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Lectio Divina: A Way of Interpreting Scripture in Liturgical Celebrations to Address Contemporary Issues in Indonesia

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Abstract

The Holy Scriptures are fundamental to liturgical celebrations as they form their theological basis; consequently, they are always read or proclaimed to the assembly. Those participating in liturgical celebrations draw meaning from these readings to serve as a guide for their lives. One way of interpreting the Holy Scriptures within liturgical celebrations is through lectio divina, a practice that has been in use since the early Christian era and continues to this day. In the introductory section, this study examines the tradition, function and significance of lectio divina as a practice for the faithful, which will subsequently be applied to the context of the Church in Indonesia to interpret it as a guiding spirit for its activities. The study will utilise primary source texts from three key figures in lectio divina—Pachomius, Benedict and Gregory—presenting foundational texts relevant to the research. To elaborate on these texts, a text-analytical approach based on the works of these authors is required; this will be presented in the findings section, and the results will be synthesised in the discussion, demonstrating that lectio divina aims to interpret the Holy Scriptures as the foundation and spirit for daily life and vigilance in one's work.

Keywords: ora et labora; lector; mindfulness life; early Christians; interpreting Scripture; zest for life; spirit of life.

Abstrak

Kitab Suci adalah sangat fundamental di dalam perayaan liturgi karena menjadi dasar teologisnya, oleh sebab itu, selalu dibaca atau dibacakan kepada pendengar. Hadirin yang berpartisipasi di dalam perayaan liturgis mengambil makna dari bacaan tersebut untuk dijadikan sebagai arahan hidup. Salah satu cara untuk memaknai Kitab Suci dalam perayaan liturgis adalah melalui lectio divina, yang sudah digunakan sejak awal Kristiani dan masih digunakan sampai saat ini. Pada bagian awal, penelitian ini menemukan tradisi, fungsi, dan

makna lectio divina sebagai cara umat beriman, yang kemudian akan diimplementasikan pada situasi Gereja di Indonesia untuk memaknainya sebagai semangat di dalam beraktivitas. Penelitian ini akan menggunakan teks sumber primer dari tiga tokoh lectio divina, Pachomius, Benedictus, dan Gregorius, dengan mempresentasikan teks dasar yang relevan dengan penelitian. Untuk berelaborasi dengan teks ini, dibutuhkan metodologi pendekatan analisis teks dari penulis tersebut yang akan ditampilkan di bagian temuan, dan hasilnya akan disintesiskan di dalam diskusi bahwa lectio divina bertujuan untuk memaknai Kitab Suci untuk menjadi dasar dan semangat dalam aktivitas hidup dan kewaspadaan di dalam pekerjaan.

Kata kunci: ora et labora; kewaspadaan hidup; Kristiani awal; memaknai Kitab Suci; semangat hidup; lektor**.**

1. Introduction

One Christian practice that remains widely used to this day is lectio divina. The name itself has been retained to denote its identity. In principle, it is linked to the Holy Scriptures, as lectio divina refers to spiritual exercises, culture,[1] the practice of the Daily Office and liturgical readings.[2] However, based on the background of its usage, it is not known exactly when lectio began. Lectio was already practised in scholarship and was subsequently incorporated into religious practice. In this context, lectio is defined as divine reading. A broader perspective emerges when considered against the historical background of its usage. Consequently, lectio no longer refers merely to reading, but rather to the process of engaging with and understanding texts that cannot be fully grasped through a cursory reading alone; it involves deeper attention and more focused reflection to comprehend the meaning conveyed by the text or lying beneath it.

The most evident background to the concept of lectio lies in ancient Greece. The people of that society were generally accustomed to reading and studying philosophical texts that had been in existence long before their own time. To interpret these texts, they employed an allegorical method of interpretation, which was later adopted by Philo to interpret the Holy Scriptures and subsequently integrated by the Church Fathers to understand the Scriptures as well. In the practice of Greek philosophy, it was customary to use lectio to explore, understand and apply philosophical values to guide one's life towards wisdom. To understand the text more deeply, lectio is usually carried out privately and does not require an audience.[3] However, this practice is not precluded from taking place in small groups so that philosophical discussions regarding the text being explored can be conducted in a participatory and detailed manner, with a view to its practical application in one's attitudes and daily life. At the conclusion of each lectio, every participant is left with a guiding principle that can be summarised or distilled from their understanding of the text; this may take the form of a phrase or word that inspires one's attitudes, actions and life principles, manifesting as virtue—a visible

[1] Benedict, *La Regola di San Benedetto,* 48, 5, Testo integrale Latino-italiano, Introduzione e commento di Georg Holzherr, Abate di Einsiedeln (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1992).
[2] Benedict, *Regola,* 73.
[3] Jean Gribomont, "Lectio Divina", in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane,* Diretto da Angelo di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1994), 1918-1920.

philosophical outcome. This form of lectio was commonly practised by philosophers such as Homer, Plato, and even Pythagoras, amongst others.

Since the second century, philosophical practices have generally been integrated into Christianity, one of which is lectio. Since the apologetic time of Justin the Martyr († c. 165),[4] philosophy has been integrated into theology, making it a vital and fundamental component. A fundamental and concrete practice that continues to this day is exegesis, although it does not fully follow the methods used in that period due to developments in the discipline.[5] Lectio, with its philosophical background, has also been implemented within Christianity. The difference from the Greek tradition lies in the texts used. Christians employ the Sacred Scriptures used in the liturgy, such as the Daily Office and other liturgical services. It is in this context that the term lectio divina is used.[6] This term simultaneously indicates its identity and distinguishes it from its use in the field of philosophy. Thanks to the School of Alexandria, through its teachers—particularly Origen—lectio divina came to be increasingly understood and became one of the ways of applying Scripture to daily life. Furthermore, Tertullian, Cyprian, Pachomius, Ambrose, Augustine, Benedict, Gregory the Great and other Church Fathers regarded lectio divina as an essential part of making sense of the daily activities and events they experienced.

