

Ordo Benedictionis Novae Domus

Text, Context, and Theology

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Abstract

This study offers a close reading of the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* in light of its sources in previous rituals, scripture, and the insights of the Second Vatican Council. In doing so, it explores the ritual and theological evolutions that have taken place both in Roman Catholic house blessings and in the post-conciliar reform of the *Rituale Romanum* viewed holistically. By analyzing one rite in depth, this study demonstrates how the ritual and theological emphases brought about by the liturgical reform of Vatican II are manifested in concrete liturgical texts and practices. The *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* reveals the post-conciliar shifts towards holistic ecclesial participation and liturgical texts that are scripturally, Christologically, and ecclesologically rich.

Keywords

Ordo benedictionis novae domus, house blessings, *Rituale Romanum*, Vatican II, participation

Introduction

The *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* is one of 51 rites included in the 1984 *De benedictionibus*, which represents an updating of the 1952 *Rituale Romanum*, as well as the *Collectio rituum* (1961 and 1964), in light of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy's provision that "the sacramentals are to be revised, account being taken of the primary principle of enabling the faithful to participate actively, easily and with awareness of what is happening."¹ *De benedictionibus* both cut down the number of rites (from 175 in the 1952 *Rituale Romanum*) and expanded the rites that it did maintain. Aelred Tegels observes that, "the most significant feature of the new Blessings... is that each rite of blessing is presented as an *ordo*, that is, as a liturgical service."² Rather than a short rite in which the priest is the primary (and in some cases, only) actor, the rites in *De benedictionibus* have a communal emphasis, and include a variety of differentiated ministerial roles, including those for priests, deacons, lay ministers, lectors, acolytes, and other baptized and confirmed individuals. In addition, the rites in *De benedictionibus*, in

1) Vatican II, "Sacrosanctum Concilium" [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in Austin Flannery, O.P. (ed.), *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 79.

2) Aelred Tegels, "De benedictionibus Commentary," *Worship* 59, no. 1 (January 1985): 79.

contrast to their predecessors, regularly include scripture readings, hymns, homilies, and thematic intercessions. This study, essentially following the methodology proposed by Kevin Irwin in *Context and Text*,³ offers a close reading of the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* in light of its sources in previous rituals, scripture, and the insights of the Second Vatican Council. In doing so, it explores the ritual and theological evolutions that have taken place in this specific blessing of a home as one example of how the ritual and theological shifts brought about by the liturgical reform of Vatican II are manifested in concrete liturgical texts and practices.

1 Historical rites of home blessings

Historical precedents for the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* can be found in the 1614 *Rituale Romanum*,⁴ the 1925 *Rituale Romanum*,⁵ the 1952 *Rituale Romanum*, the 1961 *Collectio rituum*, and the 1964 *Collectio rituum*. Before 1614, a universal *rituale* did not exist in Roman Catholicism, but the 1614 *Rituale Romanum* was directly influenced by three earlier Italian rituals. From the twelfth century until the Council of Trent, rituals existed at the local level and were created in both monastic and diocesan contexts. Before rituals first appeared as autonomous liturgical books in the eleventh century, individual ritual *ordines* existed as parts of *libelli*, small compilations of rites.⁶ This treatment compares the 1984 *ordo* to rites for the blessing of homes between found between 1614 and 1964, which are listed in the chart below:⁷

3) Kevin Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, revised ed. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2018).

4) *Rituale Romanum. Paul V Pontificus Maximi Iussu Editum. Ex Typographia Reuerende Camerae Apostolicae M.DC.XIV*, Manlio Sodi and Juan Javier Flores Arcas, eds (Vatican City: Monumenta Liturgica Concilii Tridentini 5, 2004), 1614.

5) *Rituale Romanum. Paul V Pontificis Maximi Iussu Editum Aliorumque Pontificum Cura Recognitum atque auctoritate SSMI D. N. PII PAPAE XI ad Normam Codicis Iuris Canonici Accomodatum*. Editio Typica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1925).

6) See Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources* (Portland: Pastoral Press, 1986), 257-265.

