

Seek His Face Continually

by Jeremy James



For several years I used to visit a local nursing home to chat with the elderly residents. One lady, whom I will call Maura, was known to be somewhat sullen but she eventually warmed to me. She had lived her life on a very low income and knew how it felt to barely get by.

She told me a story about her old cat, Kitty, whom she adored. The cat had reached the point where she could hardly walk and Maura was resigned to the fact that she'd need to bring her to the vet and have her euthanized. She was troubled by the thought of losing her dear friend. To add to her woes, she would have to coax her into the cat carrier and she knew Kitty would stubbornly refuse to co-operate.

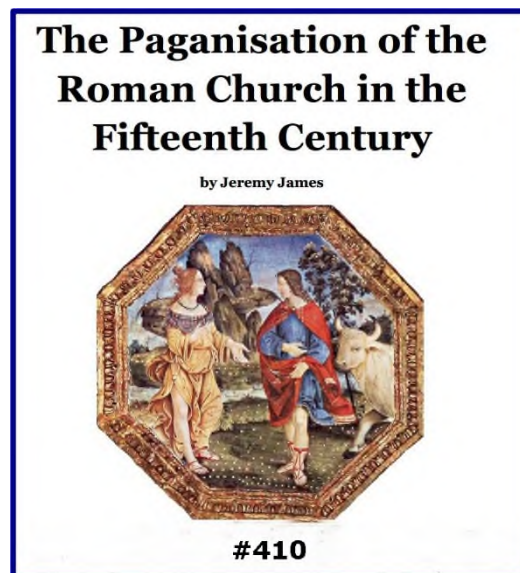
That night she had a talk with Kitty, placed the cat carrier on the kitchen counter, and went to bed. When she came down in the morning, she couldn't believe what she saw. Barely able to walk and very weak, Kitty had somehow managed to jump up on the counter and get into the basket. And there she lay, dead.

Maura was deeply touched. Kitty had kindly spared her the trauma of taking her to the vet and having her put down.

Maura was already quite old and infirm when I got to know her. She didn't seem to have any visitors apart from me. The staff were kind to her. One day she confided that she felt ready to pass over. This is something that many elderly people are not prepared to talk about. Perhaps her experience with Kitty had opened her eyes to the spiritual assistance we receive when we are dying. "I'm going to ask Him to take me," she said.

The following morning, after eating breakfast, she sat down in her chair, bowed her head and quietly passed away.

In our last paper (#410), we saw how the Catholic Church began a long process of paganization in the fifteenth century. Her leaders then, as now, were secretly following "the perennial philosophy", which is steeped in the myths of the ancient world and can be traced all the way back to Egypt and Babylon.



In our closing statement we said: "We must pray DIRECTLY to God, and ONLY to God, in the name of Jesus. The principal aim of paganism is to break this relationship and get us to place our attention elsewhere."

The paganised way of seeking God

The current paper (#411) is a continuation of this theme, an exploration of the awful spiritual harm that mankind has inflicted upon itself by accepting a paganised form of Christianity.

This may seem to be primarily of concern to followers of the Roman Catholic version of Christianity or the Eastern Orthodox Church, but this is far from being the case. There is hardly a branch of Christianity anywhere in the world today which is not infected with doctrinal beliefs that are grounded, not in Scripture, but in a paganised worldview.

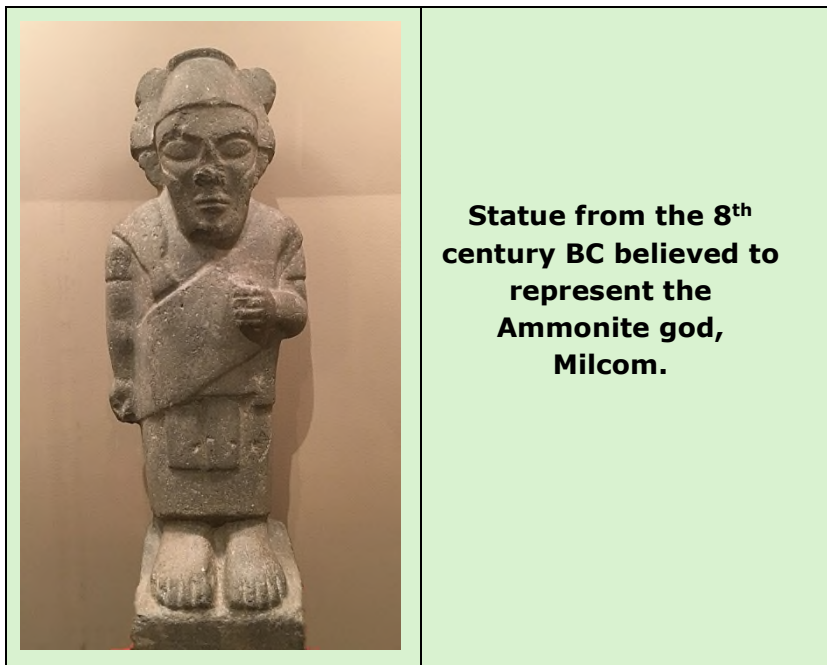
Reflecting on this, we wondered if there was a teaching somewhere in Scripture which highlighted the stark contradiction between these two positions.

