

Becoming Imbued with the Spirit and Power of the Liturgy: Liturgical Formation in Seminaries Today

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FORTY YEARS AGO, the Second Vatican Council decided to undertake a reform of the liturgy so that the faithful could “more surely derive an abundance of graces” from it, and affirmed that “the aim to be considered before all else” in this reform was the “full, conscious, and active participation called for by the very nature of the liturgy.”¹ Immediately after stressing the importance of this participation because it is “the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit,”² however, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) warned that there was no hope (*nulla spes*) of it becoming a reality “unless, in the first place, the pastors themselves become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy and make themselves its teachers.”³

To prepare priests for this crucial role in enabling the prospective outward reforms to serve as a means of spiritual renewal, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* went on to provide basic norms for the liturgical formation of the clergy, which were later developed in the *Instruction on Liturgical*

¹ Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), §§21, 14, in Documents on the *Liturgy 1963–79: Conciliar, Papal and Curial Texts* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982).

² This affirmation is drawn from Pope Pius X’s *motu proprio* on Church music, *Tra le sollecitudini*: “There Our people assemble for the purpose of acquiring the Christian spirit from its first and indispensable source, namely, active participation in the most sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.” *Papal Teachings: The Liturgy* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1962), 252.

³ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §14.

Formation in Seminaries.⁴ The purpose of this essay is to reflect, on the basis of these two documents and in light of the experience of four decades of liturgical reform, on what is needed to enable seminarians today to “become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy” so that they can help the faithful worship in the liturgy as the council intended. The first part of the essay will consider what the council enacted concerning the liturgical formation of priests and how this was developed in *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*. The second part will describe one way the kinds of knowledge concerning the liturgy these documents prescribe for priestly formation could be presented in courses as part of a seminary curriculum.⁵

Aspects of Liturgical Formation of Priests

Sacrosanctum Concilium gives foundational requirements for the kind of liturgical formation of the clergy necessary in order for the spiritual renewal through the liturgy the council desires to come about. After stating that professors who teach liturgy to those preparing for priestly

⁴ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, in *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries: A Commentary* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1984). Note that *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* contains an Appendix titled “A List of Questions Which Seem Important to Treat in the Liturgical Instruction Imparted in Seminaries”; most of the specific topics prescribed in the Appendix are elaborations on *Sacrosanctum Concilium* with descriptions of how to explain its contents.

⁵ The relatively small number of articles treating Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, that have been published have taken the form of commentaries on the document as a whole, essays on broader topics that contain limited discussion of *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, or critiques. See Achille M. Triacca, “A proposito della recente istruzione sulla formazione liturgica nei seminari,” *Notitiae* 160 (1979): 621–39; Balthasar Fischer, “Was muss der junge Seelsorger im Seminar über Liturgie gelernt haben, um seiner pastoralliturgischen Aufgabe gerechtzuwerden? Die Antworten der Instructio in fünfzehn Grundaussagen,” *Seminarium* (new series) 19 (1979): 753–58; Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, “Commentary,” in *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries: A Commentary*; Thomas A. Krosnicki and John A. Guerrieri, “Seminary Liturgy Revisited,” *Worship* 54 (1980): 158–69; Jan Michael Joncas, “Liturgical Formation in the Seminary,” *Seminary Journal* 3.2 (1997): 38–50. Since none of these articles consider the topic of the present essay (i.e., how the contents of Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, can be organized into categories from which a seminary curriculum can be constructed that can enable contemporary American seminarians to bring about spiritual renewal through the liturgy as envisioned by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*), it has not been possible to incorporate discussion of them in this essay.

ministry should receive thorough and specialized training,⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* calls for seminarians to be given both academic instruction and spiritual formation in liturgy. In regard to academic instruction, “the study of liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries and religious houses of studies; in theological faculties it is to rank among the principal courses.”⁷ Liturgy is to be taught “under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and canonical aspects”; and professors in other disciplines are to “clearly bring out the connection between their subjects and the liturgy.”⁸ In regard to spiritual formation, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* calls for seminarians “to be given a liturgical formation in the spiritual life,” including being given an understanding of what is going on in the liturgy in order that they may participate in it *toto animo*.⁹ This formation should enable them to understand, when they are priests, “what it is they are doing in their liturgical functions,” and to “live the liturgical life and share it with the faithful entrusted to their care.”¹⁰ Pastors’ liturgical training should also equip them to “promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally.”¹¹

“Liturgical Formation in the Spiritual Life”

Both *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* recognize the necessity of seminarians receiving “liturgical formation in the spiritual life.”¹² As part of the seminary’s program in formation in the spiritual life (which includes regular meetings of each seminarian with his spiritual director, guiding him in developing a serious interior life, and community conferences by the seminary spiritual director), attention needs to be given to the role of the liturgy in the spiritual life. Even as seminarians are drawn, through spiritual direction and prayer, to enter into an ever-deepening relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they must also learn to experience and express that relationship through the rites and prayers of the liturgy. The more that seminarians’ interior lives are being shaped by and

⁶ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §16.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, §17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §18. While this paragraph describes assistance to be given to priests ordained before *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’s prescriptions for seminary training go into effect, it implies that those ordained in the future will be able to acquire this knowledge as part of their seminary training.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §19.

