

THE FOUR MOVEMENTS OF LECTIO DIVINA

From Wikipedia

Historically, Lectio Divina has been a "community practice" performed by monks in monasteries. Although it can be taken up individually, its community element should not be forgotten.

Lectio Divina has been likened to "feasting on the Word": first, the taking of a bite (lectio); then chewing on it (meditatio); savoring its essence (oratio) and, finally, "digesting" it and making it a part of the body (contemplatio). In Christian teachings, this form of meditative prayer leads to an increased knowledge of Christ.

Unlike meditative practices in Eastern Christianity – for instance, hesychasm, where the Jesus Prayer is repeated many times – Lectio Divina uses different Scripture passages at different times. Although a passage may be repeated a few times, Lectio Divina is not essentially repetitive in nature.

Lectio ("read")

These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 1 Corinthians 2:9–10.

The first step is the reading of Scripture. In order to achieve a calm and tranquil state of mind, preparation before Lectio Divina is recommended. The biblical reference for preparation via stillness is Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God." An example would be sitting quietly and in silence and reciting a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide the reading of the Scripture that is to follow.

The biblical basis for the preparation goes back to 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 which emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Word of God. As in the statement by John the Baptist in John 1:26 that "Christ stands in the midst of those who seek him", the preparatory step should open the mind to finding Christ in the passage being read.

Following the preparation, the first movement of Lectio Divina is slow and gradual reading of the scriptural passage, perhaps several times. The biblical basis for the reading goes back to Romans 10:8–10 and the presence of God's word in the believer's "mouth or heart."

The attentive reading begins the process through which a higher level of understanding can be achieved. In the traditional Benedictine approach, the passage is slowly read four times, each time with a slightly different focus.

Meditatio ("meditate")

Although Lectio Divina involves reading, it is less a practice of reading than one of listening to the inner message of the Scripture delivered through the Holy Spirit. Lectio Divina does not seek information or motivation, but communion with God. It does not treat Scripture as text to be studied, but as the "Living Word"

The second movement in Lectio Divina thus involves meditating upon and pondering on the scriptural passage. When the passage is read, it is generally advised not to try to assign a meaning to it at first, but to wait for the action of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the mind, as the passage is pondered upon.

The English word ponder comes from the Latin *pondus* which relates to the mental activity of weighing or considering. To ponder on the passage that has been read, it is held lightly and gently considered from various angles. Again, the emphasis is not on analysis of the passage but to keep the mind open and allow the Holy Spirit to inspire a meaning for it.

An example passage may be the statement by Jesus during the Last Supper in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you".

An analytical approach would focus on why Jesus said that, the fact that it was said at the Last Supper, and the context within the biblical episode. Other theological analysis may follow, e.g. the cost at which Jesus the Lamb of God provided peace through his obedience to the will of Father, etc.

However, these theological analyses are generally avoided in Lectio Divina, where the focus is on Christ as the key that interprets the passage and relates it to the meditator. So rather than "dissecting peace" in an analytical manner, the practitioner of Lectio Divina "enters peace" and shares the peace of Christ. The focus will thus be on achieving peace via a closer communion with God rather than a biblical analysis of the passage. Similar other passages may be "Abide in my love", "I am the Good Shepherd", etc.

Oratio ("pray")

In the Christian tradition prayer is understood as dialogue with God, that is, as loving conversation with God who has invited us into an embrace. The constitution *Dei Verbum* which endorsed Lectio Divina for the general public, as well as in monastic settings, quoted Saint Ambrose on the importance of prayer in conjunction with Scripture reading and stated: And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.

Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of using Lectio Divina and prayers on Scripture as a guiding light and a source of direction and stated:
It should never be forgotten that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

Contemplatio ("contemplate")

Contemplation takes place in terms of silent prayer that expresses love for God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines contemplative prayer as "the hearing the Word of God" in an attentive mode. It states:

Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come" or "silent love." Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus.

The role of the Holy Spirit in contemplative prayer has been emphasized by Christian spiritual writers for centuries. In the 12th century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux compared the Holy Spirit to a kiss by the Eternal Father which allows the practitioner of contemplative prayer to experience union with God. In the 14th century, Richard Rolle viewed contemplation as the path that leads the soul to union with God in love, and considered the Holy Spirit as the center of contemplation.

From a theological perspective, God's grace is considered a principle, or cause, of contemplation, with its benefits delivered through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.