

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS FOR SLOVENIAN AND NORWEGIAN EMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. A COMPARATIVE ASPECT

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## ABSTRACT

### **The importance of the church and religious congregations for Slovenian and Norwegian emigrants to the United States of America. A comparative aspect**

Slovenia and Norway, both small European countries, have a history of being occupied by other forces. The first had a Catholic Church, the second a Lutheran, both with a bulk of primarily rural forefathers going to America in the nineteenth century, though with a time span of forty years in-between. It became a challenge to see which differences and similarities this situation, especially the churches, brought to the emigrants in the process. No doubt, the religion influenced their lives, Slovenian Church being more autocratic, the Norwegian democratic. Both gave support in education, charity work, social and cultural activities, but under different conditions. The positive effects are easy to spur, the long-term Americanisation effects will need a broader perspective.

KEY WORDS: emigration to USA, church, religious congregations, social and charity work, settlers' communities

## IZVLEČEK

### **Pomen cerkve in verskih kongregacij za slovenske in norveške emigrante v Združenih državah Amerike. Primerjalni vidik**

Slovenija in Norveška, obe majhni evropski državi, sta bili v svoji zgodovini okupirani. Prva je imela katoliško cerkev, druga luteransko, pri obeh pa so se predniki iz predvsem ruralnega okolja izseljevali v Ameriko v devetnajstem stoletju, četudi v razmiku štiridesetih let. Preučiti razlike in podobnosti med emigranti, ki jih je ustvarila situacija oz. predvsem cerkve, predstavlja izziv. Nedvomno je religija imela vpliv na njihova življenja -slovenska cerkev je bila bolj avtokratična, norveška bolj demokratična. Obe sta sodelovali pri izobraževanju, dobroti, družbenih in kulturnih aktivnostih, vendar pod različnimi pogoji. Pozitivne učinke je lažje izpostaviti, dolgoročnejši vplivi amerikanizacije pa zahtevajo širšo perspektivo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: emigracija v ZDA, cerkev, verske organizacije, socialno in dobrodelno delo, naseljitvene skupnosti

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The religion and the religious support in difficult periods have always had, and still have, a great importance in many people's lives. This seems to be the situation for immigrants today, like it was for our emigrants to America one hundred and fifty years ago.

To compare the impact of the church and religious congregations on emigrants from two different countries is somehow an impossible project, at least in few pages. The two countries, Slovenia and Norway, are situated in different parts of Europe and have each a different history. The mass emigration period for them differed with a time span of approximately 40 years and the main churches in the two countries were different, though the core of their creed was the same. Any influence on a life situation causes dynamism, which is difficult to draw a map of. Nevertheless, a presentation of some parallelism in the situation of the two groups of emigrants may give a clearer understanding of common or different traits in their history. All research of the society is a result of comparison Émile Durkheim (2000) maintained.

Some of the questions of interest are:

What kind of support have the religious congregations and churches offered in the settlers' communities?

Which were the religious values?

Through which activities were the values operationalised?

Which differences may be spurred being a result of the "policy" of the churches?

I start with presenting characteristic traits of the churches in the two countries; sketch the historic status at the time of mass emigration and sum up some church activities for the two countries in the processes of socialisation, while developing a community based on their ethnic and religious values. The main interest is then to see if there perhaps are different traits in the influence of the churches or religious congregations on the emigrants from Slovenia and Norway. Hopefully, this will give a better understanding of important elements in the churches' support to emigrants.

## **MAIN CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE LUTHERAN PROTESTANT CHURCH**

It is not relevant in this connection to discuss doctrinal differences between the two church denominations. The Catholic Church and the Protestant Church have their common Creed and the belief in God, the Creator and Father, Jesus Christ, the Salvator and The Holy Spirit, the inspiration to a Christian life on earth and a hope for a life in the Eternity. There are, however, some important differences between the two denominations.

The Roman Catholic Church represents a world-wide religion with a fixed orga-

nisational system. The hierarchy in the Catholic Church movement was and is quite clear. The Pope and the Roman Catholic Church were the “mother” (or “father”) church. The Catholic Churches in different countries were obliged to follow the Papal decree. The hierarchical structure characterised the Catholic Churches also in different countries, like in Slovenia. The idea is that the Roman Catholic Church is one and the same regardless of where it is situated. The Catholic Church had in addition an important political power. In the 1890s there was a clerical political party in Slovenia (Mřnnesland, 1999: 68). In America, Gordon (1964: 92) maintains that “... large numbers of Irish Catholics who settled in groups of eastern cities activated dormant fears of “Popery” and Rome”. This shows that the hierarchy and the political power of the Catholic Church were well known also over the Atlantic. This caused a certain fear in the receiving country.

The Protestant or Lutheran Church was started as a dissenter organisation of the Catholic Church with some other doctrines and a freer organisation. The Protestant religion was the State Church religion in Norway, which meant that you usually became a member of the church with the parents’ consent, at the baptism, being a baby. The Christian values should be the values of the country like in most of the Scandinavian and North-European countries. There was openness to, and acceptance of, different meanings within certain limits. Even when groups wanted to establish their own congregations they still were accepted as members of the Protestant Church. The Lutheran fundament was well-known in large congregations in America, even if the state was non-denominational.

It is of interest to see if the differences in hierarchical or democratic structure had an influence on the emigrant processes before the start and after the emigration. To get a thorough discussion of this is impossible in a short presentation. We see however, that the Catholic Church met scepticism in America, while the Lutheran Protestantism seemed to be more easily accepted.

## **THE TWO COUNTRIES BEFORE START**

### **Slovenia**

Slovenia was an ethnic area of the Austro-Habsburg Monarchy. The nation was conscious of its own language and culture. Compared with other nations inside Austria, Slovenians had a positive cultural and economic position (Mřnnesland: 68). Even then, Klemenčič (1993: 200) says, the “Habsburg Monarchy’s policy of hindering the economic development of Slovenian and Croatian territories...was also the major cause of emigration.” Abroad Slovenians were often known as Slavs. In USA they were registered as members of a “Slovenian-Croatian” race (Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1911: 12). The possibility of emigration was open, except for men in the age for military service, lasting seven years. Slovene Catholic missionaries were the first immigrants in USA, with Friderik Baraga already in 1830. Others followed him in the mission of

helping and converting Indians. So, in the period spanning 60 years, representatives of different groups had been there; and as the mass migration started in the 1890's, the people knew quite a lot of working conditions in America, and were tempted by the possibility of better earnings. Most often, like in Norway, it was rural people who emigrated, poor, but willing to work. The one family group could inspire the next and cause a chain migration.

