Seasons of Grace
Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Edmund Cardinal Szoka

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Tentler, Leslie Woodcock and Edmund Cardinal Szoka.

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THE MAN AND HIS CITY

When Bishop John Samuel Foley came to his new see city on November 23, 1888, he was welcomed by the most lavish parade that Catholic Detroit had ever organized. The procession began at the Union Station, where the bishop's train arrived, and moved along Jefferson Avenue, which was bedecked "as far as the eye could see" with "torches, Chinese lanterns, electric lights and illuminated windows." Thousands of men, including uniformed companies from the various parish military societies, accompanied the bishop's carriage through the downtown to the episcopal residence on Washington Street. The residence itself "was hung with the Papal colors, and from cornice to basement was a glory of Edison lights in many colored globes," while nearby on Washington Street stood an immense arch of evergreens, "gloriously festooned and lighted," and bearing "on each face a gigantic portrait of the Bishop surrounded with words of welcome."

Upon Bishop Foley's arrival at his new home, he and his party were conducted to an outdoor reviewing stand to watch the rest of the parade. "The immense procession moved past," an observer recorded, "and some divisions ... sent off rockets and colored lights in thousands. At the same time the legend, 'Leo XIII, our Pope,' in front of St. Aloysius church burst out in many colored flame, the band struck up in glorious harmony, the Catholic knights drew their sabres ... and then the procession kept moving past, and kept on moving past until near midnight." Bishop Foley patiently reviewed the parade until the very end, to the delight of the still-numerous crowds that lined the downtown streets. Those who had caught even a glimpse of the new bishop, it was subsequently reported, were certain of Detroit's good fortune. A delegation of prominent Catholics who had met the bishop's train at Toledo pronounced what was apparently the judgment of the crowd: "All were satisfied with his appearance, and all voted him 'every inch a Bishop.'"

The man who became Bishop of Detroit in 1888 was indeed a man whose appearance and history were almost bound to impress. John Foley was fifty-five
when he came to Detroit, but still a youthful man—handsome, gregarious, pos-
sessed of an urbane charm. He had been raised in notably easy circumstances
in a genteel Baltimore family, had studied at St. Mary's College in Baltimore
and at St. Mary's Seminary in that same city. His preparation was capped by
study in Rome, where he received a licentiate in Sacred Theology from the Ap-
pollinaire in 1857. He had been ordained in Rome the previous year.

Roman training was still rare among the American clergy, and Foley's educa-
tion marked him as a man destined for advancement in the Church. So did his
family and personal connections. His elder brother Thomas served as secretary
to Baltimore's Archbishop Francis Kenrick and then, from 1870 until his death
in 1879, as coadjutor bishop and administrator of the Diocese of Chicago. John
Foley was a boyhood friend of Baltimore's Archbishop—later Cardinal—James
Gibbons and a confidant and advisor to Gibbons until Foley left Baltimore for
Detroit. Through Gibbons's influence, Foley had served as a secretary at the
Third Plenary Council in 1884 and helped to write the famous Baltimore Cate-
chism that issued from it. By 1888, Foley was an intimate friend of many of the
most prominent personalities in the American Church—of Bishop John J. Keane,
first rector of the Catholic University, of Msgr.—later Bishop—Dennis O'Con-
nell, rector of the American College in Rome, and of Archbishop John Ireland
of St. Paul. These men were at the height of their influence in the late 1880s,
with well-placed friends in Rome and important admirers at home, including
many non-Catholic journalists, educators, and politicians.

It is hardly surprising, then, that when the consultors of the Diocese of Detroit
convened to nominate a successor to Bishop Caspar Borgess, their first choice was
John Samuel Foley. The bishops of the Cincinnati Province concurred unanimously,
and Foley's name headed the "terna" sent to Rome in the summer of 1887. The long
delay that followed, however, indicates that at least some members of the Propa-
ganda were not so easily persuaded of Foley's merits. Foley had in fact been nomi-
nated in 1886 as Bishop of Wilmington, only to have his name rejected in Rome.
The trouble on that occasion stemmed from the claims of several well-connected
American priests that Foley was an arrogant man of mediocre intellect, rumored
to drink excessively, and overly fond of worldly pleasures. Gibbons had defended
his friend against all these charges, but to no apparent avail.²

Gibbons's support, however, was apparently crucial in securing Foley's ap-
pointment to Detroit, carrying weight with Pope Leo XIII if not with the Propa-
ganda. The Propaganda had decided by May of 1888 to name Dennis O'Connell
to Detroit, even recommending that Gibbons be told in confidence that Foley
should never again be nominated for a see. But Leo, evidently reluctant to of-
fend the man regarded as honorific primate of the American Church, delayed
the decision, citing a need for more information, especially from Gibbons. Ul-
timately the Foley nomination was approved, and he was named Bishop of De-
troit on August 8, 1888. His consecration at the hands of Cardinal Gibbons took
place in Baltimore on November 4. The new bishop left shortly thereafter for
Detroit, and the tumultuous welcome that greeted him there.³
The Foley Episcopate

The Detroit to which Foley came could not match the charm and elegance of his native Baltimore, but it was nonetheless a city in the full flush of economic growth and civic optimism. With a population of close to 200,000, Detroit was a prosperous city in the late 1880s, possessed of a diverse economic base. Its still-tranquil downtown belied the manufacturing on which the city's population increasingly depended for their livelihoods. Detroit's wealthy families had not yet abandoned the mansions they had built in previous decades along Jefferson and Woodward avenues and the adjacent streets, and Bishop Foley found that the episcopal residence on Washington Street was very much a fashionable address. Save for a poor and disreputable "sailor's quarter" along the river, most of Detroit's working-class neighborhoods were located well beyond the downtown, mainly but not exclusively on the city's heavily immigrant East Side. Detroit was not yet, however, a city segregated primarily on the basis of class and race. Its immigrant districts—and its immigrant parishes—housed both poor and prosperous families, for ethnicity was significantly more important than class in determining the location of Detroit's population in the 1880s. The small black population of the city—less than 2 percent of the total population—was concentrated on the near east side but not yet rigidly segregated from the European immigrants among whom they lived.4

If nineteenth-century Detroit is best understood as a collection of ethnic communities, each with its complement of churches and voluntary associations, it was not a city without conflict and serious social problems. Its politics was fundamentally a politics of religious division, and the early 1890s saw a resurgence of overt and acrimonious anti-Catholicism, a response in part to an influx of poor Catholic immigrants from Poland and Italy and Austria-Hungary. And although Detroit was notably free of the tenements that horrified housing reformers in New York and Chicago, its immigrant districts were still marked by squalor and disease. Nor had the city been able to provide its residents with what contemporaries regarded as an acceptable level of basic services. The newer immigrant districts were as bereft of urban amenities as a peasant hamlet.5

But if the problems of Detroit seem by our standards to have been very nearly overwhelming, the city's leaders in the late 1880s looked with confidence to the future. Their buoyant optimism apparently infected Detroit's new bishop, who immersed himself in the city's life immediately on his arrival, visiting churches and social institutions with an enthusiasm his predecessor had never displayed, and ingratiating himself with its Catholic and non-Catholic men of affairs. Like the city fathers, Bishop Foley appeared to believe that he could master existing problems and whatever difficulties the future might bring. Despite his confidence and his considerable charm, however, John Foley was not by most accounts a successful Bishop of Detroit. Like many of the civic leaders whose easy assurance he shared in the late 1880s, his career in Detroit was eventually overwhelmed by the remarkable course of the city's history.

