

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

Assessment Question: Outline what you consider would be the main features of a missiological hermeneutic for a context with which you are familiar, giving particular attention to the role of the Bible and the church.



### 1. Introduction

The Danish people are called “the happiest population in the world?” The picture above is provided by VisitDenmark<sup>1</sup> and shows two of these happy and content Danes. We cannot see the Dannebrog – the Danish flag above their heads – but for sure it is there. Danes are usually proud of their origin. They complain about the weather and the taxes, but most of them do not wish to live anywhere else and *are* actually rather content. Different surveys, e.g. Leicester University (2006) and World Values Survey (2008)<sup>2</sup>, have appointed the Danes to be the happiest people in the world. According to one of the leading authorities nowadays on “international happiness” Ruut Veenhoven<sup>3</sup> Denmark is second to Iceland.<sup>4</sup> At the summer camp for the Danish Baptists 2009 General Secretary for the Canadian Baptists, Gary Nelson, pressed us with this question: “What is ‘the good news’ alias the Gospel to the happiest people in the world?” As a pastor in a Baptist-congregation in Denmark and as editor of the national magazine “baptist.dk” I feel challenged to find a possible answer on Nelson’s question. This essay can hopefully be a helpful tool while planning evangelism in a contemporary and relevant manner in Denmark anno 2010.

<sup>1</sup> Photo: Visit Denmark, Available at: [http://images.businessweek.com/ss/08/08/0819\\_happiest\\_countries/11.htm](http://images.businessweek.com/ss/08/08/0819_happiest_countries/11.htm) at 4.9.09.

<sup>2</sup> The Leicester survey compiled data from UNESCO, the CIA, the New Economics Foundation, and the World Health Organization, among others. The World Values Survey has compiled data from 350,000 people in 97 countries since 1981. WVS is an organised network of social scientists. The countries cover about 85 pct. of the World’s population.

<sup>3</sup> Ruut Veenhoven is emeritus-professor of ‘social conditions for human happiness’ at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Veenhoven’s World Database of Happiness includes 4222 Nation-surveys in 205 Nations.

<sup>4</sup> Veenhoven is rating happiness in 144 nations 2000-2008, Denmark and Iceland with respectively 8,5 and 8,4 points on scale 0 to 10. The Danes are rather stable in measured rise of happiness from 1973 till 2008. Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_nat/findingreports/TrendReport2009-1.pdf](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/findingreports/TrendReport2009-1.pdf) at 10.10.09.

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

Man has pursued happiness ever since Plato and Aristotle (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC). In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century AC happiness even became among the “unalienable rights” according to the US Constitutions.<sup>5</sup> By Ruut Veenhoven happiness is defined as “the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favourably.”<sup>6</sup> Happiness is therefore mostly defined as a “good life” or “doing well”. Thousands of books and homepages offer help to live happily. The Cable Television Happiness Show is one of them, writing on their homepage: “Happiness is no mystery. Most people are quite clear about what happiness is, and can easily describe how happy or not they are. Most people also consider happiness their most important goal in life. Happiness definitely rules!”<sup>7</sup> Exactly the number of offers tells us, that this *is* not that easy. Each and every person has a personal definition on happiness. And a specific question is, if happiness always is an individual quest or could be view as a collective goal. Individualism and consumerism combined with happiness as a human right can easily turn every other person into a tool for a personal project; having a meaningful, happy and independently life. Therefore I will critically review the claim, that “Danes are the happiest people in the world”. Are the surveys measuring individual or collective happiness? To find a missiological hermeneutic of the Gospel to the “happy Danes” I will turn to the Bible looking for happiness, primarily according to the Beatitudes in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> As a closure I will look on the Church’ role as a trustworthy messenger of this Gospel and consider if the missiological hermeneutic will be different for the unhappy and the so-called happy.

