

Catholicism essay example

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



In search for a definition for Catholicism, a universally accepted one is “ Adherence to the forms of Christian doctrine and practice which are generally regarded as Catholic rather than Protestant or Eastern Orthodox.” (Oxford Dictionaries). In the midst of a world that struggles to survive and live through wars, anxiety, injustice, greed, and devalued relationships, among others, the Second Vatican Council has declared that those that can provide the generations to come with reasons to life for and look life with optimism, hold the future of humanity (USCCB). Bearing that in mind, one can say that Catholicism is a faith and hope-centered religion tradition, and teaches that Jesus Christ, whom God the Father sent to this world to provide catharsis and salvation to all people, through the Church, offers the possibility “ of encountering God today and finding in him lasting meaning and hope” (USCCB). That way, people can find tranquility and inner peace, while maintaining their hope. The focus of this paper will be to provide an overview of various aspects of Catholicism, including the history of Catholicism in the U. S. and the relationship between Mexican American Catholicism and Curanderismo.

The History of Catholicism in America: A Brief Overview up to Late 1700s

In general, the colonies that declared independence from the British, in 1776, along the seaboard of the Atlantic Ocean, were the ones that the history of the Catholicism focuses on; however, besides those 13 colonies, the French and the Spanish colonies also have their place in the history of Catholicism in the United States, providing that they later formed the continental America. The most important milestones in the history of

Catholicism in America are the Spanish missions and the how and when Catholicism was introduced to the French and English colonies.

- The Spanish Missions

According to Franzen, it was the Spanish settlers and explorers that first introduced Catholicism to the lands now forming Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and the Southwest, the United States of America, between years 1513 and 1684. From 1769 and onwards, the Alta California missions, a series of 21 missions focused on spreading Christianity among the Native Americans and operating under the Portuguese and Spanish governments, played a crucial part in changing the lives of the Indian tribes living in the U. S. Some missions were established from New Mexico, and led to the founding of San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, and many others (Franzen).

- Catholicism in The French Colonies

Through a series of missions that were established in French Territories- indicatively, the Sault Ste. Marie (Michigan) and the Holy Family (Illinois), in 1668 and 1699 respectively- and then forts and colonies in New Orleans, and Detroit, among many others, Catholicism became a part of people's lives, by early 17th century (Middleton and Lombard). In the late 1700s, French expeditions with various goals (trade, power, and religion) were the first steps to spread Catholicism to the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi River, founding settlements in the present Illinois and along the Mississippi banks (Middleton and Lombard). The Church sent missionaries to introduce Catholicism to the Native Americans gradually.

- Catholicism in the English Colonies

Founding the Province of Maryland signaled the introduction of Catholicism

to the English territories. Despite the fact that Maryland was among the very few English colonies that was primarily Catholic, in mid-1600s the English Civil War and the defeat of the Royalists opened the doors to strict laws against Catholic education, while many Jesuits were sent away from the colonies (Fitzgerald). The anti-Catholic values of the New Englanders were one of the major reasons that sparked the American Revolution (Fitzgerald).

Mexican American Catholicism

According to an old Mexican saying “ Space does not separate people so much as culture” (Ballestreros and Ballesteros 44), and the Mexican-American culture is somewhat far apart the culture of mainstream Americans for various reasons and differences between those two. Ever after Spanish Conquistadors conquered Mexico, the Mexicans shifted from the religious practices of the Aztecs that were dominant at that time, and were introduced to Catholicism (Figueredo). The majority of Mexicans still practice Catholicism. However, their religious experience is different than the traditional European-heritage Catholicism, mainly because the Mexican-Americans consider their religious experience a solely personal matter and they have no issues whatsoever to alter that experience to suit their needs and desires (Figueredo). This happens because the supernatural is something that the Mexican-Americans take for granted and they believe that there is an entire world way beyond what most people call the real world, which gives them the right to give their own interpretations upon their religious experiences. They believe in the world of the spirits that can only be controlled by people by throwing offerings (Figueredo). One can say that

Mexican-American Catholicism is a mix of traditional Catholicism and ancient Aztec ideas.

What is Curanderismo?

