

Scripture Across the Curriculum: Proposals to Revive Scripture as the Soul of Theology, Spirituality, Pastoral Ministry, and Mission in Seminary Formation

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Introduction

Chapter six of *Dei verbum* sets forth a wonderful vision of the role of the Word of God in the life of the Church. That vision presupposes a high ideal for the relationship of priests and other pastoral ministers to Scripture:

Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word.... (DV 25)

Are we succeeding at forming priests who diligently read and study Sacred Scripture, who are deeply familiar with the written word of God and well equipped to proclaim it? My experience both as a layman in the pew and as a seminary professor who teaches Scripture suggests that the honest answer is “Not yet.” Two recent experiences of assessing the biblical knowledge of seminarians have confirmed this appraisal.

A couple years ago I taught Pauline Literature to thirty students, about half of whom were first-year seminarians (MDiv students) and the other half of whom were enrolled in our Master of Arts in Theology (MA) or Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (MAPS) program. I decided to give my students a pretest at the outset of the course to ascertain their familiarity with Paul’s letters. The test was taken anonymously, although I asked students to indicate the program in which they were enrolled. The pretest listed sixteen well-known Pauline quotations or topics and the titles of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, asking the students to indicate in which letter the topic or quote is found (see Appendix). I then had the students exchange tests and grade them. I took a very generous view of what constituted a correct answer. Out of sixteen possible points, the MAPS students averaged 4.16, the MA students 4.3, and the MDIV students averaged 3.5. And these figures are deceptively high. When the highest score in each group is excluded the averages drop nearly a point for each group.

I was quite surprised at how unfamiliar master’s level students were with Paul’s letters, especially the seminarians. These were the brightest, most highly motivated first-

year theologians I had taught in my years at the seminary. They had completed their college seminary and pre-theology, attended Mass and prayed the Office daily, yet were not really familiar with Paul's letters at all.¹

A subsequent assessment experience sobered me about the limited contribution seminary courses make to students' lasting knowledge of the Bible. I was asked to join two other faculty members to administer a comprehensive oral examination in Scripture, dogma, and morals to four transitional deacons completing their studies. Although one student was outstanding in all three areas, especially Scripture, the other three did very poorly, especially in regard to the letters of Paul. Two were unable to say anything about the content of the letter to the Romans, and when offered a chance to discuss the content of any of Paul's letters, one did not try and the other failed to describe accurately the content of any letter. The third student *was* able to say a bit about Romans, but his answer indicated that he was recalling a few texts mentioned in dogma courses, rather than actually being familiar with the letter.

Why did they perform so badly? Undoubtedly, three of the four did not review the Pauline literature in their immediate preparation for the exam. But what is more significant is that despite six or seven years of seminary formation and completing a course in the Pauline literature, these students were still ignorant of one of the most important books in the New Testament. It is clear that apart from liturgical selections and course assignments, these seminarians simply did not read the Bible. While I would like to think that these seminarians do not represent all the members of their class, they probably represent many. This is serious, if, as St. Jerome taught, "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." On the other hand, if we can somehow turn the situation around and train priests who know and love Scripture and are capable of nourishing themselves and others on the Word of God, who knows what faith and divinely inspired energy (Col 1:29) might be released in the Church's life and mission?

What can we do to form candidates for the priesthood who are prepared to minister the Word of God fruitfully in the life and mission of the Church? Drawing on the recommendations of the International Synod of Bishops in 2008, the suggestions of some of my colleagues at Sacred Heart Major Seminary,² and my own reflection, I would like to offer some remedial proposals for the spiritual and intellectual formation of seminarians in relation to Sacred Scripture.³ On the basis of the Synod's observation that part of the problem in forming competent ministers of the word stems from a problematic "separation" among the theological disciplines (Prop. 27, see below), I propose an integrated approach to Scripture across the academic curriculum.

For ease of reference, I have numbered and italicized my curriculum proposals, offering explanatory comments after many of them. I have divided this paper in two parts: part I sets forth the proposals that define the overall strategy; part II offers specific proposals for the diverse stages and disciplines of seminary formation following the order of the *Program of Priestly Formation* 5th ed. (*PPF*). A conclusion offers suggestions for how a seminary faculty might begin implementing these proposals.

PART ONE

Spiritual Formation

The “Final Propositions”⁴ of the 2008 Synod of Bishops on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church” suggest that Scripture should have a vital role in the spiritual formation of priests:

The Word of God is indispensable *for the formation of the heart* of a good pastor, minister of the Word.” (Prop. 31, emphasis added)

Candidates must learn to *love* the Word of God. Scripture must therefore be the soul of their theological formation....” (Prop. 32, emphasis added)

This suggests that a seminarian needs to develop a relationship with the Bible in which he not only reverences it, but finds joy in reading it and acquires the habit of turning to it for nourishment and instruction. This way of knowing Scripture makes it the soul of theology and will enable a priest to teach and preach it effectively.

The Synod prioritizes “prayerful reading” of Scripture, “in particular *Lectio divina*.”⁵ My first proposal follows from this:

1. Seminarians should be taught a simple approach to lectio divina at the very beginning of formation and encouraged to develop a daily habit of prayerful Scripture reading.

If Scripture is truly a foundation of the spiritual life of a priest, this foundation should be laid at the outset and receive the same kind of emphasis given to daily participation in the Eucharist and personal prayer. Ideally this would occur as part of a propedeutic year for spiritual formation devoted to reading through the Bible and Catechism in the context of evangelization experiences.⁶ If a spiritual year is not possible, College and Pre-theology formation should introduce scriptural *lectio divina* at the very beginning of formation.

