Opinion
Guest Voices



This scene during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Paris, Friday, July 26, 2024, was meant to represent the Greek gods during a banquet, according to organizers. (RNS/Video screen grab)



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Catholic bishops have called the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics anti-Christian because of a drag-queen tableau reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper." The depiction was a brief episode in an otherwise spectacular ceremony that has received universal praise.

The Catholic critics saw this as another example of how Christians, especially Catholics, are open season for attacks by liberal elites. Non-Catholic comedians can make jokes about Catholics, whereas non-Jewish comedians would never make jokes about Jews nor a non-Muslim about Muslims and so on, or so the argument goes.

It is tough being a comedian today when you cannot make jokes about drunks, gays, women or ethnic and racial groups unless you are a member of the group. But Catholics are still fair game.

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There is no doubt that many liberal elites have negative feelings about Catholicism, but this is not the anti-Catholicism of the past.

In the bad old days, Catholic immigrants from Europe were seen as a threat to the purity of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, or WASP establishment and its power in America. They were treated like today's immigrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America, segregated into poor neighborhoods and forced to work long hours to support their families.

Sadly, many white Catholics treat these newcomers like their grandparents were treated in the past. They join in opposing Mexican immigrants who are predominantly Catholic. Some even join the KKK, which historically went after

Blacks, Jews and Catholics.

Today’s attacks on Catholicism are different. They are more anticlerical than anti-Catholic.

Much of the antagonism is aimed at policies adopted by the Catholic hierarchy. The bishops have a perfect right to take positions on public policy, but don't be surprised that it results in name-calling.

It is not surprising, for example, that gays were mad when bishops labeled them as "intrinsically disordered," spent millions of dollars opposing gay marriage and said they should not be allowed to adopt children.

Likewise, feminists have seen the bishops oppose them on birth control, abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment. Democrats are also angry at the bishops who want to ban pro-choice politicians from Communion.

Add to this the general antagonism aimed at the church because of the failure of the bishops to deal with abusive priests.

It is regrettable but not surprising when the rhetoric of these groups sometimes sounds anti-Catholic rather than simply anticlerical. A few have even crossed the line by defacing or destroying church property, which is unacceptable and criminal.

But Catholics need to keep this in perspective. We are not under the same systemic threat of hate crimes as are Jews and Blacks. As the British say, we should "Keep calm and carry on."

Liberals would also do well to watch their words and actions lest they antagonize the Catholic public. You can only poke us in the nose so many times before we hit back.

Allowing Catholic hospitals and doctors to refuse to do medical procedures that violate their consciences would be a good beginning. Allowing a few minor exemptions to believers is a small price to pay for avoiding political controversy and having your policies generally accepted. It was politically stupid, for example, to take on the Little Sisters of the Poor, who devote their lives to helping the sick and elderly.

Artists tend to push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable, such as having a crucifix at the bottom of a urinal. While such "art" is protected by the free speech clause of the First Amendment, Catholic citizens have a right to object when their

tax dollars are used to promote such art — just as we have a right to object when our tax dollars are used for any purpose we don't like.

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The artists who produced the opening ceremony of the Olympics, for the most part, did a marvelous job. I grimaced when the “Last Supper” scene appeared because that is what I saw it for, as did so many Christians. Regardless, I quickly forgot about it as the show moved on to other acts. I would have cut the act, but I also admit it was done in the context of humorous episodes dealing with other great works of art.

Also distasteful was the decapitation scene reminiscent of the Reign of Terror. Capital punishment is not funny.

Catholic bishops objected to what they saw as a "Last Supper" parody. The creative director has since said he was intending it to invoke paintings of the Greek gods at a banquet. I find that explanation believable. Frankly, I was not sure what was going on when I first saw the act but jumped to the wrong conclusion after hearing others criticize it.

Let's all relax. No need to be paranoid. No one needs to be fired or boycotted. The opening ceremony is over; let's enjoy the Olympics.