

Bible Reading Revisited: The Librarian's Guide to Lectio Divina and Formative Styles of Reading

by Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B

Lectio divina, the Latin term for an ancient monastic approach to religious reading, gets attention these days in a good number of books and essays. The term's appearance signals a growing interest in an older style of reading through which religious readers make contact with the divine through a slow, meditative engagement of a text, most often the Scriptures but also other hallowed writings. Characteristic of the approach was a movement beyond the literal sense of a Biblical text to a more personal spiritual meaning. The term appears in the Rule of Benedict where Benedict (ca. 480-ca. 550) prescribes that those in the monastery should have certain hours for manual labor as well as others for *lectio divina*.¹ The Rule provides for about three hours of such reading each day.

The renewed interest in this ancient form of reading relates in part to a desire of many spiritually attuned individuals and groups to retrieve and employ classic practices that facilitate spiritual growth.² *Lectio divina* was appreciated for centuries for its transformative potential and has once again become a focus for scholars in theology, religious studies, and the human sciences as well as won over contemporary spiritual writers who have introduced the practice to larger audiences. In what follows I hope to present librarians a topography of literature on *lectio* to facilitate their understanding of some of the historical twists and turns taken in *lectio's* evolution as well as offer explanations for its recent popularity.

Ressourcement and the Revival of Lectio Divina

The recovery of this practice in recent times is itself an intriguing story and is related to broader cultural and theological movements.³ Central among these is *ressourcement*, a return to sources, specifically to Scripture and tradition, in Roman Catholic theological circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Theologians advocated such a return as a way of countering a neo-Scholastic theology and mindset which seemed inadequate to the problem of

¹ RB 48:1, RB 1980: *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, Timothy Fry et al., eds. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 248-249.

² See Charles Cummings, *Monastic Practices* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), esp. "Sacred Reading," 7-23; Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), esp. "Scripture: Encountering God through Lectio Divina," 45-61; and Paul J. Griffiths, "Reading as a Spiritual Discipline" in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, eds. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 32-47

³ For a fuller discussion of the revival than is offered here, see Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, Cistercian Studies 238 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2011), 1-37. Robertson's treatment is guiding the presentation of the revival here.

⁴ See Kevin L. Hughes, "Deep Reasonings: *Source Chretiennes*, *Ressourcement*, and the Logic of Scripture in the Years Before — and After — Vatican II," *Modern Theology* 29 (2013): 32-45; Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement Theology, *Aggiornamento*, and the Hermeneutics of Tradition," *Communio* 18 (1991): 530-555; and Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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rising secularism. In the area of liturgy the work of both French and German Benedictine monks (Guéranger and the Wolters) had called for and pursued an investigation of early liturgical texts in the mid-1800s.⁵ By the 1930s such a return to sources in theology had among its ardent proponents Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, and Jean Leclercq who in part turned their attention to the patristic and monastic approach to biblical texts. Already in the 1920s, Denys Gorce had produced the first part of a work entitled *La 'lectio divina' des origenes du cénobitisme à saint Benoit et Cassiodore* (1925); as it turned out he never continued the work beyond Saint Jerome's contribution to *lectio divina*.⁶ In 1927 Ursmer Berlière included a chapter on *lectio* in his influential work on Benedictine asceticism.⁷ Then in the 1940s Daniélou and de Lubac worked diligently to begin a series *Sources Chrétiennes* which made available patristic texts in critical editions along with French translations as part of this larger movement of returning to sources. Daniélou and de Lubac also both later contributed significantly to the understanding of the patristic approach to biblical texts with the publication, respectively of *Sacramentum Futuri: Études sur les origènes de la typologie biblique*⁸ and *Exégèse medievale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture*.⁹ De Lubac in a separate volume had given attention to the highly influential work of Origen regarding biblical interpretation.¹⁰ These scholars were drawing attention to the movement beyond the historical, literal sense of a text to a discovery of deeper spiritual senses found in the patristic tradition. Reading, following the lead of figures such as Origen, meant moving beyond the literal to senses that would impact more on the spiritual life and transformation of the reader. This was the style of reading that early monastic legislators and teachers embraced.

