

Lectio Divina – Fact Sheet

Lectio Divina The term “lectio divina” is Latin and means divine or sacred reading. It is a Catholic monastic method of reading the Scripture in a mystical way. At first glance lectio divina (pronounced lex-ee-o di-veen-a) might not sound very different from a traditional devotional approach that involves reading and meditating on Scripture in communion with the Holy Spirit. Where it differs is as follows:

First, lectio divina does not refer to “meditation” in a Scriptural sense. Proponents of lectio divina point to passages of Scripture that refer to “meditation” (e.g., Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2), and the uninformed reader would be led to believe that they are describing a Scriptural practice. In fact, they are describing something very different. Consider a description of lectio divina. The practitioner is taught to begin with deep breathing exercises and repetition of a “prayer word” to enter into a contemplative state. This refers to a mantra. The goal is to “become interiorly silent” (Luke Dysinger, “Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina,” Valyermo Benedictine, Spring 1990). Having prepared himself, the practitioner reads a portion of Scripture slowly and repeatedly, three or four times. Choosing a word or phrase that particularly “speaks to him,” he slowly repeats it, allowing it to interact with his “inner world of concerns, memories and ideas.” Next, he converses with God about the text. Finally, he rests in silence before God in thoughtless mysticism. Catholic priest Luke Dysinger says, “Once again we practice SILENCE, LETTING GO OF OUR OWN WORDS; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.”

Notice how Thomas Merton describes the meditation performed in lectio divina and other Catholic contemplative practices: “Meditation is ... a series of interior activities which prepare us for union with God” (Spiritual Direction and Meditation, 1960, p. 54). “Meditation is more than mere practical thinking” (p. 55). “... the fruitful silence in which WORDS LOSE THEIR POWER AND CONCEPTS ESCAPE OUR GRASP is perhaps the perfection of meditation” (p. 57). “More often than not, we can be content to simply rest, and float peacefully with the deep current of love, doing nothing of ourselves, but allowing the Holy Spirit to act in the secret depths of our soul” (pp. 101, 102). Richard Foster, who has had a far-reaching influence on evangelicalism’s contemplative practices, quotes Catholic mystic Madame Guyon as follows: “Once you sense the Lord’s presence, THE CONTENT OF WHAT YOU READ IS NO LONGER IMPORTANT. The scripture has served its purpose; it has quieted your mind; it has brought you to him. ... You should always remember that YOU ARE NOT THERE TO GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU HAVE READ; rather you are reading to turn your mind from the outward things to the deep parts of your being. YOU ARE NOT THERE TO LEARN OR TO READ, BUT YOU ARE THERE TO EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF YOUR LORD!” (Devotional Classics).

Thelma Hall’s book on lectio divina is entitled Too Deep for Words. This describes the ultimate objective of the mystical practice. Mike Pershon of Youth Specialities says lectio divina should take the practitioner to a different level of consciousness (http://www.cellofpeace.com/refl_lectio.htm). Robert Webber, late Wheaton College professor, confirms the transcendental aspect of lectio divina: “The goal of Lectio Divina is union with God through a meditative and contemplative praying of Scripture. ... All such attempts at verbalizing the experience necessarily fail to express the reality for the simple reason that CONTEMPLATION TRANSCENDS THE THINKING AND REASONING of meditation ... Contemplatio shifts praying the Scripture into a new language (SILENCE). This silence does not ask us to do anything, it is a call to being. Thomas Merton says, ‘THE BEST WAY TO PRAY IS: STOP’” (The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life, 2006, pp. 209, 210). John Michael Talbot says that lectio divina must move the practitioner “into a Reality BEYOND IMAGE AND FORM” (Come to the Quiet, p. 49). He says, “If God grants it, allow the reality of the sacred text to pass over to pure spiritual intuition in his Spirit,” and, “... allow yourself to pass over into contemplation BEYOND WORDS” (pp. 53, 62). Mark Yaconelli, who speaks in evangelical settings, describes lectio divina as follows: “In order to practice lectio divina, select a time and place that is peaceful and in which you may be alert and prayer fully attentive. Dispose yourself for prayer in whatever way is natural for you. This may be a spoken prayer to God to open you more fully to the Spirit, a gentle relaxation process that focuses on breathing, singing or

chanting, or simply a few minutes of SILENCE TO EMPTY YOURSELF OF THOUGHTS, IMAGES, AND EMOTIONS”

