

## Cardinal Pell & The Calabrian Mafia

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I hear interesting news out of Australia, where Cardinal George Pell's appeal on his child abuse conviction was heard by a court tribunal today. Daily Telegraph journalist Miranda Devine writes that the government's cast collapsed. Her column is behind a paywall, but here is an excerpt:



Cardinal George Pell and his supporters were relieved that his appeal of his child sexual assault conviction was live-streamed on Wednesday.

The intense seven-hour courtroom argument was the first time the public has heard first-hand the flimsiness of the evidence against him.

Three judges of the Victorian Appeals Court are reviewing the jury's verdict in which Cardinal Pell was convicted of sexually assaulting two choir boys after Sunday Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne in December 1996. One of the boys has since died and told his mother he never was molested.

So that leaves the conviction to be based on the word of one man against Cardinal Pell's, with no corroborating evidence, no forensic evidence, no witnesses, and against a mountain of contrary evidence which showed that the allegations were highly improbable, if not impossible.

The jury verdict has troubled legal experts and lay people around the world ever since. The evidence seen so far leads to the conclusion that an innocent man was jailed to atone for the sins of others in a church plagued by sexual abuse scandals.

From what I'm told, the state's case was routed, though we won't know the verdict for months. Meanwhile, Cardinal Pell remains jailed in Melbourne.

In 2014, Pell was given by Pope Francis responsibility for cleaning up the infamously corrupt Vatican

Bank. When that news broke, I thought, “They’ll find some way to take him out. They won’t let him do it.” When the child abuse charges were brought against Pell in 2017, I thought, “So that’s how they did it.” But I didn’t go further, because how would I prove that Pell was set up? It was just a hunch.

When I was in Australia last month, I found myself in a conversation one evening with someone about all this. (I had a lot of Pell conversations, as you might imagine.) I shared with my interlocutor my suspicion that Pell was set up to take him off the Vatican Bank case. The man across the table said, “That’s interesting. You may not know it, but the ‘Ndrangheta is quite well established in Australia, especially in Victoria. That’s where the cardinal was charged.”

The ‘Ndrangheta is the Calabrian mafia, and yes, they are [well established in Australia](#). They control organized crime on Australia’s East Coast, and are said to have infiltrated every part of the Australian establishment. With that in mind, here’s an interesting bit of news, from the [Irish Times](#), Nov. 16, 2013:

Senior Calabrian Mafia investigator Nicola Gratteri, whose investigative zeal has forced him to live with police protection since 1989, has said the pope’s plans to reform Vatican structures, including the Vatican bank, the IOR, could prove a problem for the ‘Ndrangheta, Italy’s most powerful Mafia.

He said that while Pope John Paul II called on the “military” mafiosi to “repent” in 1993, Pope Francis has gone further, perhaps hitting the ‘Ndrangheta where it hurts.

“He has named his G8 [council of cardinals] to overhaul the entire structure of the Vatican, including a review of the Vatican’s economic affairs and in particular, the IOR,” Gratteri says.

“For those with real economic power it is obvious this could be a huge disadvantage . . . Given that in the past we’ve had collusion at the highest level between church and Mafia, this exposes the pope.”

Months after this report, Cardinal George Pell was named by Francis to reform the IOR. In 2014, Pell said his team found nearly two billion euros hidden away in various Vatican accounts, off the balance sheets. In November 2015, with the Pope’s approval, Pell issued new guidelines for running all Vatican offices, to bring them up to international standards for financial transparency.

In April 2016, without consulting Pell, the Vatican Secretary of State suspends an external audit of Vatican finances. The National Catholic Register [quotes](#) an unnamed source as saying that officials are afraid of what the audit will find, and want to get rid of Pell. A year later, Pell was charged in Melbourne with sexual abuse. And that was the end of the Pell threat to the Vatican Bank insiders.

This mafia thing, it could all be a coincidence, and in any case, there are other factors in play in the persecution of George Pell, who was widely hated by Australian anti-clericalists. But it’s curious all the same. George Pell was the No. 1 enemy of the ‘Ndrangheta in the Vatican, and he showed early on in his tenure, when he uncovered all the hidden euros, that he meant business. Now George Pell sits in solitary confinement in a prison cell in Melbourne, convicted on pathetically shabby charges. The [old guard](#) in the Vatican won. The world is as it always was.

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