



Excerpts and Adapted from  
*Lectio Divina: Framework of Teresian Prayer*  
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### **The Elements of *Lectio Divina***

*Lectio divina* means literally the “divine reading.” It is a monastic designation for the meditative reading of the Scriptures. Its elements are ingredients of a spiritual frame of mind – a holy discipline that intuitively and affectively dwells on a biblical text as a means of seeking communion with Christ. The practice could also be described as dwelling on a scriptural text in the divine presence for the sake of radical change in Christ. Yet again, we could say that *lectio* is making one's own a small selection, phrase, or word of the Bible, in pursuit of greater faith, hope, and charity. In any event, *lectio divina* is *primarily* prayer over the Scriptures. The monastics of the early and medieval church developed *lection divina* into a fine art. The elements are four: **1) reading** itself – understood as the careful repetitious recitation of a short text of Scripture; **2) meditation** – an effort to fathom the meaning of the text and make it personally relevant to oneself in Christ; **3) prayer** – a personal response to the text by prayerfully asking for the grace of the text or moving over it toward union with God; and **4) contemplation** – gazing at length on something with the idea that sometimes, by the infused grace of God, one is raised above meditation to a state of seeing or experiencing the text as mystery and reality; one comes into experiential contact with the One behind and beyond the text.

### **Reading**

Reading (in the monastic tradition) involved placing the divine word on the lips; it was a focusing and centering device. One would read a selection from the Scriptures, and when a thought, line, or word stood out and captured the reader's attention, he or she would stop there and dwell on that text, carefully repeating it over and over. At each distraction one would simply return to repeating the thought, line, or word, and staying with that same text until it dried up, and would then move on with the reading until finding another engaging text. Classically, a monk would do this repetitious reading out loud, proclaiming the word to his senses, and praying with the whole body. This first element is very simple, nothing more than a verbal focus on a biblical thought, like placing the word as food in the mouth. In this way, monks committed to memory the word of God bit by bit.

### **Meditation**

Every word of Scripture was seen as intended for oneself. Every text spoke of Christ and of the pray-er. The monk personalized the text, entering into the meaning and identifying with it. Meditation employs in an intuitive way all the faculties. One does not work hard at this prayer, but simply keeps listening to the words being repeated, letting them suggest their own images, reflections, and intuitive thoughts. The whole process is basically intuitive, a right-brain activity (as is said today), like reading a love letter over and over again. Every word is savored and every thought made one's own. The meditator ponders and perceives the hidden lessons in the word of God in such a way that wisdom for life is learned. Meditation seeks to acquire the mind of Christ. One slowly begins to see what the scriptures are saying. The meditator begins the lifetime task of hearing the word of God so as to keep it. Meditation is basically hearing the word that *lectio* (reading) is repeating.

### **Prayer**

With the help of grace, devout thought engenders prayer which is the third element of *lectio divina*. The word of God moves from the lips to the mind, and now into the heart. Prayer is the response of the heart to the word of God we have heard addressing us through the Scriptures. Basically, prayer in this sense desires the grace of the text so ardently that it demands the needed graces of God. Prayer here is the whole affective component of meditation. It is petition, it is affective conversation with sentiments of love, it is resolution to grow in the virtues of Christ, it is compunction of heart for ones sins, it is silent company-keeping, and it is the loving gaze. Like the other elements of *lectio*, the affective dimension grows and develops.

### **Contemplation**

The fourth element is contemplation. Here God slakes the soul's thirst and feeds its hunger. God gives the meditator a new wine and lifts him or her above the normal meditative self into the sphere of experienced transcendence. Here at last is an infused element of prayer. Here the Spirit prays in the human spirit. One experiences a state of inner harmony; the flesh is not at odds with the spirit; the person is in a state of spiritual integration. The light of God's presence shines through the soul experientially. The love of God is no longer abstract, but concretely poured into the receiving self. One can see oneself being loved and loving in return. Clearly, we are speaking of pure gift at this point. These moments can be fleeting or prolonged, subtle or pronounced. They can go and come again. They can mingle with the flow of meditative words repeated, thoughts reflected, intuitions enjoyed, resolutions enacted. But the person is more still and passive; God is passing by.

We might sum up what the four elements of *lectio divina* in the following ways: reading seeks; meditation finds (meaning); prayer demands; contemplation tastes (God). Or again: reading provides solid food; meditation masticates; prayer achieves a savor; contemplation is the sweetness that refreshes. Or yet again: reading is on the surface; meditation gets to the inner substance; prayer demands by desire; contemplation experiences by delight.

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