¹² *Ibid.*, §17; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §51.

nourished by the Church's liturgical life, the more deeply they will be able to assimilate the knowledge imparted in academic liturgy courses and then communicate understanding of the liturgy with clarity and conviction born of personal experience. This means seminarians need to learn—in the formulation dear to the Liturgical Movement—not merely to “pray at Mass,” but to “pray the Mass.” They need to learn to enter into the presence of God—to pray—*through* the rites and prayers of the liturgy.

Central to this spiritual dimension of seminarians' liturgical formation is their learning “that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy” which they are expected to teach the faithful.¹³ It is, in fact, the need for clergy to promote this kind of participation that leads *Sacrosanctum Concilium* to set forth the requirements for clerical training in liturgy.¹⁴ For seminarians to learn this participation “called for by the very nature of the liturgy” means, first of all, that they must know what this kind of participation called for by the liturgy's very nature is—which requires prayerful study of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*'s exposition of the nature of the liturgy in paragraphs 5–13.

To summarize briefly, the nature of the liturgy is described by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as calling for those who participate in the Eucharist to be attentive to and respond to their Risen Lord who is present in his minister, in the proclamation of the Word, in his sacramental body and blood, and in his Body, the Church. It calls for participants to enter reverently into this re-presentation of the paschal mystery, where the Risen Christ as high priest is offering himself to the Father and joining them, his Body, to himself in this act where God is perfectly glorified and they are made holy and drawn into union with God and each other. The nature of the Eucharistic liturgy also calls for those who participate to join together in sincerely renewing the Church's covenant with the Lord, so that they may be drawn into his “compelling love” and “set on fire,” grateful that they may enter into this anticipation of the heavenly liturgy. In the case of the other sacraments, the nature of the liturgy also calls for worshippers to participate in them as encounters with Christ who is present to pour out his grace upon them.¹⁵

It is this kind of participation *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §11 is speaking of when it states that it is pastors' “duty to ensure that the faithful take part

¹³ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, §§14–19; cf. Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1980), 103.

¹⁵ For other aspects of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §§5–8 that are foundational in seminarians' liturgical formation in the spiritual life, see Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §9.

fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by its effects,” while §48 urges that the faithful should participate in the celebration of the Eucharist “conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full involvement.” *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* states similarly of seminarians’ participation in the liturgy that it should be “full, understanding, and devout.”¹⁶ In addition to intellectual comprehension of what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* means by the kind of participation called for by the very nature of the liturgy, in order to be able to help the faithful enter into this participation “fully, consciously, and actively,” “both internally and externally,” seminarians themselves must learn to participate in the liturgy this way *toto animo*. This requires their learning to participate in the outward form of the liturgy (for example, “acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs . . . actions, gestures, and bearing . . . silence”)¹⁷ as a vehicle through which they unite themselves interiorly to the theological and spiritual realities mediated by the liturgy described in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §§5–13.¹⁸

A crucial component of seminarians’ learning to pray “through” the rites and prayers of the liturgy is their learning the language of the liturgy, which is the language of Scripture. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explains, “it is from Scripture that the readings are given and explained in the homily and that psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration; it is from Scripture that actions and signs derive their meaning.”¹⁹ *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* states that seminarians should be taught that all these parts of the liturgy derive their meaning from Scripture, and affirms that the understanding of the liturgy necessary for priests “demands a diligent familiarity with the Bible.”²⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* exhorts priests to improve their understanding of the Bible, especially the psalms, so that they can “attune their minds to their voices” when praying the Liturgy of the Hours;²¹ *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* further specifies that seminarians should be taught to understand the psalms “in light of the New Testament and of Tradition,

¹⁶ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §20.

¹⁷ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §30.

¹⁸ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, Appendix, 5.

¹⁹ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §24.

²⁰ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §§52, 11. *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* adds that some familiarity with the Fathers of the Church is necessary.

²¹ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §90.

so as to discover the mystery of Christ in them.”²² As seminarians come to understand the scriptural language of the liturgy so well that they can think in it, they will be better able to enter into the presence of God through the rites and prayers of the liturgy.

Learning to pray from Scripture (*lectio divina*) can help seminarians assimilate the language of Scripture. Further, seminarians need to understand what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* means when it speaks of the proclamation of the Word in the liturgy as nourishing faith,²³ and praying through the proper readings before a liturgical celebration helps enable them to experience this. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* also affirms that “in the liturgy God is speaking to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his gospel. And the people are responding to God by both song and prayer.”²⁴ As seminarians learn to listen to God speak to them through his Word in times of prayer apart from liturgical celebrations, they develop the ability to listen to him speak through the proclamation of the Word in the liturgy, and are able to respond instinctively. Practicing *lectio divina* can also help seminarians nurture that “warm and living love for Scripture”²⁵ that the Council states is essential in order for the renewal of the liturgy to take place. Hearing God speak through the proclamation of the Word in the liturgy, being nourished through that proclamation, and cultivating a “warm and living love for Scripture” are aspects of the celebration of the liturgy that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* envisions for all the faithful; if seminarians are to foster these qualities in their future parishioners, they must know them as realities in their own lives first.

