

Op Ed: The Actions of Rochester Diocese: Caution or Sabotage?

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I am Msgr. James Kruse and hold a degree in church law. For many years I have served as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Peoria. I have been intimately involved in the process for advancing the Cause for Beatification of Fulton Sheen almost from its inception. I had the privilege of being involved in the investigation of the miracle that was ultimately approved by the Pope. I was involved in every stage of the court proceedings in New York regarding the transfer of the mortal remains of Fulton Sheen. It was a great privilege and honor to be present in New York and Peoria on the day his remains were transferred from the cathedral in New York to the cathedral in Peoria. I was filled with joy to hear that Rome approved the miracle attributed to Fulton Sheen and that Pope Francis called for his Beatification. Then I became disappointed when a date for Beatification was not initially granted. I worked extensively in Peoria and at the Vatican offices in Rome examining documents presented by the Diocese of Rochester. Then, I was filled with joy, when recently the date of December 21, 2019, was announced for Sheen's Beatification in Peoria. But, this week, I again became disappointed when Sheen's Beatification was postponed. As various news articles were posted and even more when statements from the Diocese of Rochester were publicized, I decided to speak out earlier this week in order to defend Sheen and present the truth of this lengthy ordeal. And now I speak out again in the hopes of setting the record straight, hopefully, for the last time.

On December 2, 2019, the Vatican announced that the Beatification was postponed due to the intervention of a few members of the United States Conference of Bishops. After this bombshell announcement, there was a media frenzy, which ultimately required me to chronicle the case of Gerard Guli, a former priest of the Diocese of Rochester. Guli was the main focus on the documents submitted by the Diocese of Rochester. Guli's case was thoroughly vetted and it was determined that Sheen did nothing wrong.

The submitted documents also involved the case of John Gormley, who in 1969 abused youth. This abuse was reported to Sheen shortly before his retirement from Rochester. Sheen immediately removed Gormley from ministry. Sheen never granted Gormley an assignment after learning of the abuse. Gormley later left the priesthood. Gormley's case was thoroughly vetted by Peoria Diocese and the Vatican. It was determined that Sheen did nothing wrong.

On December 4, 2019, the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* news article reported various statements by the Diocese of Rochester that require a response. Most notably the article stated:

The Diocese [of Rochester] statement to the *Democrat and Chronicle* referred not just to Guli but to two or more accused priests whose handling during Sheen's administration deserved more investigation. The Diocese [of Rochester], through

Douglas Mandalero, declined to say how many clerical assignments were in question or provide any details about the priests. Regretfully, this article then proceeds to speculate and imply that there are as many as sixteen cases related to Sheen's time of administration.

The *Democrat and Chronicle* article's speculation is simply bad journalism. The article does not properly explain the distinction between when the abuse occurred, when this abuse was known and how these conjectured cases directly relate to Sheen. Rather, it simply makes broad statements without clear detail.

Furthermore, Rochester Diocese's statement that an undisclosed "two or more" cases is both unjust and a regretful smear of Sheen. Time and again, the Rochester Diocese was asked if there were other documents or other cases. Time and again, Rochester said NO. They indicated that all the documents were sent to Peoria and the Vatican for review. But, only now after a media frenzy, Rochester has stated that there are undisclosed cases requiring examination. What are these cases? When did Rochester know of these cases? Until now, the undisclosed cases were unknown to Peoria and the Vatican. Why were these only announced now? Is it possible that these undisclosed cases were only presented to Rochester after the Beatification was announced? Fat chance!

I am confident that, if indeed, more cases have come to light that an investigation will demonstrate that Sheen acted properly and most likely was not aware that the abuse was taking place.

Instead, Rochester Diocese's revelation of these undisclosed cases simply follows the same pattern that Rochester Diocese has executed since this past Spring. This pattern is simple: the Sheen Cause takes a step forward and then Rochester Diocese acts to block the Beatification. When examining the pattern it is hard not to believe that the Diocese of Rochester acts more to sabotage the Cause and less to protect the good of the Church.

As one very close to the advancement of Sheen's Cause, I now present a time line of events in the process for the Beatification of Fulton Sheen. This time line reveals that under the veneer of Rochester Diocese's call for caution, more than an overwhelming majority of people would conclude that it is an unexplainable act of sabotage – a sabotage that simply hurts the faithful.