### 2. Why are the Danes “the happiest people in the world” and what does that imply?

The surveys claim to be able to measure “subjective well-being” through qualitative measuring on peoples’ personal happiness and life satisfaction and transform the answers into national ratings. World Value Survey’s two basic questions have not changed since 1981: “Considering everything - how would you rate your happiness?” and “How satisfied are you with your life these days?”<sup>9</sup> It seems to me, that this is a very simplistic ground for measuring a whole population’s happiness. That a thump-nail sketch from a number of persons, their feelings in the moment of answering, shall qualify the quality of life on a national scale? And the questionnaire leaves no answer to, why a person is happy or unhappy. For example is there no question (among 121<sup>10</sup>) about the sense of fellowship, e.g. if the person has confidants, which could estimate loneliness. I am left with the question: Can this individualistic approach to happiness be transformed into a measured national happiness? And what if they would measure more collective values; interdependence, sharing, being a part of a concerning community – maybe other countries actually would be the “most happy”?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Second sentence in the US Declaration is: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Available at <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html> 16.10.09

<sup>6</sup> Veenhoven, R., *World Database of Happiness*, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl> Assessed at: 29.09.2009.

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <http://thehappinesshow.com/WhatIsHappiness.htm> 30.9.09.

<sup>8</sup> Professor Nancy Murphy suggests, that the Danes have succeeded in turning the Beatitudes into National Social policy. Private conversation, Prague sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> The scale for question 1 is very happy, rather happy, not happy, very unhappy and don’t know. Question 2 is scaled 1-10 from very unsatisfied to very satisfied. According to the medias the Danes where the happiest people (again) in 2008, but though I have been in contact with WVS, I could not get any information about the result of the survey concerning 2008. On their web-side the newest Danish data is from 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Documentation of the Values 1999-2004 available at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> at 9.9.09.

<sup>11</sup> There is no scientific data yet on the happiness-rate after the worldwide economical crisis 2008-2009. I assume, that the happiness-rate will decrease caused by the socially destabilization. But if it is world-wide decrease the Danes might still be the “happiest”.

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

The surveys tell nothing about the values behind the answers on happiness. It comes to a guess, what is causing the measured happiness? The happiness-researcher Professor Ronald E. Inglehart, WVS, profess not to know the true secrets of happiness. In his opinion, benevolence and expressions of gratitude appear to be subtle but powerful ways to bring happiness into one's life and to extend it. Religion and solidarity in the community play a big role in this, he says, but any positive belief system can help.<sup>12</sup> Sociologically factors that can explain the generally content feeling amongst the Danish population are the social welfare system, which secures health care, pensions and free public schools and education to all.<sup>13</sup> Few people are left on the street in Denmark, though many these years will tell, that they are struggling economically. Freedom of choice has a major impact on the happiness too. According to Professor Ronald E. Inglehart, WVS, the happiness-rate arises in countries with democracy, economic development and increasing social tolerance.<sup>14</sup> A US Television programme<sup>15</sup> referring to the results of the surveys interviewed some Danes, among these Danish Professor Karl Christensen. He gives as the main reason to the "nomination"; "We have modest expectations to life". Among psychologically factors are without any doubt the feeling of safety according to the danger of war and nature catastrophes, due to the position geographically and in World politics. In addition the Danish mentality is cosiness, the Danish word is "hygge".<sup>16</sup> It tells about family or friends eating together, talking and laughing, or a couple sitting by a wood-burning stove with candles lit during the long winter-nights. Hygge deals with trust in one another and being a part of a safe fellowship. This certainly is a considerable part of happiness.

