Seasons of Grace

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When Bishop John Foley came to Detroit in 1888, he came to a city where Catholics had long been divided, politically and socially, from most of their Protestant brethren. The same was true, to a greater or lesser extent, of Catholics in the rest of the state. Foley hoped that his own charm and his impeccably "American" credentials would help to ease these tensions, and we have seen that he achieved a substantial popularity among non-Catholics locally. That popularity, however, did not prevent the rise of a virulent anti-Catholicism in politics in the early 1890s, or its recrudescence in the years after 1914. Indeed, when Bishop Foley died, early in 1918, the Church in Michigan was on the eve of the most serious political challenge it had ever faced.

But despite the anti-Catholic sentiment that flourished in the Foley years, the gulf between religious camps was narrowing perceptibly. Anti-Catholicism, for all the rancor it caused, ceased in this period to be the ideology of a major political party and was identified instead with an increasingly marginal protest vote. The incidence of marriage between Catholics and Protestants rose sharply in the Foley years, the result, for the most part, of assimilation and Catholic social mobility. Neither Catholic nor conservative Protestant leaders were pleased by this latter development. Still, they were more and more able to find common ground when it came to marriage and the family. For what they called Christian standards of sexual conduct were under a growing assault in the Foley years. Thus conservatives in every church were increasingly likely to see one another as allies.

There was additional progress on the political front. Catholics in the 1890s and after demonstrated a greater independence in political behavior than they had previously done, and the politics of Detroit and Michigan were the less polarized between a "Catholic" and a "Protestant" party as a result. Catholics flocked to the colors in 1898, with the declaration of war against Spain and again in 1917, with the declaration of war against the Central Powers. The rapidity with which Catholics were integrated into these twin crusades is a measure of how thoroughly most Catholics identified themselves as Americans and how willing most non-Catholics were to accept them as fellow citizens. (The experience
of war, at home and abroad, was itself an important cause of rapprochement between Catholics and the rest of the population.) Finally, it appears that Catholics and Protestants in Michigan's towns and smaller cities enjoyed surprisingly amicable relations in the Foley years, at least insofar as the Catholic residents of those towns were relatively well assimilated. This era of small town good feeling had unexpected political consequences on occasion, as we will later see.

**INTERMARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND CONTRACEPTION**

We have already seen that Bishop Caspar Borgess, worried by a growing incidence of mixed marriage, had probably revised diocesan policy with regard to granting dispensations for such marriages, making them extremely hard to get. Such a policy would explain the small number of mixed marriages performed by priests in the Diocese in the mid-1880s. Bishop Foley, on the other hand, seems to have issued dispensations willingly, probably assuming that most "mixed" couples would otherwise marry outside the Church. He was no more pleased than his predecessor would have been, however, by the substantial increase in mixed marriage that took place during his episcopate. Diocesan figures in this regard, it should be noted, are not wholly reliable: the number of dispensations issued in any given year will almost certainly be accurately recorded, but this is not true of the number of marriages. The Chancery relied on pastors for information of this sort, and some were more conscientious reporters than others. And the Chancery itself often seemed uninterested in accurate accounting, despite its professed concern about the rising incidence of mixed marriage. (The *Catholic Directory* lists the same number of marriages for the Diocese of Detroit in each year between 1903 and 1906.) Still, the trend in the Foley years was decidedly upward. The number of dispensations issued annually grew by more than nine times between 1890 and 1917, a rate of increase that was considerably larger than the growth in the Catholic population.¹

The best estimates for the 1890s place the incidence of mixed marriage in the Diocese at between 14 and 19 percent. Between 1900 and 1910 the figures generally range between 19 and 22 percent, with a high of 25 percent occurring in 1909. The reported rate does not drop below 20 percent between 1911 and 1916, save for the 18 percent recorded in 1915. (A 30 percent figure for 1911—startlingly high, under the circumstances—is almost certainly the result of an underreporting of marriages.) Mixed marriage appears to have been largely a phenomenon of the English-speaking parishes. Seven of the twenty-one marriages performed at St. Augustine's Church in Kalamazoo in 1905 involved a non-Catholic. "In common with the bishops and priests of the Church, we must deplore the increasing numbers of these marriages," the pastor lamented, worried that his mostly Irish-American parishioners had adapted all too well to the social world of heavily Protestant Kalamazoo. "One dreads to look ahead 25 years, and forecast how many of the descendants of these couples will go to swell the ever-increasing tide that sweeps thousands into indifferentism." At Wyan-
dotte's Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (Polish) parish, on the other hand, mixed marriages were not a problem. "Do you preach every year on the Sunday prescribed upon Marriage and caution the people about the danger of contracting mixed marriages?" asked the printed form on which all pastors submitted their annual reports to the Chancery in the Foley years. "Have no mixed marriages at all," the Mt. Carmel pastor responded in 1913—a situation apparently typical of many immigrant parishes.2

For clergy in the English-speaking parishes, the rise in mixed marriage was cause for alarm. They worried especially that the children of such marriages would be lost to the Church. Few priests, it seems, had much faith in the promises required of the non-Catholic party with regard to the religious training of offspring, and little confidence that he would eventually embrace Catholicism. "Three families, to the pastor's certain knowledge who have been married in the last few years, have children who are not baptized," the St. Augustine's parish paper warned in 1906. "In another family where the mother belonged to no church, he met children from 10 to 14 years of age, who did not know how to make the sign of the cross, nor say a prayer of any kind, not even the Our Father, and hadn't the slightest idea of God or His Commandments." The obduracy which the clergy assumed in the non-Catholic party was perhaps the cause of the surprisingly minimal requirements for religious instruction before the wedding. "At least one month of instructions once a week," was stipulated by the Chancery, although pastors were apparently free to waive the requirement. "When possible yes," the pastor at Holy Cross parish in Marine City answered, when asked in 1914 if he provided the necessary instruction to non-Catholics who were about to be married in his church, "but scarcely ever possible." Bishop Michael Gallagher eventually issued more stringent regulations: "a minimum of ten instructions in the Faith" was required after 1931, and pastors were no longer permitted to decide on their own initiative to waive or alter the law. But this reform came late, fully thirty-five years after the incidence of mixed marriage in the Diocese had risen to what nearly all good Catholics regarded as worrisome proportions.3

Mixed marriage was also seen by the clergy as a principal means by which individual Catholics were led to tolerate divorce and contraception. Both were subjects of growing concern by the turn of the century. The divorce rate nationally more than doubled between 1880 and 1910, and contraceptive practice rose substantially in this same period. By the time of the First World War, moreover, the United States was home to a militant "birth control movement," led by the flamboyant Margaret Sanger.4

Catholic spokesmen were inclined to blame this doleful state of affairs at least in part on Protestantism. It was the Reformation, after all, that had reduced marriage to a civil contract and had abolished confession, the principal means by which so private a sin as birth control might be detected and admonished against. "Who is it that fosters conjugal infidelity under the sacred sanction of law, who sweeps away the bulwark of society by legalizing divorce, practices the
sin which threatens the extinction of the race that was once dominant in New England?” demanded the Jesuit Michael Dowling in an 1890 speech before an audience of Catholics and Protestants in Detroit. “Is it not the Catholic Church alone which applies any effective remedy to the most dangerous diseases of modern society?”

But it was not possible for even the most triumphalist Catholic to blame the sins of the marital world wholly on Protestants, for many Protestant clergy and laymen were outspoken in their opposition to divorce and birth control. The Michigan Catholic in the Foley years was increasingly willing to acknowledge this. “Outside of the Catholic Church, thank God, there are to be found honest men who are noble and patriotic enough to cry out against one of the great evils of this century, an evil which is fast sapping the family life of America,” the editor wrote in 1916, with regard to an appearance in Detroit by the infamous Margaret Sanger. The warmth which the editor felt for his Protestant allies was only increased by the worries he nursed about certain elements in the Catholic population. Despite clerical opposition, birth control was rapidly acquiring something like legitimacy in the eyes of many Americans, and it was no longer possible to assume, as Catholic leaders had long been accustomed to do, that it was an exclusively Protestant practice. “In Philadelphia, last week, a speaker was almost crushed by an ignorant mob, in their desperation to get Birth-Control literature, which was freely circulated,” the Michigan Catholic reported uneasily in 1916. Evidently it was a more thoroughly secular world than many of the clergy had hitherto believed, and an astonishingly large proportion of the population was either “without religion” or ignorant “of the reason as to why God’s commandments were spoken.” The Catholic population would bear watching, then, and Catholic reticence on the topic of contraception—in the confessional as well as the pulpit—would have to give way to more frank and vigorous teaching. This was also the conclusion of Father John A. Ryan, who warned, in an influential article in 1916, that many Catholics were practicing birth control under the illusion that it was not a mortal sin. Perhaps partly in response to Father Ryan, the American bishops made their first collective statement in opposition to contraception in 1919. It was contained in the pastoral letter issued by the hierarchy to mark the return of peace to a ravaged Europe.

Were there priests in the Diocese of Detroit who believed, as Father Ryan did, that some of their parishioners practiced birth control? There is very little evidence that bears on the question, and what there is bears on it only indirectly. Were the members of St. Joseph’s parish in Erie, who were angry with their pastor in 1899 because he “interferes with peoples private affairs and troubles,” upset about close questioning in the confessional with regard to contraception? (Whatever the “interference” entailed, it was sufficiently resented that “many” were “declining to attend Church[,] refusing to contributing toward Extra Collections and in their ordinary conversation refer to [the priest] with the omission of the title justly due him.”) Were anxieties about birth control a cause of the greater hostility to women that characterized some of the sermons reported in the Michigan Catholic.
gan Catholic after about 1905? The paper's editor had apparently come to believe that women were often the initiators of contraceptive practice—he did not indicate whether or not he had reference to Catholic women—and in 1907 he gave front-page play to an unusually frank interview in which Baltimore's Cardinal Gibbons made the same point. "No doubt many women thoughtlessly discuss this subject among each other," Gibbons told a correspondent from the New York World: "It is not unusual, in all probability, for older women to advise their younger sisters, who are about to assume the relations of wifehood, not to bring children into the world for a few years, but to 'have a good time and travel.' This instruction that has been given the young wife is probably without the knowledge of the husband."77

