

CERC's Response to the Casino Issue

How do we view the whole issue from a Christian perspective? (Part 3)

Singaporeans have one more month to voice our concerns over the casino issue before the government proceeds with the plan in April. Meanwhile, foreign players are already bidding for a major contract to build and manage a money spinning empire at Sentosa.

The basic argument in favour of putting a casino here goes something like this: casino gambling provides significant benefits to our society. It ups our status as a modern global city. We are told that placing a world class casino here will definitely enhance "brand Singapore". In addition, it will also bring in the foreign travelers and dollars. It also creates jobs and ease unemployment. Furthermore, it provides a place for our own people to gamble in our own country instead of spending the local dollar at Genting and in other holiday cruises. The most presumptuous factor in favour of the casino project is the statement that says we are matured enough to handle it. I have in a previous article challenged this false assumption. We might be technologically innovative. But in moral matters, we are far from discerning.

Although I have written on the same issue twice, I feel the need to comment further on it, especially now when we are in the final stage before implementation.

1. One of the personal evils condemned by the Bible is covetousness. Although the Bible does not explicitly declare "Thou shalt not gamble", it does unambiguously declare "Thou shalt not covet". The sin of coveting is lusting for a thing with greed. Gambling in casino is not merely a simple game of entertainment and chance. People who gamble place their bets to win. And in a casino setting, you want to win big.

2. The Bible advocates a virtuous life. The Christian is expected to live with a moral responsibility. The Moral Law may have been given at Sinai, but it continues to be our moral guide and standard. Every believer is expected to demonstrate godliness and righteousness in his life. In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is not simply an intellectual virtue. It is a way of living with "fear before the Lord."

3. Gambling hurts the family. This happens when someone in the family becomes a compulsive gambler. When a person becomes addicted to the habit, his uncontrolled craving can sometimes make him behave and act irrationally. He steals. He cheats. He starts neglecting the family to gratify his cravings. And when a person loses all the family savings, his guilt can drive him to the point of suicide.

4. The pro-gambler could argue that this is a matter of personal choice and responsibility. But we must not forget that the irresponsible gambler is a small part of a trade that promotes waste, greed, and addiction. In fact, when the casino industry becomes more and more willing to hand out big cash as loans or rewards, it will entice more people to gamble.

5. By putting a casino in our city, we will inevitably redefine the moral fabric of our society. For a long time, Singapore has been praised and envied by others as a traditional, clean-cut Confucian society. It took us years to build this "clean image". By erecting a casino, we run the risk of losing our traditional values. Worst, it may make us lose our sense of right and wrong. In an early essay, I mentioned the point that morality is now viewed in purely pragmatic and humanistic terms. This happens when we begin to call the vice of gambling an entertaining game of chance.

6. What our government need at this present time is an ethical perspective on their involvement

in gambling. It needs to look beyond the political and monetary benefits, and take a long hard look at the negative impact it has on our morality.

7. What we need to do at this present time, as God's people, is to continue raising our objections. We need to challenge the public notion that casino gambling is only an entertainment; and that it has no drastic effect on public and private morality. We need also to pray that the sin of greed and covetousness do not go on corrupting our lives and ruining our homes.

8. But the Christian challenge is not simply to fight for the cause of morality and decency. We need to look at the issue at a deeper spiritual level. We need to love our neighbour with the love of Christ. This neighbourly love includes saying no to those sins that will ruin their lives. And in preaching the gospel to the lost, we will come face to face with those whose lives have been ruined by gambling. To these, we need to guide them to find faith, forgiveness and freedom in the only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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