Reform, Renewal, and Vindication: 
Irish Immigrants and the Catholic Total Abstinence Movement in Antebellum Philadelphia

FROM THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY through the first half of the nineteenth century, America, Great Britain, and Ireland together formed one transatlantic reform realm. This unity has been well documented in the case of evangelical Protestant leaders; their regular correspondence with one another and their frequent and extensive travels to promote the cause of temperance and other aims of the larger reform agenda have been tracked and charted.1 Catholics, generally, were not to be found within this group of temperance notables, and a presumption that the moral reform movement grew out of an essentially Protestant consciousness has predisposed historians not to look for similar efforts among Catholics. In fact, Catholics of this same transatlantic world shared much of the moral outlook commonly identified as Protestant-inspired. They, too, looked to the temperance movement—to its ethic of discipline and self-control, to its techniques of self-help—as a panacea for the many ills that seemed to afflict the rapidly changing society in which they lived.

In Philadelphia, Catholic enthusiasm for temperance was demonstrated by the large numbers who came forward in the summer of 1840 to enroll in the newly established Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society. With the publication of a pastoral letter on June 25, calling for the formation of “a society similar to that, which has been established by the zeal of an humble priest in Ireland, with the pledge of total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors,” Catholics in Philadelphia inaugurated their own public moral reform crusade.2

2 Catholic Herald (hereafter, CH) 8 (June 25, 1840), 201.
Temperance sermons were preached and pledges of total abstinence administered in Philadelphia's Catholic churches. In one weekend over 1,000 parishioners came forward to declare their intention "to abstain from all intoxicating drinks, except used medicinally, and by order of a medical man; and to discountenance the cause and practice of intemperance." Others wishing to follow the example of the first pledge-takers had to wait several days until more certificates could be printed. By August more than 5,000 Philadelphia Catholics had pledged to follow the path of total abstinence. At the same time, Catholics were establishing temperance and beneficial societies in the separate parishes. Before the year was out each of Philadelphia's seven Catholic parish churches with predominantly Irish parishioners had its own temperance society.

By 1840, then, Catholics in America had launched their own moral reform campaigns and, in following the example of a Catholic-led movement in Ireland, had entered a nascent Catholic transatlantic reform realm that was separate from but analogous to that of Protestant reformers. Both the similarities and the differences are important, for the Catholic movement, while subscribing to and fostering the general goals of antebellum reform, had its own distinctive purposes and special character. To understand the Catholic movement's significance requires an appropriate context. In the case of the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society, the search for meaning extends from Philadelphia across the Atlantic—to Ireland, and even to Rome—for this particular manifestation of a popular reform impulse reflected and responded to events occurring far away at the same time that it was shaped and colored, and eventually constrained, by local conditions.

Pre-famine Ireland may seem a peculiar place to find the inspiration for an organized, Catholic-directed, moral reform effort, a type of social movement usually associated with industrialization and urbanization. The picture traditionally drawn of Catholic Ireland is overwhelmingly rural—a simple, peasant society stagnating under the

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3 Ibid. 8 (July 2, 1840), 213.
oppression of alien absentee landlords. But scholarship of the past generation has shown this to be an oversimplified and misleading portrayal. Stimulated by the demands of an expanding British colonial imperium and by British military mobilization, Ireland experienced considerable economic growth in the late eighteenth century. Towns, and especially port towns, became active commercial centers.

Simultaneously, Catholic humanitarian responses to the social changes accompanying commercialization and urbanization in Ireland began to take form. To solicit the loyalty of Irish Catholics in the war against revolutionary France, the British government moderated its laws against the support of Catholic institutions. The easing of earlier prohibitions made Catholic-sponsored social "benevolence" possible, while the growth of a prosperous, town-based mercantile sector in the Catholic population provided a source of financial backing for an active, expanding charitable mission. Often lay-initiated, sometimes nonsectarian, and frequently following Quaker models (particularly in education), many of these ventures were eventually absorbed by newly established or reconstituted Catholic religious foundations.5

With the end of the Napoleonic wars, demand for the products of Irish agriculture and small-scale industry collapsed. Suddenly, there were more weavers than the shrinking markets for Irish cloth could support, an excess of dock workers for the cargo to be handled, more clerks than there were places in solvent firms to employ them. Traditional land tenantry arrangements that had once provided a subsistence to most of the population had been changing throughout the period of economic expansion, and were no longer readily available as an alternative system of support.6 Many emigrants of the 1830s came from those occupations which were hardest hit by the decline in demand.


Economic constriction in Ireland coincided with a period of intensifying sectarian strife over the issue of Catholic emancipation in the United Kingdom. Earlier nonsectarian benevolence in Ireland was largely replaced by denominational sponsorship and organization of moral reform that was, increasingly, both separate and competitive. Protestant alarmists who opposed the enfranchisement of Catholics and the toleration of the Catholic church had as their opposite numbers Catholic clergymen of a new type—young men schooled in post-revolutionary, post-Napoleonic Rome and there imbued with the spirit of anti-revolutionary Catholic revival. Returning to Ireland, often to the port towns which were the first proving grounds for many of the priests and nuns who later emigrated to America, they brought with them their Rome-inspired missionary fervor. In Dublin, Cork, and Waterford, a late eighteenth-century style humanitarian benevolence, Tridentine models of devotion and piety, and post-Napoleonic Catholic militance fused together into what would become the Catholic counterpart to the evangelical transatlantic moral reform realm and would give to the nineteenth-century Catholic urban mission in Ireland and America much of its special character.

