

Distorting Hippolytus

by Edward T. Snyder

Today's liturgical reformers claim that the writings of this third-century martyr support their innovations. But do they?

When Pope Paul VI allowed the liturgical commission known as the *Consilium*, headed by Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, to issue three new Eucharistic Prayers, a supposed adaptation of one by Hippolytus (died c. 236) was produced as Eucharistic Prayer II. This is the shortest of the Eucharistic Prayers in the new Mass, and is therefore the one most popularly used by priests.

In looking critically at the modern adaptation of Hippolytus' Eucharistic Prayer as it is used in the Mass of Pope Paul VI, we are following the lead of Cardinal Ratzinger, who has called for a "reform of the reform." It is noteworthy that the January bulletin of Fr. Joseph Fessio's *Adoremus*, which has been warmly endorsed by Cardinal Ratzinger, calls for Eucharistic Prayer II to be deleted. Hippolytus' writings, known as the "Church Orders," consisted of church regulations that originally were viewed as being in agreement with the teachings of the apostles. When the first ecumenical councils met in the fourth century, they replaced Hippolytus' rules with local collections of canon law and the first liturgical books. The Church Orders had no lasting effect on the Church in the West.

In 1934 they were published by Cambridge University Press in a translation by Burton Scott Easton entitled *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*. Easton revealed that the originals were written when Hippolytus was a schismatic bishop. His writings affects the Eastern liturgies, especially the Coptic Egyptian Church. Easton quotes Adolf Harnack in *Theologische Literatur-zeitung* (1920) as stating that what Hippolytus wrote is the richest source of knowledge of the primitive Roman Church. Today his writings are considered to contain "a detailed description of rites and practices *presumably* in use at Rome in the early third century" (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1990, p. 76; emphasis mine).

Antipope and Martyr

Hippolytus is the only known antipope to have reconciled with the Church and later to be declared a martyr. He fought Popes Zephyrinus and Callistus over their favoritism towards Sabellius, who promoted a doctrine known as modalistic monarchianism. Hippolytus declared Callistus a heretic, and Hippolytus and his disciples fled Rome, declaring that they and they alone were the true Church of Rome. They found bishops willing to consecrate Hippolytus to the episcopate (thus the title antipope). When Pope Zephyrinus died, Callistus succeeded him, and Hippolytus declared the election invalid. At this point, Pope Callistus excommunicated both Sabellius and Hippolytus.

Later, Hippolytus would adhere to a major heresy - Montanism, which taught that if someone committed a mortal sin, he had to be excommunicated and could not be reconciled with the Church. Pope Callistus allowed for penance and absolution regardless of the number of offences committed. Thus, Hippolytus was once again separated from Rome. The reconciliation came when the second Pope after Callistus, Pope Pontianus, was arrested along with Hippolytus and sent to the Sardinian mines. Both men were pronounced saints and martyrs after their death.

It is of archeological interest that a statue of Hippolytus was found in the 1551 excavations in Rome. The statue is from the third century, and is now in the Lateran Museum in the Vatican.

The Trouble with Eucharistic Prayer II

From the beginning, Eucharistic Prayer II has caused problems. First, although it is routinely used for Sunday Masses, it was not intended to be, as the noted liturgist Josef Jungmann explains:

Eucharistic Prayer II is substantially the one Hippolytus of Rome put in writing around the year 215 A.D. The striking thing about it is the simple clarity of its thanksgiving prayer as well as its extraordinary brevity, in particular the brevity of the transition from the Sanctus to the words of Institution. It is intended not for the community Mass on Sunday, but for week days. . . (*The Mass*, Collegeville Press, 1976).

Another, perhaps more serious problem arises from the fact that Eucharistic Prayer II as currently used in the English version of the new Mass is *far* from being "substantially the one Hippolytus of Rome put in writing." Compare:

The Canon of Hippolytus

We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Servant Jesus Christ, whom at the end of time you did send to us a Saviour and Redeemer and the Messenger of your counsel. Who is your Word, inseparable from you; through whom you did make all things and in whom you are well pleased. Whom you did send from heaven into the womb of the Virgin, and who, dwelling within her, was made flesh, and was manifested as your Son, being born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Who, fulfilling your will, and winning for himself a holy people, spread out his hands when he came to suffer, that by his death he might set free them who believed on you.

