

5. HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE?

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1. The inspiration of Scripture and the search for the spiritual sense of Scripture. Both words “**inspiration**” and “**spiritual**” contain a reference to the Holy Spirit

2. Inspiration

“*All Scripture is God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”. (2 Peter 1:20-21).

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13).

3. The role of the Holy Spirit in reading Scripture

“The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you”. (John 14:26)

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him”. (1 John 2:27)

4. French theologian Henri de Lubac describing the harmony between Scripture and the heart:

Scripture and the soul are a temple in which the Lord resides, a paradise in which he can stroll. Both are a fountain of living water – and of the same living water. Both conceal the same mystery in the depths of themselves. Consequently, the experience of the soul is in prior accord with the doctrine of Scripture. If I need Scripture in order to understand myself, I also understand Scripture when I read it within myself. To the degree that I understand its meaning, Scripture makes me understand the innermost depths of my being.¹
5. The French Trappist André Louf:

‘There is an affinity between the Word that calls us from outside and the Spirit waiting in our drowsy heart’.²
6. John Cassian:

‘Whoever takes into himself all the dispositions of the Psalms, will begin to repeat them and treat them not as if they were composed by the prophet but as if they were his own utterances and his own prayer.’³
7. The Egyptian monk Matta el Meskin:

‘The words of the Psalms will come across as if they were uttered by God to answer, console and help you. And yet your prayer will appear as if it was coming only from you: it is the Holy Spirit who secretly leads your prayer and answers you with the words of the Psalms’.⁴
8. The British Orthodox bishop Anthony Bloom:

‘Gradually all the words of prayer, all the thoughts and feelings the authors of the Psalms express in their prayers come alive in you, they begin to go deep into your will and to mould your will and your action.’⁵
9. The Italian monk Enzo Bianchi:

Authentic prayer flourishes only through listening to Scripture: ‘Speak Lord for your servant is listening.’ (1 Samuel 3.9). Otherwise prayer becomes a discipline based on focusing, which might dispel distractions but does not really open us to a prayerful attentiveness to the Lord who speaks and loves, who speaks because he loves”.⁶
10. This ability of the words from Scripture to speak to our heart is not uncommon in our human experience.

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¹ Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit. The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 397f.

² André Louf, *Lo Spirito prega in noi* (Bose: Qiqajon, 1995), 47–8, 51 (my translation).

³ John Cassian, *The Conferences* 10.11.4.

⁴ Matta el Meskin, *Consigli per la preghiera* (Bose: Qiqajon, 2000), 15 (my translation).

⁵ Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (Anthony Bloom), *School for Prayer* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), 30f.

⁶ Enzo Bianchi, *Perché pregare, come pregare* (Torino: Edizioni S. Paolo, 2009), 35 (my translation).

SHARP FAITH

SUNDAY THEOLOGY TALKS AT SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE, NYC

- 10.1. We love novels, poems and songs because they give voice to our feelings much better than we would be able to do it ourselves with our own words.
 - 10.2. Scripture, however, does not just express feelings we have in us but unearths a *presence*, reveals a voice has always been there – only we did not have ears able to listen to it or eyes fit to perceive it. Jesus’ healings of deaf and blind people suddenly make sense to us.
 - 10.3. This is what Luke means when he says of the disciples of Emmaus that ‘their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus’.⁷
11. This is how Scripture becomes the Word of God (see our previous talk).

Lectio Divina

12. Guigo the Chartusian, also known as Guigo II, was a Carthusian monk who lived in the 12th century. He wrote the *Ladder for the monks* in which he develops a method of reading and meditating on Scripture known as "lectio divina," which means "divine reading"⁸
 - 12.1. *Lectio* (reading)
 - 12.2. *Meditatio* (meditation)
 - 12.3. *Oratio* (prayer)
 - 12.4. *Contemplation* (contemplation)
13. **Lectio (reading):** The first step is to read a passage of Scripture slowly and attentively. The goal is not to cover a lot of material but to deeply engage with a smaller portion of text.
14. **Meditatio (meditation):** After reading, one reflects on the meaning of the text and seeks to understand its message. This involves paying attention to the words, phrases, and ideas presented in the passage. Various methods for this
 - 14.1. Ignatian method⁹: imagine yourself as a participant in the biblical scene. Engage your senses and emotions to envision the setting, the people involved, and the actions taking place. Allow yourself to be present in the story. Dialogue with the Scripture: engage in a conversation with the characters in the passage or with God.
 - 14.2. Monastic tradition the key image is “savouring” or “ruminating”.
15. **Oratio (prayer):**
 - 15.1. Responding to the text through prayer.
 - 15.2. It can be talking to God
 - 15.3. Or Choosing a verse that strikes me and slowly repeating it. It is about trust, desire, and love.
16. **Contemplatio (contemplation):**

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⁷ Luke 24.31.

⁸ See the pdf with the text. Also see Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, <https://www.amazon.com/Praying-Word-Introduction-Cistercian-Studies/dp/0879076828>

⁹ Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), died 1556. He wrote *The Spiritual Exercises*.

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- 16.1. At its most simple, contemplation is just making sure you end with a time of silence
- 16.2. Savouring the peace, joy given by the text.¹⁰
- 17. Some spiritual authors add another step: **Actio (action):**
 - 17.1. You consider how to apply the message of the Scripture to your life.
 - 17.2. Make concrete resolutions or commitments according to the teachings of the text.

An example

- 18. *Lectio (Reading)* of Matthew 6:25-34:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life e ? “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- 19. *Meditatio (Meditation)*: After reading the passage, you reflect on its meaning. In this case,
 - 19.1. you might reflect on the message of trust and reliance on God's providence.
 - 19.2. You consider the example of the birds and how they are taken care of by God without worrying.
 - 19.3. You ponder the idea that worrying does not add any value to your life and that God's care extends even to the smallest details.
- 20. *Oratio (Prayer)*: You express your gratitude to God for his caring love. You share your concerns and worries, asking for God's guidance and peace. You may also pray for a deeper trust in God's faithfulness and for the ability to let go of anxieties and worries.
- 21. *Contemplatio (Contemplation)*: You allow the words of the passage to sink in.

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¹⁰ See my book *Touched by God: The way to contemplative prayer*, https://www.amazon.com/Touched-God-way-contemplative-prayer/dp/147295100X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=274FW7S9D2LA&keywords=Luigi+Gioia+touched+by+God&qid=1685112365&s=books&prefix=luigi+gioia+touched+by+god%2Cstripbooks%2C86&sr=1-1