

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

**RE-APPROPRIATING THE ANCIENT MONASTIC PRACTICE *OF LECTIO*
DIVINA: A CONTEMPLATIVE PEDAGOGICAL METHOD OF INQUIRY TO
EXPERIENCE WISDOM EMBEDDED IN THE HUMANITIES**

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IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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This dissertation of Mary Keator entitled "Re-Appropriating the Ancient Monastic Practice of *Lectio Divina*: A Contemplative Pedagogical Method of Inquiry to Experience Wisdom Embedded in the Humanities" submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

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(Matthew 12:8)*

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METHODOLOGY

In this dissertation, I will explore and research the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina* and offer a rationale to educators within the Humanities of higher education for incorporating contemplative practices into their pedagogy. I will examine closely the practice of *lectio divina* in its four-fold movement (*lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*) as taught in the ancient and medieval monastic schools. I will then explain how this ancient monastic practice can be re-appropriated within the Humanities to help students experience wisdom embedded within a literary text. As a contemplative practice, I will show how *lectio divina* is a viable pedagogical tool to place students as the subjects of their learning experience in their efforts to read deeply, interpret critically, and respond meaningfully to the human condition reflected in literary texts.

In chapter one, I will begin with a historical overview of the contemporary contemplative movement within higher education. I will do this by showing that the roots of the contemporary contemplative movement within higher education stretch all the way back to the ancient Greek understanding of *paideia*, which focused on the education and formation of the whole student. I will also show that education, which in ancient Greece was a part of the contemplative life, was supplanted by the active life during the rise of the modern university in the 12th century. I will explain that the contemplative movement is working to reclaim the contemplative dimension in the education and formation of the whole student. Finally, I will show how the contemplative movement within higher education is working in a variety of ways to restore the student as the subject of the learning process.

In chapter two, I will begin with an introduction into the Catechetical school in Alexandria and the method employed there to teach students how to read and interpret sacred and other literary texts. I will examine how this method expanded into the desert schools in the 4th century, the Benedictine School in the 6th century, the Cistercian Schools in the 12th century, and the Carthusian School in the 12th century. In this historical overview, I will highlight some key contributors such as Origen, the desert ascetics Evagrius and Anthony, St. Benedict of Nursia, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor and Guigo II in the development and practice of the *lectio divina* method.

In chapter three, I will examine closely the first movement in the *lectio divina* method, which is *lectio*. I will begin by explaining the meaning and practice of *lectio* as an approach used in the monastic schools to teach deep reading. I will highlight three key areas of *lectio*: listening, slow reading and performative reading. I will then show how I have readapted the practice of *lectio* into my World Literature I course. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges to educators who are interested in adapting the *lectio* practice into their pedagogy.

In chapter four, I will examine closely the second movement in the *lectio divina* method, which is *meditatio*. I will begin by explaining the meaning and practice of *meditatio* used in the monastic schools to teach students how to move from their deep reading of a text to interpret it and search it for deeper meaning. I will elaborate on three key components: rumination, memory and analysis. I will then show how I have readapted the practice of *meditatio* into my World Literature I course. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges to educators who are interested in adapting the *meditatio* practice into their pedagogy.

In chapter five, I will examine closely the third movement in the *lectio divina* method, which is *oratio*. I will begin by explaining that the practice of *oratio* builds upon the previous practices of *lectio* and *meditatio* and elaborate on four specific ways the monks responded creatively to their time spent in *lectio* and *meditatio* on a sacred or other literary text: communal and private responses, spontaneous responses, extended reflections and liturgical celebrations. I will then show how I have readapted the practice of *oratio* into my World Literature I course and share some of my students' responses. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges to educators who are interested in adapting the practice of *oratio* into their pedagogy.

In chapter six, I will examine closely the fourth movement in the *lectio divina* method, which is *contemplatio*. I will describe how *contemplatio* is the outcome of the three previous movements of *lectio*, *meditatio* and *oratio*. I will begin by explaining that the monastic understanding of *contemplatio* is rooted in the Greek understanding of *theōria*. I will offer some descriptions of *contemplatio* experienced by the monks in the monastic schools. I will then share some of my students' experiences of transformation resulting from this *lectio divina* practice. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges to educators who open to giving their students a transformative learning experience.

ABSTRACT

The subject of this research is the re-appropriation of the ancient Christian contemplative practice of *lectio divina*, which developed and evolved in the monastic schools between the 2nd and 12th centuries as a way to search for and experience wisdom embedded in sacred and literary texts. This dissertation examines how this ancient practice can be adapted in an age of advanced technology as a way for educators to reclaim the contemplative dimension of education by supporting the students' subjective exploration of learning.

This dissertation gives an historical overview of the four movements of the monastic method of *lectio divina*: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (interpreting) *oratio* (responding) and *contemplatio* (experiencing wisdom), a personal contemporary adaption of each movement in a secular Humanities course, followed by some insights and challenges for educators interested in incorporating these practices into their Humanities course.

Central to this dissertation is the concrete application of the *lectio divina* method as a viable pedagogical tool to guide students slowly and methodically through a literary text and into a subjective experience of Wisdom in their ongoing search for what it means to be human in age of advanced technology.

INTRODUCTION

“The cash value of the humanities lies in their capacity to provoke transcendence as the soul awakens to deeper ways of being human.”

John J. Conley “Humanities and the Soul”

In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger, himself aware of and concerned with the rising problems regarding human beings’ relationship with technology wrote, “Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology whether we passionately affirm or deny it.”¹ Today, the unhealthy and disordered relationship with technology continues in our college community classrooms. Many students are influenced and shaped in a techno-addicted, techno-driven and techno-obsessed culture. Based on my personal experience teaching in the college classroom over the past seven years as well as multiple conversation I have had with both colleagues and students, students seem more interested in their texts messages, Facebook newsfeed, blog posts, tweets, Instagram feeds and snap stories than in entering into a dynamic conversation with a literary text, exploring it for deeper meaning and wisdom.

On many college and university campuses, students walk into class with earphones fixed in their ears and smart phones in hand. Students walk into a class oblivious to their surroundings and the people within it. In the classroom, there is no inclination to engage in a natural conversation before class begins. Once class is called to order and educators have instructed the students to put away their digital devices, some students simply ignore the instruction and continue to text, scroll and surf throughout class. Through no fault of their own, students are not capable of engaging in a face-to-

¹ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 4.

face conversation with others. They find it difficult to be in the present moment, open a book, focus on the course material, recollect their thoughts or just sit quietly waiting for class to begin. Although students are physically present, they are intellectually, emotionally and socially disconnected from themselves and the people around them.²

Previous to the 21st century, most technologies were location specific, creating boundaries around where and when they were used. For example, a phone was fixed to a wall, a computer to a desk. Today, most digital devices are no longer location specific. Portable and no longer tethered to a particular space, these digital devices can be brought into any space, anytime, anywhere. Due to advanced technology, students carry their smartphones, computers and tablets with them into the classroom space, allowing for continuous stimuli through connections, distractions and interruptions. During class, students are always available and “on call” via their digital devices and as a result are trapped in endless anticipation of the next text message or snap. Students are in constant need of stimulus and although these digital devices appear to ease their anxiety and relieve their boredom, in truth they may be adding to their agitation and feeding their narcissistic tendencies. Constantly on standby, students have become what Heidegger termed standing-reserve, “ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that [they] may be on call for a further ordering.”³

² See Sherry Turkle. Turkle is deeply concerned with the decrease in empathy as a result of students spending more time on digital devices, which she address in *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in the Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015). She argues that students no longer know how to spend time alone. Being alone makes them feel insecure, isolated and bored. Yet, she argues that boredom may in fact be a necessary requirement for turning inward, reading deeply, developing our imaginations and empathetic sensibilities.

³ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 17.

In light of these observations, the more pressing issue is that in their over-identification with and over-reliance on these digital devices, students have become disempowered, giving power over to their digital devices and not relying on the power within themselves. Students are no longer independent and freethinking; instead, they have become overly dependent on their smart phones, laptops and tablets, thereby disabling their capacity for self-awareness, self-reflection and empathy towards others. Digital devices are numbing students' sensibilities. This is reflected in the classroom when students, challenged to engage in a literary text, cannot read it deeply and respond meaningfully to the complexities of the human condition contained within it. Fixated on their digital devices, they no longer have the capacity to be self-aware, aware of the needs of others, engage a literary text or relate to their surrounding environment.

My point here is not to demonize technology, rather, it is to call attention to and address the simple truth that technology, specifically digital devices, is having a negative impact on students' ability to focus and actively engage in their learning experience. For example, in the past when access to digital devices was limited, human beings were more inclined to engage in meaningful conversation; however, now with the rise of advanced technology students are often more comfortable being in virtual relationships than in personal face-to-face relationships. There exists in our contemporary society the danger that human beings are no longer in relationship with one another, but are in fact in relationship *with* their digital devices. Students are so pre-occupied with their digital devices that they are no longer free, no longer at leisure to read deeply, question critically, think creatively, and respond meaningfully to the challenges of life, to one another and to the world around them.

Digital devices are diminishing students' ability to be attentive to the present moment. They struggle to be present to themselves, one another and by extension in the classroom to the complexities of the human condition exposed in the world of literary texts. In *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in the Digital Age*, Turkle offers an insight from a conversation she had with a college student named Haley.

Haley thinks that realistically, seven minutes is the amount of time you have to wait to see if something interesting is going to happen in a conversation. It's the amount of time you should have to wait before you should give up and take out your phone. *If you want to be in real conversation, you have to be willing to put in those seven minutes.* She says that they are not necessarily interesting minutes. In those seven minutes, 'you might be bored'.⁴

What Turkle highlights from her conversation with Haley is the struggle for students to be present to another long enough to engage in meaningful conversation. In effect, students are unable to enter into a personal relationship and sustain a meaningful conversation. Students find it difficult to have conversation because they have to consider "the other" and be willing to listen to the other's personal story. Where conversations take time, digital devices make obsolete the necessity to show up, be present, attentive and patient, to wait for something interesting to arise through the face-to-face conversation. As Haley remarks, "in real conversation, you have to be willing to put in those seven minutes." If students do not have the capacity to enter into relationship and wait to have a meaningful conversation, if they do not know how to create time and space to listen deeply to "the other" then they will not be able to see and understand the literary text as a doorway into the myriad of human relationships.

⁴ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in the Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 153.

Students today find it difficult to unplug and detach themselves from their digital devices because these devices pacify them, entertain them and empower them. For educators, this raises another important question: How does all this time on-line effect students' ability to think critically and read deeply? As early as the 1950's Marshal McLuhan suggested that mediums of information in fact shape thought, later noting, "What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation."⁵ McLuhan's observation in the 1950's offers an insight into students attending institutions of higher learning today. They too, struggle with concentration and the need for contemplation in their lives.

Maryann Wolf, professor and researcher at Tufts University is interested in the way the internet is altering our capacity for deep reading. In her article "Our 'Deep Reading' Brain: Its Digital Evolution Poses Questions," she poses the question: "Will we lose the 'deep reading' brain in a digital culture?"⁶ In it she states, "Sound bites, text bites, and mind bites are a reflection of a culture that has forgotten or become too distracted by and too drawn to the next piece of new information to allow itself time to think."⁷ Wolf a professor of child development and neuroscience is interested in how the brain develops the ability to read. In *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* she questions whether all this time on-line searching, scrolling, and streaming is re-wiring students' neuro-circuitry, resulting in a weakened capacity for

⁵ Marshall McLuhan quoted in Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 6.

⁶ Maryanne Wolf, "Our 'Deep Reading' Brain: Its Digital Evolution Poses Questions," in NiemanReports, <http://niemanreports.org/articles/our-deep-reading-brain-its-digital-evolution-poses-questions/>

⁷ Ibid.

deep reading and concentration.⁸ Even Wolf herself noticed one day while sitting down to read Herman Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* that she too, was struggling to read deeply. It was this personal struggle with deep reading that led Wolfe to explore further the impact on-line reading was having on our brains.⁹

However, McLuhan and Wolf are not alone in their critique of the relationship between the human person and technology, Nicholas Carr, author of *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brain*, has also become aware of the fact that his brain is also being re-shaped by technology.

Over the last few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory. My mind isn't going –so far as I can tell-but its changing. I'm not thinking the way I used to think. I feel it most strongly when I'm reading. I used to find it easy to immerse myself in a book or a lengthy article. My mind would get caught up in the twist of the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration starts to drift after a page or two. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel like I'm always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle.”¹⁰

Another researcher Gary Small, a professor of Psychology at UCLA and the director of its Memory and Aging Center, has also been studying the effects of digital technology on the brain. He too concurs with McLuhan, Wolf and Carr on the fact that the internet is changing our brains. According to Small's research, the daily use of digital devices, i.e. computers, smartphones, search engines, “stimulates brain cell alteration and

⁸ Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper perennial, 2007), 14-16.

⁹ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in the Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 221.

¹⁰ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 5-6. In recent years there has been and continues to be much research done on the effect the internet and digital devices are having on the brain, especially the ability to concentrate, read deeply and think critically. Carr offers a list of researchers in the back of his book for those who would like to explore the topic further.

neurotransmitter release, gradually strengthening new neural pathways in our brain while weakening old ones.”¹¹ The weakening old neural pathways, the ones’ associated with deep reading, are what led McLuhan, Wolf and Carr to struggle with concentration, deep reading and contemplation.

Although McLuhan, Wolf, Carr and other brain researchers like Small recognize that technology itself is neutral. Time spent on-line via technologies is not neutral. Quite the contrary, time spent searching, scrolling and surfing is having a significant impact on our brains. The neuro-circuitry needed to surf the web is not the same neuro-circuitry needed to concentrate and read deeply. Think of it this way, the mental activity needed to surf the web is agile and quicker, while the mental activity needed to dive into a text is intentional, slower and leisurely. By surfing the web, we “sacrifice the facility that makes deep reading possible. We revert to being ‘mere decoders of information.’”¹²

Whether or not we want to admit it, educators, especially educators in the Humanities, are faced with a serious challenge. Students arrive in our classrooms with a deficit. Many students cannot concentrate, contemplate, and read deeply. However, all is not lost, the good news according to the research of Wolf, Carr, Small and others is that through continuous practice we can re-wire our brain and strengthen its ability to focus, read deeply and ponder. Scientists have discovered that the brain is highly adaptable, meaning its plasticity allows it to build new circuitry through practice.¹³ Turkle agrees noting, that although “our brains are wired for talk, we can also train them to do deep

¹¹ Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan, *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind* (New York: Collins, 2008), 1.

¹² Maryann Wolf quoted in *The Shallows* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 122.

¹³ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 35.

reading, the kind that demands concentration on a sustained narrative thread with complex characters.”¹⁴

What research highlights is the necessity of practice. Students need to exercise their mental capabilities by stimulating and engaging their neuro-circuitry in deep reading, critical thinking and contemplation or else these neuro-pathways will begin to weaken and give way to the other neuro-pathways, those activated by constant searching, scrolling and surfing. According to Norman Doige, author of *The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*, “If we stop exercising our mental skills, we do not just forget them: the brain map space for those skills is turned over to skills we practice instead.”¹⁵ Therefore, educators, particularly those in the Humanities, may benefit from incorporating a method and practice that helps students to develop and strengthen their ability to focus on a literary text, read it deeply, reflect on it, and interpret it in a meaningful way.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger offered the following insight “Man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens and hears, and not one who is simply constrained to obey.”¹⁶ What Heidegger highlights is the need for human beings to develop their ability to listen to and discern the essence of what it means to be fully human. When human beings learn to listen to their inner self in conversation with others, they can begin to discover hidden possibilities for the transformation of humanity and the world we inhabit together. They

¹⁴ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 69.

¹⁵ Norman Doige, *The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 317.

¹⁶ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 25.

are no longer controlled by the decisions/algorithms offered by a non-living, non-questioning, non-ethical digital device. By engaging in active listening, conversations, and discernment, human beings remain the subject of their own experiences and destiny, not mere objects mastered and manipulated by technology. Students can begin to think, consider, question, ponder and discern meaning for themselves. What Heidegger points out is that in a technologically obsessed culture, what is actually at stake is human freedom.

In his Memorial Address, Heidegger offers the following solution:

We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves so free of them, that we may let go of them at any time. We can use the technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core. We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature.¹⁷

In keeping with Heidegger's insight, students who have given over their power to their digital devices are at risk of losing their freedom. Tethered to their digital devices, students risk their freedom to learn, to read deeply, and think critically so that they can respond intelligently and creatively to the challenges and problems of the human condition and the issues facing the world around them. The remedy, therefore, is to help students to detach consciously from their digital devices, and engage in deep listening to insure that their sensibilities will not become "dominated, warped and confused" by their overattachment to digital devices.

In "The Memorial Address," Heidegger points out two distinct types of thinking, calculative thinking, which "computes and races from one concept to the next. It never

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, "The Memorial Address" in *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1966), 54.

stops and never collects itself”¹⁸ and meditative thinking, which “dwell[s] on what lies close and meditate[s] on what is closest; upon that which concerns us...”¹⁹ According to Heidegger, “Man is a thinking, that is a meditative being.”²⁰ He has the ability to ponder, remain open and reflective. Meditative thinking is the skill required for sustained focus and critical reflective reading. As Heidegger notes, “But-it is one thing to have heard and read something, that is, merely to take notice, it is another thing to understand what we have heard and read, that is to ponder.”²¹ In the Humanities, students need to acquire the skills for meditative thinking in order to notice, understand and ponder the human condition exposed in the literary text they are reading.

The Humanities, as an academic discipline, study human experience, human culture and its accompanying zeitgeist, its purpose being not the indoctrination of the students, but the cultivation of the soul. Using stories, essays and other literary texts, the Humanities offer students the opportunity to be challenged and inspired by the stories of others who have lived, reflected and struggled with the human condition. Through their deep reading of and critical reflection on these texts, students can begin to awaken from their slumber, grow into and actualize their fullest human potential. By engaging in deep reading and critical thinking, students are better equipped to read the world they are living in and be prepared to address its current challenges.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Memorial Address,” 46.

¹⁹ Ibid, 47.

²⁰ Ibid., 47.

²¹ Ibid., 52.

Over the past twenty years, the emergence of the contemplative movement within higher education has emphasized the value of first-person experiences as critical in the learning process.

By legitimizing students' experiences, we change their relationship to the material being covered. In much of formal education, students are actively dissuaded from finding themselves in what they are studying; all too often, students nervously ask whether or not they may use 'I' in their papers. A direct inquiry brought about through contemplative introspection validates and deepens their understanding of both themselves and the material covered.²²

Self-charged with the task of helping students to grow into their fullest potential and become compassionate contributing members of society, the contemplative movement within higher education strives to develop and support students as first-person learners, subjects of their learning process. It is not a new movement; rather it is a re-discovery of an ancient movement reaching all the way back to ancient Greece, where the purpose of education was to know the self, develop the self and contribute ethically and virtuously to society. In the ancient Greek philosophical schools, students' minds were not perceived as empty containers waiting to be filled with the teacher's wealth of information; rather, students were actively engaged in their own learning. It was the active engagement in the learning process that led students to develop self-awareness, while deepening critical inquiry.

However today, as noted by Palmer and Zajonc "Our institutions of higher education seldom embrace a genuinely transformative view of the pedagogies they

²² Daniel Barbezat, and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 6.

consciously or more often unconsciously adopt. Our view of the student is too often as a vessel to be filled or a person to be trained.”²³ Harry Lewis, former dean of Harvard

College offered the following critique of higher education,

Universities have forgotten their larger educational role for college students. They succeed, better than ever, as creators and repositories of knowledge. But they have forgotten that the fundamental job of undergraduate education is to...help [students] grow up, to learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college better human beings.²⁴

Using various contemplative practices from around the world, contemplative educators guide students into contemplative practices to build and strengthen their abilities to concentrate and contemplate.

Today, the reading of literary texts as a valuable and meaningful way to develop and strengthen students’ abilities to concentrate and contemplate is undervalued.

However, contemplative practices as part of the Humanities “provide the opportunity for students to develop insight and creativity, hone their concentration skills and deeply inquire about what means most to them.”²⁵ Contemplative practices by nature incorporate specific techniques to slow down the reading process and create space for silence, leisure, deep reading, critical thinking, reflection and multidimensional responses. By integrating contemplative practices back into the Humanities - as originally taught within the Greek and monastic schools - students become engage in their own learning process. As subjective learners and with the help of contemplative practices,

²³ Palmer, Parker and Arthur Zajonc with Megan Scribner. *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 101.

²⁴ Harry Lewis, quoted in M.C. Taylor, *Crisis on Campuses: A Bold Plan for Reforming Our Colleges and Universities* (New York: Knopf, 2010), xii.

²⁵ Daniel Barbezat, and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices*, 8.

students can learn to detach from their digital devices and re-connect to themselves and can begin to train/re-train their minds to focus, read deeply, think critically and ponder what they are reading.

Contemplative practices shift students' attention away from learning *about* something to the *experiencing of* what they are learning. In *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*, Barzebat and Bush lay out four main objectives of contemplative practices:

1. Focus and attention building, mainly through focusing meditation and exercises that support mental stability
2. Contemplation and introspection into the content of the course, in which students discover the material in themselves and thus deepen their understanding of the material
3. Compassion, connection to others and a deepening sense of the moral and spiritual aspects of education
4. Inquiry into the nature of their minds, personal meaning, creativity and insight²⁶

Educators from various disciplines select from a wide variety of contemplative practices to help students bring the material they are learning into the subjective and inter-subjective realms where they can encounter the material thoughtfully and meaningfully.

In a technologically saturated culture, contemplative practices can bring balance to students and offer them ways to slow down the learning process and deepen mental activity by activating the neuro-circuitry needed for deep reading, critical thinking and reflection. In his article, "Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom," Toby Hart states, "Contemplative techniques offer both a portal to our inner world and an internal technology—a kind of mindscience—enabling us to use more of the mind rather than be

²⁶ Daniel Barzebat, and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices*, 11.

driven by habitual responses or emotional impulsivity.”²⁷ Instead of relying on external technology to hold their information, contemplative practices help students to strengthen their minds and build an internal information network. Students learn to develop their memory, make meaningful connections with information already within their memories and bring these thoughts, ideas and feeling into a productive dialogue.

As an educator, I am deeply concerned with the amount of time students spend on-line. I am not a Luddite; however, like McLuhan, Wolf, Carr and Turkle, I too see that all this time on-line is having negative consequences on students’ abilities to concentrate, read deeply, think critically, contemplate, and respond meaningfully to the human condition and the literary texts that explore the human condition. I find that students read a literary text the same way they read information on-line. They scroll, search, and surf through the literary text to grab bits and bytes of information, unaware of the consequences their time on-line is having on their brains. As Carr notes,

As the time we spend scanning Web pages crowds out the time we spend reading books, as the time we spend exchanging bite-sized text messages crowds out the time we spend composing sentences and paragraphs, as the time we spend hopping across links crowds out the time we devote to quiet reflection and contemplation, the circuits that support those old intellectual functions and pursuits weaken and begin to break apart. The brain recycles the disused neurons and synapses for other, more pressing work. We gain new skills and perspectives, but lose old ones.²⁸

As students spend increasing amounts of time on-line they are in danger of losing their ability to read deeply. Not only do they miss the deeper meaning of the literary text, but

²⁷ Toby Hart, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” *Journal of Transformative Education* Vol. 2 No. 1, January 2004, 46, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1541344603259311>

²⁸ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 120.

they are also in danger of reducing their self-awareness and freedom, since in order to be free, students need a modicum of self-awareness.

Freedom requires that students think for themselves. It also requires that students are in control of the technology and not the other way around. Technology is a powerful tool that has the ability to manipulate and persuade thinking. “The Net’s cacophony of stimuli short-circuits both conscious and unconscious thought, preventing our minds from thinking either deeply or creatively.”²⁹ When students rely solely on their digital devices they short-circuit their capacity to read deeply, think critically, and respond meaningfully. Technology drives, shapes, enhances and diminishes both human thought and human relationships. Students need to question whether their digital devices are enhancing or diminishing their humanity and their capacity for self-awareness and compassion.

The more unaware students are of their techno-addiction, the more they will be disconnected and alienated from themselves, others and the world around them. Due to their fixation with their digital devices, they will not be able to be attentive to the people around them; they will not be able to develop and maintain healthy relationships with others; and run the risk of being overpowered and dominated by technology. Students who are overpowered by technology cannot focus, listen, question and interpret meaning. They cannot develop and sustain meaningful conversations or learn to understand themselves, others and the world in which they live. If students cannot engage in meaningful conversations and understand others, they will not be equipped to read accurately the signs of the times. If students cannot read deeply, they cannot discern

²⁹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 119.

meaning and respond intelligently, ethically and compassionately to themselves, others and the world around them.

If the brain's plasticity allows it to be adaptable as suggested by Wolf, Turkle, Carr, Small and other scientists, then perhaps contemplative practices, which teach sustained attention, concentration and contemplation can offer a way to build and strengthen the neuro-circuitry that is diminished from time spent searching, scrolling and surfing the Web. In the realm of contemplative practices, I suggest the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*, a practice originally developed to teach students how to read and interpret both sacred and other literary texts. *Lectio divina* teaches and builds sustained attention, deep reading and critical thinking; the same processes that Wolf and Carr realized were diminishing in them due to their increased time spent on the Web. I purpose that *lectio divina* can offer a remedy for students who struggle to read deeply, think critically and ponder meaningfully the human condition and the literary texts that explore the human condition.

By engaging in contemplative practices, students become more self-aware and more integrated human beings. Since contemplative practices are designed to re-position the students as the subjects of the learning process, students can learn to detach from their digital devices and become grounded in themselves. These practices can empower students to limit their time on their digital devices, pay attention to their inner world and be more deliberate in the search for meaning and purpose in their lives. I have used contemplative practices in my classroom and have witnessed firsthand the many positive benefits that slow reading, meditation, introspection, and contemplation have on students'

ability to focus, concentrate, read deeply, think critically and consider the human condition.

However, I also discovered that contemplative practices can often confuse and disorient students when these practices are not contextualized and applied to the course material and the overall learning process. Aware of this issue, I wanted to find a more comprehensive contemplative approach that I could weave into the course material and learning outcomes, so I turned to an ancient monastic practice called *lectio divina* that I learned about in 2004 in a conversation with a practitioner and friend and re-appropriated this method for my World Literature I course. I have found it to be a fruitful contemplative method to help students develop sustained attention, critical thinking and reflection. Through *lectio divina*, students learn to become the subject of their learning experience and engage in and grow through the learning process.

It is this ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*, which I will focus on in this dissertation. *Lectio divina* is one contemplative practice in the spectrum of the contemplative movement within higher education. I am suggesting that *lectio divina* can help students strengthen the neuro-circuitry needed for deep reading and critical thinking. Situated on the generative branch of the tree of contemplative practices, *lectio divina* is a method of deep reading, study and reflection, leading students to a transformative experience.³⁰ *Lectio divina* (divine reading or sacred reading) was developed, practiced and preserved in the Christian monastic schools. The practice itself consists of four basic movements: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (interpretation), *oratio* (prayer) and *contemplatio*

³⁰ See Chapter One for further information about the contemplative movement within higher education and the tree of contemplative practices.

(a transformative experience), each movement building upon and deepening the preceding one.

In this dissertation, I will explore *lectio divina* in its four basic movements and will show that this ancient religious practice can be adapted and used outside of its religious context. *Lectio divina* is a method of deep reading and interpretation stretching all the way back to the ancient Greek philosophical schools and later adapted in the Christian monastic schools. I have taken this Christian contemplative practice and have re-adapted it as a secular method to teach students how to read (*lectio*), interpret (*meditatio*), respond to (*oratio*) and experience wisdom (*contemplatio*) embedded in a literary text.

In this dissertation, I will explain that *lectio divina* is a useful pedagogical tool for educators in the Humanities to help students read and interpret texts as they search for human meaning and purpose in the age of modern technology. *Lectio divina* teaches students the art of leisure, how to slow down the reading process, deepen concentration, analyze and interpret a text. Through *lectio divina*, students search a literary text for deeper meaning and begin to experience wisdom embedded in it.

In this dissertation, I will also show that *lectio divina* provides an opportunity for students to detach from their digital devices and enter into a meaningful encounter with a literary text, explore it and question it critically. Once detached from their digital devices, space and time open up for students to explore the deeper meaning embedded within a literary text as well as the deeper meaning and purpose of their lives. Through *lectio divina* students are transformed, their soul awakens to the deeper meaning and purpose of life, and they grow and develop into free, independent sovereign thinkers, who are better

equipped to respond intelligently and compassionately to themselves, others and the world around them.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEMPLATIVE MOVEMENT

“The fruit of education, whether in the university or in the monastery [is] the activation of that innermost center, the apex or spark which is a freedom beyond freedom, an identity beyond essence, a self beyond ego, a being beyond the created realm, and a consciousness that transcends all division, all separation.” Thomas Merton, Learning to Live

In this chapter, my intention is to survey the historical development of the contemplative movement within higher education. I will begin with a brief explanation of the ancient Greek concept of *paideia* as essential to the education and formation of the whole student. In addition, I will clarify that in ancient Greece education was an integral component of the contemplative life, but with the rise of the modern universities in the 12th century, the active life superseded the contemplative life, displacing students from being the subjects of their learning. I will provide a brief historical review of the revival of contemplative practices and approaches to student learning beginning in the 19th and 20th centuries. Finally, I will offer examples of ways in which the colleges and universities are incorporating contemplative practices into higher education in the 21st century.

Contemplative Practices within Higher Education

The contemporary contemplative movement within higher education is hardly a new movement. The roots of this movement reach all the way back to the East to the ancient Greeks in the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C.E where the purpose of education was to transform the soul.

Plato seeks to show that the essence of *paideia* does not consist in merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were a container held out empty and

waiting. On the contrary, real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it.¹

For the ancient Greeks, education was rooted in the concept of *paideia*. *Paideia* (from the Greek *pais*, *paidos*) referred to the nurture, care and education of a child, seen in the words pedagogy and pediatrician. In *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Jaeger describes *paideia* as “the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature.”² Students’ minds were not perceived as empty containers waiting to be filled with the teacher’s wealth of information; rather, education was seen as the process of leading students out of ignorance and into wisdom, to a deeper sense of self, to what Plato calls “the place of essential being.” This meant that students, themselves, had to be actively engaged in the process of learning.

In the early Christian schools including the School of Alexandria in the 3rd century C.E. and the desert schools in Egypt in the 4th century C.E, the formation of the whole person was the purpose of education and the pedagogical method used by the monks was the practice of *lectio divina*.³ Students’ training began with *lectio*, the act of reading via listening. Listening was the first step in formation.⁴ Through the act of

¹ Martin Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Teaching on Truth’, in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167. Heidegger explains, ‘*Paideia* means the turning around of the whole human being in the sense of displacing them out of the region of immediate encountering and accustoming them to another realm in which beings appear.’

² Werner Jaeger and Gilbert Highet translator, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1965), xxiii. The equivalent to the Greek *Paideia* is the Latin word *humanitas* from which we get the humanities.

³ Chapter 1 explores the origin of *lectio divina* and offers a brief history of the method in the Christian tradition. Throughout the remainder of the dissertation, I will use the term *lectio divina* to refer to the overarching pedagogical method, which began with Origen in the Catechetical School in Alexandria and led to the four-step method offered by Guigo II.

⁴ Since many monks were illiterate and few texts were available, monks first practiced *lectio* with their ears, meaning they listened as their teacher read. Later, as monks began scribing texts *lectio* incorporated both listening and reading.

listening, the students opened their ears to encounter the words of a text. Through repeated listening, they came to know the text, even repeating the words of a text as they participated in the encounter. As they came to know the text and experience it more deeply, they came to know themselves. The practices of *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio* followed *lectio*. Each step flowed to the next, as students searched deeper into the text for wisdom. The contemplative method of *lectio divina* engaged the whole student –body, mind, heart, and soul– in the learning process. Applying the method of *lectio divina* to biblical stories and other classics stirred the minds and hearts of the listeners and drew them beyond their accustomed mental borders. Challenged and inspired by the practice, students began to break free from the limited confines of the ego, ascend to a higher moral order and awaken to wisdom, love and compassion. Learning was a life-long process and the practice of *lectio divina* offered a way for students to develop their full potential in order to become contributing members of society. *Lectio Divina* was a gradual process that required the dedication and commitment of both teacher and student.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the rise of cathedral schools and modern universities, the scholastic method slowly replaced the monastic method of *lectio divina*.

It is frequently proposed that the breakdown of this approach to spiritual education occurred during the Reformation or the Scientific Revolution. In reality, the decisive changes occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the first European universities emerged from monastic and cathedral schools and undertook to complete a largely Aristotelian program in logic, the natural sciences, and theology.⁵

⁵ Brian Stock, “The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities,” The Contemplative Mind in Society Meeting of the Working Group, September 29 October 2, 1994, Pocantico, NY, Sponsored by The Nathan Cummings Foundation & Fetzer Institute, 2. <http://www.contemplativemind.org>

Although both the monastic and the scholastics emphasized slow deliberate reading, the monastic method of learning focused on the cultivation of the soul through *lectio divina*, whereas, the scholastic method of learning focused on reason through the practices of *lectio, quaestio* and *disputatio*. Instruction at Aristotle's Lyceum took the form of lecture. Students practiced close observation and used deductive reasoning to reach conclusions.

In the Aristotelian teaching act, the teacher instructs a learner about some object, some body of knowledge, or some discipline. Teaching and learning never represent merely an interpersonal relationship or the expression of feelings. They are always about disciplined inquiry into some aspect of reality. ... the school should cultivate and develop each person's rationality.⁶

In this method of learning, students and teachers examined information objectively, asked questions and entered into argumentative debates to develop students' rational abilities. What was gained through the scholastic method was a type of critical inquiry that applied close and careful objective observation and critical reasoning to issues, including faith; however, what was lost was the subjective experience, the qualify-able, and the integration of the personal, emotional and spiritual dimensions of the students. Because the scholastic method focused on objective content, meaning information that existed outside of the students, education slowly became more about learning facts and developing the skills to argue them. Education also became more about the *vita activa* and less about *vita contemplativa*.

The medieval European worldview recognized two orientations to life. One was termed *vita activa* and the other *vita contemplativa*, the active life and the contemplative life. Most of medieval society was given to the life of production... In the monasteries; by contrast, the few were given to a life of prayer and contemplation, to *vita contemplativa*.⁷

⁶ Allen C. Ornstein and Daniel U. Levine, *An Introduction to the Foundations of Education*, 2nd ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 112-113.

⁷ Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*, (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2009), 14. For more information on *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*

Today, within the institutions of higher education, learning has continued on this trajectory of acquiring knowledge and professional skills (*vita activa*) and has become less about the development of self and the pursuit of wisdom (*vita contemplative*). Many students do not even know how to read a text for deeper meaning, let alone sit still, quiet their minds, and reflect on it. In truth, students struggle to think critically and engage holistically in their learning. They scan pages of texts and surf the web to retrieve facts and figures. No longer, are students interested in pursuing wisdom or forming virtuous selves; instead, they are scattered and distracted with their focus being the completion of the assignment, rather than the learning process itself. In addition, advances in technology have also contributed to students' restlessness and their inability to stay present to self, material and to others. Technological advances continue to dislocate students from their learning and lived experience to a virtual reality.⁸

The contemplative movement within higher education focuses on the full transformation of students, which requires students to develop knowledge that is “insight-

see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7-21. Arendt links both *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* to the Greek city-state, pre-dating Christianity. The contemplative life supported the philosopher's search for truth. According to Arendt, “Every moment, the movements of body and soul as well as speech and reasoning, must cease before truth. Truth, be it the ancient truth of Being or the Christian truth of the living God, can reveal itself only in complete human stillness (15).

⁸ For more information on the contemporary technological challenges, see Sherry Turkle. In “The Flight from Conversation, *The New York Times* (New York: NY,) April 22, 2012, Sunday Edition, Turkle stated, “Connecting in sips doesn't work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another. In conversation, we tend to one another. We can attend to tone and nuance... And we use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves. So our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection.” Furthermore, she reminds us, “FACE-TO-FACE conversation unfolds slowly. It teaches patience. As we ramp up the volume and velocity of on-line connections, we start to expect faster answers. To get these, we ask one another simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters.” The attending Turkle describes in conversation is the same attending needed by students for deep reading. If there is little attending to, there is little depth and learning is diminished. For a philosophical discussion on the challenges of technology, see Martin Heidegger's essays on “The Question Concerning Technology” and “The Memorial Address.”

oriented” rather than “object-oriented.” According to Zajonc, “It’s not good enough to know about reality; you need to change how you see reality. Real education is transformation.”⁹ Real education assists students in expanding their worldview, considering content from multiple perspective and challenging preconceived ways of thinking. In the 21st century, Parker Palmer reiterates Plato’s charge for the university to help students to grow towards their greatest human potential. “What universities...are *mandated* to make up or to help make is human beings in the fullest sense of those words, not just trained workers or knowledgeable citizens but responsible heirs and members of the human culture.”¹⁰ In essence, the mandate of a university is to help bridge the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* and this is precisely what contemplative educators are working to do. For the past ten to fifteen years, there has been a growing movement within higher education, driven by scholars in various disciplines, to reclaim contemplative practices. What the contemporary contemplative movement is concentrating on is the retrieval of the ancient contemplative practices to pursue wisdom as well as to strengthen and renew education as a comprehensive approach to learning and formation.

We are being called into a more paradoxical wholeness of knowing by many voices. There is a new community of scholars in a variety of fields now who understand that genuine knowing comes out of a healthy dance between the objective and subjective, between the analytical and the integrative, between the experimental and what I would call the receptive.¹¹

⁹ Arthur Zajonc quoted in B. Boyce, “Please help me learn who I am, *Shambhala Sun*, (January 2007), 73.

¹⁰ Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc with Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, x.

Instructors are working to help students reclaim their interior center, their innermost center defined by Thomas Merton as “the apex or spark which is a freedom beyond freedom, an identity beyond essence, a self beyond ego, a being beyond the created realm, and a consciousness that transcends all division, all separation.”¹² As Merton notes, the focus is on the development of consciousness to transcend all divisions - gender, race, cultural, religious, and socio-economic – and help students connect to the spark of freedom, knowing, and truth, which lies hidden within themselves. The contemplative movement within higher education is guided and promoted by individuals who themselves have had a glimpse of the spark, the self behind the ego. They recognize the importance and power of first-person experience and the important role these experiences play in the development and formation of students.¹³ Remnants of contemplative practices were rediscovered in the 19th century. The Transcendentalists and Theosophists discovered eastern spiritual texts. In their reading and study of the eastern spiritual texts, they were introduced to ancient concepts and contemplative practices.¹⁴ William James (1842-1910), both a member of the Theosophical Society and a professor

¹² Thomas Merton, ‘Learning to Live’, in *Love and Living*, ed. by Naomi Burton Stone and Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 9.

¹³ For a brief history of the contemplative movement within higher education see Mirabai Bush, “Mindfulness in Higher Education” *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol 12, No 1, May 2011, 183-197.

¹⁴ Other movements such as the Transcendentalist and the Theosophical played a role in bringing eastern texts and practices to the West. For more information on the transcendentalist movement, see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentalism>. Members of this movement included Emerson, Thoreau and Fuller. They ascribed to the belief that human beings are innately good and had within them the ability to connect with the source of life using their imagination and intuition. For more information on Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, see <https://www.theosophical.org/the-society/history-of-the-society>. The Theosophical Society was founded in late 1875, in New York City, by Russian noblewoman Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, along with attorney William Quan Judge and a number of other individuals interested in the philosophy expounded by Madame Blavatsky. Madame Blavatsky was the first Russian woman to be naturalized as an American citizen. As a young woman, she travelled all over the world in search of wisdom about the nature of life and the reason for human existence. Blavatsky travelled to India to study and eventually brought the spiritual wisdom of the East and that of the ancient Western mysteries to the modern West, where they were virtually unknown.

of philosophy at Harvard articulated the importance attention plays in education of students. “The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will... An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.”¹⁵ During the 20th century, a renewed interest in eastern spiritual practices occurred in the sixties as people continued searching for deeper meaning and purpose in life. Within institutions of higher learning, professors and students joined in this search.¹⁶ However, towards the end of the 20th century, two people, Charles Halpern, president of The Nathan Cummings Foundation and Rob Lehman, president of the Fetzer Institute, galvanized the contemplative movement within higher education. In 1995, they “initiated the working group on the Contemplative Mind in Society and invited scholars to explore contemplative education in white papers.”¹⁷

In one white paper, Brian Stock, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto considers the role contemplative practices have in the Humanities. “To date, the humanities have played a minor role in this discourse, despite the obvious fact that a humanities discipline, religion, is the source of all that we know

¹⁵ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Cosimo Books, 2013), 424.

¹⁶ In the 20th century during the sixties, eastern spirituality exploded on the campus of Harvard. At the core of the eastern spiritual movement are the following: Richard Alpert (a psychology professor who traveled to the East to study with Neem Karoli Baba), Timothy Leary (a research psychologist and proponent of enlightenment through LSD), Huston Smith (a philosophy professor and world religions expert, who participated in experiments with Alpert and Leary), and Andrew Weil (a medical graduate student). All five of these people brought meditation and spiritual practices to the Western world. Later in the seventies, Dan Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence*), Richie Davidson (University of Wisconsin, Laboratory for Functional Brain Imaging and Behavior and the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience), Cliff Saran (Shamatha Project, UC Davis), and Mark Epstein (*Thoughts without a Thinker*) continue the trailblazing of contemplative practices, writing and research. Some of these individuals are on the advisory board for the Contemplative Mind in Society.

¹⁷ Mirabai Bush, “Mindfulness in Higher Education” *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol 12, No 1, May 2011, 186. In addition, the American Council of Learned Societies in collaboration with the Fetzer Institute have granted over one hundred Contemplative Practice and Teaching fellowships in the last decade.

about traditional meditative practices...¹⁸ Stock articulates the limited role the Humanities have played in the contemplative movement even though contemplative practices are deeply rooted in ancient world cultures, religious texts and practices. Throughout the paper, he points to the tension between religion and science remarking that it is easier to get people to look at the benefit of contemplative practices from the perspective of health than from the perspective of religious traditions. Although people are more open to making a connection between meditation and health benefits, the purpose is the same. Accessing the spiritual dimension within helps people achieve wholeness, health and a sense of well-being.

If people are taught to meditate, sooner or later many of them will discover the spiritual dimension on their own. In traditional settings, the pursuit of the contemplative life normally takes place within an accompanying belief-system. The only equivalent of this type of faith in contemporary society may be the confidence displayed in science. If I ask a room full of Americans to meditate for cultural, religious, or spiritual reasons, I am likely to find myself in the midst of a heated debate about their emotional and intellectual loyalties. If I suggest that meditation may help them achieve better health, and ultimately, perhaps, a state of well-being, most of them would weigh the evidence before dismissing my arguments

However as he continues to reflect, he draws attention to the obvious, namely that the Humanities is an appropriate place for the study and use of contemplative practices as it situates contemplative practices in its original context. Humanities (*humanitas*), drawn from the Greek *paidea*, included the holistic care of students in the pursuit of wisdom.

If contemplative activity contributes to their [students'] sense of well-being and if it helps to put them in a frame of mind that enhances their ability to cope with a range of issues ranging from health to their sense of community, then presumably contemplative traditions should have a larger place in educational programs. And, if that is the case, we have to teach students what contemplative activity is all

¹⁸ Brian Stock, "The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities," The Contemplative Mind in Society Meeting of the Working Group, September 29 October 2, 1994, Pocantico, NY, Sponsored by The Nathan Cummings Foundation & Fetzer Institute, 1. [Http://www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)

about. Among other things, they have to be instructed in reading meditative literature, not as they would read modern poems, plays, or novels, but as contemplatives read them, using texts as a means to an end and not considering them, as is the fashion in contemporary literary practice, as ends in themselves.¹⁹

Stock articulates that the Humanities offer a fitting place in teaching students how to read. He stresses that reading, not just any kind of reading but contemplative reading, plays a vital role in the development and formation of students.

Stock's research, along with other members of the working group, led to a growing interest in the possible benefits of using contemplative practices within the classrooms of higher learning and led to the establishment of the Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society and its initiative, The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education,

a multidisciplinary academic association with an international membership of over 730 educators, administrators, staff, students, researchers and other professionals committed to the transformation of higher education through the recovery and development of the contemplative dimensions of teaching, learning and knowing.²⁰

Members of the contemplative movement within higher education recognize that contemplative practices have always played a role in higher education; they recognize that the formation of students requires a comprehensive approach to learning that unites the subjective experience with the objective content. In their efforts, instructors and administrators are working to come up with contemplative approaches that will support the holistic formation of students and the development of their critical thinking skills.

Contemplative practices, a vital part of all major world religious spiritual traditions, have long had a place in intellectual inquiry. The predecessors of our colleges and universities in the West, of course, were established as alternatives to monastic schools, where contemplative practices had been central to learning. But

¹⁹ Brian Stock, "The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities," 4.

²⁰ <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/acmhe>

even within these new institutions, committed to the pursuit of rational knowledge and later to the scientific method, educators have long been exploring the use of contemplative practices in learning.²¹

The use of contemplative practices across institutions of higher learning varies from institution to institution. I have identified four main approaches that colleges and universities are employing today: 1) Institutions of Higher Education that focus on contemplative practices as part of their Mission Statement, 2) Institutions of Higher Education that have a Contemplative Studies Concentration, 3) Institutions of Higher Education that have designed and established a Contemplative Studies Center, and 4) Institutions of Higher Education that have individual professors, lecturers and instructors using contemplative practices in the classroom.

Naropa University is one of the first institutions of higher learning to be intentional in their use of contemplative practices. Founded by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Naropa University began as Naropa Institute, in 1974. Trained in both Eastern and Western education, his vision was “to take the very best elements of western scholarship and combine them with an emphasis on eastern wisdom tradition to reinvent education in the United States.”²² Naropa built upon the teachings of Nalanda University, which prospered in India from the fifth to the twelfth centuries.²³ Naropa’s mission

²¹ Barbezat, Daniel and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), xi.

²² See Naropa University website, which offers the following: “Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, was born in Tibet in 1940, a lineage holder of both the Kagyü and Nyingma Buddhist traditions. In 1959, after the Chinese invasion, he escaped Tibet through the Himalayas to northern India. Like the Dalai Lama and other exiled Tibetan teachers, he continued to teach and transmit the wisdom of the Buddhist dharma. In 1963, he received a Spaulding sponsorship to study comparative religion, philosophy and the fine arts at Oxford University, where he became fluent in English and familiar with the particular needs and interests of Western students.” <http://www.naropa.edu>

²³ Naropa is the name of an 11th century Nalanda abbot, who was himself a great Buddhist scholar, teacher and Buddhist practitioner.

statement not only names, but also clearly lays out its intentional use of contemplative practices throughout the Naropa curriculum.

Inspired by the rich intellectual and experiential traditions of East and West, Naropa University is North America's leading institution of contemplative education.

Naropa recognizes the inherent goodness and wisdom of each human being. It educates the whole person, cultivating academic excellence and contemplative insight in order to infuse knowledge with wisdom. The university nurtures in its students a lifelong joy in learning, a critical intellect, the sense of purpose that accompanies compassionate service to the world, and the openness and equanimity that arise from authentic insight and self-understanding. Ultimately, Naropa students explore the inner resources needed to engage courageously with a complex and challenging world, to help transform that world through skill and compassion, and to attain deeper levels of happiness and meaning in their lives.

Drawing on the vital insights of the world's wisdom traditions, the university is simultaneously Buddhist-inspired, ecumenical and nonsectarian. Naropa values ethnic and cultural differences for their essential role in education. It embraces the richness of human diversity with the aim of fostering a more just and equitable society and an expanded awareness of our common humanity.

A Naropa education—reflecting the interplay of discipline and delight—prepares its graduates both to meet the world as it is and to change it for the better.²⁴

Through contemplative education, Naropa seeks to educate the whole person, to integrate knowledge and wisdom, and to nurture compassionate participation in the world. Naropa is intentional in bringing together scholarly information and debate with first person reflective experiences to support the growth and development of their students. In addition, Naropa offers a BA in Contemplative Psychology, a MA in Contemplative Education and an MA in Contemplative Psychotherapy.

Where Naropa is an example of a university rooted in contemplative education, Brown University is an example of a school offering a Concentration in Contemplative Studies.

²⁴ <http://www.naropa.edu/about-naropa/mission/mission-statement.php>

Brown Contemplative Studies has been a pioneer in the development of new teaching methods that combine traditional third-person study with “critical first-person” study. We teach a variety of courses in the Humanities, Sciences, and Creative Arts in which direct experiential knowledge of contemplative practices is balanced by historical, philosophical and scientific knowledge of them. Peer to peer “second-person learning” and non self-referential “no person” learning are also part of the holistic training we call “integrative contemplative pedagogy.”²⁵

At Brown, students have the option of concentrating in Contemplative Studies in conjunction with either a science or a humanities track. To support these areas of study, Brown has a group of dedicated faculty from diverse disciplines to support each area of specialization. Brown’s Contemplative Studies course offerings include an Introduction to Contemplative Studies, Great Contemplative Traditions of Asia, Consciousness, *The Bhagavad Gita*, and Zen Meditation in China, Korea, and Japan, to name a few.²⁶ As part of their resources, they even have a lab dedicated to contemplative practices. In addition to Brown University, there are other universities offering degrees in Contemplative Studies ranging from Bachelors to Masters to even Doctoral degrees.²⁷

The third way contemplative practices are making their way into institutions of higher learning is through an intentional contemplative initiative, in which contemplative

²⁵ <http://www.brown.edu/academics/contemplative-studies/sites/brown.edu/academics/contemplative-studies/files/uploads/Contemplative%20Studies%20Brochure.pdf>

²⁶ For an in-depth look at their course offerings go to <http://www.brown.edu/academics/contemplative-studies/courses>

²⁷ For a complete list see thecontemplativemindsociety.org BFA in Jazz and Contemplative Studies at the University of Michigan, Graduate Certificate in Contemplative Clinical Practice, Smith College School for Social Work, Individualized MA & Concentration in Contemplative Studies, Burlington College, M.Ed. & Certificate, Mindfulness for Educators, Antioch University New England, M.Ed. in Curriculum & Instruction: Contemplative Inquiry and Approaches in Education, Simon Fraser University, M.Ed. in Interdisciplinary Studies: Mindfulness Studies Specialization, Lesley University, MA and Certificate in Holistic and Integrative Education, California State University-San Bernardino, MA in Interdisciplinary Studies: Mindfulness Studies Specialization, Lesley University, PhD in Religious Studies with a Contemplative Studies concentration, Rice University

courses are taught throughout disciplines in partnership with a contemplative center, such as The Contemplative Science Center at the University of Virginia. Their mission is:

to explore contemplative practices, values, ideas, and institutions historically and in contemporary times to better understand their diverse impacts, underlying mechanisms, and dynamic processes through analytical research and scholarship, as well as to help develop new applications and learning programs for their integration into varied sectors of our society. Our mandate is to pursue research, learning, and engagement related to contemplation across all schools and organizational units of the University of Virginia, and to become national and international leaders in this rapidly growing field of activity.²⁸

The Contemplative Science Center collaborates with all seven schools at UVA.

Employing research, learning, and civic engagement, they seek to explore areas of personal well-being, intellectual growth and social relationships and nurture the development of each of these three areas in their students' lives. Recognizing the relationship between citizens and society, The Contemplative Science Center has adopted models of integrative learning to foster the formation of the individual student as well as his/her capacity to bring his/her full formation into fruition into the society in which they live and work. The Center is clear that teachers are integral to student formation.

Teachers don't simply transmit their subject-specific content, but also take responsibility for the overall production of new generations who can manage their stress, regulate their emotions, be insightful and creative, engage in deep listening and bias management, and understand how community formation and engagement can be done in ways that advance goals but also improve collective well-being.²⁹

Some of the courses offered throughout the university in partnership with The Contemplative Science Center include: Introduction to Mindfulness; Meditation in Action-The Contemplative Sciences; Comparing Contemplative Traditions: Yoga,

²⁸ <http://www.uvacontemplation.org/content/mission>

²⁹ <http://www.uvacontemplation.org/content/contemplative-grounds>

Mysticism, Meditation, and Cultivating Wisdom for Personal and Professional Growth.³⁰

In addition, The University of Virginia is building an online Contemplative University.

The Contemplative University will offer instruction and learning tools on contemplative practices, as well as contemplatively-based approaches to education and understanding across a broad array of fields, including the humanities, health sciences, business, education, architecture, law, engineering, leadership and public policy, and more. U.Va. will support the technology and administration of the Contemplative University, but its governance will involve a worldwide consortium of universities and non-profit organizations with central commitments to contemplation. The Contemplative University will be offering courses, digital library-press, and social networking aligned with contemplative ideas, practices, and values. It will become a clearinghouse for contemplative research and instructional materials with a digital library of manuscripts, texts, essays, articles, photographs, audio-video recordings, and visualizations.

Vanderbilt University is yet another example of a way that schools of higher education are incorporating contemplative practices into their Centers for Teaching. Through their Center for teaching, Vanderbilt encourages, teaches and supports contemplative initiatives, workshops and practices. These centers offer resources for instructors to learn about and engage in contemplative practices in the classroom. The Center fosters mindfulness in the classroom, sometimes called ‘contemplative pedagogy’ and “involves teaching methods designed to cultivate deepened awareness, concentration, and insight.”³¹ The Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt supports contemplative learning in a variety of ways. It hosts a Contemplative Pedagogy Group throughout the academic year, offers summer learning activities, shares pedagogical materials, and maintains a resource

³⁰ To see a more detailed list go to <http://www.uvacontemplation.org/list/class>. U.Va plans to support the Contemplative University by offering a contemplative encyclopedia, social networking, online courses and contemplative mapping.

³¹ <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/contemplative-pedagogy/#vandy>

page including a Web-based teaching guide and video *Fostering Attention* in addition to a weekly blog entitled *The Mindful PhD*.³²

Finally, there are hundreds of instructors teaching contemplative practices as part of their pedagogy in institutions of higher learning, which have no institution wide contemplative initiative, no contemplative concentration and no contemplative support through a university wide center. These practices vary in degree, such as sounding of a Tibetan bell to mark the beginning and end of a class, silence, breathing exercises, yoga and/or tai chi, engaging students in developing their faculties of introspection, pondering, beholding, and witnessing. Instructors engaging in contemplative practices come from diverse disciplines including Art, Dance, Music, Biology, Economics, English, Environmental Studies, Communications, Social Work, Physics and Law to name a few. These instructors have often experienced the power of contemplative practice in their own life. They are committed to continuing education on contemplative practices including, study, classes, contemplative workshops and conferences and bring what they are learning into their classrooms.

The Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, an initiative of The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, is a strong proponent of contemplative practices and offers a plethora of resources for instructors. Their mission reads as follows:

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society transforms higher education by supporting and encouraging the use of contemplative/introspective practices and perspectives to create active learning and research environments that look deeply into experience and meaning for all in service of a more just and compassionate society.

³² <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/teaching-activities/contemplativepedagogy/>;
<http://youtube/wqRGjhW5wZE>

Led by Mirabai Bush, who herself fled to the East to study with Hindu and Buddhist teachers and recognized the potential impact these practices can have on the transformation of a human being, came back to the West to share what she had learned.³³

The Center offers workshops, a yearly summer program, conferences, a database of syllabi, and resource materials. They also, publish *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*.

a peer-reviewed journal which advances the understanding, development, and application of contemplative and introspective methods in order to serve a vision of higher education as an opportunity for cultivating personal and social awareness and an exploration of meaning, values, and engaged action.³⁴

The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society continues to grow each year.

