Gambling and religion: Histories of concord and conflict

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Abstract

This paper discusses the diverse relationships between gambling and religion in various societies and at various times in history and suggests a theoretical model for how these relationships can be understood. It is argued that gambling and religion have certain elements in common: notions of the unknown, mystery, and fate, as well as imagery of suddenly receiving something of great value that changes life for the better. In many traditional cultures gambling has existed in concord with polytheistic and animistic religion; gambling and religion go well together precisely because of the elements they have in common. Monotheistic religions that claim authority in religious and transcendental matters, however, tend to denounce gambling, and this disapproval has been strengthened by a conception that gambling offers a wicked alternative to certain religious notions and experiences. The elements that gambling and religion share have thus become a source of conflict.
Keywords: gambling, religion, magic, morality, social anthropology, ethnography

Introduction

A source of inspiration for this paper was an advertising campaign launched by the Church of Sweden in 2001, intended to promote interest in religious matters as the public elections for the local parish councils approached. The theme of the campaign, which included full-page advertisements in national newspapers and on advertising pillars, was the question, 'Are you looking in the right place?' The advertisements depicted fictitious products: one depicted a 'Consolation' chocolate bar, another an 'Affirmation' brand cellular phone, a third a package of 'Fellowship' brand cigarettes, and still another a 'Hope' lottery ticket. On the ticket, fashioned after the Triss instant lottery ticket, three fields had been scratched, revealing the word 'hope' in each (three similar amounts or symbols indicate a win in this lottery). A single line of text asked the rhetorical question, 'Are you looking in the right place?' and the logo of the Church of Sweden indicated who the advertiser was. The message of the advertising campaign was thus that people are in need of consolation, affirmation, fellowship, and hope, but that they are looking in the wrong places and should approach the Church to see what it has to offer to fulfil these needs.

The advertisement depicting the instant lottery ticket attracted considerable attention in the press and also within the Church. Some welcomed it as it highlighted the perceived excessive gambling habits of the Swedes, while others thought it wrongly made ordinary people feel guilty about their innocent and occasional purchase of lottery tickets. A few Christians maintained that the very depiction in the advertisement of an instant lottery ticket called 'Hope' was reprehensible, since it could easily be misunderstood as actually promoting gambling. The state-owned

lottery company complained that the advertisement violated the trademark of the Triss lottery.

Evidently, the advertisement expressed an idea that caught the public's attention. The Church of Sweden was long expressly critical of gambling, picturing the gambler as sinful and depraved. In this advertisement, however, it presented gambling and religion as two alternative and competing ways of obtaining hope for a better life. The message is that the Church offers a better alternative than gambling.

This paper will discuss the diverse relationships between gambling and religion at various times in history and in various societies and suggest a general model of how these relationships can be understood. The elements common to gambling and religion are viewed in this model as both promoting concord and aggravating conflict.

Three topics will be discussed. The first is the unity of religion and gambling in many traditional cultures. Gambling, in a wide variety of societies, is associated with religious practices and mythology. A second topic is the religious, spiritual, and magical dimensions of gambling in modern Western societies. Notions of luck and fate will be discussed, as well as dissociative and transcendental experiences induced by intense gambling. The third topic is the religious denunciation of gambling, and it will be argued that religions strongly opposing gambling are characterised by a claim to universal religious authority. Established religions condemn gambling for several reasons, and four major themes in Christian antigambling arguments are identified.

A large number of ethnographic examples from various cultures and times will be used to support the arguments offered here. The examples were systematically selected to illustrate contrasts and similarities in how gambling and religion relate to each other. The examples pertain mainly to traditional tribal cultures and their animistic religions and ancient and modern states with polytheistic or monotheistic religions.

Gambling and religion in concord

In many traditional non-Western societies gamblers may pray to the gods for success and explain wins and losses in terms of divine will. The Zuñi Indians of southwestern North America, for instance, worshipped eight gods of war, believed to be great gamesters, each of whom was associated with a specific game (Coxe Stevenson, 1903; see also Culin, 1907, pp. 335–340, 374–382, 682–689). When gambling on one of these games, the players invoked the proper god of war, and prayers for success were addressed to him. Equipment used in the games was offered at the altars of these gods.