The Catholic Church, however, was rather sceptical to emigration to a "god-less" country, and warned against this in different ways. The priests, for example, had to describe the temptations and dangers emigrants would meet - like deceiving travel agents, destructive ideologies for a good family life or the right Catholic ethics and belief, gold worshipping or "dissolute" lives (Drnovšek, 1992: 178-179). The main concern was splitting up of families, forgetting and becoming unfaithful to own language and culture, and losing religious faith and ethics. The church even used newspapers in the black-painting of dangers for their religious life, their families and their national loyalty. One priest is reported to praise the American freedom in 1897 (Savs in Drnovšek, 1994: 30): "Here a man can breathe, this is a country of the world, liberty and golden freedom-..." As people did not show the fear of a future life in another country, the church decided to follow the emigrants, after considerable warnings, through all the expected troubles and temptations. The Catholic Church founded Societies of St. Raphael, first in Germany and in Vienna (1890), Ljubljana (1907) and New York the year after (Drnovšek, 2003: 53). The Raphael Society was established to warn the emigrants against deceiving agencies, and later on to meet and to help them in the new country, support them with relevant information, and keep an eye on aspects in the emigrant situation. With the support of the Catholic Church, Slovene or mixed ethnic parishes, which included Slovenes, were organised. Which consequences the anti-catholic sentiment mentioned above had, it is not easy to spur in the available literature. It was, however, alive as late as in the 1890s, in a movement called American Protective Association, but still directed against the Irish, not against the Slovene Church, as far as I have realised. You can, however, read a passage like this from a letter cited by Klemenčič (199: 204): "Here they really hate Catholics, especially the Catholic priests."

### **Norway**

Norway had been governed from Denmark until 1814, later from Sweden until 1905, though Norway in the last period had their own parliament and legalisation on, for example, the State religion and Church. Some of the first emigrants, the Quakers, left Norway in 1825, because of more openness in USA to religious variations, followed by another grouping, the Haugians, both representing lay movements. As USA had no state religion, people were free to establish their own congregations, what the Norwegians also did. The "mother" Protestant Church in Norway did not interfere. Almost all the emigrants were members of the State Church. On the other hand, there was no "St. Raphael Society" to provide help and support. The religious

groups and organisations had to structure their own support. This may be regarded as a proof of a democratic church. There had not been any missionary activities before that time, only some adventurous people like Cleng Peerson, sometimes named as “Father of the Norwegian-American Immigration”. He had travelled back and forth the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, telling about freedom and fertility (Rued Holand, 2006: 15). The Quakers and Haugians wanted a more puritan way of worshipping. At the same time Norwegian peasants were poor, and heard about large fields free to cultivate. These were perhaps the main reasons for mass emigration, starting around 1860 and onwards. Ingrid Semmingsen argues that the religious pioneers created a psychological climate for opposition to old cultural, social and religious rituals, and this became a fundament to the later mass emigration (in R̄strem, 2006: 37). All the time there were also rumours, information from friends and family members about the “New World”, to people in the home country, motivating them to come. Ostergren says about Scandinavians (1988: 270):

Many immigrants arrived with much stronger feelings for their home region than for their home countries. Subgroups based on regional provenience were created in rural communities where geographical background in the home country to a large extent determined the settlement patterns.

The church did not start a great campaign to hinder emigration. One bishop, Bishop Neumann, warned his congregations in Bergen against leaving the country. He hoped that the peasants in the surroundings would continue the daily work, both for this life and for the next. It was important for people not to become tempted to go astray, away from a peaceful life. We may see both nationalistic and religious arguments in his letters, a conviction about to stay where you lived. R̄strem (2006: 9-10) has the arguments that the Bishop also has a hierarchical and conservative opinion of a society, with himself at the top. Another pioneer priest, Nordland, was a reformer, deeply religious and with an anticlerical and anti-authoritarian attitude. He recommended emigration and praised the American principles of Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood (R̄strem, 2006: 11). The Norwegian Protestantism or the dissenting members coming to USA seemed to fall easily into the religious pattern in the country. Even the first Quakers in 1825 were helped by Quaker groups from other counties in New York at the arrival.

### **Similarities and differences**

Both Slovenia and Norway were somehow un-free nations at the time of the mass emigration, but this did not seem to have any influence on the official policy of emigration, apart from restrictions for Slovenian men of the age for military service. This shows a more insecure political status for the kingdom Slovenia belonged to. Slovenia had experienced how territorial “neighbours” in every “corner” of their ethnic area wanted part of it. One could imagine that the Slovenian Catholic Church under the Roman Catholic Church, with the political influence it had, could easily be compared with the State Church in Norway, regarding the attitude it showed towards the plans

for emigration. The mentioned Bishop Neumann would fit into the picture with his arguments that people should be aware of their national responsibility and of threats about the dangers of immorality in a new country, but this was not the policy of the church. While the priests in the Slovenian Church were instructed how to present their advices, the debate in Norway was open also inside the church. This shows another attitude. Since the Protestant or Lutheran Church was in fact started as a dissenter church from the Roman Catholic Church, because of a wish not to be dictated from Rome in doctrinal or other questions, it seems reasonable that the Protestants were open to different meanings. Even if it was a State Church in Norway, there was apparently no thought of dictatorship in the case of emigration, while the Catholic Church both had and still wanted to keep the political power and the members, and consequently condemned emigration. Neither Bishop Neumann nor the Slovenian Church convinced their congregation members, who did not have the same fear of their religious life, but believed in the future. There seems not to have been an assisting system from the Norwegian Church's side for the voyage or the arrival. It was easier for travellers not having to traverse half of Europe before embarking a ship. Old friends, neighbours or family members assisted the Norwegian emigrants with casual advice in the starting period.

Even with a long time span of approximately 40 years between the mass emigration from Norway and Slovenia, the main reasons for emigration seem to be the same. Rumours of wanted freedom attracted persons somehow feeling suppressed and the possibility to economic gain were tempting reasons to go, especially for poor rural people.

