

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 786

GEORGE PELL, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND EDUCATION FUNDING

The jury came back, the cardinal is in goal – until his Appeal at least, and the law appears to have been satisfied. But although the jury is in, an appeal is pending.

The Pell case is of international interest, but it is only the *New York Times* at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/world/australia/cardinal-pell-catholic-church-sex-abuse.html?module=inline> that links Pell to the extraordinary success of Cardinal Pell and the Australian Catholic Church's assault on the public Treasury and his reward at the Vatican.

They wrote:

Cardinal Pell's career spanned decades, starting with his time as a parish priest in his hometown, Ballarat, followed by stints as archbishop of Melbourne and, later, of Sydney.

He became a cardinal in 2005. In 2014, Pope Francis named him the prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, charging him with overseeing the Vatican's finances.

At every point, he was a savvy financial operator — he is well known, in part, for protecting church finances from large payouts to abuse victims — and a culture warrior.

So, Pell is off to gaol, but what has really changed?

In the 1960s and 1970s the DOGS discovered in their High Court battle against the religious schools, that the church was a chameleon : changing colours, rhetoric and leaders to suit the times.

Yet one thing remained constant. This ancient, wealthy, multinational and hierarchical institution proved to be a cancer in the body politic, the legal system, and above all the education system of this country. (See the Story of our High Court case on our website) <http://www.adogs.info/high-court-case>

They were not wrong and have been justified by recent events. The victims of child sexual abuse have suffered similar experiences.

As Joanne McCarthy , the journalist who more than any other, exposed the child abuse scandals in the Newcastle area wrote on March 13, 2019 in the Sydney Morning Herald:

Now there's anger, but it's not just about Pell. He is a lightning rod for anger against the church, that is true. But he is also a lightning rod for anger about powerful people abusing power, throwing their weight around, acting hypocritically, telling the rest of society what to do, and sticking together when things go wrong.

He represents discussions behind closed doors, secret meetings, the dead hand of legal documents and confidentiality clauses, the denial of public accountability. And that way of doing things extends beyond the Catholic Church into too many elements of Australian life.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/pell-20190313-p513ya.html>

But, although there are stirrings, the anger has not yet carried over into the funding of the school system which was the scene of so many of the child abuse crimes. Yet Pell, the Archbishop rewarded by the Vatican with a cardinal's hat and a position in the Roman financial centre, was responsible for the growing billions of taxpayer funding pouring into the Catholic church's Australian primary, secondary – and tertiary- sector. And all this largesse flowed- and is still flowing- from his mates in the lib/lab political parties, with virtually no strings attached.

Is it any wonder that, for the Vatican, the child abuse scandals are merely hiccups in the centuries' old networks of wealth and power?

And unfortunately, looking at the current State Aid auctions in the Australian political landscape, nothing has fundamentally changed.

To name just a few of the most recent examples of on-going Catholic power over the common purse:

1. Gillard set up the Gonski 'Needs' model, but promised that no school would be worse off, even though many schools in the private sector were grossly overfunded. <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/schools-face-funding-cuts-but-julia-gillard-stands-firm-on-pledge/news-story/3c631e9bcf90cc2b3306af8259fa8f2a>
2. Although Federal Minister for Education Simon Birmingham questioned the overfunding of private schools, The Morrison Coalition have caved in to demands from the Catholic Church authorities and promised them \$4.1 billion to assuage their concerns. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/revealed-catholic-schools-reap-4-1-billion-windfall-in-scott-morrison-s-funding-fix-20190130-p50uhx.html>

3. The Andrews government have not only increased the per capita grant to Catholic schools to 25% of the government school grant, but granted \$400 million for capital grants.
4. The NSW Coalition, in election mode, have promised private and Catholic schools an extra \$500 million to build new classrooms. They have done this in response to a concerted political campaign for more funding from the Catholic sector.
<https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/premier-announces-historic-funding-boost-for-non-government-schools/>

In previous decades the DOGS were often a lone voice in the wilderness when they opposed State Aid to private, religious schools. But as the billions and billions- and more billions- have flowed, and the stench of maladministration, as well as child abuse – has increased, others are questioning the wisdom of financing this *imperium in imperio* – the State within a State.

In recent years, State and Federal Auditor Generals have spoken out against outrageous lack of accountability for billions of dollars of public money handed over to centralised religious bureaucracies for, the administration or rather, the maladministration of ‘Needs’ policies.

And in the last few weeks, Trevor Cobbold, from *Save Our Schools* was denied access to even basic materials from the Education Department in Canberra.

<http://saveourschools.com.au/funding/govt-concealing-catholic-schools-use-of-taxpayer-funds/>

DOGS were delighted to find Trevor writing that:

Public accountability for the use of taxpayer funding is a fundamental tenet of democratic government. Yet, this principle has long been ignored by Catholic education authorities who refuse to reveal how they distribute government funding amongst their schools despite it being a legislative requirement. Their refusal has been connived at by successive governments that failed to make the Commonwealth Department of Education enforce the legislation. The latest example of this tacit agreement at work is the refusal of the Education Department to fully disclose how Catholic Education Commissions distribute their taxpayer funding.

The Department refused an FOI request for the full Block Allocation Reports of the Catholic Education Commissions and education departments in each state and territory.

Ray Nilsen from the DOGS always claimed that the Catholic church was a cancer in the body politic. This was the DOGS experience. It has been the experience of the victims of sexual abuse.

AND IT IS CURRENTLY BEING DISCOVERED BY ANYONE WHO ATTEMPTS TO SHINE A LIGHT INTO THE CATACOMBS OF THEIR FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS.

The only way around this interminable and perennial battle for a democratic polity and public education system for all children is

- **The cessation of public funding for private religious schools and**
- **Separation of Religion and the State.**

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<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>