A contemporary example of gods being regarded as involved in gambling is the worship of local deities, represented by statues, in Taiwan (Yu, 1997, chap. 7). Some of these gods are asked by lottery players to reveal the winning numbers of the next draw. These gambling deities are given offerings, such as 'spirit money', and the lottery numbers are interpreted by means of various divinatory methods, such as

looking for figures in the ashes of incense offerings and drawing bamboo lots. Evidently, prayers to gambling gods are an old Chinese practice (Harrell, 1974, p. 201) and have also been reported from Chinese communities abroad (Nonini, 1979).

In southern Italy a number of saints were in the past and to some extent are still today believed to be willing to help lotto players. San Pantaleone has widely been regarded as the patron saint of lotto players, to be invoked by reading his *novena* at night (Conte, 1910, pp. 74–76; Di Mauro, 1982, pp. 40–41; Fiorenza, 1897). In Naples the Madonna di Piedigrotta and the Madonna del Carmine were asked for winning lotto numbers, and in Sicily such requests were addressed to San Alessio, San Marco, and San Giovanni Decollato (Pitrè, 1913, pp. 304–305). Similarly, the spirits of the dead in purgatory were in southern Italy believed to be able to reveal winning lotto numbers. This was a common belief at least up to the 1950s, and in some places, such as Naples, it persisted to the end of the 20th century (e.g., Ciambelli, 1980; Finamore, 1894, p. 86; Pitrè, 1889, Vol. 4, pp. 294–295). The Church did not officially embrace the ideas that saints and the spirits of the dead took an interest in lottery gambling.

Gamblers thus pray to deities, saints, and spirits for success. Games of chance, gambling, and religion can merge in a number of other ways (for overviews concerning the North American Indians, see Salter, 1974, 1980). In mythology there are numerous examples of gambling being linked with deities, often in episodes that describe the creation of the world. This was common among the North American Indians (Culin, 1907, esp. pp. 32–33) and in Mesoamerica, where the ancient ballgame, which included heavy betting, was tightly interwoven with religion and ritual (Krickeberg, 1948; Stern, 1950; Whittington, 2001). In Greek mythology the lordship of the parts of the world was decided by a dice game, the outcome of which made Zeus lord of the sky, Hades lord of the underworld, and Poseidon lord of the sea. Generally, the imagery of cosmogonal gambling can be seen as a way of reconciling a notion of the gods as powerful with the impression that the world to some extent was created arbitrarily: the gods gambled at the creation of the world and thereby the world happened to become as it is.

Among the North American Indians, success at gambling was commonly regarded as a proof of the spiritual power of the winner. There was a notion of a 'gambling power' or 'gambling spirit' that could be acquired as well as lost. This power was usually gained by arduous vision quests in the wilderness, where spiritual beings or phenomena were encountered (e.g., Maranda, 1984, chap. 4), and it could be imbued in specially prepared charms ('gambling medicines') or in a player's gambling equipment. Gambling thereby became a measure of the supernatural powers of the players; gambling was construed not as a game of chance, but as a contest in what could be called games of magical skill (for a telling example, see Culin, 1907, p. 285).

Although gambling could take place solely for amusement, among the North American Indians it was often part of rituals and ceremonies. Concerning Zuñi games and gambling, Culin (1907, p. 24) observed (see also Coxe Stevenson, 1903) that 'In general, games appear to be played ceremonially, as pleasing to the gods, with the object of securing fertility, causing rain, giving and prolonging life, expelling demons, or curing sickness'.

Gambling as a means of healing illness was also practised by the Huron (Culin, 1907, pp. 107–111; Herman, 1956, pp. 1051–1053; Trigger, 1990) and the Iroquois (Beauchamp, 1896; Salter, 1973). An early report from the Huron in the 18th century, cited by Culin (1907, pp. 106–107), emphasises the gathering of powerful spirits activated by gambling; for that reason, Christian missionaries were urged by the Indians to be present at such medicinal gambling because it was believed that 'their guardian genii are the most powerful'. The activation of powerful spirits by gambling was, among the Iroquois, also the rationale for staging gambling games for the purpose of promoting the growth of the crops (Salter, 1974).

Since gambling was part of religious ceremonies, religious leaders of North American tribes encouraged and took an active part in it. For example, among the Iroquois (Culin, 1907, p. 116, citing from L.H. Morgan's *League of the Iroquois*):

> … games were not only played at their religious festivals … but special days were set frequently apart for their celebration.… Betting upon the result was common among the Iroquois. As this practice was never reprobated by their religious teachers, but on the contrary, rather encouraged, it frequently led to the most reckless indulgence. It often happened that the Indian gambled away every valuable article which he possessed; his tomahawk, his medal, his ornaments, and even his blanket.