## **THE LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD**

In this part I want to sum up some challenges for emigrants from the two countries regarding the processes of developing a community, which included church and education activities. The first were the conditions and the uncertainty of starting a life on American soil, the next was to establish a community to provide mutual support and administration, information about the “new” and the “old” country, and a societal centre with a church and schools.

### **The first experience**

As the Slovenian Church realised that people would emigrate in spite of clerical warnings, a parallel campaign started through the Raphael Society. Already in 1894, the American Slovenian Catholic Union (Grand Carnelian Slovenian Catholic Union of the USA) was established in Illinois (Kodrič, 1992: 167). In 1908, a branch of the Raphael Society was founded in New York, as already presented. Their responsibility was “to protect the emigrants morally and materially, and to preserve their faith and national consciousness”. (Drnovšek, 1992: 181). It has been difficult to find directly described

their work in detail. However, to see and hear about the Ellis Island reception in the museum, the meeting might have been somehow frightening. The emigrants had to sleep in what could almost be compared with pigeon-holes, until their health etc. was evaluated. It makes one know it was a rather hard and discouraging test for quite a lot of people as they met the new country. With the slightest suspicion of health deficiencies people had to return. Klemenčič (1993: 212) cites a letter and says: “On Ellis Island the doctors of the Immigrant Department found the most healthy to be “sick”:

For women whose children are in the hospital on Hoffman Island, and who are waiting for them to get well again, life is bitter and full of sadness...They are not only exposed to all kinds of ill treatment, but are also forced to do the hardest kinds of jobs.

All possible assistance was needed, and the Slovene Catholic Church was there. The web pages of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops tell about the first organisation of assistance to immigrants in parishes, with pastoral care, social services and education:

The Catholic Church in the United States has been assisting immigrants and refugees adjust to their new lives since the founding of this nation. ...Between 1920 and 1930, the Immigrant Department, which had a presence at Ellis Island, had assisted more than 100.000 immigrants in their efforts to immigrate ([www.nccbuscc.org/mrs/history\\_shtml](http://www.nccbuscc.org/mrs/history_shtml)).

The control and registration at the Ellis Island did not start until 1892. This does not say that the Norwegian emigrants, mainly before that time, had an easy settlement situation. It is said about one of the first Norwegian families in the Quaker group in 1825, the Geilane family, that they received newcomers, gave them food and housing for a period of time and guided them for travelling westwards, somehow like they had been received in New York by other Quakers (Canuteson, [www.stolaf.edu/naha/pubs/nas/volume25/vol125\\_6.htm](http://www.stolaf.edu/naha/pubs/nas/volume25/vol125_6.htm)). This was a “hand of help” given as a result of religious brotherhood, of friendship and charity. This assistance between emigrants continued casually. The settlers in the 1860’s and 1880’s were welcomed to cultivate the grand areas of uncultivated land. The Americans had a positive attitude towards Scandinavians (Řstrem, 2006: 81). Rumours about possible areas decided which direction to take. This meant walking or using horses along vast, not inhabited areas. The hardship of this search for land, the possible meetings with Indians or emigrants from other countries, fear and uncertainty are vividly described in novels from this time. (Rřlvřg, 1924). In other words, they had to manage themselves, possibly getting some assistance or advice from other emigrants.

The difference in the initial situation between the two mass emigration groups was great. The Catholic Church had an available system of reception, even if not all immigrants used it and managed in other ways. Norwegians had to rely on themselves or occasional assistance from others, being religious or just friendly charity. However, they knew they were welcome and did not meet a controlling “eye” on Ellis Island. The experience of uncertainty and fear about the future one can imagine both groups experienced.

### **How to organise societies**

The Slovene Church, defined as a central ethnic institution, was rather active. The church supported the organisation of small societies, which was characteristic in the settlement period. There were both missionaries and, at the turn of the century, priests “in order to lead Slovene or ethnically mixed parishes” (Kodrič, 1992: 167). In accordance with the “home church” the preservation of Slovene ethnic activities was important. In addition to taking care of their religious responsibilities, the church had both political and cultural influence. It is difficult to discern between the religious and nationalistic argumentation. It seems as if loyalty to the family, the language, the church, the community and the nation belonged to the main religious ethics.

The “picture” of the Slovene Catholic Church in Canada seems to be the same:

The Catholic Church which was instrumental in promoting religion as well as culture, was in a way defending this nationalistic cultural stand, because it fostered self-confidence for a small nation and thus offered hope for the survival of Slovenes. ....The role of the Slovene Church and the social support that different Slovene organisations provided was crucial for the healthy adjustment of the majority of the Slovenes (Kocjančič, 1997: 217).

Here the national aspect is widened to include the self-confidence, which is an important aspect, often directly connected with a consciousness of own culture and background. The situation was that all the services had to be paid for and the Catholic Church, separated from the state in USA, had to care for its own work. Friš (1995: 401-2) has a description of the economic burden for the parishioners:

The church had to start from nothing, as it was, contrary to its position in Europe, practically without any possessions. The parishioners had to sacrifice a lot, especially in the time when new parishes were founded. They had to raise money to buy church premises, pay for the arrival of the priest (often from the country), for his apparel, his apartment, food and salary, for the purchase of the church building or its construction, the furnishing.

In addition, he says, the church has, for example to support projects home and abroad, the Vatican, The Pope, The Catholic university, the construction of a school, a cemetery etc. The owner of the church possessions was, however, the bishop. The community members managed to contribute for the development of all the institutions, sometimes by private loans. There might have been protesting voices, but the members were loyal to the community and church society, perhaps of conviction, because it was easy and secure, or possibly by feeling forced by the church system. Friš (1995: 402) maintains that the ethnic parishes were important from the cultural and social viewpoint: “Priests were often the founders and leaders of singing societies, music bands and also theatre groups”. Klemenčič supports the same view in his article, saying that the parishes had a positive influence on Slovenian immigrants’ awareness of their roots, as the parish priests and teachers were Slovenes. The nationalistic, cultural and religious challenges are primarily mentioned when the Slovene Catholic Church’s mission is described. This is an important part also in the parochial or parish schools.