Readers may be familiar with the passage in Zephaniah where the LORD identifies five categories of false believer:

“I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims [idolatrous priests] with the priests; and them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham [Milcom]; and them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him. (Zephaniah 1:4-6)

The categories are as follows:

- (a) Those who blatantly reject the LORD and worship another god;
- (b) Those who worship the LORD but at the same time worship the gods of astrology in secret;
- (c) Those who are nominal followers of the LORD and mention the LORD in their benedictions but who also acknowledge another god;
- (d) Those who may have been faithful to the LORD at one time but have since ceased to believe in him or acknowledge His existence;
- (e) Those who have never prayed to the LORD or sought His assistance.



These five ‘categories’ would seem to cover the entire spectrum of human disobedience, from unbelief to outright rebellion.

For purposes of this paper we are mainly interested in category (c). These are the people who swear by the LORD and by Milcom.

What exactly does this mean in the context of the church today? It refers to the dual authority which nominal Christians ordinarily cite in support of their opinions. When they say they are guided by the Bible and quote Scripture, they could be said to “swear by the LORD”. On the other hand, when they accept another authority – whether science, popular belief, or the general consensus – and act accordingly, they “swear by Milcom”.

The world corresponds to Milcom

The world is a modern equivalent of Milcom. That’s how Satan has designed it. The world is a false god in its own right, a vast compendium of values and opinions, reports and aspirations, which presume to overrule or supersede what the Word of God has plainly told us.

The Jews were in a similar situation in Apostolic times. Many converted to Christianity but found it next to impossible to sever their connection with the old Judaic system. Here is how H A Ironside put it in his commentary on the Book of Hebrews:

“We have only to consult the book of Acts, particularly in connection with Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, to realize how backward thousands of Hebrew believers were in the years immediately preceding the destruction of the Holy City and the manifest setting aside of the temple ritual. Those who, for the time that had elapsed since their conversion, ought to have been well able to teach others, were themselves needing instruction in the most elementary truths of the Word of God. They had not even grasped the distinction between Israel's hopes which are earthly, and those of the Church which are heavenly. Neither had they realized the transitory and shadowy character of the Levitical economy in contrast with the permanency of the Christian revelation. They were ignorant of the first principles of the oracles of God, still requiring milk and unable to digest strong meat. They were babes in the truth when they should have been mature believers. The time had come to insist upon the setting aside of Judaism and going on to the full truth of Christianity.”

In a sense, as believers, we have two ‘dispensations’. Before we are born again, we are dead in trespasses and sins. After we are born again we are dead to the world. These are vastly different states! But outwardly, to the eyes of the world, they are generally indistinguishable. Peter is speaking of this when he says:

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” (2 Peter 2:20)

We are like the Hebrew converts in the Book of Acts if, having “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”, we permit ourselves to become entangled in the world all over again and use some of its many standards to evaluate our lives and guide our behavior. We can be washed by the Holy Spirit and escape thereby “the pollutions of the world”, but we are not necessarily born again. As H A Ironside put it, to be a “partaker” of the Holy Spirit

“...is not at all the same thing as to be born of the Spirit, sealed by the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, anointed by the Spirit, baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ, or filled with the Holy Spirit. It is simply to be made aware of the mighty power of the Spirit working upon the hearts and minds of men bringing conviction, and wooing the heart toward Christ. One might tremble under this supernatural power and yet turn away from the message of the Spirit which if truly believed would bring life and peace.”

We are not trying to make a distinction in this paper between the outward behavior of professing Christians who are saved and those who are not – though such a distinction is possible. Rather our aim is to highlight for the benefit of professing Christians a teaching in Scripture that will dispel forever any lingering doubts we may have about our daily relationship with God.



This is why we opened with the story about Maura and her cat. This elderly Christian woman, who was very much alone and had lived a very unremarkable life, still knew how near Jesus was to her. She had no doubts. She was alone but not lonely. And when she felt it was time to ask her Heavenly Father to take her home, He answered her prayer.

