Hobart Lecture
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It is a great honor to offer the Hobart lecture this year in the name of a bishop of the church dedicated to its revivification. I share some sympathies with Bp Hobart as I too am a Philadelphian. My own parish is St. Mark's Philadelphia, an Oxford Movement parish built 1847 in the English medieval style, designed by John Notman and patterned on St Stephen's Westminster. Hobart, of course, was a goad to the Oxford movement that began in 1833 with the preaching of John Keble at Oxford. Hobart visited England 1823-1825, and created a stir stimulating reform both there and here.

Hobart had the spiritual acuity to see the power of combining architectural drama with democratic values, realizing that in America Episcopalians had to set aside England's class system and embrace the unity of all people and did that by combining dramatic magisterial structures with quiet interiors that would elevate the heart to God while uniting people to one another at the altar. Personally, I remain sympathetic with that aesthetic and that vision; it actually happens at St. Mark's.

For Hobart's feast day, 12 September, one of the recommended psalms is
Ps 78 and it takes us directly into today's theme:

3 things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.
4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.
5 He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;
6 that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children,
7 so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

Let us pray:
Revive your Church, Lord God of hosts, whenever it falls into complacency and sloth, by raising up devoted leaders like your servant John Henry Hobart whom we remember today; and grant that their faith and vigor of mind may awaken your people to your message and their mission; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

## I.
## God and the Art of Happiness

While the title of my book may sound like a self-help book, it is not. It is rather a God-help book. The basic argument sounds in Psalm 78; to be happy we must obey God's law. Now that may be off-putting to some, but don't close your mind down just yet.

While happiness has already become a tired topic with scads written on it, I was not aware of the gathering rush of books and studies on the topic when I began thinking about it. And even now, theology has been silent on the subject, with perhaps the exception of *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonism* by (1986) John Piper, a conservative evangelical Calvinist Baptist pastor. His thesis is that glorifying God is our joy and delight. That is most definitely an important restatement of the classic Calvinist view of happiness but it does not take account of our delight in material creation and our own well-being.

My argument takes its point of departure not from the assumption that God's delight is that we glorify him but that God created in order to enjoy himself with creation, and that happens when creation flourishes as God intended. We, being an important part of creation, please God when we flourish, and knowing that our flourishing pleases God pleases and we are happy. Still, I argue further that there is another dimension to our happiness in God. When we advance creation's flourishing we enhance our self and so enjoy being who we are. Thus, we and God are happy together and rejoice in one another when we are obedient to God's intention for creation.

Well, how did I get into the happiness business? I have been stewing about human flourishing in Christian theology since the early 1990s. My first attempt to talk about it was *By the Renewing of your Minds: the Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (1997*)*. Quite frankly, I gave a talk about human flourishing to a small gathering of Christian academics and some scowled at the idea. After my first public lecture on the topic a serious gentleman  walked by me on his way out and said simply, "there are more important things to think about." That pushed me further into it even to insist that happiness is a properly Christian theme. Eyebrows still keep going up and I so I kept going.

Then, out of nowhere, a silent cancer took my beloved husband of 40 years. At that moment, God seemed implicated in our suffering. I was hurt and angry and redoubled my efforts to see if theologically speaking I could ever be happy again. I began investigating Christian teachings on happiness. I quickly realized that Christian theology has spoken a great deal about happiness, that is, eschatological happiness. By the high middle ages heaven, the vision of God, and eternal life were often run together in the following eschatological picture. At natural death, every soul is separated from its body and goes to heaven, purgatory, limbo, or hell. At the second coming of Christ there will be a general resurrection of all bodies and a final judgment on their eternal fate as they parade before the great judgment seat of Christ. At this point, the holding pens open. The saints, reunited with their bodies will live forever in the presence of God and the damned, also reunited with their bodies, will suffer eternal punishment with their bodies in the fires of hell without the presence of God. Those in the middle will be sorted out appropriately.

In Christian thought, the ancient preference for eternality over temporality joined sometimes shakily with the Jewish hope of resurrection to create eschatological hope of another existence in which death would be destroyed and there will be only eternal bliss or eternal suffering. This is the classic Christian teaching on happiness.

Christian eschatology is often thought of as coming from the last chapters of the Apocalypse, and that is where Augustine did of course develop western eschatology at the end of CG. But 1 Cor 15 is extremely important. As Paul put it, [21] "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; [22] for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. [23] But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his [second] coming those who belong to Christ. [24] Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power." [25] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

[Christian theology has proceeded in lurches generally stimulated by controversies of one sort or another, often mounted by voices that the church eventually declared to be outside the pale of acceptability.] Absent controversy, themes and ideas that may be at odds with one another simply sit in the annals of theological history side by side with people espousing one or another sometimes unselfconsciously as is the case of combining eternality with resurrection. Theologians never straightened this out.