7) Also listed in the chart is the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis annuae familiarum in propriis domibus*. This rite, while not the focus of this paper, is a direct descendent of earlier blessings of homes during and outside of the Easter season. Like the other rites in *De benedictionibus*, it is expanded to include scripture readings, thematic prayer intentions, and multiple ministerial roles. While the *Ordo benedictionis annuae familiarum in propriis domibus* has direct corollaries in all earlier rituals, the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* has direct corollaries in some rituals, but not others. On the whole, the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* takes a few elements from earlier rites, but also represents the significant shift in theological emphasis and prayer texts brought about by the liturgical reform following Vatican II.

1614	<i>Benedictio domorum in Sabbato Sancto Paschae</i> <i>Alia benedictio domorum alio tempore facienda cum aspersione aquae benedictae</i> <i>Benedictio loci</i> <i>Alia benedictio domus novae</i>
1925	<i>Benedictio domorum in Festo Epiphaniae</i> <i>Benedictio domorum in Sabbato Sancto et reliquo Tempore Paschali</i> <i>Benedictio domorum extra Tempus Paschale</i> <i>Benedictio loci vel domus</i> <i>Alia benedictio domus</i>
1952	<i>Benedictio domorum in Festo Epiphaniae</i> <i>Benedictio domorum in Sabbato Sancto et reliquo Tempore Paschale</i> <i>Benedictio domorum extra Tempus Paschale</i> <i>Benedictio loci vel domus</i> <i>Alia benedictio domus</i>
1961 ^a	<i>Blessing of Houses During the Paschal Season</i> <i>Blessing of Houses Outside of Paschal Time</i> <i>Blessing of Any Place or House</i> <i>Blessing of a New House</i>
1964	<i>Benedictio domorum Tempore Paschali</i> <i>Benediction domorum extra Tempus Paschale</i> <i>Benedictio loci vel domus</i>
1984	<i>Ordo benedictionis annuae familiarum in propriis domibus</i> <i>Ordo benedictionis novae domus</i>

a) Titles are in English here because my source for the 1961 *Collectio rituum* is the 1962 *Priest's Ritual*, which contains both Latin (except for the title of each rite) and English.

From the chart above, it is clear that several different rites related to the blessing of a home were perpetuated from the time of the Tridentine ritual (1614) until 1964. First, a blessing of a home during the paschal season is present in all five liturgical books prior to 1984. Similarly, a blessing of a home outside the paschal season is present in all five earlier books. A blessing of a home on the Feast of Epiphany is present in the 1925 and 1952 *Rituales*. An alternative (*alia*) blessing of a home is found in 1614 and 1925, and a generic blessing of any place or house is present in 1925, 1961, and 1964.⁸ Two blessings for a house of study are found in 1925. Lastly, the blessing of a new home, the focus of our study, is also present (though in much briefer form) in 1614 and 1961. While the earlier ritual books each included between three and five rites related to the blessing of a home, they are compressed into two in *De*

8) A blessing of any place (not specifically house) is present in 1614. The ordering of the rites in the ritual makes it clear that this is the precedent for the 1925, 1961, and 1964 rites.

benedictionibus: one annual blessing of families in their homes with options for during and outside of the Easter season, and one blessing of a new home.

With regard to language, as with all Roman Catholic liturgical documents, the original text for all the aforementioned rites is in Latin. In the mid-20th century, it became permissible to use the vernacular either on its own or in conjunction with the Latin. The introduction to the 1962 *Priest's Ritual* (based on the *Collectio rituum* of 1961), for example, states, “In accordance with the new edition of the *Collectio rituum* (approved October 11, 1959) the use of English alone is permissible only in those portions of the rite where it is printed in parallel columns with the Latin in the above-mentioned *Collectio rituum*.”⁹ In some rites, the vernacular text is not parallel to the Latin, but follows it. In cases like these, the *Blessing of a New House*, for example, the Latin text would be prayed first, and the vernacular text would follow. Essentially, the rite would be performed twice, first in Latin, then in English. It is not until after Vatican II that these rites can be celebrated fully in the vernacular. The *English Book of Blessings* is a complete vernacular translation of *De benedictionibus* with minor adjustments.