Still, it was Jean Leclercq's 1957 *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age* that raised appreciation of *lectio divina* to a new level.¹¹ His review of medieval monastic authors and discussion of monastic theology highlighted an approach to theologizing that, while distinct from scholastic theology, was nevertheless quite complete and nuanced. Leclercq showed how monastic theology grew out of the practice of *lectio divina*. The practical, experiential theology that emerged was not an academic exercise but one related to the forging of a better person.¹² "Monastic theology is a *confessio*; it is an act of faith and of recognition; it involves a 're-cognition' in a deep and living manner by means of prayer and the *lectio divina* of mysteries which are known in a conceptual way; explicit perhaps, but superficial."¹³ A surge of appreciation for the scriptural Word and the ancient practice of *lectio* unfolded more dramatically in the Roman Catholic Church after 1960. Leclercq, through speaking and writing, promoted this development.

Just prior to Leclercq's spearheading a movement to appreciate monastic theology and *lectio divina*, Beryl Smalley and others scholars were pursuing investigations of the changing approach to biblical texts in the medieval period and the growing attention given to the literal, historical sense of biblical texts. While not always appreciative of the distinctive monastic approach to texts, Smalley in her *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* underscores some of the positive

⁵ Michael Kwatera, "Benedictines and Liturgical Renewal." *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 129-131.

⁶ Denys Gorce, *La 'lectio divina' des origenes du cénobitisme à saint Benoit et Cassiodore*, 1, *Saint Jérôme et la lecture sacrée dans le milieu ascétique romain* (Paris: Picard, 1925).

⁷ Ursmer Berlière, "La 'lectio divina'" in *L'ascèse bénédictine des origines à la fin du XIIe siècle: Essai historique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1927), 169-185.

⁸ Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum Futuri: Études sur les origènes de la typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950).

⁹ Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse medievale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959-1964); *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc, Vol. 1; and E.M. Macierowski, Vols. 2 and 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998-2000).

¹⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: L'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, *Théologie* 16 (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1950).

¹¹ Jean Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1957); *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: a Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

¹² Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 191-236.

¹³ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 215.

advances occurring with the rise of scholasticism.¹⁴ In the preface to her third edition, she appropriately notes the contributions of de Lubac and Leclercq to an appreciation of the richness of the monastic approach.¹⁵

Within the Roman Catholic community, the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) fostered a return to the Scriptures in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.¹⁶ This document recognized the central place of the Scriptures in Christian life. It recovered a vital practice for Scripture reading in Christian spirituality and encouraged people to read once again in the ancient way. In the 1970s, articles¹⁷ and then, in the 1980s, books¹⁸ appeared laying out the rudiments of *lectio divina* for the uninitiated. In Roman Catholic circles a further boost to the practice came in 1993 with the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Although the discussion of *lectio* is brief and the document is more concerned with endorsing the historical-critical method as well as more recent literary methods as effective tools in interpreting Scripture, still the document recognized the practice as an appropriate use for nourishing the spiritual life.¹⁹ Likewise, passing references to *lectio* in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can be seen as further stamps of Roman Catholic approval, even without extensive explanation of the practice.²⁰ In the 1990s the number of books and articles on *lectio divina* multiplied considerably.²¹ Pope Benedict XVI in a 2005 address to a meeting celebrating the fortieth anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation of

¹⁴ See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1941). Other contemporaneous works paralleling in some ways Smalley's are Ceslas Spicq, *Esquissés d'une histoire de l'exégèse latine au moyen âge* (Paris: Vim, 1944); and Robert McNally, *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959).

¹⁵ See "Preface to Third Edition," in *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), vii-xviii. For a more recent evaluation of Smalley's contribution, see Robert Sweetman, "Beryl Smalley, Thomas of Cantimpré, and the Performative Reading of Scripture," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 256-275.

¹⁶ "This sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful, too, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3:8) . . . Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids." The Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 127. For a discussion of the background leading up to the recommendation, see Jared Wicks, "Scripture Reading Urged Vehemently (DV No. 25): Background and Development," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 555-580.

¹⁷ Among the articles published in the 1970s are the following: Robert McGregor, "Monastic Lectio Divina," *Cistercian Studies* 6 (1971): 54-66; Matthias Neuman, "The Contemporary Spirituality of the Monastic Lectio," *Review for Religious* 36 (1977): 97-110; David Stanley, "A Suggested Approach to Lectio Divina," *American Benedictine Review* 23 (1972): 439-455; Armand Veilleux, "Holy Scripture in the Pachomian Koinonia," *Monastic Studies* 10 (1974): 143-153; and Ambrose Wathen, "Monastic Lectio: Some Clues from Terminology," *Monastic Studies* 12 (1976): 207-216.