As seminarians make the language of the liturgy their own, and learn to engage in the kind of participation called for by the liturgy’s very nature, they develop the capacity for their prayer life to be rooted in the Church’s prayer in the liturgy, so that even when they pray outside of liturgical celebrations, their prayer can draw life from the prayer of the whole Church in its public encounter with God in worship and be shaped by it. The vision underlying *Sacrosanctum Concilium*²⁶ is that the Church, as community of prayer, lives out each day centered on the reality of God’s revelation of himself in his Son Jesus Christ in the power of

²² Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §31; cf. Appendix, 73.

²³ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §33; cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, §21; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §31.

²⁴ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §33.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, §24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §§5–10, 47, 83–84, 102–4.

the Holy Spirit, focused in the re-presentation of Christ's paschal mystery in the Eucharistic liturgy; and within the unfolding of Christ's life through the liturgical year and commemorations of the saints, which is embodied both in the daily Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. When members of the Church community pray outside the liturgical assembly, they do so inspired by and within the embrace of the prayer of the whole community, rather than engaging in private meditations which ignore this reality.

For seminarians to have their spiritual lives thus rooted in the Church's liturgy is an important part of their "liturgical formation in the spiritual life," and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* describes various ways their formation enables them to do this. The seminarians "are to be helped to penetrate more profoundly" the most important parts of the liturgy "and to meditate on them and think on them. They are to learn to draw out and to take from them ever fresh spiritual nourishment."²⁷ Sunday must be "taught and inculcated into the students as a joyful celebration of the paschal mystery."²⁸ "The whole liturgical year should be not only a liturgical celebration, but a way of life, in the manner of a spiritual journey, in which the mystery of Christ is communicated"; and Sundays and major feasts should be celebrated in such a way that they "really become days of joy."²⁹

As seminarians learn to perceive their day-to-day lives in the context of the unfolding of Christ's life through the liturgical year, they "must be formed to grasp the supernatural meaning" of the sacred seasons and feasts, "so that they will be capable of acquiring a deeper recognition of the salvific nature of these events and will receive the grace that is found in them."³⁰ Those involved in seminarians' spiritual formation show them how participating in liturgical celebrations does not merely provide them with pious ideas for intellectual reflection; rather, "the sacred liturgy through prayer opens up for the students the source of the Christian mystery and thus it nourishes their spiritual lives."³¹ By thus coming into contact with the source of the Christian mystery through the liturgy, seminarians learn "to foster an interior life and to acquire a deep spirit of meditation and of spiritual conversion."³²

²⁷ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Appendix 1.

³² *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §10.3.

Through these facets of “liturgical formation in the spiritual life,” as well as others, seminarians are enabled to draw life from the Church’s liturgy, to know it not simply as a set of texts and ceremonies to be performed, but as truly “source and summit” of the Church’s life and theirs as well. Seminarians’ academic training in liturgy is grounded in their “liturgical formation in the spiritual life,” and the academic knowledge concerning the liturgy they acquire needs to be integrated into their spiritual life.

Academic Instruction in Liturgy

Sacrosanctum Concilium prescribed the study of liturgy “under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and canonical aspects”;³³ and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* spells out in detail subject matter to be included as part of each of these aspects. Under the theological aspect, “the very nature of the liturgy should be theologically explained, following the mind of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*”;³⁴ this includes treatment of: the relationship between salvation history and the liturgy, the paschal mystery, the liturgy as exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ, the presence of Christ in liturgical actions, the role of the Word of God, the liturgy as glorification of God and source of human sanctification and as source and summit of the Church’s life, the nature of the Church, and the liturgy’s eschatological dimension.³⁵ The hierarchic and communal nature of the liturgy and its teaching function are also to be covered.³⁶

Further, the scriptural character of the entire liturgy is to be demonstrated, with emphasis on “the great importance of Sacred Scripture for understanding the signs, actions, and prayers of the liturgy”;³⁷ and the biblical meaning of the natural elements used in the liturgy is to be explained.³⁸ Along with this, seminarians are to be “introduced into understanding that symbolical liturgical language” through which the liturgy makes use of perceptible sacred signs to signify invisible divine reality, and how through these signs human sanctification is effected.³⁹

³³ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §16.

³⁴ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §49, referring especially to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§5–11; Appendix 9 cites *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§5–13.

³⁵ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §49; Appendix 9; cf. §9.

³⁶ Appendix, 10–25. This includes principles for translation of liturgical texts into the vernacular.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Appendix 15; cf. §52.

³⁸ Also, instruction is to be drawn from Scripture and the Fathers when teaching on the meaning of liturgical posture and gestures, *ibid.*, Appendix 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, §§11, 49; Appendix 9d, 20.

