

# Nothing Lacking for Validity:

NEW RITE OR ORDINATION VALID BUT NOT GOOD IN WHAT HAS BEEN CHANGED

A Response to Rev. Anthony Cekada

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In March of 2006, Rev. Anthony Cekada published a short pamphlet on the new Rite of Episcopal Consecration, entitled *Absolutely Null and Utterly Void*. Covering just under fifteen pages of two-column text (sixteen pages if the bibliography is counted), it is an extremely well-written, concise, thoroughly-researched, neat and tidy presentation of Fr. Cekada's case.

It is also, in the last analysis, wrong in its conclusion(s).

...Let me cut to the chase: if Fr. Cekada is correct, and the 1968 Rite of Episcopal Consecration is invalid, then Sedevacantism is, as of April 19, 2005, the only logical ecclesiastical position to take. Joseph Ratzinger was consecrated as a bishop on May 28, 1977, nearly 10 years after the new Rite was in place. If the Rite is invalid, Ratzinger's consecration was invalid; if his consecration was invalid, he is not a true bishop; if he is not a true bishop, he can in no way be the *Bishop* of Rome, and thus, he is not a true pope.

My first task here will be to summarize Fr. Cekada's position, as it is spelled out in the pamphlet.

The first page of his text is occupied with the issue of Archbishop Lefebvre's opinion concerning the new Rite. I suspect this is a tactical move, by which he hopes to win the attention and trust of those affiliated (officially or otherwise) with the SSPX. Certainly, Fr. Cekada does not think that the Archbishop's opinion adds or detracts anything of substance to the discussion; if the new Rite is valid, its validity is not affected by the Archbishop's belief, and if it is invalid, it cannot be made valid by the fact that the Archbishop believed it was so.

Pages 2-3 of Fr. Cekada's text lay out the basics of sacramental validity: the matter, the form, the substance of the form, the accidents of the form, etc. It is here, in the discussion of non-substantial changes to the form of a sacrament, that he makes a very important admission:

*Example:* Instead of saying "I baptize you....," the priest says "I cleanse you in the name of the Father..." Because he has merely substituted an exact synonym for one of the words in the form ("baptize" is Greek for "cleanse"), the meaning remained the same. The change was therefore only accidental. The baptism was valid. (Rev. Anthony Cekada, "Absolutely Null and Utterly Void", p. 3)

Thus, Fr. Cekada agrees that the form of a sacrament can change without rendering it invalid. Or, to be more specific, the *words* which make up the form of the sacrament can be individually altered without invalidating the sacrament, provided that the *meaning* of the form does not change. We will return to this point later on.

He next lays down the fundamental point concerning the Episcopal Consecration, as taught by Pope Pius XII:

Pius XII, in his Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, laid down the general principle when he declared that for Holy Orders these must "univocally signify the sacramental effects - that is, the power of the Order and the grace of the Holy Ghost."

Note the two elements that it must univocally (i.e., unambiguously) express: the *specific order* being conferred (diaconate, priesthood or episcopacy) and the *grace* of the Holy Ghost. (Cekada, p. 3)

By way of historical explanation, it should be noted that this Apostolic Constitution represents the first time in Church History that the formula for the Rite of Episcopal Consecration was so definitively spelled out. Prior to this, there was no consensus, and even in so standard a work as the multi-volume *Dogmatic Theology* by Pohle-Preuss, there is no definitive formula offered.

So far, then, we have two facts to consider: the first, that a sacrament's validity depends on a formula that substantially signifies the meaning of the sacrament, although the words themselves can be changed as long as the meaning remains; the second, that for Episcopal Consecration in particular, the formula must "unambiguously" express the order being conferred, and the grace of the Holy Ghost.

Fr. Cekada goes on to relay the decision of Pius XII concerning what is the essential form of the Rite:

"Complete in thy priest the fullness of Thy ministry, and adorned in the raiment of all glory, sanctify him with the dew of heavenly anointing."

