

Chapter Eleven

Polish-Catholic Religiosity in California

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Polonia (Polish diaspora) is one of the largest in the world comprising twenty-one million in 2008. Most Polish immigrants are found in the United States and are identified by their Catholic faith. In this chapter, we examine Polish Catholic religiosity, gender and migration in relation to the parish and parochial communities in California. We use published surveys to analyze Polish religiosity and our research conducted among Polish immigrants in central California from 1994 to 2008 in cooperation with Stanford University and San Francisco State University with a grant from the Kosciuszko Foundation. Our discussion is divided into two parts: Polish religiosity and Polish religious life in the United States.

Polish Religiosity

Polish religiosity has undergone very significant changes in the course of the country's history. Initially, until the loss of independence and partitions by the neighboring empires at the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of Polish identity was much closer to the idea of today's citizen or a subject in monarchies, where it described membership in a political entity rather than national or ethnic identity (Davies 1981). However, after the partition, the notion of ethnic identity was coupled with membership in the Catholic Church and, thus, the cluster of the "Pole-Catholic" was born.

The conception of Pole-Catholic was strengthened in the second World War and its aftermath, under the Communist rule, which, associated with Soviet domination and an atheist state, gave the Catholic Church in Poland the vestige of the shelter of "Polishness." The shift from a multi-religious pre-partition society to post-war made Poland one of those rare states that are practically homogenous ethnically and religiously, i.e., about 95 percent of population is identified as ethnically Polish and Polish speaking, and Roman Catholic at the same time. It seems that we are dealing with a sort of national Catholic cluster as far as the Polish contemporary identity is concerned.

According to Norman Davis, "Poles . . . belong to a community which has acquired its modern sense of nationality in active opposition to the policies of

the states in which they lived" (1981: 11). Viewed from this perspective, the Roman Catholic Church functioned for the last 200 hundred years not as *Ecclesia* but rather as a sect, according to Benton Johnson's classification (1963: 542; cf. 1957, 1971), in which the religious community is in opposition to the socio-political environment in which it exists. This paradoxical condition of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland has very few parallels, with Ireland, possibly, being one of them.

Another aspect of Pole-Catholic identity is a certain non-reflexive attitude toward religion. Most Poles seem to take for granted their adherence to the Catholic faith and do not try to investigate its deeper meanings or question the possible contradictions between belief and everyday practice. A religious commitment that is concentrated on belief and ritual practice dimensions (Stark and Glock 1968) and associated with the agrarian way of life is often referred to as "folk religion," which typifies Polish religiosity. It is being criticized for the relative weakness or even absence of such dimensions as knowledge of the dogmas or consequences of the faith in everyday life. Hence, in spite of religious education, formerly in Sunday schools and, since 1991 as a part of public schools' curriculum, the actual knowledge of the Church's doctrine and teachings and the Bible are quite superficial. Also, displays of faith beyond the church setting such as "saying grace" or public prayer tend to be rare.

Recent surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center or CBOS (Boguszewski 2008) show that in spite of transformations in socio-economic life the image of the "Polish-Catholic" has not become a relic of the past. The Roman-Catholic faith is still an important element of Polish self-image and constitutes a part of Polish identity. Immutably, about 95 percent of the inhabitants of Poland declare their adherence to the Catholic Church, while belonging to other denominations. Religious indifference or atheism is quite seldom declared.

Declaration of faith is not the only constitutive aspect of Polish identity but also religious commitment. Based on the above cited survey report about 89 percent consider this a typical characteristic of Poles, while 25 percent believe that it also forms part of European identity. The belief that religiosity is a permanent feature of Polish identity has not changed since 1992. Interestingly enough, over 74 percent hold the opinion that the accession to the European Union (EU) has no influence on Polish religiosity.

Belief and Religious Practices

High level religious commitment finds its proof in the general declaration of faith and participation in religious practices. The last twenty years did not see a significant change in the general declaration of belief in God among Poles. In the CBOS (Boguszewski 2008) survey, almost all respondents declare their religiosity and about 10 percent consider their faith to be deep. However, the percentage of non-believers remains the same, rather insignificant range, at about 5 percent.

