

## *Sedevacantist Watch...*

### QUESTIONING FR. CEKADA'S JUDGMENT

For decades, Fr. Anthony Cekada has been publicly promoting the position that the man elected to the papal office by the Church, and accepted as Pope by the Church, is not, in fact, a true Pope. In other words, for decades Fr. Cekada has been publicly promoting his own *personal opinion*, even though it is in direct opposition to the *public judgment* of the Church. Added to this, and demonstrating a profound lack of humility, he has publicly mocked, ridiculed and engaged in childishness name-calling against those Catholics who refuse to accept his personal opinion regarding this matter.

Because Fr. Cekada has chosen to reject the judgment of the Church, and instead present his *personal opinion* as a *fact* which other Catholics must accept, we believe it is entirely appropriate for us to consider whether Fr. Cekada has the ability to form correct and sound judgments on moral and doctrinal issues. For our example, we will consider Fr. Cekada's personal judgment regarding the Terri Schiavo case.

#### **The Terri Schiavo Case**

In 1990, Mrs. Terri Schiavo suffered cardiac arrest, which resulted in brain injury due to lack of oxygen. She survived, but was left in a debilitated condition and unable to care for herself. Her condition was officially listed as "a persistent vegetative state," although her parents were convinced that she was conscious (as the pictures of her looking into her parent's eyes confirm).

In 1998, Mrs. Schiavo's husband, who had met another woman (who he would eventually marry), petitioned the court to have Terri put to death by removing her feeding tube. When the court granted the petition, a firestorm erupted. Her parents, who were shocked at the ruling, begged for help. Their cries were heard, and the public responded. Pro-life groups everywhere raised their voice in protest, as did the governor of Florida. President Bush himself sought to intervene, and even the Vatican spoke out by declaring that food and water (ordinary means of sustaining life) could not be withheld.

Now, you may be wondering, where did Fr. Cekada stand on this issue? If you don't already know, the answer may surprise you. In the face of the public outrage and the cries of desperation from Mrs.

Schiavo's parents, Fr. Cekada *publicly* sided with the Liberal court (rarely does Fr. Cekada keep his controversial opinions to himself), as did his fellow Sedevacantist, Bishop Donald Sanborn. Needless to say, this did not sit well with many of Fr. Cekada's friends and parishioners, one of whom eventually left Fr. Cekada's church and revealed what had transpired behind the scenes. Let's take a look at what this parishioner, Thomas Droleskey, wrote publicly after the event. He explains what he did in an attempt to help Fr. Cekada and Bishop Sanborn see their error, and how they reacted when he dared to question their controversial judgment. Mr. Droleskey wrote:

"The other compromise that we had to make during our stay at Saint Gertrude the Great Church involved the atrocious manner in which the murder of Mrs. Theresa Maria Schindler-Schiavo by dehydration and starvation was justified by Bishop Sanborn and Father Cekada. The moral principle at work in the Schiavo case was really simple: one can never undertake any action that has as its only possible end the death of an innocent human being. The only thing that can result from the removal of food and water from a living human being is death, and I went to great lengths last year to provide Bishop Dolan with the documentary evidence of the cruel death that Mrs. Schiavo suffered while no one was permitted to alleviate her suffering in the slightest. Such a death can never be justified before God.

Bishop Sanborn and Father Cekada got the facts of the Terri Schiavo case wrong. They refused to accept evidence of Catholic medical experts. They got their moral facts wrong. They refused to concede that the administration of food and water by artificial means, which is today not all painful and not at all costly, **facts that Father Cekada stubbornly and arrogantly refused to recognize and accept as he ignored the cold, hard evidence that was presented to him** on these matters, is a matter of ordinary care, not medical 'treatment,' extraordinary or ordinary.

... I tried my very best last year for there to be a reconsideration of their mistakes and thus a public retraction of their views, some of which were nothing other than rank utilitarianism **wrapped in sarcasm and arrogance**. ... [many Catholics] remain scandalized and bewildered by **Bishop Sanborn's and Father Cekada's refusal to re-examine their positions, convinced that they can't be trusted on other issues when they could get a matter of basic moral truth so wrong and persist in their error so defiantly**.

