The Man Who Made History

Msgr. Francis Glenn was a rarity in his field. He was—like Eusebius, the ancient father of Church history—an historian who made history.

He made history with his research alone, producing perhaps the most significant work of Western Pennsylvania’s ecclesiastical history in the latter half of this century. With his 240-page volume, *Shepherds of the Faith: A Brief History of the Bishops of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh*, he earned a permanent place on the region’s library shelves.

He served as diocesan archivist from 1949 to 1969. And he was a founding member of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania in 1940. In recent years, in recognition of his achievements in historical research, the society bestowed on Msgr. Glenn the title of “honorary president for life.”

“It had been years since Msgr. Glenn purchased a lifetime membership to the society,” said Father Joseph Scheib, society treasurer. “But he still paid his dues every year. He loved this work.”

His research was itself historic. But it was through his priestly life and his community activism that Msgr. Glenn earned his rightful place in any future histories written of this diocese.

An Inspired Life

Francis Glenn was born in Masontown, Fayette County, Oct. 4, 1912. He studied at Duquesne University (bachelor of arts, 1934) and St. Vincent College (master’s degree, 1936) and was ordained on June 12, 1938.

He served as parochial vicar at Assumption in Bellevue, St. Mary in Beaver Falls, Epiphany in Uptown, and Resurrection in Brookline. He also served as assistant chaplain at Mercy Hospital and as chaplain to the St. Joseph Sisters in Baden and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

He was founding pastor of St. Bonaventure in Glenshaw, 1957-1965. Afterward, he served as pastor of St. Paul in Butler and St. Christopher in Prospect for twenty-four years, until his retirement in 1989. In 1968, Pope Paul VI named him a domestic prelate with the title of monsignor.

Along the way, he also served as dean of Butler County, diocesan consultor, and director of the diocesan ecumenical commission.

On retirement, he took up residence at St. Mary of Mercy, Downtown, where he continued to offer daily Mass and hear confessions. He taught a lunchtime Scripture class on Wednesdays and served as spiritual moderator of the Ladies of Charity of Pittsburgh, an organization that helps the hungry and needy.

It was at his Butler assignment, however, that Msgr. Glenn made his greatest impact as an activist. In the mid-1980s, his parishioners watched as “entrepreneurs” opened a pornographic bookstore on Route 8. From the pulpit, Msgr. Glenn preached that local public officials were doing nothing to stop pornography because they perceived that

October Lecture to Spotlight Pittsburgh Work in Peru

Velma Uricchio will speak on “Experiences in the Peru Mission” at the Historical Society’s Fall meeting, Sunday, October 11, at 2:30 p.m. The meeting takes place in Synod Hall, behind St. Paul’s Cathedral in Oakland.
GLENN continued
no one really cared. The homily inspired his parishioners, most especially Norma Norris, who then created the White Ribbon Against Pornography (WRAP) campaign, which is now marked nationwide, and which has been emulated by many other “ribbon” campaigns by other charities.

Shortly after the first WRAP campaign, the porn vendors were evicted and the store bulldozed.

But the anti-porn campaign continued for Msgr. Glenn, who joined the board of the Pittsburgh Coalition Against Pornography in 1990.

A Gentleman and a Scholar
His successor at St. Paul’s, Father Hugh Gloninger, recalled in the Butler Eagle that Msgr. Glenn “was a gentleman always and all ways.” Those who knew him will confirm that observation. He was mild-mannered, even when he was most impassioned. “Scholarly” is the way most associates described him.

His wry wit enlivened his telling of Church history. Msgr. Glenn had a keen eye for stories that showed the foibles of the human condition, especially as manifested in the lives and work of churchmen.

In research, he was a tireless sleuth, combing documents, correspondence, and even homilies for clues. Trying to ascertain Bishop Michael O’Connor’s role in the formulation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Msgr. Glenn unearthed the bishop’s travel itineraries, carefully noting his trips to Rome in the years leading up to the promulgation of the dogma in 1854, then tracking Bishop O’Connor’s use of the term “Immaculate Conception” throughout those same years. It was Bishop O’Connor who consecrated the Diocese of Pittsburgh to the Immaculate Conception.

