

Victor Greene. **For God and Country: The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860-1910.** Madison, Wi.: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975.

The parameters of a European peasant village are defined by the extent of its fields; its centre is determined by the position of the village church. Land and Church: these are the two great forces which, omnipresent in the peasant's daily round, interact to shape his world-view. Hence anthropologists have concluded that "a strong attachment to property and a fervent devotion to religion were the touchstones of peasant life" (Greene, p. 14).

Victor Greene's **For God and Country** is an exploration of the consequences produced by the transplantation to the New World of these values by two Eastern European groups. Its thesis is that,

while these two factors, land and faith, were entirely compatible in Europe, . . . their juxtaposition in America caused widespread conflict, leading Poles and Lithuanians to a heightened ethnic consciousness. (p. 24).

While most Poles and Lithuanians had "no strong ethnic feelings or interest in politics" (p. 5) when they first began emigrating to America in the mid-nineteenth century, by the beginning of W. W. I, both ethnic communities were "enthusiastically supporting ethnic nationalism—(i. e.) an independent homeland" (p. 5). Greene dismisses as "minimal" (p. 10) the influence of persecution or native American hostility upon this process. He bases his argument upon the inarguable importance of their property holdings and their Church to immigrants who were still peasants at heart, and upon the distress and disruption which necessarily resulted when the parish church itself came to be viewed as community property and the authority of a "foreign" Church hierarchy was loudly challenged.

How did this occur? Greene outlines a logical progression of social phenomena. When Polish and Lithuanian immigrants arrived in America, they settled not in an alien Anglo-Saxon environment, but within the parishes of other immigrant groups—especially Germans and Czechs—whose language they knew (pp. 31-34, 59-63). Therefore, their first contact was with fellow East European Catholics, and the cultural shock of immigration was lessened, while dependence on the Church was strengthened. Moreover, Greene maintains, there was little bitterness or antipathy even in the immigrants' dealings with their American employers, because the newcomers did "achieve the income accumulation they sought" (p. 34), and managed (albeit only through great sacrifices) not only to live on their meagre earnings, but even to accumulate savings and purchase real estate (by 1886, nearly half of the Polish community in Chicago owned their own homes (p. 51)).

Therefore, Green concludes that "the impact of the New World was to reinforce the arrivals' traditional quest for economic accumulation and their Old World ideals of religiosity and property holding" (p. 30, see also p. 64). He then argues that these two ideals soon became intertwined, although he never explains just how this process took place. Nevertheless, if, in the Polish and Lithuanian experience, "the man without his own land and home had always been a serf, a slave" (p. 57), it is understandable (although Greene never makes the connection so clearly) that Polish and Lithuanian communities wanted their parish church to be theirs alone, and resented control of their parish property by outsiders.

Whatever the cause, a division certainly arose in Lithuanian and Polish parishes in the last half of the nineteenth century between two groups who each claimed to be representing traditional values. These were the "religionists," who "insisted that their faith (Roman Catholicism) and their nationality were synonymous and exclusive, any other view was godless and disloyal" (p. 64), and the "nationalists" who "passionately sought the establishment of an independent homeland, and thus placed nationality above faith in their group identification". (p. 64).

Nationalists questioned the control of Polish and Lithuanian parish assets by Irish-American bishops, the use of church buildings for only Catholic activities, and the exclusion of Lutherans and Jews from community organizations. They formed their own rival organizations and campaigned for religious toleration and for recognition of ethnic pluralism within the American Catholic Church. Religionists preached total obedience to the Catholic Church and her American bishops, for only this would guarantee the ethnic communities' survival. As one religionist newspaper warned, "This fight against priests

. . . will lead directly to the removal of the religious basis of our people . . . (Then) we are annihilated without a trace in the Anglo-Saxon sea" (p. 118). Therefore, the religionists supported diocesan title to the parish, while nationalists fought for community control.