Formators need to help seminarians understand the priority of scriptural *lectio divina* in relation to other spiritual reading or devotional practices. A priest involved in formation told me of seeing *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena* on a college seminarian’s reading goals. While admiring the seminarian’s zeal, the formator could not help but wonder if reading the Bible would not be a better place to start! In advising seminarians about devotions, it is worthwhile pointing out Pope John Paul’s priority in his apostolic letter on the rosary: “The Rosary, therefore, is no substitute for *lectio divina*; on the contrary, it presupposes and promotes it.”⁷

2. *From the outset seminarians should be taught that “the priest is first of all a ‘minister of the Word of God,’”⁸ and that for this reason, reading, praying and studying Scripture is of the highest priority.*

Many seminarians do not prioritize knowing Scripture, placing their focus almost entirely on preparing to celebrate the sacraments. It turns out that the deacon who did very well on the Scripture portion of his comprehensive exam was an exception in this respect. When I asked the secret of his success, he said that he had heard that seminarians generally performed poorly in Scripture, in comparison to dogma and moral theology. This information provoked a decision on his part:

I did not care if I were a priest who could not explain the finer points of dogmatic theology or a priest who did not know the difference between a salpingectomy and a salpingostomy; however, I did not want to be known as a priest who did not know Sacred Scripture.

Consequently, he prioritized Scripture in his exam preparation and re-read many parts of the Bible including all the letters of Paul.

3. *Scriptural lectio divina should not be confined to the Lectionary readings or to the Office of Readings. Seminarians should be encouraged to undertake a lectio continua of the whole Bible.*

Despite their value in guiding interpretation, the Lectionary and Divine Office readings are inadequate for a seminarian’s Scripture reading for two reasons. First, the Mass readings do not present biblical texts in context. This is the reason why the bright seminarians in my class who prayed the Divine Office and went to Mass daily were almost completely ignorant of where to find anything Paul said. Second, the Lectionary and Liturgy of the Hours only cover part of the biblical canon: all the daily and Sunday readings of the three-year cycle cover only 71.4% of the NT and 13.5% of the OT.⁹

In the early 1990’s Cardinal Ratzinger proposed a pattern of *lectio continua* to a group of bishops during their *ad limina* visit that would be useful for seminarians. He recommended that all bishops and theologians read through the New Testament once every year and through the Old Testament once every two years.¹⁰ Practically speaking, this works out to about a chapter a day of the New Testament and about a chapter and a half of the Old Testament, a practice that does not require much time. If seminarians adopted this excellent practice for the years of their formation they would acquire a solid familiarity with the entire Bible by their ordination, reading the Old Testament at least three times, and the New Testament seven times.¹¹

4. *When seminarians begin to pray the Liturgy of the Hours they should receive instruction that explains how to pray the psalms as Christian prayer, including an introduction to the traditional typological interpretation of the psalms.*

This is essential in order for seminarians to draw nourishment from the Word of God in the Divine Office as the Synod urges (Prop. 32). I mention this since the curriculum does not call for instruction in Psalms and Wisdom until graduate theology, and it is important that seminarians not have to wait until then. Not only will such instruction enable them to better nourish themselves from liturgical prayer, but this introduction will help them to grasp the unity of the Testaments.

5. In their annual evaluations, seminarians should be asked to assess their growth (1) in understanding and love of Scripture, (2) in understanding the biblical foundations of Church teaching, and (3) in their competence and confidence to preach, teach, and counsel from the Bible.

Intellectual Formation

As important as spiritual formation with respect to the Bible is, it will yield only modest fruit if it is not accompanied by an intellectual formation that is grounded in Sacred Scripture. The Synod concludes its section on formation of candidates for holy orders (Prop. 32) by calling for “a renewal of academic programs... so that the systematic study of theology is better seen in the light of Sacred Scripture.”¹² Such a renewal in seminary programs requires changes in the way Scripture is taught and cooperation between those who teach Scripture and those who teach the other theological and pastoral disciplines.

Teaching Scripture in the Context of Seminary Formation

The pedagogy of teaching Scripture to seminarians is extremely important and much more could be said.¹³ Nevertheless, I offer the following proposals as a starting point.

6. The first principle in the intellectual formation of seminarians must be to give them a solid grounding in the theology of divine revelation and especially of Sacred Scripture within that context.

In order to read and interpret Scripture fruitfully, it is necessary to understand the nature of the book one is reading and interpreting. The divine and human nature of Scripture should be clearly explained in a way that increases students’ faith in the written word of God and that helps seminarians to grasp the difference between this book and every other writing. These foundational truths should be taught both in theology courses (see below), introductory Scripture courses, and graduate courses on exegetical method, the Pentateuch, and the Gospels.¹⁴

7. Priority should be placed on learning the content of the Bible, its stories, principal characters, key texts, theological themes, variety of genre and books, its structure, and its grand narrative, the history of salvation.

Often this knowledge is presupposed or regarded as too basic, and pastoral ministers are taught the rudiments of biblical scholarship without ever having read, or heard explained, the content of the Bible itself. Simple pretests, like the one I used in Pauline Literature class, may be useful in many courses for ascertaining student familiarity with the biblical literature under consideration. Introductory Scripture courses should guide future pastoral ministers through reading substantial portions, if not all, of the Bible over the course of a year (or two) and aim at familiarizing students with its contents (as also proposed in #3 above).¹⁵ At both the undergraduate and graduate level, course outcomes and assessment should direct learning to a thorough knowledge of the biblical text itself.

8. Those who are entering graduate theology should be required to pass a literacy test on the Bible's principal characters and stories, the arrangement of its books, the main events of biblical history, its principal themes, and diverse genre.

