

CHAPTER 7

Liturgical Formation In Seminaries: A Lesson From *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

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Introduction

Few weeks after my ordination to the Catholic priesthood, the diocese of my incardination (Osogbo diocese) organised an orientation program for all the new priests to be involved in pastoral engagement within the diocese. The priest who anchored the liturgy session opened by saying: “you have to put aside what you have been taught in the seminary and learn how we do things in the diocese.” My first intuitive reaction was, why then do we have to spend nine years in the seminary if it is only to be ordained and put aside what we have learnt? He went further to say, “you have learnt theory in seminary and now you will be involved in the practical life of the liturgy.” I was a bit settled at that and was disposed to go through the orientation exercise which was however highly beneficial for my integration into the pastoral life in the diocese. However, after ten years of pastoral ministry and deeper studies in the liturgy, the question continues to pop up querying why the gap between theory and practice in seminary formation? Why what should be learned in seminary not adequately and sufficiently introduce the newly ordained into the ministry? Or in this particular case, why should what was learnt in seminary not be the ‘moulding of a liturgical minister?’

While I do not want to engage in the argument whether priestly formation, especially in Nigeria, is achieving the goal of moulding liturgical minister to meet the present-day challenges or not, this reflection seeks to emphasise that all that is being taught and done

in seminary, especially in the areas of moral, spiritual and intellectual/academic formation, should at the same time have a liturgical focus. While this does not imply that formation should be reduced to liturgy, this reflection argues that prioritizing the liturgical dimension of priestly formation is one of the major ways of bridging the supposed gap between theory and practice. After all, 'the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.'¹ It is through the liturgy that the work of our redemption takes place;² it is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ and therefore, 'no other action of the Church equals its effectiveness by the same title nor to the same degree.'³ Thus, having seminary formation with a liturgical focus can never be overemphasised.

To justify the position of this reflection, I will consider the meaning of the age-old maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* as it pertains to the indispensable role of liturgy in the life and faith of the Church, and how it could effectively bridge the gap between worship and doctrine, theology and liturgy, and theory and practice.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: A Maxim In Context

The late 20th-century discussion on the emergence of what is today called liturgical theology, brought with it a new look at the age-old Latin maxim, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The discussion which centres around the relationship between liturgy and theology reopened the understanding of the maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* as it sheds light on the interplay between praying and believing, between Christian worship and doctrine.⁴ Major scholars in the discussion affirm the importance of liturgy in the understanding of the belief of the Church since she prays as she believes. This, however, does not mean that what the Church believes does not affect how the Church prays, as it is evident in the periods of reforms. The proper understanding of the context in which the maxim first appeared is therefore instructive on how it should be correctly understood and used.

The axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* is the binominal for the phrase '*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*' that is 'so that the law of prayer may establish a law for belief.' The phrase has its root

in the response attributed to a lay monk, Prosper of Aquitaine (a disciple of Augustine), to Semi-Pelagians.⁵ Like Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine argues in favour of the need of God's grace for the salvation of human beings. For Prosper, the grace of God is needed at different instances and in different degrees in one's life. To justify his position, Prosper argues from the scripture, Church tradition and the liturgy of the Church:

In inviolable decrees of the blessed apostolic see, our fathers have cast down the pride of the pestiferous novelty and taught us to ascribe to the grace of Christ the very beginning of goodwill, the growth of the noble efforts, and the perseverance in them to the end. *In addition*, let us look at the sacred testimony of priestly intercessions which have been transmitted from apostles and which are uniformly celebrated throughout the world and in every catholic church; *so that the law of prayer may establish a law for belief*. For when the president of the holy congregations perform their duties, they plead the cause of the human race before the divine clemency and, joined in the sighs of the whole Church, they beg and pray that grace may be given to unbelievers; that idolaters may be freed from the errors of their impiety; that the Jews may have the veiled removed from their hearts and that the light of truth may shine on them; that heretics may recover through acceptance of the faith; that schismatics may receive afresh the spirit of charity; that the lapsed may be granted remedy of penitence; and finally that the catechumens may be brought to the sacrament of regeneration and have the court of the heavenly mercy opened to them.

