

# **THE WORD BECAME TEXT AND DWELT AMONG US**

## **The Oblate Listening in the World**

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Whenever we pray the Angelus, we recite that solemn verse from the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. This refers, of course, to God’s eternal Word becoming human and thus beginning to exist and act through the human nature that had been assumed. That is to say, within the constraining limits of space and time. The Word was present and active, but immediate in one place only, and existing from moment to moment. The life-giving Word, the image of the unseen God, became flesh at one era in history and in a single geographical location. The infinite and eternal Word who dwells in inaccessible light became accessible in space and time. Thus we could hear, see with our eyes, and touch with our hands, the mystery that had been hidden from human perception during previous ages. By reaching out in faith to the Word incarnate not only are we saved, but we also become sharers in the divinity. We become by grace all that Christ was by nature. The purpose of the incarnation of the Word is our divinisation; “from his fullness we have all received, grace for grace”.

This wondrous exchange, by which divinity and humanity were united, is the very heart and substance of Christian faith. Yet, in a manner equally wondrous, it is reproduced each time we open our hearts and our lives to God’s Word. The Word became incarnate in the context of our time-bound humanity. The Word spoke, not in abstraction, but within the confines of our limited earthly existence, in such a way as to become conditioned by the place and period in which he lived. Jesus spoke Aramaic with a Galilean accent because it was only thus that his hearers could understand what he was saying. In the Incarnation the infinite and eternal Word was “abbreviated” to accommodate

human limitation, now he still speaks to us in human terms, respecting our littleness.<sup>1</sup> The Word is spoken to us as we are, where we are. Even though our lives belong to a different era and a different region, the Word continues to speak. To us also it can be said, “The Word is close to you, in your mouth and in your heart” (Rom 10:8; Deut 30:12-14).

Those to whom Jesus spoke directly were given the task of proclaiming the Good News to all nations until the termination of the ages. By the power of the Holy Spirit a potent remembrance of the Word was created, an *anamnesis*, which could be handed on from generation to generation first orally, and then in writing. So, in a certain sense it can be said, **the Word became text and dwelt among us**. God’s life-giving Word underwent a further emptying (or *kenosis*) and presents itself through marks on a page; sacred words received, handed on, interpreted, translated – subject to a thousand vicissitudes – but still mysteriously mediating the power of the Holy Spirit to bring dead letters and dead souls to life.

The reading of these words becomes *lectio divina* only through the operation of the Holy Spirit experienced in us as the gift of faith. Without at least incipient faith, reading the Scriptures is a mere academic or informative exercise. Faith comes from hearing, from receiving the Word, either directly through Scripture or mediately. This fundamental gift of grace passes through five stages before it becomes complete.

- a) Firstly, we **experience** something of the affective power inherent in these written words and it has a powerful impact on us. We feel strongly drawn beyond our normal sphere of thought, and so become

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<sup>□</sup> See M. Casey, “The Abbreviated Word,” in *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori MO: Triumph Books, 1996), pp. 43-47.

aware of a desire to go deeper; we hear those words of Jesus addressed also to us, “Come and see” (Jn 1:39).

- b) Secondly, in some way, our eyes are opened and we catch a glimpse of the glory of the spiritual world that is invisible to our senses. We experience **enlightenment**. It is this aspect of faith that is emphasised in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Lumen fidei*.
- c) Thirdly we are empowered to give **assent** to what has been revealed to us. This is the central and essential moment of faith. By this act we say “Amen” to God, and to all that God’s providence has arranged.
- d) Fourthly, feeling instinctively that “faith without works is dead” we try to translate what we have seen on the mountain into everyday action, so that there is no inconsistency between what we read and what we do. In a sense we become what we read. Enlightened and accepted faith becomes **practice**
- e) Fifthly, faith means fidelity; only that faith is authentic that is characterised by **perseverance**. Our fulfilment of the Word is active throughout a lifetime and reaches its perfection only at the end.

Our faith-filled reading of God’s Word becomes the foundation of our whole spiritual life. It provides us with a channel by which we may enter into contact with the spiritual world and continue to be animated by this ongoing connection. It is a source of instruction and enlightenment. It leads us to giving a real and not merely notional assent to God’s plan of salvation. It guides our daily life and sustains us in fidelity throughout our lifetime. *Lectio divina* is no trivial matter. It is, as we have said, the foundation and support of our whole spiritual life.

