



# Reading reality in the light of the Word

## *Lectio Divina* for Lasallians

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### Secretariat “Being Brothers Today”

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# 1

## Presentation

Dear Brothers and all members of the Lasallian Family

It is with much pleasure and a lively hope that I present this material on Lasallian biblical prayer, prepared by the Secretariat *Being Brothers Today*. I hope that it produces abundant fruit in our spiritual renewal and for the journey of conversion to which the Church invites us once more in this time of Lent.

There are many motives that should encourage us to make the Word of God an inspiring element in our lives. The recent Synod on the Word, the Pauline Year which we are concluding, the initiative of CLAR (Latin-American Conference of Religious) to help make *Lectio Divina* become a daily and familiar part of the lives of Religious on that continent, and, above all for us, the centrality which the Scriptures had in the life of our Founder and which continues to be a part of the spirituality and charism we have inherited. We must never forget his words inviting us to make the Gospel our first and principal Rule (cf. Rule, 6).

The Word and reality were the coordinates within which he moved, and within which we ourselves ought to move. It is a matter of reading reality in the light of the Word. Scripture is an essential energising force in our life as Brothers and in the life of every Lasallian. I dream that one day we will have our own *Lectio Divina* in a Lasallian style. Different from the monastic model we use today, it will enable us to see with greater clarity the relationship between Word and life and to discover that the Word is incarnated also in events and persons, and especially in the poor. We cannot content ourselves with being people who contemplate the Word without also being announcers and witnesses of the Word.

The Word of God, the mystery of Jesus contemplated in prayer, must be transformed into a word which we live and make present. The 'Jesus before our eyes and in our heart' of the Sulpician school will have authenticity only if they find expression as 'Jesus in our hands'. This is what the Founder calls 'the spirit of the mystery', and it is to this that he invites us continually by his life and in his writings. To contemplate the Word and to make it present in our lives is one of our greatest challenges. To pray with the Word is also to proclaim it. The Word prayed is not only for me: I must share it, I must make it live.

We must approach Sacred Scripture not as a treatise, but as a story, a narrative – the living story of God's love for humanity. But we must not read this story as something from the past; we must read it as a story which helps us to understand where we presently are and where we are heading tomorrow. A story which engages our commitment and unifies our life in 'the one thing necessary'.

To make the Word live is also to share it. We have spoken much of shared mission, but not so much of the shared Word. To share the Word is to allow ourselves to enrich one another, Brothers and lay people sharing in prayer the Word pondered in the depths of our hearts. *Vita Consecrata* invites us to promote 'in ways proper to each person's particular gifts, the establishment of schools of prayer, of spirituality and of a prayerful reading of the Scriptures, in which God "speaks to people as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and draw them into fellowship with himself"' (94).

And we must not forget that biblical prayer should finally centre us on the Person of Jesus. *'In our listening to the Gospels, the most profound and rigorous knowledge of the gospel's words is insufficient and deceptive without our gaze being fixed on the living Person, without the direct contemplation of the Lord. The irreplaceable value of the gospels, the mark of their authenticity, is precisely that they always prevent us from separating the words from the Word'* (Jacques Guillet).

Like Mary at the Visitation, may we be bearers of the living Word which brings joy and hope, and like her may we allow ourselves to be transformed by the light of Easter.

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría  
*Superior General*

# 2

## Introduction

Dear Brothers and all Lasallians

‘What are you doing for Lent this year?’ It’s a question sometimes asked half-seriously. Often, the answer involves giving something up.

Whatever your answer is, we invite you *take* something up – instead, or as well.

You may have already been doing it for years. Or it may be something you have heard of, but it sounded too exotic or too monastic. *Lectio Divina*.

For some of us, Latin tags can be off-putting. *Lectio Divina* may not sound like something a busy Brother or Lasallian could possibly be interested in or have time for.

Try it this Lent. Your usual way of praying may in fact be *Lectio Divina*, or something like it, but you’ve never called it that. It’s a way of praying the Scriptures so that we listen carefully, each day, to what God wants to say to us – personally and as a community – about our life and our work.

There are many reasons for trying it, or continuing to practise it, or picking it up again if you’ve tried it before and let it go. Some of the reasons are outlined in more detail in the pages of this short series. But briefly:

- Praying with the Scriptures – or ‘praying the Scriptures’ – is fundamental to anyone’s Christian life. It is also fundamental in the life of many who are not Christian that they pray their Scriptures.
- It is a profoundly Lasallian way of praying.
- It is likely that in the coming months the Holy Father will strongly recommend *lectio divina* to all members of the Church.
- In school and parish communities, that will require humble guides.

