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EUDAIMONIC HAPPINESS AS A CONVERGENCE POINT FOR RELIGION AND MEDICINE: THE UKRAINIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The paper is aimed to present arguments for consideration of eudaimonic happiness as a convergence point between religion (Christian denominations) and medicine in the contemporary world in general and Ukraine in particular. Similarities between eudaimonic definition of happiness and traditional interpretation of happiness as a virtuous good life in historic Christianity are shown. The present tendency of modernized Christian denominations in Ukraine to elaborate a secular context of happiness concept is traced. Based on analysis of contemporary religious information resources and documents, it is shown that nowadays the majority of Christian denominations in Ukraine concur in considering happiness with others, happiness in family relationships and parenthood as the essence of happiness in the earthly life. Correlation between health and happiness is explicated as well as the contribution of medicine and religion to a person's healthy and happy life. It is demonstrated with reference to the results of multidisciplinary scientific studies that the interpretation of happiness as a good virtuous life the key component of which is relationships has a significant favorable impact on mental and physical health of a person. Relevance of the European experience of the happiness-oriented medicine for the ongoing healthcare reform in Ukraine is outlined.

Keywords: happiness, religion, Christianity, eudaimonism, health, family, medicine.

Relevance of the Research Topic

The values shift launched by secularization resulted in what Charles Taylor calls the Age of Authenticity¹ and what Luc Ferry specifies as “humanization of the divine” and “divinization of the human.”² This contemporary worldview paradigm—that has been forming since the 1960s—manifests itself in individualization, freedom to choose values and beliefs, aim to be oneself and find one's authentic path, and a focus on private and personal. In recent couple of decades, the pursuit of happiness has been topping the “must do” list of a

¹ C. Taylor. *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 302–304, 309.

² L. Ferry. *Le religieux après la religion*. (Paris, Grasset, 2004), pp.100–101.

contemporary person. Hedonic happiness as pursuit of pleasures is propagated in consumerist culture through mass media. Life satisfaction rate is measured by means of the Happy Planet Index³ attempts to create favorable conditions for a person's happiness and well-being are made through implementation of Sustainable Development Principles (partnerships, peace, equity, ecological decision-making etc). Despite the fact that the consensus on definition of happiness has not quite been reached yet, there is no doubt that the phenomenon of happiness nowadays reorients all spheres of public and private life. Happiness becomes a key value that all contemporary social institutions are supposed to consider. Religion and medicine, in particular, are no exception.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on a question: can happiness nowadays become a convergence point for religion and medicine?

Christian Interpretations of Happiness throughout the Historical Development of Christianity

Let us start with religion and its contribution to the happiness of a contemporary person. Considering the fact that the Ukrainian culture in particular and European culture in general were shaped by the Christian tradition, and the majority of the religious population in Ukraine currently belongs to Christian denominations by religion, in this paper, Christianity is implied.

On the first glance and especially from the historical perspective, Christianity does not quite seem to be a happiness-oriented religion. As Luka Zevnik puts it with reference to Michel Foucault: "The Christian refusal of sin marked the refusal/sacrifice of the self that preceded the experience of happiness [...] could be called a 'negative constitution of the subject.' Insofar as the birth of happiness was in large part constituted as a break away from the Christian experience of sin, the pursuit of happiness represents a refusal of this negative constitution of the subject."⁴ In the Christian interpretation, a subject has to neutralize desire for the sensual, whereas in the Modern interpretation, the subject of happiness has to liberate and fulfill the desire in order to achieve happiness. Zevnik emphasizes the connection of the Modern pursuit of happiness with what Michel Foucault calls the positive constitution of the subject.

³ Index (an index due to which human well-being and ecological efficiency are measured in each country of the world: <http://happyplanetindex.org>. Accessed 26.01.2021.

⁴ L. Zevnik. *Critical Perspectives in Happiness Research: The Birth of Modern Happiness*. (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014), p. 135.

This contrast between Christianity and Modern happiness, however, is only relevant within the framework of hedonism, in which happiness relates to sensual pleasure. The hedonic definition of happiness is implicit in Zevnik's remark that the tension is present in both kinds of experience which position an individual to never be fulfilled: the Christian is never morally perfect and "clean" enough and "the modern subject of happiness follows an external imperative to enjoy and be happy, but never succeeds in being happy enough."⁵ The latter is characteristic of hedonism, since sensual pleasure never provides us with sustainable and lasting happiness and self-fulfillment. A person constantly needs a new portion of pleasure, needs *more* to feel good again: more food, more entertainment, new and more expensive things, higher salary—and it is never enough. It is only fitting that this is a mode of happiness propagated by consumerist culture.