Like Cardinal Gibbons, certain priests in the Diocese were inclined to believe that the "new woman" was notably less modest, less passive, less domesticated than her mother and grandmother had been. And their pronouncements on women were considerably more alarmist than anything that the Michigan Catholic had carried in the 1890s. The changing fashions of the prewar years seemed to Father Henri Blanchot, C.S.Sp., assistant at St. Joachim's parish in Detroit, to signal a new aggressiveness in female sexuality. "The outrageously immodest dress of modern women has broken down the line of demarcation between the pure Christian lady and the harlot," he told a Lenten congregation in 1913. The cathedral's Father John Dempsey saw ominous meaning in the growing acceptability of women's drinking in public. "To speak mildly," he told a local reporter in 1908, "any woman who, either alone, or attended, enters a café and drinks intoxicants, is utterly devoid of self-respect." Bishop Foley himself told a crowd at Holy Redeemer parish in 1913 that "no greater danger to the young exists than cheap theaters with representations of bad women." And Father Michael Esper made the national press wire in 1907 with a sermon against the newly popular teddy bear, which was, according to the priest, promoting a contraceptive mentality in a dangerously vulnerable female population. "The very instincts of motherhood in a growing girl are blunted and oftentimes destroyed if the child is allowed to lavish upon an unnatural toy of this character the loving care which is so beautiful when bestowed upon a doll representing a helpless infant," he informed his congregation in the town of St. Joseph. "No more disgusting sight has ever come to my eyes than is presented by the spectacle of a little girl fondling, caressing, and even kissing these pseudo-animals."78

Father Esper's belief in a veritable conspiracy against the procreative instinct was hardly typical of his fellow priests. Most of them seem to have maintained a more balanced view of the larger culture, whatever worries they may have harbored about the laity and birth control. But there is little doubt that many priests, and many of the laity as well, were deeply disturbed by the more aggressive sexual content of popular culture in the decade or so before 1914. The rapid growth of Detroit in this same period only exacerbated these anxieties, at least for that majority of Catholics in the Diocese who lived in the city and its environs. As new factories were built and the city's population swelled, so too
did the numbers of saloons, dance halls, pool rooms, and burlesque houses—not to mention the newly minted “moving picture show.” “For the past two years the Michigan Catholic has waged war on the obscene picture shows and cautioned its readers against the evil of allowing their children to patronize these places of iniquity,” the paper reminded its readers in 1910, when there were “over a hundred of these places of entertainment” in Detroit. The city’s population was changing as well, becoming more diverse ethnically and more and more disproportionately male. Detroit in 1900 was still a city of families, with children under ten forming the single largest age group and with a small surplus of women in the population. By 1920, however, adults between twenty and thirty-five made up the single largest age group, and males outnumbered females by a sizable margin. The surplus of young adult men was a source of considerable social disorder, and a principal reason why commercialized vice—prostitution, gambling, illegal saloons—prospered so mightily and so openly. “Detroit is in a stage of shocking, horrid, abominable life,” wrote an agitated columnist in the Michigan Catholic as early as 1906, “and monstrous evils are encouraged by the indifference of the police department.” 9

Not all Catholics, of course, were troubled by the changing urban scene, or even by the altered values it apparently expressed. “Sorry to relate there are any number of so-called Catholics who make it a point to attend these performances,” the Michigan Catholic’s “Rosaleen” commented bitterly in 1908, in an attack on what she called “salacious plays.” “They do not care a bit for Church rules or priestly admonition.” The more ambitious of these “independent” Catholics, according to “Rosaleen,” moved in “decidedly Protestant” circles, but she took care to distinguish between nominal Protestants and those who were devout. “Good Protestants, like decent Catholics, taboo all that is vile and despise the lukewarm Catholic.” These sentiments were not new to readers of the Michigan Catholic; they had been told before that Catholics and Protestants shared a common moral agenda. “There is no denominationalism in protecting young women from looseness of morals and the curse of drink,” the editor had pointed out, in a characteristic editorial in 1898. “We can all be Catholics, Methodists or Baptists together on that score.” 10

The frequency with which the paper invoked “good Protestants” as allies in moral reform, however, does seem to have increased in the years around the turn of the century. In part this reflected the growth of the Catholic middle class locally, moral reform being—at least in its political dimensions—a largely middle-class preoccupation. But the sense of solidarity with “good Protestants” also grew because editor William Hughes, and many Catholics like him, believed by the early twentieth century that Christian beliefs and values were under an attack unprecedented in the United States in its scope and ferocity. The religious foundations of the culture were fast eroding, Hughes believed, and this could not help but stimulate rapprochement among the churches. “The new condition which makes the strange bed-fellows is the attack upon the fabric of Christianity itself,” he explained in 1901, with reference to manifestations at a recent Presby-
terian General Assembly of "a kindlier feeling toward the Catholic body than heretofore prevailed." "Presbyterianism is not menaced today by other forms of Christianity as it is by the attack on Christianity itself." Hughes spoke here of the dangers posed by "liberal doctrine, which is modified infidelity," but modified doctrine, in his view, was directly responsible for the widespread erosion of standards for right behavior. And it was in defense of those standards, which included most prominently an uncompromising opposition to divorce and contraception, that Catholics like William Hughes found common ground with many conservative Protestants. That this common ground was increasingly seen by its occupants as a besieged position served to make their "kindlier feeling" for one another all the stronger. This is likely a principal reason that anti-Catholic sentiment nationally declined in the early twentieth century.  

**Politics**

For much of the nineteenth century, the politics of Detroit and Michigan was essentially a politics of religious division. The dominant Republican party was widely regarded as the party of evangelical Protestantism, and it championed such "Protestant" reforms as prohibition—or, at the least, a stringent regulation of the liquor trade—and Sabbatarian laws. And the party was generally assumed to be hostile to the parochial school and to any increase in Catholic political power. The Democrats, on the other hand, were prominently identified with Catholics and with the ethnic population of the state, and with that tradition of "personal liberty" which, in Catholic eyes at least, mandated tolerance for the saloon and Sunday amusements and the further expansion of the parochial schools. Most state and local elections turned on these evocative issues, which simply reinforced the religious divisions within the electorate.  

Bishop Foley had hardly settled himself in his see city when that divided electorate threatened to become even more polarized. A resurgence of organized anti-Catholicism was evident in the Midwest by 1889, orchestrated mainly by the American Protective Association (APA), founded two years earlier at Clinton, Iowa. Alarmed by heavy immigration in the 1880s and by the increasingly Catholic composition of the immigrant population, members of the APA pledged themselves never to vote for a Catholic or to employ one when a Protestant was available or to join with Catholic workers in a strike. The organization found Michigan to be especially fertile ground: there may have been more members of the APA in Michigan by 1894 than in any other state. Its principal organ, the *Patriotic American*, was published in Detroit, and its chief spokesman nationally was a congressman from Saginaw, who had been elected with APA support in 1892. The strength of evangelical Protestantism in Michigan's towns and cities and the bitterness locally over Catholic efforts to expand the parochial schools help to explain the steady growth of the APA in the state. But what caused the membership to balloon—in Michigan and much of the rest of the nation—was the depression that began in 1893 and continued, nearly unabated,
until 1897. The severity of the depression in Detroit and its hinterland, coupled with a strong political tradition of anti-Catholicism, made many voters susceptible to a logic that blamed their considerable troubles on the Papacy and its immigrant agents.\footnote{13}

The APA was strong enough in Detroit in 1891 to be a major factor in politics. Its sympathies naturally lay with the Republican party, where local members of the APA enjoyed a wide influence. “The Republican ticket this year is Protestant from governor to coroner,” an APA circular boasted in 1892. “Briefly, we have compelled it to fall into line.” A Republican majority, sympathetic to the APA, had the previous year been elected to the school board in Detroit, and in the fall of 1892 that majority prohibited the hiring of teachers who had not received the whole of their education in the public schools. This regulation did not long survive: by the fall of 1893 the \textit{Michigan Catholic} could tell its readers that a recent St. Vincent’s Academy graduate had “passed a splendid examination and was admitted to the force of public school teachers.” But the board in 1896 revived a religious issue that had lain dormant for many years when it ordered compulsory Bible reading to be introduced into the public schools.\footnote{14}

The APA enjoyed considerable success as well in Detroit’s police department. “Many of the prominent officers, and probably half the patrolmen on the force, have identified themselves with the Sons,” the Detroit \textit{News} reported in 1892 with regard to the Patriotic Sons of America, a fraternal organization that worked closely with the APA in Detroit, “and it is said that the more zealous members of the order hold periodical meetings in the central station.” A Detroit police sergeant was elected treasurer of the APA organization in Michigan in 1894, when he was known as “one of its most prominent and active promoters.” Police departments in the United States have, of course, traditionally been contested terrain: newly assertive ethnic and racial groups nearly always demand recognition in the form of appointments to, and promotions within, the ranks of the local police. Detroit’s Protestant policemen had good cause to worry in the 1890s: they knew that the Catholic population of the city was growing, and that its political power was bound to increase. As a consequence, they were unusually vulnerable to the alarmist rhetoric of the APA.\footnote{15}

The strength of the APA in the ranks of the city’s police did decline after 1896, when the organization all but disintegrated locally and nationally. But the department remained something of a Protestant fiefdom. Even the election of a Democratic mayor in 1897 and again in 1899 did not result in the appointment of a Catholic to the Metropolitan Police Commission, a gesture that had been pointedly requested in the editorial columns of the \textit{Michigan Catholic}. Nor did it result in an end to discrimination against Catholics within the department itself. “Since the formation of the commission in 1865, there has never been a Roman Catholic citizen in its membership,” the \textit{Michigan Catholic} pointed out in 1900, noting that Mayor William Maybury, elected with strong Catholic support, had appointed four Protestants as police commissioners since 1898. “There are very many Catholic officers in the police force,” the paper continued. “They
are doing hard work. When the time for advancement comes these men generally find themselves passed over in favor of the men who wear Masonic charms on their waistcoat fronts.” Indeed, the highest ranks in the Detroit department remained closed to Catholics until the 1930s. 16

The APA wielded a good deal of influence in the Michigan legislature, especially between 1892 and 1896. Both legislative houses were heavily Protestant, and a substantial minority in each was openly sympathetic to militant anti-Catholicism. A bill to tax churches, church schools, and charitable institutions—something opposed by the leaders of nearly every denomination in the state—was defeated in the House of Representatives in 1892 by the surprisingly narrow margin of 35 to 32. (Its supporters had intended it principally to undermine the growing network of Catholic schools.) An even more serious threat, from the Chancery’s point of view, surfaced in 1895, with the introduction of a measure to repeal the 1867 law that gave the Catholic bishops of the state the right to hold Church property in their own names. Catholics could look for no Protestant allies in their efforts to defeat the Jamison Bill, as it was known. Nor were the Catholic laity or even the clergy unanimous in their opposition to it. “I feel free to say to you that I believe the bill relating to ownership of church property will surely pass the House and Senate this winter,” John Donovan, himself a state legislator, told Bishop Foley early in 1895. “A good many of our own people near as I can learn from Grand Rapids were instrumental in bringing the matter to the attention of Sen. Jamison.” The indomitable Father Peter Baart was apparently an influential lobbyist in support of the bill, a stand that was consistent with his longtime opposition to growing episcopal power. 17

