

VIOLENCE ON A SYDNEY TRAIN



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We have been hearing much in these times about alcohol fuelled violence involving young men at Kings Cross in Sydney, and other places in the same city. But on a Sydney train recently, I witnessed a potentially dangerous scene where the main protagonists, none of whom appeared drunk, were people in the forty to seventy year old age range.

I had boarded the train at Circular Quay in the northern part of Sydney's Central Business District, and we were heading for Ashfield in the inner western suburbs. The bottom deck of the carriage where I found a seat was about half full. Behind me, I heard a child crying, and it appeared that a woman had given a child under her care a slap for misbehaviour. The woman and her partner seemed to be in their forties or fifties. At the same time, a man in his late sixties or early seventies who had taken a seat near the front of the lower deck of the carriage stood up and began to abuse the woman for using violence to discipline the child. His abuse was mainly in terms of four letter words. It wasn't long before the woman and partner responded in similar language and the exchange was being conducted along the length of the carriage in full hearing of everyone, most of whom looked mildly interested and even a little amused.

But then the situation turned nasty. The man in the front of the carriage started to move down the carriage toward the parents of the child, rolling his sleeve up and shouting "I'll show you two #\$\$%\$\$#s what violence is !". The mild interest of the passengers suddenly turned to concern - what should be done - intervene ? notify train security ?

Before anyone could move, a group of four young people in their twenties, who had been quietly sitting in the middle of the carriage, stood. Two of them went towards the front of the carriage and blocked the path of the would-be attacker. They spoke politely to him saying that he would not really achieve anything through violence, that he would be better just to sit down and leave the matter alone. The other two young people went towards the woman and man in the rear of the carriage, quietly asked about the little girl, talked politely to them and

encouraged them to settle down. When all was quiet again, the young people sat down, but kept their eyes on the parties concerned to make sure that the participants had, in fact, withdrawn from battle. The rest of the passengers, myself included, heaved a sigh of relieve that the problem had not escalated. After a few stops the warring parties all left the train.

The young people involved in this incident appeared to take the matter in their stride, and were surprised when they were thanked for establishing peace. They had responded appropriately, professionally, and expertly, and were willing to take the risk of getting involved. But they sought no praise, nor even acknowledgment. In fact, they even looked a bit embarrassed at the attention given them.

It seems to me, without knowing anything about these young people apart from witnessing their behaviour on this occasion, that they acted out what Christians might call Gospel values in a very real way, a pleasant contradiction to the minority of people who are often the perpetrators of alcohol fuelled violence in our city. Perhaps they could even be compared with the Good Samaritan of the Gospels - taking a risk for the good of others ! I have to ask myself, would I myself take such a risk in the future ?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Recall a situation where you have been surprised by the sometimes unrecognised goodness of an individual or group of people.
2. Were any risks involved in this situation you are recalling ? Was there any inconvenience to those who acted for the benefit of others ?
3. Can you see any parallel with the Gospels, or any other part of our Church Tradition, in the situation ?
4. Was anything learned from this event ? Any insights that would affect your own actions in the future ?