The practice of *lectio divina* is a signature activity of the tradition emanating from the *Rule* of Saint Benedict; it is the heart and soul of what is sometimes termed “Benedictine spirituality”, but not exclusively so. As Pope Benedict’s Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* reminds us, *lectio divina* is an essential element in the life and mission of the Church. It is more than merely a pious practice. It is important that we do not lose sight of the deep theological meaning of this exercise. Normally we read for information or entertainment – reading is a means to an end. There is, however, a quasi-sacramental aspect to *lectio divina* that goes beyond what we invest in it in terms of effort, ingenuity or industry. It is a salvific encounter with the Word, in which God is the principal agent. In a certain sense, when we enter into the sacred space of *lectio divina*, the Word becomes flesh again, our Emmanuel, dwelling with us in space and time, in **our** space and time, speaking to us, energising us.

Saint Benedict reminds us the contemporaneity of the Word in that well-known passage in the Prologue of his Rule.

And with eyes wide open to the divinizing light, and with astonished ears, let us hear God’s voice crying out to us **every day** and admonishing us. “**Today**, if you hear [God’s] voice, harden not your hearts.” And again, “Let the one who has ears for hearing, hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (RB Prol 9-11)

We are, perhaps, familiar with the *hodie* of the liturgy. Today Christ is born. Today Christ is risen. Today Christ ascends into heaven. In our liturgical celebrations we are not simply commemorating past saving events, but we are actualising them, activating them, making them present and accessible today. We are entering into the process of salvation. The timeless economy of salvation is being realised for our benefit today.

The practice of *lectio divina* is a prolongation of the reception of the Word proclaimed in liturgy. In a way similar to the liturgy, when we receive God's Word in *lectio*, it is as though God were speaking directly to us today. It is not merely an inspiring word from the past that still has the power to touch us, to guide us and to move us to good living. It is God's unique and empowering Word addressed to us at this moment and in this situation in which we find ourselves. This is more than mere reading; God is at work in us. The Holy Spirit is as active in our reception of the inspired Word as in its original composition. This is why Saint Jerome wrote, "We cannot arrive at an understanding of Scripture without the aid of the Holy Spirit who inspired it."<sup>2</sup>

*Lectio divina* is a **transactional** reading. It is not merely the passive absorption of valuable information. "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow and judging the movements and thoughts of the heart" (Heb 4:12). *Lectio divina* is a contact sport, it is like Jacob grappling all night long with an angel. (Gen 32:22-30). In a certain sense, we are always at a disadvantage. God's Word cuts through any pretence or defence behind which we might hide, and summons us to go beyond our zone of comfort and to accept the challenge to live as Christ lived, to be the presence of Christ in a world which, knowingly or not, longs for his coming.

If we consider Luke's account of the Annunciation we see an illustration of how this transaction proceeds. The angel Gabriel comes bringing God's

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<sup>2</sup> Letter 120, 10; CSEL 55, 500-506, as cited by Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 16. See M. Casey, "From the Silence of God to the God of Silence: The Experience of Progress in *Lectio Divina*," *Tjurunga* 43 (1992), p. 5. "There is something mysterious or even sacramental about a believer reading Scripture as a believer. It is not merely foraging in a pious book for information, motivation or encouragement. A faith-filled encounter with the Scriptures is a moment of great truth and can result in enlightenment for the mind and heart of the believer. The Holy Spirit is just as active today in the reading of the Scriptures as in their composition in the past."

Word. The result is disturbance and an interior dialogue about what the message might mean. It seems that Mary experienced an incipient dread at the approach of the mystery and needed to be reassured. Even after the angel explains, Mary finds questions presenting themselves to her thoughts and seeks a more comprehensive meaning. Only then does Mary reach the point of surrendering to divine providence with her reply, “Let [God] do to me in accordance with your word.”

God’s saving Word is infinite and final, but we mortals have to labour to arrive at the point of complete acceptance. *Lectio divina* is not the smooth ingestion of spiritual nourishment, but a dread-filled struggle with the absolute demands that the Good News brings. The proclamation of the Gospel precipitates us into what the Fourth Gospel names as *krisis*, the moment of decision. As Saint Paul reminded the Corinthians, “God is faithful and our word spoken to you was not ‘Yes’ and ‘No’” (2 Cor 1:18). The Good News constantly summons us forth from ambiguity and compromise into an unconditional assent to what has been revealed. For most of us this is not achieved immediately or without prolonged resistance. Like Paul himself, we know what it is to kick against the goad (Acts 26:14).