The Chancery mounted a major campaign against the Jamison Bill shortly after its introduction. But in order to do so, Bishop Foley himself had to overcome what was, given the times, an astonishing degree of political ignorance. “I would ask you the name of any Catholics in the Senate or House or of those you judge likely to be friendly toward us,” he wrote to John Donovan in January 1895, asking as well that copies of the legislature’s daily journal be sent to the Chancery. Donovan had discouraging news for his bishop: “At present I know of but one other of our faith in the present membership,” he wrote, and he could name only a single additional member who might readily be persuaded to the Chancery’s point of view. Pessimistic as to the outcome, Foley nonetheless contacted the bishops of Grand Rapids and Marquette, and the three of them orchestrated an apparently formidable lobby against the Jamison Bill. “It cost $3000 to kill the bill in lawyer expenses and etc.,” the chancellor of the Detroit Diocese subsequently recorded. “I paid said sum to parties who fought the bill.” Crucial to the campaign, evidently, were the wide social contacts that many Catholics had established as longtime residents of the state. “I have done as much as I could with regard to defeating the bill at Lansing to which your Lordship called my attention,” Father Anthony Ternes reported from Adrian.
I had several interviews with Mr. A. W. Smith, one of the most prominent and influential Republicans in Southern Michigan. He has written to some of his friends in the legislature, and if his health will allow it, he will be at Lansing on Tuesday evening next.

Today I went to Hudson, the home of the State Senator of this district, and through Father Nacy's influence, prevailed upon several friends of the Senator, to write him and request him to oppose the bill.

Mr. Smith thinks that perhaps the best plan would be to see the governor and have him veto the bill, if it passes.

Not all of Michigan's Catholics were the impoverished immigrants on which anti-Catholic propagandists liked to dwell, and in the end the Catholic lobby had its way. The Jamison Bill was defeated in the spring of 1895.18

The defeat of that bill, at what was probably the height of APA influence in the state, suggests that the appeal of anti-Catholicism as a political ideology was not as great as alarmists on either side of the religious divide were inclined to believe. The behavior of Michigan's leading Republicans in the 1890s indicates that this was the case. Unwilling to repudiate the APA, most party leaders were also unwilling to risk their political futures on its program. The Republicans succeeded in drawing significant Catholic support in the Detroit mayoral elections in 1889, 1891, and 1893 by abandoning their traditional anti-saloon rhetoric and soliciting votes for the Pingree ticket in the German and Polish areas of the city. Mayor Hazen Pingree proved to be an effective apostle of municipal reform, and his Catholic support was only enhanced by his campaigns on behalf of the three-cent streetcar fare and lower prices for gas, electric, and water service. During the six years of Pingree's mayoralty, indeed, the politics of Detroit were focused more sharply than ever before on substantive rather than symbolic issues, as Pingree sought to bring a portion of Detroit's traditionally Democratic voting blocs into a new Republican coalition. His success led in 1896 to his nomination and subsequent election as Republican governor of Michigan. By this time it was clear to even the convinced anti-Catholics in the party's councils that Pingree's pragmatic orientation was essential to continued Republican domination of a rapidly changing state.19

The triumph of pragmatism over ideology among Michigan's Republicans was matched by a similar shift in the national Republican party after 1892. The party made substantial gains in the congressional elections of 1894, due almost entirely to the devastating depression that had begun, under a Democratic president, in the course of the previous year. Detroit's Catholics voted more heavily than usual for Republicans in 1894, notwithstanding the clear links between that party and the APA—links that even Mayor Pingree's popularity among Catholics could not obscure. Anxious to exploit the depression for all its political worth, the Republicans in 1896 campaigned largely on economic issues, choosing as their standard bearer Ohio's Senator William McKinley, who was prominently identified with the protective tariff. McKinley's own political history identified him as a supremely pragmatic Republican, inclined to ignore, as excessively divisive, such traditionally Protestant preoccupations as regulation of
the saloon and Sunday amusements. The Democrats, on the other hand, nominated William Jennings Bryan, a devout Presbyterian and an active temperance man, whose political vision and political style were shaped almost wholly by his religious convictions.

The 1896 election was a decisive one in American political history, and nowhere more so than in Michigan. Catholic voters in the state—and in the city of Detroit—cast a majority of their votes for McKinley, although they had been a mainly Democratic population even in 1894. Bryan, however, attracted unusually strong support among certain segments of the normally Republican Protestant population. This abrupt realignment was caused by what was essentially a reversal of political images: Bryan looked and sounded, to a good many Democrats, much like those Republicans who had historically threatened the “personal liberties” of men who liked to drink and to enjoy themselves on Sunday afternoons. (Those enemies of personal liberty had often been enemies of the parochial school as well.) McKinley, on the other hand, appeared to stand for what Democrats regarded as their own tradition of tolerance for ethnic and religious diversity.

The political realignment of 1896 proved to be an enduring one. The Republican party was widely seen thereafter not as the party of evangelical Protestantism but as the party of prosperity. It was the dominant party nationally, on the strength of this image, until 1932. Catholics in Detroit and Michigan did not, to be sure, become a mostly Republican population. But they were never again as heavily Democratic in their allegiances as they had been before the 1890s. Nor were the politics of the city or the state ever again as polarized on the basis of religion.

What happened politically in Michigan in the 1890s happened in part because the Catholic population of the state had changed considerably since the religious wars of the 1850s. Its growing middle class was now able to enlist the support of influential Protestants in the fight against anti-Catholicism. “It is a matter of satisfaction to witness the stand taken by respectable Protestants against the vile APA organization,” the Michigan Catholic commented in 1893. “Clergymen have denounced it from their pulpits as un-American, un-Christian and villainously bestial; the public press has scored it unmercifully, and public officials have ignored the pleadings of its howling officials.” The utility of religious toleration had also become more apparent to many members of what was an increasingly diverse society. The introduction of the Bible into Detroit’s public schools in 1896 was challenged, and eventually thwarted, almost entirely without Catholic assistance. “The teaching of the Bible, in the most innocuous form, could not possibly be accomplished without sectarianism,” the Michigan Catholic pointed out, “and this became apparent at once upon the motion of the Jewish and free-thinking citizens of the city, who took steps to have the proceedings stopped and the selected readings eliminated from the school course.”

The matter went to the courts and Circuit Judge Carpenter, himself a Protestant, decided, in a most masterly piece of legal writing, that the law against the teaching
of religion in the schools was being violated and enjoined the school board from continuing this part of the curriculum. The school board, still obstinate, carried the case to the Supreme Court, where it still rests.

Meantime, the non-Catholics who opposed the introduction of sectarian teaching in the schools, had had their influence on the election of new inspectors, and the Board which had just taken office has done so on the platform that the Bible readings must go.

The force of public opinion in this matter has been wholly exercised without Catholic intervention, and the wholesome lesson has been given in the whole matter that the Catholic position was the right one years ago, as it is the right one now. The fact that no Catholic voice has been raised in the matter has enabled the difficulty to be settled without the injection of prejudice.

The election of a Catholic as Detroit city treasurer in 1897 seemed to confirm that at least a portion of the city's non-Catholic majority preferred tolerance to religious controversy. William B. Thompson, a lifelong member of St. Vincent's parish, served as treasurer until 1906, when he was elected mayor of Detroit—the first Catholic to hold the position.

The politics of Detroit and Michigan were relatively free of overt religious bigotry between the late 1890s and about 1910. This was indeed the case in much of the United States. After 1910, however, a resurgent anti-Catholicism was increasingly evident throughout the nation, as the general political mood became progressively more apocalyptic. A weak economy in 1913 and a short but sharp depression in 1914 helped to broaden the audience for anti-Catholic—and anti-immigrant—propaganda, which now emanated primarily from small-town and rural America. From the Missouri hamlet of Aurora came the *Menace*, a vitriolic anti-Catholic paper that claimed a circulation of 1,000,000 by 1914, just three years after its founding. It was regularly sold on the streets of Detroit and apparently circulated widely, even among Catholics. "A good Catholic cannot be stirred through the 'rot' published in this vile sheet," a worried factory foreman told the *Michigan Catholic* in 1913, "but I am convinced that there are some lukewarm Catholics who fully believe all they read in this paper. In the factory in which I work—one of the largest auto factories in the city—there are many Catholics and in the department in which I am employed, a number of these men take the *Menace* and try to corrupt their companions." His "know-it-all ignorant" fellow workers were attracted to the *Menace*, he believed, by the paper's progressive stand on economic issues and its cautiously cordial attitude toward the growing socialist movement in the United States. "I only regret that Catholics do not work for the Church equally as hard as these men are hustling for the *Menace* and Socialism."

The resurgence of anti-Catholicism also brought in its wake the usual company of itinerant lecturers. A few of them claimed to be former priests and nuns—a venerable tradition on the anti-Catholic circuit; nearly all of them scented vast Roman conspiracies behind most of the nation's troubles, including some from the past. "A Boston evangelist . . . has taken up quarters at the Patriotic Church, corner Fourth and Howard Streets, for the purpose of 'enlightening'
his friends and hearers of the part the Catholic Church had in the assassination of President Lincoln,” the pastor at Holy Trinity Church reported in 1915. The more typical anti-Catholic diatribe focused on the threat to political liberties posed by the parochial schools and by the growing network of Catholic charitable institutions. “The parochial school is the foundation of their great power,” the Methodist Bishop Albert Ryerson told a purportedly “secret meeting” to which the Protestant clergy of Detroit were invited in 1915. “More than 1,000,000 of Catholic children are isolated from all that makes for good citizenship.” Bishop Ryerson looked to the state as the best hope for curbing Catholic power. “Not only would I advocate the government control of parochial or private schools, but every institution, private or ecclesiastical, should be regularly inspected. Sweatshop conditions, which are known to exist in many Roman institutions would then be made impossible.” He did not see these proposals as themselves a violation of individual liberties; on the contrary, they were meant to enable Catholics to claim their inalienable rights to independent thought and action. “We fought a bitter war to liberate a few millions of slaves,” he told his audience. “I would gladly give my life to help in the emancipation of 14,000,000 slaves of the Roman church, who are in greater bondage than any southern negro ever was.”