For those who don’t already know, it’s as simple as sitting quietly, reading slowly, and listening carefully for what God is asking us to do.

For busy people, that could be the most difficult thing to take up this Lent.

Please try it.

Secretariat “*Being Brothers Today*”  
Casa Generalizia, Rome  
24 January 2009

# 3

## Biblical Prayer: central to the life of Christian men and women

None of the following points about the Bible and about prayer will be new, but they may be helpful in reminding us of what we have always held to be important. They may give us something to discuss with others, including those we live and work with. Some of the quotations may be useful in community and staff prayer services.

### The Scriptures: a powerful word from a loving Father

In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters. (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 21)

### Prayer: a conversation which God begins

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2560)

### A word for our world

Tradition regards the written text [of the Scriptures] as living. This is one of the deeper faith insights that animates lectio divina... For [many of the great Fathers] inspiration is not just something that

acted once on the sacred writers, resulting in the inspired texts. It is an ongoing and ever-present influence at work within the Books themselves, which are and remain inspired. The presence of the Spirit who once dictated the Scriptures insures their perennial youth... and continues to breathe life into them. (Mariano Magrassi, OSB, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* [tr. Edward Hagman; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998], pp. 27-28.)

### Prayer is for active people

Prayer and action are completely inseparable. The words, groans and aspirations which make up our prayer need to translate into the warp and woof of our daily living. (Christopher Hayden, *Praying the Scriptures: A Practical Introduction to Lectio Divina* [London: St Pauls, 2001], p. 19)

### 'The conduct of God in my regard' (St John Baptist de La Salle)

God – we believe – has a plan for our lives. At times, our task may be not so much to discern this plan, as to live in trust that God is leading us. Even the appearance of chaos does not negate God's plan. At times in our lives, we may be able to discern in hindsight how God was at work in a hidden or surprising way, but in general, the only 'experience' of God's plan available to us lies in trusting faith. Perhaps, not surprisingly, one of the loveliest assurances in the Bible of God's plans for his people dates from a time when their trust in God had been shaken by bitter experience... Jeremiah was confident that God had



not rejected his chosen people, but was still intent on blessing them... 'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, and not for harm, to give you a future with hope (Jer 29.11).'

As life progresses, prayer becomes increasingly *our trustful openness to letting God's plan take root in our lives*. (Christopher Hayden, *Praying the Scriptures*, pp. 21-22)

### **Why Biblical prayer?**

Fundamentally, a Christian is someone who is convinced of the reality of God's loving initiative, which has reached its highest ex-

pression in Jesus. He or she is not so much someone who does things for God, but who is convinced, like Mary, that 'the Mighty One has done great things for me' (Lk 1.49). Therefore, Christian living is nothing other than a *response* to the love of God in Christ, and a continued openness to his initiative. When we approach the Bible, we do so with openness and with the desire to respond to God's word. For the Christian, Scripture and prayer are two sides of a single coin, as closely related as God's initiative and our response. (Christopher Hayden, *Praying the Scriptures*, pp. 23-24)

# 4

## Biblical Prayer at the 2008 Synod of Bishops

More than ten years ago, Mario Masini, professor of biblical exegesis at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of the Marianum, Rome, introduced his little book on *lectio divina* in this way:

“The rediscovery of *lectio divina* runs parallel to a return to the study of the Bible on the part of the Christian faithful. Both follow the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council as set forth in the magisterial documents of the contemporary Church in a crescendo which witnesses to the widespread attention now being given to *lectio divina*.” (Mario Masini, *Lectio Divina: An Ancient Prayer that is Ever New* [New York: St Pauls, 1998], p. vii.)

Some of us may be surprised to hear of this ‘rediscovery’. It may be more evident in some parts of the world than in others. And that may apply to the Lasallian world as well. But the ‘crescendo’ can only get louder: in recent months references to *lectio divina* have multiplied in the documentation associated with the October 2008 Synod of Bishops.

### The Synod of Bishops

The 12th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (5-26 October, 2008) had as its theme ‘The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church’. It was the latest in a series of such Assemblies, consciously and verbally linked with the 11th Assembly in October, 2005: ‘The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church’. It is customary for the Holy Father to issue a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, such as Pope Benedict XVI presented in

*Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 2007) after the 2005 Synod.