Just three months before his death, Msgr. Glenn was featured in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette for his research on Catholic Indians of the region during the French colonial period. “In 1739,” Monsignor told the newspaper, “an expedition of the French... came to Western Pennsylvania with three chaplains. One was for the soldiers, the other two for the 319 Catholic Shawnees, Senecas and Delawares” who had been converted by earlier missionaries.

That was Msgr. Glenn — making sure that the long-ago pioneers of our Communion of Saints would not be forgotten or overlooked.

We are richer, in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, because Msgr. Francis Glenn made history for us, in every sense of the phrase. He revealed to us our Catholic forebears, and all that was human in them, and all that was divine.

Now, he is one of them.

From the Introduction to Msgr. Glenn’s Shepherds of the Faith

The evil that men do, lives after them:
The good is oft interred with their bones.
— Shakespeare. Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2

Mark Antony’s reflection on the life of Julius Caesar summarizes the disparity between the achievements of the 19th-century bishops of Pittsburgh and the difficulties they experienced in the formation of the diocese. The great accomplishments of the bishops became mere statistics, while controversies are recorded for posterity.

Bishop Michael O’Connor’s proficiency in organizing the Diocese of Pittsburgh is overshadowed by the constant irritations of bigots like Mayor Joe Barker and attacks by the anti-Catholic newspapers of the period.

In the episcopates of Bishop Michael Domenec and Bishop John Tuigg, the wonderful successes in meeting the needs of their adherents are obscured by civil litigations and internal disputes which interfered with their dedicated efforts. . . .

A diocese is established when a bishop is assigned to administer the affairs of the church in a specific territory. A natural outline of the history of a diocese is determined by the terms of the individual bishops. Each bishop makes an imprint on the affairs and progress of the church in a diocese and each epoch of a diocese is usually marked and remembered in reference to the bishop of that time. This natural design is followed in this history of the diocese.

Memorial Mass for Msgr. Glenn
The Historical Society will offer Mass in memory of Msgr. Glenn Sunday, Nov. 22, at 2:30 p.m. at St. Mary of Mercy Church, Stanwix St. and Third Ave., Downtown. All friends, associates, and admirers of Msgr. Glenn are welcome to attend.
Pittsburgh Catholics Take the Pledge, 1851

By Mike Aquilina

In the beginning—more than a century before AA—was The Pledge. And The Pledge was between the problem drinker and God.

In the early 19th century, a temperance wave swept the United States, and millions swore off alcohol by reciting one of several popular temperance oaths and going cold turkey. The act was known, colloquially, as "Taking The Pledge." The Pledge arose out of a movement originally secular. In the late 1700s, Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia wrote pamphlets discouraging the consumption of "ardent spirits." Protestant ministers such as Lyman Beecher baptized these efforts. Though the crusade became something of a fad, it failed to arouse widespread interest among Catholics, who were perhaps suspicious of its Protestant associations. One exception was the Irish Temperance Society, which arose in Boston in 1835 and was open to both Catholics and Protestants.

The movement spread from the States to the British Isles, and was there received into full communion with the Church, thanks to the work of a Capuchin priest named Theobald Mathew from Thomastown Castle, Ireland.

Father Mathew set himself apart from his Protestant forebears by the moderation of his preaching. He believed little could be gained by whipping a crowd into frenzy with hellfire preaching, then calling them forward en masse to sign The Pledge. He taught, instead, that sobriety must be an individual decision made "in cold blood."

Father Mathew began his crusade in 1838, three years before ordination, when he himself (never a problem drinker) signed a total-abstinence pledge. He saw all around him an Irish people degraded by oppressive British rule, turning in despair to liquor. The results: economic depression, personal ruin, increasing crime and the breakdown of the family.