Liturgical Formation in Seminaries discusses specific areas of the theological aspect of liturgical celebrations that should be addressed; for example, the treatment of the Eucharist is to include explanation of the parts of the Mass and of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Eucharist as center of the sacramental system, and the worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass.⁴⁰ The document also gives particular points to be covered in regard to the other sacraments, sacramentals,⁴¹ and sanctification of time through the calendar, and insists on presentation of the doctrinal principles underlying the Liturgy of the Hours.⁴² Study of the liturgical acts themselves—their prayer-texts and ritual actions, and the *Praenotanda* of the rites—is to provide the basis for explaining the doctrine they embody.⁴³

Teaching the theology of liturgy directly from the liturgical texts themselves helps make clear the “strict connection between the liturgy and the doctrine of the faith;” *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* emphasizes the importance of teaching seminarians about this connection.⁴⁴ Priests who understand that the Church’s liturgy is the bearer of its theological tradition will understand that to preside at the liturgy is to hand on that tradition—so they will celebrate the liturgy as it is given, thus handing on the Church’s faith, rather than substituting their own ideas for the faith of the Church community. *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* also affirms that while the findings of contemporary disciplines such as anthropology can be useful in studying the theological aspect of the liturgy, they are helpful “only within the limits established by the supernatural nature of the liturgy,” and that seminarians must therefore be taught to “avoid anything that could lessen the full supernatural force of Catholic worship.”⁴⁵

In treating the historical aspect of the liturgy, *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* provides a detailed description of material from liturgical history to be presented. All periods in the history of the liturgy are to be covered, from Jewish worship in the time of Christ, through Christian worship in the early centuries, the liturgical work of the Council of

⁴⁰ Ibid., Appendix 35–41.

⁴¹ Ibid., Appendix 43–57; this section includes the liturgy of Christian death.

⁴² Ibid., Appendix 58–75; §§31, 69.

⁴³ Ibid., §§40, 46; Appendix 42, 69.

⁴⁴ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §44. Ibid., §46, notes that in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, and *Praenotanda* of the rites “one can find the theological doctrine, the pastoral motivation, and the spiritual aspect not only of the rites in general but also of each of their parts.”

⁴⁵ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §50.

Trent, the Liturgical Movement and the contributions of Pius X, to the series of documents bringing about liturgical renewal.⁴⁶ The history of the Mass is to be taught, beginning with the New Testament texts recounting the institution of the Eucharist, and including the texts of early anaphoras and other prescribed classic liturgical sources.⁴⁷ A “thorough explanation” of the “history of the baptismal liturgy and of the liturgical catechumenate” is to be given, with students expected to read the baptismal catecheses of the Fathers of the Church.⁴⁸

Liturgical Formation in Seminaries also calls for study of the history of the sacraments, and of the liturgical year and celebrations honoring the Virgin Mary and the saints, in each instance providing specific instruction on what must be included in this historical study.⁴⁹ The history of the Eastern rites, and the characteristics of Eastern (as well as Western) families of worship are also to be presented.⁵⁰ If possible, the history of sacred song and of sacred art are to be covered.⁵¹

In spelling out particular subject material within the historical aspect of the liturgy that should be taught, *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* repeatedly stresses that it is important to describe carefully the history of the various aspects of the liturgy, because their history makes clear their *meaning*.⁵² It also emphasizes that seminarians must study the history of the liturgy “to effect understanding of modern liturgical usage.”⁵³ Knowing the history of the liturgy enables seminarians to understand the developments that led to the need for certain elements of the liturgy to be changed after the Second Vatican Council, the meaning of the changes that were made in those elements, and the meaning of each reformed rite as it is celebrated today. Studying the historical aspect of the liturgy also contributes to seminarians’ knowledge of its spiritual aspect; as they perceive how the rites developed historically to help the faithful enter into union with God, they will understand how the rites are intended to enable this today.

In regard to the spiritual aspect of the liturgy, *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* advises that the lectures in liturgy “point out the reciprocal connection between the liturgy and Christian spirituality.”⁵⁴ Since, as

⁴⁶ Ibid., Appendix 26, 28, 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Appendix 30, 31, 26.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Appendix 44–45.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Appendix 42, 47–54, 59–67.

⁵⁰ Ibid., §48; Appendix 27, 31.

⁵¹ Ibid., Appendix 18, 23; cf. §57, Appendix 16.

⁵² Ibid., §47; cf. Appendix 1d, 26, 27, 36, 42, 53, 59, 62, 67.

⁵³ Ibid., Appendix 26; cf. §44b; Appendix, 29, 31.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Appendix 26b; cf. §10.1. Study of the liturgy’s spiritual dimension is to include the spiritual aspect of the Eastern rites, *ibid.*, Appendix 31.

Pope John Paul II has explained, “the liturgy is the privileged place for the encounter of Christians with God and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ,”⁵⁵ seminarians need to understand how the liturgy “works” spiritually to mediate this encounter. What is said in academic liturgy courses concerning the liturgy’s spiritual aspect should inform and reinforce what seminarians are learning in their “liturgical formation in the spiritual life,” and there should be an explicit connection between the two. For example, in seminarians’ formation in the spiritual life, they learn how the Church’s prayer from Scripture has drawn on the “spiritual sense” of Scripture, and how this can inform their own prayer;⁵⁶ in their academic liturgy courses they can be shown the special ways that the liturgy makes use of the “spiritual sense,” such as the use of scriptural imagery in prayer-texts, or the principle of typology in the selection and juxtaposition of readings for particular feasts.