There is something wild and unpredictable about genuine *lectio divina* that will necessarily frustrate all our efforts to remain in control, or to channel its energies. Guigo the Carthusian’s fourfold schema (*lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*) is misinterpreted when it is read as a step-by-step method to arrive at contemplation.<sup>3</sup> There is a certain logical sequence in the steps Guigo enunciates but experientially the way in which the different moments of the process interact is more circular than lineal. And there is no guarantee that

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□ See Guigo II, *Scala Claustralium* 2-7; SChr 163 (Paris: Cerf, 1980), pp. 82-96.

having begun with *lectio*, a particular session will necessarily pass on to *contemplatio*.

As is evident from the narratives about Antony of Egypt, Augustine and others, the Scriptures often play a role in precipitating such a radical change in perceptual horizons that a conversion results. The book of the Scriptures should carry a warning that reading from it may endanger our complacency. In fact, the great grace to pray for whenever we open the Bible is the grace of self-doubt. Truly to hear God's Word we need to demolish the wall of false security with which we protect ourselves from the challenges of the Kingdom. I am often reminded of the biblical incident where the prophet Nathan confronts King David after his adultery and murder. He tells him a story to which the king reacts with predictable self-righteousness. And then, rising to his full height and pointing an accusatory finger, the prophet declaims, "That man is you" (2 S 12:7). In a similar way, it can happen to us that, as we read a familiar portion of the Scripture and respond in our usual way, suddenly a word leaps forth from the page and strikes us. Like the crowds that heard Saint Peter preach, we are pierced through to the heart (Acts 2:37). This is how *lectio divina* operates. The Word smites us with the grace of compunction. Throughout monastic tradition we find a linkage between *lectio* and *compunctio*. Without compunction reading is merely an informational exercise.

To describe the attitude we need to have in approaching God's Word, the Benedictine tradition uses such terms as assiduity (*assiduitas*), diligence (*diligentia*), and solicitude (*solicitudo*). We need to be alert and attentive to catch every nuance of the inspired utterance. This means allowing the two-edged sword to penetrate the hard shell of habituation which protects us from the clear meaning of the text we are considering. Too often we glance at the text we are about to read and conclude that we are already familiar with its content and we prepare ourselves to react in the usual way. What we are doing

is projecting onto the text the meaning at which we have already arrived, instead of allowing the text to speak with its own voice. This is “eisegesis” not “exegesis”: “reading into” instead of “reading out of”. We have stopped listening and are prepared to hear only what agrees with what we have already accepted. In such a process there are no surprises and so our lives are left unchanged, unevangelised.

Out of reverence for the inspired text we need to pay serious attention, not only to its general gist, but to every word, every phrase and every sentence. We need to read slowly and to ponder each word. *Lectio divina* operates in a way similar to painting a wall. We go back and forth over the same area, making sure that no part is missed, moving forward very slowly. And the next day we return and cover the same area with a second coat. It will often happen that what was unnoticed at a first reading becomes apparent at a second or third encounter. This is because slowly we are moving deeper into the text beyond the superficial and obvious meanings that we perceived when we began to read.

In paying close attention to every fragment of the text we need to move our reading into the oral/aural sphere, not only scanning the printed words with our eyes but also quietly forming the words with our lips and hearing them with our ears. Vocalising the text as we read certainly slows us down. It also allows us better to catch the poetic cadences in which the biblical message is expressed. Saying the words silently to ourselves not only allows us to grasp certain subtle allusions in the text, but also more effectively embeds it in our memory so that it is more easily recalled in the course of our working day. *Lectio divina* thus becomes a multi-media event!

Inevitably we will find much in the sacred text that does not permit of ready understanding and immediate application. When this happens we have to stay with the text until it begins to yield some glimmer of light. Instinctively we

begin to look for a more expansive meaning, the *sensus plenior*. When faith interacts with a text it often sees more in it than the author intended. The part becomes more comprehensible when it is interpreted in the context of the whole of revelation, and within the entire plan of salvation. Persons illumined by faith hear resonances within their own hearts which were not envisaged by the sacred authors but which are true responses to God's Word in the here-and-now.