2 Outline of the rite

In the chart below is a structural comparison between the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* and its direct precursors, the 1614 *Alia benedictio domus novae* and the 1961 *Blessing of a New House*. The bolded elements represent parts of the 1984 rite that do not have precedents in any earlier blessings of homes. The non-bolded elements represent parts of the rite that have remained, although some elements, such as the prayer of blessing, have changed significantly.

<i>Alia benedictio domus novae</i> (1614), <i>Blessing of a New House</i> (1961)	<i>Ordo benedictionis novae domus</i> (1984)
Introductory Rites	Introductory Rites
Prayer of Blessing	Scripture Reading
Sprinkling Rite (With Psalm Verse) ^b	Responsorial Psalm
	Homily/ Exposition
	Intercessions
	Prayer of Blessing
	Sprinkling Rite
	Concluding Rite
	Song (optional)

b) The outline here corresponds to the 1614 and 1961 blessings of new homes, but in many of the other earlier blessings of homes, the sprinkling rite occurs before the prayer of blessing, and is followed by a short responsory.

9) *Priest's Ritual Compiled from The Vatican Typical Edition of the Rituale Romanum and The Collectio rituum* (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1962), 1.

3 A brief description of the 1614 and 1961 blessings of new homes

Before analyzing the 1984 rite in greater depth, a brief overview of the 1614 and 1961 blessings of new homes is in order. These two rites are identical besides minor differences in spelling and abbreviations due to the stylistic customs of their time periods; the 1961 rite is essentially a reprint of the 1614 rite with updated spelling. In addition, the 1961 rite is printed in the 1962 *Priest's Ritual* first in Latin, then in English,¹⁰ while the 1614 rite is in Latin.

As seen in the outline in section 3, these earlier blessings begin with introductory rites. The priest begins, “Our help is in the name of the Lord,” and those present respond, “Who hath made heaven and earth.” The priest continues, “The Lord be with you,” and those present respond, “And with thy spirit.”¹¹ After these introductory rites, the priest prays the prayer of blessing over the new home, which asks the Father to bless and sanctify the house, along with the people and things that dwell in it, as he blessed the house of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.¹² It asks “the Angels of Thy light” to live within the house and to guard the house and those who dwell within.¹³ After the prayer of blessing, the priest sprinkles the home with Holy Water and the brief rite is concluded.

4 Sources in earlier rites

Although much of the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* is original text based on scripture and the principles and themes of Vatican II, some elements of the rite have at least a partial source in the earlier blessings of homes. The greeting in the introductory rite, for example, “Peace be with this house and with all who live here,” is present in the blessing of a home during the paschal season and outside of a paschal season in 1614, 1925, 1952, 1961, and 1964, as well as in the 1952 *Benedictio domorum in Festo*

10) As mentioned previously, the rite would have been prayed first in Latin, then in English, essentially repeating the same content in each language.

11) *Priest's Ritual*, 331. “V. Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Dómini. R. Qui fecit caelum et terram. V. Dóminus vobíscum. R. Et cum spírítu tuo.” English translation taken from *Priest's Ritual*, 332.

12) See section 5 for the text of the blessing.

13) *Priest's Ritual*, 332. “Angeli tuae lucis.” English in *Priest's Ritual*, 333.

Epiphaniae.¹⁴ The introduction, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” has been added in the 1984 rite, along with an optional greeting for use if the rite is led by a lay minister.¹⁵

The presence of a psalm in the 1984 rite also has precedent, but the psalm options in 1984 [psalms 111(112), 126(127), and 127(128)] differ from those found in the earlier rites. Furthermore, earlier rites name only one psalm verse, typically 117:1 during the paschal season and 50:3 outside of the paschal season, along with an antiphon, whereas the 1984 rite suggests 5-10 verses of a responsorial psalm, along with an antiphon. The English *Order for the Blessing of a New Home* even includes the full text of Psalm 112 in the rite itself.¹⁶ The antiphons used in earlier blessings of homes both during and outside of paschal time are both also used in the blessing of people with holy water in the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. The antiphon, “Sprinkle me, O Lord, with hyssop, and I shall be purified; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow,” said with Psalm 50, appears in earlier blessings of homes outside the paschal season,¹⁷ while the antiphon, “I saw water coming forth from the temple, from the right side, alleluia: and all those were saved to whom that water came, and they shall say: alleluia, alleluia,” which accompanies Psalm 117, appears in earlier blessings of homes during the paschal season.¹⁸ Thematically, while the earlier psalms and antiphons connect the blessing of a home with water to the Sunday blessing of people with water (and thus to Easter and to baptism), the 1984 psalms and antiphons are thematically related to homes and dwellings.