To advance their missionary goals, Catholic militants took up the temperance cause and used it effectively. They did not, however, initiate it. The movement that came to be known as the Catholic temperance crusade was founded in 1838 in the port of Cork by a Capuchin friar, Theobald Mathew. The crusade rapidly attracted an astonishing following throughout the country, achieved international visibility, and demonstrated that, given an appropriate context, Catholics, too, were ready to be mobilized for the cause. Theobald Mathew, the "Apostle of Temperance," was not one of the new breed of Rome-inspired missionary clergy; rather, in background and in outlook, he typified an earlier generation of reformers. His family was denominationally mixed Irish gentry, from Thomastown, Tipperary. He had worked among the poor of Cork from the early 1820s, had served on the nonsectarian governing board of the Cork House of Industry, and frequently had cooperated with Protestants in philanthropic undertakings. His friend and philanthropic associate, the Quaker grain

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merchant William Martin, is credited with having persuaded the priest that the benefits of total abstinence to the Irish poor would be enormous. But it is unlikely that either William Martin or Theobald Mathew foresaw what would come of the priest's decision both to join the Cork Total Abstinence Society in April 1838 and to call a meeting at the charity school he operated on Cove Street, with the purpose of persuading other Catholics to join a temperance crusade.8

Within three months of Father Mathew's decision, 25,000 were enrolled in his temperance society; in five months the numbers had reached 131,000, and by January 1839, the society counted 200,000 members. They came to Cork from near and far to take the pledge personally from Father Mathew. In the following year he began to travel throughout the country, addressing great open-air meetings, and people continued to journey long distances, often on foot, to enroll under Father Mathew's banner.9 Very early on he acquired a reputation as a healer. Criticized for exciting false hopes, Father Mathew replied that people came to him with heightened expectations because of exaggerated accounts by former drunkards who found that their new temperate habits had renewed their health and repaired their constitutions. Though he could not restore health to the sick, he would not refuse to ask God to bless them.10

The fervor of the response to Father Mathew's campaign was unprecedented. The experience of pledge-taking was described much like that of conversion: from it flowed renewal, restoration, rehabilitation. Unexpectedly, it would seem, by separating the temperance appeal from its association with Protestant proselytizing, Theobald Mathew had been able to tap that same emotional source that nourished the recurrent religious revivals of this period. Revivalism had not yet found a regular place in Catholic devotional practice, but

8 John Francis Maguire, *Father Mathew* (London, 1863), 43, 113. Maguire, a Member of Parliament from Cork, had known Father Mathew since childhood and was a lifelong associate of his (p. vi). Like Theobald Mathew, Maguire came from a prosperous and denominationally mixed family; his aunt, Elizabeth Jackson, a convert to Catholicism, was the first novice at Nano Nagle's north Presentation Convent in Cork. See Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 156.


10 Maguire, *Father Mathew*, 525, 140-41.
within the next decade a new type of Catholic preacher would be seen in Ireland, England, and America, effectively employing the techniques of revivalism. The Catholic temperance campaign pointed the way and foreshadowed the character of this new religiosity.\textsuperscript{11}

The theme of restoration and renewal, for the individual and for the nation, runs throughout the accounts of Father Mathew's movement. A letter from a Dublin clergyman, printed in Philadelphia's \textit{Catholic Herald}, proclaimed a "miraculous moral revolution":

These men are delivered even from the temptation to drink. . . . Their persons, houses, families, business, but, above all, their minds are so altered that they declare they feel like new men. . . . The borough of Dungarven has not a single house for the sale of spiritous liquors. . . . Of 4,000 coal porters in Dublin, TWO only have not taken the pledge.\textsuperscript{12}

The once-despised Irishman had been redeemed. Father Mathew reminded a crowd in Ulster of the "bad old days" when,

if a native of this country was introduced into a farce on the stage it was in the character of a drunken Irishman. . . . But in the future the name of an Irishman and a sober man will be synonymous . . . [and] if a robbery is committed, the police, when they come to the house of a teetotaler, will pass him by and say, I wish you a very good morning, Sir.\textsuperscript{13}

The effects of this extraordinary mission went beyond the millions of pledges to abstain from intoxicating drink. Even more impressive to contemporaries was the downward turn in crime statistics. News of these transformations spread widely; and on July 10, 1840, in London the House of Lords took approving notice of Father Mathew's temperance movement.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{12} \textit{CH} 8 (July 2, 1840), 213.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 9 (Jan. 21, 1841), 23.

\textsuperscript{14} Maguire, \textit{Father Mathew}, 127, 128, 152.
The American branch of the "temperance international" was kept informed of Father Mathew's accomplishments by its Irish colleagues. In April 1841, Richard Allen, corresponding secretary of the Irish Temperance Union, wrote to John Marsh, corresponding secretary of the American Temperance Union, that

The great mass of the people in Leinster, Munster, and Connaught are teetotalers; our jails are comparatively empty; a drunken man is a rarity. Ireland needs but few soldiers to keep her order.15

The movement was especially praised for its success in establishing public order. As it took shape in the towns, it sponsored self-help programs such as benefit societies as well as alternatives to older patterns of leisure—the temperance rooms, temperance bands, and workingmen's reading rooms that were also typical of the early phase of the temperance campaign in Great Britain and America.16

The Executive Committee of the American Temperance Union, meeting in July 1840, hailed the achievements in Ireland. President Heman Humphrey of Amherst College called the Irish movement one of those great national movements, which astonish mankind, and which cannot be accounted for upon any of the common principles of politics or morals. . . . With all her degradation, [Ireland] has done more for total abstinence in six months, than we have done for years.17

Some remained skeptical of the Irish movement. John Marsh noted that "not a few of our good people viewed it all as a mere Roman affair, designed to increase the power of the priests by the pledge, and their wealth by the sale of medals." But many of the foremost Protestant leaders of the movement in America and in England

15 John Marsh, Temperance Recollections (New York, 1866), 73, 74.
16 For a persuasive argument that Father Mathew's temperance crusade was strongly town-oriented and attuned to "modernizing" social change, see H.F. Kearney, "Father Mathew: Apostle of Modernisation," in A. Cosgrove and D. McCartney, eds., Studies in Irish History (Dublin, 1979), 170-71. Not everyone thought that temperance would insure public order. Although Father Mathew himself was politically conservative, some British administrators worried, apparently not without cause, that ribbonmen were joining the movement in large numbers. And repealers cited sobriety as a weapon in the struggle against the British government. See Malcolm, "Temperance and Irish Nationalism," 76, 77.
17 CH 8 (July 16, 1840), 231.
acknowledged Father Mathew’s preeminence and established cordial relations with him.\textsuperscript{18}

The success of Father Mathew’s campaign, the variety of causes it seemed to embrace, and the general acclaim that greeted it inspired in America an associated, though not identical movement. The promise of sudden transformation, the combination of “revivalist” and “modernizing” features, were typical of the temperance movement in general and major sources of its appeal. But for the Catholic Irish, at home and abroad, temperance held one further promise: national redemption and vindication.