That these things are not asked of the Lord lightly or uselessly is shown by the outcome. For God is pleased to draw many out of every kind of error, liberating them from the power of darkness and placing them in the kingdom of his beloved Son, turning them from the vessel of wrath to vessels of mercy. This is felt to be so completely the work of God that the God who achieves it is always given

thanks and praise for bringing such people to the light or truth.⁶

There is need to underscore some points from this citation in order to get its relevance to this reflection.

First, what Prosper refers to as the practice of prayer covers for all of the liturgy and not just a reference to liturgical texts. In the following chapters of his work, he advanced the same argument in relation to ritual actions like pre-baptismal exorcism and exsufflation (symbolic action of blowing out the spirit) to argue that they are actions referring to the fact that there is need for the grace of God even for infants who are brought forward for baptism.

Second, Prosper acknowledges that liturgy is not the only doctrinal source, nor lays claim that it is the primary source.⁷ On the contrary, liturgy, together with the magisterium and scriptures are sources for doctrine. Hence, he used the words '*in addition.*' In the mind of Prosper, none is considered as receiving its authority from the other. Rather, they all corroborate one another. At best, what we can say is that the agreement between the sources further fosters their authority. In fact, in its context, Prosper in his mind simply implies that 'one may have recourse to the prayers of the Church in order to resolve the controversy on grace because they correspond to a biblical mandate (1 Tim 2:1-2), and are the expressions of the living tradition of the Church.'⁸ In other words, 'Church's engagement in rites grounds the articulation of Church's belief'⁹ in as much as it aligns with the scriptures and magisterium.

Third, the writing of Prosper affirms the authority of the liturgy in the facts that it is a universal prayer, the same everywhere and followed by all Catholics all over the world. They are credible because, they are actions of the holy congregation in the presence of God, and the fact that God answers the prayers attests to its authority.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: A Principle in Practice

Though the adage, '*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*' often reduced to *lex orandi, lex credendi* is attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, the fundamental principle underlying the adage predates Prosper's formulation. The principle is evident in many New

Testament writings and was carried on by the Apostolic Fathers. As an example, the prayers addressed to Jesus in the New Testament Christological hymn (Philippians 2: 5-11), confessing Jesus as the Lord – sharing the divine name KYRIOS used for YHWH – contribute immensely to the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus. In the same way, the Trinitarian baptismal practice in the Matthean community reflected in Matthew 28:19 reflects an instance where the practice of the Church is already constituting in a way the belief of the Church in the Trinity.

Many of the early Church Fathers constantly had recourse to the liturgy in the explanation of the faith of the Church.¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch drew from the Eucharistic liturgy to argue against the Docetists (who claim that the human body of Jesus is unreal but a phantasm, and therefore cannot really experience suffering). Thus, Ignatius refutes the Docetists that their teaching negates the truth of the Eucharist as the flesh of the Jesus Christ our saviour who suffered for our sins and was raised from the dead.¹¹

Through several references to the liturgy of baptism, early Church writers argue for what developed to the different doctrines related to baptism. For instance, in the argument against Julian Eclanum, who teaches that children are born without original sin, Augustine argues from the implication of exorcism and exsufflation which are carried out during the baptism of Children. For Augustine, the two rites – exorcism and exsufflation – are done to release the children from the power of the devil. And that it is because there is an ailment that we have recourse to the remedy. This same approach of appealing to the liturgy to understand the belief of the Church about baptism is also evident in the post-baptismal mystagogical catechesis of Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹² These bishops taught the neophytes what they are to believe based on what was celebrated.

In the sixteenth century, the axiom witnessed a modification in its application. During the period of the Reformation, the disputes in the understanding of Christian doctrines led to the reformulation of liturgical texts and practices. For the reformers, what is believed is what should reflect in worship. Believing now modifies and establishes praying. It should be noted that this move is not a denial, but a reversal, of the maxim. The principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*

was not absent but understood in a different way. A way that affirms the dual movement of the influence of one on the other.