14) *Rituale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Ioannis Pauli Pp. II promulgatum. De benedictionibus*. Editio typica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1984), 479. Hereafter, “*De benedictionibus*.” Numbers used are paragraph rather than page numbers. “*Pax huic dómui et ómnibus habitántibus in ea.*” Translation from *The Roman Ritual. Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope John Paul II. Book of Blessings. Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See*. Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1989), 665. Hereafter, “*Book of Blessings*.” Numbers used are paragraph rather than page numbers. Where possible, translations for the Latin rites are taken from the corresponding vernacular translation since (1) they are generally sufficient for the purposes of this article and (2) the English translations in the *Book of Blessings* and other vernacular translations give a direct sense for what the rite sounds like in English practice.

15) *De benedictionibus*, 478, 480. “*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spíritus Sancti.*”

16) *Book of Blessings*, 670.

17) See, for example, *Collectio rituum Pro Dioecesibus Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septentrionalis* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1964), 495, 502. “*Aspérges me, Dómine hyssópo, et mundábor: lavábis me, et super nivem dealbábor.*” Translation from *Collectio rituum* (1964), 495.

18) See, for example, *Collectio rituum* (1964), 496 (*Benedictio Populi Cum Aqua Benedicta diebus Dominicis impertienda*), 500 (*Benedictio Domorum Tempore Paschali*). “*Vidi aquam egrediéntem de templo, a látere dextro, allelúia: et omnes, ad quas pervénit aqua ista, salvi facti sunt, et dicent, allelúia, alleluia.*” *Collectio rituum* (1964), 497.

The Prayer of Blessing over the home is another element that was carried over from earlier rites to the 1984 rite and, along with the sprinkling rite, seems to constitute the core of the rite.¹⁹ Its eucharology, however, has been rewritten entirely. See, for example, a comparison between the prayer of blessing found in earlier blessing of a new home (1614 *Alia benediction domus novae* and 1961 *Blessing of a New House*) and the prayer in the 1984 rite:

<i>Rituale Romanum (1614), Collectio rituum (1961)</i>	<i>De benedictionibus (1984)</i>
<p><i>Alia benedictio domus novae (1614), Blessing of a New House (1961)</i></p> <p>We humbly beseech Thee, God the Father Almighty, for this house, for those who dwell therein and for the things that are in it, that Thou wouldst deign to bless and sanctify it and enrich it with all good things: grant them O Lord, an abundance of blessings from heaven and a plenitude of the necessities of life, and in Thy mercy fulfill all their prayers and desires. On our entry therefore into this house do Thou deign to bless and sanctify it, as Thou didst deign to bless the house of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: may the Angels of Thy light dwell within its walls to guard it and all who dwell therein. Through Christ our Lord. ^c</p>	<p><i>Ordo benedictionis novae domus</i></p> <p>Lord, be close to your servants who move into this home (today) and ask for your blessing. Be their shelter when they are at home, their companion when they are away, and their welcome guest when they return. And at last receive them into the dwelling place you have prepared for them in your Father’s house, where you live for ever and ever. ^d</p>

c) *Priest’s Ritual*, 331. “*Te Deum Patrem omnipotentem suppliciter exoramus pro hac domo, et habitatoribus eius, ac rebus: ut eam benedicere, et sanctificare, ac bonis omnibus ampliare digneris: tribue eis, Domine, de rore caeli abundantiam, et de pinguedine terrae vitae substantiam, et desideria voti eorum ad effectum tuae miserationis perducas. Ad introitum ergo nostrum benedicere, et sanctificare digneris hanc domum, sicut benedicere dignatus es domum Abraham, Isaac, et Iacob: et intra parietes domus istius Angeli tuae lucis inhabitent, eamque, et eius habitatores custodiant. Per Christum Dominum nostrum.* The 1961 text is identical, besides spelling and abbreviations, to the 1614 text. English in *Priest’s Ritual*, 333.