Eudaimonic happiness—happiness resulting from a purposeful and meaningful life—implies a different mode of experience which might apply in both secular and religious (Christian) contexts. As Christopher Jamison shows it in his comparison, the contemporary consumerist definition of happiness involves *feeling* good, whereas "Platonic contemplation involves *knowing* the good, the sense of knowing here being like that of knowing a friend rather than knowing a fact. Aristotelian virtue involves *doing* good, as living out the virtues."⁶ He goes on to write, "Platonic contemplation and Aristotelian virtue are key elements of monastic living. Indeed, the two are linked at the core of the monastic vision of happiness."⁷ Happiness in the form of thanksgiving for life and salvation also has its historical advocates. St Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas argued that a person is happy in the measure that he grows in the goodness of God.

The conditions of persecution in the times of early Christianity required Christians to be prepared to suffer for their faith at any moment. When Christianity became the official religion in the Roman Empire and persecutions ceased, Christians began to practice asceticism called "daily martyrdom" that implied ascetic life and self-imposed suffering. They fasted, isolated themselves, damaged their bodies, and practiced sleeplessness and the restriction of water in order to form a new religious self. There were two models of ascetic practice: according to the first, physical pain is useful for the insight it produces, a tool of self-knowledge; according to the second, physical pain and self-discipline are the results of

⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

⁶ C. Jamison. *Finding Happiness: A Monk's Guide to a Fulfilling Life*. (London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008).

⁷ Ibid.

self-knowledge and awareness of one's sinfulness.⁸ In the theology of martyrdom, pain and suffering were considered as a mode of imitation of, and unity with, Christ. The Original Sin, the fall of Adam and Eve, oriented people to seek heavenly delight to rejoin a lost paradise. So, permanent happiness was the ultimate goal of the Christian life, although it was impossible to achieve it in this life on earth, only in the life after death. "Transitory" happiness, happiness in present life was considered elusive, worthless and dangerous. Devotional manuals from the Christian West generally undervalued or discounted happiness.⁹

Conditions in the contemporary world are different compared to those of the Middle Ages. Secularization results in, as Peter Berger calls it, the "situation of a market"¹⁰ for religions in the 20th and 21st centuries. Nowadays, a person has the right and freedom to choose values, worldview, religion; they are not given by default any more. There is a vast range of "supply" on "the market of religious beliefs," and a competitive religion is the one that meets the demand, that is, satisfies spiritual requests of a contemporary person, of which happiness is the foremost. "The twentieth-century Christians frequently feel dismayed at the focus on suffering in traditional Christianity,"¹¹ Margaret Miles writes. She continues: "Since historical Christians have not articulated a theology of happiness, it becomes the task of the twentieth-century Christians to find ways to express the importance of happiness as gratitude for being and delight in the beauty of the created world."¹²

Happiness and Christianity Nowadays

A study was made by Kayonda Hubert Ngamaba and Debbie Soni¹³ on whether followers of different religions experience different levels of happiness and life satisfaction and how it is affected by a country's economic and cultural environment. The study was based on the data from the World Value Survey (from 1981 to 2014). Researchers discovered that Protestants, Buddhists, and Roman Catholics were happier and more satisfied with their

⁸ M. Miles. *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988), p. 174.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 165–167.

¹⁰ П. Бергер. "Религия и проблема убедительности." *Неприкосновенный запас культуры: дебаты о политике и культуре*. [Religion and a Problem of Persuasiveness." Iron Rations of Culture: Debates on Politics and Culture] 2003, № 6 (32). Available at: <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2003/6/berger.html>. Accessed 12.08.2020.

¹¹ M. Miles. *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988), p. 164.

¹² Ibid., p. 175.

¹³ K. H. Ngamaba and D. Soni. "Are Happiness and Life Satisfaction Different Across Religious Groups? Exploring Determinants of Happiness and Life Satisfaction." *Journal of Religion and Health*. 2017. pp. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0481-2>. Accessed 12.10.2020.

lives compared to other religious groups; Orthodox Christians have the lowest subjective well-being compared with both other religions followers and non-religious people. The study showed that religiosity and the country's level of development both have significant impact on people's happiness and life satisfaction. Those Orthodox Christians who reported the lowest happiness and life satisfaction level were mainly located in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It was found, however, that, with the same GDP per capita, people living in Latin America are happier than people living in Eastern Europe. This demonstrates that religious belonging (as well as cultural traditions) does matter.

