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Student Name: STEPHAN DAMIEN ALEXANDER
Student ID no.: 815011524
Degree Program: BA THEOLOGY
Supervisor: REV. DR. ARNOLD FRANCIS

Title of Thesis:
EXPLORING THE CARIBBEAN HUMANIST PHILOSOPHY OF FR. MICHEL DE VERTEUIL AS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE PRAXIS OF LECTIO DIVINA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Fr. Michel de Verteuil’s praxis of Lectio Divina and the philosophy that undergirds it, with a view to assessing his Caribbean humanist philosophy, its benefit for integral development of Caribbean people and its ability to reshape Caribbean anthropology. To achieve this objective a mixed method approach that is historical, sequential, and exploratory is utilized. The published works of Fr. Michel about Lectio together with ancillary publications that reflect his humanistic development are reviewed. Interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, which are annexed as appendixes to this research paper, were also utilized. The assessment of Fr. Michel’s philosophy and his nuanced method of Lectio reveal a focus on safeguarding the primacy of the person and helping the person to become more fully human. This is done through the attainment of self-possession, and recognition of the common humanity of Caribbean persons which leads to action. Therefore, the continuous exercise of Fr. Michel’s praxis of Lectio can effectively contribute to integral human development, reshaping a Caribbean anthropology and the further development of Caribbean humanist philosophy.
## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Primarily refers to “the conversion of one’s heart, behaving as a disciple and under the discipline of the Truth for our salvation” (Pennington 161).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>A concept used herein to reflect the human person’s separation from significant aspects of himself/herself (Ludz 11).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Unless otherwise indicated, references to the Caribbean region herein are in respect of the English-speaking islands and territories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbeaness</td>
<td>Primarily reflects the Caribbean peoples’ unity in diversity and resilience that was forged from the experiences of trauma and pain occasioned by the Transatlantic slave trade, its legacy, and Caribbean people’s exploitation by the various colonial powers whose pursuit of “Gold, God and Glory” (Lockard par. 1) led to demographic diversity in the region and the formation of a fluid Caribbean identity. These qualities are visible in our expressions of culture and particularly in the art of storytelling that emanates from, inter alia, the festivals, music, and literature in the contemporary Caribbean.</td>
</tr>
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| Christian humanism | Affirms “the dignity of every person as a Child of God, establishes a basic fraternity, teaches people to encounter nature and understand work, provides reasons for joy and humour even in the midst of a very hard life” (Catholic Church sec. 1674). It also upholds “the belief that human freedom, individual conscience, and unencumbered rational
inquiry are compatible with the practice of Christianity or even intrinsic in its doctrine. It represents a philosophical union of Christian faith and classical humanist principles” (New World Encyclopedia).

**Confrère(s)**

Or confrere(s) is used by religious congregations, including members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, otherwise known as “Holy Ghost Fathers” or “Spiritans”, to refer to “fellow members of profession” (Soanes and Hawker 204), namely, colleague(s) within the congregation.

**Critical Consciousness**

A state of in-depth understanding or “critical perception of the world” which facilitates “a comprehension of total reality” that leads persons to actively intervene in reality (Freire 19-20).

**C.S.Sp.**

This is the title used after the name of Spiritans. It is an abbreviation of the congregation’s name in Latin: *Congregatio Sancti Spiritus*.

**Friendship**

Belongs “to the core of the spiritual journey”. It is “a calling forth of each other’s chosenness [sic] and a mutual affirmation of being precious in God’s sight (Beumer 68).

**Hermeneutics**

“The science or art of interpretation” (Viviano 4).

**Homecoming**

Or “coming home” means “walking step by step toward the One who awaits me with open arms and wants to hold me in an eternal embrace” (Nouwen The Return of the Prodigal Son 6). It occurs in “the place within me where God has chosen to dwell. It is the place where I am held safe in the embrace of an all-loving Father who calls
me by name and says, ‘You are my beloved son, on you my favour rests’. It is the place where I can taste the joy and the peace that are not of this world (Nouwen The Return of the Prodigal Son 16).

**Hospitality**

“Means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances, free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a change for the guest to find his own” (Nouwen Reaching 68-69).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Humanism</strong></th>
<th>Is “a term used to designate different philosophical currents which in some way try to tell us what man is and should be” (Sanz 74).</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humanistic psychology</strong></td>
<td>“… aims to be faithful to the full range of human experience… In the science and profession of psychology, humanistic psychology seeks to develop systematic and rigorous methods of studying human beings, and to heal the fragmentary character of contemporary psychology through an ever more comprehensive and integrative approach. Humanistic psychologists are particularly sensitive to uniquely human dimensions, such as experiences of creativity and transcendence, and to the quality of human welfare” (Waterman 125).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integral development</strong></td>
<td>Refers to development of “the whole of the person in every single dimension” (Caritas in Veritate par. 11). Consequently, it concerns development of all aspects of life including the: personal, social, economic, cultural, political, and the spiritual. Herein, the term is used interchangeably with “holistic development”, “authentic human development” or “integral human development”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lectio divina</strong></td>
<td>“Is best translated ‘sacred reading’. It is a reading not only of the Bible, but of experience” (de Verteuil 1996, 10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loneliness</strong></td>
<td>Describes the wounded condition of humanity, namely, our brokenness or incompleteness, which produces an acute awareness of our isolation stemming from a sense of inner emptiness that cannot be satisfied. Properly understood, it is a gift that provides an</td>
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inexhaustible source of self-understanding that invites human persons to transcend their limitations and look beyond the boundaries of their existence (Nouwen The Wounded Healer 83-87).

Novice “A person who has entered a religious order and is under probation, before taking vows” (Soanes and Hawker 694).

Novitiate “The period or state of being a novice in a religious order” (Soanes and Hawker 694).

Ontological vocation Is the call addressed to humans “to be more fully human” (Freire 74).

Pericope “A passage of Scripture; specifically, one that is a self-contained product of oral tradition, or one prescribed for liturgical reading” (Bowker 745). This word is particularly useful because Fr. Michel advises that “Lectio divina is best taught and practised with the church’s Sunday lectionary” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 3) which prescribes liturgical readings.

Praxis “Reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 51).

Secular humanism Also called “Atheistic humanism, falsely considers man to be ‘an end to himself, and the sole maker, with control, of his history’” (Catholic Church sec. 2124). It “celebrates mankind’s intelligence as the key to understanding and explaining our world without the need for God or any other agency or rationale external to man, and at the same time it
affirms our necessary connection with and dependence on each other for mutual support, concern and care” (Broadhurst par. 3).

Becoming fully human Commences by accepting “ourselves are we are, with our own history, and to accept [sic] others as they are” (Vanier 45). Furthermore, it is to cultivate “our gifts, and also to be open to others, to look at them not with a feeling of superiority but with eyes of respect. It means to become men and women with the wisdom of love” (Vanier 11).

Therefore, it leads to “the liberation of the human heart from the … fears that provoke us to exclude and reject others … and leads us to the discovery of our common humanity” (Vanier 14-15) when the singularity and connectedness of human life, evidenced in our shared fragility, is accepted and integrated. It “means to remain connected to our humanness and to reality” (Vanier 45).
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research project is to explore Fr. Michel de Verteuil’s *praxis* of *Lectio Divina* and the philosophy that undergirds it with a view to assessing his Caribbean humanist philosophy, its benefit for integral development of Caribbean people and its ability to reshape Caribbean anthropology. Fittingly, our study is divided into five chapters to attain our goal. In chapter one the rationale and the methodological considerations relative to undertaking this study are established, together with an exposition on Caribbean humanist philosophy. Chapter two studies his humanistic development.

The evolution of *Lectio Divina* is presented in chapter three, and Fr. Michel’s method of *Lectio Divina* is elucidated in chapter four. Chapter five assesses the benefits of his philosophy for integral development of Caribbean people. Recommendations are also adduced in the final chapter. The methodology selected consists of a mixed method approach that features documentary analysis of Fr. Michel’s publications on *Lectio*, ancillary works relative to his *praxis*, and details about his humanistic formation. Interviews, focus groups and questionnaires are also utilized to evaluate Fr. Michel’s *praxis of Lectio* and determine the impact of his philosophy. For ease of reference a Glossary of Terms has been added at the beginning of this research paper.
CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Fr. Michel de Verteuil C.S.Sp. (1929-2014) (hereafter referred to as, “Fr. Michel”) taught and promoted a distinctive method of Lectio Divina (hereafter referred to as Lectio) between 1980 and 2013. He identified Lectio as a “theological method for the Caribbean” (de Verteuil 1994, 31). Moreover, elements of his method reveal an underlying humanistic philosophy that is pertinent to the processes of self-awareness, self-understanding and self-possession. Although Fr. Michel’s method of Lectio has been studied and practiced, no work has been done to explore the philosophy that undergirds it, or how it may enhance Caribbean efforts to attain integral human development and reshaping Caribbean anthropology.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

This study explores the philosophical underpinning of Fr. Michel’s praxis of Lectio, which has been identified as, Caribbean humanist philosophy. Specifically, this paper:

i. explores and defines the concept of Caribbean humanist philosophy;

ii. describes the context in which his philosophical thought developed;

iii. reviews his praxis of Lectio to discern if it discloses humanistic tendencies; and

iv. assesses whether his philosophy is beneficial for integral development of Caribbean people and reshaping Caribbean anthropology.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is Caribbean humanist philosophy?
2. In what context did Fr. Michel’s philosophical thought develop?

