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Preview Response

WE NEED TO REDISCOVER A SENSE OF PLACE IN OUR ROOTLESS COMMUNITIES

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Flourishing is a term not of theological but of vegetable origins: to flourish is, first of all, to bloom, blossom, flower.

Perhaps the earthiness of this etymology can serve to counter the airiness of philosophical and theological abstraction. After all, the necessary precondition for flourishing is, as a rule, that the plant be rooted in place; and the specifics of that place's soil, aspect, climate, and so forth, inform the possibility of flourishing.

Under the conditions of global modernity such rootedness is surely the exception rather than the rule; our modern culture has, on the whole, grown increasingly mobile, both figuratively and literally. Perhaps this is beginning to change; but for now, our buildings and cities reflect this circumstance of rootlessness in every way. The tumbleweeds of the contemporary built environment blow across the horizons of our experience. This mobility brings with it, of course, a certain kind of freedom. But does it also prejudice the likelihood of flourishing?

A theology of flourishing must therefore surely also comprise a theology of place—particular place, not generic space. For this endeavour a good starting-point is perhaps still Oliver O'Donovan's (newly pertinent) essay "The Loss of a Sense of Place," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55 (1989): 39–58, maybe set against the larger scope of Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), especially "Space and Place," 169–78.

If these are theoretical texts, it is in practical terms perhaps also worth dwelling on the pandemic-era rediscovery by each one of us of the particular places where we are constrained to live, and maybe even to flourish.

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