A characteristic feature of Polish religiosity is adherence to religious practices. Again, the level of commitment has not changed significantly in the last twenty years and still remains high. A majority of the respondents declare regular weekly church attendance; while one in five declare such participation once or twice a month. Only about 8 percent declare permanent absence from religious practices. Some fluctuations in those attendances are related to special events, such as papal pilgrimages, for instance. Nevertheless, the level of commitment seems to be steady over time. There is no indication of any tendency of decline even among young people, between eighteen and twenty-four years old, and the urban population.

CBOS confirms the high attachment of Polish population to religious ceremonies related to the rites of passage—birth, marriage, and death. Almost nine in ten Poles believe that funerals, baptisms, and weddings are of great importance. The participation in those rites of passage has declined in the last twenty years only by a small margin. Another dimension of religious fervor is found in devotional practices, such as private prayer and Bible reading. In the CBOS survey very few respondents do not pray at all, while every second person declares some form of prayer practice.

A factor indicating strong ties of Poles with the institutional Catholic Church is the strong attachment to the parish, the intensity of which does not change over time. Over 80 percent of those polled by CBOS consider themselves members of the parish in which they live. About 45 percent show very strong attachment to it. Of the 18 percent who do not declare such ties over one fourth identify with a parish away from their home. Moreover, every fourth person not participating in religious practices declares attachment to their parish.

In the same vein, the Church as a social institution enjoyed high levels of social confidence during the Communist rule with over 80 percent. The Church was the paramount authority compared to other state or public institutions at that time. After 1989, as a result of the change in its official position within the country, the Church's popularity declined. The lowest level was recorded in 1993 when only 38 percent of the respondents found it trustworthy. However, positive opinion of the Church has steadily been going up since then and, according to some recent studies, it might be as high as 74 percent today.

As far as subjective assessment of religiosity is concerned, 69 percent of Poles surveyed in 2006 responded that they are religious, while one in six declared high levels of religiosity. Only 17 percent viewed themselves as religiously indifferent and 4 percent declared a total lack of religiosity. The shift here is into the more decisive self-evaluation with the decline in the group of religiously indifferent (from 25 to 17 percent). Although in this survey it was clearly stated that participation in religious practices was not a decisive measure, most clearly considered this factor as the most significant. Thus, religiosity for the Poles is most strongly correlated with the participation in religious rituals and practices.¹

The Role of Religion in Life

The secularization hypothesis or the notion that religion tends to be less important as societies become modernized is apparently not confirmed in contemporary Poland. In spite of dramatic changes in the socio-economic and political spheres, levels of religiosity remain high. Using the same CBOS survey, about a third of the respondents believe that religion in the world is growing while another third believe that it is declining.² Therefore, it can be surmised that religion in personal and family life among the Poles is seen as stable or on the rise. Over 77 percent of the respondents view religion as an "important" value in their lives, and 44 percent consider it as "very important." Only 12 percent seem to be rather indifferent to its role while 4 percent has a negative opinion of religion. However, and this seems to be characteristic of Polish religiosity, when compared with other values religion loses precedence to peace and quiet, respect of other people, work and sincerity in that order.³ In this ranking, religion is considered important by slightly over one fourth of the respondents (28 percent). Traditionally in Poland, the highest value is attached to two aspects of life: health (80 percent) and family happiness (79 percent).⁴

In everyday language people declare their adherence to the Catholic religion but they do not seem to practice what the Church preaches. It is particularly evident in the case of the attitude toward Pope John Paul II. Poles almost unanimously declare their love for the Pope but do not follow his admonitions and teachings. That opinion is universally shared by the Poles. Only one in ten respondents objects to such a statement. There is a basic inconsistency between declarations of faith and actual behavior in life as well as acceptance of Catholic teachings. Thus, although 90 percent of Poles declare faith in God, only 74 percent believe in heaven and only 70 percent believe in life after death. About half of the Poles believe in the existence of hell or of Satan. There is also high level of belief in astrology and soothsayers, i.e., the influence of Zodiac signs on human fate.