3. Does Fr. Michel’s *praxis* of *Lectio* disclose humanistic tendencies?

4. Is Fr. Michel’s philosophy beneficial for integral development of Caribbean people and reshaping Caribbean anthropology?

1.4. **JUSTIFICATION**

Many historical portrayals have depicted the Caribbean and its people as primitive and undeveloped. This image has arguably persisted, and pervaded Caribbean self-consciousness subsequent to Daniel Defoe’s 1719 categorisation of inhabitants\(^1\) in the novel *Robinson Crusoe* as cannibals (Lewis 1). Hence, modern portrayals of the region and its people revolve around recreational enjoyment; the Caribbean, being “a set of islands in the sun full of sun, sand, and sex” (Lewis 1).

The Caribbean has also been understood as “a backward area requiring guidance from outside to modernize it” (Lewis 2). The structure of legal, governmental and other institutions\(^2\) within some Caribbean territories arguably substantiates this. The migration of Caribbean citizens to countries including the United States of America\(^3\) in search of higher standards of education and opportunities for social advancement, also reflects the alienation experienced by Caribbean people.

Consequently, the critical consciousness of Caribbean people must be awakened if they are to attain integral human development, and sustainable development of the region. An

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\(^1\) They are purportedly from the island of Tobago (Lewis 1).

\(^2\) Including: the British monarch as Head of State, and the Privy Council as the final appellate jurisdiction for many regional courts.

\(^3\) The Migration Policy Institute states that “In 2014, approximately 4 million immigrants from the Caribbean resided in the United States” whereas as at September 2016, “the Caribbean diaspora population in the United States is comprised of approximately 6.7 million individuals” (Zong and Batalova).
exploration of Fr. Michel’s Caribbean humanist philosophy is therefore justifiable insofar as it is anchored in the lived reality of Caribbean persons, appreciates the value of each person’s experience – in its positive and negative aspects – and celebrates the ability of human persons to transcend their circumstances. Such consciousness is of practical importance as we continue to seek personal and regional development.

Fr. Michel’s philosophy can also be instrumental in reshaping an anthropology for the region\(^4\) which values all human experiences and appreciates “the intrinsic worth and inviolability of the person” (Bristow 84). His Caribbean humanist approach understands the human person as a unity of body and spirit that is inherently valuable in itself\(^5\) (Catholic Church sec. 362). It promotes the development of the entire person throughout all the stages of human life. Thus, Fr. Michel’s philosophy runs counter to secular anthropological thinking which does not admit the sanctity of human life or the human body due to its discontinuity with religious belief (Engelke S293).

Similarly, Dr. Gerald Boodoo states that secular anthropological approaches encourage “the commodification of human existence”\(^6\) (1). Our exploration of Fr. Michel’s Caribbean humanist philosophy therefore presents an avenue to counteract the contemporary ethos that acquiesces to the commodification of human persons. This can arguably re-establish the primacy of human dignity and curtail the deterioration of values such as respect for life in the Caribbean.

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\(^4\) Gordon Lewis postulates the existence of “a genuine … Caribbean anthropology [as] among a movement of ideas at once created by European ideologies concerned with the New World”. Lewis suggests that this anthropology started “from the very beginning” (25), that is, “the late fifteenth century” (1), and evolved due to a “creolizing movement” (27), which absorbed, assimilated and reshaped the European ideologies “to fit the special and unique requirements of Caribbean society” (27).

\(^5\) This is in terms of Christian anthropology.

\(^6\) Pursuant to the effects of modernity, postmodernity and globalization (Boodoo 1).
1.5. METHODOLOGY

The methodology selected utilizes a mixed method approach that is historical, sequential, and exploratory. Commencing with the literature review, Fr. Michel’s humanistic formation is examined and the evolution of Lectio is reviewed. His method is then elucidated by highlighting its nuances and humanistic tendencies. Finally, Fr. Michel’s philosophy and its impact are assessed to determine its benefit for the integral development of Caribbean people.

Accordingly, primary and secondary sources of information, namely, the published works of Fr. Michel, inclusive of books and journal articles, and publications about his method are evaluated. Literature concerning the evolution of Lectio and the writings of authors whose thinking influenced Fr. Michel’s humanistic development is also reviewed.

Furthermore, the views of his confrères, colleagues and practitioners of Lectio were inquired into to obtain their opinions about Fr. Michel, his method of Lectio, and to determine whether his philosophy was apparent from his praxis. To achieve this, unstructured and semi-structured interviews together with focus groups and questionnaires were utilized (Schreiber 186).

1.6. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on Fr. Michel’s praxis of Lectio and the philosophy that undergirds it to discern whether they can contribute to the integral development of Caribbean people and reshaping Caribbean anthropology.
1.7. **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study reviews the period from 1949 to 2014, namely, the commencement Fr. Michel’s novitiate formation until his death.

1.8. **DEFINING CARIBBEAN HUMANIST PHILOSOPHY**

Caribbean humanist philosophy prioritises the holistic development of Caribbean persons. It is conceptualized as an amalgam of elements emanating from the existent humanistic perspectives in the Caribbean. Included among these perspectives are the diverse views contained within the spheres of Christian humanism, secular humanism, and humanistic psychology. However, Caribbean humanist philosophy is not simply an umbrella term used to contain the region’s humanistic concepts. Its operation is distinctive.

This philosophy specifically contemplates the human condition within the context of life in the region, and is always cognizant of the “historical and cultural synthesis” (Sanz 74) that has led to the evolution of the contemporary Caribbean person and the humanist worldviews emanating from the Caribbean (Sanz 74-75). It focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Caribbean persons and promotes acceptance and integration of same.

Philosophically, it is grounded in the understanding that the human person’s “ontological vocation … is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms [the] world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively” (Freire 32). Accordingly, it is most appropriately described as a *praxis* which facilitates the dynamic application of humanistic tendencies to the lived experiences of Caribbean persons. Through the

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7 Including diverse views encapsulated within the terms Christian humanism, secular humanism, and humanistic psychology. Gordon Lewis notes the early presence of humanistic modes of thought in the Caribbean via the influence of “the late medieval humanism of the Hispanic Mediterranean … [and] English humanitarianism” (27).
aforementioned focus, the process of authentic human development occurs as persons achieve self-awareness, self-understanding, self-acceptance, and self-possession.

This philosophy encourages persons to embrace the circumstances of their Caribbeaness. It lends greater authenticity to their being, and to the way Caribbean persons approach their current reality. The *praxis* helps persons to engage their past and present realities so they can understand themselves and develop a sense of self-worth. Such self-awareness facilitates persons’ discovery of their unique abilities and empowers them to fulfil their true potential to become “more fully human” (Freire 74).

Becoming fully human envisions a process whereby persons accept the value of their experiences and arrive at a true awareness of the oneness of humanity (Vanier 15). This requires that persons become totally aware of the other and proposes affirming: each other’s inherent worth; the close interrelationship between human persons and the world they inhabit; and the element of sacredness of each person. In this way persons act gratuitously in the service of humanity and become a positive force towards the development of our region.

Essentially, this philosophy facilitates holistic growth by allowing Caribbean persons to tell their own story in a way that makes it intelligible to themselves and others and allows them to find their place within Caribbean societies among other human beings. Therefore, it encourages, rather than prohibits, the use of religion, conscience, personal experience and rational inquiry as valid means of understanding the human person. It requires open-mindedness, fosters understanding and is undertaken within an atmosphere of freedom[^8]. It is thus, a humanism that enables Caribbean people to have non-reductionistic understandings of self, others, and the world (Raskin 126).

[^8]: Freedom is conducive to the pursuance of truth, and for achieving authentic human development.
Caribbean humanist philosophy is distinguished from elements within the sphere of Christian humanism that overlook knowledge gained from the human sciences. The incorporation of these insights into Caribbean humanism has facilitated a nuanced and enlarged conception of the Caribbean person that contemplates both the historical and cultural fusion that birthed contemporary Caribbean persons, and “the psychic and material situation of the concrete [Caribbean] individual” (Douglas 86). Reflection on the hopes and frustrations of Caribbean persons which fuel a desire for liberation and underscore the quest for identity are features of this philosophy. Hence, whereas the spiritual component of the person is not excluded, Caribbean Humanism considers untenable a primarily biblical understanding of the person, which fails to consider other dimensions of the person.

Caribbean humanist philosophy does not subscribe to the tendency within secular humanism to acknowledge rational thought as the only valid source of human knowledge, and which wholly subvert the principles of natural law. Such an understanding is reductionistic because it reduces the human person to an object measurable by science, rejects other expressions of human knowledge, and devalues human experience as a determinant towards understanding the human person. Thereby, all elements of subjectivity are removed from the human person, which invalidates conscious experiences associated with the human capacity for transcendence, or those that refer to supernatural beliefs, perspectives and desires, notwithstanding their relevance to the lives of Caribbean people.

The distinction between humanistic psychology and Caribbean humanist philosophy lies in the extended scope of the latter and the narrow scope of the former, which primarily concentrates on the psychological aspect of the person. However, to the extent that humanistic
psychology is faithful to the full range of human experience and adopts an integrative\(^9\) approach to psychotherapy, it is welcomed within the precincts of Caribbean humanist philosophy.