Currently, there are more than seven hundred and thirty educators worldwide and an active list-serve to communicate with other professionals, who are themselves practicing and teaching contemplative practices. Interest and research into the use of contemplative practices within higher education is a growing. Along with *The Journal of Contemplative*

³³ Mirabai Bush, founder of the Contemplative Mind in Society, spiritual studies include two years in India with Hindu teacher Neem Karoli Baba; meditation in monasteries with Buddhist teachers Shri S.N. Goenka, Anagarika Munindra, and IMS guiding teachers; and studies with Pir Vilayat Khan and Tibetan Buddhist lamas Kalu Rinpoche, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Gelek Rinpoche, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, and others; and five years of intensive practice in Iyengar yoga and five years of Aikido under Kanai Sensei. <http://www.mirabaibush.com/> See <http://www.contemplativemind.org/about/team> for more information Miabai Bush and the advisory council, made up of many others who travelled to India and Tibet to study with Hindu and Buddhist teachers. Many of the advisory council members have incorporated contemplative practices into their life and profession.

³⁴ For more information on The Contemplative mind in Society and Higher Education and its history, see The Contemplative Mind in Society <http://www.contemplativemind.org/journal> and Mirabai Bush, "Mindfulness in Higher Education" *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol 12, No 1, May 2011, 183-197. In 1995, the project on Contemplative Mind in Society began to form with the support of Charles Halpern, president of The Nathan Cummings Foundation and Rob Lehman, president of the Fetzer Institute who initiated the Working Group on Contemplative Mind in Society by inviting scholars to explore contemplative practices in white papers. These scholars included Robert Thurman of Columbia University, Brian Stock from the University of Toronto and Steven Rockefeller of Middlebury College. Two years later, the Contemplative Mind in Society incorporates and collaborates with the American Council of Learned Societies to offer fellowships to academics who are interested in developing courses with a contemplative component. By 2010, there were 158 fellows in more than 100 colleges and universities. For more information on pedagogical resources, included sample syllabi see <http://www.contemplativemind.org/resources>

Inquiry, there are also other publications on contemplative education including articles in the *Journal of Transformative Education*, *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *Chronicles of Higher Education*, the *Teacher's College Record*, the *New York Times* and *insidehighered.com*.³⁵ In addition, there are also books on contemplative education including *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*, *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines*, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, and *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*.³⁶

Obviously, the contemplative movement is nothing new; however, in the midst of life in the 21st century it does bring unique challenges. Contemplative practices have always been taught within a cultural-religious belief system, so the challenge contemplative educators face today, is understanding the roots of a particular contemplative practice, its purpose, and learning to apply it without proselytizing a particular faith.

³⁵ John Gravois, "Meditate on It: Can Adding Contemplation to Classroom Lead Students to More Eureka Moments?," *Chronicles of Higher Education*, October 21, 2005; Angie Green, "A Space Where Students Can Nurture Their Minds, Spirits," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 2007; Zajonc, Arthur. "Love and Knowledge: Recovering the Heart of Learning through Contemplation." *Teachers College Record* Volume 108, Number 9, September 2006, Elizabeth Redden "Meditative Spaces," *insidehighered.com*, December 3, 2007: These are only a few of the many articles being written on contemplative practice within higher education.

³⁶ Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014). See also, Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc with Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010) and Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*, (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2009). These are just some of the many texts discussing the contemplative movement in higher education.

The Use of the Contemplative Practice of *Lectio Divina* within Higher Education

The contemplative practice of *lectio divina* has a longstanding history within Catholic Christian education that continues today in Benedictine colleges and universities. The origins of Benedict's monastic school began in the 6th century (529-530 C.E.) with Benedict of Nursia. Benedict's monastery was a school of formation where monks learned first to listen (*lectio*). Listening led to meditation, conversation, transformation and to the abilities to read and write. The Benedictine practices laid down by St. Benedict have led to the Benedictine colleges and universities mission statement issued on August 27, 2007.

Like the most ancient of wisdom traditions, Benedictine education sets its sights on the transformation of the human mind and heart. Benedictine education stresses the formation of the whole person rather than the intellect alone. At its best, it calls for a lively interplay between rigorous thinking and the development of practices for right living.³⁷

The Benedictine's, in "Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition," issued by the Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities, state their purpose highlighting the important place reading plays in their educational model. Reading texts introduces students to the human condition, challenges thinking and inspires their way of living.

The intent... is to cultivate... a fundamental openness to the work of intellectual and personal transformation. It is important that the thinking of all members – students, faculty and staff – be shaped by movement between shared engagement with ideas and close personal reading of "texts" (whether written, aural or visual). It is our intent to foster connections between the subjects that persons study and the fundamental, deep purpose of their lives.³⁸

³⁷ Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities. ABCU Statement (The Ten Hallmarks of Benedictine Education): Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition. <http://www.abcu.info/>

³⁸ Ibid., Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities. ABCU Statement (The Ten Hallmarks of Benedictine Education): Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition. <http://www.abcu.info/>

In keeping with their mission of the formation and transformation of students' mind and hearts, Benedictines colleges and universities also recognize the importance of challenging the educational status-quo (object-oriented education), meaning an education directed to the study of subjects (course content) disconnected from the fundamental purpose of student's experiences (insight-oriented education). Instead, the Benedictines highlight the importance of developing insight-oriented practices that begins with the close personal reading of texts. Close reading requires self-discipline, inner work, critical thinking, and the training of the mind, and leads to the intellectual and personal transformation of students. To cultivate these practices is a life-long endeavor that leads to a mature, responsible, self-driven and self-aware individual.

We are not afraid to focus on habits of mind that will require many years to develop. In curricular and co-curricular programs, we seek to challenge realities we often take for granted, to foster intellectual and personal breakthroughs, and to cultivate habits of mind that will transform students, faculty and staff alike, nurturing deep learning and generosity over a lifetime... The goal is to move from a discipline imposed from the outside to a mature self-discipline in which a person possesses a robust love of learning and, in setting his or her own goals, is able to imagine and pursue the steps necessary to achieve those goals.³⁹

This Benedictine vision offers an insight into *lectio divina* and its place in higher learning.

Through *lectio divina*, students can learn to listen to themselves and others. Each text read, offers a window into a history, a culture and its people, replete with joys and sorrows, and triumphs and struggles. As students begin to perform close personal reading of a text, they begin to make connections with what they are reading and connect their

³⁹Ibid., Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities. ABCU Statement (The Ten Hallmarks of Benedictine Education): Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition. <http://www.abcu.info/>

insights to their personal lives. The Benedictine colleges and universities offer a vision in which *lectio divina* is an integral part of the formation and transformation of students. However reading need not be a religious activity; rather, it can be seen as a *techné* that illuminates the text and sheds light on it. In order to search a text for deeper meaning, students need light to reveal what remains hidden. They need light to search for and discover wisdom, which had remained hidden in a text and within themselves. Illumination leads to revelation and revelation leads to transformation.⁴⁰ If, therefore, the purpose of *lectio divina* is wisdom, how can the method of *lectio divina* be re-appropriated for use in all types of institutions of higher education, religious and secular, as a pedagogical method of inquiry to uncover wisdom embedded within the Humanities”?

⁴⁰ *Lectio divina* is a *techné*, as students are transformed through the process of close reading. For more on *techné* see, Aristotle, *Introductory Readings*, Translated by Terence Irwin and Gail Fine (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), *Metaphysics* XII. Aristotle viewed *techné* as a “human actualizing the potential of the material, form, and end because all crafts are potentialities”; therefore, a change must occur for potentiality to be reached and this change can be itself (a man can become musical). Aristotle investigated four causes, each in themselves a type of *techné*. The material cause (*causa materialis*), the silver used to make the chalice (the raw material made of the elements), The efficient cause (*causa efficiens*), the silversmith (the person bringing about the effect), The formal cause (*causa formalis*), the form it takes, the end point, the chalice, The final cause (*causa finalis*), the purpose of the chalice and its effect (what it brings about). These four causes are in relationship to each other and therefore, “indebted” to each other. He realizes that the efficient cause is not solely the silversmith; rather, it is due to the reflection or the pondering of the silversmith on the relationship of the causes to each other that bring forth the formal and final causes. Aristotle notes the relationship between the internal (mind) and external (matter and form) and the intellect, the highest, is a key ingredient. Also, see Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1954), 6. Heidegger offers an insight into Aristotle’s notion of cause and as he reflects, he recognizes that *techné* is not an object, but is rather, a potential becoming. *Techné* is trying to bring forth and reveal itself. The silversmith does not make a silver chalice, as a machine does; the silversmith helps something come into form and existence in a symbiotic relationship *with* the other causes. It is like a dance. Each cause is a part of something greater than itself and through the combination of both the elements and *techné*, a new possibility arises. Something previously, unknown reveals itself through pondering and this coming forth revealed a new relationship to the four causes.

The Practice of *Lectio Divina* within Higher Education

In essence, contemplative practices are not religious; rather, they are epistemological in that they offer a way of seeing and knowing, both the interior world and the exterior world. As Toby Hart associate professor of psychology at the State University of West Georgia, points out

Opening the contemplative mind in schools is not a religious issue but a practical epistemic question... Inviting contemplative study simply includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of consciousness and so forth. These approaches cultivate an inner technology of knowing and thereby a technology of learning and pedagogy without any imposition of religious doctrine whatsoever.⁴¹

The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society provides resources for educators interested in learning about contemplative practices as well as learning ways to incorporate contemplative practices into academic courses. One of the resources they use to identify a specific contemplative practice and its underlying function is the tree of contemplative practices shown below.

⁴¹ Toby Hart, "Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom," *Journal of Transformative Education* Vol. 2 No. 1, January 2004, 29.

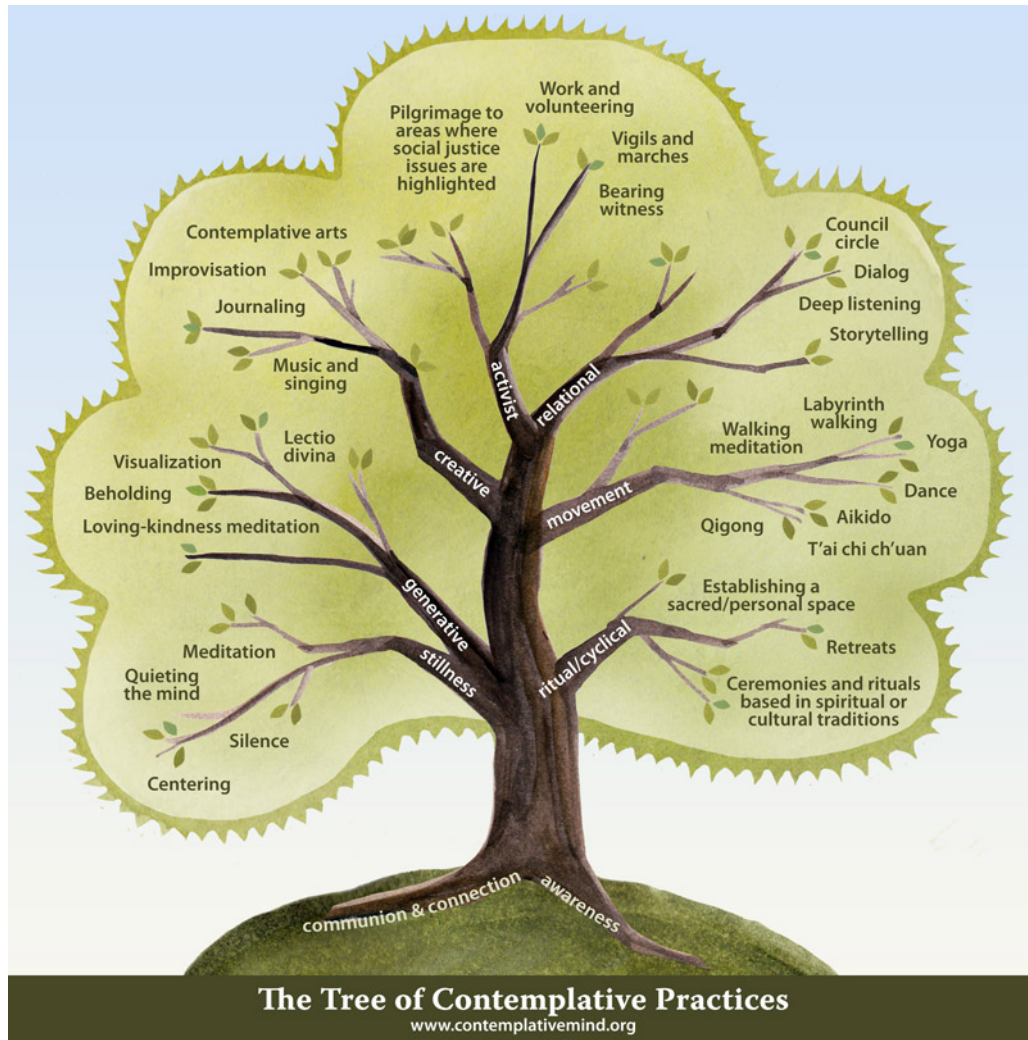


Figure 1. The Tree of Contemplative Practices. <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>
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The roots of the contemplative tree are identified as “communion, connection and awareness,” meaning that contemplative practices are nourished in states of relationality, connectivity and insight as students learn to build meaningful relationships with self and others. As in any relationship, contemplative practices require investment of time, energy, and disciplined practice. *Lectio divina*, listed on the left-hand side of the tree, is labeled a generative practice. Generative, from the Latin *generatus*, signifies creativity

and new life. By applying the pedagogical method of *lectio divina* to courses, students have the opportunity to engage in the creative process of forming and transforming themselves. *Lectio divina* is a method that brings together the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* in a contemporary way. By reading closely, students slow down and engage in sustained periods of pause and reflection; they come to know the text more intimately. Today, there are educators throughout the world employing the practice of *lectio divina* in their courses. These instructors come from a variety of disciplines, teaching courses in Religious Studies, Philosophy, Literature, Music, Environmental Studies, and Writing courses. Some instructors use *lectio divina* as an instructional method, whereas, others use *lectio divina* to teach the ancient monastic practice itself as part of a course in medieval contemplative practices or they teach it simply as a way to engage in a contemplative reading of texts.

Terry Veiling teaches in the School of Theology at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane and offers an example of an instructor using *lectio divina* as an instructional method. In his article “Listening to ‘The Voices of the Pages’ and ‘Combing the Letters;’ Spiritual Practices of Reading and Writing,” he explains in detail a way that he has used the method of *lectio divina* with his students. Veiling, wondering himself if students actively read or just skim pages for information, decided to develop a semester-long course employing the practice of *lectio divina*, where students and professor gathered “each week *to read a text together out loud.*”⁴² Veiling began the semester with an introduction to basic hermeneutical principles followed by an introduction to the

⁴² Terry A. Veiling, “Listening to ‘The Voices of the Pages’ and ‘Combing the Letters;’ Spiritual Practices of Reading and Writing,” *Religious Education*, Vol 12, No. 2, Winter 2007, 210.

practice of *lectio divina*. Veiling admits that he was not without hesitation as he wondered whether he could “transpose a twelfth-century practice into a twenty-first century university, where the ‘screen, the medium, and communication have surreptitiously replaced the page, letters, and reading.’”⁴³ However, he notes that to his surprise and delight “the whole class seemed open and willing to transform our classroom into a pre-university community of ‘mumblers and munchers.’”⁴⁴ The class began with a brief introduction to the selected text, followed by a communal reading. Each student was required to have his/her own copy of the text.⁴⁵ Reading commenced and followed a circular pattern around the room as each student, either engaged in reading a portion of the text aloud or quietly passed his/her turn to the next student; however, Veiling notes, “No one is forced to read.”⁴⁶ During their communal reading, there are times of pause as students and/or teacher “offer commentary on the text – highlight a certain point, raise a question, practice *ruminatio* – ruminating on the meaning of the text.”⁴⁷ The entire semester progressed through this manner of close communal reading. At the end of the semester, Veiling found “The whole experience – contrary to my initial doubts and misgivings – was pure joy and delight.”⁴⁸ In addition to teaching close reading (*lectio*), question and ruminatio (*meditatio*), Veiling also asked students to engage in written responses (*oratio*), noting that “the cultivated monk is not only a scholar versed in letters,

⁴³ Ibid., Veiling reflects on the ways in which the early monastics learned and draws upon Illich, Ivan. *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor’s “Didascalicon.”* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

⁴⁴ Veiling, “Listening to ‘The Voices of the Pages’, 210.

⁴⁵ Veiling uses a variety of texts, i.e. Theological and philosophical, ancient and contemporary, narrative and poetry.

⁴⁶ Veiling, “Listening to ‘The Voices of the Pages’, 210.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 211.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

not merely a ‘person of science’ or an ‘intellectual’ – the cultivated monk is a spiritual person.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, “The activities that teacher and student engage in –reading, writing, reflection, conversation, teaching, learning – are activities that can be spiritually formative, filled with love and desire, rather than driven by fear and competitiveness.”⁵⁰

To guide students in their writing, Veiling offers guidelines. He tells his students to “listen for the question, look for where it is leading you, seek out what others have to say, explore, examine and probe, find your own voice and create a clearing where truth can shine forth,”⁵¹ the purpose being the formation and transformation of students. Veiling offers an example of using the method of *lectio divina* throughout an entire course. He also notes the many benefits he noticed by engaging in the slow close reading of texts with his students such as an openness and willingness from students to participate in the text, deeper comprehension and insights, increased attention, and an overall richer experience. Through *lectio divina*, “The world of the text engages or provokes, meets or merges with their own world. The voice of the text encourages their *own voices*. They begin to consider that the possibilities and meanings of the text may also become possibilities or meanings for their own lives.”⁵² Although uncertain at first, Veiling found the method of *lectio divina* worked to bring the objective worldview and the students’ subjective-experiences into dialogue with one another, in a generative way as they searched for meaning in both the texts and their own lives.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁵¹ Veiling, “Listening to ‘The Voices of the Pages’, 220.

⁵² Ibid., 211-212.

Kristine Utterback, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Wyoming, teaches a course called Medieval Contemplation in History and Practice. Utterback applies a three-pronged approach to learning contemplation practices - integrating body, mind and heart - using the Jesus Prayer (body), *lectio divina* (mind) and Centering Prayer (heart). *Lectio divina*, the second component of the course, approaches the practice of contemplation through the mind.⁵³ The class enters into the practice of *lectio divina*, with reading (*lectio*), followed by *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*, Utterback provides no further details of the texts she uses with students for the *lectio divina* section of the course, but she does note that the practice of *lectio divina* was not limited to biblical texts. Utterback remarks “Students often find this slow, intentional reading to be difficult, with its purpose of acquiring deep understanding, not information.”⁵⁴ For a concluding assignment, Utterback uses writing to assess student learning.

I assign a written paper, due about a week after we finish each method, in which they describe their experiences, including how faithfully they practiced... In accessing these assignments, I do not consider what the student experienced, but 1) whether they fulfilled their practice commitment; 2) How much they reflected on the experience of their practice, and 3) the quality of their essay writing.⁵⁵

⁵³ To teach the Jesus Prayer, Utterback uses two texts, *The Way of the Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way* both about a 19th century Russian. To teach Centering Prayer she uses the 14th century text *The Cloud of Unknowing* (author unknown).

⁵⁴ Kristine T. Utterback, “Experiencing Medieval Christian Spirituality” in *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogies for Religious Studies*, editors, Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2011), 173.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 174. Utterback’s chapter is one of twenty-six in a book dedicated to contemplative pedagogy for Religious Studies; however, what I find interesting is that within the chapter, there are three short paragraphs devoted to *lectio divina* and within these three paragraphs, there is little description about what she actually does with her students. Since I do not know her reasoning I cannot assume her intent, perhaps her intent was not to describe the practice so much as to share her course content, which she does; however, there does seem to be an overarching unease among instructors to use the method of *lectio divina*, as they see it as a religious practice. Yet, conversely, there seems to be little unease; rather, more enthusiasm for embracing eastern contemplative practices from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, which they must see as non-religious practices.

The written assignment supports the development of students' interiority, focusing on the students' experiences and practices. In her concluding remarks, Utterback shares that both she and her students enjoy learning contemplative practices and remarks that her students often call it "the most unusual course of their academic career."⁵⁶

Although *lectio divina* has traditionally been used in Religious Studies, at Elon University, Martin Fowler incorporates *lectio divina* into his philosophy classes. Fowler recognizes the value *lectio divina* has in teaching students how to do a close reading of a text.

Lectio Divina is interesting to lift out of its Benedictine context and apply in class to open the spiritual possibilities of reading. Outside this religious tradition, *lectio divina* is a spiritual and contemplative way to read for deeper understanding. This discipline incorporates reflection and meditation within the reading experience.⁵⁷

In addition, *lectio divina* has the ability to connect students to the text, thereby bridging the subjective and objective experiences. When teaching *lectio divina* to his students, which he mentions, "he does occasionally,"⁵⁸ Fowler has students select "a section of a substantial philosophical text (e.g., Plato's dialogue Phaedo) for reading and meditation."⁵⁹ Class begins with preparatory practices such as preparing the outer and inner space to enter into the exercise of contemplative reading. He makes sure the outer

⁵⁶ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁷ E-mail correspondence with Martin Fowler, lecturer in the Philosophy Department at Elon University. When searching for research on the practice of *lectio divina* used in classrooms within higher education, I sent a message out via the Contemplative Mind and Society list serve. As mentioned earlier, there are over 730 members of the Contemplative Mind in Society. On June 21, 2015, I sent out the following e-mail through the list serve, "Greetings. I am doing some research on *lectio divina* and am wondering if anyone is teaching this contemplative method in their higher ed courses. If so, I would love to hear what you are doing and learn how you are incorporating this practice into your courses/classes. Happy Father's Day to all the fathers! Blessings, Mary. Martin Fowler was one of the responses. We corresponded over a few weeks. The quotes in this section come from the e-mail exchanges. In addition to Fowler's response, a handful of other instructors shared that they also use the practice in their classes (Music, Psychology, Religion and Philosophy) for which I am deeply grateful.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Martin Fowler

⁵⁹ Ibid., Martin Fowler.

room is quiet. He asks students to put away their cell phones and any other electronic devices. To create an inner demeanor of gratitude, he invites students to close their eyes, quiet their minds and mentally repeat, I am “more grateful for what the words have to share than for any distractions” noting, “Gratitude allows one to be more receptive.”⁶⁰ Fowler begins the practice with a moment of silence marked by the sound of a Tibetan singing bowl followed by three slow readings of the passage by the facilitator. During the first read, “The facilitator reads the passage aloud, slowly and carefully, sharing it with the class like unwrapping a gift,”⁶¹ followed by the students’ slow silent reading of the same passage during which, students are asked to “notice the word, phrase, sentence, or idea that captures their attention.”⁶² A second read, also done aloud by the facilitator follows the first. Upon completion, students are instructed to meditate on the word, sentence or phrase that spoke to them. Next, students are instructed to “silently repeat it, noticing what thoughts come to mind when they do so, whether it’s being reminded of something or a hope.”⁶³ After a sufficient amount of time has passed to allow for deeper reflection, the facilitator invites students to share. However, Fowler notes, “They are NOT called upon to explain or justify their response.”⁶⁴ During class sharing, the Tibetan singing bowl or other object is used to hold the space for individual sharing.

When one holds the bowl, that student has others’ undivided attention and is not interrupted. If the student does not wish to share, he or she holds the bowl in silence for ten seconds and then passes it to the next student. When responding after another student has spoken, one share ONLY after expressing gratitude to

⁶⁰ Ibid., Martin Fowler.

⁶¹ Ibid., Martin Fowler

⁶² Ibid., Martin Fowler

⁶³ Ibid., Martin Fowler

⁶⁴ Ibid., Martin Fowler

the prior student (by name) for what he or she has shared.⁶⁵

After the class has completed their sharing, the facilitator reads the passage one more time aloud with the intention of moving students to deeper levels of meaning, again followed by a silent reading by the students. Upon completion of the reading, students write. The topic of writing is the students' choice, which Fowler notes may be religious or nonreligious.

The nonreligious "speaking to God" about text is not substituting speaking to oneself or speaking to others. It is practicing a mindful presence to the spirit of the gathering and how that presence (larger than and other than oneself) transforms the student's understanding about something. It's letting the passage become part of who one is or wishes to become.⁶⁶

Once students have completed writing, they are invited to share their thoughts and insights with one other student.

Patrician Dixon, associate Professor of Music at Wake Forest University, integrates *lectio divina* into her music classes. According to Dixon,

I have been incorporating *lectio divina* in my music offerings. Every text we read and listen to in class, is treated as a lesson that is part of a creative process that starts with reaching inside of ourselves. As we discover the images, poetry, music, and lessons of a piece like *Strange Fruit* by Abel Meeropol, we can discuss historical and political impact on society, human rights, violence and hate, and a host of other issues that are relevant to the lesson the piece has to offer.⁶⁷

Dixon, aware of the generative nature of *lectio divina*, considers it a creative act that starts with reaching inside students, making them an integral part of the learning process. Learning becomes a movement moving deeper with the student and then extending back out to reconsider and converse with the content being studied. Before beginning a

⁶⁵ Ibid., Martin Fowler

⁶⁶ Ibid., Martin Fowler

⁶⁷ E-mail correspondence with Patricia Dixon, Wake Forest University, June 26, 2015.

practice, she explains the historical roots of *lectio divina* to her students along with the benefits of employing this approach.

The method is the important issue, but the tradition has to be explained so we can give the student a reason why we can adopt this method to reading, listening to music, and to other disciplines. It is important to read out loud in class and read slowly and mindfully so we absorb the essence of the material at hand. In a world of interruptions we don't take time to read enough and to shut everything off so we can concentrate just on reading and listening. At the end we discuss the lessons learned from the text and every person in the class is encouraged to address what they learned from the exercise.⁶⁸

Aware that there are deeper layers to the content of study - whether they are engaged in reading a text or listening to a piece of music - Dixon highlights the importance of reading/listening aloud, slowly and mindfully, noting that this type of reading/listening allows students to absorb the essence of the material. Dixon uses a traditional approach to *lectio divina* adapted from *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry* by Arthur Zajonc.⁶⁹ The class begins with listening (*lectio*) with “the ear of the heart” (St. Benedict). Pondering (*meditatio*) follows listening as students select something to ponder, allowing the process to touch both their inner and outer experiences. After pondering, students respond, dialogue and write in their journals about what they read/heard (*oratio*). However, Dixon notes that teaching *oratio* poses a challenge.

The *oratio* part of the method is the hardest one to include since I have to respect student's religious beliefs, those are personal, and I do have many who are atheists. I asked them to keep a journal and write about their learning experience so they have to reflect and reach inside themselves.

Dixon sees *oratio* as a religious practice and as such, she struggles to integrate it into a secular class.

⁶⁸ E-mail correspondence with Patricia Dixon, Wake Forest University, June 27, 2015.

⁶⁹ Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2009), 128-129.

Linda Susan Beard, a professor of literature at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania offers another example of an individual approach to *lectio divina* in her course titled, “Crossing the Threshold of Pain’s Legacy.” “The assigned texts were used as *lectio*, the reflective work done as a community constituted a shared *meditatio*, the class discussions were used as *oratio*, and the final individual essay was framed as the ‘rich elixir’ made possible by *contemplatio*.”⁷⁰ Most instructors seem comfortable with *lectio* and use it to slow down and deepen the reading process. David Haskell, associate professor of biology and environmental science at the University of the South, likens contemplative reading to snorkeling; “immerse students in the text so that they’re swimming in it, even putting the snorkel beneath it, rather than speed boating over the surface.”⁷¹ Some instructors use *meditatio* as a way to get students thinking about various levels of interpretation and invite them to make connections with their own lived experiences.

Others, such as Georgia Frank professor of religion at Colgate, use a combination of the *lectio divina* steps. In her class, students practice close reading (*lectio*) in terms of introducing students to a neighborhood. “The first reading was like walking the students around a neighborhood and the perimeter of a building. We found a few points of entry into that strange building.”⁷² Yet, as they worked together reading, questioning, dialoguing and writing with the text over a period of time, “it was the students who showed me new, exciting entrances in the sprawling house.”⁷³ Francis J. Ambrosio,

⁷⁰ Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 113-114.

⁷¹ Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 115.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

professor of philosophy at Georgetown University, comments “Contemplative reading is a path of access to the virtual reality of realms of truth contained within the text that only the human imagination can reach.”⁷⁴ For example, while reading Dante’s *Divina Commedia* he instructs them “to stop, linger and dwell contemplatively...”⁷⁵ In addition, he helps them to recognize levels of reading beginning with the literal/narrative level and progressing through the ironic/metaphorical level to the reflective level.⁷⁶ In their article, “Contemplative Pedagogy” Daniel Barbezat (Amherst College) and Allison Pingree (Harvard University) list four main benefits of contemplative practices as building and sustaining attention, a deepened understanding of materials presented, a support and increased connection and interrelatedness and the ability to inspire inquiry and insight.⁷⁷ As contemplative educators, they recognize the importance of holistic learning, which requires that students become independent thinkers.

We want to create an opportunity for our students to engage with material so that they recognize and apply its relevance to their own lives, deeply feeling and experiencing themselves within their education. In other words, while fostering their knowledge base and analytical abilities, we want to present material in a way that supports students in having their own agency so that the material is not simply a set of intellectual hoops for them to jump through but active opportunities for them to find meaning and personal intellectual development.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 122.

⁷⁷ Daniel Barbezat and Allison Pingree, “Contemplative Pedagogy: The Special Role of Teaching and Learning Centers, *To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development*, Editors, James E. Groccia and Laura Cruz, Volume 31, October 2012, 177.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Daniel Barbezat and Allison Pingree, “Contemplative Pedagogy: The Special Role of Teaching and Learning Centers, *To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development*, Editors, James E. Groccia and Laura Cruz, Volume 31, October 2012, 177 - 178.

Although Barbezat and Pingree speak of contemplative practices in general, their findings can be correlated to the contemplative practice of *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina is a contemplative method that builds and sustains attention as students work to read and re-read passages of a text and become familiar even intimate with it. In doing so, they deepen their understanding of the material presented within the text and begin to consider the authors purpose as well as their own thoughts about the material. Furthermore, knowing a text better, developing a familiarity to it increases the opportunity for students to make meaningful connections with it. What happens as students become more familiar with a text is that the writing no longer stays in the text, but moves into the students' minds and hearts where they begin to have their own relationship with it. Once within the student, the text continues to speak to them, but now on their own terms, based on their own lived experiences.

Summary

In summary, there are instructors from a wide variety of disciplines using the practice of *lectio divina* to teach students how to read a text closely. Overwhelming, instructors see the benefit of *lectio divina*. They have witnessed first-hand that slow, deliberate reading helps students come to know a text better, engage in it more deeply, consider multiple levels of meanings, and begin to make meaningful personal connections. *Lectio* requires students to slow down, take in and reflect on what they are reading. By slowing down, reading and re-reading students begin to notice things about the texts that they may not have if they had read quickly. As they begin to notice new things about a text, they begin to enter into dialogue with it, take it in and consider it from

their own perspective. Engagement in contemplative reading bridges the objective content oriented information with the students own subjective experiences. As students begin to take an active role in their learning – reading, re-reading, considering, reflecting, responding - their worldview begins to shift, grow and expand. Contemplative practices stretch and strengthen the mental, emotional and spiritual muscles of students and as a result, students begin to expand their awareness of self and others.

However, the practice itself is not without its challenges. The most obvious is the challenge to re-appropriate the monastic (religious) practice of *lectio divina* for use in a secular classroom without proselytizing Christianity. Although all religious traditions have contemplative practices to share, in general, educators within the contemplative movement are more apt to select a Buddhist or Hindu contemplative practice to use in their classrooms. Both the Buddhist and Hindu traditions are rich with introspective, meditative and contemplative practices where the focus has always been on self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-development. There are tomes of literature and commentary within both of these religious traditions on meditative practices and accompanying instructions. In addition, Buddhist and Hindu meditative practices dominate scientific studies and the accompanying literature written on the beneficial effects for those engaged in these practices.⁷⁹ For every contemplative article or book written, Buddhist and Hindu contemplative practices fill the pages, whereas Christian

⁷⁹For information on specific scientific experiments studying the effect of Buddhist and Hindu meditative practices see Mind & Life Institute located in Hadley, MA, The Britton Lab at Brown University, The Center for Investigating Healthy Minds Housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Waisman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior The Contemplative Science Lab/MARGAM at NYU Cognitive Neurophysiology Research in the Contemplative Science Lab under Zoran Josipovic, Ph.D., The Jha Lab at the University of Miami, The Lazar Lab at Massachusetts General Hospital, and The Shamatha Project at UC Davis. For more information on these research efforts see <http://www.contemplativemind.org/resources/higher-education/links>

contemplative practices, often overlooked, remain under researched. Even within the Catholic Christian tradition, most colleges and universities do not even teach the method of *lectio divina* in their religion classes, let alone research its beneficial effects. There is little research pointing to why this is the case. Since I do not know for sure, I can only speculate that many Catholic Christians have never been introduced and/or studied *lectio divina*, outside the Benedictine, Carthusian and Cistercian monasteries, and if they have been introduced to it, they do not practice it themselves and therefore, do not feel comfortable teaching *lectio divina* to their students. In addition, over the centuries the Catholic Church discouraged the laity from reading and interpreting the bible.⁸⁰

Whatever the case, the fact remains that *lectio divina* has remained a dormant practice, which has something important to offer educators and students alike. As a method, it brings together some of the greatest Greek, Jewish and Christian thinkers who stressed the importance of slow, deliberate reading and contemplative thinking. *Lectio divina* engages the whole student –mind, body, heart, spirit – in the whole learning process, from reading to critical inquiry to thoughtful response. Just as the Buddhist and Hindu traditions have some beautiful and powerful insights to share with educators and students today, so too, the Christian tradition. From the beginning, *lectio divina* was a method of listening, discovering and responding described so simply by the Russian mystic Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894).

You have a book? Then read it, reflect on what it says, and apply the words to yourself. To apply the content to oneself is the purpose and fruit of reading. If you read without applying what is read to yourself, nothing good will come of it, and

⁸⁰ It was not until Vatican II in the 1960's that laity were encouraged to read and study the bible.

even harm may result. Theories will accumulate in the head, leading you to criticize others instead of improving your own life. So have ears and hear.⁸¹

Lectio Divina invites students to take in what they read and apply it to their lives.

Although the monks referred to *lectio divina* as listening to the Word of God, the roots of the practice originate in those who sought truth, *logos* and wisdom. *Lectio divina*, therefore, is a method to uncover and experience wisdom embedded in a text. It need not be theological; rather, can simply be a *techne*, a tool to uncover what has remained hidden. Through *lectio divina*, students can learn to immerse themselves into the world within the text, sink into it deeply and swim below the surface to discover the secrets that lie within.

In this chapter, I highlighted four approaches universities are using today to incorporate contemplative practices into the learning experience. I am writing from the fourth approach. I do not teach at a university in which contemplative practice are in the mission statement; my university does not offer a contemplative studies concentration, nor does it have a center for teaching where contemplative practices are supported and encouraged. I am a full-time lecturer teaching in the English Department at a public university where I teach undergraduate courses in ancient world literature and writing. In addition, I am an adjunct instructor in the Religious Studies department at a Catholic liberal arts college, where I teach both undergraduates and graduate students world religions, theological reflection and the Christian spiritual journey. I have been teaching contemplative practices in the classroom for the past seven years.⁸² In the next chapter, I

⁸¹ *The Art of Prayer, An Orthodox Anthology*, ed. by Igumen Chariton of Valamo (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 130.

⁸² Before beginning teaching at the college/university level, I was a certified yoga and meditation teacher. I taught students and trained teachers in the U.S, Mexico and Germany.

will provide an historical overview of *lectio divina* and its development starting in the Christian Catechetical School through the monastic schools of the 12th and 13th centuries.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

“To read religiously is to read as a lover, wanting to savor the experience. The religious reader approaches what is to be read with the sense that it is a gold mine of riches that can never be exhausted.” Paul Griffins¹

In this chapter, it is my intention to offer an historical overview of the development of *lectio divina*. I will begin with a brief introduction of the Christian Catechetical School in Alexandria. In the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Origen adapted ancient Greek philosophy, Jewish midrash and Christian exegesis into his pedagogy. I will examine the historical development of the *lectio divina* method, beginning with the Christian Catechetical School in the 2nd century and examine its role in the monks’ formation. Finally, I will explain the *lectio divina* method seen in the desert schools in the 4th century, the Benedictine School in the 6th century, the Cistercian Schools in the 12th centuries and the Carthusian School in the 12th century.

Origen and the Christian Catechetical School of Alexandria

The earliest roots of *lectio divina* can be traced back to Origen of Alexandria, a renowned Father of the Eastern Church who lived between 185-254 C.E. At the time of Origen’s upbringing, Alexandria was a cultural mecca, a place where Greeks, Jews and Christians lived and studied together. Gonzales describes it as “the most active intellectual center of the time. Its Museum, or temple of the muse, with the adjacent library, was similar to our modern universities, in that it was a meeting place for scholars

¹ Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16.

in various fields.”² Origen’s education was extensive as his parents encouraged and supported his study with the leading philosophers and theologians of his time, including Ammonius Saccas, a famous philosopher in the lineage of Plato. He also, “trained as a *grammateus* in order to teach Greek literature, learning traditional Alexandrian arts of textual criticism, word study and interpretation.”³ In addition to his philosophical and literary training, Origen trained at the Christian Catechetical School of Alexandria, known as *The Didascalía*, under Clement of Alexandria, “a thinker and searcher... who helped those in the quest of deeper truth.”⁴ While there, Origen was exposed to the teachings of Hellenistic thinkers, Jewish rabbis and Christian scholars. At the age of eighteen, Origen became the director of the Christian Catechetical School and under his leadership, the school grew into a highly recognized and specialized place of learning.

The Alexandrian School is the first of its kind and a model for all subsequent expressions of Christian higher education. The school developed from humble origins to become the most emulated educational institution of the Christian world... It was the hub of Christian intellectual and literary development.⁵

The Catechetical School welcomed people from various backgrounds; even the blind attended and studied using carvings on wood. The teachers at the school represented a variety of disciplines including philosophers, mathematicians and scientists, as well as Jewish and Christian scholars.⁶ Such a wide variety of teachers afforded students the

²Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, Vol. 1 (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 71.

³ Rebecca Lyman, “Origen of Alexandria” *The Expository Times* June 2009 120: 418.

⁴ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 71.

⁵ Thomas C. Oden, *The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IPV Academic, 2011) 241-242.

⁶ See Annewies Van den Hoek’s “The ‘Catechetical’ School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol 90, No. 1 (Jan, 1997), 55-87.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1509959>. Van den Hoek investigates the Greek term *διδασκαλεῖον* and explains that it can be translated “school” and states, “its usage extends beyond the Christian realm-whether

opportunity to receive a well-rounded education comprised of instructions in “philosophy, including mathematics and astronomy.”⁷ Origen understood that these subjects gave students additional information that they could draw upon as they worked to dig out the deeper meaning in the Scriptures. However, Origen’s most noteworthy contribution was an interpretive technique he adapted and taught, drawing from both the Jewish and Greek traditions.

From the Jewish tradition, Origen employed an exegetical technique called midrash, a common practice in Alexandria. Midrash is a way of reading that draws upon the readers’ senses and experiences to illicit an allegorical interpretation of a text. Philo, a famous Jewish biblical philosopher and practitioner of midrash, greatly influenced Origen. His “link with Philo and other Jewish Hellenistic...sources was primarily a literary one.”⁸ Origen “was acquainted with Philo’s works..., used his biblical interpretations and followed his Platonic ways of thinking.”⁹ In terms of Jewish midrash, the Torah held a primary place within the context of study.

The rabbis believed that nothing in the Bible, not the choice of words or their spellings, not the order of events or the relationship of one text to another, was haphazard or inconsequential. Everything was there with purpose. They deemed it their responsibility to discover connections and harmony where on the surface none appeared to exist. A text may contain multiple meanings.¹⁰

orthodox or heterodox-to non-Christian contexts. He refers to Eusebius work, Praep. ev. 5.34.4; 11.2.3 (Greek schools); 12.33.3 (Christian); idem, Hist. eccl. 5.13.4 (Marcionites).

⁷ Gonzales., *The Story of Christianity*, 419.

⁸ Van den Hoek, “The ‘Catechetical’ School, 80.

⁹ Annewies Van den Hoek, of *Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage*, “Harvard Theological Review, Vol 90, No. 1 (Jan, 1997), 79. Although Philo was no longer living, his work was highly influential in the Alexandrian community.

¹⁰ Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, *Midrash: Reading the Bible with Question Marks* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013), 26.

Midrash uses creative tension between culture and tradition and allows room for the reader to add his/her own interpretation to the text based upon his/her own experiences. “The verb *darash*, from which the noun *midrash* is derived, has a common meaning, namely ‘to seek’ or ‘to investigate.’”¹¹ The Jews believed that human imagination is God given and each generation has to learn to read and interpret their own story within the words and sentences. Yet, to do this, one must learn how to read a text slowly, closely and discerningly.

The rabbinic tradition of exegesis, especially in Alexandria, paid special attention to the spiritual meaning of each phrase of each sacred text. Accordingly, in every sentence of the sacred text, indeed every word, everything said and unsaid, God is seeking to convey the mystery of his providential purpose for humanity...a mystery...deeper than the surface indicators.¹²

Origen drew upon the practice of midrash as an interpretive tool to help his students discern the hidden spiritual meaning of a text in the midst of their own life experiences.

Drawing from the Greek tradition, Origen adapted Hellenistic literary tools as well as the dialectic method taught by Plato. According to his main biographer Eusibius, “Origen was a philologist, a scholar of the Greek language and its literature.”¹³ Origen understood that the Hellenistic tools of grammar and syntax were essential for accurate textual analysis as it helped students in their search for meaning. Origen recognized that in order for his students to be adept at analytical discussions, they needed to understand basic literary skills including accurate meaning of words, etymologies, historical context,

¹¹ Bruns, G.L., 1992, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 104.

¹² Stephen M. Wylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah: The Jewish Way of Reading the Sacred Scriptures* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 92.

¹³ See Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012), 1. Also, Eusibius, 6.2.15; 6.19.7

inflection, tone, mood, setting, dialogue etc. The investigation into a text prodded students to engage in what they were reading and propelled them forward towards questioning. Origen built upon their engagement and adopted the dialectic method, a student-centered approach, which recognized students as active learners. He engaged in Plato's method of posing questions, which did not impose views; rather, it encouraged independent thinking. He invited his students to search diligently for the meaning themselves, instructing students to become active listeners and learners. Each student was held responsible for developing his own critical thinking skills, while engaging in an analytic discussion.¹⁴ He posed questions, told stories and allowed playful inquiry to encourage critical thinking.

Plato was not like a modern academic. Instead of expounding his ideas solemnly and logically, he often presented them playfully, indirectly, and allusively, speaking in parables and referring to fundamental truths... He believed that the process of arriving at truth was hard, and required long, rigorous training in dialectic... he also preserved the ancient methods of oral transmission, which recognized that truth could not be imparted by a simple recitation of facts, but demanded intuition, aesthetic insight, and imagination as well as empirical observation and disciplined logic.¹⁵

While adapting the interpretive tools employed by the Alexandrian School of his day, Origen developed and taught a three-fold method of interpretation, which moved the reader from the literal/historical sense to the spiritual/allegorical sense.¹⁶ Often the text

¹⁴ See Plato, *Plato's Republic*, Book vii, 518. Plato's Academy, considered by many to be the first university, used the dialectic method to bring innate knowledge to the light of awareness. "The object of education is to turn the eye, which the soul already possesses to the light. The whole function of education is not to put knowledge into the soul, but to bring out the best things that are latent in the soul, and to do so by directing it to the right objects. The problem of education, then, is to give it the right surrounding." The dialectic method was also referred to as the Socratic Method.

¹⁵ Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 374.

¹⁶ Paul B. Decock, "Origen's Christian Approach to the Song of Songs." *Religion & Theology* 17, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/157430110X517898>. For quote, see the work of R. P. Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (ACW 26; Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1957), 45-46. Origen finds a prefiguration of this threefold structure of divine philosophy"

was scriptural, but at times Origen drew from other philosophical and literary sources. After introducing the text, Origen and his students began to read the text together in order to understand its literal meaning; however, the literal meaning did not mean historical accuracy. Reading a text literally, *ad litteram*, is to read “with an exacting scrupulous attention to what was written on the page, in every detail, and with every discernable shade of significance.”¹⁷ Origen worked with his students to unpack the meaning of words through a thorough reading and study of the text in order to discover its literal and historical meaning.¹⁸ This type reading required the close attention to literary details, including etymologies, dialogue, tone, inflection, setting, and descriptions. As a master reader, Origen trained his students to concentrate on each element.

Observe each detail which has been written. For, if one knows how to dig into the depth, he will find a treasure in the details, and perhaps also, the precious jewels of the mysteries which lie hidden where they are not esteemed.¹⁹

Digging was a common metaphor used by Origen and he often referred to close reading as “digging wells and drawing water from them as Isaac did.”²⁰

What was significant about Origen’s method of interpretation was that it took place within the context of a school, as “Origen did not approve of individual interpretation isolated from the tradition and community of believers.”²¹ His method of scripture study created a sense of community; the community worked together to uncover

in the three patriarchs: Abraham (obedience), Isaac (digging of wells as symbol of searching out the root of things), and Jacob or Israel (who beheld the ladders reaching up from earth to heaven).

¹⁷ David Bentley Hart, “The Back Page,” *First Things* Jan 2015, No. 249, 71.

¹⁸ For Origen the literal sense was not the same as reading the Bible literally, but rather referred to the meaning intended by the author.

¹⁹ Origen, *Homily on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, FCH71:136.

²⁰ Raymond, Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 38.

²¹ George T. Montague, *Understanding the Bible: A Basic Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 39.

the deeper spiritual sense hidden within the Scriptures. Living a common life with his students afforded Origen the opportunity to work closely with his students and instruct them throughout the day, including morning meditation, daily study and even common meals, which provided an opportunity to read the Scriptures together.²² In addition to spending time with his students, he also wrote homilies and various other types of writing in which he instructed his students in how to develop their reading and interpretive abilities. Origen believed “Scriptures were the locus for an encounter between God and humans and since the *Logos* was incarnate in the Scriptures [it] could there touch and teach readers and hearers.”²³ He taught his students the value of active participation, as it was their “disciplined search for the hidden meaning [that] led to *Logos*.”²⁴

Logos works in the hearts of the listeners to move them forward, according to the three stages, first towards a moral life or a life of virtue, by which they become free for, and appreciative of, the true meaning of everything, including themselves, and are then able to direct their love according to that knowledge. The idea of the transformation of the listeners or readers of Scripture is crucial to Origen’s approach to Scripture; the readers of the Scriptures are not meant to be mere spectators but participants and actors in the drama. It is not merely a question of information, or of objective analysis, but of “learning to sing the songs” inspired by the *Logos*. The goal is union with God or love of God above all else, which then guides and directs the relationships of love to everyone and everything else.²⁵

What he taught students was a method to access *Logos*, the hidden spiritual meaning, and encouraged them to apply the deeper meaning to their lives. “In principle, he argued, the truth discovered by Plato and the other philosophers is the same truth revealed in the

²² Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 28-29.

²³ Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Gorman 87.

²⁵ Paul B Decock, “Origen’s Christian Approach to the Song of Songs,” *Religion & Theology* 17, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 21, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/157430110X517898>. Decock explains that the true aim of reading the Scriptures is for each reader, at whatever stage they are in their growth, to come to an ever deeper encounter and union with the *Logos*, in whom is found ultimate meaning.

Scriptures.”²⁶ This method of interpreting the Scriptures called exegesis, “from the Greek verb *exēgeisthai*, meaning, ‘to lead out’”²⁷ was Origen’s most significant contribution to the school. For Origen, the “visible world was a symbolic one whose purpose is not to ensnare us but to lead us to a lasting, divine realm. The Scriptures [contained] a vast repository of symbols with the power to reconnect us to the mysteries.”²⁸ Origen recognized the act of reading as an inspired act that led students through steps to discover the hidden spiritual meaning of a text. Reading the Scripture and interpreting its symbols led students into a divine encounter, in so far as students had the proper tools, training and discipline to interpret the hidden spiritual meaning.

Once students understood the basic literal meaning of a text, Origen encouraged them to move deeper into the text by “mapping a way to move beyond the literal sense and garner spiritual meaning.”²⁹ He did this by illuminating the text using “philological, rhetorical, literary and other existing tools of interpretation”³⁰ Each device acted like a gardeners trowel to dig deeper into the text and draw out hidden layers of meaning. In addition, Origen offered an analogy to the three levels of reading, likening it to a human being going on a spiritual journey.

First comes the literal or ordinary narrative of meaning, the body of the Scriptural text...the beginning of the journey. Second, a more developed meaning, the soul of a scriptural text, increases knowledge of the divine and so meets the needs of

²⁶ Origen: *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, Translation and Introduction by Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 6.

²⁷ Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 10. Gorman discusses that Origen taught his students how to access *Logos* as *Logos* was understood to be the dynamic principle that guides and connects all of life; the intuitive knowledge that translates directly into action.

²⁸ Raymond, Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live*, 31

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

those farther along on the journey. Finally, the spirit of the scriptural text, a secret and hidden wisdom of God, leads to union with God.³¹

His three-fold level of interpreting Scripture began with the literal level or an ordinary narrative; he then moved deeper to the soul level, a more developed meaning of the text; and finally, deeper still, to the spiritual sense containing a secret and hidden wisdom. He often employed the use of allegory to discover the spiritual meaning of a passage and invited his readers to pick up their own trowel and start digging, as he believed within each person resided a “well of living water...a heavenly perception and latent image of God.”³² This process of reading required hard work; however, too often he realized that his students were not attentive. He taught them “The word is not just to be heard or read. It must occupy a place in one’s conversation, thoughts, and heart [and] invited them to mull over the words of Scripture, to break them apart.”³³ Calling upon the analogy of the loaves and fishes, Origen explained that just as the disciples crumbled the bread into pieces, so the reader and hearers must also break the words down into little pieces in order for its meaning to reach everyone.³⁴ For Origen, the journey of searching was an ongoing process. “No mind that is created has the ability to understand completely by any manner of means, but as it finds some small part of the answers that are sought, it sees other questions to be asked.”³⁵ Through the slow deliberate reading of Scripture, along with meditative consideration, detailed analysis, and further questioning, the reader

³¹ See Karen Jo Torjesen, “‘Body,’ ‘Soul,’ ‘Spirit’ in Origen’s Theory of Exegesis,” in *Anglican Theological Review* 67 (1985):17-30.

³² Raymond, Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live*, 39.

³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁴ Origen, *Homily on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, FCH71:182-83.

³⁵ Origen, *On First Principles* Translated by G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1973), 4.14.

moved deeper towards the spiritual sense where the text spoke “to the present moment of readers and influenced their continued spiritual development.”³⁶

As Origen’s students continued to dig deeper into a text, they kept four questions in mind. The first two questions have to do with the literal/historical sense.

The first asks simply: What are the words of the text saying or describing; what is the text’s grammatical sense? The second question tries to flesh out that sense by explaining or clarifying the fuller context: What is the concrete/historical reality to which the text refers? (What transpired, what happened, what was said that forms part of the historical teaching activity of the Word?)³⁷

The next step involved further inquiry to discover the moral and spiritual meaning by asking, “What is the Word teaching through this reality? What is the divine intention in the description and record of this reality; what doctrine or mystery is being communicated?”³⁸ Origen continued to draw on the metaphor of digging and challenged his students “to do their own digging both in scriptures and within themselves.”³⁹

Therefore, you also attempt, O hearer, to have your own well and your own spring, so that you too, when you take up the book of Scriptures, may begin even from your own understanding to bring forth some meaning, and in accordance with those things which you have learned in the church, you too attempt to drink from the fountain of your own abilities. You have the nature of ‘living water’ within you.⁴⁰

Lastly, the fourth question, “What is this text speaking in the midst of the readers’ and listeners’ lives?” led students towards their continued formation as they worked to make a connection between the wisdom they uncovered and their current situation. His method

³⁶ Gerald Bostock, “Allegory and the Interpretation of the Bible in Origen,” *Journal of Literature and Theology* 1, no. 1 (March 1987):46-47.

³⁷ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 52. Also see Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 124-128 for further information on the background and theological discussion on Origen’s exegetical practice.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰ Origen, *Homily of Genesis and Exodus*. Translated by Ronald E. Heine, FCh 97 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1990), 12.5

offered a way of reading that “allowed the text to speak to the present moment of readers and influence their continuing spiritual development.”⁴¹ The practice of reading and interpreting Scriptures not only informed students, but also led towards their transformation as the hard work and community effort involved in the practice of reading and interpretation required attention, discipline and dialogue. Origen’s method moved students “from concrete historical reality presented in the Scriptures to universal doctrine being communicated back to their concrete existential circumstances.”⁴² Where the literal sense gave students information, the spiritual/allegorical senses assisted students in their formation as Christians. Furthermore, the allegorical sense, offered a “secret and hidden wisdom of God, [which] led to union with God.”⁴³ Origen believed “In and through the Scriptures themselves the Word is educating Christians and bringing them to a fuller life.”⁴⁴

Origen taught for twenty years at the Catechetical School. He also traveled and taught this method of biblical interpretation at other cultural centers and wrote prolifically on Scripture. Origen, considered the father of textual criticism, biblical exegesis, and hermeneutics, employed a specific method of reading, which he taught to his student as a way to uncover wisdom embedded in the Scriptures, but also within themselves. According to Rincoeur, “the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself [herself] better,

⁴¹ Gerald Bostock, “Allegory and the Interpretation of the Bible in Origen,” 46-47.

⁴² Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, Translated by A.S. Worrall. (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1989), 142-45.

⁴³ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 32.

⁴⁴ Karen Jo Torjesen, “Body, Soul, and Spirit in Origen’s Exegesis,” 17-30.

understands...differently, or simply begins to understand himself [herself].”⁴⁵ What Origen provided was a three-fold method of interpretation, which challenged and guided students to grow into their fullest human potential. This method began with a slow, attentive reading of the text to uncover the literal meaning. Upon which, students stayed with the text and dug even deeper to question it and search for clues to uncover hidden spiritual meaning. Finally, students worked to incorporate what they learned and apply it to their lives.

The Desert School

In the fourth century, as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, the desert ascetics, wary of these rising powers, “left the great cities...to encounter truth on their own terms.”⁴⁶

A man journeying into the desert found Truth standing alone and said to her, ‘Why, revered lady, have you left the city and dwell now in the desert?’ To which with profound wisdom she straightway replied, ‘Falsehood found a place with few among those of old, but now it has spread to all humankind.’⁴⁷

Motivated by their search for truth, thousands of men and women moved into the deserts of Egypt and Syria, and by the end of the fourth century, “nearly 5,000 had established themselves in the desert on the outskirts of Alexandria.”⁴⁸ Once in the desert, they left behind the social and political inequalities found in city life as they worked to create a

⁴⁵Paul Ricouer, “What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding,” *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145-64.

⁴⁶Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperOne, 1993), 40.

⁴⁷Ben Edwin Perry, ed. *Babrius and Phaedrus*, Fable 126. LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 162-63.