Seminarians’ spiritual formation and their academic training in the liturgy’s spiritual aspect are also linked through the expectation that the liturgy professor be able to “introduce students into the liturgical life and into its spiritual character.”⁵⁷ Thus, even in class lectures, liturgy professors are to present the subject matter in such a way that seminarians will be drawn into “the liturgical life,” where their prayer lives are rooted in and informed by the Church’s encounter with God in the liturgy. Only if priests themselves experience the liturgy as vehicle through which they can hear God, surrender to God, allow the Father to form them in the image of his Son, can they help others to experience this.

Liturgical Formation in Seminaries also addresses seminarians’ training in various practical areas, which fall under the pastoral aspect of the liturgy. There is to be careful instruction on the General Instructions of both the Roman Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours, and on the Ritual and Pontifical and their Pastoral Introductions.⁵⁸ Seminarians are to study texts and ceremonies and proper rubrical performance, and also learn how and why the Church “has forbidden improvisation in the composition and offering of made-up prayers in the liturgy.”⁵⁹ They are also to be taught how to preside at the liturgy in a way that helps the congregation to

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *On the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Conciliar Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium on the Sacred Liturgy (Vicesimus quintus annus)* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1988), §7.

⁵⁶ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, §51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix 32–36, 42; §46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, §46; Appendix 14.

worship.⁶⁰ Seminarians are thus to be given a thorough knowledge of the Church's liturgy as the Church celebrates it, and trained to prayerfully perform it this way. They are also to learn how to communicate to the faithful the riches of the Church's prayer, and what is needed for fruitful participation in the liturgy;⁶¹ this means seminarians developing the ability to explain how what the prayers and rites are talking about is what is actually taking place in the liturgy, and learning how to help people understand what God is doing for them through the liturgy of the Church, so they can enter into it.

Seminarians also need a thorough understanding of why the lectionary is set up the way it is, and what is involved in the kind of liturgical preaching called for by the Council.⁶² Professors of liturgy, Scripture, and homiletics should work together to ensure that seminarians are prepared to preach from the wide range of pericopes and combinations of them found in the reformed lectionary.⁶³ Liturgy professors should also encourage the seminarians to learn to integrate what they are being taught in their academic Scripture courses with a deep understanding of the liturgical use of Scripture, as well as with the wisdom they receive by meditating on it, so that they can preach the kinds of homilies described in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §§35 and 42.

Music is an important part of the liturgy's pastoral aspect, and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* prescribes that seminarians be given the practical instruction in music to enable them to sing the presider's parts in the liturgy and to oversee the work of those who provide music in the parish.⁶⁴ They should understand the role of sacred song in the liturgy, and the different kinds of songs (for example, psalmody, acclamations, hymns, etc.);⁶⁵ they need to be given an appreciation of the Church's musical heritage and the criteria for evaluating music for use in liturgical celebrations.⁶⁶

While the juridical aspect of the liturgy is often treated primarily in the courses on canon law, studying the other aspects of the liturgy in a required liturgy course makes it easier for seminarians to understand—and, therefore, remember—the canonical norms governing liturgical cele-

⁶⁰ That is to say, in a way that is pastoral, *ibid.*, §§44b, 46; Appendix 42; cf. Appendix 15–25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, §20; Appendix 39.

⁶² For example, Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§35, 52.

⁶³ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, §56.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Appendix 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, §56. "It is most valuable for the students to be familiar with the Latin language and with Gregorian chant." §19; cf. Appendix 16, 18.

brations. Seminarians who have learned the liturgy's theological and historical aspects, especially, will recognize that the Church's laws for valid performance of liturgical rites are not arbitrary rules, but a means for protecting the Church community's tradition of believing and praying. It is precisely because the liturgy belongs to the *whole* Church that it is governed by the laws of the Church.⁶⁷

In addressing the five aspects of academic liturgical study mandated by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* does not treat them as a discrete entity, completely separated from seminarians' liturgical formation in the spiritual life. In explaining how seminarians should be instructed in the "history and spiritual character of Easter and the Easter season," for example, the discussion concludes: "Most of all seminarians should be trained to live the paschal mystery in the depths of their souls and to prepare themselves for their future paschal ministry."⁶⁸ Seminarians are thus not only to be instructed about the liturgical commemoration of Christ's dying and rising, but encouraged to enter into experiential knowledge of how, in the liturgy, Christ makes present his paschal mystery and draws them into it, joining them to his offering of himself to the Father, empowering them to die to self and live for God, and unselfishly serve those in need.

Finally, if seminarians' liturgical formation in the spiritual life is the ground in which their academic instruction in liturgy is rooted, actual celebrations of the liturgy in the seminary are the context which informs that instruction. *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* therefore states that these celebrations must be exemplary in regard to ritual and texts, "the spiritual and pastoral mentality adopted," and the observance of liturgical norms and laws.⁶⁹ Seminary liturgies are to make use of a variety of approved options for ways the rites may be celebrated, so that seminarians become familiar with the many possibilities they may draw on in their future ministry, and with the "art of making the right choice" from among those possibilities for a particular celebration.⁷⁰

In seminary liturgies, seminarians not only practice the internal-through-external participation *Sacrosanctum Concilium* expects them to teach their

⁶⁷ Ibid., §16. The canonical aspect of the liturgy is treated in Appendix 10–14. For discussion of other pastoral aspects of the liturgy, see Appendix 15–25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Appendix 63; Appendix 73 states that seminarians' devotion to the psalms should be fostered through lectures in exegesis given by the Scripture professor.

