

Cleric who shaped U.S. 'pastoral church' dead at 99

John A. Dick | Jan. 21, 2009

Brussels, Belgium

Archbishop Jean Jadot died peacefully at his residence in Brussels Jan. 21. He was 99. He had been apostolic delegate to the United States from 1973 to 1980, and at the direction of Pope Paul VI, he transformed the U.S. episcopal leadership by appointing pastorally oriented bishops.

With family and friends near him, Jadot had received Communion and last rites a couple of days before his death. Archbishop Karl-Josef Rauber, the apostolic nuncio to Belgium, had come to his bedside with a special papal blessing from Pope Benedict XVI.

Jadot's first episcopal appointee was Bernard Law in December 1973 and his last one was Kenneth Untener in November 1980. In his seven years as apostolic delegate, he was responsible for the appointments of 103 new bishops and the assignments of 15 archbishops: William Borders to Baltimore; Patrick Flores to San Antonio; Peter Gerety to Newark, N.J.; James Hickey to Washington; Raymond Hunthausen to Seattle; Francis Hurley to Anchorage, Alaska; Oscar Lipscomb to Mobile, Alabama; Edward McCarthy to Miami; John May to St. Louis; Edward O'Meara to Indianapolis; John Quinn to San Francisco; John Roach to Saint Paul, Minn.; Charles Salatka to Oklahoma City; Robert Sanchez to Santa Fe, N.M.; and Rembert Weakland to Milwaukee.



Jadot became the hero of progressive post-Vatican II Catholics in the United

States. The bishops appointed upon his recommendation were quickly known as (and denounced by conservative American Catholics as) the "Jadot boys." After the 1976 Call to Action gathering in Detroit, and especially after an address to the American bishops in Washington on Nov. 9, 1976, in which Jadot told the bishops what their agenda should be for the sake of the church in the United States, the apostolic delegate became the target of bitter animosity from conservative bishops and laypeople. A close friend in Rome warned him at that time that "they" would now be "out to get him."

In "A Watchman for the House of Israel," his 1976 address to the general meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, Jadot gave a candid assessment of the state of the Catholic church in the United States, stressing three areas of concern. He began with the shortage of priests: "This morning, my brother bishops, I would like to share with you some of the signs that I read in our times so that we can see from afar and be prepared for what is coming. One problem that we will have to face very soon – at most within 10 years – is the shortage of priests. I ask your permission to be frank and candid. I am worried that so many of us – laity, clergy, and bishops – do not seem to be concerned that, if not today, then in a very few years, we will not be able to staff our parishes and institutions with priests as we did in the past. ... In some regions priests are dying in their 50s from overwork. Others are chronically tired and frustrated because they cannot accomplish by themselves what several priests together accomplished in the past."

He then went on to stress the need for "new forms of parochial life and perhaps new forms of parochial organization so that the parish can become a community of small communities."

Then he called attention to the problems of minorities in the American church: "How are we to give pastoral care to those who do not feel at home with our white, Western European ways of public worship and community living, to those who have not adapted and do not want to adapt to what we call our American way of doing things?" How are we to foster the unity of the people of God within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church while at the same time preserving the diversity that is one of the riches of this great country?"

A few bishops reacted with obvious irritation when he chided them about failures to promote social justice and respect for all cultures: "I wonder if the majority of our priests and people realize our shortcomings in these areas and even our arrogance toward our brothers and sisters in the faith who are in some ways different from ourselves. I wonder if we can ever fully understand the legitimate frustrations that they feel." In his concluding remarks, the apostolic delegate called brief attention to two more areas of concern that the bishops would have to follow up on: "There are other problems either near or far on the horizon. I could mention the question of the role of women in society and in the church or problems that will come from the rejection of the traditional standards of morality in society, political and business life."

The apostolic delegate concluded his address to "my brother bishops" by saying: "Let us be confident, courageous and open to the Spirit. Let us build the church of God by our foresight."

A few American bishops were delighted with Jadot's observations. A number were dumbfounded. Some were outright angry. Clearly, after that November meeting in Washington, two divergent Jadot camps emerged in the United States.



New York Times religion writer Kenneth Briggs echoed the

sentiments of more progressive American Catholics when he sketched the positive impact of the apostolic delegate in a Feb. 27, 1977 article titled "Pope's U.S. Delegate Takes Powerful Role." The anti-Jadot sentiments of conservative American Catholics were reflected in A.J. Matt's article on March 17 in *The Wanderer*: "Does Archbishop Jadot Echo Rome's Voice?" A few days later, on March 25, 1977, *National Catholic Reporter*

editor Arthur Jones came out with a major Jadot interview titled "Jean Jadot: Pope's man in the U.S.?" That same issue of *NCR* included a very laudatory editorial titled "Jadot Urbi et Orbi."