Recent Vatican documents have been at pains to defend the authenticity of what is known as the "spiritual sense".<sup>4</sup> Since the time of Origen of Alexandria the meaning of Scripture has been understood to divide into four streams, like the rivers of Paradise (Gen 2:10). At the base stands the **literal or historical sense**. Secondly, when the Word shines upon our intellect and memory it enhances our understanding of the mysteries of faith by forming associations with what we already believe. This poetic linkage of text and creative imagination, explores and expands the content of faith. It was known as the **allegorical sense**, and it often assumed a strong Christological character. Thirdly, when the Word impinges on our consciences it heightens our practical perception of right and wrong, and gives rise to the behavioural or **moral sense**. Fourthly, the Word also enhances our hope by lifting up our hearts and spirits to God and so gives birth to prayer. This is termed the **anagogical sense**. *Lectio divina* strengthens faith, guides behaviour and leads us into prayer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>□</sup> Thus Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 38. The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), "Part II: Hermeneutical Questions," 'Section B: The Meaning of Inspired Scripture,' Sub-section 1. The Spiritual Sense and Sub-section 2. The Fuller Sense. "We can define the spiritual sense, as understood by Christian faith, as the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it."

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<sup>□</sup> See M. Casey, "Levels of Meaning" in *Sacred Reading*, pp. 51-76.

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There is, clearly, an interactive aspect in *lectio divina*. We have a role in shaping what we hear when God speaks. According to an axiom of Scholastic philosophy, “Whatever is received is received according to the measure of the receiver”: *Quidquid recipitur, per modum recipientis recipitur*. This means that we are able to grasp God’s Word, not in its eternal totality, but only in so far as it speaks to our present experience as individuals and as communities. We hear only what we need to hear. What we hear applies to us: it need not necessarily apply universally.

Thus, experience provides an interpretative key to grasping what we read. Twelfth-century Cistercians used to speak about “the book of experience”.<sup>6</sup> It is as though they conceived the reader as having a book in each hand; in one the book of the text and in the other the book of experience. Personal experience was seen as the matrix for arriving at a deeper understanding of what was written and, conversely, the text helped the reader to grasp the meaning of experience. The process of reading is like watching the back and forth of a tennis match: from text to experience to text to experience until some “fusion of horizons” was achieved.<sup>7</sup> We read the Bible within the particularity of our own situation and it is this particularity that makes our reading unique. Our own life and our world blend with the inspired text to produce a message that applies revelation to the reality in which we live and move and have our being.

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□ Thus Bernard of Clairvaux, *Super Cantica* 3:1 (SBOP 1:14); Aelred of Rievaulx *Sermo* 51:6; (CCCM 2b, p. 42).

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□ This hermeneutic is compatible with that enunciated by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965). See also, M. Casey, “The Book of Experience: The Western Art of *Lectio Divina*,” in *Tjurunga* 81 (2011), pp. 35-58, especially pp. 54-57; “Integrity in Interpretation: Listening for the Authentic Voice of Saint Benedict,” *New Norcia Studies* 20 (2012), pp. 51-58.

It is this interactive element in *lectio divina* that ensures that it is not only the means by which divine revelation is opened to us, it becomes also an agent in spiritual literacy. Thus, *lectio divina* is a source not only of knowledge of God; it leads us to a deeper and more comprehensive self-knowledge. This is why Saint Athanasius speaks of Scripture as a mirror in which we can see ourselves more clearly.<sup>8</sup>

The strength of this approach to *lectio divina* is that it actualises God's Word.<sup>9</sup> We become engaged with it not only at the level of rationality but also affectively and, thereby, it has the power to motivate us to better living and a deeper mindfulness of God, within the context of our own life-situation. The weakness of the approach is that it is open to subjectivism whereby readers are not challenged but are simply confirmed in their own convictions so that their prejudices are reinforced and their blind spots are left in darkness. This is why religious fanatics and fundamentalists can quote Scripture in support of their own extreme beliefs and, sometimes, as justification of actions that are criminally opposed to Christian ideals.

To guard against the danger of subjectivism we must never lose contact with the text – the literal meaning on which all other meanings depend. This means that we must keep returning to the text to make sure that the meaning we

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□ "...And it seems to me that these words [of the Psalms] become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul, and thus affected he might recite them. Indeed he who hears the one reading receives the song that is recited as being about him, and either, when he is convicted by his conscience, being pierced he will repent, or hearing of the hope that resides in God and of the succor available to believers – how this kind of grace exists for him – he exults and begins to give thanks to God... And so, on the whole, each psalm is both spoken and composed by the Spirit so that in these same words, as was said earlier, the stirring of our souls might be grasped, and all of them said as concerning us, and the same issue from us as our own words, for a remembrance of the emotions in us and a chastening of our life." *Letter to Marcellinus* 12; Translated by Robert C. Gregg in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* series (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 111.