\(^9\) “Primarily it refers to the process of integrating the personality, which includes helping clients to become aware of and assimilate the contents of their fragmented and fixated ego states into an integrated neopsychic ego, to develop a sense of self that decreases the need for defense mechanisms and a life script, and to reengage the world and relationships with full contact. It is the process of making whole: taking disowned, unaware, unresolved aspects of the ego and making them part of a cohesive self [sic]” (Erskine and Trautmann 316).
CHAPTER 2: FORMED IN HUMANISM

2.1. ANTECEDENTS AND INFLUENCES

Before completing studies in Philosophy, Theology, English and Education (Anthony, par. 2), Fr. Michel concluded his novitiate formation where his humanistic development commenced via an introduction to the teachings of the Congregation’s founders, including those of Venerable Francis Libermann. While it is difficult to cite concrete evidence of Libermann’s influence on Fr. Michel, aspects of his priestly ministry reflect Libermann’s promptings “to his priests and brothers to develop sound psychological insights, complemented by a good dose of empathy” (van Kaam, The Life Journey of a Joyful Man of God 192).

Fr. Michel’s desire to understand people and relate to them with “firmness and gentleness” (van Kaam, The Life Journey of a Joyful Man of God 187), and his “deep respect for individuality” (van Kaam, The Life Journey of a Joyful Man of God 192) equally suggests Libermann’s influence. However, his focus on attaining self-possession through growth in self-understanding (van Kaam, The Life Journey of a Joyful Man of God 192-193) is perhaps most reflective of his novitiate formation. Growth in self-understanding helped him to better appreciate others and inspired his search for a method of spiritual and humanistic self-development for Caribbean persons.

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10 Which focused on the history of his Congregation of the Holy Spirit and spirituality.
11 This was a distinct feature of Libermann’s counsels pursuant to the French concept of douceur.
12 This is the evidence of all persons interviewed during preparation of this research project.
This appreciation of self and others developed during Fr. Michel’s study of Aquinas’ notion of the human person\(^\text{13}\) (Clarke 1) and areas including personalism, existentialism and phenomenology\(^\text{14}\). Furthermore, under the tutelage of Thomist Professor, Youssef Fuchs, and New Testament scholar, Professor Ceslas Spicq at Fribourg (E. Johnston, Interview), Fr. Michel’s interest in the “metaphysics of the human person” (Clarke 3) and his love for Scripture\(^\text{15}\) were amplified (E. Johnston, "Interview").

Consequently, Fr. Michel followed developments in philosophy, theology and psychology related to the human person (E. Johnston, Interview). He also studied church documents regarding these disciplines. Hence, Bishop Emeritus of Bridgetown, Malcolm Galt, C.S.Sp. described Fr. Michel as “aware” such developments\(^\text{16}\) (Galt, Interview). Having also quoted Pope John Paul II in his Lectio publications\(^\text{17}\) we submit that Fr. Michel was aware of Karol Wojtyla’s\(^\text{18}\) philosophical method\(^\text{19}\). Wojtyla united the metaphysical and phenomenological traditions to reflect the relational aspect of human beings and provide “an integral vision of the human person created in God’s image and likeness” (Perez-Lopez 40).

Due to his study of Scripture, Fr. Michel “worked out of the economy of the incarnation” (Jordan, "Interview"). He developed an understanding that “the Gospel of Jesus Christ not only

\(^\text{13}\) Fr. Michel studied during the Thomistic renewal (E. Johnston, "Interview"). Specifically, the third phase in the history of Thomism or Neo-Scholasticism which dominated Roman Catholic thought until the Second Vatican Council [1962-65] (Feser par. 7).

\(^\text{14}\) Philosophical theories in relation different aspects of the human person, namely, the subjectivity of the human person, human existence, and human experience and consciousness, respectively.

\(^\text{15}\) Particularly the New Testament which he studied in-depth (E. Johnston, Interview)

\(^\text{16}\) In his Lectio publications Fr. Michel cited Church documents and quoted saints, bishops, theologians and other thinkers, both religious and secular. Examples of this can be found in his book, Lectio Divina with the Sunday Gospels: The Year of Matthew · Year A at pages 24, 38, 41, 47, 52, 53, 63, 67, 108 and 109.

\(^\text{17}\) One such citation is: “All this doctrinal wealth is focused in only one direction, serving one another in our every condition, in our every ailment, in our every way…” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 24).

\(^\text{18}\) Who would later become Pope John Paul II.

\(^\text{19}\) By similar extrapolation, Thomist theologian, W. Norris Clarke’s “‘creative retrieval and completion’ of St. Thomas’s … thought on the metaphysics of the … human person”\(^\text{19}\) (Clarke 1) may have been known by Fr. Michel.
presupposes man’s essence and existence but also brings him to full perfection” ("Theology" sec. D 2.2) because Jesus “fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear [sic]”\(^{20}\) (Pope Paul VI par. 22).

Therefore, Fr. Michel’s interest in the human person, Scriptures, and literature\(^{21}\) – particularly the efficacy of ‘story’ for transforming “the ambivalent and occluded aspects of human experience” (Walton 13) into “theology through life writing” (Walton 14) – further increased his desire to help people: engage “the journey of the self from alienation towards reconciliation with the divine” (Walton 18); traverse “the movement from sin to grace” (Walton 18); and, proceed from their current image of self, towards their true identity and spiritual home (Walton 14).

Most indicative of Fr. Michel’s interests was his usage\(^{22}\) of a quote from the fourth part of T.S. Eliot’s poem *Four Quartets*, entitled *Little Gidding*: “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of our exploring would be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time”\(^{23}\) (sec. V 145). Dr. Everard Johnston suggests that for Fr. Michel, “the image of arriving at a starting point and ‘knowing the place for the first time’ spoke a ‘coming home’ to one’s true self, that is to say, of true self-knowledge and self-acceptance … (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel’s Way 6).

\(^{20}\) As, “he who is ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15) is himself the perfect man” (Pope Paul VI par. 22).

\(^{21}\) He attained an M.A. English and later taught English literature at the Minor Seminary in Nigeria.

\(^{22}\) His colleague and friend, Dr. Everard Johnston recalls Fr. Michel using this quote occasionally during conversations. From the 1970’s Fr. Michel and Dr. Johnston were close friends. They worked together at the Regional Seminary, St. John Vianney and the Uganda Marytrts, Mount St. Benedict in the formation of seminarians.

\(^{23}\) G. Douglas Atkins speaks of Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and particularly *Little Gidding* as representative of the human person’s paradoxical journey and arrival at understanding, premised on the Incarnation, and the need thereafter to “‘fare forward’, … so we move out, from the intellectual and the verbal, whereby right action follows upon right thinking, orthopraxy matching orthodoxy” (124). Hence, this poem is not only reflective of Fr. Michel’s love for Scripture, literature and his interest in the human person, but it is evidence of his continuous growth towards self-realization.
The experience of priestly ministry enhanced Fr. Michel’s humanistic growth. From 1960-1964 (Anthony, par. 3) he was assigned to “All Hallows Seminary … Nigeria” (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel’s Way 4) where he was exposed to Nigerian nationalism with its focus on identity and “projecting the Nigerian personality” (Galt, "Interview"). This experience led Fr. Michel to consider his own identity and “what it meant to be Trinadian” (Galt, "Interview"). Furthermore, the acceptance he received at All Hallows Seminary affirmed his belief that peoples’ search for identity does not discharge them from the responsibility to allow others to freely pursue their own search (E. Johnston, "Interview").

Fr. Michel’s humanistic growth increased on return to Trinidad. From 1965 to 1970 he served as Rector of the Holy Ghost Seminary, Arima when Archbishop Emeritus of Port of Spain, Joseph Harris, C.S.Sp., then a seminarian, alerted him to his ignorance of the lived experience of “black people” (Harris, "Interview") Archbishop Harris told Fr. Michel that “as a black man in Trinidad and Tobago everything I’ve been taught tells me I am second class … but I want to be respected because I’m a man [sic]” (Harris, "Interview"). Archbishop Harris sees this incident as the point of practical change for Fr. Michel, who developed a profound appreciation for others and consciously began to relate to people in a way that affirmed and empowered them.

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24 A feature of the Nigerian independence movement which culminated with independence in 1960.
25 This is attested to by Bishop Galt who was a friend and schoolmate of Fr. Michel at St. Mary’s College, Port of Spain and Kimmage Manor Seminary, Dublin, Ireland. They served as priests together in Nigeria and Trinidad.
26 Although he was a foreign priest of French creole origin, who looked exactly like the persons they were seeking independence from, Fr. Michel was considered, “one of us” (All Hallows Seminary 4) by the seminarians.
27 Fr. Michel was of French creole origins. Archbishop Harris’ implication is that Fr. Michel’s skin colour insulated him from the experience of the “black person” hence he was not “conscious” of their reality (Harris, "Interview").
The socio-political context of the Caribbean between 1960 and 1980 also enhanced Fr. Michel’s relational approach. The regional independence movements and the events surrounding the 1970 Black Power Revolution prompted convulsions in society, and among seminarians (Galt, "Interview"). From 1970-1978 Fr. Michel served as Rector of the Regional Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs (Anthony, par. 3). Because he understood “his role as Rector as primarily … accompanying the seminarians in the process of discernment” (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel's Way 3), Fr. Michel developed the skill of being present to his seminarians, allowing them the freedom to express their struggles with issues of personal and national identity (Galt, "Interview").