### The Synod and *Lectio Divina*

The various documents relating to the 12th Synod are available on the Vatican website ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm)). Here we might illustrate something of the growing ‘crescendo’ by noting that the first discussion paper sent to the Bishops (the *Lineamenta*) includes a dozen references to *lectio divina*.

Following world-wide consultation, the working paper for the Assembly (the *Instrumentum Laboris*) contains twice that many references, and includes a full section (#38) on the topic.

### The Message of the Bishops

The Bishops’ Message to the People of God at the conclusion of their Assembly (October 24) refers to praying the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours. As well, it says, ‘tradition has introduced the practice of *lectio divina*, the prayerful reading in the Holy Spirit that is able to open to the faithful the treasure of the word of God, and also to create the encounter with Christ, the living divine Word’ (#9). The Message goes on to give a helpful description of the traditional elements of *lectio divina*:

“This begins with the reading (*lectio*) of the text, which provokes the question of true knowledge of its real content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Then follows meditation (*meditatio*) where the question is: what does the Biblical text say to us? In this manner, one



arrives at prayer (*oratio*), which presupposes this other question: what do we say to the Lord in answer to his word? And one ends with contemplation (*contemplatio*) during which we assume, as God's gift, the same gaze in judging reality and ask ourselves: what conversion of the mind, the heart and life does the Lord ask of us?" (#9)



this reason be further encouraged, through the use, too, of new methods, carefully considered, that are fully up-to-date. We ought never to forget that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (cf. Ps 118/119:105).” (Pope Benedict XVI to the International Congress on *Dei Verbum*, 16 September 2005)

## Propositions

At the conclusion of the Synod, as is customary, the Bishops voted on a list of propositions (in Latin) to be submitted to the Pope. The Vatican released an Italian translation of the list (25 October). There are seven references to *lectio divina*, in six of the propositions.

## What next?

The Holy Father is free, of course, to take his own stance in any post-synodal document. But the emphasis given in the various Synod papers to this approach to biblical prayer suggests that the Pope may well urge its more widespread use. Indeed, the Pope has already made his views clear in an address to the International Congress commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, the Vatican II document on revelation:

“I would like especially to recall and to recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the assiduous reading of Holy Scripture accompanied by prayer realizes that intimate colloquy where, by reading, we listen to God who speaks and, in prayer, we respond to Him with confident openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 25). This practice, if effectively promoted, will bring to the Church - of this I am convinced - a new spiritual spring. As a firm point of biblical pastoral ministry, *Lectio Divina* should for

## The Synod and the Lasallian Family

Twice in his Christmas 2008 *Pastoral Letter to the Brothers*, Brother Superior General refers us to the Synod on the Word of God.

Continuing his reflections on two of De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (MR 195 and 196), Br Álvaro is struck by the way the Founder invites us, who are called to be collaborators of Jesus, to read the Gospel so as to be guided and formed by Jesus' own example. Such a reading 'makes us recall the central role that Scripture must have in our lives as Brothers, especially the Gospels, which in the words of the Founder, should be our first Rule'. Br Superior describes the 2008 Synod as 'an invitation to recover this fundamental means in our search for God and in our listening to his will' (pp. 14-15). A little further on, Br Álvaro makes the point that 'the Gospel method of Jesus should also lead us never to separate the Word from life' (p. 17). He refers us to the section 'Communities of Prayer' in the *Interior Life* document of the last General Chapter, and also quotes from the Synod's working document: 'The Word of God is read in the events and signs of the times with which God manifests himself in history' (#58).

(Brother Superior's Pastoral Letter to the Brothers, and the documents of the General Chapter, can be downloaded from the Institute website: <http://www.lasalle.org/>)



