

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

In the May 2015 issue *ITV* published culture editor Lucy Gordan's interview with Monsignor Pasquale Iacohone, the Holy See's Special Delegate for "Expo," the World's Fair with a food theme hosted in Milan from May 1 to October 31. She asked: "Has the Holy See taken a stand against Coca Cola and McDonald's being Expo's two most important sponsors?" He answered: "Not directly, because we couldn't interfere in the Italian government's organization of Expo. However, the Holy See is taking part in an anti-obesity campaign during 'Expo' by sponsoring a conference at *Bambin Gesù* (Rome's Vatican-owned children's hospital) on children's dangerous health threats caused by over-consumption of fast foods: especially diabetes and obesity." He noted a sad statistic: despite its generally still-healthy Mediterranean diet, Italy is beginning to have the most serious childhood obesity problems in Europe. The conference would warn of the danger of obesity and diabetes from increasing consumption of fast food products, he said.

Yet, in October, Cardinal Domenico Calcano, president of the Vatican's Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA), sparked considerable controversy when he signed a lease with McDonald's to open a franchise on December 30 (so too late to denounce in *ITV's* January issue) just outside Bernini's Colonnade, in Piazza della Città Leonina, in the Vatican-owned building where Cardinal Ratzinger lived for 25 years before becoming Pope Benedict XVI (see photo below left). Today the tenant in Cardinal Ratzinger's old apartment is another German cardinal, Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Ratzinger's successor as the Prefect for the Congregation of the Faith, the Vatican office responsible for overseeing Church orthodoxy. Other tenants in the complex are the Embassies of Chile and Egypt to the Holy See.

The space had for decades housed a branch of the largest Italian bank, Intesa San Paolo, but had gone vacant in recent months. McDonald's offered the highest bid, and will be paying a reported 30,000 euros monthly (around \$31,000) — the equivalent of 6,500 Big Macs — in rent to APSA, *La Repubblica* reported.

On opening day, the "Committee for the Protection of Borgo," made up of local residents and the consumer protection pressure group, CODACONS, filed an appeal with the Lazio Regional Administrative Court (TAR) to suspend the authorization granted by the

FAST FOOD NEAR THE VATICAN?

A McDONALD'S OPENS IN A VATICAN BUILDING NEAR ST. PETER'S

Municipality of Rome. The core of the appeal stated that McDonald's had violated a resolution that forbids the transformation of locations that could be characterized by traditional cuisine into one of just "foreign cooking." Furthermore, members of the committee believe McDonald's will further and irreparably damage the cozy atmosphere of this neighborhood of artists' studios and Mom-and-Pop shops, which has existed since the Renaissance, but which during the past decade has begun to be invaded by Chinese souvenir shops and Indian grocery stores.

Both protest groups call the McDonald's "a decisive blow to an already wounded animal." They also pointed out that most serious of all is the unnecessary security risk of a McDonald's so near St. Peter's, since there are another two as well as a Burger King only a short walk away.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* last

October, Cardinal Elio Sgreccia, who retired as president

of the Pontifical Academy for Life, had called Mc-

Donald's potential arrival "a disgrace" and said

"It's a controversial, perverse decision to say the

least." Now that the restaurant has opened, Sgreccia

hasn't tempered his views. He said that the

new, 5,800-square foot location, open seven

days a week (proving nothing is sacred

anymore) from 6:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., is "ab-

horrent."

"It would be better," he said, "to use those spaces

to help the needy of the area, open spaces for hospital-

ity, shelter and help for those who suffer, as the Holy

Father teaches," to which Calcano replied, "I don't see

the scandal." Neither did the regional court, which rejected

ed the protesters' appeal.

However, McDonald's announced that it is providing a free meal

once a week, on Mondays, for 10 weeks to the local homeless.

Certainly even less appropriate for the neighborhood, however, is

APSA's lease in another Vatican-owned building, also home to the

Brazilian and Argentine (yes, I said Argentine) Embassies to the

Holy See at *Via della Conciliazione* 22, the main boulevard leading

from the Tiber to St. Peter's Square.

This tenant is a Hard Rock Café, which opened on November 26

(see photo below right). It replaced a religious bookstore. For now

— and let us hope forever — it serves no food. Its products are

marked "Hard Rock Café Rome," but there's lots of empty space be-

hind the clothing racks. ☹



Stefano Navarini Illustration