The mass emigration from Slovenia started primarily after the new American



laws on schools in 1889. According to the Bennett law in Wisconsin (1889), parents and guardians were obliged to send their children from the age of 7 to 14 to school, for at least 12 weeks a year. The content of the elementary education had to include “reading, writing, arithmetic and the United States history in the English language” (Gjerde, 1997: 291). The Catholic Church then developed parochial elementary schools, which satisfied the prescriptions of the American laws, but supplied the prescribed content with Slovenian language, Catholic literature, religious education. Schools were active culturally. They were not paid by the state budget, but were released from taxes (Friš, 1995: 408-9). The teachers, Friš says, were usually nuns from American monasteries. Some came from Slovenia, specially mentioned are “school sisters from St. Francis d’Assisi Congregation – Christ the King, from Maribor”. The first Slovene school building was built in 1895. As the parochial schools were more expensive for the parents, while the public schools were free, some parents, because of this, or perhaps of other reasons as well, preferred the public school for their children.

The Norwegian emigrants, in the period up to the mass emigration around 1860’s, also established themselves in small societies. The Norwegian emigrants at this time were frontiers, heading for un-cultivated land. There might be long distances between the settlements. People had to manage on their own, with their own family, but they also tried together to establish a community, using their own houses for education and worshipping. Little by little more Norwegian arrived. As they also contributed gratis work, this gave a cheap possibility to establish more traditional centres. So, each community owned the church and school buildings they established. In an article (Preus, 1957) it is said, that the education of children started as soon as a church was established, but it started evidently in the family. A letter from a family from 1855 says (Gulliksen, 1999: 60): “Here is no Norwegian school, but we teach our children as good as we can.” They did not have a priest, but a schoolmaster, who organised examinations at the Confirmation. Another couple tells about their 4 children like this (1857):

She (Turi) has already learnt her Catechism by heart, and apart from that, reads every possible book. Marie...is now adding in her ABC. Here is still no school, but a school-house is starting to be built.

This family (ibid: 16) tells, that they have a good priest every third Sunday. Two years later the same father tells (ibid: 71) that they are building a house for English School for children, and in 1861 the message is that the children go sometimes to English (3 months a year), sometimes to Norwegian school (ibid: 72). Others write about religious schools with teachers from Norway, who teach 5-6 months a year. These teachers were often also church singers, paid by the congregation. Some of these teachers walked, using their own legs, from place to place (Greipstrand, 1997: 160-1).

These glimpses give a picture of the situation for the Norwegians in the 1860’s. No priest or school welcomed them in the start. The families took care of the education of their children. Members of the Lutheran Church or some religious congregation took

an initiative to collect money for school-or church-building and achieved this with collective contributions. The contributing migrants joined the work to secure a Lutheran education for their children. Without this, one may also say that the possibilities of education for the frontiers' children were rather scarce. Teachers, lay preachers and priests shared their work between the small settlements. Some of them were educated in Norway, some in USA. Bleken (1914) maintains, that the Norwegian immigrants were conscious that in a remote future they would integrate and become a part in the American people, but they would not come with empty hands, they would bring something. The values they could bring were best developed and conserved in school. Therefore, it was important to provide education in religion, Norwegian language and literature. According to the American policy, it was clear that religion was not included in the later public school, with prescribed American curriculum. This caused discussion, as both parents and private or religious organisations that had established schools, evidently lost the power to choose the school and its curriculum. It meant a liberalisation of the education. Especially the Roman Catholic Church and German Lutherans protested against this development. Because of economic reasons the solution for the Norwegians was to give the children supplementary education on Sundays or in periods without teaching in public schools. Norwegian parochial schools were developed to educate men to service in the churches as priests or teachers (Bleken, 1914, Ostergren, 1988).

In 1914 five different school types are mentioned:

- 1) Theological seminars (A study of theology)
- 2) "Normal-schools" (teacher education)
- 3) Colleges ( Latin- and Upper secondary schools)
- 4) Academies (SecondarySchools)
- 5 ) School for girls.

With few exceptions, all schools were open for both men and women. Two schools were for girls only, with education in literature, history, mathematics, science, music and song, art and crafts, house-holding, etc. (Bleken, 1914). The development of this Norwegian-Lutheran school system and the church was funded by private economic means. The State Church in Norway still did not offer economic support.

The importance for the church to secure both the national and religious elements is underlined by Ostergren (1988: 211). He says that the church was self-governing and it bound people together.

### **Similarities and differences in the period of societal establishments**

The time span between the periods of societal establishments was important for the emigrants, as the American society had developed. The Norwegians started with empty hands, sometimes in desolate areas, but with possibilities to develop. They were conscious of the necessity to organise their own life in cooperation with other emigrants, however near or remote. The way went from teaching their own children, offering their homes for worshipping rituals and sharing them with groups of pupils,

to building houses for the same purpose. This cooperation “spirit” resulted in self-owned churches and schools in their own societies. The “freedom” of worshipping did not seem to lead to the great religious happiness everywhere, however. Opinion differences in religious questions came to the surface. Ostergren (1988: 213) points at this: “The Norwegians, in particular, gained a reputation for their doctrinal disputes, which were often so bitterly fought as to split communities and even families”. Disputes about doctrines on the local level do not seem to be possible in the Catholic hierarchical system. There were murmurs about the economic burdens, and also a want to organise ethnic parishes. Friš (1995: 400) says, that ethnic groups within the Catholic Church threatened to form an independent and national church if they did not get “a maximum degree of autonomy”. On one occasion there was established an independent Catholic Slovene Church of St. Peter and St Paul because of an internal dispute about the placement of a church building. This was short-lived because of lack of economy (ibid: 406). The ethnic parishes were of great importance for the emigrants, Friš maintains. Other quarrels arise between the priest and members of church committees (ibid: 406). The two congregations’ responsibility for and contribution to worshipping possibilities, social and cultural arrangements and education seems to be fully accepted in both the Norwegian and Slovenian group. Economic situation seems to be the reason why the Norwegian Protestant Church had to accept the public school, or perhaps also a more American-friendly attitude. This is not quite clear.

