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## LEADING “AROUND SCRIPTURE”<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the Carmelite programme “Around Scripture” as a recent development in the Order, in particular the leadership of the programme. It explains the kind of activity “Around Scripture” entails and the best approach to it. It investigates the capabilities a leader needs to guide the sharing within a group, in particular his/her reading competence and exegetical capabilities. Because reflection in “Around Scripture” also relates to spirituality and the spiritual way (both in the Biblical text and in the participants) and because it also concerns processes of appropriating spirituality, the article considers the leader’s knowledge of spirituality and analyses his/her mystagogical capabilities. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the leader’s unselfishness.

Carmelite life is intended to be a dwelling or sojourn in Scripture. The Carmelite Rule witnesses to this when it links “remaining in the cell” and the meditation on the law of the Lord. Paragraph 10 states:

Let each remain in his cell or near it, meditating day and night on the Word of the Lord and keeping vigil in prayer, unless he is occupied with other lawful activities.<sup>2</sup>

“Remaining in the cell” thus means meditation on Scripture. The Rule indicates what the result of this dwelling in Scripture can be, interspersed with Biblical quotations of and allusions to Biblical texts. One could even state that the Rule is written within Scripture.

Approximately thirty-five years ago, “abiding in Scripture” gained new momentum. Because of the religious crisis in the Netherlands, the Dutch Carmel relied on the Bible and the Rule as sources. This introduced a new method of reading Scripture. Initially this was called “Around the Gospel”; later it became known as “Around Scripture.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 In honour of Kees Waaijman on the occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

2 The quotation from the Rule is taken from the translation of Waaijman (1999:31).

3 The new method has been described in Waaijman 1986 (cf. Waaijman 1992 for the English translation).

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The renewed reading of Scripture had two characteristics. First, it entailed a common reading of Scripture which included communicating one’s faith in line with the *Acts of the Apostles* in which the reading of Scripture and the communication of faith formed the basis of building the Christian community.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the renewed reflection on Scripture prepared liturgical celebrations, which entailed building up the community in faith, for the liturgy is the place where the faithful community gathers and experiences its relationship with God.

In both the renewed reading of Scripture and all spiritual reading of Scripture the Biblical story was related to one’s life and experience of faith.<sup>5</sup> This is evident from the following two phases: the first one underscores what the text tells us, and the second investigates how texts change our experience. Later studies on the reading of Scripture showed that the renewed reflection on Scripture can best be done in terms of the *lectio divina*.<sup>6</sup>

Waaïjman contributed significantly to the introduction and supervision of “Around Scripture”. He edited the introductions to the method, consistently guiding the reflection on Scripture in various Carmel groups. He also guided essays in which research was conducted into the experiences and backgrounds of the method used in “Around Scripture” (Bertens 1986).

This article investigates those qualities and competence which the leader<sup>7</sup> of the gatherings of “Around Scripture” needs in order to ensure that a common reflection runs smoothly.<sup>8</sup> Though it does not claim to speak the last word, it offers some suggestions as to what kind of activity leadership of “Around Scripture” entails and how best one can go about it. The article starts with introductory remarks on how “Gathering around Scripture” is conducted. Then the capabilities needed to guide a group in sharing will be considered. This is followed by a discussion of the reading competence and exegetical capabilities expected of individual leaders of “Around Scripture”. Because reflection in “Around Scripture” also relates to spirituality and the spiritual way (both in the Biblical text and in the participants) and because it deals with processes of appropriating spirituality, the leader’s knowledge of spirituality and mystagogical capabilities is considered. In a final paragraph, the leader’s overall attitude of

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4 Cf. the summaries of the community life of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem in Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35.

5 For a short history of the spiritual reading, cf. Welzen (2001:180-193).

6 Cf. Welzen (2006:125-144). In this publication “Around Scripture” and *Lectio Divina* have been explicitly linked. For a presentation of this way of reading Scriptures against the background of the allegorical exegesis in the school of Origen and in particular Didymus the Blind, cf. Tigcheler (1977:30-56).

