

INSULT CASE OF LEONARDO DA VINCI'S "THE LAST SUPPER" PAINTING AT THE PARIS 2024 OLYMPICS FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Nathanael Yitshak Hadi¹, Iwan Setiawan², Cornelia Mariana³, Joshua Emmanuel⁴
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kharisma

Nathanael.jng@gmail.com, iwansetiawaniwa@gmail.com, nellysetiawan17@gmail.com,
yosiemmanuele@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the incident of religious desecration that occurred during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympics, where a parody of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" depicted Jesus Christ as an obese woman and his disciples as members of the LGBTQ community. The research aims to analyze the impact of this event from a Christian perspective, particularly concerning freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and cultural representation theory. This research was conducted in response to the global controversy sparked by religious desecration at an international event like the Olympics. The author seeks to understand how this event was perceived by the Christian community and how it influenced interfaith dialogue and tolerance at a global level. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the offense against the "The Last Supper" painting from a Christian viewpoint, utilizing theoretical frameworks of freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and cultural representation theory. The study also aims to explore how religious representation in global events can influence public perception and ignite discussions on the importance of respecting religious symbols. The research finds that although freedom of expression is a fundamental right in democratic societies, it must be balanced with social responsibility. The incident at Paris 2024 demonstrates that culturally insensitive representations of religious beliefs can trigger strong reactions and lead to conflict. From a Christian perspective, the importance of forgiveness and love in responding to religious insults is emphasized, as well as the need for interfaith dialogue and education to promote tolerance and peace. These findings are crucial as they highlight the need for caution in religious representation at global events to avoid tensions and promote peace. This study also contributes to the broader discussion on the limits of freedom of expression in relation to social responsibility and the importance of education in building interfaith tolerance.

Keywords: *Religious Desecration, Paris 2024 Olympics, The Last Supper, Christian Perspective, Freedom of Expression, Religious Tolerance, Cultural Representation, Interfaith Dialogue.*

Introduction

Religious desecration is not an event confined to one specific region or country; it occurs worldwide.¹ Recently, a globally broadcasted act of disparaging Christianity took place during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympics. The offensive act involved a parody of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper," which depicts Jesus's final meal with his apostles. In this parody, Jesus Christ was portrayed as an obese woman, with his disciples depicted as members of the LGBTQ community. This sparked widespread attention from international media and provoked diverse reactions from the global community.² Freedom of expression is a fundamental principle in democratic societies, encompassing the right to voice opinions, express oneself through art and culture, and critique various social and political aspects. However, this freedom is not an absolute right.³

Training guidelines published by UNESCO regarding Freedom of Expression and Public Order acknowledge limitations, particularly when such expression has the potential to harm or offend others. In the context of the Paris 2024 Olympics opening ceremony, it is crucial

¹ Wiley Blackwell, *The Handbook of Global Communication and Media Ethics*, ed. P. Mark Fackler Robert S. Fortner, vol. 01–02 (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2011).

² <https://news.republika.co.id/berita/shbn2u409/sodom-dan-gomorrah-kalangan-kristen-kecam-seremoni-pembukaan-olimpiade-paris-2024> diakses pada tanggal 14 agustus 2024

³ Mudjiyanto, "Kebebasan Berkespresi Dan Hoaks Freedom of Expression and Hoaks," *Mudjiyanto, Kebebasan Berkespresi*, no. 1 (2019): 1–39.



to recognize the importance of balancing freedom of expression with social responsibility. This freedom should not be misconstrued as a license for recklessness; hence, it must be balanced with respect for the beliefs and values held by others.⁴

International law emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the diversity of beliefs and religious practices.⁵ Religious tolerance is a key element in creating a harmonious and peaceful society. In our increasingly interconnected global era, religious tolerance becomes even more crucial. The incident of religious insult at the Paris 2024 Olympics demonstrates that religious tolerance still faces significant challenges. The varied reactions from the Christian community reflect different levels of tolerance and interfaith understanding. Some groups view this incident as a cultural misunderstanding that can be resolved through dialogue and education, while others see it as a serious violation that must be addressed firmly.