For the Detroit to which a confident, still-youthful Foley had come in 1888 was a city destined to undergo as profound a transformation as any American
Part II: 1888-1918

city before or since. The cause, of course, was the essentially accidental concentration in and near southeastern Michigan of entrepreneurs who were interested in developing a marketable automobile. By 1914, auto workers constituted 40 percent of Detroit's rapidly expanding population of factory employees, and the explosive growth of the auto industry had already brought enormous social change. The city's population reached 750,000 in 1914. By 1918, the year that Foley died, the population of Detroit was approaching one million, and its ethnic variety was greater than ever before. The once-small Polish community had grown so impressively that even in 1910 Poles were the largest European-born group in Detroit. Significant Italian and Hungarian communities appeared in the city after 1900, as well as smaller concentrations of peoples from Russia and the Balkans and even from the Middle East. A majority of the newcomers were at least nominally Catholic; they were also disproportionately young adult men. The Catholic population was thus changed in important ways in these years, for if earlier Catholic immigrants to Detroit had been mostly poor, they had also come mainly in family groups. To be sure, this new population represented opportunities for evangelization and church-building. But it represented more immediate, and formidable, problems for Detroit's clergy and its bishop. Much the same could be said of the city as a whole: if its almost fantastic growth in size and wealth generated an excitement and an energy unknown in the quiet manufacturing town of the 1880s, the same growth brought with it a level of social disorder reminiscent of frontier days.

By the time that Foley died, then, the city to which he had come as a newly consecrated bishop was not even a memory for most Detroiter. The face-to-face world of the urban elite where he had initially moved with such aplomb had been transformed: the men who shaped Detroit after 1900 were increasingly those who had few ties to the old manufacturing city and who were equally at home in New York or Chicago. Nor were they any longer the bishop's neighbors: Foley's episcopal residence was by 1918 an anomaly in what was now a busy commercial district. The city had already assumed in broad outline the class-segregated and racially segregated organization that it bears to this day, and its wealthy residents had begun in large numbers to move toward its outlying districts and suburbs. By 1918 the Chancery was already concerned about the future of those parishes that lay in the innermost regions of the city, now increasingly dominated by commerce and light industry or settled mostly by blacks, a rapidly growing population after 1914 and an increasingly segregated one.

Like his episcopal residence, Bishop Foley himself was something of an anachronism by the time he died—a withered, incapacitated relic of a former age. He had not been much of a figure in the city's life since the early days of the century, nor had he ever been a "builder bishop" like those who were, by the early twentieth century, transforming the institutional life of the Church in other large dioceses. The latter half of the Foley episcopate was hostage, in a very real sense, to the explosive growth of Detroit and its environs after 1900. Even a relatively young man, full of energy and ambition, would have found it hard in these
years to provide Catholic Detroit with the institutions it suddenly required. But Foley was not young in 1900 and he was apparently in poor health for most of the fifteen years before his death. He was a virtual invalid after about 1914.

Because Foley failed so signally to fulfill the promise of his privileged and well-connected youth, it is tempting to ascribe his troubles as bishop to personal defects as well as to accidents of health and circumstance. No less an authority than John Tracy Ellis has concluded that Cardinal Gibbons’s support of Foley as a candidate for Detroit was an unfortunate instance of the Cardinal’s affections overruling his judgment. And even as friendly a witness as Kalamazoo’s Father Francis O’Brien was led to confess, in 1897, that Foley was an ineffective bishop, lax in the administration of his diocese and frequently absent from his duties because of deteriorating health. O’Brien alluded on this occasion to Foley’s problems with drink, which reference, taken in conjunction with earlier rumors, does raise a serious question about the bishop’s habits. But there is not much evidence with which to address the matter. (So many of Foley’s personal papers were lost, ostensibly during the moving of the Chancery offices in 1922, that it is impossible to reconstruct his career in Detroit in any great detail.) If Foley did have a drinking problem, he seems to have controlled it in public, at least in the earlier part of his episcopate. He was by all accounts a popular bishop in the 1890s, admired especially by Irish-Americans but liked by many non-Catholics too, and at a time of resurgent anti-Catholicism.

Whatever the truth about his drinking, Foley does seem to have had certain weaknesses that might have compromised his ability to govern effectively. He was a vain man, and inclined to see opposition to Chancery policies as motivated almost solely by dislike or jealousy of him personally. He was not above vindictive behavior toward those who had, in his view, been wanting in loyalty to him. He found it hard to forgive, much less forget, old grievances. And he was not the intellectual equal of his more celebrated friends in the episcopate. Certainly by the mid-1890s the affability and charm that endeared him to a large lay audience, and presumably to such lifelong friends as Cardinal Gibbons, had ceased to protect him from the criticism, even the contempt, of certain American bishops and of influential figures in Rome. “You surely would be surprised at the bad repute in which Bp. Foley is held all around here,” wrote a jubilant Father Peter Baart—long a Foley antagonist—from New York in 1896. “I imagined I had a secret, but was freely informed—one informant being a bishop—that Bishop Foley was so lectured at the Propaganda when called to Rome that the only question was ‘Has Mgr. Ciasca not been too hard?’” Not long after, the various Detroit papers reported that Foley might be replaced by an apostolic vicar. The hapless Foley cabled to Rome to learn if the rumor was true. (It was “false and absurd,” Keane cabled in reply.) That Foley was so unsure of his standing in Rome by 1897 suggests the extent to which his reputation had suffered. “You have indeed your cross to carry; but after Good Friday comes Easter,” Cincinnati’s Archbishop Elder consoled him. “The cross for a time—the crown forever.”
But despite Foley's troubles with Rome, it is not wholly clear that the defects in his character were notably greater than, or much different from, the faults that characterized other of his less notorious fellow bishops. Foley was surely not the only American bishop of his day to see resistance to his policies in personal terms or to behave in petty and occasionally vindictive ways toward those who crossed him. Nor were most of his peers in the episcopate noted for their intellectual attainments. One can, in fact, quite reasonably argue that the failure which Foley's episcopate is generally judged to have been had as much to do with forces beyond his control as it did with his shortcomings. Leaving questions of health aside for the moment, let us consider why this might be true.

The Foley episcopate was marred in the 1890s by several widely publicized disputes between Foley and certain of his priests, disputes that were adjudicated either by the Propaganda in Rome or the Apostolic Delegate in Washington. It was these difficulties which evidently earned him the contempt that Father Baart had discovered in certain quarters by 1896. But these troubles were not, on the whole, of the bishop's making—indeed he inherited two of the more vexing cases from his predecessors. And it is difficult to see that most of his peers in the episcopate would have handled these disputes much differently than he did, for they shared with Foley an essentially absolutist view of the episcopal office. That Foley came so frequently into conflict with Roman authority, then, must be attributed in some measure to simple bad fortune, and in large measure to his having been bishop at a time when relations between Rome and the American episcopate were unusually tense.