This is a practice already followed by some seminaries. Those whose biblical knowledge is not adequate can study and retake the literacy test or take remedial Scripture course(s) before admission to graduate studies. A computer-generated multiple-choice test could be designed for this purpose. College seminarians and those in pre-theology could be allowed to take the literacy text anytime during their final year before graduate theology, studying and retaking it if necessary.

Although graduate courses address more subtle questions of interpretation and engage biblical scholarship more deeply, the emphasis should remain on mastering what Scripture itself affirms, rather than the questions that frequently occupy scholars but are less relevant to Christian faith and life (e.g., questions of authorship, sources, methods, etc.). Reading assignments and assessment even in graduate courses should require students' familiarity with the biblical text itself. As much of the canon of Scripture as possible should be covered over the course of the program of intellectual formation, whether in Scripture or in other courses.

9. Scripture courses should not only interpret texts in their literary and historical contexts, but also teach a theological hermeneutic that reads texts in light of the canon, tradition, and the analogy of faith.

This was a major concern of the Synod of Bishops. Pope Benedict addressed the matter, saying, "Only where the two methodological levels, the historical-critical and the theological, are both observed can one speak of theological exegesis, an exegesis appropriate to this book" (Benedict XVI, Oct. 14, 2008). In the bishops' judgment the main problem has been the neglect of the study of "the theological dimension of the Biblical texts" and the consequences of this imbalanced approach are grave: "the Bible

becomes for its readers a book only of the past... incapable of speaking to our present.” A “hermeneutics of faith” disappears, leaving only a “positivistic and secular” hermeneutic that denies the activity of the divine in history (Prop. 26).

The holistic theological interpretation of *Dei verbum* 12 should be contrasted with exegesis that fails by virtue of defective presuppositions (e.g., rationalism, Marxism, or other controlling ideologies), or by neglecting the canon, tradition, or church doctrine. In addition to modern literary and historical methods, seminarians should be exposed to examples of pre-modern interpretation that illustrate its exegetical, theological and pastoral riches.

10. Scripture courses for seminarians should be oriented to the ministry of priests: preaching, teaching, and counseling grounded in the word of God as believed by the Church.

This requires a significant change from the approach to Scripture that has prevailed in Catholic seminaries for a generation. The presuppositions, goals, and concerns of biblical scholarship directed to the life of the Church differ sharply from those of biblical scholarship directed to the academy. Academic biblical scholarship aims at “scientific” knowledge, while the ministry of the word aims at personal transformation through an encounter with God in his word. Jesus’ disciples aspire to approach Scripture with reverence, love, faith, and obedience.

Biblical scholarship in the academy rightly employs a critical method in which devotional, apologetic, and contemporary application is absent or highly restricted. However, Scripture teaching for the formation of pastoral ministers begins from the Church’s faith, values devotional reading, aims at showing the relationship between Scripture and church doctrine, and deliberately reflects on Scripture for its meaning for Christian life today. It must be academically rigorous, but is directed toward different goals. Future pastoral ministers must learn to interpret Scripture critically, but within the Church’s hermeneutic of faith. Scholars engaged in the formation of pastoral ministers need to consider what this might mean, and how their approach to Scripture should be like and unlike the approach taken in the academy. To date, there has been very little scholarly discussion of this issue.

11. Although seminarians should be acquainted the exegetical methods of scholars, they should be trained in a practical method of Scripture study¹⁶ that they can use in the limited time they will have for preparing homilies and that they incorporate in a lifelong program of personal study.

12. Seminarians should be taught solid reasons for trusting the testimony of Sacred Scripture and sound responses to the attacks on the Bible’s credibility (e.g., responses to extreme historical minimalism in Old Testament courses and to the methodology of radical historical Jesus scholarship in Gospel courses, etc.).

13. As much as possible, Scripture professors should highlight the relationships between the biblical texts being studied and their theological implications, and between biblical texts and their usefulness in pastoral ministry. This goal should be reflected in a course outcome and in some class assignments.

Scripture across the Curriculum: Interdisciplinary Cooperation

One of the Synod's main concerns was "an unproductive separation... between exegesis and theology" that has produced "an uncertainty, and a lack of solidity, in the formative intellectual journey of some future candidates to ecclesial ministry.... The synod fathers, therefore, respectfully address an appeal both to theologians and to exegetes... [for] a clearer and more synthetic collaboration between the two" (Prop. 27).

In discussing formation for holy orders, the bishops affirm that "Scripture must ... be the soul of their theological formation, underlining the indispensable circularity among exegesis, theology, spirituality and mission" (Prop. 32). The inclusion of "spirituality and mission" indicates the Synod fathers' awareness of a second separation (alongside the one between exegesis and theology): the separation that exists between an academic approach to Scripture and its dynamism in Christian life and pastoral ministry.

The proposals below respond to the bishops' appeal to strengthen the "indispensable circularity" among the disciplines related to ministry. The goal is to "tear down the dividing wall" between the theological disciplines and, to change metaphors, to build bridges from both sides of the separations that have arisen, between Scripture and theology, and between Scripture and pastoral practice. Change will be necessary for all. Scripture professors will need to give more attention to the theological and pastoral implications of texts. For some it will be a new challenge to accept responsibility for explaining how church doctrine embodies biblical revelation. Theology professors will need to give more attention to highlighting Scriptural foundations; they may need to wrestle in a new way with the insights of historical exegesis. Professors of pastoral courses (homiletics, catechesis, pastoral counseling, pastoral leadership, etc.) will need to discover and teach how Scripture relates to their ministry specialties. In order to move beyond good intentions, course outcomes, assignments, and assessment tools should be crafted to support this change of direction.

14. Theology courses should explain doctrines beginning with their foundations in Scripture. The syllabi of these courses should reflect the priority of understanding the source of doctrine in divine revelation by a course outcome along the following lines:

The student will be able to explain the biblical foundations of church teaching (what texts and how they support it), or, if a doctrine is based on Tradition or natural law, how it is consistent with Scripture.

