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“Back to the Future”: Classical Categories of Exegesis, Application and Authority for Preaching and Spiritual Formation

by Timothy J. Ralston

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Abstract

A recovery of the ancient categories of *lectio continua* (*lectio semi-continua*), *lectio selecta* and *lectio divina* provide a helpful taxonomy to understand (a) the hermeneutic approach to the Biblical text by the preacher, (b) the relative authority of the message preached and (c) the corresponding role of the application made within the sermon for the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities.

Introduction

“So, what did you think of the sermon?”

This question dominates students leaving a campus chapel, colleagues socializing at a conference, and saints savoring “roast preacher.” It seeks an evaluation of the experience, either the speaker or the message or both. But such a simple question exposes a weakness in the modern taxonomy of preaching. Rarely is one sermon perfect on all counts. So we want to affirm one or more aspects of the message, perhaps the speaker’s skill as a communicator (presence and delivery), the speaker’s approach to the biblical text (interpretation), or the consequent authority of the speaker’s relevance (application) - but not all aspects. But an overly generous attitude that fails to distinguish between these aspects abdicates our biblical responsibilities and a too critical reply can engender a critical attitude that indiscriminately devalues all aspects of the event. The current

renewal of interest in preaching has brought communication theory, varying approaches to the determination of meaning, different structural strategies for its delivery, and new proposals for the application process. In a time when individual interpretations and applications have led to numerous excesses among Christians, one of the most acute questions for both preacher and congregation has become the authority for the application of the scriptures by the one who purports to teach. At another place and time, the issue did not exist, at least not as it does today. Then Christians had a well-accepted set of categories by which to define the relative authority of the message that they heard. In the older Christian traditions, these categories continue to be used, although within the framework of spiritual formation. This paper proposes, therefore, that returning to an ancient and widely accepted nomenclature, performing a journey “back to the future,” offers a valuable taxonomy for modern homiletic analysis, one that allows us to (a) distinguish messages vis-à-vis the role assumed by the biblical text within them, (b) appreciate the relative authority of the speaker’s proposed application derived from the biblical text used and (c) affirm the unique contribution of each use of the text in preaching for the spiritual formation of its hearers as individuals and communities of faith.

The Concept of Lectio

Traditionally Christians have recognized two directions for engaging with the biblical text: the corporate and the personal. The former is characterized by the search for a biblical text’s unique transcendent (objective) truth that will be binding upon all its hearers. The latter is characterized by one’s personal intuitive insight for the immediate needs of divine intimacy and obedience. Each way possesses a unique understanding of the process whereby the biblical text is applied and thereby derives a corresponding significance for the individual and the community. The technical term for this engagement is *lectio*,

from the Latin “to read.” But *lectio* is more than ‘reading’ in our English sense. Magrassi explains:

It is hard to find in our language a single term to convey the meaning of *lectio*. “Reading” is inadequate since that word refers to something too superficial and too uninvolved. The term “study” is no better since it [*lectio*] refers to something much more involved. Although it [*lectio*] is an intellectual activity, it is too easily identified with scientific research or knowledge. In no way did the ancients intend to create for themselves through *lectio* a body of knowledge – not even theological or scriptural.¹

In essence, to read the text at any of the different levels according to this tradition involves one with the scripture in such a way that it forms Christian experience, analogous to the Old Testament prophetic concept of knowledge.² We would speak of this as the personal application of the Bible that forms Christian character and provides wisdom for living. As Pennington notes:

We come to *lectio* not so much seeking ideas, concepts, insights, or even motivating graces; we come to *lectio* seeking God himself and nothing less than God. We come seeking the experience of the presence of the living God, to be with him and to allow him to be with us in whatever way he wishes.³

Over the centuries these different approaches to the biblical text were classified as *lectio continua* (and *semi-continua*), *lectio selecta* and *lectio divina* (also referred to as *lectio sacra*). However, any attempt to prepare a synthetic treatment of these concepts faces a significant difficulty: *lectio divina* as a personal spiritual exercise dominates the literature with little attention

paid to the corporate exercises of *continua* or *selecta*. The relationship between these three forms, their relative place, method and authority, are rarely defined or discussed. Although all three categories are not discussed in the context of homiletics or spiritual formation, this taxonomy does provide a convenient and accurate means to evaluate the relative biblical accuracy, corresponding applicational authority, and spiritual formation strategy for a given sermon.