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□ See the section "Actualisation" in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* Section IV A.

have extracted from it is at least implicitly contained in it. We must be open to correction.<sup>10</sup> This is why it was suggested earlier that we pray for the grace of self-doubt. If we are too sure of ourselves we will never be converted. It is in the process of fine-tuning our interpretation that our appreciation of the meaning of the text is sharpened and, thereby, becomes more potent in motivating behaviour.<sup>11</sup>

A further pointer to the authenticity of our reading is the quality of our life. “By their fruit you will know them” (Mt 7:16). “Become doers of the Word and not mere listeners, deceiving yourselves” (Jas 1:22). The quality of our *lectio divina* is discernible from our everyday behaviour. We will never penetrate to the deepest level of the Beatitudes merely by meditating on them, reflecting and praying about them. We will discover the full extent of their meaning and come to appreciate their beauty only by energetically applying this sublime teaching to daily life, and attempting to put the Lord’s precepts into practice. Such an obedience in faith to what we have read is, by no means, automatic. It demands sincerity in reading, clarity in perceiving how what we read may be applied, and fortitude in overcoming our habitual inertia and timidity. Reading exists in function of the reformation of our lives.<sup>12</sup>

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□ “Openness to the other, then, includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this of me. This is the parallel to the hermeneutical experience. I must allow the validity of the claim made by tradition, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me. This too calls for a fundamental sort of openness.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 324-325.

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□ “The unfolding of the totality of meaning towards which understanding is directed, forces us to make conjectures and to take them back again. The self-cancellation of the interpretation makes it possible for the thing itself [the meaning of the text] to assert itself.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 422.

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□ Adam of Perseigne changes the fourth component of integral *lectio* from Guigo’s *contemplatio* to the more practical task of good works. “First there is the attention of sacred reading, second there is the zeal of

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We read as individuals and from the Scriptures draw a personal mandate but we are, at our best, social animals living a corporate existence. We are members of Christ's Body, sharers in the life of the Church. We soon discover that the energy we derive from our *lectio divina* is not intended solely for our own benefit it is meant also to serve God's people. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit inspires and empowers different people to undertake different missions for the building up of Christ's Body. Our reception of the Word potentially calls us to a prophetic mission. That we can engage in different works guided by different lights and yet remain in communion is an indication that grace is at work in us, reconciling the world to God and furthering God's work of sanctification. There is an ecclesial dimension to *lectio divina* that can serve as not only as a source of discernment, but also as an incentive to persevere when continuing practice becomes troublesome.

As members of Christ's Body we are called upon to redeem the times in which we live (Eph 5:16). We do this not by embarking on some ego-driven crusade to bring the world around us into conformity with our ideals, but by letting go of our self-concocted principles and allowing ourselves to be reshaped by the Word. Reforming the world begins with a passivity, a receptivity, an openhearted obedience to God's Word from which derives a willingness to make ourselves the first targets of our reforming zeal.

A special sphere in which Christians today are called to become prophetic is to reverse what the Jesuit Superior General, Father Adolfo Nicolás, called the most serious problem of our time, "the globalization of superficiality".<sup>13</sup> Western

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sacred meditation, third there is the urgency of devoted prayer and fourth there is the religious solicitude actively expressed in life." Ep 30; PL 211, col. 694a.

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□ As recounted by Kevin Rudd, at the time of the meeting, Australian Prime Minister, on *Late Night Live* (6 November 2012); [www.abc.net.au/rnu](http://www.abc.net.au/rnu).

society no longer yearns for justice, wisdom or international peace. Instead we desire and demand entertainment. The 24-hour news cycle intrusively assails us with trivial detail. The lives of “celebrities” and their pathetic twitterings have become the focal point of interest for hundreds of thousands of their besotted followers. The fact is that the mass media, and especially the Internet, offer the means for hitherto thoughtful people “to slip comfortably into the permanent state of distractedness that defines the online life.”<sup>14</sup> To use Platonic terminology, “opinion” is more marketable than “knowledge”. Western civilization is well on the way to becoming a mindless dystopia.