Cultural representation theory helps analyze how culture and identity are represented in media and public events.⁶ In the context of the Olympics, this theory aids in understanding how religious and cultural symbols are displayed and received by a global audience. The religious desecration incident at the Paris 2024 Olympics highlights the importance of sensitive and respectful representation of all religions.

Thus, this study not only analyzes the incident of religious insult related to Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" painting at the Paris 2024 Olympics from a Christian perspective but also explores its implications for the Christian community. This study employs the theoretical frameworks of freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and cultural representation to provide a deeper understanding of this incident. It also underscores that in the context of global events, religious representation must be handled with care and respect to promote tolerance and peace among various communities and cultures worldwide.

Research Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze the incident of insult against Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" at the Paris 2024 Olympics from a Christian perspective. The author has gathered books, journals, and news articles discussing the Christian perspective on religious insults on the global stage, particularly at the Paris 2024 Olympics. The systematic discussion begins with the limitations of freedom of expression, religious tolerance in international contexts, the balance between freedom of expression and responsibility, the relationship between the insult to Jesus and His disciples, the creation of meaning, the importance of sensitive representation, and the case of the insult against "The Last Supper" from a Christian perspective. The study aims to provide insights that are easily understood and that help strengthen the Christian community.

Findings and Discussion

There are several key aspects that every Christian should understand regarding international law in response to insults against Christianity on the global stage:

Freedom of Expression Has Limits

The training guidelines published by UNESCO regarding "Freedom of Expression and Public Order" are designed to ensure that human rights, particularly freedom of expression, are respected in various situations, including conflict reporting, demonstrations, and other sensitive issues. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that underpins all other freedoms in a democratic society. This right is governed by various international legal instruments, including

⁴ UNESCO Office in Jakarta, *Kebasan Berekspresi Dan Ketertiban Umum: Panduan Manual*, 2020.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ STUART HALL, *REPRESENTATION Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. STUART HALL, SAGE Publications Ltd (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997).



the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The guidelines also emphasize the importance of neutrality and ethics.⁷

As a concrete example of the application of freedom of expression principles at the international level, the Paris 2024 Olympics served as a platform where this right was tested. The Olympics opening ceremony, often used as a platform to showcase cultural identity and national values, also has the potential to become a stage for various forms of expression, including those related to political, social, or even religious issues. Freedom of expression in this context includes cultural and artistic expression, which, although not explicitly verbal, can convey powerful messages through symbolism and visualization.⁸

However, it is important to note that freedom of expression on an international stage such as the Olympics is not without challenges and limitations. During the Paris 2024 Olympics opening ceremony, there was an act or representation that was considered offensive to religious figures such as Jesus, sparking significant controversy. Such actions, although they can be defended as legitimate artistic expression, can also be seen as crossing the line of freedom of expression by hurting the feelings and beliefs of certain religious communities. The Olympic Charter, which prohibits political and religious demonstrations at the event venue, is an effort to maintain neutrality and avoid conflict on the global stage. However, in practice, such regulations often lead to debates about the balance between individual freedom and collective interests.⁹

Religious Tolerance in the International Arena

UNESCO emphasizes that religious tolerance is a principle that respects individuals' freedom to practice their respective religious beliefs. This means that people from various religious or belief backgrounds should respect each other, refrain from imposing their views, and live peacefully without discrimination, prejudice, or violence. Religious tolerance also involves recognizing that every religion has the right to be respected and protected from insult or desecration.

Freedom of Expression and Responsibility

Freedom of expression is a highly valued right in democratic societies, but this right must be balanced with social responsibility. UNESCO's training guidelines emphasize the importance of limitations on freedom of expression, especially when such expression has the potential to harm or offend others. In the context of the parody of "The Last Supper," it is important to realize that freedom of expression does not mean the freedom to insult or hurt others' feelings.