With the emergence of the eremitic (anachoretic) way of life—known as asceticism within Christianity in the third century—which later developed into the community way of life (coenobitic), lectio divina became highly practical and effective. The reason for this is that both the anachoretic and the coenobitic sought to make the liturgical celebration—which is entirely based on and inspired by Scripture—the guiding spirit of their daily lives. To this end, lectio divina provides excellent support for this need. Moreover, in the anachoritic-coenobitic way of life, not all members of the community could read; therefore, there was a need for someone capable of reciting prayers or conducting liturgical celebrations correctly and well, particularly the reading of Scripture by the lector, whose role became extremely important.[7] Those listening will endeavour to grasp the content that is read or prayed, using their own abilities to recall it, reflect upon it, and distil its essence to inspire themselves in all their daily activities. It is in this context that the role of the lector is fundamental: to use all punctuation marks correctly to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities.

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[4] San Giustino, *Filosofo e Martire*, https://www.vaticannews.va/it/santo-del-giorno/06/01/san-giustino--filosofo-e-martire.html

[5] EdisonR.L. Tinambunan, "Eksegese Alegoria", in *Metodologi Riset Studi Filsafat Teologi*, A.T. Raharso & Y. Yustinus (Eds.) (Malang: Dioma, 2018a0), 243-255.

[6] Edison R.L. Tinambunan, "Filsafatisasi Kristianitas Atau Kristianisasi Filsafat", *Diskursus* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1-22.

[7] In the Christian tradition, the role of the lector is in fact a continuation of the Jewish tradition of reading the Scriptures; in the Christian tradition, this was implemented by Justin (*1 Apologi*, 67), and Hippolytus states that the lector is appointed by the bishop in his capacity as lector and, before reading the Holy Scriptures, the lector is blessed by the bishop through the laying on of hands (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8, 22), Everett Ferguson, "Reader – Lector"*,* in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* Second Edition, Everett Ferguson (Ed.) (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 973. The role of a lector involves: the ability to read the Holy Scriptures, prayers or similar texts using correct punctuation, intonation and stress (as incorrect intonation can alter the meaning), breaking down long sentences to ensure the content is understood, the rhythm of reading, vocal quality, reading posture, and communication with the audience (and, in modern times, the use of a microphone).

In the early days of the coenobitic life developed by Pachomius († 347), the practice of lectio divina became essential,[8] as it was one of the most effective ways of putting into practice the Scriptures that were read and prayed over during every liturgical celebration, such as the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and others. Every member of the coenobitic community needed the liturgical celebration as a foundation upon which to begin the day's various activities, and lectio divina served as a means of making the Scriptures the very lifeblood of their daily lives. Given the abilities of the members of the coenobitic community—who may not necessarily be able to read the Scriptures but rely on listening—through their training, they are enabled to distil the Scriptures that are prayed over and listened to, providing sustenance for the whole day.

In the development of the coenobitic way of life, lectio divina came to be regarded as a tradition and even as its very identity; whilst emphasis was subsequently placed on its various stages, its essence remained the same. Basil the Great († 379),[9] one of the Cappadocian Fathers (alongside Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa), emphasised lectio divina in the Regula, 37 for coenobitic life, to reveal the connection between the liturgy and daily life. The Church Father Benedict of Norsia (547), who founded the coenobitic life that later became the Benedictine Order, emphasised that lectio divina should be integrated into daily activities through the principle of 'ora et labora' – 'pray and work' – which remains a hallmark of the Order to this day.[10] Gregory the Great († 604),[11] whose life spanned the final period of the Church Fathers, implemented lectio divina not only for members of the monastic community, but also for the shepherds (deacons, priests and bishops) and even the faithful or the Church itself. These referenced Church Fathers are a clear indication that the practice of lectio divina is intrinsically linked to daily life. Indeed, all the Church Fathers—and indeed the faithful of the patristic period, especially the martyrs—sought to make Scripture a guide for their daily lives, which they interpreted through the practice of lectio divina.

Historically, following the patristic period, lectio divina was dominated by the coenobitic way of life. However, with the marked development of coenobitism during the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the value of lectio divina was set aside, as each form of coenobitic life displayed its own distinctive character, known as a charism. This form was more Christ-centred in its approach to the formation of spiritual life, whether for the individual or for communal life. This approach serves as a means of legitimising the implementation of the charism possessed by every coenobite. The Church recognises that every dimension of Christ is a form of sanctification of life manifested in that charism; thus, the full lived experience of the charism is also a manifestation of lectio divina. Consequently, the growth of the coenobitic way of life in the modern era has been immense, particularly as it is supported by the Church's positive development, although this has recently faltered in various places,

[8] Jean Gribomont, "Pacomio", in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane,* Diretto da Angelo di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1994), 2561-2.
[9] Jean Gribomont, "Basilio di Cesarea di Cappadocia", in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane,* Diretto da Angelo di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1994), 491-497.
[10] Sergio Zincone, "Benedict di Norcia", in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane,* Diretto da Angelo di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1994), 521-2.
[11] Vincenzo Recchia, "Gregorio Magno", in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane,* Diretto da Angelo di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1994), 1698-707.

such as in Europe. Nevertheless, in many places the Church continues to show positive development. In light of this situation within the Church, lectio divina has been reinterpreted within a broader scope, encompassing the faithful through adapted forms and structures, whilst placing even greater emphasis on systematic approaches.[12] However, a broader implementation of lectio divina has been developed by Mesters in Brazil, which, whilst taking the standard structure of lectio divina as its starting point, focuses more on the faithful by helping them to understand and interpret the Holy Scriptures and the prayers within the liturgy as a guide for their lives.[13] This indicates that the Holy Scriptures are intended for all believers to put into practice in their own lives, and this is the aim of this study—not to turn believers into semi-ascetic, coenobitic figures.