Lectio Continua

The ancient concept of *lectio continua* (“reading continuously”) treats each biblical text within complete literary units (books) according to the language, structure and assumptions of the original author and audience.⁴ Each reading continues from the conclusion of the preceding passage until the entire unit has been heard. This method was the standard for scripture readings on ordinary (i.e. non-festival) Sabbaths in Jewish synagogue lectionaries prior to the Christian era. The extent to which the early Christian communities adopted the systematic Jewish practice is not clear, although reading cycles (and their collection into lectionaries) were already underway by the early second century C.E.⁵ were formalized and continued through the Protestant Reformation, and flowered among the Puritans as the primary means of Biblical exposition.⁶

While no single sermon may comprehend an entire biblical section or even one book, *lectio continua* approaches each text as part of its larger biblical unit to understand it in the same way as its original audience. While historical grammatical exegesis and the critical disciplines are foundational to this way of reading, the goal is not merely to teach the content of the biblical text under scrutiny, but to expound this biblical text in such a way that its implications for its new hearers becomes evident and their lives are transformed by obedience.⁷

Historically when *lectio continua* occurs within the context of Christian worship, each new reading resumes with the biblical text at the point where the previous reading ended. The text read publicly forms the foundation and substance for the message to be delivered in that service. Since the meaning of the text is controlled by historical-grammatical-theological exegesis and biblical-theological context, both the understanding of a text's original meaning and the biblical principles behind its operation in the lives of its new audience should remain the same despite differences in audience context. All applications of the text made in accordance with these principles will, therefore, possess similar authority despite any superficial difference in circumstance. Consequently, the authority of *lectio continua* as a public rite transcends all differences in audience.⁸ Ideally the principle of *lectio continua* lies at the heart of all scripture reading⁹ but even more so for modern readers who have access to the tools and products of modern biblical scholarship for the determination of textual meaning.¹⁰

Lectio Selecta

A second approach to Christian interaction with the scriptures is *lectio Selecta* (reading from selected texts). Similar to the practice of the Jewish synagogues where selections from the Torah and Prophets are linked, biblical texts from distinct sections of the biblical canon (Old and New Testaments) are read in the context of the same rite, often because of a common theological theme or motif held in common by the texts. The reader seeks to understand the unity of the scriptures through the exposition of biblical themes across the canon of scripture.

Ideally each text is approached first through historical-grammatical-contextual exegesis. Then the common biblical-theological themes present in each text are correlated to discover the canonical significance of this theology for the modern reader within the community of faith who represents a climax in the

progress of revelation and the meaning in these texts. Practically the theological arrangement of texts in *lectio selecta* does not always lend itself to the strict contextual meaning. On the one hand, in the progress of revelation earlier texts do not treat themes as fully as later texts. Meanings contained within later texts are often presumed within the earlier ones. On the other hand, confessional constraints can influence an expositor's fidelity to a preexisting theological system of canonical understanding (a 'rule of faith' as a hermeneutical guide). The preacher may desire to treat each text with expositional integrity but, with the practical limits imposed by liturgical time, the individual exposition of texts chosen from disparate places in the biblical canon and the subsequent development of a biblical-theological synthesis between these texts can be overwhelming.¹¹ Therefore, when biblical texts employed in *lectio selecta* are linked in the sermon, their individual meanings are subsumed by their canonical-theological context (established through a lectionary). Since the church designs the lectionary arrangement of the texts according to its own theological understanding and purposes, philosophically and practically the message deduced through these textual links represent the hermeneutical biases of an ecclesiological authority.

