

# **GAMBLING - A SOCIAL SICKNESS**



**PUBLISHED BY THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
IN N.S.W.**

Representing the Church of England (Diocese of  
Sydney), Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational  
and Baptist Churches,  
Churches of Christ and Free Presbyterian Churches

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# GAMBLING - A SOCIAL SICKNESS



The character of a nation—its ideals, aims, conduct—can be changed either by invasion from outside with the consequent imposition of an alien ideology or by the infiltration of forces already established within the community. We believe that the latter process is at work in various ways at the present time and the growing impact of the gambling craze in N.S.W. is an example. The Christian Church has a duty to speak frankly and clearly about this serious trend which is working against the social health of our people. If unchecked, it will do irreparable damage to the moral fibre of our society and moral bankruptcy will overtake us no matter how financial the Treasury may become as a result of taxation levied upon organized gambling.

THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN N.S.W. has maintained a consistent witness in the community concerning this growing social problem and the recent publicity on this matter arose largely as a result of the Council's deputation to the Premier of N.S.W. The deputation told the Premier quite frankly that any Government was to be blamed which encouraged gambling facilities and that true statesmanship could not regard gambling revenue as an essential part of the State's economic structure. We stressed the undesirability of the Government's proposal to introduce the jackpot totalisator which subsequent experience proved to be such a failure that it has now been abandoned.

The Christian Brothers' Mammoth Lottery with a £190,000 hotel as first prize has been followed by an Air Force Association Lottery with a £250,000 hotel as its first prize—all of which shows the extent to which this craze is tending. Recently the Chief Secretary, the Hon. C. A. Kelly, declined to receive a Council of Churches' deputation on the excuse that the Premier's absence in the U.S.A. made him too busy to discuss these matters which gravely affect the welfare of the community.

The Council urges all who are concerned for the true welfare of society to take a stand against the gambling habit and to make their Parliamentary Representative aware of their opposition to the way in which the Government has continued to encourage its indulgence.

A. W. STEPHENSON, President.  
B. G. JUDD, Secretary.

## THE EXTENT OF GAMBLING

Public attention has been increasingly focussed upon the extent of gambling throughout our Australian Community. Even those who appear indifferent to its moral and spiritual consequences are becoming alarmed at the economic consequences of this increasing "craze". In October, 1957 the "Sydney Morning Herald" published the result of an extensive survey which showed the following sums invested annually by the public in the following avenues of gambling:

Horse-racing, trotting and dogs ....	£13,213,104
Licensed bookmakers .....	113,169,600
S.P. bookmakers .....	50,000,000
Lotteries. Ticket Sales .....	12,752,500
Agents' Fees .....	400,000
Poker Machines .....	40,000,000
Art Unions .....	796,525
	£ 230,331,729

Gambling is the transference of property on the basis of chance. There are only two moral ways by which property can be secured: either by giving its equivalent value in exchange or by receiving it as a gift expressing the donor's goodwill. (Inheritance comes under this heading.)

GAMBLING IS NEITHER. Though widely sanctioned by social usage it constitutes a form of "robbery by mutual consent". The gambler dethrones reason and enthrones chance. He is "an ignorant and unreasonable man, for he either neglects to inform himself about the nature of the

odds against him as do, for example, the credulous people who believe that they have any significant chance of winning a large prize in a lottery or football pool, or, knowing the odds, he deliberately makes himself believe that the figures do not mean precisely what they say." ("English Life and Leisure" by Rowntree and Lavers. p.147.)

Gambling is the organized rejection of reason, for the individual, as well as the community. Civilization depends upon a capacity for rational control of conduct. When a man decides to back a horse the known cause (that he hands over a sum of money to a bookmaker) will have a foreseeable effect, namely that he will lose his money unless a certain improbable event occurs. The degree of the improbability is expressed mathematically by the odds. The gambler does not expect the reasonable effect to follow the cause. He expects the improbable to happen and projects himself into a fairy land of superstition where "miracles" are to be expected. This constitutes an attitude which is opposed to the intellectual order on which civilization is based.

## ANTI-SOCIAL

Further, gambling is wrong because it is an attempt to obtain property without working for it or giving its equivalent in exchange. The gambler comes to accept the anti-social philosophy that the really "smart" man does not bother to work hard but learns to gamble effectively.

Gambling issues from a desire to profit by the loss of others; it

violates the principle that material benefits should be distributed according to MERIT AND NOT CHANCE and it leads to many evil consequences both spiritual and economic. Gambling works against those efforts which are being made to increase the nation's capital resources through saving. The money rendered unavailable for this purpose is the vast sum which circulates between the gambling sections of the community; now in this man's pocket, now in that man's, BUT NEVER DOING A USEFUL JOB. Even if we choose to regard it all as a vast amusement industry, the community pays a high price in terms of manpower which could otherwise be employed for productive purposes. On 20th November, 1957 the Hon. F. W. Spicer, speaking in the N.S.W. Legislative Council gave details on which he based his estimate "that about 30,000 people make their living from racing and other branches of the sport". (Hansard p.1940.)

