



Biblical happiness and baptismal identity

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Abstract

In this essay the author makes a theological contribution to the happiness discourse, by i) exploring the etymology of some terms used for happiness in the Old and New Testament, by ii) valuing the contribution of Ellen Charry on biblical happiness as “Asherism” and iii) emphasizing the sacraments, in particular baptism, as identity marker, constituting a calling to a flourishing life, which includes being a flourishing agent enabling the flourishing of others and God’s creation.

Keywords

Happiness, flourishing, baptism, identity

1. Theology and happiness

Christian theology has always been part of the happiness discourse: “Christianity has a theology of happiness, and the question is only about its shape and texture” (Charry 2011:239). Realizing that temporary happiness is not sustainable and very fragile, theologians have indeed been very cautious to enter into the terminology and even the discussion of happiness. Because of the reality of death, happiness was thought to be unattainable in this life, and theologians generally resorted to eschatological terms to express their understanding of happiness as “eternal life”. In ancient Aristotelian philosophy, happiness and morality were two sides of the same coin. Severing that bond in modernity, has placed theologians in a precarious position, where it became untenable to promote happiness on a Christian basis, for fear of it being identified too closely with hedonic happiness (the

1 The support of this study by the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* is gratefully acknowledged.

boosting of momentary and sensual experiences), detached from God and the moral good. Charry believes that theology can simultaneously hold both a moral and transcendent view on happiness, and recognize material pleasure and enjoyment, in a model of mutual affirmation:

“One reason Christians are suspicious of the pursuit of happiness is that today it is understood in hedonic terms. It is seen as the search for good feelings – often achieved in an impulsive manner. But there is another ancient understanding of happiness: happiness is the ability to live a virtuous life that promotes well-being and the judgment that one is indeed flourishing rather than languishing. This eudaemonic notion of happiness is embedded in the Christian tradition. What the tradition has not recognized is that these two understandings are not opposites and that virtue gives genuine pleasure. That is, eudaemonic flourishing produces hedonic happiness. So goodness and pleasure cannot be separated, for doing good is pleasing to us” (Charry 2007:31).

A privatized, hedonic view of happiness can thus be overcome by the realization that social happiness is inevitably linked to individual happiness, and that goodness, creating more enduring societal happiness, need to be understood as an integral constituent part of happiness. In fact, it is generally recognized today that even sadness and despair can enrich one's life.

A well-designed theological response will avoid both the extremes of other-worldliness on the one side and of mere materialism on the other. Claiming the connection between the spiritual and the material and grounding it in the theology of the incarnation and of the sacraments (as material means of grace) may show a way out of the impasse.

The way in which the Old and the New Testament speak of or allude to happiness is indeed consistent with an integral connection of the spiritual and the material.

2. The etymology of happiness in the Old and New Testament

Old Testament

Charry builds her theology of happiness around the Hebrew for “happy” in the Psalms and Proverbs, namely *‘asrê*. When instructions are given for this flourishing life, the depiction of that life is that it is *‘asrê*. “In modern translations, *‘asrê* is nearly always translated as ‘happy’ or ‘blessed’. Ancient translations do likewise: the Septuagint translates *‘asrê* in every instance with a form of *makarios* (happy), and the Vulgate with a form of *beatus* (happy, blessed). The Peshitta and the Targumim use a form of the word *tub*, ‘goodness’, usually in the construct plural form ‘tube’, to match the apparently construct plural *‘asrê*.” (Rubin 2010:366). Rubin shows that the Proto-Semitic root *sry/srw* meant something like well-off or prosperous, but that it has shifted etymologically from the more materialistic meaning to the more general “happy”. The development of the word included its change from a normal adjective function (e.g. “the happy man”) to a more comprehensive and pervasive meaning (“happy is the man”).

Janzen found previous literature to show i) “that the *‘asrê*-formula is a statement made to or about someone which somehow magnifies or extols that person’s condition as a desirable one; ii) that *‘asrê* is found in a fair number of passages that belong to the Wisdom movement; iii) that there exists some kind of relationship between *‘asrê* and forms of blessing” (Janzen 1965:215). Contrasting *‘asrê* with the *brk*-complex (blessing) it can be shown that *brk* had as content i) children, descendants, ii) fertility of flocks, herds and fields, and iii) defeat of enemies. The blessing evolved according to Mowinckel from an acclamation carrying its efficacy in itself, to a supplication to God, to a prayer of thanksgiving. A similar development and content can be shown for *‘asrê*, but Janzen (1965:225) shows an important difference in context. *‘asrê* is used when an element of envious desire comes into play. *‘asrê* as “happy is” or “blessed is” can thus also be understood as “to be envied is”. That is also why *‘asrê* is not used in connection with Yahweh (Yahweh is so different from man, that there was no place for aspiring to be like him). Because Yahweh would not envy man, it is also not ascribed to Him. God never says *‘asrê* is the man. It is always another person describing the desirable state of the “happy” or “blessed” man. Because of this character of envy, *‘asrê* also is not used for oneself (one does not envy oneself).