### Not everybody is happy!

Exactly a loss of close relationship the last 40 years is one main reason why not everybody in Denmark is happy! Many are lonely<sup>17</sup>, every fourth person 18+ are single. Mobility has increased and outskirt areas in Denmark are dominated by an elderly population, while the jobs are few. Generally speaking; either you have got a job and struggle to keep it – which is rather demanding in a society, where growth is due to technology and know-how - or you are unemployed. Though the social security system will keep you off the streets, unemployment has great negative psychological implications on the self-esteem and social network, indeed in a society, where you get your identity from your job and education. Denmark has a high rate of suicides. The suicidal-rate is alarmingly growing especially amongst male 65+ and young women and girls.<sup>18</sup> Among the causes are social isolation – adolescents are often more socially dependant on their peer group than on their parents. Not having a peer group, or being let down, cause great isolation. Many people in Denmark miss a

<sup>12</sup> BusinessWeek, Aug. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> "...economic factors related to health care, standards of living and access to basic education were determining characteristics of a nation's overall attitude. Denmark, with its free universal health care, one of the highest per-capita GDPs in the world, and first-rate schools came in first." "There's Something About Denmark" by Matt Mabe, BusinessWeek August 20, 2008. Available at:

[http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/aug2008/gb20080820\\_005351.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/aug2008/gb20080820_005351.htm) at 4.9.09.

<sup>14</sup> From <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> at 29.09.09.

<sup>15</sup> 60 Minutes – Happiness, available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch\\_popup?v=shepBx2ogJo](http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=shepBx2ogJo) at 29.10.09.

<sup>16</sup> "Danish happiness is related not as much to "hygge" but more to... trust in authorities, the justice system, police, teachers, doctors, even politicians to some extent, but most important trust in your neighbors (...) Scientists date it back to the Vikings." Claus Jørgensen, on BusinessWeeks blog Aug 20, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> According to Veenhovens surveys 25 pct. of the Danes are not happy at all. Available at:

[http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_nat/findingreports/TrendReport2009-1.pdf](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/findingreports/TrendReport2009-1.pdf) at 10.10.09.

<sup>18</sup> According to the Centre of Suicide Research Studies, 24 % out of 8000 13-15 years old have seriously considered harming themselves, and 10.2 % out of 3573 15-19 years old have tried to commit suicide at least once.

<http://www.selvmordsforskning.dk/filecache/26946/1236333910/futurechallengeseu17.pdf>

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

network to support in life-changing periods. This can be one reason why 7 % of the total Danish population is using antidepressant medication.<sup>19</sup>

I am not the only one to question the results of the happiness-surveys; the nomination to be the “happiest people” has e.g. inspired a group of amateur’s making a video showing the isolation of the individual in individualistic Denmark.<sup>20</sup> It can be a curse to be lonely and not-happy-at-all, when everybody is expected to be happy. If the unhappiness is partly caused by a missing social network, you are left alone with the television or computer, and either suicide or medication is easy options. There is certainly a tension between personal, individualistic happiness linked to economical conditions and the relational happiness, which depend on being a part of a peer group or extended family. Here the Church could have an important role in society. Let us firstly consider, what the Bible tells us about happiness?

### 3. The Bible’s approach to happiness

#### a. Happiness according to the Old Testament (OT) is wealth and national security

The overall view in the Old Testament about happiness is that blessedness/happiness is the reward from God to his faithful people. God is blessing as a Father, and his blessing is dependent on the King and Israel keeping the Law. The Law is God’s outline for the dream of a happy life<sup>21</sup>. The Law is logical demands for the communal life. Even when it seems as if the Bible talks about individualistic happiness, it is thought into a social interdependent society, where one person’s wealth benefit the whole family or village: “Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God.”<sup>22</sup> OT understanding of happiness is a social condition for the people or family more than an individual thing. Happiness demands “military security, agricultural abundance, ownership of land, fertility and the leisure of rest in the shade”.<sup>23</sup>

Among the churches in Denmark especially the preachers in charismatic free churches are using the OT. Bible-references to happiness are used to comfort and as promises of a reward to the faithful believers. And to make the church-attendants contribute economically to the church. “You get blessed by what you give”<sup>24</sup> is common teaching about tithing and some radical charismatic churches even teach: “If you are not happy, it is your own fault. You do not believe/are not faithful enough.”<sup>25</sup> Turning to NT there is much less speaking of being blessed in the OT-way, by wealth, ownership and leisure. In NT blessedness/happiness is closely related to Jesus and his teachings.

