

Can 'BROTHER LAWRENCE' be viewed as a true 'BROTHER IN CHRIST'?

On 20 January 2014 I received an email from a Christian – the subject matter of his email was 'Brother Lawrence' and in his email he posed this question – 'Do you believe that the above monk was a true believer and would you be happy to recommend a believer to read his book'?

The 'book' in question is called 'The Practice of the Presence of God' and on one web site I gleaned the following information –

Brother Lawrence (1605-1691)

The Practice of the Presence of God is a collection of letters and transcriptions of conversations, compiled by a disciple of Brother Lawrence. **Brother Lawrence was a Carmelite monk** and head cook in his monastery's kitchens. He quickly gained an international reputation as **a mystic** and spiritual counselor. The Practice of the Presence records his last words of advice to his friends and disciples, as he suffered from an unnamed illness which would eventually take his life.

In the light of this brief 'pen portrait' of 'Brother Lawrence' and the book 'The Practice of the Presence of God' I would like to make the following observations –

1. In the video '**Catholicism: Crisis of Faith**' that can be viewed on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls6IM8X52M0> my dear brother in Christ, **Bart Brewer** (my first invited guest to Northern Ireland and who is now in glory) **who was a former Carmelite Priest** (same order as Brother Lawrence) **speaks of his time and experiences as a Carmelite Priest**. You can see Bart's revealing contributions by scrolling to **12.53; 18.43; 30.38; 31.43** As can be understood from Bart's comments, his Carmelite Order believed that personal sufferings would be efficacious in obtaining remission of sins and it would appear that '**Brother Lawrence**' subscribed to this 'spiritually fatal view' as can be seen by a short article (25 April 2011) written by **The Berean Call**. The article is located on <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/brother-lawrence-and-never-finding-salvation> and reads as follows –

Brother Lawrence and never finding salvation

TBC: The contemplative movement seeks to find spiritual illumination apart from the revealed Word of God in Scripture. As a result, medieval Catholic writers such as Brother Lawrence are looked to as a source for intimacy with God. Lawrence, however great his personal sacrifice, missed the basics of the Gospel, not realizing that it was Christ's full and complete sacrifice that paid for our sins. **As a Roman Catholic, to his death he retained the false idea that his own sufferings were efficacious and paid for his sins.**

"Prepared by such a life, Brother Lawrence saw death draw near without perturbation. His patience had been great indeed through all his life, but it waxed stronger [than] ever as he approached the end. He was never in the least fretful, when he was most wracked with pain; joy was manifest not only on his countenance, but still more in his speech, so much so in fact that those who visited him were constrained to ask whether he was not suffering. 'Forgive me,' he replied. 'Yes, I do suffer, the pains in my side sore trouble me, but my spirit is happy and well content.' They added, 'Suppose God will that you suffer for ten years, what then?' 'I would suffer,' he answered, 'not for ten years only, but till the Day of Judgment, if it be God's will; and I would hope that He would continue to aid me with His grace to bear it joyfully.' His one desire was that he might suffer something for the love of God, **for all his sins**, and finding in his last illness a favorable occasion for suffering in this life, he embraced it heartily. **Purposely he bade the brethren to turn him on to his right side; he knew that this position gave great pain, and therefore wished to remain therein to satisfy his burning desire to suffer...**"

(Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, comments by Father Joseph de Beaufort, who compiled the book after Brother Lawrence died).

TBC: Our biblical hope is so much greater. ("Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory" (Colossians: 2: 21-3: 4)

Cecil: I like Matthew Henry's comments on these verses. Mr. Henry wrote **'True wisdom is, to keep close to the appointments of the gospel; in entire subjection to Christ, who is the only Head of his church. Self-imposed sufferings and fastings, might have a show of uncommon spirituality and willingness for suffering, but this was not "in any honour" to God. The whole tended, in a wrong manner, to satisfy the carnal mind, by gratifying self-will, self-wisdom, self-righteousness... To be dead, then, means this, that those who have the Holy Spirit, mortifying within them the lusts of the flesh, are able to despise earthly things, and to desire those that are heavenly. Christ is, at present, one whom we have not seen; but our comfort is, that our life is safe with him. The streams of this living water flow into the soul by the influences of the Holy Spirit, through faith. Christ lives in the believer by his Spirit, and the believer lives to him in all he does.'**