We have already seen that Roman authorities were increasingly willing by the late nineteenth century to intervene in disputes between American bishops and their priests. The case of Father Callaert and Bishop Borgess in 1878 stands as a local example. The fundamental intent of such intervention was to limit what Rome saw as the growing independence of the American hierarchy—to bind the American bishops more closely to Roman views and purposes even as these same bishops consolidated their authority in their own dioceses. The establishment of a permanent apostolic delegation in Washington in 1893 made Roman supervision of the American Church considerably easier, and for this reason conservative and liberal bishops alike were alarmed by the event. Archbishop Francesco Satolli, the first delegate, was an active party to a number of quarrels between priests and their bishops, and in many of these cases he forced bishops to accept compromises that entailed, in the eyes of the prelates involved, a serious loss of prestige. Often the unhappy bishop had indeed behaved toward the aggrieved priest in question in an autocratic fashion, ignoring what limited provisions for priests' rights existed in the late nineteenth century. But the facts of particular cases are less important than the principle which Satolli's intervention represented—that the American bishops were subject in the exercise of their authority, even in purely diocesan affairs, to a higher authority centered in Rome. No bishop would have disputed the premise, but none was happy at
the prospect of restrictions on what had hitherto been virtual episcopal autonomy in matters of diocesan administration.8

Because Bishop Foley was intimately associated with the “Americanist” or “liberal” faction in the American hierarchy, his difficulties with Rome were caused not only by the changed circumstances that Satolli’s advent symbolized but also by the waning fortunes of the liberal bishops in Rome after 1895. The rise and fall of the “Americanists” has been told in detail in other sources, and cannot detain us here. But it is likely that Foley’s reputation beyond his diocese suffered in part because his powerful patrons—indeed his Roman connections—fell into disfavor as their views on politics, education, and especially religious liberty were increasingly criticized in Rome. Foley’s rise in the hierarchy, as we have seen, had been occasioned primarily by the influential friends he possessed. Once these friends became vulnerable to Roman censure, Foley himself was vulnerable to the innuendo and outright vilification that fueled ecclesiastical politics at the end of the century. And because Foley was obviously a less talented man than his better-known allies, his reputation suffered accordingly.

Still, for all his inadequacies, Foley might well have been remembered as an ordinarily competent bishop during the first half of his tenure had not the circumstances of the 1890s brought him repeatedly into conflict with Rome. His continued popularity with the laity in his diocese is an argument in his favor here. His misfortune in the latter half of his episcopate, as we have already seen, was to live to such an advanced age—and in such impaired health—that he could not adequately govern a diocese, much less a diocese growing as prodigiously as Detroit. Here again Roman policies contributed to Foley’s failure, for the Vatican refused to appoint a coadjutor bishop to Detroit although Foley, with Gibbons’s support, had apparently asked for a coadjutor, presumably with right of succession, in 1908 and again in 1915. Rome did appoint an auxiliary bishop to Detroit in 1911 in the person of Edward Kelly, who had been pastor of St. Thomas parish in Ann Arbor since 1891. But although Bishop Kelly carried on virtually all the business of the Diocese after his consecration, he never possessed the authority to make independent decisions about the development of the Diocese in what was a crucial period in its history.9

Thus it was that the institutional development of the Diocese failed to keep pace with the growth of its population for much of the Foley episcopate. The number of priests in the Diocese increased by nearly two and a half times between 1888 and 1918 and the number of parishes nearly doubled, but the Catholic population more than trebled in the same period. Foley’s successor was required to recruit outside the Diocese to meet the need for priests in the early 1920s. The shortage of clergy was sometimes ascribed, though perhaps unfairly, to the lack of a diocesan seminary. Detroit was indeed a sufficiently populous diocese after 1900 to warrant a seminary of its own. But the initiative and energy required to found one were presumably beyond the abilities of its ailing and aging bishop.
Health and age also explain, in all likelihood, why Foley died without establishing any central agencies to coordinate Catholic charities and to supervise the growing network of parochial schools, why he failed to hold a single diocesan synod, and why he seemingly neglected the development of secondary and post-secondary education in the Diocese. (The deep depression of the mid-1890s effectively prevented development of the Diocese during several of Foley’s most vigorous years.) But this does not mean that Foley had no ambitions for his diocese when he first came to Detroit, for he obviously did. It is to those ambitions that we now turn, and to the limited achievements of his long tenure.

Aspirations and Modest Achievements

Not long after his arrival in Detroit, Bishop Foley began to identify what he regarded as the more pressing problems in the Diocese and to take steps to remedy them. He closed the costly diocesan seminary at Monroe, assigning its buildings to the St. Anthony’s Male Orphan Asylum, which had long since outgrown its original premises. He laid plans for a new cathedral, evidently of considerable dimensions—“about 200 feet in length,” he wrote in 1889. “As to the style, gothic or romanesque, I am undecided.” By the spring of 1892 he had acquired a large plot of land at the corner of Cass Avenue and Parsons Street in what was then a fashionable section of Detroit, where he planned to build a school as well as a cathedral. He had in the meantime, in 1890, designated St. Patrick’s Church to serve temporarily as his cathedral. In deference to the memory of Bishop Lefevere, it was renamed in honor of Saints Peter and Paul.

St. Patrick’s was by no means the largest or most lavish of Detroit’s churches when it became the cathedral in 1890. But it was the church where Father Charles Reilly was pastor, and Reilly, as we have seen, was well known as an opponent of strong episcopal authority. He was also a popular figure among the Irish and, as such, a particularly potent rival to his new bishop. Foley was well aware of this, and apparently chose St. Patrick’s for the single purpose of removing Reilly from Detroit. Father Reilly was subsequently assigned to Adrian, in which small town he spent the rest of his career. The remainder of the story, however, did not proceed according to plan. The depression of the mid-1890s postponed the building of a new cathedral, and the project was apparently abandoned during the long administrative twilight of the Foley episcopate. Uncertainty about the future of the proposed cathedral “district” may have inhibited the aging bishop. When his successor revived plans for a new cathedral in the early 1920s, he bought land for the project at a location much farther from the downtown.

Bishop Foley did oversee the establishment, in 1893, of a lavishly appointed school at the proposed cathedral site. It served as a parish school for the families of the former St. Patrick’s Church, who had never had a school of their own, Father Reilly counting himself among that tiny minority of priests in the late nineteenth century who were opposed in principle to parochial education. The
new Cathedral Academy proved to be Bishop Foley's most eloquent statement of his ambitions for Catholic education in his diocese. Its facilities and curriculum rivaled the best that the public schools could offer, and he was justly proud of the achievement. More intimate socially with the prosperous Catholics of Detroit than his predecessor had been, Foley well understood the importance of removing from parochial education the identification it had already acquired, in some quarters at least, with inferior academic quality and inferior social status.  