In the picture I just drew, on the popular level, soteriology and eschatology form an intellectual continuum. Faith that one is saved now flows into hope of ultimate bliss then. Salvation seems to be defined as the ability to say with the confidence of faith in divine mercy that one is saved if one trusts that one's sins have been forgiven vicariously because God has looked away from us and at Jesus's sinlessness. In the face of knowing that God seeks our death but accepts that of Jesus in our stead, we may enjoy life free from the anxiety that God actually consigns us to the everlasting fires of hell. That is, salvation is freedom from the fear of divine wrath instilled in us by the theistic sanction.

By uniting oneself to Christ, his righteousness becomes our own and we slowly grow into that beauty and power to live a beautiful life borrowing from his life and death.
Faith in God's absolution by the gracious mercy of God at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ one may live from his righteousness and sustain one's hope and expectation that eschatological happiness, complete bliss will come about after the final judgment at the second coming when one will be counted among the saints. The content of this eternal bliss may be unclear to contemporary believers, but in the medieval context in which it was forged, it portended perfect knowledge of God as God knows himself, for that is what we truly desire.

In short, growing out of medieval penitential practice, salvation in the west, whether in sacramental terms or on the strength of personal faith, became narrowed to absolution writ large. Absolution morphed into justification as salvation with sanctification following for those who lash themselves to the righteousness of Christ. It promised bliss at the general resurrection and final judgment for those absolved of sin, or at least those who believed themselves to be absolved, but precisely how that happens remained unclear. If salvation in the west is the eschatological expectation that bliss awaits believers reunited with their bodies, being saved means believing that this will one day be

the case on the strength of personal faith that for Augustinians is itself a gift of the HS, not anything that we could muster on our own.

All this is to say that classic Christian soteriology is about happiness, whether that be 1) hope that by believing that one's sins are forgiven by either sacramental means (Catholic) or by faith in divine mercy and uniting with Christ (Protestant), or 2) anticipation of happiness when one will live with God forever reunited with one's body. In either case, happiness in this life remains a hope rather than a reality. My concern with this noetic and futuristic view is that the Christian life becomes an appendage to salvation and there is not sufficient motivation to assume the godly way of life offered to us in scripture, exemplified perhaps by Psalm 78.

My proposal for reclaiming a robust Christian doctrine of temporal happiness argues that justification is the beginning rather than the center of salvation.

II.

My starting point, that God created in order to enjoy himself, that is to be happy, turns this whole discussion of happiness in a fresh direction. Rather than focusing on how God's wrath is to be appeased, it focuses on God's enjoyment by examining how God draws us into a delightful life that furthers his enjoyment of creation. With rather different questions, I went rummaging through the theological corpus to see if there are at least bits and pieces of another way that theologians have talked about happiness. I examined four important Christian thinkers.

1. Augustine Christianity was born into three cultures: classical philosophical spirituality, popular Olympian paganism, and Judaism in transition. The first major Christian theologian to write on happiness was Augustine of Hippo in the fourth-fifth century. He inherited Jewish and Christian scripture in a primitive Latin translation as Jerome was creating the Vulgate. Augustine gave us the strongly eschatological view of happiness with which we are most familiar by elaborating the last book of the Christian Bible, the Apocalypse of John, with its two resurrections and the thousand year reign of Christ that Augustine elaborates at the end of CG, as I already said. There are 22 books of CG as there are 22 chapters of the Apocalypse.

In this majestic work, Augustine tells a tale of two cities. The cities are populated by two types of person, those who live as God commends, and those who do not. The former populate the city of God and the latter populate the earthly city. The distinction turns out to be eschatological. The residents of the city of God are the saints predestined to reign with God forever [heaven], and the citizens who are the deserving vessels of wrath who will suffer eternal punishment with the devil [hell].

Despite this fatalism, Augustine believed that enjoyment of temporal life is real, possible, and desirable, because creation is good. But perhaps because he/Aug suffered the deaths of many close to him at young ages, including his son and best friend, and observed the ravages of sin that destroy our ability to enjoy the goodness of creation, he maintained a healthy respect for suffering in this life, warning that temporal material happiness is too

fragile to be relied upon. The fragility of happiness turned him toward hope of eternal happiness with God in heaven as more reliable and therefore to be preferred to the joy that comes from health, wealth, and reputation and power. It is a tale told to prevent disappointment.

2. Boethius The next important Christian voice on happiness is that of Manlius Severinus Boethius. He was a high-ranking Roman official who fell afoul of King Theodoric in 524. He was executed without benefit of trial on the charge of treason which he denied. With no legal appeals process he wrote an extraordinary piece of prison literature. Instead of seeking sympathy for the justness of his cause against the oppressive government, he argued counter intuitively (at least from our perspective on intuition) that he had sought happiness in the wrong place. Wealth, power, and fame, even when gained in pursuit of justice and truth are the whims of fickle fortune. True happiness is found in this life only by participating in God. Trusting the goods of fortune is the pursuit of vanity, even if in the pursuit of justice and peace. Seeking happiness in power, wealth, reputation, even justice for one's cause is to look in the wrong place.

