

Australia's Unintentional Extremist: Rugby Union Player Israel Folau, the Bible and Homophobia

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What limits opinions? Especially by sportspeople, who are often confused for geniuses of the mind and ambassadors of tact outside their very limited field of endeavour. (Yes, he can dribble a ball with sigh-inducing majesty, so he must know a thing or so about social and intellectual problems.)

The obverse tends to be true. The sporting personality, presuming it exists, is often incapable of adjusting once off the field. Social media becomes tempting; ranting can become irresistible. Having viewpoints, certainly shoddy ones, can be a dangerous thing, and the atmosphere for policing [such remarks](#) as those made by Australian rugby union player **Israel Folau**, is very much heated.

While **Gore Vidal** never thought there was such a thing as the homosexual per se - there are only instances of behaviour across the spectrum, with preferences coming and going - the stage hands and even players have not always thought so. Locker room homo erotica is not to be described as it is, nor are all the ancillary pointers: the heaving, the sweat, the groping, the engagement, the shower encounter.

The list of controversial statements on homosexuality in sport - as a pejorative, that is - is extensive. Much of this seems rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding similar to that found in successful armies. Some of the best fighting forces of history fought and thrived on the issue of man love rather than starved heterosexuality, the Spartans being most famous for it. Which brings us to certain collective sports which might be seen to be extensions of the same.

From management to player, the homophobe remains keen and prevalent. **Marcello Lippi**, for a good stretch coach of the Italian football team, [openly admitted](#) in 2009 that openly gay players would never play for the Azzurri. Scandal and distraction would follow.

The [response](#) from the Arcigay association asked of Lippi a fairly sensible question:

“Why, dear Lippi, couldn’t footballers openly experience gay love when they show their flirts with every type of showgirl in front of every TV camera?”

Players have also been rather happy to shoot from the hip (and mouth) on that score. The former Miami Heat guard **Tim Hardaway** was particularly full on the subject.

“You know,” [he exclaimed on Miami radio](#) in February 2007, “I hate gay people, so I let it be known. I don’t like gay people and I don’t like to be around gay people.”

School book definitions had been mastered:

“I am homophobic. I don’t like it. It shouldn’t be in the world or in the United States.”

Israel Folau is but another sprinkling in the annals of dogma. His response to a question submitted by an Instagram user about what that not-so-good deity had in mind for gay people was tart. “HELL... Unless they repent of their sins and turn to God.” Pressure followed; the squalls gathered, and still, after some days, Folau held firm. As has Rugby Australia.

The Australian context was given further spice on the subject of religious freedom, a term often as incoherent as the religious advocates themselves. But this did not involve cake and gay couples; this was a matter of fiery hell and imminent doom predicted by a self-confessed zealot, albeit it on social media.

It’s hardly the god bothering that matters so much as the people bothering in the name of god, or some other conjured up fantasy that lodges itself in prejudice. But was this sports figure, hardly nimble in mind, allowed to express it?

Folau made an attempt to supply context in [PlayersVoice](#), flaunting his sense of erring by claiming he was “a sinner too”. It would hardly have mattered to his detractors, but here was a man confessing to the literal and the fundamental, a foot soldier who, given a chance, might well slay for the unelected Sky God.

“My response to the question is that to believe God’s plan is for all sinners, according to my understanding of my Bible teachings specifically 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10.”

The passage itself oozes the contentment held by the righteous, the idea of who will inherit the Kingdom of God like some over prized bit of real estate.

“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor the drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

As with all followers of celestial tyrannies, Folau felt he was doing good, providing appropriate counsel to a misguided wanderer.

“I do not know the person who asked the question, but that did not matter. I believed he was looking for guidance and I answered him honestly and from the heart.”

The Bible was the “truth”. And so, the coda for perfect, corpse sowing extremism is laid bare.

There were some who thought that the rugby figure had simply ballsed up the whole issue of god and the good word, though it came from those churchmen uncomfortable with the evangelised knock-off version of the Bible. Folau’s critics resorted to visions of catastrophe – for the living. Albury-based Archdeacon **Peter Macleod-Miller** was not one [who felt](#) a religious dispensation applied.

“It becomes an engine for refugees within our own community... to allow this sort of thing to happen is grossly irresponsible and so corrupt.”

The issue with Folau is even less the issue of the literalists and the agnostic symbolists as to whether his Bible-based homophobia impairs his performance. Focusing on the task at hand, the sport can be played as long as the collective spirit remains. But then comes the issue of business, something Folau was attuned to.

In meeting with Rugby Australia chief executive **Raelene Castle** and Waratahs general manager **Andrew Hore**, [he acknowledged](#) that both “have to run things in a way that appeals broadly to their executive, fans and sponsors, as well as its players and staff. It is a business.” That said, his beliefs would not be tradeable. He would only play as a dogmatic spear carrier of faith.

Fellow players not willing to take to the field with him, be they opponents or from the same team, might suggest possible impediments. But as homosexuality remains the boxed and the unspoken in a range of homoerotic sporting activities (done and not described), Folau might well struggle to find a safe shower.

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