Despite his evident commitment to the maintenance of a separate Catholic school system, however, there were occasions in the 1890s when Bishop Foley betrayed what looked to be a relatively latitudinarian stance on matters of school policy. When Archbishop Francesco Satolli, who was appointed Apostolic Delegate in 1893, issued a statement in 1892 that endorsed Archbishop Ireland's cautiously tolerant attitude toward the public schools, Foley was the only bishop in the Cincinnati Province to refuse to sign a letter of protest. His own diocesan paper had defended Ireland's experiments in cooperation with the public schools, albeit in guarded terms. Foley himself had early in his episcopate lent encouragement to a Catholic students' organization at the University of Michigan—called the "Foley Guild" by its grateful members—thereby implicitly sanctioning Catholic attendance at that secular institution. Indeed he was able in 1889 to tell an Ann Arbor audience that the University of Michigan and the nascent Catholic University of America, on whose board of trustees he served, had "both the same aim and mission."

When our University is opened at the capital of the United States, it will be with the most kindly feeling and with the desire of cultivating the greatest intimacy with those gentlemen whose reputation for learning is so renowned throughout the whole of the United States—the professors of Ann Arbor.

The bishop was the happy inhabitant of a world where, as he assured his hearers, "true science will ever be the handmaid of Revelation." And he knew that if Catholics were to shun the state's most prestigious university, they would deprive themselves of an important avenue to wealth and influence. As late as 1899, the Michigan Catholic was rejoicing that Catholic young men could be found at all the nation's most celebrated colleges—"isolation is not always a good policy."

As Foley aged, however, and as the climate of opinion among the American bishops grew more conservative after the turn of the century, his views on education lost the liberality he occasionally displayed in the 1890s. Nor did his policies even in the 1890s betray any lack of commitment to separate Catholic schools. Foley knew that nearly all the American bishops of his day were ardent supporters of the parochial school, and unlike John Ireland and Boston's Archbishop John Williams, he lacked the temperament to stand against this strong majority tide. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that Foley ever thought deeply about the meaning of parochial schools for Catholic life in America. But given his optimism about American society and his desire that Catholics participate
in that society as fully as possible, he was inevitably less inclined than his predecessor to see public education as always inimical to Catholic faith. And in the liberal climate of the 1890s, he was willing, on occasion, to allow his pronouncements on schooling to be colored by his conviction that the destiny of Catholics in America was nothing less than full integration into the larger society.14

If Foley's optimism and openness to American society could not find full expression in his educational policies, concerned as these necessarily were with segregating Catholics from other Americans, he devoted much of his public life in the 1890s to a celebration of what he saw as the peculiar genius of American institutions. Patriotic themes ran through many of the sermons and speeches he delivered to Catholic audiences and especially to immigrants. Foley was an enthusiastic proponent of assimilation for ethnic Catholics, and like other liberal bishops he was alarmed at the growing assertiveness of German and Polish Catholics in the American Church. Their vision of a Church which not only tolerated but promoted enduring ethnic loyalties was to Foley not simply foolhardy—in that it ensured continued Protestant suspicion of Catholics—but very nearly treasonous. Catholicism rightly understood, Foley was certain, was not only compatible with loyalty to America but virtually demanded it. And this was so not despite the religious neutrality of the American government but precisely because of it. "We have everything to admire in the glorious Constitution under which we live," he told an Ann Arbor audience in 1889. "The church needs not, nor does she seek, the support of the civil government .... We can live together in amity and charity with our fellow citizens, each one pursuing his course, all striving for the great goal for which God has created us." Foley assured his Cathedral parishioners in 1895 that none other than Leo XIII had given his blessing to American religious pluralism. "He evinced the most intense interest in everything regarding religion," Foley informed the congregation with reference to his own recent audience with the pope, "and when told of the liberty that we enjoyed under the Constitution of the United States he was earnest in his admiration of our condition."15

The theme of religious liberty was felicitously interwoven into many of Foley's patriotic sermons and addresses. It served not only to reassure non-Catholics that Catholics were loyal to American institutions but to make the case for an American identity with the most recalcitrant cultural nationalists. Speaking in 1889 at the blessing of St. Casimir's (Polish) Church in Detroit, Foley argued that American liberty must be prized and defended by all Catholics, for it was this tradition of liberty that had made America a sanctuary for the oppressed peoples of Europe. ("Here there is no bitter Czar to crush you beneath his feet and say you shall not serve God but in the way he dictates.") And American liberty, he urged his hearers, could only be defended by a people who placed loyalty to the United States before any other national loyalty. "We Poles, Irish, Germans, French, Bohemians are here—Americans," Foley pointed out. "Can any other nation under God's high heavens evidence a scene like this?" And the Bishop proceeded to explain the veritably providential circumstances that made Catholic Detroit possible:
It is easy for me to tell you my friends, because we live under that glorious flag, that flag that protects every man in the worship of God, and gives liberty, true liberty that we should prize so highly, that we should esteem, that we should defend even with the last drop of life's blood. ... Here we are equals, free men. All that is asked of us is that we should be good citizens, and as I stand here a Bishop of the Catholic Church, I can pledge myself that there are no better citizens of this Republic than the Catholics of every nationality who stand around this corner-stone. For in this church will be taught the truths of Jesus Christ, but at the same time there will be taught loyalty, fidelity and devotion to that flag that flies over the most beautiful nation that God ever deigned to place upon the face of the earth.16

Foley surely intended that the burden of this and similar sermons be heard well beyond the bounds of the Catholic community. More than any of his predecessors, he was anxious to address, and allay, the fear that the heavily immigrant Catholic population was hostile to American political values. Largely for this reason, Foley was the first Catholic bishop to play a conspicuous role in the civic life of Detroit. Whether leading citizens had assembled to decry the Turkish persecution of Armenians in 1896 or, in 1898, to call for the liberation of Cuba, Bishop Foley was prominent among the speakers, sharing the platform with Protestant ministers and even, on occasion, with a rabbi. This was a novel experience for Catholic Detroit, but evidently a satisfying one, at least for the more assimilated. Foley's public pronouncements were not remotely controversial, nor was his a pioneering voice when it came to the problems of city or nation. (During the depression of the 1890s, which spawned a good deal of labor unrest, Foley limited his public statements to florid condemnations of anarchism and socialism.) But Foley's ability to function as a celebrant of "civil religion" almost certainly facilitated the rapprochement between assimilated Catholics and the larger society that was so significant a part of Catholic life at the end of the nineteenth century.17

Indeed it is not too much to say that Foley made his most important contribution to the Diocese in his role as a champion of a truly American Catholicism. He was the first Bishop of Detroit to be seen by large numbers of non-Catholics as a thoroughly American figure, and the first to move with ease among the city's elite. (His 1907 Golden Jubilee celebration was notable for the large attendance of non-Catholics, especially the local Protestant clergy.) Insofar as Foley was able to bolster the confidence of those Catholics who wanted to see themselves as fully American and to reassure non-Catholics about the political values of his flock, he strengthened the uneasy tradition of religious toleration in the Diocese. That he did so at a time when the growing size and ethnic diversity of the Catholic population in the Diocese threatened to create a strong anti-Catholic reaction indicates the special importance of his role. Nor should he be faulted here for insensitivity to the needs of ethnic Catholics. For despite his assimilationist rhetoric, Foley was as generous as his predecessors had been in permitting the establishment of foreign-language parishes. And because he abandoned the Burgess experiment in centralized government of the parochial schools, he permitted the schools in ethnic parishes a considerable autonomy in matters of cur-
riculum. Indeed, the long decline in administrative efficiency during the later years of the Foley episcopate probably enhanced the independence of pastors and lay parish committees throughout the Diocese.\textsuperscript{18}