New Testament

Vorster (1999:113) shows how the Stoics believed that the ultimate end (*telos*) in life is happiness. Cicero said the wise person is also always happy, because the final aim in life is to live in accordance with nature. If they live in harmony with nature, happiness and a hindrance-free life is bound to ensue. When Jesus, on the other hand, teaches that those who are poor, hungry, weeping and rejected is blessed or happy (because God will take care of them), it seems incompatible.

The Greek terms *makarios* and *eudaimonia* is used to denote “happiness”. *Makarios*, in Homer, is used for describe the gods’ state of happiness beyond care. From the time of Aristotle the term has become weaker, denoting any happiness, also for humans. Aristotle still uses *makarios* to describe the gods’ happiness, and uses *eudaimonia* to describe the happiness of humans. Seen in its Stoic context, *eudaimonia* is linked to the moral purpose (*proairesis*) of humankind, which means to live according to nature (*kata phusin*). It is further related to virtue (*arete*) and governed by reason (*logos*). So for the Stoics *eudaimonia* is the ultimate goal in life, and it is primarily “to act virtuously so that one’s life is in accordance with universal nature.” Only secondarily it is “possibly a state of exhilaration” (*chara, euphrosune*) as a subsequent manifestation of virtuous activity.

The New Testament does not use *eudaimonia* to indicate happiness. *Makarios* and *chairo* are mostly used; with less frequent use of a few other terms as well. To the early Christians, understandably, happiness was a gift from the hand of God. According to the reports in Acts, they saw themselves as a community of joy and happiness. “The coming of Jesus inaugurated a new era, that is, an era of happiness” (Vorster 1999:118). The bridegroom has arrived; the fasting is over. The blind see, the lame walk, the dead live, and there is good news for the poor. There was a definite present aspect to this new view on happiness, but this happiness also included a future, where this happiness would be full and enduring. Especially in the gospel of Luke, this joyful theology is seen right from the birth narrative to the Easter accounts. With Paul this theology includes joy in suffering. Happiness is “happiness in Christ”, which means sharing in his suffering and his glory. Happiness in spite of suffering and happiness in suffering is possible because of the future hope of sharing in Christ’s triumph. “In the

Johannine writings special emphasis is laid on happiness as something that is fulfilled in the present.” (Vorster 1999:119) In Revelation happiness is on the new earth and in the new heaven when all unhappiness is removed forever. Vorster (1999:119) summarizes: “Happiness is to be found in Christ. He is the inaugurator of happiness. In sorrow or pain, poverty or sadness, he is the reason why Christians can be happy. In Christ, God gives happiness. Happiness is both present and eschatological. In this sense, happiness appears to be a state of mind.”

Although there seems to be a contrast between the present and the future emphasis of happiness, the early Christians apparently saw no contradiction and applied the different views according to the needs of the context. The relationship between the present and future happiness is not always clear. It seems that Christians saw the present happiness to be an imitation of the future happiness, or referring to that happiness, thus operating in two symbolic universes. Vorster (1999:120-125) sees Jesus’ use of macarisms as indicative of how Christians saw this relationship between present and future happiness.

The “macarism” was known in both the Greek and Semitic worlds. It always refers to the “life-enhancing behaviour” of the believer, e.g. coming to Zion, fearing God, studying the Torah, caring for the poor, etc. The function (appearing almost exclusively in the Psalms and Wisdom literature) is to give moral instruction, indicating that persons following these instructions will be happy. Happiness corresponds with Israel’s view on well-being, which mostly concerns the present: life, security, posterity, military success, prosperity, etc. In the inter-testamentary period, beatitude formulas start appearing in apocalyptic literature, with the function of consoling the suffering, promising that enduring happiness awaits, and that the righteous will receive an otherworldly reward and happiness. It is important to understand the different worldviews of wisdom and apocalyptic literature, as it influences the meaning of the beatitudes in the different genres. In the wisdom literature, the order and unity in God’s creation is presupposed, and it is understood that good behaviour, according to God’s instruction, will align with this order in God’s creation and therefore lead to happiness. In Apocalyptic literature actions are motivated by a hope of a better future, ultimately in another world.