The explanation might be found in the level of modernization of different branches of Christianity. By modernization I mean here "humanization of the divine" and "divinization of the human," when God does not remain a cold, severe, and unreachable transcendence, when religious tradition receives "human face" and becomes closer to people's lives and daily problems, when God gets down to the Earth and value of the human rises. High rates of reported happiness and life satisfaction in Protestant and Roman Catholics groups prove that this is related to modernization here. The Roman Catholic Church underwent such modernization in 1962-1965 during the Second Vatican Council. Protestantism was already born modernized, claiming the value of earthly life, professional vocation, and family relationships as ways to serve God in *saeculum* (this world), and, therefore, producing joy from self-fulfillment in this earthly life.

It might be assumed that happiness nowadays becomes a convergence point between traditional forms of religion and secularity. The focus on happiness has a modernizing effect on traditional forms of religion. The narrative of happiness makes a traditional religion closer to spiritual demands of a contemporary person living in a secular "lifeworld" and more relevant to his/her daily challenges.

Contemporary hierarchs of the Christian denominations are actually elaborating a theology of happiness, claiming in their sermons that true happiness is in co-presence and co-participation in the goodness of God. Bishop Venedyct (Aleksiychuk) of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Eparchy of Chicago chose happiness as a subject for his speech for TEDxLviv. Techniques for a happy life that he shared do resonate with the secular interpretation of happiness and with the results of happiness studies in positive psychology. Bishop Venedykt claimed that "when we are people of faith and we believe in God, we believe that He as the Father provides us with all the best for our lives at this moment."¹⁴ As

¹⁴ В. Алексійчук. "Щастя тут і зараз" [Happiness Here and Now]. ((Львів, 2020). TEDxLviv.

believers, people are meant to be happy here and now in this earthly life, to rejoice by focusing on the present and by being ourselves (being authentic), to be happy together with other people (family and friends). Bishop Venedykt adds that God wants people to be happy in this life, at the present moment.

The leader of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk asserts that “family is God’s recipe of human happiness.”¹⁵ Family as a way to happiness¹⁶ has recently become one key subject and is explicated and vividly discussed in official blogs and podcasts among the catechesis resources of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church.

The leader of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Epiphanius also considers family as a foundation of human happiness.¹⁷ Metropolitan Epiphanius defines the purpose of a family as caring about happiness and emotional and physical health of the Other. The law of love, he claims, consists in contributing to the happiness of other people.

In the social doctrine of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople,¹⁸ happiness is mentioned only once (in chapter 26), and it is fulfilled through family relationships and parenthood. The tendency to elaborate a secular context of happiness concept might be traced in different modernized Christian churches and denominations: significance and value are ascribed to the phenomenon of happiness in the earthly life. Happiness with others, in relationships, represents a secular (earthly) dimension of happiness legitimated by contemporary Christian religious tradition.

The idea of a family as a pathway for a person’s happiness has become a subject of consensus between different religions in Ukraine which integrates their efforts to contribute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSW0wsEfw5c>. Accessed 12.08.2020.

¹⁵ “Сім’я – це Божий рецепт людського щастя!” – Глава УГКЦ запрошує взяти участь у Всеукраїнській ході на захист прав дітей і сімей.” [Family is God’s Recipe of Human Happiness! – Leader of UGCC invites to join the All-Ukrainian March for Protecting the Rights of Children and Families] *Київська Архiepархія УГКЦ*. <https://ugcc.kiev.ua/blog/simya-tse-je-bozhuj-retsept-lyudskoho-schastya-hlava-uhkts-zaprosahuje-vzyaty-uchast-u-vseukrajinskij-hodi-na-zahyst-prav-ditej-i-simej/>. Accessed 12.08.2020.

¹⁶See O. Сенчук. “Щастя в сім’ї.” *Комісія у справах освіти та виховання УГКЦ*. [“Happiness in Family.” Commission on Education and Upbringing of UGCC;] <https://www.edu-ugcc.org.ua/shchastia-v-sim-i/>. Accessed 12.08.2020; “Три уявлення про щастя.” [Three ideas of happiness.] *Патріарша катехитична комісія УГКЦ*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0Ng8u-xgi0>. Accessed 12.08.2020.

¹⁷ “Дарувати щастя іншій людині”: звернення Блаженнішого Митрополита Епіфанія.” [Grant Happiness to Another Person’: Allocution of His Beatitude the Metropolitan Epiphanius]. *5 канал*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFXxQd74c-U>. Accessed 12.08.2020.

