

# An anti-culture of nothingness

## About the opening ceremony at the Paris Olympics

By Carl Truman

The opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics will be remembered as an eloquent testimony to the tilt of contemporary Western culture. The drag queen parody of da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and the appearance of the severed head of Marie Antoinette performing karaoke said it all: A culture that has given the world the plays of Racine and Molière, the novels of Stendhal and Hugo, the paintings of the Impressionists, and the music of Berlioz and Fauré served the world a dish of blasphemous kitsch and gaudy perversion.

Of course, [those responsible denied any intention to offend Christians](#): “Clearly, there was never an intention to show disrespect towards any religious group or belief,” organizers said in a statement to *The Telegraph*. “On the contrary, each of the tableaux in the Paris 2024 Opening Ceremony were intended to celebrate community and tolerance.” Organizers further noted that pop culture, from *The Simpsons* to *The Sopranos*, has [parodied \*The Last Supper\* for decades](#), if not centuries.

Certainly, such parodies are not new is true, confirming the organizers' intellectual laziness and lack of imagination. But *The Simpsons* and *The Sopranos* are nothing more than examples of trivial entertainment, not public rituals intended to have national, even international, cultural significance. In 2012, the London Olympics opened with, among other things, a choreographed celebration of the National Health Service. It was odd and mildly amusing in a quaint sort of way. But it arguably represented something that many British people do value, for good or for ill. It was harmless and silly. But if queers mocking the Lord's Supper and a decapitated singing head are the things that France—or at least her officer class—consider to represent her, then things have surely taken a most dark turn. “This is France,” tweeted President Emmanuel Macron. I hope he was exaggerating.

As to the lack of intent to cause offense, it is impossible to read the minds of the organizers, but it is hard to believe this claim. Would they ever have contemplated mocking things considered sacred by Jews or Muslims, one wonders? That seems rather unlikely—unless they really are as insensitive and thick as they claim.

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As we reflect on this moment, Christians should note that this action indicates at least three things about our current cultural climate. First, the culture from which it emerged is largely parasitic, dependent for its existence on the denial or the mockery of what it once considered true. It has nothing positive to say, glorying only in the defilement and destruction of things that earlier cultures saw as holy. Under its tasteless wrappings, it's an anti-culture of nothingness.

Second, despite the outrage, it is oddly appropriate and fitting to French history and culture. Yes, France has produced many great cultural figures, as noted above. But on display in the opening ceremony is that other strand of French cultural life, the one that has come to dominate, the one that represents the anarchic and ecstatic destruction of every notion of truth, beauty, and goodness. It is that stream of thinking that runs from the perverted sexual fantasies of the Marquis de Sade through the weird obsessions of a man like Georges Bataille to the amoral philosophy of Michel Foucault, perhaps the most cited author in the humanities in the West today. Yes, France has produced great beauty. But the French thinkers who dominate Western intellectual approaches to culture today are those who exulted in ugliness and evil.

Third, this again points to the real problem of the West. It is not merely that science has reduced man in his own eyes to being just one amoral animal among others. It is not merely that post-industrial, bureaucratic society has turned persons into things, subjects into objects. It is not even that our culture's obsession with sex has unleashed all manner of anarchy upon the human race. It is that we now delight in desecration—of God and thus of those made in His image.

And that brings out the real horror of this “queering” of *The Last Supper*. In desecrating God's grace, it denies the real solution to humanity's problem. We need to be consecrated. And that comes only through the means of grace, the Word, and the sacraments. The spittle dripped on the latter by the organizers of the Paris Olympics is destructive not simply of culture but, more importantly, of souls. May God have mercy on us all, for we need it.



### **Carl R. Trueman**

Carl taught on the faculties of the Universities of Nottingham and Aberdeen before moving to the United States in 2001 to teach at Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. Since 2018, he has served as a professor at Grove City College. He is also a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a contributing editor at *First Things*.