No sympathy for the unjustly accused here. For Boethius, our time is out of joint. Self-pity, bemoaning one's oppression denouncing the oppressor and calling for redress and reparations are slutty choices. Do not seek reward for doing-good, but only holding to the purity of one's virtue. Virtue is its own reward. No more. Even facing death, Boethius holds out no eschatological hope of reward on the other side as Augustine did. Happiness is harshly limited to enjoyment of one's virtue quite severed from any temporal respect, recognition, or reward that fickle fortune might bestow and summarily rescind. Happiness comes only from personal strength. Expectation of reward is pure self-flattery. In the softness of our age that craves sympathy, empathy, and compassion, this is a bracing tonic for our age.

3. Aquinas It was not until the high Middle Ages that a Christian theologian was seriously interested in what we would recognize as temporal happiness: enjoyment of temporal life rather than the promise of future bliss. Thomas Aquinas, influenced by Aristotle, valued temporal material happiness: the pleasure that comes from social, material, and physical well-being. While his treatise on happiness heads up Thomas's massive ethics, it finally sounds a minor note next to his powerful eschatological stress on happiness as basking in the complete knowledge of God in heaven. Thomas's dream was to know God as well as God knows himself in heaven. Still, Thomas was the first to honor the importance of actual temporal material happiness for the Christian life.

4. Butler The last Christian theologian that I examine in detail is little known in the larger world, but better known to Anglicans. He is Joseph Butler, bishop of Durham for the last two years of his life. Butler was a philosophical theologian. He marched to his own drum as England commercialized and secularized in response to modern technology and thought that would sweep away much Christian credibility. In his own rationalist way,

For my purpose, Bp Butler was the most innovative of the theologians I examine in my work. So far, of the three figures I examined, two—Augustine and Aquinas—promote a

primarily eschatological and noetic doctrine of happiness. Happiness is to be hoped for after we depart this vale of tears and it lies in a form of knowledge, the vision of God. Even if that knowledge begins in this life through a life of piety, it is only complete in another life when the drag of the body with its constant and distracting needs is lifted. Embodied life is always trudging toward death and Christian victory is the defeat of death as Paul put it so eloquently, the curse brought upon the human race in that fated garden.

Butler was a thoroughgoing modern. He had a notion of happiness that we would recognize. It was enjoyment of life's simple pleasures. Unlike Augustine and Aquinas, Butler's was not a theological notion of happiness. Happiness, according to him, is not in enjoying God but in enjoying things we desire. His teaching on happiness is not as shallow as that of current social psychology, but neither is it Christian in the Augustinian sense that our deepest longing is for God and we cannot be genuinely happy unless and until we rest in God's beauty, wisdom and goodness. B's construal of happiness is rather pedestrian.

However, Butler did promote another idea about our identity in God. And with it he resuscitated an important idea that Augustine faintly voiced but that was subsequently buried in a later avalanche of longing for abject humility that urged self-denial, self-deprecation, and self-abnegation perhaps to the point of cultivating self-hatred as if this pleased God. In a word, Butler rehabilitated the Christian doctrine of self-love. By his day, psychological egoists like Thomas Hobbes, Bernard Mandeville, and Francois de la Rochefoucauld had proposed that all human desires are self-interested and that to be self-interested is to be selfish. It derives from a far more dour view of sin than anything Augustine ever intended. In this grim moment in the 17$^{th}$-18$^{th}$ c, Butler rose to say in a reedy voice that being self-interested is not necessarily to be selfish.

For the psychological egoist there is no such thing as benevolence. All desires are self-seeking and therefore morally culpable. The pious hope of destroying the "self" and replacing it with Christ, following Galatians 2.20 "it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" led the post-Christian psychological egoists of the seventeenth century to despair of genuine benevolence. Butler finds himself in a most odd position as a Christian opposing both the secularized doctrine of sin proposed by Hobbes and the radicalized Calvinist notion of depravity proposed by Pascal and the seventeenth century quietists.

To rescue the goodness of humanity, Butler takes the ancient Christian view that all are endowed with knowledge of right and wrong by God and elevates it to a theological principle. Self-love, he teaches, is living according to conscience, the voice of God within. That is, self-interest, we might say genuine self-interest is obeying the moral law that is the will of God. However, obedience to God is not simply submission to an alien and perhaps arbitrary authority against what one judges to be right by one's own lights. To obey conscience is to act on one's true and proper self. Obedience to the moral law within—as taught regularly in scripture—is self-love.

By contrast, disobeying the voice of conscience with which God endowed us at creation is an act of self-betrayal. It is an act of self-hatred. Butler upended the massive weight of the monastic tradition that carried over into the Reformation teaching that humility, even abject humility pleases God; the less I make of myself the more pleased God will be with me. The more I care for you and the less I tend to myself the better a Christian I am. Rather, Butler argues, active obedience to the moral law is in one's self-interest because it is congruent with one's godly identity.

Butler's reversal is spectacular. He disjoined self-interest from selfishness arguing that self-interest is by no means opposed to benevolent concern for others. There is no necessary division between concern for self and concern for others. Achieving one's own interests may well not deprive the other of what she needs. It prescinds from the binary vision that sees every interaction as potentially adversarial because everything is a zero-sum game of either/or not both/and. Butler argues both/and, win-win, not win/lose. From this vantage point, the recent Marxist inspired liberation identity theologies sustain the commitment to binary opposition that begins with the enmity between God and us established in Genesis 3 now translated into enmity between oppressed and oppressor locked into now conventional roles.

