

Humanity Before Christ: Creation, the Fall, and the Old Testament

I. Created by God, like God, and for God

- A. Created by God
 - 1. Created good!
- B. Created like God
 - 1. We're like God because we have intellect (intelligence) and will (freedom)
 - 2. "Image and likeness"
 - 3. Human person is a body-soul composite
 - a) Because we have a spiritual component, it means that although the human body has material causes, every human soul is always miraculously produced by God
- C. Created for God
 - 1. We were made for God - for an eternal relationship with God
 - a) So what went wrong?

II. The Fall - Humanity's first Sin

- A. Genesis 3
 - 1. God is our foundation, and when you reject your own foundation everything starts to break down. So our whole humanity suffered.
 - a) Our intellect were darkened
 - b) Our wills were weakened
 - 2. With sin we broke the most beautiful gift we had - our relationship with God - and we couldn't fix it
- B. The story of Adam and Eve is an explanation of our human condition and our need for a savior
 - 1. How did God respond to our sin?

III. The Old Testament: God reaching out

- A. God didn't leave us in our wretchedness. Although the story of humanity is a story of continual sin and sadness, it's also a story of God taking initiative time and again to bring us back into relationship with Him.
 - 1. How does He do that? By choosing certain leaders - and their communities - to be His representatives to the rest of humanity.
- B. For instance:
 - (1) Adam - couple
 - (2) Noah - family
 - (3) Abraham - extended family
 - (4) Moses - nation
 - (5) David - Kingdom
- C. In all these cases we see God's generosity growing, even though the chosen people are continually sinning
 - 1. But we also see a pattern where God chooses one man to govern all of God's people. And we see a pattern where God's people keep growing
 - a) So where do we see today the largest international community of believers, governed by one man who represents God? (*hint* it's the Catholic Church)

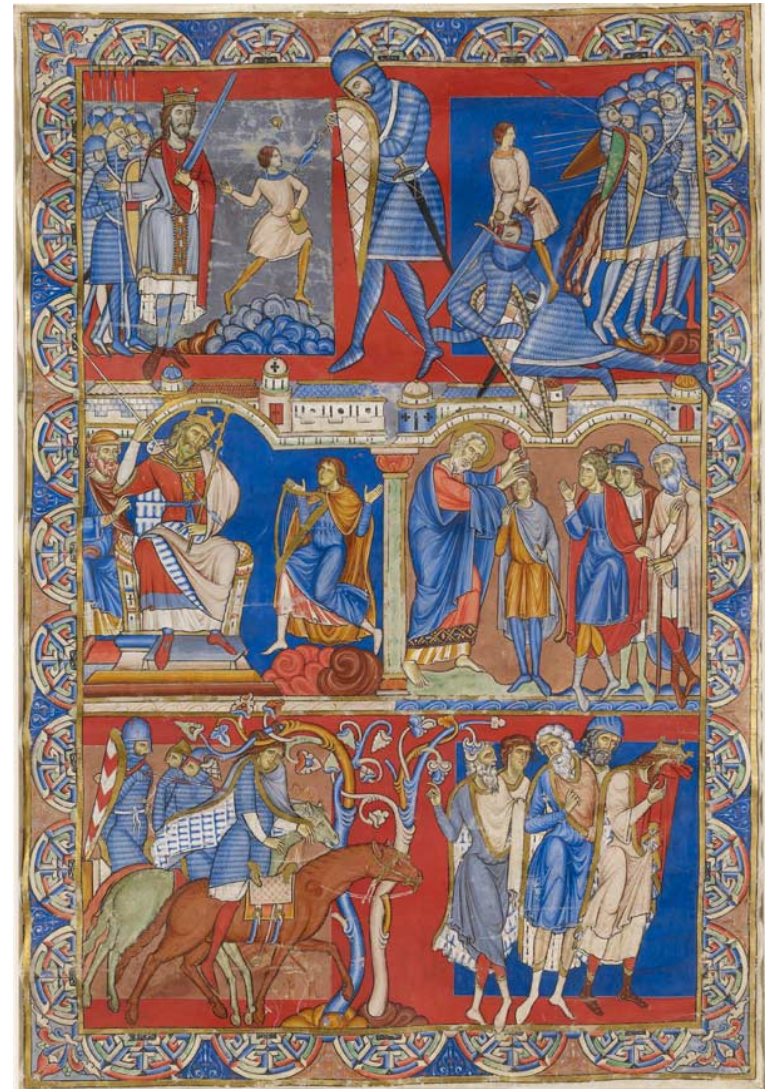
Then David spoke to Saul: “My lord should not lose heart. Let your servant go and fight this Philistine.” But Saul answered David, “You cannot go up against this Philistine and fight with him, for you are only a youth, while he has been a warrior from his youth.” Then David told Saul: “Your servant used to tend his father’s sheep, and whenever a lion or bear came to carry off a sheep from the flock, I would chase after it, attack it, and snatch the prey from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would seize it by the throat, strike it, and kill it. Your servant has killed both a lion and a bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them, because he has insulted the armies of the living God.” David continued: “The same LORD who delivered me from the claws of the lion and the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul answered David, “Go! the LORD will be with you.”

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic, putting a bronze helmet on his head and arming him with a coat of mail. David also fastened Saul’s sword over the tunic. He walked with difficulty, however, since he had never worn armor before. He said to Saul, “I cannot go in these, because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. Then, staff in hand, David selected five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in the pocket of his shepherd’s bag. With his sling in hand, he approached the Philistine.

With his shield-bearer marching before him, the Philistine advanced closer and closer to David.