Finally, gambling could be used for divination. Among the Iroquois at New Year, for instance, men played against women at the game of the peach stones in order to foretell the quality of the harvest: if the men won, the corn would grow tall, but if the women won, it would grow short (Beauchamp, 1896, p. 270). Similarly, among the Zuñi, the hidden-ball game could be played in the spring by two parties, one representing the wind gods and the other the water gods. The result of the game was interpreted as signifying who among the gods would prevail—that is, if a dry or wet season was to be expected (Culin, 1907, pp. 374–375). Divinatory use of gambling is known from other parts of the world as well, for instance from China, where gambling can be a way to discover shifts in one's fate (on Chinese emigrants, see Gabb, 2001; Papineau, 2005). This affinity between divination and gambling was noted by the anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871, pp. 80–82), who, from the perspective of social evolutionary theory, speculated that secular gambling evolved from religious practices of divination.

Religious and magical elements of gambling in modern societies

In modern Western societies gambling and religion are construed as entirely separate spheres, kept apart through institutionalisation. To gamble in a church would be unacceptable (although church bingo comes close and therefore is a contested practice), while praying for salvation in a casino would probably be regarded as the symptom of a nervous breakdown caused by monumental losses and too many hours at the gaming tables. Nevertheless, gambling in modern societies has both religious and magical elements.

As in traditional cultures, gamblers may attribute winnings to God and higher powers. About a third of the winners of huge top prizes in American lotteries believed that their winning was guided by divine or mystical forces (Kaplan, 1978). From an account of Canadian lottery winners (Gudgeon & Stewart, 2001), we learn that these winners often recall unusual coincidences and psychic experiences that in the light of the lottery win retrospectively assume a portentous character; the authors conclude that 'the lottery is the only reliable miracle left in this age of reason' (p. 11). Thus, religious concepts are used to explain the question, 'Why me; why this miracle of winning a fortune?'

People who already have religious faith might be inclined to give divine powers the credit for a big win, and some believers, despite the fact that most clergy would certainly object, also pray to God for gambling winnings. In popular American gambling magazines one occasionally sees advertising for religious charms supposed to bring luck at gambling, such as holy water from Lourdes, 'blessed earth' from Fatima, and images of the 'patron saint of gamblers', Saint Cayetano.

To buy a lottery ticket is to buy hope. For a comparatively insignificant sum of money, buyers of lottery tickets acquire the possibility of winning a fortune that could change their lives for the better. Therefore, lottery operators have been described as 'selling hope' (Binde, 2005; Clotfelter & Cook, 1989; Griffiths, 1997), and those who buy lottery tickets have been called 'dream buyers' (Campbell, 1976; Forrest, Simmons, & Chesters, 2002). This dream of personal transformation has similarities, as the advertisement of the Church of Sweden discussed earlier suggests, with the Christian hope for salvation and spiritual peace.

It might be objected that lottery jackpots inspire indulgence in dreams of material and mundane excess, while Christians put hope in spiritual salvation. At least in Sweden, however, the realisation of the truer and better self is typical both in the hope for a jackpot and in jackpot winners' accounts of their plans for the future. This is a salient theme in the frequent newspaper reporting on jackpot winners (Binde, 2007; cf. Davies, 1997; Falk & Mäenpää, 1999; Gudgeon & Stewart, 2001). Most lottery players seem to hope for greater peace of mind and relief from economic difficulties and worries for the future. It is common for winners to give substantial sums of money as gifts to relatives; work less and allow themselves more time for personal interests, such as sports, cultural events, and hobbies; and travel in order to get away

from everyday life and gain a broader perspective on life. Thus, the imagined as well as the actual new life of the lottery winner is more often characterised by altruism, self-fulfilment, and peace of mind than by going on an exorbitant spending spree.

Jackpot wins and jackpot winners are quite frequent topics in Swedish newspaper reporting and also in everyday conversations among Swedes. An analysis of over 2,000 Swedish newspaper articles on these topics, conducted by the present author (Binde, 2007), has revealed that they contain themes similar to those found in old folk tradition, most notably Christian moral lectures and legends of enchanted treasures and 'cursed wealth' (e.g., Hand, 1980; Lindow, 1982; Pitrè, 1889, Vol. 4, pp. 369–434). The jackpot win is described as a test of morals and character, it is implied that the good are rewarded and those in need are blessed, and it is suggested that luck and destiny are important for winning the jackpot. Thus, jackpot wins inspire reflections on luck, fate, blessings, and an eventual higher justice.

