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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 23, 1978

78-82

Sixth in a Series of Seven

Legalized Gambling: Bingo,
Exercise in 'Outright Theft'

By Robert O'Brien

ATLANTA (BP)--Bingo--a game stereotyped as a harmless pastime for little old ladies, charities and churches--has become one of America's major rip-offs.

While society has debated the pros and cons of a wide variety of gambling, which has infiltrated 44 states in some form since New Hampshire legalized a lottery in 1963, bingo has escaped widespread notice.

But growing evidence, gleaned from the 34 states which have legalized bingo, documents that it, like more insidious-sounding forms of gambling, attracts crime and produces no long-term economic benefits.

Not only does bingo chicanery compromise its participants, but it opens them up for manipulation and infiltration.

Investigators and reporters, digging into the evidence, have found an alarming intrusion of organized crime, games grossly unfair to charitable and church sponsors and players, and, as one state gaming official put it, a "Pandora's Box" of problems.

Voters in Georgia were told after they legalized bingo in 1976 that they had done a favor for churches and charitable organizations. But the evidence indicates they did a favor for organized crime.

"Georgia Gov. George Busbee says state and local authorities have evidence that Miami-based 'Mafia types' are involved in the operation of many bingo halls that have sprung up across the state since the passage of the amendment to the state constitution," reported "The Christian Science Monitor."

Some Georgia lawmakers, including state Rep. Benson Hamm of Forsythe, doubt that anything other than prohibition of gambling will quell a situation Gov. Busbee terms "out of control." Hamm said, "I don't see how you can fix the law so that only one group of people can gamble."

Widely gathered evidence from experts, the Monitor says, "warns that such so-called 'social gambling' and many 'Las Vegas nights,' carnivals and raffles staged in the name of charity or worthwhile causes hide some of the biggest gambling 'rip-offs' across the United States.... Most clergymen and other sponsors are not aware of the fraud involved.... but are themselves dupes of professional outsiders.... Law enforcement officials complain that mobsters and professional gamblers have moved into these 'harmless' social activities in almost every state."

In fact, experience with the problems surrounding bingo games in Los Angeles played a major role in causing California legislators to reject a state lottery, Evelle Younger, the state's attorney general, told "U. S. News and World Report." He said, "We have had enough problems with bingo games."

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James Ritchie, executive director of the Commission on the Review of the National Policy Toward Gambling, has an even more pungent view: "Bingo in this country borders on outright theft," he said. "I'd ban it if I could."

The gambling commission, which issued a voluminous report, "Gambling in America," recommends that states make no distinction between charitable bingo and commercial bingo because it could see no difference between the two. A commission survey found that "people play charitable bingo for the same reasons they might participate in legal bingo: bingo provides entertainment and a chance to make money."

It adds: "Bingo's reputation as a harmless form of fund raising is not entirely deserved. Too often the charities these bingo operations ostensibly support receive only a minute portion of the handle (proceeds) from the games, and players who feel they are victims of unfair or fixed games have no redress."

The commission's report points to racketeer influence and "skimming of the take and other scams...practiced by both organized groups and shady independent operators."

It notes also that "bingo is one of the more regressive forms of gambling, that is, those in the lower income groups spend proportionately more of their income playing it than those in higher income categories.

"Of all types of gambling, legal and illegal," the commission continues, "only lotteries enjoyed a higher rate of participation than bingo (which all ages and sexes play), yet the bingo handle in 1974 was double that of lotteries."

That observation surfaced a thread which runs through abundant research on other types of legalized gambling--the dollars flow, but to where? Not to the consumer and pitifully little to the state in the case of a variety of gambling. That includes most of the estimated \$2 billion annual take of bingo.

"Skimming--the practice of under-reporting income from games and pocketing the difference--is thought to be the biggest problem regulatory agencies and law enforcement officials have with bingo," the commission said. Not only does government not get its fair share from taxes, it continued, but it also loses on license fees based on the artificially low reports of the take.

"And the charities these games ostensibly support, as well as the players themselves, lose," the commission added.

"Fully 44 percent of those living in states where bingo is illegal, believe it is legal, making bingo the form of gambling about which public knowledge is the least accurate," the report said. "The confusion may be partly due to the game's close association with respected community institutions, such as churches and charitable groups...."

That's reminiscent of another period in American history--1790 to 1860--when 24 of the 36 states sponsored lotteries to finance improvement. Even 200 churches received funds from them.

"By 1883, the lotteries' susceptibility to fraud and their victimization of the poor had become so patent that states began to prohibit them," writes Paul M. Minus Jr. "Louisiana was the last to do so. The Louisiana Lottery Company, which operated nationwide until the end of the century, aroused so much criticism as to prompt passage of state and federal laws to drive it from the country."

That, contrasted with the modern-day rush to dance to legalized gambling's "something for nothing" tune, evokes George Santayana's observation that "those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the sixth of a seven part series on the legalized gambling dilemma, by Robert O'Brien, news editor of Baptist Press. The May, 1978, issue of "Home Missions" magazine explores the legalized gambling scene, as will the Aug., 1978, issue of "World Mission Journal."