In Jesus' use of the macarisms, Luke and Matthew interpret it differently. Luke emphasizes the plight of the poor and oppressed, while Matthew focuses more on the paranetic side emphasising the sort of behaviour that will bring happiness in an ethical sense (e.g. being humble, showing mercy, etc.). His emphasis is on the "life-enhancing behaviour". Although the macarisms refer to the reward in heaven, the present tense is used that the Kingdom "belongs" to those. Although an apocalyptic reading is possible, Vorster argues for the macarisms to be seen primarily as wisdom sayings. These wisdom sayings focus on activity and conduct. Well-being is ascribed to those who engage in proper conduct. Then the state of blessedness exists already, even though the tangible rewards may lie in the future still. This is the view of both Matthew and Luke – that happiness for the followers of Jesus is a state of mind that they experience in this life, in spite of and in the midst of adverse conditions.

Vorster (1999:126) concludes that both the Jewish tradition from which the early Christians came as well as the Greco-Roman influences in Galilee in the time of Jesus should be taken into account when trying to understand what happiness meant for the early Christians. Therefore:

“Because happiness is a gift from God and is found in the believers' relationship with God, it seems that happiness, according to early Christianity is an inner state of the mind, a condition. ... Early Christians were also happy because of their conduct. Deeds have consequences, and proper conduct leads to happiness. Except for those who saw life in an apocalyptic perspective, both early Christians and Stoics had an optimistic view of life. They both accepted life as it was and tried to live happily. To be happy is to become wise in the eyes of both Stoics and early Christians.”

Through Justin Martyr the idea of happiness as the goal of Christian life, became part of early Christian thinking (Löhr 2009:39). Having the right knowledge of God and striving to trust God in Christ, leads to happiness, Justin says. Here he uses the word *eudaimonia*, which is not used in the New Testament or in the Apostolic Fathers. That begs the question whether it can be said that happiness, according to the sources of the Christian faith, can be the goal of Christian life. Although not aligned with earlier classical philosophical and later apologetic writings on *eudaimonia*, Löhr

shows that the concept of striving to a higher goal, the goal of “the highest good” is prevalent in the ethics of the New Testament. This highest good is taken in the gospels to be “inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven”. When instructions are given with regards to this Kingdom, it is often done as admittance-sayings, and prescribes for example becoming like a child, not attaching yourself to material wealth, admonition to live justly, fulfilling the will of God. In the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, instructions for habits and attitudes worthy of inheriting the Kingdom are expounded, with the rewards being the favour of God and indeed, inheriting the Kingdom as children of God. The more eschatological tradition in the New Testament shifts the Kingdom to the afterlife; others emphasize the preliminary experiences of the Kingdom in this life. A bridge can be found in the focus on joy (*chara*) as highest good (e.g. in Mt 25:21-23 and Heb 12:2). The eschatological emphasis remains strong, however, and leads to an understanding of the highest good and the happiness associated with it as something that cannot be determined or brought on by human effort. It remains to be given by God, and received by man. No autonomy is established so that it can be construed that man is the master of his own destiny. The New Testament is hesitant in specifying a list of “ingredients” of the highest good. In the distinction between material and eternal riches, the admonition not to worry about temporal things and a whole range of instructions on how to care for others, it becomes more practical, but nowhere the highest good becomes a neatly defined and packaged list of goals to follow in itself (Löhr 2009:48).

The New Testament also speaks of suffering. Although it is not seen in a positive light, it is not seen to destroy the road to the highest good (or the Kingdom) of the faithful, as it contrasts that road, gives it profile, emphasises the urgency of being on that road, and trains the faithful in their determination to persevere towards the goal of the highest good.

The New Testament does, however, promote the concept of life, understood both in its physical and eternal sense. Not losing your “soul” or “life” by winning the (material) world and following your selfish ways, is important. Christ promises life in abundance. This life is also described in very mundane terms to be calm (1 Tim 2:2), peaceful (Jm 3:17, 1 Tim 2:2 and 1 Tess 4:11) and unselfish (1 Cor 10:33). Paul would also like his readers to be without worries (1 Cor 7:32, 35) and that they would not experience

conflict and strife in their relationships. Included is also that they should look after themselves (the way they think and act), in order to be useful to God, who will employ them in the lives of others.

