DUTCH CATHOLIC IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENTS IN WISCONSIN REVISITED

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Introduction

The part of the title of my paper, "Dutch Catholic Immigrant Settlements in Wisconsin, " refers to my book published in 1989, approximately 10 years after I started the research for my dissertation on Dutch Catholic settlements in Wisconsin.[1] The book forms a revision of my dissertation completed in 1982 and in it are aspects of the revision that I want to focus on in this paper. Thus the word "Revisited" added to the title.

When I started my thesis research, very little was known about the Dutch Catholic settlers in Wisconsin. Both Lucas and van Hinte referred to the settlement in the Fox River Valley near Green Bay, but little subsequent research had been done. As a graduate student I had conducted some comparative analysis using census data on Dutch Protestant and Dutch Catholic immigrant households in Wisconsin. It then struck me how different the two groups behaved under what appeared similar immigration and frontier circumstances. Internal migration, occupational choice and mobility, and intermarriage patterns were so different that I decided to study the matter in more detail. I started my research of the Catholic immigrant communities looking at pre-migration conditions in the Netherlands. Later I studied the frontier settlement and the subsequent development of the Catholic settlements in Wisconsin until 1905. All along I kept my first observations about the differences between the Protestant and Catholic settlers in mind and I tried to isolate the major factors which would perhaps explain these differences.

The similar immigration and frontier circumstances alluded to were the following: (1) Both groups arrived in Wisconsin at about the same time in the mid-nineteenth century when the frontier offered opportunities for immigrants. (2) Both groups in their initial settlement choice decided on land settlement suggesting exposure to similar socio-economic forces that might determine the subsequent settlement development. The major difference between the two groups was in terms of choice of residence and interaction with members of other nationality groups in later years. The Dutch Protestant settlers and their descendants were more inclined towards rural residence and ethnic exclusiveness and the Dutch Catholic settlers were more inclined towards urban residence and intermarriage.

I considered differences in pre-migration conditions as an explanation--and in fact, Bob Swierenga and I conducted a rather detailed socio-economic analysis comparing the two groups prior to migration.[2] Considering the socio-economic and regional background of the two groups, we found that Catholic immigrants were somewhat over-represented among the skilled workers and that Dutch Protestant immigrants represented a larger number of farmers and farm laborers. Both Catholic and Protestant immigrants were primarily of rural background, however, and the differences in occupational background did not seem to warrant the conclusion that the urban orientation of the Catholic immigrants in Wisconsin could be explained from the pre-migration socio-economic conditions in the Netherlands. Thus I considered the role of the church.

The role of the church is to be considered in terms of ideology and in terms of organization. Today, in my assessment of the process of development of the Dutch Catholic settlement in Wisconsin, the institutional structure of the Catholic church and the ideological-political conditions in both the Netherlands and the United States figure paramount in my thinking about the settlements in Wisconsin. In that sense, the book I published two years ago differs from the unpublished dissertation, completed in 1982, where I concluded that pre-migration conditions, economic development patterns in Wisconsin and the Catholic church all played a role in explaining the different settlement, migration, mobility and intermarriage patterns. Today I am more inclined to emphasize the role of the church.

The role of the church

Let me briefly summarize some quantitative statistical data on the Catholic immigrant settlers in Wisconsin to illustrate the differences with the Protestant immigrants (Tables 1-4).

The data show a significant difference in intermarriage rates and suggests that urban residence encourages assimilation. The choice to remain on the land or to move to the city for employment seems to have been the crucial factor. But why do the two groups respond so differently towards similar economic opportunities (i.e. industrial employment or frontier agriculture)?[3] If both choose originally frontier rural settlements then why did

