



# 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

## **HOW CAN VIRTUES DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE RELATIONAL DIMENSIONS?**

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I highly appreciate Jennifer Herdt's Preview of *The Virtues*.

The understanding of virtue ethics in terms of agents acting according to their moral character, reminded me a lot what was proposed by theologian Stanley Hauerwas as an important component of his confessional postmodernism. Moreover, as a Christian scientist, constantly seeking to give meaning to my beliefs according to our scientific age, I appreciate this emphasis on agency and character because it creates a healthy distance from substantialist views of the self.

Like many open and relational Christian thinkers, I am inclined to understand reality, including ourselves, as an interconnected wholeness. In communities such as the Church, a country, or even academia, there is a co-dependency among individuals. This is coherent with what we know from current natural/social sciences, and even, with what Jesus teaches us regarding the two most important commandments (Matthew 22:36-40). Our world is social, we live in relation to God and to our neighbors, and these relationships happen in a temporal unfolding.

A question I raise for Professor Herdt: How can the idea of virtues development include a relational dimension beyond the process of admiration for virtuous exemplars? I suspect that a mere process of admiration would not ensure that behind that process there is a true relational understanding of virtues. In other words: Are we talking about a true altruistic/empathetic process and not an imitation motivated, for instance, by narcissistic purposes without a self-reflection about the relational nature of virtues? If so, it would be very important to explain why it is the case.

An answer to the above question would be highly relevant if we think in current trends in science and technology, such as the open science movement, in which open and relational Christian views could play a significant role, as I [recently outlined](#) in a collaborative work edited by Tim Reddish, Bonnie Rambob, Fran Stedman, and Thomas Jay Oord ([Partnering with God: Exploring Collaboration in Open and Relational Theology](#), SacraSage Press, 2021). I argue that open and relational Christians can provide a deeper

meaning to limited forms of communities involved in the open science movement, and so the movement genuinely reaches ethical virtues as cooperation, inclusion, and openness.

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