#### b. Blessedness in the New Testament (NT) is weakness and poverty

In the Danish official translation of The New Testament “being happy” is written only twice; in Romans 4:7-8, where the word in Greek is *μακάριά* – “blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sin are covered...”. The reason of happiness is forgiveness of sins, which is related to Jesus’ death on the cross.<sup>26</sup> *Μακάριοι* is the key-word, not least because this is the Greek translation of the Aramaic word used by Jesus in what we call the Beatitudes, both in Luke and in

<sup>19</sup> At least 1/4 of them of other causes than depression (stress, anxiety, eating-disorder or shyness).

<sup>20</sup> “The Happiest People On Earth“ - describing an unemployed and a workaholic. Available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch\\_popup?v=UOobochjLB0](http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=UOobochjLB0), at 29.09.09.

<sup>21</sup> Magnus Malm, *Ett hjärta större än världen*, Libris 2009, p. 66

<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:19, NIV.

<sup>23</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 363

<sup>24</sup> Heard in the Pentacostal Church in Rønne, Bornholm.

<sup>25</sup> Especially in the Copenhagen Bible Training Centre, available at <http://www.kbc.dk/en/church/the-gospel> at 8.11.09.

<sup>26</sup> The second “being happy” is in 1.Pet. 3:10, the Greek word is *ἀγαθός* meaning “having good days”.

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

Matthew<sup>27</sup>. Μάκάριοι is usually translated by “blessed”, but in more new translations the word “happy” is used, though not all agree in this translation.<sup>28</sup> The Beatitudes describe a God-conditioned and paradoxical happiness<sup>29</sup>. The blessedness of Jesus is contradicting the outer circumstances. According to him those blessed or happy are not the rich and the successful, but the weak, the suffering and mourning, the meek and merciful – the poor and hungering.

Jesus is using “The Kingdom of Heaven” as the framework of the Beatitudes – in the Gospel of Matthew it is in both the first and last Beatitude. This Kingdom *is* the extract of NT-blessedness - the intensions of God as a reality on earth *as* in heaven. The heavenly Kingdom is the fulfilment of the promises in OT, as Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law.<sup>30</sup>

Undoubtedly the Beatitudes shall remind the reader of Isaiah 61, which Jesus elsewhere implies to himself.<sup>31</sup> He is personally fulfilling the prophecy. So the Beatitudes are both eschatological and here-and-now living-conditions for those believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God as well as the Son of Man, God and human. The eschatological events indeed are present in the hope deriving from the future Kingdom of Heaven, and that hope shall determine his follower’s attitudes and actions in this life. The Beatitudes illuminate the laws of the Kingdom, even as wishes for the present. Weakness and poverty is therefore the door to the Kingdom of Heaven, not intellectual strength or economical power. The Beatitudes are so to say the “door-code to the Kingdom.”<sup>32</sup> This is challenging the popular Western view on happiness; depending on personal freedom and economic development and can be an identification-factor for those, who are not happy in the secular understanding of happiness. The understanding of Jesus as the personification of this Kingdom is a key.

### A Christological understanding turns happiness upside-down

The Beatitudes are thereby Christological. Jesus identifies himself with the persons he is blessing; his life is especially conditioned by humility and sacrifice. He is always seeking down-wards. His *incarnation* is the first sign, his life without possessions and totally dependant on other people and on God his Father is the picture of poverty in material things and richness in spiritual sense. He is humble and merciful, meek and at the same time hungering for righteousness, peacemaker and therefore persecuted, all categories from the Beatitudes. His *crucifixion* amongst criminals is another huge sign of the downward process and Jesus *going to the land of the dead* to free even them, is the last huge step down-wards. “The Beatitudes are illustrated and brought to life by Jesus’

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 5:3-10 and Luke 6:20-23.