My disappointment with Butler is that he did not regard the work of conscience, the exercise of self-love in obedience to the law of God within as a theological framework. He failed to see that conscientious living is enjoyable and so sustained the impression that doing our duty is to grin and bear it, as Immanuel Kant would later insist. Happiness remained in the secular realm as it does for all the literature on happiness that has accumulated over the past 10-15 years. Still and all, because he argued that conscientious living is obedience to divine law, Butler had the theological scaffolding to mount a theological doctrine of happiness. He did not see this, however.

This brings my narrative of Christian theological history on happiness to an end. I conclude that Christian theology has a doctrine of happiness but that it is overly eschatological and intellectual and that where it does take account of human flourishing in the material and actual senses of the word, it is not strongly theological or in some cases, not theological at all. What is needed is a God-centered account of happiness for this life not to replace but to balance the eschatological hope. Put in other terms, we need a win-win dynamic of the relationship between God and us.

Having set myself this rather daunting goal of correcting what I conclude is a serious flaw in the Christian theological tradition, I identify usable theological resources within the tradition that I traversed. You will not be surprised that of the local candidates I select Aquinas and Butler as especially helpful.

## III.

At this point, it may be helpful to reiterate the basic principles of the doctrine of happiness that I stated at the outset as a simply syllogism. 1) God created for his own

enjoyment. 2) We are central to creation; 3) therefore, God enjoys himself when we flourish. Further, I argue that there is another dimension to our happiness in God. As we advance creation's flourishing we enhance our own well-being and increase our happiness with our life and with our self. God is not simply pleased that we advance creation's flourishing in obedience to the way of life that he crafts for us but we rightly rejoice in our own improvement in living well. This is a strength-based theology in contrast to the defect-based theology of the Christian west.

To construct a robust theological doctrine of Christian I relied on Thomas Aquinas and Joseph Butler.
Aquinas brought to life a minor theme in Augustine developed by Proclus in the fifth century. It is the doctrine of secondary or instrumental cause. His reliance on secondary cause comes in his consideration of providence. While he knew from scripture that God is the cause of everything that is, he had to account for human activity and creativity. Ships are designed by engineers. Houses are designed by architects. Music is written by composers. Human endeavor and ingenuity must be recognized yet God must be reckoned as the cause of everything. Secondary cause argues that while God is the first or ultimate cause of all that is, God imparts his intelligence and creativity "outward" to intelligent creatures, one of which is us, and we thus participate in the divine mind to the extent of human intelligence. In utilizing our intelligence properly, we are deputized as the instrumental cause of things in the world while God remains the ultimate cause because he is the source of human intelligence.

From Butler I took his revived theological notion of self-love also a minor theme in Augustine. Butler's self-love is a theological analogue to what a secularist like Abraham Maslow would much later call self-actualization or self-realization. For Butler, of course, self-love is a thoroughly theological notion. Obedience to what he called conscience, the voice of God within, is self-love and self-actualization theologically speaking. I am not quite as sanguine about the power of conscience as Butler was, even though he understood it to be aroused by preaching. More on that in a minute.

Still, his theological doctrine of self-love as obedience to God, is easily distinguished from destructive behavior that benighted people might pretend to themselves is self-love but is really self-hatred, following Augustine. That is, the rehabilitation of Christian self-love separated self-gratification from self-love. The latter is obedience to God who delights in our flourishing.

I link this with Butler's notion of self-love as obedience to the voice of God or conscience to argue that we love ourselves when we obey God's command to use our godly intelligence constructively for the flourishing of creation, recognizing that we can also use it ill. That is, we are happy when we exercise ourselves following the way of life that advances the flourishing of creation long or at least for the medium-term and God's enjoyment. With Thomas on one side and Butler on the other, I then move to propose a Christian doctrine of happiness.

In doing that, I had to disagree with Butler at one point. He believed that conscience inheres in us all equally well and that within normal limits we have access to it. Calvin called this the "seed of religion" in all persons. As nicely universal as that idea is, I am less sanguine about it than they were. I believe that education is important in how we construe the world morally. That is, what Butler called the voice of God within and Freud called the superego come not only, perhaps not even primarily from within but also from without. Augustine had long before observed an intuitive sense by which people can recognize a good or just person or action even if they cannot be good or just or even act well and justly. Calvin attributed that intuition to the image of God that we are. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that socialization and upbringing are also important in enabling one to envision and understand goodness and justice. Butler recognized this too as we can see from his strong emphasis on preaching. For this reason in my appropriation of Butler I expanded his teaching on self-love—acting on the voice of conscience to include positive divine commands in scripture that lay out a salutary way of life for individuals and communities. That is the path of Psalm 78.

