

Anthony Cekada. *Work of Human Hands: A Theological Critique of the Mass of Paul VI*. West Chester, OH: Philothea Press, 2010. 444pp.

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Cekada's new book is a bold, critical study of the ideology underlying the liturgical changes that occurred during the second half of the Twentieth Century in the Roman Rite. Theologically profound and well-researched, it can be seen as an important contribution to 'traditionalist' Catholic scholarship. Previous full-length monographs on this subject have focused mainly on criticizing the changes to the Ordinary of the Mass and on chronicling the historical circumstances that led up to them. This study, however, includes not only criticism of the changes to the Propers (variable parts), and in particular an unprecedented account of changes to the Lectionary, but also a ground-breaking theological analysis of the ideological influences that underlie all the changes. Despite the author's admittedly sedevacantist background, his critique of the New Mass is based exclusively on sound, traditional Catholic theology and is, thus, independent of (or at least logically prior to) his ecclesiological views on the current status of the Papal See.

The work is divided into fourteen chapters of roughly equal length. After an introductory chapter that covers the motives and scope of the work, Chapters 2-6 focus on the general history of the recent liturgical changes to the Roman Rite, laying out the ideology behind them. Chapter 2 focuses on the thought of the scholars who headed the liturgical movement that brought about the reform, with particular emphasis on Josef Jungmann and Louis Bouyer; Chapter 3 identifies the Pre-Conciliar Pian Commission

and Holy Week Reforms as being continuous in aim and motivation with the Post-Conciliar liturgical reform; and Chapters 5 and 6 deal separately with the 1969 and 1970 versions of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (or GIRM).¹ Chapters 7-13 then analyze the new Mass point by point, from art, architecture, furnishings, and introductory rites all the way through the dismissal, including both the Ordinary of the Mass and the Propers. The author does this by comparing the salient elements of the New Mass with their traditional counterparts, and citing members of the hierarchy, ‘periti’, and other authorities to reveal the motives behind the particular changes. The book then concludes with a summary of the evidence and a recapitulation of the argument. Except for this overall summary at the end, every chapter ends with a rather helpful, if unconventional, point-by-point summary of chapter contents that adds clarity and cogency to the general argument. The book’s appendix is also worth mentioning: there, Cekada offers a compelling case for the use of the 1951 (or any pre-1955) Missal, rather than the 1962 Missal, an argument that could be well received by traditionalist groups that currently use the latter.

The book’s main thesis is that (A) the Mass of Paul VI, said according to its prescribed rubrics as they are found in the *Editio Typica* of the Missal, is gravely irreverent and destroys Catholic doctrine in the minds of the faithful.² Cekada also

¹ Cekada abbreviates it as “GI,” but I shall follow the general convention in abbreviating it as “GIRM.”

² It must be noted that Cekada does not intend to criticize mere liturgical ‘abuses’—violations of the New Missal’s rubrics—that frequently take place in the context of the New Mass. Rather, he explicitly criticizes the new Missal *itself* as

defends two secondary theses that are corollaries of the first: The Mass of Paul VI, said according to prescribed rubrics, represents (B) a rupture with tradition, and (C) a spurious restoration of the ancient liturgy of the Church. The book can be seen as a 400-page inductive argument to support these three theses. Whereas I can agree entirely with theses (B) and (C), I believe that thesis (A) needs to be qualified significantly. I shall deal with (B) and (C) first, then (A).

