

**(BP)****BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 31, 1978

Last of a seven-part series

78-86

**Legalized Gambling: Divider  
and Conquerer of Christians?**

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Many churchmen have succumbed to the blandishments of legalized gambling, as it penetrates state after state, because of apathy, fear of appearing unsophisticated, or the influence of gambling's "siren song," which murmurs of its "sweet" fruits.

Many religious groups, of course, have led the fight against the intrusion of legalized gambling in its various forms. But, wherever they raise their voices effectively, as Texas Baptists did in the recent fight against parimutuels, gambling proponents attempt to characterize them as blue-nosed puritans opposed to the profit and pleasure of everyone else.

Those who have characteristically spoken out against vices which infiltrate society, thus get confusing signals.

From one direction they hear the charge from their own ranks that they spend too much time condemning the "don'ts" and not enough affirming the positive aspects of their faith. Sophisticates, they're told, don't haggle over such "petty issues" as gambling. Others, equally persuasive, admit they can overdo negatives but urge them to speak against gambling and other evils which hurt people.

Meanwhile, the refrain of supporters of legalized gambling, which has penetrated 44 states in some form since New Hampshire legalized a lottery in 1963, adds to the confusion. It promises a fiscally-sound way out of the financial morass of state and city governments. It claims that while the dollars flow "to ease tax burdens" and serve mankind, legalized gambling will create an environment which will repel illegal gambling and organized crime.

But abundant evidence--collected by law enforcement officials, economists, sociologists, educators, journalists and others--has proven, in mounting volumes, that the reverse is true.

Investigation reveals that legalized gambling has failed miserably as a financial savior, except to line the pockets of rip-off artists, and that it systematically corrupts police and government officials.

It proves also that gambling serves as a breeding ground for new suckers--setting them up for organized crime fleecing and inflicting them and the economy with business pilferage, embezzlement, loss of productivity, bad checks, bankruptcies, regressive burden on the poor, lost jobs, victimization by loan sharks, broken homes and shattered dreams.

Such evidence speaks in a language that anyone--religious or secular--can understand. But it speaks strongly to Christians, whose faith urges redemptive action in society, not only to proclaim Christ's message of salvation but also to combat influences which hurt people.

"It's not narrow based moralism to oppose gambling," says Phil Strickland, an attorney and associate director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, an organization which has led citizenship efforts in a wide array of areas over the years. Such opposition, he says, constitutes "responsible opposition to bad social and public policy which will adversely affect human beings, corrupting and dehumanizing them."

But, in state after state, the record of religious efforts in the arena of gambling remains a spotty one. Sometimes opposition has been forceful and effective, sometimes token, sometimes offered only after gambling forces have already driven in the opening wedge, and sometimes nonexistent. Denominational leadership often has a hard time convincing church members to stir themselves into effective action.

In Virginia, where the state will face a vote on parimutuels later this year, A. L. Philpott, a delegate to the state General Assembly, said, "I've been fighting this thing for 10 years, and

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TEXAS BAPTIST CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

I've never seen the church become actively involved in it. It seems that the only people concerned about parimutuels in this state are those who favor it....Church leaders really have got to start communicating with their congregations."

In Illinois, a state already infested by parimutuels, bingo and a recently enacted state lottery, Baptists have geared up--belatedly--to educate their people to the problems associated with legalized gambling.

Robert Hastings, editor of the "Illinois Baptist," says the state, which has experienced a decline in sale of lottery tickets; has started spending more on promotion and advertising and letting more people win smaller prizes so winning will appear easier. As in Maryland, where the state has become its own shill with the slogan, "You've Got to Play to Win," Illinois teases its citizens to "Buy, Try, Win!"

"Don't sit around like we did for three years and not do anything," Hastings fervently advises his counterparts in other states.

Efforts to stir up a social conscience on gambling get varied results. Some Christians, frankly, refuse to oppose it because they have some sort of financial interest that would profit from gambling-related industries, points out Strickland. Others approach it apathetically, declaring, "It doesn't affect me. I'm not going to gamble. So why should there be a law against it?"

Baptist editor Al Shackelford, who has led anti-gambling efforts in Indiana and Tennessee, comments on that: "I ask in return," he says, "'Why have a law against murder? I don't plan to murder.' The point is that as Christians we're supposed to be concerned about things which sin against God because they mar and destroy his greatest creation--the human personality. Gambling fosters self-centered greed and has the potential of keeping people, who trust to luck rather than God, from finding Jesus Christ."

Two other distinct stripes of Christians--who wind up in the same place for different reasons--also stay out of such issues. They are the "spiritualizers," who want to think of nothing but things of the spirit, and "intellectualizers," who assume an intellectual aloofness and disdain for the political process. Both end up as escapists.

"If you care enough about an individual to win him to Christ," says James M. Dunn, head of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, "you should care enough--whether you're a 'spiritualizer' or 'intellectualizer'--to keep a social evil from gobbling up that individual and spitting him out. Reaction to such issues measures the authentic depth of concern for individuals."

Some take a conciliatory view toward gambling because they equate it with "good causes" of church or civic organizations or because the nation bases its economy on risk-taking on the stock market.

"High-risk, low-productivity, get-rich-quick schemes are just as wrong in grain futures or the stock market as they are in gambling, but there's a difference between gambling and risk-taking," Dunn comments on the second point. "All risk-taking is not gambling."

Dunn, who holds a Ph.D. in ethics, and others urge Christians to evaluate the ways their money will be used--to bankroll unsavory activities or support the economy.

Investments in business could serve either purpose, depending on the investor's personal ethics and the end result of the investment. Legalized gambling, which investigation shows increases illegal gambling--the proven bankroller of organized crime--supports only the first option, unsavory activities. And it produces no new goods, which speaks both to the secular mind and the Christian view of stewardship of material resources.

