



Global Faculty Initiative

**The Faculty Initiative
seeks to promote the integration
of Christian faith and academic disciplines
by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars
across the spectrum of faculties
in research universities
worldwide.**

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Preview Response

VIRTUES / EDUCATION

Hubertus Roebben

Chair of Religious Education, Adult Faith Formation and Homiletics at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Bonn (Germany)

The virtues approach of colleague Herdt reminds us of important elements in the reflection on moral behavior and ethical decision-making. One of them is “human flourishing”. This should be the ultimate horizon for every kind of social and political action, regardless of the worldview or religious background of individuals and communities involved. The development of cardinal virtues in family education, public schooling and the life of faith can deeply and decisively contribute to human flourishing, to what I would call “growing in shared humanity”.

However, two remarks need to be made. First, I believe an *inclusive* reconfiguration of the idea of human flourishing and its accompanying virtues need to be made. By “inclusive” I mean ways in which the diversity of different options of virtuous behavior can be compared and discussed in the light of human flourishing. How do we learn to live together with differently shaped contexts for our virtues? Being a European scholar these days, this issue is really at the heart of political concern for me and many others. And secondly, what is needed for virtues to come alive in *ambiguous* settings, such as pandemic, war, racial injustice, etc.? Which formal procedures of behavior and decision-making can support the virtuous live of politicians, researchers, doctors, soldiers, teachers, etc.?

At least two fields of application should be considered briefly here. My own doctoral research was on *moral education* in Christian perspective. I conducted research on a developmental model for becoming a virtuous person and found out that instilling virtues of trust and obedience in early childhood needs to be followed by more complex virtue sets, such as the ones mentioned by colleague Herdt (temperance, courage, justice and prudence) in adolescence and young adulthood. This implies two different modes of moral education – first by admiration of virtuous examples, later by critically communicating with these examples. The second phase is much more difficult and needs extra attention these days, so that young people can become real virtuous agents of their own lives and the lives of others.

The second field of application is *academia*. Yesterday evening, after a splendid presentation on “Identities, ambiguities and designs of meaning” (our common faculty research topic) by our colleague in patristics, we discussed the need for more space in universities and higher education to discuss complexity and to deliver “slow” results of research. We were not sure whether or not modern academic institutions with their focus on result-oriented research “outcomes” still can offer us such a safe and brave space. We decided to reconsider and reconsolidate our search for a common set of

intellectual virtues for our faculty of theology and to start talking about this anew – bottom up and in mutual respect.

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