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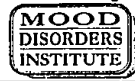
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Gambling: rein in the monster



REV. DAVID STRONG

states themselves, which, in a response to demands to lower taxes, are turning to gambling for needed resources.

In Massachusetts, many Protestant clergy are warning leaders that their state may become dependent on gaming. They say that expanded gambling may become an addiction for the state. Few politicians seem to be asking if the long-term results will be good for government as well as for the people.

The gambling industry has redefined its purpose. Gambling is now called entertainment. Many of the settings for gambling resemble Disney World. People focus upon this entertainment

image. Children and teenagers may grow up exposed to the fun side of the industry.

Many years ago, friends asked us to go to the horse races with them. We arrived more than half-way through the racing day. As closing time came, I felt the atmosphere of desperation. I could imagine that some of these people could not afford to sustain their losses of the day. This tragedy was expressed in the faces and voices of many people around us.

The pressures upon the Detroit metro area are increasing as a casino is nearing completion in Windsor. For the time being, this casino is located in the former Windsor Art Gallery. Money is in slim supply for art. In contrast, Windsor is betting that the casino will revitalize the city.

Everybody wins except the people. In 1992, the casinos in Atlantic City grossed \$3.3 billion in revenue. Where did all of this money come from? You and I know that it came out of the pockets of ordinary people. Worse than this, too much of this money came out of the living costs of families, children and needed purchases that now will not be made.

Gambling fits into a dangerous psychology. If you win, you might become rich. If you lose, someone else will be there to take care of you. Welfare, free medical coverage and Social Security will be there to bail you out. For now, forget saving what is needed to insure your future.

The most recent problem in gambling establishments is how to prevent the entrance of teenagers into the gaming areas. Such problems will multiply. Historians tell us that our country has gone through periods of rapid expansion of gambling. These periods have been followed by a strong reaction of the people against the evils caused by this industry. If we recognize the danger of an excessive growth in gambling now, we will not simply wait for the damage to be done.

A spiritual analysis of this rapid growth of gambling suggests that this phenomenon is another expression of a negative co-dependency. Like alcohol or drugs, gambling promises an immediate answer to our limitations. In contrast, a healthy faith in God affirms as good the fact that we are limited creatures. Healthy spirit-

uality focuses upon God's unending gifts to all God's people. Our relationship to God transforms our limitedness into perfect freedom.

Gambling dangles the promise that our limitedness can be overcome by luck. When a person wins, he is showered with a kind of liberation. If you can win once, you can win again. The illusion is created that a person is a more expansive, more exciting, more daring individual, if he gambles. The illusion is that one may overcome the necessity to work, to save, to plan for the future by entering into a realm that promises that everything is possible.

God promises that everything that we truly need is possible, if we accept God's love and fulfill God's purpose in our lives. Every person has a set of unique talents. If these are put to use, in the context of love, we will each have a winning experience in life.

The accelerated growth of gambling is a great danger in our time. When gambling is presented as entertainment and as a sophisticated pursuit, many people will miss the destructive dimensions. We need to rein in this monster.

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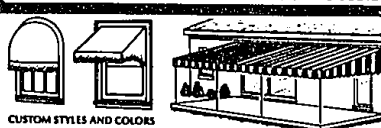
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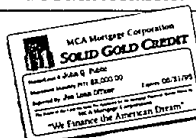
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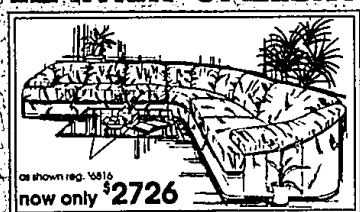
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