Finally, the Bishop must be given at least some credit for those social and educational institutions in the Diocese that were founded or expanded during his episcopate. He initiated the drive for funds that resulted in 1908 in the opening of a spacious new facility to house the boys' orphan asylum, and was apparently instrumental in bringing the Xaverian Brothers to the Diocese in 1904 to found a home for working boys in Detroit. At Foley's request, a group of Detroit laywomen established a home for working girls in the city that survived from 1894 until 1907. Four Catholic hospitals were opened during the Foley years, as well as a Catholic college for women and four Catholic academies. And toward the end of the Foley episcopate, Detroit College moved toward full university status. If the rapidly growing size of the Catholic population in the Diocese after 1900 rather dwarfed these accomplishments, they were nonetheless important.

**WHO IS THE CHURCH? CONFLICT IN THE FOLEY YEARS**

If Foley was genuinely committed to democratic values in political life, he was no more disposed than other "Americanist" bishops to countenance democracy in the Church. Particularly with regard to his clergy, he assumed that episcopal authority was absolute, and he resented—as most other bishops did—even such limited, Vatican-initiated reforms as the election of consultors. Nor did he willingly tolerate dissent among his priests. Still, he moved early in his episcopate to eliminate certain sources of tension between the Chancery and the clergy, tensions that dated mainly from the Borgess years. We have already seen that his decision to strip the diocesan school board of most of its powers pleased nearly every pastor in the Diocese. And Foley quietly discontinued the Borgess ban on parish entertainments, which had been a potent cause of friction. Because the latter years of the Foley episcopate were characterized by administrative inertia, Foley's administrative decisions in the 1890s have sometimes been described as lax or irresponsible. But one could just as plausibly argue that Foley behaved prudently by mitigating what had been an overcentralization of administrative authority during the Borgess years.

Foley's administrative prudence, however, did not save him from serious conflict with several of his priests. These conflicts exemplify the tensions that prevailed by the 1890s between the Vatican and the American hierarchy; they also provide insight into the Foley personality and his understanding of episcopal authority. For these reasons we will look in some detail at three much-publicized disputes of the Foley years, each of which was adjudicated by Roman authorities. We begin with the conclusion of the Kolasinski case, initiated in such spectacular fashion under Bishop Borgess.
6. The Foley Episcopate

The Kolasinski Case

As we have already seen, Bishop Borgess dismissed Father Dominic Kolasinski as pastor of St. Albertus (Polish) parish in the waning days of 1885. The dismissal had resulted in protests and rioting, and in the imposition of an interdict on the church, which remained closed until the summer of 1887. Kolasinski himself left Detroit in the spring of 1886, leaving behind a small but deeply aggrieved community of supporters, who proceeded to establish a school and what was in effect a church of their own. They gathered on Sundays, under the direction of the lay schoolmaster, to sing hymns and say the rosary, although many of them had at least occasional recourse to the sacraments at various Catholic churches in the city. The members of this dissident community were not, to all appearances, much worried that their continued defiance of episcopal authority had in any way affected their standing in the Church. Their leaders maintained that they and their aggrieved constituents were excellent Catholics, that it was not they but two successive bishops of Detroit who had violated Church law. Arguments like these suggest that the Kolasinski dispute involved more than a quarrel between the Chancery and a provocative priest. It had fundamentally to do with a serious disagreement between the Chancery and an ultimately sizable group of lay people over the nature of Church authority.

When Bishop Foley succeeded to the Diocese of Detroit in 1888, he inherited the troublesome after-effects of the Kolasinski dismissal. The dissident congregation of Kolasinski loyalists probably numbered no more than a few hundred souls by the close of 1888, but it constituted an embarrassment as well as a pastoral problem for the new bishop. Accordingly, Foley turned his attention to the difficulty almost as soon as he came to Detroit. Convinced, it seems, that his predecessor's impersonal style had exacerbated the almost inevitable tensions between the Chancery and the local Polish community, Foley himself twice visited the neighborhood where most of the dissidents lived, and pleaded with them to return to St. Albertus Church. Many of the dissidents had initially hoped that Foley would permit Kolasinski to return to the Diocese. But they were so moved by his visits that their leaders feared wholesale defections from the absent priest's cause. These fears brought Kolasinski to Detroit in December 1888, to make a personal appeal to Bishop Foley for reinstatement at St. Albertus. When Foley refused to reinstate him at any church in his diocese, Kolasinski rallied his waver ing supporters and announced that he would remain in Detroit, build a grand—and wholly Catholic—church there, and serve as its pastor.

Kolasinski's grand church was substantially completed at the close of 1893, when his congregation was estimated to number as many as 10,000 souls. (The group had previously worshipped in a combination church-school building that dated from the summer of 1889.) The new church was even larger than St. Albertus Church, which stood just four blocks distant, and it was lavishly decorated—a monument to the parishioners' generosity and to their conviction that they labored in a just and holy cause. For Sweetest Heart of Mary was a Roman
Catholic Church, according to its 1889 by-laws. That its parishioners had been publicly excommunicated by Bishop Foley seemed not to matter in the slightest. Nor did it matter that the democratic mode of parish government prescribed in the by-laws—Kolasinski was actually elected pastor by the church trustees—was wholly at odds with Diocesan regulations. Alarmed and angered by this stubborn defiance, Bishop Foley apparently washed his hands of the dispute in 1889. His parting shot was the establishment of a new Polish church, St. Josaphat, a few blocks to the west of Sweetest Heart of Mary. This new church, Foley hoped, would draw members from Kolasinski’s congregation and worsen what he correctly anticipated would be serious financial problems caused by Kolasinski’s ambitious building program.21

Bishop Foley was presumably comforted in these years by the realization that “Polish troubles” were not peculiar to the Diocese of Detroit. Poles in a number of American dioceses were embroiled after 1880 in sometimes violent conflict with their bishops over what were essentially issues of parish autonomy. In the neighboring Diocese of Grand Rapids, for example, the Polish parish in Bay City was disrupted between 1896 and 1898 by a dispute over the ownership of parish property that was intermittently as violent as the worst incidents in the Kolasinski affair. We have already discussed the circumstances that made Poles in the late nineteenth century unusually suspicious of episcopal authority. And we have also discussed the reasons that virtually all American bishops resisted ethnic demands for autonomy in the conduct of their parishes. Bishop Foley understood the Kolasinski crisis much as his fellow bishops would have done. Uneasily aware that his polyglot diocese had only recently been brought under effective episcopal control, Foley believed that compromise with Kolasinski would not only violate Church law but signal to every restive priest and congregation in his jurisdiction that episcopal authority could be flouted at will. Perhaps because so much was at stake, at least from his perspective, Foley seems to have convinced himself that Kolasinski was guilty of the sexual delinquencies that had been alleged before Bishop Borgess in 1885. Certainly he made no effort to ascertain the truth of what were claimed by some to have been perjured accusations.22