The anachoritic and coenobitic traditions are traditions of monastic and ascetic life, yet they are also highly relevant to the Church's way of life today. The dimension developed here is a way of understanding and interpreting Scripture by emphasising each person's capacity, with a focus on the Word of God that touches and moves the heart, which serves as a guiding principle. This approach does not require exegesis that must consider various aspects. Nor does it mean setting aside exegesis or subjective interpretation, but rather it places greater emphasis on one's capacity. The Church's liturgy presents Scripture as its source and foundation, presented in accordance with the spirit of the liturgical form being celebrated, such as the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Hours, and other liturgical celebrations. This nature of the liturgy, which is also one of the characteristics of the Church, is one in the sense that wherever the Church's liturgical celebrations are held—including in Indonesia, which is the focus of this discussion—they are the same in value and form; the differences lie in the manner of celebration, which serves to foster a meaningful liturgical experience. In this context, the Holy Scriptures, as the source and foundation of theology, become very evident, including within the liturgy. In liturgical celebrations, whatever their form, it is the minister who possesses a theological background. Typically, the minister is a priest who must have studied theology. However, the majority of the faithful taking part in liturgical celebrations have no theological training, even though the source and foundation are presented in the form of theological readings and prayers drawn from the Holy Scriptures.[14] It is in this context that lectio divina serves as a means of interpreting the Scriptures that are read (or heard) during every liturgical celebration, so that their meaning may be put into practice in daily life.

Against this background, several questions arise regarding lectio divina in relation to the present day, particularly liturgical celebrations, in whatever form they take in Indonesia. Naturally, the context relates to the role of Scripture in these liturgical celebrations. Why is lectio divina still needed in relation to liturgical celebrations, and why is lectio divina the preferred choice? How can lectio divina be practised; is it not a characteristic of coenobitic and

[12] The structure of lectio divina is as follows: preparation, lectio, meditatio and oratio, see B. A. Pareira, *Lectio Divina, Membaca dan Bedoa dari Kitab Suci* (Mlang: Dioma, 2003), 23-26. This is the standard method, although in its development, ruminatio has also been incorporated, positioned between lectio and meditatio.
[13] Carlos Mesters, *Lectio Divina* (Melbourne: Communications, 1999), 57-61.
[14] A concrete example is the Sunday Eucharistic celebration, which features three readings and one responsorial psalm from Scripture. The prayers used—such as the Great Thanksgiving, the opening prayer, the offertory prayer and the closing prayer—must be inspired by Scripture. The hymns used are likewise of a similar nature, and the homily delivered draws its theological significance from the readings. The same applies to other liturgical celebrations, in accordance with the form of the celebration.

anachoritic traditions? In what form is lectio divina beneficial in Indonesian liturgical celebrations? These three questions will be addressed in this study, which is presented in the methodology, findings and discussion sections. The aim of this research is to demonstrate that lectio divina is highly applicable to the appreciation of the Holy Scriptures within liturgical celebrations, which serve as a guide for daily life, weekly observances and one's life journey. In this context, the lectio divina under consideration is a form or method of understanding the Holy Scriptures celebrated within the liturgy in various forms. Currently, lectio divina places greater emphasis on a practical, systematic approach following the coenobitic tradition. However, this study views lectio divina as a method for understanding the Holy Scriptures by everyone who participates in the liturgy and its implementation in daily life.

2. Methodology

To answer the questions that have arisen in light of the background and to achieve the objectives, an applied methodological approach is required. The nature of research into lectio divina must draw upon the writings of the early practitioners of lectio divina, so that the originality of its aims and objectives is preserved. The earliest authors cited as having implemented lectio divina within the Christian tradition are Pachomius, followed by Benedict and Gregory the Great. Indeed, within the tradition of the Church Fathers, there are other figures who could be referenced. The reason for selecting Pachomius is that he was the first to establish lectio divina as a daily practice within the coenobitic life, which was a development of the anachoritic tradition. Meanwhile, Benedict was both an anchorite and a coenobite; consequently, the scope of lectio divina's implementation is broader, as it is intended not only for coenobites and anchorites but also for priests. The reason for selecting St Gregory the Great is that lectio divina is intended not only for anchorites, coenobites and priests, but also for the entire community of the faithful, with whom it is closely linked to the experience of liturgical celebration.

To grasp the essence of lectio divina in relation to its implementation in liturgical celebrations, official texts by Pachomius, Benedict and Gregory the Great are required so that this essence may be fully conveyed in accordance with the authors—who are recognised as primary sources, meaning the texts originate directly from them in both language and writing. This research method involves incorporating the authors' official texts and presenting their messages so that they can be correctly implemented in contemporary liturgical celebrations, particularly in Indonesia. This stage then requires textual analysis to gain a thorough understanding of the original language and, consequently, to synthesise the intentions conveyed by the three authors. This step will be presented in the findings section. Meanwhile, the implementation of lectio divina will be discussed in the discussion section, in relation to the Holy Scriptures in Indonesian liturgical celebrations.

