

After the Outrage Over the Olympics, Please Pray for France

Coming up with a way to open the Olympic Games requires Olympic-sized creativity. But the people in charge of the festivities at this year's games in Paris managed to disgust millions of viewers. Companies pulled their advertising, Catholic bishops sent an angry letter to French President Emmanuel Macron and some French politicians issued statements telling the world that the bizarre performance was an embarrassing mistake.

Meanwhile, many of the 29 million people who watched opening night on television scratched their heads and asked, "What were they thinking?"

Even some Muslim leaders in France stood in solidarity with Christians and complained to the U.S. Olympic Committee. They felt that parts of the opening night festivities crossed a line, especially a shocking segment that included drag queens, partial nudity and a strange blue man who portrayed Dionysus—the ancient Greek god of drunkenness and orgies.

Within hours, video footage of the bizarre show was yanked off YouTube, and the Olympic Committee issued an apology. Then, media commentators began arguing about whether the drag show segment was a mockery of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" painting, or if it was simply a depiction of ancient Greek gods doing lascivious things.

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Either way, I'm of the opinion that inviting bearded drag queens to gyrate on a runway at a family-friendly sporting

event is a really, really bad idea.

After the dust from this controversy settled and the competitions began, I contacted a friend who has pastored a charismatic church in Paris for more than 30 years. I wanted to know how Christians in France felt about this scandal.

"It was absolutely disgraceful," says Robert Baxter, who leads l'Assemblée du Bon Berger in Saint Denis, a Paris suburb. "Maybe the Paris Olympic Committee did this out of ignorance, but the devil was laughing all the way to the bank."

Baxter and his wife, Kathryn, moved to France in 1988 to start their church. Robert tells me that Greek mythology, occultism and Freemasonry are "baked into the DNA" of French culture, so it wasn't surprising to see the god Dionysus during the Olympic ceremony. "But there is general revolt among Christians here because of this egregious display," Baxter says.

Many Christians feel angry that blatant paganism and perversion were forced on an unsuspecting audience. I was angry too, especially because I know children were watching, and they deserve to be protected from anything sexually provocative. But I had to remind myself that we are failing in our witness to the world if our anger isn't tempered with Christ's compassion.

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When the apostle Paul traveled to Greece, "his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols" (Acts 17:16b, NASB 1995). Even though Paul was righteously angry about the idols in Athens, he didn't lash out in anger at the people who were trapped in ignorance. Instead, he preached a sermon about a loving God who wanted them to repent.

Paul knew the Greeks were just being Greeks. They were sinners doing what sinners do. He knew they were slaves to what he called “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor. 2:12b). And he knew being angry with them wouldn’t save them. So he offered them the truth about Jesus, knowing this was the only way they could escape the bondage of idolatry and perversion.

I encourage you to do the same. Let God turn your anger into a holy burden for souls. Since this unfortunate display occurred at the Olympics, I started praying for France. It’s a spiritually needy nation. Even though 61% of French people claim to be Catholic, only 8% attend church, and only 1% are evangelical believers. Meanwhile, France is on its way to becoming 17% Muslim by 2050 because of immigration.

Yet there is a spiritual stirring in the heart of France. A growth in atheism has triggered a rise in genuine spiritual hunger. My friend Baxter says there has never been more prayer going up for France—because of the Olympic Games and the recent elections.

“We are optimistic,” he says. “I wouldn’t call it a revival of prayer yet, but we are certainly on the cusp of it.” Instead of cursing the darkness and judging sinners for acting sinful, let’s hit our knees. Pray for the gospel to spread in France. Pray for churches to grow. Our friends in France are praying: “Jésus, répands l’Esprit Saint sur le peuple français!—which means, “Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on the French people!”

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