

**THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA**

**AND**

**INDEPENDENT CATHOLICISM**

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**I. *INTRODUCTION*  The National Catholic Church of North America is a progeny of the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic National Church, “THE CHURCH OF THE POOR”, founded in 1945 by Most Reverend Carlos Duarte Costa. Consecrated on December 8, 1924, by The Roman Catholic Church as Bishop of Botucatu, he remained in union with Rome until certain views expressed regarding political justice, the treatment of the poor in Brazil, and challenging certain clerical practices and doctrines caused a rift from The Vatican’s authority.**

***RESEARCH***

* ***Carlos Duarte Costa* (Google, Internet, Wikipedia and other websites for Biography)**

**When is silence a convenient FEAR?**

**When is challenging the “status quo” ARROGANCE?**

**What does the Gospels TEACH about the subject?**

**II.  *OVERVIEW* Independent Catholicism has a rich history. Just as The Roman Church through the ages has had its conflicts in growth and development The Independent Movement has encountered similar challenges as well. (For an in-depth historical perspective consult *The Other Catholics—Remaking America’s Largest Religion,* Julie Byrne 2016)**

**Whereas the Roman Church and other mainstream religious organizations have established central governing bodies per se The Independent Movement lacks one save for the varied faith-communities headed by individual bishops. This is quite similar the early Christian communities founded by St Paul during the Apostolic era. This encourages diversity for many faithful when searching for spiritual paths while sacrificing some *permanence* and *loyalty* to a particular parish or congregation. This peculiarity affects both the clergy and the followers of The Movement.**

***DISCUSSION***

* **FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE*:* Study Vatican II documents and encyclicals (*Pacem in Terris- John XXIII 1963; Dignitatis Humanae 1965; Message of John Paul II on The Value and Content of Freedom of Conscience and Religion0 1980, et al*.)on forming “an informed and educated conscience”**

**Is an “informed conscience” based on SELFISH MOTIVES?**

**Is EMOTIONAL or RATIONAL?**

**Is it INTERCHANGEABLE, IRRETRIVABLE?**

***RESEARCH/DISCUSSION***

* **Brief HISTORY of Independent Catholicism (*Google, Wikipedia, etc.*)**

**What is the difference, if any, between RELIGIOSITY/ CLERICALISM and or SPIRITUALITY/FAITH?**

**Why did Jesus criticize the PHARISEES of His time?**

**Are Independents susceptible to PHARISEEISM? How?**

**Is Dissention INHERENT to organized religions? Is it INCONGRUOUS?**

**III*. OBEDIENCE* Per Apostolic Tradition obedience is given to Bishop upon Ordination (a Scriptural concept in the matter must be studied and developed by individuals since its modern definition could be precarious). In most Independent Faith-communities, OBEDIENCE to the Bishop is the only vow taken by the Ordained clergy.**

***RESEARCH/DISCUSSION***

* **SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION… Old and New Testaments**

**When does obedience become “TOXIC””?**

**When is disobedience a matter of conscience?**

**Is “dis-Obedience” the same as “INSURRECTION”? If so, how and why?**

* **Examine and explore the SCOPE of EPISCOPAL OBEDIENCE and the need for DIALOGUE**

**When and how is Episcopal obedience “BINDING” to be effective?**

**What should the ROLE of the Bishop be? Is it merely a figure head?**

**What considerations exist to make Episcopal obedience FUNCTIONAL?**

**What must Bishops do to emphasize to the Clergy the *IMPORTANCE* of obedience?**

**IV. *DIVERSITY* Similar to our Separated Brethren’s denominations (commonly referred as Protestantism), there is a wide range of *diversity* within the Independent Catholic Movement. Although most are within the Catholic and Apostolic Traditions some branches embrace esoteric practices such as Wicca, Reiki, and other metaphysical philosophies. Its history is rich in “experimental sources” including but not limited to Nature Religions. During Bishop Costas’ lifetime priests celebrated liturgies with African believes and influences common in certain sections of Brazil’s population. Due to wide tolerance and acceptance of human nature, Independent Catholicism attracts many believers *disenfranchised* from mainstream religions. The “traditional” concept of sin and its variants become almost secondary focusing in the Redemptive Significance of Jesus Christ’s Value and Love for the WHOLE PERSON. Said Redemptive Significance is available to ALL regardless of gender, sexual orientation or identification, marital status, religious or philosophical differences, etc. As such its Orders are also offered under DIVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES to those called to Ministry and are determined to be duly prepared for Service**