Dr. E. Johnston avers that from 1971 Fr. Michel’s focus on understanding his role as Rector led to his growing interest in how psychology can illumine “aspects of one’s life in the spirit” (Fr. Michel's Way 3). Fr. Michel was initially influenced by his confrère, Fr. Adrian van Kaam, a humanistic psychologist. However, of greater influence to his humanistic development was the combined impact of Fr. Miceal O’Regan, O.P., psychologist and Vice-Rector at the Regional Seminary, and Fr. Henri Nouwen whom Fr. Michel worked with as a research fellow at Yale University during his sabbatical between 1973 to 1974 (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel's Way 3). Their influence facilitated the “psycho-spiritual turn” (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel's Way 3) in Fr. Michel, which prompted the integration of Nouwen’s perspectives on: friendship

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28 His manner of relating exemplified his humanistic vision.
29 The seminarians were from different islands. Convulsions were ongoing and coincided with each island’s struggle for independence. Convulsions often arose due to inter-island rivalry between seminarians from independent islands and those whose island had not yet attained independence (Galt, Interview).
30 Fr. van Kaam visited Trinidad (The Life Journey of a Joyful Man of God 206) in 1972 on Fr. Michel’s invitation.
31 From van Kaam, Fr. Michel discerned the need for the human person to, inter alia, “stand out into reality, to participate in being, to be present to all that is [sic]” (Religion and Personality 1) and “the role of transcendent self-presence in the spiritual life” (In Search of Spiritual Identity 172) as part of the process towards developing a transcendent self-understanding, which helps to deepen self-knowledge (In Search of Spiritual Identity 142).
32 Fr. O’Regan’s encouragement prompted this research fellowship.
(Beumer 68), hospitality (Reaching Out 68-69), loneliness (The Wounded Healer 83-87), and homecoming (The Return of the Prodigal Son 14) into his humanistic vision.

Hence, Fr. Michel’s *praxis* exemplifies Nouwen’s beliefs that “what is most personal is most universal” (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel’s Way 3), and “God is … Someone, hidden but nevertheless present in our lives and the life of the world, as a living reality, most brilliantly illuminated in humanity” (Beumer 167). Accordingly, Dr. E. Johnston underscores this “psychospiritual turn” as the ultimate inspiration for Fr. Michel’s pursuit of:

a method or process whereby persons, ordinary persons33, unlettered persons, can grow both in self-awareness and in relationship to God in Jesus Christ, through bringing to consciousness and to speech, experiences of their lives in which they identify the presence and action of God. Such a method or process Fr. Michel found in *lectio divina*, to which he gave his own formulation and nuances and which he developed after relinquishing the rectorship of the Seminary and founding the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre34, (Fr. Michel's Way 3).

The nuances aforementioned are grounded in Fr. Michel’s Caribbean humanist philosophy, which focuses on integral human development. As he grew in self-understanding, Fr. Michel became fully aware of the effects of alienation on Caribbean people, not solely as a shared condition of our humanity but as a historical reality of exploitation brought about through the “forced and despairing situation” (Boodoo 7) of colonization and its legacy in contemporary

33 To this we add lay persons (laity), namely, persons who are not clergy or members of religious congregations because Fr. Michel’s method was developed as a “theology of the people” for those in non-clerical life (de Verteuil, "A Theological" 34).
34 Fr. Michel was the founder and director for the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre from 1980-2003 (Anthony, par. 3).
Caribbean society\textsuperscript{35}. Fr. Michel’s understanding of this was affirmed in his various encounters with ordinary Caribbean people who were often unable to see themselves as a Jesus figure or the good character in Gospel accounts\textsuperscript{36} (Bengochea, Interview).

Therefore, he sought to foster a true understanding of the human condition among Caribbean people to help them accept their woundedness as an expression of our common humanity. Hospitality was a major contributor to this mission since it creates an atmosphere of openness, devoid of rejection\textsuperscript{37}, where people can become self-aware and accept themselves. In this process both the guest and the host become united and are enriched by each other’s giftedness (Nouwen, Reaching Out 64-65). Consequently, they are able to experience a “coming home” which assists the process of becoming fully human.

Accordingly, Fr. Michel adapted the classical method of \textit{Lectio} to create a hospitable environment where healing relationships could be developed among Caribbean persons who suffered from the effects of loneliness, alienation and estrangement. His method gradually changes the consciousness of practitioners and empowers them to recognise their life experience as coinciding with the Bible\textsuperscript{38}, which reveals that each person’s “story of grace is the deep truth of the person”\textsuperscript{39} (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 2).

\textsuperscript{35} An example of Fr. Michel’s growth is demonstrated by his public apology to persons present at the Antilles Pastoral Institute meeting in Barbados in 1972 for his forefathers’ role in slavery and exploitation of the descendants of enslaved Africans (Edinborough, Interview).

\textsuperscript{36} They were able to “identify with the characters but remain[ed] foreigners to them” (de Verteuil, Your Word 13) or could only associate themselves with negative characters in the Gospel (Bengochea, Interview). Fr. Michel described this as “alienating reading” (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 13).

\textsuperscript{37} Fr. Michel’s exclusion of “moralising” (E. Johnston, Fr. Michel’s Way 7) from his method of \textit{Lectio}, specifically because “the wisdom moment is not the time for moral exhortation” ("Your Word" 23) exemplifies this.

\textsuperscript{38} And vice versa.

\textsuperscript{39} Just as the Bible story reveals the double reality of sin and grace in every human person, it affirms the story of grace – and not the story of sin – as the true identity of the human person and helps practitioner to identify themselves as God’s people (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 2). This is the “truth about life” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 2).
CHAPTER 3:
LECTIO’S DEVELOPMENT

3.1. LECTIO’S BEGINNINGS

The method that Fr. Michel adapted to help ordinary persons enter into communion with God and grow in self-possession is firstly observed in the Bible\textsuperscript{40}. Fr. Michel cites “Isaiah 43:16-21” ("Your Word" 15) as evidence of this. He identifies three movements in this passage: firstly, storytelling that speaks to the imagination; then, recognising the similarity between God’s action in the story and in the present situation; and finally, ownership and reinterpretation of the story leads to new perspective (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 15-16). Through Isaiah’s action Fr. Michel sees the ability for readers and hearers of “Bible text, [to] see it come to alive in the present, and become a promise for the future” ("Your Word" 16).

Prior to being “systematised in the fourth and fifth centuries” (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 3) Lectio was observed as a “primitive practice” (Van Dyk 18) within the early Church. This practice “was a disciplined hermeneutic” (Van Dyk 18) comprising ‘stages’ of lectio – meditatio – oratio” (Van Dyk 19), with each stage associated with reading, meditation and prayer, respectively. Lectio was practised “as an early lay movement, a theological enterprise by the early Church Fathers, a monastic exercise begun by the Desert [Fathers] or as a quest for a spirituality” (Van Dyk 17).

The early Church Fathers practised Lectio as “an endeavour to study, understand and put into practice the Sacred Scriptures to transform a life into prayer personified” (Van Dyk 25). It “was a tutorial in the classroom of life with God as the real Teacher of truth”. For the Desert

\textsuperscript{40} Although the practice was not yet known by that name.
Alexander 30

Fathers, *Lectio* was “done in private” (Keating 13) and focused on establishing “the Word of God at the centre of the monk’s life” (Van Dyk 21). Their practice primarily “consisted in following the movement of the Holy Spirit in regard to the time one might devote to each step of the process, as well as passing from one step to another during the same period of prayer” (Keating 13).

### 3.2. MEDIEVAL EXPANSION

The method elaborated by Guigo II, a twelfth century Carthusian monk (Daniel 6), demonstrates *Lectio*’s evolution during the Scholastic period. He divided “the process into stages or steps in a hierarchical pattern” (Keating 13) and added a fourth step (Guigo II 67). His practice begins with “reading (*lectio*) that leads us to muse over what we have read (*meditatio*). That reflection, in turn, urges us to respond in prayer (*oratio*), which finally leads us to quiet rest (*contemplatio*) in God” [sic] (Cunningham 13). For Guigo, *Lectio*’s fruitfulness depends on the participant’s disposition when encountering the scriptures, not the action of going through the steps (Cunningham 13).

Other contemporaneous methods of *Lectio* adapted the stages while remaining faithful to scholastic form. Hugh of St. Victor’s practice introduced *operatio*, namely, operation of action or good works to the four scholastic stages (Van Dyk 19), while William of St Thierry’s reformulated method focused on the “the stages of the journey from ‘animal’ to ‘rational’, to ‘spiritual’ being” (Green 224) and respectively prioritized: imitation, exercising reason and judgment devoid of love, and enlightenment by the Holy Spirit[^41] (Green 225).

[^41]: The methods promoted by Hugh of St. Victor (Van Dyk 19), and William of St Thierry (Green 216) are twelfth century models of *Lectio*. 
3.3. **CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS**

Modern attempts to renew *Lectio* have also adapted the scholastic method. Cardinal Martini\(^{42}\) gave his own formulation to Guigo’s method of *Lectio* by introducing “two additional steps of *discretio* (discernment) and *actio* (action) … after *contemplatio*” (Van Dyk 20) because *Lectio* should lead people to discern what the Word of God is saying to them and, further, an understanding of how to act upon what has been discerned. Cardinal Martini promoted this practice to groups as a prayerful technique “to enhance a sense of community and as a way of fostering deeper Christian commitment while engendering a spirit of Christian activism” (Cunningham 14).