¹⁸ Among the books that appeared in the 1980s are M. I. Angelini, *Il monaco e la parabola: Saggio sulla spiritualità monastica della lectio divina* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1981); G. De Roma, *Monstrami, Signore, il tuo volto: La lectio divina* (Milan: Ancora, 1988); Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist, 1988); Carlo M. Martini, *Pregare la Bibbia* (Padua: Gregoriana, 1986); and G. M. Oury, *Chercher Dieu dans sa parole: la lectio divina* (Chambray-lès-Tours: C.L.D., 1982).

¹⁹ *The Pontifical Biblical Commission, The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1993), 126-127.

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 1177 and 2708.

²¹ It seems like the Biblical Commission's document was a stimulus for some of these publications. More than ten books appeared in English specifically on the topic of *lectio divina* as well as several articles. The books include Michel De Verteuil, *Your Word Is a Light for My Steps* (Dublin: Veritas, 1996); Mario Masini, *Lectio Divina: An Ancient Prayer That Is Ever New*, trans. Edmund C. Lane (New York: Alba House, 1998); Salvatore A. Panimolle, ed., *Like the Deer That Yearns: Listening to the Word and Prayer*, trans. John Glenn and Callan Slipper (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1998); and Novene Vest, *No Moment Too Small: Rhythms of Silence, Prayer, and Holy Reading* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1996).

Vatican II, spoke in strong support of the practice of *lectio divina*.²² The practice also began to catch the attention of various Protestant authors who saw it as resonating with the practice of devotional reading of the Scripture.²³

Complementing the renewed appreciation of *lectio divina* on the contemporary scene, work continued on patristic authors as well as respected monastic and theological writers of the medieval period providing a fuller backdrop to the practice and its benefits. Karen Jo Torjesen's work on Origen's method helped situate him as a major promoter of a reading of Scripture that moved from the letter to the spirit and guided readers in understanding how a particular text spoke to them in their particular life circumstances.²⁴ Brian Stock approached Augustine as a reader and mapped out in considerable detail how Augustine approached reading as a way of coming to self-knowledge.²⁵ Stock also helpfully considers the differences between *lectio divina* and a later *lectio spiritualis*.²⁶ Put simply, *lectio spiritualis* as it slowly evolved was less concerned with text and more focused on thought processes and emotional responses of the reader. Gradually, spiritual reading displaces the traditional *lectio divina*, especially as the Scriptures, untranslated into vernacular languages until much later, became less accessible to many people.²⁷

Douglas Burton-Christie ably commented on the development of *lectio* among the desert elders who flourished prior to Benedict in the fourth and fifth centuries in Egypt. In *The Word in the Desert* he indicates how a "desert hermeneutic" emerges from the efforts of these monastic ascetics to understand the Scriptures through living them.²⁸ Scripture texts were not to be thought about so much as to be performed. This is the reading practice that becomes embedded in the monastic way of life as an important constituent of monastic formation; *lectio* comprised a significant portion of the monastic day as is clear in Benedict's provisions for it. While the practice continued in monastic environments, different approaches to reading emerged along with the rise of scholasticism. The practice of silent reading takes over as punctuation and space between words make it possible to grasp words quickly without sounding the letters out aloud. Prior to this monks and others read aloud which meant that reading was a more holistic and social activity for them. Paul Saenger has provided a thorough investigation of this evolution in *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*.²⁹ As the ancient style of reading comes under threat from a more academic approach which sought to question and analyze texts and no longer approaches texts with the same reverence, two works appear that are out to defend and more carefully

²² "I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n.25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church — I am convinced of it — a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, *lectio divina* should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times." "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the International Congress Organized to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*," Castel Gandolfo, September 16, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050916_40-dei-verbum_en.html.

²³ See, for instance, Evan Howard, "Lectio Divina in the Evangelical Tradition," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5 (2012): 56-77.

²⁴ Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin:de Gruyter, 1986), esp. 138-147.

²⁵ Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2001), 101-114.

²⁷ See Jacques Rouse, Hermann Josef Sieben, and André Boland, "Lectio divina et lecture spirituelle," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 470-510, esp. 488-510.

²⁸ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-32.

