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GAMBLING

By D. B. Knox

The Protestant Faith

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Gambling is increasing in the community with the encouragement of the government, which is making money from it. Gambling is based on greed.

The good things of this world are a part of God's generous gifts to us. As St. Paul says, "God gives us all things richly to enjoy" (I Timothy 6:17). He gives us not only life itself, but health and friends, interests and possessions. All these are God's gifts. The trouble comes when some of these things occupy our attention out of all proportion to their true worth. As the Bible says, "when riches increase set not your heart on them" (Psalm 62:10). As the possibility of owning more grows we need to be on our guard lest our minds become obsessed with acquiring additional possessions. Covetousness, or the desire to have, is an attitude which quickly grows into an all absorbing passion if we relax our watchfulness against it. On the other hand, the reaction of asceticism is not the answer. Asceticism consists of a self-inflicted deprivation which has no purpose beyond itself. Going without for going without's sake - this is not God's way.

In contrast to asceticism, we should remember that God has given us His good gifts in order that we might enjoy them and give Him thanks; not that we should despise them or give them up merely for the sake of giving them up. Thankfulness to God and generosity in sharing with others is the proper way to respond to God's gifts. Yet we need to guard against covetousness by remembering that all these gifts are temporal. We should use them but not abuse them, because they will all pass away, and only eternal values, such as love, kindness, honesty and the fear of God, will survive the day of judgment and pass on with us into eternity.

The Bible is full of warnings against covetousness. It enjoins us to be content with such things as we have (Hebrews 13:5), and secondly

to share them with others in their need. In other words, while we thank God for His good gifts, we are to sit lightly to those of a material and temporal nature, and while using them, not be so absorbed with them that we want them more and more, but rather be willing to share them. A willingness to share is a great antidote to the covetous spirit, and the basis of generosity and a willingness to share is faith, that is, the recognition on the one hand that all we have is God's loving provision, and on the other a trust that He will provide for our future needs even though we are called upon to share our present resources with others in their present need. Faith in God as the supplier of our life is the source of a generous spirit as well as a contented spirit.

Australia's inordinate obsession with material possessions is reflected in its addiction to gambling. Gambling is an activity which springs from attitudes opposite to faith in God as the provider of all our gifts - gifts which we receive to enjoy for ourselves with carefree thankfulness, and to share generously with others in their need. Gambling is based on greed and covetousness, and on disregard for the other person's interests and welfare; that is why gambling is always wrong even on a small scale, because it is based on attitudes which are always wrong, namely on greed, selfish acquisitiveness and disregard of other people's interests. Of course, risk, and the excitement that accompanies risk, are not in themselves wrong, and they may be experienced in other activities which are not necessarily greedy or disregarding of other people. Thus business enterprises often carry an element of risk, and although they may be conducted in a covetous and disregarding manner, they need not be. Similarly, though it is possible to gamble on the Stock Exchange, and such gambling is wrong, investment through the Stock Exchange need not be a gamble, for although it is always accompanied by risk, it need not be motivated by

greed or selfish acquisitiveness, or by disregard of other people's welfare. But gambling cannot be conducted without greed and disregard for other people. These are its distinctive elements which distinguish it from the risks and excitement which may be experienced in other ways.

It is foolish untruth to say that all life is a gamble. and so excuse gambling. It is true that life always has risk, but risk is not gambling. Gambling is using risk in a wrong way, using it for the excitement of getting other peoples' money at the risk of your own. Gambling adds greed to risk.

But if this analysis of its character is not sufficient to prove that gambling is wrong, the simple practical test which Jesus gave us soon disposes of any doubt, namely the test that "by their fruits ye shall know them". Gambling hardens character and the more a person gambles the less Christ-like he becomes. This cannot be denied, for it is only necessary to look at the face of a habitual gambler at a Casino, to realize the effect of gambling on the character. So by its fruit as well as by its nature all gambling is seen to be wrong.

It should be a principle of a Christian community that the Government does not derive a profit by licensing something which is wrong. A government which derives tax from sin is as blameworthy as a man who lives on the immoral earnings of someone else. For many years now the Government of New South Wales has promoted facilities for gambling and has taken a rake-off. Thus Mr. Jack Lang introduced the State Lottery under the specious plea that the money was going to the hospitals, but in fact it goes to the Consolidated Revenue. Then Mr. Cahill's Government introduced the poker machine which everybody recognises is an iniquity and a spreader of misery. Mr. Cahill also introduced the Opera House Lottery, and Mr. Heffron's government

legalized off-course betting in the form of the T.A.B., though Mr Askin had already said that he would do so if elected. Consequently the Askin Government has done nothing to diminish the spread of gambling, especially the T.A.B.

Though it may not always be possible to suppress evil in the community it is the Government's duty to limit as much as possible the opportunities for it, not to increase them in order to tax it.

Unfortunately the Roman Catholic Church has not yet condemned gambling as wrong. This is because, as so often, it forms its judgment on externals rather than from the attitude of the heart. Thus, the Reverend T. Slater, SJ, in his well known Manual of Theology, volume 1, page 559, in defending gambling states, "I may make a present of my money to others if I choose. There is nothing immoral in agreeing to hand over a sum of money if I am beaten in a game either of skill or of chance'. It is fantastic to regard gambling as a form of giving, as Slater does here, and so to justify it, because the motives underlying gambling and those underlying giving are as far apart as motives can be. Gambling is based on greed and the disregard of the other person's interests, and leads to a hardening of character; but the giving of presents springs from generosity and a willingness to share with others freely and in love what God has given to us, and leads to Christ-likeness of character. Scripture constantly condemns covetousness in the heart and warns us to be on our guard against it. Consideration for other people's welfare is the positive attitude which the Scriptures enjoin; but gambling springs directly from the opposite, from covetousness and inconsiderateness. Thus no Christian should ever gamble, even in small amounts, because covetousness and the desire for other people's money is present even though the bet is small. To no practice do

the words of our Lord apply more clearly than to gambling: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:38).

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