Explaining doctrine beginning from the Scriptures is the method set forth in *Optatum totius* 16¹⁷ and followed in many church documents. For instance, *Lumen*

gentium begins by recounting the history of salvation from Scripture and then explains the nature the Church by the various biblical images.

15. Professors of theology courses should develop a list of key texts (10-20) relevant to the content of each course with an indication of the doctrine to which they are related and communicate this list to the Scripture faculty. These texts would then be read and expounded both in the theology course and in the Scripture course devoted to that portion of the biblical literature. An analogous practice would link pastoral courses and Scripture courses.

Although the *approach* to treating a given text will differ, depending on whether it is considered in a Scripture, theology, or ministry course, the effect will be to reinforce students' understanding of the intimate relationship between Scripture, doctrine, and ministry. This practice will require communication between faculty of different specialties to identify key texts and to insure that their explanations of those texts are harmonious. That could lead to some stimulating conversation!

Whenever possible, team-teaching that bring together professors across disciplines to teach a Scripture, dogma, or pastoral course is an excellent means of integrating the curriculum of ministerial formation. When team-teaching is not feasible, professors from other disciplines can be invited to present a lecture or part of a lecture on a topic. For example, a Scripture professor could present on justification in Romans in a dogma class, while a dogma professor could present on justification in the theological tradition in a Pauline literature class.

16. To counter the tendency toward a proof-texting approach (which can distort Scripture's meaning by de-contextualizing texts) and to help seminarians to grasp the integral relation between Scripture and doctrine, a longer portion of Scripture that is relevant to the topic should also be assigned and discussed in theology and pastoral courses. For example, Colossians in Christology, the Pastoral Epistles in a course on pastoral care, James in moral theology, Romans 1-8 in Christian Anthropology, etc.

17. At the end of graduate theology seminarians should be required to pass a ministry of the word competency examination that tests their ability to explain church teachings in light of Scripture, Tradition, and natural law and to answer common questions about the Bible and the meaning of a set texts that are doctrinally important or that frequently raise questions.

This would be an oral exam of 30-45 minutes before at least two examiners (a faculty member and a priest of the diocese?). To pass the examination the candidate would need to demonstrate sufficient biblical, theological, and pastoral expertise to preach, teach, or counsel at the level expected of a priest. A list of questions could be compiled and drawn at random. The exam could be taken anytime in the year before priestly ordination and repeated, if necessary. It could be combined with whatever other comprehensive means of assessment a seminary might employ.

PART II: SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

The proposals in part II merely aim to implement at each stage and in each discipline the approach outlined above. Readers who do not wish to read them all can skip to the conclusion. I welcome suggestions from specialists in all these disciplines, whether to add to or improve upon the proposals offered below.

College Seminary and Pre-theology

The undergraduate academic formation of seminarians focuses on philosophy (minimum 30 credits), leaving most of the theology to the graduate program. Scripture presently plays a very minor role in undergraduate seminary formation, a lacuna worth addressing.¹⁸

Scripture in Undergraduate Theology

The *Program of Pastoral Formation* describes the content of undergrad theology briefly:

College-level theology courses should study the themes contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, including courses on Catholic doctrine, liturgy and sacraments, Catholic morality, Christian prayer, and Sacred Scripture. (par. 158)

At this level, how can “the systematic study of theology [be] better seen in the light of Sacred Scripture” (Prop. 32)? Here are a few proposals.

18. The first theology course, as part of the presentation of divine revelation, should present what the Catechism says about Scripture as the Word of God, including its role in the life of the Church (par. 101-148¹⁹).

The dual nature of Scripture should be clearly explained in a way that increases students’ faith in the written word of God and that helps seminarians to grasp the essential difference between the Bible and every other writing, including magisterial documents. While students need to recognize the human dimension (language, genre, culture of the time, etc.), it is essential that they grasp that Scripture is divine self-communication, like the Incarnate Word.

19. *The first Scripture courses should guide seminarians through reading substantial portions if not all of the Bible over the course of a year or two (see #7 above).*²⁰

20. *Other undergraduate theology courses should show the relationship between their topic areas and Sacred Scripture. Understanding and being able to describe this relationship should be listed as an outcome for each course*

In teaching doctrine from the Catechism and other magisterial documents, it is important to point out how these ground their teaching in Scripture and the apostolic tradition, so that seminarians avoid the temptation to “magisterial positivism” of those who seek to be faithful, but do not know the basis of Church teaching in divine revelation.

Philosophy

Philosophy courses are often presented in a way that is quite remote from Scripture. Sometimes this even provokes a vocational crisis for seminarians, who, after having “tasted the goodness of the word of God” (Heb 6:5), enroll in college seminary and find themselves in a three-year philosophy program. Their surprise is sometimes like Jacob’s, who thought he was marrying Rachel, but “in the morning, behold, it was Leah” (Gen 29:25)!