²⁹ Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

explicate the process of *lectio divina*: Hugh of St. Victor's (d. 1142) *Didascalicon*³⁰ and Guigo II's (d. ca. 1188) *Scala claustralium*.³¹

Ivan Illich's *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* offers a thoughtful exposition of central ideas and themes in Hugh's work which Illich notes is "the first book written on the art of reading" as well as comments on the impact that this shift in reading style had at Hugh's times and reflects on an analogous shift today as the book is replaced by the screen.³² Guigo's work is possibly dependent on Hugh's and presents a four-fold *lectio* process which includes reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation (Hugh had included a fifth element: action [operatio]).³³ Guigo intended to pass on the practice as he knew it but he already includes, as did Hugh, a more active intellectual approach to meditation than seems to be the case in the earlier monastic and patristic sources as well as a prayer that is more devotional than petitionary, also in contrast to previous practice.³⁴ Duncan Robertson in *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, observes that *lectio divina* reaches a high point in the twelfth century with both Hugh and Guigo writing about the reading process and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) illustrating in his sermons and scriptural commentaries the *lectio* process.³⁵ With the advent of the thirteenth century *lectio divina* gives way to scholastic reading and *lectio* to the lecture. Another shift had also been occurring. The Bible, still clearly perceived as the inspired Word of God, was nonetheless thought to be something that could be available only to those who could understand it and was certainly not to be available to everyone.³⁶

A Return to Bible Reading

While some tried to keep the Scriptures out of the hands of the ordinary person, some individuals worked to get the Scriptures into more hands by converting them into a language ordinary people could comprehend. Or, it can at least be said that some people supported the principle that the Scriptures should be available to all. Among these latter falls the English reformer John Wyclif (c.1330-1384).³⁷ For him the Scriptures were the text for Christian instruction. The meaning of a text, he assumed, was available and transparent to anyone without need of Church intervention. To arrive at the meaning Wyclif recommended that people read the Scriptures with an attitude of humble seeking and openness to the Spirit.³⁸ His concern was primarily with the plain, literal sense of the texts because that basic meaning was the true law for Christians. He would, however, allow for the fact that the literal, understood as the divine author's intention, could include figurative or metaphorical meanings. In this way he broadened the understanding of the literal sense and set the stage for later Reformers who accepted this expanded understanding of the literal while distancing themselves

³⁰ Brother Charles Henry, *Buttimer, Hugonis de Sancto Victore, Didascalicon, De Studio Legendi: A Critical Text*, PhD diss. (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1939); *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). A more recent translation of Hugh's *Didascalicon* is that of Franklin T. Harkins in *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*, in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, *Victorine Texts in Translation: Exegesis, Theology and Spirituality from the Abbey of St Victor 3* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 61-201.

³¹ *Lettre sur la Vie Contemplative, L'Échelle des Moines, Douze Meditations, Sources Chrétiennes 163* (Paris: Cerf, 1970); *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Doubleday, 1978).

³² Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 5.

³³ See Simon Tugwell, *Ways of Perfection* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1985), 101, n. 1.

³⁴ See Keith Egan, "Guigo II: The Theology of the Contemplative Life" in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, *Cistercian Studies 30* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 112; Tugwell, *Ways of Perfection*, 115; and Charles Dumont, *Praying the Word of God* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1999), 14.

³⁵ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading, Cistercian Studies 238* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2011), xviii.

³⁶ See Robert McNally, *The Unreformed Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 73-76.

³⁷ See Michael J. Wilks, "Jean Wyclif," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 16 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994), 1501-1512.

³⁸ For Wyclif's rules for reading Scripture, see Johannes Wyclif, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. Rudolf Boddensieg, vol. 1 (London: The Wyclif Society, 1905), 194-205.

from the more fanciful interpretations associated with the spiritual senses.³⁹ For Wyclif, the Scriptural text speaks to each reader in a way that transcends time, giving him or her the opportunity to respond to Christ truly present, and thereby find Wisdom.⁴⁰ Wycliffite English translations of the Bible struck the English Church officials as a vulgarization of sacred writing — “casting pearls before swine.”⁴¹ These translations were burned and so were their owners, confirmed heretics by the very ownership of these texts.⁴²

Not until the sixteenth century’s Protestant Reformation did vernacular translations of the Bible based on Greek and Hebrew documents, not on the Latin Vulgate text, become more common. The rapid spread was due, in part, to encouragement by Protestant reformers to read the Scriptures. Martin Luther and other reformers initially promoted popular reading of the Bible. Soon, however, they too realized the dangers Bible reading held for many ordinary Christians and, for fear of heterodox interpretations, introduced some controls. Luther’s remarks show a definite shift away from encouraging untrained lay people to read the Scriptures toward recommending the practice of reading the catechism. The catechism became the layperson’s bible.⁴³ Zwingli, Melancthon, and Calvin all eventually came to share a similar perspective on the availability of the Scriptures for the average person.