d) *De benedictionibus*, 487. “*Adesto, Domine, famulis tuis qui domum hanc (hodie) auspicantes, benedictionem tuam supplices exorant, ut in ea commorantes te refugium sentiant, ab ea exeuntes te comite laetentur, ad eam redeuntes te hospite perfruantur donec mansionem sibi paratam in domo Patris tui feliciter inveneant. Qui vivis et regnas in saecula saeculorum.*” *Book of Blessings*, 673.

19) This is certainly true before 1984. What the “core” of the rite in 1984 is, is certainly debatable, but the sprinkling and the prayer of blessing are the most substantial elements that have been retained all the way from 1614 to 1984.

The prayer of blessing found in the *Blessing of a New House* in the 1961 *Collectio rituum*,²⁰ essentially identical to that found in the 1614 *Alia Benedictio Domus Novae*, has some thematic consistency with the 1984 prayer in *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* in that it asks God to bless the home and those who dwell in it. Unlike the 1984 blessing, the earlier prayer references God's blessing of the house of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and asks that God's angels dwell in and guard the home. Though not quoted here, other earlier blessings of homes, such as the 1952 blessing of homes during and outside of the Easter season, also ask the Father to send an angel of protection to guard the home and those who live in it. While the earlier prayers ask the Father to send down angels to protect the home, the 1984 prayer addresses the Son directly and asks him to bless and be present to the home and those who dwell in it. The 1984 blessing also connects the earthly home being blessed with the heavenly, eschatological home that awaits Christians in the house of the Father, and has resonances with the scripturally themed intercessions, as well as with several of the scripture readings that may have been proclaimed earlier in the rite. Though some thematic overlap exists between the two prayers, there is no direct relationship between the texts themselves.

The sprinkling rite is the last element present in 1984 that has precedent in earlier rites. In earlier blessings of homes during the paschal season, baptismal water was used, whereas in blessings of homes outside of the paschal season, water blessed by a different blessing prayer was used. Together with the prayer of blessing, the sprinkling rite constitutes the substance of the rite, at least historically. To the extent that the rite is considered to have an objective effect, the sprinkling and prayer of blessing can be understood as the catalysts. The 1984 rite, however, seeks to move away from a mechanical way of thinking about blessings by expanding to include scripture, a homily, intercessions, and song. The ordering of the prayer of blessing and the sprinkling rite is worth noting. In the 1984 rite, as in the 1614 and 1961 blessings of new homes, the sprinkling follows the prayer of blessing, whereas in other previous iterations the sprinkling preceded the prayer of blessing. One way of understanding the ordering of these two elements is that whichever comes second is more important and, in a sense, brings to reality what the previous element signified. For example, a prayer of blessing following a sprinkling rite may have been understood to actually confer the blessing signified by the sprinkling. A more connected way of understanding this relationship is that these two elements act together, and the second brings to completion what the first begins. The 1984 rite seems to see these two elements as parts of a greater, cohesive whole; it is not one particular prayer or action, but the entire liturgical

20) *Te Deum Patrem omnipotentem suppliciter exoramus pro hac domo, et habitatoribus eius, ac rebus: u team bene + dicere, et sancti + ficare, ac bonis omnibus ampliare digneris: tribue eis, Domine, de rore caeli abundantiam, et de pinguedine terrae vitae substantiam, et desideria voti eorum ad effectum tuae miserationis perducas. Ad introitum ergo nostrum bene + dicere, et sancti + ficare digneris hanc domum, sicut benedicere dignatus es domum Abraham, Isaac, et Iacob: et intra parietes domus istius Angeli tuae lucis inhabitent, eamque, et eius habitatores, custodiant. Per Christum Dominum nostrum (Priest's Ritual, 1).*

prayer of the assembled people (the communion hierarchically ordered) that beseeches God to dwell in and bless the home and its inhabitants.