This form univocally signifies the sacramental effects as follows:

- (1) "The *fullness* of Thy ministry," "raiment of *all* glory" = power of the Order of episcopacy.
- (2) "The dew of heavenly anointing" = grace of the Holy Ghost. (Cekada, p. 4)

In this way, says Fr. Cekada, the old Rite of Consecration met the requirement laid down by Pius XII. In contrast to this old formula, Fr. Cekada quotes the new formula, as set down in the ICEL translation of the new Rite:

"So now pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by him to the holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place to be your temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name." (Cekada, p. 4)

From pages 4-8, Fr. Cekada spends a great deal of time analyzing the claim that this new Rite of Consecration finds its source in the (valid) Eastern Rites of Episcopal Consecration. He invests a great deal of effort to disprove the similarities between the two, it can be gathered, because it is

precisely this line of thought that apparently convinced Archbishop Lefebvre of the new Rite's validity. It was also this particular defense that was raised in a recent *Angelus* article by Fr. Pierre-Marie ("Why the New Rite of Episcopal Consecration is Valid", *The Angelus*, Dec. 2005 and Jan. 2006).

Finally, Fr. Cekada investigates the substance of the new Rite's formula (quoted above) to see if it meets the criteria of Pius XII. He concedes that the formula "does seem to signify the grace of the Holy Ghost" (Cekada, p. 8), but is not so ready to grant the same approval to the other critical requirement - that the formula must express the order being conferred.

The point under dispute is whether or not the phrase "governing Spirit" adequately expresses that it is the office of Episcopacy that is being conferred:

The expression *governing Spirit - Spiritus principalis* in Latin - is at the heart of the dispute over the validity of the new rite, for if it does *not* signify the fullness of the priesthood that constitutes the episcopacy, the sacrament is invalid. (Cekada, p. 8)

The next several pages (pp. 8-10) are devoted to the analysis of this particular phrase and its meaning. He rejects the explanation of Dom Bernard Botte (in the article "'Spiritus Principalis' Formule de l'Ordination Épiscopale," *Notitiae* 10 [1974]) that the phrase means "gift of the Spirit proper to a leader" as "false - a typical case of the brazen double-talk modernists excel at when they are caught out." (Cekada, p. 9)

He appeals to Latin and Greek dictionaries (the Greek *hegemonicos* is, he says, equivalent to *Spiritus principalis*), where he admits that the phrase can mean, variously, "first in importance or esteem, chief", "of a leader, leading, governing", "authority, command", "rule, office of a superior: episcopal... of a superior of a convent... hence of sphere of bishop's rule, diocese." However, he dismisses this evidence:

... even in this sense, it does not connote the power of Order (*potestas Ordinis*), just jurisdiction (*potestas jurisdictionis*), especially since the definition mentions a monastic superior. (Cekada, p. 9)

In a display of the thoroughness that is characteristic of Fr. Cekada, he also looks at the meaning of the phrase as it appears in the Church Fathers, the above-mentioned work of Pohle-Preuss, R. Beraudy's commentary on Hippolytus' *Apostolic Constitutions*, and other non-sacramental ceremonies. His conclusion is that the phrase can have at least a dozen different meanings, none of which "specifically signify either the episcopacy in general or the fullness of Holy Orders that a bishop possesses." (Cekada, p. 10)

At any rate, even if the phrase *could* signify "the episcopacy in general or the fullness of Holy Orders," he argues, it still fails to meet the requirement of Pope Pius XII:

The expression *governing Spirit* is not *univocal* - that is, it is not a term that signifies only *one* thing, as Pius XII required.

Rather, as we demonstrated above, the expression is *ambiguous* - capable of signifying *many different* things and persons. (Cekada, p. 10)

At this point, Fr. Cekada pronounces his definitive conclusion that the new Rite is invalid, because it fails to express the very thing which Pius XII demanded.

He then turns his attention to the objection of "context." Does the context of the new Rite's prayers - especially those prayers which immediately surround the formula itself - make the formula itself valid, especially since those surrounding prayers *do* clearly express the order being conferred? He answers as follows:

But one could make such an argument only if:

(1) The new sacramental form contained *both* elements required by Pius XII (the grace of the Holy Ghost and the power of the Order), and

(2) The form signified one of those elements *equivocally* rather than *univocally*.