# 5

## Biblical Prayer: Essentially Lasallian

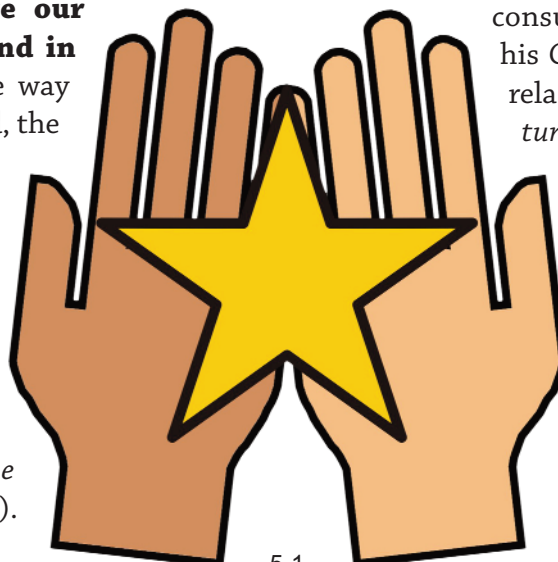
### St John Baptist de La Salle

Brothers and other Lasallians need no convincing that St John Baptist de La Salle prayed the Scriptures. His seminary training at Saint Sulpice ensured that he absorbed the reverence for the Scriptures evident in the life of Jean-Jacques Olier, the priest who established the seminary and founded the Society which directed it. According to a modern-day Sulpician, Fr Olier enthroned the Scriptures in his room, revered them as he entered and left it, read the Old and New Testaments for half an hour each morning and evening, and had a cover designed for his Bible which showed that ‘he had the same devotion for the Word as for the Eucharist’:

“Crafted in silver, one side depicts the Word in the symbol of a book adored by the Cherubim, the other an image of the Eucharist, similarly adored by the heavenly choirs.”

Olier’s prayer method

“finds its origins in the commands of the great prayer of Deuteronomy, the *Shema Israel*. He describes it in the following way: ‘We will propose an easy method here that conforms to the very design of God, expressed earlier in the Law. **It consists of having our Lord before our eyes, in our heart, and in our hands.** This is the way that, by the order of God, the Jews were required to carry the Law. ‘You shall have these words in your heart. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be, and be carried, between your eyes.’” (*Introduction to the Christian Life and Virtues*).



(David D. Thayer, S.S, ‘Fr Olier’s Devotion to the Scriptures’, in *Update*, Summer 2008, p. 4; emphasis added.)

As we know, De La Salle’s own writings – particularly the *Meditations* and the *Introduction to the Method of Interior Prayer* – are frequently a tapestry of biblical quotations and allusions which he applies with great insight to the life and ministry of the teacher.

### De La Salle and *Lectio Divina*

Did our Founder use and encourage *lectio divina*? Perhaps the answer is the same as for some of us: he did, but as far as we know he did not use the term, at least in his writings. In the concluding chapter of his detailed analysis of the fundamental place of the Scriptures in the spirituality of De La Salle, Br Luis Varela writes of the Founder’s

“knowledge and deep understanding of the revealed word, how he interiorizes it and how he uses it, not as a literary artifice, but to foster truly Christian living. De La Salle quotes Scripture because his entire life rests on faith, and this faith is supported principally by Sacred Scripture as interpreted by the Church.

From this it follows that Scripture is consubstantial with the work of his Christian Schools.” (Luis Varela Martínez, FSC, *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* [ed. Donald C. Mouton, FSC; tr. Francis Vesel, FSC; Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, 2000], p. 288)

Brother Luis refers to the Founder’s method of inte-

rior prayer as in fact intimately related to *lectio divina*:

“Aware of the role of the Word of God in every spirituality, De La Salle offers the ‘spirit of faith’ as the spirit that characterizes the Brothers of the Christian Schools, because it is the purest flower that can sprout from a total commitment to that Word, which is the revelation of God to [human beings]. Thus upon Scripture in its most intimate and divine aspect, seen through the prism of faith, will Lasallian spirituality be founded. As a consequence, De La Salle will give his followers a method of interior prayer that is equally scriptural in its essence and in its expression. This will be nourished constantly by the flowing springs of the *lectio divina*. Sacred Scripture will be their first and principle rule.” (p. 289)

## The Bible in the life of the Brother – and of all Lasallians

The Brothers’ present Rule is prefaced by the complete text of chapter 2, ‘The Spirit of this Institute’ from the Rule of 1718, It is here that the ‘spirit of this Institute’ is identified as ‘first, a spirit of faith’, as Br Luis Varela points out. It is here also that we are told that ‘the Brothers of this Society shall have a most profound respect for the Holy Scriptures’.

## The Revision of the Rule

This spirit of faith and a respect for the Scriptures are therefore linked in the present Rule’s urging that ‘to acquire and live by the spirit of their Institute, the Brothers find endless sustenance in studying, meditating and sharing among themselves the word of God’ (6) It also declares that ‘the Brothers’ community is a community of prayer. The Brothers pray together. Together they hear the word of God and meditate on it...’ (50).