'Good fortune' brings riches to the lottery winner while divine grace bestows blessings on the believer. The theological meaning of grace is (according to the *Enciclopedia cattolica*, 1948–1954) a free gift, conferred upon human beings by God. A human being cannot do anything that is *certain* to be rewarded by grace. He or she can only try to do what is righteous according to Christian teaching and hope that God grants him or her grace. Good fortune is typically perceived in a similar way. A person suddenly has good fortune. There is no action that he or she can perform that for certain will bring forth good fortune, although charms and luck-bringing rituals may be believed to have the potential to do so. In a structural sense, then, grace and good fortune are similar: good fortune can be viewed as a secular form of divine grace (Binde, 1999, pp. 110–111; Pitt-Rivers, 1992; Walker, 1999, p. 53). Both grace and good fortune derive from a notion that the cornerstone of social and economic relations—reciprocity—can temporarily be suspended and one can receive without having to give. As Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote, in the concluding chapter of his monumental work on kinship (1969, pp. 496–497), 'To this very day, mankind has always dreamed of seizing and fixing that fleeting moment when it was permissible to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded, that one could gain without losing, enjoy without sharing'.

To gamble has been seen by numerous scholars as a way to ask a question of fate: 'Am I lucky or unlucky?' (e.g., Allen, 1952, p. 215; Chevalier, Geoffrion, Allard, & Audet, 2002; Cohen, 1960, p. 58; Downes, Davies, David, & Stone, 1976, p. 26; Reith, 1999, pp. 176–178; R.J. Rosenthal, 2005). A win is interpreted as a sign that good luck will continue or that a streak of bad luck is about to end, and a loss is interpreted in the opposite way. This notion builds upon a conception that 'life is a gamble' and that the odds of success might be revealed from the outcome of bets made at the gaming table. The elevation of gambling to a fatalistic philosophy of life—constituting an alternative to the Christian outlook that God has inscrutable plans for the individual lives of human beings—has a long history. In the Age of Reason this philosophy was perceived as crumbling under the weight of deistic (Voltaire) and mechanistic (Descartes) determinism, hence these verses by the Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841), cited in Lotman (1978, p. 457):

> Whatever Voltaire or Descartes may say—
> The world for me is a pack of cards,
> Life is the bank; fate deals, I play
> And the rules of the game I apply to people.

Indeed, gambling as a metaphor for the vicissitudes of life has not withered away in popular imagination and culture.

Thus, notions of luck, fortune, and fate are important in gambling. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is very difficult to gamble without being affected at least to some extent by intuitive notions of luck (cf. Darke & Freedman, 1997). Luck is something inherently mystical—there are today no elaborate folk theories on the subject, but rather vague intuitions and a plethora of lore about how luck is gained and lost. Thus, luck belongs to a mystic sphere, contrasting with the rationality favoured in much of today's society.

Within the mystical sphere of luck and gambling thrives a multitude of magical beliefs and practices. The superstitions of gamblers, their ideas of what brings either good or bad luck in gambling, are innumerable (for an overview, see Reith, 1999, chap. 5). Among these superstitions we find phenomena that otherwise belong to religion: belief in omens, charms, and mystical revelation, as well as ritualistic behaviour and the idea that messages are conveyed from a transcendent realm by means of dreams.

The mystical dimension of gambling encompasses altered states of consciousness and dissociation, which are reported to follow from intense gambling and in particular when playing highly repetitive games such as slot machines. A survey of Swedish pathological gamblers found that as many as 40% 'regularly experienced a state of altered consciousness', such as being 'removed from reality', being in 'a trance-like state of mind', or experiencing 'exhilaration' (Bergh & Kühlhorn, 1994). A survey of American pathological gamblers found that 79% had experienced trance when gambling (Jacobs, 1988). Two investigations, one American and one Swedish, have found that about 5% of non-problem gamblers have entered trance-like states while gambling (Jacobs, 1988; Jonsson et al., 2003). Dissociative experiences such as these have been documented in several other studies (e.g., Diskin & Hodgins, 1999, 2003; Doiron & Mazer, 2001; Dow Schull, 2002; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; Jacobs, 1989; Lynch, 1990; Smith, Volberg, & Wynne, 1994).

