

## ON THE ROMAN CATHOLIC SOCIETY OF POPE LEO XIII (RCSPLXIII)

### The Presence of RCSPLXIII in the Philippines

As early as 2012, the Apostolic Nunciature in the Philippines already detected the presence in the country of a group that calls itself *Roman Catholic Society of Pope Leo XIII* (RCSPLXIII). Along with two other groups, *Igreja Catolica Apostolica Brasileria* (ICAB) and the *Sacred Cruces Franciscanum* (Sacred Cross Franciscans)<sup>1</sup>, the RCSPLXIII is not recognized by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> In a communiqué in 2012 to the *Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines* (CBCP), then Chargé d'affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature, Msgr. Gabor Pinter informed the bishops that the aforementioned groups, particularly the RCSPLXIII, are not legitimate Catholic Church organizations. Led by David G. Bell, Msgr. Pinter pointed out that RCSPLXIII is "a schismatic group not recognized in anyway by the Catholic Church" and that its bishops "cannot exercise any ministry within the Catholic Church which does not recognize their ordination." The Catholic Church in the first place refused to recognize Bell as a Roman Catholic Bishop, he having been ordained under the auspices of the schismatic ICAB.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Msgr. Pinter likewise stressed that all those ordained by Bell and Bell himself incurred *excommunication latae sententiae*, the sanction prescribed by can. 1364 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC) for the crime of schism.

Msgr. Pinter's warning came in 2012 and his warning seemed to have relegated RCSPLXIII's influence and impact on the Filipino Catholic faithful to the sidelines. Lately, however, they are back in the news, especially in social media, because of their aggressive proselytizing. For one thing, they are causing so much confusion among the Catholic faithful because they introduce themselves as *a religious society within the Roman Catholic Church*.<sup>4</sup> There is thus a need to inform once again the Catholic faithful on what the members of this group truly are.

### The Provenance of RCSPLXIII

On its Facebook page, (Monsignor) *Noel Ormenita* – based in Imus City, Cavite – declares that the **Roman Catholic Society of Pope Leo XIII** (RCSPLXIII) in the Philippines is a congregation under the **Roman Catholic Church of England and Wales** (RCCEW) that regards itself as a *sui iuris* Church.<sup>5</sup> RCSPLXIII, in fact, according to the website of the RCCEW, was "founded from the Brazilian Catholic Church by His Holiness Patriarchate of Brazil by Patriarchal Bull in 2004."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *Sacred Cruces Franciscanum* (Sacred Cross Franciscans) is an offshoot of the *Igreja Catolica Apostolica Brasileria* (ICAB).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://cbcnews.net/podcast/vatican-warns-cbc-against-schismatic-group-in-ph/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2014/03/31/news/catholic-church-refuses-to-recognise-david-bell-as-bishop-1.36349428/> (the information has supposedly been gleaned from the letter [protocol 1177/12] sent by then Apostolic Nuncio Giovanni D'Aniello on behalf of the Secretary of State to the President of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis).

<sup>4</sup> See <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com/>

<sup>5</sup> See [www.facebook.com/groups/romancatholicchurchofenglandandwales/posts/3006492159680281/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/romancatholicchurchofenglandandwales/posts/3006492159680281/) or <https://www.facebook.com/societyofpopeleoxiii>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com/what-is-rcew-foundations>.

It would thus be easy to establish the identity of RCSPLXIII by looking further into the history of RCCEW.<sup>7</sup> As its name indicates, RCCEW calls itself *Roman Catholic*, a label which the unwitting could easily confuse with the *Roman Catholic Church* based in Rome (RCC-Rome) – what RCCEW members would refer to as *Roman Catholic Church Vatican II* (RCC-Vatican II) – to distinguish it from their church affiliation.

RCCEW traces its roots to the *Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil* (CACB) or the *Igreja Católica Apostólica Brasileira* (ICAB) founded by Archbishop *Carlos Duarte Costa* on July 5, 1945. Costa was forced to resign as Bishop of Botucatu (Brazil) and later excommunicated in 1945 by Pius XI because of his opposition to some practices of the RCC-Rome, such for instance was the imposition of mandatory celibacy among its priests. Costa became the First Patriarch of the Church (CACB) he founded.

Upon Costa's death in 1961, he was succeeded by Archbishop *Luis Fernando Castillo Méndez* who was elected President of the Episcopal Council, and designated as Patriarch of CACB and of the *International Church Communion* (ICAN) that gravitated around CACB. Méndez himself, it is said, was also rescued by Costa from persecution in Venezuela and ended up becoming Costa's successor. Méndez tried to reconcile with Rome during the Pontificate of John Paul II, to no avail. While serving as Patriarch of CACB, Méndez founded the *Roman Catholic Church of England & Wales* (RCCEW) as a *sui iuris Latin Rite Church*, becoming thus also its First Patriarch.

### **The Split between RCCEW and CACB**

When Méndez died on October 29, 2009, the former Secretary of *Doctrine & Faith* of CACB from 2005 to 2009, Archbishop *James Atkinson-Wake* was appointed Patriarch of RCCEW. Earlier, Atkinson-Wake was elevated as Archbishop and then as Cardinal by Méndez himself, thus becoming his true rightful successor. Méndez's death, however, signaled the souring of relationship between CACB and RCCEW following RCCEW's continued use of the *Tridentine Latin Rite*, against which the new leadership of CACB, then under *Josivaldo Pereira de Oliveira*, disagreed. The break in 2009 between the two became inevitable.