The reversal approach to the principle is also well favoured in the reform of the Roman Catholic liturgy. In his encyclical on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII modified the meaning of the maxim in this succinct statement:

during the discussion of a doubtful or controversial truth, the Church and the Holy Fathers have not failed to look to the age-old and age-honored sacred rites for enlightenment. Hence the well-known and venerable maxim, "*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*" - let the rule for prayer determine the rule of belief. The sacred liturgy, consequently, does not decide or determine independently and of itself what is of Catholic faith. More properly, since the liturgy is also a profession of eternal truths, and subject, as such, to the supreme teaching authority of the Church, it can supply proofs and testimony, quite clearly, of no little value, towards the determination of a particular point of Christian doctrine. But if one desires to differentiate and describe the relationship between faith and the sacred liturgy in absolute and general terms, it is perfectly correct to say, "*Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi*" - let the rule of belief determine the rule of prayer.¹³

Pope Pius XII acknowledges the symbiotic interplay between faith and liturgy and throws more weight behind the rule of faith determining the rule of prayer. He justifies this claim on the ground that the ecclesiastical authority has the responsibility of organizing and regulating divine worship, 'enriching it constantly with new splendour and beauty, to the glory of God and the spiritual profit of Christians' (MD no.49). The ecclesiastical authority carries out this responsibility by modifying the human elements of the liturgy as the needs of the age, circumstance and the good of souls may require, and as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may

have authorized (MD no.50). While the reasons are laudable and appealing, it does not necessarily warrant the reversal of the meaning of the maxim.¹⁴

In a nutshell, either understood in its original context or in the application of the reversal, the axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi* expresses a deep and mutual relationship between liturgy and the faith of the Church. The liturgy celebrates the faith of the Church. This is where the maxim is relevant to the core of this reflection. The relevance is that if all that is learned in the seminary is to aid in the understanding of the faith and life of the Church, and for the future priest to be equipped for the ministry, what is learned invariably affects how future priests would understand and relate with the liturgy, which is the source and summit of the life of the Church. Therefore, for seminary formation in faith and ministry to achieve its goal, the approach to liturgical formation is key.

Reconsidering the Liturgical formation in Seminaries

The Vatican II Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius* (OT) recognizes that the training of priests should ultimately have a liturgical focus. Making the clarion call towards this recognition, the conciliar fathers requested that the entire formation of major seminarians should aim at enabling students to be formed as pastors of souls, following the example of Jesus our teacher, priest and shepherd. (OT no.4). Such formation is described as having a liturgical focus when the conciliar fathers say that ‘the students are to be trained for the ministry of the word... for the ministry of worship and sanctification so that by prayer and sharing in the liturgical celebrations, they may carry on the work of salvation’ (OT no.4). While the document makes the suggestion of the various necessary courses to be undertaken in the seminary to achieve the goal of the formation, the document made two other salient points relevant for this reflection.

Firstly, in the revision of the ecclesiastical studies to be undertaken, the primary aim is to coordinate philosophy and theology in such a way that together they open the minds of the students more and more to the mystery of Christ, which touches the whole of human history, continually influencing the Church, and is particularly at work in the priestly ministry (OT no.14). The mystery of Christ which contains, but not limited to, the work of our redemption takes place

through and in the liturgy (SC no. 2). It is this same celebration of the liturgy that all of the ecclesiastical studies in seminary formation is revised to enhance in the life of seminarians.

Secondly, when the document OT outlines the various disciplines that should be included and their respective relevance to the formation of seminarians, Liturgy was accorded a distinct position - not just one of the disciplines but the focus of all. To underscore this position, OT simply says that 'Liturgy which is to be regarded as the first and ever necessary source of true Christian spirit, should be taught in the spirit of articles 15 and 16 of the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy'. (OT 16). It is pertinent at this juncture to look at the content of the articles of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* referred to:

15. Professors who are appointed to teach liturgy in seminaries, religious houses of studies, and theological faculties must be properly trained for their work in institutes specifically designed for this purpose.

16. Sacred Liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major causes in seminaries and religious houses of studies. In theological faculties, it is to be one of the principal courses. It is to be taught under the theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects. In addition, *those who teach other subjects*, especially dogmatic theology, sacred scripture, spiritual and pastoral theology, should – while accepting the intrinsic demands of their own disciplines – expound the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation in a manner that will make clear the connection between their subjects and the liturgy, and the unity of all priestly training.