Likewise, in 2010 Pope Benedict XVI added *actio*, “which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity” (par. 87), to Guigo’s method while affirming *Lectio*’s ability to open “up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, [and bring] about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God”. Otherwise, M. Basil Pennington retains the scholastic stages. However, his renewal of *Lectio* emphasises the aspect of listening and identifies *Lectio* as “an experiential hearing of the word of God” (4) or “prayer at a deep experiential level” (27). The experience is of “God who speaks [God’s words], speaks them to us to be heard by us, making himself present, as any lover might, by communicating his love” (Pennington 4).

Fr. Michel’s *praxis of Lectio* is similar to the aforementioned methods to the extent that each method seeks to encourage individuals to interact with the divinely inspired “Word of God” through a structured process that leads participants into a contemplative state (Daniel 5).

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\(^{42}\) Cardinal Martini was a “Jesuit scripture scholar” (Cunningham 13-14) and the Archbishop of Milan from 1980 to 2002. His reflection, “The Word was made flesh in the incarnation, and ever since we have tried to make that flesh into Word again” is cited by Fr. Michel in his book entitled, *Lectio Divina with the Sunday Gospels: The Year of Matthew - Year A* (25).
However, the unique formulation that Mr. Michel gave to Lectio was specifically geared towards helping ordinary Caribbean persons\textsuperscript{43} better understand and accept the truth of themselves and others who share a sense of loneliness and alienation that is common to the experience of Caribbean persons.

\textsuperscript{43} Unlettered persons and lay people.
CHAPTER 4:
OBSERVING HIS PRAXIS

4.1. READING, MEDITATION AND PRAYER

A succinct exposition of Fr. Michel’s method of Lectio\textsuperscript{44} identifies a three-staged process comprising “reading, meditation and prayer”\textsuperscript{45} ("Your Word" 17). These stages are consecutive. They bring about a continuous movement from stage one to stage three\textsuperscript{46}. This progression invites persons to reverently read the passage aloud so that the words may “sink in and reverberate within” them (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 18). This allows the pericope to stimulate memories within them so that they may “recognize it in [their] own experience or that of people who have touched [their] lives” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 1). Prayer flows from reading and meditation. It is generally expressed as “thanksgiving, humility and petition” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 1).

Regarding stage one, Fr. Michel recommends that the pericope be read several times ("Your Word" 18). His method prefers an objective approach so that practitioners can discern “the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture”\textsuperscript{47} (Catholic Church 31), understanding what the inspired authors intended\textsuperscript{48} (Viviano 1) and “follow the movement of thought” (de Verteuil, "Let All" 21). This enables a deeper awareness so that practitioners become familiar with the text, the words resonate within them, and they feel love for them (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 17). Remaining attentive as the pericope is read, and “open to being touched by any part of it” (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 18) is key. Practitioners are to focus on the exact words of the text,

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\textsuperscript{44} Herein, “Lectio” with uppercase “L” refers to the method of Lectio Divina.
\textsuperscript{45} In Latin, lectio, meditatio, and oratio. Lowercase “l” in “lectio” refers to reading; stage one of the method.
\textsuperscript{46} These steps can be repeated in order to deepen reflection on the Bible passage (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 21).
\textsuperscript{47} This is the “literal sense” of Scripture, namely “the sense the human author intended” (Viviano 1).
\textsuperscript{48} The purpose of reading in Fr. Michel’s method is identified at page 27 herein.
and are not to add or subtract from it as they seek to situate the text in its historical and literary contexts⁴⁹ (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 18).

Fr. Michel identifies meditation as central to his praxis because it determines “whether you do a good Lectio or not” ("Practising" par. 23). For him, meditation “is not, as in other forms of prayer, a time of interior silence” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 24). It is “a moment of [interior] activity” (de Verteuil, "Let All" 21). A subjective process by which persons enter the Bible passage through their imagination, “identifying with the characters and with the movement”⁵⁰ (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 24). Participants are encouraged to situate themselves in the pericope, become conscious of their emotions and how the passage fits their personal experiences (de Verteuil, "Let All" 21).

Through mediation, practitioners recognize the characters from the pericope in their lived experiences or the lives of persons who influenced them (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 24). Whether they recognize characters as friends, exemplars, or in need of correction, meditation helps practitioners to discover for themselves “the truth of the passage”; that “this is true to life” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 24). Integrating meditation into practitioners’ daily routines is advised, to facilitate “a real dialogue between experience and text” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 34).

Prayer flows from meditation. It includes contemplation, which occurs as prayer deepens (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 23). Practitioners commence praying in their own words but

⁴⁹ As a general principle, Fr. Michel suggests that it is good to seek help only in order to get your imagination going. (de Verteuil 1999, Reading). However, as it concerns situating the text, it may be helpful to consult a teacher or a written commentary on the Bible (de Verteuil 1996, 19).

⁵⁰ So, they recognize the connection between the movement of the pericope and their life. Namely, that the Gospel is their story because they recognise themselves in the Gospel and the Gospel in themselves. See also page 26 herein where this aspect of Fr. Michel’s praxis was identified.
ultimately pray using the words of the pericope\(^{51}\) (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 27). Fr. Michel avers that “the combination of objectivity and subjectivity [that] leads to prayer” ("Let All" 21) also leads practitioners to deepen their meditation by repeating Lectio’s three stages ("Practising" par. 28). Accordingly, Lectio is an ongoing process whereby practitioners “enter more and more deeply into a passage and at the same time more and more deeply into … [themselves]” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 29).

When prayer becomes “simpler”\(^{52}\) (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 31), fewer words are used\(^{53}\) and the heart prays instead of the lips, contemplation has begun (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 24). In Fr. Michel’s praxis, this aspect of prayer is preceded by “the wisdom moment” ("Your Word" 22) or the moment of insight when practitioners “understand some aspect of grace or sin for the first time or at least more clearly than ever before” ("Practising" par. 32). Here, he specifies that the “wisdom moment is not the time for moral exhortation” (de Verteuil 1996, 23) since moralising reading greatly limits the process of Lectio\(^{54}\) (de Verteuil 1996, 24). When Lectio has led practitioners to “wisdom and is now an act of theological reflection” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 32), Lectio has effectively ended (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 33).

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\(^{51}\) For Fr. Michel, this affirms that practitioners have entered into the Bible passage and are engaging the method.

\(^{52}\) So that differentiation between thanksgiving, humility and petition ceases (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 31).

\(^{53}\) Because “one line sums up all” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 31) that has been obtained from the pericope.

\(^{54}\) Fr. Michel’s prohibition on moralising recognizes that such a reading of the text is in opposition to Jesus’ pedagogical approach, which is generally in the form of “wisdom teaching” ("Your Word" 22). He also notes that moral consequences are implied in the insight so it is not necessary to state them expressly as the commitment to implement them occurs organically (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 23).
4.2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Effective Lectio\textsuperscript{55} is contingent on the application of six principles\textsuperscript{56} that focus on: life experience, imagination, self-discovery, awareness, inclusivity, and interpretation. Fr. Michel asserts that Lectio is firstly, “a dialogue between the written biblical word and life experience” ("Your Word" 3). In this dialogue life experiences illuminate the biblical word and the biblical word illuminates life experiences so that the Word comes to life in us and transforms life experiences into God’s word “spoken to us [sic]” (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 3).

Secondly, Lectio invites practitioners to enter into the movement of the pericope through their imagination so they discover that the movement of the pericope is also the movement of their lives (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 3). Thirdly, practitioners “discover a double story of sin and grace, first in the Bible and then in [their] individual lives, in the history of every community and of humanity itself”\textsuperscript{57} (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 3). Since Lectio is equally the exercise of theology and prayer, it inspires awareness\textsuperscript{58} via “new insight into the workings of sin and grace in [practitioners’] lives and in the lives of others”\textsuperscript{59} (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 3-4). This facilitates a response “to the exercise of sin and grace in [their] lives”\textsuperscript{60} (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 3).

Regarding inclusivity, Fr. Michel asserts that Lectio “can be done by all, irrespective of educational background”\textsuperscript{61} (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 4). The principle about interpretation

\textsuperscript{55} Pursuant to Fr. Michel’s praxis.
\textsuperscript{56} These principles undergird Fr. Michel’s praxis of Lectio.
\textsuperscript{57} Awareness of this helps practitioners to recognize their common humanity, which is a requirement of the process to become more fully human.
\textsuperscript{58} This fourth principle is pivotal because it creates awareness of our common humanity which encourages action.
\textsuperscript{59} As the exercise of theology.
\textsuperscript{60} As the exercise of prayer.
\textsuperscript{61} Lectio can even be done by illiterate people because once the method is followed all persons can, “make [the] text come alive” (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 4).
affirms that “both personal freedom and the sense of community” (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 4) are required. Fr Michel notes that a hermeneutic foundation is normally established when practitioners share their personal responses to the text in “the parish community” ("A Theological" 35). This allows insights to be shared, and where necessary, guidance “to clarify the meaning of the text” (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 14) or issues of methodology.

External to these guiding principles but equally important to Fr. Michel’s praxis is his identification of Lectio as “story-reading of the Bible” ("Your Word" 13). In acknowledgement of the use of “story” in Caribbean culture as a powerful means of teaching and communicating values (de Verteuil 1996, 11-12), Fr. Michel utilises this feature to help practitioners achieve self-awareness. To wit, he advances a “homecoming reading” (de Verteuil 1996, 13) of the pericope which allows practitioners to understand themselves, by discovering in the passage their own stories as well as the stories of people who influenced their lives (de Verteuil 1996, 14).

