

Is This Cultural Heresy or Godly Convenience?

Several senior cardinals in Rome are apparently furious about plans to open a new McDonald's restaurant in the shadow of St. Peter's Basilica and have reportedly asked Pope Francis to stop the expansion from going ahead.

But that's not the only charge of cultural heresy invading the Vatican's sacred precincts this week: Questions are also being raised after the Holy See gave approval for the Hard Rock Cafe chain to open a store on Via della Conciliazione, the main boulevard leading to St. Peter's.

The Hard Rock Cafe is set to replace a long-standing religious bookstore; the site is currently being renovated and a panel in the window confirms Hard Rock will be the new tenant.

Hamish Dodds, the CEO of Hard Rock, was quoted in the Italian daily La Repubblica as saying the store would only be selling T-shirts and musical memorabilia.

In the wake of Italy's economic crisis, such changes are becoming commonplace around the Vatican as banks and bookshops have been replaced by more bars, restaurants and stores filled with tourist souvenirs.

But the advent of a McDonald's seemed to be especially galling.

Italian Cardinal Elio Sgreccia was the first to publicly sound the alarm, saying the proposal to open an outlet of the global fast-food chain below a Vatican-owned building where several cardinals live was a "controversial, perverse decision."

In an interview published over the weekend in La Repubblica, Sgreccia said the proposal was "not at all respectful of the

architectural and urban traditions” of a destination – just a block from St. Peter’s Square – that draws thousands of pilgrims and tourists a day from around the world.

He also said serving burgers and fries in the neighborhood was unacceptable because McDonald’s cuisine breached Italian taste. {eo}

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