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Preview Response

FLOURISHING / ARCHITECTURE

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I am grateful to Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun and Ryan McAnnally-Linz for their Flourishing Preview effort to get the ball rolling on this most important and complex subject, most especially for their recognition of human flourishing as a normative (hence teleological) ideal, and their emphases upon flourishing's *agential* and *circumstantial* components. Human agency – most efficaciously the good habits we call *virtues*, both moral and intellectual – is arguably the feature of human flourishing most common to persons *qua* persons; but the circumstances of our flourishing (in themselves necessary because of the space-time character of human existence) vary greatly, both with respect to the particulars given us throughout our lives *and* as subject matter and project for every person's unique vocation. (My own vocation as a professor of architecture and urban design is clearly oriented to the *circumstances* of human flourishing, the *agential* pursuit of which my character virtues or lack thereof either advance or retard.)

So far, so good. I think however the full and final Theology Brief could usefully address: 1) certain other components of and questions about human flourishing, and 2) its treatment of the emotional dimension of human flourishing; and these are related. Let me speak of issues I would hope to be addressed. There is implied but nevertheless nothing explicit in the Preview about our animal nature, about the necessary relationship between our bodies -- I will say, I hope not controversially, from *conception* -- and our personhood; or about vulnerability and disability; or the fact and significance of suffering; or (surprisingly) about work and vocation; or play; or explicitly about either the sacramental / eschatological nature of our perfection, or the sacramental / eschatological perfection of our nature (though I see these as implied in the Preview's final sentence).

The Preview also, as others have noted, tends to be individualistic in its account of human flourishing. What does it mean for *communities* to flourish, and how does communal flourishing relate to individual flourishing either in secular life or in the Church (cf. 1 Corinthians 12)? What does it mean to be flourishing as a fetus, infant, child, adolescent, or in old age – existential conditions in which flourishing is arguably *most* contingent upon circumstance – or as a young adult, spouse, or parent growing into full caring agency for children, elderly parents, one another, and one's work? I would hope to see as well a treatment of sin, differences of temperament, and the ways in which God's love for us is manifested in both our pleasure and our suffering.

I see these issues as related to the Preview's assessment of *feelings*, which after *the triumph of the therapeutic* perhaps

should not merit quite so central and objectively important a role in individual and collective human flourishing as *agency* and *circumstance*. Feelings are considered initially in a utilitarian calculus of pain and pleasure, both rightly regarded as insufficient measures of human flourishing. But if, as the Preview suggests, *joy* is the privileged sacramental and eschatological emotion, for those in daily life not temperamentally disposed toward joy -- can we imagine, say, Evelyn Waugh, or even St. Jerome, both of whom one hopes were being faithful to their respective vocations, being habitually joyful *prior to* the beatific vision? -- it seems an unnecessary burden to designate joy as *the* emotional signifier of quotidian human flourishing. To be sure, pleasure in God's creation, in human friendship and love, in whatever is true, good, or beautiful – ultimately, pleasure in "the sweet 'well done' in judgment hour" -- is no small component of human flourishing. But these are all instances of taking pleasure in things that are objectively good. Rather than zeroing in on one or a few specific emotions that Christians should be feeling, would it not be more accurate to say that flourishing requires not a disregard of feeling (including sometimes, for example, feelings of revulsion), but rather *an education in how to feel in ways appropriate* to the objective requirements of human agency (vocation), circumstance, and divine providence? Perhaps also to say that to be flourishing in a present sense is to be *on the road* to an end of more comprehensive knowledge; of personal sanctity in communion with God, neighbor, and a transfigured and sanctified creation ['a new heaven and a new earth']; to our fullest recognition of the beauty of both God and creation; and this *in the privileged specificity of our own unique vocation*, whether more pleasurable or less, whether entailing less suffering or more?

Finally, almost a *coda*: I approach the issue of human flourishing as a Christian and as an urbanist, the latter from an Aristotelian presumption that the *telos* of the state – even today, as for Aristotle, at the scale of the city (correctly understood as an agrarian-urban unit) – is the well-being of its citizens over the course of a whole lifetime (as it is for the Church, but over the course of a lifetime and into eternity). Christian theology perfects Aristotelian *eudaimonia* – happiness; blessedness; flourishing -- in a variety of particulars, e.g., with a more expansive view of human being; by introducing the idea of *shalom* and its recognition of a necessary transcendent dimension to human flourishing; and by noting the necessity for human flourishing of the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. But this completion does not negate the essential philosophical structural soundness of the Aristotelian idea succinctly summarized in *Politics VII.1*: "the best life, for both individuals and for states [πόλεις] is the life of virtue [moral and intellectual], when virtue has external goods enough for the performance of good actions." Such a life necessarily entails living in a variety of communities with others – and for most human beings *in a city*, understood as an agrarian-urban unit which in today's world can range in scale from a solitary village to a metropolis of towns and city neighborhoods, but always a community of communities the *telos* of which is the flourishing of its members.

What might such an urbanism look / be like in the modern world? In addition to the specific *Chicago 2109* project referenced above [https://afterburnham.com/] I have proposed more generally in chapter XI of *Till We Have Built Jerusalem,* "The *Polis* and Natural Law," a derived natural law precept about urban environments: *human beings should* make *walkable mixed-use settlements.* Many things follow from this precept, but one consequence of making land-use positive law – e.g. zoning law, property tax law -- in accordance with this natural law precept would be human settlements less like contemporary automobile suburbs, and more like the small town and big city neighborhoods that existed in a variety of locally specific forms virtually everywhere in the world prior to 1950.

But this would require us to become experts in the ends of city-making, with corresponding adjustments in the means by

which we make them.

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