## CONFUSED THINKING

is shown by those who try to excuse gambling by equating it with the taking of normal everyday risks. Let it be repeated: GAMBLING IS THE TRANSFERENCE OF PROPERTY ON THE BASIS OF CHANCE and, if this be remembered, it should be obvious that such statements "insurance is a gamble", "marriage is a lottery" and "the Stock Exchange is all gambling", are wide of the mark. If a marriage is successful, both parties gain: whoever heard of a lottery in which everybody wins! Insurance is aimed at eliminating the effects

of chance and preserving property against its ravages. Since so much of industry and commerce has to be financed by comparatively small sums contributed by a comparatively large number of people through joint stock companies, a market is essential where shares can be bought and sold. The Stock Exchange is as essential an institution as any other market and can, on occasion be abused by manipulators whose "inside knowledge" enables them "to play the 'Change". Such action merits the strongest condemnation but it would be foolish to suggest that it represented a large proportion of the total transactions on the Stock Exchange. If many persons provide the money to launch a venture which succeeds then both promoter and shareholder benefit as does the community at large. Some people have allowed their thinking on this subject to become so confused that they say the only way in which people can hope to enjoy the comfort of their own home is to win a major lottery prize. The fact is, if they were to buy a lottery ticket each week for 40 years the odds against winning the first prize are 48 to 1. It may be the easy way but it is most uncertain. Surely no better argument could be advanced for the virtue of hard work. More than half the homes in Australia are owned by their occupants but only a tiny proportion have been bought with lottery prizes.

## POKER MACHINES

In 1956 the N.S.W. Government legalised poker machines and now derives a revenue of about

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£800,000 each year from licence fees for their use. The balance sheets of some clubs disclose a gross income from these "one-armed bandits" amounting to tens of thousands of pounds. The excuse is given that the clubs cannot continue without these machines, which is certainly a poor commentary upon the social usefulness of such clubs. Does this mean that drinking and gambling are their reason for existence? The fascination which the poker machine exercises over otherwise rational men is as astonishing as it is socially and economically damaging. How can tradespeople be paid for really necessary commodities if such large sums are to come out of the pockets of a section of the community year after year? Two States of the Commonwealth have effectively banned the "bandits". A Government with the interests of the community at heart would rid N.S.W. of this menace. So far, N.S.W. has been spared the invasion of the legalised "betting shop" although this was mooted during 1957 before the Government turned from that proposal to introduce the jackpot totalisator legislation. In whatever form it may be devised, the BETTING SHOP would bring the Government-sponsored temptation to gamble right into the very heart of the community. The aggravating effect upon the problem of juvenile delinquency can well be imagined.

We should seek an assurance from our local Member of the Legislative Assembly that BETTING SHOPS will not be introduced into this State.

## THE CHRISTIAN AND GAMBLING

The foregoing considerations must be acknowledged by any reasonable and responsible citizen, whether he claims to be a Christian or not. For the Christian there are additional factors which call for attention. Covetousness is at the root of this desire for "easy" money—to get something without earning it. The Bible teaches that covetousness is idolatry. "No covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5.) The worship of chance leads to practical atheism and the rejection of that sense of responsibility to God which is basic to the life of faith. The Christian perceives that the worst aspect of indulgence in gambling is its insidious effect upon character.

The gambler who begins in a small way soon finds himself so caught in the toils of the gambling fever that it ceases to be "a pastime" and becomes an all-consuming force, dominating his outlook on life generally. It eventually comes to affect his business relationships and his trustworthiness. It is quite unrealistic to talk of "moderation" to the gambler who is caught in the frenzied grip of this mania.

## STEWARDSHIP

The Christian acknowledges that he is a steward—not an absolute owner—of what God has committed to his keeping, and cannot, therefore "do what he likes" with his money. He must act with a sense of responsibility, having regard to the effect which

his actions may have upon others. To acquiesce passively in the acceptance of gambling practices does put a potential stumbling block in our brother's way. It is a negation of the Christian principle that we should do unto others as we would that they should do unto us.

## "A GOOD CAUSE"

The Christian rejects the dangerous philosophy that "the end justifies the means". Gambling promoters often seek to throw a cloak of respectability over their activities by claiming that a percentage of the proceeds will go to "a good cause". By fostering the notion that charity cannot be supported apart from gambling, we have done much to "dry up" the wells of genuine generosity in the community. If a man intends to help a hospital, let him make his donation and not require the remote possibility of winning a prize to induce him to do so. GAMBLING IS WRONG IN PRINCIPLE AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH "A GOOD CAUSE" CANNOT CHANGE ITS CHARACTER.

## "BANK OF N.S.W. REVIEW"

The November, 1957 issue of "The Bank of N.S.W. Review" declared that, while gambling was increasing in this country, it did not constitute a serious economic or social threat. Just what qualifications the anonymous writer of the article had for declaring that gambling had little economic sig-

nificance, his statement that it has little social effect will be challenged by every experienced social worker who is in close contact with the life of the average citizen. As to the economic consequences, the Bank of N.S.W. article does not attempt to answer the very serious point mentioned above that the millions of pounds which circulate between the gambling sections of the community are thereby prevented from doing a useful and constructive job. It is difficult to see how so important an economic consequence could have escaped the attention of the "Bank of N.S.W. Review". "The Review" concludes on a more realistic note by saying: "If charities, churches, (is he referring to the Roman Catholic Church?) and States look more and more to the people's gambling instinct to provide additional sources of revenue, then predictions for the future suggested by George Orwell in his grim satire on the all-powerful police State could well be heeded. Describing the general body of the population in "1984", Orwell wrote:

"Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, films, football, beer, and, above all gambling filled up the horizon of their minds. The lottery, with its enormous weekly prizes, was the one public event to which the proles paid serious attention and the principal thing for which some of them lived. It was their delight, their anodyne, their intellectual stimulant."