***DISCUSSION***

* **PROS and CONS of Diversity**

**Is diversity a HINDRANCE to unity?**

**Must there be a limit to EXPERIMENTATIONS?**

**Is Diversity OBJECTIVE or merely SUBJECTIVE?**

**Should there be a DECIDING FACTOR to its limits?**

* **DETERMINING Diversity’s “Catholicism”**

**MEASURING factors… who determines them?**

**Do the END RESULTS justify the MEANS?**

**What role does COLLEGIALITY play in determining the parameters of Diversity?**

**REDEMPTIVE and DESTRUCTIVE patterns of “Traditions”**

**SOULD there BE “parameters” in Diversity? If not, why?**

**When does TOLERANCE and UNDERSTANDING of Diversity become an ENABLING “danger”?**

**How important is “SELF-CRITIQUE” regarding Diversity?**

 **V. *VALUES AND MORAL ETHICS*  Being Independent Catholic requires *developing* a personal and communal set of moral and ethical values. Because there is no set “catechism” or “fixed canons” to follow in obtaining “black and white” answers or established “formulas”, the Clergy has to constantly *evaluate* its position on contemporary issues. Issues which affect the individual and society. Without these foundations many societies have failed including, but not limited, some earlier Independent Catholic communities,**

**This “freedom” to be able to search for answers *demands* an Ethical and Moral Personal Responsibility… a Positive Responsibility which answers to the *Demands* of The Gospels and ultimately to The High Priest, Jesus The Christ. Keep in mind, as *William Edward Farley* (professor emeritus and theologian at Vanderbilt University), observes in Jill Y Crainshaw’s *Wise and Discerning Hearts- An Introduction to Wisdom Liturgical Theology*, (116, c2000) that “the Church will always contain potential for corruption and potential for transformation.” This Responsibility to seek ethical and moral values within a Christian framework is a very serious endeavor which cannot be taken lightly by anyone**