<sup>28</sup> Μάκάριος is used 50 times in The New Testament. It can be translated by ”happiness” according to e.g. *Greek-English Lexicon*, H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996. p. 1073 and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7, A commentary*, Hermeneia, 2007. Christopher Jamison, disagrees: Μάκάριοι is a person to whom God is near in a very special way – blessed. He explains: Today “blessed” in English has a totally different meaning. The greeting “bless” means to say “pity you”. Instead translators have used “Happy are...” but this is a misleading translation, says Jamison: “A person in sorrow *is* not happy!” Others translate it “congratulations”. Jamison finds this better. Though as a modern reader, one certainly would agree in the “pity you”-reading of the different life-situations described in the Beatitudes, though the intention of Jesus is exactly the opposite. *Finding Happiness – Monastic steps for at Fulfilling Life*. Read in Swedish: “Lyckan kommer”, Christopher Jamison, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008, p. 163.

<sup>29</sup> Personally I agree with Spiros Zodhiates translating μάκάριοι into “being blessed” as a condition in the heart, a happiness that is God-conditioned – “Christ-in-you” – while the word *eutucheis* is “being happy” conditioned by the circumstances. *The pursuit of happiness*, Spiros Zodhiates, Eerdmans, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus says “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” – and these three words are exactly what the Jews call the Torah.

<sup>31</sup> Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>32</sup> Malm, p. 36.

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

actions. He embodies his own words and thereby becomes the standard or model to be imitated.<sup>33</sup> Therefore it is obvious, that the Beatitudes not least is a gospel to the needy and compelling for the rich and happy. The poor and e.g. the mourning are beforehand experiencing weakness and vulnerability; realizing loss or failures can open for Gods touch in a person's life, enabling to receive the Holy Spirit – and thereby the Christ-in-you blessedness.

The Gospel of the Beatitudes is that blessedness is not about life-conditions, but about how to react on the circumstances, to seek the possibilities in the difficulties not surrendering to self-pity. The kingdom-ethics shown in the Beatitudes are about receiving and not about deserving. To be blessed in a God-conditioned way is a gracious gift. It implies that the Kingdom of God cannot be produced or learned. This fact is also especially attractively to e.g. the poor in spirit and the meek. They will often accept this gift well aware, that they can do nothing in return to deserve the blessing, while most rich and successful persons are used to get what they want by their own efforts. Being rich *and* a seeker implies therefore the challenge of the Beatitudes: “Am I to be poor or mourning to be blessed?”

It can be helpful to understand, that the Beatitudes do not urge even Christians to seek to be poor, mourning or failing<sup>34</sup>. This is not a goal in itself. Man shall not necessarily neglect the good in life, but Jesus urges man to say no to what is too small. Because what is too small makes people's hearts defensive. Only letting go on the “small” richness can open up for receiving the even bigger goodness of God.<sup>35</sup> The Beatitudes confront some of the happy people with the reality; being content can be a sign of a need for some kind of transformation<sup>36</sup>, a conversion from serving Mammon to seek God's Manna<sup>37</sup>. Jesus message is: All the idols of Mammon will leave you one day. Therefore you have to put our trust in what will not leave you; God shown to us in Jesus himself and his Kingdom. Receiving unconditioned grace can cause the needed transformation of the heart and create the right relationship between man's spirit and the Spirit of God – a precondition for *μάκάρια*. If the kingdom-ethics are normative for a person – rich or poor – he/she will seek downwards like Jesus and will seek to serve those in need with the possessions, God has given.<sup>38</sup> Thereby happiness and thankfulness is spread creating the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

### Freedom

For those not mourning, but actually living a happy life, freedom can be crucial. According to the happiness-researchers freedom is one of the important qualifications for happiness. Christopher

<sup>33</sup> Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary, T & T Clark, London, 1988, p. 467.

<sup>34</sup> Zodiates, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> Malm, p. 37.