Nevertheless, a major shift had occurred among Christians with the sixteenth-century reformation movements. An invitation to read the Bible had gone out; German Pietists in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continued the push for personal Bible reading.⁴⁴ Now that it was recognized that the Bible was for everybody, the practice of “intensive reading” reigned supreme. That is how historians of reading characterize the practice of reading and rereading a small number of books, the Bible given preeminence of place among them. Church leaders were convinced that, with repeated readings, the Bible would interpret itself to the reader correctly since the Biblical texts had their own internal logic.⁴⁵

With the sixteenth-century reform movement, a different approach to interpretation also becomes prominent. Eschewing the spiritual senses as too contrived, readers now focused on what was designated as the grammatical, literal, or historical sense of a passage. The allegorical meaning of texts, while not completely abandoned, was of little concern.⁴⁶ Strong interest in the literal meaning spurred interest in studying texts in their original languages. As a response to this grassroots movement of Bible reading, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) did consider the issue of vernacular Bibles, but the Roman Catholic Church never made a formal declaration in its conciliar statements. Still, vernacular translations of the Bible enjoyed a limited circulation among the Catholic populace. In the English-speaking world the Douay-Rheims

³⁹ See G. R. Evans, “Wyclif on Literal and Metaphorical,” in *From Ockham to Wyclif*, eds. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 261-263. This movement to a more expansive view of the literal sense had already begun among the Victorines in the twelfth century. The literal sense accurately perceived was seen as foundational and led to a more apt understanding of the formative meaning of the text. See the discussion in the general introduction to *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, *Victorine Texts in Translation: Exegesis, Theology and Spirituality from the Abbey of St. Victor*, 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 36-50.

⁴⁰ See David Lyle Jeffrey, “John Wyclif and the Hermeneutics of Reader Response,” *Interpretation* 39/3 (1985): 272-287; and Anne Hudson, *Introduction to Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 6-8.

⁴¹ A chronicle of the period records: “This Master John Wyclif translated from Latin into English — the Angle not the angel speech — the Gospel that Christ gave to the doctors and clergy of the Church [. . .] so that by his means it has become vulgar and more open to lay men and women who can read than it usually is to quite learned clergy of good intelligence. And so the pearl of the Gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.” Translated and cited in Henry Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, II: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 388.

⁴² See David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 66-67.

⁴³ “The catechism is the layman’s Bible, it contains the whole of what every Christian must know of Christian doctrine.” *D. Martin Luthers Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar, 1912-21), no. 6288 cited and translated in Richard Gawthrop and Gerald Strauss, “Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany,” *Past and Present* 104 (August 1984): 35.

⁴⁴ See Gawthrop and Strauss, “Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany,” 43-45.

⁴⁵ See Matei Calinescu, *Rereading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 85-86.

⁴⁶ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible: the Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 28-35.

Bible made its appearance first as only the Rheims New Testament (1582); decades later it was complemented with the Douay Old Testament (1609). A century and a half later Bishop Richard Challoner modernized the Douay-Rheims text style. This revised 1764 Challoner version of the Douay-Rheims Bible remained the principal English text of the Bible for Catholics for the next two centuries. Other languages fared far worse; translations into Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese lagged considerably behind English renditions.⁴⁷

The climate for Bible reading among Catholics got a little better under Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) who issued a brief that authorized the use of appropriate vernacular translations by all and required no written permissions.⁴⁸ Another threat to Bible reading that did not affect so much the average Catholic lay person, already distanced from Scripture, was the rise of an historical-critical approach to biblical texts in the eighteenth century. This approach disparaged the allegorical focus of Patristic exegesis and concerned itself with the literal text and an author intention. Protestant biblical scholars meanwhile led the way in applying historical-critical methodology to the Scriptures. On the promising side of this development, historical-critical reading clarifies what an author intended to communicate and avoids past excesses associated with spiritual exegesis. This critical approach has enjoyed fuller acceptance within ecclesial communities as the way to approach biblical texts. What continues to be debated though is the place of the spiritual senses — that dimension that was so important in the earlier periods and that had to do with the spiritual impact of the text on the reader.

