

# THE LEGACY OF “BILLY DOE”

Ralph Cipriano

With the Catholic Church under legal assault by prosecutors in 14 states, the case of a former Philadelphia altar boy dubbed “Billy Doe” serves as a cautionary tale that not every priest accused of sex abuse is automatically guilty.

The case also shows that crusading prosecutors don’t always play by the rules. And that no matter what the true facts in a sex abuse case are, it won’t matter to a biased news media.

Billy Doe, whose real name is Danny Gallagher, came forward at age 23 in 2011 to claim that back when he was 10 and 11 years old, he was repeatedly raped by two priests and a parochial school teacher. A couple of juries convicted all three attackers and sent them to jail. Also convicted was Msgr. William J. Lynn, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s former secretary for clergy. He became the first Catholic administrator in the country to be jailed in the clergy sex scandals, not for touching a child, but for endangering a child’s welfare by failing to protect the altar boy from a priest who was a known abuser.

In a civil settlement, the church subsequently paid Gallagher \$5 million.

There was only one problem—Gallagher, a former drug addict, heroin dealer, habitual liar, third-rate conman and thief, made the whole story up. And all four men who went to jail—including a priest who died there—were innocent.

How do we know? On my blog, [bigtrial.net](http://bigtrial.net), and for Newsweek and the *National Catholic Reporter*, I spent the past six years documenting all the holes in Gallagher’s outrageous and constantly changing tales of abuse.

I will now have to relate some graphic details to explain what a liar Gallagher is. And how irresponsible it was for former Philadelphia District Attorney Rufus Seth Williams to have put Gallagher on the witness stand as his star witness at two criminal trials in the D.A.'s self-described "historic" prosecution of the Church.

When he first came forward to tell two social workers for the archdiocese his accusations of abuse, Danny Gallagher claimed that:

- Father Charles Engelhardt attacked him in the sacristy after an early morning Mass, locked all the doors and then proceeded to pound away at the boy for five hours of brutal anal sex. Afterwards, Gallagher claimed the priest threatened to kill him if he told anybody about it.
- Father Edward V. Avery "punched him in the head," and knocked him unconscious. When he woke up in a storage closet at the church, Gallagher claimed he was naked and tied up with altar sashes. Gallagher further claimed that Avery anally raped him so brutally that he bled for a week. And that the priest forced the boy to suck blood off the priest's penis.
- Bernard Shero, Gallagher's homeroom teacher, allegedly punched Gallagher in the face and strangled him with a seat belt before he allegedly raped the boy in the back seat of the teacher's car. Afterwards, the teacher supposedly threatened to make the boy's life a "living hell" if he told anybody.

But when Gallagher retold his story of abuse to the police and the grand jury, every detail I just mentioned—the anal rapes, the punches, the threats, the claims about being tied up naked with altar sashes, strangled with a seatbelt, and forced to suck blood off of a priest's penis—all those graphic details were dropped from his story.

Instead, Gallagher spun a completely new fable about being forced by his attackers to view pornography and perform strip teases to music, and then engage in oral sex and mutual masturbation. In the civil courts, when Gallagher was

confronted with all of the glaring contradictions in his conflicting tales of abuse, he responded by saying he couldn't remember more than 130 times.

If this wasn't enough evidence that Gallagher wasn't credible, in 2017, Joe Walsh, the retired lead detective in the case, came forward to file a startling, 12-page affidavit. In the affidavit, Walsh stated that while questioning Gallagher pre-trial, he repeatedly came to the conclusion that the star witness was a liar, and that none of the alleged rapes ever really happened.

Walsh stated that while questioning Gallagher, the detective caught the former altar boy in one lie after another. According to Walsh, Gallagher finally admitted that with the social workers he "just made up stuff and told them anything."

None of the facts about Walsh's pre-trial grilling of Gallagher, however, were ever revealed to defense lawyers.

The retired detective also stated in his affidavit that during his investigation, he repeatedly told the lead prosecutor, former Assistant District Attorney Mariana Sorensen, that all the witnesses he interviewed, including members of Gallagher's own family, and all the evidence he gathered, contradicted Gallagher's cockamamie tales of abuse. Sorensen, however, stubbornly kept saying that she believed Gallagher. And when Walsh persisted, according to the detective, Sorensen replied, "You're killing my case."

In a subsequent bombshell, it was discovered that the prosecution hid more evidence from the defense and repeatedly lied about it. In 2010, when the D.A.'s office first interviewed Gallagher, former ADA Sorensen took seven pages of notes. And then she buried them. Over the years, Sorensen and two other prosecutors stood up in three different courtrooms, in front of three different judges, and stated that the notes didn't exist.