The request of SC 16 is of great significance which, I strongly believe, its neglect is partly one of the reasons for that gap between theory and practice, what is taught in the seminary and what is practised. All the subjects are expected to shed light, no matter how little, on the understanding and celebrations of the mystery of Christ. Courses that

seem highly unrelated in any way to the liturgy in the past has proven to be of great importance in the understanding and appreciation of the mystery being celebrated. For example, different developments in social sciences – sociology, psychology and anthropology have really developed ritual studies which today offers avenues for better understanding of Christian worship and specifically sacramental theology and practice.

The demands from the teachers of different courses in the seminary further calls for the reassessment of their process of recruitment. Pope Francis was conscious of this need when he writes that those who teach in the ecclesiastical faculties must be distinguished by a wealth of knowledge, witness to Christian and ecclesial life, and sense of responsibility.¹⁵ Though the intrinsic demands of some of these disciplines may not necessarily involve relating it to Christian worship, students are to be prepared in such a way that they have the love of rigorous investigation, observation and demonstration of truth, together with an honest awareness of the limits of human knowledge (OT 15). This will enable them to be better disposed and appropriate whatever is taught in relation to Christian worship.

Moreover, while many of the courses may not directly be related to worship, they could be related to faith and the understanding of human person. In these ways, the courses bolster the preparation of seminarians for liturgy in two ways. On the one hand, since the Church celebrates what she believes, relation of courses to faith invariably fosters conviction and understanding in worship. On the other hand, the human person is the primary subject of worship. A better understanding and appreciation of the human person, therefore, enhance the liturgical ministry of the priest.

Furthermore, to corroborate the importance of liturgy at the core of priestly formation, the conciliar fathers suggested that the spiritual formation of students in seminaries and religious houses should be given a liturgical orientation (SC no.17). This is purposely to aid their understanding of the sacred rites and to assist them to participate in them wholeheartedly. In this same vein, the seminarians are equipped to celebrate sacred mysteries and popular devotion with the spirit of the sacred liturgy (SC no.17).

Forming Priests as Christ-like *Leitourgos*

Seminary formation is geared towards making students like Christ - teacher, priest and shepherd. This expectation of the conciliar fathers is further expressed in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priest, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO) that the sacrament of orders make priests in the image of Christ (PO no.12). This fundamental notion of Catholic priesthood has its effect on how priests are formed. The introduction to the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* expressly stated that ‘the purpose of priestly education/formation is based on the concept of the Catholic priesthood.’¹⁶ While the concept of Catholic priesthood may take volumes of writings to exhaust, I will want to discuss it in this reflection in relation to the foregoing argument of the priest being in the likeness of Christ. Or better put in the light of the understanding of the Catholic priest acting *in persona Christi* at liturgy.

The New Testament highlights the priestly role of Jesus in different ways. He is regarded as the great high priest of the order of Melchizedek who offers both requests and supplications to God (Hebrew 5:5-7). He is our high priest who sits at the right hand of God ministering (*leitourgos*) in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1-2). It is pertinent to note here that the author of the letter to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as our ‘liturgist.’ Contrary to the long-held opinion that liturgy is from the two Latin words *laos* (people) and *ergon* (work) resulting in the definition of liturgy as work of the people, Paul Marshal rightly corrected¹⁷ that it is from the words *ergon* (work) and *leitōs* (public). Therefore, the etymological meaning of liturgy is a public work done on behalf of the people. It is in this light that we can better understand the priest as the minister of the word and the mystery of Christ as related in the Vatican II documents earlier cited.

Seminary formation which intends to mould ministers like Christ, our liturgist, invariably aims at forming ‘liturgists.’ It is a disservice to the generations of believers who will be led in worship by him who does not understand what he is doing. In as much as the actions of the priests are to be carried out in the person of Christ, anything less than a formation after a Christ-like liturgist is a sham. Knowing rightly that the liturgy is the exercise of the priestly office of

Jesus Christ, his ministers are to be formed with the same ideal in mind. It will never be overemphasised that having a liturgical focus is the real essence of priestly formation.

The centrality of liturgy in the formation of a priest does not end at his ordination. The conciliar fathers recommend ongoing liturgical formation for priests. This is intended to deepen their understanding of the mysteries they celebrate and to faithfully live the liturgical life (SC18). This is essential so that remaining *alter Christus*, they at the same time remain a 'liturgist' who ministers in the name of Christ.

