

At first, moreover, only a partial listing of the sources for the new orations was available. Some information was published in 1971,² but the list did not indicate which texts had been altered. Only in late 1986 — sixteen years after the Missal of Paul VI first appeared — did the Congregation for Divine Worship finally start to publish the new prayers along with their antecedents.³ In short, comparing the old orations with the new orations was a researcher's nightmare.⁴

This chapter will cover the following topics: (1) The origins of the orations in the traditional Missal. (2) The process of revising the orations after Vatican II. (3) Statistics on the extent of the revisions. (4) The “new values” the revisers wished to introduce. (5) How “negative theology” was purged from the orations. (6) The changed outlook on the world. (7) The revision of the prayers for the departed, including the systematic deletion of the word *soul*. (8) Changes made to accommodate ecumenism. (9) Near-total removal of the notion of the merits of the saints. (10) The deletion of allusions to miracles. (11) The consequences.

THE ORIGINS OF THE ORATIONS

The term *oration* comes from the Latin word for a prayer or a speech. In the liturgy, it is applied to prayers written in a manner that imitates (or attempts to imitate) the eloquent Latin style of the great Roman orators (e.g., Cicero). These prayers are very brief and direct, as may be seen from the following Collect:

Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord,
 Thy people from their offenses:
 that, through Thy bountiful goodness,
 we may be freed from the bonds of those sins,
 which through our frailty we may have committed.⁵

The Missal assigns each Sunday or feast-day Mass at least three orations whose content reflects the liturgical season or the saint's feast designated by the liturgical calendar.

2. See *Notitiae* 8 (1971), *passim*.

3. See Cuthbert Johnson OSB and Anthony Ward CM, “The Sources of the Roman Missal,” *Notitiae* 22 (1986), 445ff. In 1994 the same authors collated all the orations and blessings into one convenient volume and numbered the texts. See: *Missale Romanum Anno 1975 Promulgatum: Orationes et Benedictiones* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche 1994).

4. Before I began my study in the 1980s, I had to create several indices with a primitive computer database program to collate the texts of the orations and analyze their contents. By now, no doubt, all the texts are on-line somewhere in a more easily retrievable form.

5. M7, Pent 23, C, “M.” Bruylants *Les Oraisons du Missel Romain* is the standard reference work containing all the orations of the traditional Missal.

The bulk of the contents of both the Missal of St. Pius V and the Missal of Paul VI consists of such prayers. They are grouped according to their use in the Temporal Cycle (seasons such as Advent, Lent and Easter), the Sanctoral Cycle (feasts of Our Lady, the Angels and the saints), Commons (texts used for more than one saint or feast), Votive Masses (for special needs or honoring certain mysteries) and Ritual Masses (weddings, funerals).

Prayers under these headings, in turn, are subdivided according to their function in the Mass: Opening Prayers (called Collects in the old Missal), Prayers over the Gifts (Secrets), Prayers after Communion (Postcommunions), Prayers over the People (*super populum*), and certain blessings.

Dom Guéranger said that there is not a single point of Christian doctrine which is not brought forth at some point during the course of the Church's liturgical year.⁶ And in the orations of the traditional Missal one can see the Church unfold her law of belief through the law of her prayer, bit by bit, from the First Sunday of Advent to the Last Sunday after Pentecost.

The oldest orations in the traditional Missal are found in the Temporal Cycle. Although we do not know who wrote them all or who assigned them their places in the Missal,⁷ their order of recitation throughout the liturgical year corresponds to the sequence in the sixth century Leonine Sacramentary. Tradition ascribes the authorship of the nucleus of the Collects to Pope St. Damasus (366–84).⁸

As the Church added more feasts over the course of the centuries, she also added new orations, and the size of the Missal grew. But the more ancient orations continued to retain their appointed places in the Temporal Cycle. Thus, for example, if you open both the old Missal and the old Gregorian Sacramentary to Quinquagesima Sunday, you will see the same orations prescribed for the Collect, the Secret and the Postcommunion of the day's Mass.