The fact that in recent years there has been ‘a more and more insistent request’ from lay people ‘to share our Lasallian mission, charism and spi-

rituality’ is noted as one characteristic of the new context which gives rise to a need to revise our Rule, in which there is much that other Lasallians also find inspiring (Circular 459, pp. 4-5). It is significant, therefore, that under ‘Aspects to be considered in the revision of the Rule’, the General Council lists as the first heading ‘The Gospel is our first and principal Rule’. Its commentary on this aspect concludes:

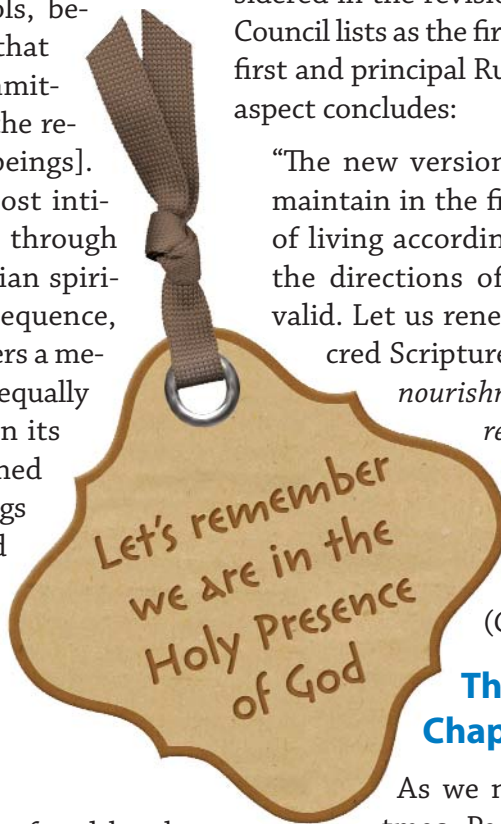
“The new version of the Rule must always maintain in the first place the radical nature of living according to the Gospel. Therefore the directions of the present Rule remain valid. Let us renew our efforts to find in Sacred Scripture the *fount and fundamental nourishment of our prayer. Let us read, study, meditate and share together the Word.* This is the best method of preparing ourselves for the work we are asked to do.” (Circular 459, pp. 8-9)

## The 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter and *Lectio Divina*

As we noted earlier, in his Christmas Pastoral Letter Br Superior draws our attention to the section of *Interior Prayer*, the first of the 2007 General Chapter documents, which urges that our daily prayer, ‘a prayerful reading of the Word of God’,

“must be a type of reading that leads us, on the one hand, to discover the religious relationship that exists between history and the economic and social situations in the simple life of the people with whom we live, and the Biblical narratives on the other.” (Pastoral Letter, p. 18; Circular 455, pp. 12-13)

That is part of the ‘horizon’ towards which the Chapter delegates were looking: ‘Brothers spiritually significant in prophetic communities’ (p. 11). When it comes to encouraging action in order to move towards this horizon, they enumerate six Lines of Action. Of these, the second recommends *Lectio Divina* specifically. It calls for a reading of the Bible which is united with ‘an interpretation of reality and that of our community to discern the signs of the times’, and so it recommends



the ways in which *Lectio Divina*, silence, self-control and humility can nourish and help us to deepen the interior life of each Brother. (Circular 455, p. 15)

## **Biblical Prayer and the Lasallian Mission**

The first discussion document for the Synod on

the Word of God contains a short passage which could have been written for Lasallians. It recommends that in a prayerful reading of the Scriptures, people will

“find renewed energy in their task of education and evangelisation, especially of the poor, the vulnerable and those on the periphery of society.” (*Lineamenta*, 27)

# 6

## Lectio Divina: an approach for individuals and groups

Fr Christopher Hayden, in the book mentioned earlier, has some helpful things to say about both the terminology and the approach to *Lectio Divina*.

### The terms

Regarding the **terminology**, he suggests that the Latin terms (despite the danger of their sounding esoteric) are at least ‘neutral’, whereas in translation the corresponding terms may carry ‘baggage’ which could be misleading. So we retain the traditional terms.

### An approach: to guide, not to bind

Concerning the **approach** to *Lectio Divina*, Fr Hayden writes that, while there are four ‘steps’ to this approach: *lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio*, he advises an attitude consistent with his early affirmation of the fact that prayer is ‘our response to the God who has already spoken to us’ (p. 17).

