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An Apostolate of the
Society of Jesus under the
Patronage of the Irish
Episcopal Conference

'Promoting sobriety for a better society'

A. THE PIONEER WAY OF FAITH AND PRAYER

1. The strength of the Pioneer movement has always been its way of faith and prayer. This is what has marked us out from other temperance organizations and has given our association its identity. The essence of this way of faith will be found in the story of our origins. The first Central Director and founder, Father James Cullen [1841-1921] wanted to address the widespread abuse of alcohol in the Ireland of his day, together with all the personal and social consequences that always flow from such abuse. He was convinced that only a radically religious solution would go to the heart of the problem. Like the evil spirit in the gospel tradition, it would be driven out only by prayer and fasting (Mk 9:29).

So Father Cullen, with his four like-minded associates, Mrs M.L. Bury, Mrs A Egan, Miss L. Power and Mrs A.M. Sullivan, who were already non-drinkers, formalized their abstinence in a union of sacrifice and prayer for the sake of others. They took on themselves a threefold commitment:

- [i] To pray daily for the conversion of excessive drinkers;
- [ii] To make this prayer concrete in the offering to God of total abstinence for life;
- [iii] To make it public and an encouragement for others by openly wearing the pin

2. The above story of the origins of the PTAA highlights, in a brief manner, first of all, how our abstinence is for others as well as for ourselves - indeed, often more for others than for ourselves. For us, total abstinence is not anti-drink as such. It arises out of a deep compassion for those caught on the treadmill of intemperance, and the way we help them is primarily by the spiritual power of prayer and sacrifice. Few of us have gone untouched or unscathed by the problems of excessive drinking, either personally or among relatives and friends. If there is one common feature to this experience, both yesterday and today, it is the feeling of helplessness among relatives and friends which has brought countless people to turn to a spiritual movement in order to help those who cannot help themselves.

3. Though the primary inspiration of the Pioneer Movement is founded on the personal and spiritual level just described, Pioneers feel that they are focusing on an issue which lies at the centre of a network of evil and unhappiness, which spreads its tentacles through society as a whole. When you have listed things like violence in the home and in the streets, substance abuse, sexual abuse, the



Fr. James Cullen, SJ
(1841-1921) Founder of
the Pioneer Total
Abstinence Association
of the Sacred Heart

carnage on our roads, absenteeism with its impact on the economy and unemployment, you have touched on some of the most glaring ills of modern life, all of which are related in varying degrees to the abuse of alcoholic drink. Consequently, Pioneers feel that, by their concern for temperance, they are close to the heart of the problems of modern life, and by their prayer and sacrifice they are making an important contribution to the health and happiness of their fellow human beings.

4. Nevertheless, the message of the Pioneer to the world at large is not the abolition of drink but moderation in its use. Total abstinence is the personal choice of the Pioneers for themselves, for the reasons described above. But, for society generally, the message is temperance in the sense of moderation and self-control in all things. Total abstinence is a means for some only. Temperance is the goal for all.

5. The dominant inspiration of this way of life in our movement has always been devotion to the Heart of Christ. We realize that in some circumstances today this devotion is not always as readily understood as it once was. At the same time, from the responses to the 1992 questionnaire and from discussions in the course of the review of the Pioneer way, it is clear that this devotion remains important for most Pioneers, particularly in Ireland. Devotion to the Heart of Christ, as understood among Pioneers, is simply a way of speaking of devotion to the person of Christ and to his individual love for each of us. Where people have difficulties about the devotion, it should not stand in the way of their becoming members of the Association, once they are prepared to undertake the three basic obligations of membership, inspired by love for Christ.



Devotion to Sacred Heart

B. THE PIONEER PRAYER

6. The special way of faith which emerged from that first meeting in Dublin in 1898 was summed up by Father Cullen in the Pioneer Prayer. Some brief reflections on each of the prayer's phrases, in the form in which he composed them, will help to bring our way of faith better into focus.