By 1840 the Catholics of Philadelphia were predominantly Irish, most of them immigrants or the children of immigrants. The Irish and Catholic presence in Philadelphia predated the American Revolution, but the decade of the 1830s brought noticeable changes to the character of the Philadelphia Irish and Catholic community. In particular, toward the end of the decade, the pace of emigration from Ireland to America quickened considerably. Arriving in America at a time of economic hardship, the new immigrants were more conspicuous than they might have been at a time of labor scarcity.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Marsh, \textit{Temperance Recollections}, 75; Harrison, \textit{Drink and Victorians}, 165.

\textsuperscript{19} Economic stagnation and business failures in the towns and evictions of “surplus” tenantry from the land combined with lower transatlantic fares and the establishment of a prepaid ticket scheme to encourage emigration of artisans and other townsmen as well as farmers’ younger sons. It was at this time that Cork replaced Belfast as the major emigrant port; Catholics from provinces other than Ulster now accounted for the majority of emigrants. While emigration was really popular only in Ulster and Leinster and in some highly commercialized districts of Munster and East Connaught (the great emigration of the Gaelic-speaking peasantry occurring much later in the century), the increase in emigration was impressive. In 1827 over 20,000 people left Ireland; in 1837, 48,000 crossed the Atlantic. And while 1838 saw a sharp drop in numbers owing to reports of the financial panic in America, emigration revived faster than the American economy. After 1838 and until the massive famine exodus an average of 56,700 left Ireland annually. See Miller, \textit{Emigrants and Exiles}, 197, 199, 200, 206. See also earlier studies whose findings Miller incorporates, especially W.F. Adams, \textit{Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World, from 1815 to the Famine} (New Haven, 1932); and Oliver MacDonough, “Irish Emigration to the U.S. of A. and the British Colonies during the Famine,” in R.D. Edwards and T.D. Williams, eds., \textit{The Great Famine} (Dublin, 1956). If Miller’s conclusions about the social and geographic origins of pre-famine Irish emigrants are correct, many of them would have first encountered modernity, not upon arrival in America, but on native ground.
During this same decade the character of the Catholic church in Philadelphia was also changing markedly.

The changes in the character of the community and the church were in large part coincidental, but the coincidence eventually had far-reaching consequences. After years of complex internal conflict, a new bishop, from Ireland by way of Rome, Francis Patrick Kenrick, succeeded for the first time in establishing in Philadelphia a strong episcopacy with a degree of central control previously unknown. From Ireland and from Rome Kenrick brought to Philadelphia a new clergy who shared his vision—largely formed in Rome in the 1820s—of a vigorous "mission" church. They were ready to respond in a new confrontational manner when evangelical anti-Catholic fervor intensified in America, and, employing a rhetoric already familiar from debates in Ireland, threatened to move from theology into politics.\(^20\)

Philadelphia's long tradition of toleration was shaken by the storm

\(^20\) Kenrick, a Dubliner, had been a student at the Urban College of Propaganda Fide in Rome. He requested assignment to the American mission and was appointed to the position of Professor of Theology at the new seminary at Bardstown, Kentucky, where he also served as pastor and missionary to the surrounding countryside. The Congregation of Propaganda Fide was responsible for all missionary territory, which at that time included the United States and the United Kingdom. At the Urban College Kenrick was a contemporary and close friend of Paul Cullen, later cardinal and head of the Irish hierarchy, credited by Emmet Larkin with the achievement of a "devotional revolution" in Ireland. See Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-1875," *American Historical Review* 77 (1972), 625-52. Dale Light, "The Reformation of Philadelphia Catholicism, 1830-1860," in this issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, traces the convergence in thought and action of Cullen and Kenrick, and argues that Kenrick, in Philadelphia, was able to institute the program, that both men desired, considerably earlier than Cullen, who had to wait until his return to Ireland from Rome at mid-century. Particularly notable among the clergy brought to Philadelphia by Kenrick were two fellow alumni of Propaganda Fide whom he appointed as his vicars-general: Michael O'Connor of Cork, later bishop of Pittsburgh, and Edward Barron of Waterford, later in charge of the new mission in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Kenrick also sent several promising students from Philadelphia to Propaganda Fide. See Hugh J. Nolan, *The Most Rev. Francis Patrick Kenrick*, 12-29; Peadar MacSuibhne, *Paul Cullen and His Contemporaries* (2 vols., Naas, 1962), 2:354; Joseph Kirlin, *Catholicity in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1909), 267-68; *Records of American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* (hereafter, *Records*) 9 (1898), 38-44; and *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (17 vols., New York, 1967), 2:124-25.

of sectarian controversy that broke out there, as elsewhere, in the 1830s. A sermon delivered by Father John Power, vicar-general of New York, at the dedication ceremonies for the new Church of St. John the Evangelist in 1832, marked a dramatic turning point for Philadelphia's Catholics. In keeping with a long-standing local custom, several distinguished Protestants had been invited as guests. In their presence, and, by one account, to the surprise of all, Power preached a bitter polemic against the anti-Catholic sermons being delivered with increasing frequency from Protestant pulpits and published in the sectarian press.\(^{21}\)

Regular formal controversy between Catholics and anti-Catholic Protestant spokesmen began in Philadelphia with the incident at the Church of St. John the Evangelist. John Hughes, the pastor at St. John's, accepted the challenge to debate soon offered by the Reverend John Breckinridge, a Presbyterian writing in the *Christian Advocate*. The *Catholic Herald* began publication in January 1833, as a weekly newspaper, in order to print the Hughes side of what became a famous controversy. Nicholas O'Donnell, an Augustinian, was its first editor. Reviewing its first year of publication, the editor drew attention to the

> advantages to be derived from having a periodical publication . . . to expose the misrepresentations of our opponents. . . . It is by means of the press [that] they have hitherto succeeded in creating and perpetuating prejudices.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) [Church of St. John the Evangelist], *A Century and a Quarter, 1830-1955* (Philadelphia, 1955), 20.