⁴⁸Henry L. Carrigan Jr., *The Wisdom of the Deserts Fathers and Mothers* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), xvi.

community “where all men were truly equal, where the only authority under God was the charismatic authority of wisdom, experience and love.”⁴⁹ Monks, derived from the Greek *monachos*, meaning ‘solitary’⁵⁰ simplified their lives and focused their energy on learning the Scriptures.

Some planted gardens, but most of them earned a living weaving baskets and mats that they then traded for bread and oil. Apart from the ready availability of reeds, this occupation had the advantage that while weaving one could pray, recite the psalms, or memorize a portion of Scripture. The diet of the desert consisted mostly of bread, to which were occasionally added fruit, vegetables, and oil. Their belongings were limited to the strictly necessary clothing, and a mat to sleep on. Most of them frowned on the possession of books, which could lead to pride. They taught each other, by heart, entire books of the Bible, particularly the Psalms and the books of the New Testament. And they also shared among themselves edifying anecdotes and pearls of wisdom coming from the most respected authorities.⁵¹

Like the classical philosophers of Ancient Greece, “the monks took as their motto the Delphic maxim, *gnôthi seauton/cognosce teipsum*: ‘know thyself.’”⁵² These ascetics, from the Greek word *askesis* (training),⁵³ withdrew to the deserts to train in the interpretation of Scripture and thus, the desert hermeneutic began to take shape. These desert schools considered “centers for advanced studies,”⁵⁴ taught Scripture, along with the teachings of the abbas (fathers) and ammas (mothers).⁵⁵ Some also became teachers,

⁴⁹ Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings of the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 5.

⁵⁰ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 138.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Gonzalez, 143.

⁵² Bernard McGinn, “Withdrawal and Return: Reflections on Monastic Retreat from the World,” *Spiritus: a Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Vol 6, No. 2, Fall 2006, 150. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

⁵³ *Askesis* is a common term in first century BCE, which refers to training of the mind and body as a path towards a higher way of life.

⁵⁴ Robin Darling Young, “Evagrius the Iconographer: Monastic Pedagogy in the Gnostikos” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol 9, No. 1, Spring, 2001, 56. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> In addition, Young explains that Evagrius, a desert father, met with his students and companions at the synaxes (weekly assemblies) in question and answer sessions.

⁵⁵ Additional information on the use of scripture in the desert is discussed in D. Burton-Christie *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also, see Guy G. Stroumsa, “The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity,

training others who sought truth. These ascetics, known as ‘lovers of wisdom,’⁵⁶ created desert schools where they trained ascetics to read and interpret Scripture; their method incorporated the practices of listening, reading, memorizing and writing.

The ascetic life was a life of training that began with listening. Listening became an important practice because Scripture held a prominent place in their solitary life as well as in their public liturgical gatherings (*synaxes*). The more they listened, the more they heard truth speaking to them through Scripture as well as in the context of their life. Scripture was the guidebook that offered instruction and direction; it “provided ethical guidelines and models of life.”⁵⁷ One such desert father, Anthony of Egypt, fled to the caves in Egypt in the fourth century in search of truth. When young, Anthony did not read or write, nor play much with other children. Instead, he felt a burning desire for God. When sitting in church with his parents, Anthony listened intently to the passages of Scripture being read and etched them into his memory where he could recall them, reflect on them and apply them to his life. “He followed so closely what was read in church that nothing in the Scriptures escaped his attention; his memory became a type of biblical library.”⁵⁸ One day while listening, a preacher read Matthew 19: 21-22, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” This event motivated him to sell many of his belongings and move to the desert to learn to interpret the Scriptures and apply them to his life. In the desert, he

Journal of Christian Studies, Vol 16, no 1, Spring 2008, pp. 67-77. In it he discusses that The monks developed a new system of reading based upon the constant and central presence of the a book whose contents were almost known by heart.

⁵⁶ Bernard McGinn, “Withdrawal and Return: Reflections on Monastic Retreat from the World,” *Spiritus: a Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Vol 6, No. 2, Fall 2006, 150. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

⁵⁷ Studzinski., *Reading to Live*, 102.

⁵⁸ Gerald O’Collins, SJ. “The Inspiring Power of Scripture: Three Case Studies.” *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 2014, Vol. 79(3), 267, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0021140014527662>

studied with other eremitic monks. It was a common practice for students to receive instructions from the elder monks, who taught them how to listen to the words of Scripture. Students sought out the Elders, the desert fathers or mothers, with two recurring requests: “‘Give me a word’ and ‘Tell me what I should do.’”⁵⁹ Elders would respond by offering something to listen to such as a scriptural text or a message of their own.

The desert school, like the Alexandrian School, taught ascetics how to read texts so they could work to interpret Scriptures. Texts included Scripture, philosophical writings, letters, and sayings of the Elders. For example, “Anthony’s life... is not simply an historical text, a source of information about a definitely dead past. It is a living text, a means of formation of the monastic life.”⁶⁰ Reading required skills such as learning the sounds of the letters, understanding various meanings of words, exploring tone and inflection. In addition, drawing from Origen’s method of digging for meaning they learned to read by moving from the literal to the deeper spiritual meaning. Literacy is an essential element in the desert school. Evagrius (another desert father and teacher) guided his students to deeper levels of understanding. “Bodily *askesis* prepares one for reading, but reading allows further progress towards monastic spiritual goals.”⁶¹ Self-discipline prepared one to read deeply. Evagrius notes the difference between hearing a text and reading a text; however, more importantly it is one’s ability to access the deeper wisdom

⁵⁹ Sudzinzki, *Reading to Live*, 98.

⁶⁰ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of learning and the Desire for God*, 3rd ed., Catherine Misrahi, trans (New York: Fordham, 1982), 99.

⁶¹ Rebecca, Krawiec. “Literacy and Memory in Evagrius’s Monasticism” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol 21, No. 3, Fall 2013, 372. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> Krawiec also notes that Evagrius does not want illiterate readers to have access to a text beyond their capabilities as this could lead to more harm than good.

embedded within a text, which is vital to spiritual growth. Taking their directives from Scripture such as “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (Lk 11:28), the desert monks not only worked to discover the hidden spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, but also worked to give life to the wisdom they uncovered. They also placed scriptural passages from their libraries (which may have been a book or two in addition to some letters) into dialogue with one another as a way to illuminate a text, discover further insights and questions. Although repetitive, the practice of reading was always new as the desert fathers taught that the meaning of Scripture was never exhausted. New meaning brought new awareness, which led to further reading and re-reading. “They entered a benevolent circle of meaning in which their practice would enhance their understanding and their new understanding, influence their continuing practice.”⁶²

Listening and reading were two practices in a more comprehensive method that included rumination, memorization and reflection. Once read, or heard, the monks committed verses and passages of scripture to memory. “Active minds, not books, stored the sacred texts and led monks to speak them often.”⁶³ Their practice began with reciting a word or phrase repeatedly as they worked throughout the day and while alone in their cave. As they called to mind a verse of scripture or an elder saying, they recited it often, slowly taking it into their minds and allowing it to seep into their hearts. They “learned by heart and meditated on [it] over and over again for a day or even a week until the paragraph had broken like a fruit on the tongue of the monk and revealed its inner flavor

⁶² Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in the Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22-23.

⁶³ Sudzinzki, *Reading to Live*, 96.

to the searching mind.”⁶⁴ The desert ascetics recognized the potency of words, the Scriptures’ and their own. Anthony chanted and sang the Psalms.⁶⁵ This exercise of speaking and hearing until committed to memory “meant quite literally taking the words to heart so that, stored in one’s memory, they could serve as a reservoir of healing texts.”⁶⁶ Evagrius also stressed the importance of memory and the disciplined training of memory. He taught his students to reshape their memories through reading, reflection and prayer. Memory was not just in terms of an individual’s memory, as a community of people also held memories. As students gathered and learned together, they worked to discipline their minds as they memorized, organized and re-organized information. Restructuring memory was “a textual process; it results from memorizing new texts that shape the self and form communal interactions with texts.”⁶⁷ Through slow repetition and committed practice, hidden meanings began to surface, thus awakening the monks to a new level of awareness. Time spent in both meditation and prayer led the monks to learn the Scriptures by heart. According to the desert fathers learning by heart is

to afford the text or music an indwelling clarity and life force... What we know by heart becomes an agency in our consciousness, a ‘pace-maker’ in the growth and vital complication of our identity. Furthermore, just as a ‘pace-maker’ gives a weakened heart life, meditation and prayer on the scriptures gave them vitality; it made them ‘truly alive.’⁶⁸

These practices, often thought of as solitary and silent, were in fact performative.

“Biblical texts were scripts to be performed, to be lived out in the concrete details of

⁶⁴ *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul’s Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Contemplatives*, transl. by John Anthony McGuckin (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 7.

⁶⁵ For more on Anthony’s practices of chanting and singing see Carrigan Henry L. Jr., *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010.

⁶⁶ Burton-Christie, Douglas, *The Word in the Desert*, 122-129.

⁶⁷ Krawiec, “Literacy and Memory...” 384.

⁶⁸ *The Saying of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*. trans. Benedicta Ward, (London: Mowbray, 1975), 40.

daily existence, to be ‘made their own,’ that is, appropriated.”⁶⁹ This meant ruminating aloud as well as hearing the words and acting on them. These meditative practices, not only taught the monks how to store information, but restored them to centeredness.”⁷⁰ Through diligent practice, the desert ascetics trained themselves to call upon texts from memory, dialogue with texts and others, distill truth, and discern appropriate application of truth. Performing these verses aloud and applying the hidden spiritual meaning to their life, led them to further transformational events.

Writing was another tool used in the Desert School. These desert writings offered instructions in *praxis*, *theoria* and *gnosis* to the monks on three levels, from the novice, to the young monks who had some years of training, and finally to the more spiritually advanced. Writings on praxis, called *Pratikos*, discussed exercises or practices that prepared monks for a life of study, prayer, and mystical searching. Writings on *Theoria*, called *Theoretikos*, addressed “recurrent problems that stopped a spiritual person from progressing.”⁷¹ Finally, writings on gnosis, title *Gnostikos*, contained instruction for those monks who had had mystical experiences. These longer writings offered further guidance. Evagrius, a desert father of the fourth century, employed the practice of writing in his teaching. Evagrius received classical training, in philosophy and rhetoric, and wrote down the teachings he learned in the desert from some of the illiterate abbas and ammas.⁷² By writing down what he learned, he created guidebooks for others. Like

⁶⁹ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 100-101.

⁷⁰ Ibid, Studzinski, 99.

⁷¹ *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul's Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Contemplatives*, transl. by John Anthony McGuckin (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 9.

⁷² Edward L. Smither “Lessons for a Tentmaking Ascetic in the Egyptian Desert: The Case of Evagrius of Pontus,” *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, Oct 2011, 487, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009182961103900406>. Evagrius wrote treatises, biblical commentaries and letters, which were used later for training other desert ascetics.

Origen, Evagrius realized that the monks required a specific type of training to guide them beyond the literal sense of a text; therefore, he took it upon himself to write such texts. His writings had “indefinable layers that provide the spiritual strength necessary for monastic contemplation...the reader/monk is only able to decipher the texts through the development of self.”⁷³ Monasticism began in the deserts of Egypt and Syria, but later spread to the rest of the Byzantine world.

St. Benedict of Nursia and the Monastic School

Benedict of Nursia (480 C.E.-547 C.E), the most prominent figure in the history of western monasticism, was born in Italy in the region of Nursia in the fifth century. During Benedict’s youth, the monks evangelized the people of Nursia, and their simple way of life would prove to have a deep impact on him. After completing his studies in Rome, Benedict left for Subiaco to live a solitary life where he studied under the guidance of a monk named Romanus. Benedict lived there, as a hermit, for three years studying and meditating on the Scriptures. He memorized and reflected on them until they were indelibly etched into his heart. These three years of ascetic living transformed Benedict from a man seeking personal salvation to one longing for communion with Christ.⁷⁴

What can be deduced from Benedict’s time at Subiaco is that this must have been a significant and trying time, a time of profound discernment and self-examination since it was after this period of solitude and intense discernment that he founded the monastic

⁷³ Rebecca Krawiec, “Literacy and Memory in Evagrius’s Monasticism” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol 21, No. 3, Fall 2013, 371. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

⁷⁴ Aquinata Bockman, *Expanding Our Hearts in Christ: Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 4.

order in the old “*Villa Neronis*” at Subiaco. He later moved to Monte Casino where he founded another monastery and wrote his rule.⁷⁵ The Rule of Benedict outlines the theological and spiritual foundation of the monastic life. Its purpose is to guide and direct the monks in their search for God by establishing rules that provide structure, order and balance between work and rest, study and recreation, and communal reading and prayer as well as individual prayer. The Rule also emphasized service and hospitality, especially to the sick, the poor, the young, and the elderly.⁷⁶ Benedict drew from other monastic sources and documents to write his Rule, specifically the Rule of the Master, the Rule of Basil and the Desert Fathers.⁷⁷

Although Origen, the desert Ascetics and Benedict all encouraged reading Scriptures within community, Benedict formalized training a bit further. Benedict believed that with commitment, effort and faithfulness to both the Rule and Scripture, one could become “fully alive” and experience the “fullness of life right now.”⁷⁸ The Rule of St. Benedict “offered practical directives on just how to experience communion with God in this life.”⁷⁹ The monastic life under Benedict was a type of school in which the monks had the opportunity to learn not only from the abbot (master) but also from one another. “Benedict serenely accepts and encourages personal spiritual authority in others than the abbot; as the abbot is not the sole proprietor of wisdom and charisma

⁷⁵Ibid. Bockman, *Expanding Our Hearts in Christ*, 4. The exact date of Benedict’s Rule and founding of his monastic schools are unknown; however, evidence points to 529-530 C.E.

⁷⁶ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 4:14, 36.

⁷⁷ Bockman, *Expanding Our Hearts in Christ*, 5-7.

⁷⁸ Benedict is concerned with disciplined practices that lead to love experienced here and now. See also Kardong 7.5, 137.

⁷⁹ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 619.

within the community.”⁸⁰ The monastic school was structured to include set times for reading, rumination, prayer and work; in addition, the monks had assigned cells, seats for eating and places to stand for prayer. Assigned sleeping areas, seats and worship places provided stability. As Kardong notes, the monk “not only committed himself unconditionally to the community, but one is given a place in the group.”⁸¹ Together the community worked to interpret the Scriptures and act upon what they had learned.

For Benedict, the Scriptures were the soul of the monastic life and the monastery was the school in which the monks learned how to read and study the Scriptures and how to integrate what they read into their lives. Benedict states in his Rule,

Therefore, we must establish a school for the Lord’s service. We have to arrange things a bit strictly to correct vice and preserve charity...[but] as we progress...our hearts will swell with the unspeakable sweetness of love...⁸²

The purpose of the school was to train students, many of whom were illiterate, to learn to read. The abbot was the head teacher and as such, was responsible for “solid biblical and monastic teaching.”⁸³ Reading was a discipline, learned and practiced within a structured community; “the written words were listened to, read, recited, chanted and meditated on by the monks.”⁸⁴ Life within the monastery was egalitarian and it took on a more social dimension as everyone listened, read, ruminated, meditated and prayed together.

⁸⁰ Kardong, RB, 21.4, 220 and RB 3.3, 71. In addition, the abbot was required to set a good example in life, matters of discipline and spiritual learning (RB 64.2, 246).

⁸¹ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 43.4, 355. Each monk was an essential member of the community, who had a reserved space. Having a reserved space meant that you belonged and that you mattered.

⁸² Ibid. Kardong, 5; Prologue 46-47, 49. Also, see Bockman 33-42.

⁸³ Ibid. Kardong, 2.12, 53.

⁸⁴ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 141.

The Rule of Benedict states, “all the community must be occupied at definitive times in manual labour and at other times in *lectio divina*” (RB 48).⁸⁵ *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading or Divine reading) is considered the Benedictine model of biblical interpretation, designed to transform the reader. It is a method of reading, which leads the reader/listener from the head to the heart. *Lectio divina* is the “leisurely savoring of biblical texts that were mostly committed to memory.”⁸⁶ Leisure was an important element as it afforded the monk time and space to enter into and remain with the text. The monk began with listening and then moved to reading, rumination and meditation, and finally to prayer.

The Prologue of the Rule begins with the command to listen! (*Obsculta*). It was here in the monastic school that the monks learned the way of Christ by listening to his word. A call from the Gospel of Luke, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (Lk 11:28). He urged the monks to “listen with the ear of the heart” and instructed them to “listen gladly to holy reading.”⁸⁷ Benedict taught that through attentive listening one could attain union with Christ, *Logos*. Listening “required complete attention of the whole person.”⁸⁸ For Benedict, this meant that the body, mind, heart, and spirit were fully engaged in the process. As the monk listened “with astonished ears,”⁸⁹ he opened himself to encounter truth and awaken to a new understanding. However, the practice itself was an “unpressured, an undistracted encounter with the

⁸⁵Ibid. Asad, 383.

⁸⁶ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 400.

⁸⁷ Kardong., RB Prologue 1, 48:4

⁸⁸ Ibid., Kardong. Prol notes 1, 5.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Kardong, RB Prol 1:9, 5.

word, savored, and slowly digested.”⁹⁰ Benedict believed that nothing was done apart from the Scriptures, and the only way to know and understand the Scriptures was to spend time listening to them. Listening came first and then reading.

As many of the monks were illiterate, Benedict’s emphasis on slow reading allowed illiterate monks to learn to read, first by listening. “*Lectio* built on ancient pedagogy, where all reading was done slowly and aloud, and where students learned to read by memorizing classic works, focusing first on letters, then on words, and then on phrases.”⁹¹ According to Leclercq, “*grammatica* was learned in a fairly rudimentary fashion through the use of the psalter alone...”⁹² Reading, also known as *lectio*, held a prominent place in the monastic school as three hours a day were set aside for *lectio*. The focus of reading was Scripture; however, other writings were read as well such as the patristics and the classics.⁹³ Although at times private, reading was mainly a public event.⁹⁴ Reading was mainly an acoustic practice, involving “the mouth, which formed the words, and the ears, which heard the sounds of the words.”⁹⁵ The monks read together throughout the day, especially in the morning and evenings as well as on Sundays, where the majority of the day was set aside for *lectio*. Benedict also emphasized the practice of reading during meals. “The meals of the brothers ought not to lack reading, nor should

⁹⁰ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 124.

⁹¹ K. Jo-Ann Badley and Ken Badley, “Slow Reading: Reading along *Lectio* Lines” *The Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 15:1 (2011), 34. In addition to the Scriptures, Benedict, like Origen and the Desert Fathers and Mothers utilized other spiritual texts for reading and commentary. See Kardong RB 1. 13, 313; 8.2, 171. Kardong explains that monks need to practice reading because the ancient texts lacked punctuation and therefore, were not easy to decipher.

⁹² Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 113-114.

⁹³ Leclercq explains that the classic authors were studied in the monasteries. Manuscripts had been preserved and found in the monastic libraries.

⁹⁴ Kardong, RB 42.6, 348-349; 48.17-21, 91.

⁹⁵ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 15.

just anyone who happens to pick up the book read there. Rather, the one who is to read should begin on Sunday and do so for the whole week.”⁹⁶ Reading not only incorporated the mind and heart, but also the body. It was an embodied, sensual experience. In fact, the bodily movement may have helped the monk to retain the information.

The body movements re-evoked those of the speech organs that have been associated with them...to give form to the bilateral, dissymmetric, complementarity by which sayings are engraven right and left, forward and backward into trunk and limb, rather than just into ear and eye.⁹⁷

Monastic reading was an “acoustical performance”⁹⁸ as the monks swayed and chanted to their recitation of the words of Scripture. Yet, once the monks learned how to read, they could also engage in silent reading, while alone in their cell. Yet even within the cell, reading was “rhythmic; the monk would read a verse of Scripture and then ‘sit’ with it, pausing to reflect or pray spontaneously... [He did] not always remain bent over his pages; he often leaned back and closed his eyes over a line he has been reading again, and its meaning spread through his blood.”⁹⁹ Reading drew the monks into a timeless space of unhurried leisure. After stopping to ponder, a monk would resume reading until another word, phrase, or line would kindle the heart and imagination.”¹⁰⁰ The whole

⁹⁶ Kardong, RB 38.1, 312-313, 321.

⁹⁷ Kardong, RB, 60-61. See commentary on Marcel Jousse, who “has studied these psychomotor techniques of fixing a spoken sequence in flesh. He has shown that for many people remembrance means the triggering of a well-established sequence of muscular patterns to which the utterances are tied. When the child is rocked during a cradle song, when the reapers bow to the rhythm of a harvest song, when the rabbi shakes his head while he prays or searches for the right answer, or when the proverb comes to mind only upon the tapping of a while.”

⁹⁸ Raymond, Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live*, 122.

⁹⁹ From *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, translated by M.D. Herter Norton (201): quoted in Charles Cummings, OCSO, *Monastic Practices*, Cistercian Studies Series: No. 75 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Maria, Lichtman, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 22. Also see Kardong, RB 58.4, 467. He states, “The ancient monastic method of ‘meditation’ involved mulling the memorized biblical passages rather than purely mental cognition.”

practice of reading was designed as a method to come to know God and live in communion with God, which for Benedict was the ultimate vision.

The more time the monks listened and read Scripture, the more they came to know it. The physical act of reading aloud, activated bodily memory. Upon completion of the morning *lectio*, the monks tended to their prescribed time of labor and as they did, they ruminated on the mornings' reading. This meditation was not a "silent intellectual exercise, but rather the verbal repetition of a memorized text."¹⁰¹ Both memorization and meditation were audible, which has given rise to the saying that monasteries were "dwelling places of mumblers and munchers."¹⁰² The monks were to repeat words until not only did they learn them by memory, but until they were etched into their hearts. This type of leisurely study slowly uncovered new levels of meaning, which continued to permeate their being. The practices of memorization and meditation were important literacy practices in the monastic school; furthermore, since the monastic school lacked lighting and copious copies of Scripture, by memorizing Scripture the monks could call selections to memory and meditate on them. "Some might memorize psalms, for each one did not have a book, and even if they did, the light would be too poor to read."¹⁰³

Memorization of Scripture, along with meditation on Scripture, drew the monks into a dialogue with God. God spoke through the Scriptures and the monks responded in prayer (*oratio*). Prayer was of two types; either quiet, intimate, and silent or liturgical

¹⁰¹ Kardong, RB 8.2, 170-171.

¹⁰² Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor's "Didascalicon."* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 54.

¹⁰³ Kardong, RB, 8.2, 171.

prayer that was chanted and sung.¹⁰⁴ *Oratio* was the other side of the dialogue with God. What was important to Benedict was the act of prayer itself and he instructed his monks to “Give [themselves] frequently to prayer.”¹⁰⁵ After the monks listened attentively to the Scripture, savoring it and ruminating on it, the natural movement to follow was a response. As they tasted the words of Scripture and savored them, the meaning penetrated deeper and deeper into their hearts until finally the love they felt could no longer be contained and poured out of them in words, songs or even tears.¹⁰⁶ Their hearts, now softened and emptied, filled with ineffable bliss. The Word reflected on and received with an open heart was offered back to God. This exchange of love continued day in and day out, until the monk’s heart was purified and renewed. The Scriptures accompanied them along their daily journey towards fuller awareness, offering opportunities to be transformed by it.

Lectio Divina was the method of interpretation taught in Benedict’s monastic school. The practices of listening, reading, rumination, meditation, and prayer were the heart of the monastic community. Casey shares that there is “an innate spiritual latency that needs a little external prompting before it bursts into a flower. When it does, we feel like a new person. We feel alive. We experience a freedom to be ourselves.”¹⁰⁷ At these moments, we come to know that God dwells not outside of ourselves, but rather deep within the chamber of our own heart; to come to know God; therefore, is to come to

¹⁰⁴ Kardong, *RB* 16; 18; 19.7, Divine office was a term used for public prayer. The monks prayed in silence in their cells, during work, but also in the chapel. However, since the monks were so accustomed to reading and ruminating aloud, they often found themselves naturally praying aloud.

¹⁰⁵ Kardong, *RB*, 4.56, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Tears, known as compunction, were an outward sign of an inward movement, a transformative understanding in the interiority of a monk.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Casey, *Fully Human Fully Divine: An Interactive Christology* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Triumph, 2004), 206.

know oneself. Through the dedicated practice of *lectio divina* the monks awakened the luminous, spiritual flame of wisdom, which illuminated their minds, nourished their hearts, and radiated wisdom back into community.

The Cathedral Schools and the Scholastic Method

Since the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, the monastics schools had kept the spark of learning alive. The monks had collected books, characteristic of small libraries; they taught reading and scribed texts. These “internal schools” used the method of *lectio divina* to teach reading the Scriptures, the Psalter, and the writings of the Church Fathers, the primary focus being to train students to enter the contemplative life. However, in the 9th century, a change occurred as monastic schools gave way to cathedral schools. Charlemagne coined the ‘education emperor,’ re-developed cities and education became an important aspect of his re-development. He, too, promoted reading and set up free schools for boys, decreeing that every bishop establish a school at his cathedral. “He gathered scholars around his own palace, and a small number of learned monks.”¹⁰⁸ These cathedral schools trained boys to read and write and clergy to minister to the people in the cities. Many of the trained monks, who came from the monastic schools, became the primary teachers in the cathedral schools. In addition, the monks brought to the cathedral schools their pedagogical method of reading called *lectio divina*.

In the eleventh and twelfth century, with the capture of Muslim Toledo and its libraries in 1085, another change would occur that would alter the pedagogical method of *lectio divina*. Muslims scholars, who had already applied Greek philosophy, critical

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image Books, 2004), 158.

reasoning and dialectics in their universities, shared their methods with the Jews and Christians. Once again, information flowed from East to West as Aristotle's writings spread from the Muslim world to the Christian world. Aristotle's writings consisted of ancient Greek philosophy, critical reasoning and dialectics. "Translated into Latin, the effect was profound: Western thought, enriched a fresh by manuscripts containing Classical learning experienced another movement of renewal..."¹⁰⁹ With the discovery of Aristotle's writings and its rational approach to reading and inquiry, the pedagogical method of *lectio divina* was once again, revised. Cathedral schools (*schola*) replete with faculty (*scholastici*) developed and grew, including the pedagogical method, called scholasticism.¹¹⁰ No longer was faith and authority taken at face value as scholars applied the scholastic method of reasoning to explain and understand their faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*).

Some of the prominent scholastic thinkers, who developed and employed this method, include Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas. Abelard was a leader in the scholastic movement and "the first theologian to view theology as a whole and attempt a grand synthesis of the data of reason with the data of faith."¹¹¹ Using the

¹⁰⁹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 399.

¹¹⁰ The *scholastici* or schoolmasters were among the intellectual class, in contrast to the unlearned, called a layperson. Originally, it was the Church that offered an opportunity to become educated as it had access to a variety of texts, the best teachers, funding, and buildings where learning could take place. The Church kept education alive. Dumont notes in *Praying the Word of God* (7), "From the sixth to the tenth centuries, illiteracy among clerics was between fifty and ninety percent; it was ninety-nine percent and over for the laity." In addition, through the crusades, the Church gained access to the Muslim libraries that held the Ancient Greek writings. However, it is worthy of noting that it was the Muslim people who had originally translated Aristotle and had used his insights to develop their societies, including their educational system. Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars all worked together to translate the ancient Greek, which offered new philosophical and dialectics material that led to the twelfth century renaissance.

¹¹¹ Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 161.

Aristotelian logic, he brought reason and faith into dialogue. His “style of disputation was the aggressive, competitive mode of debate developed in the schools, [unlike] the contemplative...style of the monastery.”¹¹² Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas each wrote significant theological treatises. Abelard wrote *Sic et Non*, Lombard wrote *Sentences* and Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, in which each systematically lays out the scholastic method as they move to reason out a specific topic of faith.¹¹³

Scholasticism developed set courses based on the Ancient Greeks as well as a rational method of inquiry to gain knowledge.¹¹⁴ The scholastic method of *lectio, quaestio and disputatio* became the main pedagogical method of inquiry in the cathedral schools and later medieval universities.

The Scholastic method, taught in the cathedral schools and later medieval universities, began with reading (*lectio*).¹¹⁵ The schoolmaster began lessons by reading a particular text to his students, followed by his commentary. The Master (teacher) began

¹¹² Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 292.

¹¹³ Aquinas addresses the most abstract questions of being and the nature of God, yet it also extends to very practical discussions of the way everyday life should be viewed, and how we should live as a part of God’s purpose.” See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 413. According to Aristotle, everything has a cause and Aristotle systematically outlines existence linking everything back to the first cause, the cause of all things (God).

¹¹⁴ Logic came to dominate medieval curriculum known as the seven liberal arts. That curriculum consisted of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 114; also Elke Weik, “The Emergence of the university: A case study of the founding of the University of Paris from neo-institutionalist perspective,” *Management and Organizational History*, Vol 6(3):287-310.

¹¹⁵ Cathedral schools, which were part of the clerical institution of the church, financed by it and under its authority, developed in northern Europe, but another type of school developed in Italy. Italy, which had larger and more developed cities, financed their own schools. Aristotle’s influence spread from the East to the West and as it did, it excited the intellectuals. With the rise of cities, the influx of Aristotle’s writings and the development of the both cathedral schools and the lay, city schools found in Italy, the modern university began to take shape. The first universities arose in Paris and Bologna and followed by Oxford and Cambridge. Theology was the highest area of study and the best and brightest devoted themselves to its study.

by applying principles of *grammatica* such as pronunciation and proper punctuation to reading; however, with the addition of the ancient Greek texts came a new way of reading, one that required the development of reasoning. The Psalter, used to teach reading in the monastic schools, had a certain rhythm to it. Set up in verse style, a monk could learn verses by heart by listening and singing them, over and over again, the aim being inner reflection and embodiment. Conversely, Aristotle's writings required a different type of reading, analytical reasoning. Aristotle's writings provided another look at the relationship between human beings and God, as he saw God as dwelling within all of life. The medieval scholar read these texts in order to bring new insights to their present situation.

The important thing was not what he had said (meaning an author), nor what he meant, nor what he was saying in his own time and place, but what a Christian of the tenth or twelfth century could find in him. Wisdom was sought in the pages of pagan literature and the searcher discovered it because he already possessed it.¹¹⁶

Enhanced technology of word separation also changed the act of reading. No longer were texts "performance pieces; now they are intended for silent consumption and cognition; the concern was to grasp abstract meaning from the text rather than to incarnate it."¹¹⁷

The new technology of word separation allowed for silent reading.¹¹⁸ Silent reading provided an opportunity for students to study and dialogue with multiple texts as they

¹¹⁶ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 119.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ As more and more monks began scribing texts, more texts became available to read and reading changed as did the way a reader read and thought. One of the developments of the monks was the technology of word separation. Before word separation, a reader had to read slowly and aloud to untangle letters and words. As more texts are developed and read, the text itself gains a prominent place of power. In addition, the critical reasoning faculties needed to understand Aristotle's writings began to re-place monastic feeling and embodiment as emphasis shifts from the heart to the mind. For a brief history of reading, see Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor's "Didascalicon."* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 116-124.; Studzinski, *The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 5-19.

read, reflected and questioned them, comparing and contrasting the arguments in one from those in another. Furthermore, new ways of reading, along with new texts to read, brought about “new words and abstract terminology to probe the mystery of God and humanity.”¹¹⁹

The main change to the pedagogical method was the addition of *quaestio and disputation*, which followed the practices of critical reading. “Traditionally, *lectio*, the reading... of a text had been at the center of teaching. The practice was focused on the master who revealed his knowledge – or more precisely, the knowledge contained in the text – to his disciples.”¹²⁰ However, with the rise of the scholastic method, teaching changed as teachers and students worked together to provoke the text with questions of their own. No longer were texts taken at face value. Now students along with their instructors began questioning (*quaestio*) texts. *Quaestio* even allowed students to question authoritative texts, which seemed to, or perhaps did, contradict the other. The process was ordered and systematic.

A two-part either/or question (*utrum...an*) was drawn up in which the two parts were placed in opposition to each other as in the following: Either faith has nothing to do with understanding, or faith seeks understanding. Each of the two parts of such a question had to be approved with yes (*sic*) or with no (*non*).¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 144. For more on the changes in reading during the Middle Ages see Brian Stock, *Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor's "Didascalicon"*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹²⁰ Elke Weik, “The Emergence of the university: A case study of the founding of the University of Paris from neo-institutionalist perspective,” *Management and Organizational History*, Vol 6(3):298.

¹²¹ Pieter L. Rouwendal “The Method of the Schools: Medieval Scholasticism” in Willem J. van Asselt *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 61. Originally, this format came from the study of canon law.

Through scholastic query, students organized, not just one author's insights, but also multiple authors' insights. It is a "dialectical presenting of two opposing proposals in order to enter into a dispute about them."¹²² The practice of *quaestio* helped students to develop their critical reasoning skills by methodologically posing questions to a text as a way to determine an author's position on a subject, his supporting evidence for which he built his position, and a better understanding of the issue itself. Furthermore, students gained knowledge on the topic in question from a variety of perspectives and sources. Once questions arose, students had to engage in further research in order to answer them. Abelard laid out the dialectic of *quaestio* in his treatise *Sic et Non*, which evolved into the standard method of the scholastics:

1. Begin with a statement of the question (*status quaestionis*)
2. List the arguments from the tradition *against* one's own view (*objectiones*).
3. List the arguments from the tradition *in favor of* one's own view, in the process of which expounded his own view.
4. Refute the aforementioned objections (*fontes solutionum*).¹²³

The scholastic method taught students to consider multiple points of view and to question texts using a type of scientific scrutiny. The "emphasis [was] on intellectual clarity...and carefully constructed arguments about theological and philosophical matters..."¹²⁴ Scholastic thinkers worked to reason out their faith. No longer did Church authority and Patristic writers have the final say as the scholastic method tested long held truths. If what faith says is true, then they sought to explain it rationally, the goal

¹²² Elke Weik, "The Emergence of the university..." Vol 6(3):296.

¹²³ Pieter L. Rouwendal "The Method of the Schools: Medieval Scholasticism," 62.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 200.

being “to gain insight into the content of faith in order to bring supernatural truth closer to the rational mind.”¹²⁵ Worldly learning, that is learning through reason, offered a window into truth, and for those who sought wisdom, “worldly learning should be looked upon in such a way that, should any exhortation to ordinary virtue be found in it which could lead to higher wisdom, they should not be rejected; the mind should endeavor to find what it is seeking.”¹²⁶

Scholarly discussions (*disputatio*) followed questioning (*quaestio*). The quiet murmuring sounds of the monks in the monastic schools gave way to heated debates, as master and students worked meticulously to unpack philosophical concepts and ideas. “Scholasticism’s essential method...consisted in disputing; a dialogue took place between master and pupil.”¹²⁷ Teachers and students were assigned sides (*sic et non*) and took turns presenting and arguing their side in heated oral debates. The goal of such a practice was to use reason to explain the teachings of Christianity. By systematically working through disputations, unreasonable thoughts and/or teaching were exposed. No authority, including the Church and the Patristics, could escape the rational application of reason. All information succumbed to rational tests and was questioned, categorized, and submitted to dispassionate, analytical reason. Disputations challenged students as well as teachers to fine-tune their knowledge, but these disputations were not solely between masters and students; often disputations were held between two masters. It was a dual of the minds, in which the best and the brightest emerged triumphant.

¹²⁵ Willem Otten, “Medieval Scholasticism: Past, Present and Future” *Dutch Review of Church History*, Vol 81, Issue 3, Dec. 2001, 280.

¹²⁶ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 118.

¹²⁷ Leclercq, 203.

Disputations were noisy, intense and provocative. “To be ‘top man’ in one’s field, one had to prove that he was ‘unbeatable’ in that field, and the best way to prove it was to engage in public disputation.”¹²⁸ In addition to readings, the Scholastics also applied the scholastic method to their writing as they systematically worked through a thought, teaching, or question. The Scholastic Method, which incorporated the practices of *lectio*, *quaestio*, and *disputatio* flourished in the Cathedral Schools during the Medieval Period and became the predominant method of learning within the European universities.

The Cistercian School

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, tensions developed between two competing schools: the Cistercian Monastic School and the Scholastic School. The Cistercian monastic schools emphasized the method of *lectio* as a way to access wisdom, while the scholastic school emphasized the method of *quaestio* and *disputatio*. Concurrently, technological advances also altered reading, “ancient scrolls gave way to book-like codices, spaces also opened up between words, words separated into categories of sacred and profane, reading turned inwards and fell silent.”¹²⁹ A new way of reading began, silent reading. The Cistercians, known for their literate and scribal abilities, incorporated these technological advances and further developed the method of *lectio* taught by the Benedictine School. In addition, the Cistercian Monastic School, wary of the rising scholastic method in the Cathedral Schools, criticized scholasticism as giving

¹²⁸ George Makdisi, “The Scholastic Method in Medieval Education: An Inquiry into its Origins in Law and Theology,” *Speculum*, Vol. 49, Oct 1974, 650. Makdisi goes into detail showing the roots of the scholastic method in Muslim societies, especially in law.

¹²⁹ David B. Morris, “Reading Is Always Biocultural,” *New Literary History*, 2006, 37:539.

more weight to objective, rational arguments, while giving too little weight to subjective experience. Two Cistercian abbots, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)¹³⁰ and Hugh of St. Victor (1096 –1141)¹³¹ stressed the importance of *lectio* (reading) as way of learning. In his commentary on *The Song of Songs*, Bernard noted his disregard for the scholastics and their method and pointed to what he saw as the highest way of reading.

For there are some who desire to know only for the sake of knowing; and this is disgraceful curiosity. And then there are some who desire to know, that they may become known themselves; and this is disgraceful vanity... And there are also some who desire to know in order to sell their knowledge, as for money, or for degrees; and this is disgraceful commercialism. But there are also some who desire to know in order to edify; and this is love.¹³²

It is within this historical-cultural milieu that the Cistercian School developed its method of learning. Both Bernard and Hugh deepened the practice of *lectio* by emphasizing the personal, subjective experience. Where scholasticism approached Scripture and other texts from a rational standpoint, the Cistercian abbots taught their monks to place themselves within the text. Where the scholastic teachers focused on the development of rational critical thinking the Cistercians monks' focused on the development of the

¹³⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux was a French abbot, who had trained in literature and the scholastic method. There existed great tension between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux. Abelard favored the rational scholastic approach to faith and Bernard argued that the rational approach corrupted learning. For more information, see Alex J. Novikoff, "Peter Abelard and Disputation: A Reexamination," *Rhetorica*, Vol XXXII, Issue 4:323-347, 2014. Studzinski, Raymond, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009. However, it is important to note that the tension between Abelard's scholastic method of *lectio* and the monastic schools' method of *lectio divina* may in fact have been a creative tension to the overall development of *lectio* as Bernard himself was trained in the scholastic method.

¹³¹ Little is known of his early years; however, around 1120, he traveled to Paris with his uncle, Archdeacon Reinhard of Halberstadt and settled into the Abbey of Saint-Victor. There he deepened his own spiritual practices and became a respected teacher and writer. In 1133, Hugh headed the school of Saint-Victor and under his guidance, it continued to flourish. Although there are many other Cistercian monks who may have contributed to the practice of *lectio*, I am focusing on the contributions of Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugh of St. Victor.

¹³² From *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, quoted in Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, *The Steps to Humility*, Trans and with introduction by George Bosworth Burch (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 37.

imagination. Where the scholastics taught to argue a text, the Cistercians taught the monks to revel in a text allowing it to transform them. They understood and valued the importance of building intellectual abilities, but they also understood and valued the power of imagination to affect the monk's hearts. With the Cistercian School, monastic meditative reading evolved. For the Cistercians, reading was far more than an informative act; it was a transformational act. It was a way of learning, a way of inquiry and a way of formation. The whole process moved the monk deeper within a text, while simultaneously moving him deeper within himself; he did this by awakening and exercising his mental and emotional faculties. Both Bernard and Hugh adapted the method of *lectio* to the changing times in the twelfth century. The Cistercian method began with a slow, deliberate reading (*lectio*) of a text followed by a period of inquiry (*meditatio*) that challenged them simultaneously to grow intellectually and emotionally with the specific purpose of leading the monk towards new levels of self-knowledge and self-awareness.

Bernard of Clairvaux

When Bernard read, he strolled through the scriptures, the classics and even nature, resting at places that drew him into further inquiry. In his sermon, *On the Song of Songs* Bernard shared his own process saying, “no one should be surprised or annoyed if I spend time in minute scrutiny of these matters, for in them the Holy Spirit has stored his treasures.”¹³³ He favored a sense-oriented approach to reading, one that sought not just

¹³³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon On the Song of Songs* 16.1, CF 4:114; SBOp 1:89.

“to explain words but to touch hearts.”¹³⁴ *Lectio* was the method he used to help his monks form and transform themselves. His approach has been termed “‘monastic body-building,’ [as] this manner of reading impacted the monastic reader at the level of the body...”¹³⁵ *Lectio* began with a slow, deliberate reading of a text. He recommended his own practice to the monks and constantly taught them through his own writing and preaching, “Above all he wanted the monk not just to skim the surface of the text seeking knowledge but to search for the interior echo so that ‘what he hears outwardly he feels inwardly.’”¹³⁶ Staying present to the words, listening to them and allowing them to penetrate and affect the mind and heart was hard work. The monks had to draw upon “their understanding of *stabilitas* to stay with a text and plumb its depths in conjunction with their own lives for deeper meaning.”¹³⁷ The benefit, if one had developed the courage and fortitude to stay with a text, was a possibility of deepening a relationship with what one read and thereby becoming transformed in the process.

In the monastic tradition, reading was often related to eating. The word to eat (*ruminare*) referred to repeated stages of chewing that were necessary in order for food to be properly digested and assimilated. Bernard taught his monks to take in each word slowly and chew it thoroughly.

¹³⁴St. Bernard, *On the Song of Songs*. See Charles Dumont, *Praying the Word of God* (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG Press, 1999), 9.

¹³⁵ Mark. Burrows, “Hunters, Hounds, and Allegorical Readers: The Body of the text and the text of the Body in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs.” *Studies in Spirituality* 14, no. 1 (2004):113-37, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/SIS.14.0.505190i>.

¹³⁶ Michael Casey OCSO, “The Book of Experience: The Western Monastic Art of *Lectio Divina*,” *Eye of the Heart 2*, Bendigo: La Trobe University, 2008, 22. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/huss-documents/Eye-of-the-Heart-issue2-2008.pdf>

¹³⁷ Monks were bound to the walls of the monastery through their vow of *stabilitas loci*. Upon entering the Cistercian order, he commits to staying in one place. The monk was able to draw upon this practice when reading a text.

As food is sweet to the palate, so does a psalm delight a heart. But the soul that is sincere and wise will not fail to chew the psalm with the teeth as it were of the mind, because if he swallows it in a lump, without mastication, the palate will be cheated of the delicious flavor, sweeter than honey that drips from the comb.¹³⁸

Each word had its own a specific flavor and it was up to the monks to discern and experience it for themselves. Some tastes were bitter, pungent or spicy whereas others were sweet and succulent, but regardless, each one had the potential to heal and hallow.

In this slow process of reading, the monks were guided to rest in each word, paying close attention to its etymological meaning, but also charged to pay close attention to the space between words. According to Peter Norber, “when monastic readers tried to understand (*intelligere*) a scriptural text they were guided by the etymological links of *intelligere* with *inter-legere*, to read between the lines, as well as *intus-legere*, to penetrate to the depth.¹³⁹ As reading drew the monks deeper into the text, it also drew them deeper within themselves; “they read, [with] one eye on the scriptural text, the other eye focused on personal experience.”¹⁴⁰ Drawing upon the allegorical method, Bernard taught his monks to begin reading for the literal sense and then move towards the allegorical sense. Allegory was a deeper more interiorized form of reading. It “established a meaning-making process that located the primary function of interpretation not as the discovery of a truth external to the reader but as the construction of the ‘self.’”¹⁴¹ This construction of self or rather, re-construction of self was the goal of the monastic method of *lectio*. By reading leisurely and intentionally, the monks felt more space to feel and

¹³⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon On the Song of Songs* 7.3.5, CF 4:41-42; SBOp 1:34.

¹³⁹ Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 147.

¹⁴⁰ Mark Burrows, “Hunters, Hounds and Allegorical readers, *Studies in Spirituality* 14/1 (2004):

116.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

experience the text. The text offered counsel and instruction. It acted as a mirror in which the monks could see themselves more clearly. It had the ability to comfort the afflicted and afflict the complacent. Although laborious, Bernard also encouraged his monks to find enjoyment in their search and delight in the words of the texts, he even encouraged them “to get caught up and enjoy the hunt.”¹⁴²

The reading of the text led to meditation on the text. Through meditation, the monks were able to search for the deeper meaning and significance of the text.

The method urges the (monastic) reader to mine for a deeper meaning of the scriptural text as a springboard to discovering a deeper meaning to bodily experience. The movement in both cases was one of transcendence: just as the reader transcends the literal text of the Scriptures and moves to a deep spiritual meaning, so he or she transcends the bodily experience and moves to a deeper spiritual experience.¹⁴³

The exercise of *meditatio* required the engagement of the whole person: body, mind, heart, and spirit. This exercise allowed the monks to have various interpretations of the texts. Bernard recognized the value of multiple interpretations and encouraged his monks to plumb the depths of the text to discover new insights. Dumont adds, “Bernard often said to his monks, after giving them an allegorical or moral meaning: ‘If you find a better one, so much the better for you’, or ‘come and tell me about your find.’”¹⁴⁴ The practice continued to aid the monks in their formation, transforming their minds and hearts as they continuously searched a text for fresh meanings.

¹⁴² See Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 1.3.5, *On the Song of Songs* I, CF 4:3-4; SBOp 1:5. Bernard’s sermons engaged the listeners and taught them a sensual way of reading that captured their affections and imagination, while drawing them deeper into the reading experience. For example, when referring to the biblical verse “Let him kiss me with kisses of the mouth,” he wrote, “How delightful a ploy of speech this, prompted into life by the kiss, with Scripture’s own engaging countenance inspiring the reader and enticing him on, that he may find pleasure even in the laborious pursuit of what lies hidden, with a fascinating theme to sweeten the fatigue of research.” (154).

¹⁴³ Studzinski *Reading to Live*, 150.

¹⁴⁴ Charles Dumont, *Praying the Word of God* (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG Press, 1999), 9.

Meditatio touched upon the monks' personal experiences and Bernard encouraged this personal connection. He instructed them "to make a connection between the text and personal experience; in this way each monk would capture the text's meaning in terms of his or her own experience."¹⁴⁵ As they drew upon their own personal experiences, they were able to discover new insights. The words they read often triggered a memory or feeling, which offered a new insight, which brought understanding and comfort, or at other times confusion and discomfort. Bernard understood the "reciprocal relationship between one's personal experience and the experiences recorded within Scripture; personal experience helps the reader to understand Scripture and Scripture helps the reader to understand his own personal experiences."¹⁴⁶ Therefore, it was essential to stay steady with the process. Bernard continued to urge his monks to trust their inner wisdom. "Today the text we study is the book of our own experience. You must therefore turn your attention inwards, each one must take note of his own particular awareness of the things I am about to discuss."¹⁴⁷ It is through this relationship with the text that the monk began to reflect on his own thoughts, actions and experiences. "By turning inward a person can notice feelings and examine motivations and thus discover a deeper self, seen as the Image of God."¹⁴⁸

Along with personal experience, Bernard adapted the method of *lectio* to develop and integrate the monks' imagination. The monks "were encouraged to insert themselves

¹⁴⁵ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 150.

¹⁴⁶ H. Geybels, *COGNITIO DEI EXPERIMENTALIS: A Theological Genealogy of Christian Religious Experience* (Peeters Publishers, Belgium, 2007), 191.

¹⁴⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon On the Song of Songs* 3.1, CF 4:16; SBOp 1:14.

¹⁴⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 85-86.

into the scriptural event.”¹⁴⁹ By awakening and exercising their imagination, the practice of meditation depended on the subjective experience. The monks now had the freedom to cultivate their own sense of wonder and imagination by inserting themselves into the story. Aelred, a student of Bernard, wrote in *Life of a Recluse* about an emerging practice of *lectio* that he had learned from Bernard.

Nothing entirely comparable can be found either before him or among his contemporaries nor even in his own work. In this exercise of meditation, it is simply a matter of contemplating the gospel scene in and for itself, of picturing it, of being present at it and taking part in the action or, better, being caught up in the dialogue or the emotion of the moment.¹⁵⁰

The monks read as though they were “present at the Gospel scene, listening, watching, and participating in the Gospel mysteries with all the powers of imagination and feeling.”¹⁵¹ Drawing upon their experience and their imagination, the monks were able to move into the text and experience it deeper and more personally. They made it their own. The text was no longer strings of words pointing to images, people and dialogues; it came to life in the monks’ own life. Through this practice, the monks encountered and came to know people, visit places and enter into dialogues with the people they encountered. They felt the joys and struggles of their companions. Imagination “permitted them to picture, to ‘make present,’ to see beings with all the details provided by the texts: the colors and dimensions of things, the clothing, bearing and actions of the people, the complex

¹⁴⁹ Marie Anne Mayeski, “A Twelfth-Century View of Imagination: AElred of Rievaulx,” in *Noble Piety and Reformed Monasticism*, Studies in Medieval Cistercian History VII, E. Rozanne Elder, ed. CS 65 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 123-129.

¹⁵⁰ Mayeski, “A Twelfth-Century View of Imagination,” 12-13.

¹⁵¹ Dumont, “*Praying the Word*,” 11.

environment in which they move.”¹⁵² Imagination led them to deepen their inquiry, and deeper inquiry, led them to embody the texts.

As the monks worked through Bernard’s method of reading and meditating, the practice began to cleanse the mirror of their minds and hearts; it began to purify their memory and they began to see more clearly. “Thus being purged, memory is freed, so to speak, from believing in wrong myths, from having wrong expectations, from imposing dimensions of eternity on that which is supposed to be just time.”¹⁵³ The *lectio* method taught by Bernard of Clairvaux challenged the monks’ preconceived ways of thinking. The more the monks stayed with the text - reading, experiencing, imagining and praying- the greater the access the monks had to its deeper meaning. This slow, deliberative method of reading led to moments of transformation and ultimately to wisdom, the fruit of their learning.

Hugh of St. Victor

Hugh was an abbot at the Cistercian monastery of St. Victor during the twelfth century. Although St. Victor was a school of formation for monks, it was also open to external students, were who permitted to attend classes to study and learn. Hugh’s method drew upon the ancient Greeks, whose writings had become available and worked to reconcile the divide between monastic and scholastic theology (faith and reason). For Hugh, divine wisdom was inherent in all of creation. He believed that human beings could taste and experience wisdom with the proper course of study and a skilled and

¹⁵² Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 75.

¹⁵³ M.B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 131.

virtuous teacher as the guide. Hugh recognized the value of a good teacher. He explained the role of a pedagogue as “that of a guide who helps the student grasp the Good, *bonum*, which in turn, will bring the pupil to wisdom, *sapientia*.”¹⁵⁴ In one of his more prominent writings, *The Didascalicon de Studio Legendi* (On the Study of Reading),¹⁵⁵ Hugh exults wisdom and examines the art of learning beginning with the slow, meditative reading of sacred Scriptures. He begins *The Didascalicon* with “‘*omnium expetendorum prima est sapientia*,’ of all things to be sought. The first is wisdom.”¹⁵⁶ For Hugh, wisdom is the goal of learning and learning begins with reading.

Reading, therefore, was a primary practice in the monastery. Where and with whom one read mattered as did what and how one read. Reading was done within the community. Hugh cautioned against the dangers of silent reading warning, “Reading, as an isolated activity, can lead to error.”¹⁵⁷ What students read was an important part of their education in the Cistercian school at St. Victor. He incorporated both sacred and secular texts in various subject areas, including the *trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). The visible world offered a starting point for the student to enter into and experience the invisible reality; thus, he cautioned students to remain open-minded and unbiased in their reading. “

Even subjects dismissed by contemporaries as unworthy of scholarly attention, he embraced: fabric-making, hunting, and theater, among other arts received a place in his pedagogical program. These activities of daily life help clothe us, feed us,

¹⁵⁴ Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor's "Didascalicon."* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 9.

¹⁵⁵ See Illich, Ivan. *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 8. Illich notes, “*Didascalicon* is a Greek word (matters instructional). Originally it was used for the sessions of the Greek chorus training; however in Byzantine Greek the predominate meaning becomes ‘things scholastic.’”

¹⁵⁶ Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Michael A. Signer, “Rabbi and Magister: Overlapping intellectual models of the twelfth-century renaissance,” *Jewish History* 22: 125, 2008.

refresh us with entertainment, and so they are all indispensable elements in our pursuit of wisdom.¹⁵⁸

Hugh counseled his students saying, “Gladly learn from all what you do not know, for humility can make you a sharer in the special gift which natural endowment has given to every man. You will be wiser than all if you are willing to learn from all.”¹⁵⁹ Hugh also laid out some prerequisites for the students who came to St. Victor to study, both lay and monastics. To begin with, students must be willing to dedicate themselves to rigorous study, as the path to wisdom was hard work.

Hugh revived classical memory training from the Greeks and believed a well-developed memory was essential to student learning.¹⁶⁰ He encouraged training in mnemonics (memory training) as a pre-requisite to study; however, if they did not have the required training, he offered it as the first step in their learning. Hugh also, encouraged students to embrace and respect the value of a quiet life. “Quiet of life,” writes Hugh, “whether interior, so that the mind is not distracted with illicit desires, or exterior, so that leisure and opportunity are provided for creditable and useful studies – is

¹⁵⁸ Brian FitzGerald, “Divine Wisdom at the Root of Things: Hugh of St. Victor,” *Crisis Magazine*, February 11, 2013. <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2013/divine-wisdom-at-the-root-of-things-hugh-of-st-victor> (accessed March 20, 2016).

¹⁵⁹ *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 96.

¹⁶⁰ See Dan Terkla “Hugh of St Victor (1096–1141) and Anglo-French Cartography.” *Imago Mundi* 65, no. 2 (June 2013): 161-179, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03085694.2013.784091>. “Hugh was a visual thinker and understood the mnemonic and cognitive power of physical and mental images; for him images and words were of equal importance, with one complementing the other. His reliance on the hybrid art of cartography, which melds words and images, therefore makes perfect sense. Hugh knew that deftly conceived images would help his pupils and readers (whom we may see as students of a higher order) understand, remember and retrieve the knowledge (scientia) they acquired from lectures, sermons and thoughtful reading.”

in both senses important to discipline.”¹⁶¹ Hugh revived the ancient art of rhetoric, and taught it to the monastic and lay alike. Hugh describes his method as follows:

There are four things in which the life of just men is now practiced and raised, as it were by certain steps, to its future perfection – namely, study or instruction, meditation, prayer, and performance. Then follows a fifth, contemplation, in which, as by a sort of fruit of the preceding steps, one has a foretaste, even in this life, of what the future reward of good work is.¹⁶²

In the Cistercian School, *lectio* developed into a systematic method for spiritual and moral development; it included five steps: reading, meditation, prayer, performance and contemplation.

