

"Contesting the City:

Catholic Assertings and Protestant Responses in Late 19th Century Hartford."

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"The ground on which St. Joseph's convent and chapel have been erected was purchased by Bishop MacFarland of James Goodwin, Esq. in July 1872, for the sum of \$70,000. Up to that time the site had been known as the "old Morgan homestead."

Its purchase for Catholic purposes caused some talk among the neighbors. The words exchanged were less friendly than those of Ossian in his address to the Sun, and have been forgotten."

With these odd, oblique comments, the Rev. Joseph Reid inscribed the first page of the baptismal register for the newly organized St. Joseph's Cathedral parish in Hartford. For Reid and many other Roman Catholics, the purchase of "the old Morgan homestead" in 1872 was a delicious moment, a turning point that called for ceremonial and triumphant gestures. The property, owned by Hartford's largest landowner, stood in a prominent spot on Farmington Avenue in Asylum Hill, a city neighborhood then developing rapidly as an elite suburb happily removed from the clatter and congestion that had taken over the old heart of the city, a mile to the east. For many of the prosperous Yankees who were building houses on its shady streets, one of Asylum Hill's chief charms was its promise of recreating the reassuring atmosphere of bygone

days, of an old Hartford that was quiet, homogeneous, and largely free of the strains caused by a generation of industrialization, urban growth, and a swelling flood of strangers.

Reid and his co-religionists were not simply celebrating a good real estate deal, they basked in the chagrin of their Protestant neighbors. Bishop Francis McFarland bought the old Morgan homestead partly because he wanted to build his new cathedral in the best part of town. But he also wanted to make a decisive political and social statement: Whether the Yankees liked it or not, they now had to deal with the rising strength of Catholics, and particularly Irish Catholic immigrants. Forty years after a small group of impoverished Irish ditch-diggers scraped together enough money to buy an abandoned Episcopal church on the city's East Side, Hartford's Catholics had become a force to be reckoned with.

To make sure he had the opportunity to make his grand gesture, McFarland took care to buy the property on Farmington Avenue secretly. He commissioned one of the city's few Catholic lawyers, Thomas McManus, to find a Protestant intermediary who could negotiate with James Goodwin without arousing suspicion. McManus persuaded George Affleck, an Asylum Hill nurseryman to make the purchase and resell it to him.¹

McFarland, the first Catholic bishop to reside in Hartford, made his first priority the construction of a mother house for Connecticut's Sisters of Mercy, which included a large chapel that served both the sisters and the small congregation that could be gathered for the cathedral parish. (For decades, most parishioners lived in other neighborhoods of the city, when the cathedral established a parish school it was located in Frog Hollow, almost a mile away.) An episcopal residence followed and then, in 1879, a "basement church" enclosed by the foundations for an immense Gothic cathedral. Reid, McFarland, and others gloried in the day, but, in fact, the day of real Catholic power had not yet arrived. It took the Catholic bishops, priests and people of Hartford almost 20 more years to construct the brownstone cathedral that loomed over Protestant Asylum Hill.

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¹ The arrangement is described in McManus' privately printed "Sketch of the Catholic Church in Hartford."

Like many New England cities, Hartford experienced remarkable demographic transformation over the course of the 19th century. Migrants from rural Connecticut and northern New England had posed the initial challenge in the early decades of the century. But the waves of immigration that took place after 1850 proved to be far more disruptive to Yankee society and its patterns and beliefs. Immigration, especially by Irish Catholics, became noticeable in Hartford after 1830. By 1850, it was a salient feature of city life. By 1890, the city's population balanced evenly between "native-born" Protestants and immigrants and their children.²

During these transitional decades, two large, self-conscious, and well-organized groups dominated an incessant discourse over Hartford's transition from a homogeneous, Protestant, small town into a pluralistic urban center: on the one hand were native-born Protestants, especially Congregationalists, and, on the other, the largest and most conspicuous of the city's immigrant groups, the Irish, whose Catholic identity deepened their differentness. Many Hartford Yankees experienced the late nineteenth century as a wholly unwanted and unexpected disruption of a familiar and homogeneous society. But the city's native-stock Protestants clung tenaciously to social and political control. And through the 1890s, decisive political control of the city remained just beyond the grasp of the city's Democrats, who were mostly "immigrants" (although the party's leadership was still mostly composed of native-born Protestants). By New England standards, Irish (and hence Catholic) political ascendancy came late. Ignatius Sullivan, the city's first Catholic mayor, was not elected until 1902--full decades after Catholics rose to positions of elective power in other New England cities.

