting the material creation for God—and this is certainly one understanding of what the fall is all about. Throughout history, this substitution has been a common narrowing or blindness. Modern consumerism is a good example of this misidentification of the center of existence, as is seeing the market or a particular form of government as the telos of human happiness. In the Christian understanding, locating human happiness in anything that does not include and acknowledge the divine represents major error.

Managing all these tensions implies an understanding of happiness in which God befriends human beings and human beings live in community together with God. Worldly goods are dually important, for as part of good creation they reflect the creator, and they are a necessary element of true happiness for corporeal beings. The Christian focus on divine incarnation and the divine possibility of human creation makes corporeal happiness significant and essential. It also means that the happiness of individuals is impossible outside community. This leads us back to the ancient prophetic vision for which *shalom* is the byword: human beings living together in friendship with God and one another, having food and drink in abundance, and in whom all sorts of illness and brokenness

20 Matthew 5:48.

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are healed. God is known as friend, more directly as friend Jesus, and as God is reflected in human siblings and in other forms of creation. Justice prevails.

Justice is the fruit of loving and befriending God and neighbor; it is perfected on the virtuous road and uses every resource available to human creatures: mind, body, heart, soul, spirit, affect, inspiration, cooperation—love in all its forms and parts. The result is the beloved community, the community of friends who know themselves beloved of God.

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