For the monastic, reading was a way of life; it had a distinct purpose, to guide the reader towards wisdom. There are two things, Hugh tells us in his preface, “by which a person advances in knowledge - reading and meditation.”¹⁶³ For Hugh, reading was a remedial technique,¹⁶⁴ the beginning of a journey that moved the student towards illumination, self-knowledge and wisdom.¹⁶⁵ Like Bernard, Hugh stressed slow deliberate

¹⁶¹ *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans, Jerome Taylor, 99. See also Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 35-45. Illich explains that memory palaces were created by the ancient Greeks to develop their learning. Hugh drew upon these techniques and adapted them to his students. He recognized various levels of abilities, which required an appropriate level of training ranging from the beginner to the advance. To his younger, beginner students, he stressed the ability to develop a two-dimensional framework. He related memory to a treasure chest saying, “Wisdom is a treasure and thy heart is a place to store it...the treasures of wisdom are manifold. And there are many hiding places in your heart...you must learn to distinguish these spots...to know which is where, in order to remember where you have placed this thing or that.” Yet, to the advanced student, he offered a three dimensional framework a “space-time matrix.” Illich explains why memory training was so important to Hugh’s method and notes, “By reviving ancient architectural memory training, Hugh hopes to prepare boys born around 1120 to read their way toward wisdom in an age in which the new collections could only too easily have scattered their brains and overwhelmed them.”

¹⁶² *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. Taylor, 132.

¹⁶³ *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. Taylor, 44.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 47. According to Hugh, “The highest curative in life; therefore, is the pursuit of Wisdom: he who finds it is happy and he who possesses it, blessed.”

¹⁶⁵ See Illich, Ivan. *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor’s “Didascalicon.”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 87. Here Hugh acknowledged three types of reading: the teacher who reads to his student, the student who reads to his teacher, and the independent reader who reads to himself. In addition, Illich noted that reading had begun to change, due to the development of three things, mainly training in the Latin alphabet, the technology of copying texts and

reading. Details mattered; each word had the potential to invite students on a quest to explore and investigate unknown territory. Reading was an adventure. Words veil wisdom and it was the students' task to work to unveil wisdom and allow it to illuminate their minds and heart. The student was encouraged to "expose himself to the light emanating from the page, *ut agnoscat seipsum*, so that he may recognize himself. In the light of wisdom that brings the page to glow, the self of the reader will catch fire, and in its light the reader will recognize himself."¹⁶⁶

To expose oneself was not a task for the feeble; rather, it required stamina, dedication and courage. Reading involved the full cooperative abilities of the body, mind and heart. Reading was strenuous; it was an intensive activity described as "striding from line to line, or flapping one's wings."¹⁶⁷ The students' lips moved along the lines as they mumbled the words, their bodies swayed in the rhythmic beat of the verses and their hands often waved about gesturing certain words. These reading techniques continued to enforce memory as students slowly embodied the words they read. Reading involved the mind as students searched the texts for words and worked to connect these with other words to elucidated further meaning.¹⁶⁸ The word to read, *legere*, is rooted in physical

separating words on the page, and the availability of texts to read. Brian Stock also addresses these issues in *The Implications of Literacy and The Meditative Reader and the Text*.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) Hugh encouraged education saying, "Learn everything," he said, "you will see afterwards that nothing is superfluous. A skimpy knowledge is not a pleasing thing" and "thus he taught not only all of theology in its broad sense (biblical, doctrinal, practical, philosophical) but also history and grammar, geometry and geography. The organization of such learning and teaching was his distinctive contribution to the development of medieval thought. How to hold so much together in one unified and holistic package of learning and life could also be his contribution to our own age of specializations to the point of fragmentation."

activity, connoting “‘picking,’ ‘bundling,’ ‘harvesting’ or ‘collecting.’”¹⁶⁹ The mind had to search out and select words. Once, “‘picked, bundled, harvested and collected,” words continued to enlighten their minds and inform their reading. Reading was also a heart practice, as students opened their hearts to feel the words on the page, allowing them to touch, purify and affect their hearts.

Reading was also a moral act that moved through three steps: literal, allegorical and tropological. Readers began identifying and categorizing the historical-literal level, which included the literary devices of grammar, syntax and order. Slow and thoughtful consideration was the way in which the students discovered the appropriate meaning of words. Hugh cautioned students not to “twist [words] into something they were not written to say.”¹⁷⁰ Next, students used their felt sense as they journeyed through the allegorical level; finally, they were charged with a new way of living as they came to understand the tropological level. Hugh drew upon the work of Origen. He started his students’ at the most basic level and then built upon their foundation.

Hugh’s discussion of textual analysis seems rather straightforward -begin with the basic sense of the words and then look for the deeper meaning. But, unusually for the 12th century, he uses this method for both sacred *and* secular texts: first the letter (the literal meaning), then the sense (*sensus*) or particular figures of speech, and finally the deeper meaning (*sententia*)¹⁷¹

The foundational level began with the historical books as history grounded students in the literal-historical facts.

¹⁶⁹ Cicero and Virgil note this connection. *Dictionnaire étymologique*. See also Illich, Ivan. *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor’s “Didascalicon.”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 58.

¹⁷⁰ *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. Taylor, 138.

¹⁷¹ Brian D. FitzGerald, “Medieval Theories of Education,” *Oxford Review of Education* Vol. 36, No. 5, October 2010, 579.

History is the story of things done, which we find in the literal sense; allegory is when through what is done, something else in the past, present or future is signified; tropology is when through what is done, something which should be done is signified.¹⁷²

The allegorical level built upon the historical-literal as students worked to make a personal connection with what they were reading. It was a meaning-making exercise as students were encouraged to use their imagination to experience the texts more fully. As the students began to experience the text, they became responsible to apply its teaching to their lives. The tropological level moved the students towards this deeper ethical stance and held them accountable for bringing the teaching to fruition in their lives.

Hugh is clear that meditation is a spiritual discipline that follows reading. “The start of learning, thus, lies in reading, but its consummation lies in meditation.”¹⁷³ Yet, where reading was methodical and ordered, meditation was less rigid. It did not have to following a strict protocol. It was more of an open and fluid process of investigation and inquiry into both the text and oneself. According to Hugh, “Meditation takes its start from reading but is bound by none of reading’s rules or precepts...it is a ‘free gaze’ that moves ‘along open ground’ toward contemplation.”¹⁷⁴ However, free gaze did carry some restraint, “we should for the time being at least recollect our hearts from their restrained distractions’ and only allow our thinking to ‘change within limits,’ not permitting thoughts to wander unbridled.”¹⁷⁵ It was during meditation that the students began to make personal connections as they activated their imagination and explored

¹⁷² Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 50; *De Sacramentis*, I, prol., cap 4; *PL* 176, 185.

¹⁷³ *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. Taylor, 93.

¹⁷⁴ *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. Taylor, 92.

¹⁷⁵ Hugh of St. Victor, ‘The Soul’s Three Ways of Seeing’ in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 126.
http://www.archive.org/stream/hughofsaintvicto012978mbp/hughofsaintvicto012978mbp_djvu.txt

more deeply, what they read. For Hugh, meditation was sustained thought. Students worked to stay present to a word, thought, feeling or concept with a higher purpose in mind, to move towards contemplation and rest in wisdom. “In contemplative meditation, one’s thinking is brought within boundaries and oriented toward the goal of a ‘tranquility of rest.’”¹⁷⁶ However, like reading, meditation in the monastic tradition was often vocal and active. It was not a practice isolated to the mind, but engaged the body and called upon well-trained muscle memories.

Given “Meditation’s focus upon obscurity and its attempt ‘to unravel something complicated...,”¹⁷⁷ Students called upon their own experiences, memories, and imagination to enter more fully into the text. As they journeyed through the text, they began noticing words and wondering about their meaning both in relation to the text and in relation to themselves. Their wonder led to questions, which they asked themselves and the texts. Their questions led to an even deeper investigation as they explored further, seeking answers. Investigation led to unveiling what had remained hidden. The point of meditation was to spend time with something unclear and bring it to clarity. The practice of meditation purified the student’s mind and heart. It was unifying practice; it was an active journey towards wisdom, using all the mental and emotional faculties available.

The last three steps in Hugh’s method of *lectio* included prayer, performance and contemplation. Prayer followed meditation and was a staple of the monastic practice set down by Benedict in the sixth century. Each day was separated into specific times for prayer, study and work. The monks engaged in both quiet and vocal prayer. Quiet prayer

¹⁷⁶ Matthew R. Mc Whorter, “Hugh of St. Victor on Contemplative Meditation,” *The Heythrop Journal*, HeyJ LV (2014), 114.

¹⁷⁷ Mc Whorter, “Hugh of St. Victor...”116.

included the slow recitation of the Psalms, or even the emptying of oneself in the presence of God found in Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” However, prayers were also vocal and active, as one can still witness in a twenty-first century monastery where the monks can be seen facing each other singing and swaying to the prayers of the day. Monastics chanted together in rhythmic measure the verse of Psalms, the divine office or other prayers. Prayer was a time to allow the nectar of one’s reading and meditation to sink deeper within the monk and infuse him with sweetness and illumination; it was affective, meaning it drew the monk into a deeper relation with God, perfected Wisdom.

As the monk continued to steep himself in reading, meditation and prayer, he began to change; he grew in consciousness. Time in *lectio* had enlightened him with new levels of awareness, new levels of understanding, which he was responsible to enact in his daily life. *Lectio* was far from just a method of reading, it was a systematic method of growth, maturation and transformation. It was a remedy for uniting the self. The life of the student was performative. Beginning with reading and moving through meditation and prayer, the ultimate goal was contemplation, living each moment of the day in the presence of wisdom and sharing this presence with others. Contemplation was the sweetness and radiance of wisdom. Hugh shares in the following excerpt a vision of contemplation:

Suddenly I am renewed and completely changed, and it begins to be well with me, far better than I can say my conscience rejoices, all the suffering of my past trials is forgotten; my mind exults, my understanding becomes clear, my heart radiant, my desires glad, and at once I seem to be somewhere else, I know not where. I hold something in an inner embrace of love, and know not what it be, save that I would keep it always, and strive with all my might never to lose it. My mind is somehow involved in a delightful struggle not to depart from what it longs to

embrace forever and is supremely, unspeakably exultant, as though it had found in this the end of all its desires, asking nothing more, desiring nothing further, wishing ever to be thus. Can this be my beloved?¹⁷⁸

Two Cistercian Schools, Bernard of Clairvaux's and Hugh of St. Victor's, adapted the practice of *lectio* to the changing times of the twelfth century. Both were troubled by the purely cerebral approach to reading taught by the scholastics, as they felt it built up the student's ego and distanced him from his heart, leaving him dry and empty. They favored a more sense-oriented approach to reading, which challenged the student to immerse himself - body, mind, heart - into what he was reading. The teachers in the Cistercian schools sought transformation. They wanted their students to learn, but also more importantly become transformed in the process. Using both sacred and secular texts, they worked to develop a method of *lectio* that guided their students to restoration and the fullness of life.

Guigo II and The Carthusian School

During the twelfth century, Guigo II (1174-1188 C.E.), the ninth Prior of the Carthusian order,¹⁷⁹ also modified the method of *lectio*. The Carthusians, known for their strict adherence to silence as well as their literate abilities, spent their days in their cells reading, writing and interpreting texts. Books became more prevalent as monastics continued to transcribe. Their transcriptions, works of art themselves, were depicted with

¹⁷⁸ Hugh of St. Victor, *Selected Spiritual Writings*,

http://www.archive.org/stream/hughofsaintvicto012978mbp/hughofsaintvicto012978mbp_djvu.txt

¹⁷⁹ Bruno of Cologne (c. 1030 – 6 October 1101) was educated at the Cathedral School in Reims, France and founded the Carthusian Order where he settled with his monks in the mountains of Chartreuse France. The Carthusian monks lived an austere life. Most of their day was spent in silence. Like the Cistercians, they were a textual community spending much of their day in their cell reading, scribing texts and depicting them. Instead of using words, they preached through their books. For the Carthusians quality texts, such as scripture, the Patristic writings and other classics acted as a mirror in which one could examine the self and grow in self-knowledge.

beautiful script and illustrations. Time spent reading, writing and illustrating led them to memorization and further reflection. By memorizing texts, the monks came to know them. They could recall the words and reflect on their meaning in the midst of their own life circumstances. Reading became a transformative practice. It “supported a relationship between reading and spirituality, between textuality and interiority.”¹⁸⁰ Reading became a “technology for uncovering and reforming the self, made in the image of God.”¹⁸¹

These developments in reading were significant in a time when scholasticism was gaining momentum as the preferred method in the medieval universities. Guigo, aware of this movement, worked to root the practice of *lectio* in the monastic tradition. He understood the value of critical thinking and reasoning, but so too, the value of silence and personal reflection. He modified the practice of *lectio divina*, calling it the “ladder of the monks” (*Scala Claustralium*). Green notes, “The title of Guigo’s work draws attention to the biblical origins of the metaphor in Jacob’s dream about a ladder reaching up to heaven.”¹⁸²

A ladder was there, standing on the ground with its top reaching to heaven;
and there were angels of God going up it and coming down:
And Yahweh was there, standing over him saying,
‘I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac...’¹⁸³

Working to climb the ladder became the method used by the monks to reach a vision of self, made in the image and likeness of God. In keeping with the monastic tradition, reading was the primary practice. Through reading, the monk moved deeper within the

¹⁸⁰ Studzinski, *Reading to Live.*, 172.

¹⁸¹ Studzinski, 141.

¹⁸² John Green, “The Golden Epistle and the Ladder of Monks: Lectio Divina in the Context of Twelfth Century Carthusian Spirituality.” *Australasian Catholic Record* 87, no. 2 (April 2010): 220. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 21, 2015).

¹⁸³ See Genesis 28: 12-13.

texts to seek the truth, written within his own heart. Climbing the ladder, rung by rung, raised the monk from the limited confines of the ego and brought him closer to truth.

In a letter to his friend, Gervase, Guigo described his vision:

One day when I was busy working with my hands I began to think about our spiritual work, and all at once four stages in spiritual exercises came to mind: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. These make a ladder for the monks by which they are lifted up from earth to heaven.¹⁸⁴

Although each step had its own unique quality, all worked together; they flowed in and out of one another seamlessly. Each stage drew the monk deeper into the text and yet, at the same time, deeper into himself. Reading was a spiraling activity, which developed the monk's awareness, raising it to greater and more profound insights. They moved from speaking the words on their lips to reflecting on them in their minds, to feeling them in their hearts and then perhaps back to reading and further reflection. Each movement enlightened the minds and hearts of the monks. Sacred reading naturally moved the monks into meditation and reflection, reflection drew the monks more deeply into the heart of prayer, and prayer illuminated the way to God. What resulted in this inspired arrangement was an ordered ritual of *lectio divina* that could be followed individually as well as communally. In light of his vision, Guigo framed and arranged the monastic practice of *lectio divina* in a new way. *Lectio Divina* became a unique method of biblical interpretation that flowed through four stages: *lectio* (sacred reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer) and *contemplatio* (contemplation).

¹⁸⁴ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 100-101.

For Guigo, reading continued to be a practice of lingering with the text, noting words and images. It was the first taste that would later move through a process of digestion before being assimilated into oneself. Guigo describes it as follows:

Reading, as it were, puts food into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself, which gladdens and refreshes. Reading works on the outside, meditation on the pith: prayer asks for what we long for, contemplation gives us delight in the sweetness, which we have found.¹⁸⁵

Although *lectio divina* focused on “the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all ones powers on it,”¹⁸⁶ Guigo recognized the value of other texts. He did not “believe that monastic or Christian reading and thinking have any special quality which distinguishes them intrinsically from anybody else’s reading and thinking.”¹⁸⁷ In addition, “Reading is decidedly less performance as envisioned by the ancients; it is edging clearly towards the more rationalized process found in the university, though the ancient concerns are still there as well.”¹⁸⁸ Each monk was entrusted with two books from the library.¹⁸⁹ Limited texts meant limited distraction. As the monk read, he did so slowly, attentively and reverently until he memorized the verse or passage. As he read and re-read, he came to know the words.

Reading was not just a practice; it was an encounter. There was always a presence behind the words, someone speaking to them. “Reading is a linear act, but spiritual

¹⁸⁵ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks and Twelve Meditations*, Trans with Intro by Edmund Colledge, OSA, and James Walsh SJ (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 69.

¹⁸⁶ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks*, 2, 82.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4, 83. See also Raymond, Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 168. Studzinski shares that Guigo encouraged his monks to read all types of texts as a way to further their education, growth and development.

¹⁸⁸ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks*, 5, 84-85.

¹⁸⁹ See Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 27-77. Brantley offers insights into the Carthusian textual community, especially their scribal responsibilities.

reading is not-any of the elements may be at the fore at any one time...the process is more like a looping spiral in which all four elements are repeated, but in various sequences and configurations.”¹⁹⁰ Reading had a rhythmic flow as the monk’s eyes slowly danced across the pages of a text seeking truth. Guigo’s ladder provided a visual for the monk to work through a text, touching upon various levels of meaning. Once tasted, the text was chewed to discover insights beyond the literal level.

Meditation followed reading. It was the slow chewing, tasting and savoring of the words. In the past, meditation, which was “always dependent on and subordinate to reading, begins to assume a prominence over reading.”¹⁹¹ According to Casey,

In the Middle Ages, the *meditation* was not restricted to mental activity...More like a friendship, a cherishing, whereby one lived with a text that had become particularly dear, exploring it from different vantage points, saying it to oneself in a quiet, non-analytical way and letting it act on the heart.¹⁹²

Although texts were limited, time meditating on the texts was not. The monk took his time and searched the text thoroughly. Reading became a process of uncovering wisdom leading to self-discovery. Meditation was time set aside to seek the hidden truth as the monk continued to move from a place of inquiry to a practice of self-formation. In keeping with the monastic tradition, exegetical techniques were applied to discern various meanings, beginning with the literal level, moving through the tropological (moral) and allegorical (symbolic) levels respectively, and ending with the anagogical (spiritual) level.

¹⁹⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 91.

¹⁹¹ Simon Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1985), 106.

¹⁹² Michael Casey, OCSO, *Towards God: The Western tradition of Contemplation* (Melbourn, Australia: Collins Dove, 1991), 74.

Guigo's ladder may correlate with the four senses of scripture according to the ancients. In this case, reading would be linked to the literal sense, meditation to the tropological sense, prayer with the allegorical sense and contemplation with the anagogical sense.¹⁹³

The monk worked through each level, squeezing out as much beneficial juice as possible to further nourish himself and aid his growth and development. Each level deepened the monk's understanding and moved him closer to the truth found within himself. As the monk read, he grew in relationship with the voice behind the text. What he read, he reflected on within his mind and heart. The text was a mirror in which he searched for the pure face of Truth. As he searched within the text, he also searched within himself.

Meditation led to self-scrutiny. It was a humbling process, which drew him deeper into prayer. Prayer became more devotional and less petitional. "Traditionally prayer was conceived as the heartfelt response to the inspiration received in *lectio*. Having heard the divine voice, the reader would respond freely, spontaneously; however, Guigo sees the function of prayer as geared to obtaining the grace of contemplation."¹⁹⁴ The monk yearned to be in relationship with the voice within the text.

Lord, you speak in my heart and say, 'Seek my face.'
Your face, Lord, will I seek; hide not your face from me.
Raise me up from myself and draw me near to you.¹⁹⁵

Prayer was relational and communal. He sought to get beyond the rind of the letter into the letter's hidden meaning."¹⁹⁶ Through the practice of *lectio* the monk began to

¹⁹³Charles Cummings, *Monastic Practices*, CS 75 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 14-15. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (118) uses a medieval couplet to describe these four senses "The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith; The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny."

¹⁹⁴ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 169.

¹⁹⁵ Taize Prayer

¹⁹⁶ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks*, 6.

experience the ‘grandeur of God,’ aflame in all of life. These moments of inspiration helped him to perdure in his practice.

Prayer lead to contemplation, but unlike *lectio, meditatio and oratio, contemplatio* was not a practice of doing; rather, it was a moment of no-thing-ness, of pure openness, of communion. It was moment of ego-less-ness and of at-one-ment. It was a resting in the divine embrace as the monk felt suspended in time, basking in the light of truth. Words fail to convey the deep intimacy felt by the monk in the state of *contemplatio*. In *contemplatio*, the monk reached the divine source. As Lichtmann notes,

The generativity or creativity of contemplation is one of the best kept secrets. Contemplation shows us how to create from the most vital source of the universe, the Creative Spirit. To tap into this creative source is to initiate transformation that is in effect a re-creation of ourselves and an emergence of our souls.¹⁹⁷

As the spiritual life develops, the monk continued to work to uncover wisdom, but in truth, wisdom as subject, comes to meet the monk and fills him with insight. This uncovering of wisdom happened through deep intention and ardent effort as he engaged all of his faculties, memory, reason and feeling.

Summary

Lectio Divina is an ancient monastic practice of being attentive and present to the voice behind the texts. “*Lectio* was from the outset a *studium*, a study of God’s word and immersion in that word would transform the reader. *Lectio* is a way of reading to uncover wisdom; it leads one on a path towards self-formation and transformation, the ultimate

¹⁹⁷ Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 114.

goal, being “an enhanced subjectivity.”¹⁹⁸ Guigo formalized the practice into four steps: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (study/reflection/meditation), *oratio* (prayer/performance) and *contemplatio* (contemplation/awareness/wisdom). For the monks, the call was to hear the Word of God and obey it, meaning to be faithful to it by learning from it, embodying it and living its message out in their lives. The monks spent hours each day listening to voice behind the texts; they welcomed and received it in the midst of the struggle of their own human condition. They practiced with reverence in awe; with the understanding that they were entering into and committing to a relationship that would draw them deeper into truth and enlighten their minds and hearts. The deeper the monks sipped and savored the texts, the more wisdom began to illuminate and nourish their minds and hearts, described by Bianchi as “a spiritual anointing with love.”¹⁹⁹

The uncovering of wisdom is never an easy process. It took time and patience. It was hard work, work that required courage, commitment, diligent study, and surrender. We know from our own lives how easy it is to get distracted, restless, frustrate and bored and this was true for the monks as well. This was the same for the monks; they too had to deal with distractions, frustrations, laziness and restlessness.²⁰⁰ They needed guidelines and the loving support of their abbot or abbess and fellowship of the community. They found that the more they practiced the more they grew in wisdom. The words in the texts journeyed with them daily and thus presented the monks with an opportunity to be transformed by it.

¹⁹⁸ Sandra Schneider, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 167-68.

¹⁹⁹ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 55.

²⁰⁰ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 393-395.

Lectio Divina was essential to the monastic way of life. It was and still is a contemplative method of reading and study that assisted the monks in their journey to uncover wisdom and come to know and experience wisdom within themselves. According to Schneider, “To really enter the world before the text...is to be changed, to ‘come back different,’ which is a way of saying that one does not come ‘back’ at all, but moves forward into a newness of being.”²⁰¹ Today, *lectio divina* continues to be practiced in monasteries throughout the world as monks and students continue to search the pages of texts to help them uncover wisdom and encounter the Truth within. What can be garnered from this historical overview is the following insight: *lectio* is a pedagogical method of uncovering wisdom embedded within a text. It is a method that can be re-appropriated for use within the walls of higher education. In the next four chapters, I will look more deeply into the method of *lectio divina* – *lectio, meditatio, oratio and contemplatio* respectively – and re-appropriate it as contemplative pedagogical tool to seek and uncover wisdom embedded in the Humanities.

²⁰¹ Sandra Schneider, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 167-68.

RE-APPROPRIATING THE MONASTIC PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

CHAPTER THREE

***LECTIO*: ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT**

I would not be surprised if that which lies ahead for classical modes of reading resembles the monasticism from which those modes sprung. I sometimes dream of houses of reading — a Hebrew phrase — in which those passionate to learn how to read well would find the necessary guidance, silence, and complicity of disciplined companionship.

"The end of bookishness?" George Steiner

In this chapter, my intention is to look at how the ancient practice of *lectio*, used in the monastic schools, can be re-appropriated for use in a 21st century Humanities classroom as a method to experience wisdom hidden within a text. I will begin with a brief review of the ancient monastic practice of *lectio* (reading) including its purpose, and propose its use as a way of reading literary works in 21st century Humanities classrooms. I will examine three elements of the ancient monastic method of *lectio* - listening, slow reading and performative reading, and offer some examples of the way in which I have adapted *lectio* into my pedagogy. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges for instructors in the Humanities interested in incorporating the contemplative practice of *lectio* into their teaching.

The purpose of the monastic schools was to train students to listen and to read so they could begin to seek and uncover wisdom hidden within the text. The monastic practice of *lectio divina* began with *lectio*, the slow deliberate reading of a text. Benedict begins his Rule with the word *Obsculta!* (Listen!). He instructs his monks “to listen

intently” and “to listen with the ear of the heart.”¹ *Lectio*, the slow deliberate reading of a text, was the method of reading taught in the monastic schools. *Lectio* trained monks to lean into a text and give their full attention to what the text was saying. At times, listening soothed the monks as the words they heard brought healing and comfort, but at other times, it challenged them to open their limited worldviews and experience something different, deeper, or new. As the monks listened to the words read, and re-read, they began to experience them. Reading led to conversion (Latin, *conversio*, meaning to turn with, to transform), to a change of mind and heart. Monastic listening was a spiritual pilgrimage that led the monks from the darkness of ignorance towards the light of wisdom, until the light of wisdom was so luminous and vibrant that it caused them to stop and contemplate what they had just heard.

He still walks through the pages and conceives of reading as a pilgrimage. Reading is not solely a visual activity for him, not an accumulation. Rather, reading is a pilgrimage towards regions ever lighter, towards the light, into the light, until the light becomes so strong that he does not go on reading but begins to contemplate.²

As the monks began listening to a text, they began their pilgrimage to uncover wisdom and truth hidden within it. Listening was the first step. It was not a practice of gathering facts; it was a journey to search for wisdom and a deeper truth, which led the monks to

¹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), RB Prologue 1, 48:4; 91. As mentioned in chapter one, since most monks were illiterate and few copies of manuscripts were available, they learned, first by listening to the text being read. For more on listening in the monastic traditions, see chapter one. Kardong mentions “the word *libenter* (intently) probably hints at the difficulty Mediterranean people have in refraining from comment and chatter during assemblies.”

² Ivan Illich. *Ivan Illich: In Conversation*, with David Cayley (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 232. See also, *In the Vineyard of the Text* where Illich remarks that the parchment of the twelfth-century books lit up the words and the figures contained in them.

encounter and contemplate this wisdom and deeper truth. The whole practice of reading was designed as a method to come to know *logos* (wisdom) hidden within the text.

Although many years separate the ancient monastic schools from today's institutions of higher education, the purpose of reading literary works remains much the same; it is still a search for wisdom and truth. However, many students today lack a disciplined method of reading that can assist them in this quest for wisdom and truth. *Lectio* is a viable method that can be re-appropriated into Humanities classrooms to teach students how to read a text for deeper meaning. Although utilized by the Christian monks to uncover wisdom and truth, the origin of the *lectio* method itself is not Christian; rather, it is a *techné* (a literary tool), whose roots extend back to ancient Greece.³ "For the early monks, reading became a technology of the spirit, part of a toolkit for contemplation."⁴ The Christian desert monks re-appropriated the practice of *lectio* to search for *logos*, whom they called Christ. Today, instructors can adapt and incorporate the ancient monastic elements of listening, reading and performance into their pedagogy to help students encounter a text and begin a journey to uncover wisdom and truth. Instructors within the Humanities can learn from the ancient monastic practitioners the value of the practice of *lectio*, as a technique to help students search texts for wisdom and truth and allow what they read to transform them. Bringing the method of *lectio* into a Humanities

³ See chapter one. In chapter one, I trace the roots of the *lectio* practice back to ancient Greece. For the Greeks, technology was *techné* (art, craft, and skill) and *épistème* (knowledge). For example, According to Mitcham, "Plato used "*techné and épistème*, (art and systematic knowledge) almost interchangeably." "Plato's idea of "*techné* comes to be conceived not only as an activity of some particular sort, but as a kind of knowledge." It is not until Bacon and the rise of the scientific method that a clear distinction arises between *techné and épistème*. See, Carl Mitcham, *Thinking through Technology: The Path between Engineering and Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1994), 118-119.

⁴ Maria Lichtman, *The Teacher's Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 22.

class in a 21st century secular institution of higher learning is not an attempt to proselytize students; it is the re-appropriation of a skill, drawn from over a thousand years of wisdom in the art and practice of reading.

Encountering the Text: Text Selection and Preparation

In the monastic schools, *lectio* began with a common text, selected by the abbot. The abbot was the head teacher and as such, was responsible for “solid biblical and monastic teaching.”⁵ Texts were carefully chosen, as the monks believed that reading good texts helped in the monks’ overall formation by providing essential nourishment for the monks’ growth and development. “When something is read for the whole community, the content does not fall in the sphere of the individual’s choice. The reading may concern a topic in which one has little interest, and so one is forced to broaden the scope of one’s mental outlook.”⁶ Text selections included passages from the Bible (both the Old and New Testaments), writings of the Church Fathers and Classical texts, including ancient Greek texts. In the monastic school, Benedict is mindful of the challenge of distractions and spoke of arranging things “a bit strictly,” including reading.⁷ Aware that the monks struggled to stay present and listen attentively, he reminded them that *lectio* was hard work; it demanded regular practice, focus and attention. Benedict notes,

the bored brother who gives himself over to frivolity or gossip and is not serious about *lectio*...[he] is useless to himself, [and] leads others astray as well...If someone is so negligent and slothful that he will not or cannot meditate or read, he should be assigned some work to keep him busy.⁸

⁵ Kardong, *RB*, 2.12, 53.

⁶ Michael Casey, *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living: Reflections on the Fourth Chapter of Benedict’s Rule* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 185.

⁷ Kardong, *RB*, 1.47, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.18, 383, 393. Benedict is aware of the monks’ struggle to stay present, focused and aware and names the monk’s distractions as boredom, frivolity, gossip, restlessness and sloth.

At set periods of the day, the monks gathered into an uncluttered space, took their assigned seats and cleared their minds and hearts of any distracting thoughts and feelings in preparation to listen to the text.⁹

Similar to the abbot, I spend a significant amount of time selecting texts for my students. When selecting texts, I take into consideration many factors such as the mission and values of the university, the levels and requirements of the course, the diversity of students I will be teaching, and the length and complexities of texts. I also consider texts that students will enjoy and find meaningful as well as texts that I enjoy and find meaningful. I search for texts that will speak to the students' struggles within their human condition and provoke critical thinking and deeper reflection. "What people read, they begin to live,"¹⁰ notes Studzinski. I take into consideration texts that explore the meaning of life, the nature of the human person and the human condition, as well as texts that question what it means to live a good life, to be a good citizen, and to live in healthy relationships with oneself and others.

I have noticed that good texts provoke critical thinking and reflection. They stimulate students' minds, stir their hearts and critique the status quo. They make students stop, think, and reflect on what the text is saying to them in light of their lived experience. In World Literature I course, I use texts that vary in length and complexity. Some are longer texts such as *Gilgamesh*, *Antigone*, *The Bhagavad Gita* and some are shorter such as *The Katha Upanishad*, *The Conference of the Birds*, *The King and the*

⁹ Kardong, *RB*, 43.4, 355. Each monk was an essential member of the community, who had a reserved space. Having a reserved space was in keeping with *stabilitas* (stability) and sent the message that you belonged and that you mattered. Whenever a monk was absent from *lectio*, it was apparent.

¹⁰ Raymond Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 222.

Handmaiden, biblical stories and excerpts from *The Dhammapada* and the *Tao Te Ching*.

I take into account that students need time and space to explore and encounter a text before they search within it for wisdom and truth; therefore, I have learned to set boundaries and limits around the assigned readings.

Similar to the monastic schools, I also order my classroom. In each class, I ask students to assist me in rearranging the desk chairs into a circle; however, within a couple weeks, students begin to take the initiative to order the classroom themselves.¹¹ Unlike the monastic schools, however, I do not assign a particular seat to the students, but I have noticed that they generally sit in the same place each time they come to class. Once the room is ordered, I prepare students for the practice of listening. I invite them to detach themselves from distractions and preoccupations.

Similar to the monks' struggles, students today also struggle with frivolity, boredom, and restlessness, which are symptomatic of the students' fixation with technology. The majority of my students enter class tethered to their smart phones, searching the web, texting friends, playing games or listening to music. Most are not inclined to engage with one another before class begins and are not comfortable having face-to-face conversations. This behavior can have a negative impact on their learning process.¹² The hyper-dependency on technology seems to be moving students away from

¹¹ Obviously, not all classrooms can be arranged in a circle as some seats are bolted to the floor. However, whenever possible, I arrange the seats so students can look at one another. If there are tables, I try to arrange them in a square or rectangle. In the monastic schools, it was a common practice for the monks to face one another. I have noticed that most students enjoy being able to see one another and speak to one another.

¹² Although seemingly benign, the fact that students are always in 'technology mode' impacts their ability to be connected to themselves and make meaningful connections with others. See Sherry Turkle, "The Flight from Conversation," *The New York Times* (New York: NY,) April 22, 2012, Sunday Edition. Turkle notes the importance of FACE-TO-FACE conversation, saying it unfolds slowly and teaches patience. "As we ramp up the volume and velocity of on-line connections, we start to expect faster answers.

self-reflection and disempowers them to be fully aware and present in the learning process.

In an age of science and technology, in which man finds himself bewildered and disoriented by the fabulous versatility of the machines he has created, we live precipitated outside ourselves at every movement, interiorly empty, spiritually lost. . . . At such a time as this, it seems absurd to talk of contemplation. The contemplative is not just a man who sits under a tree with his legs crossed, or one who edifies himself with the answer to ultimate and spiritual problems. He is one who seeks to know the meaning of life not only with his head but with his whole being...¹³

A contemplative approach to reading requires that students be self-possessed and self-empowered. They need to see themselves as the subject of their learning process. In order to read contemplatively and search for wisdom and truth, students must be fully engaged in the practice of *lectio* and make space within themselves to listen attentively. Merton advises, “The greatest need of our time is to clean out the enormous mass of mental and emotional rubbish that clutters our minds... Without this house cleaning we cannot begin to *see*. Unless we *see*, we cannot think.”¹⁴ Since the use of digital devices distract students’ physical, mental and emotional faculties, before class begins, I ask students to silence and put out of sight all digital services.¹⁵ In addition, I have a strict

To get these, we ask one another simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters... Connecting in sips doesn’t work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another. In conversation, we tend to one another. We can attend to tone and nuance... And we use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves. So our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection.”

¹³ Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart, OCSO (New York: New Directions, 1981) 339-40, 345.

¹⁴ Thomas Merton, *Seeds* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 41.

¹⁵ See Andrew Lepp, Jacob E. Barkley and Aryn C. Karpinski, “The Relationship between Cell Phone Used and Academic Performance in a Sample of U.S. College Students,” <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2158244015573169>. This study showed that increased cell phone used negatively affected student GPA. Also see Sherry Turkle. Turkle notes, Connecting in sips doesn’t work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another. In conversation, we tend to one another. We can attend to tone and nuance... And we use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves. So our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection.

“no cell phone” policy in my syllabus, making it clear that if I see a student using his/her cell phone, they will be marked absent.¹⁶

Once the room is ordered and all cell phones are silenced and stored away, I begin class with a moment of silence, inviting students to turn their attention inward. “For our life to be a life of listening, it is required that our ears be attuned, but also that noise, both interior and exterior, be silenced. Quieting the interior noises-those inner voices of preoccupation, desires, planning, and feelings-most find is the more challenging task.”¹⁷ I invite students to sit up straight in their chairs, close their eyes and focus on their breath as I guide them through a practice to center students a little deeper into themselves. “Allow yourself to settle into this space and be fully present, fully here in this moment. There is nothing else to do, but be here, now. Feel your feet firmly rooted on the floor. Exhale slowly and gently.” Pause. “Now, inhale, slowly and gently.” Finally, I ask students to rest their attention on their breath, watching it move in and out of the body, without changing it. We remain in silence for a few minutes allowing everyone to settle into the space together. Finally, I invite them to open their eyes and focus on the text at hand.

Quieting the interior and exterior noises opens up space for students to enter into the text and have an authentic encounter with the text. This contemplative approach to listening prepares students to meet the text on its own terms.

¹⁶ From spring 2015 course syllabus: Cell phones must be placed on silent mode, not vibrate, and kept in your bags or pockets during class! Please be considerate and respectful. If I see you, texting or speaking on the phone you will be marked as absent. However, should there be extenuating circumstance please let me know before class. I do spend quality time at the beginning of the semester to help students see just how disruptive electronic devices can be to their learning as well as the learning of everyone else in the class and when appropriate demonstrate the power of technology to pull attention away from self and the task at hand.

¹⁷ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 213.

Silence, can create hospitality, though it may bring awkwardness in the door with it. When we invite silence into the learning space, we send a signal that we want our students to reach for their authentic selves, not just to impress or please us.¹⁸

A hospitable space creates an environment in which students can relax, be themselves and begin to listen openly and intentionally to the text before them. Creating space within the students' minds and hearts, subsequently, affects the classroom environment as well. The silence created within extends out into the classroom space. Silence opens space within the students and within the classroom for an authentic encounter with the text. Students are now prepared to move into the practice of listening with "a contemplative mind: open, fresh, alert, calm and receptive."¹⁹

Encountering the Text: Listening

As previously stated, in the monastic schools the reading of a text began with listening (*Obsculta!*). Again, Benedict instructs his monks to "listen intently" and "with the ears of the heart." Even if students are attentive and reflective in their learning, "no deep learning-no wisdom- will occur unless [they] open their hearts."²⁰ The community listened together as a selection from a text was read aloud; "the written words were listened to... by the monks."²¹ In the ancient monastic schools, listening and reading were interchangeable terms. Listening was reading and reading was listening.

They read, not as today, principally with the eyes, but with the lips, pronouncing what they saw, and with the ears, listening to the words pronounced, hearing what

¹⁸ Maria Lichtman, *The Teacher's Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life*. (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 99.

¹⁹ *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies*, Editors. Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2011), 138.

²⁰ Lichtman, *The Teacher's Way*, 88.

²¹ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 141.

is called the ‘voices of the pages.’ It is a real acoustical reading; *legere* means the same as *audire*. One understands only what one hears...²²

Much of the time, only one monk had a copy of the text in front of him. He read the text aloud, while the other monks listened “gladly or willingly.”²³

The ancient monastic schools were considered schools of leisure; and the monks approached the practice of *lectio* leisurely, savoring biblical texts...²⁴

Leisure in Greek is *skole*, and in Latin, *scola*, the English word, ‘school.’ The word used to designate the place where we educate and teach is derived from a word that means, ‘leisure.’ ‘School’ does not, properly speaking, mean school, but leisure.²⁵

For the ancient Greeks, leisure was the ideal state of freedom as it freed the students to engage in the important and worthy issues of life, the intellectual, cultural and artistic activities. Leisure held the highest value in life, fitting only to those in search of wisdom and truth. The ancient monks drew upon the Greek’s understanding of leisure and adopted it to the way they listened to texts.²⁶ Leisure was essential to the practice of listening.

Leisure is a form of that stillness that is a necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear. Such stillness as this is not mere soundlessness or a dead muteness; it means, rather, that the soul’s power, as real, of responding to the real – a *co-* response, eternally established in nature – has not yet descended into words. Leisure is the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion – in the real...²⁷

²² Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 15.

²³ Michael Casey, *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living*, 184.

²⁴ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 400. Also, see Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 48:4, 386. Kardong recognized that *lectio* required effort and concentration, but is also recognized it a leisure, having stated “it is something akin to contemplation” and “is in the class of leisure.”

²⁵ Josef Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 19.

²⁶ See Illch, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 62. Augustine, who founded a small community in the town of Thagaste proposed that the groups common life be “defiled by leisure” and urged his monks to love leisure saying, ‘My leisure is not spent in nurturing idleness, but in exploring wisdom.’

²⁷ Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, 31.

Leisure was understood not as an activity of relaxation; rather, it was a stillness of intentional listening in order to hear deeply. Leisure provided the monks with time and space to encounter a text, remain with it, and search it for wisdom and truth. For Benedict, leisure was time away from labor; it was time designated to listen to the voice of *logos* hidden within a text.

As the monks listened “with astonished ears,”²⁸ they opened themselves to encounter truth and awaken to a new understanding. Listening for the monks meant listening with one’s full sensory attention, body, mind and heart. Casey notes, “In an oral/aural culture, the capacity to absorb a message from a text read aloud was greater...”²⁹ Since listening was embedded into their culture, it was a familiar practice for most monks.

Unlike the culture of the monastic schools, most students have not been trained in the art and practice of listening.

All colleges in the country aspire to cultivate in their students the fundamental liberal arts of reading, writing, and speaking. But very few address the reverse side of speaking, that is listening-listening to heart as well as head, and listening to the other individual or group, quietly, patiently, letting them have their voice uninterrupted, without trying to straighten them out.³⁰

Students also lack an understanding of the ancient view and purpose of leisure.

Moreover, they themselves have no space in their lives for leisure, so I spend some time explaining the practice of deep listening and the importance of approaching texts leisurely.

²⁸ Kardong, RB Prol 1:9, 5.

²⁹ Casey, *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living*, 184.

³⁰ *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies*, Editors. Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2011), 5.

I invite students to open up their books and listen attentively to what the text is saying and to lend their ears to listen closely for the voice speaking within the text. Then, I begin reading, slowly and carefully aloud, using various voices, tempos, and inflections to bring the story to life. Sometimes, I read just one word and stop, and then re-read it. Other times, depending on the story, I read part of line or a verse, stop and then re-read it. I may move on to complete the verse or short passage and then stop, re-read the same line a few more times and then invite students to share what they heard. Invariably, at the beginning of the semester, someone will ask, “Are we going to read this slowly the whole time”? At which point I once again, explain the practice of listening to them. “When I read slowly, it opens up space for you to listen to the words and hear what they are saying. However, in order to hear what the text is saying, you need to be actively listening.” After modeling the practice of listening attentively and patiently, I read the text quickly as a way of contrasting the two modes of listening. Usually, this quick demonstration gets the point across. Then we move back to the passage and I read it again, aloud and slowly as they continue to practice listening.

As we move through this exercise, students begin to recognize that listening requires focus, effort and patience.

Deep listening is a way of hearing in which we are fully present with what is happening in the moment without trying to control it or judge it. We let go of the inner clamoring and our usual assumptions and listen with respect for precisely what is being said.³¹

³¹The Contemplative Mind in Society <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/deep-listening> Listening is a challenging practice for students, mostly because they have not been trained to listen. According to the Listening Center, “We spend about 45 percent of our time listening, but we are distracted, preoccupied, or forgetful about 75 percent of that time. The average attention span for adults is about twenty two seconds. Immediately after listening to someone talk, we usually recall only about half of what we’ve heard and within a few hours, only about 20 percent.” Listening Center, *The Sacred Art of Listening*, 2009. http://www.sacredlistening.com/ylc_listening101.htm

Few students have developed this level of capacity for listening. Some students are able to relax and not feel intimidated by the exercise, but others begin to worry that they will not be able to listen without distractions and are left feeling inadequate. Yet, I explain to them that this takes time to learn. I spend quality time helping students develop their listening skills, drawing from the art of leisure practiced by ancient monks. I need to be patient with my students as this is a new practice for them. I also, need to be consistent so that they can begin to trust their abilities and settle into the practice of listening. I try to help them realize that listening is not just a class activity, but is also a way of life.

Lectio teaches students to listen attentively with their minds and hearts to their own voice, the voice within the text, the voice of the instructor, and the voices of their classmates. *Lectio* trains students to be patient and listen compassionately without judgment to each voice as it presents itself - a challenging task for most students. Yet, I have noticed that within a short amount of time, students do become more engaged in a text and find it easier to listen attentively for the deeper meaning yet to be discovered within the text.

Encountering the Text: Slow Deliberate Reading

“*Lectio* built on ancient pedagogy, where all reading was done slowly and aloud, and where students learned to read by focusing first on letters, then on words, and then on phrases.”³² Just as listening required leisure, so too, reading. Slow reading in the

³² K. Jo-Ann Badley and Ken Badley, “Slow Reading: Reading along *Lectio* Lines” *The Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 15:1 (2011), 34, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/205699711101500104>. In addition to the Scriptures, Benedict, like Origen and the Desert Fathers and Mothers utilized other spiritual texts for reading and commentary. See Kardong RB 1. 13, 313; 8.2, 171. Kardong explains that monks needed to practice reading because the ancient texts lacked punctuation and therefore, were not easy to decipher.

monastic schools was an “unpressured, an undistracted encounter with the word, savored, and slowly digested.”³³ As the monks worked through the text, they did so in leisure.

Illich offers an image of the monks strolling through a vineyard, picking and tasting each fruit carefully and thoughtfully.

The lines on the page are the thread of a trellis that supports the vines. The reader harvests these lines as one who picks berries, and like ripe fruit the *voces paginarum* drop from his mouth... The reader savors the text as one who savors the fruit of the vine... Along the trellis of the vineyard, each word catches hold of one or several other words that become linked together in rich associations...³⁴

As the monks read, they ate each word, ingesting and chewing on it slowly and thoughtfully, ruminating on each one (*ruminare*). Each word had its own unique flavor and it was up to the monks to discover it and experience it for themselves. Slow reading was hard work and required regular practice. As mentioned earlier, the master teacher selected a passage from a biblical text or classic work.

Reading was not a solitary activity as it often is today; rather, it was a disciplined practice done within a structured community. Reading and re-reading aloud with the community of monks provided an opportunity for the master teacher to model slow deliberate reading, giving the monks an opportunity to have an encounter and experience with the text.

Reading aloud transforms reading into prayer. Pronouncing the words under one’s breath, one quite literally ‘tastes’ them in the mouth. Sounding words ‘out loud’ engages the sense of hearing and opens the ethical implications of the listening attitude... the reader also discovers the emotional inflections contained in the meaning of the words and enacts the protagonist’s role.³⁵

³³ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 124.

³⁴ Terry A Veiling, “Listening to ‘The Voices of the Pages’ and ‘Combing the Letters;’ Spiritual Practices of reading and Writing.” *Religious Education*, Vol 12, No. 2, Winter 2007, 208. For more on Illich’s description see Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor’s “Didascalicon.”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

³⁵ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 102.

Slow reading required the monks to pay close attention to spelling, syntax and punctuation, all of which were essential to reading a text correctly. Attention to detail not only helped the monks read and re-read words correctly, but it also helped them to enter into the text and have an encounter with it. “The goal of reading,” according to Magrassi “is to enter into the marrow, to read deeply, to reach the underground veins of the Word.”³⁶ As they read slowly and aloud, the words in the text came to life.

In the reading process, slow deliberate reading opens up space for the students to feel and experience what is about to take place in the text. Barbezat and Bush notes, “Contemplative reading in a classroom is radically different. It slows down the reader and the reading, and that alone changes the student’s experience.”³⁷ When reading with students, I adapt the monastic practice of slow reading, which as Studzinski describes “is most like reading poetry, savoring words, reading them slowly (gargling on them as it were), making associations.”³⁸ I select a short passage from a literary work that we will read together. I begin by offering some historical background to contextualize the reading. Then, I read the passage slowly, deliberately, and aloud to the students. I pause to define any foreign words and explain concepts and images.

After modeling slow deliberate reading, I invite the students to participate reading aloud slowly and deliberately, reminding them to pay close attention to the words, syntax and punctuation so they can adjust their tone and voice. They come to realize that they

³⁶ Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 58.

³⁷ Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 113.

³⁸ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 214.

will have to adjust their inflection, rhythm, tone and voice as they read the text. At first, the students feel uncomfortable reading slowly, deliberately and aloud because they are unfamiliar with the text and not accustomed to reading slowly and leisurely. I explain to them, “Slow reading is not like riding in a motorboat speeding across the pages; rather, slow reading requires that you put on your scuba gear, enter the text, dive into it, and marvel at what is before you.”³⁹

To read in the ancient way is not only to decipher the meaning signified by the alphabetic characters but also to read the world pregnant with meaning. It is to read in such a way that one connects with a presence that is the ultimate source of meaning and an unspoken answer to human questions.⁴⁰

Reading literary works in the Humanities is not about skimming for information; it is essentially a quest for wisdom and truth. Students read to learn, to be inspired and challenged, to ask questions and see the world through new and different perspectives.

As I stated in the section on text selection and preparation, texts chosen for Humanities courses, need to mirror the human condition, challenging students to reflect on their own life experiences and the meaning and purpose of life. Slow deliberate reading needs to be approached with deep care and respect. “There is a voice speaking in the text,” I tell my students, “and it is up to you to hear it and listen to it as you read it slowly and deliberately.”

In deep reading we do not have a text ‘before’ us as much as a ‘presence’ of voices, of living words and symbols, around us...Reading of this kind is similar to

³⁹ I also incorporate the image used by David Haskell, associate professor of biology and environmental science at the University of the South. See Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 115.

⁴⁰ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 4.

living in a sprawling house, in which we climb up and down and explore adjoining rooms, halls and yard.⁴¹

Slow deliberate reading helps students to take in, little by little, not only the words of the text but also the voice behind the words in the text. Again, it is a leisurely process, which allows the text to slowly reveal itself to the reader.

Each book has its own way about it, and generally a careful reader begins to learn how to read a book by slowly and carefully poking around in it for a very long time until he finds his or her way. A careful reader will proceed with caution, allowing the book itself to teach us how to read it.⁴²

Students tend to understand the story better when the reading moves slowly and the reader, who is reading aloud, works to embody the voice and demeanor of the writer or characters portrayed in the text.

After we have sufficiently read the passage, I invite students to take turns reading the text aloud, explaining that we will move around the circle that we had created at the beginning of class. Students may read a paragraph; however, if a student chooses to opt out of reading, they may simply say, “pass” and the reading moves to the next student. As we move through this exercise of slow reading, we often stop and re-read a line or verse and try to listen, awaiting its meaning to be revealed. This is as true for me, as well as for my students. Each time I read and re-read a text with them, I discover the text is still speaking to me.

When reading slowly, students often want to stop and linger over a line or a word, wondering what it means. Recently, when reading *Antigone* one student wanted to stop

⁴¹ Richard Niebuhr, “The Strife of Interpreting: The Moral Burden of Imagination,” *Parabola* 10, no. 2 (May 1985): 40.

⁴² Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 52.

and reflect on Creon's statement, "for no institution has so harmed humanity as the creation of money."⁴³ Something about this statement made him stop and think. He wanted to explore the meaning of this statement with the class.⁴⁴ The slow reading of the text created enough space and time for this particular sentence to jump out at him and challenge him. The practice of slow, deliberate reading was working. The student was listening, he heard Creon's statement and wanted to stop and reflect on it. No longer were his eyes skimming over the words, he was beginning to encounter the words. He heard the words and wanted to chew them slowly and thoughtfully.

Soon students begin to notice that reading slowly aloud together allows time for the words to sink in a bit deeper than if they were reading silently or on their own. One student commented, "Reading *Antigone* for the first time made little sense, especially due to the unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions used...Until I read it about three times I really could not unlock the meaning and lesson of the tragedy."⁴⁵ Another commented, "By reading it that much slower the brain has more time to process and think about what is being read and come up with a better understanding of what the words say and how they can be construed."⁴⁶

For homework, I often assign a passage for them to read aloud at home in preparation for the next class. The next time we meet, I invite the students to stand in a circle. I hand one student a small soft ball (a beanbag would also work) and invite him/her to share aloud one word that they remember from the passage they had to read

⁴³ Sophocles, *Antigone* (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2005), line 303-305 p. 23.

⁴⁴ In fact, this particular student later went on to write a paper about this statement made by King Creon.

⁴⁵ Comment for a student in a World Literature I course. (Spring 2015)

⁴⁶ Comment for a student in a World Literature I course. (Spring 2015)

aloud on their own for homework. After offering a word, each student passes the ball to another student, who then shares his/her word from the passage read aloud for homework. Students may repeat a word spoken by another student. Allowing for repetition tends to relax students, relieve pressure to remember a word on the spot, and it helps students remain attentive to what their classmates are sharing. In addition, the repetition of words allows the words shared to be heard multiple times, thus re-enforcing the text. As the students recall words from the texts, they are deepening their encounter and experience with the text, and are becoming more familiar with it. As students become more familiar with the text, they begin to feel less intimidated by it. As students share words, while passing the ball around the room, they provoke each other memories allowing new words to flow. Students continue in this manner, passing the ball to whomever they wish for about 5-7 minutes. The students seem to have fun as they begin to engage deeper with the text and are often amazed at what they begin to remember in the process.⁴⁷

When reading a dialogue, I have found it helpful to invite students to select a character they wish to give voice to in their reading; however, no one is forced to read. Reading is optional. At times, I will choose a character to give voice to that no one else has chosen. Here, preparation for slow deliberate reading is important because students are in the habit of speedreading through a text, glossing over words, lines and phrases that are packed with meaning. “The modern day reader is more like a tourist or commuter

⁴⁷ A colleague, Patrizia Acerra from DePaul University, shared the original practice of saying a word and tossing a ball with me and I adapted this technique for use in my literature courses. As students remember words, they are helping each other prepare to enter into *meditatio*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

who wants to get to a destination as quickly as possible rather than a pedestrian or pilgrim who takes in everything along the way at a more leisurely pace.”⁴⁸

Students are in the practice of reading word after word without pause, and reflection. They generally do not stop to think about the character who is speaking to them in the text and how the words spoken are intended to convey meaning. However, when students do pause and reflect on the words and think about the character, they begin to encounter and see the character as a living person within the story, who has the potential to challenge their own thinking and feelings. Characters can sometimes comfort students, but at other times, they can disturb them, triggering old memories and unearthing feelings that they have buried. Characters often bring students to think and feel things that they have not thought or felt before.

In order to read a dialogue properly, students need to pay attention to not just the words and the characters, but also to punctuation because by not, it limits the students ability to understand and interpret the text. As the monks needed to learn how to read, and re-read texts slowly and deliberately, students also need guidance and practice on how to read slowly and deliberately. Slow deliberate reading conveys a different tone and message, but also different meanings and interpretations.

Because texts inevitably have gaps, they can never tell the whole story; they invite in each reading the reader’s unique creative efforts to fill in the blank spaces, to make connections. Each time a text is reread different efforts to fill in the gaps can be pursued.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 7. Studzinski is paraphrasing Illich. Ivan Illich *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 110.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

When students read slowly, deliberately and leisurely, like monks strolling through a vineyard, they can begin to notice that how words are read, affects how words are heard.

As students begin to recognize the connection between the way they read and meaning, they can begin to experiment with tone. For example in *Antigone*, Haemon confronts King Creon (his father) about his decision to bury Antigone alive.⁵⁰ If a student reads this passage as though Haemon is polite and solicitous, students will get one sense; however, if they read it as though Haemon is insolent and demanding, they will get a different sense of his character. In the story of *Jesus and the woman of Samaria*, we read that Jesus, tired from his journey, stops to rest by the well where he encounters and unnamed woman. He says to the woman of Samaria, “Give me a drink.”⁵¹ Does he command her, or ask her, or invite her? We try different ways of reading the line using tone and inflection and students notice that they begin to see Jesus and the woman in a different light depending on how they read the story. One student commented at the end of the semester,

While reading *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria* we discussed how the tone we read in affects the meaning of a text. We read and reread, “Give me a drink” (John 4:7) and found that Jesus could be using a demanding tone, could be saying it casually or he could be asking a question by emphasizing ‘drink.’ Depending on how we read it, the story can take on an entirely different meaning. It was important for us to use these tones because how the text is interpreted affects the entire story. It is essential to think about tone because it affects the meaning and determines the characters’ personality as well as setting the stage for the rest of the reading.⁵²

⁵⁰ Sophocles, *Antigone* (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2005), line 695-736 p. 38-39.

⁵¹ John 4: 1-42.