There is a similarity between the economic burdens in the two emigrant groups, but also differences that make it difficult to compare directly. Some offers of higher education and charity organisations were there for the Slovene emigrants. The Norwegians developed the whole system on their own. The Slovenes, however, had to support the Vatican and Rome, which was not the case for the Norwegians as to their mother church. Both groups had to build and run schools and churches etc.. The economic burdens might be similar in the two emigration groups. Psychologically it makes a difference if someone outside decides for you and claims the ownership of what you have done, or if you decide for yourself what to contribute to. However, democracy also contains challenges. The Norwegians seemed to have difficulties in handling the freedom, and the Slovenes in accepting the “un-freedom” or consequences of the work of religious authorities.

### **The public education through the press**

The use of the newspaper and the press was well known for the Protestant and the Catholic Church. It was a way of giving information and presenting opinions of different kind. It inspired the religious activities, discussed ethics or presented news. The Society of St. Raphael in New York cooperated with Slovenian newspapers and used advertisements to inform people in the “old” country. They also began to publish a monthly newspaper, Ave Maria (Friš, 1995: 413). The first Slovene newspaper in USA, Amerikanski Slovenec, was published in 1891. It was not a religious newspaper, but Friš characterises it as having “Catholic orientation” (ibid: 415). It is reported

from Canada that the Polish Catholic Weekly appeared before 1920. A later Slovene newspaper started in 1932. (Godina, 2001: 78). The Norwegian church and religious congregations had a broad activity in presenting books, pamphlets, newspapers and different printings. In a list of the kind of printings one can see how broad the activity was, not least in the decade 1873 – 82 (Norlie, 1914: 33-34). Then you can find religious newspapers, periodicals and magazines, booklets for children and for youth, a Lutheran magazine for schools, hymnbooks, songbooks and pamphlets for discourses about doctrinal questions.

The different press activities meant a cultural inspiration for people both inside and outside the congregations. R̥strem (2006: 80) points at the impact the written publications also had on preserving the language and the culture, which was a result for both groups.

### **Social and charity work**

Both the Catholic and the Protestant Church cared for health, social and charity support. Even if it seems to be barely mentioned in some research descriptions, one knows that the emigrants met all kind of challenges during their stay: poverty, sickness, strain in the daily life etc. The established institutions tell about the variety of support given.

The Slovene branch of St.Raphael (this document, p.5) wanted to assist the immigrants and “offer protection to single women and workers who had left their homeland...” There was also a St.Mary’s Society for single Slovene women in New York (Friš, 1995: 396 and 414). Alcohol problems are mentioned by Drnovšek (1994: 30), and this may have caused needs for help in the entire family. The Catholic charities’ history tells, for example, of orphanages as early as in 1830 ([www.cdow.org/cchistory.html](http://www.cdow.org/cchistory.html)). In 1914, Union of Catholic Slovenes was established to print and publish books and booklets, to organise lectures, to be a charitable organisation with paying members (Friš, 1995, p.407). The Catholic Church’s will to provide charity has been there all the time. The church was not the only agent in this arena, so a relation between the Slovene Church in the United States and the socialistic organisation “Slovene National Benefit society”, as Kodrič tells (1992: 167), is not a surprise. The concern for the workers was perhaps the same, but sometimes used in different ways, as Klemenčič tells, referring to descriptions of bad working conditions (1993: 212-13):

The image of America presented in the labour press thus differed little from that of the Catholic and liberal press in its overall assessment. The labour press decried the drain of class-conscious workers; the other publications emphasised the loss of the Slovene nationality.

The labour press advocated a more oppositional attitude, while the Catholic paper not really supportive, concluded that it was a mistake to emigrate.

The Norwegian Lutheran Church’s “work of care and charity” is presented in an overview of the Norwegian Lutheran priests in America 1843 to 1913, by the Norwegian Lutheran priest O.M.Norlie. It is primarily a summary of all the institutions built by

the Norwegian Church in America. It started in 1883 with a hospital and a house for deaconesses. Totally, in this period to 1893, there were four Homes for children built, one home for Indian Children, one home for sailors, one home for elderly people and four hospitals, three of them with a home for deaconesses. In the entire period up to 1913 there was great activity. The congregation members contributed information about the work, making it known and supported by collecting money. More institutions were built, hospitals, education for nurses was started, etc.. The houses for aging people were full, children needed homes. The church also gave economic support to priests, their widows and students. (Norlie, 1914: 44, 56-7) These houses show that the church wanted to meet the registered need of different groups of people. Each of these houses took care of people, and more than that. For example, the deaconess Elisabeth Fedde also trained young women for deaconess work. Elisabeth Fedde wrote a diary of her work, and in a presentation of this book it is told:

During the development of the Brooklyn deaconess home, outdoor relief also expanded because of the increase of Norwegian immigration, the augmented services rendered by the Sisters, and the hard times of the 1890's. Thus from 1885-91 inclusive, the number of families receiving food increased from 46 to 504; those receiving clothing, from 127 to 184; and those calls made, from 805 to 2844 (ed. Beulah Folkedah).

This shows hard times in the late 1880's. The Norwegian Church established the mentioned institutions for Norwegians in the period from 1883, which is relatively late in the mass emigration period. There was not any cooperation with the Swedish or the Danish Churches. How people managed before that is unclear. Already in 1830, the Catholic Church had an orphanage, most likely open for different nationalities. Even if there are mentioned institutions for Slovenes only, the Roman Catholic Church had an organisation ready for people, who needed it long before the Slovene mass emigration.

### **Nationalism or Americanisation?**

Even if nationalism was a strong fundament in the Slovene Catholic Church, there were opposite voices inside the church, like the priest Savs (Drnovšek, 1994: 30), who saw the possibilities of a life in the USA under certain conditions. Jurij Trunk, also a clergyman, looked up to emigrants from other nationalities, among others the Scandinavians, who managed to accept America as their home country. In 1912, he advised people (in Klemenčič, 1993: 214) to emigrate with the family if they had to, and live together in ethnic communities, because:

Every family in free America can remain Slovene if it wants to.... Only he who does not forget his God in his new homeland, can remain true to his ancestral homeland, to his mother, and to the Catholic Church, thus preserving his most precious treasure – his faith.