One could then at least argue that the form indeed contained the element that Pius XII required and that the context adequately specified it. (Cekada, p. 11)

He then adds his own objection that "such an argument could never produce *moral certitude* that the new sacramental form was valid, only a *probable opinion* that it was." (Cekada, p. 11) Since accepting "mere probable opinion about validity" in the realm of the sacraments constitutes "a mortal sin against religion, charity and (for the minister) against justice" (Cekada, p. 11), this line of argument cannot be accepted.

Ratcheting up the argument a notch, Fr. Cekada blocks all recourse to an appeal to "context" by stating that the new Rite does not *in any way* express the power of order being conferred, and thus, all the context in the world would not help the new formula attain validity:

If I recite *all* the prayers and perform *all* the ceremonies that the *Rituale Romanum* prescribes for a baptism, yet - God forbid - omit the word "baptize" when I pour the water on a baby's head, the sacrament is *invalid*. All the prayers in the surrounding context - no matter how much they speak about baptism, cleansing, and the life of grace - *cannot* render the form valid. An *essential* element was missing from the form, so there is *nothing* - not even an equivocal term - for the context somehow to render specific.

So too, here. The power of Order is *gone* from the form, and context cannot bring it back.

All that remains is *governing Spirit*, which may refer to the Holy Ghost, or one of His effects, or the Father, or knowledge, or Coptic abbot-like virtues. (Cekada, p. 12)

This, in essence, is the end of Fr. Cekada's argument. He does go on to consider some lesser objections, but the real heart of his presentation is contained in the above quotes. Having

recapitulated and summarized his argument, it will now be our task to examine the merits of his argument.

### ...The Church Can Change the Accidents

The Council of Trent declared the following, with regard to the distribution of the Eucharistic species:

[The council] furthermore declares, that this power has ever been in the Church, that, in the dispensation of the sacraments, their substance being untouched, it may ordain or change what things soever it may judge most expedient, for the profit of those who receive, or for the veneration of the said sacraments, according to the difference of circumstances, times, and places. (Session XXI, Cap. 2)

The same power of the Church applies with regard to the various formulae of the sacraments. She cannot touch the "substance," the *essential meaning* of the sacraments, but She most certainly can change the accidents - even the several words of the sacramental formulae can be altered, provided that no substantial change in meaning takes place.

Fr. Cekada knows this, and he admits it when he says that he could change the baptismal formula to, "I *cleanse* thee ... etc.," without doing violence to the sacrament's validity.

### The Substance, not the Words

We must apply this principle to the Rite of Episcopal Consecration in a way far more exhaustive than Fr. Cekada has done. The *words* of the Episcopal Consecration formula are not set in stone. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, it was not until 1947 that the Latin Rite formula was even definitively identified (Pope Pius XII, *Sacramentum Ordinis*). When such formula was identified, it was not because this or that particular series of words were *in themselves* necessary, but because these particular words found in the old Rite expressed the *substance* of the sacramental form.

Let me break away from the esoteric for just a moment in order to step back and get a fresher view of the issue.

Pope Pius XII said that the formula of Episcopal Consecration *must* "univocally signify the sacramental effects - namely the power of Order and the grace of the Holy Spirit." (*Sacramentum Ordinis*, 4) In the *particular* case of the *then-in-use* Latin Rite, these two sacramental effects were expressed in the words:

Perfect in Thy priest the fullness of thy ministry and, clothing him in all the ornaments of spiritual glorification, sanctify him with the Heavenly anointing. (*Sacramentum Ordinis*, 5)

Now, these words are only applicable to the Latin Rite *as it stood in 1947*. If Pius XII had been looking at one of the valid Eastern Rites of Episcopal Consecration, he would have undoubtedly found a *different* cluster of words that most appropriately expressed the sacramental effects.

To entertain a bit of ridiculousness, we might even say (taking Fr. Cekada's example) that the Rite of Episcopal Consecration could be validly conferred in these words:

This here priest, O God, needs a promotion. Through the grace of the Third Person of the Trinity, promote him to be a Bishop.

I am certainly not advocating this kind of loose formality in a sacramental formula, and hopefully the ICEL never gets their hands on this text; but I *am* trying to show that, as long as the substance of the sacrament is expressed - the power of the Order and the grace of the Holy Ghost - then the actual words themselves are up for grabs (*technically* speaking of course - as a Traditionalist, I think it is utterly foolish to tamper with any of the sacramental formulae).