\(^{22}\) *CH* 2 (Dec. 19, 1833), 202. John Hughes, born in County Tyrone in the north of Ireland, emigrated with his family to Pennsylvania at the age of twenty. Educated for the priesthood at Mt. St. Mary's, Emmitsburg, Maryland, he was ordained in Philadelphia in 1826 and appointed to assist Kenrick's predecessor, Bishop Henry Conwell. Hughes's active style of ministry—his extension of religious instruction to adults and to potential converts, his establishment of a Catholic tract society—as well as his consistent and vigorous support of episcopal authority over the counter claims of some of the clergy and laity helped to establish a foundation for Kenrick's reorganization of Catholic life in Philadelphia. See John Hughes to Rev. S. Brute, May 7, 1827, published in *Records* 28 (1917), 254; and John R.G. Hassard, *Life of the Most Rev. John Hughes, D.D.* (New York, 1866), 10, 19-25, 77, 83.

Nicholas O'Donnell had served at St. Augustine's since his arrival in Philadelphia in 1828. See *Records* 13 (1902), 168. The Augustinians' firm support of the bishop during the
From the start, however, the Catholic Herald contained more than theological controversy and sermons. Although it refrained from discussing American politics as a matter of policy, the paper printed at length political news about Ireland, thereby declaring, in effect, that such matters were the proper concern of Catholics in America. Speeches of "the Liberator," Daniel O'Connell, refusal by Catholics to pay tithes for the support of the established (Protestant) church in Ireland, tenants’ resistance to evictions by landlords, legislation in Parliament on Irish questions, and protest meetings of British radicals which touched upon Irish issues—all were recurrent features in the Catholic Herald, as were the condition of the Irish poor in English cities and the growth of the Catholic church in England. To a lesser extent other European news bearing upon Catholic interests was reprinted from overseas papers which arrived regularly in Philadelphia by packet. Catholic church news and reports of anti-Catholic agitation elsewhere in America regularly appeared in the paper as well. Philadelphia items were generally about church-connected activities, including announcements and reports of the meetings of charitable societies and accounts of the work of these organizations. Notices placed by recent immigrants seeking to locate kinsmen who had emigrated earlier became a common feature of the paper. And in 1835 the paper printed its first advertisement for a shipping line prepared to remit to Ireland certificates of passage to America, easing the route for emigrants fortunate enough to have connections already established.  

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23 Accounts of the burning of the Ursuline convent and school in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in August 1834, and of the trial and acquittal of the rioters were carried in the CH, usually reprinted from Boston secular newspapers, with editorial commentary. In the spring and summer of 1835, the CH printed news of the desecration of a Catholic burial ground in Lowell, Massachusetts (CH 3 [May 21, 1835], 83); the accusation in a Pittsburgh Presbyterian paper that Irish and German Catholics comprised the majority of the inmates of prisons, penitentiaries, and workhouses (CH 3 [July 3, 1835], 108); and a complaint by a Pittsburgh Catholic that "our houses are entered without ceremony by Sunday school teachers, to drag our children to their Presbyterian institutions" (CH 3 [July 16, 1835], 115), with the commentary that "from reading some American papers one might think they..."
The complexity of the theological discussions carried in the *Catholic Herald*—the paper's most prominent feature—suggests that the *Catholic Herald* was written primarily for the clergy and for a relatively small portion of the laity. Its readership was probably similar in extent and composition to that of many Protestant denominational papers, but it was more than a typical denominational publication. By regularly supplying news of Ireland—in effect identifying the British administration and the Protestant ascendancy as the sources of political and economic injustice as well as religious oppression—it conveyed the message that freedom for the Catholic church and justice for the Catholic people of Ireland were causes that were bound together. Moreover, these were, or ought to be, concerns not only in Ireland or for recent immigrants, but equally for those well established in America. Even in the land of liberty, religious controversy, increasingly linked to a more general anti-immigrant stance, was finding its way into political rhetoric. An outbreak of anti-Catholic riots threatened the comfort and composure as well as the status and reputation of Catholics settled in America. While anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Irish attitudes were not necessarily synonymous, they tended to converge. Nor did Catholic spokesmen attempt to separate the strands; for their own reasons they accepted, even encouraged the identification of Catholic, Irish, and immigrant. And, with the example of Ireland informing their understanding and forming their vision, they looked to a resurgent Catholic church and a rehabiliated Irish character to triumph together.

The form assumed by the Philadelphia Catholic temperance campaign that opened in the summer of 1840 was largely directed toward this end. The decision to mount a public campaign marked a sharp change in stance from the previous position of the Catholic church in Philadelphia. When, early in 1838, an article had appeared in Philadelphia’s *Public Ledger* calling for “the Irish clergy in America to proclaim a crusade against this physical and moral pestilence” of intemperance, the *Catholic Herald* had revealed that the church had already begun to address the problem of intemperance, intending to

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represent the effusions of some tythe-fed advocate of Orange ascendancy in Ireland” (*CH* 3 [July 23, 1835], 118). The first advertisement in the *CH* for prepaid fares appeared in *CH* 3 (Oct. 1, 1835), 159.
work quietly within the community. Catholic temperance did not court publicity, the editor had explained, but he made known that an Irish temperance society under the direction of a clergyman already existed in the city. This was the first Catholic temperance group on record in Philadelphia, although there may have been other groups of Catholics associated for the same purpose who did not "court publicity." The Catholic church in Philadelphia had initially proposed to deal with intemperance by working quietly within the community for the moral reformation of individuals, but the church reversed direction in the summer of 1840. Publicity, formerly avoided, now seemed desirable. The reason for this change in attitude and behavior was the fact that in Ireland the campaign of Theobald Mathew had seized the initiative from those whose public discussion of Irish intemperance had frequently been joined to a more general criticism of the Irish character and of the Catholic religion. Suddenly, it seemed, public attention was captured by the vision of formerly "intemperate Irishmen" now transformed into heroes of temperance and exemplars to others.

In May 1840 the bishops of the Roman Catholic church in the United States, assembled in the Fourth Provincial Council in Baltimore, endorsed temperance activities and recommended that temperance societies be established in all parishes. But the Irish-

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24 CH 6 (Jan. 18, 1838), 21, for a reprint of the Public Ledger (hereafter, PL) article and for the commentary upon it. This was not the first Catholic-led temperance association in the country; in 1828 a Catholic priest served as director of a temperance society in Rochester, New York, an area associated with canal construction employing many Irish laborers. This temperance society is mentioned in the study of the post-Civil War Catholic temperance movement by Sister Joan Bland, *Hibernian Crusade: The Story of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America* (Washington, 1951), 10.