Bishop Ryerson was hardly alone in his militance. “At present Detroit has a number of anti-Catholic lecturers holding meetings in this city,” the Michigan Catholic noted in 1916, “and the House of the Good Shepherd is being regularly attacked for its work of reformation. . . . A number of meddling bigots have called at the House and tried to force their way into the private apartments, which house unfortunate girls sent up from the juvenile courts to be cared for.” The Sisters at the house were variously accused of employing their residents under illegal conditions, of holding girls against their will without any authorization from the courts, and of forcing young women to enter the cloistered sisterhood which had its convent on the property. The campaign against the House of the Good Shepherd had attained such proportions by 1916 that Bishop Foley asked the Michigan State Board of Corrections and Charities to visit the house and issue a formal report with regard to their investigation. They did so in the spring of that year, assuring the public that the Sisters ran a model institution. “The spirit of the place is remarkable. There is nothing that would indicate to a stranger a reformatory.”

Attacks on the House of the Good Shepherd diminished thereafter, but the fears that had fueled them were not much allayed. These found subsequent expression in a growing agitation against the parochial schools. This led eventually to two statewide referenda—the first in 1920, the second in 1924—in which Michigan’s voters were asked to approve legislation that would have closed nearly every parochial school in the state. Both referenda were soundly defeated, as we will later see, but at considerable cost to Catholics in terms of money and political energy.

The anti-Catholicism that emerged in the decade after 1910 was essentially
reactionary—a fear-ridden response to a world that had become progressively more secular in its orientation and in its values. But it sometimes wore a liberal guise. The Church was frequently attacked for its purported opposition to intellectual freedom and to democracy. “Why do the papists want to steal from us our God-given rights, life and liberty?” a woman from Galesburg (Michigan) asked Father Frank O’Brien in 1914. “Why are the Priests so wicked, and why do they lie to their poor dupes, as they do to get their hard-earned money? You all know there is no such thing as purgatory. I truly pity the poor ignorant creatures, but why are they such fools as not to think for themselves?” The _Menace_ repeatedly denounced the Church as an enemy of social welfare legislation and of trade unions. _Watson’s Magazine_, a former Populist party organ that converted to anti-Catholicism in 1910, identified the Church as a primary ally of corporate tyranny in the United States. These accusations had, in the main, little basis in fact. Those Catholic clergy and editors who spoke at all about social issues in this period were likely to be sympathetic to moderate trade unionism and to social welfare laws that did not appear to threaten the independence of the parochial schools. The _Michigan Catholic_’s William Hughes defended the right to strike, denounced anti-Semitism in Europe and America, and argued against efforts to restrict immigration. (Like many trade-unionists of his day, however, he was an ardent proponent of the Chinese Exclusion Act.) And if he remained neutral on the issue of women’s suffrage until his death in 1918, his paper still carried occasional features that argued in favor of the woman’s vote.27

Catholic spokesmen were certainly vocal in their opposition to socialism, and this may have looked, to the jaundiced eyes of some anti-Catholics, like confirmation of their hostility to social progressivism. A Catholic “cannot be a Socialist, when Socialism is antagonistic to religious truth, and be a Catholic at the same time,” the _Michigan Catholic_ warned in 1908. “The Socialism which Catholics should keep far-removed from, starts with the untrue postulate that all men are equal, though they evidently are not and never were and never can be, whether physically, mentally, or morally.” The paper gave more space, in the years between 1905 and 1914, to denunciations of socialism than it did to criticisms of existing social inequities, mainly because of the growing size and popularity of the recently founded Socialist party. The appeal of that party among Catholics was never very great—at its height it was no more than a minor third party—but men like William Hughes and his clerical allies in Detroit were fearful nonetheless that the recent history of Europe might be reenacted in the United States. Given their fears, the occasional socialist in the Catholic community was a threatening creature indeed, to be opposed no less resolutely than the advocates of birth control.28

The Catholic socialist, on the other hand, might well be puzzled by their opposition. Such was the case with one M. Sullivan, a Detroiter who undertook in 1902 to persuade Father Peter Baart of the desirability—and the inevitability—of a socialist America. He was “an old CMBA man and above all a zealous Catholic,” but could not agree with the priest that “no Catholic may be a social
democrat,” as Father Baart had recently told an audience at Marshall. “As to socialism or the Co-operative Commonwealth,” Sullivan wrote, “I think it is coming, as sure as the abolition of slavery came, and I for one do not want to see the Catholic Church obstructing it as they did slavery. . . . Truth must prevail you might try to stop the Detroit river as stop it. I believe ⅔ of the thinking people of the world are Socialists.” As far as Sullivan was concerned, the socialist movement was not hostile to Christianity but was, on the contrary, its fuller realization. “When Socialists come,” he concluded, “the gospel will be preached to the poor.”

IN WARTIME

During the years that Bishop Foley served in Detroit, the United States twice declared war against a foreign enemy. On both occasions the response of local Catholic leaders was intensely patriotic, and the mass of Catholics seemed willing, even eager, to offer their services in the nation’s cause. These wartime experiences worked to integrate Catholics more fully into the larger society, and to make overt anti-Catholicism a less and less respectable preoccupation. In the short term, it is true, wars nearly always take their toll of civil liberties and tolerance for unpopular minorities. But for American Catholics, war has historically made for greater toleration.

War with Spain in 1898 provided an especially effective backdrop for manifestations of American Catholic patriotism, for Spain was associated in the popular mind with ultramontane Catholicism and an implacable hostility to liberal political values. Catholic spokesmen, aware of this sentiment, took care as war approached to assure the public that Catholic loyalties lay with the United States. (Their job was made easier by the negligible numbers of Spanish immigrants resident in the country.) When the battleship Maine was sunk in Havana harbor, kindling indignation among Americans, the Michigan Catholic was quick to point out that Catholics not only shared in the anger but were actually the more ardent patriots. The many Masses offered for the victims of the Maine disaster showed “how far Catholic patriotism goes,” the paper noted. “It follows them who are the strong arms of the country through their battles and it remembers them after they are gone by the prayers of the Church. We have not noticed that any of our separated brethren have devoted themselves to the holding of services in memory of these dead.” Bishop Foley spoke publicly, in March of 1898, in support of Cuban independence, and assured a rally in Detroit that “in the event of war, the nation would have upholding her hands, every Catholic Bishop, priest and layman in the United States.” A declaration of war came just one month later, and with it the opportunity for Catholics to show the nation how firm their commitment to America was. Bishop Foley reminded Detroiters that Catholics had a special stake in this war when he spoke to a public reception for the men of the Michigan National Guard who were sent late in April to train for an invasion of Cuba. “Defend that flag,” he told the troops, “and spread its
folds over Cuba until there is the same liberty there that we enjoy. . . . To the Catholic soldiers, let me say: Remember your duty. Fight as soldiers should fight, and show yourselves the better soldiers that you belong to our Church."

Nearly every member of the American Catholic hierarchy stood with Bishop Foley in strong support of the war. "Whatever may have been the individual opinions of Americans prior to the declaration of war, there can now be no two opinions as to the duty of every loyal American citizen," according to the pastoral letter issued by the archbishops of the United States early in May. "We, the members of the Catholic Church, are true Americans, and as such are loyal to our country and our flag and obedient to the highest decrees and the authority of the nation." The Catholic laity, or at least the English-speaking among them, were as much infected by war fever as other Americans. "I suppose that it is all war talk in Detroit as well as here," young Mary Loftus wrote from Ionia. "My little brother Johnny is always talking about what mamma is going to do with this and that of papa's if he goes to war." The Detroit Catholic Cadets convened after war was declared and offered their services as combat troops to Governor Pingree. A soldier already in uniform wrote to the Michigan Catholic on May 3 to exult in the number of Catholic volunteers with him at camp near Brighton. "As you are aware the Spanish nation is a Catholic nation," he began, "and for that reason there is a certain class of the American people so bigoted as to believe that we American Catholics would sympathize with Spain in the contest."

But I am proud to say, Mr. Editor, that I belong to one of the military companies encamped here, namely, the Montgomery Rifles, seven-eighths of whom are Catholics, and from Capt. Considine, Jr., down, every man of them would give up his life in defense of the Stars and Stripes.

We have in our company at camp 86 men and out of that number only three declined to volunteer their services, and they had good reason for doing so. The boys are anxiously waiting to be called to the front to help expel from this Western Continent the cruel Spaniards. So you can see the position of the Catholic soldiers in our company and the same feeling exists among all our co-religionists in camp.

Those Catholics too young or too old to fight were warm in their demonstrations of support for those who could. "The soldiers here went to Island Lake April 26," Edwin Sanscrainte wrote from his school in Monroe. "All the school-children, the band, the Knights of St. John and the old soldiers accompanied them to the train." Patriotic themes dominated parochial school closing exercises in June. The pupils at St. Anne's school in Detroit presented a "patriotic operetta 'Old Glory,'" which "closed with a glorious tableau, 'Liberty,' in which 'Cuba,' represented by Miss Irene Cotton, stretched out her shackled arms toward the Goddess of Liberty, represented by Miss L. Patton." Among the children in the "soldier's chorus," one G. Paré—the future historian of the Diocese—"carried off the honors for singing and dancing."

The actual fighting in the Spanish-American War lasted less than ten weeks, far too brief a time to engender the weariness and cynicism in the civilian population that have come in the wake of other American wars. Rejoicing in the libera-
tion of Cuba and in the relatively small number of American battle deaths (fewer than 400), most Americans agreed that, in the words of Secretary of State John Hay, it had been a “splendid little war.” Its aftermath, however, was more sobering. Deaths among the American troops in Cuba and the Philippines mounted rapidly after the armistice, mostly because of disease. The nation was deeply divided by President McKinley's decision to annex the Philippine Islands and to use American troops to quell a popular rebellion there. The eagerness with which certain Protestant organs had pressed for annexation had made many Catholics uneasy, nor were their fears allayed when McKinley explained to an assembly of Methodist ministers that he had had no choice but to annex the Islands and “to educate the Filipinos and to uplift and civilize and Christianize them.” “We . . . protest most energetically against the forcible setting aside of a Catholic civilization that has endured far beyond a hundred years, and against the proselytizing efforts which are being made under the banner of imperialism by a band of sectarian fanatics and of unscrupulous hypocrites in the islands of the Southern Sea,” the German-American Catholic Association of Michigan resolved at its annual convention in 1900. “We condemn as unnecessary, imprudent and brutal the imposition of our godless Public School system in the islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.” The Michigan Catholic's William Hughes was by this time so embittered by the course of American foreign policy that he could not bring himself to speak of the recently reelected McKinley with the respect he nearly always gave to duly constituted authority. “In St. Mary's hospital, this city, lies a soldier, Willis Hausner, whose young life is fast ebbing away,” he told his readers in an impassioned editorial.

