



July 29, 2024

Thomas Bach
President, International Olympic Committee
Maison Olympique
1007 Lausanne
Switzerland

Dear President Bach:

The Southern Baptist Convention is comprised of over 47,000 cooperating churches and congregations and 13.6 million members here in America. I lead the entity tasked with engaging public officials and leaders in the public square. Southern Baptist men and women watching these Games were highly dismayed that, once again, an event meant to inspire unity on a worldwide stage instead became an occasion to deride and marginalize Christians.

Two years ago, I wrote [a letter to NBC](#) about the coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, fearful the reporting taking place would turn a blind eye to the ongoing human rights abuses and genocide of the Uyghur people by the Chinese Communist Party. Given the scant attention given during those Games, those concerns were valid.

Now, with the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad underway in Paris, once again I am writing to express concern over something deeply disturbing. Regrettably, an obscene image made its way into billions of homes around the globe last week where families had gathered to watch the start of the Olympics. Of course, I am speaking of the scene in the opening ceremony depicting Leonardo da Vinci's rendering of the "Last Supper" featuring LGBTQ activist Barbara Butch and a host of drag performers and dancers.

Christians around the world have raised an uproar about the inappropriate spectacle. The director of the event, Thomas Jolly, seemed to suggest fault for any offense lies with those who were aghast at what we all were subjected to on the screen. He went on to say he merely wanted to send a "message of love, a message of inclusion and not at all to divide." If this is accurate, Mr. Jolly must have somehow calculated that insulting the over two billion Christians worldwide was going to accomplish that objective. That is ludicrous.

How does something so grossly offensive get approval for this global sporting event? The Olympics are meant to "develop harmony" through instilling "a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles." These opening ceremonies fall far short of the values of the Olympics and have tarnished the reputation of the International Olympic Committee.

Given the justifiable fallout from this, the following requests require your immediate attention:

- Please personally review the production plans for the closing ceremony of these Games and remove any overt or inadvertent depictions, language, or actions that would mock the Christian faith or any religious tradition.



- For future ceremonies, including the 2026 Olympics in Milan and the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, please put in place new protocols to ensure such degrading scenes as the ones that were included in these ceremonies are not created.
- Please engage religious scholars and experts from all traditions for future Olympic Games.

President Bach, please lead the IOC to uphold the values of respect and morality that it claims to support. My team and I at the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission are willing to aid in helping your organization to identify religious scholars and experts to ensure this type of mockery never happens again.

Respectfully,

Frederick Brent Leatherwood
President
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
of the Southern Baptist Convention