Interest in divine commands of course took me to scripture. Here I was rather surprised. I saw that discussion of divine commands has been among Christian philosophers rather than biblical scholars or theologians and the philosophical discussion undergirds theological presuppositions. Since the fourteenth century, the discussion of divine command has generally assumed that all biblical commands are of a common type; they are generally thought to be voluntarist. The idea is that divine commands are the result of the divine will alone. It is the fact the God wills something that makes it proper and right, even if our intellect tells us that it is morally reprehensible like the command to Abraham that he kill his son. That is, God's commanding it makes something good. God does not command something good because it is good in itself. The moral freight that they carry is not internal to the act but external to it. Its value lies in enabling the one who obeys to be obedient as an end in itself. In other words, voluntarist commands are not necessarily socially valuable. Obedience itself is the value.

This has led to the idea that obedience to divine commands is blind obedience and that piety is obedience for its own sake even if the command is accompanied by a motivating threat. One obeys simply because it is commanded and the dutiful Christian wants to be or become obedient for its own sake. Divine commands may be arbitrary, even obscene as in the case of Genesis 22, or indirectly through Moses in Deuteronomy 20, but no matter. Voluntarist commands do not invite the agent to think about the action but simply to obey.

The excuse offered by soldiers in the Vietnam War who committed civilian atrocities was that they were only following orders; obedience is a solder's duty. Disobeying orders is liable to court martial and punishment. Whistleblowers act outside normal procedure and risk paying a price. The theory of voluntarist divine commands is of this order.

In perusing the Bible, however, I came to see that actually very few of its commands are of this voluntarist type designed to display divine power and threat of punishment. The command not to eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, the command to

Lot's family not to look back, and the command to Abraham to slay Isaac are such. However, I did not find many others although the OT is filled with commands.

The vast majority of commands, including those of the Decalogue, are, for lack of a better description, sighted commands. Most all carry moral freight. Obvious commands like do not murder, commit adultery or steal need no comment. But less direct ones like you may eat eggs but don't kill the mother bird, don't eat the priests' food and do not take from the tribe's booty are equally morally freighted. They invite reflection on one's behavior. Such reflection and action cultivate attitudes toward property and neighbors that are essential for peaceful and harmonious societies. They form people in, for and with the common good. Rules of tithing, leaving the corners of the field unharvested, and sabbatical remission of debts assume and promote moral reflection. All these practices aim a forming character and the values that construct civil society.

There are of course, commands whose social utility is not as transparent to us. Biblical purity laws that distinguish animals that may be eaten from those that may not, or the prohibition of yoking an ox with a donkey (Dt 22.10) and of wearing garments woven of wool and linen together (Dt 22.11) may be morally opaque to us today. Yet they appear along with clearly humanitarian commands and rules of sexual propriety whose moral value is more apparent to us.

What binds them together is the principle of discerning what belongs where and which activities to pursue and others not. When taken not only literally but also as guidelines for communal living they cultivate a discerning attitude toward touching the world. Together they form a moral compass by which navigate one's life discriminatingly. Christians have always deemed some activities preferable to others, and like rabbinic Judaism, have sometimes prohibited activities that may become problematic. The point here is not about the inherent value of various acts themselves but of the notion that life is to be approached cautiously and with regard to the social effects of specific actions.

I also examined scripture's teachings on happiness in the Torah, Psalms and Proverbs. Ashrey is a salient OT word often translated as happy. Being *ashrey* is the privilege of Israel as the people of God in covenantal faithfulness of obedience to divine commands that turn out on close inspection to be guidelines for healthy families and communities. Ashrey is not a feeling state of mild euphoria as happiness is often portrayed in the American marketplace. It is the sense of contentment, satisfaction and enjoyment that accompany the excellent way of life of the morally transparent biblical/asherist commands.

A theme that often accompanies *ahreyhood* in scripture is a phrase often translated as "fear of the Lord" This translation is a bit misleading to Christian ears steeped in the post-biblical Christian emphasis on divine wrath. A better translation is reverence for the Lord. This reverence is like the filial "fear" of a loving child rather than the cringing fear of an employee as Paul put it in Galatians 4. It is closer to dutiful love of the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son who was persuaded that being a productive member of his

father's household was the best thing for him and the household community. "The beginning of wisdom is reverence for the Lord."

Examining the Torah, psalms, and Proverbs led me to formulate asherism. It is an offering for Christian ethics based on the win-win scenario that God has laid down principles for an excellent way of life for us in Israel's scriptures and that we, both those born into and those grafted onto the tree of life of Israel, will delight God as we participate in and advance our own flourishing and that of our community.

I also examined the Gospel of John and concluded that eternal life in John is a teaching on happiness that may also be considered asherist. It too comes from being part of community and enjoying eternal life is by abiding in Jesus and his teachings, especially his teaching to love one another. Jesus' command to being joined to the Father by abiding in him and in his word and teaching on love is, I believe, another way of talking about covenant faithfulness in another setting and in another time from those of the Torah, Psalms and Proverbs, but I do not read it as discontinuous with it in spirit. The language is completely different and it was worked out in a tense situation that focused on one Jew rather than on corporate Israel itself. Yet both sets of text offer what I dare to call a happy way of life with God in community. Israel takes refuge in God and in his commandments, dwells in his house, and seeks his face, while the Johannine Jews take refuge in Jesus and his proclamation that he has come from the Father to bring them new birth, light, life abundant or eternal life. Uniting them is God's sending us a way of life that delights him and us as we thrive and promote creation to thrive.