(web.archive.org/web/20080724110254/http://www.ymsp.org/resources/practices/lectio_divina.html). It is obvious that meditation and prayer, after the lectio divina fashion, is far removed from simply contemplating on the Scripture before the Lord, seeking better understanding of it, talking with God about it, and applying it to one's life by the wisdom and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Second, lectio divina associates the practitioner with centuries-old heresy. Lectio divina was invented by the heretic Origen in the third century and was adopted as a Roman Catholic practice in the Dark Ages. Origen is a dangerous man to follow. Among other heresies, he denied the infallible inspiration of Scripture and the literal history of the early chapters of Genesis, taught baptismal regeneration and universal salvation, and believed that Jesus is a created being. The practice of lectio divina was incorporated into the rules of Rome's dark monasticism. It was systematized into four steps in the 12th century by Guido II, a Carthusian monk, in "The Ladder of Four Rungs" or "The Monk's Ladder." The four steps are reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation, which are supposed to be the means by which one "can climb from earth to heaven" and learn "heavenly secrets." Thus, lectio divina is intimately associated with Roman Catholicism and its false gospel. Modern lectio divina gurus such as Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating follow in the footsteps of ancient Catholic heretics by intertwining this practice with the heresies of Rome. Merton, for example, associates lectio divina with the Mass (which he describes as a "living and supremely efficacious re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice"), baptismal regeneration, meriting union with God, prayers to Mary, and salvation through works (Spiritual Direction and Meditation, pp. 62, 71, 72, 74, 108). Bible believers have maintained rich devotional practices throughout the church age without resorting to something invented by heretics and developed in the bosom of the Harlot Church.

Third, lectio divina is typically used as a means of receiving personal revelation and mystical experiences beyond the words of Scripture. Youth Specialties' Youth Worker Journal says of lectio divina, "THE GOAL ISN'T EXEGESIS OR ANALYSIS, but allowing God to speak to us through the word" (quoted from Brian Flynn, "Lectio Divina--Sacred Divination"). This refers to a mystical knowing and a transcendental revelation that supposedly exists beyond conscious thought.

Brian Flynn makes an important observation: "The concept of allowing God to speak through His Word is perfectly legitimate. I experience that when I read or meditate on the Bible. However, in the context of this [Youth Specialties'] article the purpose is not to contemplate the meaning of a Bible verse by thinking about it but is rather meant to gain an experience from it."

Thomas Keating says: "The early monks ... would sit with that sentence or phrase ... just listening, repeating slowly the same short text over and over again. This receptive disposition enabled the Holy Spirit to expand their capacity to listen" ("The Classical Monastic Practice of Lectio Divina"). The danger of the lectio divina method is illustrated by the fact that its practitioners are taught heresy by this means. This is evident in that Catholic mystic saints have been confirmed in their heresies by this practice for the space of more than a millennium. Consider a revelation that Basil Pennington said he received through lectio divina. He said that he chose Christ's words "I am the way" from John 14:6 and repeated them during his meditation and throughout the day. At the end of the day when he was tired and wasn't looking forward to singing evening prayers at the monastery he says the Lord spoke to him and said, "Oh yes, you are the way," so he "went and sang Vespers and had a great time" (interview with Mary NurrieStearns published on the Personal Transformation website, <http://www.personaltransformation.com/Pennington.html>). Note that "the Lord" allegedly took the declaration that Christ is the way and applied it to Pennington, instructing him that he, too, is the way, which is rank heresy. We believe strongly in studying Scripture and seeking God's illumination of it, but this is done through a process of interpretive Bible study and active contemplation (e.g., Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15), rather than through a mystical process that seeks to go beyond the Bible's words and is intimately associated with heresy. Former psychic Brian Flynn warns: "By taking passages of Scripture, which have an intended meaning, and breaking them down into smaller, separate segments, often for the purpose of chanting over and over, the true meaning of the passages is lost. Rather a form of occult mysticism is practiced--with the hope and intention of gaining a

mystical experience that God never intended when He gave the inspired words to His servants” (Running against the Wind, p. 136).