Importantly, in both the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* and the earlier rites, it is not only the home that is sprinkled with water, but the people present as well. The introduction to the 1984 rite makes clear that the presence of those who will dwell in the home is essential to the rite: “There is to be no blessing of a new home unless those who will live in it are present.”²¹ While the link to baptism and the paschal mystery was implied in earlier rites by the psalm and antiphon used, the 1984 rite includes an explicit verbal reminder to those present of the connection between the sprinkling of blessed water and baptism: “Let this water call to mind our baptism into Christ, who has redeemed us by his death and resurrection.”²²

5 New elements and their theology

Many elements of the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* do not have historical precedent and are new to the 1984 rite. Thus, the sources of these elements are not previous ritual texts, but scripture and the theological emphases of Vatican II brought together by the composers of the rite. These new elements are therefore particularly helpful for discerning the vision of Vatican II as applied to this particular rite, as well as to the 51 rites of *De benedictionibus* seen as a whole. A thorough analysis of the new elements in the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* yields insight into a renewed theology of blessing homes, as well as a glimpse into Vatican II’s reformulated vision of rituals as fuller liturgical rites that value rich and scriptural theological imagery, as well as active participation.

The first new element to note in the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* is the words of preparation in the introductory rite, which set the tone for the rest of the rite:

When Christ took flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary, he made his home with us. Let us now pray that he will enter this home and bless it with his presence. May he always be here among you; may he nurture your love for each other, share in your joys, comfort you in your sorrows. Inspired by his teachings and example, seek to make your new home before all else a dwelling place of love, diffusing far and wide the goodness of Christ.²³

21) *De benedictionibus*, 477. “*Benedictio novae domus sine commorantium praesentia ne fiat.*” *Book of Blessings*, 663.

22) *De benedictionibus*, 489. “*Sic haec aqua suscepti Baptismatis memoria et Christum recolat, qui Passione et Resurrectione sua nos redemit.*” *Book of Blessings*, 675.

23) *De benedictionibus*, 481. “*Ad Christum, fraters carissimi, qui ex Virgine Maria nasci dignatus est et habitavit in nobis, fervens nostra dirigatur oratio ut sub hoc tectum intrare et hanc domum sua praesentia benedicere dignetur. Christus Dominus sit hic in medio vestri, caritatem fraternam in vobis alat, gaudia participet, sublevet maerores. Vos autem, Christi praecceptis et exemplis adducti, id apprime curate ut haec nova domus caritatis sit domicilium, una bonus Christi odor longe lateque diffundatur.*” *Book of Blessings*, 667.

These preparatory words are Christological and introduce the theological themes of incarnation and indwelling that will continue throughout the rite. These introductory words also invite those present to participate in the prayer of the rite, which they will have ample opportunity to do.

A second new element in the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* is the reading of scripture. All six available options (Luke 10:5-9, Genesis 19:1-10a, Mark 1:29-30, Luke 10:38-42, Luke 19:1-9, and Luke 24:28-32) have something to do with homes. Four of the five Gospel options relate Jesus entering the homes of disciples and friends, and the option from Genesis is the famous visitation to Abraham by the Lord in the form of three visitors. The primary option, printed in full form both in *De benedictionibus* and *The Book of Blessings*, relates Jesus' words to the seventy-two as they prepare to be sent out to proclaim the gospel message. When they enter a household, they are first to say, "Peace be with this house," as has already been said by the minister during the introductory rites.²⁴ Each one of the scriptural options conveys a sense of peace that the Lord himself will visit this household. After the responsorial psalm, which follows the scripture reading, the rubrics of the rite suggest a brief explanation of the biblical text: "As circumstances suggest, the minister may give those present a brief explanation of the biblical text, so that they may understand through faith the meaning of the celebration."²⁵ The *ut* clause suggests not only the purpose of a brief homily, but a primary purpose of the entire revision of this rite: that those present may understand, through faith, the meaning of the liturgical celebration.