Oddly enough, the day after I wrote down the story of Maura for use in this article, I happened upon an episode from the original TV series, *All Creatures Great and Small* (1978), which was made by the BBC. It was based on the books by retired vet James Herriot, whose storylines were greatly influenced by his own experiences in a practice in the Yorkshire dales.

In this episode he is visiting Miss Stubbs, an elderly, bedbound spinster, to check on her dogs and cats. She had a large embroidered sign above her bed which read, 'GOD IS NEAR'.



Later in the episode her old dog passed away and Herriot called on her to express his sympathy. Miss Stubbs quietly told him that her own time had come too. She had absolutely no fear of death and knew she would be reunited with her parents and her brothers after she left this world. The only thing that bothered her was not knowing whether she'd ever meet her pets again. Herriot's reply seemed to reassure her.

Just a few days later, she died. As an expression of her gratitude she had bequeathed her embroidered sign, 'GOD IS NEAR', to Herriot.

He is not far from any of us

As believers we live from day to day. Oh yes, we make plans, but our heart is in the moment with God. We can do this because He is near, just as He was for Maura and Miss Stubbs. As the Word of God says in Acts 17:27, He is not far from any of us.

The world does all it can to distract us from this ever-fresh reality. Our cultural environment has been carefully shaped by the powers that be – through the media, education and technology – to ensure that, should we permit it, we can be continually preoccupied with pleasing diversions. It may be painless, but it is also immensely wasteful. In effect, we are being entertained to death.

Our walk with Christ in the Age of Grace is akin to the journey taken by the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. They were in God's care and enjoyed a knowledge of His presence through the pillars of cloud and fire. They also knew how many years of their wilderness experience still remained. Today we enjoy a knowledge of His presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We also know, in general terms, how much of our 'wilderness experience' still remains.

If this is so, then why do so many professing Christians feel God is "watching us from a distance" (This is the refrain in a lovely song made popular by Nanci Griffith in the late 1980s)? It is always good to be reminded that God is watching us, but He is not doing so *from a distance*. As the Word of God says, He is never far from any of us.



I am reminded here of the prophet Amos when the Lord appeared to him, standing by a wall which had been built in a fully upright position by the use of a plumbline:

“Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline.” (Amos 7:7-8)

The Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, was not standing at a distance but near enough for Amos to see the plumbline.

The instinctive response of our fallen nature

Philosophy and metaphysics through the ages, followed later by the doctrines and strictures of science, have greatly exploited the mind of fallen man. We tend instinctively to place limitations or conditions on what the Creator of heaven and earth can or cannot do. The Word reminds us in many places of this awful tendency. Even Moses, “the servant of the LORD”, doubted for a moment whether He could furnish a lavish meal for up to two million people in the wilderness of Sinai. Shortly thereafter a staggering quantity of food rained down from the sky:

“And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.” (Numbers 11:21-23)

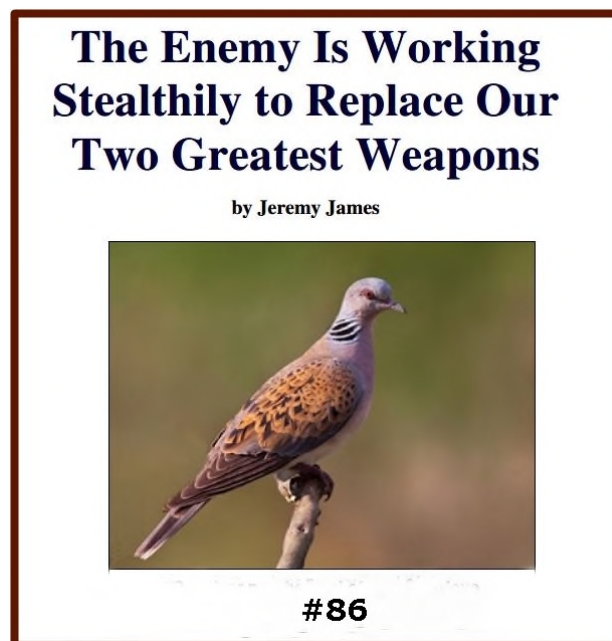
The same expression – re the shortening of the LORD’s hand – is used in Isaiah:

“Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:” (Isaiah 59:1)

When we sit alone and imagine that God is *in the distance* we shorten His hand as it were, we place a limitation on the blood-bought relationship between ourselves and our Redeemer.

The prophet also refers to what we might call the universal hearing of God. His words imply an active attentiveness, not just a capacity.

God is listening.



Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you

For those who want to know the nearness of God, it is only necessary to call upon Him. We are assured that He hears us and that He draws near to all who call upon Him *in truth*:

“The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.” (Psalm 145:18)

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)

Our Maker wants all men and all women to have this opportunity. As we noted in our paper on Calvinism (#89): “Calvin made a great mistake when he allowed Greek philosophy to shape his understanding of God... He simply couldn't see that God's sovereignty was so great that He could give free will to all men and STILL accomplish His holy will to the smallest detail.”

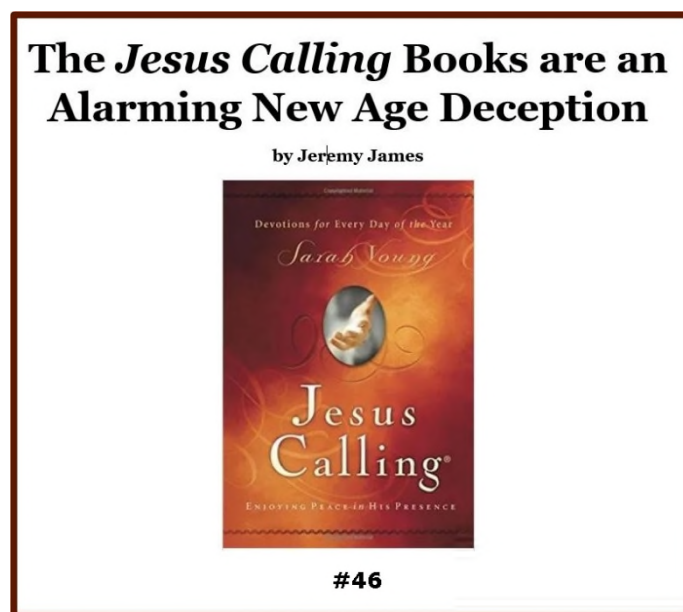
Our LORD did not predestine some of humanity to eternal salvation and some to eternal damnation. He hears all who call upon Him in truth:

“I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.” (Proverbs 8:17)

To seek Him “early” means to be so filled with an eagerness to find Him that it is our first thought when we awaken every morning.

False pagan techniques

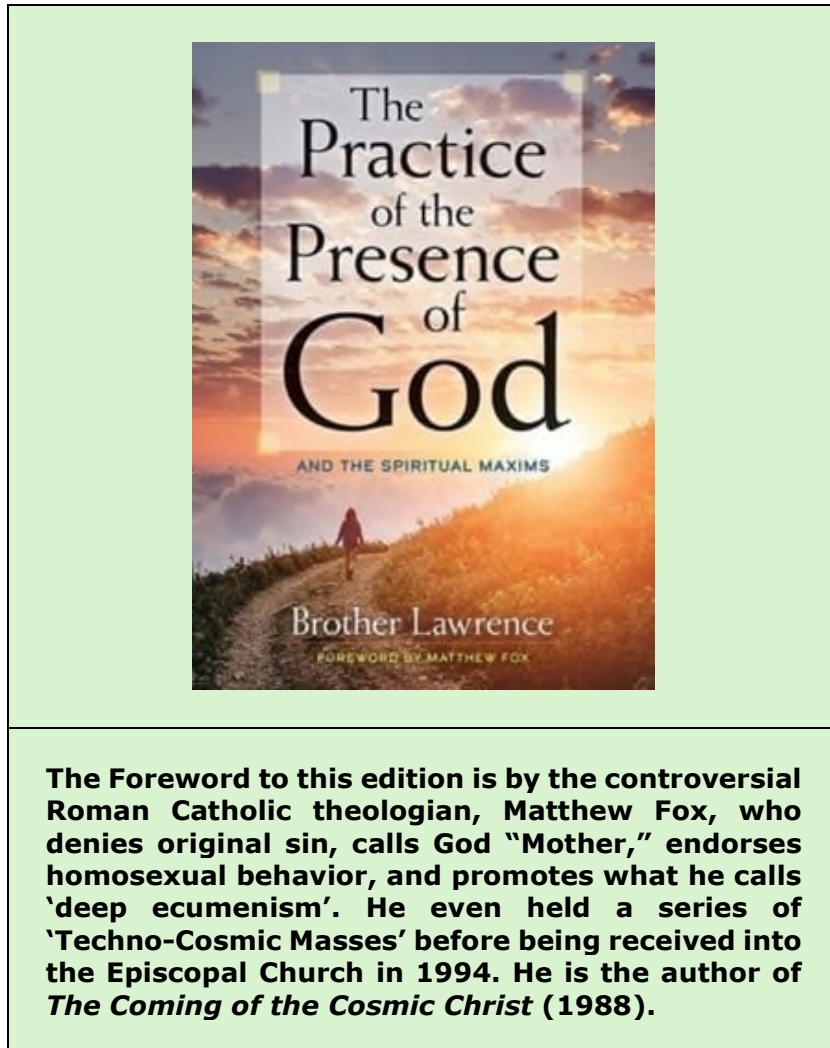
Great problems arise when we confuse the nearness of God with what the neo-pagans call “the practice of the presence of God”. This is at the core of contemplative spirituality, a false teaching which has infected many Christian denominations. In addition to a short work by Brother Lawrence, a French Catholic monk, they cite approvingly *A Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster, a Quaker theologian.