This in part explains why the church historically presumed the right to dictate the meaning and significance of the text read in public worship, requiring that the preacher's message through the texts conform to the confession under which the sermon was preached. The authority of the message preached to the community of faith was limited by its conformity to the community's confession or dogma. This demonstrates a vital distinction between *lectio continua* and *lectio selecta*. The former begins with the text and assumes the authority of the text over the theology of the interpreter; the latter begins with canonical theology or the interpreter's theological tradition and elevates this as the control over application of the text. By

virtue of its transcendent meaning, the authority of application rooted in *lectio continua* is universal. Application under the conditions of *lectio selecta*, however, holds lesser authority inasmuch as its applicational significance is often limited by the agreement of the audience with the ecclesial or theological framework of the preacher (or the community he represents). Only to the extent that this theological significance is truly canonical does an application derived from *lectio selecta* possess authority equal to that derived through *lectio continua*.¹²

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (also known as *lectio sacra* or ‘sacred reading’) represents a third method for approaching the biblical text. The terms first come to us in patristic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries from the pens of such notables as Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine and is extolled through the centuries by prominent church figures like Cyprian, Origen, Gregory, and Alcuin.¹³ During this period its practice usually required a context in which extended contemplation was possible. Hence it flourished largely as a monastic discipline. The twelfth century, however, marked a turning point in its practice as the focus of the church shifted from the monastic emphasis on spiritual practice to the scholastic emphasis on academic inquiry and the new mendicant (non-cloistered) monastic orders appeared. As more and more biblical, spiritual and liturgical texts became available in the vernacular for popular consumption, the practice of sacred reading of the text gradually extended into all degrees of the laity as well.¹⁴ Consequently, by the thirteenth century “even the term *lectio divina* becomes less frequent and disappears entirely from some contexts.”¹⁵ After the Reformation, various Protestant groups recognized the value of *lectio divina* and proceeded to advocate and regulate its practice.¹⁶ John Wesley articulated the classic medieval procedure of *lectio divina* for Methodism by incorporating the

practice within the broader framework of one's spiritual interaction with all forms of Christian literature.¹⁷

Lectio divina's advocates encouraged Bible reading with an affective goal – the momentary application of the text, “not to acquire [biblical] knowledge (unless selfknowledge) but to ‘excite’ penitence and a greater love of God,”¹⁸ an extension of God's sovereign work of inspiration to every individual,¹⁹ creating a “*living Word* ... animated by the Spirit of life.”²⁰ Called a “unique and extraordinary experience,²¹ it assumes that the text's significance to the reader will be controlled by elements operating in addition to and above exegesis or theology,²² namely the reader's spiritually informed intuition concerning its immediate role in his or her life.²³ While ideally such a meaning will be congruent with the products of exegesis, practically this is not always possible – or even desirable! In fact, the product of *lectio divina* cannot be limited to the bounds of significance or application created by exegesis: “One listens to a section of scripture not as a lesson in biblical history, not as an exercise in critical scholarship (although for those trained in exegesis such questions and viewpoints inevitably run through the mind). One listens to hear the voice of God. That voice is heard in an individual way, according to the measure of the understanding of each.”²⁴

In summary, *lectio divina* is accessible to all because it requires no exegetical expertise and only the most limited biblical-theological understanding. It functions as a devotional activity in which neither *lectio continua* nor *lectio selecta* will be performed in their proper sense.²⁵ Therefore, unlike the products of *lectio continua* or *lectio selecta*, the message of *lectio divina* speaks only to the momentary situation of the reader with the corresponding limitation of application authority.²⁶ Consequently, the Word experienced in *lectio divina* is understood as distinct from the Word as received in the Liturgy of the Word (i.e. *lectio selecta* or even *continua*).²⁷

This three-fold classification provides a window to understand the relative means by which the scriptures function in spiritual formation. *Lectio continua* will be authoritative for all Christians' ethics and behavior, possessing the broadest significance for spiritual formation, regardless of confession or circumstance. *Lectio selecta* has a more limited potential for individual formation since it occurs only within community liturgical-theological contexts, re-enforcing the theological ethical norms of the community. *Lectio divina* in preaching has no intrinsic authority for the community or its individuals, but such as individuals attribute to it through respect for the preacher as an authority or by identification with the circumstances of the preacher's intuition.

