***OPINION***

Why bishops are to blame for empty Catholic churches across Australia

Children are no longer taught the basic beliefs of the faith, such as the existence of mortal sin and hell, and consequently they see no reason to continue to go to church as adults.

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([LifeSiteNews](https://www.lifesitenews.com/)) — A group of orthodox Catholics in Australia called “New Perspectives for Catholic Education” has discovered how the Australian bishops managed to convert a Catholic population in the 1960s, a large proportion of whom were practicing the faith, into a population of mainly non-practicing Catholics. In doing so, it has exposed one of the biggest and most successful tricks of all time that was done by stealth and deceit.

The bishops’ deception of the laity needs to be publicly exposed and they should be held accountable for their actions. Canon Law needs to be amended to provide an effective mechanism whereby bishops can be brought into line for breaches of the Code of Canon Law.



**Claims the Church was infiltrated and taken over**

In his book *Infiltration,* Taylor Marshall provided evidence of a takeover of the Catholic Church from within around the time of Vatican II. Drastic changes in the Catholic religion definitely took place in the 1960s and the years after Vatican II.

**Changing the beliefs of orthodox Catholics through stealth and deceit**

It is clear to everyone that the Catholic faith has been radically changed over the past 50 years and that the percentage of Catholics practicing the faith has been in steep decline since the 1970s. What is not clear is how all of this was brought about and why nobody was aware of the exact cause.

It was achieved by the greatest deception of all time. The Catholic Church had always asserted that the Catholic faith cannot, in substance, change its basic beliefs. So, Catholics never suspected that it would do so.

The bishops did not come out and announce drastic changes. What the bishops did was to leave the Catechism and Code of Canon Law as they were.

In the 1970s, the bishops began teaching some of what was in the Catechism but not all of it. The bishops de-emphasized Hell, mortal sin, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the need to save your soul. In short, it was the traditional beliefs minus the need for individual morality and the need to save your soul.

This new approach to religious education was called the “discipleship approach.” The previous method of Catholic religious education was termed the “salvation approach” as it taught what the child needed to know to merit salvation.

The “discipleship approach” really made no sense to children as it did not involve a compelling reason for practicing their faith or why they needed to love their neighbor. There were no rewards or penalties.

Parents were unaware of any change and happily continued to pay to send their children to Catholic schools and attributed their children’s lack of interest in the faith to other reasons. These included the changes in general society and the reliance on lay teachers. They had no reason to believe that Catholic schools and their Church would not continue to teach the same Catholic faith it had taught in the past.

Anyone reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Code of Canon Law today would find little indication of any major changes in the direction of the Church or of its beliefs. All of this was achieved by stealth and deceit.

**Detailed description of religious education under the two different approaches**

Let us compare the two approaches to religious education in more detail.

Before the 1970s, children in Catholic schools were given intensive training at age 7 on mortal and venial sin, on the existence of Hell, and on how they could save their souls. This was to prepare them for their first reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion.

Having received the first sacraments, they were fully responsible Catholics and were told of their obligations. Among them were not to receive Holy Communion if they were in a state of mortal sin (Canon 989), and to confess serious sins and receive Holy Communion at least once a year (Canon 916). The concept of mortal sin and the need to focus on saving your soul were discussed in great detail each and every year of their schooling. They were presented with a compelling reason why they should practice their faith, and they were acutely aware of it.

Today in Australia, Catholic school children and state school children attend short parish programs to prepare them to receive the sacraments for the first time. The training is done in the parishes and not in the schools.

Each sacramental program is made up of about five one-hour lessons. They are not told of Hell or about the difference between mortal and venial sin. They are not told of the need to save their souls. They are only told of the existence of sin in general. They are not told of their obligations as Catholics and so are unable to fulfill all of their obligations as Catholics, which is required by Canon Law.

Currently in Catholic schools, students are not told about the existence of mortal sin until year five and then not in great detail. They are finally given a more in-depth explanation of mortal sin in year seven when they are 13 years old. However, after going to confession for five years with no mention of mortal sin, by age 13 it is too late to effectively incorporate mortal sin into the sacrament. So having no sense of sin, no fear of Hell, and no knowledge of the need to save their soul, they have no incentive or reason to practice their faith.

The group found that primary and secondary Catholic students in state schools in the Diocese of Broken Bay are never told about mortal sin.

