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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
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Preview Response

WHAT ABOUT VIRTUE IN OTHER RELIGIONS?

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As a New Testament scholar who works in the area of Christian wealth ethics, I agree heartily with Prof. Herdt's construal of Christian virtues as both *infused* and *cultivated*. The component of *infusion* does, to my mind, reflect Pauline theology as well as, e.g., Jeremiah 31. So also, the emphasis on the *development* of virtues coheres with the exhortations of Jesus, James, and the Torah.

It is as a participant in interreligious dialogue (specifically, with Muslim theologians) that the Christian and biblical account of virtues aptly summarized by Prof. Herdt leaves me with questions. If divine infusion of virtue depends on the work of the Holy Spirit poured into believers as part of the soteriological process that begins with reconciliation to God through Christ (as Romans 5:1-5 does indeed indicate), then what do I do about the fact that I perceive in many of my Muslim friends the same patterns of acting well that, in a Christian, I would call virtue? It strikes me as special pleading to say, on the one hand, that they are acting well, but not consistently so, by dint of their lack of infusion by the Holy Spirit; and by contrast to say that my Christian friends act well under the salvific influence of the Spirit, and that their inconsistencies are merely the persistent influences of their sin nature. It also seems to me that the pillars of Islam—profession of faith, prayer, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage—look very much like components in the process of developing virtues, especially when coupled with the admiration and imitations of virtuous exemplars from within the Islamic tradition. (I could further elaborate the same argument in connection to Judaism, but the issue feels more poignant in relation to Islam than in relation to the Jewish religion, of which Christianity sees itself as an heir.)

In brief, I would be grateful for Prof. Herdt's insights on how to connect this account of Christian virtue with the settled dispositions of laudable behavior on display in many faithful practitioners of the other Abrahamic religions.

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