Concerning the situation of the faithful in the Indonesian Church, the data used is not field data, but is based on information provided by parishes throughout Indonesia—where liturgical celebrations are more or less the same,[15] and is corroborated by data from the

[15] Paroki Indonesia, (1924), https://www.scribd.com/document/700791414/Daftar-Paroki-di-Seluruh-Keuskupan-di-Indonesia-2023

Indonesian Bishops' Conference (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia).[16] The aim is to present an overview of the situation of the Indonesian Church. The findings of this study are then concluded with a summary which highlights that the research objective of lectio divina remains highly beneficial and applicable to the appreciation of Scripture within current liturgical celebrations.

3. Findings

The following three figures—Pachomius, Benedict and Gregory the Great—were the driving forces behind lectio divina in the early Church, although in truth all early Christians were also masters of this practice. This is evidenced by the fact that they made the Word of God the guiding principle of their daily lives and even went so far as to sacrifice their lives, particularly in the period before the fourth century.

3.1. Pachomius (c. 292–347)

Pachomius wrote the Rule for the coenobitic life, composed around the middle of the fourth century,[17] which is directly related to lectio divina. This Rule was the first of its kind in the Church, and would subsequently serve as the basis for other Rules. Consequently, Pachomius's Rule has always served as a reference for subsequent Rules in different contexts.[18] The following are the key points of Pachomius's Rule.

> Praecepta Pachomii de collecta fratrum, quo modo collecta fieri debeat, et fratres a forte congregandi ad audiendum verbum Dei iuxta praecepta maiorum, et doctrinam sanctorum scripturarum, ut liberentur et errorem animae conuersorum, et glorificent Deum in luce viuentium, ut sciant quomodo oporteat in domo dei conuersari sine ruina et scandalo, ut non inebrientur aliqua possessione, sed stent in mensura ueritatis, et traditionibus apostolorum, et prophetarum, et forte sollemnitatum ordinem teneant imitantes congregationem eorum in domo dei, et ieiunia atque orationes ex more complentes. Qui enim bene minstrant, sequuntur regulam scripturarum (*Regula*, 113).[19]

In this text, lectio divina is not explicitly mentioned, but reference is made to listening to the divine word (ad audiendum verbum Dei iuxta praecepta maiorum, et doctrinam sanctorum scripturarum). The reason for this is that, during this period, not all members of the coenobium were able to read, let alone the Holy Scriptures. Consequently, a lector was required (to read the Scriptures, the teachings of the faith and other readings, such as the teachings of the faith, meditations and the like) who would observe all the punctuation marks during the reading. In this context, listening to the divine word became fundamental to lectio divina.

The purpose of lectio divina in this study is explored following a presentation of the subject, which is divided into two sections. The first purpose of lectio divina is to avoid fault

[16] Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (1924), https://www.kawali.org/keusk/
[17] Johannes Quasten, *Patrologia,* Vol. II dal Concilio di Nicea a quello di Calcedonia, Nello Beghin (Tr.) (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1983), 156-159.
[18] Hubertus R. Drobner, *Patrologia,* Presentazione di Angeli di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1998), 470-505.
[19] Pachomius, *Regula*, E Syriaco Craecoque in Latinum a B. Hieronymo confersa, illustrissimo ac reuerendus D. Paulo Aretio (Roma: Apud Haeredes Antonii Bladi Impressores Camerales, Anno Iubliae, M.D.LXXV).

in life, which is one way of glorifying God. Another purpose of this section is to enable one to adopt an attitude towards God and towards one's neighbour that seeks to avoid scandal. The second section is more concerned with moral and ethical teachings, namely not to be swayed by worldly influences, but to stand firm in the truth and the traditions of the apostles and prophets, including the order of liturgical celebrations.

> Hoc est ergo ministerium quod ministri ecclesiae amplere debebunt. Congregent fratres orationis tempore, et omnia faciant quae vite complenda sunt, ut nullam occasionem detractioni tribuat, nec sinant quempiam ambulare contrarium disciplinae. Si codicem postulauerint, deferant eis (*Regula,* 114).

In this section, lectio divina is expanded into what is known as the Daily Prayer, incorporating the 'oratio temporis', in which, in principle, all prayers are drawn from Scripture, with the exception of the opening and closing prayers. These prayers do not remain merely as prayers, but become the spirit and guiding principle for daily life, to be put into practice so that one may live in accordance with the principles of faith and ethical living.

3.2. Benedict (480–547)

We can learn about Benedict's life from Gregory the Great's book *Dialogi*, which provides more detailed information, including on the spiritual and coenobitic life he established at Monte Cassino, Italy *Dialogi* II, I–XXXVIII).[20] Gregory devoted an entire chapter solely to Benedict. This work is more authoritative than other sources concerning Benedict, as it was written not long after the saint's lifetime.[21] It was for this coenobitic way of life that Benedict wrote the *Regula* to organise the monastic way of life, which serves as a reference for the findings of this study. The primary reference is *Regula* 48, 1–4, which is divided into two parts. The first part concerns lectio divina, which is inseparable from daily activities, and the second part concerns the continuity of lectio divina.