7 For practical considerations the leader of “Around Scripture” will be indicated by “he” instead of “s/he”.

8 The following remarks are based on my own experience in leading “Around Scripture”.

unselfishness will be mooted. As background to “Gathered around Scripture” for the uninitiated, the course of the gathering will be explained briefly.

## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON “AROUND SCRIPTURE”

The meeting of “Around Scripture” proceeds according to a specific pattern (Waaïjman 1992:19-28). Two phases follow the reading out loud of the text. The purpose of the first phase is to seek the experience in Scripture in order to trace the deeper concern in the texts. There are two steps. First, the participants read the text in silence. Questions in respect of composition, *dramatis personae*, context, intertextual connections, social setting, keywords, and so forth can help less experienced groups. Participants make notes of their response(s). After ten minutes, the leader invites all present to share their findings. Secondly, the sharing of the group. The group seeks the layer of experience in Scripture. At the end the leader summarises the findings.

It is effective to have a short break after the first phase before embarking on the second phase which concentrates more on the layer of experience in the participants. They explore within themselves what the reading and sharing of Scripture has evoked in them. This second phase consists of two steps. First, the participants turn quietly to their own layer of experience. They reflect on feelings, images and experiences that emerge through the text. This includes questions such as “Which symbols were generated in me?” and “To which types of persons in the text can I relate best?” Participants should make short notes. After ten minutes the leader invites the participants to exchange their experiences. Secondly, sharing experiences, the purpose of which is to understand one another better, so that the expressed experiences can become shared experiences.

This working model is also useful for preparing a liturgy or preaching (Waaïjman 1992:36-42). When a group is tasked to prepare a liturgy, a third phase may be added, in which a central theme for the liturgy is chosen. The participants are tasked to collect liturgical material against the background of the Scripture passage they have read, of the sharing and of the chosen theme. This would include other texts, songs, psalms, stories, symbols, representations, and so forth. These elements are combined, possibly in a next gathering, where they are tested and ordered accordingly.<sup>9</sup>

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9 In the Dutch Carmelite province, “Gathered around Scripture” is the base for a weekly supply of liturgical material. Several groups participate in a regular liturgy preparation based on a communal Scripture meditation on the Gospel text of Sunday’s Eucharist celebration. The material prepared by the group includes introductory notes, a number of celebrations, reflections, readings, psalms, hymns and prayers. The scheduling, redaction, organisation and mailing are co-ordinated by the *Redactie Liturgie*.

When using this method to prepare for preaching, it may help to arrange the sharing in the first phase in such a way that the participants formulate a central theme of the text. Similarly, in the second phase, participants can formulate a central experience. Based on this they can, in a third phase, introduce building stones for preaching and possibly agree on its presentation.

## 2. THE CAPABILITY TO LEAD THE SHARING OF THE GROUP

The aim of “Around Scripture” is to communicate faith. It entails a discussion of how participants live their lives in belief or unbelief. Viewpoints are not debated, decisions are not made or other participants are not persuaded. It aims at the kind of existential communication used in encounter groups (Rogers 1970). The only difference is that a text from Scripture forms the centre of the sharing by an open group.

In an existential communication the ability to listen is important. Listening not only means understanding the content of the words, but also recognising the experiences and feelings behind the words, that is, the having-been-touched from the depth out of which the words are spoken. In this respect, contents and the relational aspect of communication must be distinguished (cf. Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson 1967). In every communication data is being communicated in order to clarify its meaning. The content of the message can relate to everything that is communicable. However, every message also contains data about how it has to be understood. This often goes unnoticed. It is important to pay attention to this relational aspect, because it reveals how the participant relates to what s/he says, how s/he relates to the text as the centre of the sharing, how s/he relates to the other participants and to the leader of the group. The ability to listen to the relational aspects in communication is an important means to arrive at the existential communication as the presupposition of the faith communication and as the goal of “Around Scripture.” The leader of the gathering can often put these relational aspects explicitly on the table and bring the sharing to the intended existential level. In this way he successfully moves the sharing beyond the level of mere ideas and opinions to the level of experiences and feelings, thus deepening and intensifying the sharing. From experience it is clear that this approach can promote the exchange of participants’ faith experiences.

