

In Re:
Some Recent Comments of Fr. Hewko on +Williamson and the New Mass

By
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Introduction:

Today, the latest comments of Fr. David Hewko appeared on The Catacombs Forum ¹which, if slightly more tempered than in years past, nevertheless maintain the same old errors, distortions, and falsehoods as formerly. In the interest of correcting these errors, we take the time to enumerate several of them, and offer their refutations. Our hope is that some day, Fr. Hewko will be able to acknowledge the truth of these arguments, mend fences with the bishops of the Resistance, and unite with them, even if it should mean he will lose misguided benefactors and faithful in the process. Perhaps in due time, they too would follow his good example.

In any case, it is a pious hope.

Among the errors contained in today's comments by Fr. Hewko are the following:

- 1) Archbishop Lefebvre never said the new Mass gives grace;
- 2) The new Mass is sterile;
- 3) The new rite is not a Catholic sacrament, theologically speaking;
- 4) The conflation of "faith" and "disposition;"
- 5) Lefebvre on the new Mass and the Sunday obligation;
- 6) Finding an ally in Fr. Carl Pulvermacher?
- 7) But Holy Mother Church has already decided, Fr. Hewko;
- 8) Who really needs to return to the position of +Lefebvre?

Before diving into Fr. Hewko's particular objections, it is first necessary to clarify some imprecision: Fr. Hewko tends not to distinguish between the "rite of Mass" and "the sacrament," and often seems to use them interchangeably. This is evinced in several instances (in the article cited, and elsewhere), where he speaks of "grace in the new Mass." A precise and/or doctrinally astute reader might initially think that, by the use of such a phrase, Fr. Hewko was discussing whether or not the "solemn form" or "essential form" of the rite itself (rather than the sacrament of Holy Communion confected by said rite) could produce grace.² But this is not what he has been objecting to since the days of the Mahopac conference. When Fr. Hewko says "you cannot receive grace at the new Mass," what he really means is that a well-disposed communicant does not receive an increase of sanctifying grace (i.e., "nourishment") at a valid Novus Ordo Mass.

In other words, he is advancing a condemned theory of sterile sacraments, which we will discuss in due course.

Archbishop Lefebvre never said the new Mass gives grace?

The following quotation of +Lefebvre was recorded from a 1974 spiritual conference in Ecône (COSPEC),³ and was translated by Samuel Loeman. Those with access to +Lefebvre's *opera omnia* will still have access to it, but the present version was lifted from Cathinfo, as Samuel's blog has now been closed:

"But if, on the other hand, as happens for example, they mentioned a case to me of.. some of you gave me the case of a priest who always says the old offertory, who always says the old canon, but he says the mass, he uses the new mass, he says the mass facing the people but he does not give communion in the hand. Well, if there are any seminarians that don't have any other mass, can they attend a mass like that ? I think yes, what do you expect ! The priest who makes such an effort would be a little discouraged, hurt to see the seminarians close to him, whom he loves very much, to see that they don't come and attend his mass under the pretext that he does not say [the old mass] absolutely from beginning to end.. I believe there are some circumstances we have to consider !

The father of Mr Pazat who is here told me yesterday that right now, there is not a single mass of St Pius V in Madrid. If there is no more mass of St Pius V in Madrid, if one is logical with those who are strict on the question of the mass, one would have to tell all people in Madrid that they cannot put in a foot in a church, one has to be logical, one has to be logical..

Do you feel in conscience capable to tell all people in Madrid, the whole city of Madrid, all Catholics : you cannot set foot anymore in a Church ? I do not dare saying that in such an absolute manner, since there are quite a few conditions, as I will mention, quite a few circumstances in which we cannot attend these masses.

But there are still priests who believe, there are still priests.. the mass is not always invalid, certainly not ! If it was always an invalid mass, of course we cannot go there, if it was always a sacrilegious mass, a mass regularly sacrilegious, evidently, a mass that has a net protestant tendency, it would be evident. But I think there are at the same time circumstances in which.. we do not know, because there is still the danger on one hand of losing the faith in the case of people who don't go to mass for one month, two months, three months, four months, a year, they will lose the faith, it's over, that's obvious, we cannot make ourselves any illusions, if one were to say such to a whole city, imagine !