Although Congregationalism had been disestablished in 1818, the old established church and its near relations retained considerable prestige and a

² See Graham Taylor's Religious Census of Hartford, Taken by the Connecticut Bible Society in 1889 (Hartford: Plympton Manufacturing, 1889). By this point, Catholics were by far the largest single religious body in the city, although still a minority of the population.

surprising amount of social power late into the nineteenth century.

Congregational and Episcopal ministers, in particular, remained formidable communal leaders in many Connecticut towns. During the middle decades of the century, these Protestants and their flocks welcomed non-Protestant immigrants with little grace. Non-Christian public worship, for example, was not legally permitted in Connecticut until 1842, and so the state's first synagogues were not able to incorporate until that date.

Nevertheless, open hostility to Catholics did not become widespread until they became a sizeable and visible minority in the late 1840s. In 1830, the consecration of Connecticut's first Catholic church in an old Episcopal building--Holy Trinity in Hartford--was received politely by the city's Protestants. But by the 1850s, ethnic and religious tension roiled Hartford and other Connecticut towns. The state became a major center of nativism--Holy Trinity Church was burned in a suspicious arson in 1853--and Protestants often invoked the power of the state to harass Catholics. In 1855, for example, after extended litigation Connecticut courts upheld a Protestant husband's trespass complaint against Waterbury's first Catholic pastor, who had been called to administer the last rites to the man's Catholic wife.

During the antebellum decades, the urge to issue anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic broadsides was not restricted to vulgar nativists. Most of the state's Congregational clergy worried that Catholic immigrants would undermine Connecticut's religious and political structure. Few were more vocal than Horace Bushnell, the intellectual leader of Hartford's Protestant clergy during the middle decades of the century. Bushnell's long series of warnings about the dangers of Irish Catholicism began in his first published sermon in 1835.

Romanism has set in with a new enterprise upon our liberties....Popery, we have supposed, was such an extravagance as could not be inflicted upon the American people; we have been confident of Protestantism. But we hear of such advances...that we can close our eyes no longer....Catholic emigrants are pouring into this country,

in a manner altogether unexampled.³

Bushnell and other leaders of Hartford's second establishment hoped that Protestantism would remain the undiminished source of social cohesion and values. Under their leadership and the activism of lay leaders, especially women, a cluster of benevolent organizations developed between the 1830s and the 1850s to redirect and "improve" the new urban poor, both native born migrants and non-Protestant immigrants. These organizations were animated by the optimism of revivalism and by postmillennial confidence in the perfectability of society. In 1850, four young men founded the Congregational City Mission Society hoping to alleviate "the Temporal necessities of the destitute, strengthen the religious interests of the poor, gather children into Sabbath Schools and provide free religious services each Sabbath."⁴

For most of its first quarter century, the society was led by David Hawley, a former farmer, who set the tone for the society's work. Hawley roamed the city's laboring district, distributing religious tracts, clothing and food. Resolutely evangelical in mood, technique, and purpose, he hated drinking. Even after the city's poorest neighborhoods took on a strong immigrant and Catholic character, Hawley did not shift his methods or presumptions. His unswerving, if rarely realized, goal was to convert the Catholic poor to evangelical Protestantism, to cultivate in them new Protestant identities, and to encourage conformity to Protestant and middle class mores and values.

Hartford's antebellum Protestant reformers allowed no compromise with Catholic interests or Catholic identity. Supporters of the very active common school movement of the 1850s insisted on Protestant texts for the schools and

³ Horace Bushnell, The Crisis of the Church (Hartford: 1835), 22.

⁴ Charter of the Congregational City Mission Society. Cited in Robert Decker, Hartford Immigrants: A History of the Christian Activities Council (Congregational) 1850-1980 (New York: United Church Press, 1987), 11.

the tone of Sunday School, temperance, and charitable workers was relentlessly conversionary.