Existential communication depends on the security in the group and the participants’ feeling of freedom. Security means that the group members feel that their contributions are respected as their rightful experience and that they can share their existence in this group and with regard to the Bible text. When they lack this respect for their experience, they can become fearful as the basic respect for the other is lacking. Respect for the freedom of the participant means

that participants should not be forced to communicate what they do not want to communicate.

Trust and an atmosphere of warmth are typical for the encounter group. But this acceptance includes also: accepting that, for example, someone does not want to talk about his marriage, or his faith crisis (Lindijer & Lindijer-Banning 1977:69).

Well-intended group pressure may be exerted on a participant to communicate. The sharing leader, however, must protect the participant against such pressure.

When the sharing leader links the contribution of one participant with that of another, he must be aware, particularly in the second phase of the sharing, that these links are made on the existential level. To communicate one's faith is not a matter of sharing faith contents, but rather an exchange of personal ways of believing.

Three risks threaten the personal and experiential character of communication: generalisation, theorising and psychologising. When we generalise or theorise, we bring a statement about a personal experience to a more general level, a general law or a theory about experience. This ignores the fact that experience is always personal and unique. Although many people have undergone similar experiences, a particular experience remains that of an individual person and, in this sense, it is unique. This uniqueness does not mean that the experience occurs only once, but that it has a personal character. Generalising and theorising deprive the experience of its personal and existential character. Psychologising reduces the experience of participants to a psychological issue, which does not do justice to its personal and unique character. In addition, the person who psychologises keeps a safe distance from what has been contributed by the participants. S/He does not become personally engaged with what the other contributes as a personal experience, but turns it into a psychological problem.

By generalising, theorising or psychologising, one does not have to relate to what has been contributed by the participants. The here-and-now character of the shared experience and the implicit request to relate to this experience are being denied and vitiated. The experience is fixated in a general law, a theory or a psychological mechanism, and is thus objectified. The obligation to relate to the experience of the other is nullified. The result of generalising, theorising and psychologising is usually a failed sharing and a feeling of frustration of its "victims".

A special feature of individual leaders of "Around Scripture" is that they both participate and lead. On the one hand, they contribute their own experiences, like all the participants. They often function as a model by contributing their own experiences as leaders of the group. On the other hand, they have to keep sufficient distance from what is being contributed in order to be able to lead the sharing. They must interconnect the contributions and, when necessary, deepen them. Every leader can

feel the stressful relationship between these two roles. After contributing their own faith experience they must resume their role as leader of the sharing.<sup>10</sup>

All this may create the impression that a good leader needs to be trained. Experience, however, teaches that common sense, trust in the strength of the group and, last but not least, awareness of one's own role are sufficient to facilitate communication of faith as an aim of “Around Scripture.”

### 3. READING COMPETENCE

The reading activities of texts must form part of a common reading by the group. This includes the recognition of ink marks on paper as symbols with meaning as well as the combination of letters into words, words into sentences and sentences into larger text units. The decoding, according to the code for meaningful signals, also forms part of this common reading activity. What is being read at present is combined with what has been read previously and with what still has to be read. As a final part of a common reading, meaning has to be attributed to the text. Such meaning is certainly subjective, but not arbitrary since the reader is guided by the data in the text. The act of common reading is an interactive hermeneutical process, in which there is a movement from the text to the reader, but in which the reader also acts in attributing meaning to the text.<sup>11</sup> The leaders should realise that the meaning of a text is subjective. This explains why participants differ when they explain what they read in the text. In the reading process each participant has a personal initial situation and pre-understanding which interacts with the creation of meaning.

There is a second reason for subjective meaning. Meaning arises in and emerges from the act of reading. The meaning of a text does not exist; it is generated when the text is read. The argument that an objective meaning is made available, for example, by the application of correct exegetical methods is a hermeneutical misconception.

