

Contextualization Essay

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Toward the fulfillment of

DMin 514 History and Theology of Christian Spirituality

Professor: Leah Payne

November 12, 2012

Assignment: Students will write a 500-word essay in which they will analyze the biblical, theological, and historical foundations of one spiritual formation practice (ancient or modern).

Practicing the Presence of God

A gloriously thick word, *presence* captures the mystery of conscious, influential companionship. The antithesis of absence, *presence* is the invisible weight of existence. Though the phrase *Practicing the Presence* emerged around the 17th Century, the application of this phrase in spiritual formation is as old as time itself.

In the beginning, mankind practiced the presence of God in a way that was tangible to the senses. Adam and Eve were spiritually formed as they saw, heard, talked with, worked with, and walked with their Creator. Practicing the Presence is perhaps the most ancient of all spiritual formation disciplines.

As a new follower of Jesus, the Genesis images of fellowship with the Presence created within me an ache to hear God's "sound" and walk with him "in the cool of the day."¹ Like countless souls before me, the heart-prayer that defines my life is to walk with God as Enoch² walked, intimately, outside of Eden. In the words of John R. Tyson, "Yearning for Eden is what sets men and women in pursuit of paradise lost."³

God himself seems to thirst for us to practice—as opposed to merely acknowledge—His presence. He spoke to Moses, "face to face, as one speaks to a friend."⁴ He described David as,

¹ Gen. 3:8 NIV

² Gen. 5:24

³ John R. Tyson, ed., *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: an Ecumenical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), page 8.

⁴ Ex 33:11

“a man after his own heart.”⁵ He assured his disillusioned people that one day a ruler would arise who would, “devote himself to be close to [Him].”⁶

Post-Calvary, practicing the Presence seems less of a search for the Divine without than attention to the Divine Presence mysteriously within. Jesus promised to send us, his followers, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, “to be with you forever...for he lives with you and will be in you.”⁷ Echoing this reality, Paul spoke to the Colossians of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”⁸

Historically, two voices are often sought as mentors to guide us into the discipline of practicing God’s presence. Brother Lawrence, a 17th Century Carmelite lay brother, testified, “I have found that we can establish ourselves in a sense of the presence of God by continually talking with Him.”⁹ Evangelical missionary and mystic, Frank Laubach, writing three centuries later, stated, “No practice we have ever found has held the mind as much as this: making all thought a conversation with the Lord.”¹⁰

From a monk in a monastery to a missionary in Mindanao to this mother in Missouri, I hope to join the generations who have sought to live in the plural, conversing with God in every given moment: practicing the Presence until I see Him face to face.

⁵ 1 Sam 13:14

⁶ Jer 30.21

⁷ John 14.15, 17

⁸ Col 1:27

⁹ Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach, *Practicing His Presence (the Library of Spiritual Classics, Volume 1)*, Presumed 1st as edition not stated ed. (Jacksonville, FL: Christian Books Pub House, 1988), page 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 32, 35.