

Gambling Group's 150-Foot 'Christ the Redeemer' Hot Air Balloon Outrages Christians

A marketing campaign featuring a 150-foot-tall replica of Brazil's famous landmark, "Christ the Redeemer"—with a soccer jersey on—has outraged some Australians.

The gambling company Sportsbet set the balloon floating over Melbourne last week to promote betting on the World Cup.

The Rev. Tim Costello, chair of the Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce, said the stunt was an overreach.

"There seems to be no corporate or civic responsibility to say, 'Hang on, is nothing sacred?' " he told Yahoo! Australia. "Is betting to absolutely dominate not just casino and gamble areas and TV rooms, but now literally the sky?

"This is extraordinary, if they knew anything about Jesus they'd know he'd be overturning tables in the gaming halls, because they're highly addictive and destroy lives," he added.

Costello has asked the sport's governing body, Football Federation Australia, to speak out against the campaign.

"One of the great statues in Rio is Jesus, and Brazil is a Catholic nation that takes its faith seriously and its football fanatically," he said. "You don't exploit those things that are sacred to people simply for your own advertising reach, and I think that soccer as a world game should be sensitive to that and certainly express their disdain for these types of advertisements."

Sportsbet also caused a stir with a controversial marketing campaign last year when it promoted a rugby clash between Australia and Britain with a vulgar sign featuring the teams'

mascots. The Victorian Government and Parks Victoria condemned the sign.