

AN OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONAL LECTIO

Argentinean/Chicagoan Nancy Bedford, after expositing an ecclesial missiology grounded in the Trinity and the incarnation, focuses on discernment with attention to how the Holy Spirit engages the church in God's initiatives. Churches do not to receive master plans from books or hierarchy but instead are called to develop skills and habits for timely and local faithfulness: "The practice of discernment helps people in community, at a given time and place, to find out what actions appear to be consistent with their stand against evil, their desire to respond concretely to need, and their commitment to follow the way of Jesus Christ." Bedford draws on Luther and Bonhoeffer in reclaiming the medieval monastic *hours of lectio, meditatio, oratio, tentatio*. It is helpful that Bedford both honors a tradition and cites Paul Ricoeur's work on a hermeneutic of both suspicion and redemption; church work is penultimate.

Lectio embraces the text as what *was* in events and inscription, what *will be* eschatologically, and what *is* as a specific church makes itself available to Word and Spirit regarding their own timely participation in *missio Dei*. With appropriate cautions about a church's capacities to manipulate meanings, Bedford values the communal, expectant practice that welcomes the Spirit to use the text to read us. *Meditatio* is personal and corporate rumination – processing, listening, thinking, conversing as the church engages the text, submitting to the Spirit's promptings, in the church's context. *Oratio* is prayer, a "conversation (that) might take the form of a supplication, an accusation, a demand, a request or a cry of pain or anguish. At other times, it can be an expression of thankfulness and of the peace which passes all understanding." Bedford emphasizes that conversation involves a commitment to understand God's own viewpoint, so this is a listening, receptive activity. In Christian history, the fourth step is most often cited as *contemplatio*, an experience of awareness and rest in God's presence. In Bedford's exposition, the more Protestant version moves to *tentatio*, which counters the temptation to deception and avoidance in favor of "'trying out' what we believe we have discerned about our *sending* from our *lectio, meditatio* and *oratio*." This experimental approach, in contrast to strategic master plans, makes possible a more innovative and participatory ecclesial life. (Nancy Bedford in Padilla & Yamamori, *The Local Church as Agent of Transformation*, 115-121.)

STEPS

- 1) We invite God the Spirit to read the text with us, giving us wisdom, prompting us to hear and to have courage.
- 2) We listen to the selected text as it is read aloud by two participants.
- 3) Individually, for 5-15 minutes, in silence, we read the text repeatedly. We anticipate being drawn into the text and to have some particular verse or phrase draw our attention, perhaps by the Spirit's prompting, or by our curiosity, or by observing repeated themes. This becomes meditation and perhaps prayer.
- 4) In pairs we converse about what we heard in the text, and we may begin to note its significance.

We report to the group what we heard from our partners, with special attention to themes that are repeated or to connections among the noted texts. (With further discussion, and additional sequences, this leads to experiments that arise from the personal and group discernment.)

Luke 4:14-30

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” 23 He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” 24 And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.