settlers remain mostly rural and oriented toward frontier farming and the Catholic settlers become
al oriented. Here we have to consider the role of the church.
der to understand the process, I have in the past suggested to look at immigrants as minorities and to
sponse in the context of the larger society.[4] In this way, assimilation and ethno-religious identity can
efense mechanism by the group concerned. The Catholic church typically did not encourage frontier
he way Protestant churches did. Protestant churches were often the spearheads of colonization
t the Catholic church hierarchy based on the East coast discouraged active colonization efforts for a
he nineteenth century. The Catholic church remained an urban based church and its policies and
ructure reflect this. Schools, charitable organizations and church administration were all integrated
level which gave the church a distinctive urban character. At the same time, church policy was not
separate ethnic parish churches. Irish, German, Belgian and Dutch Catholic immigrants, in many
ed the same parish church in Wisconsin settlements. Thus, the organizational structure of the church,
the defensive posture with respect to frontier colonization, help explain why the Dutch Catholic
Wisconsin as compared to the Dutch Protestant immigrants were more inclined to move to the city,
and other urban employment, and marry and mix with members of other immigrant groups.[5] But
nsive posture with respect to frontier colonization?
we need to go back to the mid-nineteenth century when for the first time in American history,
igrants arrive in large numbers. The country had remained up until then primarily Anglo-Saxon
society's values and outlook on the future determined its attitude toward other non-Protestant groups
cking on its doors. We can think of Irish Catholics who arrived in large numbers during the 1840s
n poor, they settled in ports cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia where they frequently
scrimination and were seen as a threat. Anglo-Saxon Protestant groups organized nativist parties to
act of the Catholic presence and the Catholic church -in response- developed defensive policies with
action between Catholic and Protestant groups.[6] The philosophy on the part of the church was that
tholic groups and geographic concentration would overcome minority status. Fear of close contact
groups resulted in a strong emphasis on schools and charitable institutions organized at the level of
corporating immigrants of different nationalities. Strong loyalty to Rome and close alliance with
tholicism also characterizes this period in the nineteenth century. The Catholic church established
minantly urban church during these years; a position reinforced when more and more immigrants
nd Eastern Europe arrived to join the urban-industrial workforce towards the end of the century.[7]

other hand, Protestant churches typically promoted western colonization. In the literature on
h organization we read about the frontier as the milieu that stimulated the expansion of
hurches.[8] Conditions on the American frontier and the absence of a state church allowed the
ant denominations to flourish and to establish themselves as important immigrant-community
ike the Catholic church, many Protestant immigrant churches emphasized localism and self-help
rsalism and unity, and as such the Protestant Church was probably better adapted to frontier living
e Catholic church.[9]
ese circumstances we can indeed imagine the different experiences of Protestant and Catholic
. Thus, sociologists found the explanation for assimilation and ethnicity in the religious factor.[10]

eason why Dutch Catholic immigrants were so easily absorbed in the larger Catholic community
ir experiences as Catholics in a country like the Netherlands dominated by protestantism.
olic life in the Netherlands in the mid-nineteenth century were far from ideal. Like in Ireland,
minated by Protestant majorities; politically and economically. In fact, the Catholic southern
Netherlands had been economically exploited by Protestant entrepreneurs for centuries and the
became actively involved in the struggle for political and economic emancipation of the southern
ration of Dutch Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century took place in the midst of an intensifying
tical conflict between the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority segment of Dutch society.
vement and the constitution of 1848 political rights were finally granted but the atmosphere in
ce left scars between the two groups for a long time to come.
t of these struggles on identity and awareness of the Dutch Catholic immigrants in Wisconsin
mine. Most of the political activities and agitation took place in the larger cities and in the

transition zone between the Catholic southern and Protestant northern provinces. Here Protestant city governments often suppressed Catholic minority groups and here is where most of the Catholic leadership became militant. The Wisconsin settlers derived mostly from rural areas of the Catholic southern provinces, where over 90 percent of the population was Catholic; however, confrontations with officials and the military, most of whom were Protestant, was part of Catholic life everywhere in the Netherlands. Confiscation of church property, prohibition of Catholic education, and censorship of the Catholic press affected Catholic populations in all areas. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that the Dutch Catholic immigrants' attitude towards a Protestant majority resembled that of some of the other Catholic groups from northwestern Europe (in particular the Irish) who had found similar conditions at home.[12]

The impact of Old World religious heritage on the settlement response of Catholic immigrants in Wisconsin is difficult to assess. Some evidence suggests, however, that settlement patterns among the different Catholic immigrant groups in Wisconsin varied. Whereas the German Catholic immigrants were more oriented towards rural settlement, many Irish immigrants (like the Dutch Catholics) became urban residents during the second half of the nineteenth century.[13] At the national level the Irish had gained control over church policy by mid-century. On the other hand, German immigrants held important positions in the church hierarchy in the Midwest, particularly in Wisconsin, where they had settled in large numbers.[14] Differences in approach to Catholic church organization and rule between the two groups may explain the different settlement orientation in the Midwest. Many Irish had lived in East coast cities prior to coming to the Midwest and had experienced the full impact of the nativist movements. Their attitude was strongly in favor of Catholic unity and group integration. Most of the German immigrants came directly from Europe and felt a great need to preserve their language and cultural traditions. As newcomers they favored diocesan organization based on nationality rather than on geographical area. The established hierarchy of the Catholic church defeated the idea, however, and installed the territorial diocese in the Midwest favored by the Irish Catholics, which seems to explain the more urban orientation of Dutch Catholic immigrants in Wisconsin.