Again, speaking from a purely technical standpoint, it is not even necessary to prescribe a written formula for the Rite. The Vatican *could* leave it up to every individual ordaining bishop to use whatever words he wishes, *as long as the sacramental effects are made clear*. The reasons why the Church *does* prescribe written formulae are for purposes of uniformity across geographical lines, and more importantly, to remove all doubt as to the sacrament's validity. If every consecrating bishop decided to invent his own formula every time he performed a consecration, there would be a question *every single time* of whether the words he decided to use *this time* truly met the requirement of expressing the sacramental effects.

### **Who Decides?**

But here we touch upon a most critical point: given that the words used could be almost *any* series of individual words, provided the meaning does not change, how do we know which combination of words meets the criteria? If there were, for example, twenty different versions of the consecration formula, how would we know which (if any) of those versions were adequate enough to be valid?

The answer is simple enough: the Church, in Her Magisterium, determines if a given formula is valid or not. The sacramental formulae are not thrown open for individual examination and judgment by any bishop, priest, or layman who decides that such an examination must be made.

This in itself is enough of an obstacle to Fr. Cekada's arguments. He has personally made an investigation into the validity of the new Rite formula (without any mandate to do so), and has concluded that it is invalid. As a personal exercise in intellectual curiosity, this is all well and good, but Fr. Cekada's opinions stand in contrast to the official judgment of the Magisterium. He must show that his personal opinion trumps the opinion of the pope, which he cannot.

Let me anticipate an objection: am I saying that no bishop, priest, or layman could rightly come to such a conclusion? What if, to build up an extreme example, the pope said that the new formula for the Rite of Episcopal Consecration is henceforth and evermore to be expressed in these words: "I have a car, I have a cat, and I love them both" - would we be bound to say that the official papal opinion settles the case, that this new formula is valid, and that there can be no objection against it?

Of course not. But let us return to reality: the pope who promulgated the new Rite of Episcopal Consecration did not make such an obvious blunder. We are not dealing with a clear-cut case of formulaic invalidity here. The fact that Fr. Cekada has to spend so much time analyzing the one phrase, *governing Spirit*, proves that this is so.

### **Significatio ex Adjunctis**

Although Fr. Cekada dismissed the question of the "context" of the new Rite, it is clear that in this case the context is very important, and must not be brushed aside as irrelevant. In determining what is the meaning of certain words and phrases within the formula, it is almost disingenuous for Fr. Cekada to consider the text of the formula in isolation from the rest of the prayers - although it certainly makes his case easier to prove.

Take, for example, his analysis of the phrase *governing Spirit*. After a near-exhaustive investigation into the historical usage and meaning of the phrase, he comes up with a dozen different meanings, and behaves as though the existence of these numerous options prove the ambiguity of the formula itself.

However, his approach cuts both ways. We could easily create this same mirage of confusion if we were to slice up the old Rite and begin examining each word or phrase in isolation. The formula as laid down by Pius XII says (using Fr. Cekada's text), "Complete in thy priest the fullness of Thy ministry, and adorned in the raiment of all glory, sanctify him with the dew of heavenly anointing."

He makes the rather tenuous claim that "This form univocally signifies the sacramental effects" (Cekada, p. 4), but this is his predetermined conclusion. What is "the fullness of Thy ministry"? Yes, Jesus was a High Priest, and perhaps that is what the text means; but He is also called the King in Sacred Scripture - does this portion of the text mean that the bishop-elect is going to be a king? Or what about "in the raiment of all glory"? Who does this text refer to? Christ, or the bishop-elect? And what of "the dew of heavenly anointing"? That could be interpreted as a reference to the Holy Ghost, sure, but it neither *says* "Holy Ghost," nor does it *say* "grace."

If this formula were perfectly clear, Fr. Cekada would not have had to spell out its meaning as he does in the pamphlet:

- (1) "The fullness of Thy ministry," "raiment of all glory" = power of the Order of episcopacy.
- (2) "The dew of heavenly anointing" = grace of the Holy Ghost. (Cekada, p. 4)

His interpretation of the phrases is correct, no doubt, but in making such an interpretation, he is himself dependent upon the *significatio ex adjunctis* - the "signification from the setting," or, in other words, the *context* of the Rite.