2. Christians are not to employ some 'mystical' technique recommended by a man, **Brother Lawrence**, who did not know the true and living God and so **did not possess His indwelling presence** and because of that he 'devised' some method to try and 'conjure up' that presence. (I believe that many sadly unregenerate professing charismatics also seek to conjure up similar 'presence-experiences' and that is evidenced by the Lord's words in Matthew 7:21-23) How do we **'practice the presence of God'** - we are to live lives that reflect 'the presence of God' (John 14:16-18) - **"trust and obey"** as the old hymn says - we **'trust God'** when he says He indwells us (John 14:23) and we walk in **'obedience to His Word'** to demonstrate that truth (John 15:14) and **'to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever'** as the catechism says. **Romans 12:1-2** would be a good summary of this.

3. We **'encounter God'** with our mind and not with our heart – yes our 'heart' can be touched through feelings and emotions BUT it is through the 'mind' that we receive and process God's truth. In **2 Corinthians 4:3-4** we read **"But if our gospel be hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world [the devil] hath blinded THE MINDS of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"** and then in verse 6 Paul writes **"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"** and the result is that our **'blinded minds'** are given **'spiritual sight'**.

Why do believers possess **"the knowledge of the glory of God"**? In **1 Corinthians 2:14** the apostle Paul explains why the natural/unregenerate man does not understand God's truth – Paul wrote **"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither CAN he know them because they are spiritually discerned"**. Paul then goes on to talk about the ability of believers to know the mind of the Lord and he writes in verse 16 **"But we have the MIND of Christ"**.

In Romans chapter 7 Paul outlines the struggle that he has as a believer between obeying or disobeying God and he writes in verse 25 **"So then, with the MIND I myself serve the law of God"**. When appealing to the Christians in Philippi to be humble just as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was, Paul wrote in chapter 2 verse 5 **"Let this MIND be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"**. When appealing to Christians to live holy lives the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:13-15 **"Wherefore, gird up the loins of your MIND, be sober...As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance...be ye holy in all manner of life"**.

When discerning God's presence, direction and will for our lives our minds must never become 'disengaged' in favour of emotions, feelings, meaningless vain repetitive prayer techniques etc.

4. On the first edition of **Ray Yungen's** book **'A Time of Departing'** an endorsement that I gave was printed on the back cover and read as follows –

"Is contemplative prayer really a vehicle to a closer walk with God? *A Time of Departing* documents clearly that far from being such a vehicle, contemplative prayer is more akin to a Trojan horse. You may be very surprised to read of who the prime pawns are in this spiritually dangerous deception."

CECIL ANDREWS 'Take Heed' Ministries Northern Ireland

Since writing that endorsement **Ray Yungen** has had published a second and enlarged edition of '**A Time of Departing**' and one of the 'enlargements' is a section that includes many references to '**Brother Lawrence**'. The book itself can be purchased online by going to -

http://www.lighthouse trails.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=LTP&Product_Code=ATOD&Category_Code=RY

However, I am also delighted to say that the relevant section from the book

(Pages 146 – 152) can be viewed and read online by going to –

[http://www.lighthouse trails.com/atodch8.pdf#search="brother lawrence"](http://www.lighthouse trails.com/atodch8.pdf#search=)

For those who might want to consider further this whole subject of '**The Presence of God**' perhaps I could direct you to the following two resources.

Firstly there is a lengthy article called '**The present of His Presence**' located on

<http://herescope.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/the-present-of-his-presence.html>

Then secondly there is a book by **Warren Smith** called

"Another Jesus" Calling: How False Christs Are Entering the Church Through Contemplative Prayer

There is a review of this book located on

<http://herescope.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/another-jesus-calling.html>

and the book itself can be purchased online by going to

http://www.lighthouse trails.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=LTP&Product_Code=AJC&Category_Code=WS

So, in conclusion, how did I respond to the question posed by the Christian who contacted me when he asked '**would you be happy to recommend a believer to read his book**'?). I replied with these words -

I would not recommend 'Brother Lawrence' as he was an unregenerate Roman Catholic Carmelite monk who was into unscriptural 'mystical practices' designed to try and 'conjure up' some sort of 'presence of God' because of course, being unregenerate, he was not indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.