The *NCR* editorial was the straw that broke the conservative American Catholic camel's back. From that time on, Jadot received a steady flow of anonymous hate mail (originating from Missouri) telling him to "get out of the United States and go back to Belgium." He was also being denounced at the Vatican. At one point Jadot even offered his resignation to Paul VI, who responded immediately by saying, "No. You are doing just what I want you to do."

Sentiments at the Vatican, however, would change significantly with the election of Pope Paul's second successor. In 1980, a physically worn-out Jadot offered his resignation to Pope John Paul II. It was happily accepted. Jadot was called to Rome, where he worked in obvious papal disfavor for four years, as pro-president of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians.

Since 1984, he had been in active retirement in Brussels. Unlike his predecessors and his successor as apostolic delegate, Jadot was never named cardinal.

I vividly remember being with him the day the announcement came out about his successor, Archbishop Pio Laghi, being named cardinal. Jadot had called me that morning and asked if he could drive over to Louvain for lunch with his friends at The American College. At the time I had not yet heard the news, but learned what had happened while he was on his way from Brussels. We met and had a delightful lunch. No one said anything about Laghi. After lunch, I walked him back to his car. Just before he opened the door, he turned to me: "Did you hear the news?" "Yes," I said, "just after your phone call this morning." "Well," Jadot said, "I had to be with my American friends today. It is not important to be a cardinal. What bothers me is that I know this is not about being a cardinal. It is a slap in my face."

Jadot was born Nov. 23, 1909, in Brussels. He came from a well-known aristocratic Belgian family of engineers, bankers and railroad builders whose business dealings stretched throughout Belgium, as well as into China and the Belgian Congo. Two months before his 17th birthday, Jadot entered the Catholic University of Louvain. He was a bright but not always physically strong student. By 1930 he had already completed his doctorate in philosophy, graduating magna cum laude. His thesis was titled "On the Thought of Alfred Edward Taylor." Jadot often said, with a wry chuckle, "Fortunately they never published my doctorate. I would be so embarrassed today. I began my university studies much too young and lacked the necessary maturity. They gave me my degree more for my efforts than for any philosophical value of my work."

The same year that he completed his doctoral work at Louvain, Jadot entered the major seminary in Malines. He was happy about the direction of his life, but his father was not. Already in 1927, the older Jadot had sent his son to the United States on a get-acquainted-with-the-bigger-world-type business trip. His father hoped that Jadot would get a taste for the secular life and stop thinking about priesthood. Jadot returned with a fascination with Americans and their almost childlike innocence and spontaneity. And he still wanted to become a priest. A year later, his father sent him to Africa, again hoping to shift the direction of his son's life. Jadot returned with valuable insights into colonial Africa – a colonial Africa shaped in part by his own family. No more trips for a while.

On Feb. 11, 1934, Cardinal Josef-Ernest Van Roey in Malines ordained Jadot a priest. In the years immediately following his ordination, from 1934-1940, he was an associate pastor in suburban Brussels, and from 1939-1952 held various chaplaincy for youth as well as the Belgian military. From 1952 to 1960 he was chaplain to the Congolese troops in the then-Belgian Congo. From 1960 to 1968 he was Belgian national director of the the Propagation of the Faith. During this time he was already attracting the attention of Pope Paul VI, thanks to the influence of Cardinal Joseph Suenens, who had taken a special interest in Jadot and recommended him to the attention of the Vatican Secretary of State.

In May 1967, when Archbishop Pietro Sigismondi, secretary of what is now called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, died very unexpectedly, Cardinal Josef Frings from Cologne, Germany, recommended Jadot as his successor. In August, however, Pope Paul VI selected his friend Archbishop Sergio Pignedoli for the position. At the request of Pope Paul, one of Pignedoli's first responsibilities shortly after taking office in Rome was to prepare for the elevation of Jadot to the episcopacy so that "he will be able to represent the Holy See in a missionary country."