⁶⁹ Ibid., §16; cf. Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§17, 29; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §20. Also, they are to be done in such a way that their "community and supernatural nature will shine out," *ibid.*, §12.

⁷⁰ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §17.

future parishioners (and lead them in by example),⁷¹ but also learn by assisting in liturgical ministries or music. *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* expects that seminary faculty will guide and patiently correct the seminarians in regard to their contributions to the liturgy “so that there is formed in them a genuine notion of the liturgy solidly rooted in the doctrine and sense of the Church.”⁷² It is important that seminarians “experience the richer and more developed forms of the celebrations of the seasons and solemnities of the liturgical year,” since, while they may use a simpler form in their parish ministry, “it is clear that the way the students experience the liturgy in the seminary will be an example for them on which their future pastoral ministry will be based.”⁷³

A Seminary Liturgy Curriculum

While *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* fleshed out the norms in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* with a comprehensive description of the kinds of knowledge concerning the liturgy needed for priestly formation, it left to each seminary and its liturgy professors to determine how the recommended topics for instruction should be divided into courses. In 1995 I was invited to create a seminary liturgy program, composed of required classes and sufficient electives for an M.A. concentration in liturgy, which I based on *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the “suitable directives” of *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* summarized above. The fortieth anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has occasioned renewed reflection on what is necessary for priests to become “imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy,” which, as the Constitution recognized, is dependent on their having appropriate training in seminary. In the remainder of this essay I will describe the seminary liturgy program I created, as an example of one way the recommendations of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* could be translated into a curriculum; I offer this as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of how to enable priests to become “imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy,” so that the Council’s reforms in the liturgy can bear their intended fruit of spiritual renewal.

The Required Course and Its Rationale

The foundation of the program is a required two-semester course in liturgy, which serves as preparation both for elective liturgy courses, and

⁷¹ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §19.

⁷² Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §17; cf. §13.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, §33; the sentence continues “as well as the foundation for their meditation on and knowledge of the liturgical year.”

for later required systematics courses in sacramental theology and practica courses in celebrating Mass and the rites. This required course presents the historical development of the Church's liturgy focusing on the *meaning* of the rites: how they were/are understood theologically and experienced spiritually as mediating God's saving presence and how this was/is affected by the pastoral quality of their celebration. It shows where the liturgical rites have come from and why they are the way they are today, so that the liturgical tradition is seen as a unity.⁷⁴ The course also incorporates treatment of the role of the Church's artistic and musical heritage in worship, and includes slide lectures and musical examples.

In the first semester, the seminarians learn of the Jewish matrix of Christian worship and are led through the development of the Eucharist and the other sacramental rites, the temporal and sanctoral calendars, and the Liturgy of the Hours, from their origin to the sixteenth century. As students read excerpts from liturgical texts through the centuries, they see how extensively the liturgy draws on Scripture, and begin to have a sense of "the language of the liturgy," which includes the language of sign and symbol.

At the beginning of the second semester, the course considers how the liturgy developed in the Eastern Churches from the patristic period into the principal rites celebrated today. Returning to the West, after examining the liturgies of the Protestant Reformation, the course considers the response of the Council of Trent, the Liturgical Movement and its recovery of the Paschal Mystery as heart of the liturgy, culminating in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. After careful study of the theological vision of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, explaining how the specific reforms it called for were intended to bring about spiritual renewal, the course turns to each aspect of the worship of the Church today (Mass, calendars, lectionary, sacraments, etc.) as the present manifestation of the Church's living tradition. Special attention is given to the *Praenotanda* of the reformed rites (which provide "the theological doctrine, the pastoral motivation, and the spiritual aspect" of each rite and its parts)⁷⁵ and to the meaning of the rites' texts and ritual actions, and to developing seminarians' ability to grasp what is needed for celebration that is truly pastoral, so that participants can enter into deeper union with God and with each other as Church. The course concludes by considering what is involved in having one's prayer life rooted in the liturgy of the Church,

⁷⁴ Ibid., Appendix 26: "When giving an orderly exposition of the individual liturgical actions and of the sacraments, the history of each rite must be dwelt upon both to effect understanding of modern liturgical usage and to make sacramental theology more clear and precise."

⁷⁵ Ibid., §46.

especially the role of the Liturgy of the Hours. This two-semester required course thus seeks to enable seminarians to see themselves as celebrants of the contemporary rites in continuity with the Church's tradition of liturgical prayer, so that they will identify with it and want to open it up for those they are leading in worship, so that it gives life.