If on the other hand obviously you say : “But they eat meat that is poisoned !” That’s true, but if one eats a meal that is more or less poisoned, they may still last a little longer, **until the moment when better nourishment arrives**, while if they would die of hunger, they would be dead in three weeks or a month, they would die of hunger; It would be better to die in six months than to die in one month ! It would be better if they did not die at all, of course. But what do you expect, if not going to mass causes them to die by lack of faith, if by going to a mass that is not not very good because it is poisoning them they can prolong a little.. Take someone in a concentration camp who is given a choice : either you don’t eat, and thus you will die in a short time, or you will be given meat that has gone off, knowing well that you will eat bad meat, they know quite well that it will harm them, but they eat it anyway saying : “If I can survive a little longer, maybe my deliverance will come soon !” So, that is what we must say also, maybe our deliverance will come and we will have the mass of St Pius V; it is in this spirit that we have to tell them, I think.. [end of tape]"⁴

Evidently, Archbishop Lefebvre is guilty of the very thing Fr. Hewko accuses +Williamson of: Asserting that nourishment (i.e., sanctifying grace) can be had at a valid new Mass by a well-disposed communicant.

It is anticipated that some will say, “Well that was +Lefebvre in the early 70’s, but we all know he hardened his position in later years. We readily concede that point, but the argument is based on a missed distinction: What changed in later years was not +Lefebvre’s *theology* (i.e., grace passes/grace does not pass), but his prudential directive regarding *Novus Ordo Mass attendance* (i.e., you can go/you cannot go).

Others will dig up the same old well-refuted, out of context and/or misunderstood quotes from “*Open Letter to Confused Catholics*” and/or “*A Bishop Speaks*,” but as these sophistries are not reproduced in the article under consideration, we’ll wait for them to pop up again.

The New Mass is sterile?

Fr. Hewko says, “Does the New Mass give grace? Abp. Lefebvre said it is sterile and doesn't pass the grace.” No doubt, Fr. Hewko is mistakenly basing this claim on an August 1972 Econe priest retreat, in which the Archbishop stated:

“The current problem of the Mass is an extremely serious problem for the Holy Church. I believe that if the dioceses and seminaries and works that are currently done are struck with sterility, it is because the recent deviations drew upon us the divine curse. All the efforts that are made to hang on to what is being lost, to reorganize, reconstruct, rebuild, all that is struck with sterility, because we no longer have the true source of holiness which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. **Profaned as it is, it no longer gives grace, it no**

longer makes grace pass.” (Archbishop Lefebvre, August 1972, priestly retreat; can be found in *A Bishop Speaks*)⁵

The first half of the quote is neither here nor there (i.e., +Lefebvre is speaking of “sterility” with reference to the works and initiatives of the conciliar church). But what about the bolded words? Doesn't Fr. Hewko have a point here?

No.

The same failure to distinguish between “rite” and “sacrament” discussed in the previous example is again manifesting itself here: Where Fr. Hewko often uses the terms “Mass” (i.e., the rite) and “sacrament” (i.e., Holy Communion) interchangeably, +Lefebvre distinguished between the two: +Lefebvre is here speaking of the Mass (i.e., the rite) being sterile, and not the sacrament being sterile. The proof of this is that only 1.5 years later, he was giving the “concentration camp” spiritual conference to seminarians at Ecône, whereby Novus Ordo communicants would be receiving sanctifying grace (i.e., nourishment).

So, either I am correct in that Fr. Hewko is consistently missing this distinction, which is causing his erroneous conclusions, or, Archbishop is the most erratic and unreliable of bishops, allegedly saying no grace passes in 1972, then reversing course in 1974. As stated above, it is universally accepted that the Archbishop slowly hardened his position with regard to new Mass *attendance*, for prudential reasons, but to allege he changes his *theology* (grace does not pass, to grace passes, and back to grace does not pass at some unstated point) is completely without foundation or evidence.

The new rite is not a Catholic sacrament, theologically speaking?

One perceives at a glance, the same confusion persists, with Fr. Hewko continuing to conflate “rite” and “sacrament,” when he should be distinguishing between the two. He argues as follows:

A sacrament is defined in the traditional catechism as "an external sign, instituted by Christ, that gives grace." This is presupposing the "sign" is a Catholic sign, and not tampered and modified to give a Protestant and Modernist expression. The New Mass expresses a sign that is no longer Catholic, but Modernist. This is because the New Mass incorporates some Catholic elements, some Protestant elements and some Modernist elements, all combined into one liturgical action. So, taken as a whole, the sign expressed in the New Mass is a Modernist sign, a Modernist Liturgy, one that no longer expressing the Catholic Faith!⁶

But Fr. Hewko, the Council of Trent (Session 7, on the sacraments) has already infallibly declared how sacraments work:

CANON VI.-If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or, that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto; as though they were merely outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession, whereby believers are distinguished amongst men from unbelievers; let him be anathema.

CANON VII.-If any one saith, that grace, as far as God's part is concerned, is not given through the said sacraments, always, and to all men, even though they receive them rightly, but (only) sometimes, and to some persons; let him be anathema.⁷

How do you avoid this condemnation?