Bishop Sanborn steadfastly refused offers that I made to him on several occasions to have Dr. Paul Bryne speak to him about the

matter of 'brain death.' **Father Cekada mocked publicly the neurological expertise of Dr. James Gebel, Jr.**<sup>1</sup>

Here we see that Fr. Cekada engaged in his usual tactic of **publicly mocking** those with whom he disagrees – in this case, publicly mocking a neurological expert over a case that was directly related to the doctor's specialized field, a field in which Cekada possesses absolutely no expertise! Once again, we see the manifestation of Fr. Cekada's excessive pride and arrogance on public display.

What the Terri Schiavo case shows us is that Fr. Cekada not only lacks a basic moral sense of right and wrong (you don't put an innocent person to death), a basic knowledge of Catholic teaching (you don't withhold ordinary means of sustaining human life), and the inability to form a sound judgment, but it also reveals that he "stubbornly and arrogantly refuses" to accept facts and hard evidence which proves him wrong when it is presented to him. It also shows that he will not shy away from publicly promoting his controversial judgments, even when what he is advocating is the death of an innocent person.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Fr. Cekada does not shy away from rushing in where angels fear to tread.

We will now consider an example of how Fr. Cekada justifies holding to his *personal opinion*, even when it is directly contrary to the teaching of the Church.

### **Fr. Cekada and the Fourth Council of Constantinople**

After our recent interview with Louie Verrecchio, Fr. Cekada posted a comment on a message forum in response to a point we made. In the interview, we noted that a council of the Church forbade Catholics to remove the name of their Patriarch (the Pope is the Patriarch of the West) from the liturgy before the Church itself rendered a judgment concerning any alleged crime (which is precisely what Fr. Cekada chooses to do when he offers the Mass). The same council also forbade Catholics to formally separate from their Patriarch before the Church rendered a judgment, attaching the grave penalty of excommunication to any layperson who would do so. Here is the council's declaration:

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<sup>1</sup> "Sanctimony Won't Work This Time", by Thomas A. Droleskey, November 8, 2009. <http://sggscandal.com/articles/sanctimony.htm>

<sup>2</sup> It's fair to include spiritual, not just physical, death in our assessment, since Fr. Cekada, in his capacity as a priest, continuously works to lead souls out of the Church and into his Sedevacantist sect.

“As divine scripture clearly proclaims, Do not find fault before you investigate, and understand first and then find fault, and does our law judge a person without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? Consequently **this holy and universal synod justly and fittingly declares and lays down that no lay person or monk or cleric should separate himself from communion with his own patriarch before a careful enquiry and judgment in synod, even if he alleges that he knows of some crime perpetrated by his patriarch, and he must not refuse to include his patriarch's name during the divine mysteries or offices.**

In the same way we command that bishops and priests who are in distant dioceses and regions should behave similarly towards their own metropolitans, and metropolitans should do the same with regard to their own patriarchs. **If anyone shall be found defying this holy synod, he is to be debarred from all priestly functions and status if he is a bishop or cleric; if a monk or lay person, he must be excluded from all communion and meetings of the church [i.e., excommunicated] until he is converted by repentance and reconciled.**”<sup>3</sup>

Now, in the face of such a clear teaching, you may be wondering how Fr. Cekada can possibly justify doing precisely what this ecumenical council of the Catholic Church forbids. As noted above, Fr. Cekada tried to defend himself on this very point on a message forum, using his real name. On the forum, he attempted to justify his position using two utterly absurd arguments, which we will now address.

### **Fr. Cekada's "Circular Argument"**

Here is his first argument:

(1) “Invoking the 10th Canon of Constantinople is a circular argument, because the very question being argued is ‘Are the post-Conciliar popes true popes (Patriarchs of the West) in the first place?’ No pope, no sweat! (...) If someone is not a real patriarch (pope) to begin with ... there can hardly be a requirement for ‘a formal judgment of the Church.’”

For Fr. Cekada to argue that our reliance upon the teaching of an ecumenical council “is a circular argument” shows just how desperate he has become to defend himself. It is a new low for him in terms of

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<sup>3</sup> Fourth Council of Constantinople, Canon 10.

intellectual engagement. A circular argument is a logical fallacy in which the reasoner *begins* with what he is trying to end with. As applied here, Cekada *begins* with the argument that the post-conciliar Popes are not true Popes according to his private judgment, and then *ends* with the conclusion that Constantinople IV doesn't apply, since it only applies to true Popes.