Linking the life-promoting God to the concept of “blessing”, Westermann (1968:44) shows that the Christian church stood in the long tradition which distinguished them from other religions of the time in that blessing would not only denote the showering with gifts because the worshippers of the particular God have performed the right rituals to appease the divine. Blessing was seen and experienced as God’s power that enabled and sustained life and flourishing. It also protected from danger and despair. The Christians understood this notion of blessing to be proprietary connected to the salvation of God in Christ. Salvation in the Jewish tradition was not primarily seen then as salvation “from”, but salvation to the empowering of the people of God in their existence in God’s land. It is the Creator God who also blesses, and His blessing is continuation of his life-creating love. Westermann also shows the close relationship between blessing and wisdom. Where profane wisdom was about controlling your life in order to succeed, the reciprocal relationship between wisdom and blessing in Israel meant that wisdom was received as part of the blessing of God.

3. “Asherism” as flourishing

If happiness thus means the participation in the abundance of life in the life-giving God, Ellen Charry’s term “Asherism” to denote biblical happiness is very relevant. With “Asherism” Charry has contributed to the conversation between theology and the interdisciplinary science of happiness and co-created a space where theology can translate its tradition and terminology in a manner intelligible even in a-religious discourses.² She describes in her analysis the meaning of “*asrê*” as “the honor or privilege bestowed on the people of God in its covenantal relationship with God” (Charry 2011:244). “Ashrethood” or “Asherism” then, is not some emotional euphoria, but rather the fact of being granted covenantal responsibility by God for the people of God (and the creation of God). God’s commands in this regard can be seen as bringing contentment and satisfaction, but also pleasure

2 This bilingualism is one of the characteristics of all true public theological contributions, cf Bedford-Strohm (2008:151) and Van der Merwe (2008).

and enjoyment. Happiness in the New Testament lies in line with the Law and the Prophets. Being part of a faithful community and abiding to Jesus' teaching of love (and all his reiterations and interpretations of the Law and the Prophets) had the same goal in mind – living joyfully in communion with God and neighbour.

The presuppositions of such a theological understanding of happiness have to be clear, namely that God created out of abundant life for mutual pleasure and enjoyment. The link between (human) happiness and God's happiness directs us towards an understanding of happiness as “a delightful life that furthers God's enjoyment of creation by means of our flourishing and that of the rest of the material world.” Charry sums up the main theological argument concerning happiness: “God created us for his own enjoyment. God enjoys himself when creation flourishes. Therefore, God intends that we flourish. To tend to our own flourishing and that of the rest of creation is to be obedient to God” (Charry 2011:240). As part of creation our tending to the flourishing of creation, also constitutes our own flourishing (well-being, pleasure or enjoyment).

In the tradition of both the Old and the New Testaments it is important to gain the necessary wisdom to act in wise ways, within the broader purpose of this flourishing of creation. Education and formation, by means of the instruction and observance of the Law and the Prophets (and also the New Testament in its application of Jesus' teaching on everyday life) forms the character of the individual and collectively of the *laos* and the *ekklesia* to engage in a flourishing way (as flourishing is more a way of living, than a certain destination of enlightenment or an affectionate state).

Charry (2011:245) distinguishes her view of “asherism” from “agapism” and “eudaemonism”, respectively. “Agapism” refers to “agape” as self-sacrificial love, with no concern for personal pleasure and benefit. It is denoted as the love that Jesus portrayed in his sacrificial death, and which He asked us to imitate in our relationships with others. “Eudaemonism” is a virtue ethic: being happy is a function of being virtuous. Christian theology was often suspicious of the idea of happiness as a goal in itself, as then our acts of love and goodness could be instrumentalized, while it should rather spring from love with disregard of the self. What would make an act truly good is if no personal benefit would be expected from it. The self-sacrifice of agapism and the selfishness of (or at least ulterior motives inherent in) eudaemonism

were set up as irreconcilable, and Christian theology opted for the ethics of agape. This ethics built upon the doctrine of man as *corruptio totalis* and self-denial would be the way to work against the sinful and selfish nature of man, which contaminates even his best endeavours. However, loving your neighbour *as yourself* presupposes a healthy self-regard, so that the other is not abused into fulfilling my deficits, but can be the beneficiary of my self-regard as somebody who has the responsibility to facilitate the flourishing of God's creation. Self-flourishing is not excluded in this equation. Aligning with eudaemonism in this regard, it is to be remembered that happiness is central to the Christian life, if the idea of God's enjoyment of his creation's flourishing is to be taken seriously. Motive remains important. Doing good just in order to be happy devalues the good deed and devoid it of the love which gives it its passionate efficacy. It also runs contrary to the essence of happiness, which is that it cannot be reached as a goal in itself, but only received as the by-product of happiness-aligning behaviour and attitudes.

