

GRACED, HAPPY OR VIRTUOUS? : THREE FEMALE THEOLOGICAL VOICES ON GOD AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

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THESIS

ENGLISH ABSTRACT: The Yale Center for Faith and Culture has held seven Consultations on God and Human Flourishing, 2007 to 2013, where it was affirmed that human relation to God is reason enough for human flourishing. The seven consultations indicate a growing conversation on God and human flourishing in theology. With this in mind the three female theologians are considered and argued to be important as participants in a conversation on God and human flourishing. The three female theologians are Serene Jones, a feminist theologian, Ellen Charry a systematic-pastoral theologian, and Jennifer Herdt, a virtue ethicist. Serene Jones is presented in the thesis as the first voice to engage theologically with the notions of happiness and human flourishing from a feminist critical position. Serene Jones argues, by means of feminist theory, that gendered constructions of women's nature are present in readings of doctrine and Scripture. The way in which happiness and human flourishing is understood to characterise the lives of women is consequently challenged and critiqued. Due to the oppressive logic inherent in gender insensitive readings of doctrine and Scripture, Serene Jones opts for a re-reading where the agency of women is affirmed. The doctrines of justification and sanctification are re-formulated by Serene Jones as justifying and sanctifying grace. Grace is described by Serene Jones as an envelope that enfolds the substance of women, presenting women with a redemptive narrative that they are able to identify with. Serene Jones' contribution lies in her affirmation of the graced agency of women. Ellen Charry, a female theologian who is concerned with the salutary effect of knowledge on an individual represents the second voice. Ellen Charry understands the dichotomy between goodness and pleasure established by modernity to be false. In the notion of asherism Ellen Charry seeks to bridge the gap by asserting that obedience to God's commandments evokes both goodness and pleasure. Pleasure is described as the enjoyment of God and creation. Ellen Charry goes further by affirming that God enjoys creation when creation flourishes. A mutual enjoyment between God and creation takes place which brings about a happy disposition. Happiness accordingly is a way of life established through a particular knowledge of God attained when one obeys God's norm for living. In addition, happiness is not just marked by an excellent life but also by the enjoyment of both God and creation. Ellen Charry contributes to the conversation by affirming that happiness is established when humans and God flourish. Jennifer Herdt, a virtue ethicist, starts with the secularisation of moral thought present since the sixteenth century. The secularisation of moral thought caused morality to be separated from its religious moorings. A shift in emphasis occurred, moving from the person doing the action to the action itself. With this shift in emphasis the possibility of virtue to bring humans into relation with God through grace was negated. The result was a recapitulated Augustinian anxiety of acquired virtue. Jennifer Herdt seeks to negate the Augustinian anxiety by returning the emphasis to the agent of the action. Jennifer Herdt delineates an account of mimetic performance, where she argues that by imitating a divine exemplar through virtue, grace progressively brings one into relation with God. Virtue is a means by which an individual partakes in and is formed by a liturgy. As virtue is practiced the agent participates in God, an act denoting happiness. Jennifer Herdt's account of human happiness takes into consideration how virtue assimilates an agent to Christ. From the three female perspectives, happiness and human flourishing is understood to pertain to one's relation to God, a perspective which resonates with the God and Human Flourishing Consultations. In light of the female theological contributions, the suggestion that each female theological voice may be important for a diverse conversation on God and human flourishing as well as future initiatives for God and Human Flourishing is warranted.