The author offers strong evidence for his second and third theses, (B) and (C). The theological foundations of Cekada's overall argument are found in Chapter 2, a true gem on the theological motives behind the liturgical reform. There, Cekada shows that the changes were intended to promote the *nouvelle theologie* ('new theology') of men

doctrinally problematic. According to Cekada, his view distinguishes him from other traditionalist authors who, he claims, have only criticized 'abuses' or who argue in favor of the traditional Mass on the basis of mere aesthetic preference or individual sentiment, and if they ever criticize the New Missal itself, they have merely held it is 'ambiguous', instead of acknowledging that it is inherently problematic in its doctrine. I think Cekada exaggerates a bit, however; there are plenty of other works that are critical of the *doctrine* contained implicitly and explicitly in the New Mass and the new liturgical laws, and not just its aesthetical problems or its 'abuses'. To name a few of these works: Davies' monumental, three-volume *Liturgical Revolution*, the SSPX's *The Problem of the Liturgical Reform: A Theological and Liturgical Study*, and of course, *A Short Critical Study of the New Order of Mass* by Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci, commonly known as *The Ottaviani Intervention*.

like Pius Parsch, Romano Guardini, Josef Jungmann, and Louis Bouyer. As operative theological principles of the reform, Cekada specifically singles out the following four: (1) Josef Jungmann’s liturgical “Corruption Theory,” according to which the Roman Rite that was in use in the early 20th Century represented a departure from, and corruption of, primitive liturgical ideals. As a result, the liturgical reform—claims Jungmann—must recover this primitive ideal. Jungmann thus promoted a sort of *resourcement* in the area of the liturgy. (2) Jungmann’s “Pastoral Liturgy” view, which advocated refashioning the Mass in order to meet the perceived needs of contemporary man—a position that could also be characterized as a sort of liturgical *aggiornamento*. (3) Louis Bouyer’s “Assembly Theology,” according to which the essence of the Mass consists in an *assembly* of the ‘People of God’ that, together, celebrates the gathering, the priest merely acting as ‘presider’—a Protestantizing view that bypasses the traditional Catholic doctrine of the Mass as essentially a Sacrifice offered by the priest alone to God, to which the people unite themselves. (4) Bouyer’s theory of “Other ‘Real’ Presences,” which inflates Christ’s presence in the congregation and in Scripture in order to de-emphasize the faith in *the* Real Presence of Christ under the Eucharistic species—a technique of the reformers that pervades the New Mass and which Cekada calls ‘devaluation-by-inflation’. Whereas *resourcement* and *aggiornamento* characterize Jungmann’s principles, a strong ecumenical motivation is evident behind Bouyer’s views.

Cekada meticulously shows that these principles are at work in the recent liturgical changes. In Chapters 5 and 6, he shows how Bouyer’s “Assembly Theology” and his theory of “Other ‘Real’ Presences” are the central motifs in the New Missal and the *GIRM*. He also shows that, for every change that is a supposed to represent a ‘return

to the ancient ideal' (cf., Jungmann's "Corruption Theory"), the real motive is not a fidelity to antiquity but a desire to abolish a rubric that is doctrinally unacceptable to 'modern man' (or to these new theologians). Hence the need 'modernize' the liturgy and make it acceptable to 'contemporary sensibilities' (cf., "Pastoral Liturgy"). Take, for instance, the "Prayer of the Faithful" or "Universal Prayer": such prayers did exist in some ancient liturgies, and so the re-establishing of these prayers in the New Mass was presented as a return to antiquity. Yet the original text of these prayers, which the traditional Missal still prescribes for the Mass of the Presanctified on Good Friday, is emphatically un-ecumenical and offensive to 'modern man' and to new theology; moreover, they are invariable. The new "Universal Prayer," on the other hand, is systematically de-Christianized, de-spiritualized, and de-supernaturalized, primarily to placate liturgists who complained that the original prayers had been written "in the direction of a devout and conventional religion, utterly foreign to the pastoral needs of today" (p. 256). In the end, even the de-supernaturalized prayers became optional, and their content is ultimately de-regularized and left up to the discretion of the priest, commercial liturgical publisher, local liturgical planning committee, or director of worship. The result is something that superficially resembles an ancient liturgical prayer (cf. "Corruption Theory"), but which was established to meet the 'needs of contemporary man' (cf. "Pastoral Liturgy") and is, as Gamber puts it, "a novelty which stands completely against liturgical tradition" (p. 257).