When he sized David up and saw that he was youthful, ruddy, and handsome in appearance, he began to deride him. He said to David, “Am I a dog that you come against me with a staff?” Then the Philistine cursed David by his gods and said to him, “Come here to me, and I will feed your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.” David answered him: “You come against me with sword and spear and scimitar, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have insulted. Today the LORD shall deliver you into my hand; I will strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will feed your dead

body and the dead bodies of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field; thus the whole land shall learn that Israel has a God. All this multitude, too, shall learn that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves. For the battle belongs to the LORD, who shall deliver you into our hands.” - 1 Samuel 17:32-47



The Morgan Leaf, from the Winchester Bible: Frontispiece for 1 Samuel(?) with Life of David (v.), ca. 1150–80. Made in Winchester, England.

Lectio Divina: Meditating with the Word of God

We begin by calling on the Holy Spirit, asking for his assistance. Then we proceed to read and to meditate the Sacred Text in Five Movements, using each time a different human quality.

[Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you (LK 11:9)]

The **First Movement** is called *Lectio*, which is to read the Sacred Text: using the **Intellect** we *seek* for the objective meaning of the Text. In words of Pope Benedict XVI: *“It opens with the reading (Lectio) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas”* (VD 87).

| Characters: Who are the characters in the reading? | Circumstances: Events, when, how, where, & why? | Teachings: What does the reading say? |
|---|--|--|
| | | |

The **Second Movement** is called *Meditatio*, which is to meditate the Sacred Text: using the **Heart** we *find* what the text is saying to me. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: *“Next comes meditation (Meditatio), which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged”* (VD 87).

| Assimilation: What is the text telling me? | Association: How does it affect my life? | Correlation: What does it remind me off? |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

The **Third Movement** is called *Oratio*, which is to pray with the Sacred Text: using our whole Being we *knock* by engaging in conversation with God through prayer. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: *“Following this, comes prayer (Oratio), which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us”* (VD 87).

| Petition: What is the Text asking me to do or to change? | Intercession: That God may give me the Grace to do it. | Thanksgiving: The Lord beforehand for the gift. | Praise: In God’s Providence to achieve the goal. |
|---|---|--|---|
| | | | |

The **Fourth Movement** is called *Contemplatio*, which is a passive act of contemplation: using **Nothing**, we let the Lord *open* to us and *reveal* to us *whatsoever, however and whenever*. In words of Pope Benedict XVI: *“Next comes contemplation (Contemplatio), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? [...] Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us “the mind of Christ” (1Cor 2:16)”* (VD 87).

| Contemplate: God’s love through the message He has given me. | Comprehend: That I am a part of His plan & that despite my faults He loves me. | Taste: I Enjoy the beauty of His gifts and the healing power of His mercy. |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

The **Fifth Movement** is called *Actio*, which is an active resolution to make the Text come to life: using the power of the **Will**, we *enter* to cooperate (**FIAT**) with God’s grace to act upon the Word. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: *“The process of Lectio Divina is not concluded until it arrives at action (Actio), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity. We find the supreme synthesis and fulfilment of this process in the Mother of God. For every member of the faithful Mary is the model of docile acceptance of God’s word, for she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51)”* (VD 87).

| Recognize: What is it that I am supposed to do? | Plan: How I am to do it? | Evaluate: How am I progressing? |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | | |

We conclude our Lectio by offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God for all gifts received.

Using *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina*

Barbara Sutton, D.Min.



The practice of praying with visual images is called *visio divina*, or divine seeing. It is adapted from the sixth-century Benedictine practice of Bible reading called *lectio divina*, using both the text and art to help the reader encounter the living Word of God. The rhythm of *visio divina* ignites the senses to “hear and see” the Word of God as one listens, meditates, and prays with the sacred text.

Studying a text of Scripture and the illustration involves uncovering layers of meaning. One is the intended message of the inspired author who wrote for a particular audience at a particular time. When we have discovered the “voice” of the text, we can bring its images and lessons into the present and discern its significance for our own life situations.

Facilitating *Lectio Divina*

- **Listen:** As one encounters the living Word of God, listening with the “ear of your heart” (Rb 1980: *The Rule of St. Benedict*, prologue) is as essential as being instructed, informed, or inspired by the Word of God as well as being formed into a truly obedient person of faith.
- **Meditate:** To meditate on the Word of God means to let his Word descend from our logical mind into our intuitive heart, ruminating on the Scripture text itself. Meditating “engages thoughts, imagination, emotion and desire. . . . In order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2708).
- **Pray:** As we respond to the question *What does this text mean to me?*, we humbly repent, remove obstacles to our relationships, and deeply pray from the heart and soul. In the abiding presence of Christ, listen for the soft gentle voice of the Holy Spirit directing your choices.
- **Contemplate:** In contemplation the single goal is to be present to God. In this movement, experience a mystical encounter with God.

Facilitating *Visio Divina*

- **Listen:** As you hear the Word of God proclaimed, listen with the “ear of your heart” for a word or short phrase that God has for you this day.
- **Meditate:** Ruminating on the Word, turning it over in your heart and mind. What does the word or phrase you have chosen mean to you today?
- **See:** Fix your gaze on the picture, asking God to open your eyes to see what God wants you to see. What do you see? Where do you see God in this picture?
- **Pray:** What do you want to pray for today?
- **Contemplate:** Sit quietly and rest in the presence of God.
- **Become Christlike:** How do the Scripture and the image encourage you to be more like Jesus and the disciples?

Barbara Sutton, D.Min., is an adjunct professor of theology and Associate Dean of Ministerial Formation and Outreach at St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, MN.

For Reflection

- In what way do you connect spiritually with beauty?
- How does your rhythm of “hearing and seeing” the Word of God impact your faith?