But as the city grew in population and spread out in the 1850s and 1860s, Hartford developed a structure of neighborhoods distinguished by ethnic, religious and class segmentation. This growth created what were, in effect, immigrant bastions. And, as a result, Protestant benevolent and social activity increasingly took the shape of action directed by one group of people at another group isolated by a buffer zone—the new commercial and industrial downtown.

Despite their energetic activity and commitment to benevolent reform, few of the city's mid-century Protestant leaders were ever able to overcome their sense of the radical differentness of the new immigrants. Barbara Cross, Horace Bushnell's biographer, notes that during the 1840s and 1850s Bushnell ultimately "rationalized the prevailing contempt for religious or racial aliens" in Hartford. "Blurring distinctions among them, he treated them with all practical neglect and theoretic derogation."⁵ Like many of his parishioners at North Church, Bushnell responded to mass migration by personal withdrawal, by refusing to acknowledge the changes happening before his eyes. "Our range of life is so walled up by the respectability of our associations, that what is on the other side of the wall is very much a world unknown," he admitted in a sermon published in 1858."⁶

Containing Catholics:

The elite Protestant policy of trying to keep Catholics out of sight and out of mind did give immigrants a certain room to maneuver and develop their own institutions—most notably the institutional infrastructure of the Catholic church. Catholics asserted themselves repeatedly and increasingly, but until the 1870s they could find few signs that they would ever find an equal footing in Hartford.

⁵ Barbara M. Cross, Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 40.

⁶ Horace Bushnell, Sermons for the New Life (New York: 1858), 330. Cited in Cross, Horace Bushnell, 40.

In the decades before the Civil War, only one major Yankee institution, the Democratic Party, showed much openness to Catholic immigrants—and even its chief interest was in finding votes to end the party’s perennial minority status, not an embrace of Catholic equality. In the years between the 1830s and 1870, Catholic immigrants to Hartford experienced local versions of most of the classic themes and controversies that characterized the first great wave of Catholic immigration to the United States: daunting poverty, illiteracy, social isolation and discrimination, disenfranchisement, and inability to control critical communal issues such as the education of the young. The major episodes of Catholic assertion and Protestant response are laid out below:

*In the 1830s, tensions arising out of competition for jobs and religious differences led to frequent conflict between African-Americans and Irish immigrants in the old East Side. In July of 1834, “there was what amounted to a three-day race riot” in the area around Talcott Street, unrest apparently triggered by exchanges that took place after a mass at Holy Trinity Church.⁷

*As the city’s Irish immigrant population rose rapidly in the late 1840s and 1850s, serious tensions developed, especially as immigrants were naturalized and began active participation in city elections as Democrats. Anti-immigrant sentiment crystallized in a strong nativist movement in Connecticut. The secretive American or Know-Nothing Party organized in the state in 1853 under the title, “the State Council of Connecticut.” Its constitution stated that the party’s object was “to resist the insidious policy of the Church of Rome, and all other foreign influences against the institutions of our country, by placing in all offices in the gift of the people, whether by election or appointment, none but native-born Protestant citizens.”⁸

One factor that “pushed” nativist Protestants to support the new party was the common perception that the Democratic Party was acting increasingly vigorously on behalf of immigrants. Until the early 1850s, for example, immigrant

⁷ Mentioned in Glenn Weaver, Hartford: An Illustrated History of Connecticut’s Capital (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1982), 94.

⁸ Albert Van Dusen, Connecticut (New York: Random House, 1962), 221.

participation in city politics was discouraged by the fact that Hartford's aldermen and city councilors were elected at large. But in 1850, under Democratic majorities in the General Assembly, Hartford's state-chartered form of government was altered to mandate elections through a new system of city wards. In the city elections of 1851, the Sixth Ward, located on the East Side moved permanently into the Democratic column. In 1852, the Sixth elected the city's first Catholic councilor, James Mulligan, a foundry worker. In 1853 and 1854 Irish voters on the East Side played a key role in electing Democratic mayors.