As anyone with a modicum of intelligence can see, it is *Cekada's* argument that is circular, since he begins with an argument he has not proven, and, in fact, has no authority to declare (the Vatican II Popes are not true Popes), in order to circumvent the teaching of an ecumenical council which condemns him for making that very argument (and for separating from them, and removing their name from the canon of the Mass, before the Church has rendered a judgment). In other words, Fr. Cekada attempts to get around Constantinople IV by doing the very thing the council condemned! Cekada's argument could be used just as easily to reject the infallible teaching of a council ("we only have to accept the infallible teaching of *true* Councils. No true council, no sweat"). Indeed, even a fifth grader can distinguish between actual proof and assuming what has not been proven.

The other problem with Fr. Cekada's argument is that all of the recent Popes (which he rejects) were legally elected by the Church; they all accepted the office; and they were all accepted by the Church as Pope. Therefore, according to *the Church's judgment*, they have all been true Popes. The judgment of the Church, with respect to the validity of a Pope or council, falls into the category of *dogmatic facts*, which is considered by common theological opinion to be *infallible*. In other words, when the Church accepts a man as Pope or a council as legitimate, this judgment itself is infallible. Msgr. Van Noort explains:

“DOGOMATIC FACTS. A dogmatic fact is one that has not been revealed, yet is so intimately connected with a doctrine of faith that without certain knowledge of the fact there can be no certain knowledge of the doctrine. For example, **was the [First] Vatican Council truly ecumenical? Was Pius IX a legitimate pope? Was the election of Pius XI valid?** Such questions must be decided with certainty before decrees issued by any council or pope can be accepted as infallibly true or binding on the Church. **It is evident, then, that the Church must be infallible in judging of such facts,** and since the Church is infallible in believing as well as in teaching, it follows that **the practically unanimous consent of the bishops and faithful in accepting a council as ecumenical, or a Roman**

**Pontiff as legitimately elected, gives absolute and infallible certainty of the fact”** (*The Church of Christ*, p. 290).

Clearly, accepting the *fact* that the recent Popes have been Popes, based upon the authority of the Church teaching, and then drawing a conclusion based upon that premise, is not engaging in “circular reasoning.” On the contrary, refusing to accept these Popes is to deny the infallible judgment of the Church, which is a mortal sin against faith.<sup>4</sup> So Fr. Cekada’s first argument clearly failed.

**Fr. Cekada’s “Word Games”**

Now we will consider his second attempt to get around the teaching of Constantinople IV, this time, by playing some “word games.” Please read the following very carefully and ask yourself if this strikes you as the response of someone who is truly trying to conform his mind to the mind of the Church, or rather someone who is “stubbornly and arrogantly” seeking any way possible to get around what the Church teaches. Fr. Cekada wrote:

(2) “In 2006 Benedict XVI renounced the title ‘Patriarch of the West.’ The Vatican explained that it ‘appeared for the first time in the ‘Anuario Pontificio’ in 1863... the title ‘Patriarch of the West,’ never very clear, over history has become obsolete and practically unusable.’ Are Messrs. Siscoe and Salza really crypto-sedes who don’t recognize Benedict’s authority to renounce the title?”

Now, consider this argument carefully. With a straight face, Fr. Cekada rejects the definitive teaching of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (which forbids one to separate from their Patriarch, who is their bishop) because, as he claims, the *title* of “Patriarch” was abandoned by Pope Benedict XVI. Does Fr. Cekada really expect his followers to believe that Constantinople IV’s condemnation of separating from one’s Patriarch/Bishop by private judgment no longer applies as soon as the title “Patriarch” is no longer used? In other words, simply change the title of the office, and then you can skirt the condemnation of an ecumenical council?

Do we really have to tell Fr. Cekada that Constantinople is condemning those who separate from their bishops by private

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<sup>4</sup> In his 1951 book, “*On the Value of Theological Notes and the Criteria for Discerning Them*,” Fr. Sixtus Cartechini, S.J. explains that the rejection of a dogmatic fact constitutes a mortal sin against faith. See: <http://www.the-pope.com/theolnotes.html>.

judgment, whether they use the term “Patriarch,” or “Bishop,” or “Ordinary” or “Primate”? Must we actually tell Fr. Cekada that whether or not the *name* of the office changes, the council’s condemnation of the *principle error* (formally separating from legal holders of the office by private judgment) still applies? And why would Fr. Cekada make an argument based upon “Benedict’s authority to renounce the title” when Cekada does not believe that Benedict, an alleged antipope, *had* any authority? These arguments reveal that Fr. Cekada will attempt to defend himself at all costs, no matter how embarrassing the results – and that he has, in fact, hit a new low.