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10 The transition is often very perceptible, when individual leaders are the last ones to share in the first or second phase and when, after having given their own contribution, they have to make the transition to the group sharing. It is helpful to arrange the individual sharing so that the leader is not the last one to contribute, but does so somewhere in the middle. The transition from one's own contribution to leading the sharing is then not so difficult.

11 Van Iersel (1998:14-29). Very enlightening too is the complete issue of *Schrift* (1980) devoted to the theme of reading. In his design of spiritual hermeneutics Waaijman processes contemporary hermeneutic conceptions about reading and attributing meaning, such as those of Eco, Iser, Ricoeur and Levinas. (Cf. Waaijman 2002:729-771 in particular).

It is also important that the group enjoys the text and reading it. This holds for all participants in "Around Scripture," but more so for the leader of the gathering. The memory of those moments that a reader loses himself in the reading of a text, the enjoyment of "the strange pleasure that is called reading" (Dresden 2002<sup>4</sup>) will make the leader appreciate how people have a love affair with texts. The world of the text comes alive for them when it impacts on their "here and now," their everyday world. We all experience such moments when we are captivated by and immersed in the text only to return to our own world when we close the book. Such reading experiences cause the leader of a group to reflect on the effects texts can have on readers, why they integrate texts into their lives as important and valuable gems, and why, at times, some texts transform the lives of readers.

An important remark must be made about the actual texts which are read. As a rule one translation will be read, but more translations could be consulted. In principle, more translations can be enriching. The leader should be aware that each translation is an interpretation of the text. When translations differ, it is a sign that the text can have more meanings and that it is open to more than one translation. It helps if a person in the group reads the original Greek or Hebrew text. But this knowledge should not be used to determine what the text means, but that several translations are possible. In this case too, it is stressed that the meaning of a text is not fixed, but generated when the text is read. Knowledge of the original languages is only an instrument of the "midwife" who helps to bring into the world the meaning under discussion in the group.

Returning to the original text is an ambiguous action, and often even perilous. There is no original text of the Bible. Not only do the various churches have their own canon, but even the Greek and Hebrew texts are not the original texts. The text-critical editions of the Greek *New Testament* are reconstructions of Biblical scholars who use the manuscript traditions and text interpretations and reconstruct a possible original text. The most used text editions are those of Nestle-Aland (Aland *et al.* 1993) and those of the United Bible Societies. The latter's footnote apparatus grades the textual alternatives. Considerations of the printed variant are provided in a separate commentary (Metzger 1994).

As far as the Old Testament is concerned, the most used text edition (Kittel *et al.* 1997) is not a reconstruction of the original text, but reflects one manuscript, the codex Leningrad B19 A, which stems from 1009. This is a diplomatic edition, that is, the text edition is based on one manuscript. The edition of the Hebrew Bible Project is also a diplomatic edition (Goshen-Gottstein 1976). Both manuscripts are the result of the work of Jewish scholars who from ca. 500 to 1000 endeavoured to record the Hebrew text and its pronunciation. In Qumran and Masada, manuscripts have been found which testify to much older text forms. The so-called Samaritan *Pentateuch* witnesses to a text form which is older than contemporary critical editions, as well as old translations such as the

*Septuaginta* (the most important translation in Greek), the *Pesjitta* (the translation into Syrian), the *Targumim* (the translations into Aramaic) and the *Vulgate* (the translation into Latin by Jerome). These older text forms no longer exist.

#### 4. EXEGETICAL CAPACITIES

The brochure “Gathered around Scripture” warns against exegetical knowledge which blocks reading the Scriptures as a group.

A first point which keeps coming back is the question of *expertise*. Some people think you can only read Scripture if you are a Bible scholar, an “exegete”. Experience teaches, however, that this sort of “learnedness” has an inhibiting effect. Exegetical baggage has a negative effect when it blocks openness. Of course we do not want to rule out all prior knowledge artificially. Such knowledge is most welcome. It can, however, have a deadening effect if someone offers to the group his own interpretation based on his knowledge of books.