AFRIKAANSE OPSOMMING: Die "Yale Center for Faith and Culture" het sewe konsultasies gehad, 2007 tot 2013, oor "God and Human Flourishing" waar daar beklemtoon is dat die menslike verhouding tot God genoegsame rede is vir menslike florerings. Die sewe konsultasies weerspieël 'n toenemende gesprek oor God en menslike florerings in teologie. Dié toenemende gesprek het daartoe gelei dat drie vroulike stemme geïdentifiseer word en geargumenteer word dat hulle belangrike deelnemers in 'n gesprek rondom God en menslike florerings is. Die drie vroulike stemme is Serene Jones, 'n feministiese teoloog, Ellen Charry, 'n sistematies-pastorale teoloog, en Jennifer Herdt, 'n deugde etikus. Serene Jones word in die tesis eerste aangebied om teologies, vanuit 'n feministies kritiese oogpunt, in gesprek te tree met die konsepte van geluk en menslike florerings. Serene Jones argumenteer, deur middel van feministiese teorie, dat geslagskonstruksies van vrouens se natuur teenwoordig is in die lees van die Bybel en leerstellings. Die konsepte van geluk en florerings, wat beskrywende woorde is, moet daarom ook krities gelees word en by tye uitgedaag word. Weens die geslags onsensitiewe lees van die Bybel en leerstellinge, onderneem Serene Jones om die leerstellings van regverdiging en heiligmaking te heroorweeg, met die klem op vrouens se agentskap. Die leerstellings van regverdiging en heiligmaking word heroorweeg en benoem as geregverdigde en geheiligde genade. Genade word deur Serene Jones beskryf as 'n koevert wat die wese van vrouens omvou. Vrouens word hiermee van 'n verlossingsnarratief voorsien waarmee hulle kan identifiseer. Serene Jones se bydrae lê dus in haar prioriteit teenoor vrouens se genadigde agentskap. Ellen Charry, 'n vrou teoloog wat besorg is oor die pastorale effek van kennis, verteenwoordig die tweede stem. Ellen Charry is krities oor die tweedeling van goedheid en genot wat deur die modernisme ingestel is en beskou dit as vals. Deur die konsep van asherisme probeer Ellen Charry die tweedeling oorbrug deur te argumenteer dat gehoorsaamheid aan God se geboorte beide goedheid en genot meebring. Sy beskryf genot as die wedersydse plesier wat mense beleef wanneer hulle God geniet deur gehoorsaam te wees aan God. Ellen Charry gaan verder deur te verduidelik dat God ook die mensdom geniet wanneer die mensdom floreer en God daardeur floreer. Die wedersydse florerings van beide skepping en God bring 'n gelukkige disposisie mee. Geluk word vervolgens beskryf as 'n manier van leef, gebaseer op die uitlewing van die kennis wat deur God se geboorte geopenbaar word. Ellen Charry dra by tot die gesprek van geluk en florerings deur die wedersydse genot wat mens en God beleef as kardinaal te beskou vir die verstaan van geluk. Jennifer Herdt, 'n deugde etikus en die derde vroulike stem, begin met die verwêreldliking van moraliteit wat sedert die sestiende eeu teenwoordig is. Die verwêreldliking van morele nadenke het moraliteit en godsdienste van mekaar geskei. Die skeiding van moraliteit en godsdienste het tot gevolg gehad dat die klem verskuif is van die agent na handelings self. Met dié verskuiwing is die rol van genade om die agent geleidelik in gemeenskap met God te bring ondermyn. Die resultaat was die herhaling van die Augustiniese angs oor verkrygte deugde. Jennifer Herdt probeer die Augustiniese angs vermy deur die klem weer op die agent te laat val. Die konsep van nabootsende uitvoerings word deur Jennifer Herdt gebruik om te beskryf hoe die individu wat deugde beoefen, deur die nabootsing van Christus, toenemend in verhouding met God gebring word deur middel van genade. Deugde is 'n wyse waarop 'n persoon deelneem aan en gevorm word deur 'n bepaalde liturgie. Wanneer die persoon deugde beoefen, word daar deelgeneem aan God deur Christus, 'n daad wat geluk vergestalt. Jennifer Herdt se weergawe van menslike geluk neem in ag hoe 'n persoon geassimileer word tot God deur deugde te beoefen. Deur die drie vroulike stemme se bydrae word daar verstaan dat geluk en die florerings van mense verband hou met hulle verhouding tot God, 'n perspektief wat resoneer met die "God and Human Flourishing Consultations." In die lig van die onderskeie vroulike teologiese bydrae, is die voorstel dat elke stem belangrik is vir 'n gediversifiseerde gesprek oor God en menslike florerings so wel as toekomstige initiatiewe waar daar besin word oor God en menslike florerings geregverdig.

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