¹⁸“Соціальна доктрина Вселенського Патріархату.” [Social Doctrine of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.] *Cerkvarium*. https://cerkvarium.org/dokumenty/tserkovni/sotsialna-doktrina-vselenskogo-patriarkhatu?fbclid=IwAR2yWj89YyQrWT0IvdbFRSDGoRZpEld_nYqicXr2D2pEDXxw-eREFcr5_Jk. Accessed 12.08.2020.

practically in boosting people's mental health and well-being. Since 2016, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations has held an annual event—the All-Ukrainian March for Protecting the Rights of Children and Families. The event is aimed at reinforcement of values of the traditional family and promotion of harmonious upbringing and healthy development of children.

It seems that in the doctrine of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the concept of happiness remains interpreted in a rather traditional way and its secular context (happiness of a person in this earthly life) is not quite elaborated. The leader of the UOC-MP, Metropolitan of Kyiv Onufrius, outlines in general terms that bliss, as well as eternal life, can only be found in God and “a person who has not found God or is not searching for Him is unhappy.”¹⁹ Wealth, health, and other earthly goods are perishable; even possessing them a person remains unhappy because without God his/her soul is damaged with anxiety. In order to be happy, a person is supposed “to comprehend God's truth that indicates a correct way to the Kingdom of Heaven.”²⁰ Based on this sermon, it might be concluded that, in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, on the one hand, happiness is defined as a virtuous life pleasing to God, and, on the other hand, a vector of the pursuit of happiness is oriented towards the afterlife.

What makes the Christian interpretation of happiness similar with the eudaimonic one is the consideration of happiness as a certain way of life, leading a “good life.” Paul Wadell emphasizes that “the study of morality can best be understood as training in happiness, as an ongoing initiation into the desires, attitudes, habits, and practices that make for a happy and good life.”²¹

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), Jesus Christ claims that the meek and humble will be deeply happy and blessed. By freely imitating Christ's nonviolent nurturing power of love and truth, humans become happy. Christ teaches that blessedness comes from self-giving love, merciful humility, continual truth seeking, effortful peacemaking, altruistic action, friendship and engaged cooperation. No external circumstances can take away

¹⁹ “Митрополит Онуфрій: Найвище завдання – пошук Бога, решта додасться.” [Metropolitan Onufrius: The Highest Task is the Search of God, the Rest Will Be Added.] *Спілка православних журналістів*. https://spzh.news/ua/news/72569-blazhennejshij-onufrij-naivysshaja-zadacha-poisk-boga-ostalynoje-prilozhitsya?fbclid=IwAR2ON9X79fzQIVPmZZYMkb6rOkSw5wO6uEkMv_U3NqJ_KdvGRJtfo8yNihc. Accessed 12.10.2020.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ P. J. Wadell. *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2008), p. 4.

happiness produced by the life of loving, giving, and receiving.²² The Auxiliary Bishop of Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese Olexandr Yazlovetskyi²³ emphasizes a metaphorical definition of the Beatitudes articulated by Christ in the Sermon of the Plain (Luke 6). By the end of Bishop Olexandr's explanation, we understand that happiness is the result of a particular way of life described by Christ, a "good life" (virtuous life that resonates with the eudaimonic interpretation), a life in accordance with God's Will. A person becomes happy from living this particular life and having a particular attitude. Four main steps provide a good/virtuous life and, therefore, happiness: being poor—meaning, not being attached to material things; being hungry—striving for the Truth and knowledge; weeping—being sorry for one's sins and trying to improve oneself; and being persecuted for their faith in God—having strong convictions, being unafraid of judgment and not trying to please everyone.

These steps are quite complicated for many people, but those who succeed in making them rejoice from living a good/virtuous life. Happiness attained in this way is sustainable, lasting, and resilient to any unfavorable circumstances. This is actually the eudaimonic happiness: happiness is produced by exercising virtues, by doing the good. To recapitulate, the eudaimonic happiness, indeed, provides a person with emotional resilience, endurance, and adaptivity in the face of discomfort and unpleasant circumstances, hence, boosts a person's mental health.

Happiness-Oriented Medicine and Contribution of Eudaimonic-Christian Interpretation of Happiness for Mental Health

Contemporary science explains how and why this eudaimonic-Christian approach is efficient in attaining sustainable and lasting happiness. Neuroscientists discovered "the helper principle": acts of altruism generate emotionally positive feelings that correlate with activated reward signals in the brain. Studies on forgiveness show that "actively forgiving enemies and past injuries produces feelings of happiness, as well as improving different measures of physical health."²⁴ The Harvard Study of Adult Development shows that love,

²² S. Callahan. *Called to Happiness: Where Faith and Psychology Meet*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), pp. 46–47.