The OT story of Esau is the picture of a person seeking the good instead of the best, selling his birthright for a meal. Ge. 25:29-34. “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on marking mudpies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” C.S.Lewis *The Weigh of Glory and Other Adresses* Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans, 1965, p. 1-2

<sup>36</sup> As in the story of the rich, young man, whom Jesus is telling to "sell all your possessions, give the money to the poor and come and follow me", Matt. 19:16-22. Disciples need to decide, whom they obey, God or Money and which they seek, manna or Mammon, the idol of possessions. 6:24

<sup>37</sup> Mammon is never satisfied, while God gives just enough manna for the day. Ex. 16:4-5.

<sup>38</sup> There is “no ground for supposing that the poor are blessed to the exclusion of the rich”, Zodiates p. 67. The use of the possessions given to a certain person is essential. Is wealth used for personal pleasure or shared with the poor? Property and riches must always be a means to and end and never the end in itself. The attitude showed into actions is determining the rate of permanent happiness alias blessedness. Sharing and receiving are key-words in the blessings. Not earning and owing.

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

Jamison<sup>39</sup> claimed that many people, having everything, doing well, without obvious problems, living individualistic and with the only aim to consume, deep down are not happy at all. And he got heavily response from the television-audience. He concludes that real happiness is a pure heart - as in the sixth blessing of Matthew. Pleasure in itself makes nobody happy. Jamison wonder, why we put the weight on outer, and not the inner freedom<sup>40</sup>. As if it had no importance to the quality of life, which spiritual values we build our life on. A monastic life is to give up upon outer freedom to concentrate on the inner freedom.<sup>41</sup> And this inner freedom – a God-indwelled contradiction to the outer circumstances - can be called the NT version of God’s blessings. The truth is that either you are rich or poor, sick or healthy, you *always* have the freedom left to decide how to react on the situation, in which you are.”<sup>42</sup> The Beatitudes are telling about a freedom surpassing the challenges in life. To be a receiver of Gods blessing imply an inner positive attitude towards people and situations and leads automatically to be thankful, hospitable and generous, and that is important groundings for experiencing The Kingdom of Heaven on earth – really the happy life.

### Acting and being together with the non-Christians

Can this Gospel be understood by anyone not being Christian? The blessings are contradictory to common sense. Zodiates says, that only the Christian will be able to understand “these laws of the spiritual life”.<sup>43</sup> I do not agree. Jesus is talking about being peacemakers and hunger and thirst for righteousness. Many people, not calling themselves Christians, are doing so, often more than the Christians. Actually Christians can invite non-Christians into a missional work being engaged in anti-trafficking, environmental activities or collecting money to Red Cross. Being merciful is giving without any expectation of return. Many non-Christians are self-offering and the Church could honour that and learn from these people burning for righteousness.

Another thing is that especially in life-changing conditions, in grief or despair, non-Christians experience openness for the Gospel. A person mourning or being persecuted seeks the blessed kind of inner peace, which can be found realizing that the not-wanted circumstances - it is a matter of fact: I *will* die of this disease; I *am* lonely - or hungry – and will *not* get relief! These conditions will not change. Leonard Cohen sings: “There is a crack in everything. That’s where the light gets in.” The Beatitudes tells about “the frustration transformed into a shaft of light”.<sup>44</sup> The Gospel is that you can be comforted by trust in something bigger than life itself. Christian faith gives a “secret vision and hope that makes powerlessness and suffering bearable.”<sup>45</sup> If Christians dare standing beside a person, mourning and helpless, being transparent, at disposition, listening and weeping with them, this is the most powerful witness of the Gospel.

<sup>39</sup> Abbot in Worth in England, and known from the BBC-television serial “The Monastery”.

<sup>40</sup> Monastic discipline is for most people a contradiction to freedom; but Jamison’s experience is, that to live in harmony with ourselves and others we need to discipline our thoughts and acts from within. The real freedom is not in the ability to buy or do everything you like, but to seek a pure heart, by handling the thoughts and acts, that contradict the will of God – expressed in the eight(!) deadly sins, by him called “thoughts”: Spiritual indifference, gluttony, lust, greed, wrath, melancholy, vanity and arrogance. Which all of them are damaging the inner freedom, the ground for a pure heart. Jamison, p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> The fact that happiness today by some is sought precisely in the “deadly sins” tells us, that it is a necessity as a Christian to be aware of the “thoughts” and to find a way to deal with them personally, to seek a pure heart, the real happiness.