A person may also happen to know Greek and debate what s/he thinks the text *really* states. “Or someone is at home in the Biblical backgrounds and now cannot see past these backgrounds. This kind of know-it-all-ness kills, at least chills, the conversation” (Waaïjman 1992:14-15). It is important to note that the warning is not directed at exegetical knowledge and foreknowledge as such, but at obstacles which are the result of the wrong use of exegetical knowledge and foreknowledge.

Exegetical knowledge can certainly be useful. Knowledge of the important outlines of a Biblical writing can be helpful when a group is reading a pericope from that text. Even more so when a group regularly reads from it. The regular reading from the same book can in this way provide a fundamental insight into its spiritual foundation. Knowledge of the connection of the *Messiasgeheimnis*, the silence command and the parable theory in the Gospel according to Mark can help, for example, to determine the spiritual thrust of Mark and to recognise it in the separate pericopes within this Gospel. It could help a person to perceive how the whole Gospel is present in every pericope and that a pericope is not merely a part or a “piece of the Gospel” as it is sometimes alleged in homilies. The author of this article experienced this when he was asked to lead the weekly meeting of “Around Scripture”, at which the Gospel according to Mark was read. The continuous reading of pericopes from that Gospel book brought the group into contact with its spirituality of unselfishness which is the core not only of the secret of the identity of Jesus, but also of that of a follower of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

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12 For a description of this spirituality, cf. Welzen (1995:86-103).



More important than exegetical knowledge is knowledge of method. Just as there are various methods of Biblical interpretation, there are various approaches of participants. The knowledge that there are many sound approaches to the Biblical text which have their own merits can, together with the knowledge of these approaches, help to differentiate and order the contributions of the participants.<sup>13</sup> Some participants will note the narrative aspects, some the interaction between characters, some the historical events to which the text refers, some the historical circumstances in which the text originated and was handed on, some the arrangement of the text, some important keywords, some text echoes of other texts, while others will pay attention to the way in which a text affects its readers.

There are different exegetical approaches for all these perspectives on the text. Knowledge of these different approaches will help the leader to recognise the perspectives from which the participants approach a text, to order the different remarks and to bring them into discussion in a fruitful way. Of course, it is important that the leader puts his knowledge at the service of the participants and that he uses it only for the benefit of the common quest for the secret of the text.

## 5. KNOWLEDGE OF SPIRITUALITY

“Around Scripture” is a form of Biblical spirituality. In the joint reflection on Scripture, there is Biblical spirituality in both meanings of the word. On the one hand, the group is seeking spirituality in the Biblical texts. It is an exploration of the divine-human relational process as it is present in the Bible. On the other hand, it is also an experience of how the Bible functions and penetrates one’s own spirituality, i.e. the Bible in the divine-human relationship of the participants.

The leader of “Around Scripture” must recognise the moment spirituality emerges. This holds for both the spirituality reflected in the Bible texts and the spirituality of the participants. Knowledge of the ways in which people have expressed their spirituality throughout history can help the leader to recognise the spirituality of the text and the spiritual impact of the text on the participants more easily. We give an example of both.

The Dutch Bible translation, *De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (2004), translates the question of two disciples of John the Baptist after the residence of Jesus as follows: “‘Rabbi’, zeiden ze tegen hem (dat is in onze taal ‘meester’), ‘waar loeert

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13 For introductions on method, cf. a.o. the two editions of *Concilium* (1980 & 1991) on this topic; further, Klijn (1982); Zimmermann (1982<sup>7</sup>; In the 1982 edition attention is paid to synchronic approaches); Conzelmann & Lindemann (1988<sup>9</sup>); Roloff (1992<sup>3</sup>); Welzen (1989-1990); Van Segbroeck (1993); Pauselijke Bijbelcommissie (1994); and Weren (1998).

u?” (John 1:38; “‘Rabbi’, they said to him (which translated means ‘Teacher’), ‘where do you have board and lodging?’”). In other translations the word rendered in *De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* as “logeren” is translated as to “stay” or “dwell”. This translation better reflects the fact that the question of the two disciples touches a spirituality of the mutual alliance of Father and Son and the alliance of Jesus and his disciples (cf. Welzen 2003:23-25). This is clear from the meaning of “to stay” or “to dwell” in the Gospel according to John.