In the area of norms and values the discrepancy between declaration of faith and actual beliefs and attitudes is even more dramatic. Only slightly more than one third of the respondents declare that there is a clear distinction between good and evil. Over half of those polled are of the opinion that there are no objective dimensions of good and evil (Boguszewski 2008). In general, it can be stated that only about one third of the population believe that there are fixed and clear moral principles and values, and the majority find them contingent and relative. As a result, there is widespread acceptance of such behavior that is obviously considered faulty or sinful in the Catholic morality. The examples do not only include premarital sex, contraception, but also divorce, cohabitation, euthanasia, or even cheating at exams or buying counterfeit goods (Boguszewski 2008).

Religion, Social and Civic Attitudes

Research shows that there is a positive correlation between religious participation and civic activity. Respondents declaring regular participation in religious practices more often vote in elections than those who are less active in their practices. Also, the commitment to religious practices correlates positively with the belief that people, acting collectively, can help solve problems of the community. There is also evidence that the civic commitment of citizens increases with their participation in religious practices to the ratio of two to one (Wciorka 2008).

Strong attachment of Poles to the ritual aspects of religious life is a proof that religiosity thus understood will remain a permanent feature of social life. On the other hand, in the doctrinal and pragmatic sense, Polish religiosity presents a different picture. The declarative and factual aspects of religious life differ significantly and it can be safely argued that the Catholic ideal of morality operates at the level of declaration and not application in life. Thus, the thesis that Poland is religiously homogenous should be modified by the perspective one adopts. Viewed from the outside and in ritual dimension it appears to be uniform and homogenous—the "Pole-Catholic" stereotype. However, viewed from inside, this religiosity becomes more differentiated. In the final analysis, religiosity in Poland, associated with high levels of church practices, is an autotelic value unrelated to the interiorization of Catholic dogmas and moral norms. Paradoxically, this declarative and performative attachment to religion seems to support the involvement of Poles in their civic and social life.

Polish Religious Life in United States

Migration is perceived as the psychological process of uprooting, acculturation, and adaptation that is developed in a dialogue between the individual, community and society (Ward 1996). The phenomenon of religion and spiritual life has been analyzed in categories of an organized institution, a faith-based community as well as an individual spiritual experience (Johnstone 2006).

Our research aims to identify strategies of acculturation and social inclusion of immigrants in a multicultural society as well as to identify the crossroads of gender and religion as factors of social integration. The study is interdisciplinary and applies both psychological and sociological approaches. We used qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data: case study and survey. The case study focusing on the processes of social inclusion employed longitudinal observation, interview and document analysis of thirty-one cases (18 males and 13 females). The survey, conducted in the states of New York and California, was concerned with problems of acculturation and included the research sample of 137 Polish immigrants (59 males and 78 females). All respondents migrated to the United States during the period of the Solidarity movement (1980-1990). They were between the ages of thirty-five and fifty, with educational backgrounds ranging

from high school to university levels. Information used in this chapter was obtained from the case studies.

Parochial Community and Polish Immigrants

Polish immigrants show both high adaptability and high resistance to assimilation processes (Polzin 1973; Sandberg 1974). Their integration capacity has depended on their education and expectations toward the host country. William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1996) describe uneducated peasants as less able to integrate fairly well compared to the educated political refugees. Immigrants who perceive the host country as a final objective of their plight integrated better than those who saw immigration as temporary. All groups, however, displayed the same need to maintain their cultural identity.

Since the occupying powers in Poland at the end of the Second World War, after its partition, had different state religions, Roman Catholicism was an essential element of the Polish identity (Poser-Zielinski 2003). Alongside with secularization and socio-political changes in Poland the role of religion as a national identity marker began but seems to fade as it underwent privatization and began to acquire the nature of political orientation (Bleszyńska 2002). The arrival of new, mostly young, immigrants in the 1990s to the United States has brought these tendencies to the *Polonia* communities.