Lectio and Evangelical Preaching

Listening to modern Evangelical preaching, one hears all three hermeneutical approaches employed to apply the biblical text (although they are rarely equated with their ancient counterparts). A comparison of *lectio continua* with the consensus definitions of expository preaching reveals a startling similarity.²⁸ Both emphasize the fundamental role of historical-grammatical-contextual exegesis for determining the meaning of the biblical text and the central place of this meaning in the preacher's message. Both aspire to the inculcation of authoritative biblical principles in the believer's life as the basis for Christian conduct. Consequently, although rarely designated by its ancient name, *lectio continua* has enjoyed an esteemed place and active pursuit in expository preaching among modern American Evangelicals. Often it assumes *lectio semi-continua* in the form of expositions through extended scriptural passages appropriate to seasonal themes (e.g. Christmas, Easter, etc.) or other extended subsets of the Biblical books.²⁹

Many Evangelical messages also illustrate the principles of *lectio selecta*. This hermeneutic appears under one of two

names. In topical preaching two or more biblical texts are called upon to offer their contributions to a more comprehensive (theological) statement. At least one element under discussion is present in each text and each text makes a distinct contribution to the formulation of the whole. Topical theological sermons include theological statements, biographical studies, and lexical (word) studies. Under the label “textual preaching,” a single biblical text becomes the means whereby a theological concept can be presented because of its appearance in the text (whether or not that concept is central to the exegesis). The preacher may refer to other texts supportive of his thesis, thereby creating an *ad hoc* version of *lectio selecta* (devoid of the formal introduction of these texts) or may simply choose to ignore the context in the theological focus of the message. However, both types of Evangelical *lectio selecta* choose points legitimately drawn from the text(s) which do not violate the context. Two common examples are the so-called “Romans Road” presentation of the Gospel and the “Four Spiritual Laws” (in which, however, at least one text is used without due regard for its contextual meaning). A “biographical sermon,” one that traces the life of a biblical character for its spiritual lessons, also follows the principle of *lectio selecta*.

Evangelical *lectio selecta* experiences the same problems of application as its ancient counterpart. Superficial textual relationships are created lacking theological substance; theological themes consist of (or degenerate into) mere ‘word studies’ or a confessional commentary without regard for contextual issues. As with its ancient counterpart, the authority of the message application is limited to the conferred authority of the preacher’s theology, both as a historical phenomenon (creedal or confessional conformity) and as an audience commitment (theological congruence between preacher and audience).

And what about *lectio divina*? It dominates modern Evangelical devotional practices. Preachers urge us to “read the Word every

day, not to get a sermon, but to get a message for yourself”³⁰ and devotional literature assures us that God “can speak to us from any place in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16) ... when he uses our thoughts and informs us through our minds as we consider what He says in His Word.³¹ Many editions of the Bible add textual notes to focus the relevance for a particular social group or suggest imaginative exercises that facilitate an engagement with the text.³² Similarly sermons also follow a *lectio divina* hermeneutic when the text’s significance is based on sentiment or action is urged on the basis of the preacher’s *ethos*. Such sermons are little more than ‘pastoral advice’ to the audience. The authority of the message (such as it is) depends solely on the audience’s willingness to defer to the speaker’s preferences and prejudices concerning the matter at hand. (Since both the textual meaning of the text and its theological significance are absent from such messages, perhaps it would be more honest to set aside any reference to a biblical text in such sermons and admit openly to the congregation that the message merely represents the accumulated wisdom of the speaker as ‘sparked’ by a spiritual thought about the Bible.)

