

Australians All Let us Rejoice for we are Young and Free But for How Long?



It's rather ironic that in Australia where sport is our 'second religion' it is sport that has highlighted deep underlying issues that are worrying for Catholics and other people of faith in our great and free nation.

I am sure we are all reasonably familiar with the details of the case of Israel Folau and Rugby Australia. Whatever the pros or cons of how Israel went about publicly expressing his Christian faith, in the end it was the fact that he did publicly express his Christian faith that resulted in him being sacked by Rugby Australia.

It is with a certain hesitation that I even mention this case. Such is the state of public discourse now in Australia that even mentioning certain things or defending certain people can get one into a lot of hot water. Two AFL footballers found themselves being hounded by the media and chased by the "thought police" simply for "liking" Israel's tweet. We as Catholics, Christians, and people of good will need to be alert to 'the signs of the times'.

Alan Jones in a recent article in the Australian commented: "We seem to be in a situation where conflict between religious and other views, on certain issues, has spiralled out of control. Express a religious view on issues that others find 'offensive' and there are cascading and immediate demands that someone be sacked." How did things get to be like this in our country of 'the fair go'?

The discussion on religious freedom in this country is one that has not really been properly examined or discussed. Yet there are important questions that need answering: Will Christians be free to voice their beliefs publicly or in the workplace and not live in fear of losing their jobs? Will Christian schools be free to teach children in accordance with their faith? Will Christian employers and business owners be free to make decisions of conscience and not be dragged before the courts?

As many of us feared at the time, the result of the legalisation of same sex marriage is becoming the 'litmus test' for how the question of religious freedom will play out in our country. Paul Kelly described it well when he said, "What is happening now is the inevitable ramification for religious freedom of the passage of same-sex marriage that meant the law of the state and the law of the church (most churches) came into conflict." People who profess traditional Christian faith, particularly in regard to sexuality, are now branded as the new bigots and racists.

These are some of the worrying signs for us in our society which once espoused great tolerance of differing



religious perspectives. Rob Dreher, a visiting academic and author, best known for his book “The Benedict Option” commented that progressives, while proclaiming tolerance, are attacking the liberal values they seek to espouse when they attack Christians, now considered ‘fair game’. “This kind of anti-Christian bigotry is undermining the legitimacy of liberal democracy. And the fools can’t even see what they’re doing.”

Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan had noticed this tendency in the USA as early as 1984. In an address to an Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast in Dallas he said: “the frustrating thing is that those who are attacking religion claim they are doing it in the name of tolerance, freedom and open-mindedness.

Isn’t the real truth that they are intolerant of religion? ... I submit to you that those who claim to be fighting for tolerance on this issue may not be tolerant at all.” He went on to say “All are free to believe or not believe; all are free to practice a faith or not. But those who believe must be free to speak of and act on their belief, to apply moral teaching to public questions.”

Our Lord Jesus reminded us that “Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” (Mt 10:16). Increasingly in Australia we are going to be called out for what we

believe, challenged for beliefs that were once commonly held. There is great opportunity here for us to bear witness, but it will require us to be prepared. How well do I know my faith? Do I ever stand up for my faith and try to explain it to others? As we look ahead, perhaps we can all commit to increased prayer, but also to deeper formation in the truths of the faith, and to a willingness to stand by it. In this way, in an increasingly worrying world, we can continue to be beacons of light and hope.

It is time for us all to pray for our fair nation and to be prepared to stand up for our beliefs.

Bishop Michael Kennedy



1 Alan Jones, ‘The Board should fall on its sword’ in *The Australian* 17 May 2019 online edition: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/sport/rugby-union/rugby-australia-board-has-failed-on-folau-and-should-fall-on-its-sword/news-story/a781220a324052547a2e6a599ba7e7da>

2 Paul Kelly, ‘Nation in denial on religious revolution’ in *The Australian newspaper* 16 May 2019 online edition: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/nation-in-denial-on-religious-revolution/news-story/8c9ded61508fb250db04d3f450f2443c>

3 Tess Livingstone, “‘Dangerous precedent’ set by putting PM’s faith centre stage’ in *The Australian newspaper* 16 May 2019 online edition: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/dangerous-precedent-set-by-putting-pms-faith-centre-stage/news-story/dccff7650b05e-32f94ac65aab7daf3b>