The weakening of religion's position as the Polish identity marker did not influence the position of the Catholic Church in the Polish diaspora. Historic conditions, specific situation of the immigrant (e.g., social isolation, the necessity to reconstruct one's life, acculturation stress) and needs of affiliation associated with the immigrant experience make parish communities the reference groups, which replace the ones that remained in the home country. Following Steven Vertovec (2001), integration in the faith-based communities stimulates religious revitalization even with those who showed low interest in religion at the home country.

Religiosity and Choices

Reconstruction of life in a new country requires immigrants to make numerous choices. One of them is their religious affiliation. Polish society is ethnically and religiously diverse. These differences, perceived as negligible in the home country, become significant after the immigrants' arrival in the United States, thus, dividing Poles according to their ethnic and religious identities. Our study shows that religious non-Catholic Poles join their own religious communities, loosening ties with *Polonia* while Catholics participate in the religious, cultural and social life of the Catholic parish. Most of the Catholics continue their ties to the homeland by choosing Polish Roman Catholic parishes. Much less frequently, the choices are Polish-Catholic, Mariavit or other Catholic parishes.

Changes in parish affiliation are more often initiated by women than men. Many Polish women usually emphasize the convenient location of the new parish or the objections toward the functioning of the Roman Catholic parishes

(e.g., politicization or conservative approach toward women) in their decision to change parishes. Two women in our study consider their religious fundamentalism unacceptable within the Polish community. Most of the respondents have satisfied their spiritual needs within their parish or other Christian churches. In few cases, the respondents went beyond in their spiritual search to explore other religions like Buddhism. Their attempts did not result, however, in religious conversion.

A frequent phenomenon we observed was the loosening of ties with the religious community and privatization of religiosity by immigrants staying in the United States for longer than two years. It seems that this change results from individualization of spiritual experience, and suspends selective participation in religious practices of the parish. This phenomenon pertains to both men and women alike and is intensified with mobility as well as the length of stay in the United States. On the other hand, numerous non-practicing believers, as well as some atheists and agnostics, mostly women, revive their religiosity by returning to the fold of the Polish parish community. However, some respondents, mostly men, maintain a distance to matters of religion.

Choices that Polish immigrants face in America also relate to the religious doctrine they have internalized in the home country. Confrontations of individualism and human rights with the Catholic vision of the family and society, challenges of a liberal and consumer society, pluralism of ideas, diversity of spiritual life as well as weakening mechanisms of social control stimulate many Pole-Catholics to review and transform their attitudes and choices under the pressure of American values. The most questioned topics are "the right of individuals to the pursuit of happiness" and the social role of women. The specific Marian character of Roman Catholicism in Poland, stressing motherhood as a woman's task and emphasizing piety in women often could not stand the test of American ways. Many Pole-Catholic women reject the Marian model of self-sacrifice and adopt a pragmatic approach, distancing themselves from the unaccepted standards while maintaining membership in the parochial community. In some cases, however, these contradictions result in departure from the community.

The frequency and forms of religious practices present another area of choice. Transformation of religiosity among contemporary Poles combined with the dispersal of Polish settlements in California tend to develop alternative patterns of religious behaviors. One of these is the selective commitment in religious practices such as weddings, funerals, Easter and Christmas Masses. It appears that the basis for the development of an alternative pattern is the privatization of religious experience adopting the shape of personal and dialogical relation with God enhanced by reflexive thought and cherishing of religiosity in the non-ritualized forms of prayer. Male respondents expressed these attitudes with such statements as: "in order to pray I do not have to go to Church" or "I am closer to God in the mountains or on the seashore." These statements were accompanied by the decline or disappearance of participation in religious practices and life in the parochial community.