It is upon this basis that the theologians have taught ever since that:

The grace of the sacraments is infallibly produced in those who are capable and fit recipients, by reason of the sacred rite itself (*ex opere operato*).⁸

Historical context proves the applicability of Trent to the present dispute: It was precisely against the sacramental theology of the Protestant reformers, who sought to proliferate the Judaic Old Testament notion of sterile sacraments (i.e., empty signs which might incite a disposition for the reception of grace *ex opere operantis*, but which did not contain grace within themselves, and which was not, therefore, infallibly transmitted to well-disposed faithful who received them). This was precisely the error the Tridentine fathers sought to suppress in the Reformers, and it is precisely the error Fr. Hewko is resurrecting once again with the notion of sterile sacraments.

In other words, if it's a sacrament, Trent applies, and Fr. Hewko must either accept that grace passes at a valid Novus Ordo to well-disposed communicants (as +Williamson has been saying), or, he must declare (without any authority, and on the basis of his own private judgment) the invalidity of the Novus Ordo, which would at least be theologically consistent. What he cannot do, is pretend to find a "middle ground," whereby there could be such a thing as a valid sacrament, yet claim it is insufficiently Catholic to pass grace.

The conflation of "faith" and "disposition"

Writing on the subject of "disposition," Fr. Hewko makes the novel argument that:

Perhaps, one could argue that POTENTIALLY it could give grace (if it's valid), but ACTUALLY it doesn't, in many cases, because of the lack of dispositions necessary. This, because the priest and many attending the New Mass, have a non-Catholic understanding of the Mass, and if it's merely a "symbol of the faith of the community," as

is taught by Modernists, then their lack of Faith and proper dispositions, blocks the transfer of grace in their souls. In this case, for many souls, the New Mass doesn't give grace.⁹

This is a strange statement, because when we speak of disposition and/or an *obex gratiae* (i.e., obstacle to grace) relative to the reception of a sacrament, we are generally speaking of a soul that is or is not *in the state of grace*. If a soul is in the state of grace, it is well-disposed, and grace will infallibly be transmitted. It is in this sense that Trent discusses and defines the matter, as per the quotes above. Instead, Fr. Hewko seems to want to make disposition dependent upon orthodoxy, rather than the state of the soul, such that the faithful communicants at a Novus Ordo who might be unwittingly have embraced mistaken or even covertly and materially heretical notions about the Mass, would thereby block all grace from their souls.

Finally, I would note in passing that Fr. Hewko's reluctant concession that a Novus Ordo-
confectured Eucharist could "potentially" contain grace seems to be a contradiction to his earlier contention that +Lefebvre believed the sacrament was sterile.

Lefebvre on the new Mass and the Sunday obligation

Fr. Hewko takes a brief detour from the matter at hand (i.e., grace passes/grace does not pass), to make the following statement:

Even Abp. Lefebvre said that he believed the New Mass doesn't fulfill the Sunday obligation...¹⁰

We let Michael Davies answer this claim (in mid-1980):

One passage [from +Lefebvre] in particular gave some readers the impression that the Archbishop had stated that a Catholic could never fulfill his Sunday obligation by assisting at the New Mass. Among those who had received this impression from the statement was Cardinal Seper, who mentioned the anxiety it had caused him during an interview he granted me at Easter 1980. I had the opportunity of a long interview with the Archbishop a few weeks later when we discussed the matter. He was kind enough to summarize his considered opinion for me in writing (dated 9 May 1980). It read as follows:

Those who feel themselves obliged in conscience to assist at the New Mass on Sunday **can fulfill their Sunday obligation**. But one cannot accuse a person of a grave fault because he prefers not to assist at Mass on Sunday rather than assist at the New Mass.¹¹

It seems to me, therefore, that Fr. Hewko must acknowledge this fact, and either retract his own position (which is clearly at odds with +Lefebvre), or, he must distance and condemn +Lefebvre, and adopt the same erroneous position regarding him as he does regarding +Williamson.

Finding an ally in Fr. Carl Pulvermacher

Undeterred by the inconvenient facts, Fr. Hewko presses on, and thinks to find an ally in the independent Capuchin, Fr. Carl Pulvermacher (an early editor of *The Angelus*), who in 1984 responded therein to a question from a faithful regarding Novus Ordo Mass attendance:¹²

Here we get down to the bare facts. In all questions like this I always advise people to avoid attending the New Mass, as well as the altered Sacraments. I do not say they are always invalid. However, this alone doesn't make them good. The New Mass is not grace-giving.¹³

What Fr. Hewko does not mention is the scandal that response generated, including responses from several *Angelus* readers (correctly) alleging that his opinion was heretical. Here is Fr. Pulvermacher in his own words.

Q. Several people objected to my saying, in last month's column, that the New Mass was not grace-giving. "It is heresy to hold a valid Mass is not grace giving."