Relation to Insults Against Jesus and His Disciples

The act of insulting Jesus as an obese woman and His disciples as LGBTQ individuals in the context of the Paris 2024 Olympics opening ceremony can be seen as a violation of the principles of religious tolerance. If a representation or symbol explicitly or implicitly insults significant figures in Christianity such as Jesus and His disciples, it can provoke a strong reaction from the Christian community. This is not only a matter of insult to religious figures but also an action that contradicts the values of religious tolerance.¹⁰

Creation of Meaning

The Paris 2024 Olympics opening ceremony can be seen as a stage where cultural meanings are produced and disseminated through various symbols, images, and performances. When a representation is perceived as religious desecration, it reflects the friction between the

⁷ UNESCO Office in Jakarta, *Kebiasaan Berekspres dan Ketertiban Umum: Panduan Manual*.

⁸ Yann Descamps, Daniel Kilvington, and John Price, "Sport, Discrimination, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games," *International Journal of Sport and Society* 15, no. 3 (2024): i–xiv.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onP5-DKSbI4> accessed on August 20, 2024.

¹⁰ UNESCO Office in Jakarta, *Kebiasaan Berekspres dan Ketertiban Umum: Panduan Manual*.



meaning generated by the content creators and the meaning received or interpreted by the audience. The reaction to what is considered religious desecration demonstrates how representations not only reflect culture but also shape and challenge existing social values.

Representations that are perceived as desecrating religion, particularly Christianity by depicting Jesus in a controversial context, demonstrate how meaning can become a site of conflict when faced with differing cultural interpretations and prevailing values.

According to Hall, meaning is not inherent in objects or symbols but is constructed through discursive practices involving cultural codes. At this ceremony, what may have been intended by the artist as an artistic expression or political statement was interpreted by some audiences as an act of desecration. This shows how different cultural codes can lead to different interpretations of the same representation, and how power plays a crucial role in controlling or contesting the meanings that are produced.¹¹

The Importance of Sensitive Representation

This case also underscores the importance of context in the construction of meaning. The Olympics opening ceremony is a global event that attracts attention from various cultural and religious groups with different value codes. Representations that are normally accepted in one cultural context can become highly controversial in another. Here, Hall's theory helps us understand that representations are never free from the broader social, historical, and ideological contexts in which they are produced and consumed.

Furthermore, this incident shows how representation can become a battleground for ideological struggle. Religious desecration is a concrete example where the meaning produced by representation is not only questioned but also contested in the public arena. Those who feel offended may see this as an attempt to discredit or alter the meaning of their religious symbols, while defenders of freedom of expression may see it as a legitimate right to express social or political criticism through art.

In the context of the Paris 2024 Olympics, this case serves as concrete evidence that representation has the power to evoke strong emotional reactions and influence public discourse. It reminds us that representation is not only about depicting the world but also about how the world is understood and debated by different groups.¹²

The Last Supper'In the Christian Perspective

The incident involving the desecration of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" at the Paris 2024 Olympics has sparked significant controversy and strong reactions from various communities, particularly the Christian community. This event raises important issues concerning freedom of expression, cultural representation, and religious tolerance. From a Christian perspective, there are several key points that can be drawn from the Gospel of Matthew 26:26-28 in responding to this offense:

The Sacred Meaning of the Last Supper

The Last Supper is a deeply sacred moment in Christian tradition. In Matthew 26:26-28, Jesus takes bread and wine, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to His disciples as a symbol of His body and blood.¹³ In this narrative, Jesus provides a new interpretation of the elements of the Passover ritual, which not only affirms His impending suffering and death but also introduces a new concept fundamental to Christian theology: personal participation in Jesus' sacrifice through the act of 'eating' and 'drinking.'

¹¹ HALL, *REPRESENTATION Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ R. T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Matthew*, ed. Leon Morris, Second edi. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

Passover and Jewish Tradition

In Jewish tradition, Passover is a celebration of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, commemorated with a ritual meal that is highly symbolic. Every element in this meal, including unleavened bread and wine, carries symbolic meanings that refer to the story of liberation and God's covenant with Israel. Unleavened bread, for instance, reminds the Israelites of the bread they ate when they left Egypt in haste, while wine symbolizes the covenant and salvation they enjoy as God's chosen people.¹⁴

During the Last Supper, Jesus follows the traditional Passover pattern but adds new elements that signify a transition from the old covenant to the new. By taking the bread and wine, the two main elements of the Passover meal, Jesus gives them new meaning centered on Himself and the sacrifice He was about to make.¹⁵

The Theological Significance of Bread as the Body of Jesus

When Jesus took the bread and declared it to be His body, He was not merely indicating His death but also signifying that His death would have special significance for His followers. The use of bread as a symbol of His body shows that His body would be 'broken' for them, reflecting a sacrifice made on behalf of others.

