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**Legalized Gambling: An
Exercise in Self Delusion**

By Harry N. Hollis, Jr.
for Baptist Press

On October 15, 1976, the U.S. Commission on the Review of the National Policy Toward Gambling will make its final report. It will recommend what forms of gambling, if any, should be legalized in the United States. We do not have to wait for this report to know much support for the legalization of more gambling exists in this country.

This growing sentiment for legalization of gambling discourages many Christians who are deeply concerned about the unwholesome effect of gambling on individuals and on the American society.

Gambling fosters a something-for-nothing mentality which is unhealthy for people both economically and morally. Christians should oppose it with firmness and intelligence. Since many people argue strongly for the legalization of more and more forms of gambling, it is important to know how to answer them. Here are some of their arguments:

1. "People will gamble anyway, so the government should get the revenue." This argument appeals to financially desperate governments. In truth, legalized gambling cannot provide enough money to make up for the moral costs that must be paid when the government gets into the gambling business. Indeed, when higher police, court, and welfare expenses are added, the costs to governments are higher by far than revenue received from gambling taxes. Furthermore, bureaucracy that must be added to administer legalized gambling, such as a state operated lottery, will use up much of the revenue it collects.

2. "Gambling is at worst a victimless crime and the government has no right to interfere." Gambling is certainly not victimless. It affects other people than the gamblers. It affects families who often do not have adequate resources due to the waste of money through gambling. It affects government officials who are offered bribes by organized crime. It affects businesses which cannot get people who are broke from gambling to pay their bills. A Los Angeles department store manager reported that during racing season the receipt of bad checks doubled, absenteeism increased, and that time payments decreased by 30 percent.

3. "Gambling helps people who are bored with life because it enables them to escape their dull routines." This argument is based on the foolish belief that a society will be happier if it can enjoy the diversion of gambling. It ignores the fact that most gamblers lose most of the time. There is a better way to escape boredom. Gambling will not really bring permanent escape. It will only increase anxiety and lead to further unhappiness.

4. "Gambling is often controlled by organized crime. The state should control gambling to take the action away from the criminals." Organized crime must be fought diligently, but the legalization leads to an attitude of leniency toward illegal gambling, thus causing more people to break the law as they try illegal forms of gambling.

There are strong arguments against legalized gambling:

1. Legalized gambling leads to economic problems. The additional revenues brought in through the taxation of gambling are offset by the harm that gambling does to the economy. Unpaid bills, bankruptcy, embezzlement, and bad checks often accompany legal gambling. No economy can survive on a something-for-nothing economic philosophy.

2. Legalized gambling gives government consent to a harmful activity. More and more people will gamble as this activity is legalized. Indeed the government may use ads, as in the case of lottery promotions, to entice people to gamble. How long can such a government command the respect of the governed? Not very long.

3. Legalized gambling places a heavy burden on the poor who are least able to pay for their gambling losses. It encourages the pursuit of the hopeless dream of instant wealth. It places them in an ever more hopeless situation as they seek to gamble more and more to catch up.

4. Legalized gambling will lead to the corruption of public officials. Criminals will seek to bribe politicians for a piece of the action. Furthermore, legalized gambling will open up the door for other associated crimes. It has done so in those areas where gambling has already been legalized.

5. Legalized gambling often causes broken homes and lives. Gambling leads frequently to the undermining of character, to covetousness, to recklessness, and to unwise stewardship. It is detrimental to a society. Momentary pleasure is far outweighed by the misery it causes.

As moral standards change and as the government looks for more and more financial resources, the legalization of gambling will continue to be attractive to many people. Here are some actions that Christians concerned about gambling can take to help.

1. Share the good news that there is a genuinely full life available through Jesus Christ. The gospel offers a satisfying alternative to a life based on chance. The crutch of gambling is not needed by those open to the joys of a relationship to Jesus Christ.

2. Teach Christian stewardship as a way to combat the covetousness that often leads people to gamble. Demonstrate through your own life-style that giving is better than grasping, that sharing is better than coveting.

3. Work to educate people about the fake claims that supporters of legalized gambling often make. Seek to educate people about the harmful effects of gambling, using such institutions as churches, schools, labor unions, businesses and civic organizations.

4. People already addicted to gambling should be helped through rehabilitation programs. Give your support to programs which provide guidance and counseling. Organizations for compulsive gamblers such as Gamblers Anonymous can help to rehabilitate gamblers.

5. Support legislation which will check the spread of gambling and eliminate it where possible. Work to prevent the further legalization of gambling. Contact your legislators and express your opposition.

6. Encourage effective enforcement of antigambling laws. Strict and fair law enforcement is essential to deter gambling. If laws are not enforced people will lose respect for them.

Gambling is contrary to biblical principles, harmful to individuals and detrimental to society. Christians should oppose this greedy parasite. We must teach that America cannot afford to take a chance on gambling. (BP)

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a five-part series on contemporary moral issues and the law written by Harry N. Hollis, Ph.D., director of family and special moral concerns for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Baptist Bond Broker
Indicted on 10 Counts

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Henry C. Atkeison, a church bond broker and dealer and former Southern Baptist pastor, was indicted by a federal grand jury on 10 counts of defrauding church bond and investment certificate investors and misusing the proceeds from sales.

If convicted as charged, the 47-year-old Atkeison could be fined up to \$90,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 20 years.