⁵² Comment from student in a World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

By drawing on the ancient monastic practice of slow deliberate reading and re-reading, focusing on words, tone and punctuations, students begin to encounter hear, feel and experience the story on a deeper level.

Encountering the Text: Performative Reading

In the monastic schools, reading was performative, vocally and bodily. The monks chanted and performed the texts they read and worked to embody. The “monks spent hours together each day chanting psalms and listening to biblical readings.”⁵³ Chanting was a daily practice and part of their slow deliberate reading.

Cassian consistently distinguishes “psalmody” (*psalmodia*) from the “prayer” (*oratio*) that followed it. This pattern is familiar from many Egyptian monastic sources, where it is clear that chanting a psalm was not itself understood to constitute “prayer,” but was preparation for a subsequent moment in which a sentiment expressed by the Psalmist (gratitude, praise, lament, etc.) would inspire personal prayer.⁵⁴

As Stewart notes, chanting was not necessarily a part of prayer; rather, it prepared the monks for prayer. Chanting was affective; it deepened the monks encounter with the text and moved them to respond in prayer. Chanting was also hard work, as it called upon the monks’ full sensory faculties. As Stewart notes “the use of eye, mouth, and ear to decipher and remember what was being read...”⁵⁵ They had to pay attention to the words,

⁵³ Columba Stewart OSB, “The Latin West III: Benedictine Monasticism and Mysticism,” in *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A.Lamm (2013), 217.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Columba Stewart OSB, 224-225. See also Donald R. Cox, “Music in the Time of Saint Anselm,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2.1 (Fall 2004) 92. Cox notes, “Two other styles of psalmody were far more inclusive of and depended more on the participation of the congregation. One style was unison psalmody in which congregation sang together the entire psalm in unison. The other style was “antiphonal psalmody where the congregation was divided into two choirs who alternated [singing psalm] verses with one another.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

rhythm and pace of the text so they could chant in accord with one another. As the monks chanted, they created and engaged in an “acoustical performance.”⁵⁶

The Psalter, used to teach reading in the monastic schools, had a certain rhythm to it. The monks recited the verses to a familiar tune, which helped them to learn the Psalms by heart. “The psalms were always sung in some fashion.”⁵⁷ As they chanted together in rhythmic measure, the verses of Psalms, the divine office or other prayers, the voice became the primary instrument, “let us stand and sing in such a way that our mind is in harmony with our voice.”⁵⁸ Chanting was purifying, rejuvenating and memorable. The repetition of the verses to a familiar tune subdued and quieted their minds. As the monks continued to chant the verses repeatedly, the words slowly seeped into their minds and hearts, gently clearing and quieting their interior. Chanting purified their minds and hearts, opening space for the *logos* within the monks to encounter the *logos* within the text. Chanting also helped the monks learn verses of Scripture by heart, “The reader understands the lines by moving to their beat, remembers them by recapturing their rhythm...”⁵⁹ so that they could recall verses while working or alone in their cells. “The ceremonial celebration of the book, Latin, chant and recitation thus form an acoustic phenomenon embedded in a complex architecture of rhythm, spaces and gesture.”⁶⁰

In addition to calling on their voices to chant the Scriptures, the monks called upon their bodies to perform Scripture using gestures and other bodily movements. As

⁵⁶ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 122. See also, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 141.

⁵⁷ Kardong, 18.12, 201. See also 9.5, 175. Kardong notes, “The psalms were sung standing up, the ideal posture for good vocal performance.”

⁵⁸ Kardong, 19.7, 203.

⁵⁹ Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 54.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

the monks listened, they moved their lips and swayed their bodies to the words they read. Reading was not a solitary practice; it was always communal. Even while alone in their cell, the monks read as though they were reading to someone and with someone.

Reading like acting, is a performance with a public and social dimension. Contrary to the predominate contemporary understanding of reading as a private, silent activity, the early monastics saw it as always being done before someone.⁶¹

As the monks engaged with the text, they began to imagine what they were reading.

Imagination...permitted [the monks] to picture, to 'make present,' to see beings with all the details provided by the texts: the colors and dimensions of things, the clothing, bearing, and actions of the people, the complex environment in which they move. They liked to describe them, so to speak and re-create them, giving very sharp relief to images and feelings.⁶²

Imagination led to embodiment and embodiment to performance. "Biblical texts were scripts to be performed, to be lived out in the concrete details of daily existence, to be "made their own," that is, appropriated"⁶³ and this was true for other texts as well. First, the monks had to image what they were reading. They had to see the text, hear it, feel it and come to know it. The deeper they imagined the passage, the more they could incarnate it.

The reader's ears pay attention, and strain to catch what the reader's mouth gives forth. In this manner the sequence of letters translates directly into body movements and patterns nerve impulses, The lines are a sound track picked up by the mouth and voiced by the reader for his own ear. By reading, the page is literally embodied, incorporated.⁶⁴

Engaging their bodies in the reading process helped the monks to be present and attentive to what they were reading. Real presence led to authentic performance. As they

⁶¹ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 128.

⁶² Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 79.

⁶³ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 100-101.

⁶⁴ Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 54.

performed the texts, they were drawn deeper within them and as a result began to feel and experience the words on the page.

Performing texts also helped the monks commit texts to memory and be able to recall a line, or a verse, or a passage, as they worked or when alone in their cells. “Memory... is not just a mental process affecting the mind only but an inscription in the body that mouths the words and acts in accord with them in daily life.”⁶⁵ Nothing about reading was passive. Performative reading required full sensory engagement with the text. The monks were trained to be fully present to the text, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically. Performative reading brought the text to life, made reading enjoyable and memorable, and progressed the monks along their journey to uncover wisdom and truth.

The monks were trained to chant; chanting was an aspect of reading. But students today are not trained to chant; it is not an aspect of their reading. Yet, not only is it easier to learn verses when put to chant or song, but it can deepen learning as it accesses the auditory and kinesthetic centers of the brain. Elena Manne has written on the amazing power of music to stimulate brain activity, including memory.⁶⁶ I invite students to sing along with me a childhood song such as, “The Wheels on the Bus” or “The Twelve Days of Christmas”⁶⁷ using the accompanying gestures. After I begin singing, within a less

⁶⁵ Nathan Mitchell, “Rituals as Reading,” *In Source and Summit: Commemorating Josef A. Jungmann*, S.J., ed. by Joanne M. Pierce and Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 171-181.

⁶⁶ See Elena Manne, *The Power of Music* (New York: Walker Publishing, Co, 2011).

⁶⁷ Somewhere between 1558 until 1829, when Roman Catholics in England were forbidden to practice their faith openly, someone wrote *The Twelve Days of Christmas* as a catechism for young children. The song has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of the faith. Each day of Christmas contained a number and symbol that corresponded to a teaching within the Church. Students are intrigued when I share with them the background of how the

than a minute a few students chime in, followed by a few more. Asked when they learned the song, students reply that they learned it when they were a child. “How come you can remember it,” I ask? To which they reply something along the lines that it is easier to remember a song. Once remembered they could call upon it.

Several ways I have incorporated song and chant into my classes include bringing to class a song written about the story *Gilgamesh*. I give students a copy of the song and they read along, while I play the song. Then, I invite students to sing it with me.

Long, long time ago, in a land between two streams
Lived a guy named Gilgamesh
In ancient Uruk he began
2/3 god and 1/3 man
Goddess mom and dad made of frail flesh
Was he fake or was he really born?
True, or just cuneiform?
His tale is rather gory
In mankind's oldest story.
So listen to the tale I tell
Of gods and monsters, death and hell
And how his friend, Enkidu, fell, Once upon a time⁶⁸

Another example, using chant, is from the invocation to *The Katha Upanishad*, called the *Shāntipātha*. The *Shāntipātha* was chanted by the teacher and the student before reading the text together. First, I go over the words with the students, saying them slowly aloud and then I carefully explain their meaning. Next, I chant it a couple of times, slowly and invite student to join me.

*Om Saha navavatu; Saha nau bhunaktu;
Saha viryam karavavahai;
Tejasvi navadhitamastu;*

Christians used this song to keep the teachings of their faith alive during persecution. It helps them to see the power of song in remembering a story.

⁶⁸ *The Gilgamesh Song by Herveus* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emHlrBIICuc>). I skip the commentary and just play the song for my students, which goes to the tune of American Pie by Don McClean.

*Ma vidvishavahai;
Om Santih; Santih; Santih*

Om! May we both be protected, (the teacher and the student).
May we both enjoy protection.
May we both exert ourselves to find out the true meaning of the scriptures.
May we never quarrel with one another.
Let there be threefold Peace. Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

At first, chanting can feel a bit awkward and uncomfortable to the students as it is foreign to them and appears complicated. I take it slow and begin by explaining the chant. Next, I have them listen to me chant it and then I invite them to chant with me. At first, students are a bit uncomfortable but in time, they start to follow along with the words and chant with me. At the end of the semester, not only do they learn it, but begin to like it and express confidence in themselves knowing that they can remember something that originally appeared so complex. Many students have shared with me that they feel as though chanting brings the class together and helps set the mood for the story. Students tell me that once they learn the chant, they find themselves chanting it when they are stressed. One student even told me that she would never admit this to anyone, but she chants it while driving because she finds it peaceful and relaxing. These are the ways I have incorporated chanting into my classes. I am still exploring additional ways to incorporate chant and am considering giving my students the task of coming up with their own chant to a verse or passage of a text.

In addition to chanting, I also introduce and incorporate performative reading into my classes. Since students are not skilled in performative reading, I often ask them to recall one of their favorite childhood stories. As Manguel states, “In childhood, reading

stories or hearing them read is formative in a lasting way.”⁶⁹ Sometimes I share a story about my daughter, Madeleine, to get them thinking. When my daughter Madeleine was around 4 or 5, she loved to listen to the story *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse*. At first, she would snuggle up next to me on the couch and listen to the story. Yet after a week or so of reading the story together, Madeleine does something different. This time before I began reading to her, she asked me to wait. Madeleine got off the couch and went into her room. A few minutes later, she resurfaced, now dressed as she imagined Lilly to be dressed. “Okay, Mama,” she said. “I’m ready.” After another week or so, Madeleine not only continued to dress the part, but instead of snuggling up next to me while I read, she got up off the couch and started to perform the story, using her voice to speak as she imagined Lilly to speak and moving her body as she imagined Lily to move her body. For Madeleine, there was no rush in reading. Time spent reading was a leisurely experience; it was playful, imaginative and re-creative. She found it more meaningful to insert herself into the story, relate to the characters and come to know them with full sensory engagement. Because she entered into the story and listened to the characters’ voices and their struggles, joys and sorrows, she came to know the story more intimately.

One approach I use to introduce students to performative reading and bring a text to life is through hand gestures. For example, when reading the Prologue to *Gilgamesh* listed below, I demonstrate to the students how to tell the story using hand gestures. I explain to them that reading a story with hand gestures will help them pay attention to, remember and experience what they are reading.

He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions,

⁶⁹ Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 39.

From exaltation to despair, had been granted a vision
into the great mystery, the secret places,
the primeval days before the Flood. He had journeyed
to the edge of the world and made his way back, exhausted
but whole. He had carved his trials on stone tablets,
had restored the holy Eanna Temple and the massive
wall of Uruk, which no city on earth can equal.⁷⁰

After I read and demonstrate the hand gestures to a passage from *Gilgamesh*, I invite students to stand up and as we move around the circle (created at the beginning of class), they mimic my gestures as each one leads the passage. At first, they have to look at the text, but by the time we get to about the seventh person; many of the students have already memorized the passage. Although at first this process is a bit odd to them, slowly they begin to enjoy the experience. At the end of the semester, a student offered the following comment on reading *Gilgamesh* with hand gestures.

Putting motions to words helps you remember what you are reading... The very first time we read, we read *Gilgamesh* and I remember feeling shy about putting motions to words. "He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions, from exaltation to despair," (*Gilgamesh* 69) and "He had journey to the edge of the world and made his way back, exhausted but whole" (*Gilgamesh* 69). We put motions to the words by moving our arms and hands like we were searching for something when *Gilgamesh* had seen everything. To show exaltation we threw our arms up in the air and then brought them back down and looked sulky for despair... I am surprised at myself for still remembering what we did because most of the time I would read something for a class and immediately forget it when I did not have to know it anymore... If we had not put the motion to the words I would not remember the beginning of the text. It helps me study because putting certain motions to things helps my memory.⁷¹

Students are surprised at how well they remember a text after going through this exercise. They feel a sense of pride for what they were able to accomplish in a short period of time. Reading a text accompanied by hand gestures helped to facilitate the reading process,

⁷⁰ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh* (New York, Free Press, 2004), 69.

⁷¹ Comment from a student in a World Literature I class (Spring 2015).

allowing the students to encounter and engage with the text at a deeper level. One student remarked on a final reflection,

I remember the very first day of classes; we learned our first helpful tip in order to understand the reading: hand motions. It is so simple, yet so unbelievable great. As we read, we were to talk aloud, all while using our hands and arms to depict the story. This creates a visual and physical way to remember the story, literally in the book, and as well in your head.⁷²

I also use this technique of hand gesture with *The Dhammapada*.

As irrigators lead water where they want, as
Archers make their arrows straight, as carpenters
Carve wood, the wise shape their minds.⁷³

Students were placed in groups and each group came up with their own hand gestures for the above passage and then later taught them to the class. Students enjoyed the activity and shared with me that it helped them to experience, understand and remember the verse. I have observed that when students are given an opportunity to experience and perform a text using hand gestures, they are apt to remember it more easily and reflect on the meaning of it for their own lives. I often give a homework assignment to the students. I ask them to select a passage and come up with hand gestures that they will then teach the class in our next meeting.

As the class progresses, I build on hand gestures and challenge my students to get more involved in the story by engaging more of their bodies. Sometimes, I get my students up to perform a passage from a story, which offers them an opportunity to experience the passage from a different perspective. One semester, while reading the *Tao*

⁷² Comment from a student in a World Literature I class (Spring 2015).

⁷³ Easwaran, Eknath. *The Dhammapada* (Berkeley, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 6:80, 126.

Te Ching, students were given an assignment to create their own way of performing a verse from the text. One group selected the following line.

Those who stand on tiptoes cannot stand⁷⁴

First they demonstrated to the class that it is difficult to balance when standing on tip toes and then they took it a bit deeper and demonstrated what happens when one of their group mates gently pushed them, which caused them lose their balance. Next, they invited their fellow classmates to stand up and go through the exercise with a partner. By performing this line from the text, the students came to understand its meaning on a much deeper level. After acting it out, the students leading the exercise began to discuss the instability of pride and the stability of humility.

Another example is when reading *The Katha Upanishad*, which is a dialogue between Yama (the god of death) and Nachiketa (a teenage boy). Yama instructs Nachiketa on self-realization.

Know the Self as lord of the chariot,
The body as the chariot itself,
The discriminating intellect as charioteer,
And the mind as reins.
The senses, say the wise, are the horses;
Selfish desires are the roads they travel.
When the Self is confused with the body,
Mind, and senses, they point out, he seems
To enjoy pleasure and suffer sorrow.

When one lacks discrimination
And his mind is undisciplined, the senses
Run hither and thither like wild horses.
But they obey the rein like trained horses
When one has discrimination and has made
The mind one-pointed.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Tao Te Ching*, Trans by Derek Lin (Woodstock VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2011), 49.

⁷⁵ Eknath Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 81.

I have students get up on top of their chairs, while I do the same. We pretend that we are in chariots, and act out the scene. We allow the horses (which in the story represent the senses) to pull the chariot where they want to go. We also, allow the reigns (which in this story represents the mind) to move the chariot where it wants to go. Finally, we allow the Self (the passenger in the chariot) to re-direct the chariot as we voice the lines over and over again to the passage. One student wrote at the end of the semester, “Now, when talking about pleasures and the senses I instantly think of standing on a chair pretending to drive a chariot.”⁷⁶

Performing the reading helped the students to experience the passage, search for wisdom and apply it to their own lives. Students comment that by applying movements to words “it allows you to commit what you are reading to a different part of your brain, which allows you to remember it deeper and in more than one way.”⁷⁷ A positive aspect of this experience is that students can remember a text and explain how it speaks to them, challenges them and/or comforts them on a deeper level. “A memorized work (like a lover, a friend, a spouse, a child) has entered into the fabric of its possessor’s intellectual and emotional life in a way that makes deep claims upon that life, claims that can only be ignored with effort and deliberation.”⁷⁸

Pedagogical Insights and Challenges

As a contemplative practitioner, I have observed that there are genuine benefits and challenges for educators who may want to implement the method of *lectio* into their

⁷⁶ Comment from a student in a World Literature I class (Spring 2015).

⁷⁷ Comment shared by a student in one of my World Literature I classes (summer 2015).

⁷⁸ Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

pedagogy. Many educators wrestle with the concept of using contemplative practices in the classroom. To some, contemplative practices seem overtly religious, while to others they seem pointless and a waste of valuable class time. Since many educators do not fully understand the nature of contemplative practices and the value of a contemplative approach to learning, they will need some professional development on the value of contemplative teaching.⁷⁹ Educators need to understand that *lectio* outside of its religious context is a contemplative practice of reading to search within a text for wisdom and truth. They need to understand how the use of this contemplative practice impacts text selection, pedagogy, course objectives/outcomes and the overall learning process. Solid preparation is foundational to the practice of *lectio*, along with the practices of attentive listening, slow deliberate reading, and performative reading.

The first challenge facing educators is to understand the history of the method and purpose of *lectio*. Having a historical overview of *lectio* might help dispel some of the fear and apprehension around the use of this contemplative practice. *Lectio* is a method used to search for, uncover and experience wisdom and truth in literary texts; it is a *techné* (a literary tool), outside the Christian context. It is not Christian in its origins; rather the early Christians applied the method to their search for wisdom and truth. Yet, most instructors are not trained in or familiar with *lectio* and even those who are, many tend to view it solely as a Christian practice, and as a result, do not feel comfortable applying its method to their pedagogy. I have personally wrestled with this issue. Like many contemplative practitioners, I felt more comfortable, bringing nontheistic Hindu

⁷⁹ Chapter One, The Contemporary Contemplative Movement offers further information on the history of contemplative practices in higher education, value and purpose of using it in the classroom.

and Buddhist practices into my classes, than I did using the practice of *lectio*, because I too, had originally conceived it as a solely Christian practice. However, I have come to understand *lectio* as a viable literary tool to be used with my students in reading texts and have witnessed the many benefits my students have experienced from the practice.

The second challenge facing educators centers on the quality of text selection. “Quality, not quantity, of text ‘covered’ is key to *lectio*, for it is the interior process that is most important.”⁸⁰ Students may read less, but they will understand more when they are given an opportunity to enter more deeply into what they are reading. By selecting fewer texts, instructors may worry that they will not be able to get through the same amount of material, which may raise serious concerns if they are feeling pressured to cover specified amounts of material in the courses they are teaching. I am also aware of the struggle to cover more material as there are so many great texts to read and explore with students. However, I have learned that if a little is good, more is not better. In truth, over the years it has been my students, who have taught me that a little quality goes along way. Some students tell me that they are going to keep their texts and not return them to the bookstore for a refund because they want to reference them, re-read them, and discuss them with friends and family. “My copy of the Dhammapada will not be found up for sale on line, instead it will sit in my night stand to reference it whenever I feel it necessary.”⁸¹ Some students have even asked me for titles of other texts similar to the

⁸⁰ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 214.

⁸¹ Comment shared by a student in one of my World Literature I classes (Summer 2015). In September of 2015, I received an e-mail from a former student, who has since graduated, asking for the titles of the books we read in World Literature I, “Lately I’ve been thinking about how I really want to reread those books!” In November of 2015, a student shared in a paper, “After taking this class and reading Buddha’s teachings in [*The Dhammapada*] I have found myself at peace...I rented this book, but I enjoyed it so much that I went back to the bookstore and bought it. This book has truly changed my perspective on life and happiness.”

ones we read in class. What students are essentially saying is that they heard the text speaking to them and want to continue to listen to its wisdom.

The third challenge that educators will have to consider is classroom environment. Educators need to create an open and hospitable space to practice *lectio* with their students. In this type of teaching environment, both educators and students have room to think and explore the text for deeper meaning. In an open and hospitable space, students feel welcome, less intimidated, safe, and more likely to engage in the communal practice of *lectio*. An open and hospitable atmosphere demonstrates care and attention to detail. If possible, chairs and desks can be repositioned to face one another, opening the space and deepening a sense of community between the educator and the students. As Parker notes,

When chairs are arranged facing the lectern, row upon row, the learning space is confined to a narrow alley of attention between each student and the teacher. Such an arrangement speaks. It says that in this space there is no room for students to relate to each other and each other's thoughts; there is no invitation to a community of truth; there is no hospitality. But when the chairs are placed in a circle, creating an open space between us, within which we can connect, something else is said. The teacher may sit in that circle and talk, but we are all being invited to create a community of learning by engaging ideas and one another in the open space between.⁸²

Educators who decide to engage in the practice of *lectio* will have to be intentional in how they arrange or re-arrange their classrooms and will be challenged to find creative ways to create a setting that fosters and invites reflection and encourages students to face and speak with one another.

The fourth challenge facing educators is related to the classroom environment. Educators will need to understand the importance of silence within the space and will

⁸² Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperOne, 1993), 75.

need to address both external and internal distractions. Both educators and students come to class attached to their digital devices, preoccupied and distracted. They enter the classroom space filled with mental chatter, emotional chaos, and general anxiety. Educators and students struggle to detach themselves from digital devices. They do not know how to enter into a period of silence, center themselves, and prepare for slow deliberate reading. Therefore, educators will have to come up with a policy to address the use of digital devices in their classroom, since they can be a source of distraction preventing students from fully engaging in the learning process. Implementing a centering practice such as a moment of silence requires patience and practice. Although many students are not inclined to readily detach themselves from their digital devices because to do so makes them feel disconnected, I explain to them that they have to disconnect from something in order to make space to connect to something else. Explaining this process to students takes a bit of time.

At the beginning of the semester, when I encounter a new group of students, I take time to explain the importance of clearing the space, minimizing distractions and the value of silence. Some instructors may be concerned that taking these initial steps to prepare the students for the learning experience will negatively affect their ability to teach the material at hand, but a classroom of attentive students has a greater potential for student-instructor interaction and increased learning. When reflecting on centering practices one student wrote,

This class certainly held a larger focus on contemplative practices than I expected. At first I must admit I was skeptical...As we covered more material over the course of the semester, I came to discover that there are many benefits to

meditating, inner reflection and chanting... These encouraged me to start meditating at the very least on a weekly basis.⁸³

Educators will need to trust the process as it unfolds, while not forcing any preconceived outcomes. Since this is a new practice, it is understandable that both educators and students may feel uncomfortable.

The fifth challenge facing educators is learning the art of attentive listening. Since some educators within the Humanities do have training in the art of listening, they can apply their training to the practice of *lectio*. For others, who do not have training in the art of listening, they can learn the practice. Attentive listening is crucial to the contemplative method of *lectio*; it is crucial for listening to the “voice” within the text. Most instructors feel at ease standing in front of the class lecturing and sharing information on their subject matter, but many feel awkward creating space for attentive listening; however, it is within this uncomfortable silence that students can be challenged to enter the text on a deeper level and listen to what it is saying. The practice of attentive listening urges educators to adapt their teaching style from the dispensing of facts and information to a more intentional search for the “voice” of wisdom and truth hidden within the text.

Attentive listening changes the teaching dynamic; it creates more room for active engagement between the educator, the students and the text and challenges both educators and students to change the way they approach a text. Working together, educators and students can uncover additional insights and deeper wisdom. Although attentive listening is a counter-cultural practice within academia, it can be fostered and

⁸³ Comment shared by a student in one of my World Literature I classes (Spring 2015).

nurtured.⁸⁴ Students can learn to actively listen to the knowledge of their instructors, the insights of one another and the voice within the text. Attentive listening needs the full active engagement of both educator and students. It is a communal practice where educators and students become seekers equally.

The sixth challenge facing educators is the practice of slow deliberate reading, which can be the most frustrating aspect of the *lectio* practice. The intent or purpose of slow deliberate reading is not to rush through material gathering information; instead, it is to read the text leisurely, savoring every word as the students search the text for deeper meaning. Both educators and students have been trained to read for information. Many educators teach material to students and prepare them to pass an exam; however, the primary aim of reading in the Humanities is to help students learn how to live life with meaning and purpose and to become compassionate, responsible citizens of the world. Many students do not understand how to read a text for deeper meaning. Instead of reading a text as “something to be mastered,” students need to learn how to read with a “willingness to let the text shape [them].”⁸⁵ The practice of slow deliberate reading requires a fundamental change in the educator and his/her pedagogy. No longer is the text a static object or container of information; it is a dynamic partner to be experienced and explored. A text is not something to be strictly analyzed, it is a subject to be known, to be felt and experienced. Through slow deliberate reading, students can learn to “savor what

⁸⁴ *Lectio divina* recognizes the need for educators to lecturer as students need help understanding the historical-cultural background, philosophical/ theological arguments, artistic/musical/dance theories or other information. Certainly, lecture can be incorporated within both the *lectio* and *meditatio* movements; however, what I am emphasizing in this chapter is the importance of attentive listening between educators, students and text. This is not to dismiss lecture, but rather to highlight the practice of listening.

⁸⁵ Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture is Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1985), 49-59.

they read, and allow the text to trigger memories and associations that reside below the threshold of awareness.”⁸⁶ Reading in this manner enhances critical thinking, draws upon the students’ imagination and provides opportunities for the students to experience texts in various ways.

Lectio, the practice of slow deliberate reading is a way to actively engage students in their learning process.

To teach is to engage students in learning; thus teaching consists of getting students involved in the active construction of knowledge . . . The aim of teaching is not only to transmit information, but also to transform students from passive recipients of other people’s knowledge into active constructors of their own and others’ knowledge. . .⁸⁷

Slow deliberate reading requires reading and re-reading. Most educators can barely get students to read a text once. *Lectio* challenges educators to get students to read and re-read the text, since the text is always revealing something new and deeper. However, getting students to read and re-read a text is not an easy task. Often students get frustrated, impatient or bored. They do not understand the value and purpose of reading and re-reading and will need further explanation and practice. Slow deliberate reading creates stable boundaries around the reading of a text, creating space for students to encounter and enter into a deeper relationship with the text. I have observed that overtime students recognize and value the opportunity to engage in slow deliberate reading.

One of the biggest things that has helped me through this semester was learning to slow down when I read and take the text line by line, which we did in class. This method aided in uncovering the true wisdom and meaning within the text by

⁸⁶ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1996), 63.

⁸⁷David Elkind and Freddy Sweet, quoted in Maheshvari Naidu, “Engaged Pedagogy and Performative Teaching: Examples from Teaching Practice,” *International Journal of Education Science*, 6(3): 459, <http://krepublishers.com/02-Journals/IJES/IJES-06-0-000-14-Web/IJES-06-3-000-14-Abst-PDF/IJES-6-3-459-14-313-Naidu-M/IJES-6-3-459-14-313-Naidu-M-Tx%5b10%5d.pdf>.

really searching for that deeper meaning. For some reason, it's natural to me to try and read quickly, and often times when reading quickly I tend to pass over important facts and information that could assist me in understanding the greater meaning of a text...⁸⁸

A final challenge facing educators is one that they should be most familiar with because all educators use performance techniques when they teach. Intuitively, educators have some insights into the performative dimension of teaching such as the use of voice, hand gestures and bodily movements to express what they are trying to teach. Their challenge is to allow their students the opportunity to engage their full sensory capabilities and perform the reading of a text, allowing them to deepen their relationship with it. Performance is part of the human condition. All educators come to class with their own innate gifts and talents, which can be incorporated into performative reading. Students, too, are natural performers. They come to class with a variety of demeanors, tones of voice, inflections and gestures, all useful in performative reading. The majority of students cannot tell stories without using their hands and body language. They just need some help making the distinction between standing outside the text and standing in the text through performative reading. Learning to perform a reading from within the text will help students to encounter and experience the text on a deeper level.

We humanist intellectuals generally take the body for granted because we are so passionately interested in the life of the mind and the creative arts that express our human spirit. But the body is not only an essential dimension of our humanity, it is also the basic instrument of all human performance, our tool of tools, a necessity for all our perception, action, and even thought. Just as skilled builders need expert knowledge of their tools, so we need better somatic knowledge to improve our understanding and performance in the arts and human sciences and to advance our mastery in the highest art of all—that of perfecting our humanity and living better lives. We need to think more carefully through the body in order to cultivate ourselves and edify our students because true humanity is not a mere

⁸⁸ Comment shared by a student in one of my World Literature I classes (Spring 2015).

genetic given but an educational achievement in which body, mind, and culture must be thoroughly integrated.⁸⁹

When students perform the texts, they are actively engaging in their learning. I have observed a difference in the classroom environment, including increased student engagement with the text and with one another. Students have shared with me the many ways in which performing a text has deepened their reading. Intentional use of performative reading takes some time, preparation and patience. In the beginning, many students may feel awkward or embarrassed to perform a passage. Yet, I have come to realize that with a bit of explaining, gentle encouragement, and patience students find the performances fun and reap the ensuing benefits. Educators just have to be aware of this and be gentle with students as they experiment with this new way of reading a text.

Summary

In summary, this proposed method of *lectio*, the slow deliberate reading of a text and its components, is one creative way to encounter and experience a text. The ancient monastics found *lectio* a fruitful way to read a text. In order to adapt and implement *lectio* it is important for educators to have some professional development on this practice, to understand the meaning and purpose behind the method, and to develop some techniques to implement the method and support them in their teaching. Educators who

⁸⁹ Richard Shusterman, "Thinking Through the Body, Educating for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics" *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring, 2006), 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4140215>. See also <http://www.fau.edu/humanitieschair/Thinking%20through%20the%20body%20webpdf.pdf>.

do engage in the practice of *lectio* and learn its accompanying benefits will be better equipped to bring this contemplative practice into their classrooms. They can begin to revise their course outcomes to include subjective, student-centered outcomes, rather than purely objective content-centered outcomes.

By doing so, educators send a message to their students that their formation is important to them. They also convey to students that slow deliberate reading of a text involves the active participation of educators and students, who search a text together seeking wisdom and truth. This practice often gives students a renewed desire to learn and search for the deeper meaning and purpose of life. It gives them tools to read as they begin engage more full in the reading process. They acquire a renewed sense of confidence in their ability to read and search within a text for deeper meaning. Once the students have learned the skill of *lectio*, they will have the foundation necessary to move into the next practice of *meditatio*, the skill of moving deeper into the subjective realm where they can begin to learn to interpret a text.

RE-APPROPRIATING THE MONASTIC PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

CHAPTER FOUR

MEDITATIO: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

“For there are some who desire to know only for the sake of knowing; and this is disgraceful curiosity. And then there are some who desire to know, that they may become known themselves; and this is disgraceful vanity...And there are also some who desire to know in order to sell their knowledge, as for money, or for degrees; and this is disgraceful commercialism. But there are also some who desire to know in order to edify; and this is love.” Bernard of Clairvaux

In this chapter, I will look at how the ancient practice of *meditatio*, used in the monastic schools, can be re-appropriated for use in a 21st century Humanities classroom as a method to experience wisdom hidden within a text. I will begin with a brief review of the ancient monastic practice of *meditatio* (the search for meaning), including its purpose, and propose its use as a way of searching for meaning in a literary work in 21st century Humanities classrooms. I will examine three elements of the ancient monastic method of *meditatio* – rumination, memorization, and analysis, and offer some examples of the way in which I have adapted *meditatio* into my pedagogy. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges for instructors in the Humanities instructors interested in incorporating the contemplative practice of *meditatio* into their teaching.

Meditatio: The Search for Meaning

In the Monastic Schools, the practice of *meditatio* (Latin, to think over, to reflect, to consider) followed the practice of *lectio* (slow deliberate reading). *Meditatio* is the diligent search within a text for deeper meaning. *Meditatio*, like *lectio* is also a *techné* (a

skill)¹ the monks applied to “search a text for authentic meaning...”² The meaning of *meditatio* in the monastic tradition has evolved over the centuries. Pennington states, “To meditate is to chew and ruminate, for it is to reflect, remember, interpret and penetrate.”³ *Meditatio* consisted in “memorizing and continually repeating biblical texts with both mouth and heart.”⁴

The monastics offer various definitions of *meditatio*. According to Robertson, *meditatio* is an intentional process. It is a “conscious, voluntary, rational ‘scrutiny,’ in which the reader ‘penetrates’ (*penetrat*) and ‘investigates’ (*rimatur*), seeking to ‘extract’ hidden meaning.”⁵ Hugh of St. Victor describes *meditatio* as “deliberate and sustained thought along planned lines; it prudently investigates the cause and the sources, the manner and utility of each thing.”⁶ In reference to *meditatio*, Bernard of Clairvaux “talks of strenuous searching and diligent hunting as the reader ponders every detail of a passage.”⁷ Finally, Magrassi comments *meditatio* is “the patient analysis and deeper study...of a text, the process by which the monks’ pondered each word in order to grasp its full meaning.”⁸

¹ Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor’s “Didascalicon”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 61.

² Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Ligouri, MO: Triumph Books, 1996), 63.

³ Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 160.

⁴ Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes* (New York: Newman, 2000) 54, note on 2.15.1.

⁵ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 205-206.

⁶ Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 52. See also, Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 165.

⁷ Studzinski, Raymond, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 156.

⁸ Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 109.

For Guigo I, *meditatio* “has to do with probing to the heart of the matter—a concern with the marrow of meaning.”⁹ *Meditatio* “examines each point thoroughly,”¹⁰ states Guigo II; it “is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one’s own reason for knowledge of hidden truth.”¹¹ In keeping with the monastic tradition, Guigo II compares *meditatio* to the action of chewing. As the monks entered into *meditatio*, they “chewed on a text, breaking it up for meaning.”¹² Many of the monastic teachers describe *meditatio* as the way in which the monks entered the text to “dig for treasure.”¹³ In this sense, *meditatio* acted as a springboard for the monks to dive within the text and shift their vision from “looking at the *words* of the text to entering the *world* of the text.”¹⁴ Once within the world of the text, the monks “probed [it] in an effort to understand it.”¹⁵

These various understandings of *meditatio* paint a picture of what this ancient practice was like and offer some insights into the monastic literary world, giving a sense of the ways in which the monks searched a text for deeper meaning. As the monks diligently searched the text for meaning, they ‘chewed,’ ‘pondered,’ ‘probed,’ ‘dug,’ and ‘analyzed’ a text. Leclercq offers a fitting summary of the practice of *meditatio* in the monastic tradition.

For the ancients, to meditate is to read a text and to learn it ‘by heart’ in the fullest sense of this expression, that is, with one’s whole being: with the body, since the

⁹*The Meditations of Guigo I, Prior of the Charterhouse, Translated by A. Gordon Mursell* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 15.

¹⁰ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks and Twelve Meditations*, Trans with Intro by Edmund Colledge, OSA and James Walsh SJ (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 70.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 68–69.

¹² Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 170.

¹³ Guigo II, *Ladder of the Monks* quoted in Studzinski, Raymond, OSB. *Reading to Live*, 171.

¹⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 99.

¹⁵ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 168.

mouth pronounced it, with the memory which fixes it, with the intelligence which understands its meaning, and with the will which desires to put it into practice.¹⁶

Through the practices of rumination, memorization, and analysis, the monks engaged in the practice of *meditatio* as they searched a text for deeper meaning.

Rumination: The Search for Meaning

One of the most cherished spiritual practices of the ancient monks was their unceasing rumination upon Scriptural and classic texts. The encounter the monks had with a text in their *lectio* practice continued to deepen during rumination. For the monks, rumination was an organic multifaceted process whereby they entered into the world of a literary work to search it for meaning. It was an organic process in that it was slow, unforced, and led to deeper nourishment. It was also a multifaceted process, since it entailed deepening levels of interface with the text. Rumination, derived from the Latin *ruminare*, referred ‘to chewing the cud’ or ‘to turn over in the mind.’ Described as “the slow repetition of words, the chewing over of words, again and again,”¹⁷ rumination is a way “to think deeply about something.”¹⁸ In the monastic schools, the monks ruminated on a word or verse of a text. Rumination was an auditory practice. According to Kardong it was “not the silent intellectual exercise it is for us, but rather the verbal repetition of a memorized text.”¹⁹ Casey refers to it as “the low-voiced recitation”²⁰ of a word or verse

¹⁶Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 17.

¹⁷ Enzo Bianchi, *Lectio Divina: From God’s Word to Our Lives* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2015), 55.

¹⁸ Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 62.

¹⁹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996). 170.

²⁰ Michael Casey, *Towards God: The Western Tradition of Contemplation* (Melbourn, Australia: Collins Dove, 1991), 74

that the monks had read in *lectio*. Ruminating followed *lectio*, as the monks deliberately repeated, chewed, and savored a word or verse in their continued search for deeper meaning.

Ruminating began with deliberate focused attention. As the monks entered into the world of the text, they had to put all other thoughts aside in order to ruminate on a specific word or verse. Robertson notes, “It is in the nature of the mind to be always preoccupied-like a millstone kept spinning by the rush of water-but it is in the power of the supervisor of the mill to decide what to grind.”²¹ According to Pennington, “The mind should go on grasping this word until it can cast away the abundance and multiplicity of other thoughts and restrict itself to poverty of a single word.”²² Casey concurs adding, the monks made “a deliberate choice to put aside other thoughts and fantasies...to exercise some control over [their] thoughts to be ready to recall [their] mind to its goal through the practice of meditation.”²³ Ruminating was a disciplined practice that strengthened the monks’ faculty of concentration. Deliberate attention created boundaries for the monks to ruminate on a word or verse where they could begin to mine it for meaning.

Once the monks’ had placed their full attention on a word or verse, they began to repeat it slowly and intentionally. Repetition required bodily vigor. By seeing the words with their eyes and repeating the words aloud using their lips, tongues and vocal chords, the monks engaged their whole bodies in the repetition process. “The very muscles used

²¹ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience*, 83.

²² Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 55.

²³ Michael Casey, *The Undivided Heart: The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation* (Petershams, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1994), 71-72.

to mouth the words and those receptors in the ears that respond to the spoken sound ‘remember’ the Scriptures.”²⁴ As they did, the words began to inscribe themselves in their memory. Repetition moved the monks closer to meaning as they “attached [themselves] closely to the sentence being recited and weighed all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning.”²⁵ Through the practice of repetition, the monks deepened their participation with the text and as a result, moved closer to its hidden meaning.

Repetition led to chewing. According to Duncan, “The bread of Scripture must be opened up, torn apart, chewed, tasted in its sweetness...”²⁶ Words were not just repeated continuously in unawareness; rather, the monks consciously chewed on the words, entering deeper into the meaning. As the monks chewed on the words, they began to taste them.

The medieval writers, we recall, conceive the activity of reading in alimentary metaphors; the reader ‘tastes’ the words of Scripture on the ‘palate’ of the heart, or indeed literally in the mouth as he or she pronounces them; one has then to ‘chew’ the text thoroughly and ‘digest’ it, that is to say, proceed toward interpretation and personal appropriation.²⁷

As the monks ate the words, they tasted them, digested them, and assimilated them. “Much like a cow chews its cud,²⁸ the monks chewed on the words of a text. As they chewed on them, the words became a part of them. “The more [the word] is chewed in the mouth, the more sweetly it is savored in the heart.”²⁹ According to Guigo II,

reading puts food whole into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up... For what is the use of spending time in continuous reading [the

²⁴ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 134.

²⁵ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning* 73.

²⁶ Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 192.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁸ *The Benedictine Tradition: Spirituality in History*. Eds, Laura Swan and Phyllis Zagano (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), xix.

²⁹ Oger of Locedio quoted in Mariano Magrassi *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 109-110.

words]...unless we can extract nourishment from them by chewing and digesting this food so that its strength can pass into our inmost heart?³⁰

The monks experienced the words read as nourishment, vital to their growth and development.

Chewing on word or verse helped the monks to breakdown the larger text into smaller pieces so that they could taste them. Chewing on the word or verse led the monks to internalize and memorize what they were ruminating on and begin to deepen their understanding of the larger text. The monks discovered that words, like food, have flavors. As the monks chewed the words, they began to discover insights. Similar to Ezekiel's experience, a word often began as a bitter flavor in the monks' mouth, but through the process of chewing, it sweetened as the monks discovered a deeper meaning.

He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.³¹

Conversely, a word may begin as sweet as honey in the monks' mouth, but after repeated rumination begins to release its bitter quality.

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth."¹⁰ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.³²

Bitter, however, is not necessarily bad. Ancient healing traditions teach that bitter purifies and detoxifies. Through the practice of chewing on a word or verse, the monks were able to begin to gain clarity and sense its deeper meaning.

³⁰ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks and Twelve Meditations*, 69.

³¹ Oremus Bible Browser, NRSV Ezekiel 3:1-4, <http://bible.oremus.org/>

³² Oremus Bible Browser, NRSV Revelations 10:9, <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Rumination also included savoring the words repeated and chewed. Paintner shares, “*Meditatio* is the art of savoring.”³³ Savor, derived from the Latin, *sapere*, meaning ‘to know’ shares the same root as *sapientia*, Latin for wisdom. Often a word or verse leapt out at the monks causing them to stop, lean back and savor it. The slow savoring of a word or verse helped the monks to come to know it. As the monks savored a word or verse, it began “to release its full flavor.”³⁴ As the monks lingered over a word or verse, savoring it, they waited patiently for the word “to trigger memories and associations that resided below the threshold of awareness.”³⁵

The monks did not rush the process of rumination. Instead of repeating a word or verse in a hurry, the monks slowly savored the word or verse as though sipping fine wine. Calling upon Illich’s image of the text as a vineyard, Lichtmann states, “If for the monks *lectio* means tasting the grapes of the vineyard...meditation is as though putting [them] in a wine press, extracting their precious juices and savoring their flavors until they diffuse our being deeply.”³⁶ Savoring is a slow process that led the monks to discover the inherent power within the word, which at first, was not apparent. According to Cassian, “the reader should feel the ‘power’ of the words before attempting to grasp their meaning.”³⁷ As the word released their power, they released an insight for the monks to savor.

³³ Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina:-the sacred art: Transforming Words & Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2011), 82.

³⁴ JLeclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, , 73.

³⁵ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 83.

³⁶ Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way*, 62.

³⁷ Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 31.

Where many monastics used alimentary (Latin *alimentarius* ‘pertaining to food’) for rumination, Bernard of Clairvaux “adapted an erotic metaphor to the same process... transforming reading into an embrace of the souls.”³⁸ For Bernard, the text acted as a mirror for the readers, enlightening the ruminators’ life.

The flexibility of the text, its responsiveness to the reader individually...its ability to ‘mirror’ the reader, changing as he or she changes; its openness, unboundedness, accessibility to penetration, the continuity of flow into and out of the reader’s ‘real’ life...Intellectual understanding alone cannot comprehend such a text; the *affectus* and even the physical body must also be wholly committed.³⁹

Bernard highlights the reciprocal relationship between a reader and a text. Through the process of rumination, the monks opened themselves more deeply to the text, exposing their vulnerability and in the process the text acted as a mirror, reflecting insights back to the monks. Bernard, like the other monastics, highlights the importance of full bodily engagement. For the monks, the texts read contained wisdom, and rumination was the process by which the monks began their search for deeper meaning. Rumination was an affective process; it made the monks feel. As the monks ruminated on a word or verse in a text, they came to sense it and feel it. Rumination led to memorization. Once portions of texts were memorized, the monks could recall them and continue their search for meaning “while at work, away from the book, he makes them his own.”⁴⁰ According to Magrassi, “Pochomius’s monks are able to sing a Scripture text while they are putting the bread in the oven or carrying home the baskets of fragrant loaves.”⁴¹

³⁸ Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 202. Robertson explains Bernard’s nuanced approach to meditation. He mentions that both Cassian and Gregory touched upon this approach but were unable to fully develop it.

³⁹ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁴¹ Magrassi, *Praying the Bible*, 112.

Before explaining my students' process, I must emphasize that the foundational practices I began with the students in *lectio* continue in *meditatio*. The whole process is more like a spiral than a ladder, meaning each subsequent practices deepens and develops the previous one.

In the West we have become accustomed to a lineal logic; we begin at A and progress to Z. We keep pressing forward, never turning back. [*Meditatio*] does not follow this pattern of inevitable forward movement. It certainly begins at the beginning and continues to the end, but there is much meandering in between...repetition is a right brain activity; we do not grasp the entire content immediately but in a circle manner.⁴²

There are no demarcated boundaries between *lectio and meditatio*; instead students engaged in *lectio and meditatio*, flow back and forth between reading, re-reading and ruminating on the text. When adapting the practice of rumination in my World Literature I classes, students follow a similar sequence the monks used in their rumination. After selecting a word or verse, students slowly repeat the word or verse, chew the word or verse and then savor the word or verse. Taking into account that rumination is not a one-time event, students often move from savoring a word or verse back to chewing it to see if in fact, there is more juice to be extracted and savored.

Students generally read a text to gather information for a paper, a quiz, or an exam. They have little practice in slowing down the reading process and very little, if any practice with the slow repetition of a word or verse from the larger text. In the beginning of the semester, I model repetition by giving the students a short verse to repeat. As stated in the chapter on *lectio*, once the verse is selected I repeat it slowly a few times using tone, inflection and gestures and then I invite students to repeat the verse slowly and

⁴² Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 24.

carefully using their own tone, inflection and gestures as we progress one by one around the circle. When reading *Gilgamesh* I often use a verse from the Prologue, which introduces the readers to Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk.

He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions,
From exaltation to despair, had been granted a vision
into the great mystery, the secret places,
the primeval days before the Flood. He had journeyed
to the edge of the world and made his way back, exhausted
but whole. He had carved his trials on stone tablets,
had restored the holy Eanna Temple and the massive
wall of Uruk, which no city on earth can equal.⁴³

After we have read the Prologue aloud and moved around the circle, we slow it down, sectioning it off into smaller sections. We begin with the first part of the Prologue,

He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions,
From exaltation to despair

Again, we move around the circle and each student repeats the line using his/her own tone and inflection. Many students continue to use the hand gestures as well. As we move around the circle, students actually pay close attention to one another. When all of the students have completed their turn, they share what they noticed such as Gilgamesh endured a lot; he went on a journey that was difficult; he knew hidden mysteries and secrets. When working with *Antigone*, students' repeated Antigone statement to her sister Ismene, "He has no right to keep me from my own,"⁴⁴ (he, referring to King Creon). One student commented, "Once I remember a classmate used a tone while reading Antigone's voice that was soft and timid. I remember thinking Antigone would never sound like that

⁴³ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh* (New York, Free Press, 2004), 69.

⁴⁴ Sophocles, *Antigone* (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2005), line 50.

[since] she was a brave, strong willed female character.”⁴⁵ This student became aware of the fact that not all students heard Antigone’s voice the way she did.

Just as repetition led the monks to chew the word or verse, repetition also leads the students to chew a word or verse more deeply. *The Katha Upanishad* uses many unfamiliar words and concepts. For example, the idea of Self is a complex process. In *The Katha Upanishad*, one’s true incorruptible nature is referred to as the Self (notice the capital S) or Atman, located within a person. *The Katha Upanishad* states, “Hidden in the heart of every creature exists the Self.”⁴⁶ The term Atman refers to this One Universal Supreme energy within a person (immanent), while the term Brahman refers to the One Universal Supreme energy outside of oneself (transcendent). To help students begin to understand these two terms, I have them repeat the words Atman and Brahman using hand gestures. Repeatedly, I have students repeat the word ‘Atman’ and place their hands over their hearts and then repeat the word ‘Brahman’ and extend their arms up into the air. After 5-7 times of repeating Atman and Brahman with gestures, they begin to repeat the line, “Hidden in the heart of every creature exists the Self,”⁴⁷ using the hand gestures over their hearts. As they repeat these lines, they begin to notice them and consider the concept of Self that Yama (the god of death) is teaching to Nachiketa. Many students share with me that they had never even considered the notion of having a Self before repeating these lines. Through repetition of a word or verse, students slowly begin to consider the meaning of the word or verse. No longer, is a word or verse separate from

⁴⁵ Comment from a student in a World Lit I course (summer 2015).

⁴⁶ Eknath Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 79.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad*, 79.

meaning; instead, students begin to discover for themselves that the word or verse contains deeper meaning still waiting to be discovered.

Repetition leads to chewing. As the monks chewed on a word or verse, they began to break the larger text into smaller pieces, so that they could taste the text; this is also true for students. As students chewed on the following verse from *The Katha Upanishad*, “Hidden in the heart of every creature exists the Self,” they began to consider even more intensely the concept of Self, its meaning in the text as well as its meaning within their own lives, and wanted to learn more about it. As we delve deeper into the concept of the Self, we work with the following passage from *The Katha Upanishad*.

Perennial joy or passing pleasure?
This is the choice one is to make always.⁴⁸

Yama teaches Nachiketa about the power of choice and the importance of choose wisely. The wise, aware of such choices, choose the Self; whereas, the ignorant, unaware of such choices choose passing pleasures. As students continue to chew on this verse, they begin to break it down and consider their past choices as well as their potential choices awaiting decisions. They begin to consider the concepts of perennial joy and passing pleasure in relation to the decisions they make every day, such as going to a party or staying in and studying for an exam, or choosing between answering the text message that just came through on the smart phone during class or waiting until class is over. Students begin to notice that in every moment they are presented with a choice, ‘passing pleasure or perennial joy?’ Knowing that they have a choice is both challenging and freeing for the

⁴⁸ Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad*, 75. Perennial joy is the joy one experiences when connected with the Self and equates it with the wise; whereas, passing pleasures gives one purely immediate pleasure and is equated with the ignorant.

students. Challenging because now they are responsible to discern, and freeing because they feel empowered.

Students begin to question how often they are driven by their passing pleasure (the senses). Many students share with the class that they had not thought about choices in this way before, but show that they are beginning to reflect on the deeper meaning, “Learning to differentiate urges and temptations that won’t last between long lasting delight is key to wisdom.”⁴⁹ Chewing leads students to ponder a verse for deeper meaning. By allowing time for students to chew on the words of the texts, they entered more deeply into the world of the text. Once within the world of the text, students began to see themselves within it. The text acted as a mirror, as mentioned by Bernard. Once students began to see the text mirroring something within themselves, they became even more interested in the text, and want to continue to search it for deeper meaning.

Chewing leads to savoring. As students continue to chew a word or verse, they begin to sense it and taste it. In *The Conference of the Birds*, the partridge complains that he cannot endure the journey to the Simorgh’s throne, saying:

I cannot tear myself away;
My feet refuse as if caught fast in clay.
My life is here; I have no wish to fly;
I must discover precious stones or die.⁵⁰

As students chewed this verse, they began to savor it, questioning its meaning. At first, precious stones sound like a good thing to students. If the partridge has precious stones, he is rich. As students continue to savor, they begin to take deeper notice of the words, ‘I

⁴⁹ Comment by World Literature I student (Spring 2015).

⁵⁰ Farid Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, Translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 52.

cannot,' 'my feet refuse' and 'no wish to fly.' They begin to sense the heaviness of these words and see that the partridge is stuck, 'his feet refuse to move.'" The partridge has an opportunity to go on an amazing journey and meet Simorgh,⁵¹ but he cannot tear himself away from his precious stones. Why? The partridge is not able to free himself, 'I must discover precious stones or die.' What is preventing him? His fixation with precious stones is preventing him from moving on.

As they move through the savoring process, they come to see that precious stones no longer represent what they had first thought. Students come to see that the partridge is addicted to the precious stones and his addiction is preventing him from continuing on the journey with the other birds to see Simorgh and developing himself. As students begin to deepen their experience meditating on a word or verse, they begin to recognize the importance of and connection between slow reading (*lectio*) and the search for meaning (*meditatio*). One student commented,

Trying to discover what an entire text is attempting to convey can be extremely challenging. In order to tackle such a task, it is paramount to first understand every passage that makes up the text. This is why focusing on a specific passage at a time can be such a useful tool...it allows the reader to get a much more detailed grasp on the material.⁵²

Through the slow rumination process of repetition, chewing and savoring students enter into the world of the text and begin the process of searching the text for deeper meaning, one word or verse at a time. As the students continued to ruminate on a word or verse, they began to learn it, memorizing it by heart. The words ruminated on slowly

⁵¹ Simorgh means 'thirty birds.' When thirty birds finally make it to Simorgh's throne they discover that the walls of the hall are covered with mirrors; therefore who they see in the hall is themselves (thirty birds).

⁵² Comment from a student in World Lit I (spring 2015).

begin to enter into the minds and hearts where they can remember and recall them, and begin the search for deeper meaning.

Memory: The Search for Meaning

Since the monastic schools drew from the ancient Greek understanding of memory, it is important to underscore their view of memory first. According to Carruthers, “Memory is a central feature of knowledge – its very basis in fact- whether through ‘recollection’ (as for Plato) or as the agent building ‘experience’ (as for Aristotle).”⁵³ Socrates describes memory as the following:

Imagine...that our minds contain a block of wax, which in this or that individual may be larger or smaller, and composed of wax that is comparatively pure or muddy, often harder in some, softer in others, and sometimes of just the right consistency...Let us call it the gift of the Muses’ mother, Memory, and say that whenever we wish to remember something we see or hear or conceive in our own minds, we hold this wax under the perceptions or ideas and imprint them on it as we stamp the impression on a seal ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains; whatever is rubbed out or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know.⁵⁴

Socrates highlights the fact that memory is a gift bestowed by Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of Memory and as such reveals that memory is an innate skill within us, vital to human learning and understanding. For Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, memory was vital to the continued growth, development and formation of human beings. Carruthers explains that for both the ancient Greek philosophers and the medieval monastic teachers

⁵³ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21. According to legend, “the ancients believed that when one died and crossed into the Underworld one would be given a choice . . . whether to drink from the river Lethe where you would forget all the pains and terrors of your previous life (and with them, the lessons they brought), or whether to drink from the Mnemosyne, the spring of memory. Those who chose to forget had to be reborn, to return to earth to learn the lessons they needed. Those who had chosen to remember were admitted to the Elysian Fields where they would spend eternity in comfort and peace.” See <http://www.goddessgift.com/Goddess-myths/g-mnemosyne.htm>

Memoria meant...trained memory, educated and disciplined according to a well-developed pedagogy that was part of the elementary language arts –grammar, logic and rhetoric. The fundamental principle is to ‘divide’ the material to be remembered into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units and to key these units into some sort of rigid, easily reconstructable order..⁵⁵

In the monastic schools, memory (Latin *memoria*, ‘memory, remembrance, recollection’) held a prominent place in *meditatio* and aided the monks as they continued to search a text for meaning. Memory development was a critical feature of monastic training.

“‘Memory’ as ‘heart’ was encoded in the common Latin verb *recordari*, meaning to ‘recollect.’”⁵⁶ When the monks remembered or recollected words, they did so by drawing upon the pages of texts already written upon their hearts.