The debate already took on urgency in the 1940s, as scholars preparing critical editions of patristic texts had to deal with classic examples of spiritual exegesis in writers of that era such as Origen.⁴⁹ While not disparaging historical-critical methods, Henri de Lubac called for a renewed appreciation of the ancient way of understanding biblical texts. He and others saw the spiritual sense or spiritual exegesis as a valid theological method that moves from the literal sense of a text to applying its message to particular circumstances of the reader/interpreter.⁵⁰ In 1946 Leclercq contributed to the conversation about the value of the spiritual senses by discussing the monastic tradition of *lectio divina*. He pointed out that the medieval monastic authors he had studied did not typically disregard the literal sense and so could not be labeled as anti-historical. Yet they were able to draw from the passages that they commented on real spiritual nourishment. They moved beyond the historical, literal sense to an experiential and spiritual sense.⁵¹

⁴⁷ “In the states of the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, for over two centuries direct reading of the Bible was reserved to the clergy, given that the only available text was in Latin.” Dominique Julia, “Reading and the Counter-Reformation,” in *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, 238-268 (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 245.

⁴⁸ See Julia, “Reading and the Counter-Reformation,” 244-245. The Index of Forbidden Books issued at the Council of Trent and promulgated by Pius IV (1559-1565) allowed that bishops could grant permission in writing for the use of Bibles translated by Catholics to those who could benefit from them. The revision of the Index under Leo XIII (1878-1903) allowed the use of translations approved by the Holy See or edited under its vigilance and accompanied with the appropriate annotations to the faithful without requiring any special permissions. However, only students of theology or scripture could use Scriptures edited or translated by non-Catholics. See Joseph M. Pernicone, *The Ecclesiastical Prohibition of Books*, Studies in Canon Law 72 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1932), 48-61.

⁴⁹ Jean Danielou, Louis Bouyer, Yves Congar are among this group. See Marie Anne Majeski, “Catholic Theology and the History of Exegesis,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 140-153.

⁵⁰ See the discussion of this point in David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 200-204.

⁵¹ See Jean Leclercq, “La ‘Lecture Divine,’” *La Maison-Dieu* 5 (1946): 21-33; reprinted in *La Liturgie et les Paradoxes Chrétiens* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963), 241-257.

The debate between the place of historical-critical exegesis and the place of spiritual exegesis continues; what has changed is the recognition of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* as a more equal partner in the debate has gained ground.⁵²

Lectio Divina in Broader Perspective

There are a number of recent studies which offer an overview both historically and theologically of the practice of *lectio divina*. Raymond Studzinski's *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* traces the practice from its roots in the ascetic movement in the early church and monasticism to its rediscovery in recent times and also notes modern commentators from a variety of perspectives who spell out *lectio's* potential for a twenty-first century society.⁵³ Mario Masini offers a thorough treatment of historical and theological dimensions of *lectio* in his *La "lectio divina": Teologia, spiritualità, metodo*.⁵⁴ A fine synthesis of patristic and monastic sources foundational to *lectio* is Archbishop Mariano Magrassi's *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*.⁵⁵ Paul J. Griffiths relates the Christian approach to reading Scriptures embodied in *lectio divina* to the approach to reading in other world religions in *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*.⁵⁶ He draws attention among other things to the particular attitudes religious readers have to the texts that they read and contrasts religious readers with what he calls "consumerist readers" who are quick to discard what they have read because they have no further use for it. Religious readers see their texts as rich treasure-houses which are never exhausted.⁵⁷ Michael Casey's *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* offers a more in-depth presentation of the art intended to help those already engaged in the practice for some years. He is especially interested in considering how *lectio* prepares for and relates to contemplation.⁵⁸