25 The endorsement and recommendation is contained in the fifth decree of the Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore. See Peter Guilday, *A History of the Councils of Baltimore, 1791-1884* (New York, 1932), 125. The pastoral letter of Archbishop Samuel Eccleston, published following the council, stated the council's position on temperance:

we neither feel ourselves warranted to require, nor called upon to recommend to all our flock, a total abstinence from a beverage which the sacred scriptures do not prohibit and of which the most holy persons have occasionally partaken. We, however, do commend the resolutions of those persons, who, to guard the more effectively against temptation, and to endeavor by their example and influence to achieve the eradication of vice, and having no need of their use, abstain altogether from ardent spirits.

At the same time the letter warned that no lasting amendment could be achieved except
American clergy had been well aware of Father Mathew's campaign before the provincial council published its decree. Many had recently come to America from parts of Ireland much affected by the movement. Regular correspondence with family and clerical colleagues in Ireland kept those who had come earlier informed of Irish happenings; still others travelled abroad and were able to report on events at first hand. While the Fourth Provincial Council was in session, John Hughes, formerly pastor of St. John's in Philadelphia and then bishop of New York, was on a visit to Ireland. There, on several occasions, he accompanied Father Mathew to temperance meetings and afterwards wrote enthusiastic reports to Catholic clergymen and newspapers in America about the changes in Ireland. Inspired by the prospect of a wholesale revision of opinion concerning Ireland, Hughes wrote in a letter from Dublin to his former congregation of St. John's, that

Ireland has now a proud distinction before her, if after having triumphed by her patient fidelity over the persecution of the British Empire, for 300 years;—after having proved herself the most faithful nation on earth, she should now prove that her people are also the most moral people.  

It should be noted that the decree of the 1840 Baltimore council did not call for total abstinence or refer explicitly to Father Mathew and the Irish movement. This was no mere oversight; the hierarchy was ambivalent in its attitude toward the Irish priest and his temperance crusade. His goal of a temperate Ireland was not disputed, but the charismatic quality and virtually ecumenical character of the man and his movement were held suspect by a hierarchy ever more concerned to strengthen its own position, to sharpen denominational distinctions, and to secure Catholics firmly in their faith. Yet, to the extent that the souls seen as ripe for harvesting by Catholic missioners were embodied in Irish immigrants, endorsement and emulation of the popular Irish movement held great promise as a missionary technique. This point was more likely to be appreciated by the Irish through grace, and to this end pious confraternities should be formed to encourage partaking of the sacraments to enrich and strengthen every good work. See CH 8 (June 18, 1840), 198.

26 Ibid. 8 (June 25, 1840), 205 and (July 9, 1840), 221.
members of the hierarchy than by the French members or by Archbishop Samuel Eccleston. Although Kenrick, with his markedly Roman outlook, was, as a rule, less concerned with specifically Irish issues than were some of the other Irish members of the American hierarchy, in this case he could see that his missionary goals would benefit from association with the Irish movement and the publicity that attended it. As for the nonsectarian leanings of Father Mathew, this factor need not be confronted directly. The fact that he was an Irish Catholic priest could be stressed and complicating details ignored, for in America the man, Theobald Mathew, was not himself a presence. So Kenrick drew upon the reputation and inspiration of Father Mathew in his pastoral letter of June 25, 1840, to the Catholics of the Philadelphia diocese, going beyond the language of the Baltimore council’s decree to cite the Irish movement explicitly by calling for the formation of “a society similar to that, which has been established by the zeal of an humble priest in Ireland, with the pledge of total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors.”

Throughout the first year of the movement, temperance news was prominently featured every week in the Catholic Herald. A letter from “a parishioner” at St. Francis told of a society formed some months previously in the parish for the purpose of overcoming drunkenness, though this purpose was not stated in its rules. He wished it to be known that the society had been successful on its own account, but its members had decided to take the abstinence pledge anyway, whereupon 109 parishioners took the “Father Mathew Pledge” and joined their local effort to the transatlantic crusade.

Regularly appearing in the paper were local announcements of temperance and beneficial society meetings, reports of the continued activities of Father Mathew, news of the Catholic temperance campaign elsewhere in the United States, and “hints” to emigrants, stressing the importance of temperance in America. Sobriety was essential:

[In Ireland] they might have pleaded that they sought to drown the

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27 Ibid. 8 (June 25, 1840), 201.
28 Ibid. 8 (Sept. 10, 1840), 292. At St. Patrick’s the original group that formed its temperance and beneficial society consisted of 54 men and 61 women. See A Century of Faith, 132.
remembrance of hopeless and irremediable wretchedness, for in Ireland a poor man cannot rise. But [in America] you have no such plea; in the United States you can rise. The fatal cup is almost the sole obstacle.  

In Philadelphia, Catholics eagerly embracing temperance as a cure for social ills were quick to report notable success. In its “Ninth Annual Report” published in October 1840, the Ladies’ Roman Catholic Benevolent Society praised the good that temperance societies had already achieved, though the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society had been in existence for only three months.  

Youth associations were an early feature of the movement. For the youthful members of the abstinence society, taking the pledge was spoken of as a “preventive,” not as a cure. Women, too, seem to have been regular participants from the beginning. While detailed information on the membership of the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society is lacking, it is known that the temperance and beneficial society at St. Patrick’s, near the Schuylkill docks, had several more women than men in its original membership. St. Augustine’s society was composed of 168 women and 146 men in 1840. And on the first occasion of mass pledge-taking by the Catholics of Philadelphia, several groups “with women predominating” had come forward immediately after the initial groups of “prominent” citizens.  

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29 CH 8 (Nov. 5, 1840), 355-56. The article is said to have been written by “an Irish Laborer,” but the style is that of a Catholic Herald editorial.  