The kind of entertainment offered by the mass media may seem like harmless amusement, but we should be in no doubt that the more we expose ourselves to influence by these organs of social communication, the more our beliefs and values are being shaped according to principles that are foreign to the Gospel. A war of attrition is being secretly waged against fundamental Gospel priorities. And more than that. Our capacity to seek a higher truth is debilitated by constant involvement with matters of no importance. If you keep using a chisel to open paint tins, its finely honed edge is dulled and it becomes useless for its particular purpose. So too with our minds. As Saint Bernard famously wrote, “Seeking after frivolity amounts to a contempt for the truth, and contempt for the truth causes blindness.”<sup>15</sup> Too much television degrades our mental and spiritual faculties.<sup>16</sup> Add up the hours spent each week with

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□ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 117.

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□ *Appetitus vanitatis est contemptus veritatis, contemptus veritatis est causa nostra caecitatis.* Bernard of Clairvaux, Letter 18:1, SBOp 7, p.67.

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radio, television, the internet, and social networking. Compare these with the hours spent weekly in *lectio divina*. It should not be too difficult to calculate which of these sources of formation has the greater influence on our thought and, eventually, on the way we conduct ourselves.

We do not act unless we are motivated. Because we are rational animals we are best motivated through reasoning and, thence, by reasonable desire. To make ourselves strangers to the world by our actions (RB 4:20), we need to have a distinctive world-view based on the Gospel. We cannot develop a world-view based on the Gospel unless we allow the text of the Gospel to enter our present situation and interact with it. This means regularly making time for *lectio divina*.<sup>17</sup>

The regularity of this reading will, obviously, be different for the monk in his cloister and for the lay person living and working in a secular environment. Perhaps less different than a romantic imagination may believe, since monks also can easily become side-tracked, “worried and disturbed about many things”. The fact remains, however, that the Benedictine oblate, although benefiting from the formation received through monastic contacts, must find a way to build *lectio divina* into life according to the particularities of different circumstances.

This necessity is offset by a potential advantage. The oblate’s life-situation provides a distinctive context that colours interpretation. Non-

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<sup>□</sup> See M. Casey, “Escape from Meaning,” in *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Brewster MA: Paraclete Press, 2005), pp. 38-44.

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<sup>□</sup> On this see M. Casey, *Sacred Reading*, pp. 20-26, and “At definite hours space is to be made for definite reading. For random and varied reading, as if found by chance, is not constructive, but it makes the mind unstable since it enters consciousness lightly and as lightly departs. Rather let the mind remain with books of good quality so that it becomes accustomed to them.” William of Saint-Thierry, *The Golden Epistle*, 120; SChr 223, p. 238.

monastics necessarily read in the context of family, work, social, economic, political and intellectual involvement. The message they receive from the Scriptures is, accordingly, conditioned by the unique situation of each. The Word speaks to them and sends them forth to proclaim the Good News wherever they are and whatever their circumstances. Just as it does with monastics. None can know *a priori* what the message will be. Readers must listen with the ear of the heart in the context of diversified experience. The message, likewise, will be directed to them not simply as persons and as believers, but as sharers in the prophetic mission of the Church, called to proclaim in every corner of their life the Good News of salvation, sometimes using words – as Saint Francis famously remarked.

So we can say that it is more evident in the lives of those involved in temporal affairs than it is for those withdrawn from society, that *lectio divina* serves a prophetic purpose. A person comes forth from reading with a more active zeal for the Kingdom of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). *Lectio divina* does not merely **inform**; it seeks to **reform** so as to **conform** to Christ. It sends you forth as a Christlike presence to your home, to your workplace, to the world. The word is spoken, received, internalised and then externalised in new words drawn from your own particular experience, and in inspired actions prompted by your own situation. This process is one of the agencies through which God works so that “all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). In committing ourselves to *lectio divina* we are also committing ourselves to this grander enterprise. We, who live in the world, by hearing God’s Word are equipped to proclaim God’s Word to the world. But nobody gives what they do not have: *nemo dat quod non habet*.

I would like to conclude by reminding you of some verses from Psalm 85: when we receive God’s Word we are beginning a process by which justice and peace are brought to fulfilment on earth.

I will hear what the LORD God has to say,  
a voice that speaks of peace,  
peace for God's people and friends,  
and those who turn to him in their hearts.

Salvation is near for those who fear God,  
and his glory will dwell in our land.

Mercy and faithfulness have met;  
justice and peace have embraced.  
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth  
and justice look down from heaven.

The LORD will make us prosper  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.  
Justice shall march before God's face,  
and peace shall follow his footsteps.

The Word became flesh. The Word became text so that those who receive the Word will become agents of mercy, faithfulness, justice and peace so that, ultimately, all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.