Rama Coomaraswamy, in his essay on the subject of the new Rite, quotes Francis Clark, S.J., as follows:

... the sacramental signification of an ordination rite is not necessarily limited to one phrase or formula, but can be clearly conveyed from many parts of the rite. *These other parts could thus contribute, either individually or in combination, to determining the sacramental meaning of the operative formula in an unambiguous sense.* Thus the wording of an ordination form, even if not specifically determinate in itself, can be given the required determination from its setting (*ex adjunctis*), that is, from the other prayers and actions of the rite, or even from the connotation of the ceremony as a whole in the religious context of the age. (Rama P. Coomaraswamy, "The Post-Conciliar Rite of Holy Orders", *Studies in Comparative Religion*, vol. 16:3-4 [1986], p. 167, fn. 12, emphasis added)

It will be necessary to examine the full context of the new Rite before going any further into the discussion of the *significatio ex adjunctis*.

### The New Rite of Episcopal Ordination

Recalling that the critical issue here is whether or not the new Rite adequately signifies the power of the Order, that is, the fullness of the priesthood, we look to the texts of the new Rite, beginning with the opening lines of the "Examination of the Candidate" (all rubrics are italicized):

*The bishop-elect then rises and stands in front of the principal consecrator, who questions him: ...*

**My brother, are you resolved by the grace of the Holy Spirit to discharge to the end of your life the office the apostles entrusted to us, which we now pass on to you by the laying on of hands?**

A point to keep in mind here: the new Rite expressly indicates that the bishop-elect is about to receive "the office" that is associated with "the apostles," and that he will discharge his duties "by the grace of the Holy Spirit." The two required parts of the sacramental formula are thus present here in the examination: the power of Order and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

After the singing of the Litany of the saints, the consecrating bishop recites a prayer:

*After the litany, the principal consecrator alone stands and, with hands joined sings or says:*

**Lord, be moved by our prayers. Anoint your servant with the fullness of priestly grace, and bless him with spiritual power in all its richness. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

This prayer, too, contains the expression of the power of Order, using the specific words "fullness of priestly grace." If Fr. Cekada is free to take a phrase like "the dew of heavenly anointing" and interpret it as a reference to the Holy Spirit, then we too are free to take the words "Anoint your servant with ... *grace*" as a similar reference to the Holy Spirit. Once again, this prayer that leads up to the consecration itself expresses both of the sacramental effects.

We then come to the prayer of consecration itself, which consists of a "preface," recited by all of the consecrating bishops present, which is followed by a longer prayer recited by the principal consecrator alone:

*The following part of the prayer is recited by all the consecrating bishops, with hands joined:*

**So now pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by him to the holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place to be your temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name.**

*Then the principal consecrator continues alone:*

**Father, you know all hearts. You have chosen your servant for the office of bishop. May he be a shepherd to your holy flock, and a high priest blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day; may he always gain the blessing of your favor and offer the gifts of your holy Church. Through the Spirit who gives the grace of high priesthood grant him the power to forgive sins as you have commanded, to assign ministries as you have decreed, and to loose every bond by the authority which you gave to your apostles. May he be pleasing to you by his gentleness and purity of heart, presenting a fragrant offering to you, through Jesus Christ, your Son, through whom glory and power and honor are yours with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, now and for ever. Amen.**

We will turn our attention to the all-critical "preface" in a moment. The prayer which follows it, however, explicitly mentions both of the sacramental effects of ordination: the bishop is called "a high priest blameless in your sight," who is consecrated through "the Spirit who gives the grace of high priesthood." Nothing is lacking in this prayer, just as nothing was lacking in the previous texts.

A fourth prayer follows after the anointing of the new bishop:

*The principal consecrator puts on a linen gremial, takes the chrism, and anoints the head of the bishop, who kneels before him. He says:*

**God has brought you to share the high priesthood of Christ, May he pour out on you the oil of mystical anointing and enrich you with spiritual blessings.**

(all texts above are from the ICEL translation, *The Rites of the Catholic Church* [New York: Pueblo Publishing Co, 1980], pp. 87-100)

This last prayer contains everything that the old Rite formula contained, in even more explicit terms: a reference to "the high priesthood of Christ," coupled with the "oil of mystical anointing," undoubtedly another reference to the Holy Spirit.