But earlier this year, seven pages of Sorensen's typewritten notes mysteriously reappeared. We also know that the prosecution also hid seven pages of notes taken by Church social workers that showed that when he first came forward, Gallagher wasn't interested in pressing charges against anybody; he just wanted to find a lawyer so he could get paid.

Meanwhile, an appeals court overturned Msgr. Lynn's conviction after he had served 33 months of his 36-month sentence, plus 18 months of house arrest. But despite Lynn's jail time previously served, Gallagher's complete lack of credibility, and Detective Walsh's testimony about prosecutorial misconduct, a new Philadelphia district attorney, Larry Krasner, has decided he will retry the case next year.

And what about the media, which trumpeted the arrests, indictments and convictions of the three priests and former schoolteacher? How has the media covered all the bombshells that showed the prosecution of the Church was a sham?

By stonewalling, and willfully ignoring it.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which in the past seven years has printed 64 news articles and editorials on the Billy Doe case, always presenting him as a legitimate victim of sex abuse, never outed Gallagher, or told readers that he was a fraud.

And then there's *Rolling Stone*. Remember Sabrina Rubin Erderly, the reporter who fabricated a story about an alleged gang rape by seven men at a frat house at the University of Virginia by relying on the false accusations of a woman named "Jackie?"

Before she got conned by Jackie, Erderly was fooled by Billy. In 2011, Erderly wrote "The Catholic Church's Secret Sex-Crime Files," which accepted as gospel Billy Doe's fraudulent tales of abuse. The reporter also hid that when she wrote the story she had an undisclosed conflict of interest – her husband was an assistant Philadelphia district attorney who worked for the

D.A. that was prosecuting Billy's alleged attackers.

*Rolling Stone*, which retracted the UVA rape story, has never retracted or even corrected Erderly's fake story about the Church, which is still posted online.

How's that for a fair and responsible media?

So this summer, when Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro announced the results of his secret grand jury investigation into sex abuse in six Pennsylvania dioceses, I wasn't surprised that the media covered ancient accusations of abuse as though it had all just happened yesterday.

*The Inquirer*, which never got around to telling its readers that Billy Doe was a fraud, ran the grand jury story on its front page, cranking out a total of seven news stories and a column that blasted the Church.

Now we all know that the Catholic Church for decades was guilty of committing horrendous crimes against children, and also guilty of covering it up. But that doesn't mean the media should suspend its judgment when it comes to holding prosecutors accountable.

When I read that grand jury report, it was like a tour through an ecclesiastic graveyard. Of 250 accused predator priests, at least 117 were dead. Another 13 priests born before 1940 had the dates of their deaths listed as unknown.

The oldest priest who was allegedly a predator was born in 1869, four years after the Civil War ended. Another alleged predator priest had been dead since 1950.

The alleged crimes detailed in the report were from as far back as the 1940s; one alleged victim was 83.

The grand jury report came with plenty of lurid charges. Such as the allegation that in 1969, Father Gregory Flohr had allegedly used a rope to tie up an altar boy in the

confessional before sodomizing him with a crucifix.

Father Flohr could not be reached for comment; he's been dead for 14 years.

But none of this mattered to the media; the Shapiro grand jury report that should have run on the History Channel made headlines nationally and internationally. It also inspired prosecutors in 14 states, as well as in the District of Columbia, to announce plans to launch their own investigations of the Catholic Church.

And why not? The Church is a sitting duck. Under ancient Vatican rules, each diocese is required to keep written records of all accusations against priests, whether they're true or false. All an ambitious prosecutor needs for a fresh set of headlines and a room full of reporters at his next press conference is a judge willing to grant a subpoena to open the so-called secret archive files, just like Shapiro did.

Whether any of the lurid allegations a prosecutor makes will be subject to due process—and only a couple of Shapiro's thousands of alleged crimes fell within the statute of limitations—doesn't seem to matter.

So the next time you hear a prosecutor making shocking allegations against the Church, remember the Billy Doe story. And the corrupt D.A. in Philadelphia who used a fraudulent witness to stage a modern-day witch hunt.

These days, former Philly D.A. Rufus Seth Williams wears an orange jumpsuit. He's sitting in a federal prison after pleading guilty in 2017 to a federal corruption case where he admitted to a crime wave that included taking bribes, misusing campaign contributions, and stealing from his own mother.

But Williams has never been prosecuted for the worst crimes he ever committed, namely what he did in the Billy Doe case to a

blind lady named Justice.

Four men—three priests and a schoolteacher—were sent to jail on false charges. And one of those men, Father Engelhardt, who needed a heart operation, died in prison.

The priest spent his last hours handcuffed to a hospital bed, and in a dying declaration, still professing his innocence.

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