**The “watering down” of the concept of what is a mortal sin**

Even when mortal sin is presented under the “discipleship approach,” a diluted notion is taught. The Catechism teaches that mortal sin is the result of three elements: The matter must be grave, the person must have sufficient knowledge of the evil it involves and know it is mortally sinful, and he or she must be able to exercise free will in choosing to commit it.

Under the “discipleship approach,” the same three criteria are taught, but considerable emphasis is given to mitigating circumstances, i.e., factors that can reduce personal culpability. They are encouraged to use these as an excuse or justification.

For example, if they fear that their employer might not promote them if they refuse to swear a false oath, then their offense is not a mortal sin. It is regarded as not really being totally their fault. If they fear that their friends would cease to be friends if they did not commit a mortal sin, then their sin is not a mortal sin. The result of teaching this approach is that all sins tend to be excusable and are not mortal sins.

Prior to the 1970s, mitigating circumstances were regarded as something God might take into consideration at our judgment in determining if or not our unforgiven mortal sins merited us being sent to Hell. Under the new approach, we usurp God’s discretion, which, in practice, means most people excuse themselves and believe they remain in good standing with God despite being in serious sin.

It has reached the stage where many Catholics today doubt that it is ever possible to commit mortal sins.

**Comparing the two approaches**

By comparing the two approaches to religious education, the merits of the “salvation approach” become evident. It better conforms to reality and also appeals to a student’s self-interest by making it clear from day one that the objective in life is to save your soul. This message was the focus of the entire religious education program.

The “discipleship approach” to religious education does not provide students with this sense of sin as a focus. They see no reason to practice their faith, and so they don’t practice it.



The “discipleship approach” to religious education has been operating in sacramental programs, in the Australian Catholic school system, in the state school systems, and in parishes for 50 years now.

**The echoes of universal salvation**

The “discipleship approach” emphasizes the perspective that Catholics aim to join Christ as disciples within a community of love and acceptance. There is considerable truth in this claim, but its hazards lie not in the truth it proclaims but in the truth it remains silent on. It presents the mercy of God without His justice. It is the “*come as you are*” theology that implies no need for conversion or contrition and that everyone is on a path to heaven.

This attractive proposition has become a prominent opinion in many parts of the Church, both in the progressive and conservative wings. Karl Rahner’s “anonymous Christians” reflected it. Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s invitation to hope that “all men are saved” has been taken up by the apparently conservative Bishop Robert Barron, and even Pope Benedict XVI suggested resonances of the position in *Spe Salvi* (nn. 45-47).

Universalism can be seen as one of the key dynamics underpinning the “discipleship approach,” and it has reached even into the opinions of some of Australia’s best Catholic leaders. In a book for Catholic schools, *Issues of Faith and Morals*, Cardinal George Pell suggested, “Some great Christian thinkers, even as early as Origen from Alexandria in Egypt in the third century, have dared to hope that even the most terrible moral monsters will eventually be purified through suffering for heaven.”

At least 95% of Australian Catholic school children appear to have concluded from that proposition that individual morality and the need to save their souls were no longer essential parts of Catholic belief.

**Disposing of members of the teaching orders of priests, brothers and sisters**

One obstacle to the bishops’ plans was the existence of teaching orders of dedicated priests, brothers, and sisters who had been teaching the traditional “salvation approach” for generations. For some reason, which was never properly explained, hundreds of thousands of the members of these orders suddenly left them in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is highly probable that the major reason for their exodus was that they could not “stomach” having to teach the content of the new “discipleship approach.” So, this proved not to be an obstacle, after all.

Unfortunately, those leaving their orders did not protest publicly or inform other Catholics. They just left. No satisfactory explanation was provided by the bishops. An explanation should now be sought and given.

The departure of clerical teachers cleared the way for the bishops to begin to teach the new beliefs in Catholic schools.

**Results of teaching the new faith**

Around 2000, Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher, who was then instructing trainee teachers, found that with a great many of his students he had to start from scratch to teach them about the faith. He said that they knew little about the traditions of the Church. In 2008, new textbooks called *To Know, Worship and Love* were introduced. They gave students a lot more information about the faith but did not solve the problem. The bishops continued to use the “discipleship approach.”

In May 2015, Sydney’s *Catholic Weekly* ran a story in which Archbishop Fisher noted the results of a survey that indicated that only 5% of graduates of Catholic schools practiced the faith after reaching age 29 in the Archdiocese of Sydney. A later survey of the Catholic working population done by the *Catholic Weekly* in 2016 found a 97% failure rate.

