



Date: 31st July 2024

Bishop's Circular 11/2024

Dear Members of the Synod of the Diocese of West Malaysia,

STATEMENT ON THE PARIS OLYMPICS 2024

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Members of the Diocese will by now have heard about, if not actually seen, controversial images of certain aspects of the Opening Ceremony of the Paris Olympics 2024, which was held recently.

The depiction in the form of artistic interpretation of the iconic painting of the Last Supper during the Opening Ceremony was, at the very least, deeply disturbing, if not downright offensive. While the Opening Ceremony of an Olympic Games is customarily intended to celebrate the history and cultural life of the host country, certain manifestations of social or cultural significance are not simply part of the patrimony of any one country, but is of universal and shared heritage. Great care should therefore be taken else the manipulation of religious imagery of universal familiarity and reverence causes serious offence to others.

The French Roman Catholic Bishops were the first to respond and pushed back saying that it was a parody of the Last Supper and by extension Christianity itself. The Middle East Council of Churches, which includes the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, issued a statement "with a lot of love mixed with astonishment and disapproval," asking the Olympic organizers to commit to its values of respect and friendship. "Freedom, diversity, and creativity are not compatible with insulting the beliefs of others, nor with mocking them, in ways that have nothing to do with human equality," the statement read.

Even though we support the principle of freedom of artistic expression, and of a more inclusive society, certain religious imagery, whether historical or otherwise, have over the centuries taken on a deeper spiritual meaning amongst adherents of those religions. The possibility of offending religious sensitivities should be taken into account in deciding whether such expressions are appropriate for general display and public viewing. Not everything that may be permissible by the laws of one country is necessarily beneficial or advantageous in the context of our diverse world.

We note that the organisers of the Opening Ceremony of the Paris Olympics 2024 have issued an apology, which is the correct thing to do. Their statement of remorse is welcomed. We hope and pray that organisers of other major occasions of global significance and importance will exercise greater discernment when planning their events and that there will not be a repeat of such an unfortunate incident.

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"Behold, I am making all things new"
Revelation 21:5



Let us fast and pray for Paris Olympics 2024, especially for the Christian athletes who are affected by this.

Let us also fast and pray that we will be open to what God is already doing, and to discern what God wants us to do.

Let us pray.

Nisi Dominus Frustra,



The Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Steven Abbarow
Bishop of West Malaysia



“Behold, I am making all things new”
Revelation 21:5