Certain of the rightness of his stand and aware that the “Polish problem” was wider than his own diocese, Foley was astonished to learn in 1893 that the Apostolic Delegate was interested in negotiating a compromise settlement to the Kolasinski case. The delegate was concerned about the great and still-growing size of Kolasinski’s congregation, and concerned as well about the increasing frequency and violence of disputes between Polish congregations and their American bishops. From his point of view, moreover, the American bishops suffered less from uncertain authority in their own dioceses than from a tendency toward an arrogant independence that made them a growing worry in Rome. Since Delegate Satolli had recently forced as powerful a prelate as New York’s Michael Corrigan to reinstate a priest whom he had suspended and then excommunicated in what had been a nationally publicized case, he was clearly not loath
to impose a settlement to the Kolasinski affair on the much less influential Foley. Nonetheless, Foley resisted. And because Kolasinski was equally resistant to anything less than complete vindication, Satolli's task was a difficult one. Negotiations extended for the better part of a year, eventually involving the Propaganda in Rome. A decision was finally reached on the last day of 1893, when the Propaganda instructed Foley to accept Kolasinski as a priest in the Diocese of Detroit once Kolasinski had made a penitent retreat and confessed publicly, before his congregation, to disobedience of lawful authority.23

Foley was deeply angered by the decision, as were his closest clerical advisors. And probably many of his priests, embarrassed by the more flamboyant aspects of Kolasinski's career, were almost as deeply distressed. But Foley had no effective appeal from the judgment of the Propaganda. Kolasinski was officially reconciled with the Church in February 1894, when, in the presence of Satolli's personal representative and of a vast congregation, he read the prescribed confession—but in a whisper! With this astonishing last defiance of authority, he seemed to have emerged from the long dispute the uncontested victor. For by the terms of the agreement that Satolli had negotiated, Kolasinski was to remain pastor of his enormous if debt-ridden church.24

But it was Kolasinski's parishioners who in the end succeeded in imposing their understanding of authority in the Church on the other parties to the dispute. The congregation continued after 1894 to elect a governing board of trustees at its annual meeting, Bishop Foley knowing better than to intervene in the affairs of this particular parish, despite the violation of diocesan statute. Then, in 1897, the men of Sweetest Heart of Mary parish extended the vote in congregational elections to women. (They were almost certainly the first in the Diocese to do so.) The decision to enfranchise women was apparently related to a growing financial crisis in the parish, which reached a head early in 1897, when the church was sold, by court order, to pay outstanding debts. The parish trustees subsequently secured a loan and bought back the church, but not without resolving to keep Kolasinski from any future participation in parish financial affairs. The outraged priest brought his case to the congregation, urging them to elect a slate of trustees at their next meeting who would treat him with the deference due a pastor. But early in 1898, the congregation voted overwhelmingly to retain the trustees who had ordered their priest to busy himself with the spiritual rather than the temporal affairs of the parish—a division of labor that the 1889 parish by-laws in fact prescribed.25

Kolasinski died not long after. Bishop Foley himself brought the last sacraments to the deathbed, according to the local papers, and the two former enemies were reconciled at last. Perhaps by this time each man understood that he had been as much a prisoner of events as a free agent in the long conflict known as the Kolasinski affair. Certainly this was true of Bishop Foley, who not only inherited the case from his predecessor but was caught up in its latter stages in a Roman political struggle where he was more pawn than actor. It is easy to say—as Foley's critics said at the time—that he was too much concerned with
the maintenance of his own authority and too little concerned about the scandal and the danger to souls represented by Kolasinski’s enormous schismatic congregation. And it was perhaps especially easy to say that Foley behaved in this way because he too readily confused the satisfaction of his own desires with legitimate defense of episcopal authority. “He considered and even said to me and others ‘that he was the diocese,’” Father Peter Baart, no admirer of Foley, wrote of his bishop to the Apostolic Delegate. “Therefore instead of considering cases official, he considered them personal.” This may well have been true. But Father Baart was more than a little disingenuous in this exchange with Satolli, for what he objected to was less the Foley personality than the definition of the episcopal office to which Foley and nearly all his fellow bishops were committed. And in the final analysis, the Kolasinski affair was as much a conflict between differing views of authority in the Church as it was a clash of egocentric personalities.26

The “Church Farm” Case

The legitimate extent of a bishop’s authority was the question at the heart of a second much-publicized case which began in Detroit in 1892. The “Church Farm” suit was initiated in that year by Father Christian Denissen, pastor of the recently established St. Charles parish on the eastern fringes of Detroit. Quite by accident, Father Denissen had discovered that the land on which his parish buildings stood had once been diocesan property, part of a large parcel with a remarkably complex history of ownership. This history began in 1808, when the parcel was deeded to Catholics living in the “Côte du Nord-Est,” a territory stretching along the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair northeast of what was then the village of Detroit. The property was to be used by said inhabitants and their descendants for “literary and religious purposes.” Subsequently, in 1833, the land was deeded to Bishop Frederic Rese, apparently to be held in trust by him and his successors for the beneficiaries and purposes designated in the original transaction.

Unfortunately, the 1833 deed was never registered. Nor could it be found after Bishop Rese left Detroit, which led in 1857 to a court challenge to Bishop Lefevere’s putative claim to the property. Lefevere’s title to the land was eventually upheld, but only after an agreement was reached by which the bishop surrendered a part of the original parcel to various claimants and agreed with regard to the land that remained to abide by what were assumed to be the strictures of the 1833 deed. To this end, Lefevere established St. Anthony’s Church and school on a portion of the property, selling additional lots to pay for the parish buildings. The small but increasingly valuable parcel of the “Church Farm” that still remained was deeded in time to Bishop Borgess and then to Bishop Foley. It was this land, or the money to be realized from its sale, that interested Father Denissen in 1892. He was convinced, he told the Foley Chancery, that St. Charles parish was the sole legitimate heir of the 1808 bequest to the inhabitants of the “Côte du Nord-Est.”27
The protracted dispute that followed Father Denissen's discovery is of interest mostly for what it reveals about the principal parties. Father Denissen's motives were perhaps the simplest. Pastor of a new and financially straitened parish, he was anxious to stake his claim to the Church Farm because—in the words of the "Bill of Complaint" submitted on his behalf to Archbishop Elder—"he very badly needs the income or proceeds of this property for the purpose of paying for the erection of new church, school and rectory buildings." If he came in the course of the suit to dislike and mistrust his bishop, he had not, to all appearances, initiated the suit with a view to challenging episcopal authority for principled purposes. Not so his lawyer, the already well-known canonist Father Peter Baart. Baart's interest in the case seems to have stemmed mainly from his concern for what he regarded as the eroding rights of pastors in the American Church. The issue in the Church Farm case, he asserted at one point, was the canonical right of pastors to administer the property of their parishes. The ownership of Church property might rest with the bishop, in Baart's view, but the bishop's freedom to make use of that property was strictly limited by law. Father Denissen, as pastor of the congregation that was rightful heir to the Church Farm bequest, was free to do with that property as he saw fit. The Church Farm case was thus of a piece with the logic of Baart's legal career, for his interest was always to establish or strengthen legal limits to episcopal authority, not for the benefit of the laity—who were of little interest to him—but for the benefit of the clergy.28