This is outside my field of expertise, but my colleague, Eduardo Echeverria, who is both a philosopher and a theologian, insists that Christian philosophy ought to be practiced and taught in connection with the word of God. He writes,

Vatican II’s “Decree on the Training of Priests,” *Optatam totius*, par. 15, says something that points in the right direction on this question of Scripture and philosophy: “The students themselves should be helped to perceive the connection between philosophical arguments and the mysteries of salvation” (par. 15). Although this decree immediately turns to theology as the study of those mysteries, there is a tradition of Christian philosophy that explains the connection that Vatican II is referring to as “the art of philosophizing in a Christian manner; namely a philosophical reflection [and practice] that is vitally conjoined to faith” [*Fides et ratio*, 76]. That means having a Christian philosophical perspective on a theory of knowledge, culture, politics, metaphysics, language, history, theology, hermeneutics, and so forth.²¹

Besides the problem of beginning undergraduate seminary education with so little Scripture, the venerable custom of completing philosophy studies *before* beginning theology merits reconsideration. Might there not be a way of integrating the two fields of study more fruitfully? For example, the Synod urges that courses in philosophy promote “a clear understanding of the presuppositions and implications contained in the diverse hermeneutical methods applied to the study of the Bible” (Prop. 32). This topic in philosophy could be much more fruitfully studied in the graduate program, when

seminarians are learning about exegetical methods and biblical hermeneutics, than in the undergraduate period when philosophy is taught. A reappraisal of each philosophy course to clarify its place in the curriculum in relation to Scripture, theology, and other aspects of priestly formation would be well worth the effort.

Graduate Theology

Fundamental Theology

21. Fundamental theology (or theological method) should include the theology of revelation and of Scripture among its principal topics, including a careful exposition of Dei verbum, chapters I-III and VI.

Again, this must be done in a way that makes clear that the Scriptures faithfully communicate God's word to us and does not make Scripture seem to play second fiddle to the Magisterium. (A seminarian once asked one of my colleagues in systematic theology, "What authority does the Magisterium accord to 1 Timothy 2:4?"). Of course, the complementary role of Tradition must also be explained, as well as the role of the Magisterium to serve, listen to, expound, and render authoritative interpretation.

22. The history of the biblical canon should be taught, indicating the role of tradition and church authority and the criteria by which books were chosen.

An explanation should be offered to why some "gospels" were not included, to equip seminarians to respond to the current confusion in this area.

Patristic Studies

23. Patristics courses should explain the role of Scripture in the theological and pastoral writings of the fathers and their methods of interpretation, and include selected examples of biblical commentary by the church fathers.

Dogmatic Theology

According to the *Program for Priestly Formation*, dogmatic theology includes instruction in Trinity, Christology, Christian anthropology and soteriology (creation-human person-fall-redemption-grace), ecclesiology, sacraments, eschatology, Mariology, missiology, and Holy Orders.

In each of these topic areas, proposals #14, #15, and #16 for interdisciplinary cooperation (explaining the Scriptural foundations of doctrines and linking it to a course outcome, identifying 10 to 20 key texts for the Scripture faculty, selecting an appropriate longer text from Scripture) apply.

24. At least one written assignment in each dogma class should ask the seminarian to write a homily or catechesis that explains a doctrine from Scripture.

Moral Theology

Moral theology is built on the foundation of Scripture and natural law. It shows how the way of life taught in Scripture reflects God's loving plan that accords with reason and human flourishing, explains how Christian moral living is made possible by the gift of the Spirit, and applies biblical principles, the Christian tradition, and natural law reasoning to ethical questions not directly addressed by Scripture.²²

25. The proposals that apply to dogmatic theology can be applied to moral theology, mutatis mutandis.

26. Seminarians should be brought to see how Scripture addresses a wide range of moral topics, from the value of human work, to ecology, to the role of government, etc., and how Scripture is the source for much of the Church's moral teaching.

Besides referring to key texts like the Sermon on the Mount or Galatians 5, moral theology courses could read the letter of James, sections of the Law of Moses, or wisdom about how to live from Proverbs or Sirach.

Seminarians are motivated when they see the *usefulness* (2 Tim 3:16-17) of Scripture for pastoral ministry. Scripture is especially helpful for teaching on marriage, sex, and family life and for teaching about social justice and the Christian attitudes toward money and the poor. Students should be given opportunities in assignments to prepare homilies or catechetical instruction on moral topics from Scripture.

Church History

27. When key events in church history are related to the interpretation or application of biblical texts, the most important of those texts should be read in class and their significance explained. A list of the most important texts from church history courses and their relevance should be forwarded to the Scripture faculty for comment in the appropriate courses.

Canon Law

28. *The first course in canon law, perhaps the first lecture, should establish the basis for canon law from Scripture.*

Pope John Paul's *Sacrae disciplinae leges* 15-16 provides a useful starting point.²³

29. *When Scripture is the basis for provisions of canon law, those key texts should be read in class. A list of such key texts should be distributed among the Scripture courses for explanation by Scripture professors as described in proposal #15.*²⁴

Spirituality and spiritual direction

30. *Courses in the history of spirituality should explain the role of the Bible in its development and read and explain key biblical texts employed in the spiritual tradition, communicating a list of these texts to the Scripture faculty as described in proposal #15.*

Of course this entails reference to the foundations of Christian prayer in *lectio divina* and the Divine Office discussed above under spiritual formation.

An introduction to Ignatian prayer and meditation could teach the role of imagination in reflecting on biblical narratives.

Students could be asked to read *The Song of Songs* and some portion of traditional commentary upon it.

Liturgy

31. *Seminarians should come to understand that Catholic liturgy is a direct development of the worship of Israel and of the early Christians as depicted in Sacred Scripture and other writings of the early Church. Furthermore, the biblical patterns of sacrifice, praise, and prayer that undergird Catholic liturgical worship should be pointed out, along with the biblical words, images, and phrases that shape our liturgical prayers.*

Reformation objections to Catholic liturgical practice should be answered by reference to Scripture (e.g., Eucharist as sacrifice in 1 Cor 10, the use of vestments in Old Testament worship and in the visions of heavenly worship in Rev, use of set prayers by the use of psalms in the worship of Israel and the Church of the New Testament, etc.).

32. *Seminarians should be taught the theological significance of the Liturgy of the Word and instructed regarding the practices that show Catholic veneration of the Word of God.*

They should read and discuss the Introduction to the Lectionary and the General Instruction in the Roman Missal.

