

being where we tend to be closed, where we protect the false ego from the death which is inevitable if we are to become whole persons in the image of Christ.

Perceptual obstacles consist of deeply ingrained, usually unconscious patterns and structures of interaction with the world which hinder our encounter with God in reading scripture. Our culture has nurtured us in a way of knowing which militates against an openness to God in reading scripture. We have come to perceive the world as an object out there to be grasped, controlled, and manipulated for our own purposes.<sup>2</sup> When we read, the text tends to become an object for us to grasp with our mind, bring under the cognitive and affective control of our intellect and emotions, and then use to enhance our structuring of events, situations, people, and even ourselves to suit our own agenda. When coupled with our unique personal obstacles to encounter with God, such perceptual obstacles become powerful means of avoiding God, using the text to entrench ourselves in our brokenness, and making the "word of God" an excuse for inflicting our destructive brokenness upon the world.

What we need is an approach to scripture which will assist us to overcome these personal and perceptual obstacles and make us available for encounter with God. Such an approach must rescue us from a subjectivism which simply reads the shape of our brokenness into the text and hears echoes of our own desires as the voice of God. It must also rescue us from a legalistic objectivism which seeks outer conformity to perceived or inferred patterns of behavior without any inner transformation. We need a disciplined set of practices which will persistently, perhaps painfully, pry us open to the recreating love of God.

Such a set of practices, time-tested and proven effective, thread their way through the Christian tradition. Their classical name is *lectio divina*, "spiritual reading," and the practices are *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. I would like to bracket these with *silencio* as the introduction and *incarnatio* as the conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>For an excellent treatment of this issue, cf. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Susan Muto of the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University for this insight which she shared while we were team-