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AMERICA/BRAZIL - The "crucified" football player is blasphemous: Bishops protest

Brasilia (Agenzia Fides) - "Shameful and disgraceful" image published on the cover of the famous sports magazine "Placar" which, in a montage, depicts the player Neymar as the Crucified Christ. The Bishops of Brazil protested openly, referring to the blasphemous film "The Innocence of Muslims." In a statement sent to Fides, the Episcopal Conference notes that "ridiculing faith and despising the religious sentiment of the people, by disrespectfully using the image of Jesus Christ, suggest the manipulation of religion with purely commercial purposes."

The controversial photo montage of Neymar, a rising star of Brazilian football, shows him on the cross with an expression of pain on his face, his hands and feet bleeding. The title "The Crucifixion of Neymar" refers to the incident that involved him: nicknamed "Cai-cai" ("fall-fall"), the player, practicing Christian, was pelted by critics for the frequency with which he falls in the penalty area.

The Bishops' note, signed by the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference, Mgr. Leonardo Ulrich Steiner, recognizes "freedom of expression, a fundamental principle of the democratic state" but indicates "limits on the exercise of this principle." He emphasizes also the insensitivity with respect to the global situation after the violence caused "by the misuse of religious figures."

The striker Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, 20 years old, led his team, Santos, to win the "Recopa Sudamericana." Convinced evangelical Christian, when Santos won the Paulista Championship in May last year, he honored it by wearing a headband with the inscription "100% Jesus." The player claims to pay in part of his billionaire salary to the Evangelical Church. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 29/09/2012)

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