

CAN CARDINAL PELL EVER GET A FAIR TRIAL?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the latest development in the trial of Cardinal George Pell:

The Australian judicial system, at least as applied to Cardinal George Pell, is not comprehensible to Americans. In this country, the accused knows the identity of his accuser when charges are pressed. Pell was denied this right. In this country, the accused knows exactly what the charges against him are when they are made. Pell was denied this right.

In this country, the media have wide access to court proceedings and can report what they learn. In Australia, the media have limited rights and can be banned from reporting almost anything. In this country, the prosecuting and defense attorneys can question prospective jurors, vetoing those they consider biased. They have no such rule in the Australian state of Victoria, the venue of the Pell trial, which means the jury can easily be stacked against him. Victoria is known as a very liberal, and not Catholic-friendly, part of the country.

On May 1, the most serious charges against Pell were dismissed by the court. Following this decision, Australian reporter Andrew Bolt wrote, "All I can say is that several claims against Pell that were pushed by the media never even reached this courtroom and have been debunked."

The latest development adds to the absurdities surrounding this case.

A Victoria County Court staff member has been fired for allegedly retrieving information about the Pell case from the court's computer system. The prosecutors wasted no time asking the court to ban "any report of the whole or any part of these

proceedings and any information derived from this proceeding and any court documents associated with this proceeding.”

This is a wild swing of the pendulum. After the media savaged Pell for years, tainting prospective jurors, prosecutors are now asking for a total gag rule.

In 2016, Bolt wrote, “There is something utterly repulsive about the media’s persecution of George Pell.” In 2017, he wrote, “The media commentary suggest there is little chance Cardinal George Pell can get a fair trial.” Amanda Vanstone, a reporter not regarded as religion-friendly, went further. “What we are seeing is no better than a lynch mob from the dark ages,” she said.

The little we know of Pell’s accusers validates the position of the Catholic League: Pell is the subject of a witch hunt. Indeed, he is the whipping boy of those seeking revenge against the Catholic Church. Yes, there were some admittedly lousy decisions made by Catholic priests and bishops in the past, but that is no excuse for plundering the rights of Cardinal Pell.

Consider the charges against Pell that were tossed and those that are extant.

One of the charges against Pell that was thrown out involves an unspecified incident that allegedly occurred 40 years ago in a theater during the screening of the movie “Close Encounters of the Third Kind.” But a cinema worker said he never saw Pell at the theater. Moreover, the movie was not shown at that theater on the date of the alleged offense.

The other charge that was made occurred sometime after the movie offense allegedly happened. But in addition to saying he was abused at a chapel, the accuser changed his mind saying the offense took place in a playground. He also said it took place on a mountain. The judge dismissed the charge saying the accuser showed a “cavalier attitude” and a “poor memory.”

What's left? Charges that Pell abused boys in the 1970s *while he was throwing them in the air in a swimming pool in front of others*. One of the accusers has since died of cancer. One of the others has a record of violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and burglary. We know nothing about any other accusers.

Two men made the other charge. They said Pell made them perform oral sex on him in the 1990s after Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral. One of the accusers has since died of drug abuse. Oh, yes, the mother of the boy who died said her son told her on two occasions that he was never abused by Pell.

To say that this is a travesty of justice is a gross understatement. They have put Cardinal Pell through hell. None of this is by accident.

Please keep Cardinal George Pell in your prayers.