As a reaction to developments of this sort, in 1855, the Know-Nothing candidate for governor, William A. Minor, won election, along with a working majority in the General Assembly. Immediately, Minor denounced immigrants as unfit for citizenship and proposed a 21-year residency requirement for naturalization. He then moved briskly to disband six state militia companies composed of Irish Catholic immigrants. In 1856, the General Assembly also passed legislation that required all church property to be held by local congregations—a practice that struck directly at Catholic doctrine and customary practice. To add insult to injury, the act explicitly exempted Episcopal, Methodist, Shaker and Jewish groups from the restriction. An amendment to the state Constitution passed restricting suffrage to men able to read the state Constitution and laws, as did an act forbidding the state courts to naturalize aliens.

*During the 1850s, the city's Protestant leadership also moved to criticize informal practices that had led to *de facto* public funding for parochial education at the common school level. Horace Bushnell and educational reformer Henry Barnard pushed for a reorganization of the city's publicly-funded schools to eliminate Catholic control of some of the city's schools. (Between the 1830s and 1868, Hartford had improvised a system in which minority groups received some funding, largely salaries for teachers, for schools conducted in or by churches. This practice began when African-Americans asked to remove their children from the common schools and to receive public support for teacher's salaries. Segregated schools were then formed at the Colored Congregational Church on

Talcott Street and the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Pearl Street. Catholics took advantage of this precedent to demand and obtain similar support for schools at Holy Trinity Church on Talcott Street, St. Patrick's Church on Church Street, and St. Peter's Church on the South Green. Two key factors that permitted this blurring of the boundaries between church and state were the decentralized system of public education that prevailed and the overlap between city-funded common schools and Protestant-dominated Sunday Schools. Until the end of the 19th century, each of the Town of Hartford's common school districts had its own elected school board that hired and fired teachers [Hartford had wholly separate Town and City governments until 1897. Education fell under the purview of the town selectmen, who were often more receptive to the requests of immigrants than the Board of Aldermen or City Council.⁹] A district board could be and often was set up to meet the needs of a particular population group.

Full scale political conflict broke out in 1865 and 1866, as Protestant reformers pushed for a tighter system of school administration that would be less friendly to Catholics. The major confrontation took place in St. Peter's parish, which had been organized in 1859 to serve Catholics living south of the Park River, which then bisected downtown Hartford. Bishop Francis McFarland staked out an impressive and controversial location for the new church, directly on the city's South Green, which was emerging as an elite Protestant neighborhood. The parish, initially located in a disused Masonic hall, opened a school with 200 pupils in 1860. The school was staffed by principal John Gaffney and three lay Catholic women, who were all paid by the local district committee.

For several years, the district committee continued to employ an all-Catholic teaching staff at St. Peter's. But by the mid-1860s, half of the staff was composed of Protestant women who began to insist on using the King James Version of the Bible, rather than the Catholic Douay Version, in classroom lessons and devotions. (It was taken for granted by both Catholics and

⁹ Hartford's very complex local political and governmental history has not yet been disentangled. Many of these remarks are preliminary assessments.

Protestants that the school's curriculum should include religious lessons and devotions).

In 1865, Father John Lynch, pastor of St. Peter's, denounced the King James Version as a "secular book," and pressured the district committee to forbid its use at St. Peter's, or, failing that, to transfer the Protestant teachers. When the district committee failed to act, Lynch mobilized Catholic voters to eject the district committee at that fall's town election. Before leaving office, however, the committee signed contracts with several Protestant teachers, most notably Emily Parsons, who began her lessons each day with lengthy prayers and readings from the Protestant version of the Bible.

Lynch and Parsons went head to head in the classroom, and in the public prints, but Lynch was unable to oust the resolute Parsons. He decided, instead, to remove all her pupils, and so Parsons conducted her lessons in solitude until the spring of 1866. At that point, the city's priests announced the removal of publically-funded teachers from both of the city's parochial schools. The city's parishes then sought to locate religious sisters who could take over Catholic school instruction. The feud rumbled on into the late 1860s, eventually leading the *Hartford Times* to denounce "the insane bigotry of a few hotheads in the South School District."¹⁰

Protestant Shifts in the 1870s

In several important respects, Hartford's Protestant leaders began to alter their policy of detachment and hostility toward Catholics and immigrants. Residential segmentation continued, but the social policies of a new generation of Protestant leaders (and the religious values underpinning them) changed significantly. Encouraged by their economic success and the institutional growth of their own churches and other endeavors, Bushnell's heirs and disciples grasped during the 1870s and 1880s that the homogeneous world of their childhoods could not be recovered. Further, they came to realize that Protestants could not maintain a guiding hand in society if they continued their withdrawal from the city.

