

Erdogan Persuaded the Pope to Condemn the Olympics Opening Ceremony

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Much has been written on how divisive the “Woke” spectacle of the July 26 Olympics opening ceremony was. The controversial spectacle prompted condemnation from Muslim and Christian religious leaders worldwide.

Pope Francis [finally](#) broke his silence and joined these voices on August 3, eight days after the episode. It seems this took some convincing, with reports that the bishop of Rome only did so after talks with... Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, of all people. This is impressive in itself and merits some analysis.

The Olympics opening was so offensive that, with the global backlash, in an underreported development, the videos have been [removed](#) from the official websites – they can no longer be found in the Olympic Committee’s [YouTube channel](#). The same thing happened with the NBC Sports YouTube channel, the official broadcaster of the Games in the USA. [No official explanation](#) has been provided yet, but the reason is clear enough, with condemnations from politicians and religious leaders piling up – and with American company C Spire [pulling its advertising out of the Olympics](#). Even Jean-Luc Melenchon, the leader of left-wing party France Unbowed (LFI), [condemned it](#). The Paris Olympics organizers have [apologized](#), albeit claiming they had no intention to offend anyone.

The opening ceremony, broadcast worldwide, was not family-friendly: it displayed, among other things, a [threesome](#), a Lady Gaga’s performance, [male genitalia exposure](#), and more infamously, a tableau vivant called “La Cène Sur Un Scène Sur La Seine”, a word-play which of course [means](#) “The Last Supper on the stage on the [River] Seine.” It was basically a [parody](#) of Jesus Christ’s Last Supper involving artists in drag and Greek Gods. All of this would fit well in a Madonna or Marilyn Manson concert in any Western capital but this kind of provocation is unprecedented in such an event.

Traditionally, the opening ceremonies of Olympic games, which have their own “diplomacy” and etiquette, emphasize the culture and history of the host country in a manner that is inclusive to audiences worldwide. Jesus Christ is of course respected by Muslims as well, who believe he is a Prophet and God’s Messenger. It turns out the supposed parade of “diversity” was (as is often the case with Western “woke” ideology), actually non-inclusive to children, families, religious people, the Global South and most of the world. It is no wonder, then, that such an intense backlash came about.

In a brief 90-word statement, the Vatican [said](#) that “the Holy See was saddened by certain scenes during the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games” and thus “cannot but join its voice with the others that have been raised in these last days to deplore the offense made to numerous Christians and believers of other religions.” It stated such events should

celebrate international common values rather than “ridiculing the religious convictions of many people”, and added that freedom of expression should be “limited by respect for others” – something the “woke” ideologues themselves agree with, although they would differ on just whom should also be respected (not religious people, it seems).

So far, no big deal. The point here is that, according to America Magazine and many other sources, the Vatican had decided not to issue any statement condemning the event because the French bishops had already done so. The reasoning here is unclear: this could be part of Pope Francis’ usually conciliatory approach and his efforts to emphasize tolerance. In any case, it has been [reported](#) that, on August 1, President Erdogan of Turkey, called the Pope following the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran, and also took the opportunity to urge the pontiff to “raise voices together and take a common stance in this regard” (the Olympics’ episode), which “offended Muslims as much as the Christian world.” Erdogan had previously told his AK Party that he would try to persuade the Roman pontiff – and persuade him he did, it seems.

This has led John L. Allen Jr. to enquire, [in his piece](#) for the Catholic Herald, why it took “a Muslim” to persuade the Catholic leader to join the chorus (as he titled his piece). After all, for a week, several Catholic players (including some Bishops) tried to persuade the Pope to comment on the matter – to no avail. Erdogan did it. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the Pope is also a Head of State. Allen Jr. reasoning is that the bishop of Rome could be “disinclined to pick a diplomatic fight with France” in light of an already tense situation there, involving a debate on abortion. John L. Allen Jr. is considered to be the most authoritative Anglophone writer on Vatican affairs.

The same expert also notes that Erdogan was clever in “packaging” his Olympics appeal within a discussion about the Israeli military campaign in Gaza. During the call, he suggested the Pope engaged in conversations with countries supporting Israel as part of diplomatic endeavors to prevent an escalation. Playing precisely that role is in the Holy See’s interest and this is why the Pope was happy, Allen Jr. argues, to toss Erdogan “a bone” on the Olympic topic so as to thereby further secure the Turkish leader’s backing. This would be part of reorienting the Vatican “away from its historical profile as a Western institution towards a more truly global, non-aligned role, and a key part of that agenda has been outreach to the Islamic world.”

To sum it up, the recent Pope-Erdogan episode demonstrates the decline of the US-led West’s moral authority, especially from the point of view of the Global South, the Islamic world, and Christians in general. It shows how the “woke” ideology, often described as a tool for Washington’s soft power (some prefer to talk about “[woke imperialism](#)”) is backfiring. Some analysts even point out it has become a liability to US [national security](#) itself. The episode also demonstrates how Erdogan, despite his more incendiary recent statements (about [militarily intervening in Israel-Palestine](#)), still wants Turkey to be a peace-broker in the Holy Land, while projecting it and himself as a kind of leader of the Islamic world – or of the Global South itself. Those are ambitious and challenging goals: for one thing, playing mediator in the cause of Palestine would require a certain neutrality which Ankara clearly does not possess. In any case, such goals are also part of a Turkish [neo-Ottomanist](#) agenda, which, as I [wrote](#), faces a lot of opposition from many different players in the Middle East, Central Asia and beyond. In this particular Pope move, however, Erdogan can certainly boast a success story.

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