## IV.

Asherism stands mid-way between two forms of ethics, agapism on one hand and eudaemonism on the other. Modern Christian ethicists often contrast the agapist ethic of self-sacrifice (the truly Christian ethic) with the eudaemonist ethic of happiness or flourishing associated with Aristotle, adopted by Thomas Aquinas and rejected by Immanuel Kant the first great modern ethicist.

Many Christians embrace agapism as unstinting sacrificial love because it seems to imitate Jesus in his self-sacrificial death. He gave himself for others and we should too. Origen's mother had to steal his clothes to keep him from martyrdom. Christians distrust eudaemonism because it seems to authorize happiness as a proper goal of life, and that is seen as selfish and therefore as Christianly untoward. Christian ethics has sometimes pitted agapism against eudaemonism, especially in the form of Aristotle's virtue ethics, as a choice between self-sacrifice and selfishness. Asherism argues that such an argument misunderstands agapism and fails to envision a genuinely theological understanding of eudaemonism. Asherism is a *tertiam quid* that I hope draws on the strengths of both and addresses at least some weaknesses of both.

### Agapism

The agapist norm is unconditional love. We should spill ourselves in service to others. The assumption here is that unconditional service is self-sacrificial and that Christian

piety calls for giving to and for others until it hurts and then some. In giving of one's time, talent, and treasure, one has less of these for one's own enjoyment. According to this ethic this is all to the good because the Christian way of life, following Jesus is a life of unstinting service to the neighbor or now as we say to the 'other' not the neighbor near-by but those most different from us where giving becomes a bit more risky and tricky I would add.

While I am not aware of an explicit connection being made in this regard, the idea of unconditional self-sacrificial service as proper Christian ethics on the horizontal level, it seems to fit with a view of proper Christian piety on the vertical level. Picking up on Augustine's mature theology—that we all deserve to be vessels of wrath from whom some are chosen to be exempt—Calvin taught that there is no part of us that is worthy of God except the image of God in us that remains underneath our sinful depravity. God loves only that of himself in us, the rest of us being worse than useless in God's eyes.

If nothing good remains in us after the fall, piety calls us to self-denial, and self-abnegation, Calvin says, for these are the tools of humility which is the only proper stance before God. Here the goal is not to try to please or placate God with our humility, however, but to place ourselves in the proper position to accept God's will for us whether that be election or rejection by training us that we deserve rejection.

The humility topos, so powerful in western theology, comes I think from the 7th chapter of the RB on humility that elaborated Galatians 4.1-7 where Paul argues that growth in Christian piety is to pass from servile to filial fear, the one obedience based on fear of punishment the other obedience based on reverent love for God.

[My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property;
2 but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.
3 So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world.
4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.]

The goal is to move from obedience out of fear to obedience based on pure love of Christ.

Chapter 7 constructs a ladder of 12 steps from pride to humility away from self-exaltation to the highest peak of humility. It is the quintessential picture of monastic piety. Quickly, the grades of humility are 1) obeying God's commandments in fear of being cast into hell not following our own will and being on guard against the evil desires of the body; 2) improvement is recognized when one does not bother to please himself but follows the commandments of his own will; 3) when one obeys one's superiors from love of God; 4) when one puts up with everything painful, unjust and all adverse conditions patiently and obediently; 5) the confession to another that one harbors evil thoughts in one's heart; 6) accepting all that is crude and harsh and thinking oneself a poor and worthless servant at one's appointed tasks; 7) when one not only says but

believes that one is an inferior and common wretch reciting Ps 22.6 “I am a worm and no man”; 8) is doing only what is demanded of him 9) when one speaks only when spoken to; 10) when one no longer laughs; 11) when all one’s speech is gentle, soft, serious, and terse; and finally 12) when whatever one is doing one repeats Lk 18.13 “Lord, I a sinner am not worthy to life my eyes to heaven” and Ps 38.8 “I am bowed down and totally humbled.”

Bernard of Clairvaux elaborated this chapter of the rule in the 12th century in two immensely influential treatises, “On Loving God” and “On the Steps of Humility and Pride” in which he elaborated Benedict’s ladder and added its analogue in the descent into pride.

Although Calvin was not a monk, he admired Bernard a lot. He and Luther did not challenge monastic piety but expanded its reach by carrying it out of the monastery and into daily life of humble self-denial as Christianly proper. It seems that agapism on the horizontal level and the drive toward humility before God on the other are of a piece.

The problem with this piety of sacrificial humility is that I find it to be both psychologically and theologically unsound. Psychologically, as Butler taught us, self-love and I would add self-care are not opposed to service to others but necessary for it, especially for doing it well. People who cannot or do not take care of themselves may easily use others to make up that lack in the name of serving them. Further, caring for others may be, indeed often is deeply satisfying and enjoyable. Using one’s time energy and resources for the sake of others is the way one wants to use them. Not only that, but sustained practice in using oneself and ones resources well enhances one’s ability to serve even better as one becomes more efficient and agile at it. This inevitably brings satisfaction and contentment, healing the soul of what Augustine so aptly called distorted love, the true essence of sin.