What we know by heart becomes an agency in our consciousness, a ‘pace-maker’ in the growth and vital complication of our identity. Furthermore, just as a ‘pace-maker’ gives a weakened heart life, meditation... on the scriptures gave them vitality; it made them ‘truly alive.’⁵⁷

Since memory engaged the monks’ hearts, it was a sensuous experience, calling upon their full sensory capabilities. “The active agency of the reader, ‘discutiens,’ ‘breaking up’ or ‘shattering’ each single word as he recreates the scene in his memory, is emphasized: ‘Ego autem audivi...audivi...audivi...’ He re-hears, re-sees, re-feels, experiences and re-experiences.”⁵⁸ The monks “learned by heart and meditated on words

⁵⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 7. According to Robertson in *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 73-75. “classical pedagogy [was] a rigorous rote-learning process, proceeding in a prescribed sequence from the simplest elements to the more difficult constructions, with progress reinforced by beatings at every stage...” Robertson explains that the rigorous training continued throughout history, but became less severe and more playful with Quintilian, whose pedagogy becomes more humanistic between character development and skill. Memorization as an essential skill for both academic and moral development continues to be an important element in medieval education both outside and inside the monastic schools, “Memorization remains an essential feature of education at all stages, from the first approach to the alphabet through the most sophisticated adult enterprises.” See also Henri Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1956)150-154.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁷ *The Saying of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Mowbray, 1975), 40.

⁵⁸ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 169.

over and over again for a day or even a week until the paragraph had broken like a fruit on the tongue of the monk and revealed its inner flavor to the searching mind.”⁵⁹ Bianchi remarks, “The ancient fathers recommended constant study and memorization of the scriptural texts, not just because they came from an oral culture, but because memorizing worked for them...”⁶⁰

Formation for the monks required both reading (*lectio*) and memory (*meditatio*), which were intricately connected. What the monks had read in *lectio* they deepened during *meditatio*. According to Leclercq, “The *meditatio* consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise with total memorization; it is, therefore, inseparable from the *lectio*. It is what inscribes so to speak, the sacred text in the body and in the soul.”⁶¹ For Hugh, “The art of memory is closely intertwined with the art of reading; one cannot be understood without the other”⁶²; “the whole usefulness of education consists only in the memory of it.”⁶³ Bernard of Clairvaux taught his students

that stories and poems should be read thoroughly, and not as though the readers were put to flight like a spurred horse. Wherefore he always insistently demanded from each one, as a daily debt, something committed to memory.⁶⁴

What each of these monks point out is the importance of the faculty of memory in monastic formation. Without the aid of their memories, the monks could not recall a text and probe it for deeper meaning.

⁵⁹ *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul's Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Contemplatives*, transl. by John Anthony McGuckin (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 7.

⁶⁰ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 50.

⁶¹ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 90.

⁶² Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 42.

⁶³ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 248.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

The monks used a variety of techniques to help their students strengthen their memories. Hugh recognized that students need memory training; “memory is lazy and rejoices in brevity.”⁶⁵ Aware that students could only learn short pieces of texts, it was a common practice for the monks to break texts up into smaller segments and instruct their students to memorize one verse at a time. Hugh taught his students specific mnemonic techniques for ordering these verses in such a way as they could easily recall them. In his *De arc Noe morali*, he taught students to build an ark ‘board by board’ in their memories. “The Ark of Wisdom has three-stories, which represent three stages of moral judgment: correct, useful, and habitual. I am in the first storey of the ark when I begin to love to meditate (that is, memorize) Scripture...”⁶⁶ Another technique used to help the monks remember a text was to sing it. Anthony chanted and sang the Psalms, memorizing them by heart.⁶⁷

Once a text was inscribed in the monks’ memories (hearts), they could recall a verse at will and ruminate upon it further, searching it for wisdom. Without memory, there was no connection to what the monks had read in *lectio*. Hugh charged his monks, “not to rejoice a great deal because you may have read many things, but because you have retained them.”⁶⁸ William of St. Thierry noted, “Some part of your daily reading

⁶⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 162. Carruthers talks at length in the text of Hugh’s mnemonic techniques. She states, “One of the more intriguing aspects of Hugh of St. Victor’s Ark-picture is its ‘gathering’ of many common medieval diagrams into one ‘place,’ and, if one adds the columnar format he employed in his *Chronicle*, it is clear that Hugh used virtually every major genre of diagram common in the twelfth century—ladders, trees, circles, columns, maps, and genealogy charts— all enclosed within the rectangular shape of the memorial page.” (248). Studzinski also discusses the high importance Hugh placed on memory training.

⁶⁷ For more on Anthony’s practices of chanting and singing see Carrigan Henry L. Jr., *The Wisdom of the Deserts Fathers and Mothers*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010.

⁶⁸ Hugh of St. Victor. *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Guide to the Arts*. Translated by Jeremy Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 3.11, 94; Duncan Robertson, 163.

should, each day, be stored in the stomach (i.e., the memory) and be allowed to be digested. At times, it should be brought up again for frequent rumination.”⁶⁹ Discussing *memoria* in the *Didascalicon*, Hugh instructs his students to “replicate frequently the matter one has memorized and placed in the ‘arcula’ of one’s memory, and to recall it from the stomach of the memory palette.”⁷⁰ Note that Hugh uses the word ‘arcula,’ meaning a jeweled treasure chest. The words memorized were so precious to the monks that they gathered them (*colligere*) into the jeweled treasure chest of their hearts and recalled them with reverence and affection.

In the monastic schools, the monks not only memorized a word or verse, they memorized long passages and even whole texts. “Memorization of reading and constant review must continue until whole books of Scripture are retained.”⁷¹ Through constant reading and meditation, their minds became libraries of “accumulated cultural riches to be stored in the *cellarium* of memory.”⁷² According to O’Collins, St. Anthony’s memory “became a type of biblical library.”⁷³ “Active minds, not books, stored the sacred texts...”⁷⁴ Once texts were stored in their memories they worked from within. Studzinski notes, “Having texts stored in memory further intensified their power.”⁷⁵ For the monks, the memorized texts held healing powers and aided the monks in their continued formation. Memory “meant quite literally taking the words to heart so that, stored in

⁶⁹ William of St. Thierry quoted in Michael Casey, *The Undivided Heart: The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation* (Petershams, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1994), 71.

⁷⁰ See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 165; and Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon* III, II.

⁷¹ Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 84.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁷³ Gerald O’Collins, SJ. “The Inspiring Power of Scripture: Three Case Studies. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 2014, Vol. 79(3), 267.

⁷⁴ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 96.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

one's memory, they could serve as a reservoir of healing texts."⁷⁶ Cassian notes that even while the monks rested or slept, memorized text continued to reveal deeper meaning, "free from every seductive deed or sight, silently meditating...at rest and as it were immersed in the stupor of sleep, there will be revealed an understanding of hidden meaning that we did not grasp even slightly when we were awake."⁷⁷

Once memorized, a text was no longer just on the pages in front of them; rather, it was etched into their hearts. According to Leclercq,

[I]n the Middle Ages the reader usually pronounced the words with his lips, at least in a low tone, and consequently he hears the sentences seen by the eyes...This results in more than a visual memory of the written words. What results is a muscular memory of the words pronounced and an aural memory of the words heard. The *meditatio* consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization; it is therefore, inseparable from *lectio*.⁷⁸

Memorization of texts affected the monks viscerally - their auditory senses, visual senses and muscular senses- and it also stimulated their learning and creativity. "Having memorized the text and having placed them in the context of one's own experience, the reader re-authors them and makes them, in effect, his or her own."⁷⁹ The practice of rumination and memorization led to deeper understanding as the monks worked to interpret what they ruminated on and memorized.

And the first rule of this undertaking and labor is, as we have said, to know these books even if they are not understood, at least to read them or to memorize them, or to make them not altogether unfamiliar to us...for the more one learns about these things the more capable of understanding he becomes.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Burton-Christie, Douglas, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in the Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 122-129.

⁷⁷ Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 84.

⁷⁸ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 72-73.

⁷⁹ Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, xv.

⁸⁰ Augustine, quoted in Studzinski, Raymond, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 89.

The monks discovered that a well-trained memory acted as an interpretive key to unlock the bigger text and search it for meaning.

The monks discovered that their memory was primed during *lectio*, but further developed in *meditatio*. In my World Literature I course, the students deepen what they read in *lectio* during *meditatio*. The two practices are interconnected and mutually dependent. Students need to read a text multiple times, break down larger texts into shorter segments and exercise their faculty of memory in order to search a text for deeper meaning. Unlike the monks, students today have little practice developing their memories.⁸¹ They have not been taught the power of memory and its usefulness in their growth and development. Students do not have the same understanding as Socrates, who saw memory as a gift bestowed upon human beings by the goddess of Memory nor do they have the same understanding as the monks, who saw memory as a treasure chest. Students today do not really think about training their memory. They do not see a need to develop their memory because unlike the monks, students store everything in their external digital devices (smart phones, iPads, Kindles, computers etc.). Although these technologies bring many benefits to human beings, they contain a shadow side. These technologies are actually contributing to students' disembodiment. Everything is stored outside of the student, which weakens their memory. In addition, these technologies are diminishing the students' self-confidence. Students do not store knowledge within their internal treasure chest; sadly, they are not the keepers of knowledge, their digital devices are.

⁸¹ One area within the Humanities where students do have to work on their memory capabilities is in the areas of music, dance and theater.

Where the monks had to rely on their memories to store texts – as few text were available – students have multiple digital devices that store text for them.⁸² Where the monks located memory in their hearts and felt and experienced the texts they read, students read the text with their eyes only. They do not engage in a full sensory experience; they do not listen to the text and feel its impact as they read it. In general, their reading process is to gloss over words, seeing them with their eyes only. They do not know how to listen to the voice behind the text. Many students share with me that when they read, “they cannot distinguish the voice in the text or even one voice from another.” They also share that “nothing sticks.” Where memory was vital to monastic education and their continued search for meaning, students use short-term memory for quizzes and exams. In my World Literature course, I help students to develop their faculty of memory through repetition, gestures, chanting and performances on short sections of a text.

The first mnemonic technique I use to help students develop their faculty of memory is to have them break down passages into smaller segments. When reading *Antigone* with my class, we look at a short section of a dialogue between Haemon and his father, King Creon. Haemon states, “Father, the gods endowed human beings with intelligence, which is the greatest of all possessions.”⁸³ After reading this line, I ask student to pause and I read it again. Then, I invite students to read the line aloud. As the

⁸² To get my students to think about memory I ask them, ‘How many phone numbers do you know by heart?’ Many students sit quietly thinking, while others respond that they know their parents or perhaps their best friends’ phone numbers. I share with them that when I was their age, I had many phone numbers, maybe fifty or so memorized. Yet, you can barely remember a few. Students share with me that they do not need to know phone numbers or anything else, because they can just look it up on their digital devices.

⁸³ Sophocles, *Antigone* (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2005), 695-697.

students listen to each other read the selection aloud, they begin to pay closer attention to it and the text begins to open for them. Putting students' focus and attention on one small section, forces students to notice it and search for meaning. They begin to ponder these small selections, 'intelligence' and 'the greatest of all possessions.' As they ponder this short section, they remember it and begin to intentionally search for the meaning behind Haemon's statement. Noting the positive impact of rereading on the development of memory one student commented, "When interpreting a text it is hard for me to understand it if I don't reread it or do something to help get it stuck in my memory."⁸⁴

Another line from *Antigone* that students often remember and want to explore for deeper meaning is a small section of a dialogue between Creon and the Guard.

Creon: "You have annoyed me by saying that!"
Guard "Does it sting in your ears or in your soul?"
Creon: "Why do you care where my pain is located?"
Guard: "The doer troubles your mind, I your ears."⁸⁵

At first glance, many students pay no attention to this short exchange between the Guard and King Creon; however, after reading it and repeating it, they begin to remember it and want to understand the Guard's question, "Does it sting in your ears or in your soul"?. They also want to pursue the different meanings of pain brought up - pain in the ears, pain in the soul and pain in the mind. By practicing this mnemonic technique, students begin to notice that this type of training builds their memory and assists them in searching the text for deeper meaning.

You need to dive into a text head first and just break it down, piece by piece. Read every line, slowly and with a clear mind, and then read it again until you are

⁸⁴ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁸⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone* (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2005), 326-329.

able to make perfect sense of it. Look for the deeper meaning of things; if you just skim the surface, you are missing the valuable pieces...⁸⁶

A second mnemonic technique, I use to help students train their memory is by using hand gestures with small sections of a text. Putting gestures to these small sections help students to build their memory so that they can remember a text. When reading *The Dhammapada* with my students, I read the text aloud. Next, I teach them hand gestures to go with the short section. *The Dhammapada* begins with, “All that we are is a result of what we have thought...”⁸⁷ This one section sets the foundation for the whole book; therefore, once the students remember it, it can help them unlock the meaning of the larger text. “Using gestures...not only helped to allow me to remember parts of the books...but it also helped me to get a deeper understanding of not only the part of the book but the book as a whole.”⁸⁸ When working with this passage, I say the line aloud using hand gestures. I move my hands in a circle for “all that we are.” Next, I place my right-hand palm up in the palm of my left hand and tap it three times for “is the result of.” Finally, I place my right forefinger to the right side of my head and repeat, “what we have thought.” I repeat this line with gestures a few times and then I invite each student to do the same.

This mnemonic technique is effective in developing and strengthening students’ memory, but it is also a powerful technique to help student to build trust in themselves. When they can remember, they can trust the information that they have within them. It is so effective in fact, that generally students memorize this short section before every

⁸⁶ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁸⁷ Eknath Easwaran, *The Dhammapada* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 105 (line 1).

⁸⁸ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Summer 2015).

student has completed his/her turn around the circle. What I have noticed is that students will often mouth the lines and move their hands to the words as their fellow classmates take their turns. In essence, students are training their own memory. By the end of the exercise, the students will have heard the line at least thirty times. Although students would not do this exercise on their own, having done it together in class they notice the effectiveness of it and even transfer this technique to other courses. One student shared that she used this technique to help her learn material from her psychology class. “After realizing the affects the motions had on my memory, I used the motion idea to study for my psychology class and during an exam I was signing motions to myself but remembered all the information I needed to know.”⁸⁹ This student felt empowered through the practice. The text was now stored within her. She trusted the technique and as a result, felt empowered to use it for another course.

A third mnemonic technique I use to help students to develop their memory is chanting and singing. *The Katha Upanishad* begins with an invocation called the *Shantipatha* chant.

*Om Saha navavatu; Saha nau bhunaktu;
Saha viryam karavavahai;
Tejasvi navadhitamastu;
Ma vidvishavahai;
Om Santih; Santih; Santih*

Om! May we both be protected, (the teacher and the student).
May we both enjoy protection.
May we both exert ourselves to find out the true meaning of the scriptures.
May we never quarrel with one another.

⁸⁹ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015). I am not sure whether this student meant to use the word affect or effect, but is interesting that she chose affect. Did this practice in fact not only help her to learn the words, but also to feel the words? If so, this is in keeping with the monastic experiences of memory.

Let there be threefold Peace. Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

Unlike the monks, chanting is an unfamiliar practice to students, but it is a powerful technique to develop memory. I have used this chant in three distinct ways: to exercise students' memory, to help them to understand the teacher-student relationship in the Indian culture, and to help them to understand the story. In terms of exercising students' memory, at the beginning of the semester I have my students open up their syllabus to the *Shantipatha* chant. I slowly read the chant to them in Sanskrit followed by the translation. Next, I have the students listen to me chant it a few times in Sanskrit. Finally, I invite them to chant it with me, one line at a time. At first, the chant is foreign to the students and they do not think they will ever be able to memorize it; however, after chanting it three times at the beginning of each class, most students have memorized it before the middle of the semester and ninety-five percent of my students have memorized it by the end of the semester.

Chanting helped to bring me into the moment. During the first few classes, I had no idea what we were supposed to be saying, causing me to pay close attention to the words and how they were pronounced. I had to read off the syllabus for a long time to remember the chant, but now that we are at the end of the semester, I know it by heart...⁹⁰

Chanting builds and develops student's memory, but it also builds self-trust. The words do not remain on the page of the syllabus (stored outside of them), now they are embedded in the memory of the student. Many students are not accustomed to developing their memory and when they can remember something that seemed so difficult at first, they feel more confident and self-empowered.

⁹⁰ Comment from a student in my World Literature 1 course (Spring 2015).

A fourth mnemonic technique, I use to help students train their memory is by having them perform a short section of a text. Performing is a complex process that calls upon the students' full sensory engagement. Students have to know the text; they have to use appropriate tone, inflection and body movement; they have to be able to see the text, hear the text and feel the text; and they have to memorize the text in order to perform it. Below I offer two examples of performance that I have used in my World Literature I course. The first one is from *The Dhammapada* and the second one is from the story of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*.

While reading *The Dhammapada*, I have students work in groups, select a short section of the text, and come up with a way to perform it. I give each group approximately ten minutes to work together on their selection. After ten minutes, I invite each group to perform their selection for the whole class. This exercise, performed in the middle of the semester, is memorable for many students. One student shared that she worked to develop movements to the verse "Let us live in joy, never hating those who hate us. Let us live in freedom, without hatred even among those who hate."⁹¹ At the end of the semester, she shared the following:

By putting motions to literally every single word, I began to remember it and I could almost feel what he was trying to say. This also helps you completely understand it. Reading every story quickly, just to get it done, results in only taking in a little bit from it. I do not remember too much when I read something quickly, or read something without actually thinking about every sentence or every paragraph or every page. By taking time to reflect and to think, that helps me to remember and to take in everything I can. I make sure to take my time.

⁹¹ Eknath Easwaran, *The Dhammapada* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 177, (line 197).

Reading these short sections slowly, repeating them and performing them helps students remember portions of the text and begin to search it more intentionally for meaning.

When performing the story of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*, I have students work in pairs with a short section of the story, memorize it and then practice performing it. After ten minutes, I invite the students to perform the story in front of the class. When students learn a few lines each, they will begin to remember them and be able to search them for deeper meaning. “Performing physical actions help memorize things that are important to the text.... I have never thought that acting out a specific line or action would help me recite it when I needed to...”⁹² A few things happen when students get up and perform the story. First, their performance shows that they have internalized and memorized the text.

Second, their performance depicts various ways that the students have interpreted the text. For example, some students playing the role of Jesus sit up straight, while others slouch (as he is tired). When depicting the woman of Samaria, some students walk towards the table (the well) with a regular gait, some hunch over as though burdened, while others walk with attitude and self-confidence. It is interesting to see how the students embody the characters, as each student is different. It is also interesting to see how they give voice to the text. In the text, Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, “Give me a drink.”⁹³ Yet, each student’s representation of Jesus differs. Some say it in a demanding tone, others in a tired tone, and still others in a gentle tone. Responding to Jesus, the Samaritan woman says, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of

⁹² Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁹³ The Gospel of John 4:7.

Samaria?”⁹⁴ Just as students use different tones for Jesus, they also do the same for the woman of Samaria. Some respond in a tone of shock, some humility, and others disdain.

Third, the care they take in their multiple interpretations of the text shows that they have deepened their appreciation of literature and fourth, their performance itself shows development in their self-confidence and self-esteem, as it is not easy for college students to perform in front of their peers. Like the monks, students learn that seeing, hearing and feeling a text, leaves an imprint on their memory. They begin to internalize this practice and make it their own, “I now enjoy acting out stories to myself as I read.”⁹⁵

Analysis: The Search for Meaning

In the monastic schools, memorization led to analysis. Once the monks had ruminated and memorized the text, they began to analyze it (Greek *analysis* ‘a breaking up’, ‘a loosening,’ ‘releasing’), searching it for deeper meaning. According to Origen, “Even those who cannot understand what is concealed in these writings... understands clearly that something is concealed there”⁹⁶ and analysis was the method the monks used to dig out the hidden meaning. Through analysis, the monks moved to interpret the text and appropriate its meaning into their lives. Origen referred to analysis as “digging” and urged his monks to dig deeper to unearth different and deeper meanings.⁹⁷ He taught his

⁹⁴ The Gospel of John 4:8.

⁹⁵ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course. (Summer 2015)

⁹⁶ Origen, *On First principles*, 4.2 in Duncan Robertson *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 21.

⁹⁷ In *Silence: A Christian History*, Diarmaid MacCulloch states, “In adopting an allegorical method, Origen imitated the method long used by learned Greeks to read Homer’s *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, or by learned Hellenistic Jews like Philo of Alexandria to read their Tanakh. The innermost meanings, hidden behind the literal sense of the words on the page, were not only the most important, but were also only available to those with eyes to see: allegory was to be constructed through the imagination...” (90). Biblical analysis and exegesis are interchangeable terms at this point in history.

students to begin their search at the literal sense, move to the allegorical sense and finally to the tropological sense. Gregory the Great compared the analysis of scripture to the construction of a building, “first we put in place the foundations of the history; then, with the typical meaning we build the superstructure of the mind... finally by the grace of moral allegory, we clothe the building with a coat of paint.”⁹⁸ According to Hugh, “All exposition of divine scripture is drawn forth according to three senses: story, allegory and ‘tropology’...”⁹⁹ In the monastic schools, these three senses of analysis (literal, allegorical and tropological) have remained foundational steps to search the text for deeper meaning.

In the first phase of analysis, the monks searched the text for the literal meaning (Latin *littera* ‘letter’), also referred to as the historical or narrative sense. “The order of the *littera* aims at no more than the correct reading of the text in its basic grammatical literal sense.”¹⁰⁰ Origen taught his monks to question the text asking, “What are the words of the text saying or describing; what is the text’s grammatical sense? What is the concrete/historical reality to which the text refers?”¹⁰¹ Hugh urged his students “to take time to learn the truth of the historical sense, and of deeds done,...”¹⁰² As the monks worked to understand the literal sense, they incorporated existing tools of literary analysis

⁹⁸ Great the great quoted in Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina*, 220.

⁹⁹ Hugh quoted in Raymond Studzinski, OSB, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 164. See also Duncan Robertson *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 215-216. In addition, Hugh also refers to these phases as the *littera*, *sensus*, and *sententia*.

¹⁰⁰ Wanda Cizewski, “Reading the World as Scripture: Hugh of St. Victor’s *De Tribus Diebus*, *Florilegium* 9, 1987, 67.

¹⁰¹ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 52. See also Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 124-128 for further information on the background and theological discussion on Origen’s exegetical practice.

¹⁰² Cizewski, “Reading the World as Scripture: Hugh of St. Victor’s *De Tribus Diebus*, *Florilegium* 9, 1987, 67.

such as philology, rhetoric and other literary and historical writings to shed light on the text's literal meaning. While investigating the literal meaning, the monks looked closely at words (nouns, verbs and adjectives), paying careful attention to their precise meanings. They also noticed who was speaking, what was being said, and the tone used to convey the message. They scrutinized dialogues as well as the historical-cultural context of the author and his/her audience. In the Cistercian School, the monks were instructed to imagine themselves in the narrative. Robertson notes, "For each verse of the Song, Bernard devotes an initial paragraph to the *littera*, imaging the scene depicted, relating to its immediate context, and conscientiously questioning its vocabulary and grammar."¹⁰³ By imagining the text, the monks could place themselves within the story where they could gaze upon the people speaking and see them in light of their own historical-cultural context.

In the second phase of analysis, the monks searched the text for the allegorical meaning (Latin *allegoria* 'figurative language, description of one thing under the image of another'). As the monks penetrated the literal surface of the text, they discovered "the 'hidden' or 'interior' meaning, that is, the allegorical sense."¹⁰⁴ In this second phase, the monks worked to interpret the text and understand what it was saying to them in light of their own lives, "What is this text speaking in the midst of the readers' or hearers'

¹⁰³ Robertson *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 185. The Song refers to Bernard's commentary on *The Song of Songs*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

lives?”¹⁰⁵ Building upon Origen’s explanation, the Cistercian monks drew upon their faculty of imagination, deepening it even further.

The innermost meanings, hidden behind the literal sense of the words on the page, were not only the most important, but were also only available to those with eyes to see: allegory was to be constructed through the imagination...¹⁰⁶

Imagination was critical in the monks’ search for the allegorical meaning of the text.

Without imagination, the search for meaning lacked depth which inhibited their ability to fully engage with the text. For Bernard,

Allegory as an interiorized form of reading established a meaning-making process that located the primary function of interpretation not as the discovery of a truth external to the reader but as the construction of the ‘self.’¹⁰⁷

Through the acts of reading and interpretation, the monks were re-constructing themselves. Bernard urged his monks to analyze the text in relationship with one’s life.

“Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience.”¹⁰⁸ As the monks worked through the allegorical meaning of the text, they deepened their relationship with the text, themselves and one another. Robertson notes in his research that the search for meaning in the monastic communities was “a live dialogue among readers/hearers and with the Author of the text, an interaction in which all participants are able to respond to one another.”¹⁰⁹ They were trained to listen to the voice behind and within the text And

¹⁰⁵ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 52. Also see Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 124-128 for further information on the background and theological discussion on Origen’s exegetical practice.

¹⁰⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 90-91.

¹⁰⁷ Burrows, Hunters, Hounds and Allegorical Readers: The Body of the text and the text of the Body in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs, *Studies in Spirituality* 14/1 (2004): 120, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/SIS.14.0.505190>.

¹⁰⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux quoted in Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 158.

¹⁰⁹ Duncan Robertson, 34.

as they began to hear the wisdom that the text was sharing with them, they leaned in closer and began to listen more intently.

In the third phase of analysis, the monks plumbed the text more profoundly as they searched it for the tropological meaning (Latin *tropologia*, Greek *trope* ‘a turn, direction, course, way’), referring to ethics and morals. As the monks examined the text more closely, they worked to discern its ethical meaning. As Rorem notes, “The moral sense of the scriptures is thus the moral of the story, that is, the personal application of the biblical message to the whole of one’s own life, rather than to just one part of life later called morality.”¹¹⁰ Origen taught his students to question the text, asking “What is the Word teaching through this reality?” Hugh taught that the tropological meaning is illuminated when “we recognize what we should be doing.”¹¹¹ The text always had something important to share with its readers and hearers about behavior. By analyzing the text for the tropological meaning, the monks discovered the effects of both virtuous and non-virtuous actions. These resulting consequences not only informed the monks, but also formed them as they worked to apply what they learned to live virtuous lives.

In summary, the monastic schools taught a three-phased approach to analyzing a text. Beginning with their search for its literal/historical meaning, the monks progressed to the allegorical/symbolic meaning and finally to the tropological/moral meaning. As Cizewski notes, “the text must be broken into parts to disclose meaning, and then the meaning of each part must be disclosed by [further] investigation.”¹¹² Each step in the

¹¹⁰ Paul Rorem, *Hugh of St. Victor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 120.

¹¹¹ Hugh of St. Victor quoted in Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 164. See also Hugh of St. Victor, “De Tribus Maximis Circumstantiis Gestorum” in Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 264.

¹¹² Cizewski, “Reading the World as Scripture: Hugh of St. Victor’s *De Tribus Diebus, Florilegium*,” 9, 1987, 68, journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/flor/article/download/19170/20844

meditatio process led the monks to search the text with greater intention and intensity as they struggled to understand it better. As they searched the text for deeper meaning, the monks entered into a reciprocal relationship with it and came to know it, not just objectively, but subjectively. They “moved from being critical outsiders to becoming appreciative insiders. The text [was] no longer something to be looked at with cool and detached expertise but something to be entered into with the playful curiosity of a child.”¹¹³ As they came to know the text better, they began to interpret its meaning for their own lives. According to Ricoeur, “The interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself [or herself] better, understands...differently, or simply begins to understand himself [or herself]...Initially the text had only a sense;...now it has a meaning...”¹¹⁴

The monks searched the text for its deeper meaning and its significance in their personal growth and development. Drawing from the monastic literary practice, students in my World Literature I course analyze the literal, allegorical and tropological senses of the text as they work to uncover deeper meaning. As students work through these three senses, they too, like the monks, begin to uncover hidden wisdom for their personal growth and development. One student likened this approach to a kaleidoscope saying,

Most of the time, we learn something new when we look at it from another point of view. We should do the same when we read; be able to get a different standpoint that can change the way we see things. I like to think of it as a kaleidoscope; when you rotate it, different colors and new shapes appear that were not visible in the beginning.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book*, 102

¹¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “What is a text? Explanation and Understanding,” *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 158-159. See also, Studzinski, 56.

¹¹⁵ Comment from a student in a World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

When reading a text, I have students begin their analysis with the literal sense (what the text says). Next, I have them explore the allegorical sense (symbolic and/or personal meaning), and finally I have students explore the tropological sense (ethical and personal application for their own lives).

As I work with students to help them unpack the literal sense of the text, I use a variety of techniques such as providing them with the historical-cultural context, paying close attention to words and punctuation marks, examining arguments and dialogue, and drawing pictures. However, I have also discovered that it is important to stay flexible. As the monks noted, not all three senses are in every text¹¹⁶; therefore, I work to select the best techniques that will fit the reading and help increase student learning.¹¹⁷

Before my students engage in reading the text, I provide students with some historical-cultural backgrounds to help them situate the text in its original context. By situating the text in its historical-cultural context, students are better able to grasp the socio-political-cultural milieu of the time. In “Performative Literacy: The Habits of Mind of Highly Literate Readers,” Blau explains that students need “prior conceptual and informational knowledge to make sense of what they read, beyond what they would understand merely by pronouncing and decoding the words of a text.”¹¹⁸ Without

¹¹⁶ Hugh of St. Victor, quoted in Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 164. See also, Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 5.2. Hugh states, “It is necessary, therefore, so to handle the Sacred Scripture that we do not try to find history everywhere, not allegory everywhere, nor tropology everywhere but rather that we assign individual things fittingly in their own places, as reason demands.”

¹¹⁷ I will provide examples throughout the analysis section; however, I will limit the examples to a few texts as a way to intentionally build upon previous examples in an attempt to deepen the readers understanding of the practice and to reduce confusion.

¹¹⁸ Sheridan Blau, “Performative Literacy: The Habits of Mind of Highly Literate Readers,” *Voices from the Middle*, Vol 10, N.3, March 2003, 19. <http://www.ncte.org/journals/vm/issues/v10-3>

insights into the historical-cultural climate, the text loses its roots and its original contribution to the culture and period in which it was written.

When introducing *The Katha Upanishad* (circa 800-500 B.C.E.), a dialogue between a student (Nachiketa) and his teacher (Yama, the god of death), I offer insights into the Indian culture including the longstanding tradition of the student-teacher relationship as well as the importance of the forest ashrams and their significance to a student's spiritual growth and development. Another example of situating a text in its historical-cultural context is in the story *Jesus and the woman of Samaria* located in the Gospel of John (circa 95-110 C.E.). This story unfolds at Jacob's well, a place filled with religious history, and addresses tensions between differing cultural-religious groups (the Jews and the Samaritans). When students begin to understand the historical-cultural origins and context of the conflict and tensions between the Jews and Samaritans (such as the Assyrians conquering Northern Israel in 722 B.C.E. and displacing its people, and the Jewish purity codes, claiming Samaritans' impure and unclean), they can better understand the story. "Having background information on the relationship between the Jews and the people of Samaria... allowed us to have a different perspective on why the Woman was saying, 'How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink of me, a woman of Samaria' (John 4:9)?"¹¹⁹

A second technique is to help students unpack the literal sense of the text is to have them pay close attention to the words in the text. Words often contain multiple meanings, which alter the interpretation. Therefore, discerning the appropriate meaning

¹¹⁹ Comment for a student in my World Literature I course (Summer 2015).

of a word is essential to understanding the literal sense of the text. Many of the texts in a World Literature course contain unfamiliar terms that need to be defined and explained. Sometimes I will define and explain a word; however, if I know that the definition and explanation is contained within the text, I encourage students to search for its meaning. When reading *The Katha Upanishad*, I explain the meaning of some of the words such as Atman, Brahman, dharma and karma, but I have students search for the meaning of Yama, reincarnation, samsara and Om. In addition, it is also important for students to pay attention to the number of times a word shows up in a particular passage or even in the overall text. Repetition of words shows their significance in the overall meaning of the text. For example in *Jesus and the woman of Samaria*, the word ‘water’ shows up ten times in the text. Students need to understand that water is a life-giving metaphor that acts as a key to unlock the deeper meaning of the text.

A third technique to help students unpack the literal sense of the text is to pay attention to punctuation marks. Punctuation marks guide the way a text should be read. They also help to unlock the meaning of the text. When students pay attention to punctuation, they get a better sense of how the text is supposed to flow as well as the meaning that the text is trying to convey. For example, in *The Katha Upanishad*, Nachiketa, observing his father perform a religious offering, asks him, “What merit can be obtained by giving away cows that are too old to give milk?”¹²⁰ This one question leads to a confrontation between Nachiketa and his father about what constitutes a proper sacrifice. Nachiketa not only question his father’s sacrifice but also repeatedly asks him,

¹²⁰ Eknath Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 69.

“To whom will you offer me?” Finally, his father exclaims, “To death I give you!”¹²¹ The Father’s command is quite shocking and at first students cannot wrap their heads around it, but as we continue to explore the text, they realize that it is in the home of death that Nachiketa learns the mystery of life.

Although punctuation helps to guide the students through the text, they can still leave room for ambiguity, which students will need to discern. For example, in *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*, the story states, “A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’... The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’”¹²² Is Jesus demanding a drink, is he tired and gently pleading for a drink or is he just stating that he would like a drink? In terms of the Samaritan woman, is she annoyed, humiliated, or curious? Punctuation acts as signpost and before proceeding, students need to stop, look and listen to what the text says, but also how the words are conveyed. In this pause, students can enter more deeply into the text and discern its meaning.

A fourth technique to help students unpack the literal sense of the text is to have students diagram character’s statements and/or arguments. I often approach this in two ways. I have the students locate the argument(s) around a particular issue and write it down or I have students write out the dialogue, noting the questions and how each question is answered in the dialogue. For example, when reading *Antigone*, I have students work in groups to find and list each character’s argument. By listing the arguments, students get a better understanding of why each character responds the way

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² John 4:7-9, Oremus Bible Browser.

they do. “From Antigone’s perspective one might view Creon as a tyrant who is unfair to his people. From Creon’s perspective, one might view Antigone as a criminal who acted out against the law and deserves punishment.”¹²³

As we explore *Antigone* further, I also ask students to breakdown Haemon’s argument, in which he questions King Creon’s decision to put Antigone to death. As students meticulously work through the dialogue, they begin to notice the eloquence and intelligence of Haemon’s words and his ability to construct a rational argument supporting a democratic society, while exposing the weakness of a monarchy. When reading the story of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*, I also invite students to write out the dialogue between Jesus and the woman of Samaria, beginning with the first statement, in which Jesus says, “Give me a drink.”¹²⁴ After writing out the entire dialogue, students begin to notice that Jesus never did receive a physical drink of water from the well. In fact, as the dialogue continues it is the woman who asked Jesus for ‘living water.’ “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”¹²⁵

A fifth technique to help students unpack the literal sense of a text is to have them illustrate the text in an artistic form. In order for students to accurately illustrate the text, they have to pay close attention to what the text is literally stating and think about how they are going to draw it. Another benefit of drawing is the fact that it helps students visualize the story. For example, when reading *The Katha Upanishad* I have students draw out the following passage:

¹²³ Comment for a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

¹²⁴ John 4:7.

¹²⁵ John 4:15.

Know the Self as lord of the chariot,
The body as the chariot itself,
The discriminating intellect as charioteer,
And the mind as reins.
The senses, say the wise, are the horses;
Selfish desires are the roads they travel.¹²⁶

Students draw a picture of a chariot being pulled by five horses (the five senses). Within the chariot, they draw the Self. Then they draw the intellect, who is seated outside and drives the chariot, while holding onto the reins (the mind). When reading the story of *Jesus and the woman of Samaria*, I have students paying close attention to the descriptions offered in the text to help them to illustrate the scene of Jesus and the woman of Samaria at the well. How they visualize Jesus, the woman of Samaria and the well provides insights into how they are interpreting the text. As students share their pictures with their classmates, they are often amazed at the various ways in which students depict the text and begin to draw insights from one another.

Once students have a solid understanding of the literal sense of the text, I invite them to move deeper to explore the allegorical sense. I begin by explaining to students that the allegorical sense of the text contains symbols, which point to hidden meaning, not readily apparent during a literal read. Students need techniques to help them get deeper inside the text, interpret it, experience it, and uncover its wisdom. I guide students in unpacking the allegorical sense of the text by employing the following techniques: looking beyond the surface meaning of words and/or statements for the symbolic meaning, posing questions to the text, expanding on their drawings and inviting them to place themselves within the text to spark a personal connection.

¹²⁶ Eknath Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 81.

To help students unpack the allegorical sense of a text, I read a word or phrase and ask students, “What does this mean?” *The Katha Upanishad* is full of symbolism. Yama (the god of death) is Nachiketa’s (a teenage boy) teacher. What an unlikely a teacher!¹²⁷ At one point in the story, Yama explains the human body to Nachiketa in terms of a city saying,

There is a city with eleven gates
Of which the ruler is the unborn Self,
Whose light forever shines.¹²⁸

Students need help understanding that the eleven gates refer to the eleven openings in the body and that none of these openings is the Supreme ruler of the city (the body), but only the Self, which rules supreme.¹²⁹ Another example is from the story of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*. Jesus travels to a foreign land, meets a woman at the well where the dialogue unfolds. In the Hebrew Scriptures, a man meeting a woman at a well symbolizes a betrothal. According Alter,

a betrothal type-scene in the Hebrew bible occurs when the hero (the future bridegroom) or his surrogate journeys to a foreign land, encounters a girl at the well, and one of them draws water from the well...the meeting of Isaac's surrogate with Rebekah (Gen 24:10-61) and the meeting of Jacob and Rachel at a well (Gen 29:1-10).¹³⁰

What type of betrothal the text elicits is something students need to question and discern.

¹²⁷ Nachiketa, having been sent by his father to the home of death, waits for Yama for three nights. What person would wait for death to show up? Yet, Nachiketa seeks to know the secret of death and therefore, who better to teach him than the god of death.

¹²⁸ Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad*, 86.

¹²⁹ The eleven openings in the body are the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, orignation opening, umbilicus, anus, and the crown of the head (called the crown chakra).

¹³⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of the Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 51-62 quoted in Adeline Fehribach. *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 50.

Where the word ‘well’ carries symbolic meaning, so too, does the word ‘husband.’ At one point in the story, Jesus says to the woman of Samaria,

‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.’¹³¹

Literally, the story states that the woman had five husbands; however, it does not state why the woman of Samaria had five husbands or what else, the ‘five husbands’ may represent. Therefore, students need help to unpack the meaning, relying on the instructor’s knowledge or additional commentaries provided by the instructor. During students’ first few reads, they generally view the woman of Samaria in a negative light. They see her as an uncommitted, scandalous woman. I share with students that “the five husbands may be a symbolic reference to the foreign gods of the five groups of people brought in by the Assyrians to colonize Samaria (cf. 2 Kgs 17:13-34).”¹³² I also share with them that perhaps all five of her husbands may have died. Reflecting on her time discerning the meaning of this verse, one student shared, “Truly learning the importance of how words and their meaning can change depending on how you look at it really made me wonder if people have been misinterpreting texts since the very beginning of the written words.”¹³³

The second technique to help students unpack the allegorical sense of a text is to have them create a question that will help them search the text for deeper meaning. I have students move into groups and pose a question to their fellow classmates. However, their

¹³¹ John 4:16-18

¹³² Adeline Fehribach. *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 65.

¹³³ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

classmates may not answer the question; instead, they are to come up with additional questions to help the student probe the text for deeper meaning. This is a challenging practice for students. They must know the text, think deeply about the text, and be able to construct additional questions that support the student in his/her own discovery. For example, when reading *The Katha Upanishad*, one student asked his group, “How did Nachiketa get Yama to tell him the secret of immortal life?”¹³⁴ Students within his group began posing questions to the student such as: How long did Nachiketa wait for Yama? Would you have waited at the home of death for three nights, all alone? What did Yama offer Nachiketa? What would you do with three wishes? What did Nachiketa wish for? Was Nachiketa tested by Yama? How did he respond? Although challenging, this practice was powerful for students, “At first we struggled to answer these questions, but when the questions got more personal like what would you wish for? And do you think you know your Self? We started to realize Nachiketa was not like any of us...he was more self aware.”¹³⁵

The third technique to help students unpack the allegorical sense of a text is to have them expand on their drawings. By expanding on the drawings they created while searching for the literal sense, students can begin to transition from the literal to the allegorical sense. For example, when searching for the allegorical meaning in *The Katha Upanishad*, I ask students to build upon the drawing they created for the following passage:

Know the Self as lord of the chariot,
The body as the chariot itself,
The discriminating intellect as charioteer,

¹³⁴ Question from a student from my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

¹³⁵ Comment for a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

And the mind as reins.
The senses, say the wise, are the horses;
Selfish desires are the roads they travel.¹³⁶

Students begin by drawing a thought bubble around each horse (five horses representing the five senses) and write within it what each of their five senses desire. (For example, their eyes may desire the latest smart phone; their nose may desire the pizza they smell cooking in the cafeteria etc.) Next, students draw a thought bubble around the mind and list within it all the thoughts swirling through their mind. Then, they place a thought bubble around the charioteer (the intellect) and write what it is that they are working towards. Finally, they place a thought bubble around the Self, seated within the chariot and write down their hearts deepest desire. By working through this exercise, students begin to make a personal connection with the story. The passage is no longer an abstract image, but begins to take on meaning for them. One student commented,

[A]fter analyzing the text and putting it into my own life scenario, I learned...the horses represent your senses, things that could potentially pull you away from finding your true self. In relation to me...my senses would be anything that would hold me from attaining a job in law enforcement. There are things around me all the time that could pose a potential threat to achieving my goal... Things like drugs, alcohol, and other potential scenarios that would severely harm my chances of a training for a job in law enforcement... There needs to be something controlling those senses...they are the reins and the reins are a metaphor for the mind...Though I do have the goal of becoming an agent and I know what it takes to become one, sometimes the mind isn't enough, I also need to be able to tell myself that that is my goal and that that is what I want and I'll do whatever it takes to get it.¹³⁷

Through further analysis, this student was able to begin to distinguish between his senses, his mind and his deeper goal (purpose in life). He began to see how the senses need the

¹³⁶ Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad*, 81.

¹³⁷ Comment for a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

mind to discipline them, but he also realized that his mind needs guidance from a deeper place within himself, which he refers to as the “I who tells himself.”

The fourth technique to help students unpack the allegorical sense of a text is to have them place themselves within the text and imagine the text is speaking to them personally. For example, in *The Katha Upanishad*, Nachiketa waits for three nights for Yama to return to his home. Upon his return, Yama states,

O Spiritual guest, I grant you three boons
To atone for the three inhospitable nights
You have spent in my abode.
Ask for three boons, one for each night.¹³⁸

I ask students to write down on a piece of paper what they would ask for if given three wishes. They are amazed at how different their responses are from Nachiketa’s and begin to pay closer attention to the text to understand what contributed to this teenage boy’s maturity.

Another example of how I use dialogue to explore deeper meaning in a text is to expand on the dialogue, which began in the literal analysis. In *Jesus and the woman of Samaria*, I ask students to re-look at the dialogue between Jesus and the woman of Samaria and unpack it for deeper meaning. As they dig deeper into the dialogue, they notice that the text begins with Jesus asking for a drink. Yet, students begin to notice that nowhere does the text state that Jesus received a drink of water. The woman comes with a water-jar, but leaves it at the well when she exits the scene. In one respect, it appears as though neither Jesus nor the woman of Samaria received what they originally wanted; however, upon further analysis each received what they deeply desired. Jesus’ message of

¹³⁸ Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad*, 70.

living water was received, as the woman, herself became a well of life-giving water for others in her town, and the woman of Samaria receives not only receives valuable information, but experiences the Truth.

As the dialogue unfolds between Jesus and the woman of Samaria students begin to see the multiple levels of meaning inherent in the text. After working through the dialogue in the text more carefully, one student commented, “the well in the story was really a symbol for everyone’s capacity to tap into the well inside of him or her...the metaphorical water was a life-giving substance that people could access inside [themselves]...”¹³⁹ As Jesus and the woman of Samaria dialogue, Jesus helps her dig further inside herself, expose her wounds of rejection and heal them. As students work through these levels of meaning, they begin to make a personal connection. One student noted,

the transition from division to unity between the Samaritans and the Jews related to my life of roommate drama...From this story I learned that for unity to come from division, someone has to make the first move and be the bigger person by making him or herself vulnerable...Creating unity cannot be one sided, but both sides must become vulnerable to create equality between the two.¹⁴⁰

By working through the allegorical meanings of the text, the students begin to uncover hidden wisdom, which they continue to reflect on outside of class.

After I work through the allegorical sense with students, I invite them to move deeper to explore the tropological sense. I explain to the students that the tropological sense builds on the literal and allegorical senses and refers to the ethical meanings within a text. I have students explore the ethical issues raised in the text and the way in which

¹³⁹ Comment for a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

¹⁴⁰ Comment for a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

they can apply the ethical meaning unfolding in the text in their personal lives. For example, Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* raises ethical questions. According to the law of the gods, Polynices needs to be buried or else he will be blocked from entering Hades and doomed to wander for all eternity by the river Styx. Furthermore, according to Greek custom, burial is the responsibility of the women and as such offers a female an important role in society. According to the law of King Creon, whoever buries Polynices (considered a traitor to the city of Thebes) will be punished by death. In the end, Antigone decided to bury her brother Polynices and in return, King Creon has her buried alive. In addition, Creon's wife Eurydice and their son Haemon both commit suicide. I have students break into groups and discuss the ethical implications raised in the tragedy and share with each other what they are learning about democracy, power, leadership, free will and laws.

When reading and analyzing the tropological sense for *The Katha Upanishad*, I invite students to think of ways to learn and grow from the story. One student made the following connection:

When I first sat down in class, and [the instructor] stressed the 'no cellphone' policy, I believed she was being like every other teacher. When we read about passing pleasures in *The Katha Upanishad*, it made sense to me why our teacher wanted our full attention away from our cellphones; the information we receive from our phones are considered a passing pleasure which distracts us from why we are in class: to learn. When our attention is taken away from the class to focus on what is going on elsewhere, we lose the drive to learn and pay attention. I did not like to think of myself as 'goaded by [my] senses, after what seems immediate pleasure' (Katha Upanishad 15), yet I realized that even when I felt my phone vibrate, I felt my mind wander to consider what it could be. I hated knowing that a little device had such power over my mind.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

As students begin to consider the ethical nature of the text, they begin to learn something deeper about themselves and begin to apply this wisdom to their lives. As students continue to discern the tropological sense, they begin to grow in self-awareness.

When reflecting on the tropological sense of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*, I invite students to consider what the text has to share about living in right relationship with others. For example, Jesus, as a Jewish rabbi, took a risk, when he entered into a dialogue with a woman of Samaria, defying cultural-religious norms, as did the woman of Samaria. As students explore the dialogue further, they begin to see the way in which Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman works to mend a broken relationship.

Reflecting on the dialogue between Jesus and the woman of Samaria, one student noted,

I don't find many people capable of this kind of dialogue with one another, including myself. It is a skill we have lost over the course of time and with the development of technology. Will we ever regain this dialogue? ...I am afraid we never will. It is important, however, that we learn how to create proper dialogue with others...¹⁴²

Exploring the tropological meaning of the text encourages students to engage more fully in it and draw out wisdom to apply to their own lives. The above student began to think about the impact technology is having on peoples' ability to have authentic inter-personal dialogue, which is vital to living in right relationship with others.

Pedagogical Insights and Challenges

The monastic method of *meditatio* offers educators a pedagogical method to use with students to search a text for deeper meaning. Educators who choose to use this monastic method must be committed to slowing down the entire learning process. In the

¹⁴² Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

monastic schools, the monks not only engaged in the slow deliberate reading of a text, but they incorporated the techniques of rumination, memorization and analysis into their study of a text. As the monks worked slowly through a text, they deepened their relationship with it, learned from it, and incorporated the wisdom they uncovered into their personal lives.

One pedagogical challenge facing educators is the necessity of creating a safe communal space within the classroom for students to feel comfortable to explore the text more deeply and to share the insights that they are discovering. I stress in the beginning of the semester the importance of respect for everyone's thoughts (students and instructor). I explain to students that each text contains multiple meanings buried below a literal reading. If there are thirty students and one instructor in the class, then the blessing is that we will have thirty-one different insights into the text. I also share with students that I do not have all the answers and am delighted to learn new things from them. It is vital that educators be open to listening to the students' point of view. When students feel listened to and valued, they are more likely to engage more profoundly in their exploration and study of the text.

A second pedagogical challenge facing educators is class size. Small class sizes are ideal; however, educators who have larger classes can adapt the pedagogical method for their class size and classroom set-up. I usually have thirty students in each of my World Literature I classes and at times, I invite students to gather into small groups to work on a particular technique together; however, when they have finished I invite each group to share something they learned with the whole class to afford the entire class then benefit of listening to each groups' insights. When the class is larger, the educator may

have to slow down the practice even more to make time for group sharing. Students often share that they really enjoy listening to each other's insights and learn a lot from one another.

A third pedagogical challenge educators face is providing time and space for students to ruminate on the text. Generally, educators feel the need to cover a certain amount of material and as a result, move quickly through the text. Rumination disrupts the quick pace, forcing the educator to slow down. Slowing down may mean covering less content, but the result will be a deepening of the content and the overall learning experience for the students. Students, for different reasons, rush through the text, skimming over lines. They want to read the text quickly and move on to the next point so that they have less to do on their own outside of class. Students have not learned that slowing down and ruminating on the text will actually help them to engage in it more deeply. Rumination forces everyone to slow down and patiently listen to the text. Educators need to be patient, stand their ground and not give in to students' impatience and petulance. They need to trust that as students begin to repeat the words slowly, they will begin to hear them, feel them, and think about them deeper. As the text slowly enters into them, it will continue to inform and form them.

A fourth pedagogical challenge facing educators is the challenge to get students to memorize selections of the text. The faculty of memory has a long-standing tradition in the Humanities. In music courses, student learn to memorize notes and songs; in dance courses, students learn to memorize dance steps and routines; in theater courses, students learn to memorize lines of plays; and in poetry classes, students learn to memorize poems. As students memorized the necessary elements for their discipline, they build an

internal repertoire, a treasure chest of information that will continue to shape their thoughts. Students can also learn to memorize stories, dialogues, speeches, and other texts in the areas of English, History, Philosophy and Religious Studies. Educators have to reclaim the power of the faculty of memory and create time and space to encourage its development in their classes.

Although students are trained to retain information for a quiz or an exam, often referred to as ‘data-dumping,’ they are only engaging their short-term memory. Students today are not trained to remember anything long-term. Instead, they rely on their digital devices to remember everything for them. However, this reliance on technology comes with a price. In *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brain*, Nicholas Carr states,

brain scientist have come to realize that that long-term memory is actually the seat of understanding. It stores not just facts but complex concepts, or ‘schemas.’ By organizing scattered bits of information into patterns of knowledge, schemas give depth and richness to our thinking.¹⁴³

When students begin to memorize a text they are adding ‘knowledge,’ ‘schemes’ and a ‘richness’ to their thinking, which they can continue to cultivate and draw upon in a variety of ways in their lives.

Furthermore, digital devices are not only impacting students’ long-term memory, but also their ability to interpret what they read. According to Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University, “When we read online, we tend to become mere decoders of information. Our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections

¹⁴³ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 124.

that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged.”¹⁴⁴

Educators need to work to engage students at the start of the semester. At first, it may seem a bit awkward but they must trust that the pedagogical method of *meditatio* has been vetted over centuries. For example, the fall semester of 2015 has just begun. After I finished reviewing the World Literature I syllabus with students, I engaged them in an activity to learn some of their classmates’ names. Not only did they remember some of their classmates’ names, but they also had fun. By the end of the fifteen minutes or so, the class of thirty began to form a sense of community.

Next, after introducing *Gilgamesh* and situating it in its historical-cultural context, I began reading it slowly and deliberately. I read the first lines a few times and then I invited students to read with me.

He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions, from exaltation to despair, had been granted a vision into the great mystery, the secret places, the primeval days before the Flood. He had journeyed to the edge of the world and had made his way back, exhausted but whole.¹⁴⁵

After reading the lines from *Giglamesh*, I taught them gestures to put with the words, which I had them perform as they recited the text (most of my students had yet to purchase the text, so therefore, they needed to rely on their memory). They did this a few more times. Finally, I asked them to please stand up and repeat the lines of the text, while using their hand gestures. I recited it with them a few more times and then I had them recite it by themselves. It was amazing to see all of the students actively engaged in

¹⁴⁴ Maryanne Wolf, quoted in Nicholas Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to our Brains” *The Atlantic*, July/August, 2008. Wolf is a developmental psychologist at Tufts University and the author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>

¹⁴⁵ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 69.

reciting the text by memory. One student was so excited she shouted out, “We are remembering it!” As students strengthen their memory, they build a treasure chest, which will continue to nurture them as they continue to read and search a text for deeper meaning.

A fifth pedagogical challenge that educators face is helping students to mine the text for deeper meaning. Students cannot mine the text for hidden wisdom unless the whole reading and searching for meaning process slows down. Therefore, educators must be committed to analysis. Mining a text is hard work and students need constant encouragement. Educators need to remain open to the possibility of multiple meanings as stated above, but they must also provide various techniques to help the students penetrate the surface of the text. These include beginning with the literal sense so that students can be grounded in what the text actually says. Next, they need to understand the symbolic meaning, while making a personal connection. Finally, they need to be encouraged to extract some precious wisdom to live out in their own life. Students want to benefit from their efforts and it is vital that educators help them to see the relevancy of the texts they read.

Again, this monastic literary practice takes time and educators will not be able to cover the same amount of material in a class. However, I have discovered that students engage more fully when instructors work with smaller sections of the text. For example, in the above section I mentioned that we read four lines from *Gilgamesh* on their first day of class. Yet, after spending time with these four lines, (again, most students did not have a book in front of them) I asked students what they knew about Gilgamesh and what they wanted to know about Gilgamesh. Without hesitation, students shared with the class that

Gilgamesh went on a long journey, he had seen everything, the journey was hard, he experienced all emotions, and he came back exhausted but whole. Some shared what they wanted to know. What propelled Gilgamesh on his journey? Where did he go? Who shared the great mysteries and secrets with him? What happened to him that he became whole?¹⁴⁶ What I noticed is students began to invest in the text and were primed to read a portion of it on their own.

Summary

In summary, this proposed method of *meditatio* is one way to search a text for deeper meaning. The ancient monastics found *meditatio* a fruitful way to uncover wisdom. In order to adapt and implement *meditatio* it is important for educators to have some professional development on this practice, to understand the meaning and purpose behind the method, and to develop some technique to implement the method and support them in their teaching. Educators who do engage in the method and learn its accompanying benefits will be better equipped to bring this monastic literary practice into their classrooms. They can begin to revise their pedagogy and include various *meditatio* techniques to search a text for deeper meaning. They can also revise their course outcomes to include subjective, student-centered outcomes, rather than purely objective content-centered outcomes. By doing so, educators send a message to their students that their formation is important to them.

Educators need to emphasize that searching a text for deeper meaning involves the active participation of educators and students, who search a text together seeking

¹⁴⁶ Students' comments in a World Literature I course (Fall 2015).

wisdom and truth. This practice often gives students a renewed desire to learn and search for the deeper meaning and purpose of text knowing that it will inform and form their lives. It gives them tools to dig deep within a text and unearth a treasure of hidden wisdom that they can apply to their personal lives. As students practice *meditatio* techniques, they acquire a renewed sense of confidence in their ability to search within a text for deeper meaning. Once the students have learned the skill of *meditatio*, they will have the foundation necessary to move into the next practice of *oratio*, the skill of moving even deeper into the subjective realm where they can begin to learn to respond to the text.