In the Gospel of John “to stay”, “to remain” or “to dwell” often means “to stay in one place for some time”. The word is used in this sense after the wedding of Cana. Jesus went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; they remained there a few days (John 2:12). After the conversation with the Samaritan woman the Samaritans who came to believe in Jesus asked him to stay with them; he stayed there for two days (John 4:40). When Jesus’ brothers went to Judea to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles, they insisted that Jesus accompany them. But because his time had not yet come he stayed in Galilee (John 7:9).

However, the word “stay” can be used in a different sense. Jesus “stayed” in other places rather than towns, villages and regions. His dwelling place is the love of the Father, as the parable of the vine in John 15 illustrates. Jesus explicitly states that he abides in the love of the Father (John 15:10). But conversely the Father dwells also in Jesus. God is at work by dwelling in Jesus.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his work (John 14:10).

Jesus dwells in God and God dwells in Jesus simultaneously. They are each other’s “indwelling”. This mutual indwelling of God and Jesus is not exclusive, as shown by the parable of the vine which is about the alliance of Jesus and the disciples:

Abide in me as I abide in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:4-5).

The dwelling place of the disciples is the love of Jesus, in the same way as the dwelling place of Jesus is the love of God (John 15:9-10). This is a matter of reciprocity: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (John 15:4). Jesus speaks about the fact that the disciples abide in him and that his words abide in the disciples (John 15:7).

By dwelling in Jesus the disciples achieve what is impossible for human beings: Nobody has ever seen God (John 1:18). The disciples are led into the mystery of God by Jesus. By abiding in Jesus the relationship with the mystery

of the total reality becomes possible. "Everyone who believes in Me should not remain in the darkness" (John 12:46). Jesus mediates the relationship with the mystery of God, in accordance with the end of the prologue, "It is God the only Son, who is close to the father's heart, who has made Him known" (John 1:18). The word which *De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* translates as "logeren" (to have board and lodging) thus points to a divine-human reality that has to do with the mutual indwelling of Father and Son and the unity of Jesus and the disciples. To see where Jesus stays means to be introduced into this divine-human relationship. The word "logeren" ("to have board and lodging") evokes the spiritual traditions which express the divine-human relationship in terms of "indwelling". Recognition of this spiritual terminology helps to fathom the spiritual depth in the question of the two disciples.

This is not the only spirituality under discussion. The participants in "Around Scripture" also communicate their spirituality, as a second example discussed at a meeting on the parable of the vine in John 15:1-8 reveals. The metaphor of removing the branches that bear no fruit evoked in the memory of one of the participants the work in the garden when rose bushes had to be pruned. The Biblical metaphor was transformed via a picture from the experiential reality of a group member. During the group's sharing, pruning the rose bushes became an image to express the need to do something about spirituality and the experience of God's love: "Otherwise there will be no roses" (quoted with permission). God's love bears fruit and impacts on humanity. The metaphor expressed the experience that God's love will only impact on human existence if one is committed to and engaged by it. The offer of God's love demands from us that we receive this love and accept it.

This again shows how important it is for the leader of "Around Scripture" to recognise that the participants express and communicate their spirituality and religious experience in their own language and their own metaphors.

## 6. MYSTAGOGICAL CAPABILITIES

In the meetings of "Around Scripture" the experience reflected in the Biblical texts is linked to the contemporary faith and existential experience of the participants. This normally happens in response to the raising of the question as to what the Biblical story evokes in them. This is a legitimate question since the Biblical experience should be emphatically linked to the experience of the participants. This request should not be regarded as simply placing a Biblical experience next to that of the participants. That would imply losing sight of the existential and dynamic character of religious experience and faith communication. The Biblical spirituality and the personal spirituality of the participants then become static quantities and the dynamic connection between them is lost. By reading

and meditation, one can link texts to one's own experience, but reading and meditation also influence that experience. In fact, the reading of and meditation on Biblical texts sometimes even evoke experience. Even Guigo the Carthusian was aware of how experience is borne in reflection. In *Scala claustralium* he describes four steps of spiritual reading: reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*), contemplation (*contemplatio*).<sup>14</sup> The activities in the first phase of “Around Scripture” are easily recognisable as those that Guigo classified under *lectio* and *meditatio*. “Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one's power on it” (Guigo II, *op. cit.*, 68).