The required course uses exposition of the history of the liturgy as framework within which the theological, spiritual, and pastoral aspects of the liturgy are presented, the juridical aspect being treated in the canon law courses. While the historical aspect of the liturgy is important in its own right, course lectures are not limited to offering descriptions of the rites in chronological sequence. In the decades since the Council, liturgical history has sometimes been taught in a way that can leave the impression that the outward forms of the rites have been determined much more by anthropological and sociological factors (constantly changing in different times and places) than by theological and spiritual concerns. Since the outward forms of the rites are the bearers of their theological and spiritual meaning, an overemphasis on the diversity of outward forms through the centuries can be used to support relativism in the rites' theological meaning. This confusion can be avoided by teaching the historical development of the rites simultaneously with the Church's theological understanding of them, and thus presenting the history of the liturgy in a theological way, as *tradition*.⁷⁶

Treating the theological and historical aspects of the liturgy together also leads to a deeper and richer understanding of the many areas of the theological aspect specifically prescribed for study by *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*. Rather than discussing these as abstract concepts, course lectures consider them as they are embodied in the prayers and rites of the liturgy,⁷⁷ so that seminarians can see how the Church's understanding of, for example, the presence of Christ in liturgical actions came to its mature articulation through centuries of worship.

As lectures present the theological meaning of a given liturgical rite, they also consider how that rite has functioned spiritually. Treatment of the spiritual aspect of the liturgy is enhanced by beginning each lecture

⁷⁶ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, "Commentary," in *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries: A Commentary*, 99: "The historicity of the liturgy should not be taught in such a manner that the liturgy appears as though it were the product of a series of unrelated occurrences combined in a haphazard manner to shape the worship practices of the Catholic Church so that what remains is only the product of chance."

⁷⁷ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, §46: "The prayers and orations of the sacred liturgy are to be explained in a way that sheds light upon the doctrinal treasures and the spiritual values they contain."

with a prayer taken from the historical rite to be studied, thus demonstrating how texts of liturgical prayers are not only theologically-appropriate statements, but actually *express* the prayer of the heart of those who respond to God's call through those prayers. When lectures explain the theological dimensions of the liturgy, such as the relationship between salvation history and the liturgy, they also point out how these dimensions are not simply concepts to be acquired, but realities that must be understood as they are lived out in seminarians' lives of praying with the Church day by day—in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist, within the unfolding of the liturgical calendar. The presentation of all conceptual knowledge in the course is shaped by the ultimate goal that seminarians be better able both to pray with the Church themselves, and to enable the faithful entrusted to their care to pray.

Discussion of the pastoral aspect of the liturgy is also integrated with the presentation of its historical, theological, and spiritual aspects. *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* §19 states that it is one of priests' "chief duties as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God" to help the faithful understand what God is doing in the liturgy so they can fruitfully participate in it. This means priests themselves must not only understand what the rites mean, how they have developed to "work" theologically and spiritually to enable worshippers to enter into union with God, and what is necessary for worshippers to experience this—but priests must also have the ability to *explain* this to their congregations. Lectures throughout the course call attention to points particularly important for contemporary Catholics to know, and suggest ways of explaining these things to them. Since *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* §35 affirms that preaching may draw on liturgical (as well as scriptural) sources, examples are also given of how a particular source being studied could be used in a homily to convey needed understanding of how God acts in the liturgy.

The course's organization around how the Church has worshipped through the centuries also provides a natural base for treating another aspect of the pastoral dimension of the liturgy. Since the reformed liturgy allows for a variety of ways of celebrating a given rite, in order for a celebrant to decide which of the possible options should be selected, he needs criteria for discerning which option is most pastorally appropriate for a given set of circumstances. As seminarians study how the liturgy developed and begin to assimilate the tradition of how and why liturgical rites have been celebrated, they gradually develop the ability to discern which option in the reformed liturgy will be most helpful in a particular situation.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Appendix 14.

Further, lectures providing careful commentary on the contemporary rites themselves, their *Praenotanda* and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, present basic pastoral principles for what is required to preside over the Church's worship in a manner that is faithful to the rubrics and that will help enable worshippers to pray and enter into encounter with God through the liturgy; later practica courses treat this in much greater detail. Lectures are illustrated with specific examples (taken from many years of parish experience) of instances where something went either very well or very badly from a pastoral perspective, then pointing out the reasons; seminarians are asked to offer examples from their own experience as well.

In addition, during the second semester, students are assigned a project that requires working with the practical dimensions of parish liturgy. One year, after the class selected topics related to parish liturgical life (for example, training servers, children's liturgies, etc.), they were divided into groups according to topic and assigned to compile extensive critical bibliographies of resources available (print, audio-visual, internet) to assist parishes in their liturgical celebrations. Another year, after compiling similar critical bibliographies of resources regarding the many celebrations of the temporal and sanctoral calendars, and also the Liturgy of the Hours, the seminarians were assigned to develop a pastoral plan for making the Church's liturgy of time come alive in a parish. Yet another year, after researching relevant resource material, students put together programs for training lectors that included spiritual formation (for example, Bible study, retreat), as well as training in public speaking. Sometimes projects required the seminarians to write talks they would give in their upcoming summer placements; often, they included seminarians going to their diocesan liturgy offices and getting to know the staff and resources there.

Using the historical aspect of the liturgy as framework into which its theological, spiritual, and pastoral aspects are integrated helps future celebrants to understand that what they will do when they stand before the Church and lead it in worship is not arbitrary; students come to see that the Church is Catholic not only in space but in time—each part of the liturgy connects today's worshippers to generations of praying Catholics who have faithfully handed it on to them. The presentation of the historic rites and their meaning to the seminarians is shaped by the goal that when as priests they preside over the liturgy of the Church, they will have a deep sense of standing rooted in a tradition that goes back two thousand years, which they are extending outward to yet another generation, in order to draw them in.