There is a plethora of popular treatments of *lectio divina* by writers from various denominations. Some of the earlier works are still among the best available; these would include the following by Catholic authors: Enzo Bianchi's *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*;⁵⁹ Garcia M. Colombás, *Reading God*;⁶⁰ Charles Dumont, *Praying the Word of God: The Use of Lectio Divina*;⁶¹ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*;⁶² and M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*.⁶³ Growing appreciation of the role of spiritual practices or disciplines in religious transformation has sparked the interest of Protestant writers who may or may not make an explicit link to *lectio divina* as they present an engaged way of reading the Scriptures. An early book in this regard is Walter Wink's *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm in Biblical Studies*.⁶⁴ Among

⁵² The following is a sampling of some of the more recent pieces advocating a place for spiritual exegesis: Brian Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?: Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," *Communio* 29 (2002): 185-216; Ignace de la Potterie, "The Spiritual Sense of Scripture," *Communio* 23 (1996): 738-756; Graham Ward, "Allegoria: Reading as a Spiritual Exercise," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999): 271-295; Robert Louis Wilken, "In Defense of Allegory," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 197-202; Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, "Spiritual Interpretation and Realigned Temporality," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 587-596.

⁵³ Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*, Cistercian Studies 231 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009).

⁵⁴ Mario Masini, *La "lectio divina": Teologia, spiritualità, metodo* (Milan: San Paolo, 1996).

⁵⁵ Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, trans. Edward Hagman (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁷ Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 40-42.

⁵⁸ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1995).

⁵⁹ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, trans. James W. Zona (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998).

⁶⁰ Garcia M. Colombás, *Reading God*, trans. Gregory J. Roettger (Schuyler, NE: BMH Publications, 1993).

⁶¹ Charles Dumont, *Praying the Word of God: The Use of Lectio Divina* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1999).

⁶² Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

⁶³ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

⁶⁴ Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm in Biblical Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

those who have followed Wink's lead is M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., whose *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* appeared more recently in a revised edition.⁶⁵ Mulholland notes how religious readers are concerned with sacred texts mastering them rather than their becoming masters of the texts themselves. More explicitly linked to the *lectio divina* tradition are Eugene H. Peterson's *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*,⁶⁶ David G. Benner's *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer*,⁶⁷ and James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard's *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life*.⁶⁸ Among the books that seek to make a wider application of the principles of *lectio divina* to read phenomena other than classic spiritual texts are Mary C. Earle's *Broken Body, Healing Spirit: Lectio Divina and Living with Illness*⁶⁹ and Christine Valters Painter and Lucy Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness*⁷⁰ where the authors explore "reading" illness, art, poetry, and life's events with an openness to their deeper spiritual meaning.

Providing a fuller context for understanding *lectio divina* are explorations of the history of reading which often make note of the distinctive style of a *lectio divina* approach. A comprehensive overview of reading is Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading*⁷¹ while a more detailed analysis of specific periods is *A History of Reading in the West*, a collection of essays edited by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier.⁷² George Steiner is among those on the contemporary scene outside theological and religious studies circles calling for a return to an ancient style of reading for it is in that style that the reader is put in touch with the transcendent, a "real presence" that grounds creative living and communicating. In *Real Presences* he makes his argument most forcefully.⁷³ In *Text and Psyche*, Schuyler Brown argues for the ability of scriptural language to resonate deeply with inner psychic resources as offering some explanation of the power of Scripture reading to change people's lives.⁷⁴ He, too, values *lectio divina* as a practice that allows for this affective impact of a scriptural text on a reader. The revival of *lectio divina* continues to have repercussions even beyond the spiritual and religious domain. A movement promoting slow reading and those advocating its use, in educational contexts have noted how *lectio divina* can serve as a framework for slow reading and can be introduced to students with great benefit as another way to approach a text.⁷⁵ The growing body of literature touching on *lectio divina* and its history, use and benefits suggests that librarians will keep encountering the practice for some time to come.

⁶⁵ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Rooms, 1985); rev. ed., 2002.

⁶⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁶⁷ David G. Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

⁶⁸ James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

⁶⁹ Mary C. Earle, *Broken Body, Healing Spirit: Lectio Divina and Living with Illness* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2003).

⁷⁰ Christine Valters Painter and Lucy Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness* (New York: Paulist, 2008).

⁷¹ Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996).

⁷² Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

⁷³ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁷⁴ Schuyler Brown, *Text and Psyche* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

⁷⁵ See K. Jo-Ann Badley and Ken Badley, "Slow Reading: Reading along Lectio Lines," *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 15 no. 1 (2011): 29-42; John Miedema, *Slow Reading* (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2009); and Thomas Newkirk, *The Art of Slow Reading* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2012).