Bishop Foley, for his part, saw the case from the first as a threat to his ability to administer his diocese. He argued both privately and in two ecclesiastical courts that he could not, for the good of the Diocese, be bound by the conditions of a legal transaction so old that its very terms had no contemporary meaning. The descendants of the families of the "Côte du Nord-Est" had long been dispersed, and since the original beneficiaries of the Church Farm bequest had lived in a geographically large area, there were many parishes besides St. Charles that might legitimately claim to be heirs. Because of this, the bishop contended, it was both sensible and equitable for him to use the proceeds of the Farm for the good of the whole Diocese, specifically to finance the building of a cathedral. Beyond this, and more fundamentally, Foley feared that this challenge to his administrative authority would weaken him in the eyes of the clergy. This was especially true as the case was adjudicated wholly outside the Diocese. Although Foley claimed that his own diocesan court ought properly to hear the case, Cincinnati's Archbishop Elder accepted Baart's argument that Foley's status as defendant in the suit meant that the Metropolitan Court in Cincinnati was the rightful court of first instance. Should this precedent be upheld, Foley wrote to his friend Dennis O'Connell, he "would be useless in this administration of Detroit and every Tom, Dick and Harry could go before the Metropolitan Court, such as it is." Subsequently appealing the jurisdictional question to the Propaganda in Rome, Foley gave voice to the same fears. "If priests can easily appeal their cases to Cincinnati or to Rome," he demanded, "where will this thing end?
If they can write any combination of facts they please in a bill, and load the Diocese with expense to show their fraud and falsehood, what will become of order in the Church?"29

Because the case was finally heard in Rome, a verdict was slow in coming—the Propaganda did not render a decision in the matter until early in 1897. The verdict was essentially a compromise, although the logic of the decision gave more support to Foley’s view of episcopal authority than it did to Baart’s. The bishop was ordered to use the proceeds of the Church Farm not for the benefit of St. Charles parish alone but for the benefit of all the parishes and Catholic institutions located in the old “Côte du Nord-Est.” The bishop’s status as owner and administrator of the property was specifically recognized and a subsequent clarification by the Propaganda gave Bishop Foley the right to determine the geographic area defined by the term “Côte du Nord-Est”—a hotly disputed question—and the responsibility of administering any monies realized from the sale of Church Farm property.30

Bishop Foley had apparently hoped for a more thoroughgoing vindication of his episcopal rights, for he was unduly disappointed by what was clearly a more than partial victory in the case. His distress was doubtless compounded when he learned from the local papers that Father Denissen considered the decision an unqualified triumph for St. Charles parish, which, the euphoric priest announced, would “at once erect a handsome church, modern school buildings and other buildings required.” Just how Father Denissen arrived at this unwarranted conclusion is not clear. Probably he assumed that the case turned more fundamentally on the question of the extent of a bishop’s authority than on the rather dubious claim of St. Charles parish to represent the descendants of the original Church Farm heirs. Father Baart was disposed to think this way and indeed, the verdict did limit Foley’s freedom to dispose of land that the Propaganda had recognized as his.31

Father Denissen, however, was not long able to sustain the illusion of victory. By early April, Bishop Keane could assure his friend Foley that certain Roman authorities “have already written to Fr. Denissen that his claim—that the money should go only to St. Charles Church, cannot be entertained.” The last word, moreover, rested with the bishop’s side. The long-lost deed of 1833 was found in 1915, and it made no mention of the “Côte du Nord-Est.” The Church Farm, according to the deed, was simply to be used for “literary and religious purposes.” Foley did nothing with this new evidence, but in 1920 his successor appealed to the Propaganda and received permission to use for diocesan purposes that remnant of the Church Farm still held in trust.32

If Foley’s authority in his own diocese was not much undermined by the Church Farm case, his standing in Rome was surely affected. Both Foley and his attorney, Father Robert Doman, behaved throughout the case in an almost reckless fashion. Foley was convinced that the case had developed only at the instigation of Peter Baart, and only, in Foley’s words, “for the simple purpose of [Baart’s] advancing himself and gaining notoriety.” Father Doman thought so
too. "Rev. Denissen is not the real plaintiff in this case," he warned Archbishop Elder, "he is the tool." Both Foley and Doman had a penchant, from the outset of the case, for scurrilous personal argument, as Baart himself noted—not without a certain satisfaction—in a letter to Foley's secretary. "From the appearance of things, the Bishop takes the case pretty hard, and feels quite mad at me, but when he has been through as many cases as you and I he probably will take them philosophically." Not so in this instance, however. "This man Baart . . . is physically a little shriveled creature," Foley informed the Propaganda in an 1892 brief that was largely devoted to a savage attack on Baart's probity. "He has always been an agitator in this Diocese. . . . We cannot rely on a word he says or writes." But Baart was in fact a respected canonist, and Foley would have done better to confine his argument to the considerable legal and historical precedent that favored his case. That Foley and Doman insisted on arguing in this fashion may explain some of the dislike Archbishop Satolli had conceived for Foley by the time the Kolasinski case was in its final stages. It is noteworthy in this regard that it was Father Baart to whom Satolli turned in 1893 to secure what Satolli described as an unbiased history of the Kolasinski affair.

Why Foley behaved so imprudently in the Church Farm case is far from clear. Certainly he misread the situation in Rome, where his arguments for essentially unchecked episcopal authority were more likely to feed anxieties about the American Church than to strike a responsive chord. And he may have been so uncertain of his actual authority in his own diocese that Baart's cool and skillful challenge of that authority—much publicized in the local press—caused Foley to lash out angrily at the man he believed was deliberately undermining his status in the eyes of the clergy. Or perhaps he was simply the man Baart alleged him to be—vindictive, mean-spirited, unable to tolerate even disinterested opposition to his own policies. It is worth remarking, however, that Foley's position in this case was a good deal more generous, with regard to the whole of the Diocese, than that of Fathers Denissen and Baart.