Internalization of spiritual life as a matter of individual concern also results in the dislike of majority Polish immigrants to demonstrate religiosity in an ostentatious way. Polish religious ceremonies rarely go beyond the boundaries of the parish. The respondents in our study rarely display religious symbols outside of their homes, contrary to the Polish rural practice of little shrines and crosses placed in the courtyard. Also, domestic religious practices are private and usually do not involve visitors. There is little difference in these attitudes when gender comes into consideration. The exception is in the religious holidays celebrated in the household. Preparation and organization of the activity are mostly in the hands of females continuing the traditional role of women as the spiritual, cultural, and social leader of the family while men perform auxiliary functions at best.

Identifying the choices in the lives of Pole-Catholic immigrants in the United States is a continuing discourse. Spiritual searches beyond the Polish diaspora usually open access to resources of non-Polish origin. They support the development of English language communication and intercultural competences facilitating interactions with the American community. In the case of communities with members of high social status they also contribute to immigrants' successes in the American society. They deprive, however, some immigrants from the support of their compatriots thus intensifying their feeling of disintegration and uprooting. On the other hand, associating with small, separatist or fundamentalist faith-based communities also pose a threat of social marginalization or potential manipulation.

Rejection or complete privatization of religiosity pushes respondents beyond the faith-based communities. Among people living alone, it increases the risk of isolation and emotional stress. This situation is very rare in our study though, and concern mainly males, while women choosing that strategy rely on social networks which compensate for the lack of support from faith-based communities.

The optimal strategy from the point of view of integration is inclusion and moderate participation of immigrants in the life of the Polish parochial community while keeping open and developing contacts with other groups. General preferences concerning that strategy are not gender-related. However, men more often establish friendships within their ethnic group, while women more often show tendencies to establish intergroup relationships.

Religion, Experience and Migration

Migration as a social phenomenon generates long-term physical, psychological and social stresses. Isolation and social marginalization, change of living conditions and the necessity of adaptation to a new environment as well as continuing stress and deprivation of needs result in psychological crises threatening the physical and mental health of the immigrant (Haavio-Mannila 1973). All these factors seem to hinder the process of integration of immigrants into the host society.

The basic conditions of coping with the challenges of migration are the development of competences facilitating the survival, acquisition of a desired form of life, socio-economic status as well as establishing satisfying relations with other people. Existential concerns play a more significant role in the lives of immigrants contributing to the specificity of the migration experience. Our study affirms many challenges in the lives of Polish immigrants in the United States. Their reflections on their migration and life in a new country are one of the most important dimensions in reconstructing their lives and careers. These include questions related to the meaning of migration, choices made, fear and hope, uprooting, and the ability to cope with difficulties. The confrontation of the Polish *habitus* with the American way of life possibly results in the collapse of the immigrant internal normative order that might lead to the development of anomie (Błęzyńska 2008).

Collected data show that regardless of gender, almost all respondents have experienced a normative crisis. Due to their belief system the respondents who declared to be religious could cope with problems more easily than non-believers or agnostics. The changes in lifestyle that Pole-Catholics adopt are more superficial and do not affect the core values of their worldview.

The level of immigrant's integration is determined by their ability to cope with psychological problems. These problems include acculturation difficulties, anxiety and uncertainty, pressure of the pursuit of success, and related frustration as well as the sense of disorientation, non-competence and loss of control of one's life (Berry 2006). There are also problems related to the reconstruction of identity and the erosion of self-esteem due to the loss of social status upon migration, perceived stigma and marginalization, and experience of cultural incompetence in dealing with the host society. Another set of problems relates to the difficulties in relations with other people. These include the sense of guilt toward relatives left in Poland, responsibility for the accompanying persons, loneliness and social isolation, as well as problems with integrating in the multiethnic local communities. Some negative experiences of these relationships result in ethnic prejudices. It is possible that certain prejudices result from the affirmative action policies of the United States causing among immigrants from post-communist Europe, especially among men, the sense of discrimination and social injustice compared to other groups.