Conclusion

The most striking difference between Dutch Catholic immigrants and Dutch Protestant immigrants in the Midwest was the inclination among Catholic immigrants towards urban residence and assimilation or intermarriage with members of other groups and the tendency among Protestant immigrants towards settlement in rural communities and towards ethnic exclusiveness. The apparent major difference was the religious-institutional milieu which derived from socio-political strife between Protestant and Catholic groups in both the Old and New world. Certain aspects of the organizational structure and ideology of the Catholic church explain why the Catholic immigrants were more inclined towards urban residence. While Catholic urban settlements expanded rapidly as the century progressed, Protestant immigrants moved in growing numbers to the frontier. Socio-political considerations related to religious heritage, therefore have to be considered as the main differentiating factor.

1. Yda Schreuder, *Dutch Catholic Immigrant Settlement in Wisconsin, 1850-1905* (Garland Publishing Inc., New York, 1989)

2. Robert P. Swierenga and Yda Saueressig-Schreuder, "Catholic and Protestant Emigration from the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Social Structural Analysis," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 74, 1, Spring 1983, pp. 25-40.

3.Yda Saueressig-Schreuder, "Immigration and Frontier Development: Dutch Catholic Settlement in the Fox River Valley of Wisconsin in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Upper Midwest History*, 5, 1985, pp. 45-59.

4. Yda Schreuder, "Ethnic Solidarity and Assimilation among Dutch Catholic Immigrant groups in the State of Wisconsin, 1850-1905," in Rob Kroes (ed.), *The Dutch in North-America: Their immigration and cultural continuity* (VU University Press, Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 195-218.

5. Jay P. Dolan, "A critical period in American Catholicism," *Review of Politics*, 35, 1973, pp. 323-336. See also, John T. Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 1955, pp. 62-64; Andrew M. Greeley, *The Denominational Society: A sociological approach to religion in America*, 1972, pp. 187-189; and John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, 1955, revised edition 1978, p. 21.

6. Higham, *op.cit.* See also, Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism*, 1938.

7.See Ellis, *op. cit.*, and Dolan, *op. cit.*

8. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier*, 1964, Chapter 15, pp. 203-240. See also, Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 1929; Greeley, op.cit., 1972; and Ellis, *op.cit.*, 1955.

9. Niebuhr, *op.cit.*, pp. 200-235; James P. Shannon, *Catholic Colonization on the Western Frontier*, 1957, pp. 18-22; and Henry J. Browne, "Archbishop Hughes and western colonization," *Catholic Historical Review*, 36, 1950, pp. 257-285. With respect to the Dutch immigrants, see Robert P. Swierenga, "Religion and Immigration Patterns: A Comparative Analysis of Dutch Protestants and Catholics, 1835-1880," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 5, 2, Spring 1986, pp. 23-45.

10. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, and Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, revised edition, 1960, pp. 99-135.

11. For the Catholic church history of the early period (sixteenth and seventeeth century), see L. J. Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het Katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de Zestiende en Zeventiende Eeuw*, (2 volumes), 1947. For the nineteenth and twentieth century, see L. J. Rogier and N. de Rooy, *In Vrijheid Herboren: Katholiek Nederland, 1853-1953*, 1953.

12. Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890*, 1966; Nathan Glazer, "Ethnic Groups in America: From National Culture to Ideology,"in M. Berger, T. Abel, and C. H. Page (eds.), *Freedom and Control in Modern Society*, 1964. See also, Harold J. Abramson, "Ethnic Diversity within Catholicism: A Comparative Analysis of Contemporary and Historical Religion," *Journal of Social History*, 4, 1971, pp. 359-388.

13. Justille M. McDonald, *History of the Irish in Wisconsin in the Nineteenth Century*, 1954

14. Supremacy by the Irish at the national level is discussed by Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, pp. 130-138. Se also, Theodore Maynard, *The Story of American Catholicism*, 1951, pp. 249-275; Edward Wakin and Joseph F. Schreuer, *The De-Romanization of the American Catholic Church*, 1966, pp. 21-25; and Jay P.Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865*, 1975.