Such story-reading helps practitioners to become conscious of who they are and where they have come from (de Verteuil 1996, 14). Thereafter, practitioners can better communicate the story of who they are becoming. Fr. Michel’s recommendation that Lectio be done with the Gospels provided in “the church’s Sunday lectionary” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 3) is instructive. The Gospels present portraits of Jesus therefore engaging the Gospels mean engaging Jesus who helps practitioners to understand themselves and others.

4.3. Tendencies Revealed

The method just elaborated is distinctively humanistic. It focuses on the experiential and the rational aspects of the human person. Specifically, it concentrates on developing these said

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62 Interpretation must be personal and specific to the experience of each practitioner. However, it must also be in keeping with the Church’s interpretation as expressed through the tradition. Community facilitates the latter aspect.
human capacities through a process that encounters Caribbean people within the context of their life experiences, and facilitates the “interplay between theology and ordinary life experiences” (de Verteuil, "A Theological" 36) to inspire self-awareness, self-understanding and self-acceptance.

Thus, Fr. Michel’s method of Lectio enables practitioners to “become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way” (Jas 1:4b), namely, to become more fully human. The implications of this are also anthropological since discovery of common humanity reveals essential truths about participants shared human condition that affirms humanity’s leaning toward the divine and contradicts a reductionistic understanding of the human person.

Understanding the person in such non-reductionistic terms presents a direct challenge to the instrumentalization of the human person and leads to a renewed respect for human life in the Caribbean.

Similarly, the combination of life experience, imagination and proper interpretation allows practitioners to enter into themselves as they read the Bible passage, making Lectio “a sacred reading of life” (de Verteuil, "A Theological" 37). Furthermore, practitioners “begin to interpret what is going on in society” as they “develop critical consciousness” (de Verteuil, "A Theological" 37-38). This enables practitioners to become more aware of their own gifts and the gifts of others. Consequently, practitioners are more likely to

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63 Especially the acceptance and integration of practitioners’ history and their Caribbeaness.
64 This translation is taken from The New Jerusalem Bible (Wansbrough 1996).
65 Inclusive of past and present experiences.
66 Adequate understanding of the meaning of the pericope and the literary and historical elements contained therein.
67 That is, no matter their level of education, social status or their religious involvement.
68 Discovering one’s gifts within the context of their common humanity leads persons to cultivate said gifts in a way that allows them to be open to others, and to look at others with respect, empathy and love rather than an attitude of superiority (Vanier 11).
recognize their common humanity as a ground from which to act rationally, ethically and compassionately in addressing the various challenges of contemporary Caribbean societies.

Additionally, the method’s focus on “the relational aspect of being human” (Selling par. 1) demonstrates Fr. Michel’s understanding of “the human person [as] a multi-dimensional being” (Selling par. 1) and confirms his desire to encourage holistic development of the person. Philosophically, the relationality of human persons admits understanding of persons as intentional beings who are in relation with all of reality (Selling par. 4). Relationality avers that human persons “stand in relation to reality not merely physically but intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually as well” (Selling par. 4). It recognizes that human persons “relate through physical presence but also through our imagination” (Selling par. 4).

Thus, by establishing imagination as the gateway to meditation, and Fr. Michel encourages practitioners to involve all dimensions of themselves in the exercise of Lectio, especially when Lectio is done in community. Human relationality is organically discerned when practitioners share their insights within a group as they are led to consider others, and themselves. Practitioners, thus, understand themselves as “conscious interiority” as they recognize that they are “not simply a material, cultural, historical, social, relational entity but also a ‘self’ … as a subject” (Selling par. 12). This encounter with self provides the foundation for self-understanding and self-possession which are vital to attaining integral development.

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69 Professor Joseph A. Selling identifies 8 dimensions of the person from the position of Christian Ethics and philosophy, namely: original, intentional, intimate, interiority, material, historical, cultural and corporeal. Through imagination, Fr. Michel’s method extends beyond engaging the rational mind to the other dimensions.

70 This affirms the humanizing nature of his method since it contains elements that allow human persons to understand and accept themselves, which fosters the process of holistic growth or becoming more fully human.
4.4. **HUMANISTIC FOCUS**

The humanistic focus of this method was particularly apparent during the exercise of Fr. Michel’s method\(^ {71}\) and through observation of its results\(^ {72}\). The components of “prayer and activity”\(^ {73}\) (de Verteuil, "Practising" par. 6), that make *Lectio* “a people’s theology” (de Verteuil, "A Theological" 34) served as a vehicle to elevate individual insights gained from Bible reading to anthropological indicators about human nature when shared within the *Lectio* group. This occurred because practitioners’ personal reflections allowed others to experience the pericope from a different perspective, enabling them to recognize in themselves each other’s story. Their awareness of the Gospels’ application to other areas of their life also increased.

The sharing of experiences\(^ {74}\) in the group appeared genuine. Practitioners did not attempt to preach to other members. When some participants’ insights demonstrated a tendency towards moralising or to a disproportionate focus on experiences of sin, group members sought to affirm those participants’ experiences while helping them to recognize their experiences of grace. This served to empower participants by valuing their experiences and consequently their personhood. It also evidenced growth in understanding the common humanity of group members.

Additionally, the relationships among practitioners of the *Lectio* groups we visited and their efforts at humanitarian outreach both demonstrated the relational aspect of the human person and the impact of Lectio’s humanistic focus in participants’ lives. Despite the eclectic

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71 We have ourselves been trained in this method of *Lectio* and occasionally attend Lectio meetings, the last two of which were hosted by the “Homecomers” lectio group (formed by Fr. Michel) and the Bible Circle Movement prayer group whose facilitators were trained by Fr. Michel. These meetings were hosted on 16.3.18 and 16.4.18 respectively.

72 It was also attested to by practitioners of *Lectio* who were interviewed during preparation of this research project.

73 Hence Fr. Michel identifies *Lectio* as, “a method of theology” ("A Theological" 36).

74 Some dating back to childhood or early life experiences.
composition\textsuperscript{75} of both groups practitioners related as if they family member, they were comfortable in sharing intimate insights and ended their \textit{Lectio} sessions with a meal\textsuperscript{76}. Also, the majority of members of the Bible Circle Ministries \textit{Lectio} group are involved in social activities directly involved in caring for and empowering human persons, including humanitarian outreach to asylum seekers in Trinidad.

\textsuperscript{75} The group comprised people of varied ages, educational backgrounds, social standing, career status and levels of church participation
\textsuperscript{76} Members of the Homecomers group indicated that this practise was initiated by Fr. Michel. Members of the Bible Circle Ministries did not associate this detail with Fr. Michel’s influence but as an organic occurrence stemming from the growth in relationship among members.
CHAPTER 5:
ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. ASSESSMENT

Fr. Michel stated in a 2007 documentary entitled *Fr. Michel de Verteuil, Theologian & Friend* that “the wonderful thing in the world today is to be human, not to be Christian, but to be human” (Edinborough, "Documentary" 35:41). This understanding which he credits to his interaction with practitioners from the different religions in Trinidad and Tobago exemplifies his “deep respect for the value of each human person” (Harvey, "Interview"), and the inclusive nature of his Caribbean humanist philosophy.

His philosophy appreciates the intrinsic worth and inviolability of all Caribbean persons and values their experiences as equally essential to their selfhood and communion with Caribbean people. Accordingly, it promotes a holistic vision of the Caribbean person that stems from an ontological focus on human nature, and the living experience of the human beings in the Caribbean. Thus, it specifically contemplates the human condition within the context of life in the region with a view to facilitating the holistic development of Caribbean persons.

A significant feature of his philosophy is its endeavour to help Caribbean persons embrace their Caribbeaness as an essential aspect of self-possession. This envisions a process whereby persons living within the Caribbean context can come to recognise and accept, *inter alia*, the sense of alienation they experience as the result of a historical reality of oppression and exploitation. This directly corresponds to the aspects of Fr. Michel’s *praxis* of Lectio that facilitates recognition of experiences of sin and grace in the individual and collective stories of Caribbean persons.
Within this recognition comes the awareness that these stories “are not equally true, … the story of grace [being] the deep truth of the person” (de Verteuil, "Lectio" 2). Consequently, participants appreciate their story and the stories of fellow Caribbean persons, which equates to appreciation of the Caribbean story and acceptance of their Caribbeaness. Furthermore, appreciating the aforementioned truth is particularly noteworthy as it signals a move away from a negative view of Caribbean persons, precipitated by alienation, to a primary focus on all that is good in respect of Caribbean persons who are gradually attaining self-possession and therefore advancing along the process of integral development.

Viewed in this way, Lectio creates an avenue for practitioners to look at the Bible from the point of view of liberation and more importantly, to experience their own liberation through Bible reading. The impact of liberation creates a sense of empowerment and ownership of ones’ situation through a change of consciousness that leads to activity. This is represented in the liberated practitioners changing vision of reality which allows for, inter alia, greater social involvement to counteract the social ills such as violence and poverty. The basis of said activity is grounded in the practitioner’s growing closeness to God and to the recognition of their shared human condition.