¹⁰ *The Hartford Times*, 27 July 1868, pg. 4.

Growing Protestant congregations were mobilized to a remarkable degree to staff ventures in the neighborhoods along the Connecticut River that were now almost entirely populated by immigrants. During the 1880s and 1890s, Protestant voluntary activity far exceeded the levels of the antebellum period. During the late 1880s, for example, at least 50 Protestant voluntary agencies and efforts functioned actively in the immigrant Sixth Ward along the Connecticut River. While many of these new voluntary and benevolent activities smacked strongly of bourgeois Protestant triumphalism and social control, they were also motivated by genuine piety, and often provided the only assistance available to the poor.

After the Civil War, the leaders of the third establishment began to acknowledge the existence of some limits to legitimate Protestant power in Hartford. One key factor in this shift was the unavoidable recognition that immigrant Catholics had rallied strongly to the Union's cause during the Civil War. Some of the members of the rising generation of Protestant pastors had worked closely with Catholics during military service, and this group, in particular, proved to be willing to shape their ministries at least partly to accommodate the preferences and demands they discovered in their now-frequent dealings with lay Catholics and with the institutional Catholic Church.

And as the Catholic population rose, so did the consideration accorded to Catholic values and sentiments. By the late 1870s, when Catholics made up one third of the city's population, signs of a softening Protestant stance were surfacing in many areas of civic life. .

The Protestant leaders who emerged in these years had deeper contact with Catholics than their predecessors could tolerate. The Rev. Joseph Hopkins Twichell, pastor of the genteel Asylum Hill Congregational Church, provided a good example of this transition. Nominated for his pulpit by Bushnell in 1865, Twichell was mentioned almost daily in the Hartford press. For decades he was held up as a symbol of pastoral warmth, civic activism, and sound values.

Two major themes dominated journalistic discussions of Twichell during the 1870s and 1880s. The first was his close friendship with Samuel Clemens and the second was his service as a chaplain in the Civil War. The product of a

sheltered "Puritan" childhood in rural Southington, Connecticut, Twichell reflexively upheld the social leadership of the Protestant churches and the Republican Party well into the 20th century. But he was manifestly a man who had been changed and broadened by his wartime experiences.

More importantly, Twichell, who had once written proudly to his father, a Congregational deacon, to report that every single member of his Class of 1859 at Yale had undergone a Protestant conversion experience, was willing to publicize, indeed to celebrate his dealings with Catholics. Plucked from Union Theological Seminary and ordained to serve as chaplain of the 71st Regiment of New York Volunteers.¹¹ Twichell was alarmed to discover that only a few members of the 71st were Protestants. Twichell remained with the mostly Irish Catholic regiment through three years of heavy combat and formed close relationships with many Catholic soldiers--and particularly with John O'Hagan, a Jesuit priest who also served as a chaplain in the 71st. Accounts of the Twichell-O'Hagan friendship appeared in Hartford newspapers no fewer than 14 times between 1868 and 1885, usually culminating with Twichell's description of the night he and O'Hagan huddled together on the battlefield at Fredericksburg in 1862. "I remember thinking. Great God! A Puritan minister and a Jesuit sharing the same blanket."¹²

However, closer, more respectful relations with Catholics and other immigrants did not imply that Protestants now believed in the equality of all ethnic and religious groups. While many Protestants were willing to admit that no single

¹¹ Joseph Hopkins Twichell Letters, April 9, 1858, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

¹² See the Twichell scrapbook at the Beinecke. Many out of town newspapers also circulated the account. The story usually surfaced when O'Hagan visited Twichell or when Twichell took some public role at a reunion of Civil War combatants. Another clipping with an alternative version of the tradition puts the key words in O'Hagan's mouth. In it, the shivering Twichell asks O'Hagan why he is laughing. The priest responded, "Because of the scene of you and me--me a Jesuit priest and you a Puritan minister of the worst kind, spooned together under the same blankets."

group could hold all of the power in society, they still claimed many prerogatives. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Twichell and colleagues like George Leon Walker at Center Church, argued that Protestants were still entitled to shape the values of the entire community. Catholics might enjoy a legitimate place in Hartford's civic life, but Congregationalists and other Protestants occupied an inherited position of privilege.

