

## French bishop's case troubling many

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Few postconciliar developments have been more pastorally disturbing than the Vatican's action last month removing a French bishop from his diocese for failing to exercise "the ministry of unity."

Jacques Gaillot had been bishop of Evreux in Normandy for the past 12 years, and before that a seminary rector. According to news reports, the bishop has been a controversial figure because of his public statements and actions on a variety of issues.

First, he was a strong proponent of peace initiatives during the Cold War, but so, too, were the U.S. Catholic bishops in their 1983 pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace."

Second, he opposed the Persian Gulf war in 1991, as did Pope John Paul II in his encyclical that same year, *Centesimus Annus*.

Third, he has been an advocate for homeless young people, urging the French government to provide greater financial support, for which he received praise from Abbe Pierre, the famous "ragpicker priest" of Paris.

Fourth, Bishop Gaillot gave interviews to gay magazines, telling one periodical that "homosexuals will go before us to the kingdom of God" — a line similar to one directed by Jesus at the chief priests and elders: "Truly, I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Matthew 21:31).



### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Fifth, he supports the ordination of married men as priests and the return of married priests to the active ministry.

But the Catholic Church already has thousands of married priests in its various Eastern-rite churches in communion with Rome, and the Roman rite itself has been admitting married men — former Episcopalian priests — into the priesthood without requiring them to live as celibates.

Sixth, Bishop Gaillot also criticized the French government last year for passing tougher immigration laws. But his concern for immigrants is no less "Catholic" than those expressed by Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles and other U.S. bishops.

Seventh, he has advocated a strong ministry to AIDS victims. But so has

Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York, and many other bishops.

Bishop Gaillot was even accused of "marrying" a gay couple. But he only did what any sensitive pastor would have done if two gay Catholics came to him, one dying of AIDS, to seek some sign of the church's loving care. He met with the couple and prayed with and for them.

Eighth, the bishop told another gay magazine in 1989 that there is a moral obligation to advise people at risk of contracting AIDS to protect themselves with condoms. But the Administrative Board of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops incorporated that approach in a 1987 AIDS document published in the Dec. 24, 1987 *Origins*. Although the bishops' point was carefully nuanced, it was later modified under pressure from critics.

None of the above items yields a single compelling reason why Bishop Gaillot was dismissed from office. What seems to have done him in is his overall public profile which proved a source of serious irritation to conservative forces within the French government and church.

According to *The New York Times*, Bishop Gaillot was bitterly attacked for his stand on immigration by Charles Pasqua, the conservative interior minister who is said to have complained personally to the Vatican.

More decisive, however, was the opposition mounted by Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris, a conservative pastoral leader close to the pope.

It is inexplicable that there was no canonical process, nor any formal review of the case by the national episcopal conference in France. Both deficiencies generate the gravest concerns about the action taken against Bishop Gaillot. Some of these concerns have been expressed already by several of his fellow bishops.

Jacques Delaporte, archbishop of Cambrai, said that the bishop's outright dismissal from his diocese was "a wound for our church," a "failure" for dialogue, and "a source of misunderstanding for the poor and for all those who seek the truth and who put their trust in the church."

Bishop Jean Vilnet of Lille also expressed concern for the action's impact on those who had been touched by Bishop Gaillot's ministry: "the poor, the marginals, the excluded, those seeking hope."

Archbishop Andre Collini of Toulouse warned that the action "threatened to create divisions and misunderstandings" within the church.

And the president of the French bishops' conference, Archbishop Joseph Duval of Rouen, acknowledged that he had pleaded with Rome to have patience, but to no avail.

Many Catholics would be mystified by such concerns because they think of the church as an absolute monarchy, which it isn't, and of the bishops as the deputies of the pope, which they are not.

But those are issues for another column.

## Getting even never pays off in the end

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 6:27-38; (R1) 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.

The heart of Christianity is love — a love that is not natural, but supernatural, for it is a love that includes even one's enemies.

To love one's enemies does not mean to become a doormat, a milquetoast. Rather, it means a positive, aggressive action such as doing good toward, blessing and praying for one's enemies, not judging or condemning, but pardoning them.

Why should we do this? Because the Lord is kind and merciful. We should imitate God. He pardons all our iniquities; He redeems us. "He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. Not according to our sins does He deal with us" (Resp).

When St. Philip Neri saw a criminal go to the scaffold, he would say, "There go I but for the grace of God." St. Paul often said, "I am what I am by the grace of God." The Lord says, "Be merciful, for I am merciful."

David affords us a wonderful ex-



### A WORD FOR SUNDAY

ample of love of enemies (R1). David did not have Christ's example, nor the New Testament's graces, yet few Christians ever rise to his grandeur of soul.

David's enemy was Saul, yet all David ever did for Saul was to do him good. He killed Goliath and defeated the Philistines — all Saul's enemies. Yet Saul repeatedly tried to kill David. Why? Simply because Saul envied David's popularity. Envy is the sadness brought about by the good for-

ture of another. Everyone knew David would make a better king than Saul; everyone knew Saul was mad with envy.

Thus, when he should have been pursuing the Philistines, Saul was hunting David. Saul fell into David's hands. Abishai wanted David to kill Saul, but David would not. His friends wanted him to launch a coup — in other words, overthrow Saul — but David would not. He seemed crazy that way. He worried his generals by not treating his enemies as enemies. Instead of revenge, he forgave. And he waited patiently till the end of Saul's reign.

It all paid off in the end. When David became king, no civil war or bloodshed occurred, which would have happened had David killed his enemy Saul. Because he forgave, David brought to Israel's tribes the greatest unity, harmony and expansion in Israel's whole history. In the long run, "getting even" never pays off. It boomerangs.

To hit back, to give tit for tat, to give an eye for eye and tooth for tooth and punch for punch and bump for bump, seems so sensible, so natural. But that's the point: it is natural, not supernatural. To err is human, but to

forgive is divine.

Therefore, resolve always to do two things. First, don't be a reactor. Never let other people's actions determine your actions. Act from principles within, such as: love your enemies; be compassionate; do not judge; do to others what you would have them do to you; pardon; and be merciful.

Secondly, remember the French proverb: *Comprendre tout, c'est pardonner tout* ("To know all is to forgive all"). If we could read the human heart and know all the circumstances and conditions that lead a person to commit some act or offense, we'd be more lenient and forgiving.

The whole business of loving one's enemies might seem crazy, but it's Christ's way, the Christian's way, the only way to make His kingdom come on earth.

Crowds of people in heaven today are there because of kind actions: many are there for doing them, and many are there for having them done to them. In *Les Miserables*, Jean Valjean's life was changed by a single act of kindness by the saintly Bishop of Digne. The book ends with the words: "To love another person is to see the face of God."

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