Compared to the meditation, an important transition takes place in the *oratio*. The focus is not on the content and the meaning of the text, but rather on the relation to this content. “Prayer is the heart's devoted turning to God ...” (Guigo II, *op. cit.*, 68). Guigo characterises this relationship as “longing”. He calls the fundamental movement of the prayerful reading *desiderium* (longing) which is based on meditation. Meditation leads to prayer. Prayer is fired by meditation. This desire is explicitly directed to God, “... and all the while in my meditation the fire of longing, the desire to know you more fully, has increased” (Guigo II, *op. cit.*, 73). Guigo explains this by referring to Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman who asks Jesus to be given to drink from the living water. “You can see that it was because she had heard the Lord's words and meditated on them that she was moved to prayer. How could she have pressed her petition, had she not first been fired by meditation?” (Guigo II, *op. cit.*, 81).

This shift from *meditatio* to *oratio*, as Guigo depicts it, means that the leader of “Around Scripture” does not direct the sharing to existing experiences which the participants associate with Scripture, but to experiences which are called into existence here and now by the reading of Scripture. This can become even more fruitful when something of the longing which Guigo mentions becomes evident in the more text-orientated phase. In the transition from the phase which focuses more on the text to the more experience-orientated phase, the transition from content to relation takes place. To promote this transition one needs to understand and recognise the language of longing that one feels “when the heart burns”.<sup>15</sup>

From a mystagogical perspective another moment in “Around Scripture” is important. One often experiences that the sharing of the text and one's own

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14 Guigo II, 163,81-123. For an English translation cf. Guigo (1978).

15 Cf. Lk. 24:32. It is remarkable that Guigo and the two disciples of Emmaus use the same image. Guigo speaks of the inflaming of the desire in the *meditatio*, the disciples of Emmaus of the burning of the heart as Jesus spoke to them and opened Scripture to them. Something apparently happens in the conscious transition that easily evokes the image of a flame.

experience lead to a situation in which something about which the text is speaking actually happens. The mystery of the text becomes present in the group. The sharing in the group stops and the group falls silent. The group has found a sojourn, a place to dwell; it experiences a “mystery-full” attention to what is caused by the text and by the sharing and the mutual exchange. Words are no longer needed, and yet, there is a speaking presence.

In this case, it is not advisable to claim God’s presence too soon. In spite of all our knowledge and desire, we too often do not know how God is manifested. Yet the wordless sharing leaves one wondering. Without fixating the mystery, one can perhaps associate this with what Guigo calls contemplation. *Contemplatio* is not the result of one’s own efforts. It does not automatically follow the other phases of the spiritual reading. It is not the natural result of a well-led sharing. It is an initiative “from the other side”.

But the Lord, whose eyes are upon the just and whose ears can catch not only the words, but the very meaning of their prayers, does not wait until the longing soul has said all its say, but breaks in upon the middle of its prayer, runs to meet it in all haste (Guigo II, *op. cit.*, 73-74).

When it happens in the group discussion of the text, when the group falls silent and sojourns with the mystery, it is important to let the silence be and not to obscure the mystery with words that seek to clarify. Wondering, puzzlement, awe and not knowing are more important indications of respect than explanation and clarification.

## 7. AN ATTITUDE OF UNSELFISHNESS

“Around Scripture” is not about the excellence of a group’s leader who guides its sharing. The role of individual leaders is one of serving: serving the text, the participants, the sharing, the communication and the process. They execute their task unselfishly. Their leadership will often be invisible. Much is demanded of them and many talents are required. Probably the greatest contribution of individual leaders is that they do not value their own efforts. They would rather, in an invisible manner, place their capacities at the disposal of the Word and its impact. “Around Scripture” works best when one does not notice leaders and their leadership, but rather surrenders to the leadership of God’s Word.

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Welzen

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