Homiletics

33. Homiletics courses should recall what church documents say regarding the importance of proclaiming and explaining Scripture in the homily.²⁵ One of the criteria for evaluating homilies should be, “Has the homilist effectively explained and applied one or more of the Scripture readings?”

Seminarians should learn the difference between proclaiming the word of God from the readings, and using a text as a segue to preach whatever is on their minds, however good or true.

34. Seminarians should be taught a sound methodology of moving from text to proclamation (actualization) that entails careful study of the word of God in its context, prayerful listening to the Spirit, and reflection on the situation and needs of those to whom he will be preaching.

Those who teach Scripture and those who teach homiletics should work together to present a common approach to study, interpretation, and exposition of the word of God in preaching.

St. Augustine says that one of the best ways of learning to preach is to hear good preaching. An effort should be made in homiletics and Scripture courses to expose seminarians to examples of excellent biblical preaching, whether in print, audio, or video formats.

While homiletics courses necessarily help seminarians to develop public speaking skills, the emphasis should remain on the exposition of the word and on the spiritual dynamic of preaching, i.e., to make oneself an instrument through whom God can speak.

Catechesis

35. Courses should explain what church documents teach regarding the role of Scripture in catechesis,²⁶ and include assignments and a course outcome aimed at developing this skill. They should also propose practical ways of promoting Bible reading and study among the people of God.

It may be worth considering using Ephesians or 1 Peter (a letter that is rich in post-baptismal catechesis) in a course on catechesis.

Ecumenism

The course on ecumenism could consider ecumenical cooperation in textual criticism and translations of the Bible as well as the contribution of biblical exegesis to ecumenical dialogues about justification, Mary, and other topics.²⁷

Pastoral Theology

36. Pastoral counseling should be approached as a ministry of the word to individuals, couples or families--as opening the meaning of Scripture and helping people apply it in the circumstances of their lives.

This approach to pastoral counseling works with a divine instrument that has divine power to achieve a divine result. The divine instrument is “that gracious word of his that can build you up and give you the inheritance among all who are consecrated” (Acts 20:32). The divine result is life in Christ. This task is a specifically pastoral, representing Christ the Good Shepherd.

While it is also important to make students aware of the approaches of contemporary psychology, this approach trains them for their particular pastoral role of applying the Word of God.²⁸

Conclusion

The shift to moving the Word of God to the center of the Church’s life and mission must begin with the Church’s ministers, and therefore with seminaries, the institutions devoted to their formation. Although these are very ambitious proposals, something major is needed. The foolishness of continuing to do the same thing while hoping for a different result is well known. It takes time to turn a large ship, and the bark of Peter is a large ship. At the Second Vatican Council she began a turn *ad fontes*, to her sources in Scripture and Tradition. Implementing these principles and practices will help to turn the great ship by forming priests who know and love the written Word of God and will be able to proclaim it with power.

These proposals require that those involved in forming seminarians catch the vision. They require that Scripture professors learn to teach in a new way, giving more attention to theology and pastoral implications. They require that other theology faculty devote precious classroom time to Scripture. Some faculty members may feel ill-prepared to do so and will need Scripture faculty to team-teach or give a lecture now and then. Scripture faculty may feel a similar need for help with topics in dogma, morals, canon law, or history.

Some of these proposals can be implemented on the initiative of individual faculty members. Others require the action of the whole faculty or of the dean of studies. Still others require consideration by the formation faculty. If a faculty is willing to pursue the interdisciplinary cooperation described here, it may be easiest to begin by identifying key biblical texts in one course per discipline per semester. Perhaps one faculty meeting per semester could allocate time to discuss how to approach to those texts. Realistically, progress will be gradual; we can perhaps take some steps right away, but will need to wait on others. A few verses from Paul's letters to seem appropriate to the present situation:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (1 Tim 4:13)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

Our part is to keep teaching the word with all patience. The Lord's part is to build up his Church. And he will.

Appendix I: Pauline Literature Pretest

1. Choose which of the following most accurately characterizes **your familiarity with the Pauline Literature**:

_____ Quite familiar. I have read all of Paul's letters three or more times and am pretty familiar their contents.

_____ Somewhat familiar. I have probably read all of Paul's letters at least once or twice (besides hearing sections in the liturgy), and know the contents somewhat.

_____ Not very familiar. I've heard Paul's writings at Mass and occasional read some of them, but really don't know these NT books at all.

2. **Program** in which you are enrolled: MA _____ ; MDiv _____, MAPS, none _____

3. **Familiarity Pretest** (Identify which Pauline letter contains the items in the first column)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Paul's farewell message _____ | a) Romans |
| 2. Paul's explanation of God's plan for Israel _____ | b) 1 Corinthians |
| 3. The hymn to love _____ | c) 2 Corinthians |
| 4. Paul's list of "fruit of the Spirit" _____ | d) Galatians |
| 5. Paul on "justification by faith" _____ | e) Ephesians |
| 6. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church..." _____ | f) Philippians |
| 7. "Whatever gain I had I count as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ..." _____ | g) Colossians |
| 8. Teaching on Christian sexual morality _____ | h) 1 Thessalonians |
| 9. Paul on the resurrection of the body _____ | i) 2 Thessalonians |
| 10. Paul on charisms _____ | j) 1 Timothy |
| 11. Qualifications of presbyters and deacons _____ | k) 2 Timothy |
| 12. Focuses on the supremacy of Christ _____ | l) Titus |
| 13. Describes Paul's apostolic sufferings _____ | m) Philemon |
| 14. Paul on the Eucharist _____ | |
| 15. Baptism as dying and rising with Christ _____ | |
| 16. The timing of the second coming of Christ _____ | |

[Many of these questions admit more than one correct answer. I took a lenient approach to scoring this pretest, counting any defensible answer as correct.]

