

## LECTIO DIVINA SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### **Lectio Divina as a spiritual practice in the life of the Christian meditator**

Found online at (<http://wccm.org/content/what-lectio-divina>)

*Through Lectio Divina we learn to know the heart of God, through the Word of God.*

Saint Gregory the Great

“Saint Benedict saw *lectio*, spiritual reading, as an integral part of our Christian living. . . . The purpose of *lectio* is to help us respond to the presence of God in his Word. . . . *Lectio* prepares us for the mystery of God – a mystery that ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard’. We have to be clear that it does *prepare* us. The movement itself is accomplished by the redemptive love of Jesus that we encounter as our spirit opens fully to his life released in our hearts.” (From *Community of Love*, “The Monastic Adventure”. John Main OSB)

“When we are open and receptive to the Word of God, conversion happens. It is not a matter of changing our opinions or acquiring a new spiritual home. It is a revolution in the deep structures of the personality that, if it is genuine, goes on for the rest of our lives.” (From Laurence Freeman OSB – Introduction to *The Burning Heart*. Gregory Ryan.)

In the centuries-old tradition of *lectio divina* – which is Latin for *sacred reading* – it is suggested that, before or after your morning or evening meditation, you read a passage of scripture. After reading this go back to it, either then or later, and spend some time – even 15 or 20 minutes if you can - reverently turning the passage over in your heart. Read slowly and lovingly, pausing whenever the words draw you into silence. Close your eyes and experience the meaning of the words for you *now*. But even more, experience the presence found in them. Let the reality of the words become more and more a part of your being.

During the time of *lectio*, the historical setting of the passage is not as important as the place it has in *your* life *now*. In a real sense, you are not the same person you were ten, five or even one year ago. Since you are always a ‘new person’ your response to the Word will never be the same. You may find yourself making acts of the will to conform your life more to the message of the text. One day you may rest in a deep peace. Another day you may be aware of tension, anger or sorrow. These feelings should not cause any anxiety because they are all part of God’s healing action at work in you. In time, you will learn to accept yourself as a work-in-progress, and your growing appreciation for the Living Word of God will lead you to a life of constant wonder, gratitude and love. (Adapted from - *The Burning Heart*, Gregory Ryan.)

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### ***A Simple Way of Lectio Divina***

*Your words were found and I ate them,  
and your words became to me a joy  
and the delight of my heart.*  
(Jeremiah 15:16)

#### *Preparation*

Prepare for your time of *Lectio* in a similar way as to how you prepare for meditation. Allow 15 – 20 minutes to slowly move through the stages outlined

#### *Reading / Lectio*

(Listening) Read the passage slowly, two or three times and notice what word or phrase speaks to you. - What am I hearing?

#### *Meditation / Meditatio*

(Repetition) Repeat the word or phrase over and over, allow it to sink into and act on your heart, notice any feelings, thoughts, questions arising and allow these to touch your life. - How is this touching me?

#### *Prayer / Oratio*

(Listening) *Listen* for what you sense the Lord is saying to you now. Take this to heart and ask for the grace to be taught and formed by the Word of God.

- *What new insight am I being invited to embrace?*
- *What am I hearing?*
- *How is this touching me?*
- *What new insight am I being invited to embrace?*
- *How will I respond?*

You could also form a short mental prayer around your response.

#### *Contemplation / Contemplatio*

(Being) Stay quietly with whatever is happening, and trust this. Now is the time to stop pondering, and allow yourself to be with what is, knowing that the Lord loves you and wants what is best for you.

#### *The next step*

“The next step is to start the work of silence, the saying of the word throughout the time of meditation.

You will find that lectio is an enriching form of prayer that will help you enter more fully into the separate time of prayer set aside for meditation with the mantra. Your meditation – called ‘pure prayer’ because in it we ‘abandon all the riches of thought and imagination

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(Cassian, Conference X) – also prepares the heart for lectio but also for the Eucharist and all other forms of prayer in a contemplative spirit. All prayer is a participation in the prayer of Jesus. In that sense all our forms of prayer are preparations for this grace of participation.”  
(*Laurence Freeman OSB*)

### **Additional Background**

**Craig S. Pesti-Strobel, Ph.D.**

*Lectio Divina*, when fully practiced through all the steps leading to *Contemplatio*, is an example of transcendent relationality in which the limits and boundaries fall away and being addresses being in an experience of overwhelming love. The 11th Century monastic, John of Fécamp, writes of the contemplative experience arising out of the practice of Lectio:

There are many kinds of contemplation in which the soul devoted to thee, O Christ, takes its delight, but in none of these do I so rejoice as in that which, ignoring all things, directs a simple glance of the untroubled spirit to thee alone, O God. What peace and joy does the soul find in thee then. While my soul yearns for the divine vision and proclaims thy glory as best it can, the burden of the flesh weighs less heavily upon it, distracting thoughts subside, the weight and misery of our mortal condition no longer deaden the faculties as usual; all is quiet and peaceful. The heart is inflamed with love, the spirit is filled with joy, the memory is powerful, the mind is clear, and the whole soul, burning with a desire for the vision of thy beauty, is ravished by a love of things invisible.<sup>i</sup>

Guigo "the Angelic", a 12th Century Carthusian prior at the Grand Chartreuse, describes *Lectio* in these terms:

Reading is the careful study of the Scripture, concentrating all one's powers on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek the help of one's own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart's devoted turning to God to do away with what is evil and obtain what is good. In contemplation the mind is in some way lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness....