We also note that when Constantinople IV issued the decree, the Bishop of Rome was one of the five Patriarchs of the Church (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem). As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, the Bishop of Rome has always been known as the Patriarch of the West:

“Apart from his universal primacy, the pope had **always** been unquestioned Patriarch of the West” (*Original Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913, The Roman Rite).

We can further see that Fr. Cekada is playing games with words in an attempt to get around Constantinople’s condemnation when we consider that Cekada had formally separated from John Paul II (declared him to be a false Pope) and refused to include his name in the Mass *before Pope Benedict allegedly abandoned the title Patriarch of the West*. So, Fr. Cekada is clearly not being honest here, but simply trying to find any way possible to excuse himself for disobeying the definitive teaching of an ecumenical council, which he very well knows condemns him and his Sedevacantist position.

As if the definitive condemnation of an ecumenical council weren’t enough to sink Cekada and his Sedevacantist ship, we also have a more recent papal teaching that affirms the Church’s condemnation of separating from the Pope by private judgment and excluding his name from the Mass. The teaching is found in the encyclical *Ex Quo* by Pope Benedict XIV (1740–1758). In the encyclical, Benedict XIV is absolutely clear about the target of such private judgments (and exclusion from the canon of the Mass), and it is *none other than the “Apostolic Pontiff” himself*. The Pope wrote:

“Ivo of Flaviniaca who writes: ‘Whosoever does not pronounce the name of the Apostolic one in the canon for whatever reason should realize that he is separated from the communion of the whole world’ (Chronicle, p. 228); or by the authority of the famous

Alcuin: **‘It is generally agreed that those who do not for any reason recall the memory of the Apostolic pontiff in the course of the sacred mysteries according to custom are, as the blessed Pelagius teaches, separated from the communion of the entire world’** (*de Divinis Officiis*, bk. 1, chap. 12).

“Pope Pelagius II who held the Apostolic See in the sixth century of the Church gives this weightier statement on Our present subject in his letter: ‘I am greatly astonished at your separation from the rest of the Church and I cannot equably endure it. For Augustine, mindful that the Lord established the foundation of the Church on the Apostolic sees, says that **whosoever removes himself from the authority and communion of the prelates of those sees is in schism**. He states plainly that there is no church apart from one which is firmly established on the pontifical bases of the Apostolic sees. Thus **how can you believe that you are not separated from the communion of the whole world if you do not commemorate *my name* during the sacred mysteries, according to custom?**”<sup>5</sup>

One wonders what sort of sophistical argumentation Fr. Cekada will try to use to get around this papal teaching. After all, Cekada is a master of the rhetorical skills of the sophists (particularly with his use of ridicule and sarcasm), which enables him to appeal to the emotions, and hence the *will*, of his readers. This tactic serves to divert his readers’ attention away from the *intellectual* deficiency and general weakness of his arguments, which, if he keeps them entertained and laughing, they are less likely to spot. Unfortunately for Fr. Cekada, to reject the public judgment of the Church and the infallible dogmatic fact of who is Pope, is to separate oneself from that same Church (as Constantinople IV and *Ex Quo* make clear) and commit objective mortal sin against both faith and charity.<sup>6</sup>

In closing, Fr. Cekada has demonstrated himself to be an individual who lacks the ability to make sound moral judgments. Whether it’s mocking the neurological expertise of a physician, or the legal training of an opposing Catholic writer, or even the authority of his own superiors, Fr. Cekada is a man of extraordinary pride, even to the point of exalting his own *personal opinions* above the public and infallible *judgment of the Catholic Church*.

In the words of his fellow Sedevacantist, Thomas Droleskey, Fr. Cekada “stubbornly and arrogantly” refuses to recognize “cold, hard

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XIV, *Ex Quo* (On the Euchologion), March 1, 1756.

<sup>6</sup> Rejecting a dogmatic fact is a sin against faith (see footnote 2), and separating from the Church (schism) is a sin against charity (*Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIæ, 39, 1, ad 3).

evidence” that would convince any reasonable person of sound mind and good will, even concerning basic moral truths and Catholic teaching. Thus, we conclude, as did Mr. Droleskey, that Cekada “can’t be trusted on other issues, when he could get a matter of basic moral truth so wrong and persist in his error so defiantly.” Those who choose to follow Fr. Cekada do so at the risk of their own salvation, and they will not be able to claim ignorance when they arrive at their Particular Judgment, which, given the state of the world, could be sooner than they expect.