Another extensive example of antiquity-as-an-excuse-for-novelty is given in Chapter 10, which concerns the changes to the Lectionary. Here—Cekada argues—despite the fact that, thanks to its three-year cycle, the New Lectionary contains more

Scripture readings than the old Missal, nonetheless, through ‘adroit choices’ some important Scriptural texts—often a verse or two in the middle of a feast day or Sunday Gospel reading—are bracketed off as optional or altogether omitted, because of their ‘negative theology’, i.e., they doctrinally run afoul of the *nouvelle theologie* or of ecumenism. Thanks to these omissions, the average Catholic can attend Mass every Sunday for an entire Lectionary Cycle (three years) and never hear theologically ‘negative’ Scriptural passages such as Our Lord’s warnings against hell, St. Paul’s warning against receiving the Body of Our Lord unworthily, his teaching on heresy, heretics and their fate, or his command that women be submissive to their husbands, that they cover their heads, and remain silent in Church. In practical terms, this chapter is perhaps the most devastating for the defenders of the liturgical reform, and it alone, in my opinion, is worth the price of the entire book.

Now, Cekada’s main thesis (A), in my view, is not sufficiently nuanced. There are doctrinal problems with the new Missal and *GIRM*, to be sure; yet, contrary to what Cekada suggests, there is nothing in the Missal or *GIRM* that could explicitly be identified as heretical. In the 444 pages of the work, Cekada never successfully points to a single explicit heretical proposition in the text of the New Mass, whether in the Propers or the Ordinary. All of the doctrinal problems that he points out consist in omissions, ambiguous phrases, ‘devaluation-by-inflation’, or deficiencies in the many rubrics, expressions, and gestures that make up the Missal and *GIRM*. Nowhere is a dogma explicitly denied. As far as I could tell, there are only two places in the book where Cekada tries to identify a specific heresy that he thinks is present in the new liturgical reform. One of these is his discussion of the *GIRM*’s doctrine that the Mass is a re-

presentation of the *Last Supper*. He claims that this is opposed to the Council of Trent's dogma that the Mass is a re-presentation of the *Sacrifice of the Cross*. Yet Cekada does not sufficiently discuss or explain why these two notions contradict each other or are mutually incompatible. I do not see why someone who thinks that the Mass is in some sense a representation of the *Last Supper* must necessarily deny the dogma that the Mass is a representation of the *Sacrifice of Calvary*. While I do not defend the idea that the Mass consists in a representation of the Last Supper, I would not go so far as to claim it is necessarily a denial of a Tridentine dogma. A doctrinal novelty does not *ipso facto* involve heresy. There are different levels of theological error—and Cekada is well aware of this—yet he does not discuss whether the doctrinal problems of the new Mass could be categorized as otherwise than heresy.

Rather than state that the Mass contains heresies, I would admit that it was clearly *motivated* by novel doctrines, some of which are obviously dangerous. One could even admit that, in the context of current theological trends, the New Rite may *indirectly promote* these novel doctrines, and *in the minds of most of the faithful* these novel doctrines involve a denial of the traditional faith, yet this in no way means that the new Missal contains any proposition or gesture that inherently asserts heresy. Take, for example, the changes to the offertory prayers. The traditional prayers at the offering of the paten and chalice eloquently summarize the Catholic doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, and offer the bread and wine already under the aspect of an 'Immaculate Victim' (*Immaculatam Hostiam*) that will be sacrificed later on, thus making an allusion to the future Consecration. The new prayers, however, do not make reference to the 'Victim' or to the Sacrifice. Instead, they are pervaded by a naturalistic tone, as they speak of