Despite his generally conciliatory public stance towards Catholics, Twichell always reserved the right to criticize the Catholic Church and to encourage the conversion of Catholics to Protestantism. He encouraged several Catholic women who served as domestics in his own household to join Asylum Hill Church, including his maid, Suzy Lee.¹³ On one occasion, he enabled Lee to pursue her sister to Holyoke, Massachusetts so that Lee could thwart the sister's plan of joining the Sisters of Charity.

By and large, however, the leaders of the third establishment generally preferred that Protestant hegemony be exercised circumspectly. They embraced opportunities to demonstrate that the Protestant ethos transcended partisan or ethnic boundaries. On some occasions, they even were willing to act publicly to oppose Republican politicians. Twichell and Walker of Center Church both received frosty receptions from their congregations when they publicly opposed James Blaine's candidacy for president in 1884. "The faces at the women's sewing circle supper were still glum," Walker wrote in his diary in December of 1884. "They are still angry with me over the Blaine business."¹⁴

Twichell was particularly willing to make goodwill gestures towards Catholics and their leaders. For example, his diary recounts the pageant surrounding the transfer of Connecticut's regimental battle flags to the new state capital in 1879. Twichell recorded that U.S. Sen. Joseph Hawley, a member of

¹³ Twichell, *Diary*, October 24, 1874 and May 7, 1876.

¹⁴ George Leon Walker, *Diary*, December 10, 1884, Yale Divinity School Library. A more serious and substantial thinker than Twichell, Walker was nonetheless capable of grand gestures. The New York Times reported in an astonished tone on November 8, 1884 that Walker had been accompanied to the polls by 500 workmen carrying torches.

the Asylum Hill Church, asked him to share a carriage with Bishop McMahon, who also had been chaplain of a Massachusetts regiment during the Civil War. "Hawley said, 'Now it would be nice if you would ride with him. It would read well and look well and be on the side of things that make for peace.' Twichell did it (McMahon, too)."¹⁵

By the 1880s, Protestants workers in the city' slum neighborhoods were increasingly conscious of Catholic preferences and many of them attempted to minimize offenses to Catholics' sensibilities. One sure sign of this concern surfaced in the Graham Taylor's pioneer Religious Census of Hartford, performed in 1889 for the Connecticut Bible Society. The census, for example, listed Hartford's Catholic temperance and benevolent associations as well as Protestant ones, an unprecedented act .

Although intended as an aid to urban evangelism, Taylor's Census also reflected nervous Protestant temperature-taking at exactly the point where the immigrant portion of the city's population overtook that of the native-born. Taylor defined "the foreign population" as immigrants and their children, and he reported that in 1889 the foreign outnumbered "Americans (white and colored)" 24,900 to 23,154. ¹⁶

Taylor's census took account of self-ascribed religious identity by ethnic group, religious affiliation, and attendance at worship. It also gingerly probed birth and intermarriage rates. Carefully searching for a positive way to put troubling news, Taylor reported that illiteracy rates among the city's 500 recent Italian immigrants exceeded 50 percent. Protestant mission and relief workers were then canvassing Italian immigrants vigorously to find out whether they were less

¹⁵ Joseph Hopkins Twichell, Diary, September 17, 1879. One of McMahon's real cards to play was that he, too, had a distinguished career as a chaplain with a Massachusetts regiment during the Civil War, serving with particular distinction at the battle of Antietam, a day of devastation for Connecticut regiments.

