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THE

PROTESTANT

FAITH

MONEY, GAMBLING AND THE CONSTITUTION

by

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Dr. Coombes, Governor of the Reserve Bank has recently warned Australians that they are too much taken up with the acquisition of material possessions. There is nothing novel in this warning, but it is refreshing to hear it come from someone so involved in the commercial world, as is a banker.

Material possessions 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. It was this that Dr. Coombes was warning against, and it is certainly a warning Australians need. 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. 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. But on the other hand 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.



Because of the ever present danger which Dr. Coombes draws attention to, 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 acquisitions 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 acquisitions, 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.

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 habitual gamblers 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 provided additional 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. And now Mr. Heffron's is legalizing off-course betting.

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. But actually it is not difficult as it is sometimes said to suppress illegal betting if the Government had the will to do it. For example, during the recent Royal Commission of Mr. Justice Kinsella which inquired into S.P. betting, important evidence was given by Inspector C.E. Brebner, Chief of the Vice Squad in the South Australian Police Force, who testified that in South Australia the Vice Squad, consisting of twelve men and a sergeant, had effectively suppressed illegal off-course betting. So much then for the often repeated argument that illegal betting cannot be suppressed. It could be suppressed, if there was a will to do this in the Government, by increasing the penalties and directing the Police to enforce the law. Significantly enough, Mr. Justice Kinsella who recommended off-course betting did not mention Inspector Brebner in his report. But instead of limiting this evil of gambling the Government's proposal will greatly increase it. This has been the experience in England as reported by Time Magazine of 15th November last, which stated that as a result of the recent Betting and Gaming Act which set up 15,000 betting agencies in Great Britain, betting, instead of being reduced, had been greatly increased; even housewives are now getting the habit, it was stated. There is no doubt that the proposals to make betting easier will bring a great deal of sorrow into the homes of New South Wales and it is shocking that the Government should legislate to receive a profit from misery and hardship.

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 wellknown 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; 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. But we must remember that God classifies action not by its outward appearance but by its motive, for as the Lord told Samuel "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart"; and His Word in 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).

I conclude by adding a note as a citizen on the constitutional aspect about this present proposal. As the secular press itself has admitted, the Government has no mandate from the people for this highly controversial legislation. The churches' request for



a referendum is very moderate, and to override this request and persist with this legislation, even gagging it through the House, when it has been endorsed neither by a general election nor a referendum is not only to ignore the welfare of the people but is also to act against the interests of the Constitution, as this has been developing in our State. As you know, the State constitution is unwritten, but nevertheless, real. For example you will remember the Civil War in the reign of Charles I was caused by the king's insistence on an obsolete royal prerogative, and his disregard of the development of the constitution in his day. What is needed is an act to safeguard the voice of the people when controversial legislation is being framed about which Parliament has been given no mandate. Perhaps the Governor should be required to dismiss a ministry which introduces contentious legislation without a mandate. Some such provision would be a great protection against a future takeover by, for example, a crypto-communist government using parliament to pass legislation after the election for which it had been given no mandate by the electors. The present government's disregard of the request for a referendum is a turning back of the constitutional clock.

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