

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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14-15 May 2011

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

The Pernicious Nature of Gambling

Over the last twenty years, the growth of the gambling industry has been staggering. Increasingly, more and more states are legalizing all forms of gambling. It is on several Indian reservations and the respective states are now utterly dependent on revenue from some form of gambling. The gambling industry is a huge, worldwide business. According to *The Economist*, in 2009, the total revenue from gambling worldwide was \$335 billion. That percentage total breaks down as follows:

- Casinos--31.2%
- Sports betting--5%
- Bingo, etc.--5.4%
- Lottery products--29.6%
- Non-casino gaming machines--21.6%
- Horseracing--7.2%

The same magazine makes this insightful comment: “The odds of winning the jackpot in America’s richest lottery, Mega Millions, are one in 176 million. Euro Millions, available to players in nine western European countries, offers slightly better odds: one in 76 million. Roulette players, on average, will hit their number once in 36 or 37 attempts. Poker players’ chances of being dealt a royal flush are much the same as being struck by lightning.” Despite such overwhelming odds, Americans still gamble and are doing so at stunning rates. Further, government is now involved in state-sponsored gambling as a matter of public policy.

What is the case against gambling? How can we as Christians be good citizens and expose the pernicious nature of this growing pastime for Americans?

- First of all, a few thoughts on gambling as a goal of public policy. It seems to me that immoral means have never led to moral ends. We are no longer skimming the profits from a criminal activity—we are putting the full force of government into the promotion of moral corruption. Quite frankly, gambling promotion has become a key to states balancing their respective budgets. But it is wrong for the state to exploit the weakness of its citizens just to balance the budget. It is the most unfair and painful form of “painless” taxation. The money is not coming from a few big bookies but from the pockets of millions of its citizens. The states have become as hooked on gambling as a source of revenue as any compulsive gambler betting the milk money. Gambling feeds a get-rich-quick illusion that debilitates society, and thereby causes individual ruin, despair and suicide. Therefore, gambling corrupts the state and its citizens that both seek “a piece of the action.”

- Second, how does state-approved gambling impact people's lives?
 1. Legalized gambling sidetracks a great deal of money. The amounts that people spend on gambling equals or exceeds the total amount given to religious organizations and/or the total amount spent on elementary and secondary education.
 2. Legalized gambling handicaps a lot of people. The number of compulsive gamblers in the US is about 5 to 7% of the population. Gambling behavior is usually associated with poverty, marital strife, job loss, homelessness and hunger.
 3. Legalized gambling victimizes vulnerable members of society—women, youth and ethnic minorities.
 4. State-sponsored gambling also seems to break down the resistance of people who would not otherwise gamble. Gambling addiction has risen precipitously since legalized gambling began several decades ago.
 5. State-sponsored gambling has promoted materialism and the fantasy of a life of luxury without labor.

- Third, it is difficult to fit gambling into a Christian worldview. There are several reasons:
 1. Gambling encourages the sin of greed and covetousness.
 2. Gambling promotes the mismanagement of possessions entrusted to us by God.
 3. Gambling undermines absolute dependence on God for His provision.
 4. Gambling works at cross purposes with a commitment to productive work.
 5. Gambling is a potentially addictive behavior.
 6. Gambling threatens the welfare of our neighbor.

In short, it is difficult to view gambling—either private or state-sponsored—as a positive. It is one of the most telling signs of a civilization in dysfunction and decline, one of the more discouraging aspects of our postmodern world. Hence, the evidence is in—gambling is another factor contributing to cultural decadence. But it is pursued by individuals and the respective states with greater vigor and greater passion. There is perhaps no greater sign of cultural declension than that!!

See *The Economist* (10 July 2010), pp. 3-5—“Special Report on Gambling”; *Christianity Today* (25 November 1991), pp. 16-21; and <http://www.lcms.org/faqs> (LCMS Views, Contemporary Issues).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research

I am on the advisory board of The Nebraska Coalition for Ethical Research (NCER), which opposes the derivation and use of stem cells from human embryos. Such derivation and use involves the direct destruction of a human being in its embryonic stage of development and treats such humans as mere physical objects that can be harvested for their parts. However, NCER

supports and applauds the use of stem cells obtained from umbilical cord blood or adult sources that do not involve the destruction of human life.