> Otiositas inimica est animae; et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione diuina. Ideoque hac dispositione credimus utraque tempora ordinari (*Regula* 48, 1-2).[22]

The context of these findings is rooted in the spirit of the Benedictine Order, 'ora et labora' – pray and work. These two activities are combined with the practice of coenobitism. The understanding of prayer is based on the Christian tradition of prayer known as the Liturgy of the Hours. Prayer begins with the Offitio Lecturae – the Liturgy of the Readings – which takes place before aurora or dawn. This is followed by Laudes (morning prayer), which takes place at dawn. Evening prayer – Vespers – is usually held around 18.00 and is then concluded with Compline (evening prayer before retiring for the night). The period between 06.00 and 18.00 is divided into four prayer times known as prima – the first, terza – the third, sesta – the sixth and nona – the ninth. The calculation is as follows. The day begins at 06.00 and is dedicated to the prayer for that hour, known as prima. Then, the calculation involves adding a

[20] Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, Introduzione di Benedetto Calati, Traduzione a c. Delle Suore Benedittine Isola San Gregorio, Note e Indici a cura di Attillo Stendardi (Roma: Città Nuova, 200).
[21] Sergio Zincone, *Benedetto di Norcia,* 521-2.
[22] Benedictus, *La Regola di San Benedetto.*

decimal number starting from one, resulting in 'terza' (6+3=9, i.e. prayer at 09.00), followed by 'sesta' (6+6=12, i.e. prayer at 12.00 or midday) and 'nona' (6+9=15, i.e. prayer at 15.00).[23]

This prayer schedule is divided into four prayer periods, each of which is generally not very long, lasting around 15 minutes. As mentioned previously, the content of the prayers is drawn from the Holy Scriptures and adapted to the needs of the time and situation. With this division, outside of prayer times, the brothers are engaged in physical labour, all of which takes place within the monastery grounds, 'ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum'. In the performance of their work, the passages from the Holy Scriptures recited during prayer are put into practice in that work and in their conduct, 'certis iterum horis in lectione diuina'. It is in this context that 'ora et labora' becomes of paramount importance in the life of the coenobite and is constantly sought to be applied.

> Id est, ut a Pascha usque kalendas octobres a mane exeuntes a prima usque hora pene quarta laborent quod necessarium fuerit. Ab hora autem quarta usque hora quasi Sexta agente, lectioni uacent (*Regula* 48, 3-4).

This second text describes a combination of physical labour and lectio divina through the Daily Office. In the morning, the coenobitic work from the first hour until nearly the fourth hour, then attend to whatever is necessary; from the fourth hour until around the sixth hour, they devote themselves to lectio divina. This text provides important information that physical labour and lectio divina form a single unity and are interlinked; however, lectio divina serves as the foundation for the work, to prevent self-justification regarding physical labour.

3.3. Gregory the Great (540–604)

The next text we examine is by Gregory the Great, taken from his book entitled *Moralia in Iob*. This work is a lengthy reflection by Gregory on the spiritual life, written between 579 and 600, which takes the figure of Job as its subject. The purpose of choosing this figure was to apply Scripture to the lives of the faithful, and Job was the perfect figure for this.[24] Gregory did indeed write the *Regula*, but it was oriented towards pastoral care and served as a guide for pastors. Consequently, the work is known as the *Regula Pastoralis*, which was used by pastors right up until the Middle Ages.[25] Meanwhile, the material relating to lectio divina is found in *Moralia in Iob*, which forms part of the findings of this study.

> Oculos adulteri obseruat caliginem, dicens: Non me uidebit oculos. Hoc etiam iuxta litteram nil obstat intellegi, ut qui adulterium perpretrare desiderat tenebras exquirat. Sed quia contra haereticos sententia promitur, dignum est ut hoc quod dicitur nystice sentiatur. Nam Paulus ait: Non enim sumus, sicut plurimi, adulterantes uerbum Dei (2 Cor. 2:17). Adulter quippe in carnali coitu non prolem sed uoluptatem quaerit. Et peruersus quisque ac uanae gloriae seruiens recte adulterare uerbum Dei dicitur, quia per sacrum eloquium non Deo filios gignere, sed suam scientiam desiderat ostentare. Quem enim libido gloriae ad

[23] _____, *Breviarium Ordinis Fratrum Beatissimae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmelo*, Pars Aestiva (Roma – Tornaci – Parisiis: Tipis Socieatatis S. Ioannis Evangelistae, 1938), 1-1003.
[24] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob,* Gregorii Magni Opera I/1, Cura et studio Marci Adriaen et Paulus Siniscalco emendauit, Claude Dagens et Emilio Gandolfo (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1992), 7-61.
[25] Vincenzo Recchia, "Gregorio Magno*",* in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane,* Diretto da Angelo di Berardino (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1994), 1698-1707.

> loquendum trahit, uoluptati magis quam generationi opera impendit (*Moralia in Iob,* III, LX, 74).[26]

The scope of this text relates to the preacher and his sermon. The audience consists of those connected to the preacher himself, both at the time the sermon is delivered and afterwards. A sermon is an exposition and application of Scripture that is actively related to the preacher's spiritual life and conduct. It is in this context that Gregory's words form an essential part of the lectio divina for the preacher. In this text, Gregory addresses preachers alone, whoever they may be.

Gregory takes 2 Corinthians 2:17 as his starting point, quoting only the opening phrase. It appears that Gregory considers these words of Paul to be a very strong foundation for presenting his argument regarding the value of preaching in relation to lectio divina for the preacher. In this text, Paul states very emphatically that he is not like others (heretical teachers) who profane the Word of God by prioritising physical pleasures, flaunting knowledge, seeking divine glory, using flowery rhetoric, and prioritising pleasure.[27] Yet the true purpose of preaching is to bring forth children of God. Gregory points out that the measure of a sermon's success lies not in the manner or style of preaching, but in its implementation in the preacher's own life.