¹⁶ Taylor, Religious Census, 9.

loyal than the Irish to the Catholic Church. Taylor praised the willingness of Italian parents to sacrifice for their children and noted hopefully that the children are unusually bright, and easy to reach, many attending Protestant Sunday and mission schools. Some of the adults themselves attend evening school. It was observed too that this people were more thrifty than is usually supposed; though, as a class not particularly tidy. None was found at the Town Farm.¹⁷

Taylor, who had recently moved from the post of pastor of Fourth Congregational Church, which served the East Side, into a faculty position at the Hartford Theological Seminary, had a long record of involvement in "rescue work" for alcoholic men. He learned there how fiercely many of the families of drinking men resisted Protestant interference in their lives. The aim of Taylor's "Yoked Fellows Band" was to encourage drinking men to help one another and then, eventually, to bring them into Fourth Church as regular members. Taylor's archive includes a letter from a member of the band member illustrating Catholic resistance to the evangelization of family members by Protestants, even if it involved the successful treatment of serious drinking problems. "After going without a drink for a year and ten months, John O'Brien began it again some two months ago after being shamefully treated by his sister, whom he had helped with her children in many ways" a band member wrote to Taylor. "She treated him thus because he would not give up the Fourth Church."¹⁸

During the 1880s, Virginia Thrall Smith, the chief executive of the City Mission Society, knew that success in her work, which focused increasingly on the care of dependent women and children, depended on demonstrating respect for Catholics and Catholicism. As a result, she consciously sought out Catholic married women to serve as foster parents for dependant Catholic children in order to quell rumors that her work was intended to snatch away Catholic babies.

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¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

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Check fn.

As she developed Connecticut's new child welfare system during the 1880s, Smith also took care to cultivate working relationships with the Catholic clergy and religious responsible for supervising the parallel system of Catholic child care emerging just then. Her public reports, for example always specified clearly the number Catholic children transferred "into the supervision of Catholic priests" and child welfare organizations.¹⁹

Smith knew that critics could undermine her work by depicting it as anti-Catholic, a charge made frequently in the city's Democratic newspaper, The Hartford Times, which was the mainstream voice for immigrant Catholics. Smith always tried to control damage promptly. In June of 1892, for example, rumors spread that a woman who had died in childbirth at Smith's house had been denied permission to call a Catholic priest. Immediately Smith responded with a denial in the city's newspapers and in her own magazine, The City Mission Record.

It has been stated that the girl-mother was Irish, that she was not permitted the consolation of a priest upon her death-bed, that her body was removed in secrecy that her disease was puerperal fever, that fifty dollars had been paid for harboring her, etc,²⁰

Smith proclaimed that, far from being an Irish Catholic, the woman was a native-born Episcopalian from Westfield, Massachusetts who had refused Smith's offer to send for an Episcopal cleric. Smith knew that without the support of Catholics, her work would break down. Therefore, she could not maintain the critical and evangelical posture that she herself had struck before 1880.

By the mid 1890s, the attitudes of Hartford's Protestant leaders had changed so much that many of them were moving to dampen displays of nativist sentiment that accompanied a depressed economy. Led by the Rev. Edwin Pond Parker, the pastor of the genteel South Congregational Church, mobilized

¹⁹ See for example Smith's Report to the State Board of Charities, 1884, 57.

²⁰ "The True Story of Annie Brown--Mrs. Smith's Statement" City Mission Record, July 1892, 99.

Hartford's Congregational ministers to oppose the American Protective Association's activities.

The Hartford South Association of Congregational ministers spent most of its February meeting 1894 discussing the topic: "What Should Be Our Bearing Toward the Catholics Among Us." Despite lingering fears about another massive wave of Catholic migration, the minutes report that, "Most of the brethren present expressed their sentiments, which amounted to about this--that we should treat all persons in a friendly and Christian manner, and also be watchful for liberty, for our institutions and for truth."²¹

In a sermon republished in all four of the city's daily newspapers, Parker, one of Bushnell's closest disciples, carried the ministerial discussion to his parishioners and to the public. He himself argued that Connecticut's Catholics had proven over the course of decades that they were not a threat to liberty or even to public schooling. "They have proved loyal to this country. Loyal to their Church, they are free in civil affairs. They would defend the republic with the last drop of their blood."²²

Indeed, Parker now valued the Catholic church as "a mighty bulwark for conservative values" against the "wide raging and destructive forces of the social life."²³ He added that in the renewed nativist controversy, he wanted "to be counted with the Catholics" because "they are my friends."²⁴

Recognizing the legitimacy of other religious groups was now part of the price of social leadership for Protestants in Hartford. To secure the new social, educational, cultural and political institutions they were creating, Protestants

²¹ Hartford South Association Minutes, February 1884.