The Father Francis Kennedy Case

The antagonisms and alliances that grew out of the Church Farm affair had a bearing on the later case of Father Francis Kennedy. Here the least attractive side of the bishop's character was much in evidence; if one wanted to argue that Foley was fundamentally an arrogant and vindictive man—and not a very competent administrator—one would do well to center the argument on this particular case. It began in the spring of 1896, when the young Father Kennedy, pastor of St. John's parish in Ypsilanti, was abruptly transferred by his bishop to a pastorate in Niles, a small village in the far western part of the state. Kennedy had recently given Foley some cause for displeasure: the priest, evidently interceding in a family quarrel, had spent the better part of a day in the unchaperoned company of a young woman, even registering under an assumed name at a hotel in the town to which both had gone. A local reporter had recognized Father Kennedy and then informed Bishop Foley, who was disturbed by the young priest's
imprudence if apparently convinced that he was innocent of more serious wrongdoing. Foley claimed that his subsequent transfer of Kennedy from Ypsilanti to Niles was not by way of punishment but simply to avoid a scandal. Had the Niles parish not been smaller and poorer than the prosperous parish at Ypsilanti, and had Foley not immediately given the Ypsilanti pastorate to his friend Father Robert Doman, Kennedy might not have contested the decision. But under the circumstances, he was angry and ready to fight. 34

Father Kennedy had not been a radical during his short career as a priest; indeed it was partly his loyalty to episcopal authority that had brought him so early to as desirable a parish as St. John's. And his initial attempt to contest the transfer was characteristically respectful: he asked the venerable Father James Doherty, longtime pastor of St. Vincent's in Detroit, to intercede for him at the Chancery. Doherty was plainly puzzled by Foley's conduct with regard to the promising young priest. "It is strange the Bishop would order you so without any understanding," he wrote to Kennedy. "He generally has an understanding with the pastors he moves." Whether Doherty subsequently sought to change the bishop's mind we do not know. In any event, Foley did not rescind Kennedy's transfer. 35

Kennedy next turned to Father Peter Baart, already widely known for his legal work on behalf of aggrieved priests—and nearly as widely known as an antagonist of Bishop Foley. Baart gladly received the case, and filed an appeal with the Apostolic Delegate on May 28. It was surely one of the easier briefs he had ever prepared, for Foley had disregarded what were generally recognized as the procedures to be followed when a pastor was moved. A pastor was not to be subject to a punitive transfer if he was not guilty of a canonical offense, Baart argued. And Foley himself had admitted that Kennedy had done no serious wrong. Still, he had transferred Father Kennedy, against the priest's will, to a demonstrably inferior post. The Niles parish, Baart pointed out, was not only smaller and poorer than the parish at Ypsilanti, but did not even provide its priest with a rectory. Father Kennedy would suffer economically from the transfer—"the perquisites of your orator would be thus diminished by about half"—and his reputation would suffer as well. No matter what statements were issued to the contrary, Baart claimed, the clergy of the Diocese would consider that Kennedy was being punished, simply because the Niles pastorate was so inferior to his previous one. And Kennedy would suffer socially in Niles, a parish "without city advantages" and considerably farther than Ypsilanti from Detroit. "Moreover the people of Niles are inferior to those of Ypsilanti," Baart continued uncharitably, "and the clergy of that section are not so intimately known to your orator." The real motivation for the Kennedy transfer, Baart concluded, was Foley's desire to accommodate his friend Doman—who had by this time published attacks on both Baart and the Apostolic Delegate, as Baart was careful to mention. "And now, forsooth, to make room for a person of such demerit instead of merit your orator is forced to leave his parish, his home, and go to a much inferior parish, and into practical banishment? Is this fairness? Is this equity?" 36

The case was decided by the Apostolic Delegate just two months later. Foley's
arguments on his own behalf were summarily rejected—the decision “is really dreadful on the Bishop,” crowed a delighted Baart, hoping perhaps that this outcome would affect the course of the Church Farm case, still pending in Rome. Foley was ordered to reinstate Kennedy immediately as pastor at Ypsilanti, and the bishop did so. A now thoroughly politicized Father Kennedy sent his thanks to the Apostolic Delegate, repenting of his previously uncritical loyalty to Foley. He especially regretted having signed a petition in 1893 which objected in strong language to the rumored reinstatement of Father Kolasinski as a priest in the Diocese—a petition that Father Baart had pointedly refused to sign. “It was done under pressure and from misinformation,” Kennedy explained, “and now the feeling grows that Father Baart’s advocacy is testimony to the justice of any cause.”

Foley’s already poor standing in the estimation of the now-Cardinal Satolli was further eroded by the Kennedy affair, and at a time when his ecclesiastical allies were under increasing attack in Rome. When Father Baart wrote from New York in the wake of the Kennedy decision to rejoice at the “bad répute in which Bishop Foley is held all around here,” he also had occasion to note that “Cardinal Gibbons was practically told to leave Rome and today has absolutely no influence there.” It cannot have contributed to the equilibrium of the vain and rather quick-tempered Foley to have learned, in this ominous political climate, that the Kennedy case had, in Baart’s words, “surely attracted attention.” But whatever his personal distress, there can be no justification for Foley’s subsequent behavior toward Father Kennedy. Foley quite deliberately refused to approve a teaching order for Kennedy’s parish school, causing the school to be closed in the autumn of 1896, apparently hoping in this way to turn the congregation at Ypsilanti against the reinstated priest. That Kennedy was not moved from Ypsilanti in later years may also have been due to Foley’s animosity rather than the priest’s own preference. Certainly Kennedy’s considerable talents had led many to expect that he would finish his career at a large parish in Detroit—as Father Robert Doman did.

If these three cases reveal a side to Foley that was narrow, vindictive, and resistant to compromise, they also reveal the unusually difficult circumstances under which he served in the 1890s. That the Kolasinski and Church Farm cases originated in his diocese was simply bad luck. And that he counted among his priests the redoubtable Peter Baart was likewise—from a bishop’s point of view—an instance of misfortune. For Baart was not only a skilled and aggressive canonist with a distinctly minimalist understanding of the episcopal office, he was also a friend of the powerful Cardinal Satolli. And Satolli, as we have seen, had his own agenda in the 1890s, into which Baart’s attacks on Foley fitted neatly. This is not to excuse Foley’s conduct in the Kennedy case or to argue that his administration of the Diocese in the 1890s was notably adept. But our judgment of his episcopate must be tempered by an understanding of its context.

Bishop Foley died on January 5, 1918. His funeral at Detroit’s cathedral was a major civic event—the mayor and the City Council attended the requiem
Mass, and more than 100,000 mourners were said to have passed by the bier where the body lay in state. Foley was eighty-four when he died, and had been only a shadowy presence in Detroit for the better part of a decade. Relatively few Detroiters in 1918 had memories of Foley in his vigorous middle years. Catholics bade farewell, then, less to a man than to the embodiment of their own high Victorian past. And as they did this, they celebrated a coming-of-age for Catholics throughout the Diocese. If organized anti-Catholicism was poised in 1918 for a last major appearance in Michigan politics, Catholics were nonetheless more fully integrated into their communities than they had ever been before. John Foley had served as bishop during an important transition in Catholic life, and for many older Catholics he had himself been a symbol and even a cause of that change. 39

Many of those who paid their last respects to the bishop were probably at least dimly aware that much had remained undone during his long episcopate. Detroit had only a modest cathedral and it had no seminary. Both were institutions that, for a great many Catholics, gauged the status and progress of a diocese. But if these same Catholics also sensed that the Foley years had been a time of growth and change, they were quite right. For the Foley episcopate encompassed not only significant change in the religious lives of many Catholics in the Diocese, it was a period of greatly increased lay activity in parish and in interparochial organizations. These developments, it is true, had generally been initiated and sustained by forces outside the Chancery. But this did not prevent most Catholics in 1918 from associating the advent of a more disciplined and vigorous Catholicism with "the Foley years."