offering of (mere) bread and wine, which are being considered as the ‘work of human hands’ and which will become ‘bread of life’ and ‘spiritual drink’. This is where Cekada makes his second accusation of heresy: he suggests that calling the bread and wine ‘the work of human hands’ amounts to stating that the matter of the Sacrament of the Eucharist consists in human work, and that this is heretical. Yet, the New Missal in no way states that the matter of the Holy Eucharist is human work. That some theologians read the Missal this way is one thing, but that the Mass itself says so explicitly is quite another. A more reasonable criticism of the new offertory prayers would be that, though not heretical, they simply fail to communicate the Catholic theology of the Sacrifice of the Mass. Perhaps the change was *motivated* by a novel theology that differed from the traditional theology of the Sacrifice of the Mass, yet no denial of the traditional doctrine is present in the rite itself.

Similarly, in the context of current theological trends (e.g., the ecumenical requirement of making the Mass less offensive to Protestants, and the desire of many to abandon the traditional Catholic theology of the Mass), the now-allowed gesture of receiving Holy Communion in the hand may be seen as an indirect attack on our faith in the Real Presence. Yet it is not inherently wrong or heretical in itself to receive Holy Communion in the Hand. Even the old *De defectibus* prescribes it in certain irregular situations. In itself, this change only amounts to an *omitted* profession of faith in the Real Presence—an omission that does not in itself imply a denial. So it is in context only, and not in itself, that this new concession can be seen as doctrinally problematic.

Interestingly, Cekada also offers two arguments for the invalidity of the New Mass. First, he gives the well-known ‘*pro multis*’—‘for all’ argument. To my

disappointment, Cekada never addresses any of the detailed defenses of the validity of the ‘for all’ translation offered by scholars such as John McCarthy and Manfred Hauke, or even as much as mentions the Vatican pronouncement on this issue. His second argument, however, is more interesting: it is based on one of the criticisms in the *Ottaviani Intervention* regarding the requisite ministerial intention for saying a valid Mass. The traditional Mass left no room for the priest to be lacking in his requisite intention to change bread and wine into the Most Sacred Body and Blood of Our Lord: the texts made clear what was going on, and what ought to be the intention of the celebrant. The priest who pronounced those words meaningfully and assertively would automatically have the requisite intention. The New Mass, however, together with the 1969 *GIRM*, present what used to be called the ‘Consecration’ as a mere ‘Institution Narrative’,³ such that a priest is able to pronounce the new ‘Institution Narrative’ as a mere historical account of the Last Supper without the intention of effecting the Transubstantiation. This would result in an invalid Mass—as Cekada dramatically puts it: “No Body, no Blood, no Mass.” This, in my view, is a theologically sound criticism of the new ‘Institution Narrative’ terminology. Yet this criticism should be tempered by one important clarification that Cekada never makes: this argument applies only to individual Masses where the priest lacks the requisite intention—something that is also possible, though significantly more difficult, in the context of the Old Mass. The criticism does not apply to every Mass said according to the New Missal, for even in the New Rite, a priest who, despite the vague, new ‘Institution Narrative’ language, manages to

³ The 1970 *GIRM* saw itself forced to change the expression to ‘Institution Narrative or Consecration’.

pronounce the words of consecration meaningfully and assertively, with the requisite intention, bypasses this problem and truly brings about the Transubstantiation.⁴

Cekada's research is, overall, scholarly and profound, eye-opening and convincing. He leaves no room to doubt in the reader's mind that the creators of the New Mass were seeking to promote doctrines in line with the ecumenical and *nouvelle theologie* movements. Even though Cekada's main thesis is not *simpliciter* warranted, the book successfully shows that the New Mass represents a theological novelty, a doctrinal rupture with tradition and a spurious return to primitive liturgy. Inevitably, the book will have to be taken seriously by contemporary theology scholars of all camps.

⁴ Oddly enough, although Cekada thinks the New Mass is invalid, he still thinks it is a sacrilege! Yet, if "no Body, no Blood, no Mass," then how can it be sacrilege? Cekada appears never to make this connection.