He is another victim of imperialism, and after serving his country well both in Cuba and the Philippines has been sent home to die—absolutely penniless. . . . Think of it. Some poor mother's son, junketed thousands of miles over land and sea to his home city, absolutely starving for want of proper nourishment, without a penny in his pocket, while Emperor William of Canton is spending thousands of dollars paying for the feasting at his coronation. Like Nero of old this Washington imperialist chuckles over his splendid conquests, while the life of this boy, as well as that of hundreds of others, is being offered up to satisfy his greed for pomp and power.33

Most Catholics in the Diocese probably knew little about events in the Philippines, for all the emotion spent by William Hughes on his anti-imperialist editorials. McKinley won broad support when he was reelected in 1900, most Americans apparently content now to ignore the war that still went on in those remote Pacific islands. Press censorship kept some of the more brutal aspects of the Philippines campaign from the public, and the return of prosperity after 1897 had the effect of muting dissent generally. But however great their indifference to overarching questions of foreign policy, most Catholics must been aware of the dramatic decline in anti-Catholic activity after 1898. “Anti-Catholicism broke down even more completely than other forms of nativism during the war with Catholic Spain,” historian John Higham has noted. “The shattered ranks of the American Protective Association shrank entirely out of sight.” A revived econ-
omy contributed to the era of denominational good feeling that followed the war, but the war itself had clearly been a primary cause of rapprochement between Catholics and their fellow citizens. It had given a polyglot nation the experience of unity, and reassured all but the most recalcitrant nativists that the children of Catholic Europe were indeed becoming good Americans.34

The war that began in Europe in August 1914 did not initially appear to challenge the American loyalties of the Catholic population. German-Americans, in the Diocese of Detroit and elsewhere, were openly sympathetic to the Central Powers, but did not believe—as they had no reason to do—that their sympathies were inconsistent with their allegiance to the United States. The delegates who assembled in Detroit in 1914 for the annual convention of Michigan’s German Catholic Societies unself-consciously endorsed a collection for those victims of the war whom they identified as “our countrymen.” The German-born pastor of St. Anthony’s parish in Detroit had been traveling in Germany when war broke out. He remained there for some months, serving as a chaplain in the German army. Certain Irish-Americans in the Diocese too were supporters of the Central Powers, mainly because of their undying enmity toward England. Probably a majority of the Irish, however, were in the early stages of the conflict disposed to a genuine neutrality.35

French and Belgian Catholics, on the other hand, were partisans of the Allies, as were most Poles. The members of Our Lady of Sorrows (Belgian) parish solicited funds in 1914 “in the interests of their distressed brethren in Europe,” and even dispatched their pastor to Belgium, from whence he returned with more than 100 refugees. The French-surnamed residents of Detroit’s East Side, many of whom had left the precincts of St. Joachim’s (French) parish, were moved to return in “very large” numbers in 1915 for “Peace Sunday,” when Catholics in the United States and other countries too assembled, at the behest of Pope Benedict, to pray for an end to the European war. “In Detroit . . . the churches were thronged to capacity at all of the Masses,” the Michigan Catholic noted of the occasion, “and the number of communions was unprecedented in the history of many of the parishes.”36

It was still possible in 1915 for Americans to believe that the war menaced only the unhappy nations of Europe. Catholics had particular reason to cling to this illusion, for the Catholic community was more divided by nationality than any other religious group. “Our American people, during the coming months, will have to be on their guard,” the Michigan Catholic warned in the summer of 1915, “and will have to make it plain to their legislators and statesmen that no propaganda, financed from abroad or by the selfish interests of this country, will avail to involve us in this old-world insanity.” The paper had been scrupulously neutral in its own editorial stance and in its coverage of the war itself. Editor Hughes had declined to publish the first reports of German atrocities that came out of Belgium in 1914—reports that had been hotly disputed by German-Americans, Catholic and Protestant alike. “If there are atrocities perpetrated other than the privileged acts of war, in the awful conflict now raging in Europe,”
he finally brought himself to say, “these acts are not committed by Catholic soldiers.”

As tensions increased between Washington and Berlin, Hughes maintained his neutral stance. “The newspapers dish up lurid stories, highly colored,” he complained in 1916, “until the sound of martial music sets the minds of men distraught and unsettled, and untrained they are ready to leap into the fray, with no knowledge or little preparation for the awful scenes they will become a part of.” The large German population of the Diocese was doubtless on his mind as he looked with apprehension to the future. For that population had sustained, over four generations, what looked to be a vibrant sense of German identity. Even in 1917, German-American Catholics supported a network of social and religious organizations that was unrivaled in the Diocese. The aggressiveness with which German-American spokesmen defended the Central Powers during the years of nominal American neutrality had roused deep resentments against that community long before the United States entered the war, and Hughes may well have feared that the loyalty of many German-Americans was dangerously divided. But in fact that population was more thoroughly assimilated than most observers believed.

The United States entered the First World War in April 1917. Uncertain as to the depth of popular support for this decision, the Wilson administration, aided by a compliant press, immediately undertook an intensive propaganda campaign. The Allied cause was presented as a veritable crusade for liberty, while Germany was depicted as a brutal, almost diabolical nation, bent on destroying the very foundations of Christian society. Catholic spokesmen appropriated these themes for their own pronouncements on the war, aware that certain of their ethnic constituencies were suspected of divided loyalties. Bishop Foley was too old and feeble to rally his people to the colors, but most of his clergy were ardent patriots. Those young men who had been conscripted into the army, the pastor at Belding told his congregation, had “won a new heritage of honor.”

Soon the best young men of our country will be in training—a few more months and they will be fighting for humanity, for the world—suffering and dying to rescue the Sacrament of liberty from those who would despoil it and deny it to humanity. The call comes to Uncle Sam’s boys like the call to the Crusaders of old, to fight a system—not a nation, to rescue liberty . . . that people shall have a right to live.

Father John McClory, SJ, was no less eloquent in a September 1917 sermon preached to newly conscripted soldiers at Detroit’s Holy Rosary Church. “A military death is not a calamity, but a triumph,” he told the crowd, which filled the church to its doors, “not a slaughter, but an apotheosis.” Those who died on the field of battle, he assured his hearers, would be numbered “among the heroes of the Civil and the Revolutionary wars and indeed the wars of all time. But best of all, with your life’s blood streaming from you, you will realize that you have done God’s will; that He will welcome you: that you will hear those sweet words from His lips: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. Because thou hast been faithful over few things, I will place thee over many; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!’”
Perhaps inspired by Father McClory’s vision of the war, the students at the University of Detroit, where he was on the faculty, enlisted in large numbers in the spring of 1917, as did students at colleges across the country. The Polish parishes were fruitful sources of recruits as well, for an Allied victory was widely assumed to mean restoration of the Polish nation. A contingent of young Polish-Americans, some 300 strong and “Catholic to a man,” marched to Detroit’s City Hall on Memorial Day to offer their services in the cause of liberty. “The Poles of Detroit stand behind President Wilson,” their spokesman told Mayor Marx, himself a German-American. “The fathers and mothers of these Polish boys love them as devotedly as parents can, yet they are willing to spill Polish blood for independence.” Those young men who were not moved to volunteer for the armed forces were, after May 1917, subject to conscription. Father John Vismara gave an especially emphatic seal of approval to the draft when he agreed to serve as chairman of Kalamazoo’s board of registration. Other clergy made the same point in more conventional ways. “When the president of the United States sends out the call to arms the Catholic church teaches obedience to the voice of God,” Father Peter Slane told the graduates of SS. Peter and Paul’s school in Owosso. “It may mean sacrifice, but the Catholic has never been known to be a slacker in the cause.”

There was little opposition to conscription among Americans generally during the war, and almost none within the Catholic community. Catholics nationally made up a larger proportion of the armed forces than they did of the general population, and local spokesmen claimed that this was true in the Diocese of Detroit as well. Parishes throughout the Diocese proudly displayed the “service flags” that indicated, by their variously colored stars, the numbers of young men from the parish who were in uniform, or had been wounded or killed. “The service flag for St. Vincent’s Church was blessed Sunday, June 9, at the 12 o’clock Mass,” the Michigan Catholic reported in 1918:

The services were carried out in a very patriotic manner. The flag was carried by the boys from the parish school, some of whom were dressed as sailors, others as soldiers. Before the blessing of the flag a very fine sermon was delivered by Rev. Father Chawke. In the sermon our beloved assistant laid before the people the necessity of assisting the president, laying before the congregation innumerable instances in which the Catholic element of the US showed particular courage and undaunted bravery. All in all, there are about two hundred stars on the flag, each denoting some member of the parish who is in the service. On the flag also are three golden stars to call to mind the three young men, Leo Mcllkenny, Leo O’ Grady and William Frank, who have already sacrificed their prospects and life itself in order that democracy might remain untrampled by the heel of Kaiserism.

Holy Redeemer parish, to the west of St. Vincent’s, had 675 young men in the armed forces by September 1918, five of whom had died. (Our Lady of Help parish, on Detroit’s East Side, had in March 1918 had “the honor of giving the first hero, from this city, to fall on the firing line of France in the cause of Liberty and Democracy.”) If there were those who wondered, as the war ground on,
whether the prize was worth the mounting cost in lives, the state of public opinion did not encourage them to voice their doubts. "The man who cries for peace today is either a traitor to his country or crazy," Father John Zindler told his congregation in the town of St. Joseph. "Plato said 'Carthage must be destroyed,' and the time has come when we must say 'The Kaiser Must Be Destroyed. . . . There will be no peace until there is victory. It may take one, two, or thirty years, but when it does come the stars and stripes will be floating over the fields of France and Flanders and liberty will be proclaimed throughout the world."41

Buoyed, perhaps, by the passionate rhetoric of their clergy, Catholics were notably active, for a heavily working-class population, in war work on the home front. Pastors and lay committees solicited funds for the various war bond drives, with the parochial schools in Detroit vying to see which could sell the most subscriptions. (Bishop Foley had declared, in an October 1917 pastoral letter, that buying war bonds was a "moral duty.") Catholic women locally were active in Red Cross work. "A little army of volunteers" could be found in Holy Redeemer parish at the biweekly meetings of its Red Cross unit, and similar scenes were evident at other churches too. The Knights of Columbus distinguished themselves by establishing soldiers' recreation centers at Camp Custer near Battle Creek, in Detroit, and in Ann Arbor. Like all of the Knights' facilities for soldiers in the United States and abroad, these were open to any man in uniform. "The non-Catholic soldier is meeting with our priests, many of them for the first time, and are finding that they are men's men, and they like them," a delighted observer reported from Camp Custer. And by the spring of 1918, Catholics in Detroit had joined the rest of the populace in support of the Detroit Patriotic Fund. "Future campaigns to raise money for war relief and public welfare work in Wayne County will be combined in one great drive, staged once a year," the Michigan Catholic noted, explaining what was in fact the first of the annual "united fund" drives by which Catholic charities in Detroit were largely supported between 1918 and 1944. Catholics were well represented among the fund's directors in 1918, and among the thousands of workers who solicited contributions that year.42