> Sed multa sunt quae audientis animum produnt, maxime si auditores nostri et semper laudant quod audiunt, et numquam quod laudant sequuntur. Hanc inanem loquendi gloriam praedicator egregius fugerat, cum dicebat: Non enim sumus sicut plurimi, adulterantes uerbum Dei; sed ex sinceritate, sicut ex Deo, coram Deo in Christo loquimur (2 Cor. 2:17). Adulterari namque est uerbum Dei aut aliter de illo sentire quam est, aut ex eo non spiritales fructus, sed adulterinos fetus quaerere laudis humanae. Ex sinceritate uero loqui, est nil in eloquio extra quam oporteat quaerere. Sicut ex Deo autem loquitur qui scit non se a se habere, sed ex Deo accepisse quod dicit. Coram Deo uero loquitur qui in omni quod dicit, non humanos fauores appetit, sed omnipotentis Dei praesentiae intendit; non suam sed auctoris gloriam requirit. Qui autem scit quidem ex Deo se accepisse quod dicit, et tamen dicendo propriam gloriam quaerit, sicut ex Deo loquitur, sed non coram Deo, quia eum quem cordi suo non proponit cum praedicat quasi absentem putat (*Moralia in Iob,* IV, XXII, 39).[28]

This text is, in fact, still discussing the preacher, as quoted earlier. The basis for this is also the same as in the previous text, 2 Corinthians 2:17: "Non enim sumus sicut plurimi, adulterantes uerbum Dei; sed ex sinceritate, sicut ex Deo, coram Deo in Christo loquimur"; however, in this section, Gregory quotes the entire verse (whereas previously he had only quoted the first phrase). The meaning of this second phrase is that the preacher, in accordance with his responsibility and purpose, directs his thoughts towards the presence of the Almighty;

[26] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob,* Gregorii Magni Opera I/2, Cura et studio Marci Adriaen et Paulus Siniscalco emendauit (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1994).
[27] Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis,* I, 3. See Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis,* Gregorii Magni Opera VII, F. Rommel & Giuseppe Cremascoli (Eds.) (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2008).
[28] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob,* Gregorii Magni Opera I/3, Cura et studio Marci Adriaen et Paulus Siniscalco emendauit (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1997).

he does not seek his own glory, popularity, or anything of a subjective, worldly nature, but rather the glory of the Creator.[29]

The difference between this text by Gregory and the previous one (*Moralia in Iob*, III, LX, 74) lies in the opening section, which emphasises not only the preacher but also his listeners—a point not mentioned in the earlier passage. The listeners in this context are the faithful present at the time of the sermon and those who read this text afterwards. Its scope is not limited to the occasion on which the sermon was delivered, but extends to the universal Church or indeed to anyone. Such listeners, according to Gregory, are aware of the value of the sermon, which is an understanding of Holy Scripture. The sermon and the preacher are praised by the listeners, but they need not follow the preacher's unpraiseworthy behaviour: 'For there are many things that reveal the listener's heart, especially if our listeners always praise what they hear, yet never follow what they praise.' This attitude on the part of the listener is the implementation of lectio divina, which gives meaning to the value of Scripture within the listener through the dimension of the sermon. Lectio divina enables the listener to distinguish between the humanistic dimension and the divine dimension.

Based on these findings, the textual dimensions of Pachomius, Benedict and Gregory the Great share similarities in subject matter, yet their objectives differ from one another, as indicated in the findings section. To facilitate the discussion in the subsequent section of this study, the propositions put forward are as follows. The Scriptures used in the liturgy require a deep engagement with every person taking part in the celebration, which can transform their lives. It is in this context that the Scriptures touch the personality of each individual through the practice of lectio divina. This inner transformation will influence all aspects of one's demeanour, such as the way one speaks, reacts, acts, and even all the external attributes known as virtues. Another dimension that is no less important in human life is work or activity, which is the way in which human beings take part in God's work of creation.

4. Discussion

To date, the Indonesian Church continues to grow rapidly. Parish governance is also excellent and in line with Indonesia's social structure, which seeks to reach out to the faithful. This parish system greatly facilitates the rapid growth of the faithful, both in terms of numbers and quality, and consequently, the frequency and attendance at liturgical celebrations have become high and widespread. In almost all churches across Indonesia, liturgical celebrations such as the Eucharist, for example, are always filled with participating faithful, as are other activities.[30] To help the faithful make the Word of God a guide for their lives, the role of lectio divina becomes crucial. The reason is that the understanding they gain serves as a foundation and guidance, whilst ensuring consistency with the teachings of the faith and avoiding emotionalism. These three elements form the pillars of lectio divina in the contemplation of Scripture.

[29] Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis,* I, 5.
[30] An overview of the parish and its organisation can be found in the article, Alphonsus Tjatur Rahaso & Edison R. L. Tinambunan, "*Seruus seruorum dei* of Gregory the Great: its implementation in collegial and exemplary leadership in Indonesian church parishes" *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 13, 1 (2026), 1-10.

