American Catholics in the Protestant Imagination

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Two • Why the Famine Irish Became Catholic in America

1. Margaret Anne Cusack (1832–1899), the “Nun of Kenmare,” was born into a wealthy Protestant family in Dublin but converted to Catholicism. She joined the Poor Clares around 1860 and was living in a Poor Clare convent in Ireland when she wrote her Advice to Irish Girls in America, as well as a number of other popular works. Although she would win praise from Pope Leo XIII for her efforts on behalf of the Irish poor following the crop failures in 1879, her political activities would eventually cause her to leave the Catholic Church in the 1880s. For more on her life, see Glazier (1999, 198–199).

Three • Italian American Catholicism

1. The Dillingham Commission (1911, 215) reported that for the years 1898–1910 inclusive, 84 percent of all Italian immigrants to the United States were from Southern Italy, and scholars (see, for example, Tomasi 1975, 18–19) have generally taken this figure at face value. I suspect that, in fact, the percentage would be a bit lower, at least if by “Southern” is meant the region that is usually termed the Mezzogiorno. The reason for this lies with something usually overlooked in the commission’s report: Genoa and the surrounding region were taken to be a part of the South of Italy (see Dillingham 1911, 250–252). This is because—quite in line with the racialized thinking of the time—commission members saw “Southern Italian” as more of a physical type than a geographical category.

2. The 1918 estimate is based on several sources. First, the old prayer card in front of the madonna’s statue says that the Society was founded in that year. Second, in August 1988, while attending the annual festa in honor of the Madonna della Guardia (which continues to be held), I met a former leader of the Society who later showed me Society records in her possession that make reference to a twenty-fifth anniversary dinner held in 1943, suggesting a founding date of 1918. On the other hand, she also showed me a handwritten list of “original members still living” that had been drawn up in 1965 and which gave the date each person had first joined the Society. This list indicated that some people had joined the Society in 1916 and 1917.

3. The new immigration laws also had an effect on scholarship. For example, the
authors of the Report of the Committee on Linguistic and National Stocks in the Population of the United States made it clear that it was the new “national origins plan of restricting immigration” that had led to a greater concern with determining the national origins of the white population in the United States and so to their study (American Council of Learned Societies 1931, 107).

4. Here again, as with the discussion of the Church of Santi Pietro e Paolo, the events being described cut close to home for me. My mother still remembers the day when her mother received a phone call from my grandfather saying that he had been arrested for selling wine at his restaurant. It was the arrest, not the fact that he provided wine to his customers, that was surprising. For years my grandfather had kept bottles of homemade wine on hand, generally stored behind some loose boards on the outside wall of the restaurant (which formed part of an enclosed alleyway). Although he sold this wine only to regular customers he knew well, these regular customers had always included a number of federal agents working in San Francisco. Indeed, he put their pictures up on the wall in the restaurant. My grandfather, then, didn’t hesitate at all when one of these agents asked for a glass of red wine with his meal on that particular day. Unfortunately, as the agent would later explain, my grandfather was serving wine to a friend who had fallen behind in his arrests; and so, in the contest between looking good to his superiors and honoring his friendship with my grandfather, it was the former that won out, and the agent arrested my grandfather. Although my grandmother paid a fine and my grandfather was quickly released, I’ve always believed that that arrest and my grandfather’s desire to distance himself from the shame of it explain why he made a point of associating with police officers in later life. He had his picture taken with several chiefs of police and retired chiefs of police (these too went up on the restaurant’s wall), and I can still recall days in the 1950s when the officer on the beat was always invited to share in Monday lunch (often made with leftovers but outstandingly good nevertheless), which my grandfather provided free to his friends on the day the restaurant was closed to the public.

Four • Were the Acadians/Cajuns Really Good Catholics?

1. As Griffiths (1992, 3–32) makes clear, Acadia meant different things to different groups at different times. In sixteenth-century maps, for example, Acadie was the label given to a region that today includes southeastern Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and northeastern Maine (Griffiths 2005, 467). Nevertheless, as a practical matter, the vast majority of those who first developed a distinctly “Acadian” identity lived in and around those parts of Nova Scotia and southeastern New Brunswick that border the Bay of Fundy.

2. Delaney (2005) provides a week-by-week account of the events associated with the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755 and then follows their fate through 1816.

3. Although France ceded Louisiana to Spain in 1762, the first Spanish governor, Don Antonio de Ulloa, did not arrive in the colony until 1766.

4. The term Cajun came into widespread use during the latter half of the nineteenth century, mainly among English speakers in Louisiana, as a derogatory term for lower-class Acadians. Basically, as Ancelet (1997, 34) suggests, it meant something like “poor white
French-speaking trash.” More recently, however, the term has tended to lose its derogatory connotations and has come to be applied to all French-speaking Louisianans who claim descent (or partial descent) from the Acadians who settled there in the late 1700s. This is the usage I have adopted here.

5. These comments are based on a reading of the articles published between 1995 and 2006 in *La Société historique acadienne: Les cahiers*.

6. For an overview of the “doing gender” approach, see Ginsberg and Tsing (1990), Kimmel (2000), and Marecek (1995).

**Five • Hispanic Catholicism and the Illusion of Knowledge**

1. The three other focal places identified by Weigle and White are the Shiprock and Four Corners area, Pecos Pueblo and Mission, and Carlsbad Caverns. *Hispanio* refers specifically to the Spanish-speaking inhabitants of northern New Mexico who claim descent from the early Spanish colonists.

2. These are 8 to 10 inch–tall candles enclosed in a glass casing on which the image of a saint or madonna has been imprinted. They are widely available in New Mexico; at the time, for example, I purchased one at a local Wal-Mart for ninety-nine cents.

3. Fray Alvarez’s letter to diocesan authorities in Durango is document #2 in folder #17, Miscellaneous Church Records, New Mexico Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe.


6. The sale of the *santuario* is described in Kay (1987) and Weigle (1983).

7. On the centrality and importance of the Penitente Brotherhood in Hispanic communities, see Carroll (2002) and Weigle (1976). For an autobiographical account of just how central Penitente rituals were to the lived experience of Catholicism in New Mexican communities, even as late as the 1930s, see Sandoval (1990).

8. Email communication with Thomas Tweed, June 2005.

9. Even though the proportion of Hispanics who are Catholic is decreasing, it is still the case—just as scholars like Stevens-Arroyo and Díaz-Stevens declare—that the proportion of Catholics who are Hispanics is increasing (Harris 2002). What allows this to happen, of course, is that, as the result of both natural increase and migration, the size of the Hispanic Catholic population is increasing dramatically relative to the rest of the Catholic population in the United States.

**Six • Protestantism and the Academic Study of American Religion**

1. Harris (1968) still provides the best overview of the theories of religion developed by these and other social evolutionary thinkers in the nineteenth century.

2. On the influence Hall and Starbuck had in psychology, see Wulff (1997).

3. The history and nature of the consensus model is discussed at length in Albanese (2002) and Wilson (2003), and I have relied heavily on these discussions in what follows here. This use of the term *consensus* derives from this tradition’s emphasis on a melting
pot ideology, that is, on the need for non-Protestant groups to become more like the sort of Protestantism that “made America great.”


5. Finke and Stark (1992) make clear in a footnote (p. 298) that they use the term adherence rate, rather than membership rate, in order to signal to readers that they have “standardized the membership data to eliminate different definitions of membership across religious bodies.” Basically, in the case of denominations that do not include children as members, Finke and Stark inflated membership statistics using data on the local age profile.