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GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR ALCOHOL AND GAMBLING

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The State Government is to consider in two days time extending the trading hours of hotels. Alcohol is one of the greatest problems in our society and it is madness to extend the trading hours of liquor outlets. The only purpose can be to increase the amount of alcohol sold, because longer hours for the hotel people mean more work and extra costs and so they must be counting on selling more alcohol, although they say this is not so. But it is a common sense conclusion. With other drugs of addiction like heroin and marijuhana the whole civilised world is trying to stop their production. The opium farmers of Thailand are being encouraged to switch to other crops and it is a serious offense to be growing marijuhana in Australia and an analgesic powder now requires a doctor's prescription. But alcohol is a much greater problem, it produces much more misery all told, yet the government is thinking of extending its availability. How mad can you get?

The truth is that our community is hooked on alcohol. Even such a simple reform as random breath testing to stop drunken drivers is more than the government is able to support. Our goal ought to be to limit as far as possible the consumption of alcohol, just as the goal of limiting as far as possible the consumption of marijuhana or heroin has been the goal of the government for years. It wont be easy to arrive at this goal quickly but this is what we should be aiming at. Immense sums of money are spent on cleaning up after the results of alcohol abuse. Broken homes, road deaths and hospitalisation all costs the community money. A leading Sydney hospital reckons that 20% of its expenditure goes directly to dealing with sicknesses which are the direct result of alcohol. We have to pay for this in our taxes and it is only a small section of the cost to the community of excessive drinking of alcohol. Yet the government is encouraging the addiction.

There is another addiction that the government is encouraging, and that is gambling. The Premier proposes to add casinos and lotto to the many other forms of gambling we already have. The effects of gambling are very obvious. The hardened gambler has a callous character and this is often plain in his face. A visit to a casino will confirm this observation. The reason is simple, because gambling is based entirely on greed, covetousness and avariciousness. The greedy person is self-centred. We have been created by God to be other-person centred. Jesus is the exemplar of how human life should be lived. He said "I come to serve other people and not to be served myself". The happy home is the home where all find their centre in other members of the home; and the happy community is of the same character. We should find our centre in other people and we in ourselves or our own interests. Business should be conducted on the same principle. The business man should serve his customer genuinely. Business can, of course, be conducted on the principle of greed but no Christian should engage in business with this objective.

Gambling is essentially greedy. If there is no hope of gain there is no incentive. Take the example of your local Parents' and Citizens' Association at the neighbourhood school. Ask parents to make a small contribution towards a needed amenity for the school and little money is forthcoming; ask them to take a raffle ticket and you have no difficulty in obtaining the money. The difference is simply the presence of greed.

We reap what we sow and if we encourage greed in the community we will reap an unfriendly hard-hearted, Godless community which won't lift a hand to help other people in need. All gambling has this effect of reimposing self-centredness and strengthening greed in the heart of the

gambler. Casinos intensify this to a very considerable degree, because the possibility of winning very large sums is held before the eyes with the increasing strengthening of greed and covetousness. That is why we should be directing our prayers that God will give us a God-fearing community where His name is hallowed.

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