4.1. Lectio divina as an approach to interpreting Scripture in liturgical celebrations

The field of exegesis is currently flourishing, and there is a vast body of literature in this area to aid understanding of Scripture. In the Indonesian context, however, the situation is different, due to linguistic limitations and pastoral considerations, both of which are interrelated. Such an ecclesial context requires alternative approaches to understanding the Holy Scriptures within liturgical celebrations. Given these limitations and the fact that the faithful in Indonesia take part in church liturgical celebrations every Sunday—and indeed, for many, on a daily basis—lectio divina serves as a means of putting this understanding into practice in their daily lives.

The anachorite and coenobite, from the time of Pachomius up to Gregory the Great, had limited ability to read, let alone carry out exegesis of the Scriptures; yet they were able to put into practice the Scriptures that were read or heard—which were used as prayers in liturgical celebrations—as a guide for their daily lives.[31] The legacy passed down to us today is that they excelled in the contemplation of Scripture and liturgical prayer and remained steadfast in the face of challenges to their faith, however severe.[32] During the time of Pachomius, for example, the lives of anachorite and coenobite were still subject to massive persecution by the Roman Empire, to the extent that bearing the name 'Christian' was a matter of life and death. However, thanks to the Scriptures and the liturgical celebrations which served as a guide for their lives, they were able to direct themselves in accordance with the faith. The knowledge they possessed—which is a gift from God to every person—was utilised to the full to interpret the plan of the Giver of grace within their lives. Although an anachorite or coenobite might only be able to listen to the readings, in this context, practising lectio was not carried out directly due to limited literacy. Then, through ruminatio—which involves meditative reflection on the Scriptures during liturgical celebrations—this leads to insights that become a guiding spirit for life.[33] Those who reach this stage are able to interpret the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations and make them a practical and actionable guide for life. For this reason, anachorite, coenobite and Christians in general were, in the early period, deeply committed to the contemplation of Scripture and the liturgical celebrations.

Such ascetic and coenobitic approaches could serve as one way of engaging with the Holy Scriptures in liturgical celebrations in Indonesia. The context is not the same as that of the early anachoritic and coenobitic periods, owing to developments in science and society. As with the faithful in general, the forms of knowledge possessed vary, and indeed so do the levels of understanding.[34] This does not pose an obstacle to the implementation of Scripture readings in liturgical celebrations, but rather presents an opportunity to explore them. Each person, according to their own capacity, interprets the Scriptures within the liturgical celebration.

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[31] Benedictus, *Regula,* 66, 6-7.
[32] Gregory Santy, "Lectio Divina: A Time-Tested Plan for What to Read When", *Dominicana Theology Philosophy Culture* (May 10, 2024).
[33] Brad Klassen, "The Bible and Lectio Divina: A Helpful Tool or a Dangerous Practice?", *The Master's Seminary* (January 19, 2021).
[34] Yessy Kenny Jacob, "Developing and Implementing a Christ-Centered Pedagogy in Christian Religious Education for Effective Faith Formation in Adolescents", *Journal of Hunan University Natural Sciences* 52, 6 (2025), 113-122.

Various approaches, in line with one's own knowledge and capacity, seek the best way to grasp the spirit or essence of the liturgical readings within the celebration so that they may be lived out. The anachoritic and coenobitic methods are available to assist in this. Everyone has been gifted with knowledge and understanding to be utilised. This is a way of honouring and glorifying God's work within each individual. In this context, the grace received from God is maximised to enhance one's personal growth and to interpret the Scriptures within the liturgical celebration, which is also a gift from God to every person. This situation demonstrates that the faithful are supported and guided as effectively as possible in their lives, both day-to-day and into an unlimited future.

4.2. A Fiery Zeal

For anachoritic and coenobitic members, the understanding of Scripture and liturgical celebrations—in accordance with their capacity—is accompanied by the discovery of the form of zeal they uphold, making it a guide that takes the form of self-control or, more profoundly still, serves to renew all forms of daily wisdom. Therefore, the Scriptures and liturgical celebrations are not static and confined solely to the celebrations themselves, but are truly beneficial in kindling a better way of life.[35] This attitude is maintained day by day, to make life better.

The situation of the faithful in Indonesia is not akin to that of an ascetic or coenobitic life. The frequency of faithful attendance at church on Sundays or weekdays for liturgical celebrations is high, as evidenced by daily and, in particular, weekly services, where churches are generally full, even though the frequency of masses has increased.[36] From this perspective, this is very positive for the Indonesian Church; however, the implementation of the Holy Scriptures – liturgical celebrations through lectio divina – makes these celebrations a source of sustenance for life, whether for a single day or a week, or even for the journey ahead. A fundamental aspect is the guidance for all activities, in whatever form they may take. The faithful need the spirit of the Holy Scriptures – these liturgical celebrations – within the heterogeneous religious landscape that is characteristic of Indonesia. This guiding principle is not apologetic towards other religions, but rather a form of mutual virtue or the prioritisation of virtue amongst one another, as every religion, by its very nature, inevitably seeks to put this into practice in daily life through interaction.[37] As people of faith, the significance of lectio divina is highly practical for the faithful.