Conclusion

The maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* was discussed in this reflection as highlighting the relationship between liturgy and theology, praying and believing, faith and worship. Since in the original usage of the maxim, liturgy, in agreement with scripture and tradition, influences what the Church believes, it is expedient that the formation of liturgical ministers put into consideration the urgent need of appropriating learning in the seminaries to have a liturgical undertone. The understanding of the maxim in its context affirms that the faith of the Church is what the liturgy celebrates. This affirmation guides against two extremes - of liturgical archaism (the idea that the way things are done in the past is always and the only ideal way of worship) and of the fluid liturgy (the idea that liturgy must adapt to modern-day 'beliefs' and its charismatic expressions). The faith of the Church which is celebrated in the liturgy is not a view or an ideology of a movement, no matter how popular within the Church. Therefore, the envisaged liturgical formation of seminarians prepares against the tendency of bringing different aberrations into worship and at the same time guards against rubricism.

Perhaps, if what this paper has discussed is faithfully considered, the attitude of ministers to the liturgy may be more positive and their conviction in the power of the rites further strengthened. These will possibly help to bridge the supposed gap between what they are taught in the seminary and what is expected of them at worship.

Endnotes

¹ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10. (Henceforth referred to as SC).

² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 2.

³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

⁴ For a detailed discussion on the interplay between theology and liturgy, see Michael Aune, 'Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship,' *Worship* 81(2007): 46-68, 141-169.

⁵ Pelagianism is the theological position that human beings, are like Adam before the fall. They are born innocent, with absolute free will and absolutely capable of obeying God's commandment and by so doing merit eternal life on their own. It was an extreme position against the Gnostic and Manichean doctrine. Augustine responding to the adherents of Pelagianism argues that human will is not free but sick, human nature is mortally wounded by sin and that from the moment of birth, human beings does not have the capacity to choose the good. This led to the development of Augustine's teaching on original sin. For him, it is only the grace of God that can enable human beings to turn to God. Without this grace, humanity is condemned. Pelagianism was condemned at the Synod of Carthage in 418 and the Council of Ephesus in 431. However, there arose a slight modification of the teaching of Augustine to further emphasise the fact that God created man good and all about the goodness is not lost in the fall, giving rise to Semi-Pelagianism. This doctrine holds on to the necessity of divine grace for salvation, but further claims that even the first step to this is dependent on free will. For further readings on Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol.1: *The Emergence of Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 278-331.

⁶ *Capitula Coestini* 8. As translated by Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press 1980), 225-226.

⁷ Some contemporary theologians however see in the maxim a confirmation of liturgy as the primary theology. Aidan Kavanagh, for instance, argues that the liturgy is the primary source for theology. See Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), 134; Aidan Kavanagh, 'Response: Primary Theology and Liturgical Acts' *Worship* (1983): 323-324.

⁸ Paul De Clerk, "'Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi': The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Age," *Studia Liturgica* 24 (1994): 192.

⁹ Kevin W. Irwin, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi – Origins and Meaning: State of the Question" *Liturgical Ministry* 11 (2002): 59.

¹⁰ For elaborate discussion on the application of the principle in early christianity, see Maxwell E. Johnson, *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay Between Christian Worship and Doctrine* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013).

¹¹ *Smyrnaeans* 6. Translated from Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters*. In Cyril C. Richardson, ed & transl, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 114.

¹² For the mystagogical catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, see Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of RCIA*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 65 -250.

¹³ Pope Pius XII, *Encyclical on the Liturgy: Mediator Dei*, (November 20, 1947), no. 48 (Henceforth referred to as MD).

¹⁴ See Aidan Kavanagh, 'Response: Primary Theology and Liturgical Acts,' 342. He argues that 'with the presence of the verb, *statuat*, in the sentence, it is impossible to reverse the subject and predicate any more than one can reverse the member of the statement: the foundations support the house. Having said that, one cannot really say that the house supports the foundation. One must say something different.'

¹⁵ Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*: On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, Art. 25 par. 1:1, January 29, 2018.

¹⁶ Introduction to *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, March 19, 1985.

¹⁷ Paul Marshall, "Reconsidering 'Liturgical theology': Is there a *Lex Orandi* for All Christians?," *Studia Liturgical* 25 (1995): 129-155.