Although the chief protagonists of both groups came from a small educated and articulate elite, their quarrel had wide-ranging effects because of three factors: the fact that it began when the Polish and Lithuanian parishes were first forming; its long duration (42 years in the Polish community); and its pervasive impact on all church-goers. In fact, passions ran so high that any and all weapons were employed, from wars of invective in the ethnic newspapers, to excommunications and even mob violence. In Omaha, a group of Polish parishioners engaged their pastor in a pitched gun battle for legal title to their church (p. 110). Lithuanian parishioners in Chicago, exasperated at their pastor's autocratic insistence on sole control of church funds, actually attacked him during Mass:

The police guard which came to his defense was "seriously hampered by ... an attacking party ... of (several hundred) women and girls", wielding hatpins, bottles, rocks, and boards. Seriously scratched, stabbed, or otherwise injured, the police officers called for reinforcements When the smoke of battle cleared, the rectory had been severely damaged, Father Steponavičius was in his quarters suffering from nervous prostration, and four rioters lay badly injured. (p. 159).

All this culminated in the establishment of churches separate or "independent" from the official Catholic Church hierarchy. Some of these even united into a rival nation-wide Church, the Polish National Catholic Church. Thus,

. . . the pro- and anti-independent forces pitted one Pole against another at a time when the Polish people were struggling by means of mutual aid to attain economic and cultural viability in a strange environment. The flurry of excommunications of popular clerics (who consented to lead independent churches) in the late 1890's, actions which Polish Catholic leaders supported, forced each church-going group member to ponder which of the three wings of the nationality—Catholic, nationalist, or independent—was the proper one for a Pole The immigrant could not attend Mass comfortably, for his countrymen, his friends, perhaps even his relatives, were hostile to the priest and might go to the extreme of assaulting him and interfering with religious services. (p. 114)

This struggle was not resolved for the Poles until the appointment of a Polish bishop in Chicago in 1908; and it did not subside among the Lithuanians until the end of World War I. In its wake it left bitterness, but also a heightened consciousness of national identity.

Greene describes and analyzes this conflict in clear and lively prose, which brings to life past turbulence while maintaining the historical perspective of the present. He has done exhaustive research in Polish and Lithuanian primary sources—newspapers, contemporary records, interviews, etc. Some results of this research are presented in several very useful statistical tables demonstrating the patterns of home ownership and income, growth of population, formation of building and loan societies, foundation of parishes, and membership in community organizations. Also included are eight pages of photographs, and an invaluable bibliographical essay which discusses the quality and location of most types of Polish and some Lithuanian sources.

Moreover, Greene has not been content to simply compile this mass of facts, but has sifted and organized it into a convincing and logical argument for his thesis that Polish and Lithuanian peasant values were based on property and religion, that in America these two values clashed and led to deep divisions within communities, and that these "inner struggles stimulated ethnic awareness" (p. 175).

But is the argument too neat, too logical? Greene presents an almost textbook example of the historian's craft: he postulates a hypothesis, gathers facts to support it, and uses the accumulation of internal logic and the juxtaposition of developments which seem logically to belong together to build up a persuasive theory. Excellent exercise for the intellect, this nevertheless hardly reflects the often illogical, multi-faceted vagaries of human psychology—and it must be remembered that Greene's book is above all a study of the development of a group psychology or consciousness.

Greene writes that his work "rests on a traditional methodology of extrapolating from events" (p. 170). There is certainly no reason for any a priori rejection of such methodology. Yet perhaps our author has extrapolated along one line of development too narrowly, creating a simplistic argument. For example, he dismisses rather too quickly the effects of alienation which the ethnic suffers in an environment which, whether it treats him well or ill, is nevertheless alien. An ethnic community can help to cushion the shock, but all its members are painfully aware that it is only a poor substitute for the feeling of "belonging" which they took for granted on their native soil, but which they have now lost forever. Perhaps (as is suggested by my own experiences within a Lithuanian community), immigrants feud so savagely over issues which could easily be resolved by rational discussion precisely because they feel so helpless and unable to control their larger environment. Whether it is the leadership of the local scout group, a position within one of the myriad political groups which all claim to represent the community, or the management of the local parish which is at issue, the real aim is a fierce struggle to wrest some vestiges of position, power and prestige from life in hostile and foreign surroundings.