The loyalty that Catholics displayed during the war did not go unrewarded. The strength of organized anti-Catholicism, both locally and nationally, declined precipitously after 1915, as the fears and resentments of the mass of Americans were more and more directed toward Germany. Circulation of the Menace, which peaked in the spring of 1915, declined by more than a million copies in little better than a year. The paper continued to be hawked in the streets of Detroit, however, until the summer of 1918, when the City Council prohibited its public sale or distribution. There was widespread support in Detroit for the council's action, which was generally seen as a wartime bid for unity. "The Detroit Board of Aldermen is to be commended for its courageous decision to prohibit the sale of that contemptible sheet The Menace, upon the streets of Detroit," the Detroit Jewish Chronicle commented. "This action should have been taken long ago. Moreover, similar action should be taken in every city of the country."
Never before had local opposition to anti-Catholicism been so broad or so strong, and Catholic spokesmen were obviously gratified by the turn of events. It is not too much to say, in fact, that the war gave many Catholics a greater sense of belonging to the larger society than they had ever known before.\textsuperscript{43}

For Catholics of German descent, however, the war was an experience of a wholly different order, as it was for German-American Protestants. The anti-German sentiment that had been building nationally since 1915 erupted, after the American declaration of war, into a veritable hysteria. German-Americans were widely suspected not simply of divided loyalties, but of working as domestic agents for the Kaiser. German-American institutions were therefore the targets of enormous hostility, and their leaders sometimes the objects of real persecution. We have already seen that the German-language curriculum in the parochial schools of the Diocese was either eliminated or greatly curtailed during the war, out of deference to a hostile public. Detroit's German Catholic weekly, \textit{Stimme der Wahrheit}, first published in 1875, ceased publication in 1918, due largely to a precipitous drop in advertising revenue. And while most of the German Catholic organizations in the Diocese survived the war, they never again possessed the élan and the clear sense of purpose that had characterized them in the days when Germans were perhaps the most admired and confident of the nation's many ethnic groups. The war, no doubt, simply hastened the end of German cultural nationalism, which was probably doomed to extinction by the progress of assimilation and intermarriage. But it was a bitter chapter nonetheless in the annals of the local German community. And it was a signal that the United States, now a world power, was almost bound in the future to be less and less tolerant of those who clung to the language and culture of their forebears, even as the country was becoming more tolerant of those Catholics whose cultural and political loyalties were demonstrably American.

\textbf{CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS IN MICHIGAN'S SMALL TOWNS}

Catholics in the Diocese of Detroit, as in most American dioceses, were a mainly urban population in the years around the turn of the century. Much of what we know about Catholic life in this period, including the relationship of Catholics to other Americans, reflects the experience of this urban majority. We know rather little about those Catholics who lived on farms and in small towns, and even less about their relations with their Protestant neighbors. At first glance, they would seem to have been a more embattled population than their urban cousins, at least in the Diocese of Detroit, where most small towns were predominantly Protestant and were said to give organized anti-Catholicism much of its support. But the pages of the \textit{Michigan Catholic} in the Foley years convey a different story. The local correspondents on whom the paper depended for its small town news nearly always described the relations between Catholics and Protestants in their own communities as tranquil and cooperative, whatever the appeal of anti-Catholic propaganda might be elsewhere. "We have none of
this in Mt. Morris,” an anonymous correspondent assured the *Michigan Catholic* in 1914, with reference to resurgent anti-Catholicism. “The Menace is hardly known, because the Mt. Morris people do not want it.” He had impressive grounds for his optimism: “every elector in the village” had recently signed a petition asking the Catholic pastor at Mt. Morris to run for mayor, although Catholics were a tiny minority in the town's population. (Father Thomas Luby had declined the nomination.) And Catholic religious practice seems to have enjoyed a surprising measure of tolerance, even of respect. “In the village public schools there are nearly three hundred children—thirty of these are Catholics; yet on every holy day and during missions, Forty Hours’ devotions and Holy Week they are sent in a body from the school to attend Mass. Whenever the priest needs servers for funerals or weddings, he simply telephones the superintendent of the High School and servers are on hand.”

Father Luby’s experience in Mt. Morris was perhaps not typical. Priests were not normally asked to run for public office, although Father Patrick Dunigan was elected mayor of heavily Protestant Lapeer in 1912 and Father Charles Koenig was elected president of the village of New Baltimore in 1914. But priests were often highly respected figures in the small towns of the Diocese, enjoying much the same status as the local Protestant clergy, particularly where the priest took care to cultivate good relations with the Protestant majority. “Everyone likes him,” wrote young Ella Lynch in 1894 of Father J. A. VanHoomissen, pastor at Mt. Clemens, “not only Catholics, but people of every race, sect, and religion, on account of his friendly ways.” Numerous reports from across the Diocese in the Foley years tell the same story. Priests were asked to speak at patriotic celebrations and high school graduations, to lend their support to various efforts at civic improvement, and they were sometimes the recipients of affectionate tributes from their non-Catholic fellow citizens. Protestants and Catholics in the village of Durand came together in 1906 at a farewell reception for Father Dennis Hayes, about to leave for a new pastorate at Coldwater. The local Baptist minister graced the occasion and “made a very felicitous speech of commendation and praise of Father Hayes, ending by wishing him God speed and good wishes for his success in his new field of labor.” The citizens of St. Joseph turned out in force in 1917 to say goodbye to Father Michael Esper, for he had belonged to the Chamber of Commerce and been a charter member of the Civic Improvement Association, which achievements were duly noted by the mayor and other dignitaries in their addresses. Father Joseph Hallissey, pastor in mostly Protestant Hudson, was the guest in 1918 at a surprise reception to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination. “The opera house was decorated patriotically,” a local correspondent reported. “Every denomination was represented in the assemblage.” Over 2,000 people attended the funeral of Battle Creek’s Father Michael Sadlier in 1908, including the mayor and the city council—which had “adopted a resolution . . . to attend the funeral in a body”—and the members of the local Protestant clergy. “His Protestant fellow citizens are saddened by his passing, and mourn his death as the loss of an honest, upright citizen, one
who had always stood for righteousness and justice and whose charity was unbounded,” an anonymous parishioner wrote.45

No priest in the Diocese, however, received a more touching demonstration of non-Catholic affection than Father Cornelius Korst, who served as pastor of St. Charles parish in Coldwater from 1866 until his retirement in 1900. In that latter year, the Coldwater Odd Fellows sponsored a contest to choose the most popular man in town, who stood to win a trip to Paris. Citizens might vote as often as they liked, the cost of each vote being just one penny. “The four leading candidates were Rev. C. Korst, of St. Charles Catholic Church; Rev. French of the Methodist [church]; Rev. Dr. Wilson, of the Seven[th] Day Adventists, and Mr. Sydney Champion, book-keeper at the Cement Factory,” explained a local correspondent, who proceeded to describe the unexpected denouement of the affair:

It was evident from the start that Father Korst was the favorite of most of the city people, but the Cement people made a great bustle at their plant for their man, with lots of money behind them, and Mr. Champion won by less than 100 votes, Father Korst having about 3,000 votes when counted, Mr. Champion about 3095; but still the leading business and professional men of the city claimed Father Korst was the most popular and had ought to go, and would go, and the next morning a committee from the Odd Fellows and business men started out and in one hour and forty minutes they collected $221 for the Rev. Father, and the most surprising part of all was they would not accept a cent from a Catholic, claiming they had done their part, and furthermore, they wished to show the Rev. Father in what high esteem the non-Catholics of this place hold him.46

Just why the Catholic clergy should be so widely accepted in a state where anti-Catholicism has historically been strong is not entirely clear. Certainly they benefited from the respect that was generally accorded the clergy in Michigan’s small towns and from the tradition of tolerance that was necessitated by the wide variety of Protestant denominations that flourished in the state. Father Walter Elliott, preaching a mission in Freedom Township in 1894, found that this rural hamlet supported no less than seven Protestant churches, as well as a Free-Will Baptist College. “This denomination has a good church building also, and so have respectively the Calvinistic or Hardshell Baptists, the Methodists, the Congregationalists, the Episcopalians, and the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Free or Howling Methodists having a nascent society which meets in a little hall.” As the Catholic clergy were increasingly a native-born population, moreover, they were able to dispel some of the fears that linked Catholicism with foreign ideologies. And many of them discovered that the rigidities of their seminary training had prepared them rather well for the religious and social climate of the typical small town. Their Protestant neighbors might harbor grave doubts about certain Catholic doctrines, but they stood with the Catholic clergy on the literal interpretation of scripture and on an unrelenting opposition to the sins of the flesh. “A man must be an outright and aggressive total abstainer to succeed in
this work,” Walter Elliott warned in 1893, with regard to his recently ini­
igated missions to non-Catholics in the small towns of the Diocese.47

Many of the small town pastors who got on well with their Protestant neigh­
bors were, in fact, ardent proponents of temperance. Father Joseph Cullinane,
pastor at Niles, was surely a force for ecumenism when he gave “his celebrated
lecture on ‘Intemperance’” in the various towns of the Diocese. “The hall was
crowded, and the eloquent young lecturer created a favorable impression on his
listeners,” an observer at St. Joseph reported in 1897. “Father Cullinane also
presented his stereopticon views of ‘Ten Nights in a Bar-Room’.” The diocesan
clergy in the Foley years were almost certainly more favorably disposed to the
temperance cause than were the mass of the laity, and a few of them shared the
near-apocalyptic vision of its more extreme Protestant proponents. “It did not
require a political clairvoyant to see that a conflict was coming in this country
between the saloon and the temperance elements,” Father Charles Reilly told
a temperance meeting at Hudson, “and the Catholic Church was taking steps
to determine the faithful on the position they should occupy in the strife.” Most
Catholic temperance advocates did stop short of endorsing prohibition, preferr­ing
moral suasion and such limited legal reforms as the closing of saloons on
Sunday. But there were priests in the Diocese who advocated prohibition. Fa­
thers Dennis Hayes and Patrick Dunigan campaigned in 1916 on behalf of the
“drys” in Michigan’s prohibition referendum — the prohibition forces carried the
day, despite losing badly in heavily Catholic Detroit — and Father John O’Raff­
ferry was known in rural Shiawassee County for his efforts in an earlier “dry”
campaign there.48

