

**Lutheran Church of Australia:
Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions**

GAMBLING

Adopted by the Commission, May 1987

It is a matter of concern to many members of the church that governments have increasingly become involved in the promotion of gambling, which has thereby gained greater acceptance and respectability in the community. As a result there is much confusion about the morality of gambling. Therefore the Commission has readdressed this issue.

1. Gambling, as commonly understood in our society, is an activity involving two or more people engaged in the betting or staking of something of value, with consciousness of the risk of loss and the hope of gain, on the outcome of a game, a contest, or an uncertain event whose result may be determined by chance or accident. The stake may be almost anything, and may vary infinitely, from something of negligible monetary value to something of very great value indeed. Gambling can take many forms: betting on horse races, lotteries, poker machines, games of chance, speculation¹ in financial commodities.

2. Although the Bible does not speak specifically about gambling, it does say a good deal about money, the use of money, and our relationship with and responsibility to our neighbour. In assessing the morality of gambling one has to consider such matters as: the motives people have for gambling; the effect of gambling on others as well as on oneself. It is recognised that some activities of this kind fall into a grey area, and are matters for individual Christian conscience.

3. Probably the most common motive behind all gambling is the desire for quick gain and wealth. Such a motive is quite contrary to the Christian ethic which puts greed and covetousness among those things directly forbidden in the Ten Commandments (see Luther's explanation of the Ninth Commandment in the *Small Catechism*). There is a real danger that those who buy lottery tickets for fun or go to the races to 'have a flutter' end up gambling for this wrong motive.

The church, which knows through the word of God of the wickedness of the human heart, should therefore warn its members against the covetousness and selfishness which are normally associated with gambling.

4. It is often overlooked that all winning in gambling necessarily involves loss for others who have taken part in the gamble. Consciences of Christians should be alerted to this and to the fact that gambling activities may mislead and cause harm to other people.

5. In our society gambling in all its forms is promoted vigorously and pursued enthusiastically, even by governments, and its appeal is directed toward people's basic selfish nature. The reliance on chance or luck conflicts with the biblical teaching that we should trust in God. It is part of God's order of creation that our own needs and those of others should be supplied through work (2 Thess 3:6-12).

6. The church should likewise point out other serious evils to which gambling can and does lead – evils, both public and private, economic and moral. It often causes in those addicted to it a wasteful use of family income, time and energy, and leads to family hardship. It opens the

way for corruption on many levels of society. It is frequently associated with criminals and racketeers. It often leads to stealing and other crimes.

7. The church should also in its own activities discourage money-raising efforts which would foster the gambling spirit and in doing so violate the Christian ethic.

8. The church should encourage in its members a deep sense of personal responsibility for all of their activities, and lead them to think in terms of mutual aid and support, and concern for the conscience of one's neighbour, and thus to witness to Christian faith and love in the community. Christians belong to God and should not let their hearts be possessed by money or the love of it (1 Tim 6:9-10).

¹ *'Speculation' is here understood as the 'action or practice of buying and selling goods, stocks and shares, etc. in order to profit by the rise or fall in the market value, as distinct from regular trading or investment'. (See the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.)*