

Cultivating the virtues

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An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB. “Dearest Friends,” WCCM International Newsletter, Winter 2001.

Peace is not achieved by rooting out and destroying evil. When we become aware of our vices – anger, pride, greed, lust – the attempt to destroy them easily degenerates into self-hatred. After all, if we cannot love ourselves why bother to love others? Better than destroying your faults is to work patiently to implant the virtues – a slower and less dramatic work but far more effective. And by avoiding the dangers of religious hypocrisy and self-righteousness, the work creates a more pleasant working personality. Hidden in all our faults – our capacity for evil – there are also the seeds of virtues, many virtues. The terrorist may have had the seed of justice in him before his anger and the delusion that he is the instrument of God’s wrath took him over. When we conduct war against ourselves (many of the greatest religious fanatics have been self-denying) we risk huge collateral damage: in the destruction of our own seeds of virtue. Every kind of violence is a crime against humanity because it deprives the world of unknown goodness. The first step in implanting the virtues that will eventually overpower the vices is to establish the foundational virtue of deep and regular prayer. Through this silent rhythm of prayer, wisdom slowly penetrates our mind and our world. Wisdom is the universal power that brings good out of evil. As the book of Wisdom says, “the hope for the salvation of the world lies in the greatest number of wise people.” The wise know the distinction between self-knowledge and self-fixation, between detachment and hardness of heart, between correction and cruelty. There are no rules for wisdom. Rules are never universal. But virtue is.

After Meditation, an excerpt from The Book of Wisdom 8: 21-29 in Christian Community Bible (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1997), p. 925.

Wisdom surpasses in mobility all that moves, pervades and permeates all things. She is a breath of the power of God, an emanation of glory; nothing impure can enter her. She is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of God’s action and an image of God’s goodness. She is but one, yet Wisdom can do all things and, herself unchanging, she renews all things. She enters souls, making them prophets and friends of God. . . She is indeed more beautiful than the sun and surpasses all the constellations; she outrivals light, for light gives way to night, but evil cannot prevail against Wisdom.

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