Some of the questions of assimilation seem to become a generational issue. In 1927, Father Hugo Bren advised to have English sermons in the church, to keep the younger generation as church members (Friš, 1995: 403). This had also a connection

with the emigration stop in these years with few new Slovene immigrants arriving. Friš calls it “an intrusive process of americanisation” as the immigrants “became part of the American melting pot (ibid: 394). Even if there were religious conflicts of different kinds inside the congregations, this discussion was possibly not so fervent in the Scandinavian countries. Gjerde (1997: 278) refers to the scholar Rasmus B. Anderson, who argued that “Norwegians should work within public schools so their voices and influence could find a place in them”. Rönnqvist (2006: 168) cites a school-inspector in north Alberta who states (1903):

The quickest and surest method of assimilation of foreign elements is through school. Here is seen the ready adaptation of dress, manners, language and customs.

It is not clear what place the earlier mentioned English School had in the system, perhaps only a shared possibility in remote areas. The education question was important in both the Catholic and Lutheran traditions, because, as said, the school was the arena to educate the next generation and secure a continuity of values and culture. To choose between types of school, the public one and a church school on American premises, was not easy. Even with different outcome, both churches took the responsibility for the national language and culture education. It may be said that in the situation in America, with discussions inside the churches, they kept a balance between the American assimilation policy and the intention of the church to cultivate the religious and national values. There was a pressure to transform to a future in a liberal, pluralistic society. It seems as if the Norwegian Lutherans were relatively more open to this transformation, while the Slovenes experienced the process more like a forced situation. This may have a connection with the Norwegians staying in the country for a longer period.

## **THE SUPPORT OF THE RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS AND CHURCHES IN THE SETTLER'S COMMUNITIES**

### **Which were the values?**

The emigrants from both countries praised the freedom in America, being the most important value they sought, besides the more materialistic aim of better living conditions. As the Catholic Church considered the possibilities of freedom being dangerous to a religious life, they underlined the loyalty to the home country or the society being more important, like the conservative bishop Neumann in Norway. That this love of freedom had different consequences in the two church congregations is already described.

There are common traits in the two churches. The loyalty to the religion, the family, the community and the country were values especially declared in the mass emigration periods. It is not quite easy to discern between religious values and national values in the emigrant literature because the churches' support of the nationality

is so strong. Furthermore, values are often included in “culture”, a concept that may be understood as language, lifestyle, ethics and the presentation of this through art, in a way that communicated to the relevant ethnic group. Sometimes it is best to see definitions of what the opposite is like in a pamphlet of a German Catholic priest Wahlburg, who in 1880 characterised what he calls the false Americanism (presented by Gjerde, 1997: 254-5) as: “a pharisaical, hypocritical spirit that puts on the garb of virtue when all is hollowness and rottenness within. This “spirit” promoted “infidelity and materialism”, it was “mammon worship”, it “adores the golden calf...” Later, “Americanism” was described in words like “fanatism”, intolerance”, “free-lovism”, “prohibition”, “infidelity”. We also know that a conservative Lutheran priest “banned secular tendencies, such as drinking, card playing, dancing and theatre...” (Norman and Runblom, 1987: 198).

Without ending in a philosophic discussion, we can conclude that rural values were part of the national values and were somehow included in religious values. So when immigrants generally were considered “honest”, “polite” and “canny” (Gjerde, 1988: 236); or the words about the Slovenian include (Drnovšek 1994: 30): “diligence, assiduity, modesty, thriftiness and persistence”, one knows which personal qualities that had to be defended and so they were by the church.

The practical consequences of different values had both similar and different traits. The Norwegian State Church was more democratic and accepting to different opinions both regarding emigrant movement and, for example, use of rituals for worshipping. The Roman or Slovene Catholic Church had autocratic directives for the priests about how to meet the “will- become” emigrants. One may say, that the intention of all the church and congregation activities, in both the Slovenian and Norwegian settlements, was to realise the values of their religious belief. There is a missionary decree in the religion, therefore it was important to establish a place, a church, where to worship and preach, and so they did. Besides the religious belief, the most central value in the churches, however, was the loyalty to the family, because the ideal of the society was the family loyalty, structure and function. “The family was the crucial, “natural” institution upon which society was founded”, the Roman Catholic Church maintained (Gjerde, 1998: 266). This caused discussion of two reasons inside the church societies. The one was how authoritarian structure the family should have. The second was to which degree the state should dictate the family. The parental authority was quite clear in the Catholic Church. A decree from the Pope in 1891 (referred by Gjerde, 1998: 267) said that:

Because the family preceded the state, the idea that “civil government should, at its own discretion, penetrate and pervade the family” was a great and pernicious mistake.” Likewise “parental authority,” the Pope contended, “can neither be abolished by the State, nor absorbed; for it has the same source as human life itself.” In the end “the child belongs to the father” and is, as it were, the continuation of the father’s personality.

The Protestant and the Catholic Church agreed in their view on the importance of the family in opposition to the loose American family. The family was regarded as the

“core” of the society. Gjerde (1997: 263) maintains that European families “regretted that families in the United States were becoming increasingly porous” and consequently saw the consequence: “an increasingly weak society”. Norwegian Lutherans, he continues, respect both the reciprocal parent-child relationship and the authority of the parents. He presents a reservation to the Catholic Church, saying that the Scandinavian Lutherans were less concerned about governmental intrusions. Therefore, even if the Scandinavian Lutherans also agreed in patriarchal practices like the Catholics, they were in reality not that strict. They included views on changing family roles and properties (*ibid.*: 273). We can discern a more liberal or democratic attitude by this, though there were rather conservative voices also in the Lutheran group. Ostermann (1997: 269) maintains, that the discussions about whether to adopt the manners, rules, and morals of the host society or not, took place in the home and the neighbourhood, as well as in churches and associations. Therefore, the churches’ commitment was shared by the people. Regardless of nuances, the aims especially declared in the mass emigration periods, nevertheless were to develop and secure rural values, the religious belief and ethics, the loyalty to the family structure and authority and loyalty to the community and the home country. These values were often presented as opposing American values, while, in addition, the emigrants at the same time fought for the US freedom aspect.