The distinctions between the three basic forms of *lectio* and their modern significance for applicational authority in preaching can be summarized as follows:

Ancient Form	<i>Lectio Continua</i>	<i>Lectio Selecta</i>	<i>Lectio Divina</i>
Context for the Text’s Meaning & Significance	Biblical context (historical-grammatical exegesis)	Theological context (confessional-theological significance)	Individual context (personal intuition and reflection)
Sermon Type Preacher’s Authority	Expository “Thus saith YHWH...”	Topical “We believe...”	Devotional “My good advice...”
Application Authority	Universal - a shared Biblical commitment	Ecclesiastical - a shared theological matrix	Personal - a shared need, intuition & circumstance
Corresponding Authority Limits	None	Some	Most
Spiritual Formation Value for Preaching	Most valuable	Limited value	Least valuable

Classifying Modern Examples of *Lectio*³³

To study the relative effects of each form of *lectio* upon the application of a biblical text, consider the three ways of treating Judges 6:36-40 (Gideon's fleece) with the corresponding applications.

1. Approached through *lectio continua*, the biblical-theological context of Judges and Gideon's behavior shows that the two fleeces represent an act of resistance to God's will. The application should encourage us of God's patience but warn us against tempting Him. This possesses universal authority since (a) it can be validated directly by contextual exegesis and (b) it conforms with a biblical pattern concerning human response to God's revealed will.
2. Approached through *lectio selecta*, the Common Lectionary links this text with Eph 4:11-16 (how Christ equips his church through spiritually-gifted individuals in order to bring about His purpose), John 14:1-7 (how 'abiding' in Christ results in the accomplishment of God's purposes) and Psalm 136:1-4,23-26 (the psalmist acknowledging God's greatness and His covenantal provision to His own).³⁴ Now the story appears as part of the broader matrix of God's preparation and encouragement of those who serve him. It joins a broader story of God's work to help us perform His will, a meaning tangential to but distinct from the warning derived through *lectio continua*. This application has limited authority since it uses the Gideon cycle only as an example of the means whereby God selects and equips human beings to accomplish His purposes.
3. Approaching the text through *lectio divina*, popular spirituality often speaks of "laying out a fleece" as a

means for determining God's will. This sense of the passage stands in contradiction to the context. While emotionally encouraging and concrete in image, its role as an authoritative example cannot be justified by contextual exegesis, biblical pattern or confessional direction as a means for eliciting God's will. While Christian individuals have received divine guidance through such means, the pattern represents nothing more than the pastoral advice of one Christian to another to which the listener has no obligation.

Rarely are the options so apparent. Instead a listener hears only one application and must decide on its authority without recourse to alternative perspectives. Consider these examples. A sermon on the story of Jephtha (Judges 11) concludes that it teaches the priority of keeping one's promises.³⁵ The astute exegete recognizes that in context Jephtha's keeping his vow produced tragedy at several levels: the loss of his daughter, his only child, and hence of any heritage in Israel as well as disobedience to the explicit requirements of the Old Testament Law concerning such sacrifices. Clearly Jephtha's ignorance of the law and rashness in wording his vow place his act in an unfavorable light. However, the principle of faithfulness to one's word is established elsewhere in the Old Testament. Therefore, while the message application violates the principles of *lectio continua*, one might classify the message application as *lectio selecta*: the biblical principle of faithful promise keeping gives the message some authority beyond the individual.

A sermon based on Paul's admonition to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12) advocates wearing suitable apparel that conforms to a school's dress code, urges complimentary make-up for the women, and admonishes all to practice personal hygiene.³⁶ Unfortunately the context clearly defines that Paul's focus allows for none of these matters. Clearly this is not *lectio continua*. When one attempts to correlate this message

theologically, one finds biblical teaching that emphasizes Christians not look to externals for spiritual reality, nor is there creedal or confessional requirement. The application fails the test of *lectio selecta*. Therefore, the behavior presented by the preacher represents *lectio divina*, a personal judgment based on sound advice for successful modern social interactions. It carries no greater authority than what the listener desires to attribute to the speaker as a Christian leader. The listener is not obligated to obey the injunction.

In a message on Jesus' miracle at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11), the speaker finds Jesus' miraculous creation of an alcoholic beverage for social consumption at a public event to be reckless (if not wrong as contributing to public intoxication) and concludes that Jesus' example encourages Christians to "do what you need to do and don't worry about the consequences."³⁷ The explicit biblical-theological significance of the passage as a sign in Johannine theology that identifies Jesus' fulfillment of messianic expectation has been ignored (*lectio continua*). The speaker's admonition itself violates teachings elsewhere of Christian responsibility for behavior (*lectio selecta*). Hence the message might be classified as another example of *lectio divina*, obedience being optional for the hearer (which option is only strengthened since the message violates explicit biblical injunctions to personal and community responsibility elsewhere to the contrary).

