

PHILLY JURY SAYS NO TO CONSPIRACY

In late June, the jury in the trial of two Philadelphia Catholic priests reached a verdict. Msgr. William Lynn was acquitted of conspiracy; on the two charges of child endangerment, he was acquitted on one of them, and found guilty on the other. In addition to the decision on Lynn, the jury was deadlocked on two charges against Rev. James Brennan: one for attempted rape, and one for child endangerment.

The witch-hunt finally had come to an end, and those who were clamoring for blood lost big time.

What made this a witch-hunt was the decision of former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham to summarily ignore what she was empowered to do in 2001: She was given the charge "to investigate the sexual abuse of minors by individuals associated with religious organizations and denominations." Had she done so, those cases of minors who may have been sexually molested by ministers, rabbis, and other religious leaders, would have been investigated. Instead, the focus was on the Roman Catholic Church and absolutely nothing was done regarding other religions.

In fact, on March 31, 2011, Bill Donohue sent Abraham a letter in the overnight mail asking her to identify which "religious organizations and denominations" she pursued other than the Roman Catholic Church. She never answered. After all, what could she say?

After the verdict was handed down, there were a number of stories on Abraham's role in bringing about the trial and ultimately Lynn's conviction. In none of those stories did they mention her singular focus on the Catholic Church which did not follow the initial parameters for the investigation.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), and church-chasing attorneys like Marci Hamilton and Jeffrey Anderson, were the big losers. For years these groups—as well as pundits like Andrew Sullivan—have been trying to cast the notion that an intricate cabal exists from the pope to the parish priest, all for the purpose of covering up for the crimes of abusive priests. Following the Philadelphia decision, this idea has been shot dead.

Had this cabal existed, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua would have been indicted but he wasn't. If it existed, Lynn would have been convicted on conspiracy but he wasn't.

These groups also couldn't have cared less about getting Fr. Brennan, and they didn't care a whole lot more about getting Msgr. Lynn on child endangerment. They wanted the big prize—they wanted to nail a high-ranking clergyman on conspiracy. Had they won on this count, they would have been in the driver's seat to pursue other "conspirators" nationally. Looks like their car ran out of gas in Philadelphia.