Seminaries Slate Joint
Meeting in Georgia

CALLAWAY GARDENS, Ga. (BP)--About 200 faculty and administrators from the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries will participate in a joint meeting at Callaway Gardens, Ga., June 8-11.

Landrum Leavell, chairman of the president's group of the six seminaries, said the retreat is the first such activity in recent years in which seminary representatives have gathered to discuss "matters that are of great concern to all of the seminaries."

Recently, questionnaires were sent to faculty members to determine areas of greatest concern. These responses will form the basis for discussions during the four-day conference, the week before the SBC annual meeting, June 13-15, in Atlanta.

Particularly strong emphasis, Leavell said, will be given to the SBC's Bold Mission Thrust goal to proclaim the message of Christ to everyone in the world by the year 2000.

In addition to the seminary representatives, convention leaders attending the conference will include Grady Cothen, William Tanner and Porter Routh, chief executives respectively of the SBC Sunday School Board, Home Mission Board and Executive Committee.

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Runnels Resigns Church,
Joins Southwest Baptist

Baptist Press
5/23/78

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Olan H. Runnels, first vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention, has resigned a 10-year pastorate at Swope Park Baptist Church to become a vice president at Southwest Baptist College, Bolivar, Mo.

Runnels, who began at Southwest Baptist May 23, will work with the vice president for development, Kenneth Edmondson, in institutional development, according to college president James Sells.

Runnels, 46, is a native of Oklahoma and holds degrees from the University of Corpus Christi and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned the doctor of theology degree. Previous pastorates include four churches in Texas and one in Oklahoma.

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Baptist Agencies Plan
Hunger Convocation

Baptist Press
5/23/78

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--While the majority of Americans are getting the turkey and pumpkin pie ready for Thanksgiving homecomings this November, a group of Southern Baptist representatives will be meeting in North Carolina to talk about world hunger.

A Convocation on World Hunger, the first to be held in the Southern Baptist Convention, is being planned for Nov. 20-22 at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center near Asheville, N.C.

According to W. David Sapp, director of organization for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the meeting's objectives will be to stimulate awareness of the world hunger problem, to share information on hunger-related activities of SBC agencies and to provide opportunities for an exchange of ideas.

Organizers of the convocation also hope participants will identify practical steps which churches and other Southern Baptist bodies can take to help alleviate hunger.

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"We intend to hold a meeting in which we do more than talk to each other and go away feeling good," Sapp emphasized. "We intend to lay a foundation for strong Christian action which will help meet the moral challenge of world hunger."

Stressing that hunger "is more than an issue," Sapp added that "in the face of the existence of hunger, our full stomachs, full cupboards and full silos call us to judgment. We have been concerned about the high price of food, but too often we have been unconcerned about our neighbors who have no food or money to buy it."

The Christian Life Commission chairs a group of eight SBC organizations which have expressed an interest in sponsoring the convocation. Representatives of those agencies met in Nashville recently to set the date and discuss program ideas.

In addition to the Christian Life Commission, agencies represented were the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission, Woman's Missionary Union, Baptist Sunday School Board, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and Baptist World Alliance.

The convocation will take place less than four months after the denomination's first World Hunger Day, to be observed in Southern Baptist churches Aug. 2.

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Seminarian Contributes To Original Translation

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Douglas Waruta, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has helped an interdenominational team of translators achieve a "first" in Africa.

Waruta's team, after four years of intensive work, has produced the first translation of the New Testament into the Kiswahili language done by nationals for nationals. The current Kiswahili version of the Bible, in use for 25 years, employs archaic expressions and too-long sentences, according to Waruta.

Waruta, proficient in koine Greek, said the translators, which included an Anglican and a Roman Catholic, used "dynamic equivalence" as the principle in their translating. "This," he explained, "is what the Biblical materials are saying and how we can put it into our language so that people can understand what the author was saying in his time."

The men did not want a book of "theological jargon." For example, instead of simply using the word "justification," the new translation says "God's way of making people have a good relationship with Him."

At the same time, Waruta contends the new version is not a paraphrase. "A paraphrase tells more than is actually there," he said. Waruta and the others consider the new version to be faithful to the original meanings and text.

Every two months, while working on the text, the three men would take two weeks to confer with church leaders in various countries about the new translation. Some conservative groups were concerned about the new version and greeted it with some misgivings. "We wanted to let them know we were being true to the Word," Waruta said.

The New Testament has been completed and has been printed. The United Bible Societies expects to have published the entire Bible by 1982.

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CORRECTION

In BP story of May 25, 1978, entitled Women Increase On SBC Boards, By David Wilkinson, graph five, line four, please correct as follows: "... 1977-78 (73 of 852)" instead of "...1977-78 (73 of 352)."

Thanks, Baptist Press



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