Human embryonic stem cells are the master cells of the body. They have the capacity to produce the over 200 different specialized cells that make up the adult human body. There are two sources for human embryonic stem cells: (1) human embryos created through in vitro fertilization and (2) human embryos produced through cloning. Non-embryonic or adult sources of human stem cells include the placenta, umbilical cord blood, bone marrow and a number of other tissues. A human embryo is created sexually when an egg is fertilized by a sperm, or is produced asexually through cloning. An embryo begins as a single cell zygote that starts to divide within hours after fertilization or, with cloning, after the fusion process. After about five days of development, the embryo is called a blastocyst and is comprised of two parts and two kinds of cells. One part is the outer sphere of trophoblast cells that becomes the placenta and other tissues necessary to support the growth and development of the human embryo/fetus throughout pregnancy. The trophoblast cells surround the second part, the body of the embryo, an inner cell mass of about 100 stem cells. The cells of the early embryo (probably up to its 8-cell stage) are totipotent. That is, each totipotent cell, if separated from the embryo, can develop as a new and complete embryo. As the totipotent cells continue to divide, they differentiate and become more specialized cells called pluripotent stem cells. Unlike totipotent cells, pluripotent cells cannot produce a new and complete embryo; they can only produce the various specialized cells and organs of the body. Researchers seek to obtain the approximately 100 pluripotent stem cells of the body of the embryo at the blastocyst stage. To do this, they must separate the body of the embryo from its trophoblast shell or covering, a process that destroys or kills the embryo.

Human stem cells are important for a number of reasons. First, embryonic stem cells are responsible for development of the human body during its embryonic and fetal stages. Second, adult stem cells maintain the health of the human being at each subsequent stage of life. For example, bone marrow stem cells continually replenish the body's blood supply. Some researchers want to use pluripotent stem cells from human embryos because these cells have the capacity to produce any of the specialized body cells and might be useful to treat or cure human disease. However, their ability to do so has not yet been demonstrated convincingly in human beings.

Human embryonic stem cell research is immoral and must be banned because it violates the life, dignity, and rights of human beings.

- Every human being has a right to life--The harvesting of human embryonic stem cells deliberately destroys embryonic human beings.
- Every human being has a right to be protected from discrimination--Human embryonic stem cell research discriminates against human embryos on the basis of developmental immaturity.
- Every human being is an end to be loved, not a means to be used for another's end--Human embryonic stem cell research treats the embryonic human being as an object to be valued for its parts. To categorize so-called spare embryos as "having no future" or as "going to be destroyed anyway" is to rationalize the destruction of one human being to possibly benefit the health of another.

- Every human being is of equal value to every other human being--Human embryonic stem cell research treats the embryonic human being as less valuable than a fetus, a neonate, or an adult.
- Research involving human subjects requires that proxy or presumed consent can be given only if the research does not harm the subject--Human embryonic stem cell research is, by its very nature, destructive. Therefore, proxy or presumed consent for such research is not ethically valid.
- The goal of research involving human subjects is to serve humanity by curing disease and relieving suffering--Human embryonic stem cell research destroys, rather than heals, the human embryos involved. Any therapies developed from human embryonic stem cells are ill-gotten gains because the benefit to some human beings requires the death of other human beings.
- The rules of ethical human research demand that scientists pursue the least morally controversial of available options when these prove to be equally beneficial--Most of the goals of human embryonic stem cell research can be obtained through the use of non-embryonic stem cells, without any destruction of human life.
- Failure to protect embryonic and fetal human life, the most vulnerable of human beings, erodes the moral fiber of our society--Human embryonic stem cell research does not accord embryonic human beings the protection that is their due as human subjects of research. An assault against any innocent human being is an assault on humanity in general. Since respect for human life is a cornerstone of civilization, human embryonic stem cell research will weaken the moral foundation of our society.

See the position paper by the Nebraska Coalition for Ethical Research on “Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research.”

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

The Bin Laden Victory: Echoes of George W. Bush

President Barack Obama invited President Bush to join him as he traveled to “ground zero” in lower Manhattan last week. President Bush declined the offer. In issuing this invitation, perhaps President Obama recognized how much he truly owes to President Bush. In fact, one could probably argue that President Bush’s decisions right after 9/11 made the death of Bin Laden possible. Several thoughts:

1. After 9/11, Bush waged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that forged a military so skilled that it carried out a complicated covert raid with only minor complications.
2. A detention and interrogation system constructed by the Bush administration, once condemned by Obama, produced the intelligence that led the SEALS to Osama Bin Laden. This is indisputable! Obama campaigned against the legal system adopted by the Bush administration to capture, detain, question and try terrorist suspects, including those at the center of Bin Laden’s network. After pledging to close Guantanamo within a year of taking office, Obama failed to do so. In fact, he altered rather than scrapped the Bush military commission system. We may never know exactly when and how all of the intelligence that

led to Bin Laden was gathered, but I suspect that the Bush administration's infrastructure yielded the most valuable information.

3. We must never forget that the Bush war on terror brought down the Taliban in Afghanistan, scattered and decimated al Qaeda and made Bin Laden a fugitive. That Bin Laden was killed and even found in the first place is a total vindication of the Bush war on terror. Bin Laden is dead and al Qaeda in disarray because of what we once knew as the “war on terror.” Perhaps it is time to re-introduce that phrase into our vocabulary.

Thanks, President Bush! You made what happened to Bin Laden possible.

See Charles Krauthammer in the *Washington Post* (5 May 2011) and Scott Wilson and Anne Kornblut in the *Washington Post* (4 May 2011).