The small town priest also had the advantage of representing a modest popu­
lation of Catholics, who were usually a distinct minority in the local population.
Whatever fears the small town Protestant might entertain about the political de­
signs of the Pope, he did not have to worry, for the most part, that Catholics
locally were about to assume political power. (Protestants in the city of Detroit,
on the other hand, had every reason to fear this.) And as a growing number
of his parishioners became assimilated and reasonably prosperous, the small
town priest was able to present Catholicism to his Protestant neighbors as a po­
tent force for Americanization and sound morality. Catholics, after all, went
regularly to church, eschewed theological liberalism, and were taught the virtues
of obedience, thrift, and temperance. Certainly by the late nineteenth century
there seem to have been many small towns where the gulf between the churched
and the unchurched was considerably greater than the gulf between Catholics
and Protestants, a state of affairs from which priests could only benefit. “He is
everywhere known as a great-hearted, brave, patriotic American gentleman, a
true servant of the Master,” the Protestant editor of the St. Joseph Evening Press
informed Bishop Foley in 1899 with regard to Father James Gore, who was
prominent as a St. Joseph civic leader. Ironically, the editor wrote to defend Fa­
ther Gore against the complaints of an unhappy faction in his congregation.49
Small town priests themselves appear to have been increasingly disposed to appreciate the virtues of Protestants and especially the Protestant clergy, with whom they were likely to have much more contact than would have been the case in a heavily Catholic city like Detroit. Msgr. Francis Kelley, who founded the Catholic Church Extension Society in 1905 when he was pastor at Lapeer, recalled in 1916 that during his years in Lapeer he had "learned to love everyone in the city, finding that the line of religion was observed only on Sunday and that the same friendship existed for him among Protestants as among his own parishioners." Seated with Msgr. Kelley at the speakers' table at this 1916 reception were Dr. and Mrs. S. G. Livingston of Lapeer, he the longtime Presbyterian minister there. Kalamazoo's Father Frank O'Brien seemed to think it quite natural, in 1895, that some of the young Catholics in his parish Sunday school should be students at the local Baptist College, where he evidently trusted that no untoward proselytizing would take place. Father O'Brien had apparently amicable relations with most of his city's Protestant clergy, and indeed with influential Protestants throughout the state. "He was appointed a member of the State Board of Charities some years ago by the Governor of Michigan," the Michigan Catholic noted in 1896, "and later on, was commissioned as one of the examiners of West Point by President Harrison. The degree of Doctor of Laws has been conferred on him both by the University of Michigan, and Notre Dame University. He is thoroughly wide-awake and up to the times, and it would be a good thing for every diocese if they had a few more Father O'Briens."\(^{50}\)

If the small town was often surprisingly hospitable to "wide-awake" priests like Father O'Brien, it was apparently no less so for assimilated members of the Catholic laity. Such, at least, is the picture that emerges from the Michigan Catholic in the years around the turn of the century. Catholics and Protestants were surely aware that they differed theologically and in their mode of worship and probably in political allegiance as well. They almost certainly did not want their children to marry across the religious divide. But the intimacies of small town life seem to have made, at least on some occasions, for a startling degree of interfaith cooperation. Respectable social life in the small town generally centered on the churches, and by the late nineteenth century Catholics and Protestants were evidently accustomed to frequent one another's bazaars and entertainments. "The ladies of the Episcopal church gave an entertainment at the opera house last week in which I took part," young Florence Dwyer wrote from the village of Hudson in 1895. "It was quite a decided success." The women at Dearborn's Sacred Heart parish, for their part, had no trouble drawing an ecumenical crowd to the Thanksgiving Day supper they served in 1891 to benefit the parish treasury. "The tables were set in the Town Hall and they were surrounded by a very happy company, including people of all the Protestant denominations as well as the Catholics." Not every Catholic social event, to be sure, enjoyed the same degree of Protestant support that Father Stephen Witliffe found when he assumed the pastorate at tiny Pewamo in 1906. The parish picnic that year was immensely successful, raising $800 for the church building fund. "The
day was an ideal one and fully two thousand people, many of them coming a distance of ten or twelve miles, participated in the festivities. The townspeople turned out en masse, non-Catholics vying with their Catholic neighbors in contributing to the success of the event, and the Protestant merchants of the town closed their places of business to give the new pastor . . . a helping hand.”

The merchants of Pewamo were understandably eager to see a new St. Joseph's Church rise in their village, for the number and grandeur of a small town's churches bore witness to its growth and prosperity. An imposing Catholic church, by this logic, was more to be desired than feared, and small town Protestants in the Foley years seem often to have contributed to Catholic building funds in their communities. The Protestants of Dowagiac, according to a local correspondent, were nearly as delighted as the Catholics by the completion of Holy Maternity Church in 1893, “because through their generous contributions they have assisted a good work and have added another ornament to their beautiful little city.” Protestants at Swartz Creek not only contributed to the church fund but took a leading part in the 1913 celebration that surrounded the dedication of the new St. Mary’s Church there. It was the “Methodist ladies . . . who entertained the visiting clergy and the large crowd in attendance at the dedication services, at dinner in the Odd Fellows' hall. Mrs. Passmore, the estimable wife of the resident Methodist minister, was chairman in charge of the arrangements. All of the stores were closed and in the afternoon the businessmen played baseball and devoted the receipts of the gate to the church fund.”

Patriotic holidays in the small town were apparently often marked by an earnest ecumenism, as Catholics and Protestants came together to pay tribute to those myths and symbols that defined their common American identity. Fin-de-siècle nationalism, as John Higham has noted, was an increasingly secular ideology, still employing religious imagery but, happily for Catholics, an imagery that was more and more vague and inclusive. The “fully 1000” persons who gathered in St. Mary’s Church in Chelsea on Memorial Day in 1898 were bound more firmly together by the patriotic myths they celebrated than they were divided by their various religious allegiances—such was the case, at least, for the duration of the day’s festivities. “The ministers of the different churches, the members of the local post of the G.A.R. [Grand Army of the Republic] and of the W.R.C. [Women’s Relief Corps], with all the prominent non-Catholic citizens of Chelsea occupied the place just in front of the Sanctuary,” an observer explained, noting that Father William Considine’s “magnificent address” was the highlight of the occasion. “It is the simple truth to state that never was such a patriotic, impressive, and eloquent address given in Chelsea. . . . You should have heard the grand rendition of ‘Columbia’ by the entire audience, which so deeply stirred the patriotic souls of all.” The Chelsea correspondent thought that this occasion marked the first time “that memorial services under the auspices of the G.A.R. were ever held in a Catholic church in our State,” but such services had in fact been held at St. John's Church in Monroe in 1894, when Father James Hally had distinguished himself “in a patriotic address of over an hour's duration.”
Catholic devotion to the Constitution and to the separation of Church and State was generally a major theme when priests addressed patriotic assemblies, as was the willingness of Catholics to lay down their lives in defense of their country. Father Joseph Hallissey, addressing the citizens of Wyandotte on Memorial Day in 1895, invoked the martyrs of the Civil War to protest the activities of anti-Catholics in the vicinity. "In the days of the rebellion the man who fought and bled for his country was not asked his religion. Catholics and Protestants fought together side by side, died together, and were consigned to the same grave." And he assured his audience that Catholics posed no threat to republican liberties. "In glowing words he showed there was no hostility between Church and State, quoting Archbishop Satolli's undying words to the Catholics of this grand Republic: 'Go forth with the Bible, the light of God's truth in one hand, and in the other the Constitution of the United States.'" Archbishop Satolli was not in fact the champion of religious liberty that Father Hallissey believed him to be, and Roman authorities were seldom invoked, especially after 1900, to make the case for religious pluralism. But a Roman imprimatur was hardly necessary, for religious tolerance was more and more an article of the prevailing national faith, for Protestants and Catholics alike. "You do not belong to the same branch of the Christian Church that I do," Father Timothy Murphy told the members of the G.A.R. and the W.R.C who had assembled in 1907 for memorial services at his church in Flint, "but you all belong to the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, and that to me is a union of Church and State in which every intelligent man ought to take a just pride. Duty to God and loyalty to country are attributes that know no fine lines of demarcation between religions and creeds."54

The easing of tensions between Catholics and Protestants in the small towns of the Diocese was presumably a gradual thing, accomplished as Catholics became a more and more assimilated population. But there is some evidence that Catholic-Protestant relations in many small towns improved significantly during the later 1880s and the 1890s, as the "Americanizing" bishops and a newly assertive lay elite drew favorable comment in the secular press. Convinced that American Catholicism was finally being purged of its "autocratic" and "superstitious" elements, a growing number of Protestant clergy were ready to mute the polemics with which they were accustomed to greet all things Catholic. The Rev. W. K. Spencer, a Presbyterian minister at Adrian, was apparently among their number, or so it seemed when he introduced Bishop Foley to a heavily Protestant audience in that city in 1890. "It is a very felicitous circumstance that we as Protestants can gather here and look back to a few months past, when at Baltimore the council of perhaps the wisest and best at least among the laity of the Roman Catholic Church assembled," he told the crowd, referring to the Lay Catholic Congress held in 1889. "It was with the deepest interest that I read the verbatim reports of those very able addresses . . . made at that time, and I hailed it as amongst auspicious omens that there was in the church which our brother, the one to whom we all do honor tonight, represents, that growing spirit of char-
ity and that breadth of liberality." Liberality in the Catholic ranks was evidently seen by many Protestants as a harbinger of true ecumenism. "It is said by Protestants that the Catholic people of America, as they become Americanized, are imbibing the principles of Protestantism, and will soon join hands with Protestants in one common faith," the Paulist Walter Elliott was told in the course of one of his missions to non-Catholics in the Diocese. "Is this so?" Father Elliott also looked toward an ecumenical future, but of a different sort. "American political principles, based on the dignity of man and the need of a strong central government to secure human liberty and equality, are to the political order what Catholic principles are to the religious order," he told his questioner. "Enlightened Catholics believe that the providence of God in establishing this Republic has prepared the way for the return of the northern races to Christian unity in the Catholic Church." 55