¹ I did a little inquiring to identify the high scorers. In the MAPS program, a permanent diaconate candidate who spent several years in a lay charismatic community scored 11/16; in the MA program a lay student who grew up in the same community scored 9/16; and in the MDIV program a seminarian with a background in Catholic apologetics and some charismatic involvement scored 10/16. The other high-scorer (9/16), not yet enrolled in any program, was a recent “revert” to the Catholic Church who had spent a year at a Lutheran Seminary. At the end of the course I repeated the anonymous pretest and the class average was 10 or 11 out of 16—not excellent, but a big improvement.

² I wish to acknowledge the helpful suggestions of Fr. Michael Byrnes, Robert Fastiggi, Edward Peters, Janet Smith, Gerry Rauch, Eduardo Echeverria, Fr. Daniel Trapp, and others of my colleagues at Sacred Heart Major Seminary. Nevertheless, these proposals are my own, and I look forward to discussing them with my colleagues.

³ The role of Scripture in the human and pastoral formation of priests deserves analogous consideration, but is beyond the space limits of this paper.

⁴ The official Synod document is in Latin and the Vatican released a “provisional and unofficial” translation in Italian on October 25, 2008. Quotations from the “Final Propositions” in this paper are taken from a translation of the Italian version by *National Catholic Reporter* and available online at <http://ncronline.org/node/12228> (last accessed September 1, 2009).

⁵ Prop. 32. The Final Propositions give considerable emphasis to *lectio divina*, mentioning it seven times.

⁶ I encountered this excellent practice in some of the dioceses in Lithuania where the year of spiritual formation also involves participation in activities of the most vigorous lay movements and an experience of their methods of evangelization and prayer.

⁷ Despite its insistence that the proclamation of the word is the first task of the priest (par. 239), *The Program of Priestly Formation*, 5th ed., is not as helpful as it could be in indicating the priority of the Word of God in the spiritual life of the priest. Reading Scripture is mentioned fifth in a list of sixteen characteristics or practices that foster priestly spirituality, and the impression is given that reading the lectionary readings is enough (*PPF*, 110). This *PPF* paragraph cites *Pastores dabo vobis* 47, which does teach prayerful reading of the word of God, but does not suggest this is adequately fulfilled by the lectionary readings. The *PPF* 5th ed. is an excellent document, but the next edition would benefit from explicit consideration of the 2008 Synod of Bishops and of how to form priests for the church life envisioned in *Dei verbum*, chapter six.

⁸ *Pastores dabo vobis* 26: “The priest is first of all a ‘minister of the Word of God.’ He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever-increasing knowledge of and communion in the mystery of God, as revealed and communicated to us in Christ. For this reason, the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic or exegetical aspects, though certainly necessary, is not enough. He needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart, so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him—‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2:16)—such that his words and his choices and attitudes may become ever more a reflection, a proclamation and a witness to the Gospel. Only if he ‘abides’ in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free, overcoming every conditioning which is contrary or foreign to the Gospel (cf. Jn 8:31-32).” *PDV* 47 expounds in greater detail the role of the word of God in spiritual formation.

⁹ It is doubtful that adding the Office of Readings adds more than 10% to each Testament. Detailed information about lectionary coverage is available at <http://www.catholic-resources.org/Lectionary/index.html>.

¹⁰ Cardinal Ratzinger suggested that this reading should focus on the text itself, not a reading of notes or commentary; he also suggested that a regular reading of the Catechism or documents of Vatican II could supplement this biblical *lectio continua*. I read this speech on a bulletin board at the Pontifical Biblical Institute where it was posted by Fr. James Swetnam, SJ, but have not been able to find it since. I believe it originally appeared in *L’Osservatore Romano* and was reprinted elsewhere.

¹¹ If seminarians are asked to undertake a prayerful *lectio continua* of the whole Bible, they should be advised about varying the types of literature (e.g., spread the Gospels through the year) and about handling difficult sections, like genealogies, Leviticus, etc. Although *lectio divina* comes naturally for some, most seminarians will profit from practical teaching about how to go about it, what to pay attention to, etc.

¹² This accords with Vatican II’s *Optatum totius* 16: “The theological disciplines, in the light of faith and under the guidance of the magisterium of the Church, should be so taught that the students will correctly draw out Catholic

doctrine from divine revelation, profoundly penetrate it, make it the food of their own spiritual lives, and be enabled to proclaim, explain, and protect it in their priestly ministry.”

¹³ I touch on this in “Biblical Scholarship with a Pastoral Purpose” (*Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, Nov 2006, 8-13), have explored it further in unpublished presentations at a Continuing Seminar of the Catholic Biblical Association (“A Pastoral Hermeneutic and A Pastoral Pedagogy” and “Biblical Interpretation for the Life and Mission of the Church”). See also Robert C. Hill’s *Breaking the Bread of the Word: Principles of Teaching Scripture*, Subsidia Biblica (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1991) and Dale P. Martin’s *Pedagogy of the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2008).

¹⁴ The various sections of *Dei Verbum* can also be taken up in the courses to which they especially pertain: chapter III in the course on exegetical method and interpretation; chapter IV in the course on the Pentateuch; chapter V in the courses on the Gospels.

¹⁵ The presentation of critical issues should be saved for more advanced courses, although it is important to respond to questions along the way. Since the goal of these courses is to facilitate reading, acquaintance, and initial reflection, they need not require as many classroom hours as more advanced courses.

