

GAMBLING AND CHARACTER

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'THE CHRISTIAN FAITH'

You may have read in the paper recently of an American tourist who rescued a woman who was drowning in Circular Quay. He expressed surprise that no one in the crowd who was watching had jumped in to help her before he came, for he had to push his way through them to reach the railings. This incident is an ominous indication of how our community is drifting into selfishness and indifference to other people's welfare. We are not willing to put ourselves out to help.

We ought not to be surprised that this is happening to our community. Ever since Jack Lang introduced the state lottery fifty years ago gambling facilities have been on the increase, first the lottery, then the pokies, then the TAB and now the government is toying with casinos. Gambling has nothing to redeem it, it is thoroughly self centred and if the government encourages gambling by making it so easy and legal, we must not be surprised if the inevitable fruits of this self centred, money centred, other-person-ignoring habit creates a national character which spreads through every other area of our relationships with one another. The American tourist came from a culture which was originally the same as Australia, but now he is surprised that the Australians are so indifferent to another person struggling for life a few yards away in the water. Gambling hardens character. It is much better that gambling should be illegal and underground, with just a few determined persons indulging in gambling, and even that criminals should run it, than that this vice should be easy and legal throughout the community, because vices affect the national character. It is a stupid argument that

because it is difficult to suppress gambling, it should be made legal. Legalising it does not remove the criminal element, but legalization simply makes it available to corrupt the characters of people who would never gamble if it were illegal. But by encouraging people constantly to think about our own hopes of making money in disregard for other people and their hopes and wishes, we create a character hateful to God, for it contradicts His own character and His intentions for human nature which He has made, for He always seeks our welfare.

We will all have to give an account to God on the Judgement Day, but in the meanwhile covetousness and greed which gambling feeds will bring great sorrow to the community. If we will not bestir ourselves in the simple matter of saving someone from drowning in the calm waters of the harbour a few yards from the shore (and we are all good swimmers in Australia) we are not likely to bestir ourselves in a national crisis to resist, for example, a coup d'etat or a civil rebellion aimed to take away our freedom and to establish dictatorship. We will reap what we sow, and if we sow to selfishness we will reap slavery. The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceeding small. We ought to use every endeavour to repeal these laws which have established gambling in the community and first we should deal with ourselves. We ought not to set our hearts on material gain but on serving God and serving our neighbours, looking to that spiritual gain of eternal friendship with one another and with our saviour now and for always. As Jesus said "Beware of all greed and covetousness. For a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses".

Not in possessing things, but in relationships, friendly relationships in the home and with the neighbours, which come about by forgetting ourselves and sincerely serving others, that is where the abundance of life is found, and especially in our happy relationship with God through forgiveness.

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