<sup>42</sup> Malm, p. 32

<sup>43</sup> Zodiates p.4.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. A.L.Macfie and D.D. Raphael, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982, 3.5.7., p. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Davies and Allison, p. 467.

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

### c. The “third Testament” – the Christians and the Church

People are seeking God’s holiness<sup>46</sup>, but especially if they are wounded, they do not seek it in the Church as an institution – because it seems as if the Gospel is; “if you believe, everything is good.” When everything is not good, this false Gospel prevent people from seeking the Church– and even God. This is actually also the case for church-members in critical life-changing periods, if the message of their Church is about having a “nice facade”. A recent study claimed that over half of evangelical Christians agreed in this statement: “The purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfilment”.<sup>47</sup> And most Christians would agree that it seems as if the happiness of human beings was the original intension of the Creator.<sup>48</sup> So in fact most Christians are hedonists. The goal is not having any serious troubles, being safe, having sufficient money, good health and freedom to choose how to live your life and they expect God to be the tool to obtain this goal.

This is an individualistic homemade religion. The Gospel is that every individual Christian and the Church as fellowship are willing to offer time and money on the needy. The picture from OT is not individualistic. It tells about an interdependent community – and this is also the story of the first Church!<sup>49</sup> A Church not an open relationship, inviting poor, sharing possessions, offering time and love, is an unreliable messenger of the Kingdom of Heaven. Even most of the Evangelical church-members will have to repent and be transformed to be blessed in the way, Jesus wants. Not by being poor or mourning but by living the kingdom-ethics in weakness and accessibility. “Seldom it is lack of money hindering God from working, but our self-centeredness.... It is more important, than we would know: Awaiting in poverty and resisting filling the time with anything else but God.”<sup>50</sup> Poverty is not necessarily a question of money, but accepting being dependant on the triune God.

### The vulnerable Church as missiological hermeneutics

The Church *has* an important role, being the opposite of the secular society, where everybody is busy being important. The significance of the Church is a fellowship of people not being important themselves, but letting everybody who comes near to this fellowship experience that *they* are important.<sup>51</sup> Those Jesus is speaking of in the Beatitudes, especially the mourning, the persecuted and the offended, are people for whom relations are broken. What Jesus ask from his disciples, is being vulnerable themselves. That they dare go beyond their social boundaries and take into the friendship those who are left alone, the Church being generous in friendship and love. This will only happen while being humble and hospitable.<sup>52</sup>

The missiological hermeneutics of today is Christ-like figures, the Gospel incarnate. A local Church, daring to be vulnerable, poor, meek, merciful, making peace among themselves(!) and others, fighting for justice and being persecuted - or maybe just unpopular, mourning with the sorrowful, feeding the hungry, showing the world a pure heart, not seeking popularity but truth, is in witness the Gospel as well to the happy as well as to the unhappy Danes.

<sup>46</sup> Tanya Petrova in a private conversation Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, and Jesper Møller-Hansen’s experiences from a Gospel-workshop in Copenhagen touching the participants deeply, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>47</sup> George Barna citing Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A strategy for reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, ill: InterVarsity Press, 1997) p. 21. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay, defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, Downers Grove, 2000.

p. 22

<sup>48</sup> Smith, p. 166

<sup>49</sup> Acts 2:37-47

<sup>50</sup> Malm, p. 264f.