The presence of thematic intercessions is a third novel element present in the 1984 rite. The rubrics for the intercessions in *The Book of Blessings* make explicit what is implied in the Latin arrangement of the text, namely that there are multiple ministerial roles in this part of the rite. The presiding minister begins the intercessions, an assisting minister reads each specific intercession, and the assembly responds to each intercession, "Stay with us, Lord."²⁶ The intercessions are then concluded by the presider, who prays the prayer of blessing treated previously. The structural connection between the intercessions and the prayer of blessing conveys the sense that the prayer of blessing is the prayer of all who are gathered. The presider (notably, the presider can be a priest, deacon, or lay minister) is not primarily depicted in the rite as a conduit through which divine grace flows, but rather as the one who gathers the prayers of the people into one communal prayer and directs it to God.

The intercessions are notable not only because of their structure, but also because of their rich content. They are scripturally themed, and they serve to perpetuate the themes introduced previously by the words of preparation and the scripture and psalm selections. The introduction to the intercessions, spoken by the primary minister, reiterates the theme of the incarnation: "The Son of God, Lord of heaven and earth, made his home among us. With thankfulness and gladness let us call upon him,

24) *De benedictionibus*, 482, 479. "Pax huic domui." *Book of Blessings*, 668, 665.

25) *De benedictionibus*, 485. "Minister, pro opportunitate, adstantes breviter alloquitur, lectionem biblicam illustrans, ut sensum celebrationis fide percipiant." *Book of Blessings*, 671.

26) *De benedictionibus*, 486. "Mane nobiscum, Dómine." *Book of Blessings*, 672.

saying:²⁷ The Word of God, by his nature, is one who comes to dwell with humanity. The Son of God, who pitched his tent among the human race,²⁸ is now asked to dwell in this specific home.

The four petitions are also each addressed directly to Christ. The first intercession reflects on Jesus' earthly life in a human home with Mary and Joseph: "Lord Jesus Christ, by your life with Mary and Joseph you sanctified the life of the home; dwell with us in our home, so that we may have you as our guest and honor you as our Head."²⁹ By his life on Earth, Jesus sanctified the life of the home. He is now asked to be present in this particular home both as guest and head. The second petition is pneumatological, and asks that this house be built, in the Holy Spirit, into a dwelling place and holy temple of God: "In you every dwelling grows into a holy temple; grant that those who live in this house may be built up together into the dwelling place of God in the Holy Spirit."³⁰ The third intercession refers to Jesus' words in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 7:24-27) or plain (Luke 6:47-49), and asks that those who reside in this house will follow Jesus' words by building their spiritual lives on solid rock: "You taught your followers to build their houses upon solid rock; grant that the members of this family may hold fast to your teachings and, free of all discord, serve you with their whole heart."³¹ Here the physical dwelling place being blessed is referenced as a symbol of the Christian's spiritual house. The fourth petition refers to Jesus' words, "the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58, Matthew 8:20) and prays for adequate housing for those who are homeless: "You had no place to lay your head, but in uncomplaining poverty you accepted the hospitality of your friends; grant that through our help people who are homeless may obtain decent housing."³² As a set, the intercessions use dwelling as a theological theme to pray for the presence of God in the home being blessed, the spiritual lives of those who will dwell there, and the material needs of all who are without adequate housing.

The concluding rite is a fourth new addition in the 1984 *Ordo benedictionis novae domus*. Whereas in previous iterations of the rite, the blessing of a home ended either with the prayer of blessing or the sprinkling rite, the 1984 rite includes a concluding prayer that follows the sprinkling rite. In additi-

27) *De benedictionibus*, 486. "Filiū Dei, Dōminum caeli et terrae, qui, caro factus, habitāvit in nobis, grato et laeto corde invocēmus, dicentes." *Book of Blessings*, 672.

28) See John 1:14 (σκηνώ).

29) *De benedictionibus*, 486. "Dōmine Iesu Christe, qui vitam domesticam cum Mariā et Ioseph sanctificāsti, nobiscum in hac domo commorāri dignēris, ut te nostrum hōspitem sentiāmus et caput venerēmur." *Book of Blessings*, 672.