RE-APPROPRIATING THE MONASTIC PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

CHAPTER FIVE

***ORATIO*: RESPONDING TO THE TEXT**

Lectio begins a conversation, engaging people and moving them to respond. The word comes to be a demanding word. It nudges people to free themselves from attachments. It addresses them often where they are the most vulnerable...It speaks to readers' particular situations, inviting a concrete response. Raymond Studzinski

In this chapter, I will look at how the ancient practice of *oratio*, used in the monastic schools, can be re-appropriated for use in a 21st century Humanities classroom as an extended way of deepening one's understanding of and responding to a literary text. I will begin with a brief review of the ancient monastic practice of *oratio* including its purpose, and propose its use as a personal and communal way of responding to a literary work in a contemporary college-level course. I will explore *oratio* as a movement away from the centrality of the text into the subjective realm, where the monks poured out their heartfelt response to the text, and offer some examples of the ways in which I have adapted *oratio* into my pedagogy. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges for instructors in the Humanities interested in incorporating the contemplative practice of *oratio* into their teaching.

Part I: History

***Oratio*: Responding to the Text**

In the Monastic Schools, the practice of *oratio* (Latin, 'a discourse,' 'mode of expressing,' 'prayer') followed the practice of *meditatio* (the search for meaning). *Oratio* is a movement away from the centrality of the text into the subjective realm where the

monks poured out their heartfelt response to what they were experiencing from their time listening to the text (*lectio*) and searching it for meaning (*meditatio*). Benedict called *oratio* “a colloquy [Latin, ‘conversation,’] with the Lord.”¹ Isadore of Seville referred to *oratio* as ‘the reason of the mouth.’² For Casey, *oratio* is simply “prayer”³ and for Dumont, *oratio* expresses “a heart to heart conversation.”⁴ According to Bianchi *oratio* is “a response to reading Scripture...it is an intoxicating moment, which could easily result in tears of joy or in dance.”⁵ In his research, Stewart notes:

Cassian consistently distinguishes ‘psalmody’ (*psalmodia*) from the ‘prayer’ (*oratio*) that followed it. This pattern is familiar from many Egyptian monastic sources, where it is clear that chanting a psalm was not itself understood to constitute ‘prayer,’ but was preparation for a subsequent moment in which sentiment expressed by the Psalmist (gratitude, praise, lament, etc.) would inspire personal prayer..⁶

These various monastic understandings of *oratio* give us a sense of what this ancient practice was for the monks.

As the monks immersed themselves deeper into the text - listening to it, searching within it, thinking about it, walking with it, eating with it, working with it, feeling it, and sitting still with it – their search proved productive as it uncovered a deeper truth, a truth that often pierced their hearts, calling forth a response. The resulting outward flow was called *oratio*. Studinski explains,

¹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 52.3, 417

² Isadore of Seville quoted in Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 117.

³ Michael Casey, *The Undivided Heart: The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation* (Petershams, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1994), 164.

⁴ Charles Dumont, “*Praying the Word of God*” (Oxford, SLG Press, 1999), 19.

⁵ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 62.

⁶ Columba Stewart, OSB. “The Latin West III: Benedictine Monasticism and Mysticism” in the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 223-224.

Lectio begins a conversation, engaging people and moving them to respond. The word comes to be a demanding word. It nudges people to free themselves from attachments. It addresses them often where they are the most vulnerable...It speaks to readers' particular situations, inviting a concrete response.⁷

For the monastics, *oratio* was a significant shift – a movement away from the hegemony of the text to the interiority of the monks as well as a shift from the head to the heart – where the monks began to articulate the transformation of their inner world, both communally and in private, through spontaneous expressions, extended reflections and liturgical celebrations.

***Oratio* as a Communal and Private Response**

Since *oratio* was such a spontaneous response to a deeper experience of a sacred text, Benedict offered instructions to his monks to aid them in their inspired responses. For communal prayer, he emphasized brevity of prayer: “in community, prayer should be very brief...”⁸ However, for private prayer he emphasized depth of feeling, ‘tears’ and ‘full attention of the heart’, although not loud emoting. “If one wishes to pray privately, let him simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and full attention of heart.”⁹ Since *oratio* shifted attention from the examination of the text to the subjective experience of the reader, it was essential to have flexible boundaries to support the monks in their emotional purgative process. Benedict’s instructions point to the fact that the monks must have needed these guidelines, for they must have been so moved by their time with the text that they naturally poured out their feelings in long and/or

⁷ Studzinski, OSB. *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 214.

⁸ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, 20.5, 206.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.4, 415.

uncontrollable vocal outbursts. In addition, these guidelines served to protect the monks from entanglement in others' experiences, which would prevent them from fully engaging in their own authentic responses. Benedict focused on the interiority of *oratio*, more so than the outward mode of this interior experience. He saw *oratio* as a powerful heart-softener, vital to the monks continued growth and inner transformation.

***Oratio* as a Spontaneous Response**

Where the practices of *lectio* and *meditatio* required specific steps to unlock the hidden meaning of a text, *oratio* only required an openness to the spirit contained in the text that comes “spontaneously from our hearts when we allow them to be touched by the presence of the sacred in the text.”¹⁰ As the monks read and searched the text, they did so as “participants in what [was] written, not accidental drop-ins, not hit or miss bystanders, not an addendum or footnote.”¹¹ For them, *oratio* was a deeply emotional and intimate experience. As the monks discoursed with the text, they surrendered to the voice behind the text, calling them to experience a deeper truth. This surrender made them vulnerable, which gave way to a spontaneous response. The whole practice was a trust walk, similar to a love affair. When the monks first began reading and studying the text, they had no idea how the text would touch them, provoke them, challenge them, comfort them, awaken them, and/or inspire them. At times, the practice was intoxicating, as they felt drawn into a magnetizing love, while at other times it was terrifying as their deep wounds and vulnerabilities were exposed. Whether intoxicated or terrified, *oratio* led the monks

¹⁰ Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina: -the sacred art: Transforming Words & Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2011), 103.

¹¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 107.

into the uncharted waters deep within themselves where they were overcome with emotions in the face of a deeper truth.

The monks' responses varied according to how the text spoke to them. Some responses were joyous and uplifting, while others expressed pain and longing. Bede describes a monk in a monastery who was outwardly expressive, pouring out songs and poetry in response to reading a sacred text. "In the monastery of this abbess there was a certain brother who was specially marked out by the grace of God, so that he used to compose godly and religious songs; thus, whatever he learned from the holy Scriptures... he quickly turned into extremely delightful and moving poetry..."¹² This particular monk felt moved to respond to holy Scripture in song and poetry, which as Bede described was 'extremely delightful and moving'.

However not all responses were uplifting as some monks poured out their pain and longing. In *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and The Bridegroom of Christ*, St. John of the Cross wrote,

Where hast Thou hidden Thyself,
And abandoning me in my groaning, O my Beloved?
Thou hast fled like the hart,
Having wounded me.
I ran after Thee, crying; but Thou wert gone.¹³

As the monks poured out their spontaneous responses, they realized that *oratio* was changing them, transforming their minds and hearts, leading them to experience a deeper sense of humility, self-acceptance, self-forgiveness and self-understanding.

¹² *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, editor, A. M. Sellar (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 4.24, 351. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/38326>

¹³ St. John of the Cross, *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and The Bridegroom of Christ*, trans, David Lewis (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 5.

***Oratio* as Extended Reflections**

These spontaneous responses sometimes led the monks to reflect and respond in the more extended written forms of poems, reflections, commentaries and sermons. Again, these written responses highlight the intimate connection the monks had with the voice behind the text.¹⁴ The deeper the monks engaged with the text, the more intimate their responses became. *Oratio* continued to lead the monks to a deepening “engagement of the heart that [led] to the lover’s union...”¹⁵ One of the most well documented, extended, poetic response comes from Bernard’s *Sermon on the Song of Songs*. Robertson explains the importance of Bernard’s deep intimate experience and relationship with the text.

Bernard’s conviction, repeatedly restated throughout the *Sermons*, is that the Song cannot be read or heard from the ‘outside’; only in a personal *experientia* can one apprehend its meaning. He seeks not only to translate the love poem... but also to participate directly and actively in the text as the protagonist, ultimately as the Bride in the dialogue.¹⁶

As Bernard read the text, he entered into an intimate relationship with it; he became the beloved seeking the bridegroom. Bernard begins his sermon on the *Song of Songs* with the first words of the book, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!”¹⁷ The deeper Bernard entered into the verse, the more aflame his heart became for the beloved, inspiring his search for the intimate kiss of love. Bernard was no longer

¹⁴ For the monks, there was always the voice behind the text (*logos*), speaking to them, whom they referred to as Christ or God.

¹⁵ Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 88.

¹⁶ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), vxiii. Bernard wrote extensive commentary on *The Song of Songs* in beautiful poetic and even at times erotic imagery.

¹⁷ Song of Songs 1:1. <http://bible.oremus.org>

responding with his intellect; rather, he was responding with his heart. According to Calati, Bernard's *oratio* demonstrates, "privileged moments for the meeting between the soul and the Bridegroom."¹⁸ For Bernard, the voice originally situated within the text had shifted to the interior recesses of his own heart, which invited him into deeper communion.

The monastics libraries are replete with beautiful, powerful and thought-provoking responses from the monks' time reading, studying and reflecting on sacred Scripture and other classic texts. Augustine, living in the 4th century, wrote the following in his *Confessions*:

Imagine if all the tumult of the body were to quiet down, along with all our busy thoughts about earth, sea, and air; if the very world should stop, and the mind cease thinking about itself, go beyond itself, and be quite still; if all the fantasies that appear in dreams and imagination should cease, and there be no speech, no sign: Imagine if all things that are perishable grew still – for if we listen they are saying, We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever – imagine, then, that they should say this and fall silent, listening to the very voice of him who made them and not to that of his creation; so that we should hear not his word through the tongues of men, nor the voice of angels, nor the clouds' thunder, nor any symbol, but the very Self which in these things we love, and go beyond ourselves to attain a flash of that eternal wisdom which abides above all things: And imagine if that moment were to go on and on, leaving behind all other sights and sounds but this one vision which ravishes and absorbs and fixes the beholder in joy; so that the rest of eternal life were like that moment of illumination which leaves us breathless: Would this not be what is bidden in scripture, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?¹⁹

Augustine wrote with such penetrating depth, sharing his personal experiences and insights through his writing. Augustine talked about going into and beyond himself,

¹⁸ Benedetto Calati, "Saint Bernard, Heir of the Monastic Tradition," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (August 2012): 253-278. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 20, 2015).

¹⁹ Poem taken from The Blue Mountain Meditation Center website. <http://www.easwaran.org/saint-augustine-entering-into-joy.html> Augustine's *Confessions* book Nine, Chapter Ten. Translation by Michael Nagler.

receiving flashes of eternal wisdom, leaving him absorbed and fixed in joy. Hildegard of Bingen, an eleventh century Benedictine abbess and prolific writer also shared her responses to the holiness of life in poems and songs.

Holy Spirit,
Giving life to all life,
Moving all creatures,
Root of all things,
Washing them clean,
Wiping out their mistakes,
Healing their wounds,
You are our true life,
Luminous, wonderful,
Awakening the heart
From its ancient sleep.²⁰

Whether composing songs, writing reflections, poems, commentaries or sermons, the fact remains that the monks' time spent reading and studying the text inspired them to respond not only spontaneously, but also in various artistic forms.

***Oratio* as a Liturgical Celebration**

Not only did the monks offer a deeply personal response to their time in the text, but they also responded communally in liturgy. Liturgy (Latin, *liturgia*, 'public worship' or 'the work of the people') was the work of the community in response to God. It was a choreographed celebration, in which the monks celebrated in movement, prayers, chants, and song to the voice of God and presence of God in the community. Robertson shares that according to Louis Bouyer the liturgy creates "an inseparable

²⁰ *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry*, ed. Stephen Mitchell (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989), 42.

connection between responsorial chant, personal prayer and the group prayer...it is the instinctive response of the human heart to the initiative of God.”²¹

One way the monks responded through liturgical prayer is by chanting the psalms. “In the psalms you will find an intimate confession of your sins, and a complete prayer for divine mercy; in the psalms also you will find intimate thanksgiving for all things which have happened to you.”²² Since the psalms reference many of the joys and struggles inherent in the human condition, as the monks chanted the psalms, they engaged in a heart-felt personal response to the voice they had heard within the sacred text.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.²³

In addition to a personal response, the psalms also included the response of a community,

“May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us...”²⁴

Notice that the pronoun has shifted from the personal (me) in the first psalm to the communal (us) in the second psalm. Their liturgy also included other communal responses such as the *Our Father* and *The Gloria*. Through liturgy, the monks became one in mind and heart as they offered their communal ‘instinctual response’ to their experience of the voice of God in the sacred Scriptures.

²¹ Robertson, *The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 122. Bouyer discusses three phases: silent prayer, solitary reflection, and prayer within the community.

²² Ibid., 127.

²³ Psalm 25:16-17, NRSV Oremus Bible Browser

²⁴ Psalm 67: 1, NRSV Oremus Bible Browser

In summary, through the practice of *oratio* the monks' attention shifted from searching for deeper meaning in the text to experiencing this deeper meaning within their own hearts. Once within them, this deeper truth challenged them to grow and transcend their own limited understandings. At times, *oratio* was terrifying for them as it exposed their wounds and unawareness; while at other times, it comforted and even exhilarated them, drawing them into deeper communion with God. As the monks experienced these deeper truths, they responded, spontaneously in prayer, in writing, and through liturgical celebrations.

Just as time spent listening to and searching for meaning in the sacred and classical texts moved the monks to respond, I have discovered in my World Literature I course that time spent listening to and searching for meaning in a literary text, moves students to respond. However, where the monks stayed with a portion of a text for many days, months and even years, students have many courses and texts to read.²⁵ Therefore, it is essential for students to spend ample time in *lectio* and *meditatio* to deepen their understanding of the text to the point where it begins to speak to them from within their own hearts. It is through this deepening process that the focus shifts away from the centrality of the text to the subjective realm where students begin to respond spontaneously through class dialogue, in written assignments, and class performances.

²⁵ Where the monastic school offered a quiet, secluded and protected space for the monks to read and study, students today are bombarded with information about the outer world, especially through their digital devices. This barrage of information fills their mental and emotional spaces, leaving little room for a literary text to touch them. Yet, students are often unaware of the barrage of information and often do not give much thought to the importance of the information they are receiving. As a result, students weight all information the same or worse, unimportant information is given more weight. It takes time, therefore for students to create space to discern meaning, weight it appropriately and allow the deeper meaning in the text to touch their minds and hearts, evoking a response.

Part II: A Contemporary Application

Oratio as Spontaneous Response

Like the monks, students also respond spontaneously to the text; however, since I have limited time with them I do not always witness their responses. While reading slowly and searching a text for deeper meaning, I sometimes notice students' attention and gaze being drawn inward, as though the text has taken hold of them from within. I watch their eyes move and their facial expressions change. This also happens through class dialogue. Students tend to pay close attention to one another's responses. As students begin to share how the text is affecting them with the class, their responses significantly affect the other students as well, drawing them inward towards deeper reflection. While reading and searching for deeper meaning in the chapter on "Evil" in the *Dhammapada*, one student had a deeply personal public response to the text. He spontaneously began to share his story with the class about a painful experience, while serving in the Air Force. The class was riveted and later, many students commented in their writing how this one student's personal testimony in response to the text affected them. Although students do not always respond spontaneously in class, they often share with me later through their writing the impact that a text is having on them in the moment.

Just as the monks wrote their responses to the text, so too do my students. In my World Literature I course, I continue to assign writing assignments to help students engage in a deeply reflective response to the text. What I have noticed is that students need these assignments to help them stay engaged with the text, search it for

deeper meaning and cultivate a genuine response. These written assignments challenge the students to share their inner thoughts and feelings and as a result, nudge them deeper into the text where the text can begin to speak to them personally. Through journal entries, reflection papers, booklets and/or newsletters, as well as group performances, students begin to open up and share the many ways in which the text speaks to them.

Oratio as Journal Writing

Another way students respond to a literary text is through journaling. I have students keep a journal and write in it using the *lectio divina* format. After we have worked with the text, I select a word or verse from the text and write it on the board for the students to reflect on and respond to in writing. Under the verse, I offer a question for deeper reflection. For example when reading *The Katha Upanishad*, students reflect on the following verse and questions: “Perennial joy or passing pleasure? This is the choice one is to make always.”²⁶ Then underneath this verse I write, “Name passing pleasures. What draws you to choose these passing pleasures? Name perennial joy. What draws you to choose perennial joy?” I have found that it is helpful to give students a guiding question or two to encourage them to think about the deeper meaning of the text in terms of their own lives. Since students need time to reflect, I usually give them between 7-10 minutes to write out their thoughts and feelings without pressure or judgment. When the journaling time has ended, I invite students to share their thoughts and feeling with the rest of the class; however, there is

²⁶ Eknath Easwaran, *The Katha Upanishad* (Berkeley, Ca: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 75.

never any pressure for students to share. I want students to feel safe and unintimidated. When students do share their journal writing, everyone listens. There is no right or wrong, no judgment or critical commentary, just sharing.²⁷ I have found that students enjoying hearing each other's responses and that these responses often do lead to meaningful dialogue on the literary text. What I have discovered is that by allowing space for students to reflect, they are more likely to submit deeper reflective papers in the genre of a spiritual autobiography.

***Oratio* as Reflection Papers**

In addition to journal writing, students can respond to a literary text through reflection papers. Upon the completion of reading and studying each text, I assign a short 2- 2 ½ page written reflection paper. In the reflection paper, students write their response to something in the text that touched them and moved them to a new state of self-awareness. While reflecting on *The Katha Upanishad* one student shared that he could not understand why Nachiketa did not use his boons to gain “unlimited wealth, women and power.” After searching for deeper meaning in the text with the class, he came to realize that perhaps there is more to life than material possessions.

I have always been so focused on paying my bills and buying new things that I never stopped to think about the fact that someday none of them will matter. My brand new snow board - in a few years won't matter. My apartment-someday I won't live there. My car-there will be several more in my lifetime, each seeming even newer than the last. This is where the lesson becomes so crucial, because I realized I was on a path to live my entire life in search of possessions. It is disappointing to admit, but almost my whole college career

²⁷ I acknowledge students' responses and only offer a correction if they have misunderstood an historical-cultural aspect of the text. However, when I do, I am conscious to do so gently to assist their reflection as well as the other students in the class. I have found that it is helpful to the students to offer a correction in the moment, rather than later.

has been spent focusing on money and what to do with it, rather than just enjoying my time in school and finding happiness in what I have.²⁸

Another student, reflecting on *The Dhammapada* wrote,

Personally, I know I do not have a trained mind, which according to Buddha is bad because “an undisciplined mind does greater harm” (42). I can see now how this can be true because after examining my thoughts and emotions I realize that when my mind is going in a hundred different directions my stress level drastically increases which oftentimes leads me into getting sick.²⁹

For both of these students the text uncovered a painful truth within himself or herself.

One student discovered his overattachment to material possessions, while the other student uncovered the problematic nature of her undisciplined mind. As a result of their self-realizations, both students are now more self-empowered to make some change and move their lives in a more meaningful life direction. By writing out their responses, students not only give voice to their insights, but they also create space within themselves to re-order their lives around this new insight. This internal awareness is the beginning of an inner transformation.

In addition to reflection papers on each text, I also sometimes assign a final reflection paper to provide students the opportunity to give voice to a deeper truth that they have uncovered throughout the semester while listening to and searching for deeper meaning in the literary texts we read. In her final reflection, one student shared what she had learned about herself.

My biggest problem has always been my anger issues. It has been something I have struggled with for my entire life with no answers of why or any possible solution for getting rid of it. Now having read Buddha’s teaching on controlling and repressing anger, I can see a light peeking through at the end of a very long, dark, scary tunnel. The knowledge I have gained from this is better than anything I have ever learned. Buddha has given me hope for a

²⁸ Student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

²⁹ Student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

better future where I am in control of my anger, not where my anger is controlling me.³⁰

Where the above student's response was deeply personal, describing her inner transformation, other students responded more critically to an ethos around the interpretation of a sacred text and how this interpretation can have either a negative or positive impact on the human condition. Responding to the biblical story of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria* in the Gospel of John, one Lebanese student voiced the following:

The power religion holds, whether it be spiritual or destructive, sits in the hands of the interpreters, not the authors. It is the interpreters of books sacred to religions, such as the Bible or the Koran that form the religious codes the people of the religion attest to, and are often willing to die for. With every new reader that comes to a text, there is an individual blurred lens that he reads the words through. The lenses are made up of his own personal experiences, making the way he sees the story completely his own. Due in part to his lenses and in part to human error and the tendencies of human kind, unjust laws often take place in the name of religion... Those who oppose these unjust laws, could look closely at the setting of the story, pay close attention to detail, and consider different possible tones when interpreting religious books. People who speak out about religion are often accused of hating God and of being a sinner. Speaking up by using the text in a varied interpretation can be a much more powerful point. Just because reading needs to be interpreted doesn't mean it doesn't have a right or wrong answer...³¹

Allowing time and space for students to respond to what they are learning from the text continues to deepen the students' relationship with the text, themselves and the human condition.

³⁰ Student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

³¹ Student in my World Literature I course (Summer 2015).

***Oratio* as Booklets and Newsletters**

A third way students can respond to a literary text is through the creation of booklets and newsletters. I have assigned both booklets and newsletters in my World Literature I course to provide students with a forum to give voice to what has touched them in our reading and exploration of the literary texts. Each time I have assigned this format, I have done so as a ‘final course project.’ In the Fall and Spring of 2013, I had students create a manual for college age students. The students began by selecting seven quotes from the course readings and then followed the *lectio divina* format we used in class for their journal writing. Each booklet contains an introduction, an historical background of the text selected followed by a verse (*lectio*), an explanation of the deeper meaning (*meditatio*), a personal response (*oratio*), and a conclusion. In addition, students titled their booklets and placed pictures throughout, allowing an opportunity for artistic expression. Students came up with various titles such as “Finding Yourself in these Words of Wisdom,” “The Enlightened College Student,” “The Tao of Classical Music” “The Tao of Athletics,” “The Tao of Anxiety” and “A College Student’s Guide to Keeping Balance.” Not only did student have to break down the meaning in these verses, but also the entire booklet served as their response to the texts they had read, studied and reflected on throughout the semester. In his conclusion, one student shared the following:

Through the teachings of *The Upanishads*, *The Dhammapada*, *The Tao Te Ching* and now *The Sufi Stories*, I have been blown away by the simple yet powerful messages brought about within their pages. From the Self within my heart, to the Tao all around me, I have been enlightened by the fact that there is so much more to the world around me, and that I should be spending much less time worrying about which party to go to this weekend and much more

dedicated to my spirituality and how to better myself while cherishing the life I am already living.³²

In another semester, instead of assigning the creation of a booklet, I assigned a newsletter project. I asked my students to create a newsletter for college students interested in taking World Literature I. In the newsletter, a 17 x 11 paper folded in half, students shared the deeper truths they had uncovered throughout the semester while reading, studying and reflecting on the literary texts. Each newsletter was a unique artistic expression, containing historical background, written reflections, pictures, and added additions such as cartoons, word searches, riddles and questions for deeper reflection around a common theme that the students selected. Students came up with a variety of titles such as “The Journey to Finding Yourself,” “The Path of Discipline,” “Appreciating Others,” and “Material Goods: What Society and the Ancient World Tells Us, and “Wisdom.” In one section of the Newsletter titled “The Journey to Finding Yourself,” the students wrote about the connection they made to the journey of the thirty birds in the story of *The Conference of the Birds* to the journey of a college student.

In college, one of your goals may be to get a degree. You may be focusing on getting that degree but that degree is nothing more than a piece of paper. The journey taken in college is like the birds’ journey, they were in search of the King while you are in search of a degree. In the end, the King ended up being about finding themselves, as is your journey through college.³³

³² Student in my World Literature I course (Fall 2013).

³³ Comment from my World Literature I students (Spring 2014).

Booklets and newsletters provide an opportunity for students to share their heartfelt responses to their experience of reading, studying and reflecting on the literary texts through written words, creative formats and artistic expressions.

Oratio as Performances

Group performance is another creative way for students to respond to a literary text. At the beginning of the semester students gather into groups of three, (I usually have thirty students in class, which makes ten groups of three), and they select one of the literary texts from the course readings to design a 7- 10 minute performance, in which they create a modern rendition of the story. Students have creative reign and write their own scripts, which they submit to me at the end of their performance. The main requirements are that they bring a deeper meaning in the text to light, modernize the text, and have practiced their lines. In addition, they may bring in props, costumes, and music.

Some students are timid to perform in front of their peers, but often times after they perform they begin to feel a new sense of self-empowerment, especially if they worked to create a meaningful performance. As students work to create a contemporary rendition of the literary text, they begin to make deeper connections to the story and find unique ways to express their insights with the class. In order to create a contemporary response to the text, students need to spend time with the text, not only understanding it, but also embodying it, taking on the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the story. When they do, their modern renditions are so insightful. Not only do their classmates enjoy the performances, they are deeply moved and

touched by them, even to the point where some of them release their own spontaneous responses, while the text is being performed.

One semester, three students performed a selection from *Antigone*, which the class enjoyed. The setting for the story was “The Jerry Springer Show.” One student played the role of Jerry Springer and the other two Antigone and Ismene. Throughout the play, Jerry asked questions of the two sisters concerning their family dispute. The girls’ feisty contemporary responses got the class engaged and emoting. They were awe struck at the level of familiar struggle, depicted in the girls’ anger and sadness and the way in which the students modernized the language and setting. Afterwards, the students who watched the performance commented to the class that they felt the setting of “The Jerry Springer” show was creative and appropriate, and brought the painful reality of the family dispute to life for them. They also shared that they better understood the pain of Sophocles tragedy from the perspective of the painful quarrel between the two sisters. I am always amazed at the students’ performances and students know that I look forward to performance days.

Another group, while performing *Antigone*, made Creon the CEO of Google. The scene was the dinner table at Creon’s mansion. Commenting on his role in the performance, one student commented,

Turning King Creon into a CEO of Google helped me think about what Creon would be like in today’s society. The performance allowed my group and me to bring the characters to life and to experience the roles that they played in Sophocles’ story. It involved a great deal of thinking as we thought about where the setting would be, how old the characters would be, and we made sure our tone of voice fit our character. This activity helped me interpret *Antigone* because instead of sitting at a desk and looking at words on a page, I was able to be active and mobile...I was able to stand up and show the class my interpretation of the story. I had fun with the performance but I also

learned a great deal about the story and the kind of situation Antigone was in. As I played Creon, I noticed how overpowering and cruel he was to his nieces and how that power he had took over his emotions.³⁴

Students came up with a variety of modern interpretations to the literary texts we read. When performing *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*, one group of students adapted the story into a modern day love story and changed ‘the water of eternal life,’ into “a kiss that would give eternal love.”³⁵ Another group of students who were modernizing *The Dhammapada* created a scene at a party and in which a student had to decide whether he was going to listen to his desires (untrained mind) or his intellect (trained mind) even though he was the designated driver. They performed the scene twice, once following his desires, leading him to continue to choose to drink (following desire), which led him to end up in a car crash, injuring his friends. In the second rendition, the student listened to his intellect (trained mind) and stopped drinking after two drinks, in which he and his friends returned home safely. When students are given the opportunity to respond through a group performance they connect deeper to the inherent wisdom in the story and begin to embody it, bringing it to life for themselves as well as for their classmates.

Pedagogical Insights and Challenges

The monastic method of *oratio* offers educators a pedagogical method to help students voice their insights and feelings in response to a literary text. Educators who choose to use this monastic method need to understand the complex nature of *oratio*

³⁴ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

³⁵ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

employed in the monastic school. *Oratio* is not an easy practice to adapt to a humanities classroom, as it is generally considered a religious practice, but *oratio* is actually a response provoked by the text. Although the monks responded to the voice of God, students can respond to what they are hearing and uncovering both in the text and within themselves. Educators must be committed to slowing down the learning process and be willing to alter the way they access students' responses to literary texts. Just as the monks had time, space and discretion to respond to the text they were reading, so too do students. The monks could not respond to the text if they did not understand it, nor can the students. Just as it takes time for the deeper truths hidden within the literary texts to be uncovered, it also takes time for these deeper truths to penetrate the students' mind and hearts as they attempt to give words to their thoughts and feelings. *Oratio* can only happen when the students' attention has shifted from searching for the text for deeper truth to experiencing this deeper truth on a subjective level within their own minds and hearts. Once within them, this deeper truth challenges students to grow and transcend their own limited understandings, which at times, can be exhilarating and empowering, while at other times frustrating and painful.

One pedagogical challenge facing educators is the importance of spending ample time in *meditatio* to help students mine the text for deeper meaning. Students cannot respond meaningfully to a text if they do not understand the text. Therefore, it is essential that educators move methodically through *meditatio* before trying to preempt *oratio*. An authentic response "begins when [students] can say 'taste and see'

of the texts [they] had ‘eaten’ and ‘chewed’” during *meditatio*.³⁶ I have learned this lesson the hard way. In the past, I have tried to encourage or even require students to respond to the text before they were ready. Just as fruit needs time to ripen, so too do students’ responses. When educators rush through the text, the students may be able to summarize the text, but have little to add themselves because the text has not yet touched them, provoking a response. When this happens, students become frustrated and begin to lose confidence in themselves and the educator. Once I realized the dilemma, I began to wait until I noticed students responding naturally and spontaneously to the text through class dialogue. I realized that once students begin to understand the text, they naturally want to talk about what insights they are discovering for their own lives. This realization led me to a deeper insight. Students may not share in class, not because they do not want to share, but because they have yet to feel the deeper truth of the text affecting them from within their own minds and hearts.

Another pedagogical challenge facing educators is the need for more solitude in the classroom. Lichtmann comments, “When we invite silence into the learning space, we tend to signal that we want our students to reach for their authentic selves, not just to impress or please.”³⁷ As students explore the literary texts for deeper meaning, they need time, space and aloneness to allow the deeper meaning uncovered in the text to soak into their hearts and impress them. Often educators feel the need to

³⁶ Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 89.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

get through the whole text, which results in time spent lecturing and talking *about* the text. However, students will not begin to feel a text, if all they do is talk about the story. They need time to sit with it and feel it, before they can respond to it. In “Stop Googling, Let’s Talk” Turkle highlights a connection between solitude and authentic dialogue. “In solitude we find ourselves; we prepare ourselves to come to conversation with something to say that is authentic, ours.”³⁸ Students cannot respond authentically to a text, if they have not had an opportunity to sit quietly and reflect on the truth within it and wait for this deeper truth to penetrate and permeate their own hearts.

Again, I have learned this lesson the hard way. In World Literature I, we read ancient texts from around the world. These texts, which are rich and complex, are unfamiliar to many students; therefore, I have to take time to read and mine the story for deeper meaning. Yet, I have come to understand that students cannot mine every section of the story, they can only mine a few places deeply. During class, I focus on these selections, giving students time to reflect and encouraging responses through weekly *lectio divina* journals and class dialogue. I make sure to give ample time to the process to allow students to respond authentically.

A third pedagogical challenge facing educators is to come up with creative assignments to encourage students to respond authentically and meaningfully to the literary text they have read and explored for deeper meaning. Many educators use quizzes, exams and essays to test students’ knowledge of the text. These assignments

³⁸ Sherry Turkle, “Stop Googling. Let’s Talk” *New York Times* (September 27, 2015 Sunday): 2454 words. LexisNexis Academic. Web. Date Accessed: 2015/10/01. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/opinion/sunday/stop-googling-lets-talk.html>

can work to develop the students understanding of the text and search it for deeper meaning (*meditatio*), but none of these assignments encourages an authentic heartfelt response to the text. I have found that I need to come up with creative ways that elicit authentic responses from the students, responses in which they share their deeper insights and make personal connections. Students need to know that educators are interested in hearing their voices and listening to their discoveries without judgment. Students share with me that they are not used to writing this way. They have been told repeatedly by other educators not to use “I” in their papers; therefore, I have to continually remind them that I want to hear how the text has touched them and/or transformed their thinking, which means that they will need to use “I” in their writing. Creative assignments challenge students to integrate what they are learning as they listen to a text and search it for deeper wisdom. These assignments challenge students to know the text, think deeply about some aspects of it, and respond creatively and authentically to the way it has touched them personally. I have found booklets, newsletters, and group performances provide these opportunities for students to respond authentically, artistically and meaningfully to the text.

A fourth challenge facing educators is the need to understand the subjective nature of *oratio*. *Oratio*, which is a reflective response to literary text initiates from the students’ inner subjective realm. This inner subjective realm is a complex arena filled with a variety of biases: familial, cultural, ethnic, gender, religious, and political as well as past personal experiences, hurts and pains, and internal conflicts. *Oratio* provides an opportunity for students to articulate what is going on in their inner world and begin to look at and consider the internal obstacles that restrict them from having

a more comprehensive understanding of the literary text, themselves and the world in which they live. However, students are not accustomed to responding subjectively in this manner because it makes them feel vulnerable. Educators need to be aware of students' timidity and reserve in responding subjectively and work to encourage and support them as much as possible to help alleviate their apprehensions and fears, while also challenging them to respond honestly and thoughtfully.

A fifth challenge facing educators is to know the distinction between the monastic understanding of *oratio* as a response of prayer and secular adaptation of *oratio* as a subjective formative response to a literary text. Educators who are interested in adapting *oratio* as a subjective formative response need to consider and be open to the multiple ways students may respond to a literary text. In light of what I have written about the practice of *oratio* in this dissertation as well as the students' responses to literary texts that I have shared, I have found that students can express their subjective thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways, demonstrating their growth and transformation. For example, if educators want to assess whether students' responses demonstrate an increase capacity for self-awareness, personal growth, or a shift in thinking they can ask the following questions:

1. Does the student identify and make a meaningful connection with a particular character in the text and can he/she articulate it in his/her response (class conversations, performances or written responses)?³⁹

³⁹ See footnote 580 about the student who made a connection with King Creon in his performance.

2. Is the student able to see the exercise of *oratio* (reflective response) as a tool to clarify values?⁴⁰
3. Is the student more open and willing to accept constructive criticism from the educator and fellow classmates?⁴¹

These types of responses can demonstrate how students are being changed and transformed through the process of *lectio divina*.

A sixth challenge facing educators is the grading of written responses. Written responses cannot be graded the way a quiz, exam or short essay is graded. Educators need to explain to their students what is expected of them and how their *oratio* responses will be graded. *Oratio* is not about testing students' knowledge; it is about giving students the opportunity to experience and respond to the text in a new way using their own insights and feelings. What is important in *oratio* is that students respond authentically and to do so, they have to trust that they will receive a just reward for their writing. Again, students are not accustomed to responding this way and often feel vulnerable pouring out their heartfelt responses in writing; therefore, educators need to work with them to help lessen their fears. Here in the subjective domain, the educators' goal is to challenge, guide and inspire students to consider their thoughts and feelings more deeply and thoroughly by using their responses as a way to enter into a conversation with others. This conversation begins on the first day of class and continues throughout the semester.

⁴⁰ See footnote 574 about the student who discovered that there is more to life than money.

⁴¹ See footnote 541 about the student who was not happy with the cell phone policy but the realized that she in fact was goaded by her sense to answer her phone when it vibrated.

I usually give students participation credit for spontaneous responses, *lectio divina* journals, written reflection papers and group performances. In addition, I also provide students with encouraging comments and/or questions as well as a check, check plus or a check minus for their written reflection papers.⁴² These varying degrees of checks help students gauge their responses. Are they summarizing the story, surface writing or making a deeper connection? For their final reflection, booklet or newsletter I give them a letter grade based on the depth and connectedness of their writing, and their overall artistic expression (format, thematic connection and good writing conventions). Subjective assessment is a challenge for educators. The truth is that I am still working to discern the best way to assess students' responses in a way that encourages honest, heartfelt responses and reduces prescriptive responses. Grades often create fear in students, closing them up and inhibiting natural response.

However, for their final paper, booklet or newsletter I do give them a letter grade based on the depth and connectedness of their writing, and their overall artistic expression (format, thematic connection and good writing conventions). For example, in the *lectio divina* booklet, students needed to create a polished and ordered booklet with proper writing conventions using the *lectio divina* format, providing seven accurate and well-developed entries, along with an introduction and conclusion explaining what they learned throughout the semester. I give them the criteria ahead of

⁴² I explain *oratio* to my students and share with them that their reflection papers are their personal responses to the literary text. Since students are so unfamiliar with this type of written response, the check marks help to guide them. For example, if students purely summarize the text, demonstrate a lack of effort in not meeting the short page requirement and submitting sloppy writing, they receive a check minus; however, if they attempt to make a personal connection or draw upon a deeper insight they move into the check and check plus range. I am aware that the grading system is imperfect and I continually work to revise it. Yet, it is important to note that students' written reflections are part of their overall participation grade with the emphasis placed on their continued growth and development.

time and assess the students' booklets on the quality of their work in terms of completing the requirements and submitting it in on time. I do not divide their grade up in terms of content and form. I do my best to assess students' responses holistically. Again, assessment is not easy and I continue to work to develop responses that engage students' holistic development.

A seventh challenge facing educators is the realization that students' formulate their responses over time; therefore, their responses cannot be restricted to the classroom setting. Often students do not have the time and space to cultivate their responses while in class. They have yet to feel the effect of the text deeply enough to provoke a heartfelt response. It is not until they get outside of the classroom that the deeper significance of a text begins to touch them, releasing an authentic response - which can be exhilarating, but also painful and frightening if the text exposes something they may have concealed or were unaware of and therefore, have not yet faced. At first, students may keep quiet and express their feeling in private, at other times they may choose to share their feelings with a friend or family member, while still at other times, they may choose to share their insights later in class or through a written assignment. Regardless of whether or not they share their responses, what matters is their shift from the centrality of the text to the subjective experience of the text. Educators must be gentle with students and keep in mind that unlike *meditatio*, *oratio* is a deeply personal experience, exposing the interiority and vulnerability of the students.

Summary

In summary, this proposed practice of *oratio*, involving a variety of possible methods, offers a powerful transformative way for students to express their heartfelt response to a literary text. In the monastic schools, *oratio* provided a meaningful way for the monks to share their inner feelings and insights in response to their time reading and studying the sacred and classical texts. In order to adapt and implement *oratio* it is important for educators to have some professional development on this practice, to understand the meaning and purpose behind it, and to develop some techniques to support them in their teaching. Educators who do engage in the method and learn its accompanying benefits will be better equipped to bring this monastic literary practice into their classrooms. They can begin to revise their pedagogy and include various *oratio* practices to respond to a literary text.

Since *oratio* originates within the interior space of the students, the practice requires patience, gentleness, and respect for the dignity of each student on the part of the educators. Furthermore, educators will need to revise their course outcomes to include subjective, student-centered outcomes, rather than purely objective content-centered outcomes to encourage students' authentic heartfelt responses. By doing so, educators send a message to their students that their interior formation is important to them. Educators need to emphasize that responding authentically to the text involves trust and the active participation of both educators and students, who listen to each other's genuine responses provoked by their time with the text. *Oratio* often gives students a renewed desire to express their insights knowing that it will continue to inform and form their lives. It gives them a practice, a way to continue to dig deep within themselves and

unearth treasures of hidden wisdom that they bring into their consciousness and apply to their lives. As students practice *oratio*, they acquire a renewed sense of confidence in their ability to respond authentically and meaningfully to literary texts and life's complex realities. Once the students have gained experience with the practice of *oratio*, and the multiple skills that evoke it, they have the foundation necessary to move into the next practice of *contemplatio*, the integration and transformation of their being in the world.

RE-APPROPRIATING THE MONASTIC PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

CHAPTER SIX

CONTEMPLATIO: EXPERIENCING WISDOM

I run to stillness so that the verses of my reading and prayer should become sweet to me. And when my tongue becomes silent because of the sweetness that comes from understanding them, then, as it were into a kind of sleep, I fall into a state where my senses and my thoughts become inactive. . . . [W]aves of joy ceaselessly surge over me, waves arising from inward intuitions that beyond expectation suddenly blossom forth to delight my heart. Isaac the Syrian

In this chapter, I will begin with a brief explanation of the ancient Greek concept of *theōria*, which informed the monastic notion of *contemplatio*. I will offer some descriptions of *contemplatio*, experienced by the monks in the monastic schools and show how the *lectio divina* method can move students into a subjective experience of wisdom embedded within a literary text used in a Humanities course. I will also share some of the writings of my students' experiences of *contemplatio* in their journey towards greater self-awareness through their practice of *lectio divina* on literary works in my World Literature I course. Finally, I will offer some insights and challenges for instructors in the Humanities who are still unsure of or not yet open to the potential transformative experiences that can arise through the *lectio divina* method.

Part I: History

***Theōria*: The Ancient Greek Understanding of the Contemplative Life**

The ancient Greeks recognized two predominate modes of living in the world: *vita activa* (the active life) or *vita contemplativa* (the contemplative life). Those who followed the active life concerned themselves with the outer world of activity, while

those engaged in the contemplative life focused on the inner world of thought and the discovery of truth. The contemplative life for the ancient Greeks was the privileged life of the philosopher (*philo-sophos*, lover of wisdom). This life was favored over the active life as it afforded the philosophers time and space to come to seek truth and wisdom through the practice of *theōria* (to ‘reflect deeply’, ‘to wonder’, ‘to muse’).¹ The Greeks believed that *theōria* was a specific way of knowing through seeing and experiencing, as in a spectacle. It was an experiential knowing as opposed to knowing *about* something or knowing how to *do* something.

Originally, *theōria* was understood as a journey or pilgrimage that one embarked on to see and experience the world, a new city or religious celebration. These pilgrim-philosophers embarked on journeys to experience new sights, new ideas and ways of living. When the pilgrims returned to their own city, they brought back with them these new insights along with the wisdom they gained from their experience of the spectacle. In Book 5 of Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates compares the search and experience of the lovers of spectacles with that of the philosophers’ experience of the search for truth. “Like the ‘lovers of spectacles’ the philosopher loves spectating. But the philosopher is a ‘lover of the *spectacle of truth*’ (*philotheamôn tês alêtheias*).”²

Both the lovers of spectacles and the philosophers embarked on a journey to explore and experience life; however, unlike the lovers of spectacles, the philosophers

¹ Gerard Schuhmacher, “Why is Contemplation so highly regarded by Aristotle?” http://www.gerhard-schuhmacher.com/nofr/essays/philosophy_aristotle.pdf.

² Andrea Wilson Nightingale, “On Wandering and Wondering: ‘Theōria’ in Greek Philosophy and Culture,” *A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Third Series, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall, 2001), 29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163840> Accessed: 21-10-2015. See also *The Republic Book 5*, Sophocles uses the term ‘lovers of spectacles’ to describe the person who undertakes these journeys. Nightingale points out that the philosopher becomes the “lovers of the spectacle of truth.”

sought to find the deeper, spectacle of truth and wisdom hidden within the outward spectacle. The philosophers' journey as depicted in Plato is more of an inward journey to penetrate life's mysteries, discover truth, and experience wisdom. The philosopher "moves out of the darkness of the cave and into the light where he sees with the 'eye of his soul.'" ³ Once the philosopher sees with 'the eye of his soul,' he begins to change; he enters the depths of the unknown in search of something new to be encountered.

In Book X of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refers to *theōria* "as being both the highest [and most continuous] form of activity ... since the intellect [or *nous*] is the highest thing in us, and the objects that it apprehends are the highest things that can be known."⁴ For Aristotle, the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*) was considered the ideal life in the society. The practice of *theōria* was a continuous state of wonder, in which, the philosopher was drawn outside of himself into an ecstatic experience, where he became one with the object of his contemplation. Mark Shiffman, associate professor of classical studies at Villanova University writes,

Starting with Socrates, ancient philosophers in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition contend that the human being is best understood as the subject of wonder. Awakened by wonder, rational inquiry opens us to truth not ultimately grounded in power, but in the Good. The subject of wonder is not simply a meeting point of accumulated powers gathered at a center of control. On the contrary, he is a subject that is always also oriented towards a center outside itself. The wondering being is an 'ecstatic' subject, from the Greek, *ekstasis*, standing outside oneself... For Plato, we are preeminently erotic beings, in love with the attractive beauty of goods and truths not of our own making. We are penetrated and called forth by the intimate effects of beauty and truth, drawn outside ourselves into the world and into contemplation.⁵

³ Nightingale, "On Wandering and Wondering: 29.

⁴ H. Tredennick, trans., *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, revised (Penguin Books, Ringwood, VIC. 1976), 328.

⁵ Mark Shiffman, "HUMANITY 4.5." *First Things: A Monthly Journal Of Religion & Public Life* no. 257 (November 2015): 27-28. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 18, 2015).

In other words, human beings, by nature, are born to be “subjects” of wonder. As subjects and practitioners of *theōria* or contemplation, human beings are awakened and drawn into the wonder of beauty, goodness and truth. They are drawn beyond themselves to search for and enter into an experience with beauty, goodness and truth.

In order to be fully engaged in the contemplative life, one needed, as stated earlier, time and space to practice *theōria*. One needed the freedom to wonder. The ancient Greeks called this type of freedom to wonder, leisure (*scholē*). The ancient Greek view of leisure is quite different from the 21st century view of leisure. Today, most people view leisure as time-off, a vacation, or time to rest and relax. Yet, for the ancient Greeks, leisure was a state of being free from work. Aristotle stated, “We are *not-at-leisure* in order to *be-at-leisure*.”⁶ In Greek, the word for ‘work’ (*ascholia*), represented one who is not at leisure, whereas, *scholē* referred to someone at leisure. Interestingly enough, the Greek word for leisure, *scholē*, is where we get the word school.⁷ Herbert shares, “To the classical mind, leisure is closely associated with the ultimate and perfect good of man, and therefore with human freedom and the *artes liberales*, while work is tied to the realm of necessary, contingent, and subordinate goods, and hence to the *artes serviles*.”⁸ To be educated (schooled), therefore, is to engage in a life of leisure (to be free to wonder), to participate in the *artes liberales* (liberal arts), and to be afforded the opportunity to experience wisdom.

⁶ *The Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7 (1177b4-6).

⁷ Christopher Perrin, “Learning and Leisure: Developing a School of Scholē,” <http://www.insideclassical.com>

⁸ Joseph Herbert, Jr., L., “Be Still and See,” *Logos: A Journal Of Catholic Thought & Culture* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2013 2013): 146. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 24, 2015).

Pieper, a Twentieth century philosopher, explains leisure as a condition of the soul. It is not an activity, but rather a freedom to be at-one-with self, to be in accord with one's own being.

There can only be leisure, when man is at one with himself, when he is in accord with his own being...[Leisure] is not necessarily present in all external things like 'breaks,' 'time-off,' 'weekend,' 'vacation'...it is a condition of the soul...a disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion - in the real.⁹

Leisure is a subjective inner experience where one needs to be totally present to the reality that one is beholding. As Pieper points out, "Simple looking at something, gazing at it, 'taking it in,' is merely to open our eyes to receive the things that present themselves to us without any need for an 'effort' on our part to 'possess' them."¹⁰ One who was still, open and receptive was able to engage in what Heraclites called "*Listening-in to the beings of things.*"¹¹ Thus, as the philosopher engaged in a life of leisure, he opened himself to a journey of wonder, to contemplative beholding, and the *listening-in to the beings of things*. This inward journey guided him beyond his limited worldview into a deeper subjective knowing and experience of wisdom or '*ekstasis.*'

The Monastic Understanding of *Contemplatio*

The monastic understanding of *contemplatio* builds on the Greek idea of *theōria* (a state of wonder), an inner subjective awakening, in which the "lovers of wisdom" were drawn beyond their limited understandings into an ecstatic experience. The monks were

⁹ See Josef, Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture* (South Bend, IN: Augustine's Press, 1988), 30-31. Pieper quotes Aquinas saying, "Every art is called *liberal* which is ordered to knowing; those which are ordered to some utility to be attained through action are called *servile* arts." See also Aquinas commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* I,3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

lovers of the Word of God, the sacred place where God, the Divine, was hidden. The monks journeyed into the sacred texts to be in communion with God, expressed in the Psalms, “Be at leisure and know that I am God.”¹² After long periods of *lectio divina* in an environment of leisure and prayer, the monks experienced unexpected moments of ecstasy. It is in these ecstatic moments that the monks underwent an inner transformative experience, which they called *contemplatio*. Like the ancient Greek philosophers, these ecstatic experiences awakened them to new levels of self-awareness and a deeper understanding of Beauty, Wisdom, Truth, and the Good, all of which are ways of beholding God.

***Contemplatio* in the Christian Catechetical School of Alexandria**

The monastic understanding of *contemplatio* evolved over the centuries dating back to the Alexandrian School of Origen. This pre-monastic school was influenced by the ancient Greek schools and the philosophers’ understanding of *theōria*. It is important to understand that for Origen everything came from *logos* (wisdom).¹³ In Origen’s school, the students were taught not only a method of reading and interpreting sacred and classical texts, but also a pathway to experience *logos* (wisdom) embedded in these texts. Origen instructed his students to dig within the sacred texts to discover wisdom, “if one knows how to dig into the depth, he will find a treasure....the precious jewels of the mysteries which lie hidden where they are not esteemed.”¹⁴ It can be deduced from

¹² Psalm 46:10, also translated as “Be still and know that I am God.

¹³ Origen believed that *logos* could be encountered both in the scriptures and in the heart of the students. *Logos* inspired and awakened the students’ minds and hearts. It was the fire of life, awakening students to beauty, goodness, wisdom, truth and love. For further information on Origen’s understanding of *logos*, see Chapter Two pages 6-7.

¹⁴ Origen, *Homily on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, FCH71:136.

Origen's instructions that the students who searched for and found "the precious jewels of the mysteries," the hidden "treasure," must have experienced a state of wonder (*theōria*) which transported them into a subjective experience *logos*, Wisdom.

***Contemplatio* in the Desert School**

In the monastic desert schools of Egypt and Syria, the experience of *contemplatio* was called "pure prayer,"¹⁵ which made the soul grow; it was also defined as a silence filled with "sweetness, joy and delight." In the desert school, *contemplatio* was understood as a transformative experience of one's life growing into pure "sweetness, joy and delight."¹⁶ The soul, which was the inner subjective life of the monk, awakened to an experience of awe and wonder. The desert monk, Evagrius, called this experience the "act of beholding,"¹⁷ which moved the monks into an experience of *contemplatio*. He warned the monks against grasping on to images as the act of grasping prevented them from beholding what was yet to be revealed through the image.¹⁸ It was the act of beholding

¹⁵ Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Studies Publications, 1987), 254. See also, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (NOYΣ): Pure Prayer according to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal Of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 2 (September 2011): 291-321. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 16, 2015).

¹⁶ Michael Nagler, "Words and the Mind." *Religion East & West* no. 10 (October 2010): 83. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2015). See also, <https://issuu.com/drbu/docs/rew-iss10-art7/1?e=1469891/7059380>. Isaac the Syrian used the words sweetness, joy and delight when referring to a contemplatio experience.

¹⁷ Evagrius remarked, "When Moses tried to draw near to the burning bush he was forbidden to approach until he had loosed his sandals from his feet (cf. Exod. 3:5). If, then, you wish to behold and commune with Him who is beyond sense-perception and beyond concept, you must free yourself from every impassioned thought." See the *Philokalia*, Vol 1, 55, n.4, <https://archive.org/stream/Philokalia-TheCompleteText/Philokalia-Complete-Text#page/n0/mode/2up>.

¹⁸ See Blossom Stefaniw, "Evagrius Ponticus on Image and Material." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (May 2007): 125-135. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 24, 2015). Stefaniw explains that Evagrius warned his monks of the power of images to take over their mind, thus drawing the mind to the image and away from the pure space of God. But if the 'image of God' no longer remains in embodied humans, what is all too present for them, according to Evagrius, is the super-abundance of images that crowd the human mind. It is these images or "thoughts" (*logismoi*) that arouse our passions and separate humans from God.

itself, which Evagrius highlights, since it was through the *act* of beholding that the soul of the monks awakened to awe and wonder.

***Contemplatio* in the Benedictine Monastic School**

In the 5th century Benedictine monastic tradition, the monastery was a school of contemplation; it was a school of love. Benedict does not mention *contemplatio* by name, but *contemplatio* was implied in his Rule and in the practice of *lectio divina*. In his Prologue, Benedict instructed his monks, “Let us open our eyes to the divine light, and let us listen with astonished ears to the warning of the divine voice, which daily cries out to us.”¹⁹ By opening their eyes and ears, the monks opened themselves to experience the wonder and awe of God’s love. It is in this experience of wonder and awe that the monks were lifted up into “the unspeakable sweetness of Love.”²⁰ The whole practice of *lectio divina* was a journey that the monks undertook to lead them to experience the “pinnacle of perfection.”²¹ Benedict understood that as pilgrims on a journey, the monks needed reliable guideposts to help them move towards the pinnacle of perfection. Benedict saw the scriptures as these reliable guideposts. “For what page or even what word of the divinely inspired Old and New Testaments is not a completely reliable guidepost for human life?”²² As the monks continued on their faithful journey through the scriptures, they were drawn into “the unspeakable sweetness of love.”²³ The culminating experience of *lectio divina* was *contemplatio*, union with God’s love. The search for love motivated

¹⁹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), Prol. 9.

²⁰ Ibid. Prol. 49, 24.

²¹ Ibid., 73, 2, 603.

²² Ibid., 73.3, 603.

²³ Ibid., 49, 24.

and inspired their practice of *lectio divina* during prayer (*ora*) or holy leisure (*vocare*), “time spent only for God and with God”²⁴ and work (*labora*).

A Shift from *Contemplatio*: The Rise of the Cathedral Schools and Medieval

Universities

Like the monastic schools, the cathedral schools and later medieval universities were places of leisure as these schools were structured around the study of the *artes liberales* (liberal arts) with an emphasis on developing the *vita contemplative* (contemplative life).

The medieval university was a place for the study of the liberal arts that made possible a life of thought, of contemplation. The liberal arts (that is, free arts, as opposed to the servile arts to which a man is bound) make possible the exercise of freedom and the development of what is divine in humans, whereby human nature transcends itself. Contemplation, too, we have seen is a gift: not the result of labour, but something given and received.²⁵

However, unlike the monastic schools (internal schools) that trained monks to leave the world behind for religious life in the monastery, the cathedral schools and later medieval universities (external schools) trained people who lived in the world to address the needs of the people in the world.²⁶ The monastic schools focused on the *subjective inner* experience of the world; through the contemplative life, they sought union with God (*contemplatio*). Whereas the cathedral schools and later medieval universities, focused on

²⁴ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 401.

²⁵ Louth, Andrew. "THEOLOGY, CONTEMPLATION AND THE UNIVERSITY." *Studies In Christian Ethics* 17, no. 1 (April 2004): 74. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 20, 2015).

²⁶ See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 194-196. LeClercq explains the distinction between the monastic and scholastic schools in terms of internal schools and external schools. LeClercq notes, “The difference between scholastic theology and monastic theology corresponds to the difference between the two stages of life: the state of Christian life in the world and the state of Christian life in the religious life.”

the *objective* experience of the world; through the active life they sought to use reason to understand the created world (*ratio*). As Davis explains, “Monastic theology had as its aim the enrichment of contemplative prayer. Twelfth-century scholastic theology, making use of dialectic, presented Christian doctrine in a systematized form addressed to theological problems and pastoral needs.”²⁷

Students were trained to question their faith in relation to what they were learning about the created world. In truth, these students were seeking to come to know God through reason. They sought to come to know God through dialectic, reason and study of the natural world. However, over time, this shift towards *ratio* as objective reasoning replaced the monastic pedagogical method of *lectio divina* with the scholastic method of *lectio, quaestio* and *disputatio*. This new scholastic pedagogical method developed and employed new technical terminology, which students had to learn and understand. As Studzinski notes, “Texts are no longer performance pieces; now they are intended for silent consumption and cogitation; the concern was to grasp the abstract meaning from the text rather than to incarnate it.”²⁸ No longer, did students seek union with God; rather, they sought to analyze and dissect everything in order to discover a rational explanation of God and God’s creation. Overtime this emphasis on rational analysis in order to know *how* to do something or to know *about* something (*vita activa*) slowly began to supersede the inner-subjective knowing, a beholding and uniting *with* the love of God (*vita contemplativa*).