On the theological side, sacrificial humility that cultivates self-denigration to promote filial fear of God as the Christian west has embodied Paul’s contrast between servile and filial fear cannot delight God if his commitment to creation for its flourishing with the blessing of procreation and this big garden for which we are responsible is genuine. If God delights in our doing good and being well and doing well at being good, the sacrificial humility of agapism must surely displease God because it does not build the individual up in flourishing and its enablement to produce more flourishing but intends to discourage and disenable by distrusting independent thinking about what living well and doing good require.

Eudaimonism

Most of the ancient philosophical moralists were eudaemonists. Their spiritual pieties all sought flourishing. The chief text for contemporary virtue ethics is the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle. The work has 10 books, the first and last being on happiness, suggesting that the whole is a treatise to that end. Until the rise of the current advertising industry designed to keep the economy humming, happiness was a serious topic of

conversation. As noted previously, Christians did not shy away from the topic. They do not belly up to it now because it is so readily confused with eating chocolate, casual sex, and buying power. That is not our problem, however. Christians have a right to resume talking about happiness as the goal of the Christian life.

Eudaemonism was taken off the Christian table by Immanuel Kant, a pietist who argued that moral behavior is no more and no less than doing one's duty so long as one not enjoy doing it. Now we should hear echoes of the RB 7 from which all pleasure and enjoyment are absent in tending to one's appointed tasks in obedience to one's superiors. In Kant's most frequently read work in ethics, *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he insisted that ethics is obedience to duty *tout court* and that enjoying performing one's duty disqualifies the act as moral precisely because enjoying oneself might be the motive behind the activity. This would be a selfish motivation and so the activity could not be considered moral. Kant's stern pietism insisted that morality and pleasure must be strictly separated. Here it is not the act itself, but the motive behind it that determines the moral value of an act. While the Christian moral tradition had a strong interest in the inherent value of acts—stealing and adultery are immoral on that view—here Kant is one with another aspect of the western tradition that holds that pleasure and morality are incompatible by definition. He did acknowledge that there are times when one may enjoy doing one's duty but that must be completely incidental to the commitment to duty for its own sake, not its hope.

Note then, that pleasure, even apt pleasure is suspect and that for a variety of reasons. Now, Christians well understand that without pleasure the human race would long ago have died out and that that is contrary to the divine will. Yet they have been skittish about articulating appropriate pleasure that is desirable and to be encouraged.

Moralistic opposition between goodness and pleasure is, however, arbitrary as Joseph Butler first pointed out. After the moral egoists—Hobbes, Bernard de Mandeville Francois de la Rochefoucauld among others—Kant could not see beyond the agapic view that doing good must be self-sacrificial and therefore painful and not pleasurable. He had no thought for the compatibility of something's being painful at one level yet pleasurable at another or that one is enhanced by serving others well.

To follow the format used in the discussion of agapism immediately above that first considered psychological and then theological objections to these moral theories, I begin with a psychological or rather a Christian psychological objection.

Aristotle, like all the ancients, worked under the Platonic principle that to know the good is to do the good. Failing to be good is the result of ignorance. Moral education will require far more than didactic instruction, as no one can doubt Plato understood well, but for him and his scions, that knowledge can be found in the soul. Christian Platonists did not challenge this until Augustine of Hippo, searching his own soul concluded that the soul is not rational but subject to unruly desires that escape the control of Plato's charioteer, reason. With himself as the model, Augustine taught the Christian west that to know the good may be to long for it, but it is far from being able to do it. The Christian

criticism is that speaking, Aristotle was psychologically overly-optimistic. Sin intervenes between what we know we should do and what we do do, as Paul knew (Rom. 7).

That humans are stuck between knowing the good and doing it is grounds for several Christian theological objections to eudaemonism, only one of which I will voice here. It is that Aristotelian eudaemonism, grounded as it is in the cardinal virtues is unable in and of itself to provide adequate guidance for healthy communities without what Jews and Christians know as divine commands and guidelines. Aristotle relied on the values that guided the Athenian gentry in the habits of magnanimity, self-control, public spiritedness, strength of character, and courage. Some of these were adopted by Christians to be sure, but finally they are difficult to commend becuase have no supernatural authority behind them. There is no commanding voice that the community recognizes as authoring and authorizing its way of life that would bind the community together in a common understanding of the common good from beyond itself.

Asherism offers a corrective to the agapism's arbitrary objection to pleasure and to eudaemonism's want of transcendent authority for its virtues with its theory of divine command that charts a middle path between these two options.

To agapism: Caring for creatures that they may flourish may involve one's time, talent, and treasure, but that does not require self-sacrifice in the sense of giving oneself up, or away, self-denial, self-neglect, or selflessness. On the contrary, when one brings one's strengths and skills to bear on a situation that can benefit from them, be it feeding the hungry, nurturing children, or saving the whales one is using oneself adroitly as the asherist divine commands of which I spoke earlier intend. Using oneself discerningly and adroitly enskills one to continue the activity and do it ever better. Self-enhancement, not self-denial is the way to flourishing that enables creation to flourish to God's delight.

