

# ON HAPPINESS

## Adrian Calderone

THE FIRST THING we can say about happiness is that there is so little of it in the world today. Man by nature desires happiness for its own sake just as he desires health. Yet it is sought in the wrong ways and in the wrong places. And here's the problem: it is sought directly in counterfeits when, in fact, it is more like a gift.

So, what exactly is happiness. I will offer the following definition. Happiness is the state of well-being resulting from actions which foster the flourishing of the soul.

To begin with, and this is a critical point to keep in mind, the happiness we speak of here is not an emotion, although it may be accompanied by joy. Happiness is not a feeling but a state of being. Emotions can change, whereas happiness is an abiding state.<sup>1</sup> If, for example, we win at a ball game we become elated. In 1955 all of Brooklyn erupted in jubilation when the Dodgers won the World Series. But, like all things, the

happy times and bragging rights only lasted so long.

Some people think that winning the lottery will bring happy times. But they sometimes find out that they have won a million dollars worth of trouble. Others try to find happiness in amusements, parties and sexual encounters. But they eventually discover that the loneliness they sought to escape has only been made worse.

No matter how enticing they seem, worldly things, if not properly regarded, bring not fulfilment but emptiness.<sup>2</sup> The worldly things are not bad, but are not ends in themselves. They are to be used as a means to something other than themselves of true and everlasting value.

The state of well-being is a state of rest or satisfaction in knowing that one has achieved one's purpose or is on the way to achieving it. What, then, is one's purpose in life? The materialists, among whom we can count communists and atheists, deny that there is any such thing as a purpose of one's life. They

deny that man has an immortal soul and that there is any meaning in life beyond which we choose for ourselves. Good or bad, when we die we enter into

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nothingness. There is nothing besides matter. A purpose is a reason for which a thing is made. To accept that things which are made have a purpose is to

admit that there is a maker. It means that things are created and therefore there is a creator which is other than the created things. If nature itself is a creation there must be a supernatural Creator. And if man is part of nature he must have a purpose directed to the Creator. This is something the atheists and communists cannot abide. It would mean we are not masters of our own life. For those who accept such a philosophy life is existence ultimately in personal despair.

The modern social movement is to advance a pantheistic naturalism in worship of "Mother Earth". We come from Mother Earth and when we die we go back to Mother Earth, losing our individuality. We are subsumed into nature. The highest value is environmentalism and ecology. Human population is seen as a plague upon the earth. Hence, anything to reduce it, like contraception and abortion, is encouraged. Pantheist religion includes worship of nature spirits, such as gods of fertility.<sup>3</sup> But there is nothing beyond nature, nothing supernatural. These

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## St. Thomas Becket

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take away the reproach from your generation."<sup>10</sup>

Tedious attempts at reconciliation between Thomas and the King were made in neutral locations. Eventually a compromise was reached, and the Archbishop was ensured a safe return to his See in Canterbury.

After six years of exile, St. Thomas triumphantly returned to the adulation of his flock. This joy would be short lived. On the evening of December 29, 1170, as he prepared for Vespers, report came of the approach of four soldiers. Thomas knew it was his final hour. In the very church he was consecrated bishop, he would suffer a martyr's death. And as the legend goes, on the very spot of his head where he was anointed with chrism, he received his death-wound.

The knights guilty of spilling the martyr's blood were roused by the loose words of their king. Who while disparaging his nobles remarked, "Who will rid me of this traitorous priest?" Taking his rantings as a command, the four crossed the English Channel and stormed Canterbury Cathedral. The

monks panicked and hurried to barricade the church's entrance. But the saint was ready to meet his accusers. He yelled, "Let the blind wretches rage: I order you, in virtue of obedience, not to shut the door: a church ought not to be fortified like a castle."<sup>11</sup>

Three of the soldiers struck the saint down, but a popular legend tells of a single blow severing the crown of Thomas. The sword continued its trajectory and hit the floor so hard that the tip broke off. These two incidents would yield their own relics respectively. As for the murderers, another legend claims that the pope sent them to fight in the Holy Land as penance. From whence they never returned.

As for King Henry, most historians agree that he felt genuine sorrow upon word of his old friends' brutal death. Although a legitimate case for obstruction of justice can be made based on his actions. To avoid censure, he crossed into Ireland and "ordered that no cleric was to be permitted to leave the kingdom without an oath not to be a party to any measure against himself or the realm." He also added that, "no one bearing letters was

to have access to him."<sup>12</sup>

Eventually the king's ostensive hunt in the Emerald Isle had to come to an end and he agreed to an interview with two legates from Rome. Even though he bore no direct guilt for the murder, Henry submitted to an assignment of penance which included an oath to the Papacy and payment for 200 soldiers to be placed at the disposal of the Templars for one year.

Within two years of his martyrdom, St. Thomas was canonized. Word of miracles attributed to his intercession spread throughout Europe. Philes of his blood became, "the mark of the pilgrim to St. Thomas, as the palm was of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the scallop to St. James at Compostela."<sup>13</sup> Later in the middle ages, the pilgrim's badge became the souvenir for travelers to his tomb. Biographies of the saint began to appear from as far away as Iceland.

PIC 2 "Becket pilgrim badge," Museum of London.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Morris, *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*, 433-434.

<sup>13</sup> Morris, *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*, 446.

<sup>14</sup> "Pilgrims badge," by Museum of London, Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons. (Original text: <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/London-Wall/Whats-on/Galleries/medieval/People/record.htm?type=person&id=147009>), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47402595>.

More than three centuries after receiving the crown of martyrdom, Thomas was summoned to answer for allegations of crimes against his king. The jury content with hearing the prosecution and what passed for a defense, formal sentence was passed. Morris records:

...the King's Majesty [Henry VIII] thought it expedient to declare to his loving subjects that he [St. Thomas] was no saint, but rather a rebel and traitor to his prince... all images and pictures of him should be destroyed, the festivals in his honour be abolished, and his name and remembrance be erased out of all books, under pain of his Majesty's indignation, and imprisonment at his Grace's pleasure.<sup>15</sup>

All of the abortive efforts taken against this beloved saint have only gone on to make him a symbol of resistance. He stands as a paragon amongst the great English saints and deserves our veneration as much as St. Thomas More or St. Augustine the Apostle to England. We sorely need more bishops with the courage of St. Thomas in the Church today. Holy men unafraid of exercising their spiritual authority, standing against secular tyrants, and excommunicating heretics. Defender of the Church and protector of Her liberty, St. Thomas of Canterbury, pray for us. Christ Our King; Thy Kingdom Come! ■

<sup>15</sup> Morris, *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*, 483-484.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*, 224.

<sup>11</sup> Morris, *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*, 413.