A particularly suggestive example of dissociation induced by gambling is the Japanese game of Pachinko, a hybrid of pinball and slot machine in which tiny metal balls bounce down through a grid of pins attached to a horizontal surface. The typically hectic and repetitive pachinko gambling can be viewed as a kind of meditation, a way of clearing the mind of thoughts in order to reach a blank state of mind, comparable to Eastern religious mind exercises such as repeating a mantra or focussing on an insoluble riddle (Richie, 2003, pp. 110–123; Shinohara et al., 1999). Japanese scholars have concluded that 'Pachinko satisfies people's everyday needs for

spiritual healing, and a parlor may be said to be a convenience store for one's mental health' (Hirano & Takahashi, 2003, p. 56).

Brian Sutton-Smith (1997, pp. 66–67) points out the similarity—and rivalry—between such game-induced psychological states and religious experiences:

> … modern chance games and modern festivals have fallen away from religion and become secularised. Yet one can see that, along with all forms of play, they both still provide experiences of 'otherness', 'alterity', or 'altered states of consciousness'. And these or similar states of mind are as essential to religious ritual and prayer as they are to game involvement. In both cases one becomes 'lost' in the experience and thus transcends everyday cares and concerns. It is worth considering that because the two (religion and play) are in modern times so separate, they are in effect rivals for the promotion of such altered states of consciousness.

To sum up: gambling encompasses notions of a magical, mystical, and religious nature not only in traditional non-Western cultures but also in modern Western societies (France, 1902; Reith, 1999, chap. 5). In our modern societies gambling therefore has a kind of spiritual or religious attraction—the gambler shifts into 'a mystical state' (Kusyszyn, 1984, p. 138) or a 'conscious mood of mysticism' (Martinez, 1976, pp. 359–60). 'Gambling possesses a metaphysical and almost sacred meaning' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1924, p. 200), it 'encapsulates the area of mystery diffused throughout life' (Downes et al., 1976, p. 26), and it 'excites the deepest of all interest in life—that in the transcendent, the dark obscure beyond' (France, 1902, p. 406). It has also been suggested that animistic ideas find their expression in gambling (Allen, 1952; Veblen, 1970). It might thus be concluded that gambling to some extent fills the void, in the realm of the mystical and transcendental, left by the decline of official religion in secularised Western societies.

Religious denunciation of gambling

The many religions of the world have varying attitudes to gambling. We have seen that, on the one hand, religion and gambling can coexist in harmony and unity. On the other hand, some religions are severe in their denunciation of gambling. Gambling tends to be condemned by religions that are monotheistic, that rely on text sources believed to contain the word of God, that have developed a rigid set of doctrines, and that are intolerant of deviations from the 'true creed'—in short, religions that claim to hold a monopoly on truth and on the channels of communication with the supernatural.

Religious critiques of gambling can therefore to some extent be explained by seeing gambling as an activity that in certain matters competes with religion, as suggested before by a few scholars (Brenner & Brenner, 1990; Reefe, 1987, pp. 61–62; Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 65–68). From a psychoanalytical perspective it has even been argued that gambling is a 'secular "religion" for the obsessional neurotic' and that the real

reason Christians regard it as sinful is that gambling 'cannot be tolerated because it provides a similar alternative to Christianity' (Fuller, 1974, p. 67).

Significantly, Islam is a world religion with a strong emphasis on monotheism and also consistently condemning gambling. In Islamic societies gambling is either totally forbidden or very restricted (F. Rosenthal, 1975). Gambling is explicitly condemned as sinful in the Koran (Surah al-Baqarah 2:219 and Surah Ma'idah 5:90, 91), which by Muslims is regarded as the complete and final revelation from the only God.

From its origin, Christianity has been critical of gambling (Slater, 1909). Early Church councils forbade games of chance, and up to the time of the Reformation the Church in general viewed gambling as sinful and reprehensible. After the Reformation, the current liberal attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards gambling gradually emerged. Games of chance are not regarded as sinful in themselves, but only when played to excess and when they 'deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others' (The Roman Catholic Catechism, paragraph 2413). There are, however, many Roman Catholics, especially in the United States, who are strongly opposed to gambling and would like the Church to reconsider its current standpoint.