Having been formed in and conformed to a way of life for flourishing in practicing that way, one's skills become sharper, one's vision keener, and one's decisions more efficient. As one becomes more adept at enabling one's garden to grow over time one enhances oneself and grows in obedience to God's charge that we and creation flourish for his enjoyment and ours.

Enhancing one's ability to use one's talent, time and treasure to enhance creation's flourishing prepare for a win-win situation. One must certainly expend effort, often at considerable cost and energy to become skilled at anything. But those efforts are only sacrificial on one sense of the term. They are deeply rewarding and joyful and pleasurable in quite another sense that both minimizes the sacrifices called for and turns them into desirable opportunities, for they build the skills, character and expertise that constitute becoming excellent in some manner.

While expertise can certainly be deployed perniciously, I would go so far as to suggest that self-development from practice and experience, when pursued within a framework of divine guidance broadly applied is not only pleasurable, but can eclipse or even begin to repair less pretty aspects of one's personality endowment. To put that back in theological

terms, living in obedience to divine commands—again broadly applied—can and should eat away at sin over time. Self-care is not necessarily selfish. While some behavior undertaken for the end of happiness can be self-defeating, under the authority of asherist commands, that expertise will be used delightfully for the benefit of all parties.

To Eudaemonism: As a theory of divine command, asherism speaks directly to philosophical eudemonism. The theological objection is that without a supernatural foundation that claims an authoritative voice, Aristotle's ethics is vulnerable to the values and virtues of the day. Given that support for the commanding voice of God, while respected in some Christian circles, is not well received in others, and is even less popular among the public, asherism will have a limited appeal. Nevertheless, if the asherist way of life is appealing because it promotes both personal and social well-being, its indisputable claim to divine authority may not be the great obstacle that it would have been under the conditions of modernity.

The post-modern ethos is again beginning to respect the religious impulse that craves a spiritual framework of meaning to shape experience and within which to shape ideas in the face of impending nihilism and a purely materialist option that while it has much to commend it, lacks the interpretive power of poetry and the beauty of moral elegance. The resurgence of various religious fundamentalisms may be disturbing but they betray a longing for divine guidance that need not foreclose discerning thought and judicious reflection on the wisdom of the ages that reside in the repositories of knowledge in the various religious traditions.

Discerning hearts will always yearn for guidance. Modernity touted both moral autonomy and individuality. This has been liberating and empowering but together they have also set people adrift from community and commitment to the common good producing serious social problems. Each solution to a problem breeds problems of its own. Asherism, seeking a middle way between the dangers of fear of pleasure on one hand and its pursuit in nonmoral terms on the other will undoubtedly breed problems of its own. But it does suggest a Christian doctrine of happiness that promotes personal and communal well-being simultaneously.

## V.

Now some of you may well be asking what is Christian about agapism with its focus on divine commands that Paul teaches that Christ liberates us from. Is agapism a Christian ethic? Here I ask you to keep in mind that I suggested that justification is not the accomplishment of salvation but its starting point. Doctrinally speaking, asherism is reconnecting sanctification and eschatology to justification or absolution. If justification is a belief that God absolves one of the consequences of sin and that belief arouses trust, love, and gratitude, a consequence of justification will be a turn to the way of life that God commands. The ordo salutis here is a movement of the soul toward God that has several aspects to it. In contemporary parlance, we might see it as a psychological transformation of the self. Paul called it a new creation and Simone Weil called it a turning of the head to look directly on the love of God in response to the blessings made

known in the life of Israel in Jesus Christ and in the life of obedience to divine guidance now eagerly undertaken in love. Unlike Luther who lived in an age when the voice of divine wrath overpowered the melody of divine love, ours may be an age that sings of divine love at the expense of divine guidance that is to be distinguished from divine wrath.

The biblical witnesses are points at which one may enter the hermeneutical circle whereby God gets our attention to a better way for ourselves and our communities under his guidance. Together the saving narratives draw us godward that we may, as Augustine said speaking of the incarnation—by which he meant the whole narrative of the second article of the creed from the annunciation to the session of Christ at the right hand of the Father, "First, we had to be persuaded how much God loved us, in case out of sheer despair we lacked the courage to reach up to him" (DT 4.1.2, Hill, p. 153). Luther experienced that despair immediately while Calvin believed it first had to be induced so that then people would appreciate its being addressed by Christ. This may reflect their different temperaments as well as different cultural settings. Thus, it is the terrible responsibility of the preacher to address those needing to be rescued from despair and those needing to be thrown into it in the same audience.

Asherism's nuancing of the classic Christian narrative creation-fall-redemption is simply to point out that redemption is a process rather than a moment. It begins when God draws us with cords of love so that we undertake and grow into obedience joyfully because that is what we want for ourselves, those we love and those lives we impact knowingly and unknowingly. Our redemption is God's delight and there can be no greater bliss on earth or in heaven than God and we celebrating our mutual delight together.