30 Ibid. 8 (Oct. 8, 1840), 324. Expenditures were up, however. In 1833, during the first year of its existence, the Ladies Roman Catholic Benevolent Society had spent $700; in 1840 the society disbursed $1,792 for poor relief. Organized in 1832 along the lines of the Union Benevolent Society which had been formed two years earlier, the Catholic society, like its Protestant and nonsectarian counterparts, depended upon the work of the laity. Its “visitors” investigated the needs of the poor in their assigned districts and recommended particular forms of relief: money, bread, clothing, coal, medical attention, or schooling, often at one of the schoolrooms attached to a Catholic orphanage. They also arranged for additional assistance from other Philadelphia charities. The society’s first “Annual Report” is printed in ibid. 1 (Nov. 14, 1833); each successive report appears in an autumn issue of the newspaper. Philadelphia’s first Catholic orphanage was opened to care for children of Catholics who had died during the yellow fever epidemic of 1798. Two more orphanages were added in the early nineteenth century. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884 (Philadelphia, 1884), 1376; and CH 2 (Jan. 23, 1834), 15.  

31 CH 8 (July 2, 1840), 213; and Constitution of the St. Augustine’s Catholic Temperance Beneficial Society 1840 (Philadelphia, 1840), copy in Augustinian Provincial Archives (Villanova University), and reprinted in Kathleen Gavigan, “The Rise and Fall of Parish
That women and children enrolled from the start suggests that family welfare and a particular understanding of familial responsibility were important concerns of the temperance movement. Taking the pledge and abiding by the promise was an act and an obligation of the individual, but joining a branch of the society was done for the sake of the family as much as for the individual—for specific, practical benefits and for the example to be set for the young. At the same time, the bonds between family and church would be strengthened, for it was the church that pointed the way and created the means for inclination to be translated into action.

The movement sought to bind together clergy and laity, the prosperous and the poor, women and men, the young and the mature. It was a movement for all, yet, at the same time, it remained hierarchical in structure and authority. At the top were the clergy; then came locally well-established laymen: lawyers, real estate agents, minor political figures. All signed the pledge, for signing or joining a branch of the temperance society did not imply that one was a drunkard; rather, it demonstrated approval of the cause and the belief that those less fortunate who needed the moral and practical assistance of the temperance and beneficial societies would be moved by the example of their betters, as children were to be influenced by the example of their parents.

Irish Catholics in Philadelphia soon succeeded in creating their own temperance institutions, temperance celebrations, and temperance icons. Following the lead of other temperance campaigns both in America and abroad, the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society sought to provide an alternative to the sociability of the tavern by opening a coffee house. A literary institute on temperance principles was inaugurated at St. Augustine's in October. A Catholic bookseller and printer offered for sale lithograph prints of Father Mathew.

Cohesiveness in Philadelphia,” Records 86 (1975), 118. See also ibid., 130, note 27 for the rules, benefits, dues, fees, and fines of the society. The initiation fee was $1.00 for members under age 30, with an additional $.25 for every year over 30. No one over age 50 was accepted. Dues were $.25 a month. The society paid sick benefits (unless sickness was due to boxing, drunkenness, or violence); death benefits were $40 for a member's funeral, $20 for the funeral of a husband or wife of a member. Fines could be levied for breaking the pledge, frequenting taverns, speaking unkindly about another member, falling behind in dues, or failure to perform duties.
Several months later two bookshops advertised "temperance pledges neatly framed, at short notice."

When it was less than a year old, the Catholic movement took a new direction, venturing into the civic realm and thereby assuming a new function which soon became a characteristic feature. Meeting at St. John's in April 1841 for solemnities on the death of President William Henry Harrison, the citywide organization of the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society explicitly associated Catholic abstainers with an important national event. In the following month, the separate societies chose delegates to plan a public Catholic celebration for the Fourth of July. For the next three years the Fourth of July parade would be the central event around which the society would organize itself.

To temperance reformers in America, the Fourth of July presented a special challenge. They wished to tame the occasion, to eliminate the drunkenness and brawling which often accompanied the celebration but at the same time to preserve its excitement, pageantry, and color. To this end, temperance advocates devised their own pageants which were intended to show that joy and good cheer could flourish without the stimulus of drink. In this spirit, Philadelphia's Fourth of July celebration in 1840 had featured a temperance parade of fifteen to twenty societies, named for the different districts of the city.

The Catholic Total Abstinence Society, just beginning to organize in late July, did not take part in the 1840 patriotic display. But July 4, 1841, was different. Early in June 1841 a meeting of delegates from the several branches of the society resolved to celebrate the Fourth of July by a public procession of the society's male members. A temperance address would follow the procession. Tickets for the address were to be priced at twenty-five cents each, the proceeds to

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32 CH 8 (Oct. 22, 1840), 341; (Oct. 29, 1840), 352; (Dec. 31, 1840), 424; 9 (Feb. 18, 1841), 56; (May 20, 1841), 160; (May 27, 1841), 168.
33 Ibid. 9 (April 15, 1841), 120.
34 Between 500 and 700 individuals, 200 of them boys, met at Franklin Square at 7 a.m. and marched through the city. They were accompanied by floats, prominently featuring a cart with a large water cooler and filter from which water was dispensed by girls. The march terminated at the Philadelphia Museum for closing exercises, ending with the singing of the National Temperance Ode to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner. See PL, July 3, 1840, and July 6, 1840.
be applied to St. John’s and St. Joseph’s orphan asylums. In its first Independence Day appearance, the Catholic Total Abstinence Society intended to present to the city of Philadelphia a spectacle of masses of sober, Catholic Irishmen, many of them people of modest means, affirming their American patriotism at the same time that they demonstrated communal unity and, by using the occasion to raise money for charity, proclaimed their civic virtue.

With the Fourth of July falling on a Sunday that year, the procession was planned for Monday, the fifth. The Catholic Total Abstinence procession was to form around the intersection of Pine and Broad Streets, with a specific location assigned to each society. Those who had taken the pledge but were not enrolled in a temperance and beneficial society were invited to form with St. Joseph’s Temperance Society. St. Mary’s and St. Joseph’s societies marched together, followed by St. John’s, St. Augustine’s, St. Michael’s (the church serving the weaving community of Kensington to the north of the city), St. Francis’s, and St. Patrick’s. Youth associations were to form with the bodies whose names they bore.