By instructing His disciples to eat the bread, Jesus introduces the concept of personal participation in His sacrifice. This shows that those who eat the bread are not just remembering Jesus, but are also partaking in the effects of His sacrifice. This participation is akin to how the Israelites partook in the salvation from Egypt through the Passover meal, but now refers to the greater salvation through Jesus' death. This is not just a ritual but a theological act that connects them with Jesus' sacrifice and the salvation offered through His death.¹⁶

The Theological Significance of Wine as the Blood of Jesus

When Jesus took the cup and declared it to be His blood, He again imparted new meaning to an already familiar element in the Passover meal. In Jewish tradition, blood is a symbol of life and sacrifice, and in the context of Passover, the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts of Israelite homes symbolizes protection and salvation from God's judgment on Egypt.

Jesus declared that His blood was the blood of the covenant, a statement that harkens back to the old covenant made by God with Israel under Moses, where the blood of sacrifices was used to sanctify the covenant. However, Jesus' blood now represents the blood of a new covenant, which would not only save people from physical death but also offer the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Jesus adds the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins," emphasizing that His death would have salvific effects for those who believe in Him. This ties back to Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant that would erase the sins of God's people and restore them to a right relationship with Him.¹⁷

The Formation of a New Community of God's People

By linking the acts of 'eating' and 'drinking' with His sacrifice, Jesus not only reinterprets the meaning of Passover but also establishes a new community that would be formed based on His sacrifice. This is the essence of the New Covenant, where the relationship between God and His people is now mediated through Jesus and His death on the cross.

This new community, later known as the Church, is no longer based on ethnic ties or adherence to the Law, but on participation in Christ's sacrifice through faith. Jesus becomes the

¹⁴ Alon Mandimpu Nainggolan et al., "Menggagas Penggunaan Benih Dalam Perayaan Paskah : Analisis Biblikal Yohanes 12 : 20-26," *EPIGRAPHE: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan Kristiani* 5, no. 1 (2021): 40–41.

¹⁵ Pitre, Brant. *Jesus and the Last Supper*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2015.

¹⁶ Martin H. Manser, *The New Matthew Henry Commentary* (Zondervan, 2006).

¹⁷ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke*, ed. Leon Morris, Second Edi. (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).



center of this new community, and those who are members are those who partake in His body and blood through the Eucharist, reminding them of His sacrifice and the salvific effects of His death.¹⁸

Forgiveness and Love

Jesus taught forgiveness and love even in the most challenging situations. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This serves as a guide for Christians in responding to offenses. Rather than responding with anger, Christians are encouraged to emulate Jesus' example by showing forgiveness and love, and by praying for those who offend them.¹⁹

Response to Offense

The response to offenses, such as those that occurred at the Paris 2024 Olympics, should reflect the teachings of love and forgiveness as taught by Jesus. The desecration of religious symbols can be deeply painful for the Christian community, but a response rooted in love and forgiveness can help to defuse tensions. In John 13:34, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." This loving response can serve as an example to the world of how to handle conflict with peace and understanding.

Conclusion

The incident involving the desecration of the "The Last Supper" at the Paris 2024 Olympics serves as a reminder of the importance of respecting religious symbols and the values held by others. From a Christian perspective, the best response is to follow Jesus' example in prioritizing forgiveness and love. Moreover, it is important to encourage interfaith dialogue and education that promotes understanding and tolerance. Freedom of expression should be exercised with wisdom and responsibility to ensure that it does not harm or offend others. Thus, religious representation in global events like the Olympics can promote peace and tolerance among various communities and cultures worldwide.

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¹⁸ David A deSilva, "An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation" (2004).

¹⁹ France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Matthew*.

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