The problems associated with migration are often reflected in the tendency of many Polish immigrants to withdraw from social activities in various ways: social withdrawal, psychological breakdown, psycho-somatic diseases and, sometimes, addictions. Significantly, four out of five males even declare experiencing suicidal thoughts. Efficient handling of such conditions depends, amongst many others, on the personal religiosity of the immigrant and his/her attachment to the faith-based community. Based on our study, immigrants who maintain their Catholic religiosity made reference to their belief system as a framework for reorganizing the immigration experience and providing emotional support. A female Polish immigrant describes the function of religion as: "faith protected me from despair . . . in the most difficult moment, when all

things seemed to be going against me, when I was all exhausted, I felt that God was with me and helped me carry that burden . . . and that let me survive." The sense of divine proximity seems to give comfort and internal peace. Many identify belief in God as important, seen as next to relation with parents and/or mentor. It brings hope and a sense of security, develops a distance from one's experience and places this experience within the framework offered by the religious doctrine. Challenges of immigration are perceived as tasks set by God. The sense of guilt and self-accusation seems to be alleviated by pangs of conscience, repentance, and belief in forgiveness. The norm of forgiveness, coupled with the Christian imperative of love, helps to neutralize negative feelings toward oneself and others.

As declared, faith protects Polish immigrants from the collapse of their Catholic worldview upon migration, stabilizes the system of moral values, and prevents a sense of alienation. Internalized moral norms serve as the bases from which one becomes oriented and directs one's behavior in a multicultural society like America. However, Polish immigrants with no declared religion experience more problems of alienation. The sense of moral confusion, relativism or rift between the values imposed by the new society and action objectives that are accepted in society and accessible to the actor are some issues they have to deal with.

Religious norms shape the immigrants' social attitudes. The norms of human equality and positive attitudes toward others as well as Christian personalist openness to others, even promoted by John Paul II, provide a sense of protection among many respondents from racism, ethnic prejudice, and discriminatory practices. In many cases, religious views contribute to the ways in which non-Catholics are treated by Pole-Catholic immigrants. For example, a female respondent in our study states that "I could not host a person not being a Catholic." The supportive role of religion in the integration of immigrants also includes the issue of group image and status. The historically low position of Polish immigrants in the United States and the individual sense of social degradation and humiliation (e.g., Polish jokes) make it difficult for many immigrants to reconstruct a positive image of oneself and one's group (Olzak 1994). However, this positioning seems countered by their improved social status or economic success. A change in the construction of Polish identity took place after the election of a Catholic Polish pope in 1979 and the collapse of the communist system ten years later. The popularity of John Paul II as well as the recognition of the role played by Poles and the Polish Church in the fall of communism contributed to the perceived boost in self-esteem among Polish immigrants in United States. Moreover, the development of interests in Poland and Polish affairs in American society apparently limit the sense of marginalization among Polish immigrants.

Integration and the Parish Community

The parish community is one of the most important reference groups of Polish immigrants in the United States. Inclusion in parish community life is usually

the first step toward integration in American society. It also meets many needs of the immigrants, providing them with a sense of belonging and security as well as social and emotional support. Its supportive role has been greatly expressed by a female respondent: "Each of us, leaving Poland, got the same advice: if you need help in America, look for a Polish church."

Ties with members of the faith-based community initiate reconstruction of immigrant's social capital, provide access to resources and means, and facilitate the immigrant's adaptation. Parochial community members provide new arrivals with assistance in the search for housing and employment and offer advice for problems appearing in the life of each immigrant. Those who are in dire conditions could obtain legal, medical and material help. The above mentioned support absorbed the shocks of the early stages of immigration. If the religious community is ethnic, it also helps to maintain the immigrants' cultural identity.

Participation in parochial community life facilitates the acquisition of social rules and the civic commitment of immigrants in American society. The specificity of the functioning of the parochial communities, such as personal commitment of members, participation in the decision making process and varied forms of activity, taking responsibility for problems in the parish, stimulates both social and political interests of Polish immigrants. It also enriches their social networks, sparks interest in volunteering and sense of common responsibility for the parish and its members. The necessity of getting involved beyond the parish and maintaining contact with other religious institutions, organizations, or American administrative institutions help Polish immigrants acquire knowledge of the ways the state and society function, thus, shaping their ability to operate in new conditions, and contribute to the social inclusion of others.