Despite the poor performance of the new approach to religious education from the first days of its introduction, the Australian bishops continue to persist with the new approach. The problem is not restricted to Australia as the shift in approach seems to be mirrored in other parts of the world.

**The formation of the “New Perspectives for Catholic Education” group**

The New Perspectives for Catholic Education group was formed in 2015 by members of Frenchs Forest Parish after a parish pastoral council meeting that discussed the dismal demographics of the parish. It was noted that Mass attendance was dominated by people in their 70s and 80s, with almost no one participating in the parish after attending its schools. The group quickly acquired concerned members from beyond the parish and even diocesan boundaries.

The group initially read through all of the relevant textbooks (the To Know, Worship and Love series of texts*)* and curriculum documents used to teach religious education in Catholic schools.

They examined the texts used by catechists in the Broken Bay diocese and the sacramental programs manuals used in the diocese and the Archdiocese of Sydney. This examination disclosed the radical change in approach to religious education.

**The ”Big Silence”**

The group sent a submission to the Australian Plenary Council, and a copy went to each bishop. It also sent a complaint to the Vatican. However, no responses were received. The group was confronted by the “Big Silence” that is used by the bishops to avoid all criticism and complaints. Details of the submission to the Plenary Council and of the complaint to the Vatican and other information are available for viewing at [https://truthaboutthechurch.com.au.](https://truthaboutthechurch.com.au./)

**Cardinal Pell’s move to provide leadership to orthodox Catholics**

*The Australian* newspaper published a telling quote from Cardinal Pell’s *Prison Journal* on February 20, 2021. Cardinal Pell warned: “Until sin makes a comeback, the Church cannot go forward.”

In the last two years of the cardinal’s life, he did appear to become more focused on the problems in the Church and what needed to be done to fix them. His reference to sin seemed to go to the heart of the problem. Unfortunately, his work took him beyond the problems in Australian dioceses and our local bishops do not seem interested in addressing the problems of Catholic religious education. He died after an operation on his hip in December 2022.

The cardinal’s criticisms of the leadership of the Church and his criticisms of the current synodality experiment go to the source of the problem that is behind the crisis in Australian Catholic religious education. The leadership of the Church is no longer directed toward ensuring that the beliefs of the Catholic Church, authentically passed on for two millennia, will continue to be passed on into the next generation.

***What is needed***

The group calls for five things to be done:

1. The Australian bishops’ claim that the decline in the practice of the faith in Australia over the past 50 years has been due to increasing secularism in society needs to be debunked.
2. The Australian bishops’ grand deception of Catholic parents in teaching their children beliefs that are not in conformity with the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism needs to be exposed publicly. The Australian bishops and the Vatican should be asked to make the documents pertinent to this issue available for public discussion.
3. The effective worldwide dismantling of the religious teaching orders in the 1960s and 1970s needs to be raised for public discussion. Why was this done, and what really caused the members of these orders to leave so abruptly? Again, the Australian bishops and the Vatican should be asked to make the documents pertinent to this issue available for public discussion.
4. The Church needs to have provisions incorporated into its Code of Canon Law which:
* allow members of the laity to complain about breaches of the Code by bishops.
* create a judicial body to investigate complaints: and
* allow disciplinary action to be taken against any bishop found to be in breach of the Code.
1. A genuine re-evangelisation is necessary to communicate to Catholics the basics of the faith that few people under 60 years of age have learned in their Catholic schooling, despite many of them now being grandparents.

The Australian case appears to be just one example of what has happened in many countries. The evidence will be in the textbooks used in other countries of the world. The phenomenon of Catholic homeschooling gives a hint that many individual Catholic parents have recognized the problem and found the only way to protect their children was to remove them from the Catholic school system.



It seems to be up to lay Catholics in these various countries to examine the religious education textbooks used in Catholic schools. It is likely that they too will find that the cause of the decline in the faith lies in the religious education system.

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Great article. The less orthodox our Holy Church is, the less relevant and meaningful.
Here in the UK the same.
I have had arguments with priests and bishops on this very topic - why no sermons on sin, hell, your duties, on our great history, our inventions, our saints, our intellectuals, our deep faith which created so much. Nothing. Nothing but climate nonsense, Rona fascist support, BBC talking points and God is grand-ma baking cookies in the kitchen, and will love you no matter what. Here have a cookie to feel better. That is not what Christ said and not what the Bible preaches. Never heard one sermon - ever - on hell.