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Blast From the Past: Third Plenary Council of Baltimore

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Distinctly Catholic

Reading Tom Roberts' post about Canon 515, and the accompanying news article, I am reminded that in the nineteenth century, it was Rome that was pushing for limitations on the authority of bishops within their own diocese, calling for cathedral chapters whose consent was required for many diocesan decisions. Back then, the U.S. Church was considered mission territory which explains the mention of Propaganda Fide in the text below. This excerpt from Gerald Fogarty's "The Vatican and the American Hierarchy from 1870 to 1965" highlights the way the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 dealt with issues of episcopal control:

"At the council, the bishops strengthened their authority beyond what was contained in the Roman schemata and, in addition, introduced new legislation. They modified still further what had originally been Propaganda's proposal of cathedral chapters and decreed that a bishop needed to seek the advice of his consultors before he could buy or sell property, disband or erect a parish, but did not need their consent. When they discussed the proposal of irremovable rectors, John Ireland asked the opinion of Gibbons, who replied that the Holy See was so intent on having them that, if the council failed to legislate for them, Rome would intervene with some embarrassment to the bishops."

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