²² Edwin Pond Parker, Hartford Courant, February 19, 1894, 8. Parker went on to propose and lead to a successful vote a resolution criticizing nativism at the Annual Conference of the state's Congregational churches in November 1894.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Joseph W. Duffy, "Congregational Clergy and the APA," Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin 48 (Winter 1983) No. 1., 24.

needed at least the consent of Catholics and others. To get that consent non-Protestants could no longer be kept standing in the vestibule. And, as Parker now suggested, Catholics might make good allies against the even more unfamiliar folk and ideological systems then beginning to appear on the nation's shores.

The Irish in America owe everything to the Church, more than they are aware of. Whoever heard of an Irish-Catholic anarchist, nihilist, or ultra-socialist? The Roman Catholic Church holds here people in martial array for the faith...I find myself more closely allied to the Roman Catholic Church than to many Protestants, who by their rationalist beliefs have taken away my Lord. I could even worship with them with some pauses.

* * * * *

But even these extravagant public comments, didn't signify that Hartford's Protestant ministers and politicians were inviting Catholics into the city's inner sanctum as equals. Catholics noted the improving climate of opportunity, but they retained a healthy skepticism. "Except where Catholics are strong in numbers and consequently powerful in influence, it is ordinarily regarded as presumptuous in them to aspire to civic prominence," an editorial in the Hartford weekly, *The Connecticut Catholic*, observed after the 1892 elections (which brought in a Democratic governor with an electoral margin of 1,100 votes). "It would matter little what their capacity may be, or what their public service may have been; their ambitions are met with the condescending assurance that success is doubtful for them because of their Catholic affiliation."²⁵ One of the reasons for this skepticism was the continuing reluctance of Yankee voters to authorize a change in the city's electoral districts. The 1850 plan with six wards persisted until 1897,

²⁵ *The Connecticut Catholic*, 16 April 1892, pg. 4. In rejecting Republican rule, the editor wrote on November 12 of that year, "Connecticut has been true to herself in giving us such a grant and glorious Democratic victory. She has placed herself where she really belongs, outside the pale of the doubtful states, in the list of sane Democratic communities."

an approach that guaranteed immigrants in the Sixth Ward some representation on the Board of Alderman and City Council, but not very much. The wards were drawn as geographical entities, and were not intended to provide proportional representation. As a result of the crush of immigration, by the late 1880s almost 40 percent of the population—the immigrant share—lived in Ward Six and was entitled to only one sixth of the aldermen and councilors. The reforms of 1897 created ten, more equitably drawn wards. The balance of political power began to shift more quickly, leading to the election of the city's first Irish mayor in 1902 and a second in 1910. (True Democratic and Catholic dominance of the city's politics did not arrive until 1935.)

As Hartford's Catholics approached the gates of political power in the 1890s, their leaders were practicing the rhetoric of American civil religion. When Michael Tierney was chosen to replace Lawrence McMahon as Bishop of Hartford in 1894, he selected George Washington's Birthday as the date for his consecration. Tierney seized the occasion to preach on the civic role and promise of Catholics, arguing in particular that the Irish were just as good and loyal Americans as were the Yankees. He then urged that the city Irish-Americans, as a sign of their political maturity, give up the tradition of raucous and assertive parades on St. Patrick's Day in favor of "banquets and other intellectual exercises."

Nevertheless, there was lingering concern about the potential damage that assimilation could do to the city's emerging Catholic subculture. In the 1890s, Catholic leaders still expressed grave concern about the potential lure of the liberties of the Protestant world. Clergy and Catholic journalists still policed the perimeters vigorously. In the middle of singing the praises of the new St. Joseph's Cathedral, for example, the editor of the *Connecticut Catholic* paused to complain about "those Catholics who make a practice of resorting to the religious meetings of Protestant denominations when some itinerant "evangelist" is announced to speak or sing would attend their own church, they would have less reason to be ashamed of themselves. Dull indeed must be the musical tastes of

those who prefer the ditties of these meetings to the beautiful chants of the mass and vesper services.”²⁶

Well into the twentieth century, Hartford’s Catholic political and religious leaders continued to sing this tune.

²⁶ Ibid., 19 March 1892, pg. 8.