A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LECTIO DIVINA

One of the primary aims of a Benedictine novitiate is to introduce the new monk to our spiritual tradition. Classes can accomplish this only in a sketchy fashion – there is really no alternative to actually reading these classic monastic writings for yourself if you wish to acquire a “monastic outlook” and to deepen your own spirituality.

This list is constructed around what is available in the Kristo Buase library. It is deliberately selective and you will find many other rewarding books for yourself later on. However, during these years as a novice and Junior I would like you to confine yourself to just these titles for the evening lectio period. The morning lectio period should be kept for Scripture.

Remember that lectio is not the same as study. Your aim should be a slow and meditative reading which leads to prayer. A fruitful lectio period in the morning will often give you food for thought throughout the working day.

You don’t need to read through all the titles in this order, but make sure that you become familiar with the ones marked with a +. Some you may find more difficult and these could safely be left until later on when you feel more at home with the basic ideas: these are marked **.

Finally, remember St Benedict’s advice that books should be read right through and in their entirety. This does not apply to introductory matter which can be skimmed (if too technical) or read after the text itself.

So where do we start?

* * *

I. HOLY SCRIPTURE

The Bible itself has always been the starting point for lectio divina. Many of the works listed below were written specifically to lead the reader back to a richer and deeper understanding of the scriptures. You should make a point of reading a portion of the Bible every day, even if only a few verses.

II. THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH


1. The Apostolic Fathers will be found in the Penguin volume, Early Christian Writings +. There are also simplified A.I.M. editions of the Letters of St Ignatius and the Didache.

2. Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works (Classics of Western Spirituality), especially “Prayer” and “Exhortation to Martyrdom”. **

3. Ambrose of Milan, Commentary of Saint Ambrose on Psalm 118, translated by Íde Ní Riain, RSCJ, [Halcyon Press, Dublin]

5. **St Gregory of Nyssa**, *The Life of Moses*, (Classics of Western Spirituality). **


7. **St Gregory the Great**, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, [Cistercian Studies Series].

8. [Lives], *Handmaids of the Lord: Holy Women in Late Antiquity & the Early Middle Ages*, (including the “Life of St Macrina” by St Gregory of Nyssa and works of St Jerome), Selected & Translated by Joan M. Petersen [Cistercian Studies Series]; St Gregory the Great, *The Life of St Benedict* [Book 2 of the Dialogues], with a commentary by Adalbert de Vogüé.

III. THE DESERT FATHER TRADITION

**Introductions**: William Harmless, SJ, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*; Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*; Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*.

**I. Egyptian**

9. **St Athanasius**, *The Life of Antony*, [Classics of Western Spirituality].


13. **John Cassian**, *Conferences*, (Classics of Western Spirituality); or now the full text in the Ancient Christian Writers series, translated by Boniface Ramsey, OP – *Institutes*, *Conferences*.


**II. Palestinian and Syrian**


A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LECTIO DIVINA

18. Dorotheus of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, (Cistercian Studies Series)

19. [Isaac of Nineveh], Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, (Cistercian Studies Series); *The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Translated by Sebastian Brock (Fairacres Pamphlets)


III. Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Monasticism

**Introductions:** Benedicta Ward, *High King of Heaven: Aspects of Early English Spirituality*; Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (Cistercian Studies Series);


23. The Venerable Bede, *On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings*, (Classics of Western Spirituality).

IV. Medieval Monastic Writings


i. Benedictines


26. Hildegard of Bingen, *Mystical Writings*, edited by Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies; *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias* [Classics of Western Spirituality]


ii. Cistercians of the Twelfth Century


30. **Guerric of Igny**, *Liturgical Sermons*, (2 volumes), [Cistercian Fathers Series]


**V. Hermit Orders**


32. **Guigo II**, *Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations +*, [Cistercian Studies Series].

33. **Paul Giustiniani**, *Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine and Rule of Blessed Paul Giustiniani*, Edited by the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona (includes *Alone with God +*, by Dom Jean Leclercq).


**VI. Dom Augustine Baker and his Sources**


35. **Augustine Baker**, *Holy Wisdom ***; there is a modernised abridgement of this work in *The Essence of “Holy Wisdom”: Treatises on the Spiritual Life*, by Augustine Baker. Edited & modernised by Teresa Rodrigues, OSB


**VII. The Philokalia Tradition**

40. [Philokalia], *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (especially, St Maximus the Confessor, “Four Centuries on Love”), [Faber and Faber].

41. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Practical and Theological Chapters & the Three Theological Discourses* [Cistercian Studies Series].

42. [Jesus Prayer], *The Way of the Pilgrim +, & The Pilgrim Continues on his Way*. Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*. [Fairacres Pamphlets].

43. [Theophan the Recluse], *The Art of Prayer; An Orthodox Anthology*, Compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo [Faber & Faber].

44. [Seraphim of Sarov], *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, Compiled by G.P. Fedotov, (especially “St Seraphim: Mystic and Prophet +”).

**VIII. Modern Works**


45. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*


47. M. Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form*.

48. André Louf, *Teach us to Pray*.

49. Dom Hugh Gilbert, *Unfolding the Mystery: Monastic Conferences on the Liturgical Year*.

50. Enzo Bianchi, *God, where are you?*

Dom Ambrose Flavell, OSB  
Kristo Buase Monastery,  [kb@africaonline.com.gh](mailto:kb@africaonline.com.gh)  
7th July 2014.