“*Lectio Divina* is not intended to be a kind of straitjacket, dictating the details of how we pray. We are presenting it in a step-by-step manner, but any given period of prayer with the Bible may not be quite so ordered. In practice, we will often be doing *meditatio*, reflecting on a passage, even as we read it. At times, the first contact with a verse of Scripture will lead us straight into prayer. Again, there may be the odd occasion when, no sooner have we opened our Bible, than we feel moved to sit quietly in contemplation.

When there is an effortless, inner

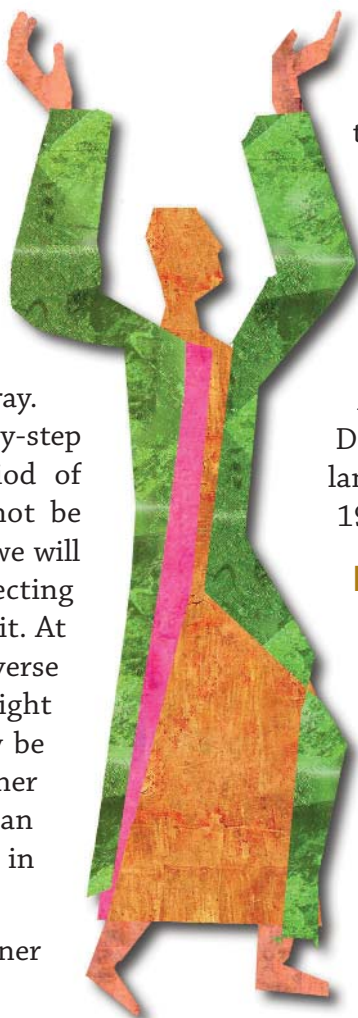
movement in our time of prayer with the Bible, we should follow it, rather than anxiously trying to conform to a rigid, step-by-step pattern. It might be helpful to consider the different steps in *lectio divina* as components, rather than strictly as steps which must necessarily follow each other. Without a doubt, the ‘normal’ route we follow will be a progression – or a struggle to progress – through the steps of *lectio divina*, but they are given to guide us, rather than to bind us.” (p. 77)

This may remind us of Brother Donald Mouton’s commentary on De La Salle’s *Method of Interior Prayer*:

For De La Salle, interior prayer is not a complicated path to follow, but a dialogue with the living God. And the ultimate criterion of prayer is not found in the number of acts made, but in life. We know that God has worked in us when we leave interior prayer with renewed zeal for doing our duty for the love of God. (*Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* by John Baptist de La Salle [ed. Donald Mouton, FSC; Landover, Maryland: Christian Brothers Conference, 1995], p. 13).

### How to...

The following are simply brief, illustrative notes, particularly for those who may be unfamiliar with this approach to prayer. The quotations are from Fr Christopher Hayden. For more detail, we would strongly suggest reading his book, or one of the many guides available in various languages. (See ‘*For Further Reading*’)



## 1. *Lectio*

**Read the text.** The readings of the day are one good basis for choice. Having a predetermined set of readings helps us to avoid choosing the passages that we like because they are ‘comfortable’. Sometimes it is helpful to consult some notes or a commentary, but the purpose here is not so much bible study (which may be a very helpful prelude) as a reasonably clear understanding of the plain meaning of the text for its original audience.

## 2. *Meditatio*

**Listen for connections.** ‘From the biblical context to our context.’ *Lectio* has given us information about this text, but ‘the Word of God is the word of life, not just the word of knowledge’. We now let it touch our lives. In *lectio* ‘we struggle to master the word but we do this only so that the word might master us’. In *meditatio* we look for points of contact between the plan of God as it unfolds in the Bible and our lives as they unfold.’ These may be confirming, or they may be challenging. I need to listen for what God is saying *to me, today*.

## 3. *Oratio*

‘Having read and understood the word of God, having reflected on it, and seen how it speaks to us, it is only natural that we should react to what we have seen.’ *Oratio* is nothing but our reaction to the word, and it is our turn to speak to God. It may be spontaneous repentance, and a re-commitment, when we see how far our lives are from the values inherent in the word. We may be struck by God’s sheer goodness, and pray in thanks, or we may pray for the needs of people we know, or for those in the day’s headlines.

