

Bishop's case hits close to home

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Last week I did a column on the recent dismissal of Bishop Jacques Gaillot from his diocese in France on the grounds that he had somehow failed in his "ministry of unity."

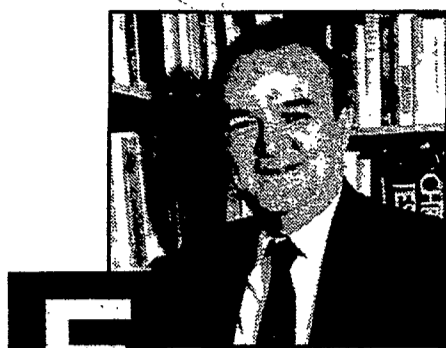
Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that Bishop Gaillot did fail in his episcopal responsibilities and that there was just pastoral cause for his removal as bishop of Evreux. That wouldn't end the matter.

What is at issue in the controversy is the process by which the bishop's dismissal from office took place.

There was no canonical process, and there was no involvement on the part of the French bishops' conference. The decision was taken unilaterally by the Vatican and personally communicated to the bishop by Cardinal Gantin, prefect of the Congregation for the Bishops.

Some Catholics might argue that the mode of action was justified because every bishop serves at the pope's pleasure. Just as in any business, the chief executive officer determines whom he or she wants on the administrative team. When job performance no longer matches expectations, you make a change.

But this line of reasoning is wrong. As the Second Vatican Council de-



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clared: "Nor are they (i.e., bishops) to be regarded as vicars (i.e., representatives) of the Roman Pontiff, for they exercise an authority which is proper to them (i.e., not delegated by someone higher up), and are quite correctly called 'prelates,' heads of the people whom they govern. Their power, therefore, is not destroyed by the supreme universal power" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 27).

If bishops are "representatives" or "vicars" of anyone, it is of Jesus Christ himself, not the pope. Indeed, during most of the first thousand years of the church's history, all bishops — not just

the bishop of Rome — were considered to be "vicars of Christ." The pope's distinctive title, on the other hand, was "vicar of Peter."

The controversy surrounding Bishop Gaillot echoes an earlier one surrounding the former archbishop of Seattle, Raymond Hunthausen, some eight or nine years ago.

Responding to complaints from extreme right-wing Catholics, the Vatican installed a conservative auxiliary bishop from outside the archdiocese, with full authority over pastoral matters that canonically belong to the diocesan bishop. The reaction of an overwhelming number of Catholics in Seattle — laity, clergy, and religious alike — was swift and strong. Support for the archbishop was at once widespread and deep.

The Vatican took note of the protests but would probably have done nothing if it were not for the fact that a similarly negative reaction developed within the National Conference of Catholic Bishops as well.

The great majority of U.S. bishops, conservatives, as well as so-called moderates, were troubled, even angered, by the manner in which the Vatican had moved against a brother bishop.

Some of the bishops were appalled that the Vatican had placed so much credence in the complaints of extremists. Other bishops were simply

worried about the precedent such action might set.

The upshot was that the bishops, meeting as a body in executive session in the presence of the Vatican's diplomatic representative to the United States, expressed their concerns in very vivid terms and urged the Vatican to reconsider its action.

A three-member visitation team, headed by the moderate Cardinal-archbishop of Chicago, Joseph Bernardin, subsequently reviewed the situation and recommended a compromise that finally resolved the matter: the conservative auxiliary bishop who had been imposed on the archdiocese was removed; a new and more moderate bishop was appointed as coadjutor archbishop with the right of succession; and Archbishop Hunthausen's episcopal authority was fully restored.

If the French bishops, by contrast with their American counterparts, allow the action against Bishop Gaillot to stand, they will have altered the nature of the episcopate in France and may even have contributed to its erosion elsewhere in the church.

The fact is that bishops do not serve at the pleasure of the pope, nor are they vicars of the pope. The Gaillot case reminds us, however, that there are still many Catholics — some in very high places — who think otherwise.

Remodeling home deepens appreciation

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

After living in our 1928-vintage house for eight years, my wife and I finally got up the courage to remodel the kitchen. Trying to be as realistic (and frugal) as possible, we first eliminated our more grandiose dreams of expanding the room's actual size and instead settled for redoing what we have.

Then we experienced the "sticker shock" of what it costs for a new stove (we kept our refrigerator and dishwasher), new sink and fixtures, and especially new kitchen cabinets. We went back and revised our budget.

We decided that the only way we could update our kitchen was to do as much of the work as possible ourselves. Unfortunately, neither one of us are gifted handypersons, but we were able to find friends in our parish



FAITH AND WORK

and neighborhood who are. So we hired an electrician, plumber, carpenter and his brother the plasterer

to do all the skilled work.

That left only the unskilled, destruction work for us. For those of you who have ever remodeled a kitchen, you know what I mean. Before anything new can be built or installed, the existing cabinets, fixtures, plumbing and appliances must all be ripped out right down to the bare walls. While our kitchen was old, there never was any question that it was solidly built, so the job was a hard, dirty, time-consuming one.

My wife and I discovered that there is a certain spirituality to be found in the work of tearing down and clearing out the old and building up the new. We experienced a certain satisfaction from being involved ourselves — not only because of the money we saved but also because of what we learned:

• For the first time in our lives, we got to see and understand the mys-

tery of how a kitchen works. It gave us an appreciation for the work of the architects and craftspeople who had originally designed and put the kitchen together and the skilled labor of those who are now putting it back together.

• As we peeled off layer upon layer of plaster and tile, we got in touch with almost 90 years of our house's history. We found, for example, a three-cent postcard that was dated 1962 and addressed to one of the previous owners and written entirely in German.

• By being intimately involved in the task from start to finish, we observed first-hand the process of the "death" followed by the "resurrection" of our kitchen.

In renovating our kitchen we discovered that the very fiber of our home is holy, if we are willing to put our hands on it.

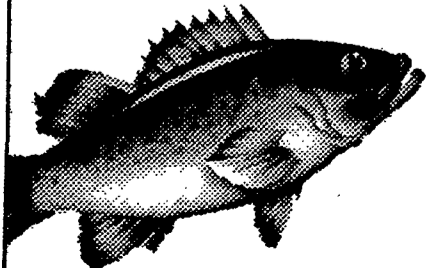
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