Asherism "is allied with agapism in its commitment to obedience to divine commands and to the role of love in living well and is allied with eudaemonism in its commitment to human flourishing" (Charry 2011:249). It corrects the misread form of self-sacrifice as self-harming or self-depletion but emphasises love as the root motive for acting benevolently. In fact, living according to God's commands, is supposed to build a whole, flourishing self and not destroy it.

Asherism is about happiness as flourishing, but then flourishing as part of a community and the whole of creation, to which flourishing I actively contribute. Asherism even has room for hedonism, in the sense of affirming the material and the pleasure of temporal enjoyment. It is about giving from a heart of love to contribute to the flourishing of community and creation, and receiving the joy of own flourishing as a gift from God's own flourishing.

In the biblical context such a life of flourishing also constitutes a "meaningful" life or "a life of purpose". Searching for meaning is part of the human condition. The link between the search for meaning and happiness has been studied in experimental psychology, to which we turn in the next section.

4. Happiness and the search for meaning

Research in the field of experimental psychology has shown that “searching for meaning in life” can in itself be distressful and decrease life satisfaction. However, “the extent to which there is presence of meaning in life held by an individual appears to act as a defence against feelings of psychological distress experienced whilst searching for meaning in life” (Cohen and Cairns 2012:328). In other words, the research of Cohen and Cairns suggests that people who are open-minded and reflective and thus search for meaning will not decrease in life satisfaction if they already have some experiences of meaning and if they have higher levels of self-efficacy, thus believing in their capacity to achieve their goals in life.

Meaning is believed to be achieved through a variety of different paths such as goal directedness, a sense of coherence in life, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals and through the need for self-efficacy, values in life, purpose in life and self-worth. The affective component of meaning in life comprises the feelings of satisfaction (happiness) and fulfilment that arises when individuals achieve their goals and through general life experiences (Cohen and Cairns 2012:314).

Wisdom and life satisfaction also seem to go hand in hand, where wisdom includes the traits of i) openness and ii) self-transcendence (Le 2011:171). The openness trait and openness values are positively associated with wisdom. This makes sense in that openness requires accommodation, cognitive flexibility, and change from the habitual, ingrained ways of thinking, beliefs, and ideas. On the other hand, conservation values such as security, conformity, and tradition as well as self-enhancement values of power and pleasure would be negatively related to wisdom. Self-transcendence relates to decreases in attachment to one’s own perspectives, viewpoints, truths, and construal self, as well as extension of care, compassion, and concern toward others including both past and future generations. Although self-transcendence has primarily been regarded as a personality trait or a dimension of values, it can also be viewed as a developmental process that involves a change in perspective and orientation of self in relation to others, social status, and objects (Le 2011:173).

It is significant that the wisdom tradition is so strong in the biblical sources and that biblical wisdom indeed promotes compassion, care

and unselfishness. Rediscovering flourishing, wisdom and calling in Christian identity enables theological reflection to be a voice of note in the interdisciplinary discussion of happiness. This essay finally suggests in the next section that linking Christian identity to the meaning of the sacraments (and baptism in particular) assists theological thinking in its engagement in the happiness discourse.

5. Baptismal identity as positive theology

Reformed theology's focus on human sin and total depravity before God, have had some negative consequences, hopefully unintended and unforeseen, but nevertheless very real. The anthropological view of total depravity has all too often led to a undermining of psychological well-being in the disregard for the self, leading to negative views on self-determination, self-affirmation, and even the desirability of happiness as pleasure and joy. Charry (2011:284) wants to see this "pathology-driven narrative" augmented by the "strengths-based language inspired by the sacraments".

She takes her cue from positive psychology that has focused in recent years on character and personality strengths from which the treatment of weaknesses can be initiated. The theological equivalent would be to supplement an anthropology of depravity with one of hope, seeing redemption as the activation of human potential and creativity according to the creation in the image of God. The idea is for theology to speak more constructively about human psychology on theology's own terms (Charry 2011:285). Charry names the tenets of classical Western Christian psychology as i) sinfulness as chronic spiritual illness, ii) responsibility for actual sins (although we are unable not to sin, we are nevertheless responsible for our bad behaviour) and iii) self-rejection as a way forward. The corresponding God-views are i) that God is indignant at human failing, ii) that he relies on fear for punishment to obtain human compliance with righteousness and iii) that he selects some to escape punishment by redemption in Christ. This is done to display his power and glory (Charry 2011:287).