## 4. *Contemplatio*

The ‘baggage’ of this term may make us want to reject it as the preserve of monastic contemplatives or mystics. This is not the case. We have tried to understand our text, to let it engage our lives in the present, to let it encourage a response

to the God who has long ago begun a relationship with us. What more is there to do? That is the point of *contemplatio*. There is nothing more that we can do, except ‘let go and let God’. For busy people, this can be a difficult and sometimes apparently fruitless discipline, but it is an essential prelude to action. We simply ‘give God a chance to work within us’ – to sit still ‘quietly and humbly in God’s presence, allowing him to touch us’. *Contemplatio*, to the extent that it involves effort on our part, is our consent to God’s transforming us.



## *Lectio Divina* and life

As Fr Hayden puts it, ‘commitment to living the words of Scripture could be considered a fifth element in the process of *lectio divina*, because without it the whole process would be radically incomplete’:

“The word of God is for transformation rather than information. It is for life and for living. Likewise, *lectio divina* teaches us not just how to pray, but how to live. While we need to devote specific times to it, *lectio divina* is not an activity which stands alone. The word of God cannot be a hobby or a special interest, but must touch our lives in a concrete and tangible way. Far from setting up a closed circuit, a cosy *tête-à-tête* between ourselves and God, praying the Scriptures opens us out, in a new and demanding way, to the world.” (p. 106)

## *Lectio Divina* and living as a Lasallian

We would do well to reflect on, and to talk about with one other, the connections between this approach to praying the Scriptures, and to the heart of the method of interior prayer of St John Baptist de La Salle.

As a starting point we note the perception of Brs Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage that, within its apparent complexity, De La Salle’s method embraces ‘the unity of a movement which starts from life and leads back to life, a unique dynamism in which can be discovered four stages’ (p. 376):

1. In the concrete pattern of our daily living, to identify and own the tensions and forces which break up or unify our life of prayer and our ministry.
2. Starting from the events of life, to recognize and celebrate a God who is our Father and who calls us to collaborate in his work.
3. In Jesus Christ incarnate amongst us and living in us by his Spirit, contemplate and admire the marvels of the Son as liberator and mediator who sends us to be his representatives among abandoned youth.
4. Starting from confrontation between life and the Gospel, welcome and actualise the power of the Spirit who converts hearts and renews the face of the earth.

(Miguel Campos, FSC and Michel Sauvage, FSC, *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart: a commentary on John Baptist de La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* [tr. Oswald Murdoch, FSC; Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995], pp. 376-442)

### **Lectio Divina for groups and communities**

*Lectio divina* is in itself a personal form of prayer, but as many know, it can also be adapted as an approach to shared prayer. Sometimes it is then called *colatio*, described and recommended in the Synod's *Lineamenta* as 'a shared experience of God resulting from the Word itself which is listened to' (#5). It is also referred to and encouraged in the long section the document devotes to *Lectio Divina* (#38).

Fr Christopher Hayden outlines an approach 'which also makes it [*lectio divina*] ideal for shared or group prayer' (p. 111).

Again, we provide brief notes of Fr Hayden's comments and suggestions (pp. 111-112), and recommend further reading. Different groups will develop their own processes.

### **Lectio**

'Even having a text read aloud by another person in a group can help us to

hear it in a new way. A shared commitment to studying a text and understanding its background and meaning can make the effort involved more enjoyable. Alternatively, one individual in a group might undertake to study a particular passage or book, and share their findings with the group.'

1. 'Begin with a prayer, invoking the Holy Spirit who has inspired the Scriptures, and who continues to work through them.'
2. Read the chosen passage aloud – two or three times, if it is not long, with two or three readers. Ideally, people will have known in advance what text is to be used.
3. Share any findings or insights. It may be helpful for people to be told that there is no pressure on them to speak. Again, people should not feel obliged to say something.

### **Meditatio**

'The benefits of sharing are obvious, and at times it is quite amazing to hear how the word speaks so differently to different people.'

4. Share what the text says to each member of the group in his or her life at present.

### **Oratio**

'A period of common prayer can build up all who take part.'

5. Share intercessions, petitions, praise.

### **Contemplatio**

'Time allowed for silent *contemplatio* can keep everyone alert to the presence of the Lord, who assures us of his special action among people who come together to pray: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18.20).'

6. Have a period of silence.
7. End the session with a well-known prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer.



# 7

## For Further Reading

Religious bookshops will be helpful in finding titles related to *Lectio Divina*. Lists compiled by Pauline Books and Media suggest that there are very many of them in our languages.

An internet search: 'books about lectio divina' yielded nineteen titles just from Amazon, each with a comment from a list author.

There is an extensive bibliography on *Lectio Divina* containing titles in English, French, Spanish, Italian and German (etc.) at <http://www.osb.org/rb/rbbib/b2lect0.html> (or Google 'lectio bibliography').