This holistic presentation of the historical, theological, spiritual, and pastoral aspects of the liturgy as a living tradition enables seminarians to understand that what is required in order to provide parishioners with faithful and reverent celebration of the liturgy is not a matter of rote-learning of the rubrics for every conceivable liturgical eventuality. Given the priest's responsibilities for every aspect of the liturgy in a contemporary parish, and the enormous number of unforeseeable questions that will arise, it is not possible for a priest to learn pastoral care for the liturgy of the Church simply by memorizing a lengthy list of rules, for which he may never have even been told the reasons. Rather, he needs to absorb the Church's liturgical tradition so thoroughly that it is part of who he is, so that he lives and moves in that tradition like a fish in water, and therefore can enable his parishioners to have their relationship with God shaped by the Church's liturgical tradition, even as his own is.

Required Courses Related to Liturgy

The required two-semester liturgy course lays the foundation for other required courses related to liturgy. Sacramental theology considered from the perspective of systematic theology is covered at a later stage in the curriculum, after the seminarians have acquired the necessary conceptual background in systematics through courses in Revelation, Trinity, Christology, and Grace.⁷⁹ Having learned *why* the rites are the way they are today⁸⁰ (and therefore should not be changed by celebrants), seminarians are prepared to learn *how* to celebrate them. In practica courses on the celebration of the rites and presiding at the Eucharist, seminarians can practice reverently presiding at the liturgy, gaining experience with the various approved options and overcoming self-consciousness. There is also a required course on the proclamation of the Word and required courses in homiletics.

Elective Courses in Liturgy

For seminarians who wish to pursue their study of liturgy in greater depth, there are also elective courses taught in seminar format, which may be used toward an M.A. In *Christian Initiation: Baptism*, seminarians trace the Church's initiatory practice from primary sources, beginning with scriptural evidence and patristic descriptions of the baptismal rites, through later liturgical texts, the development of the rite and theology of Confirmation, and finally in the RCIA. Each week seminarians consider

⁷⁹ Note that *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* envisions sacramental theology courses as distinct from courses in liturgy, §54.

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, §47.

another stage in the development of the rites, to see how the Church's liturgy has helped to mediate conversion; and they discuss what can be learned from the Church's rich experience to help modern-day converts come to know Christ.

Christian Initiation: Eucharist continues the in-depth reading and discussion of Scripture, the Church Fathers, texts of actual liturgies, theological treatises, councils, and spiritual writings, this time concerning the Eucharist. The upper-level electives thus make it possible for students to do much more extensive reading in primary sources (actual rites, prayers, theological texts) than was possible in the introductory required course, to do a close reading of contemporary liturgical texts in light of Scripture and the Fathers, and to reflect with each other in seminar discussions on what can be learned from these historic sources for fruitful pastoral celebration of the liturgy today. Writing research papers enables them to develop the skills they will need to write an M.A. thesis. Seminarians who are not pursuing an M.A. may, if they prefer, use the course material toward putting together a pastoral project which they will use in their parish assignment.

In *Liturgical Time*, students read and discuss sources which show the development of the feasts and seasons, celebrations honoring Mary and the saints, and the Liturgy of the Hours. The fourth elective, *Liturgical Spirituality*, is based on the conviction that in order for a priest to help his parishioners experience the liturgy as the source from which they draw their very lives as Christians, as well as the highest expression—the culmination—of that life,⁸¹ he must himself experience his own Christian life as rooted in the Church's prayer in the liturgy and flowing from it. Through selected readings, journal reflection, and intensive discussion, this course seeks to enable students to enter into a truly liturgical spirituality themselves, and to begin to develop ways to lead others into it.

The set of courses just described, of course, represents only one way that the norms for seminary liturgical training given in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* can be translated into a seminary curriculum. However, while each seminary must consider how the teaching of liturgy fits best into the curriculum as a whole, there are some general principles that all who construct curricula in liturgy should bear in mind. First, in order to provide today's seminarians with the preparation they will need to celebrate the contemporary liturgy, any seminary curriculum should be based on the norms and vision of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*. Second, the

⁸¹ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §10.

purpose of seminary training in liturgy is not primarily to teach a set of skills or facts—but to enable priests to be “imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy” so that they can teach the faithful to enter into the “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations *called for by the very nature of the liturgy*” which is “the source of the true Christian spirit.”⁸² Seminary liturgical training must therefore aim toward enabling priests to know the liturgy as “the privileged place for the encounter of Christians with God and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ”⁸³ so that they can help those they lead in worship to experience this, and to “more surely derive an abundance of graces” from the liturgy—which was the purpose of the reforms.⁸⁴ As *Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* summarizes it, the main task of those who teach liturgy “is to lead the students to study the liturgical texts which the seminarians must understand. This is so that, when they become celebrants of the liturgy, they will be capable of leading the people to a knowledgeable and fruitful participation in the mystery of Christ.”⁸⁵

N.V.

⁸² Ibid., §14.

⁸³ John Paul II, *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, §7.

⁸⁴ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §21.

⁸⁵ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries*, Appendix 5. (The translation actually reads “seminarists.”)