



### A Sporting Religion

A sign in a London café forbids wearing football (soccer) club colors. Too many fistfights between loyal fans made the measure necessary.

The sign reminds me of the first US football game I attended. The Tampa Bay Bucs played the Dallas Cowboys. There I met a Giants fan recently relocated to Florida. He held season tickets even though he did not live in New York anymore. For him watching other football teams was preferable to watching none.

During the game he commented on Tampa Bay's ability – an informal comment based on years of acquaintance with the sport. This enraged a drunken man in front of him. The drunk turned and threatened to commit murder. His friends forced him to turn around and be quiet, but it ruined the game for the long-time Giants fan. He left soon afterwards.

"Tsk, Tsk," Christian people say. "Why make sport a matter of life and death?" But I write this in London – a city where people were once executed for wearing religious colors. I also live in the US where the original colonies were safe havens for various streams of Christianity. Immigrants wanted

religious freedom, but also freedom from contact with the other traditions.

Christians in England and North America are far more tolerant today, but tolerance is becoming disinterest. Enthusiasm wanes. Financial investment in religious affiliation is in steep decline. Distinctive clothing is nearly gone. Conversely, sporting fans – many of them church attenders – invest ever more money in tickets, related clothing items and fantasy leagues.

Christian leaders are challenged to rekindle a level of enthusiasm, a devotion that restores

investment in religious practice and ministry. All this without returning to the intolerance and prejudice we once knew. If we do not, our faith becomes irrelevant in this post-modern age. Any ideas?

-mark

***"The drunk turned and threatened to commit murder"***