30) *De benedictionibus*, 486. "Tu, in quo omnis aedificātio compācta crescit in templum sanctum fac ut habitāntes in hac domo coaedificēntur in habitāculum Dei in Spīritu." *Book of Blessings*, 672.

31) *De benedictionibus*, 486. "Qui fideles tuos domum suam supra firmam petram aedificare docuisti da ut huus familiae vita verbis tuis fortiter adhaereat et omni divisione remota, corde magno et animo volenti tibi deserviat." *Book of Blessings*, 672.

32) *De benedictionibus*, 486. "Qui, domo propria careens, hospitalitatem amicorum in laetitia paupertatis accepisti, fac ut omnes qui locum habitationis inquirunt domum suo nomine dignam, adiuvantibus nobis inveniant." *Book of Blessings*, 672.

on, the 1984 rite suggests the singing of a suitable song: “It is preferable to end the celebration with a suitable song.”³³ The addition of a concluding prayer and the suggestion of a song contribute to the sense that the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* is a complete liturgical rite with parallel structures to other commonly used liturgical rites such as Mass or the Liturgy of the Hours. The text of the concluding prayer reiterates the theme of peace with which the rite began. It moves the context of peace, however, from the home to the hearts of those present. It likewise furthers the theme of the indwelling of Christ, who has already been asked to dwell in the blessed house, and is now asked to dwell in the hearts of the gathered people: “May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and may the word of Christ in all its richness dwell in us, so that whatever we do in word and in work, we will do in the name of the Lord.”³⁴

6 Conclusion

A deacon recently recounted to me a debate that had taken place among diocesan seminarians about which sacramental blessings to use. Some of the seminarians favored the 1952 *Rituale Romanum* because it is more precise in its language about what is ‘actually happening’ in the rite (via a prayer of exorcism or a priestly blessing of an object, for example). According to this position, the new rites in *De benedictionibus* are more vague about what is ‘actually happening’ during a ritual such as a sprinkling or a blessing of a home, and are thus less desirable. This study, I hope, has presented the case that the Vatican II – influenced rites in *De benedictionibus* are not more vague, but rather fuller and more theologically rich than those that preceded them. In contrast to a quasi-magical worldview, in which the priest is seen as possessing the power to change the character of an object by saying a particular formula while performing a corresponding action, the rites in *De benedictionibus* propose a liturgical theology that is scriptural, Christological, and ecclesiological rich.

As has been shown, the theme of homes and dwelling in the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus* is grounded scripturally through carefully chosen lectionary and psalm options, a homiletic exposition of these texts, and thematically corresponding intercessions. In the prayer of blessing, it is Christ himself, rather than an angelic intermediary, who is invited to dwell in the new home, as well as in the hearts of those who live there. The theme of dwelling is also expanded in the rite to include dwelling in the house of the Church and in the kingdom of God. The prayer of blessing connects dwelling in an earthly home with eschatologically dwelling in the Father’s heavenly home, and numerous opportunities for active participation through the opening dialogue, the scripture reading and psalm, the intercessions, and the sprinkling rite and accompanying (optional) song remind those present that they are members of the living Church, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Something certainly is happening during

33) *De benedictionibus*, 491. “Laudabiliter ritus cantu apto perficitur.” *Book of Blessings*, 677.

34) *De benedictionibus*, 490. “Pax Christi regent in cōrdibus nostris verbum Christi hábitet in nobis abundanter, ut quodcúmque fácimus in verbo aut in ópere, ómnia in nómine Dómini faciámus.” *Book of Blessings*, 676.

rites such as the *Ordo benedictionis novae domus*. The gathered body of Christ, the communion hierarchically ordered, offers its prayer to God that God will bless a particular house, but also that God will dwell in each person gathered and provide dwellings for those throughout the world who are without shelter. By their robust liturgical participation, those gathered fulfill the call of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*³⁵ as they pray to become more and more the holy people of God.³⁶

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35) See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14.

36) See Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], in Austin Flannery, O.P. (ed.), *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), chapters 2 and 5.