THE PROCESS OF REVISION

While the identity of those who created the orations in the traditional Missal is lost forever in the mists of history, we know that the orations in the Missal of Paul VI were the work of Consilium Study Group 18b, which was appointed by Bugnini in 1965. The membership consisted of Fathers Henry Ashworth, Placide Bruylants, Antoine Dumas, W. Durig, G.A. Gracias, G. Lucchesi and A. Rose.⁹ To these we may add the names of Fathers Matias

6. *The Liturgical Year* (London: reprinted by Britons Catholic Library 1983) 1:16.

7. Not even modern historical scholarship, it seems, was able to reconstruct the relevant records back beyond the fifth century. See MRR 1:49.

8. LRC, 244.

9. RL, 392–3.

Augé, Walter Ferretti, Vincenzo Raffa, and Carlo Braga, Bugnini's assistant. Their writings, culled from other sources, provide much invaluable information about how they changed the orations and why.

The study group first met at Louvain, Belgium in April 1965. Its first move was to begin overhauling the orations of the Temporal Cycle (Advent, Lent, Pentecost, etc.).

Considering the age of these prayers, this was an act of breathtaking arrogance, but it was typical of the reformers. Introducing the vernacular, said Augé, demonstrated the "limits" of the traditional orations.¹⁰ And though Vatican II had said nothing *specific* about changing the orations, Augé said the change was justified by the Council's broader statement that: "In this reform both texts and rites should be so drawn up that they express more clearly the holy things they signify."¹¹ Note the underlying assumption: the prayers of the Church (some of which had been said for nearly 1500 years) had shrouded holy things in an obscurity which only the wisdom of Augé and company were now able to dispel.

The upper-ranking members of Consilium met in October 1966, and approved general principles (probably drawn up by Bugnini) to guide the various study groups. In its work on the orations, Study Group 18b was instructed: "where fitting, [to] replace expressions which have for the most part lost their significance today (the emphasis the Lenten orations place on bodily fasting, for instance) with others more in accord with today's conditions."¹²

STATISTICS ON THE REVISIONS

The orations, then, like the rest of the Mass, were in for a bit of what Bugnini in his memoirs liked to call *qualche ritocchi* (some touching up) and *arricchimento* (enrichment). For an old oration, "touching it up" turned out to mean dropping language and concepts repugnant to Protestants and modernists. "Enriching" the Missal meant suppressing old orations in their entirety and substituting texts from other sources, sometimes in their entirety, sometimes themselves "touched up."

In writing this book, I have come across claims that the Missal of Paul VI contains three-quarters of the pre-Vatican II Missal. But the statistics show that this is nonsense. The traditional Missal contains 1182 orations. About 760 of those were dropped entirely. Of the approximately 36% which remained, the revisers altered *over half* of them before introducing them into the new Missal. Thus, only 17% of the orations from the old Missal made it

10. Matias Augé CMF, "Le Collette del Proprio del Tempo nel Nuovo Messale," EL 84 (1970), 275-6.

11. Augé, "Le Collette," 275, citing SC §21, DOL 21.

12. Quoted in RL, 393.

untouched into the new.¹³

Even this tiny percentage may be reduced still further. The first figure of 1182 orations reflects only *individual* texts in the traditional Missal — it does not take into account the many times these texts were *repeated* in several places throughout the liturgical year.

However you figure it, the bulk of the traditional orations simply disappeared under the revisers’ busy blue pencils. If you want to engage in “a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” between the pre- and post-Vatican II liturgy, just cite the statistics for the orations.

“NEW VALUES, NEW PERSPECTIVES”

And the rupture, please note, is in their *doctrinal* content. For this, we have the testimony of Bugnini’s assistant, Braga, who put the finishing touches on the revisers’ work immediately before the new Missal went to press:¹⁴

Revising the preexisting text becomes more delicate when faced with a need to update content or language, and when all this affects not only form, but also *doctrinal reality*. This [revision] is called for in light of the new view of human values, considered in relation to and as a way to supernatural goods. The Council clearly proposes this [new view] and it was kept in mind when the Temporal Cycle was revised. It could not have been ignored in revising the Sanctoral Cycle. In other cases, ecumenical requirements dictated appropriate revisions in language. Expressions recalling positions or struggles of the past are no longer in harmony with the Church’s new positions[!] *An entirely new foundation of eucharistic theology* has superseded devotional points of view or of a particular way of venerating and invoking the Saints. Retouching the text, moreover, was deemed necessary to bring to light new values and new perspectives.¹⁵

13. Based on the partial documentation Consilium provided regarding the sources of the 1970 Missal and based on the index of *incipits* in Bruylants, volume 1, I calculated that about 425 of the old orations were used in the 1970 Missal. Of those 425, approximately 225 were changed in some way, and approximately 200 were left untouched.