Anthropological consequences also arise from the movement towards self-possession, which affects the conception of the Caribbean person. The ability for practitioners of Fr. Michel’s method of Lectio to reinterpret their stories after encountering Christ in the Gospels is equivalent to reinterpreting the self, particularly as this conception changes due to the growing appreciation of their common humanity. More profoundly for practitioners, however, is the reminder that the living experience of the human being alone, does not connote the person. This is affirmed when practitioners engage Jesus in the Gospel and encounter in him, the true essence
of humanity who makes clear, the ontological vocation of each human person. This renewed conception of the person and the self-awareness that it causes helps practitioners “to be free and transforming agents” (de Verteuil, "A Theological" 35).

The above remains true even if the practitioner is not a Christian. Fr. Michel’s praxis is deliberately inclusive so that all persons can do Lectio (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 4). Once the method is followed even a purely narrative reading of the Gospels will allow non-Christian practitioners to find meaning in the passage and may even lead to the wisdom moment (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 4). This is particularly so because of Fr. Michel’s use of story ("Your Word" 13) and his guidance with respect to homecoming reading of the biblical passage. Following the method will also allow practitioners to recognise their shared human condition. Additionally, because the insights during Lectio are expressed as universal statements they can be shared with all persons including non-Christians (de Verteuil, "Your Word" 4). This is perhaps why Fr. Michel was insistent that Lectio be done with the Sunday Gospels in community.

The recommendations that Lectio be done in community with the Sunday Gospel displays an approach that is profoundly incarnational. It recognized that “God had become a human being and so, the human being could have a Godward dimension” (Jordan, "Interview"). The philosophical implications of this human tendency to the divine – as it relates to human nature – supports the inclusion of the spiritual dimension in Fr. Michel’s Caribbean humanist philosophy. Additionally, it is a further step towards reshaping a Caribbean Anthropology.

Fr. Michel’s interactions with people were based on his understanding of the incarnation, and the growth of his humanistic vision, which led him to develop a profound respect for each human person. Hence, his dealings with persons and ultimately his nuanced method of Lectio
focused on safeguarding the primacy of the person and helping the person be the best that he thought the person could be (Jordan, "Interview"). Having regard to the above, a distinctly humanistic vision can be discerned from Fr. Michel’s praxis of Lectio. The research conducted herein suggests that this philosophy and the praxis of Lectio can effectively contribute to integral human development in the Caribbean and reshaping a Caribbean anthropology. It is however accepted that further research need to be conducted to verify our findings.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered form our interviewees, questionnaires, focus groups our experience of Lectio with the Homecomers, and Bible Circle Ministry Lectio groups, we recommend that:

1. Lectio is most effective when done in a community. Within the group setting practitioners’ benefit more from the personal experiences and shared insights of members, which help them to understand themselves, others, and how Jesus works in their lives.

2. An atmosphere of hospitality is central to good Lectio. Practitioners will not freely share their insights and experiences if they are do not feel comfortable.

3. The Lectio group should be sufficiently diverse to achieve a greater spectrum of views and experiences. The more diverse the group the greater the experience and the more participants will learn.
4. When necessary more freedom should be allowed in respect of how practitioners’
   experience connects with Jesus in the Gospel. Diversity is to be encouraged. It broadens
   practitioners’ perspectives to see new ways in which Christ works in the life and
   strengthens the sense of common humanity.

5. Doing Lectio continuously for an extended period of time will expand practitioners’
   appreciation of each other. This will help to shape Caribbean humanism as we enter into
   our experience as Caribbean people.

6. More expansive research be done by the Church to better ascertain the impact of Lectio
   Divina in the lives of practitioners, including non-Christian practitioners. Specifically,
   whether this practice leads to integral human development, to what extent and how long
   it takes for Lectio to seriously impact practitioners. Responses to our questionnaires
   indicated that a few months was sufficient for this practice to affect practitioners.
   However, the impact of sustained practice over years seemed to provide best results. This
   would assist the Church in developing an effective plan to help parishioners along their
   journey toward Christ, towards becoming fully human.
CONCLUSION

As a result of his personal journey towards self-possession and communion with God, Fr. Michel de Verteuil formulated his method of Lectio as a means of assisting ordinary people to develop a better grasp of Christianity and of themselves. Lectio would thus allow them to experience growth in relationship to God in Jesus Christ and self-awareness through bringing to consciousness and speech, the daily experiences of their lived reality. This would better allow ordinary people identify and be aware of the presence and action of God in their living experiences.

His praxis of Lectio was propagated as a method of theology for the Caribbean, within the overall context of promoting “feet on the ground theology” (de Verteuil, "Editorial" 2). As its name implies, feet on the ground theology is complementary to Lectio, which Fr. Michel’s designates as “a people’s theology” (de Verteuil 1994, 34) that can only be done “in a life setting” (de Verteuil 1994, 34). His praxis of Lectio and the philosophy that undergirds therefore seeks to encounter ordinary people where they are, within the context of their lived reality.

The two-fold purpose this praxis – already identified above – ultimately seeks to convey to practitioners a sense to their true identity, that is to say, the truth of who they are, while reinforcing the aspect of their common humanity. These elements jointly provide a framework which affirms our suggestion that the practice of Lectio leads practitioners to become more fully human and furthermore to the development of a Caribbean humanist philosophy. Accordingly, we sought to explore Fr. Michel’s Caribbean humanist philosophy, its benefit for integral development of Caribbean people and its ability to reshape Caribbean anthropology via an examination of his method of Lectio.
This said examination of Lectio, as evidenced in the questionnaires exhibited as “Appendix B” to this paper, suggests that consistent practice of Lectio, for an extended period of time, changes or reshapes the way practitioners understand themselves and other people. As a result of the experience of encounter with God facilitated by Lectio practitioners are moulded and guided to become more understanding, tolerant, service-oriented persons who are “called to action as a response to the grace of [the] encounter” (Daniel 6). It is perhaps for this reason that Archbishop Joseph E. Harris suggested that Lectio contributes “to integral human development and therefore to the development to nations” (Harris, "Foreword" iii).

Our study was conceptualized as a result of Archbishop Harris’ further suggestion that we must seek to understand how Lectio contributes to such development (Harris, "Foreword" iii). Accordingly, we now advise that our research provides the starting point for further investigation, insofar as it identifies the philosophy that undergirds the method of Lectio taught by Fr. Michel and documents the results of the continuous exercise of this praxis.
Appendix A: Sample Questionnaire

**Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)**

Name:

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio? (E.g. 1 year)

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.

5. Has your practice of Lectio changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.

6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?
Appendix B: Completed Questionnaires

List of Questionnaires

Figure 1: Felix Edinborough 50
Figure 2: Hilary Bengochea 51
Figure 3: Helena Allum 53
Figure 4: Bernadette Salandy 54
Figure 5: Pearl Lezama 55
Figure 6: Mikkel Trestrail 57
Figure 7: Shenelle Boyce 59
Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio? (E.g. 1 year)
   - 38 years

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - Weekly

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - Normally a group every week at the parish and monthly with a group named ‘Homecomers’.

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - It has made more interested in the Gospel and more aware of the work of God through the Scriptures in everyday life. I am more confident in speaking about and reflecting on the Gospel.

5. Has your practice of Lectio changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.
   - I can better understand people and their behaviour as often I see their actions similar to what has taken place in the Gospels.

6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why? It is.
   - Especially as I attend daily Mass I often prepare for Mass by reading the Gospel and doing Lectio reflection on the passages. I do not do it every day but I try to do it often.
Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio? (E.g. 1 year)
   - We have been practicing Lectio Divina since 1985

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - Daily by myself reflecting on the daily Gospel but officially in a group weekly sharing on the Sunday Gospel

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - The Group is the Bible Circles Movement (BCM) prayer group. We meet weekly on Mondays at 5.30pm at 100 Eastern Main Rd. Champs Fleurs Trinidad

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - I believe so. I am ‘obsessed’ with trying to interpret my life experiences through Gospel passages. Recently on the passing of my eldest son, a year ago, has led me to be regularly interpreting it and the subsequent experiences in light of the Gospel. It has helped me tremendously in ‘making sense’ of a crisis in our lives. I have grown closer in my relationship with the Trinity. Together with my wife, it has led us to found BCM which now has approximately 15 active members. We are Missionary Disciples.

5. Has your practice of Lectio changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.
   - Yes, it has led me to see myself, as a work in progress ‘manifestation’ of Jesus, as one of his disciples. I see myself as a ‘work in progress’ Missionary Disciple. I have learnt that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in all people’s lives. I have come to believe the Holy Spirit is as active today in people’s lives as in the first Pentecost.
6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?

- Yes, it is a significant part of my life/routine. It helps me daily interpret the many experiences I, my family and friends have in the light of the Gospel. It helps draw us closer together in our BCM prayer group and gradually lead us to Mission. It also helps us interpret the direction for our family business. It helps me interpret the meaning of my son’s life and his passing. It also helps me abandon childish concepts of the Trinity and in particular Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and its meaning to my life. Lectio is an oasis in the modern-day desert of life with all its wild beasts. It leads me to stop and reflect in the “helter skelter” of modern day life.
Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio? (E.g. 1 year)
   - 25+ years

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - At least once weekly

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - Alone when done daily, with group at Rosary RCPOS weekly

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - Change is not the word. Moulded/ shaped/ directed is more appropriate.

5. Has your practice of Lectio changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.
   - Yes. Have become more understanding, less judgemental. Encourages me to feel that I am continuing the work of Jesus and the work of re-creating the world.

