

Soccer-Mad Church Worships Diego Maradona as a God



(AP Photo/Dado Galdieri)

For many in Argentina, soccer is almost a religion. For a few, it is exactly that.

Argentina

is home to a religious movement called the Maradonian Church which

venerates former soccer player Diego Armando Maradona as a god.

Founded by three men, Hernán Amez, Alejandro

Verón and Héctor Campomar, in 2001 in the city of Rosario—186 miles from Buenos Aires—the Maradonian Church now claims 200,000 followers,

enrolled online on the official church website, from countries around

the world like the U.S., Mexico, Spain, Afghanistan, Philippines and Australia.

This unusual personality cult “was created

to express and preach throughout the world our love to ‘El Diego,’ who

has given us so much and has worked miracles”, says Amez, one of the

church’s three founding spiritual leaders.

Maradona, popularly known as ‘El Diego’ and

‘El Pelusa’ (The Fuzz, due to his frizzy hair) to millions of sports

fans, is reverently referred to within the church as D10S, a tetragrammaton resulting from mixing his playing number (10) with the

Spanish word for God (Dios).

In church ceremonies, the Bible has been replaced by Maradona's autobiography, and special rites like Maradonian baptisms, weddings and masses are celebrated on special dates of special Maradonian significance. "October 30 is the date of birth of the greatest soccer player ever," explains Amez. "And for 10 years now, we have been celebrating the Maradonian Nativity." (Maradona's next birthday will mark the start of the year 51 AD—Anno Diego).

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