In early December 1967, as Jadot was preparing for his father's death (the older Jadot died on December 17), Cardinal Suenens got a phone call from Rome: Would he support the nomination of Jadot to the post of apostolic pro-nuncio to Thailand? Suenens immediately responded with an enthusiastic "Yes." Nothing officially was said to Jadot. In early January 1968, however, Jadot had picked up some gossip from a close friend who simply told him, "I have heard from XYZ that you are going to be appointed apostolic delegate to Bangkok [Thailand] " but you like me know nothing about this."

On Feb. 12, 1968, Archbishop Silvio Oddi, papal nuncio in Brussels, called Jadot. Oddi urgently had to speak with him about "the language problems at the University of Louvain." (Strong demands were coming from the Flemish-speaking Belgians that the university be separated into two autonomous universities, one French-speaking and one Dutch-speaking; and apparently the nuncio thought Jadot could supply him with some helpful background information about the situation.) Archbishop Oddi asked Jadot to meet with him. When he and Jadot met, they exchanged a few remarks about Louvain, but then the nuncio remarked: "Actually I need to talk to you about something else. I have been charged to inform you that the Holy Father has elevated you to the episcopacy and appointed you apostolic pro-nuncio to Thailand. The telegram arrived this morning and I am to report back tomorrow morning that you have accepted. You have no reason to refuse. Reflect and pray. I expect to hear from you at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow." Jadot's formal diplomatic ministry for the Holy See had begun.

On May 1, 1968, Jadot was ordained bishop at the church of Our Lady of Grace outside Brussels by Cardinal Suenens; Archbishop Oddi; and André Marie Charue, Bishop of Namur, Belgium. From 1968 to 1971 he was apostolic pro-nuncio to Thailand and apostolic delegate to Laos, Malaysia and Singapore. From May 1971 to 1973 he was apostolic pro-nuncio to Cameroon and Gabon and apostolic delegate to Equatorial Guinea.

In April 1972, Jadot's mother was near death, and he returned to Belgium to be with her. (She died on April 22.) Jadot was in poor health, literally worn-out from his travels and work in Africa. His doctors put him in a hospital in Lausanne for a few weeks of rest and also told him he had to get out of the tropical climate. Word, of course, got back to Rome.

On the anniversary of his episcopal ordination, May 1, 1973, Jadot, now back in Cameroon, returned to his residence around noon and found a letter on his desk marked "personal." He didn't think much of it, because by that time he was used to secret and personal communications about various issues. He opened the envelope and immediately found a second envelope hand-addressed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Jean Villot. It was dated April 27. Villot informed him that Pope Paul VI had been looking for a new apostolic delegate for the United States and was thinking of him. Would he be willing to accept?

Jadot reflected and prayed. During the liturgy of May 2, the feast of St. Athanasius, Jadot was struck by a phrase taken from the Gospel according to St. John: "It is not you who have chosen me but I have chosen you " you will go and produce fruit and your fruit will be lasting." On May 4, he wrote Cardinal Villot. Yes, he would accept " especially because the United States was not a tropical country!

In early July 1973, Jadot was in Rome to receive specific instructions about his new appointment. Pope Paul VI informed him that he had had been selected to "the most important of our posts" because he was not under the influence of the curia and would not have to follow in the footsteps of his two predecessors. Paul VI was very

much aware of the fact that previous apostolic delegates had been pawns in the hands of powerful kingmaker American cardinals. Nor did Paul like the fact that most American bishops were, in his opinion, more big businessmen than they were pastors. It was time for a change. Archbishop Giovanni Benelli, from the Secretariat of State, had also informed the pope that several U.S. archbishops were pushing for a new kind of apostolic delegate, as well. Previous delegates Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi and Archbishop Luigi Raimondi had in fact not been that well received.

Jadot was told he did not have to be the "eyes and ears of the pope," but he did have to "express his heart" to the church in the United States. Paul VI, Benelli and other key advisors from the Secretariat of State then outlined major characteristics of Catholics in the United States as well as their concerns. American Catholics were "faithful" and "generous," especially toward Third-World peoples; they had made great strides in Catholic education, thanks especially to the great numbers of religious; but there were also a number of red flags about the church in North America.

The pope was alarmed about a growing pro-abortion movement in the United States, a decline in the quality of religious instruction in Catholic schools, increased numbers of divorced people, and certain questionable theological positions being taught at American Catholic universities. Jadot was reminded about a comment made by Belgian Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx shortly after he had returned from a tour of the United States: "Rome should be paying more attention to the audacity developing within the United States than to what is happening in Holland."