Lectio and Spiritual Formation

In each of the cases described above, an understanding of the classical categories of interaction with scripture (*lectio continua*, *lectio selecta*, *lectio divina*) proves helpful in classifying the use of the biblical text by the preacher and the relative authority of the application urged by the preacher upon the audience. But it should also be obvious that the recovery of this terminology would prove equally helpful for the

understanding and classification of the different postures assumed by a preacher vis-a-vis the scriptures in the spiritual formation of the congregation.

Because of its transcendent authority, that addresses both individuals and communities without distinction, *lectio continua* offers the widest opportunity for the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities. Assuming equal competence and spirituality in method, well-prepared, concrete applications of the principle ensure the transferability of the biblical truth itself while giving room for application of that truth according to contextual demands. Ideally this method contributes to the unity (not homogeneity) of the church, thereby fulfilling the goal of ecclesial unity in Christ, which is the biblical evidence of successful spiritual formation.

As a subset, *lectio selecta* addresses the Christian community according to broader standards of faith and practice. It provides the framework necessary for participation in the life of the church and finds its most obvious place within the corporate worship gatherings of the church. To this end its greatest value for spiritual formation lies within community life, rather than the acts of individuals in relative isolation.

Since the authority sphere of *lectio divina* has been defined according to the individual experiencing it firsthand, this hermeneutical method possesses value only for the spiritual formation of that individual. While the immediacy of its application and corresponding sentimental appeal often makes it attractive to a larger audience, its potential to ignore (and perhaps even contradict) the product of *lectio continua* and/or *lectio selecta* renders it impotent as a means to nurture communities and potentially damaging when universalized to address the spiritual formation of individuals who may not share the circumstances of the speaker to whom the text originally “spoke.” Often a substitution of authority occurs, the *ethos* of

the preacher and his view (interpretation) of the text replacing the text as an objective authority to be read and understood by all.³⁸

Summary

The categories *lectio continua*, *lectio semi-continua*, *lectio selecta* and *lectio divina* describe hermeneutical approaches to the application of scripture. Consequently these categories provide a helpful means to classify the hermeneutical validity of an application presented in a sermon and, by implication, the relative authority of the ethic derived from one's interaction with a biblical text. They also offer a well accepted taxonomy to understand the differing use of the Bible in the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities. Therefore, they represent valuable categories worthy of recovery and adoption for evaluating sermons.

Perhaps I state the obvious. I hope so. Most (if not all) Evangelicals express a genuine commitment to the ideal of *lectio continua*, that which we believe lies at the heart of preaching in the tradition of *sola scriptura*. Often, however, our preaching hermeneutic, even that which designates itself as "expository," displays more of the characteristics of *lectio selecta* or *lectio divina*. Unfortunately few appreciate the difference and most aren't aware of the problem.

The Holy Spirit is not limited by the poverty of a method, but the weakness of our application to reflect the results of authoritative exegesis must surely detract from the simplicity of the Bible's authority as it speaks to human need. Ultimately, anything less than *lectio continua* in preaching undermines a local church's ability to form the lives of its members according to scripture and to engage with other Christian communities in obedience to our Lord's requirement of unity in faith and witness – the measure of true Christian maturity and the measure of success in our effort toward the spiritual formation of the Body of Christ.