### **Through which activities were the values operationalised?**

The church sermons and ceremonies are so well-known that it seems unnecessary to mention them. So important were the priests for the Norwegian settlers, that when there was a shortage of them, they had to be responsible for different churches. This was common in rural areas, with spread settlements. They could not afford a priest of their own. For the Slovenes there was also a shortage of priests. Friš (1995: 404) maintains, partly because “within the framework of the Catholic church, the United States had until 1908 a status of missionary province.” Both groups wanted to listen to the Gospel in their mother tongue. Whether a shortage or not, it was important for the emigrants, and why? I think it is right to present a question of what in the message could be so important, even if there most likely is more than one answer. There were many situations the emigrants had to cope with, which we today would call stress factors. A troublesome voyage to a new country with a new language, unknown habits, strange food, foreign people, the entire settling process was demanding. There was a real fear for life sometimes, women felt loneliness with responsibility for home and children, while men were at work. There are stories about people who did not manage this.

As the church supported the rural and national values, it preached ethics that could help the immigrants to manage and enhance their self-confidence. As said before, the more specific religious message is built on the central common Creed for the two churches, the belief in God, the father, Jesus Christ, the Salvatore, and the Holy Spirit, the hope for eternal life. Without going into the more dogmatic questions, I can imagine people also needed comfort and security through the message of a God, who cares for



his “children”, a Christ who tells “I forgive you what wrongs you possibly have done, I take your burdens and accept the person you are.” Furthermore, a weary, aging and not rather successful immigrant, could get a hope for a better world in another place. That the religious message gives security for the believers seems reasonable. The other part of the religion, the symbolic rituals like baptism, confirmation, wedding ceremonies and burials were well-known from the home country. It is not documented that all people followed these, but it is true that most of them did. Rituals most likely belonged to their cultural heritage, well known from the home country. I think having the possibility to read letters, one would know more about what the participation in sermons meant.

Both the Protestant Church and the Catholic Church denominations developed different charity organisations. For the Slovenians the organisations were there as they arrived, while the Norwegians had developed the different charity organisations during the years in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The “duty” to help is part of the religious content of both churches. The kind of charity organisations mentioned may tell about the different needs in the groups. The Norwegians came to the point when they had to take care of the old people and widows. Some of the organisations mentioned were there when the Slovenes came. There were alcohol problems in both groups of immigrants. One read about Catholic orphanage, assistance to workers and single women. It is interesting that the St. Mary’s society for single women had rather strict rules. The women had to attend meetings, and if they did not show up three times without excuse they were expelled. This, I think, raises a question impossible to go into in this connection, but nevertheless: on which conditions were and are the charity offers given? The most important is perhaps that both Churches had a helping hand to offer.

Behind the charity one could perhaps also discern missionary intentions. The Roman Catholic Church was already there when the bulk of the emigrants arrived. They provided help as the emigrants had to find work and were supporting when organising ethnic communities or parishes for Slovenian emigrants. However, they represented the “know-how”, but also an autocratic power, which decided how the parish members had to be economically responsible for the development of the parish and other activities. This was effectuated through a parish church committee. The ownership of church and congregation properties belonged to the bishop, as said earlier. It led to a “double-bind” situation, which caused some opposition. The Norwegians did not get the same charity. They were in opposition to some of the rituals and the practice of the State Church, but were still members. All of them were not eager church-goers, but they stuck together, cooperated and took the responsibility for establishing a society with the church and the school in the centre. In this democratic structure they also were their own and mutual “missionaries”.

The churches were also an arena for social and cultural expressions. To contribute to preserving the national and ethnic culture was one of the strong “imperatives” in the church message and activities. As to the culture expressions, the churches and denominations were open to the entire families in religious, social and cultural life.

For Norwegians it is said that they had “a myriad of social and purposive clubs and organisations” (Ostergren, 1988: 211). The church, he continues, is open for both members and non-members. It served as a centre for a dispersed and lonely population. Friš (1995: 402) says the Slovene parishioners gathered for religious service, but also for other occasions, social events, picnics, dances, pageants raffles, excursions to the “old country” etc. There they used their own language. The conclusion seems to be clear: “Ethnic parishes played an extremely important role in the life of first generation immigrants in preserving their ethnic identity” (Ibid: 403). This shows that the churches were also involved in social and cultural arrangements for everyone, in addition to the schools’ cultural education. The religion was the first “glue” in both settlers’ communities, one may say.

The education question was important in both the Catholic and Lutheran traditions because the school was the arena to educate the next generation and thereby secure a continuity of values. I have presented protests and discussions when it was made more difficult to continue with ethnic schools, which had been the responsibility of the church. Even if the Norwegian and Slovene Churches chose two different solutions, their worries were the same, to give education in the homeland’s religion, language, literature, culture and history as a supplement to the American curriculum. This responsibility included the entire population. Klemenčič says in the article:

Parish priests in Slovene ethnic parishes were usually Slovenes, as were the teachers in the schools, born in Slovenia or of Slovene descent. Therefore the organising of ethnic parishes had a positive influence for awareness of their Slovene roots among Slovene immigrants and their descendants.”

Norman and Rundblom (1987: 275) give a similar “price” to the school education by saying:

Like some other groups, Nordic immigrants have had their strongest and most long-lived cultural safeguards in their schools, academies and colleges, and for some of them the bonds with the old countries are still strong in the 1980’s.

As to further education, the Norwegian Church educated their priests, established secondary and upper secondary schools and academies, as mentioned. I am not quite sure if the Slovenian branch of the Catholic Church had offers of that kind, but the local parishes had to contribute economically to the Roman Catholic University. In addition to the activities inside the churches and the education in schools, the more public education in newspapers and different literary presentations contributed to enhance the national and cultural values. The Catholic and Protestant Churches’ newspaper activities, either through their own organs or advertisements, or articles in more liberal newspapers, became a link between the homeland and the “new world”. Friš (1995: 399) tells about a somewhat ambivalent Catholic newspaper in Slovenia, “Slovenski gospodar”, where the news from America often consisted of reports from death accidents, criminal activities, unemployment, high prices or natural disasters, but also about successful Americans, income and successes of the Catholic Church in America. This ambivalence seems to be more characteristic for

the Catholic press in the home country, than in the USA. St. Raphael organisation spread information about their possibility to offer assistance as advertisement in the other newspaper. The Norwegian Protestant press had the same function of giving information in newspapers about activities from both countries. Besides that, they took the responsibility for a broader aim. They published pamphlets, Hymn books etc. The newspapers, or other printed products, used the mother tongue and were important for the feeling of ethnic identity of the readers, and like other parts of the churches' activities kept alive the connection to the mother country, whether it could be somewhat biased or not.