¹⁶ This training in a pastoral approach to Scripture study should include practice with commentaries, Bible dictionaries, analytical concordances, and other resources (including online and Bible software) that equip them to study the use of key terms in the Bible with insight into the meaning in Greek and Hebrew words, even if they do not know these languages.

¹⁷ “The students are to be formed with particular care in the study of the Bible, which ought to be, as it were, the soul of all theology. After a suitable introduction they are to be initiated carefully into the method of exegesis; and they are to see the great themes of divine revelation and to receive from their daily reading of and meditating on the sacred books inspiration and nourishment. Dogmatic theology should be so arranged that these biblical themes are proposed first of all.”

¹⁸ The *PPF* states the goal of undergraduate theology as follows: “College-level seminarians should also begin the study of theology, with undergraduate courses that focus on the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith. In particular, they should concentrate on those elements of the faith that may have been overlooked or neglected in the students’ earlier religious education and that stand as a presupposition for all forms of graduate theological study” (par. 158). The second sentence points to the need for more undergraduate study of Scripture.

¹⁹ However, *Catechism* 115-118 and 126 may be better left to when students read the OT and Gospels respectively.

²⁰ The presentation of critical issues should be saved for more advanced courses, although it is important to respond to questions along the way. Since the goal of these courses is to facilitate reading, acquaintance and initial reflection, they need not require as many classroom hours as more advanced courses.

²¹ Email from Eduardo Echeverria, June 1, 2009. Echeverria argues that this is the ideal expressed in John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio* 76 and by important neo-Thomist figures like Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson; he develops these ideas in his forthcoming *Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist*, chapter 5, “The God of Philosophy and the Holy Scriptures” (Wipf and Stock, 2010).

²² *PPF* 205: “Moral theology should be taught in a way that draws deeply from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, refers to the natural law and absolute moral norms, and gives consideration to the results of the natural and human sciences.” The newly-released Biblical Commission document, *The Bible and Morality*, holds promise for shedding light on this topic.

²³ “Christ the Lord, indeed, did not in the least wish to destroy the very rich heritage of the Law and of the Prophets which was gradually formed from the history and experience of the People of God in the Old Testament, but He brought it to completion (cf. Mt. 5:17), in such wise that in a new and higher way it became part of the heritage of the New Testament. Therefore, although St. Paul, in expounding the Paschal Mystery, teaches that justification is not obtained by the works of the Law, but by means of faith (cf. Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), he does not thereby exclude the binding force of the Decalogue (cf. Rom. 13:28; Gal. 5:13-25; 6:2), nor does he deny the importance of discipline in the Church of God (cf. 1 Cor. chapters 5, 6). Thus the writings of the New Testament enable us to understand still more the importance itself of discipline and make us see better how it is more closely connected with the saving character of the evangelical message itself.

“[16] This being so, it appears sufficiently clear that the Code is in no way intended as a substitute for faith, grace and the charisms in the life of the Church and of the faithful. On the contrary, its purpose is rather to create such an

order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to faith, grace and the charisms, it at the same time renders easier their organic development in the life both of the ecclesial society and of the individual persons who belong to it.”

²⁴ “Scripture comes up in a number of ways in canon law: as a source of substantive provisions, esp. on sacraments (e.g., form of baptism, laws on marriage) and ecclesiology (e.g., Petrine primacy *vis a vis* the hierarchical structure of the Church); as a source of natural law principles (e.g., Decalogue,) most of which eventually show up in the Code; and occasionally as a source of procedural law (compare Matt 18: 15 ff to 1983 CIC 1341).” Email from Ed Peters, 4/14/2009.

²⁵ E.g., *DV* 25, Introduction to the Lectionary, 24.

²⁶ E.g., *Catechism* 132, 1971; *Catechesi tradendae*. The Biblical Commission’s *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) offered some helpful orientations in section IV.C.3:

The explanation of the Word of God in catechesis (*Sacros. Conc.*, 35; *Gen. Catech. Direct.*, 1971,16) has Sacred Scripture as first source. Explained in the context of the Tradition, Scripture provides the starting point, foundation and norm of catechetical teaching. One of the goals of catechesis should be to initiate a person in correct understanding and fruitful reading of the Bible. This will bring about the discovery of the divine truth it contains and evoke as generous a response as is possible to the message God addresses through his word to the whole human race.

Catechesis should proceed from the historical context of divine revelation so as to present persons and events of the Old and New Testaments in the light of God’s overall plan.

To move from the biblical text to its salvific meaning for the present time various hermeneutic procedures are employed. These will give rise to different kinds of commentary. The effectiveness of the catechesis depends on the value of the hermeneutic employed. There is the danger of resting content with a superficial commentary, one which remains simply a chronological presentation of the sequence of persons and events in the Bible.

Clearly, catechesis can avail itself of only a small part of the full range of biblical texts. Generally speaking, it will make particular use of stories, both those of the New Testament and those of the Old. It will single out the Decalogue. It should also see that it makes use of the prophetic oracles, the wisdom teaching and the great discourses in the Gospels, such as the Sermon on the Mount.

The presentation of the Gospels should be done in such a way as to elicit an encounter with Christ, who provides the key to the whole biblical revelation and communicates the call of God that summons each one to respond. The word of the prophets and that of the “ministers of the Word” (Luke 1:2) ought to appear as something addressed to Christians now.

²⁷ See J. Reumann, “After Historical Criticism, What? Trends in Biblical Interpretation and Ecumenical, Interfaith Dialogues,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29:1 (1992): 55-86; J. Reumann and J.A. Fitzmyer, “Scripture as Norm for Our Common Faith,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30:1 (1993): 81-107.

²⁸ The preceding three paragraphs are adapted from a description of “Pastoral Counseling Courses” by Gerry Rauch, MSW, adjunct professor of pastoral counseling at Sacred Heart Major Seminary.