Civic attitudes are demonstrated by involvement in activities geared toward benefiting the home country. During the period of this research, there were reported activities that motivate immigrants of Polish citizenship to participate in Polish presidential and parliamentary elections, collective actions supporting Poland's accession to North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as legal actions aimed at correcting misinformation of Nazi concentration camps in Polish territory. These engagements introduced Poles into the American political space and developed in them the skills to use the mechanisms of civil society. Extensive commitment to the Polish parochial communities, however, did not always favor social integration among immigrants in our study. The focus on political issues affecting Poland or concentration of activities, including the professional and social limited to the Polish diaspora, usually marginalized immigrants reporting this kind of involvement (Błeszyńska 2008).

In terms of gender, the behaviors of men and women suggest a traditional differentiation of their participation in the life of parochial communities. Men tend to be more actively committed to the legal and political actions going beyond the boundaries of the parish. The social ties men create are rather weak and rarely involve interethnic relations. Women's participation, on the other hand, involve intra-group and interethnic activities concerning mostly the areas

of culture, education, and preparations for festivities. There is no gender difference, however, in the tendency to limit oneself to the boundaries of the parochial community.

Catholic Church, Integration and Polish Migration

The attempts to define the role of the Catholic Church in the process of social inclusion of Polish immigrants suggest that there is a nationality-related gap between the actions undertaken at the level of the Polish parishes and the activities of the American ecclesiastical authorities. The priests and the nuns operating at the parish level have Polish origins and represent the missionary orders preparing them to work with immigrants. Their services include ministry, social work and counseling. As community members, they participate in its life and activities as well as provide support and help to members of the parochial community. Authorities of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States seem less involved in the integration of Polish immigrants. Many Polish immigrants in our study view these churches as lacking in interest in the social inclusion of immigrants. It appears that these institutions act indifferently or are even considered hostile to immigrants in their own communities. Representatives of Roman Catholic churches are, in their opinion, mainly concerned with conflicts and religious celebrations and not with the lives of immigrants.

In the course of our research two serious conflicts took place concerning property rights. These conflicts, which were eventually adjudicated in favor of Poles, unified the members of the Polish community and made them familiar with legal procedures in the United States. For the immigrants raised in Communist Poland, these were lessons in civic education that enabled them to acquire principles of law as well as establish emotional ties and trust toward the state.

Paradoxically, conflicts with the American Catholic Church authorities seem to contribute to the development of civic attitudes and participation of Polish immigrants. The duality of the church's nature as being both the hierarchical institution of the *Gessellschaft* type as well as a community, that is *Gemeinschaft*, has forced Poles to choose between obedience to the church hierarchy and the sense of subjectivity and American civic engagement. These conflicts have appeared since the early stages of the establishment of Polish ethnic enclaves in the United States (Posem-Zieliński 1982). It produced a systematic growth in the bonds, subjectivity and autonomy of community members, gradually limiting the interference of church authorities and stimulating the development of secularized institutions within the Polish diaspora. In terms of conflict with value systems, demands or mutual resistance also resulted in the defection of the individual or occasionally of the whole parish communities.

Both men and women equally participated in resolving conflicts with the Catholic Church, although there were cases of local concern. Comparison of their behavior indicated, however, some gender-related differences. Men

showed a greater commitment to the formal action taking place at the public forum. Women, on the other hand, were more willing to join the preparatory work and support activities conducted behind the scenes such as mobilizing, canvassing and running errands.

Conclusion

Religion and its corresponding belief system and rituals among faith-based communities facilitate the social inclusion of Polish immigrants in the United States. While the path toward integration seems to be under the control of the immigrant, our study demonstrates these basic patterns of integration: the Polish parochial community-mediated integration, the integration through transfer to another faith-based community and, the individual integration beyond any religious communities such as privatized religiosity or rejection of religion. The support of the faith-based communities tends to be more effective and productive than the attempts at neglecting mediations of any of the three groups. Avoidance of the group mediation, particularly in cases of people with limited social competences, carries with it a threat of isolation and social exclusion.