On March 5, 2019, the New York Appellate Court, First Department, issued its decision permitting the transfer of Fulton Sheen's remains from New York to Peoria. On or about March 13, 2019, Fr. Dan Conlon, Vicar General of the Diocese of Rochester, contacted me. This was the first time that I ever interacted with Fr. Conlon or the Diocese of Rochester. Conlon indicated, for the first time, that the Diocese of Rochester submitted documents to the Attorney General of New York, which may possibly implicate Sheen in appointing priests to assignments while having knowledge that these priests had abused children. Conlon clearly stated that he was not accusing Sheen of personal acts of abuse but may have "covered up" other misconduct. He stated that he provided this information in order to protect the Church from possible embarrassment. Conlon stated

that he had been involved in these cases since 2003. I asked why this information was not presented earlier considering that the Cause for Sheen began in 2002. Conlon said, "I was never asked." It is important to note that the Attorney General subpoenaed Rochester's documents around September 5, 2018. Conlon also clearly indicated that he had a personal dislike for Sheen. Conlon's vitriol opinion of Sheen and the fact that he only brought to light his concerns within a few days of the New York Appellate decision, left me wondering if all of this was an effort to sabotage Sheen's Beatification and the transfer of his remains to Peoria.

The motives of only alerting the Diocese of Peoria only after the New York Court's favorable decision to green-light Sheen's transfer was supported by subsequent follow up phone calls between me, Conlon and Bishop Matano, Bishop of Rochester. They emphasized again that Sheen did no personal misconduct. Instead the documents may reveal that Sheen may have covered up other cleric's misconduct. I requested the Diocese of Rochester to submit the documents to Bishop Jenky for his review, which was only appropriate because he was promoter of the Cause. As promoter, he had a responsibility to investigate the life and ministry of Sheen and present these results to the Vatican. During the month of May, there were further discussions where Peoria attempted to obtain these documents. Rochester Diocese did not provide them at that time. Instead, they indicated that they would submit them to the Vatican. However, as I will explain below, these documents were not immediately submitted to the Vatican.

During May, the Archdiocese of New York was denied their first request for appeal regarding the transfer of Sheen's remains. On June 7, 2019, the New York court denied any further appeals resulting in a final decision regarding Sheen's remains. On June 8, 2019, the Diocese of Rochester submitted to Peoria the documents regarding Sheen's administration related to two clerics known to have previously abused youth. The Diocese of Peoria believed that these documents were also submitted to the Vatican for their review. But as explained below, they were not.

In June, the Diocese of Peoria and the Archdiocese of New York worked out the details to transfer Sheen's remains. On June 27, Sheen's remains were transferred to Peoria. On July 6, 2019, the miracle attributed to Sheen was approved by the Vatican and Pope Francis called for his Beatification. The Diocese of Peoria rightly believed that the documents were submitted to the Vatican and that they determined them to be of no consequence. Why else would they issue a decree approving the miracle and call for a beatification?

Out of the public eye, the Vatican unofficially indicated a date of Beatification for September 20, 2019. But, no official decree setting the date was presented by the Vatican. Instead, on July 24, 2019, the Diocese of Peoria was informed that the Vatican's Secretary of State has delayed the Beatification of Sheen. The letter stated: "His Holiness has disposed to put on hold any Beatification ceremony until the Congregation of the Causes of Saints is able to study this issue." This issue was the documents submitted by Rochester Diocese. On July 23, 2019, the Congregation of Saints sent a letter to the Diocese of Peoria stating: "It is necessary to suspend the

[Beatification] celebration. The Apostolic Nunciature in Washington has received from his Excellency Salvatore Matano, Bishop of Rochester, some documents which were sent here and examined by this Congregation. Only at the end of this exam it will be possible to take [sic] a decision about the date of the Beatification.”

On July 26, 2019, I spoke with Bishop Matano regarding the letters received from the Vatican. Bishop Matano stated that back on June 11, 2019, at the Baltimore Bishop’s Conference he spoke to an official from the Nuncio office in Washington, D.C.. This was the first time that Matano alerted the Nuncio office that documents may implicate Sheen and possibly bring embarrassment to the Church. It is important to remember that on June 7th, the high Court of New York blocked any further appeal regarding transferring Sheen’s remains. Matano told me that on July 11, 2019, he spoke directly to Archbishop Christopher Pierre, Papal Nuncio to the United States. He expressed the same concerns regarding Sheen. On the same day, July 11, submitted to the Nuncio the documents. It is important to note that this was about a week after the miracle was approved and His Holiness called for a Beatification. In this phone call, Matano clearly stated that the case was now in the hands of Rome. We must await their decision and abide by it. This is significant considering that Matano later November 19th letter began to overturn the Vatican’s decision.