The Catholic Total Abstinence procession as “large and truly inspiring,” with beautiful banners, and each marcher wearing a temperance medal attached to his coat by means of a ribbon. The report estimated that nearly 3,000 people marched in the procession. Catholic symbols were prominently displayed; Michael O’Connor wrote that “the banners . . . with the Madonna and Bambino in front . . . reminded people of the processions in Rome.” In a separate march by other (non-Catholic) temperance societies the estimated the turnout to have been about 700 people, approximately the same number as had marched the year before, but nowhere near the size of the Catholic turnout.

Like the temperance marchers of the previous year, the Catholics, too, ended their procession at the Philadelphia Museum. There they closed their program with a recitation of the Declaration of Inde-

35 CH 9 (July 1, 1841), 208.
36 Ibid. 9 (June 10, 1841), 184.
37 PL, July 7, 1841.
38 See O’Connor to Paul Cullen, Jan. 10, 1842, printed in Records 7 (1896), 348-49.
39 PL, July 7, 1841.
dependence and a temperance oration by Dr. Patrick Moriarty of St. Augustine's, reputed to be the foremost orator among Philadelphia's Catholic clergy.\(^4^0\) An ardent temperance reformer, a leader in the Catholic revival, and a staunch Irish nationalist as well, Moriarty was a popular speaker. As a spokesman for the cause of Ireland, he represented a distinctly Catholic alternative to the Repeal Association of Philadelphia which marched in its own procession on this Independence Day, and included the Hibernia Greens, the Montgomery Hibernia Greens, and the Irish Volunteers, a new group whose display centered upon a barouche carrying exiled Irish patriots of the 1798 rising.\(^4^1\)

The following year the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society staged its greatest Fourth of July display. The participants in the 1842 procession were said to have numbered between 7,000 and 8,000, exclusive of several youth societies. American emblems prominently joined Catholic icons in that year's parade. The Catholic Ladies of Philadelphia had presented the society with a banner depicting George Washington on a white charger, the national flag overhead, an Indian chief to one side, and a group of "savages" further back, reclining on the summit of a steep and rugged bank. There were other banners as well, worked by the girls of the Catholic schools. The report of the *Public Ledger* described this display as "the most imposing we have ever witnessed both as regards the order and decorum which prevailed, the number who composed the procession,

\(^4^0\) Patrick Moriarty, named Provincial of the American Augustinians in 1839, was born in 1805 into a prosperous Dublin family, related to Daniel O'Connell and to the influential Bishop Moriarty of Kerry. He was a student at the Augustinian study house in Rome when Kenrick, Cullen, O'Connor, and Barron were completing their studies at the College of Propaganda Fide. While sharing their "Roman" vision of Catholic renewal, Moriarty's strong commitment to the cause of Irish nationalism distinguished him from the others. In later years, he was considered to be pro-Fenian. His abilities as a preacher were evident from the beginning of his stay in Philadelphia; for some of the clergy, however, Moriarty's popularity was not an unmixed blessing. Michael O'Connor wrote, "he is cried up here as the nonsuch for his preaching by the people (that with them includes everything) and he thus stands on his own ground and may make his own terms." M. O'Connor to P.R. Kenrick, Philadelphia, Nov. 24, 1839, *Irish College Microfilms* (Notre Dame University). In 1848 Moriarty was asked to undertake the reestablishment of the Augustinians in England; returning to America, he was a founder of Villanova University and its president from 1851 to 1855. See *Records* 1 (1887), 201; 12 (1901), 139-40.

\(^4^1\) *PL*, July 7, 1841.
and the magnificence of the banners.\textsuperscript{42} While the number of Catholics marching under the temperance standard to celebrate the Fourth of July increased this year, processions by other temperance groups declined. Only one other temperance march in Philadelphia on that day is mentioned; it was a relatively small affair by a single Youths' Temperance Society.

The 1843 Independence Day celebration conducted by the Catholic associations saw a falling off in numbers of participants. Still, 3,000 to 4,000 men, "the great bulk of whom were natives of green Erin," and about 200 boys were estimated to have taken part in the procession. A high point in the ceremonies was the reading of a letter from Father Mathew, written in reply to an invitation from the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society, in which he referred to the 29,000 members of that organization.\textsuperscript{43}

Eighteen forty-three proved to be the last year in which Philadelphia's Irish Catholics celebrated Independence Day in this manner, for the events of 1844 made another Catholic temperance procession impossible. In May of that year St. Michael's Church in Kensington and St. Augustine's were destroyed in rioting that lasted several days and resulted in the destruction of homes and shops, the loss of life, and the wounding of many. The rioting was triggered by a controversy over the use of the Bible in the common schools. Late in 1842 Bishop Kenrick had issued a public appeal to the Board of Controllers of the Pennsylvania common schools to allow Catholic children to use their own version of the Bible in class and to be excused from other religious instruction. He was partially successful; although the Board of Controllers did not allow the Catholic Bible to be used in the schools, the Board did rule in January 1843 that children "whose parents were conscientiously opposed" might be excused from class during Bible readings. But that very success and the publicity which attended it added fuel to the fires being stoked by nativist politicians. The Native American Republican party sought artisan support in Philadelphia's elections by drawing a distinction between worthy American working men and foreign-born Catholics under the discipline of the "Roman Church." In the incident which precipitated

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., July 6, 1842.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., July 6, 1843.
the riots, Magistrate Hugh Clark (a master weaver and a Catholic) authorized a Kensington teacher to omit Bible reading in her overwhelmingly Catholic class. An open air protest rally heated the controversy further. After several days of mounting tension, verging on violence, rioting erupted on May 6.

The details of the fighting have been recounted elsewhere and need not be repeated here. The entire story of the Kensington riots is a complex one, and its significance has been much debated. But whatever were the elements that went into the making of the riots and the destruction of St. Michael’s in Kensington and St. Augustine’s in Philadelphia’s Northern Liberties, this overt clash in the streets of Philadelphia put an end to public displays by Philadelphia’s Catholics. On the Fourth of July of 1844 there was no Catholic temperance procession; instead, Philadelphia witnessed a Native American party parade. Its civic icons—replicas of Washington and the Declaration of Independence—were similar to those that had been displayed and honored by the Catholics, but where the Catholics had featured the madonna and child the nativists featured the Bible. Widows and orphans of the “Kensington Martyrs” were given a special place of honor. On the following day St. Philip Neri Church in Southwark was attacked, and fighting continued in the neighborhood of the church for several days. Volunteers guarded the other Catholic churches.