Religion, religiosity and religious communities support the integration of immigrants in the following dimension: existential, functional, psychological, social and political. Existential dimension refers to providing meaning to the immigrant experience and normative stabilization of the worldview. Functional dimension addresses counseling, assistance in adaptation processes and organization of life in the new country. Psychological dimension includes emotional support, facilitation of the acculturation and identity transformation processes. Social dimension is instrumental in shaping positive attitudes toward other ethnic groups, social support, reconstruction of the immigrant's social capital, mediation in the relations with other groups and local social environment. Political dimension is responsible for the development of civic attitudes and engagement. Limiting one's activities to the ethnic parochial community creates a barrier in the social integration process. Our study shows that participation in church activities leading to social integration of immigrants was rather limited. Nevertheless, the priests and nuns operating within the parochial community displayed significant commitment and competences in these activities. On the other hand, institutions with hierarchical structures show a relative lack of such commitment.

Gender seems very significant in diversification of religious behavior and the forms of participation in faith-based communities. Women are often likely to engage in religious rituals or participate in social, educational or cultural activities within the community. They are more willing to build ties with representatives of other faith-based communities. Women tend to be autonomous in their decisions regarding changes in their attitudes toward religious affiliations. Men show more restraint in their religious activities. They are largely engaged in the political programs of the community or in collective

action in the public arena, seldom leave the parochial community for good, and are less prone to build ties with other ethnic groups on the basis of religious beliefs.

Women are more flexible and show greater tendency to deal with problems related to acculturation than men. The gender difference may be attributed to women's greater mobility, their ability to display expressive behavior, and create social networks. Women tend to attribute protective, cathartic, and consolatory functions to religious experiences. It seems that this attribute stabilizes any disruption in women's lives more than men.

Religiosity is one of the essential factors shaping the psychological and social situation of immigrants. It is instrumental in supporting immigrants to cope with the challenges of their migration experience. Religion establishes a framework which shapes the overall meaning of their migration to another country. Commitment to religious life compensates for the alienating experience and threat to one's positive self-valuation; protects the normative structures and value systems; directs moral choices; and facilitates the integration to the new environment. Furthermore, it reduces the sense of anxiety and apprehension, making possible the immigrant's coping of adversity. The religious experience and ties with religious communities are significant in alleviating the culture shock upon migration and in facilitating social inclusion as shown by Pole-Catholics in diaspora.

Notes

1. Like other countries, levels of religiosity differ from region to region. If the frequency of participation in practices is the measure of religiosity, then it is quite differentiated territorially. Thus, the most religious are the inhabitants of the Carpathian Piedmont (84.4 percent) and Little Poland (76.5 percent). If we move from the most religious south-east westward, the least religious region is Western Pomerania with 38.6 percent, or about half of the participation level compared to Piedmont. Another factor differentiating the levels of religiosity is the size of the settlement. Highly urbanized areas show much lower levels of religiosity. In terms of gender, there is greater religiosity in women, with elderly people showing higher commitment to religion, as well as among poor people with lower levels of education. Men who reside in cities, the youth, and those with higher education and income status tend to be less religious.

2. About 40 percent of the respondents view the present status of religion as higher than it used to be, while 23 percent believe it has declined somewhat.

3. Religion in Poland ranks fifth after such values as peace and quiet (42 percent), respect of other people (42 percent), work (45 percent) or sincerity (53 percent). See Rafal Boguszewski, "Polak – na Zawsze Katolik? Polska Religijność w Latach 1989-2008 na Podstawie Badan, CBOS," *Wież* 9, no. 599 (September 2008): 5-26.

4. Education (23 percent), patriotism (21 percent), friendship (17 percent), freedom of speech (17 percent) and wealth (12 percent) are valued less than religion. Other values of less significance include participation in cultural life (6 percent), adventures and experiences (6 percent), participation in socio-political life (5 percent) or success and fame (3 percent). See Boguszewski, "Polak."

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