



Dear Friends,
 You may be familiar with the words
 from a 1960's song by Jimmy
 McGregor:

*'Oh he's football crazy,
 he's football mad,
 Football's gone and taken away
 the little bit of sense he had...'*

They seem to reflect something of the
 general sense of excitement there
 has been in this country as England
 and fifteen other countries compete at
 the highest level in Portugal for the
 European Cup. The words might well
 express something of what you feel
 about people you know.

There is no doubt that European Cup
 fever has gripped the interest of
 many, even those who normally have
 only a nominal interest in the game.
 But for many followers of the game
 today football has become a religion,
 they live their lives by it, around it and
 for it. I recall some oft quoted words
 of Bill Shankly, one of Liverpool's
 greatest managers; he said, "*Some
 people think football is a matter of life
 and death...I can assure them it is
 much more serious than that.*" A
 purposely provocative statement but
 one which indicates the degree of
 commitment which he and countless
 others have given, and continue to
 give, to the game.

So what has all this to do with my
 contribution to this month's church
 magazine? Surely this ought to be a
 'Football Free Zone': Is nothing
 sacred? I believe all life is a gift from
 God and in that sense is sacred.
 There is nothing outside his concern
 and interest, not even the European
 Cup. But what might this mean, and
 what ought to be the Christian's
 response?

In spite of various aspects of the
 game of football, and of tournaments
 like the European Cup, about which
 we should rightly be concerned, the
 aim and intention of the vast majority

of fans, whether in Portugal or at
 home in front of the TV, is to delight in
 the game itself, to feast on the skills
 and abilities of the players, to admire
 the spirit of teamwork, to enjoy the
 camaraderie and friendship which the
 games can and do often engender,
 and to identify with the fortunes of
 those who represent their country.
 This all seems to me to be good, clean
 and wholesome; a great celebration of
 an ingredient of life which brings
 enjoyment to many people. Something
 which ought to be acknowledged as
 one of God's gifts to us for which we
 should be grateful to him.

Having said this, I believe we need to
 keep things in perspective. I recall
 some words of Glenn Hoddle when he
 was the England Coach at the World
 Cup in 1998, after taking the hard
 decision not to include 'Gazza' in the
 final squad of players, and finding
 more than one player in tears, he said,
*"It was a strange day and a difficult
 one for all concerned, but afterwards I
 walked into John Gormon's room and
 there on the television was a news
 report about an earthquake in
 Afghanistan in which thousands of
 people had been killed. It put
 everything into perspective."*

There is life and a world outside
 football and the European Cup, and
 never let us forget it. All things need to
 be kept in perspective, the perspective
 of God's love and care.

The Lord be with you.

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COMMON
 GROUND

In this edition John
 Bown writes our
 leading article. It
 also appears in the
 magazines of
 Bromley Methodist
 Church & Bromley
 URC