His preaching in Ireland was phenomenally successful. All along the island, liquor revenues plummeted to half of the country's pre-Pledge levels. Historians report that, in short order, nearly half of the country's adult population came to sign Father Mathew's Pledge. Children did, too, encouraged to swear off the stuff before they had the chance to be seduced by it. Confirmation classes would sometimes take a temporary vow, which could later be renewed for life.

As more Irish left the Isle for refuge in the States, they took their Pledge with them. Catholic temperance societies soon emerged here, encouraged by a largely immigrant Irish hierarchy. As early as 1840, Bishop Patrick Kinrick of Philadelphia was promoting total abstinence among his flock. In 1845, Pittsburgh's zealously teetotaling bishop, Michael O'Connor, sailed home to Ireland so that he could meet with Father Mathew. Bishop O'Connor, speaking for many other U.S. prelates, begged Father Mathew to come to America.

But Father had work enough in Ireland, and was not able to cross the Atlantic until 1849. By then his celebrity was such that he was met by crowds wherever he went. Till 1851 he barnstormed from city to city, through 25 states. President Zachary Taylor received him at the White House. Half a million people signed the Pledge during the tour.

Eight thousand signed on in Pittsburgh alone, when the "Venerable Apostle of Temperance" visited in 1851. Each one signed individually, emphasized the Pittsburgh Catholic newspaper. "There has been no excitement, no public meeting in which hundreds have signed, in a moment of enthusiasm. Those who have taken the Pledge from Father Mathew here have visited him, one by one, in a private house, and have been urged to the course by no solicitations other than those of their personal friends." This was striking to the newspaper's reporter, who recalled how, 10 years before, the temperance fad had swept the region with fiery preaching and large rallies, but "how few have adhered to the resolutions which they made." Father Mathew, on the other hand, estimated, then, that 96 percent of those to whom he administered The Pledge stayed dry.

Bishop O'Connor himself publicly took The Pledge in St. Paul's Cathedral, with the members of the Brotherhood of St. Joseph, a local temperance society. The president of the society thanked Father Mathew, noting that his Pledge had become, for many Irish immigrants to America, "their passport to credit and honor, peace, happiness and support, and, to many, wealth and renown . . . . The drunkard has now become a sober, honest, virtuous, industrious and respectable citizen."

Pittsburghers detained the priest as long as they could, and on the day of his departure a throng followed him "even to the boat." The Pittsburgh Catholic concluded: "Could he have prolonged his visit for another week, we do not doubt that he would have doubled the number of his disciples in this place."

Father Mathew returned to Ireland shortly after his stay in Pittsburgh. But the years that followed hardly matched his earlier successes. The land had been devastated by the Potato Famine (1845-47), and the people spiraled into further depression. Many of the best and brightest left for America. Many others, feeling bereft, began to break The Pledge. The priest,
PLEDGE continued
already in ailing health after a succession of strokes, spent his last years serving the poor. He died in 1856, and his apostolate, for the most part, was buried with him.

The Pledge received new vigor, however, in 1898 with the founding of the Pioneer Association in Dublin. The Association thrives today in Pittsburgh, promoting total abstinence and Irish culture. *(For information on the Pioneers, call Kevin McGinty: 216-486-8279.)*

**History of Schools**

Society member Father Joseph Linck, C.O., will address “Catholic Schools and American Culture: Lessons from History,” at the Total Catholic Education Conference, Downtown, Nov. 6. For information, call 412-456-3100.

**Fr. Edward Bryce Gives 1998 Lambing Lecture**

On April 9, Father Edward Bryce gave the society’s annual Lambing Lecture, speaking on “The Church Responding to Roe v. Wade through Twenty-Five Years.” Father Bryce is a veteran of the movement, having served as director of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life activities in Washington, D.C. He is now pastor of St. Bede Parish, Point Breeze. He is shown above with diocesan archivist Ken White (left), who organized an exhibit on the local Church’s pro-life activities, and Father James Garvey (right), president of the Catholic Historical society.

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Additional donations help the society to complete research, publishing, and preservation projects in local Church history. Send check to Catholic Historical Society of Western Pa., Synod Hall, 125 North Craig Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1510.