Baptist leaders and others view the "gambling-for-a-good-cause" rationale as perhaps the most insidious form of reasoning a religious person can develop. Shackelford recalls that in Indiana several Roman Catholic leaders privately opposed parimutuel gambling and worked behind the scenes against it. "But they could not come out publicly against parimutuels," he said, "because they might lose the right to play bingo."

Many view "good-cause" gambling, proven to be widely infiltrated by organized crime and compromising to sponsors, as a poor substitute for proper financial support of churches and charities by committed individuals. They find it reminiscent of the old saying about "using the Devil's money to run the Lord's mill."

One religious leader comments that such rationalizations--and other mental gymnastics which mute Christian influence on a social dilemma--remind him of the words of the late Pogo Possum, who said, "We have met the nemy, and they is us."

**SBC Joggers' Jubilee  
Set for June 13**

ATLANTA (BP)--Plans have been announced for the fifth annual Southern Baptist Convention Joggers' Jubilee, June 13, in Atlanta, to promote jogging as a means toward physical fitness.

E. Eugene Greer of Dallas, general coordinator, said the annual event will be held from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m. at Lakewood Stadium.

Joggers' Jubilee, planned to coincide with the opening day of the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting, June 13-15, is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department.

Local organizer for the event is Loyd Tripp, minister of activities at Rainbow Park Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga.

Joggers may participate at no cost, but a \$1 fee will be charged persons who ride buses to and from the stadium. Bus schedules will be provided to all pre-registrants. Persons may register in Atlanta or they may pre-register by writing to Tripp at P.O. Box 32387, Decatur, Ga., 30032, giving name, hotel location and bus transportation needs.

Each jogger will receive a certificate of participation. Joggers not attending the 1978 Joggers' Jubilee in Atlanta may receive a certificate by notifying the Sunday School Board's church recreation department, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, of time and distance jogged on June 13, 1978. Information should be sent before June 30.

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SBC Pre-registration  
Totals 4,850

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5/31/78

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has pre-registered more than 4,850 "messengers" to the annual meeting of the SBC, June 13-15, at the Georgia World Congress Center.

Last year, the first of a two-year study of whether pre-registration would aid messengers, over 2,700 persons pre-registered.

After the convention is over, the Executive Committee will study the results and make a final decision on the future of pre-registration, according to Tim Hedquist, assistant to the executive secretary and director of financial planning.

If pre-registration continues, the Executive Committee will study ways to simplify and refine the system, Hedquist said, to facilitate the entire registration process. This year, pre-registration had about 10 percent error, he said. Many messengers either sent no money or the improper amount or omitted necessary information. Hedquist said that indicates a need for revision in the system.

Total registration for the Atlanta meeting is expected to exceed 16,000, with overall attendance likely to top 20,000. Last year in Kansas City, 16,271 persons registered. A record 18,637 registered at the 1976 convention in Norfolk.

-30-

Humanitarian's Agency  
Launches Mercy Ship

Baptist Press  
5/31/78

LOS ANGELES (BP)--World Vision International, a Christian humanitarian agency, will launch a mercy ship to assist hundreds of Vietnamese boat refugees fleeing Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

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Called "Operation S sweep," a 345-ton, 188-foot, LST-type landing ship will cruise the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand providing refugees with food, water, medicines, clothing and personal hygiene items, according to group president Stan Mooneyham.

A medical doctor, two nurses and two mechanics will be on the ship. The mechanics will attempt to repair the makeshift boats in which about 1,500 people from Vietnam alone make their dash for freedom each month.

Reports indicate 5,000 boat refugees are on the high seas at any given time. The boats are overcrowded, with little water, food or fuel. They are easy targets for pirates who rob, rape and sometimes murder the refugees. Some Southeast Asian countries are not permitting the boat people to land.

"While the nations of Southeast Asia and the West argue about what to do with them, the suffering of these victimized people has gone unsolved and unsoothed," Mooneyham said. "The conviction has been growing in me that since God cares for the refugees, He wants to do something to help them."

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Illinois Baptist Offers  
Agencies Free Space

Baptist Press  
5/31/78

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--The Illinois Baptist newspaper is offering space valued at over \$12,000 to agencies and institutions of the Southern Baptist Convention to tell their story to Illinois readers.

Each agency is being offered at least one full page, which if paid for at agency rates, would be \$435 per page. The Sunday School Board, Foreign and Home Mission Boards--because of their size--will be offered three or four pages.

Editorial assistant Elsie Taylor, who is coordinating the project, says the only restrictions are that each agency tell its story in picture form, slanted to Illinois readers, and the copy cannot be a "puff sheet" for chief executives of an agency or institution.

"Our paper is published primarily for Illinoisans," Mrs. Taylor said, "and we want copy that interprets an agency's ministry to our readers." Editor Robert J. Hastings estimated it would take about two years to publish the entire series, using one or two lay-outs per month.

The Illinois Baptist, which accepts no paid advertising, has a weekly circulation of 48,000--almost blanket coverage of Southern Baptist homes in Illinois.

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Church Has  
Sure Winners

Baptist Press  
5/31/78

GREAT FALLS, S. C. (BP)--A popular radio show daily features the couple in the United States that is celebrating the longest anniversary.

Someone ought to tell the announcer about the folks at First Baptist Church in Great Falls. That church has 22 couples who have been married for at least 50 years--accumulating 1,166 years of married life.

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#### CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story mailed 5/30/78, entitled "Baptist Student Work Continues Steady Growth," please replace graph 7, which was garbled, with the following:

He said growth is partially due to efforts by National Student Ministries to work with states to identify areas which need Baptist campus ministry. At present, 686 campuses are earmarked for new work as soon as money and leadership are available.

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