Curanderismo is a healing tradition; very common among many Latino and Mexican American cultures. In general, it is a system of illness and healing, where plant and herbal remedies are used to heal an illness. Graham defines Curanderismo “ the art of folk healing by a curandero, the healer par excellence in the folk medicine qv practiced by Texas Hispanics.” (1). There are three types of healers (curanderos) (1) the herbalist (yerbero), (2) the midwife (partera), and (3) the masseur (sobador) (Graham). Besides treating multiple illnesses, the curandero is the sole healer of witchcraft-related illnesses; thus, he is considered God-sent and a gift from above for having such powers. The curandero teaches another curandero his healing art either through spiritual rituals or apprenticeship (Graham). The curandero has an intense fight with the so-called witches that appear to be standing between the curandero and God. For that reason, he struggles to defeat Satan and evil, through the ones that are believed to have made a pact with the Devil (the witches). The curandero works on the material, spiritual, and mental world, so he may either conduct a ritual or prescribe a plant remedy. Finally, people may also call for a practitioner, in cases they believe that an illness has come from the supernatural world (Graham).

Curanderismo and Mexican-American Catholicism

Curanderismo is considered an important part of the Mexican-American culture and is interwoven with the health-related, spiritual, and religious

beliefs of the Mexican-Americans. For some people, this healing practice, as described before, invokes feelings of fear, confusion, and embarrassment, while for others it brings happiness, hope, and faith (Salazar and Levin). A study of Mexican Americans living on nonborder and border areas has revealed that approximately one fourth of the participants were using traditional folk medicine, while most Complementary and Alternative Medicine therapies were delivered either combined with conventional medicine or separately (Salazar and Levin). As aforementioned, the healing properties of the curandero are perceived a gift from God, many curandero “ incorporate religious paraphernalia into the healing process [thus] The religious element of the practice is alluring to participants.” (Salazar and Levin 150). These religious paraphernalia are used in combination with prayer to achieve the best healing results of the rituals. Curanderismo makes use of the Roman Catholic concepts, just as Santeria does, which is a syncretic religion of Caribbean and West African origin, where saints are incorporated in their practice (Salazar and Levin). Back to Curanderismo, complete faith in God (and towards the curandero) is considered a crucial factor that affects the healing process, which is why some practitioners put the blame on their patients is they are not healed. That being said; the therapeutic touch is believed to be another major factor that determines the healing process (Salazar and Levin). Just like Catholics have faith in God and believe in God’s therapeutic abilities (Jesus had performed numerous miracles by touching people), curanderos and Mexican Americans seem to carry Catholic elements and beliefs inside them, only in a very personal and different way. Nevertheless, the truth is rather far from that, given that there

re practices associated with a specific type of curanderismo, namely Santísima Muerte or Saint Death, are considered to define a cult that is so dangerous and disapproving of the Catholic Church that is considered to be more closely connected to Satanism, rather than Catholicism (Salazar and Levin).

Mexican Catholicism is affected by the practice of Curanderismo, because the complexities of the relationship between those two may affect the mental health of people seeking for help from curanderos, as well as the practitioners themselves. Curanderismo is believed to be evolving towards incorporating “ biomedical principles within its practice—principles that thus exist alongside of Roman-Catholic-influenced ideas as well as folk medical concepts.” (Salazar and Levin 157).

An important part of Curanderismo comes from Catholicism. Sandra Hurlong, PhD and contributor at the Intercultural Open University Foundation, cites a personal experience, according to which, her conversation with a Dominican priest and noted scholar, Padre Urbano, made her realize that curanderos and priests have much alike, taking into account the convergence of the indigenous culture and the Spanish culture of the 16th century. As disease and illnesses were mowing down their dioceses, priests that came to colonize Mexico knew of healing herbs and they used this knowledge to help people. It is said that these priests called upon curanderos to share their healing knowledge, while healing was encouraged in the name of Christianity (Hurlong).

Conclusion

Catholicism is the church order, practice, and faith of the Catholic Church, and, was introduced to the United States at around late 1700s. Among their beliefs is faith and hope to God, which is what the Mexican Americans also believe in, among others. However, they practice religion very differently compared to the Catholics of Europe. In fact, Mexican Americans carry the cultural and religious practices of their past, when ruled by the Aztecs and have a strong belief in the supernatural and the world of spirits. For that reason, Curanderismo is more like a combination of the Mexican Americans' old beliefs with the Catholic concepts, which makes their relationship with Catholicism rather complex.

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