Benelli stressed that there was a growing communication problem among American Catholics "between conservatives and progressives and between bishops and priests" and added that the Holy See had lost much credibility in the United States. The new apostolic delegate would have to be a healer and a bridge-builder, someone who could establish "bonds of affection." Pope Paul told Jadot that he had selected him because he was not in the mold of previous delegates Vagnozzi and Raimondi. He expected Jadot to be a new kind of representative of the Holy See. Jadot understood what he meant and immediately sent a clear and highly symbolic message to the American hierarchy. He announced that he would not enter the United States by way of New York.

Jadot had been informed that previous apostolic delegates had arrived first of all in New York, where they were welcomed by the local archbishop, who thereafter considered the apostolic delegates his special friends. Cardinal Terence James Cooke, archbishop of New York, as soon as he had heard about Jadot's appointment, had written to Jadot that he was looking forward to welcoming Jadot to the United States and would be at the airport in New York to greet him. Jadot's reaction to Cooke was typically Jadot: "I wrote Cardinal Cooke to thank him for his kind intentions but told him that since there was a direct flight to Philadelphia, which then went on to Washington, I would take this flight. It would be faster and I would not have to change planes. And that is what I did on July 12, 1973, accompanied by Msgr. Powers." (Msgr. Raymond T. Powers was secretary to the Apostolic Delegation Washington 1971-1977.)

Cooke was angry, considered Jadot's actions a personal affront, and never forgot this highly significant event. Jadot landed first in Philadelphia, where he went through customs, then flew on to Washington, where he was warmly greeted by, in his own words, "an impressive group of cardinals and bishops." Eight days after U.S. Independence Day celebrations in the nation's capital, the ninth apostolic delegate and the first non-Italian was immediately introduced to the high-speed pace of the American way of life.

Jadot arrived at the delegation in Washington at 5:30 p.m. and was given a few minutes to freshen up before a reception and banquet in his honor. "After 10 hours in an airplane," he commented, "it is not easy to improvise a response to a toast of welcome from a kind but teasing cardinal." Jadot, in the first hours of his assignment, made a hit with the hierarchy and finally got to bed at 10:30 p.m. "20 hours without sleep after his departure

from Rome. And he was at work early the next morning.

In Bangkok, Jadot had been assisted by one aide from the Vatican and an administrative secretary. In Washington, he discovered that he had a large administrative staff and six priest aides, four Americans and two Italians, from the Vatican. At 8:00 a.m. on July 13, when the mail arrived, Jadot astonished his new staff. It was the first of many changes that would surprise them. Jadot invited his secretaries to sit around the table with him as they went through the mail. Some weeks later, he was informed that his predecessors had never done such a thing. In the past the mail had been sorted by a seated senior aide while the secretaries stood in silence at the other side of the table.

The anti-Jadot campaign, I can reveal today, was spearheaded by Cardinals John Carberry of St. Louis, John Krol of Philadelphia and John Cody of Chicago. Carberry and Krol clearly had the ear of John Paul II and eventually convinced him that Jadot was "destroying the Catholic church in the United States." Cody was opposed to Jadot because he knew personally that Jadot had asked Paul VI to remove him.

One of my favorite tape-recorded Jadot recollections, in fact, is his account of his meeting with Paul VI about Cody. "I knew something had to be done about Cody," Jadot said, "so I went to Pope Paul VI. I stood before his desk. The Holy Father asked what I wanted. I said, "Holy Father, I have come to ask for the head of John Cardinal Cody on a silver platter." "Jadot thought Paul would acquiesce and was surprised at his reaction. "You don't understand. You don't understand," the pope replied, "I cannot do this because he is my friend." It seems that Cody and Paul VI had become friends, were in periodic telephone contact, and Pope Paul VI, clearly aware of the situation, still could not remove him. And so Cody stayed until his death in 1982. And under John Paul II, Jadot left in 1980, was kept out of the limelight at the Vatican for four years, and then retired.

I believe that American Catholic church history will be kind to Archbishop Jadot and that the words of the eminent American Catholic church historian John Tracy Ellis will someday be carved somewhere in stone: "It was my good fortune to become a friend of this admirable churchman, and the more I studied him the more did I admire his dedication to the church, his high intelligence, his broad reading habits and his friendly approach."

(John A. (?Jack?) Dick, Jadot friend and biographer, now retired from the University of Louvain in Belgium, is completing a book about Jadot titled Paul's Man in Washington. The book focuses primarily on the seven years that Jadot was in Washington and is based on more than 1,000 pages of primary-source notes, tape-recorded interviews, articles and Jadot archival materials.)

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