Notes

1. Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 17.
2. S.v. “[d]y” by Jack P. Lewis in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 367.
3. M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 27.
4. Speaking of this, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that “Brief verses cannot and should not take the place of reading Scripture as a whole ... Holy Scripture does not consist of individual passages; it is a unit and is intended to be used as such.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), 50-51.
5. S.v. “Lectionary” by R.H. Fuller in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, J.G. Davies, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 297-98.
6. David Hatten Jussely, “The Puritan Use of the Lectio Continua in Sermon Invention (1640-1700)” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1997).
7. Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 42.
8. Modern discussions also speak of *lectio semi-continua*, the treatment of longer biblical texts over several sessions but not proceeding to offer an exposition of the entire biblical unit (book). It represents a subset of *Lectio continua*, a concession to the demands of modern lectionary arrangements or seasonal requirements. For convenience both *lectio continua* and *lectio semi-continua* are treated as the same thing since both assume the same hermeneutic.
9. Fuller, xvii-xxxi.
10. E. Hagman, “Introduction”, in Magrassi, vii, speaks of the other ways of reading scripture and notes that “Today’s advances in biblical studies have become increasingly known to non-specialists. In our reading of scripture, they enable us to adhere to the literal sense, careful to situate the sacred texts in their original historical-religious contexts.”
11. Recently a third issue has surfaced: the limited canonical understanding of the expositor (the preacher’s limited training and understanding) result in superficial linking of texts through situations, symbols, etc. This explains how the New Hermeneutic /Homiletic operates within the constraints of the lectionary, further complicated by the minimalist biblical-theological training provided to seminarians and the proliferation of lectionary preaching aids that direct the preacher to meanings outside the biblical-theological context. This method and its rationale was argued by Gail Ramshaw, Ph.D., to the Homiletics working group at the annual meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy (January, 1999).
12. A similar danger is noted by David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues In Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 32.
13. Magrassi, 15-16, offers a brief survey of such citations. For a more comprehensive list of usage among the fathers, see H. de Labac, *Exegese Medievale: les quatre sens de l’Ecriture*, part 1, vol. 1 (Paris, 1959), 82-84.
14. John A. Alford, “Rolle’s English Psalter and Lectio Divina.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 77:3 (Fall, 1995): 48-59, demonstrates how this functioned with an English psalter translated from the Vulgate for the explicit purpose of providing the non-scholarly with a means to perform the discipline of *lectio divina*.
15. Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh of St. Victor’s Didascalion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 95.
16. Gary Bert Gates, “Bible Reading As Communion With God: A Historical Study of Monastic Lectio Divina, Denoting Its Influence Upon Puritan Meditation and Proposing Its Applicability for the Christian Today” (Th.M. thesis, Regent College, 1995).
17. John Wesley, “Introduction” to *An Abridgement of Thomas a Kempis’ Treatise of the Imitation of Christ in The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), 517.
18. Alford, 47.

