

Eucharistic Prayer II: its problems and background

- "Pope Paul's New Mass" (The Angelus Press, 1980), by Michael Davies, pages 346-348.

As Eucharistic Prayer II is presented as the argument par excellence in favor of the Novus Ordo Missae, some examination of its background might be useful. Hippolytus was a skillful controversialist of the third century (c. 170-c. 236). His orthodoxy was suspect on a number of points but in others he was a truly fierce proponent of orthodoxy. He came into conflict with two popes, Zephyrinus (d. 217) and Callistus (d. 222) and set himself up as anti-pope to the latter. He was eventually reconciled to the Church and died as a martyr. Hippolytus was narrow, obstinate, and quite unsympathetic in his dealings with others. By his rigor, he seems to have alienated even his own supporters in his quarrel with the hierarchy, and no man with any sweetness in his nature could have written the odious account of Callistus' sufferings as a slave, even if every word were true, which there is good reason to doubt. The so-called Canon of Hippolytus forms part of his Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition. It represented his personal theory of the apostolic tradition and was never recognized as an official Church book. Several editions are currently available. The original Greek text has been lost and the version now available is based on Coptic, Arabic, Ethiopian, Syriac, and Latin versions. Thus we do not know to what extent the text we have corresponds to what Hippolytus actually wrote. All the scholars who have studied it agree that during its history it has suffered additions and modifications with each successive edition. Such scholars as Ratcliff and Dix have taken a very critical attitude to its textual integrity. The most controversial section of the entire text is the Eucharistic Prayer, where considerable modification of the original has been suspected - there are important differences in the various editions. Finally, Hippolytus made no claim that his Eucharistic Prayer was one actually used in the third-century Rome. He makes it plain that the prayers in the Apostolic Tradition are no more than models of the kind of prayer he considers desirable.

To sum up, the Canon of Hippolytus was written by a third-century anti-pope with views of dubious orthodoxy. It was simply a personal suggestion of the form a Eucharistic Prayer should take. It has never formed part of the official liturgy of the Church, its original version has been lost, and the text we have has certainly been modified. Yet because this prayer is supposedly included within the Novus Ordo all our doubts are to be set at rest!

However, it is far from true to claim that Eucharistic Prayer II is the Canon of Hippolytus. The best that can be said is that it contains passages from this Eucharistic Prayer. The following analysis of Eucharistic Prayer II was written by the theologian already cited in this chapter ["New Eucharistic Prayers"]:

The text of Canon II is stated to be "based on that most ancient eucharistic prayer that we possess, namely that of Hippolytus." There is no direct evidence that this anaphora was ever in liturgical use in the West. Its only certain liturgical use is in Ethiopia whither it arrived via the Egyptian and Ethiopic church orders, and after various transformations, became the present Ethiopic Anaphora of the Apostles. The Hippolytus anaphora commences with the Sursum corda dialogue and includes no Sanctus. The composers of Canon II have retained the Roman Sanctus and inserted some of the Hippolytan material into a new Preface, but since it is stated that Canon II may be used with other Prefaces, attention will be confined to what follows the Sanctus. In that published edition under consideration, this comprises 48 lines, excluding the people's acclamation, which is a feature of the Missa Normativa and not peculiar to Canon II, and also an insert for Requiems. Of these 48 lines, 30 are identical or similar to parts of the Roman Canon, 7 correspond to parts of the Hippolytan Canon, 5 can be described as intermediate, being identical with neither but resembling both, 2 are derived from a probably oriental interpolation in the Hippolytan Canon, 1 is Mozarabic, 1 is Gallican and 2 may be regarded as specially composed. It is thus highly doubtful whether one can refer to a canon spliced of such diverse strands as having any stylistic unity, and the fact that two-thirds of it are derived from the Roman Canon makes it difficult to attach much weight to the assertion of its stylistic distinction from the latter.

It is thus clear that what has been presented to us as the Canon of Hippolytus is not the Canon of Hippolytus. Even if it had been this would not have been a cause for rejoicing as this prayer was formulated at a time when specific sacrificial terminology in the Mass had some way to develop and, thus, the introduction of this Canon could be for no other purpose than to serve false ecumenism.