

More than a month ago, Sister Sheila McNiff of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus published a Los Angeles Times Op-Ed piece claiming that the clerical sexual abuse problems in Los Angeles have come to an end.

I do not blame her for attempting to close the door on an ugly decades-old chapter of the Archdiocese's history - she was just doing her job. Those of us who have worked for the Roman Church were all taught to protect the Bishop. And that is exactly what she is doing.

The op-ed's chart and accompanying text do the "numerator/denominator shuffle" by portraying the state of the local church as one with new procedures that have miraculously stopped bishops, priests, and deacons in the archdiocese from sexually abusing minors and vulnerable adults.

That is simply not the case. The truth is actually much scarier: only the simple criminals have been caught. The craftier clerical pedophiles and ephebophiles remain. Or better put: how can a couple of rules stop a 2000-year SECRET history of sexual abuse? The church (under the rule of the Pope) has been secretive for its entire history - how can one Cardinal change it? More importantly, why would he want to?

Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical Spe Salvi reminds us that the laws of reason, will and love ultimately govern the world. But we also know that reason and the powers of observation tell us that sexually abusive clerics were and are in active ministry.

The first time Catholic bishops met with the goal to implement controls over clerics who sexually abused children was at the Council of Elvira in 309 A.D. It didn't work.

More than 1600 years later, abuse was still a serious problem ~ in 1922 Pope Benedict XV issued a worldwide procedure, De Modo Procendi in Causis Sollicitationis, instructing Bishops on how to proceed with accusations of clerical sexual abuse. The document was kept secret for more than 90 years.

In Los Angeles, the problem is endemic. We now know that Former Los Angeles Cardinal Timothy Manning sent and visited an Archdiocesan priest, George Pausch, at the Servants of the Paraclete in the 1950s to deal with clerical sexual abuse. These visits were kept secret until recently, when more than 500 civil sexual abuse cases unearthed documentation of the meetings.

Also, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops met at Saint John's Abbey in 1985 in closed session to discuss the national scandal. Why was the meeting closed and its purpose kept secret? And what will Mahony do to change this tradition? Nothing.

Since 2001, the L.A. District Attorney's office has prosecuted several L.A. clerics for conduct after 2001 - with little to no help from the Archdiocese. What will Mahony do to help law enforcement? Nothing.

Thus, reason and history dictate that we will see new criminal and civil cases in 2008 and beyond.

Why? Because of the secrecy.

One of the classic defense arguments is that the "will" of Cardinal Roger Mahony has produced policies and procedures that have rooted out abusers. In short, defenders claim, things are getting better and better everyday. But facts are facts: It is sheer folly to even consider that the "will" of the Cardinal or any cleric can change the 2000-year-old culture of the Latin rite church.

Let's look at what Mahony's "will" could not do:

Cardinal Mahony did not have the will to stop clerical abusers as vicar general and auxiliary bishop in Fresno. As bishop of Stockton, he did not have the will to stop abusers like Oliver O'Grady. Finally, Cardinal Mahony did not have the will to stop Fathers Baker, Wempe, and Lopez in Los Angeles. It was only due to the secular criminal and civil legal systems that these predators were finally stopped.

But these are the sloppy perpetrators. As more and more clerics are exposed as abusers, I believe that the more clever men - men like Donald McGuire - will slowly be ferreted out. And considering the size and history of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, I think that there are many clever men who are still actively serving and actively perpetrating. The sloppy perpetrators were able to abuse countless kids in spite of "reforms" and "studies" within the church. Smarter men will have no problem circumventing any new regulations that come their way.

Until Roger Mahony cooperates fully with law enforcement, tells the truth about abuse, and comes clean about what he knows and what he has done, all of the "reforms" in the world will not make the Archdiocese a safer place.

As we approach the Lenten season, I contend that God's love will conquer the darkness of the clerical sexual abuses the Cardinals of Los Angeles attempted and still attempt to hide from the public. I have hope - not in internal Archdiocesan or Papal procedures - but in the police and prosecutors who now have the history and experience to help us stop the craftier clerical criminals yet to be discovered.