²³ "Свангеліє дня та проповідь о. Олександра Язловецького, 11 вересня 2019 р." [Gospel of a Day and a Sermon of the Father Olexandr Yazlovetskyi, September, 11, 2019]. *Католицький Медіа-Центр Конференції римсько-католицьких єпископів України*. http://kmc.media/2019/09/11/yevangeliye-dnya-ta-propovid-o-oleksandra-yazloveckogo-11-veresnya-2019-r.html?fbclid=IwAR3EPL-Kne9nOUT8iYV1CjMhwDB_KK1Ny_YjnbECs_B_duPDDgiHhWJY8dc. Accessed 12.08.2020."

²⁴ S. Callahan. *Called to Happiness: Where Faith and Psychology Meet*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), p. 48.

close and strong relationships with family and friends contribute to health and longevity.²⁵ “Those who are fulfilled and rejoice in the present can deactivate and reshape the negative patterns and configurations of the past.”²⁶

Belonging to a religious community, connectedness, and the feeling of belonging to something bigger than a person his or herself (God’s Grace, God’s Design, and World religious community) are other significant factors of eudaimonic happiness. Even during the COVID-19 quarantine restrictions, members of religious communities feel united following the livestream of the Service from different sanctuaries via the Internet.

People have a capacity to feel positive emotions and happiness from anticipating pleasant events in the future.²⁷ Here is where Christian hope comes onstage. Hope is the capacity of a person to create an optimistic scenario of his/her future. Hope helps us to rejoice in the present by anticipating the happy future, even if it is only in the life after death.

Medicine also provides a person with hope for the happy future, exclusively, however, in this life. According to the definition of the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Integration of health and well-being in this definition relates medicine to happiness. The task of medicine is not just to bring a person from suffering to a neutral mood or “0” point on a scale of emotions by eliminating symptoms and reducing pain. The purpose is to help a person and provide him/her with tools to enjoy life in a healthy way (healthy diet, healthy activities, healthy ways to get pleasure, and healthy social interaction). This purpose intersects with what religion also provides. Happiness-oriented medicine is an extremely relevant issue on the Ukrainian agenda considering the ongoing healthcare reform. The happiness-oriented strategy of healthcare policies is supposed to be aimed at a broad range of new tasks, in particular, to boost the happiness and well-being of people living with chronic conditions (psoriasis, diabetes, etc.), to maximize a happy experience of patients during treatment, etc. The research results and practical experience of the Health & Happiness Research Foundation²⁸ (that is aimed at adopting happiness measures in healthcare systems)

²⁵ L. Mineo. “Good genes are nice, but joy is better.” *The Harvard Gazette*. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/>. Accessed 12.08.2020.

²⁶ Callahan. *Called to Happiness: Where Faith and Psychology Meet*. p. 49.

²⁷ Р. Пурий and У. Луц. *Планування щасливого життя* [Happy Life Planning.]. (Львів: Літопис, 2019), pp. 92–93.

²⁸ Talks at Google: “Happiness: The True Measure of a Successful Society”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w2IGGQJlfc&t=25s>. Accessed 12.09.2020.

and LEO Innovation Lab²⁹ (that uses digital innovations for improving the lives of people living with chronic skin conditions) might be very useful for outlining new directions and strategies of the Ukrainian healthcare system.

In eudaimonist perspective, Roman Purii, the co-author of our book “Happy Life Planning,” and I define happiness as the flourishing of a person at three levels: biological, social, and spiritual.³⁰ Contemporary medicine and contemporary religion (Christianity in the case of the current research) cover all three levels by promoting a person’s physical, mental, and spiritual health. Contemporary medicine and religion are meant to provide a person with tools to flourish at these three levels and teach him/her to fully enjoy life in healthy ways.

Conclusion

The focus on happiness of a person in this earthly life is a sign of modernization of religion (Christian churches and denominations). The contemporary Christian interpretation of happiness (in particular, claimed by some of the leaders of the Christian churches in Ukraine) as a virtuous good life which is being fulfilled in family relationships, resonates, indeed, with Aristotelian eudaimonism. On strengthening mental and physical health, contemporary religion and medicine contribute to the overall well-being of a person.

²⁹ LEO in this proper name that means “lion” in Latin. It is the logo of the company; does not seem to be an abbreviation based on information from their web-sites.

³⁰ Пурій and Луц, *Планування щасливого життя* [Happy Life Planning]. (Lviv: Litopys, 2019), pp.34–37.

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