With its emergence, ascetic Protestantism stressed arguments relating to the work ethic that opposed gambling. Lutheran churches have been harsh in their condemnation of gambling, and it generally holds that the more dogmatic they are, the more strongly they repudiate gambling. Since the 1950s many Lutheran churches have adopted a more permissive outlook on gambling, but there are still, especially in the United States, a considerable number of Lutherans who categorically denounce all forms of gambling.

When, on the other hand, gambling and religion coexist in harmony and fuse with each other, the religion is most commonly of the animistic and polytheistic kind, such as the traditional belief systems of the North American Indians. Chinese religion—as practised in prerevolutionary mainland China and in Taiwan of today—is also a case in point. It can briefly be described as a composite of ancestor worship, devotion to local deities, the philosophical and moral teachings of Confucianism and Taoism, and a belief in fate. Such systems acknowledge a multitude of deities and spirits, and there is a tolerance of different opinions and of religious innovations. In short, there is no claim to a monopoly on religious and transcendent matters. There seem to be few, if any, animistic religions in the world that condemn indigenous gambling on doctrinal and moral grounds.

Earlier we described widespread beliefs in traditional southern Italy that certain saints and spirits of the dead help lotto players. Does not this merging of Roman Catholicism and gambling contradict the argument just presented that religions aspiring to monopoly in supernatural matters tend to denounce gambling? We have to consider that, in the case of large, established religions that have spread to many societies and cultures, there is often a difference, sometimes slight but sometimes considerable, between official religion and religion as actually practised locally.

Popular Roman Catholicism in traditional southern Italy had, through the cult of local saints, a polytheistic character, and local belief systems included various forms of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, as well as beliefs in spirits and non-Christian supernatural beings (Binde, 1999). These beliefs were so tightly integrated in the worldview of the common people that the Church, despite attempts to do so, was unable to suppress them. Thus, the religion that in southern Italy was associated with lottery gambling was in fact a polytheistic and animistic system of beliefs, transmitted from generation to generation mainly through oral tradition, and therefore liable to be subject to local variations and innovations.

A contrast between official religion and locally practised religion also characterises Hinduism and Buddhism. Hinduism is a multifaceted religion in which older layers of belief have been integrated with more recent ones. In popular religious practices a great number of gods are worshipped; in official religious doctrine, however, there is an emphasis on a few high gods, and a strict moral code has been established. A similar ambiguity is found in Hindu views on gambling. On the one hand, gambling has long been practised in India and by figures in mythology; on the other hand, religious authorities harshly condemn gambling, and most forms of gambling are today illegal in India. The relationship between Buddhism and gambling is comparable. In popular practice Buddhism is often a polytheistic religion with a multitude of divinities, and gambling has been, or is today, widespread in many Buddhist countries, such as Thailand. Many believers evidently do not experience a conflict between their religion and gambling; for instance, gambling at Thai funerals is very common (Klima, 2002). According to orthodox Buddhist doctrine, however, gambling is an activity that leads away from the proper path of spiritual development, and all forms of gambling except lotteries are illegal in Thailand.

Thus, religions that claim a strict monopoly in matters concerning the divine and supernatural tend to have a critical attitude towards gambling, while polytheistic and animistic religions, where there is no such strong claim, accept gambling and often merge with gambling. Variations over time in a certain religion's attitudes towards gambling can, of course, be understood only by a more detailed analysis of shifts in its moral doctrines and of political and cultural contexts. For instance, the mild criticism of gambling expressed by the advertisement discussed in the introduction to this paper, in which the Church of Sweden asked lottery ticket buyers if they were looking for hope in the right place, illustrates a shift in attitude towards gambling. By adapting to the more liberal moral judgements current in society at large, the Church has, over a period of 50 years, modified its earlier puritan standpoint on most matters and become more modern in its attitudes: homosexual couples are blessed in church, 'dialogues' are held with immigrants on their religions, and pantheistic ideas of God's presence in unspoiled nature, rather than in Heaven, are accepted. Similarly, gambling is no longer considered as sinful by the Church of Sweden, but as something that unfortunately engages many people who are assumed to be experiencing a sense of dissatisfaction with their lives. Hence, when the Church still had decisive authority in moral matters in Sweden, the gambler was harshly condemned as sinful. Now that the Church has adjusted itself to a changing moral climate that calls for more tolerance, it

acknowledges that the lottery is a way of 'buying hope' and reminds the public that the Church supplies hope for free.