 ***DISCUSION/RESEARCH***

* **RESOURCES reconsidered…**

**Must they be ROMAN based?**

**Can PSYCHOLGICAL studies be trusted or solely consulted?**

**Do CULTURAL/SOCIETAL MORES determine values/ethics?**

**How can ENVIRONMENT affect “morals” or “behavioral” principles?**

**Does PERSONAL EXPERIENCE influence formation of ethical thinking? If so, is it a reliable/ biased?**

**When does CONSCIENCE become a tool for personal agendas/prejudices?**

**Is there a UNIVERSAL factor for ethical foundation?**

**Is the Hebrew DECALOGUE relevant today still? How?**

* **SIN AND BROKENNESS**

**How has PSYCHOLOGY challenged the traditional definition of SIN?**

**How has “sin” been used as a MANIPULATION/CONTROLLING tool?**

**Are life’s misfortunes (illnesses, accidents, poverty, etc.) “consequences” of sin?**

**How does Christ’s Gospel deal with these human situations?**

**REDEMPTION from WHAT? From WHOM?**

**How are BROKENNESS AND “MISSING THE MARK” more realistic concepts?**

**How important is Christ’s DEATH/VICTIMHOOD in the concept of “brokenness” vs. traditional “sinfulness”?**

**Why the RESURRECTION?**

**What is the VALUE of (personal) CONFESSION as a SACRAMENT?**

**(NB: some Independents reject it as such)**

* **COMMUNAL EFFECT**

**Is the subject of “moral ethics” strictly a PERSONAL issue?**

**What are the communal DANGERS of a “subjective morality”?**

**Has SCANDAL become an acceptable part of today’s mores?**

**Must others’ SENSITIVITIES be considered? If so, why?**

**Does complete personal HONESTY disregard other people’s Dignity?**

**Define DIGNITY… self/others**

**Define INTEGRITY/ TRANSPARENCY. Why are these VALUED?**

**Can “traditional” DESTRUCTIVE patterns *institutionalized* as DOCTRINES be discerned? If so, how?**

**Define TRUST and CONFIDENTIALITY as essential and necessary factors of moral ethics**

 **VI. *THE ECUCHARIST as CENTRAL LITURGICAL CELEBRATION of THE INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT* Common and Integral to all sectors of The Movement is the Liturgical Celebration of The Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper, The Agape Meal—THE COMMUNION TABLE OF *JESUS’ BREAKING OF THE BREAD*. Because of diversity its Liturgy is varied and sometimes indistinguishable from non-Catholic celebrations. Most Independents honor the Western Tradition; others include influences from Eastern Churches.**

**Vatican II strongly emphasized The Liturgy to be *for* the People of God… not a theatrical showcase for the Priest. Because “freedom of expression” is allowed and is not bound by strict celebration norms, Independents have the facility to make The Eucharist relevant to the faithful, nay, the *responsibility* to draw the audience into *participation* of the Sacred Mystery. The Liturgy, although “divided” into sections is, of Itself, a Whole Entity made cohesive by The Celebrant. In The Celebration the “brokenness of the world” is *acknowledged.* Comfort, hope, and instructions to remedy this challenge are received by reading The Word. Spiritual *nourishment* and *mutual encouragement* are provided in The Breaking and Sharing of The Bread by the community; and, lastly the Faithful is *sent* to bring the Good News for a better world,**

***Imagination* and *Creativity*, Divine gifts both, are the Celebrant’s *tools*. It is in Proverbs where such assets are clearly shown. The Writer uses the Wisdom Persona to make relevant and to bring to *life* to the community a way of harnessing our human potentials. The Christ exemplified it through Parables and by meeting people in their own realities. To make this happen the congregation and its Clergy as *Creative* Mentors, as *Inspirational* Guides, and as *Imaginative* Leaders must profoundly *internalize four* major characteristics of the Liturgy:**

* **Recognize the world’ BROKENESS (our daily human condition) and resolve to amend it- *RECONCILIATION***
* **Actively LISTEN to the instructions (encouragement and hope) given for renewal- *SCRIPTURES***
* **Receive NOURISHMENT as a community for strength *energizing* these resolutions- *THE EUCHARIST***
* **ANNOUNCING to the broken world that IT CAN BE RECONCILED THROUGH US- *THE MISSION***

***OBSERVATIONS/DISCUSSION***

* **RUBRICS… or “STAGE DIRECTIONS”**

**Are “rubrics” conducive to “magical ‘doctrines’”?**

**Is ritual “uniformity” a requirement for “catholicism”?**

**Are liturgical sections interchangeable? If not, why? If yes, why, when and how?**

**Is The Eucharistic Liturgy meant to be a “fixed” (unchangeable) or an evolving entity? Why? How?**

**(What about the other Sacraments? Fixed or evolving?)**

**What criteria is to be used for changes in liturgical reform? Who decides?**

 **VII. *REVIEW AND CONTINUATION* The SESSIONS afore mentioned cover *some* major topics. Independent Catholicism should have the capacity to be always *evolving* according to the needs of the faith-community. It should never sacrifice The Root of Faith: THE COSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. It is the Ordained Priests’/Ministers’ (Deacons, catechists, et al.) *OBLIGATION AND DUTY to personally purse continuous education to more effectively SERVICE the Faith -Community.***

 **VIII. *PERSONAL JOURNEY*S  *Interviews* from Clergy (Bishops, priests, deacons, etc.) regarding their Journey to the Independent Movement, particularly, with The National Catholic Church of North America, will follow. These journeys will include their *search* for a fulfilling Ministry, their personal *decision* to join The NCC of NA, their experiential *service length within prior faith-communities and in their current ministry*, and, of great value-- their personal *vision* for The NCC of NA.**

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**\*\*\*\*Any other suggestions are welcome\*\*\*\***