A. First of all, there is a difference between validity and grace-giving. I believe the one may be present without the other.¹⁴

Leaving aside the same conflation of rite and sacrament that Fr. Hewko makes, it is certainly true that there can be validly confected sacraments which do not transmit *the grace which they infallibly contain*, but only because of the poor disposition of the recipient. So for example, should an Eastern rite Catholic in the state of grace mistakenly walk into a Greek Orthodox church (i.e., he has maintained his good disposition) and receive communion, Trent applies, and he infallibly receives the transmission of sanctifying grace. Ironically, he may be the only one in the entire church who received any sanctifying grace, as the rest –being schismatics beyond the age of reason- are presumed to be in the state of sin, and therefore this *obex gratiae* precludes the transmission of grace.¹⁵

The point being that Fr. Hewko had to go all the way back nearly 40 years to find another non-sedevacantist priest who shared his opinion prior to +Williamson's 2015 Mahopac comments, and this priest appears to have made the same error as Fr. Hewko.

But Holy Mother Church has already decided, Fr. Hewko

Adopting a more conciliatory tone, Fr. Hewko states:

After all is said and done, it is ultimately Mother Church who will authoritatively decide on these matters, when she returns to Tradition, and on this point, I'm sure we all agree and eagerly await. What will Mother Church decide when that day comes? How will she judge the New Mass and New sacraments? We shall see.

And again a bit later:

Until then, Abp. Lefebvre was proven right on many other things, I'll take his side on this point as well. "In doctrinal matters defined by the Church, full consent; in matters of custom, respect; in debatable matters of opinion, always charity."

The problem here is that Mother Church already definitively decided this matter 450 years ago at the Council of Trent, and consequently, what Fr. Hewko thinks is a matter for theological debate is already a settled matter. That's why he had to go back 40 years to find an ally in Fr. Pulvermacher (who ended up on the receiving end of the ire of orthodox traditionalists who knew better). So, while I appreciate the newly adopted more conciliatory tone, it would appear that Fr. Hewko has unfortunately missed the bus on this one.

Who really needs to return to the position of +Lefebvre?

In his penultimate paragraph, Fr. Hewko expresses his hopes that +Williamson and the other Resistance bishops will discover their errors, and return to the position of Archbishop Lefebvre:

Tribute to Bishop Williamson, who in spite of promoting some erroneous opinions and signing the petition to remove the "excommunication" that never was, did at least consecrate bishops for Tradition, which the Conciliar-SSPX bishops will never do. Pray they ALL return to the unwavering stand of Abp. Marcel Lefebvre!

The obvious irony here, as we have shown from the beginning of this article, is that it is not *the Resistance bishops* who have left the path of +Lefebvre, but Fr. Hewko and the handful of priests who have sided with him.

A final word

Though we have parsed and refuted several claims in Fr. Hewko's article, we did not miss his newfound diplomatic tone, which was a nice development. At the personal level, I know and like Fr. Hewko (though we have not spoken since he and Fr. Pfeiffer went to war with

+Williamson...nearly two years before Mahopac). I very much doubt he would have arrived at his present position, had it not been for those unfortunate years of association with Fr. Pfeiffer, but that's water under the bridge. Should this article ever cross his desk, I would like him to know that I bear him no ill will, and pray for the day when he will once again kiss the rings of the Resistance bishops, and live in concord with them, and with us.

Sean Johnson
Feast of St. Jerome

¹ <https://thecatacombs.org/showthread.php?tid=3998>

² And in fact, both can, but only "actual," not "sanctifying" grace.

³ <http://tradidi.com/articles/abl-nom-slow-poison/>

⁴ <https://www.cathinfo.com/sspx-resistance-news/lefebvre-says-grace-from-nom-communion/>

⁵ <https://cor-mariae.com/threads/abp-lefebvre-says-no-grace-in-new-mass.4313/>

⁶ <https://thecatacombs.org/showthread.php?tid=3998>

⁷ <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch7.htm>

⁸ H. Davis, SJ. Moral and Pastoral Theology (Vol. I), p.5 (1943).

⁹ <https://thecatacombs.org/showthread.php?tid=3998>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ https://www.sspxasia.com/Documents/Archbishop-Lefebvre/Apologia/Vol_two/Chapter_40.htm

¹² Fr. Carl Pulvermacher was a sibling of Fr. Lucien Pulvermacher (later Antipope Pius XIII):

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80185563/carl-pulvermacher>

¹³ <https://cor-mariae.com/threads/1984-angelus-magazine-new-mass-does-not-give-grace.4308/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ We do not here enter into a discussion regarding implicit baptism of desire, or the effect of invincible ignorance, as these pertain to the internal forum which only God can judge.