It is, of course, important to keep the theologically realistic view on humanity intact. Self-reflection is necessary and over-estimating the

human condition can lead to a very destructive self-centredness. Therefore the critical element of “judgment” is not to be waived. On the other hand, the mercy of God that inspires reciprocal love in humankind must not be overshadowed by a one-sided emphasis on wrath and atonement.

Charry finds pneumatology to be the most appropriate theological locus for this discussion, as it is through the work of the Holy Spirit in the reformed tradition that “sanctification” takes place, which allows for a certain empowerment or “self-confident functioning that enable us to enjoy self-reflective morally good lives” (Charry 2011:288). It is also in pneumatology where the doctrine of the sacraments resides, as it is according to the reformed tradition through Word and sacrament that the Holy Spirit applies the beneficial work of Christ in our lives, by including us in the efficacy thereof. Beyond an almost mechanical view on the working of the sacraments (the *ex opere operato* character of the sacraments was explicitly denied by the reformers), the reformers thought very highly of the sacraments. Calvin taught that baptism “is also the sign of regeneration and that children should be educated to grow into their baptismal identity as they mature” (Charry 2011:289).

Including baptism, anointing and the Eucharist in her view, Charry describes the features of baptismal theology:

“1) being truly free of original sin as well as previously accumulated actual sins; 2) co-opting Christians into the drama of the redemption of the cosmos, indeed in the very life of God through engrafting of each person into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and 3) locating people in the ongoing life of the Christian community with its ministrations of grace in the company of all faithful people past, present and future who offer guidance and support for the Christian life. Each Christian will still face the prospect of future sins but they enter the church as unsullied participants in the drama of the redemption of the cosmos, taking their place in the company of the church militant (on earth) and triumphant (in heaven) (Charry 2011).

In that sense the sacraments of *baptism* and *Eucharist* (but Charry also includes *anointing*) constitute identity and calling:

Baptism draws a person into the force field of the Spirit, and advances the Kingdom of God, which is a Kingdom of peace, justice and joyful, flourishing life. Instead of incorporating the baptized in the Trinitarian flow of the *missio Dei*, however, our anthropology fixated on depravity and original sin, thereby countering the creative power of the *imago Dei* in created and redeemed humankind.

Whereas *baptism* is to incorporate someone as part of the community of faith in Christ, and including him or her in the flow of God's mission to love his creation and let it flourish, *anointing* (chrismation) "seals" and "grafts" one into Christ forever. Biblically, the anointing is the calling, the commissioning and the empowering of those grafted in Christ.

The *Eucharist* feeds and empowers on this journey. It feeds with the unconditional and sacrificial love of Christ, which confirms our worth as God's created and redeemed people, but also draws us into serving with this same motive of unconditional love in God's world.

This, according to Cherry, is then where positive theology and positive psychology can find their shared and mutual enriching space. Psychology can inform theology on the capacities and attitudes in human personality and action that enhances well-being. Theology can bring baptismal identity as an enduring and inalienable source of living well, beyond mere self-interest and pursuing of happiness as an end in itself.

"For those who live into it, Christian identity provides a solid floor on which positive psychology's interest in resilience, emotional security, positive emotions and coping mechanisms, as well as the classic Christian virtues like compassion, empathy, forgiveness, gratitude, love, and hope can build" (Cherry 2011:291).

6. Conclusion

A theological contribution to the study of happiness has to start with an understanding of its own sources, the biblical text of the Old and New Testament and the tradition that stems from those sources. An exploration of the background of the Hebrew and Greek terms used for happiness in the Bible reveals a notion of happiness that transcends the dichotomy between hedonic and eudaemonic happiness and describes human flourishing

incorporated in the flourishing of God’s creation as central to the Biblical view on happiness. Even more, there is a view of God as wellspring and lover of life which constitutes God as delighting in his creation and the flourishing thereof.

In the Christian tradition, the sacraments are not to be seen as mechanically bestowing “happiness” or “blessing” on the participants, but rather it constitutes a calling to a flourishing life, which includes being the conduit for the flourishing of others and of God’s whole creation.

This theological perspective defines happiness not as a so-called “stock” or something static to be owned, but a so-called “flow” which can be perceived and experienced dynamically as we participate in the flourishing life made possible by the God of life. This could be considered as “meaning in life” or “wisdom”, which is shown in inter-disciplinary research as constitutive to self-reported life satisfaction.

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