

COLUMNISTS

No one wins in Sister Gramick case

The case of Sister Jeannine Gramick, a School Sister of Notre Dame, is drawing to its final, sad conclusion. Sister Gramick has been in difficulty with the Vatican for well over a decade because of her ministry to gays and lesbians — a ministry she shared for much of that time with Robert Nugent, a Salvatorian priest.

Last July, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), after an extended investigation, ordered the two religious to withdraw from their long-standing national ministry on the grounds that they had not sufficiently emphasized and supported the church's official teaching on homosexuality.

The CDF charged that Sister Gramick and Father Nugent had created "harmful confusion" among the faithful because of the "ambiguities and errors in their publications and activities."

There has been a new development in the case that requires some comment.

The Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life recently instructed the superior general of Sister Gramick's religious community to direct her not to speak or write about homosexuality, nor about the action taken against her last summer, nor about any of the ecclesiastical processes that led up to that action or fol-



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

lowed from it, nor to encourage supporters to write to the Vatican to express their views on the case.

On May 24 Sister Gramick was placed under "formal obedience" by her community. The next day she issued a response.

"A woman religious," she insisted, "does not surrender her human rights by virtue of her state of life," citing the 1971 statement on "Justice in the World" of the Third World Synod of Bishops, the Code of Canon Law (can. 212.3), and the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom (n. 11).

"After finding my voice to tell my story," she concluded, "I choose not to collaborate in my own oppression by restricting a basic human right. To me, this is a matter of conscience."

The church has consistently taught that one must follow conscience above all else even if, unknowingly, it happens to be in error. Therefore, unless someone has evidence that Sister Gramick's conscience is really telling her to obey the directive, we must respect her decision and admire, however grudgingly for some, her willingness to accept its inevitable and deeply painful consequence, namely, expulsion from a religious community that has been her family for virtually all of her adult life.

However-disappointed Sister Gramick may be in the decision taken by her community's leadership, they had no choice, given the canonical realities. On the other hand, the matter should not have been allowed to come to such a point.

Whatever one thinks of Jeannine Gramick's nearly life-long ministry to gays and lesbians, she does not exert a major influence on national, much less, global Catholic thinking and behavior. One can at least raise the question whether her speeches and other public statements over the past several months have changed anyone's mind.

Critics of the Vatican continue to be critical. None of those supportive of the Vatican's action likely changed their minds after hearing her side of the story,

if indeed they listened at all. Perhaps she has persuaded a few fence-sitters to lean her way. But only "perhaps."

There is a biblical principle involved here, which I call the Gamaliel principle, after a wise teacher of the law, who prevented his Sanhedrin colleagues from putting Peter and other disciples to death for preaching about Jesus.

"For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself," Gamaliel pointed out. "But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God." (Acts 5:38-39).

No one wins in this instance. Not gays and lesbians. Not those who minister to them. Not the religious communities to which those ministers belong. Not even those who brought the action against Sister Gramick or who kept up the drumbeat of criticism against her, both before and after last July.

At the end of her statement of May 25, Jeannine Gramick asked for "the prayers of all who are concerned." She richly-deserves them. And large doses of gratitude and admiration besides.

But, in the end, Gamaliel had it right.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at Notre Dame University.

Healing involves medical science and faith

13th Sunday of the Year (July 2): (R3) Mark 5:21-43; (R1) Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; (R2) 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15.

As Jesus' fame as both a teacher and a healer spread, large crowds flocked around him. Everyone wanted to touch him, especially the physically disabled.

One day he was in Capernaum. A woman in the area had been afflicted with a hemorrhage for a dozen years, had spent all her savings in seeking a cure, but only got worse. (Comedian Milton Berle once said, "Americans spend more money on doctors than ever before and it's working. More doctors are feeling better.")

This poor woman was at her wit's end. She could find no relief. She had only one hope — Jesus. "If I just touch his clothing, I shall get well." She squeezed through the crowd and reached out a small hand to touch his garments.

Notice, first of all, that this is the story of every person who has a need that the material world cannot meet. One of the great heresies of our time is that modern technology can solve all of our problems. I say that is heresy because it is not true. Where do we go to find a cure for a broken heart? Where do we go



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

to solve the problem of a son or daughter who has left home and is living a destructive lifestyle? Where do we go when medical science can no longer meet our needs? Where do we go when we lose a loved one to death? Where did the woman with the issue of blood turn? She learned through hard experience that there was no one to turn to but to Jesus. She did and she was cured.

Note, secondly, that this woman's instinct was correct: Jesus did heal her. This is important. Jesus does heal. In a recent survey, 99 percent of doctors believe there is an important relationship between prayer and healing. That's a staggering finding.

In a California study of prayer's effects on recovery from heart problems, half

of the nearly 400 subjects were the recipients of prayers, while the other half received no known prayers from anyone affiliated with the study. Neither group was told about the prayers. The patients who received prayers had half as many complications as those who were not recipients and had a lower rate of congestive heart failure.

Two words of caution, however. Prayer should not be a substitute for medical treatment. God has given us modern medical and surgical procedures to aid in the healing process. It is criminal to withhold medicine and depend on faith and prayer alone. We should do all that humanly can be done and, at the same time, pray with all our might. Act as though all depends on us; and pray as though all depends on God! Secondly, many people pray and are prayed for and do not recover physically. We must remember God knows best. Faith is a wonderful thing, but it must be a faith in Jesus.

In the Gospel cure, Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" For he said, "Power has gone out from me." The implication is clear. It was Christ himself who had healed her, not just faith. Faith is belief in the God who became incarnate in Je-

sus Christ. It is not something abstract, but concrete.

In one of the examples given above, some patients profited from prayers that they did not know were being offered for them. Prayer works. One of the best ways to get back on your feet is to first get on your knees. "If I just touch his clothing," said the woman. She was right. In Christ is healing. Try it.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, July 3

Ephesians 2:19-22; John 20:24-29

Tuesday, July 4

Amos 3:1-8, 4:11-12;

Matthew 8:23-27

Wednesday, July 5

Amos 5:14-15, 21-24;

Matthew 8:28-34

Thursday, July 6

Amos 7:10-17; Matthew 9:1-8

Friday, July 7

Amos 8:4-6, 9-12; Matthew 9:9-13

Saturday, July 8

Amos 9:11-15; Matthew 9:14-17

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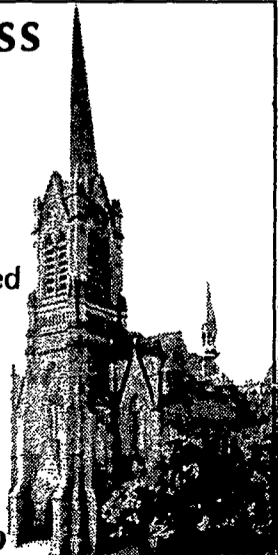
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