Who, when he was betrayed to his willing death, that he might bring to nought death, and break the bond of the devil, and tread hell under foot, and give light to the righteous and set up a boundary post, and manifest his resurrection, taking bread and giving thanks to you said: Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you. And

Eucharistic Prayer II

Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness. Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Before he was given up to death, a death he freely accepted, he took bread and gave you thanks. He took the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you. When supper was ended, he took the cup. Again he gave you thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples, and said: Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith. [Four options for response.]

Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again; bring them and all the departed

likewise also the cup, saying:
This is my blood, which is shed
for you. As often as you
perform this, perform my
memorial. Having in memory,
therefore, his death and
resurrection, we offer to you
the bread and the cup, yielding
you thanks, because you have
counted us worthy to stand
before you and to minister to
you. And we pray you that you
would send your Holy Spirit
upon the offering of your holy
church; that you, gathering
them into one, would grant to
all your saints who partake to
be filled with the Holy Spirit,
that their faith may be
confirmed in truth, that we may
praise and glorify you. Through
your Servant Jesus Christ,
through whom be to you glory
and honor, with the Holy Spirit
in the holy church, both now
and always and world without
end. Amen.

(Translation from *The Apostolic
Tradition of Hippolytus* by
Burton Scott Easton, 1934)

into the light of your presence.
Have mercy on us all; make us
worthy to share eternal life
with Mary, the virgin Mother
of God, with the apostles, and
with all the saints who have
done your will throughout the
ages. May we praise you in
union with them, and give you
glory through your Son, Jesus
Christ. Through him, with him,
in him, in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, all glory and honor is
yours, almighty Father, for ever
and ever. Amen.

(Translation from *Ordo Missae
Cum Populo, A Latin-English
Text For Congregational Use
According to the Intent of the
Constitution on the Sacred
Liturgy, Second Vatican
Council, 1978*)

Note especially the underlined phrases contained in Hippolytus' prayer, omitted in Eucharistic Prayer II, that serve to describe Our Lord's divine role and to link Him with the Mass, or to point up the role of the priest.

But even adopted verbatim and perfectly translated, Hippolytus' prayer represents a stage in the Church which is at best theologically underdeveloped. The doctrine of the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist had not yet been given its definitive form, and it is no accident that the Arian heresy, most famous for denying the divinity of Christ, followed shortly after Hippolytus. Considering today's lack of belief in the Real Presence among Catholics, surely now is the time to return to the Roman Canon as the only Eucharistic Prayer which conveys this belief in clear, unambiguous language.

Why Progressives Promote Hippolytus

Pope Paul VI is probably referring to Hippolytus (among other early sources on the Roman Mass) when he says in the Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Missal (*Missale Romanum*, 1969):

After the Council of Trent, the study of "of ancient manuscripts of the Vatican library and of others gathered elsewhere," as Our Predecessor of St. Pius V indicated in the Apostolic Constitution *Quo Primum*, has greatly helped for the revision of the Roman Missal. Since then, however, more ancient liturgical sources have become better known. Many wish that the riches, both doctrinal and spiritual, might not be hidden.

...

The implication here is that if Pope Pius V's commission on the codification of the Roman rite had had access to earlier sources, it would have fixed the Roman rite of Mass differently in 1570. But the Mass had in fact been fixed substantially in that form centuries earlier, during the pontificate of Gregory the Great in the sixth and early seventh centuries. Proof of that comes from the liturgical books known as the *Ordines Romani*, the books of papal ceremonial first printed in modern times in 1561 (during the Council of Trent) in Cologne, Germany by G. Cassander. It is unlikely that earlier Church sources in Rome would have been used (if they had been discovered) because they were composed in Greek and were not stable forms of the Mass; Latin soon became the liturgical language.

