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by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars
across the spectrum of faculties
in research universities
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Preview Response

SUFFERING AND THE GIFT OF FLOURISHING IN COLOMBIA

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Flourishing in suffering

I read the Theology brief on human flourishing after visiting a family of indigenous healers in my country, Colombia – a family that has become my own. The Taita's (shaman) grandchildren, 7 and 4 years old, were mourning the absence of their mother, who had to go away for a treatment. Instead of grief, they seemed only capable of love and joy. Love and joy sprang so spontaneously from them, as life itself nursing and nourishing each tree and animal around their home. The three dimensions of a flourishing life proposed by the authors of the brief (agential, circumstantial and emotional) were not only integrated in them, but their borders dissolved in those children's spontaneity. Certainly, they will have to grow up physically, psychologically and spiritually, and growth requires the conscious effort necessary for educating oneself in a right way of thinking and acting. But at that very moment there was no dichotomy between an active and a passive dimension of a fully human life, which, just as Angelus Silesius's rose, "is without why, it blooms because it blooms".

Maybe only in deep suffering are we able to experience such a degree of surrender and emptiness as to rediscover that, as the authors of the brief say, a flourishing life is not a possession or an achievement of an independent self (of the modern, autonomous, buffered self, to use Charles Taylor's designation), but rather the gift of a life spent in relationship to the Divine. Through everything that we can and cannot do (agency), in everything that happens to us (circumstances), and within all our feelings and dispositions (emotional), it is God who makes us flourish. Children normally do not hinder His doings.

I believe that to recover that spontaneity is one of the greatest aims and invitations for a genuinely flourishing human life.

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