No doubt, the activities of the churches were aimed at supporting the religious, cultural and national values. Norwegian settlers developed the necessary organisations themselves, while the Slovenians followed up and further developed a system in accordance with the values.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In a short presentation like this fine distinctions will certainly disappear and they would have to be further discussed. The start, the time span between the mass migration from the two countries and the society were different, and so was the reception. The situation of the poor and rural societies the emigrants left, had "fostered" similar values of modesty, prudence and honesty, which was accepted and supported both by the churches and the surroundings.

To stay in the long-distance perspective with the really great contours, there seems to be more similarities than differences between the Slovene Catholic Church's contribution to the Slovene emigrants and the Protestant Church's support to the somewhat earlier Norwegian settlers in the USA. The aims of securing loyalty to the religion, the family and the country were similar. The emigrants should stay with their family and not forget the language and the culture they had left. The churches contributed to the aims by assisting the emigrants in the period of establishing a community with churches and schools, opening the churches to social activities in addition to religious. The church organisations cared for people in need. The fundament in the Creed was the same, though with differences in nuances "underneath". Then the great difference is the organisation of the churches. The Roman Catholic Church was, as repeated, hierarchical with the Pope on the top. The Catholic Church is a worldwide organisation where all the member churches have the same possibilities and the same obligations. The congregations had to give economic support to the Vatican and the Pope. They do not own what they could call their "property", even congregation buildings they have managed to build themselves. The Norwegian emigrants also had to pay to develop their society, but of free will.

The great question is which effect the policy of the authoritarian Catholic Church had, compared with the "absent" Norwegian Protestant State Church with no support,

but neither with condemnation for the emigrants. This is impossible to see, apart from the results of the economic contributions. The democratic way of living gives responsibility for own dispositions, but is not without challenges, as the doctrinal disputes show. If we should use a modern theory on a more general level, Kjeldstadli (2006: 11) maintains that even discussions and disagreement may unite people, because of the process of listening to each other's arguments. Ostergren maintained that the self-governing of the Church bound people together. An autocratic regime may have led to either suppression or opposition. The policy of the Catholic Church was both to support and to decide on behalf of its members, which is characteristic for this kind of organisation that had ambivalent attitude towards the emigration process. There was some opposition, but how strong it was is difficult to say.

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## POVZETEK

### POMEN CERKVE IN VERSKIH KONGREGACIJ ZA SLOVENSKE IN NORVEŠKE EMIGRANTE V ZDRUŽENIH DRŽAVAH AMERIKE. PRIMERJALNI VIDIK

Martha Lea

»Bilo je nekoč ...«, se začne večina pravljič. Pravljičice o ameriški svobodi in blaginji so v 19. stoletju vzpodbudile številne Evropejce, da so se z velikimi pričakovanji podali na dolgo pot. Večinoma so le slutili, kaj jih čaka v »obljubljeni« deželi. Omenjeno drži tudi v primeru emigrantov, ki so se v ZDA selili iz dveh majhnih dežel, Norveške in Slovenije. S seboj so poleg upanja prinesli tudi voljo do dela in željo po uspehu. V obeh deželah sta imeli v tem času veliko vlogo vera in cerkev, četudi niso bili vsi prebivalci verni. Slovenci so pripadali rimokatoliški cerkvi pod vodstvom papeža, Norvežani pa so bili Luteranci. Namen članka je primerjati migracijske procese obeh skupin in način ustanavljanja skupnosti, ki so delovale kot verske kongregacije.

Katoliška cerkev je svarila Slovence pred izgubo vere, če bodo odhajali v »brezbožno« Ameriko. Čeprav svaril niso upoštevali, so jih predstavniki cerkve ob prihodu v novo deželo sprejeli in jim tudi nudili pomoč. Rimokatoliška cerkev v ZDA ni bila priljubljena, ampak je zaradi svoje moči vzbujala strah. Slovenci so prišli v ZDA v devetdesetih letih osemnajstega stoletja, ko so bile možnosti za delo manjše kot v obdobju pred tem. Norvežani so prišli kakšnih štirideset let prej, in čeprav so bili kot naseljenci zaželeni, so bili pri naselitvi in iskanju rodovitne zemlje na oddaljenih območjih prepuščeni samim sebi. Pri naselitvi jih nič ni oviralo, a jim državna cerkev tudi ni nudila pomoči. V nasprotju z rimokatoliško je bila Luteranska cerkev v ZDA dobro sprejeta. Pogoji dela v kongregacijah pod katoliško cerkvijo ali pod protestantsko so bili tako različni. Temeljne vrednote pa so bile pri obeh precej podobne. Vključevale so etične poglede na dobro in harmonično družinsko življenje, zvestobo narodu in ruralne vrednote kot so poštenost, marljivost in varčnost. Emigranti obeh skupin so poleg skrbi za lastne družine in preživetje razvijali tudi lastne skupnosti, tako da so gradili cerkve in šole. Pri tem so bili Norvežani lastniki teh zgradb, Slovenci pa so jih gradili za »lastnika« – škofa. Oboji so sami plačevali učitelje in duhovnike. Izobrazba, ki sta jo nudili cerkvi, je bila pomembna za ohranjanje kulture in jezika za naslednje generacije. Migrantom so bile verske in družabne dejavnosti tudi v oporo v njihovem vsakdanjem življenju, saj so jim dajale širšo perspektivo. Delovanje obeh cerkva se je razlikovalo na področju dobrodelne dejavnosti. Rimokatoliška cerkev je imela za ljudi v stiski na voljo več institucij, medtem ko so Norvežani morali te institucije šele vzpostaviti in tudi sami plačati.

Podobnosti v delovanju obeh cerkva lahko najdemo pri podporni dejavnosti, vendar so razlike očitne, ko govorimo o pogojih za njen nastanek. Zanimiv je tudi vpliv na eni strani avtorske in na drugi strani demokratične organizacije na dolgoročni

*The importance of the church and religious congregations for Slovenian and Norwegian ...*

*uspeh in »amerikanizacijo« obeh skupin. Vse pravljice se začnejo podobno, vendar se lahko razvijejo in končajo na različne načine.*