Themes in Christian arguments against gambling

What more precisely have religious monopolies to say against gambling? Let us consider Christianity. An examination of Christian literature, historical works, and gambling studies reveals that the arguments raised against gambling have been, and still are, many and varying. The following overview derives from the reading of numerous such texts. Since the source documents to a large extent include pamphlets and devotional literature in various languages, which only with difficulty can be accessed by the international reader, detailed references are not supplied here. A representative older work is the treatise by the minister John Northbrooke (1843 [1577]); typical modern texts are the sermons by John MacArthur (1997) and the paper by M.E. Otterstatter (1975), and an investigation of how conservative Protestants in Texas view lotteries (Ellison & Nybroten, 1999) might exemplify a social science source. A scrutiny of the critical arguments reveals that they pertain to four major themes.

The first theme in the Christian criticism of gambling is *greed*. The kernel argument is that the prime mover of gambling is greed and the love of money, which is the 'root of all evil'. An elaboration of this argument is that gamblers in their greed wish their opponents to lose and do not care about the suffering and pain caused by this; thus they do not 'love their neighbour'. Another version, suggesting that gambling violates the eighth commandment, is that gambling is a kind of theft, albeit by consent; it is equally as wrong as duelling, which is murder by consent. A contemporary variation on the greed theme is the following argument: lotteries are sinful since they, in order to make a profit, exploit the desperation and vain hopes of the poor and the weakness of those addicted to gambling. The greed arguments relate to the ethical dimension of Christianity, which concerns the proper conduct between human beings in reciprocal social and economic systems.

The demonic force of gambling constitutes a second theme of criticism. The words, 'The Devil invented gambling', are attributed to the church father St. Augustine (CE 354–430). Of perhaps equal antiquity is the idea that the fall of the dice is controlled by the Devil, who cunningly uses this opportunity to instigate discord among human beings and to entice them to sin. More generally it has been maintained that gambling has a demonic power that inevitably causes sinful behaviour and misery. The British preacher John Northbrooke (1843 [1577], p. 119) summed up the evil consequences of gambling (in a treatise published in the 16th century):

> '… (gambling) is a doore and windowe into all theft, murther, whoredome, swearing, blaspheming, banketting, dauncing, rioting, drunkennesse, pryde, couetousnesse, craft, deceyt, lying, brawling, fighting, prodigalitie, night-watchings, ydlenesse, beggerie, pouertie, bankrupting, miserie, prisonment, hanging, &c. and what not?'

Arguments pertaining to this theme thus claim the reality of evil non-Christian supernatural forces and state that these are at work in gambling.

The third theme in the Christian criticism of gambling includes arguments that concern cosmology. These express the opinion that gambling in one way or another conflicts with God's creation and with Christian cosmology; they elaborate upon the disturbance that gambling, being an activity governed by chance, causes to the orderly and purposeful universe created by God.

Examples of such arguments are the following:

- God is almighty; nothing happens by chance; thus throwing the dice is a wicked act that forces God to take an interest in gambling.
- As it is told in the Bible, the will of God might righteously be disclosed through the drawing of lots; gambling is a corruption and profanation of this sacred practice.
- God has imposed work on human beings—man shall 'by the sweat of his brow' eat his bread (Genesis 3:18–19 (King James Version)) and work 6 days a week (Exodus 20:9); gambling discourages industriousness and promotes idleness.
- God has in his wisdom decided that there shall be a proper correspondence between work and reward; gambling upsets this balance because a gambler can win a fortune without having to work.
- In contrast to animals, God has created human beings with the faculty of reason; gambling is irrational and hence contrary to the intentions of the Creator.

The fourth theme in Christian antigambling arguments is that gambling is to some extent perceived to offer mundane, fatalistic, or occult alternatives to what is offered or held as true in Christianity. The 'alternative' arguments thus derive from the ambition of Christianity to monopolise the 'truth' about the supernatural and the channels for communicating with it. Current in the early Church was the following argument: gambling has its origin in heathen divination and is therefore inappropriate for the Christian. Assuming God's absolute omnipotence, it has also been argued that since God is almighty, 'luck' does not exist. Thus, gambling, which is based on notions of luck, relies on erroneous non-Christian and fatalistic beliefs. In Christian criticism of gambling today the following two arguments are often heard: gambling encourages many superstitions and often involves the invocation of occult powers, and gambling offers hope of becoming rich and happy, but true riches and true happiness are spiritual, not material. It is this latter argument that is expressed in the advertisement of the Church of Sweden discussed earlier.