Earlier in May, Matano indicated that he was submitting these documents to Rome. Believing that these documents were submitted to the Vatican, Peoria Diocese continued to advance the Cause. Rightfully, the Diocese of Peoria believed that any difficulties surrounding these documents were not a problem. After all, on June 6th the Vatican called for Sheen’s Beatification. Only after this announcement did Rochester present the documents to Rome and the Beatification set for September was delayed.

After Matano blocked the Beatification unofficially scheduled in September, Bishop Jenky of Peoria gathered together a group to examine the documents. I was involved in this examination. This examination revealed that Bishop Sheen acted rightly and did not place children in harms way.

In late September and early October, I along with other representatives of the Diocese of Peoria, met with officials at the Congregation of Saints and the Secretary of State in Rome. The results of the Peoria Diocese investigation were presented. The Congregation of Saints and the Peoria contingent thoroughly examined the documents. The same Congregation then did their own examination. This examination exonerated Sheen. On November 18, 2019, officials at the Vatican’s Secretary of State directly called the offices of Diocese of Peoria to confirm the receipt of Vatican’s letter setting a date for Beatification in December.

On November 19, 2019, Bishop Matano sent a letter to Archbishop Christopher Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio. A copy of this letter was also sent to Bishop Jenky, Cardinal Bechciu, Prefect of Congregation of Saints, and Cardinals Dolan and Cupich. In this letter Matano spoke again of his concerns related to Sheen. Matano stated: “I believe it is not advisable to have the Beatification this December....the Diocese of Rochester cannot

support the Beatification...it is a matter that requires further study and deliberation...the Diocese [requests] that the Beatification be delayed.” When I read this letter I immediately remembered Matano telling me in July that the case is now in the hands of Rome. We must wait for the conclusion of their investigation and abide by their decision. His earlier words rang hollow as I read his letter that again has blocked Sheen’s Beatification.

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This speculation of the *Democrat and Chronicle* article and the Rochester Diocese’s lack of full disclosure simply smears Sheen. The timing stinks! But these statements follow Rochester Diocese’s pattern begun last Spring: Sheen’s Cause takes a step forward and Rochester acts to block the Cause. Constantly the Diocese of Rochester calls for greater caution, but it is hard not to think that they simply act to sabotage the Cause.

The Diocese of Peoria has acted rightly. It collaborated with the wider Church and did not act alone. The Diocese of Peoria interacted directly with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Secretary of State in Rome. These are the very officials whose decision Matano told me must be followed. The Vatican’s Secretary of State set a date and told the Diocese of Peoria to announce the Beatification. The Diocese simply obeyed Rome.

Regretfully, after this next step in Sheen’s Cause, Rochester Diocese acted to block the Cause. This was not really an act of caution, but appears to simply be another act of sabotage. All of the reasons for this sabotage are unknown. But one reason Matano has

made clear: Sheen's Beatification can only come after the Attorney General's report. Sadly, he has subjugated a Church decision to the civil authority of the Attorney General of New York. Regretfully, it appears that only after receiving the Attorney General's approval, will Sheen enjoy Beatification. We also must wait to see if Rochester Diocese's established pattern will continue even after this report.

In conclusion, I regret that my statement today may cause greater difficulty for the faithful. I regret how deeply these events have challenged their faith and how on face value appear to be so shameful. But, I remind the faithful that Sheen's administration has been exonerated. Both the Vatican and the Peoria Diocese have confirmed that Sheen did not put children in harms way. The Vatican also has confirmed that through Sheen's intercession raised a baby from the dead. The Diocese of Peoria constantly receives reports of more miracles that are attributed to help and intercession of Sheen. I am confident that Sheen's Beatification will eventually take place. Regretfully, certain forces are now inexplicably causing its delay. But, do not loose heart. Follow Sheen's example: even when facing adversity, keep the faith! God love you, and may Fulton Sheen pray for us.