This fundamental dimension, as the aim of lectio divina, is directed towards each individual, just as practised by the anachoritic-coenobitic tradition. Self-control in all its dimensions is the key to life, whether in conversation, attitude, mindset, or other aspects of virtue; and, no less important, self-control in the face of temptations originating from outside oneself.[38] One phenomenon that makes it difficult to practise self-control in Indonesia is social media. Because people are easily influenced, because they go with the flow, and because of the

[35] Benedict stated that the benefits of lectio divina have the potential to transform lives because they are filled with the Holy Spirit, *Regula,* 66, 6-7.
[36] Alphonsus Tjatur Rahaso & Edison R. L. Tinambunan, "*Seruus seruorum dei* of Gregory the Great".
[37] Eedison R. L. Tinambunan, I. Ketut Gegel, Peter Bruno Sarbini and Gus Zain Baik, "Implication Abu Dhabi Document: to build religious moderationwith brotherhood-sisterhood and friendship in Indonesia," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, 1 (2025), 1-13.
[38] Pachomius, *Regula,* 116.

influence of the majority, it is not uncommon for people to fall into the negativity of social media, which is not its intended purpose; for, rationally speaking, social media is meant to aid human progress, not to undermine human dignity, but rather to uplift it.

4.3. Mindfulness in daily activities

The way in which the anacoretic and coenobitic interpret their daily activities—based on lectio divina[39]—becomes a method for reflecting on daily activities or work. This same approach is also highly beneficial for the faithful, who generally have to work hard in various roles and workplaces. Not all the faithful read or listen to the Holy Scriptures every day, but the Sunday celebration serves as a guide throughout the week. The current situation in Indonesia, with an increasingly difficult economic climate and conditions that are less than conducive in many respects, means that people must work ever harder to meet their basic needs.[40] Working well and diligently is, in principle, a form of collaboration with the Creator to shape the world in accordance with its meaning and purpose, whilst preserving the environment and upholding humanism.

An understanding of the value and meaning of work of this kind will always face challenges from two dimensions. This is very different from the anachoretic-coenobitic context, as the challenges there are more focused on a single dimension, namely the internal one. Meanwhile, for people of faith, particularly in Indonesia, these challenges stem from within, such as the enthusiasm for work, in order to realise the value of work (co-operating with the Creator) and its purpose of meeting life's needs, whether for oneself or for others, such as family and the wider community connected to that work. This internal dimension is fundamental for people of faith, as it provides guidance regarding the value of their work, whatever form it may take—be it as farmers, service staff, office workers, educators or others. The current situation in Indonesia is such that working well and productively does not guarantee job security, due to an unfavourable social climate.[41] In such circumstances, it is essential to understand and embrace this internal dimension.

Meanwhile, the external environment generally presents many challenges and can sometimes be very burdensome. Indonesia's social landscape is heterogeneous, encompassing culture, religion, race and workplace backgrounds. The guidance and spirit of life found in the Holy Scriptures provide a means of instilling wisdom in such diverse settings, serving as a common foundation.[42] In relation to daily activities, this essentially constitutes a form of collaboration with the Creator to prioritise wisdom, as the very essence of working towards a broader scope. Therefore, our activities serve as a means of sharing wisdom in various ways with all sections of society, particularly in Indonesia.[43] Wisdom, as derived from lectio divina,

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[39] Abbot of Tabennisi, *The Life of Saint Pachomius***,** Dionysius Exiguus, Abbot of Rome - Benedict Baker (Trs.), 10, 23-24.

[40] Aisyah Llewellyn, "Indonesia has 44 million youths. It's struggling to get them jobs
Young Indonesians are more pessimistic about their economic futures than their regional peers, according to surveys", *Aljazeera,* (July 18, 2025).

[41] Faisal Irfani, "Gelombang PHK massal menggulung nasib para buruh di sektor industri – 'Sampai kapan kami harus bertahan seperti ini?'", *BBC News Indonesia* (25 Juni 2026).

[42] Eedison R. L. Tinambunan, I. Ketut Gegel, Peter Bruno Sarbini and Gus Zain Baik, "Implication Abu Dhabi Document".

[43] Eedison R. L. Tinambunan, " Politics and Religion. Dichotomy and Correlation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy", In *Minoritas dan Politik di Indonesia. Eksistensi dan Peran Minoritas dalam Dinamika Politik di*

becomes particularly tangible for the faithful whose activities are inseparable from collaboration with colleagues, superiors, subordinates, people of different genders, and numerous other stakeholders. Healthy collaboration based on lectio divina creates a comfortable working environment for creativity across all dimensions of work, helping to avoid unhealthy competition, hatred, harmful possessiveness, violence or even harassment in various contexts.

5. Conclusion

One tradition that continues to this day is lectio divina, the value and benefits of which are still felt today; it relates to the Holy Scriptures, which are always used in liturgical celebrations. In this regard, lectio divina is not a form of exegesis, but a way of understanding and interpreting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with the insights required for daily life. The approach of the early Christians—particularly Pachomius, Benedict and Gregory—was highly effective, as it put into practice what was heard and understood from the Holy Scriptures as encountered in liturgical celebrations, such as the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours and others. It is within this context that lectio divina, in connection with liturgical celebrations, serves a purpose and proves beneficial for life.

In the Indonesian context, where the Church is still growing rapidly, and church attendance for liturgical celebrations is widespread—on Sundays, for example—the role of lectio divina is highly beneficial as a complement to sermons that seek to put the Word of God into practice in the inner life. This benefit is essential for shaping the inner disposition of the faithful from psychological, somatic and physical perspectives. The faithful need not seek other aspects beyond the Word of God, for it already possesses and surpasses all other qualities.

Lectio divina aims to make the Holy Scriptures a guiding light in our daily activities, whether throughout the day or the week. The guidance of the Word of God gained from the liturgy enables the faithful to infuse their activities, work, family life and social life with meaning. Moreover, social media is now an integral part of social life, requiring guidance to navigate it wisely, to make decisions that foster what is good and avoid what is harmful. A lack of wisdom in life will lead one to bring about one's own downfall through one's actions.

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