14. RL, 394. Braga was responsible for revising the prayers for the Sanctoral Cycle.

15. Carlo Braga, “Il ‘Proprium de Sanctis,’” EL 84 (1970), 419. “La revisione del testo preesistente diviene più delicata quando si arriva alla necessità di un aggiornamento del contenuto o del linguaggio, e quando tutto ciò tocca non solo la forma, ma la realtà dottrinale. Si è già accennato alla nuova prospettiva dei valori umani considerati in relazione e quasi come via ai beni soprannaturali: il Concilio la propone chiaramente, ed è stata tenuta presente nella revisione del Temporale; non poteva ignorarsi nella revisione del Santorale. Altre volte l’opportunità di una revisione del linguaggio è dettata da esigenze ecumeniche; espressioni che richiamano posizioni o lotte del passato non sono più in armonia con le nuove posizioni della Chiesa. Aspetti devozionali, o di particolari modi di venerazione e invocazione dei Santi, sono superati da tutta una nuova impostazione della teologia eucaristica: anche qui è stato necessario ritoccare il testo per mettere in luci nuovi valori e nuove prospettive.” My emphasis.

New views of human values, ecumenical requirements, new positions of the Church, a new foundation of eucharistic theology — clearly, then, the changes involved a lot more than merely perfecting the contents of the old Missal.

We now turn to the texts of the new orations themselves in order to discover the new “doctrinal reality,” as Braga put it, the “new values and new perspectives.”

THE ELIMINATION OF “NEGATIVE THEOLOGY”

The first category of doctrinal reality to be updated in the orations was a broad one — what Consilium’s revisers termed “negative theology,” an elusive concept they described rather than defined. The old Advent orations, for instance, they pronounced impoverished, too “negative,” too moralizing.¹⁶ So too the Lenten orations which, still worse, were “of little relevance to the mentality of modern man.” Augé explained:

Some of these collects, in fact, spoke of, among other things, the punishments, anger, or divine wrath for our sins, of a Christian assembly oppressed with guilt, continually afflicted due to its disorders, threatened with condemnation to eternal punishment, etc.¹⁷

— theological dinosaurs, to be sure, in modern man’s world of evolving morality.

Thus the orations in the existing Missal. So, did the revisers then gather older orations from their much-touted primitive Christian sources,¹⁸ texts that were less negative and more joyous, and substitute these for the negative texts in the pre-Vatican II Missal?

Alas, pity the poor revisers. For the prayers in the most ancient liturgical sources (books called sacramentaries) likewise contained negative concepts.

Consilium, therefore, incorporated into the Missal of Paul VI only those older texts “which could still have a pastoral worth for contemporary man.” To have introduced unaltered ancient prayers which alluded to doctrinal controversies or fasting, or which disparaged the things of this world, would have created, said the revisers, “difficulty for the psychology of the man who experiences other problems, who has a different way of thinking, and who lives in a different material and disciplinary situation.”¹⁹ Mental institutions, no doubt, would have been crowded.

16. Augé, “Le Collette,” 275–8.

17. Augé, “Le Collette,” 287.

18. The progress of liturgical studies and the fruits it bore in his reform, Paul VI said, would ensure that these doctrinal and spiritual riches, far from being hidden in the dark, would now “be put into use for the enlightenment of the mind of Christians and the nurture of their spirit.” Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*, approving the new Roman Missal, 3 April 1969, DOL 1358.

19. Carlo Braga CM, “Il Nuovo Messale Romano,” EL 84 (1970), 272.