

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT
SCHOOLS**

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‘Gullible’ polities being fooled by the Catholic Church?’:

Malcolm Turnbull

Malcolm Turnbull, a converted Catholic, has had a revelation about the duplicitous nature of the Catholic hierarchy.

DOGS could have warned him.

Since the introduction of State Aid and the ‘Needs’ policy in 1973 — the Whitlam Government’s attempt to ameliorate the ‘Catholic vote’ in the DLP — the Australian Catholic Church has gamed the funding system. The Church hierarchy, as opposed to caring members of the faithful, have never cared about ‘poor’ children. After all, to quote Christ, himself, the “Poor will always be with us” The problem is – the wealthy will always be with us as well. And so will a wealthy Church which lusts after power, political influence, and taxpayers money.

For years the DOGS attempted to expose the ‘bottom of the schoolyard’ schemes in which the Catholic Church authorities diverted money given for disadvantaged schools to wealthy schools or new ‘needy’ schools. They were always able to do this because their bureaucrats received billions of taxpayer dollars in lump sums and were permitted to distribute it as they saw fit.

For sixty years the DOGS have attempted to expose the dissembling nature of State Aid for private church schools. But now, many billions of dollars later, a modicum of figures have become available on the MySchool website and there are calls for accountability from Federal and State Auditors General. Finally, some politicians, themselves good Catholics, are fed up.

Malcolm Turnbull, an ex-Prime Minister turned author, and Adrian Piccoli, the NSW ex Minister of Education turned director of the Gonski Institute, have blown the whistle. Malcolm Turnbull has called the Catholic Church [‘duplicitous and unaccountable in needs based school funding’](#) ,

Adrian Piccoli agreed.

Quentin Demster in the *New Daily* and John Menadue with his blog, *Pearls and Irritations* are to be congratulated for giving the matter oxygen. For half a century, the mainstream media never gave any coverage to the DOGS facts and figures exposing the shenanigans in the Church treasuries. The research of Trevor Cobbold of *Save Our Schools*, however, has been given recent coverage.

In his recently published Memoir, *A Bigger Picture*, Malcolm Turnbull exposes the arrogance of the Catholic hierarchy when they are dealing with politicians.

He writes:

“Over the years Catholic bishops, like George Pell, had always insisted the virtue of funding the Catholic schools in one lump sum, as a system, was that they could cross-subsidise the poorer schools at the expense of those in the wealthier suburbs. And this claim seemed so plausible, given the church’s mission, that none of us gullible politicians questioned it.”

Mr Turnbull said he discerned from conversations and correspondence with Archbishop Fisher that the “reverse was the case.”

“He (Fisher) explained that ‘the problem’ with our needs-based model was that more funding would go to schools in ‘the poorer outer suburbs of Sydney and country New South Wales’. I was astonished. ‘But don’t you do that now?’ There was a long pause. ‘Malcolm if your reforms go through, it would mean the fees of St Francis’s school in Paddington, would have to go up’. Mr Turnbull writes that parents of St Francis, with excellent education results in his Wentworth electorate, would be horrified to learn the church was doing that.

“The archbishop sighed. ‘I am afraid to say, on this occasion, the politician has a more idealised view of human nature than the archbishop’.”

Mr Turnbull wrote that he explained that government funding would still come to the church in one cheque but transparency was required. “If they wanted to subsidise fees in posh areas at the expense of schools in poor areas, they were free to do that. ‘Oh, come on, Malcolm,’ said Fisher. ‘You know, once you tell people how the government has assessed need and shown how much each school would get, we could never get away with it. People would say we were short-changing poor schools to benefit the rich ones’.”

Mr Turnbull wrote that at one point Archbishop Fisher argued schools in his Wentworth electorate were needier “because the parents had bigger mortgages.”

The exchanges with Archbishop Fisher were some of the most “unedifying and disappointing” he had undertaken with a church leader. “This was the fundamental issue: he was objecting to transparency and accountability and wasn’t prepared publicly to defend how they moved government money around their school system”. Mr Turnbull concluded he could only assume that the objective of the Catholic system was to maintain enrolments in middle-class areas by keeping fees lower.

DOGS note that, historically, the Church, as in Medieval times, sees itself as a State within a State, an *imperium in imperio*. The hierarchy regard themselves as 'Princes of the Church'. The Church itself is a monarchy, not a democracy.

When, in the nineteenth century Australian politicians like Henry Parkes and John Dunmore Lang had the guts to confront the Australian bishops and demanded accountability for education funds, the Australian bishops took their schools out from under the Government funding. They did not expect it, but it took 80 years before they gained political influence enough to have it returned – but on their terms. Turnbull should not be surprised by the behaviour of Archbishop Fisher.

Nor is there anything new about the current situation with Catholic – and other church school funding. The only think which has changed is the calibre of our politicians. They lack the guts to call out the Church and its princes and princelings for their 'duplicitous' behaviour.

Hopefully, some might learn from Turnbull and Piccoli. He who pays the piper with citizen taxpayer moneys should also call the tune.

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