The full force of these facts must be absorbed: we have looked at the content of four texts in the new Rite of Episcopal Consecration, two of which immediately precede the consecration formula, and two of which immediately follow the consecration formula. In every case, these surrounding texts explicitly contain the signification of the sacramental effects.

With that in mind, we are much better equipped to attempt an interpretation of the formula prayer itself, not (as Fr. Cekada did) wrenching it from its context, but allowing the context of the immediately surrounding prayers to inform our understanding of the words.

I have laid out the formula of the consecration in a kind of poetic fashion below, the better to show its structure. I have also underscored the parallel terms:

So now  
 pour out upon this chosen one that power  
 which is from you,  
 the governing Spirit  
 whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ,  
 the Spirit given by him to the holy apostles,  
 who founded the Church in every place  
 to be your temple  
 for the unceasing glory and praise of your name.

Father Cekada did a lot to blur the meaning of *governing Spirit*, showing all of the various meanings that *principalis* might have, ultimately concluding that there is no way to know what the phrase means in this prayer. I submit that the phrase is no more difficult to understand than "the dew of heavenly anointing," when it is considered in context.

He pointed out that the phrase was used in connection with King David - but will anyone *seriously* suggest that there might be confusion as to whether the bishop-elect over whom these words are pronounced might be receiving a royal coronation?

He pointed out that the phrase was used in connection with Coptic abbots - but is anyone *seriously* questioning whether the man being ordained here is being elevated to the position of "abbot"?

The meaning of the phrase *governing Spirit* is no mystery in this context. It is the textual parallel to "the Spirit given by [Christ] to the holy apostles" - the first bishops of the Catholic Church. This is undoubtedly a reference to the Descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, when the Church was born and the Apostles became bishops. Here is where the *significatio ex adjunctis* helps us out: during the "Examination of the Candidate", explicit mention was already made of the "office of the apostles," which contextually prepares us for the reference to the "holy apostles" in the formula itself.

For a man as smart as Fr. Cekada is, I don't know why he insists on playing ignorant when it comes to the question of what *governing Spirit* means. Both the inter-textual and contextual evidence leaves very little room for confusion. The bishop-elect is being given (according to the text) the "power" of the "governing Spirit," which is specifically the power and governing Spirit which was "given ... to the holy apostles," the first bishops of the Catholic Church.

## Conclusion

In his pamphlet, Fr. Cekada raises some questions about the formula of the new Rite. Those questions have been met with an answer here. He has proposed that the phrase *governing Spirit* is ambiguous and does not adequately express the power of Order being conferred; I have proposed that this is clear from the consecration formula, and further strengthened by the context of the immediately surrounding texts. Yes, "governing Spirit" *can* mean other things, but in this context it is clear that it *does not* mean those other things. It refers, in this context, *univocally* (by the very reason that it cannot mean anything else) to power of Order being conferred.

In the final analysis, however, Fr. Cekada's opinions, and my opinions which I have set in contrast to his, must be submitted to the Magisterium for a final decision. Unfortunately, Fr. Cekada's position has left him without any such Magisterium to make those decisions, which is why he can freely and with impunity write pamphlets challenging the validity of the sacraments. Since Fr. Cekada will not recognize the current Magisterium, it must always and ever be the case that we will be at an impasse. The most he can do is to give us "mere probably opinion" as to the meaning of the words of the new Rite, to which I will respond with my own counter-arguments - and this must of necessity be an endless cycle, because Fr. Cekada has no Magisterium that can give a definitive ruling.

However, that black hole aside, when the text of the new Rite is considered, interpreted in its proper context (and not in isolation), its meaning is clearly Catholic. When this is wedded to the fact that (by all appearances) a validly reigning pope promulgated it, there is every reason for moral certitude: there is nothing lacking in the new Rite of Episcopal Consecration for its validity.

**...Jacob Michael**