Fourth, the traditional practice of lectio divina involves the search for a “deeper” meaning of Scripture. This refers to Origen’s spiritualized meaning that is beyond the literal. Origen claimed that the Scripture has four levels of meaning. He spoke of the letter and the spirit, the exterior and the interior. While acknowledging a historical, literal meaning, he emphasized the “allegorical” sense. He likened the literal meaning of Scripture to water, whereas the deeper allegorical meaning is the wine. Following Origen, Gregory the Great interpreted the “wheel within the wheel” of Ezekiel 1:16 to mean that the allegorical meaning is hidden within the literal meaning of Scripture. This error leaves the interpretation of Scripture up to the imagination of the reader, because if the Bible does not mean what it says when interpreted by the normal-literal method, then we cannot know for certain what it does mean. This is one of the foundational errors of Roman

David W. Cloud. *Contemplative Mysticism - A Powerful Ecumenical Bond* (Kindle Locations 2187-2197). Way of Life Literature. Kindle Edition.

monasticism, and it is being adopted today by evangelicals. Thomas Keating says: “By ‘ruminating’ I mean sitting with a sentence, phrase or even one word that emerges from the text, allowing the Spirit to expand our listening capacity and to OPEN US TO ITS DEEPER MEANING; in other words, TO PENETRATE THE SPIRITUAL SENSE of a scripture passage” (“The Classical Monastic Practice of Lectio Divina”). It is obvious that this “deeper meaning” carries one beyond the true meaning of Scripture, since it is a practice that is loved by Roman Catholics. For centuries Catholic monks and nuns have “meditated” on the Scripture via the method of lectio divina, but they have never come to the knowledge of the truth! It has only confirmed them in their commitment to Rome’s heresies.

Fifth, the practice of lectio divina does not include a strong warning about the potential for spiritual delusion and the danger of receiving “doctrines of devils.” Catholic priest Luke Dysinger says, “Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity” (“Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina”). ***If Dysinger, who is a modern monk, would practice biblical devotion in true communion with the Spirit of truth he would recognize that Romanism is heresy and would flee from it, but he is practicing contemplative practices from a position of unregeneracy and spiritual blindness and unknowing openness to deception.*** Brian Flynn gives an important warning about this practice when he says: “I was having a discussion over lunch with a pastor who taught Lectio Divina at a local seminary, and he attempted to defend the practice. He stated that in the process of reading a page of scripture over and over again a word will ‘jump out’ at you. He said that the Holy Spirit chooses this word for you. However, how do I know that this concept is true?”

First, there is no reference to Lectio Divina in the Bible.

Secondly, how do I know what this word is supposed to mean to me?

If it were ‘love’, does that mean I should concentrate on love for self, God, the world, sister, mother, brother? There is no way of knowing other than using my own imagination or desire. ... **BY USING THIS PRACTICE, WE ARE TURNING THE BIBLE INTO A MYSTICAL DEVICE FOR PERSONAL REVELATIONS RATHER THAN A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE.** By taking passages of Scripture, which have an intended meaning, and breaking them down into smaller, separate segments, often for the purpose of chanting over and over, the true meaning of the passages is lost” (“Lectio Divina--Sacred Divination”).

Sixth, the practice of lectio divina is contrary to the Bible’s instruction about Scripture study. The New Testament does not instruct the believer to sit in silence before God or to put himself into a contemplative-receptive state. It does not instruct us to use the Scripture to try to “experience God.” It instructs us to study as a workman (2 Timothy 2:15). This is an active process rather than a passive one.

In the proper practice of Bible study, the mind is fully in gear; the spirit is aggressively seeking God's wisdom and is wary of deception; one is prayerful, seeking divine help. The wise Bible student knows that it is dangerous to isolate Scripture, so he carefully analyzes the context and compares Scripture with Scripture. He does not depend upon his own intuitions about the meaning of Scripture exclusively but consults trusted men of God and carefully uses godly dictionaries and commentaries. Lectio Divina is not an innocent means of meditating upon Scripture. It is an unscriptural practice that has the power to draw the practitioner into fellowship with demons.

Source:

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