²⁷ Thomas X. Davis, "Benedict's Monastic Theological Formation: A Garden of Nuts," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (August 2011): 252. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 14, 2015).

²⁸ Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 143.

***Contemplatio* in the Cistercian School**

In the monastic Cistercian School of the 12th century, the monks continued to experience *contemplatio* as a gift from God, but they also began to interpret these experiences of *contemplatio* as a taste of communion with God in the afterlife. Bernard of Clairvaux described his experience of *contemplatio* as a gift from God, a “foretaste [that] engenders in the soul a joy, an exaltation, a sort of intoxication... a sober inebriation.”²⁹ For Bernard, this experience was a glimpse into divine love; it was an “ecstatic state.” Richards distinguishes the journey of the contemplative life as described in Bernard’s *Liber de diligendo Deo*,³⁰

Bernard distinguishes four degrees, or stages, through which the contemplative progresses. First he loves himself for his own sake (8.23-25); next, for his own sake he loves God, and then he comes to love God for God's sake (9.26); finally, as the fourth and final step, he loves himself only for God's sake (10.27-28). The last stage especially concerns us, for it is there that the living contemplative experiences ecstasy. The ecstatic state... is an imperfect foretaste of the beatific vision, not only because it is momentary rather than unending, but also because in it God is not seen in an intellectual vision but instead is felt by the affection of love. The love attained in this state is infused as a gift from God, Bernard explains, ‘for it is in God's hands to give it to whom he wishes, it is not obtained by human efforts.’³¹

Throughout each stage of *contemplatio*, the contemplative moved progressively into a deeper love relationship with God, beginning with ‘loving himself for his own sake’ to finally ‘loving himself for God’s sake.’ Not until the monks had fully fallen in love with

²⁹ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 66.

³⁰ St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Liber de diligendo Deo, On Loving God*, trans. Robert Walton, 2d ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 29-31.

³¹ Kay, Richard, “DANTE IN ECSTASY: PARADISO 33 AND BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX.” *Mediaeval Studies* 66, no. 1 (January 2004): 195-196. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed October 19, 2015).

and surrendered to God were they sufficiently prepared to experience, by divine initiative, the full gift of *contemplatio*.

In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St. Victor also describes the progressive steps leading to an experience of *contemplatio* as “‘a foretaste’ of future rewards.”³² He explained:

There are four things in which the life of just men is now practiced and raised, as it were by certain steps, to its future perfection – namely, study or instruction, meditation, prayer, and performance. Then follows a fifth, contemplation, in which, as by a sort of fruit of the preceding steps, one has a foretaste, even in this life, of what the future reward of good work is.³³

For Hugh, *contemplatio* was a pinnacle experience that arose out of a deep desire to be in communion with the love of God through the faithful practice of *lectio divina*.

***Contemplatio* in the Carthusian School**

In the monastic Carthusian School of the 12th century, Guigo II describes *contemplatio* as a way of tasting, experiencing or discerning something new. In this sense, *contemplatio* is an experience of the contemplative mind being raised up into something beyond itself, being “‘lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.”³⁴ For Guigo II, the mind is not separate from its subject. The subject himself experiences or “‘tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness” which is *contemplatio*. In his *Ladder of the Monks*, Guigo II explained in detail the intricate relationship between *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*.

Reading comes first and it is at it were a foundation; it provides the subject matter which we must use for meditation. Meditation considers more carefully what is to

³² *The Didascalicon*, Taylor, trans, 93.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁴ *Guigo II: Ladder of the Monks and Twelve Meditations*, Trans with Intro by Edmund Colledge, OSA and James Walsh SJ (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 68.

be sought after; it digs as it were for the treasures which it finds and reveals, but since it is not in meditations power to seize upon the treasure, it directs us to prayer. Prayer lifts up to God with all its strength and begs for the treasure which it longs for, which is the sweetness of contemplation. Contemplation, when it comes, rewards the labors of the other three; it inebriates the thirsty soul with the dew of heavenly sweetness. Reading is an exercise of the outward senses, meditation is concerned with the inward understanding, prayer is concerned with desire, contemplation outstrips every faculty.³⁵

Guigo II observed that the monks' experiences of *contemplatio* were the result of a deep commitment to the practice of *lectio divina* (*lectio, meditation, and oratio*) that drew them into the "dew of heavenly sweetness," which is love. Through the faithful practice of *lectio divina*, the monks gaze became one-pointed - moving from the exterior of the text to the interior of their hearts - where they began to experience "the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes."³⁶

Renewed Understanding of *Contemplatio*

What can be discerned from the monastic tradition and the monks' descriptions of *contemplatio* is that the experience of *contemplatio* was a gift from God. Through their diligent practice of *lectio divina*, the monks awakened to a deeper understanding of the literal text, an inner subjective experience of the text wherein they encountered awe and wonder, which according to the scriptures is the beginning of the search for knowledge and wisdom.³⁷ For the monks, the experience of *contemplatio* arose through their daily surrender to the practice of *lectio divina* that moved them to a deeper understanding of

³⁵ Guigo II, *Ladder of the Monks*, 92-93.

³⁶ Ibid., 69.

³⁷ See Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

the scriptures and guided them on their journey towards communion with God, the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

In the various monastic schools, we learned that the monks embarked on a journey to experience the wonder and awe of God (*contemplatio*). They described their experiences of *contemplatio* in different ways: “a silence filled with sweetness, joy and delight,” “the unspeakable sweetness of love,” “a sober inebriation” or “a sweetness which gladden and refreshes.” What is common among the monks who experienced *contemplatio* is that they felt drawn into an unexpected ecstatic moment, where they experienced what it means to “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.”³⁸ Thus, their experience with *contemplatio* transformed them, their vision, and their way of being in the world. Once they awakened to wisdom, they experienced the transformative power of the “unspeakable sweetness of love.”

The monastic schools practiced the method of *lectio divina* as a way to prepare themselves for *contemplatio*. Although colleges and universities in the 21st century are not monastic schools, the ancient practice of *lectio divina* method can be adapted and seen as a useful tool to unlock wisdom in a literary text. This pedagogical method can help students to experience and reclaim a sense of wonder and awe in life, which was for the monastics the purpose of *lectio divina*. The re-appropriation of the *lectio divina* method provides an opportunity for students to embark on a journey of self-discovery and underscores the essence of the liberal arts: to search for beauty, goodness, truth and wisdom and ultimately to experience *theōria* (wonder and awe). The aim of the liberal

³⁸ Psalm 34:8.

arts was not just the study and analysis of literary texts; it was to experience what was embedded within the literary texts.

Part II: A Contemporary Application

***Contemplatio* in the 21st Century**

Where the ancient Greek philosophers embarked on a journey to experience *theōria* (wonder and awe), through *lectio divina* students can embark on a journey into the objective world of a text, where they are moved beyond the text to an inner subjective experience of *theōria* or *contemplatio*. In the 21st century classroom, I have found that by engaging students in the practice of *lectio divina* they too, can experience moments of *contemplatio*. Along the journey, students begin to learn that in order to transcend their limited worldviews, they have to let go of previously held views about themselves, others and the world that limit their growth and development.

Through the practice of *lectio divina* (reading a text, searching for deeper meaning in a text and responding to a text), their old way of thinking shifts. They are changed, renewed and transformed. Their minds have somehow grown larger and they know things now that they had not known before. What they thought they knew begins to fall away and make way and opens them up to experience a deeper realization of beauty, goodness, wisdom and truth. At the end of the semester, they can see how their journey into the world of the text has awakened them to a deeper understanding of beauty, goodness, truth and/or wisdom as they came to see it and experience it in their own lives.

Students have described these experiences of *contemplatio* in class dialogues, journal writings, reflection papers, performances and final papers. Sometimes they

describe these experiences in terms of feelings, while at other times, they describe these experiences in terms of simple awareness. As Peterson notes, “Contemplation in the schema of *lectio divina* means living the read/meditated/prayed text in the everyday world. It means getting the text into our muscles and bones, our oxygen-breathing lungs and blood pumping heart.”³⁹ Although Peterson speaks from within the Christian tradition, I have found that my students express how the *lectio divina* method has brought them to experience beauty, goodness, wisdom and truth embedded in the text, which now flows out from their “muscles and bones and oxygen-breathing lungs and blood pumping heart” into their lives. The spontaneous experience of *contemplatio* awakens and challenges students to transcend their limited views and offers glimpses into students’ learning, growth and transformation.

Contemplatio as Beauty

Some students come to experience *contemplatio* as beauty. While reading “Flowers” in *The Dhammapada*, one student expressed her experience with beauty in the natural world. She wrote,

I enjoy frequent walks in the park. I read the signs, ‘take only pictures, leave only footprints.’ Yet, normally I like to pick a flower and wear it in my hair... My point was to bring some of the parks’ beauty home with me to savor until it wilts away. Now I see... my mind was tricking myself to think I was enjoying the flowers more by bringing one home; when the most fulfilling joy I could have gotten out of the flowers, was just to look.⁴⁰

Note that this student went on a walk (a journey) and along the way was inspired to “take some of the park’s beauty home.” She was drawn into the beauty of the flowers,

³⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 109.

⁴⁰ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Summer 2015).

believing at first that beauty was in the flower alone. Yet, upon study and further reflection on “Joy” in *The Dhammapada* and her experience in the park with the flowers, she realized that beauty and the joy that came with it was in fact in the beholding experience of the flowers. It was her ability to be in communion *with* the flower, which brought her the greatest joy.

***Contemplatio* as Goodness**

Some students experience *contemplatio* as goodness. Reflecting on the story of *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria* in the Gospel of John, this student wrote about how her time with this story helped her to assess her old prejudices towards others who do not share her same religious views.

This story really opened my eyes to my own religion. It taught me that God seeks out even the poorest of poor to rejoice in his word and worship. God has no bias towards who follows his word and he considers no one to be an outcast. All people are valuable to God and Jesus demonstrates that we should demonstrate and show love to everyone, including the people whom we consider enemies.⁴¹

A contemplative reading of this Gospel story, affected not only her view of others but her entire worldview. She came to realize that all people have value, meaning no one should be rejected, not even her enemies. The contemplative method of *lectio divina* challenged her to develop herself holistically, as Lichtmann states, “sincere and integrated-one, not divided- with heart, hands, and head acting together, not duplicitous or hypocritical.”⁴² She realized that God’s goodness is for all people and therefore, all people, herself included, need to reflect this goodness in the world.

⁴¹ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁴² Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 111.

Another student sharing his experience with *The Katha Upanishad* also made a spiritual connection, but this time with a story in the *Gospel of Matthew*. He entered into a spontaneous inner inter-religious dialogue.

‘These pleasures last until tomorrow, and they wear out the vitals of life (*The Katha Upanishad* 1.26).’ For me this made me think of a similar passage in Matthew 6:19-21, ‘Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart is.’ Both of these spoke to me. They made me reevaluate my life. What was my purpose for living? I came to the conclusion that for a while I have been living for the pleasures of the flesh, these pleasures that will eventually fade... I could have gone snowboarding less and helped work at soup kitchens. I could have waited to buy a bike and maybe donated some money. My actions lately have been all about me.⁴³

Through the deepening practice of *lectio divina*, he began to make a meaningful connection “between the word ‘read’ and the word ‘lived.’”⁴⁴ *Lectio divina* led him deeper into an experience of goodness; it inspired him to reconsider other ways that he could actualize his goodness in the world.

Contemplatio as Wisdom

Students sometimes articulate an experience of wisdom stating, “The wisdom is inside of you it just needs to be awakened.”⁴⁵ Another student wrote, “*The Dhammapada* and *The Katha Upanishad* were two texts that really opened my eyes to the fact that material things don’t matter, wisdom and love do.”⁴⁶ Through the *lectio divina* method, students are able to allow the wisdom in the text to illuminate their inner wisdom, own it,

⁴³ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Fall 2015)

⁴⁴ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 113.

⁴⁵ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁴⁶ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

articulate it and apply it to their lives. One student wrote about his choice between smoking marijuana and studying.

At the beginning of the semester, this was a very easy choice for me as I would always just smoke and get high, and I would rarely get my work done. Back then I didn't care about getting work done, I just cared about the passing pleasures. Once we read "joy" in *The Dhammapada* it really opened my eyes, and I realized that I had to start taking advantages of perennial joys... Since I decided to choose not to pick the passing pleasures, my grades have started to go up, and I have also been healthier as a person.⁴⁷

The above student articulates an aha moment, in which a new understanding of joy arose in him, empowering him to make better choices in his life.

Another student, while studying *The Katha Upanishad*, wrote about the problematic nature of the mind. He realized that his mind needed discipline in order to create deeper meaning in his life.

If the mind were to clear itself of all the thoughts... the heart would be able to access the mind and become one with the mind. As I was drawing this picture, I realized that this picture accurately represents my life. Every day of my life, my mind is crowded with thoughts and by the end of the day my mind is worn out by thinking too much... My ultimate goal is to connect my heart with my mind... My thoughts block my heart when I am thinking about multiple things at once, however, if I get in the habit of only thinking about one thing at a time, then I can connect with my heart for the first time.⁴⁸

The above student is beginning to recognize the problematic nature of a crowded and undisciplined mind and the effect it is having on his life. *Lectio divina* provide mental boundaries to help guide students to access deeper levels of thought, reflection and feelings.

Students begin to increase their awareness and feel empowered by their experience as a result of working slowly and mindfully through the literary texts. The

⁴⁷ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁴⁸ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

student below shares her reluctance to take World Literature I, but expresses her delight in her growth and development.

This World Literature class took me by surprise... This simple common core class was not something I ever planned on taking until my roommate told me to sign up with her. Initially I begged her to take another class with me because of my lack of interest in reading books from other cultures... Reading the culturally diverse books was a big eye-opener for me as well as a growth in myself... Leaping out of my comfort zone of literature and entering a new realm of information and insight made me realize how deep and meaningful a text can be... I am grateful for the skills of reading, insight on the human condition, how to better interpret texts, as well as my new wisdom because I feel a change in myself as well as a growth in myself...⁴⁹

By using the *lectio divina* method, students are transforming throughout the semester.

They are no longer the same student who entered into the course at the beginning of the semester. Their minds have expanded and they are aware of things that they did not know before.

Contemplatio as Truth

Students also express their experiences of *contemplatio* in terms of an awareness of a deeper inner self, the ‘true self’ stating, “Our purpose in life is to experience our own true Self.”⁵⁰ Reflecting on *The Katha Upanishad*, one student wrote,

I’ve come to the realization... that I allow my thoughts and my senses to take over me, giving no room for my Self to emerge. But this text has shown me that this does not have to be the case, for my Self is grander than the instant gratification delivered by the senses.⁵¹

Again, through the contemplative practice of *lectio divina*, students are increasing self-awareness. They are slowly peeling away the layers of the false self and are gaining

⁴⁹ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015)

⁵⁰ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

⁵¹ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

glimpses into a deeper truer self. As they do, they begin to listen to the true self and make space for it to emerge.

Pedagogical Insights and Challenges

The ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina* offers educators a contemplative pedagogical method to guide students into an experience of *contemplatio*. Educators who choose to use this monastic method need to be versed in *lectio divina* and understand its organic nature. *Lectio*, *meditatio* and *oratio* flow in and out of each other seamlessly, deepening the students' understanding of the text as well as their lived experience in light of the text. *Contemplatio*, flows out of the practice of *lectio*, *meditatio* and *oratio*; it is the fruit of this practice. *Contemplatio* was a transformative experience that the ancient Greeks philosophers called *theōria* (awe and wonder). Through the guided practice of *lectio divina*, students begin a transformative journey to uncover, perceive and experience beauty, goodness, truth and wisdom as they awaken to a new understanding of self, others and the world.

One critical challenge facing educators interested in using the *lectio divina* method is the need for a comprehensive understanding of and training in this ancient monastic practice. Educators need to know the history, method and practice of *lectio divina*. They need to understand that the historical roots of *lectio divina* stretch back to the ancient Greek philosophical schools where “contemplation (the search for Ultimate Truth, fascination with Good, union with the One) was the purpose of human existence.”⁵² This is what the Greek philosophers called the *vita contemplativa*, the life of

⁵² Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans. Peter Vriend (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2002), 343.

leisure. The monastic schools adapted this ancient Greek understanding and practice of contemplation and threaded it through their learning and way of life. By immersing themselves in the contemplative practice of *lectio divina*, the monks experienced beauty, goodness, truth, wisdom and unity with the One, which they called God.

Since *lectio divina* is rooted in the context of the Christian monastic tradition, educators will be challenged to see this contemplative practice as a useful pedagogical tool to uncover wisdom embedded within literary texts used in Humanities courses. The adaptation of this Christian monastic method does not require or impose a Christian belief on the educators or students. In the monastic schools, *lectio divina* was not just a search for wisdom and a pathway to the divine; it was also a method of interpretation of sacred and literary texts. The search for wisdom accompanied by a critical analysis of the text led the monks to *contemplatio* (a transformative experience).

Although the monks described their transformative experiences in spiritual terms, *contemplatio* itself is not solely a spiritual-religious practice; rather, it is an inner subjective experience leading to a transformative awakening of self. As Harold Roth notes, “Contemplative experiences are not confined exclusively to religion... In the humanities one explores the contemplative dimensions of literature, philosophy and religion”⁵³ In the Humanities, the emphasis is on the transformation of the students as they study and interact with literary texts, the goal of the *artes liberales*. This is also the aim of contemplative practices: *lectio divina* shifts the focus of the learning process from the material learned to the student who embarks on a search for meaning and in the

⁵³ Harold Roth, “Against Cognitive Imperialism: A Call for a Non-Ethnocentric Approach to Cognitive Science and Religious Studies,” *Religion East & West*, 2008, p.20. See also, <http://www.contemplativemind.org/archives/965>

process has a subjective experience with truth and wisdom. Although, some educators may be wary of using the *lectio divina* method because of its Christian heritage, what is important is that they understand its historical roots, method, purpose, and potential to change students' lives, before attempting to adapt this practice in a humanities course.

A third challenge facing educators who chose to use the *lectio divina* method is a one of familiarity with and commitment to the practice of *lectio divina*. As Barbezat and Bush note in *Contemplative Practice in Higher Education*,

There is no effective way to teach contemplative practices without practicing them yourself...you need a deep familiarity with the practices before introducing them so that you can guide students through them and help them process their experience afterwards...Guiding students from many backgrounds within the context of your own discipline is no easy task...Without a solid grounding in your own practice, you may not be able to respond in ways that help students learn.⁵⁴

Educators cannot teach what they do not know, understand and practice themselves. If they are not engaged in contemplative practices themselves, they cannot be authentic practitioners in their teaching. In order to understand *contemplatio* as an inner transformative experience of wonder and awe, educators need to be committed to the practice of *lectio divina*. As educators become more familiar with and committed to the practice of *lectio divina*, they too will be transformed and as a result, be better equipped to understand the benefits that it offers in the learning process.

The experience of *contemplatio* comes about through a state of leisure; therefore, a fourth challenge for educators is to understand the necessity for significant periods of leisure to maximize the *lectio divina* practice. For the ancient Greeks, leisure (*schola*) was a state of being free from work, creating the freedom to wonder. Leisure creates

⁵⁴ Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 67-68.

space in the learning process, but also within the students' minds and hearts. It is essential that educators understand the importance of leisure when guiding their students through the *lectio divina* practice. Leisure empowers students to wander freely through the text, searching for meaning without fear of making a mistake or being judged in the process. It is in this state of leisure that students will begin to question, dialogue, explore, and experience what is embedded within the literary text.

However, a pedagogy that embraces leisure also requires trust. At first, educators may feel uncomfortable with leisure, since it opens up space for the unexpected to emerge. Educators cannot predict when or how students will express themselves. They also cannot predict what questions, thoughts or feelings will arise or how students will pose their questions, thoughts, or feelings because they have no control over the students' inner subjective experience of the text. As noted in previous chapters, this raises difficulties for educators assessing students' subjective exploration. Educators have to be willing to allow the students to grow and develop through the process, and express themselves on their own terms. Educators will also have to be more attentive to the way in which students engage in their learning process. Also as noted earlier, neither educators nor students can rush to experience the deeper truths hidden within the literary texts, since it takes time for these deeper truths to reveal themselves, to penetrate the mind and hearts of students and transform them.

Therefore, educators need to develop an appreciation for leisure in their own lives before trying to implement it into their pedagogy. Contemplative practices require some form of leisure. Educators need to create space and time in their own lives for quiet reading, reflection and wonder. Once they begin to experience the power of leisure in

their own lives, they will be able to bring the wisdom of their experience into the classroom. Educators who value leisure and have experienced leisure will feel more comfortable giving their students leisure to explore literary texts and will support and encourage them in this contemplative practice.

Once educators have opened a space for wonder, they are faced with a fifth challenge, which is the ability to keep the learning space open for ongoing wonder and exploration. As Palmer notes, “If we are to open space for knowing, we must be alert to our fear of not knowing and to our fearful tendency to fill the learning space.”⁵⁵

Although leisure opens up the learning space for students to wander and wonder through the text, they can also become easily distracted, anxious and bored. Educators need to be aware of these challenges and continue to guide, reassure and encourage students of the value and purpose of the *lectio divina* practice. When I notice students becoming bored, frustrated or distracted, I gently, but firmly bring them back to the text. Sometimes, I pose a question and invite them to explore it for deeper meaning or I ask them to pose a question for the class to explore for deeper meaning together. At other times, I ask them to break down a dialogue or argument, depict the text or work together to perform a short passage from the text. Furthermore, just as the students struggle with the open learning space, so too do the educators. Yet, educators must not give in to their fears and insecurities and clutter the learning space with too much lecture or busy work, but instead stay with the *lectio divina* method and trust that the deeper wisdom embedded within the text will reveal itself to students in time.

⁵⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as A Spiritual Journey* (New York, NY: HaperOne, 1993), 72.

As a space for leisure opens, educators are faced with a sixth challenge, the importance of creating healthy boundaries in the learning process. As mentioned earlier, leisure opens space for wonder, but also for agitation, boredom, fears and distractions as both educators and students bring their anxiety, inner chaos and stress into the classroom. Therefore, educators need to create firm boundaries for themselves as well as for their students to feel safe to wander and wonder through the text.

The openness of the space is created by the firmness of the boundaries. A learning space cannot go on forever; if it did, it would not be structured for learning but an invitation to confusion and chaos. A space has edges, perimeters, limits. When those boundaries are violated –when the city creeps into the desert...the quality of space is destroyed...The teacher who wants to create an open learning space must define and defend its boundaries with care.⁵⁶

There is already much chaos and confusion in the minds and hearts of the students.

Students need an ordered space, a focal point and time to discern their thoughts and insights. Therefore, educators need to create and articulate the “edges, perimeters, limits.” As students make steady progress in *lectio divina*, they will recognize how difficult it is to be the subject of their own experience and not be overwhelmed and controlled by the chaos and confusion within their own minds and hearts.

Educators need to recognize the importance of ordering the classroom space but they also need to recognize the importance of helping students to re-order their inner space. Students need educators to provide them with a focal point and allow time for them to discern their thoughts, feelings and insights without feeling judged and criticized. Educators also need to be sensitive to students’ anxieties and fears of exposing their inner world of thoughts and feelings as they enter into the subjective experience of the text.

⁵⁶ Palmer, *To Know as We are Known*, 72.

Therefore, educators need to know how to create healthy boundaries for the classroom space as well as for the interior space of the students' minds and hearts. Boundaries create safety. First, they help students know what is expected of them. Second, they create the opportunity for students to look inside their minds and hearts, get in touch with the thoughts and feelings that the text is provoking within them and third, healthy boundaries create a safe space for students to begin to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings. As students begin to feel more comfortable exploring their thoughts and feelings, their anxiety, inner chaos and stress begins to diminish thereby opening the learning space for fuller exploration.

Although not an easy task, educators can create healthy boundaries within their classrooms. In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer offers six paradoxes for creating a healthy learning space:

1. The space should be bounded and open
2. The space should be hospitable and “charged.”
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honor the “little” stories of the students and the “big” stories of the disciplines and tradition.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of the community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.⁵⁷

Healthy boundaries are “bounded and open,” protecting those who are in the learning space and keeping out those who do not belong in the learning space. The learning space, comprised of the educator and the students, needs to free from other distractions that diminish their focus and attention such as information coming in through their digital

⁵⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 76-77.

devices, homework from other courses and personal concerns. Once boundaries are set and kept, energy can build within the space “charging it” for learning as educators and students explore the text for further meaning and expression. Spaces are “hospitable” when the educator sets and maintains these boundaries, while welcoming students to engage actively in the learning process by providing a nonjudgmental space for further exploration and discovery. A hospitable space encourages students to consider, try out and share ideas with the class as they work through a text without fear of being wrong.

Healthy boundaries keep the students focused within their own inner subjective experiences of the literary text and provide space for them to share their thoughts, questions and experiences. At the same time, these healthy boundaries allow space for the voices of the other students to be heard as well as the historical-cultural voice of the text. Finally, healthy boundaries allow for both solitude and silence, while recognizing the value of and allowing space for the input of others.

Digital devices have no boundaries and pose a real threat to healthy boundaries by infiltrating the learning space, creating a vehicle for distraction and enmeshment. It is vital that educators recognize the challenge that digital devices create in the learning process. Digital devices defy and collapse healthy boundaries by allowing entry to those outside of the learning space. When someone outside the learning space sends a text message to a student within the learning space the person outside the learning space pulls the student’s attention out of the learning space. Students are constantly on alert. At any moment, their digital device may call their attention away from leisure, away from one

another and the deepening of the learning process.⁵⁸ However, it is also true that at any moment students may use their digital devices to transport themselves outside the learning space. For example, when students begin to feel bored they can opt to get on their digital devices and send a message to someone outside of the learning space.

Technology when used appropriately can add to the learning process, but it is important that educators be aware of its shadow side, which impedes the learning process.⁵⁹ Digital devices draw students' attention away from focusing on a single task such as deep reading, critical thinking, or reflection and into a multi-tasking mode, which according to Turkle dilutes the learning process.

When we think we are multitasking, our brains are actually moving quickly from one thing to the next, and our performance degrades for each new task we add to the mix. Multitasking gives us a neurochemical high so we think we are doing better and better when actually we are doing worse and worse...students – think

⁵⁸ See Przybyiski, Andrew K., and Netta Weinstein. "Can You Connect with Me Now? How the Presence of Mobile Communication Technology Influences Face-to-Face Conversation Quality." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 30, no. 3 (July 19, 2012): 237- 46. Accessed September 13, 2013, 241, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407512453827>. Przybyiski and Weinstein conducted an experiment and found that didactic partners who got to know one another in the presence of a mobile phone felt less close with their partners and reported a lower quality of relationships than did partners who shared a conversation without a mobile phone present. In this study, Przybyiski and Weinstein created two groups of pairs. Each conversed, but only one did so in the presence of a cell phone. Their findings revealed, "Partner trust, partner empathy, and relationship quality (with trust being the most significant difference, then empathy and lastly relationship quality) were all less when a cell phone was present." Moreover, they also discovered "when debriefing the test subjects that they were unaware of these effects, the debriefing procedure suggests that these effects might happen outside of conscious awareness." Even the presence of a cell phone as described by Przybyiski and Weinstein's study can hinder human development and the ability to deepen human-to-human connectivity.

⁵⁹ Twenty-First Century thinkers are exploring the impact of cell phone technology on human interactions, both social and personal, as well as reflecting on what it means to be together, meaning sharing the same physical space. According to Judith Shulevitz, "There is one big difference, though, between face-to-face and electronic interlocution. That is what psychologists call "co-presence," which provides, they say, "attunement." The value of physical togetherness lies in the possibility of aligning ourselves to others at the deepest level. Test show that people laughing together soon begin to gasp and whoop to the same convulsive beat. People happily talking together mirror one another's blinks, nods and finger tips." See Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 197.

that texting during class does not interrupt their understanding of class conversation, but they are wrong.⁶⁰

One technique to help keep the learning space open is to begin class by reminding students to turn off their cell phones or place them on silent mode, put away their lap-tops and invite them into a moment of silence as a way to destress and calm the students' minds and hearts. Sherry Turkle, tries a "device-free class," which she describes as "a class with a short break to check phones." She notices that by placing boundaries around cell phone that class "Conversations become more relaxed and cohesive. Students finish their thoughts, unrushed. What the students tell me is that they feel relief: When they are not tempted by their phones, they feel more in control of their attention."⁶¹

In addition to creating boundaries around digital devices, educators need to create boundaries around the deep study and exploration of a text. Students need a focus, a way into the text and guiding questions can provide this entry point. Once inside the text, students also need to feel safe to wander through the pages of the text wondering and expressing what they are discovering. Guiding questions keep students' attention focused on a single point, encouraging them to move deeper, while providing support for them to express what they are discovering. Guiding questions provide a focal point, streamlines thinking, and re-directs students' chaos and stress. They not only create healthy boundaries, but also prevent these boundaries from collapsing. Educators can use guiding questions throughout the class to continue to probe a text for deeper meaning. They can write a verse from the text on the board, along with a probing question as a way to focus

⁶⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversations: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 213.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

students' attention at the beginning of class, but they can also add to or deepen a question in the middle of class or even at the end of class. When educators begin to notice the students' attention pulling away from the text, they can pose a question and ask students to write a short in-class-response to it as a way to re-focus their attention.

Contemplatio cannot be forced, required or prescribed. As mentioned earlier, *contemplatio* requires leisure and therefore, cannot happen in a stressful environment. Students experience moments of *contemplatio* when they are ready. Just as a flower opens and reveals beauty in its own time, *contemplatio* comes in its own time. Educators must be careful not to push students into premature, and thus inauthentic, experiences. They must be aware that *lectio divina* can inspire, empower and excite students, but it can also bring up painful experiences for them, which they will sometimes share in class conversations or in their writings. As Barbezat and Bush note, "Since contemplative exercises require first-person reflection and attention, students are likely to uncover aspects of their experience that are uncomfortable for them and possibly frightening."⁶² This does not mean that educators are to become counselors for their students. It just means that they need to provide a safe classroom space as well as a safe office space for students to explore the texts and the feelings that arise through their study of the text.⁶³

Students need to know that educators care about them as persons as well as their growth and development. Although many of my students share deeply personal things in

⁶² Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 80.

⁶³ Again, safety has to do with students feeling safe to express their thoughts, feelings and concerns without feeling judged. Understanding literary texts is multilayered task and students need to know that educators will listen to them, be patient with them, while encouraging them to explore the many layers of meaning.

class and in their writing, I do not try to counsel them. I just listen and acknowledge their thoughts and feelings. Actually what I have noticed is rather interesting. As educators, we worry about students exposing their inner world in the classroom. We worry for them, for the other students and for ourselves. We feel uncomfortable in the face of such raw expression. However, I have noticed that when students express an inner truth in class, when they expose their interior world that this expression of raw truth has a profound impact on the class as a whole. It actually draws the class closer together and supports other students to explore and express their inner world, opening a greater space for further exploration and consideration. It is in these moments that students are engaging in the learning process and becoming subjective learners. Earlier I mentioned a student who had a painful experience in the military. His sharing of his pain, his mistakes and realization not only deeply impacted him, but many of the other students in the class, so much so that both he and others wrote about its effect on them in their final semester writing assignment.⁶⁴

Lectio divina is a comprehensive method of learning how to read, study, and experience a literary text. This practice challenges students to become whole persons (mind, body, spirit). Therefore, a seventh challenge for educators is that they must see contemplative practices such as *lectio divina* as an integral component of holistic education. As Waaijman states, “*Wholistic* education seeks to be comprehensive. It does not limit itself to intellectual formation and the training of the will”⁶⁵; rather it aims at the formation of character, the transmission of values and the overall growth and

⁶⁴ See *Oratio*, p. 229.

⁶⁵ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans. Peter Vriend (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2002), 47.

development of the human person. Holistic education challenges traditional pedagogy. It takes as its premise the fact that students already possess beauty, goodness, wisdom and truth within them; therefore, the educators' task is to not to fill them with information but to help them discover, uncover and experience what is already within them. Holistic educators need to consider embracing the contemplative pedagogy of *lectio divina*, which aims at the holistic development and transformation of the student. The *lectio divina* method embraces holistic learning by combining reading, lecturer, memory training, class discussion, analysis, leisure, group work, performance, journal writing, reflection papers, and other creative assignments to provide students with multiple ways to explore, question, articulate, feel and express where they are in their learning process. Through *lectio divina*, students grow into a more integrated self-aware human being.

Summary

In summary, *contemplatio* is the fruit of the *lectio divina* practice; it is a transformative experience of Beauty, Goodness, Wisdom, and Truth. The ancient Greek philosophers called this transformative experience *theōria* (wonder and awe), while the monastics called it *contemplatio*, “the unspeakable sweetness of love.”⁶⁶ For both the ancient Greek philosophers and the monastics, this inner subjective experience transformed them, their vision, and their way of being in the world. Therefore, educators could find the contemplative practice of *lectio divina* a suitable pedagogical method to generate a deep transformative learning experience in the humanities.

⁶⁶ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, Prol. 49, 24.

Lectio divina as an alternative pedagogy can guide students into an enlightening transformative experience. It awakens them to something new that they had not seen or understood before. It is this experience itself, which is vital to the students' self-understanding, growth and transformation. As Morson notes in "Why College Kids are Avoiding the Study of Literature," "The real literary work is the reader's experience. This means the first thing a teacher needs to do is to help students have the experience the author is trying to create."⁶⁷ Storytellers, philosophers and writers invite their listeners and readers into an experience of the human condition. As students engage deeply in these various literary texts, they are confronted, provoked, challenged, and inspired by the struggles of the characters, their historical-social-cultural-political-religious situations in which they find themselves and as a result begin to move out of their comfort zone and reflect on how these circumstances are mirrored in their own lives.

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The practice of *lectio divina* sharpens the students' ability to read a text closely and engage a text with critical eyes. *Lectio divina* is also an interpretive tool to help students dig out meaning, while providing a pathway for them to experience beauty,

⁶⁷ Gary Saul Morson, "Why College Kids are Avoiding the Study of Literature," *Commentary* 139, no. 7 (July 2015): 25. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 5, 2016). See also, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/why-college-kids-are-avoiding-the-study-of-literature/>

⁶⁸ Comment from a student in my World Literature I course (Spring 2015).

goodness, truth and wisdom. As Proust and Ruskin remarks, *On Reading*, the literary text is merely the starting point for the readers' search for wisdom.

We feel quite truly that our wisdom begins where that of the author ends, and we would like to have him give us answers, while all he can do is give us desires. And these desires he can arouse in us only by making us contemplate the supreme beauty which the last effort of his art has permitted him to reach. But by...a law which perhaps signifies that we can receive the truth from nobody, and that we must create it ourselves, that which is the end of their wisdom appears to us as but the beginning of ours.⁶⁹

Through the contemplative practice of *lectio divina* students are given a pathway to experience wisdom and awakened to a new way of seeing and understanding self, others and the world.

It is important for educators to recognize their critical role in guiding the students through the *lectio divina* practice. Their role is not simply one of imparting knowledge to the students, but one of helping students to realize that they are the subjects of their learning experience, not mere receptacles of knowledge. A literary text is like a theater in which the students are invited to become active participants in the drama of the human condition. The *lectio divina* practice offers students a holistic, unitive experience with the truth hidden in the text and the truth of their own human condition. Through the practice of *lectio divina*, students learn to read critically, interpret deeply, and respond meaningfully. They begin to transform themselves and as a result, the world they inhabit. One of the major goals of the Humanities is to help the students to come to the realization that they are not a mere consequence of the human condition, but rather wise compassionate agents, creators, and transformers of the human condition. The role of

⁶⁹ Marcel Proust and John Ruskin, *On Reading* (London, England: Hesperus Press Limited, 2011), 23.

educators it is to help students to grow into the fullest expression of themselves, to grow in self-knowledge, self-understanding and self-awareness and to live in the world with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose, compassion and peace. *Lectio divina* is one pedagogical method that can help educators achieve this vision.

CONCLUSION

“It seems that the Humanities is onto something when it seeks to keep the essence of the soul as a priority in life. We cannot lose our soul in a technological world because the soul is the essence of the human person.” Fr. Warren J. Savage

As I conclude this dissertation, I turn once again to Martin Heidegger, who was deeply concerned with the ways in which modern technology was threatening to disempower human beings in the 20th century. At the end of “The Memorial Address” Heidegger wrote,

In this dawning atomic age a far greater danger threatens... This assertion is valid in the sense that the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as *the only* way of thinking.¹

Although Heidegger was speaking in the 20th century, his insight into human beings relationship with technology in the 21st century is spot on. All throughout college and university campuses, students are “captivated, bewitched, dazzled and beguiled” by their digital devices.

Students today rely more on their digital devices for information, than on themselves. They search Wikipedia and Google for information, but rarely stop to read critically, consider and reflect on the information they receive. When I mention this point to my students, they shared with me that they do not even have to search the Web anymore; instead, they just ask Siri. But, Siri cannot teach students how to ponder; Siri cannot teach them how to appropriate ethical value to their lives, the lives of others and the world in which they live. Siri cannot help them to build and sustain healthy

¹ Martin Heidegger, “The Memorial Address,” in *Discourse on Thinking*. Translated by, John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1966), 56.

meaningful relationships. Siri cannot help them to become more fully human, merciful and compassionate towards themselves and others.

The problem with modern technology, according to Heidegger is that it relies on calculative thinking. It calculates, computes, and plans. But human beings, as noted by Heidegger, are meditative beings. In our deepest essence, we are connected to the mystery of life and the endless possibilities it affords us. The danger, therefore, for Heidegger is not modern technology itself; rather, it is our relationship with it. By continuing an unhealthy relationship with modern technology, calculative thinking will become the norm, resulting in the loss of our true nature.

What great danger then might move upon us? Then there might go hand in hand with the greatest ingenuity in calculative planning and inventing indifference toward meditative thinking, total thoughtlessness. And then? Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature-that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is in saving man's essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive.²

In this dissertation, I have offered a re-appropriation of the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina* as a way for educators to keep meditative thinking alive in our Humanities courses.

The roots of *lectio divina* as explored in this dissertation stretch all the way back to ancient Greece, where the focus of education was the growth and transformation of the whole student. For the ancient Greeks, the contemplative life, *theōria* (wonder and awe), was integral to the education of students. The contemplative life allowed space and time for students to examine life and explore the deeper meaning and purpose of their lives, to debate and reflect on the enduring questions of the Humanities such as what is the

² Heidegger, "The Memorial Address," 56.

virtuous self; what is the meaning and purpose of life; why do we suffer; and what generates happiness? The contemplative life was the examined life and according to Socrates, “the only life worth living.”

The ancient monastic schools embraced the contemplative life along with the enduring questions of humanity and began teaching students how to read deeply and interpret critically and meaningfully the thoughts of others, which had been written down in sacred and other literary texts. If students could not read deeply and interpret meaningfully, they could not learn from, consider and ponder the meaning shared by those who had lived before them. Aware of the importance of being able to read, dialogue, interpret and articulate their search and experience of wisdom, the monks in the monastic schools developed the *lectio divina* method as a way to inform and form the monks.

Lectio divina is a contemplative practice, composed of a four-fold movement (*lectio, meditatio, oratio* and *contemplatio*) that positions students as the subjects of the learning process. Through the practice of *lectio divina* students learn how to read deeply, think critically and respond meaningfully to the enduring questions of humanity. As students moved through the *lectio divina* method they move from the objective world of the text to the subjective world of the self where they began to sense, feel, intuit and experience the wisdom embedded within the text.

Lectio, the first movement in the *lectio divina* method, teaches students to slow down, focus and concentrate on the text before them. Once students begin to slow down the reading process, they begin to enter more deeply into the world of the text and the complexity of the human condition explored within the text. They begin to encounter

characters and the joys and struggles that they face. The more deeply they encounter the characters, the more they get to know them. As they begin to listen to their stories and struggles, they begin to identify with and understand them and as a result, their minds, hearts and souls begin to open and become transformed in the process.

Lectio teaches students not only to read a text, but to read their lives, the lives of others and the world around them. *Lectio* is a way of reading, not only a text but also life itself. When students learn to slow down their reading of a text, they also learn to slow down their reading of life unfolding all around them. This ability to slow down and read deeply is even more critical today than in the monastic schools. In the monastic schools, the monks had distractions, mostly interior distractions.

Today students still have interior distractions but in addition, they have the external distractions brought about in the age of modern technology. Technology accelerates the pace of life, not allowing time to consider, reflect and ponder. To slow down is to value life; it is to create time and space to consider deeply that, which is before us - whether it be a text, ourselves, another or the world in which we dwell; it is to live the examined life. Slow reading is a critical practice in the Humanities. As students practice the art of slow reading they learn to focus, concentrate and encounter the voice of the other whether in the text or in life.

Meditatio, the second movement in the *lectio divina* method, teaches students how to interpret a text for deeper meaning and purpose. Through *meditatio*, students learn how to contextualize a text and ruminate on it as they plunge below the surface of the literal meaning to discover hidden deeper meanings. The practice of rumination builds memory as students learn to organize and store thoughts and information within their

own minds. *Meditatio* also teaches students how to analyze and interpret the various meaning of texts. They learn to question and discern meaning for a particular time period as well as to question and discern meaning that they can apply to their own lives.

The art of interpretation is another critical practice in the Humanities. *Meditatio* not only trains students to slow down and interpret a text for deeper meaning, but as students slow down and learn how to interpret a text for deeper meaning, they begin to learn how to slow down and interpret the deeper meaning of life. They learn to ruminate on the fundamental questions of humanity. They learn to store within their memory the insights shared by others who have dialogued, reflected and written on the human condition. They build self-confidence as they learn to rely on their own power to remember and ability to make meaningful connections, and not rely solely on their digital devices to do this work for them. *Meditatio* also teaches students how to analyze the insights of others for deeper meaning that can be applied to life today.

Oratio, the third movement in the *lectio divina* method, teaches students how to respond meaningfully to the texts that they are reading. Students can only respond meaningfully once they have understood, analyzed, considered and reflected on what they have read, all of which takes time. Again, the slow deliberate pace of the contemplative life is essential for students to deepen their understanding of what they have read and offer an intelligent and meaningful response to what they are learning. Authentic responses take time and cannot be preempted, but arise naturally from the processes of deep reading, dialogue, interpretation and reflection.

Once students learn to respond intelligently and meaningfully to the complexities inherent within a text, they are better equipped to respond intelligently and meaningfully

to the struggles inherent in their own lives, the lives of others and the world in which they dwell, and give voice to them. As students practice responding to a text, they begin to recognize their own inherent struggles. They begin to see how they may also struggle with similar issues uncovered through their time in a literary text. As they become more aware of their own struggles, they develop the capacity to respond to them with new awareness. They are less likely to react to situations that arise in their lives and more likely to reflect and respond with deep thought and care.

Contemplatio is the fruit of the *lectio divina* practice. Rooted in the Greek understanding of *theōria* (wonder and awe), *contemplatio* is an experience with Beauty, Goodness, Truth and Wisdom. The practice of *lectio divina* not only guides students to discover the deeper hidden Wisdom embedded within the text, but to experience this deeper hidden Wisdom embedded within themselves. Once students have an experience with Wisdom, they are transformed. They know something now that they had not known before. Their minds and hearts have grown larger and the soul has awakened and been transformed by the experience. The experience of *contemplatio* is the whole purpose of education, since its goal is the growth and transformation of the students. As John J. Conley notes, it is “to awaken [the students’] souls to deeper ways of being human.”³

No matter how advanced technology is students still need to know how to read deeply, interpret critically and respond meaningfully to the texts they read, their lives, the lives of others and the world around them. Students still need a pathway to experience Beauty, Truth, the Good, and Wisdom, since these experiences will continue to inform,

³ John J. Conley, “The Humanities and the Soul,” *America*, Dec (2015), Vol. 213 No. 19, p. 29.

transform, and nourish their lives. We live in a different time from the ancient Greek and monastic schools, but the same fundamental questions of humanity perdure. When I pick up a literary text to read with my students, we enter into an aspect of the human condition and begin to explore the way in which this particular literary text is speaking to our soul and the soul of all humanity. We wonder what we might unlock as we read and explore the text for deeper meaning, not only within the text, but within ourselves.

As we enter into the world of the text, we intentionally leave our digital devices and their mode of calculative thinking behind. We are intentional, we work to open time and space and build trust as we slowly begin to enter into the text and walk through it together as we encounter characters and explore their thoughts and feelings. None of this is easy. Every day we have to meet the challenge to welcome the contemplative life in the classroom. We have to remind each other to strengthen our concentration, challenge our thinking and deepen our reflection. We have to allow space for each other to explore our thoughts and feelings without judging and criticizing one another. We have to hold space for what Heidegger refers to as meditative thinking and open ourselves to the myriad possibilities of what we can learn as we stroll through “the vineyard of the text,⁴ together, experiencing the fruits it has to offer.

Writing this dissertation has been a transformational experience for me. I have grown as critical, reflective thinker and writer. In order to write this dissertation, I have had to practice the *lectio divina* method. I have had to slow down to research, read and consider deeply what I was reading and writing. I have had to encounter the ancient

⁴ See Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh St. Victor's "Didascalicon."* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. He referred to slow deliberate reading as “strolling through the vineyard of the text.”

Greeks and the ancient and medieval monastics along the way and consider their struggles as well as their insights into the human condition. I have had to analyze critically and interpret the meaning of what I was reading and studying, and like the monks I have needed the companionship of others to dialogue, guide and walk with me. I have unearthed a valuable treasure in this research and writing and I offer it to other educators within the Humanities to help their students to experience Beauty, the Good, Wisdom and Truth, since these are not bound to any religious tradition.

In *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*, Barzebat and Bush challenge the focus on objective learning within higher education stating, “We are cheating our students out of the opportunity to inquire deeply into their own meaning and find themselves in the center of their learning, thus providing them with a clear sense of the meaning of their studies.”⁵ The Contemplative movement within higher education is working to reclaim the contemplative dimension of education and reposition students as the subject of their learning. *Lectio divina* is one contemplative practice that can do this. Through *lectio divina*, the students engage in deep reading, encounter characters and great thinkers along the way, engage in critical inquiry, open up their senses to feel and intuit deeper meaning, and respond meaningfully and thoughtfully to what they are discovering.

The Humanities seek to explore how to become a better person. By reading literary texts, student can also explore what it means to be human, consider the challenges and rise to meet them, not only in the classroom but in the midst of their own lives. As

⁵ Daniel Barzebat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), xv.

students become more aware, they can respond to themselves, others and the world with more care and compassion. Compassion demands that all of us, educators and students put down our digital devices and be present to one another in the midst and challenge of the human condition. It means that we fasten our eyes on the human person and not on our digital devices so that we can read accurately and respond compassionately to the needs of our times.

APPENDIX I

Analysis of the Course Objectives in Light of the *Lectio Divina* Method

Educators need to be aware that the *lectio divina* method can help them to meet specific course objectives. I have found that by using the *lectio divina* method in my World Literature I course that I have been able to meet the course objectives and fulfill the mission statement of the university.¹

First Objective: “Through reading, class discussions, critical thinking questions, presentations and written assignments students will be able to interpret human experience through a diversity of worldviews and mediums.”²

Lectio divina is not just a contemplative practice; it is also a method of interpreting literary texts and the overall human experience presented in these texts. By using the *lectio divina* method, I can see that students not only begin to uncover deeper beauty, goodness, wisdom and truth within the multiple texts selected, but also within their own lives. In my World Literature I course, I guide students through each text using class dialogue, journal writing, group work, performance and written assignments to interpret the human experience embedded in each text. In *Gilgamesh*, students questioned, reflected and wrote about Gilgamesh’s desire for friendship, but were also struck by his arrogance and self-centered behavior. In *Antigone*, students wrestled with issues of justice and pride as well as the pain found in complicated political-family and societal relationships. In *The Katha Upanishad* and *The Dhammapada*, they explored the nature

¹ Course objectives for World Literature I at Westfield State University

² Ibid.

of the mind, the ego and the intellect and began to realize the deeper struggle to be true to oneself. In “Jesus and the woman of Samaria,” located in *The Gospel of John*, students explored the power of dialogue and the value of attentive nonjudgmental listening. Finally, in *The Conference of the Birds*, students began to relate their arduous educational journey to seek truth with the birds’ arduous journey to seek truth.

Second Objective: Identify the language, culture, history, values, music, literature and/or art of one of more groups.³

The slow reading and deep analysis of each text introduced students to a culture replete with its own history, language, values, music, literature, and art. In my course, students focus on ancient and medieval literature along with the history and cultural values embedded within each text. They gain insights into the ancient and medieval cultures of Mesopotamia, India, Samaria, Persia and their respective worldviews. Before reading a text, I provide students with a brief introduction of the history, culture and basic terminology to guide them through the historical-cultural milieu. As we read, I help students to identify the values each culture places on life, family, friendship, gender, ethics, dress, cultural activities (music, poetry, dance and art), religion, politics and self-development.

Third Objective: Utilize methods in identifying and understanding literary works and their corresponding vocabulary.⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

By using the *lectio divina* method, students are taught to examine closely the new and often complex terminology found in literary works. When students read slowly and deliberately, they notice unfamiliar words and instead of jumping over them – a habit many of them had developed - they learn to stop and ask for clarification. I take time to teach students about Brahman, atman, dharma, karma, moksha, nirvana, Allah, Messiah, polis, miasma and tragedy. They also learn how each of these terms conveys a deeper insight into the culture and worldview of the text. As I guide students through the multiple layers of interpretation, they begin to uncover the deeper significance of the word/concept, reflect on it in light of the text, the culture, and their own lives.

Fourth Objective: Identify and consider the fundamental issues of humanity such as existence, meaning, value, taste, truth and freedom from diverse worldviews.⁵

Lectio divina has been tested through history in the monastic schools as a useful pedagogical tool for reading and interpreting a variety of literary works such as history, philosophy, science, Scripture, the classics and the Patristic letters and commentaries. The monastic schools developed specific vocabulary and ideas to understand complex philosophical views concerning the meaning of life. *Lectio divina* is a tool to help the monks question and discover the meaning of human existence, beauty, goodness, wisdom and truth embedded in the sacred and literary texts. From its inception, *lectio divina* encouraged the deeper exploration of meaning embedded in a sacred or literary text and has offered a clear method to wrestle with the fundamental issues of humanity. I have found using the *lectio divina* method in my course that students enter into a deep and

⁵ Ibid.

meaningful relationship with the texts. They not only identify the complex human condition and corresponding behavior of characters, but they also begin to interpret, judge, and give voice to them orally and in writing. They even begin to question themselves in light of a particular character's behavior and struggle. As student continued to explore the text for deeper meaning, the class dialogue deepens. They begin questioning human nature, the nature of the mind, the role of desires, the value of education and the responsibility of freedom.

Fifth Objective: Evaluate literary issues critically and methodically.⁶

As mentioned before, *lectio divina* is a method of interpretation. In the Alexandrian School, Origin taught his student to read slowly and worked methodically through the literal, allegorical and tropological levels of interpretation. By incorporating the method of *lectio divina*, I teach my students how to read slowly and purposely, critically question texts, evaluate texts, and uncover deeper truths about the human condition by paying close attention the literary devices, methods, and the historical-cultural-political context. They notice that stories that began in an oral tradition often use repetition and are easier to read and remember, whereas later stories often have philosophical issues embedded within them, which need to be uncovered and explored for deeper meaning. I also emphasize the importance of paying close attention to words, setting, tone, punctuation and mood and the corresponding effect these have on the reader as they move slowly and methodically from the literal level to the allegorical level to the tropological level.

⁶ Ibid.

Sixth Objective: Identify the historical context of literary themes, problems, meanings, arguments, and worldviews.⁷

Since all literary works rise up out of a historical-cultural worldview, I spend time before reading a text to situate it in its proper historical-cultural context. The *lectio divina* method encourages the close reading of texts and as a result, students begin to identify literary themes, problems, meanings, arguments and various worldviews within the texts. Students identify the fear of death, the desire for friendship, the nature of the mind, the struggle for freedom, and the effort to develop oneself fully. As we move slowly and methodically through each text, students begin to recognize the specific ways that each culture questions and articulates the meaning of human existence. Students begin to see that the ancient Mesopotamian view of life and death varies greatly from the Indian view. Where Gilgamesh views death as grim existence in the underworld, Yama teaches Nachiketa about reincarnation. Students also begin to see that a culture's view of what happens after one dies informs their view on how to live a meaningful life. Gilgamesh is advised to enjoy life and the pleasures it brings, yet not at the expense of his people; whereas, Nachiketa is taught to deny earthly pleasures and focus his energy on self-discovery. By the end of the semester, students can often identify one text from another, since each has its own unique flavor. They are able to differentiate the language, the way it is written, the questions it raises and the overall message.

Seventh Objective: Argue effectively, opinions and ideas orally, and in writing.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Lectio divina encourages students to spend ample time in a text exploring it for deeper meaning. As students explore the text for deeper meaning, they begin to question it as they wrestle to understand it. Questioning brings about conversation. Students begin to feel comfortable asking questions in class, sharing insights and further investigating a text for deeper truths. I encourage students to dialogue with texts, themselves and one another through class conversations, journal writings, performances, group work, drawings, written reflection papers and final papers. As student spend more time with a text, they come to know it better and feel more comfortable conversing about it.

Analysis of the University's Mission Statement in Light of the *Lectio Divina* Method

By adapting the method of *lectio divina* in my World Literature I course, I can actualize the mission of the University.

Westfield State University fosters intellectual curiosity, encourages critical thinking, inspires civic engagement, and promotes a global perspective. A public teaching institution offering quality programs in the liberal arts and sciences with complementing professional studies curricula, we are grounded in our founding principles of academic excellence and educating all in a diverse and welcoming community. Westfield State develops the knowledge, skills, and character essential for students to reach their full potential and become responsible leaders in society. We contribute to the economic, social, and cultural vitality of the region.⁹

As mentioned earlier, *lectio divina* provokes questions, challenges thinking, and inspire students to seek truth in various texts. Rooted in the *artes liberales*, *lectio divina* draws upon the ancient Greek concepts of leisure and *theōria*. Students learn the value of slow intentional reading and study. They learn to the value of leaning into a text, listening closely to it, themselves and one another. As they do, students develop an appreciation of and respect for multiple views and learn to hold these views in dialogue with each other

⁹ Mission statement of Westfield State University (www.westfield.ma.edu)

as they explore them for deeper meaning and truth. Through *lectio divina*, students are challenged to grow and develop, to learn, but also to transform themselves through their learning. Each semester I ask themselves to consider if they are the same person who walked into the classroom at the beginning of the semester. Are you the same person with more information or have you somehow changed through your learning or do you think or act differently now based on your time in these texts? I have found that for most of my students who actively engage in their learning that the *lectio divina* method has led helped them to transform. They are not the same person who entered the course. They not only developed knowledge about a text, a culture and its philosophical perspective, but through this first-person learning approach, they become more aware of themselves, others and the world and as a result deepen their sense of compassion.

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