Meanwhile, Atkinson-Wake also tried to mend RCCEW's relationship with the Roman Catholic Church during the Pontificate of Benedict XVI from 2008 and 2011, but talks between him and the Roman See did not prosper because of too many irreconcilable differences. All hopes then for a reconciliation vanished and the divide between the two Churches all the more became wider. For one thing, for most of RCCEW's bishops, the Roman Catholic Church has become *schismatic*, and by that has become a "new religion" because of Vatican II.

In any case, RCCEW maintains its presence in the Philippines through the *Roman Catholic Society of Pope Leo XIII -Latin Rite* (RCSPLXIII), represented by Archbishop *Noel Ormenita, OSB*, who is recognized within RCCEW as the Titular Archbishop of Metro Manila, Philippines. Strangely, RCCEW also recognizes a religious community, the *Benedictine Celestine of the Renewal* (OSB), which was founded by two Roman Catholic Prelates (now both deceased) who were in full

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com>.

communion with Rome, namely, *Anselmo Pamintuan, OSB*, a Papal Chaplain, and *Camilo Diaz-Gregorio*, who used to be the Bishop-Prelate of Batanes, Philippines.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Relationship between RCCEW/RCSPLXIII and RCC-Rome**

During John Paul II's papacy, as already mentioned, *Luis Fernando Castillo Mendez* held private talks with the late Pope in the hope of "returning the Brazilian Catholic Church back to Rome [RCC-Rome] as an Autocephalous Catholic Church." The Council of Bishops, however, of the new Brazilian Catholic Church had voted against re-joining what it called the *Roman Catholic Church-Vatican II*, claiming that much suffering and torture had been inflicted upon them largely at the urging of the Roman Catholic Church and that unless they purged their actions and sought forgiveness for their years of actions, then they could not join as one..." thereby making –in RCCEW's own words– "the split caused by the Roman Catholic Church remain even to this day."<sup>9</sup>

For his part, Archbishop James Atkinson-Wake also had private talks with the RCC-Rome under Pope Benedict XVI from 2008 to 2011.<sup>10</sup> The talks did not yield positive results towards reunification. RCCEW, for one, saw that the differences between the two parties were too many as to be easily reconciled. Atkinson-Wake "decided that the Church [RCCEW] was better off without being in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church-Vatican II."

In all these, the RCCEW/RCSPLXII "see the Roman Catholic Church-Vatican II as Schismatics." Adhering to the Tridentine Mass (pre-Vatican II mass of 1962), they further claim that they are a Latin Rite Church... accepted worldwide as the true Catholic faith.<sup>11</sup>

All this bolster their insistence that "as lawful Catholics" they are "not a part of the Roman Catholic Church Vatican II."

### **Conclusion**

In light of the historical information above and based on RCCEW/RCSPLXIII's very own assertions:

1. From the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church–Rome, the RCSPLXIII belongs to a schismatic Church, the RCCEW – which is therefore *canonically* not under the jurisdiction of the RCC-Rome. Its claim of being a *sui iuris* Church is non-consequential on the part of RCC-Rome, as it does nothing to render RCCEW as an autocephalous member of RCC-Rome.

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com/what-is-rccew-foundations>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com/what-is-rccew-foundations>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://catholicchurchofenglandandwales.com/what-is-rccew-foundations>.

The RCCEW (and with it the RCSPLXIII), in the first place, does not pretend to be in full communion with the RCC-Rome, because for its part it also views the RCC-Rome as schismatic. On the contrary, the RCCEW (and with it the RCSPLXIII) asserts that it is **not in full communion** with the RCC-Rome.

2. The RCSPLXIII recognizes as its Primate *Archbishop James Atkinson-Wake* (not Pope Francis of RCC-Rome). On the other hand, Archbishop Wake comes from a line of succession of schismatic and excommunicated bishops: *Archbishop Carlos Duarte Costa* of the *Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil* (CACB) or the *Igreja Católica Apostólica Brasileira* (ICAB), and *Archbishop Luis Fernando Castillo Méndez* also of CACB-ICAB, and eventual founder of CCEW.
3. RCC-Rome does not recognize the hierarchy of RCCEW and, thus, neither the clerics of RCSPLXIII, as belonging to its own.
4. Apart from baptism, RCC-Rome does not recognize the validity and liceity of the sacraments administered by RCCEW and the RCSPLXIII.

All these being the case, the hierarchy and clerics of the RCCEW and the RCSPLXIII are not authorized to administer their sacraments in chapels, oratories and churches of the RCC-Rome, nor to demand monetary contributions therefrom. In fact, to repeat the words of Msgr. Pinter, they cannot exercise any ministry within the Catholic Church. It would be deceitful on the part of RCCEW/RCSPLXIII clerics to introduce themselves to the Catholic faithful of RCC-Rome, and offer them the sacraments, *without* distinguishing themselves from the clerics of RCC-Rome and without disclosing to them that they constitute a Church that is distinct from the RCC-Rome.

  
✠ J. ROJAS  
CBCP ECDF Chairman  
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