Atkeison did business under the legal corporate names of Ambassador and of Atalbe Christian Credit Association, Inc., both headquartered in Brentwood, Tenn., a Nashville suburb. Ambassador and Atalbe are currently before U. S. Dist. Court Judge L. Clure Morton in connection with a civil suit filed by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Nashville attorney Fred Bryan has been appointed trustee for the two companies which now have a status of "tantamount to bankruptcy," according to E. Warner Bass, a Nashville attorney representing Bryan.

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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

BUREAUS**ATLANTA** Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041**DALLAS** Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996**MEMPHIS** Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461**NASHVILLE** (Baptist Sunday School Board) Gomer Lesch, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 254-5461**RICHMOND** Richard M. Styles, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151**WASHINGTON** W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Wrapup**Executive Committee Votes
To Study Seminary Campaign**

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Executive Committee, in semi-annual session here, approved a study to determine the feasibility of a joint fund raising campaign for the six SBC theological seminaries and recommended record SBC Cooperative Program and convention operating budgets for 1976-77.

The 65-person committee also approved a fund raising campaign for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, approved an SBC Sunday School Board request for launching a magazine for senior adults, and recommended St. Louis as the site of the 1980 SBC meeting, June 10-12.

Among other actions, the committee also approved a complex formula for distribution of Cooperative Program unified budget funds to the six seminaries and recommended a change in the SBC constitution which would decrease the number of local members serving as trustees of SBC boards and agencies.

Actions on the budgets, the 1980 SBC site, and the proposed constitutional change on local members will be among items needing final approval by "messengers" to the 1976 SBC in Norfolk, June 15-17.

The feasibility study would determine the need for a joint fund raising campaign by the seminaries of up to \$30 million, which would be divided equally among the seminaries. The study grew out of an earlier request by Owen Cooper of Yazoo City, Miss., an Executive Committee member and former SBC president, that the seminaries be allowed to launch a \$100 million joint campaign.

Any such campaign would not go to churches but seek out support from individuals, business organizations and foundations.

In September, the Executive Committee allowed Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, to launch a \$8 million fund raising campaign in accordance with the SBC's business and financial plan.

At the February meeting here the committee approved a similar \$10 million campaign for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, during the period of January 1977-January 1, 1980.

Either campaign could be coordinated with a nationwide effort but each seminary would keep whatever it raised in local campaigns and divide the proceeds of any joint effort.

The Executive Committee recommended a record \$55 million Cooperative Program budget for 1976-77, which would include a \$49 million basic operating budget, \$1,080,000 for capital needs and some \$4,920,000 in challenge funds.

The proposed budget exceeds the 1975-76 goal, which calls for a \$51 million total budget, including a \$41 million basic operating budget, \$1,080,000 for capital needs and the remainder in challenge funds.

A convention operating budget of \$909,000 was also approved for 1976-77. That includes the annual budget of the Executive Committee, the cost of operating the annual SBC meeting, the SBC's contribution to the Baptist World Alliance and other items.

The Sunday School Board won approval to launch "Mature Living," a monthly magazine with large type for senior adults, with a first-issue target date of April, 1977. A spokesman said the board projects a monthly circulation of 100,000 by the end of the first year of circulation.

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The formula for distribution of Cooperative Program funds to seminaries grew out of an increasing need to devise a manner of distribution which would more adequately fund the needs of the seminaries.

The formula, which includes a number of complex factors, was based on a long study by SBC leaders and educational consultants and was unanimously approved by the six seminary presidents.

The basic alteration in the SBC constitution's Article VI on the question of local trustees would change the number of trustees from "the city or vicinity of the state in which the board is located" from 18 to 12. It would also reduce the number of local members from any one church from 5 to 3.

The recommendation grew out of a motion at the 1973 Southern Baptist Convention by Kenneth Barnett, then a messenger from Oklahoma, which would have had the effect of abolishing local boards altogether and seeking wider representation.

Barnett, now pastor of First Baptist Church, Springer, N. Mex., attended the hearings and told the Executive Committee's administrative subcommittee that he would support the revised proposal at the convention.

Last year, an Executive Committee recommendation to the convention that the figures be reduced from 18 to 16 and 5 to 4 was referred back for further study.

The 1976 recommendation, in addition to lessening the local board members, would also lower membership requirements for representation in much the same manner as the original 1973 motion on the convention floor requested.

If approved, boards of trustees would be allowed an additional member from each state with 250,000 Southern Baptists, instead of the current 500,000. Each state would also be allowed an additional representative for each additional 250,000, as the SBC constitution now stipulates.

Another suggested change, for Commissions whose trustees are not determined by charter requirements, would reduce local members from 10 to 8 and representatives of the same church from 5 to 2.

The original motion grew out of a feeling that SBC boards and agencies need wider representation. The latest recommendation seeks to incorporate that feeling but not abolish local members because of the need of agencies to have members close by to assist with corporate work that a board made up of only distant members would find more difficult to accomplish.

Baker J. Cauthen, executive secretary of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, told the Executive Committee, "This recommendation is a compromise between the recommendation (originally) on the floor of the convention and the working reality of the agencies. To reduce it to 12 persons is painful to the agencies, but this is better than reducing it to 8 or 6 or none. We appreciate the work of local members." He said he understood the problem and "could live with it."

In other action, the Executive Committee agreed to recommend to the convention in Norfolk that the Home Mission Board be allowed to change its charter so that its church loan division could guarantee loans to churches from other lending institutions when advisable. The change is in keeping with the laws of Georgia, where the Home Mission Board was chartered.

The Executive Committee also voted to sponsor a Consultation on Program Budgeting to give SBC agency heads, state executive secretaries and other appropriate personnel more detailed information on the nature and value of program budgeting.