Those who have found books that are helpful regarding biblical prayer are invited to send the bibliographic information to the Secretariat *Being Brothers Today*: [jcantwell@lasalle.org](mailto:jcantwell@lasalle.org), so that we can publicise them.

The following are some titles in English, both original and translated, (including those referred to in this set of articles):

BIANCHI, Enzo, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (tr. James W. Zona; Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1998). Brother Enzo is from the ecumenical monastic community in Bose, Italy.

BINZ, Stephen J. , *Conversing with God in Scripture: A Contemporary Approach to Lectio Divina*, Word Among Us Press, 2008.

GARGANO, Innocenzo, OSB, *Holy Reading: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (tr. Walter Vitale; Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007). The author is a Camaldolese monk, novice master, prior of the monastery of San Gregorio al Celio, Rome. He is also a professor of patristic Greek theology and of patristic hermeneutics.

HAYDEN, Christopher, *Praying the Scriptures: A Practical Introduction to Lectio Divina* (London: St Pauls, 2001). (Fr Hayden is a priest working in a parish in Wexford, Ireland. He has taught Scripture in St Peter's Seminary, Wexford and St John's Seminary, Waterford).

MAGRASSI, Mariano, OSB, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (tr. Edward Hagman; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998). Archbishop Magrassi has been abbot of the monastery of Santa Maria della Scala, in Noci, and archbishop of Bari.

MASINI, Mario, *Lectio Divina: An Ancient Prayer that is Ever New* (New York: St Pauls, 1998). Mario Masini is a professor of biblical exegesis at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of the Marianum in Rome.

SCHULTZ, Karl A., *Becoming Community: Biblical Meditations and Applications in Modern Life* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2007). Karl A. Schulz is described as one of the world's leading writers and teachers of lectio divina.

SCHULTZ, Karl A., *How to Pray with the Bible: The Ancient Prayer form of Lectio Divina made simple* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2007).

## **French**

### **Books**

BIANCHI, Enzo, *Ecouter la Parole, les enjeux de la Lectio divina*, éditions Lessius.

BIANCHI, Enzo, *Prier la Parole, une introduction à la Lectio divina*, Vie monastique n° 15, éditions Abbaye de Bellefontaine.

DE DREUILLE, Christophe, P., *Nourris-toi de la Parole*, éditions Parole et Silence.

La collection «*Lectio divina*» ; éditions du Cerf (+ de 188 titres).

VERLINDE, Joseph-Marie, P., *Initiation à la Lectio divina*, éditions Parole et Silence.

### **Revues**

La vie spirituelle (Cerf) n° 740, septembre 2001 et n° 741, décembre 2001 : deux dossiers sur la *Lectio divina*.

Documentaion catholique 2240 (21 janvier 2001)

Lettre apostolique *Novo millennio ineunte*, 39-40, de Jean-Paul II.

### **Articles**

Dictionnaire de spiritualité (tome 9) "Lectio divina" et lecture spirituelle (J. Rouse)

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<http://www.bible-service.net/site/173.html>

<http://jerusalem.cef.fr/index.php/fraternites/mediter-la-parole/la-lectio-divina>

## **Spanish**

MESTERS, Carlos, *Por detrás de las palabras*. Cuenca. Edicay. 1988.

MESTER, Carlos, *Hacer arder el corazón* (Editorial Verbo Divino, 2008).

MARTÍN, Antonio M., OCSO, *La scala claustralium de Guigo II el Cartujo. Experiencia y método de la Lectio Divina* (Ediciones Monte Casino, 1994)

Serie "Tu Palabra es vida". Conferencia de Religiosos de Brasil. Revisión: La Casa de la Biblia. Editorial Verbo Divino. Estella (Navarra). 2002.

De Verbo Divino:

Serie: *Tú tienes palabras de vida*.

Serie: *Tu palabra es vida*.

Serie: *Lectura popular de la Biblia*.

Serie: *Guías de lectura*.- Carlos Mesters.

Serie: *Lectio divina para cada día del año*.

Serie: *Lectio divina para la vida cristiana*.

[http://www.discipulasdm.org/biblia/lectio\\_divina/lectio\\_indice.htm](http://www.discipulasdm.org/biblia/lectio_divina/lectio_indice.htm)

<http://lectionautas.com>. Links on 'Aprendiendo Lectio Divina' and 'Lectio Divina Dominical'.