Father Peter Baart, himself a small town pastor, believed that Catholic-Protestant relations were undergoing significant change in the 1890s. Writing pseudonymously in the St. Louis Review in 1898, Baart claimed that Catholics in the Diocese of Detroit had, since the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, become much less reluctant to join with Protestants in what were essentially religious endeavors. (Catholic representation at that famous ecumenical assembly was regularly criticized by conservatives in the 1890s, and on ecumenical questions Father Baart was very much the conservative.) What specifically troubled Father Baart was the willingness of Catholics in certain unnamed communities to participate in the annual Sunday school picnics that were sponsored jointly by the local Protestant churches. "First they march in procession through the streets," he explained of these affairs, "each school headed by its banner, and accompanied by its teachers. They proceed to a chosen ground where prayer is offered, hymns sung and addresses made on Sunday school topics. Then all the children, and the old folks, have their picnic." Catholic children in many communities had been asked to participate in these picnics in recent years, according to Father Baart, "and in quite a number of places, not only did the Catholic children march in procession with the Protestant schools, but their priests participated with them in all the religious exercises. In fact, the Sisters who taught the children also assisted. On one occasion it rained—all, ministers and priests, Protestant and Catholic children went to a Protestant church for the exercises and the picnic." Father Baart clearly hoped to embarrass Bishop Foley by these revelations—"a certain practice which is known to exist in the Diocese of Detroit may prove interesting to some of the foreign subscribers to The Review"—and he may have exaggerated the extent of Catholic participation in such Protestant-sponsored activities. But this participation was almost certainly not the product of his imagination. The Michigan Catholic in the 1890s bears ample witness to the ease with which Catholics and Protestants were able to cooperate in those many activities of small town life that were both civic and religious in nature. 56

Still, the 1890s were also a decade of virulent anti-Catholicism, and particularly so in Michigan. How can we reconcile this fact with the abundant anec-
dotal evidence that seems to indicate a perceptible thaw in Protestant-Catholic relations in the same decade? There were, of course, many Michigan Protestants who had almost no contact with Catholics, for Catholics were only sparsely represented in certain areas of the state. Anti-Catholicism may well have flourished in such settings. There was undoubtedly an unreconstructed anti-Catholic minority in those many small towns where the majority of Protestants got on amicably with their Catholic neighbors. And it is certainly possible that many individuals were capable of feeling real affection for those Catholics whom they knew, while at the same time crediting the most outlandish claims of anti-Catholic propagandists. Anti-Catholicism served to express the discontents of many small town dwellers with a world they never made—an economically precarious world for much of the 1890s—and with the disorders of the distant big city. Local Catholics, however, were not necessarily seen as one with the superstitious foreigners whose growing numbers were believed to be the cause of unemployment and corruption and political unrest.

No Catholic made a more concerted effort in the 1890s to fathom the mysteries of the Protestant mind than Paulist Father Walter Elliott. The Detroit-born Elliott returned to the Diocese of Detroit in 1893 to preach a series of missions to non-Catholics, confining his work to the small towns. “He will hire halls, speak in churches, distribute books, pamphlets, leaflets, go into villages and country districts, and there expound and explain the doctrines and practices of his Church in plain and simple language that cannot be misunderstood,” the New York Sun reported. This Michigan tour was the first time that Elliott had set out to preach primarily to non-Catholics, and it marked a shift in his own career and in the work of the Paulist Order, which, after the mid-1890s, turned more and more to mission work of this distinctly ecumenical nature. The conversion of Protestants was the “remote object” of the missions he preached in the Diocese in 1893, according to Elliott; “my immediate object was to dispel prejudice.” Prejudice certainly existed, as Father Elliott’s experience confirmed. But he also found in the Diocese a gratifying store of Protestant good will.57

Elliott drew substantial crowds wherever he preached in the Diocese, and nearly always enjoyed a warm reception. “The spacious opera house was densely crowded each evening, many being unable to gain admission,” Joseph Leszczynski wrote from Sand Beach—now Harbor Beach—where Elliott inaugurated his mission series in September. “Every seat was occupied and many remained standing in the rear of the hall, whilst hundreds returned to their homes not being able to gain admission into the building,” came the report from St. Joseph, where the stage in the Academy of Music had been “decorated with the national colors, while a portrait of Columbus in a frame 8 x 6 was most conspicuous upon the platform.” Elliott’s reputation as an orator helped to swell the crowds, good preaching ranking high as entertainment among the church-going population in Michigan’s small towns. (Protestants often attended Catholic parish missions in the Diocese in the years around the turn of the century. “Many who attended came a distance of twenty miles, and our separated brethren were present in
large numbers at nearly all of the exercises," ran a typical report, this one con­
cerning a mission preached in Sebewaing in 1900.) Father Elliott benefited too
from the evident curiosity of many Protestants about Catholic doctrine and prac­
tice. "My hearers inundated me with inquiries concerning the confessional, the
Sacraments, the Communion, the power of the priesthood, the danger to the
civil authority of the Papacy, purgatory and the intercession of the saints. Purga­
tory appeared to be a difficult point with many of them." 58

The warmth with which Elliott was generally received had to do in part with
his own appealing personality, but was also the effect of his reputation as a tem­
perance man. "His lecture on temperance and total abstinence was a master­
piece and one that will never be forgotten by those who heard it," a correpon­
dent reported from Milford. "On the 13th his subject was 'Intemperance as a
Vice and as a Disease,'" a Vermontville resident wrote. "A number of the leading
Prohibitionists told me it was the best lecture they ever heard on temperance."
The temperance sermon was always among the four to six sermons that Father
Elliott preached at each stop on this tour, for his audiences were composed,
as he described them, of "the best and most religious elements in the popula­
tion . . . . church members and adherents of churches." Few of these in the 1890s
looked with equanimity on the saloon. Father Elliott found favor too because
of his theological conservatism. The Protestants in his audience might question
the scriptural basis for purgatory or auricular confession, but they were pleased
to learn that Father Elliott had no quarrel, as certain liberal Protestant theo­
logians did, with such hard doctrines as eternal damnation. "I found, I am
happy to say, that in the masses of the people agnosticism and religious doubt
had made little headway," he reported in December, although he cautioned that
this could not be said of the masses who lived in big cities. The church-going
population of the small towns was still convinced "that Christ in God is the ac­
tual deity; that the Scriptures were God's Book, and that men need
Christ as a Savior." Theirs was a strictly Biblical faith, and while they were not unaffected
by liberal religious currents, their allegiances were conservative:

It is an instructive fact that the awful truth of eternal punishment still holds its place
in the vast majority of Protestant minds, in spite of the tendency to pick and choose
doctrines at will which their notion of private interpretation so inevitably fosters.
It is easy, indeed, to find Protestant men and women who will doubt the terrible
dogma, who like to say both no and yes to it; but a settled conviction of universal
salvation is rare to find—rare to find a flourishing or even small-sized Universalist
church society outside large cities. 59

But if Father Elliott found large and cordial crowds on his circuit of the Dio­
cese, he also discovered that a significant minority in his audiences shared many
of the prejudices, even the paranoia, of the more extreme anti-Catholic propa­
gandists. This was apparently especially true in those areas where few Catholics
lived. Rural Freedom Township, heavily Protestant, was "neck-deep in bigotry,"
Elliott recalled. And in Vermontville, where "a Catholic priest was never before
heard to speak in a public meeting," the questions submitted to Father Elliott
via the “query box” that was a feature of his missions revealed, in the words of a local correspondent, “that those who propounded them had read and credited the calumnies of the contemptible APA.” The Vermontville audience was curious about confession and about the celibacy of the clergy, as were the members of virtually every audience before whom Elliott spoke. But they also wanted to know why “Catholics were Placing Firearms in Their Churches” and “Why were Catholics all Democrats?” “Did the Catholics elect Grover Cleveland?” one man wondered, presumably because the hapless Cleveland was being widely blamed for the hard times that were already evident in the state. “Why is Mexico, a Catholic Country, so far Behind the United States in Knowledge?” another listener asked. Elliott encountered many of these same questions in other towns as well, although the majority of queries seem always to have had to do with dogma and ritual and the extent of papal authority. “The questions put in the question box betrayed a great deal of misapprehension and ignorance of Catholic doctrines, beliefs and ceremonies,” a correspondent wrote from Ypsilanti. “An intelligent person, not a Catholic by any means, sitting near us one evening, expressed the fear that many of the questions would give Mr. Elliott a low opinion of the people of Ypsilanti, but there need be no fear of that. All the questions were just such as the lecturer meets wherever he goes.”

The contents of the question box must have assured Father Elliott that his new work was a needed one, for when he completed his missions in the Diocese of Detroit in May 1894, he announced plans for a similar series of missions in the Diocese of Cleveland. Two of his Paulist brethren preached a series of missions to non-Catholics in the Diocese of Grand Rapids in 1897, and for a number of years thereafter the Paulists periodically visited the Diocese of Detroit to preach such missions there. (The first Paulist mission to non-Catholics in the city of Detroit was given at St. Aloysius Church in 1899.) The Holy Ghost Fathers preached a mission to non-Catholics at Wayne in 1907, and the Redemptorists followed suit in the heavily Protestant towns of the Michigan Thumb in 1908. Two diocesan priests, Fathers James Cahalan of Hillsdale and Edwin Fisher of Clinton, began, probably in 1907, to give lecture series on Catholicism in the small towns of the Diocese, “their aim being,” according to the Milan Leader in 1908, “to remove misunderstanding in these matters and promote the interests of truth and charity. We have nothing but kind words for these consecrated men who have been in our midst for some short time in the interests of their chosen religion.” The mission to non-Catholics had in fact become so familiar a part of the small town religious landscape by 1908 that Father Henry DeGryse, pastor at Anchorville, was moved to tell his congregation that “in this beloved country of ours the strictly Catholic missions have ceased to exist. Henceforth they should be considered and properly called Christian missions, because all Christians are welcome to our churches, without any distinction whatsoever in regard to nationality or religious denomination.” The Redemptorist Fathers were about to open a “Christian mission” in the Catholic church at Anchorville to which “the well-meaning public in general” was invited. “If therefore you are so for-
tunate as to find time to attend this mission,” Father DeGryse concluded, “you will hear that the different topics of their great evening sermons ... are taken from religious points of Faith, generally admitted, and believed in by all Christians of good will.”

There was still division between Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese by the time of Bishop Foley’s death, the ecumenism of men like Father DeGryse notwithstanding. Nor was organized anti-Catholicism yet eliminated as a factor in Detroit and Michigan politics: the Ku Klux Klan enjoyed strong support in both the city and the state in the early 1920s on a largely anti-Catholic platform. But the Foley years are still best seen as a time of transition from a situation of religious polarization to one of relative amity, where confessional frictions were notably muted, and where Catholics were more at home than they had ever been before. When Bishop Michael Gallagher came to Detroit in the fall of 1918, he found a Catholic population that was better organized than it had ever been, wealthier, more numerous, and more confident politically. And he found a see city that suddenly ranked among the largest and richest in the nation. The future of Detroit looked wonderfully bright, and so, despite ominous rumblings from a vocal anti-Catholic minority, did the future of Catholics in that city and in its rapidly developing hinterland.