Because the public displays ended, it is now difficult to trace the

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45 A Century of Faith, 23. A German Catholic church in the process of construction not far from St. Michael’s (parishioners of St. Michael’s had been helping with labor on this church) had been ignored completely by the rioters, who frequently passed the building but made no attempt to disturb it. See Fest-Schrift zum Andenken an die Wieder-Eröffnung der St. Peterskirche (Philadelphia, 1901), 50. In this context it is interesting to note that Holy Trinity, founded by German Catholic laymen in 1787 as a German “national” church, seems to have taken no part in the Catholic total abstinence movement. The movement’s strong Irish identification may account for what seems to have been a lack of interest among the Germans, but the absence of any reference to the German Catholics in newspaper reports and correspondence remains puzzling.
subsequent history of the Catholic temperance movement in the antebellum period. One of the prime purposes of the movement, the proud public presentation of Catholic Irish Americans to their friends and enemies alike, could not be pursued in the aftermath of the rioting. Two years after the riots, famine in Ireland sent the first of several massive waves of emigrants to America, and this much larger “new immigration” then became the overwhelming concern of Catholic communities. At a time of mounting tension, the Catholic church and community responded by accelerating efforts first begun late in the 1830s. New parishes were formed in outlying areas where the immigrants lived and worked, and the foundation was laid for a system of Catholic institutions, including parochial schools, intended as alternatives to the “nonsectarian” institutions.

Catholic temperance and beneficial societies did not disappear, but Philadelphia’s Catholics had lost the hope once encouraged by Father Mathew’s success and acclaim in Ireland that a moral revolution and a revolution in the public perception of the Irish Catholic character might both be accomplished quickly, at the same time and by the same means. Had Theobald Mathew been able to accept the invitation tendered him in 1843, there is no doubt that he would have been greeted by a grand public display organized by the Pennsylvania Catholic Total Abstinence Society. But, when he was at last able to visit Philadelphia in 1849, the Public Ledger noted that “the distinguished Apostle of Temperance arrived in this city yesterday on the train from New York, unheralded and unattended, and went quietly from the Railroad landing on Walnut St., by chaise to the residence of Bishop Kenrick.”

His presence did, however, generate new excitement in the temperance movement. He was taken to the rooms of St. Augustine’s Temperance and Benevolent Society in the Vigilant Hall, Race Street, where he received a donation and administered the pledge to “a large number of persons.” As the guest of the bishop, Father Mathew spoke at several Catholic churches and accompanied Kenrick to the dedication of a new church in Gloucester,

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46 PL, Nov. 29, 1849.
47 Ibid., Dec. 7, 1849. First the famine emergency and relief connected with it, and then a paralytic stroke from which he only partially recovered, caused Father Mathew to postpone his visit to America.
New Jersey, where he administered the pledge to several hundred people. It was said that probably 3,000 people, Protestants as well as Catholics, took the pledge from him during his short stay of less than two weeks in the city. His mission retained its own distinctive character: Bishop Kenrick noted in his Diary,

Very many people brought to him their sick, the blind and otherwise afflicted. He prayed to God and blessed them, but I do not know whether any wonderful cures were wrought. Non Catholics and people of every class came with great eagerness to visit him.

But even as they welcomed him, the Catholic clergy deplored Matthew's close association with Protestants and his willingness to go before groups such as the Odd Fellows, for they wished to discourage Catholics from participating in such societies. Moreover, his concentration upon the cause of temperance and the technique of the pledge had, from the beginning, made many of the Catholic clergy uneasy. Kenrick, while firmly supporting the cause of total abstinence, had written of his own doubts in a letter to his brother as early as September 1843: "He seems to detract from religion and rest too much on the pledge alone, not without injury to the grace and truth of God." After meeting the man, however, Kenrick's fears were allayed and he wrote to his brother that Father Mathew ought to be welcomed by all the bishops.

Among Protestant leaders, Father Mathew's reputation was as high as ever. He was a popular figure. Barnum's Museum displayed a waxwork statue of the Irish temperance leader to celebrate his visit to Philadelphia, and the priest returned the compliment by touring the museum. There he administered the pledge to the giant, Mr.

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48 CH 17 (Dec. 6, 1849), 389. Martin Griffin, a lay leader of the post-Civil War Catholic temperance movement in Philadelphia, and a founder of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, recalled as a child being kissed by Father Mathew on the occasion of the Irish priest's visit to St. Mary's Church. Griffin's parents were members of St. Mary's Temperance and Beneficial Society. See The American Catholic Historical Researches 20 ([Philadelphia], n.d.), 33.

49 Diary and Visitation Record of the Right Reverend Francis Patrick Kenrick (trans. and ed. by permission and under the direction of His Grace and Most Reverend Edmond F. Prendergast, Archbishop of Philadelphia), (Philadelphia, 1916), 257.

Hales, to General Mole, and a few score visitors. But there were no Catholic clergymen or representatives of Catholic temperance associations present on this occasion or at the two receptions held in honor of Father Mathew at Independence Hall, where he was greeted by officers of non-Catholic temperance societies and city officials.

The Catholic commitment to moral reform was genuine. By sponsoring a total abstinence movement, Catholics had demonstrated that they were in basic agreement with Protestants concerning the nature of contemporary social ills and that they, too, looked to the moral reformation of the individual and the adoption of a prudent way of life to solve many of the problems of that era. However, this underlying agreement on the cause of the disorder and its remedy did not link different denominations in a joint effort. Despite the popularity of the man and his cause, the Catholic leadership did not follow Theobald Mathew’s personal example of denominational cooperation for the purposes of moral reform.

Instead, Catholic-sponsored temperance societies, in addition to promoting moral reform, were to be one means for retaining—perhaps, even, for creating—a separate identity and allegiance. For Theobald Mathew the cause of temperance remained the chief and abiding concern. For the Catholic clergy in America it became but one of several fronts on which to wage the struggle to shape the boundaries and define the moral nature of their community.

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51 CH 17 (Dec. 13, 1849), 397.