Reading comes first, and is as it were the foundation; it provides the subject matter which we must use for meditation. Meditation considers more carefully what is to be sought after; it digs, as it were, for treasure which it finds and reveals, but since it is not in meditation's power to seize upon the treasure, it directs us to prayer. Prayer lifts itself up to God with all its strength, and begs for the treasure which it longs for, which is the sweetness of contemplation. Contemplation, when it comes, rewards the labors of the other three; it inebriates the thirsting soul with the dew of heavenly sweetness. Reading is an exercise of the outer senses, meditation is concerned with the inward understanding, prayer is concerned with desire, contemplation outstrips every faculty. The first degree is proper to beginners, the second to proficients, the third to devotees, the fourth to the blessed.<sup>ii</sup>

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*Lectio Divina* is a form of relational transcendence that allows the text to speak as person to person. The practice of humility and silence, poverty and prayer serve as disciplines together with *Lectio* to enable a person to remove the barrier and limits to an *I-Thou* encounter with God.

What is instructive is how the text is treated at each stage of *Lectio* and how the nature of the relationship changes between text and person. At first the text is a thing, an *It*. It consists of letters on a page. The eyes perceive it and the ears hear it if it is read aloud, which is the preferred method of reading, hence the term, *oratio*. If it is a book, the hands feel the touch of the paper, the weight of the volume. As Guigo describes, the first stage is concerned with the outer senses.

In the second stage the text is still an *It*, but it comes to be known in an internal sense as the mind ponders it from various angles and perspectives, a form of interior sight, as it were. This is the stage where the imagination especially comes into play. The imagination takes the written words and imbues them with the quality of the spoken word within the mind. That is, the graphic image takes on the quality of speech, which is perceived as being spoken. For speech to be spoken, there must be a speaker. During *meditatio*, then, not only is the intellectual content of the text evaluated and pondered, but the imagination effects a transformation in the text, which has been internalized, so that it has the quality of being spoken, as by a person. At this point, it is appropriate to say the text addresses us.

It is from this experience of being addressed as if by a person that *Lectio* moves into the prayer of *ruminatio*. Here, the text moves toward becoming a *Thou* by engaging the person in conversation, as it were. What was printed on the page is no longer the sole focus of attention. What matters now is *who* spoke the word, and what that person has to say now. Relationship becomes established at this point. Through this relationship, the text-as-person reveals itself to the person-in-flesh, and the person-in-flesh is opened and revealed to the text-as-person. In this opening, the person-in-flesh learns not only of the text, but also perceives more of him- or herself. Self-disclosure to the other leads to self-knowledge of oneself.

This self-disclosure comes by way of vulnerability and openness. The barriers and limits are down. Transcendence occurs and an *I-Thou* relationship is established. This relationship is experienced as love in "the sweetness of contemplation." *Contemplatio* exists beyond words, beyond discursive thought, beyond even imagination. It is Immediacy, and Pure Experience.

The relational encounter of *I-Thou* is a *happening* that results in a transformation such that the *I* and *Thou* are somehow increased. Martin Buber helps to shed light on the act of contemplation. Buber explains that the person "who emerges from the act of pure relation that so involved his being has now in his being something more that has grown in him, of which he did not know before and whose origin he is not rightly able to indicate."<sup>iii</sup>

Between you and it there is mutual giving: you say *Thou* to it and give yourself to it, it says *Thou* to you and gives itself to you. You cannot make yourself understood with others concerning it, you are alone with it. But it teaches you to meet others, and to hold your ground when you meet them. Through the graciousness of its

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comings and the solemn sadness of its goings it leads you away to the *Thou* in which the parallel lines of relations meet. It does not help to sustain you in life, it only helps you to glimpse eternity.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> John Fécamp, *Confessio theologica*, in J. LeClerq - J. Bonnes, *Un matre de la vie spirituelle au XIIIe siecle, Jean de Fécamp*, (Paris, 1946), p. 182, quoted in Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985), p. 88.

<sup>ii</sup> Jordan Aumann, pp. 92-3.

<sup>iii</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* 2nd ed., trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) p. 109.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.