6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?
   - Yes it helps to put my weekly experiences in context when I celebrate Eucharist with the worshipping community on the weekend. Motivates me to try to practice what I meditate on, so that the coming week will see me allowing the messages of the Gospel Reading to guide my actions.
Figure 4: Bernadette Salandy

**Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)**

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio? (E.g. 1 year)
   - More than 20 years

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - I belong to a parish group and we meet weekly

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - We are known as the Lectio Divina Group. We are from St. Anthony’s Parish, Petit Valley.

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - Yes. It helps me to put meaning to my experiences and not just take them lightly or simply dismiss them as good or bad experiences.

5. Has your practice of Lectio changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.
   - Yes, as mentioned in ques.4 my life story and others’ stories are sacred. My experiences or my life stories are God’s words since my experiences are in the bible stories. There are times when my stories are good and there are times when they are not. All our lives are stories of grace and sin. Practicing lectio helps me not to be too hard on myself. I am comforted that my life experiences/stories are in the Bible.

6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?
   - Yes, it guides me in decision making and how I build relationship.
**Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)**

1. How long have you been practicing *Lectio*? (E.g. 1 year)
   - 16 years

2. How often do you practice *Lectio*? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - Daily

3. Do you practice *Lectio* alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - Alone and as part of a group. Sacred Heart Lectio Divina Group Gasparillo. We meet at Virginia Viera’s home - Darneaud Street -Gasparillo - on a Tuesday weekly.

4. Has your practice of *Lectio* led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - Many changes - the text speaks to your own story in your daily life and guides your approach to the challenges and joys of daily living. As a result, you are being constantly formed and reformed without sometimes realising it but others do see the change.

5. Has your practice of *Lectio* changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.
   - Certainly once you stick to the method changes will take place in your life - the WORD opens up your inner eyes in seeing yourself as you are - the truth of who you are in a given situation and if you do not get it right in the present text on which you are meditating another text is sure to bring it back to you until you come to face the truth of who you are. The WORD is truth and once you are seeking truth it will not rest until it does what it sets out to do. A practitioner of Lectio Divina come into a deeper understanding of self and others too which brings about better relationship with your fellowman and God.
6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?

- Extremely important for it forms me into being what I am called to be child of God.
Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio?
   - 15 years

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - Daily and sometimes more than once a day

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - I mainly practice Lectio as part of the charism of Companions of the Transfigured Christ. It is our response to the command of the Father to listen to His Beloved Son, given on Mt. Tabor. This is practised daily during our morning and evening prayer and as part of our weekly prayer meetings and in our retreat work. We have two prayer meetings in Trinidad and one in Curacao.

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - It has impacted my life in many ways:
     a. Because of the dialogue between scripture and my experience I have found that the scriptures are more relevant and accessible. Also, it has made it a lot easier for me to feel and experience the movements in a passage and how they relate to the human experience.
     b. As part of my preparation for preaching Lectio has help my preaching to be better rooted in human experience and therefore the message becomes easier for persons to relate to.
     c. It has helped me to discover my own stories of grace and sin and it helps in an on-going conversion of my life.
     d. It helps me to hear the will of God for my life through the rhythm of the liturgical cycle.
e. It is also a great tool in the ministry of spiritual direction.

5. Has your practice of *Lectio* changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.

   - Lectio has helped me to better appreciate each person and their stories of sin and grace. I have found that it has helped me in listening to others and their stories, hearing in them sin and grace but most of all the movements of God in their life. It has helped me to search for the good in myself and others, and to affirm this goodness. Its simplicity has also taught me that all persons can come to encounter god and it has just become a way of life, learning to listen to God as God speaks in the scriptures and through the experiences of life and others.

6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?

   - Lectio is a way of life. It is a way of encountering God and trusting that God is always speaking to me. The method has helped me to reflect on scripture and my own life. This has helped me to better find god in the difficult times and to hold on when things are very tough. I would say then that Lectio is my life routine. A constant openness to recognise the working of God and a constant return to God as well in prayer.
Focus Group questions for Lectio Divina (Fr. Michel’s method)

1. How long have you been practicing Lectio? (E.g. 1 year)
   - Over 5 years

2. How often do you practice Lectio? (E.g. daily, weekly, monthly)
   - Twice a week

3. Do you practice Lectio alone or as part of a group? If in a group state the name (if applicable) and location of the group:
   - Alone and sometimes as part of prayer meetings (CTC community female prayer meeting, French Street, Woodbrook)

4. Has your practice of Lectio led to any changes in your life? If yes, please describe.
   - I think it has given me a different perspective and outlook on my faith and strengthened my relationship with God. It has also helped my prayer life.

5. Has your practice of Lectio changed the way you understand yourself or other people? If yes, please explain.
   - I think it has helped me to not live in a reactionary way, encouraging me to discern what God is asking of me, or calling me to see in different moments.

6. Is Lectio an important part of your life/routine? If yes, please describe why?
   - Yes. It has become an integral part of my prayer life and my discerning God’s presence in my life and vocation and ministry.
Appendix C: Interviewees’ Comments

Figure 6: Attached hereto are various comments/quotations from our interviewees

June Johnston:

Mrs. Johnston met Fr. Michel in 1971/1972 as an 18-year-old. He was a confidant, spiritual director, family friend and also worked with Fr. Michel when he was editor at the Catholic News. She was also a member of the senior study group that Fr. Michel formed in the 1980s. Comments from her interview include (J. Johnston, "Interview").

- Lectio leads to an action in very concrete ways. It always leads to an action which affects the person in their humanity.

- Fr. Michel always had confidence in people and the fact that they had something to offer the world. He was always able to communicate that to the person and them to trust in themselves. He used to say God has planted something good in us and he was there to draw out that in them.

- Fr. Michel valued what is Caribbean. Especially Caribbean people and culture.

- He felt that as Caribbean people we have a voice that is not anyone else’s because of our lived experience and because of our history.

- Michel would say, be true to memory, history, culture and to your being. Cultural aspects were key to the expression of the person. You can’t do Lectio away from what the majority of the people are doing because there is a pulse that the people are into. It is part of you.
Paschal Jordan, OSB

Fr. Michel taught Brother Paschal Jordan, a Benedictine monk, philosophy. Thereafter they became colleagues and friends while working at the Trinidad School of Liturgy from 1977. The following are comments from his interview (Jordan, "Interview")

- His manner towards you lifted you up and helped you to recognize your talent, your humanity all in a context of friendship.
- “He empowered people to read the bible understand it and apply it to themselves”
- He always appeals to the person’s own experience which gave the person a sense that their own experience was valid.
- Michel was able to help us all and not in a superficial way but in a real way. Paschal
- He gave our community a retreat from Hosea – I will lead you into the desert and speak to your heart. It blew our minds because we were accustomed to moralist conferences … you must do this and that to please God and this wasn’t about. With him there was no moralising. He allowed the person to figure it out for themselves. The consequences came from you because he took you to a place where you could see it and accept it for yourself.
Bishop Clyde Martin Harvey

Bishop Harvey knew Fr. Michel for almost 45 years and says that he grew to admire him over the years. The following are comments from his interview (Harvey, "Interview"):

- Michel believed that God is fundamentally and radically at work in every person.
- He would tell his seminarians, you cannot know more than the people.
- He sought within his own self to come to a fundamental respect for the person regardless of the colour of your skin or your background.
- It was in this psycho-theology that he found this new space and it was helped primarily by his experience with Henri Nouwen.
- He developed this method specifically for the Caribbean but propagated it elsewhere.
In a 2007 documentary entitled *Fr. Michel de Verteuil, Theologian & Friend* was prepared to show appreciation to Fr. Michel for his contribution towards theological reflection in the region. It was presented at the thirteenth Conference on Catholic Theology in the Caribbean Today held in Rosseau, Commonwealth of Dominica, June 11-15, 2007 entitled “*A Festschrift* for Fr. Michel de Verteuil, CSSp.” The comments below are taken from this documentary. They are members of Fr. Michel’s *Lectio* study groups and also from Fr. Michel. A comment is also included from Archbishop Miriam Mannette

- He had the ability to bring out what is best in people, in each person (Edinborough, "Documentary" 23:37)

- He makes you feel that you are a person (Edinborough, "Documentary" 27:15)

Dianne Diaz

- Where ever he taught the method of *Lectio*, ordinary, simple folk felt that they were able to take the Gospel story and find their story in it. This was the essence of Michel’s style, he made you feel that you were capable to doing it (Edinborough, "Documentary" 29:40)

Suzanne Roget

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*A volume of writings by different authors presented as a tribute or memorial especially to a scholar.* (Merriam-Webster dictionary)
Through *Lectio Divina* he would get us to celebrate our lives. The whole point of *Lectio* is that your life is important (Edinborough, "Documentary" 14:43)

Fr. Michel

- I discovered Lectio Divina and it’s a beautiful method that suits our people very well (Edinborough, "Documentary" 15:35)
- It was at the pastoral centre that I discovered my love for *Lectio* (Edinborough, "Documentary" 22:11)
- I learnt from practitioners of different religions in Trinidad that “the wonderful thing in the world today is to be human, not to be Christian but to be human” (Edinborough, "Documentary" 35:41)

June Johnston

- Fr. Michel had a great ability to empower people, to make people realize their potential, to draw it out of them (Edinborough, "Documentary" 23:23)

Archbishop Emeritus Edward Gilbert CSsR

- He has significantly contributed to the spiritual life of people from all walks of life, from various Christian traditions, and possibly non-Christian traditions by teaching a method that can be used for putting people in touch with their own foundational documents (Edinborough, "Documentary" 32:26)
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