<sup>51</sup> Jamison, p. 180

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p. 182



## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

### 5. The Gospel to the happiest people in the World - as well as to the unhappy

The main features of missiological hermeneutics in the context of the "happy Danes" can be divided into two; the living Gospel – the witnesses of Christ - and the words. As such, the Church and the Christians must decide, whether they want to convince the "happy Danes", that they are not happy at all - or try to catch up, playing in the tune of the World. But there is a third choice - being living icons<sup>53</sup> of God, Christians who dare to be accessible, weak and vulnerable, and at the same time able to show thankfulness and being gracious towards others. The living, open and safe relationship is the best messenger of the Gospel.

The other hermeneutic is the message in words. The Gospel is holistic – and is to both the rich and the poor, to the happy and the unhappy, but some part of the good news will be heard by the unhappy and another part can reach those feeling happy and content. The unhappy could be attracted to the message of a compassionate God, whom do not need our deeds or capacities but who reaches down and only want to be in personal relationship with us through Jesus Christ. It is also a message of freedom from the curse of necessarily being happy all the time. A freedom to be You as a part of a fellowship of believers, that dare to be just as mourning or suffering as You are. The Gospel is holiness – God can touch our lives and change us, especially in our vulnerability. The good news to the actively involved in the fight for righteousness, is that God himself is benevolent and that the expression of gratitude towards the Giver will change our focus from the deserving to receiving and then giving ourselves to the needy, by the grace of God and not by our own goodness, which can lead to burn-out. The freedom of God is to choose the best instead of the better. The inner freedom will set you free from the bondage of Mammon, and instead seek the God-conditioned blessedness. Happiness is a gift to a community, when the ethics of the Kingdom of God is apparent in the World, through fellowship and solidarity, gratitude and benevolence, following the longing for a deeper meaning of the life of man, being meek and merciful, having a pure heart - and therefore finding an inner blessedness and happiness independent on outer circumstances.

### References:

- Allison, Dale C. and Davies, W.D., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary, T & T Clark, London, 1988.
- Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1973.
- BusinessWeek, Aug. 20th 2006, read on the web, therefore no pagenummer.
- BussinessWeek blog Aug. 20th, 2009.
- Cable Television homepage, The: "The Happiness Show":  
<http://thehappinesshow.com/WhatIsHappiness.htm>
- Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, England, 1998.
- Eagleton, Terry *The Meaning of Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.
- Encyclopedia of Christianity, The, E-I*, Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publicing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001.
- Greek-English Lexicon*, H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.
- Groothuis, Douglas, *Truth Decay, defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, InterVarsity Press/IVP Books, Downers Grove, III, 2000.
- Hagner, Donald Alfred, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A, Word Books, Pub. Dallas, 1993.

---

<sup>53</sup> Malm, p. 266

## The Gospel to the happiest people in the World?

- Jamison, Christopher, *Finding Happiness – Monastic steps for at Fulfilling Life*, (Swedish: *Lyckan kommer*), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Weigh of Glory and Other Adresses* Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans, 1965.
- Luz, Ulrich, *Matthew 1-7*, A commentary, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007.
- Malm, Magnus, *Ett hjärta store end Världen (A Heart Bigger than the World)*, Libris, Örebro, 2009.
- new Dictionary of Christian Ethics, A*, SMC Press, London, 1967.
- New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, The*, Vol. 2, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2007.
- Newbegin, Leslie, *Truth and Authority in Modernity*, Trinity Press, Valley Forge, Pa, 1996.
- Rouner, Leroy S. ed. *In Pursuit of Happiness*, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion vol. 16, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1995.
- Rouner, Leroy S., ed. *If I should die*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 2001.
- Smith, Adam, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. A.L.Macfie and D.D. Raphael, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982.
- Stassen, Glen Harold *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2006
- Veenhoven, Ruut, *World Database of Happiness*, Erasmus University Rotterdam. His studies are available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl> Assessed at: 29.09.2009.
- World Values Survey, Stockholm, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.
- Zodhiates, Spiros, *The pursuit of happiness*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1966.
- Zoellner, Lilian PhD, Director, Centre for Suicide Reseach in Denmark:  
<http://www.selvmordsforskning.dk/filecache/26946/1236333910/futurechallengeseu17.pdf>
- Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975.