6.1 For thy greater glory

The central thrust of the Pioneer Association as a spiritual organization is captured in this phrase. It comes from Father Cullen who, in turn, learnt it from St. Ignatius Loyola, whose motto was: "For the Greater Glory of God." As we cannot say too often, the Pioneer Movement is not an anti-drink movement. Pioneers are primarily defined, not by what they are against, but by what they are for; and primarily they are for God and for his greater glory. We might also recall the phrase of St. Irenaeus, "The glory of God is the human being fully alive." Few things so help the glory of God in our world as the restoration of human dignity to the victims of alcohol abuse and its associated evils.

6.2 and consolation

The masters of prayer tell us that it is a good thing to contemplate Christ in the gospels and that, when we do so, we should take the scenes as contemporary with ourselves. It is especially in this context that people have come to speak of consoling Christ by our love and service (cf. Ps 68(69):20). It is not a form of devotion which is as widely practised today as once was the case. If it does not appeal to an individual, it need not be insisted on.

6.3 O Sacred Heart of Jesus

To refer to Christ as 'Jesus of Nazareth' places Him in the context of His life among His contemporaries two thousand years ago. To call Him 'the Sacred Heart' is a way of underlining, firstly, that our devotion is to the person of Christ; and secondly, that His love for people knows no limit of time and space. Jesus does not belong simply to those who knew Him on earth so long ago. His love is directed to each of us personally, as ours is to Him. Because He is the Son of God, he carries each of us in His heart; because He is a full human being, He cares for each with a fully human love; so that each of us can say with St. Paul, "He loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

6.4 ...for thy sake

Usually when people join the Pioneers it is because they have seen the devastation which the abuse of drink can cause in a person's life. But underlying such concern, they are also thinking of what this means to Christ, who always takes to heart the plight of those for whom He died. All sin is against Christ in some way. It is always an affront to the goodness and mercy He has shown us by giving us so much. In wishing to repair a fallen world, the Pioneer begins at the top by wishing to repair the offence done to Christ.

6.5 ...to give good example

One of the most powerful influences in society leading to the abuse of alcohol is the social pressure encouraging excessive drinking. There are many who either wish to drink alcohol in moderation or who do not wish to drink it at all but are pressurised into going beyond what their own better judgement suggests. By insisting on personal abstinence, the Pioneer helps to create a space of freedom for others, and can be a real support for the weak and the wavering amid the pressures of the consumer society.

6.6 ...to practise self-denial

In the following of Our Lord, the cross is unavoidable. Mostly it comes without having to be sought; but if we undertake self-denial as a voluntary exercise, it helps us to prepare for those occasions and to strengthen our self-control. It is then an age-old tradition among Christians to offer up acts of self-denial out of solidarity with Christ in His passion. In this way, we identify ourselves with His sacrifice and apply the benefits of His cross to those for whom we pray.

6.7 ...to make reparation for the sins for intemperance

When one offends another person, particularly a friend, it is only natural to feel ashamed of what one has done and to try to make up; in this way, the fact of one's faults becomes itself a reason for demonstrating one's love all the more. This is a human comparison to help us to understand the mystery of reparation. As well as reparation to Christ, to which reference was made above, there is also reparation to the Father. This is even more fundamental since it is an aspect of the redemptive work of Christ on the cross, offering his love to the Father on behalf of the human race; and it is something in which we can share as we offer reparation, not only to Christ but with him to the Father.

6.8 ...and for the conversion of excessive drinkers

This intention is the spark which kindled the entire Pioneer movement. It expresses the helping hand which the Pioneer holds out to all who are struggling with the problem of excessive drinking.

Because of their own abstinence, Pioneers do not have the problem themselves, though they may have had it in the past. However, it is important that our help be given out of compassion, not out of any sense of assumed superiority. Just because the Pioneer does not have this particular problem does not mean that he or she has none. We all have our sins and our weaknesses, and have no right to cast the stone at anyone. But one good thing we can do is at least to hold out the helping hand to those who are struggling with the problem of excessive drink.

6.9 ...I will abstain for life from all intoxicating drinks

The prayer ends with the basic statement of the Pioneer pledge. The very reciting of it is a way of renewing our offering to God.