In our paper #46, *The Jesus Calling Books are an Alarming New Age Deception*, we made the following comment about the practice of the presence of God:

“...Jesus is with each born-again believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Toward the close of his ministry, he told his disciples that he was going to his Father but that he would send another Comforter. This is the Holy Spirit who enables us to pray to our Father in the name of his wonderful Son. Christ restored to us the relationship with our Father that mankind lost at the Fall. The Father is all-knowing but He is **not** in the world or part of the world. He is **not** a mystical Presence!

“To practice the presence of God, as Brother Lawrence taught, and as so many professing Christians teach today, is a very serious spiritual error. Our Father is not ‘present’ with us in the same way that an angel may be present. In fact our Father does not operate in the world in any way that our minds can understand or that any faculty of our being can apprehend.”



Brother Lawrence wrote his little book with almost no regard to the Word of God. In his Letters, which comprise more than half of the book, he made no mention of Jesus. His focus is on the heart, not the Word. This is typical of the Catholic mystics. In his Fifth Letter he says -

“I know that for the right practice of it the heart must be empty of all other things, because God will possess the heart *alone*; and as He cannot possess it *alone* without emptying it of all besides, so neither can He act *there*, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him. There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practise and experience it...”

The Bible does NOT teach us to seek God through our heart. Rather, it gives a strong warning against taking that approach:

**“The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately wicked:
who can know it?”
(Jeremiah 17:9)**

**“A fool hath no delight in understanding,
but that his heart may discover itself.”
(Proverbs 18:2)**

There is no technique (or “exercise” as Brother Lawrence calls it) by which we are able to draw closer to God. Prayer is not a technique. Neither is a study of God’s Word. Any attempt to “practice the presence of God” is little more than an imaginative exercise. It may bring emotional consolation, but it has no foundation in God’s Word.

CONCLUSION

We can only approach God on His terms! This requires that we study His Word and gain a deeper understanding of what He expects of us. The Enemy devised mysticism in all its forms to lure men away from the careful spiritual instruction that only the Bible can provide, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

When we love God, serve Him, and keep His commandments, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us – as born-again believers – leads us gently into a better understanding of what we must do to please Him and draw closer to Him.

We can only do this in the name of His Son. Jesus restored our relationship with our Father on Calvary. On that remarkable occasion, the veil of separation was torn from top to bottom. Thereafter, as blood-bought believers, we are entitled – entirely on foot of what Jesus achieved on our behalf on Calvary – to approach the throne of God and request His grace and mercy:

**“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that
we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”
(Hebrews 4:16)**

This is joy of the highest kind. *This* is where our hearts respond! *This* is where we know, plainly and with certainty, that God is near, and that He hears us and knows us.

There are many passages in His Word which exemplify this truth, but, given what we have been discussing in this paper, there are two that really stand out:

**“Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that
seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his
face continually [*tamid* H8548].” (1 Chronicles 16:10-11)**

**“Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that
seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his
face evermore [*tamid* H8548].” (Psalm 105:3-4)**

These passages are saying the same thing. Through them the LORD is telling us how He wants us to approach or “seek” Him:

1. Glory in His holy Name for He is the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; praise Him and take delight in Who He is; praise Him for sending Jesus, His Son, to redeem us.
2. Rejoice in Whom we seek; take delight in the thought that He has asked us to seek Him!
3. Look toward Him at all times and seek His strength, His grace and His mercy.
4. In all your seeking, expect Him to reveal more of Who He is; in particular expect to see His face one day.

This seeking implies a patient waiting, a recognition that God responds to us in His own time and on His own terms:

“I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.” (Psalm 130:5-6)

**“The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.”
(Lamentations 3:25-26)**

**Jeremy James
Ireland
February 01, 2025**

For further information visit www.zephaniah.eu

Copyright Jeremy James 2025