19. "For [the patristic fathers], inspiration is not just something that acted once on the sacred writers, resulting in the inspired texts. It is an ongoing and ever-present influence at work within the books themselves, which are and remain inspired" (Magrassi, 27).
20. *Ibid.*, 29.
21. Hagman, vii.
22. Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri/Triumph, 1996), 54, writes "Lectio and study are not to be identified, although they may sometimes overlap. ...it is necessary only to envisage lectio divina as that dealing with the text that begins where the study leaves off."
23. "These intuitions are given to us at the precise moment that the reading penetrates our hearts. Once again, they cannot be identified with the conclusions of some other research that pursues other aims for another purpose. It is important to distinguish between these two levels," Ghislaine Salvail, *At the Crossroads of the Scriptures: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, trans. Paul C. Duggan (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994), 15-16. Similarly Pennington, 27, argues "it is important, that in lectio we do not try to contract the Word we receive to the dimensions of our already-held concepts and ideas [i.e. derived from the study of the biblical text]." Magrassi states "we do not mean to exclude the appropriate role of study, and normally, the need for it. All we are saying is that its role with regard to Lectio divina is introductory. It prepares us for the vital assimilation that take place only in prayer" (72) and "Study is concerned with scientific certitude; lectio wishes to nourish spiritual experience. Study takes place on the objective and detached level of investigation; lectio takes place in the contemplative atmosphere of prayer. Professional exegetes strive to prescind from personal feelings. Spiritual persons... do not proceed by way of specific analytic technique, but trust the intuitions of their grace-filled soul" (73-74).
24. Pfatteicher, 42.
25. Magrassi, 8-9, notes that "...the medievals would say that in the liturgy the Word reveals mainly its allegorical dimension (which refer to the mystery of Christ and the Church) and its analogical dimension (which refers to the final consummation). In personal reading it reveals its anthropological dimension (which refers to the individual's spiritual life)."
26. Interestingly Salvail (a Roman Catholic) speaks of the independent authority granted to the believer through the sanctified intuition: "we affirm with Peter that every believer is a priest, prophet, king and saint, and that these four characteristics are essential for anyone undertaking *lectio divina*" (21). This distinction between forms of "reading" (studying) the Bible explains the intention of the Second Vatican Council. It did not authorize lay performance of *lectio continua/selecta* of the biblical text (whose product would then be binding upon the church), but *lectio divina* as a devotional experience born from the intuition of the reader. By definition, the product of such study has no dogmatic significance. Consequently Protestant Evangelical assumptions concerning "personal Bible study methods" as the basis for determining the transcendent truth of a biblical passage (and thereby its binding authority upon all believers) must be considered distinct from this traditional teaching concerning one's engagement with the scriptures.
27. Pennington, 19-30. This is not to imply that that hermeneutic of *lectio divina* has not been applied to preaching, but that such an application of the method was considered exceptional. See Cyril Dmjevic, "Doing Lectio Out Loud: A Benedictine Approach to Preaching" (M.Div. Thesis, Mount Angel Seminary, Spring 2000).
28. Consider the follow sample definitions of expository preaching: "the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness" from Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 17; "persuasively and urgently communicating the exact and full meaning of the text of scripture in terms of contemporary culture, with the specific goal of helping people to understand and obey the truth of God" as offered by the Congress on Biblical Exposition at the National Convention in Anaheim, California (March, 1986). See Brian Bird, "Biblical Exposition: Becoming a Lost Art?"

- Christianity Today* 30:7 (April 18, 1986): 34; “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers” from Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 20. Longer discussions containing similar elements without such a concise summary can be found in Keith Willhite and Scott Gibson, eds., *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 13-22; Walter Leifeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 6-7; Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33; Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984), xviii. Surely the best, most succinct and scholarly presentation of the hermeneutical method that exemplifies the ideal of *lectio continua*, preserving the authority of the biblical text within a new contextual application, is offered by Timothy S. Warren, “A Paradigm for Preaching.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991):463-486.
29. Some studies do continue to use the classic terminology: Hughes Oliphant Old, “Preaching by the Book: Using the Lectio Continua Approach in Sermon Preparation.” *Reformed Worship* 8 (1988): 24-25; John P. Burgess, “Shaping A Congregation Through Lectio Continua.” *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30 (1996):1: 3-6.
 30. John F. Walvoord, message in chapel (8/31/2000), Dallas Theological Seminary.
 31. Peter V. Deison, *The Priority of Knowing God: Taking Time With God When There is No Time* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1990), 21.
 32. Unfortunately, this strategy is contrary to the traditional strategy of *lectio divina* in which the text is brought to the reader (thereby suggesting that the text brings truth to the reader apart from the reader’s expectation and requiring the reader’s obedience to its demands) rather than suggesting that the reader comes to the text seeking what he or she desires and expecting the text to supply it.
 33. Each of these examples represent actual case studies of message application presented in evangelical contexts.
 34. This is the only element of the Gideon cycle included in the three-year cycle of the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The entire cycle is absent from the current edition of the *Catholic Lectionary* (as designed for Sunday reading).
 35. Richard Allen Farmer, “A Question Posed to a Glad Warrior” (Chapel message, Dallas Theological Seminary, January 15, 1999).
 36. C. Swindoll, “Pay Close Attention to Your Appearance” (Chapel message, Dallas Theological Seminary, March 18, 1999).
 37. Untitled Vespers message, Cathedral of San Fernando, San Antonio, Texas (January 3, 1999).
 38. In fact, this phenomenon represents what occurs within the process of developing communities that appear cult-like, such as are common in America today. The community gathered around the leader is expected to express obedience to the leader’s special application of the Biblical text, often with disastrous consequences.