

South Brisbane and All That

One of the worrying things that I can see coming out of all the hoo-haa surrounding The South Brisbane saga is that it will be all put down to a runaway parish doing weird things which is stomped on and all will be well again. That would be tragic, not just for the injustice it would allow to take place at the moment, but also because of the implications for the future. For there is not just one or two, but FOUR key players in the mess as it unfolds.

First, there is South Brisbane and Peter Kennedy and the crew. South Brisbane was a dying inner city Parish when Peter went there, with the fatal blow delivered with the clearing of the South Bank for Expo. It was a Parish without parishioners, and over the past twenty years it has attracted a significant number of people, a number of whom were somewhat disaffected with Church. Peter has been willing to listen to their concerns and give the community a significant say in decision making. You may not agree with the solutions they have come up with (e.g. replacing the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Baptismal formula), but hopefully we are aware of the problem (we are burdened with an overabundance of masculine words in such formulae), and see the need in a more sensitive world to search for more inclusive alternatives.

Secondly, there are those who run around looking for something to report. There is a very small, but strong, group of right wing Catholics who will go round from church to church searching out things to report to authorities. They attend services in bad faith, at no time intending to participate fully or reverently, but to take notes and pick the service to pieces. We had experiences of that in this area 8 years ago when it was openly declared by one of the leaders of this group that their intention was to FORCE Catholics back into the Confessional box. In actual fact, their concern is not to be able to worship as they prefer, but to impose their preferred ways of living their faith onto everyone. Sadly, they have often found an ally, hopefully unwittingly, in the Courier Mail, from within through significant staff with similar tendencies and also information fed to them from without.

Thirdly, there is the Vatican which sometimes seems to put its trust in the above group, rather than its appointed Bishops and priests. For those of you who follow Church news, it may not come as a surprise to hear that the Vatican is facing a crucial time, with major disagreements between key consistories. One of the most recent gaffes had to do with one of the Congregations having a swipe at Cardinal Kaspar, the head of the Congregation for Inter-faith Relations. They publicly demanded that he retract his oft stated credo that the primary aim of Christian Mission was no longer to win over converts, but to live a Christian life in their presence. Within days Kaspar himself had to come to the defence of the Church when the Jews said if the primary aim of Christians was to proselytize they would not be welcome in the Holy Land. There are a number of significant persons in key positions in the Vatican who would like to wind back on the Second Vatican Council and move towards the status quo prior to the Council. As a result, you might have heard that the Vatican recently lifted the excommunication of the four Le Febvre Bishops, who don't recognize the validity of the Council, one of whom turned out to be a Holocaust denier, much to Rome's embarrassment.

Fourthly, there is the Bishop who I suppose is caught between a rock and a hard place. While he says that he is acting on his own behest, he has himself stated that he was unaware of the things that were happening at South Brisbane until it was brought to his attention by certain Roman Cardinals. He would be one of the few.

So the whole situation is a lot more complex than a parish out of control. It is about the way we will be able to be Church in the future.

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