Greene fails to note the omni-present and continuing quality of such community strife. In short, he simply takes one particular quarrel too seriously. (Obviously, he has never heard the common Lithuanian saying, "Where there are two Lithuanians, there are three political parties". Such factionalism is even more characteristic of the Poles, whose culturally advanced state disintegrated in the 18th century mainly from the extreme political disunity of its nobles). If personal experience can again be cited, we can view a split in the present-day Lithuanian community which is as divisive as anything Greene describes. This has arisen over the question of contacts with the Russian-occupied motherland. Rather

than "independent" churches, we have the development of "independent" World Lithuanian Associations, "independent" scout groups and entire "independent" communities, which decry all those who visit Lithuania as "communists." Interestingly enough, like the old religionists who designated all their opponents as "atheists" (a word now linked with communism), this faction is led mostly by clerics (in fact, a priest in my home parish once anathematized my own family because its children were allowed to visit Lithuania). Nevertheless, this conflict has not produced any deep-rooted psychological changes in most immigrant Lithuanians, and is simply deplored as a part of the inevitable bickering which has always been endemic in their communities.

Greene has focused not only on only one quarrel among many, but also on only one cause—the disputes over property control—to the exclusion of all other contributing factors. Yet he himself mentions the "autocratic" and "domineering" behaviour of some Polish and Lithuanian priests (p. 76, 101, etc.), the attractive "cousin" one priest was living with (p. 71), and the "abrasive" and "unattractive" personality of another pastor (p. 104). Furthermore, the nationalists feud was more with one religious order—the Resurrectionists—than with the whole Catholic Church: one Polish nationalist proclaimed bluntly, "in every case of these troubles ... it is the same order of Resurrectionists that is at the bottom of it all" (p. 106). Therefore, personality conflicts which arose as autocratic European priests failed to adjust to a more democratic New-World environment must not be discounted, although there is no doubt that wider issues did exist and many nationalists fought, in the words of one Polish leader, primarily for "the training of Polish nationality in our people," and against "the Americanization of Poles by the Roman Catholic Church" (p. 119).

It is in his assessment of the rise of such Polish and Lithuanian feelings of nationality that Greene is most limited because he looks at this development only within the American context, although he has himself informed us (p. 33) that the immigrants were in constant touch with European developments through letters and the steady flow of new arrivals. Thus, he argues that it was the "nationalizing pressures of the war in Europe" which united the two warring Lithuanian factions by 1918 (p. 161). If European pressures can unite, can they not also divide? In other words, how can Greene ignore the effects of the nationalistic "enlightenment" which swept Poland before the 1863 uprising and Lithuania in the last two decades of the century, when the timing of the Polish (1866-1908) and Lithuanian (1890-1918) nationalist-religionist disputes coincides so exactly with this movement (if we allow a few years for ideas and individuals to cross the Atlantic)?

In we study the Lithuanian example, we note that the pioneer Lithuanian newspaper **Aušra** was first published in 1889 by a liberal and nationalist intellectual, Dr. J. Basanavičius. It was followed by **Varpas** ("The Bell") in 1889, a publication whose name recalled the **Kolokol** ("Bell"), a contemporary socialist revolutionist Russian newspaper. In 1884, Dr. Jonas Šliūpas, a follower of Basanavičius, (p. 147), arrived in New York, and by the 1890's had emerged as the leader of the new Lithuanian nationalist groups. Meanwhile, in Lithuania, rival clerical newspapers had sprung up to counter the liberal deistic philosophy of **Aušra** and **Varpas**, with names like **Šviesa—"The Light"** (in 1887), and **Tėvynės Sargas—"The Guard of the Fatherland"** (in 1896). At the same time, religionist newspapers and organizations were being established in America to counter the "masonic" (i. e. free-thinking) nationalists. Obviously, even if it is true that quarrels over parish property led to a growing sense of ethnic identity among Poles and Lithuanians in America, we must also take some account of the growth of nationalism and liberalism in Europe in the wake of the Romantic movement, which eventually reached Poland and Lithuania and stimulated an assertion of national identity which was soon mirrored in the American immigrant communities.

Therefore, Greene's book is limited by its narrow focus and its explanation of a multi-faceted issue in terms of one theory alone. But it is a worthwhile and very readable attempt to explore a little-researched field: the intra-community factors which contribute to the development of an ethnic identity. As such, it is valuable both to the student of immigration history and to the Polish or Lithuanian-American who wishes to better understand the turbulent background of his community's development.

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