Scholars do not know how widespread the liturgy described by Hippolytus was, nor why it was not kept as part of the Roman Rite Mass. Changing the Mass by allowing

new Eucharistic Prayers is the most radical innovation made to the Roman Mass, for there has never been any other Eucharistic Prayer in the Roman Mass except the Roman Canon since well before the time of Gregory the Great. But since the justification given for using Hippolytus' prayer is that it was used in early Christian times, I have shown that the modern version produced after Vatican II does not contain the same theological substance as the original.

Critics of Eucharistic Prayer II

In the September 1991 issue of *30 Days*, Cardinal Silvio Oddi had the follow to say:

Years ago, the introduction of the Second Canon for the Eucharistic consecration had also created some ill feeling.

When the Second Canon was published, Protestants of the famous Taize community, whose liturgy does not conform with Catholic liturgy, declared: "We might have written it ourselves." This meant that the canon was open to an interpretation which did not require the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. So even then it was unclear, imprecise, to say the least - I had no difficulty in pronouncing it but I was surprised one day when Cardinal Franjo Seper himself, who was the Holy Office Prefect then and had to keep watch over the Church's orthodoxy, said to me: "I will never recite that canon." He, too, had his suspicions.

My impression is that people not particularly concerned about the purity of dogma and doctrine were chosen to formulate these liturgical reforms - in the name of a misinterpreted ecumenical concept, they sought to present these aspects in a way that would be pleasing to others.

In Archbishop Dwyer's (unpublished) letter of July 20, 1975 to Pope Paul VI, there is the following concerning the new Eucharistic Prayers:

In the English translation, after the words, "Do this in memory of Me," is stated, "Let us proclaim the Mystery of Faith:" This translation with the colon (:) at the end actually tells the reader that the mystery is not the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, but the death, resurrection and the coming of Christ.

Hippolytus Contra Modern Liturgists

Not a few matters of early liturgical practice revealed by Hippolytus run contrary to the ideological predilections of liturgical modernists, who therefore ignore them. For instance:

And women, whether believers or catechumens, shall stand for their prayers by themselves in a separate part of the church.

And when [the catechumens] finish their prayers, they must not give the kiss of peace, for their kiss is not yet pure. Only believers salute one another, but men with men and women with women; a man shall not salute a woman. And let all the women have their heads covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of thin linen, for this is not a true covering.

. . . before being baptized, those assembled are commanded to kneel in prayer (Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, p. 43).

(Liturgists say that standing is the preferred way to pray because it was practiced in the primitive Church.)

Another embarrassment for modern liturgists is Hippolytus' description of the Mass for the newly baptized:

And then the offering is immediately brought by the deacons to the bishop, and by thanksgiving he shall make the bread into an image of the body of Christ, and the cup of wine mixed with the water according to the likeness of the blood, which is shed for all who believe in him. . .

Note the concluding phrase. In the vernacular translations of Pope Paul's new Mass around the world, only the prayer of consecration in the French language uses the words "for the multitude" to describe Jesus Christ's shedding of blood; all other languages simply say "for all." In the pre-Conciliar Mass (1962 Missal), the words *pro multis* are translated "for many." "For many" is another way of saying "for all who believe in him." By shortening this phrase to "for all," the modern liturgists insert an ambiguity.

And it is fair to say that Hippolytus would be scandalized by the manner of receiving Communion promoted by his supposed disciples today. Consider:

And the presbyters - or if there are not enough presbyters, the deacons - shall hold the cups, and shall stand with reverences and modesty.

And even if the bishop should be absent when the faithful meet at a supper, if a presbyter or deacon is present they shall eat in a similar orderly fashion, and each shall be careful to take the blessed bread from the presbyter's or deacon's hand. (*The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, pp. 48-49)

Notice that nowhere are deaconesses or laymen mentioned as distributing Communion. Only those who have received holy orders - priests and deacons - do so. Thus, although traditional Catholics are ridiculed for being "rigid," in fact they are more faithful than modernists to what Hippolytus shows was the practice of the primitive Church of Rome.

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