It has even been claimed that gambling, when it becomes a passion, is a sin against the first commandment: 'You shall have no other gods before me'. This argument relies on a broad definition of the concept of 'God', following Luther, who in his Large Catechism made the following explication: 'That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god' (Luther, 1921 [1530], part 1, 1st commandment). Thus, the passionate gambler is viewed as worshipping a false god;

an article in the magazine *Christianity Today* was titled 'Playing the lottery is idolatry' (Watson, 1989). Sometimes Isaiah 65:11, a verse of the Bible that condemns fortune-telling and blind submission to fate, is referred to. The person who gambles for money rather than excitement is criticised using a similar argument, based on the statement in the Bible that 'No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon' (Luke 16:13). Thus, the gambler worships mammon, the personification of wealth, rather than God.

To sum up, Christian criticism of gambling comprises four major themes: the supposed greed of the gambler, gambling having a demonic power, gambling conflicting with Christian cosmology, and gambling being an undesired alternative to Christianity in some matters relating to fate, the unknown, and transcendence. As the historian Thomas Reefe (1987, p. 61) remarked, 'gambling challenges monotheism implicitly as metaphysics and explicitly as ritual'.

Concluding discussion

Examples abound of how gambling and religion have in many cultures coexisted in harmony. The gods are regarded as gamblers; deities, saints, and spirits are believed to be ready to help players; gambling is part of religious ritual; religious officials encourage ceremonial gambling; and mythology tells about gambling. Gambling always involves an element of chance, and if chance, in the sense of randomness, is not acknowledged, then the possibility presents itself that divine and mystical forces govern the outcome of chance games. From the viewpoint of the religious believer, the supernatural can thereby be invoked through games of chance; from the viewpoint of the gambler, there is a prospect of winning in games of chance by invoking the supernatural.

It is often argued in a superficial manner that in modern Western societies religion is withering away, giving way to a rational and secular outlook. Certainly, in many countries traditional Christian religion has difficulties recruiting active members for its congregations and making its voice heard in public debate; however, sentiments, attitudes, and notions of a religious nature, though they may have taken new forms, continue to be of importance. As the anthropologist Ernst Gellner (1985, p. 195) wrote when discussing the psychoanalytic movement, '… the old religious or metaphysical transcendent is withering away not because it is transcendent, but because it is the wrong kind of transcendent'.

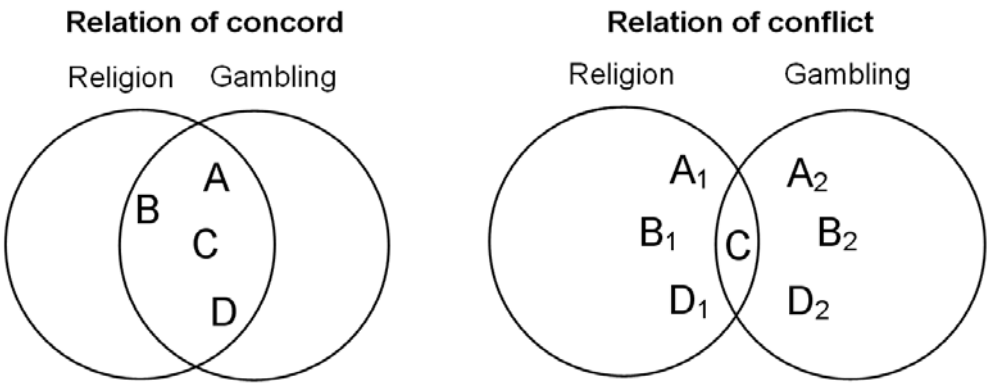
From this perspective gambling can be viewed as a way in which people in a secularised society connect with and probe the realm of the transcendental and mystical. As we have seen, gamblers often hold superstitious and irrational beliefs concerning games of chance, beliefs based on notions of luck and fortune as mystical powers. These notions extend into the mythological domain in everyday discourse and in newspaper articles about jackpot wins as moral tests or blessings, and they also connect with the realm of action when gambling creates altered states of consciousness. The dream of winning a jackpot in the lottery has transcendent

qualities in the vision of a new and better life; 'good fortune' in this context emerges as a secular form of divine grace.

Thus, if gambling contains elements of a religious character and competes with religion for people's attention, then an attack on gambling is to be expected from a religion that strives to maintain a religious and moral monopoly (Brenner & Brenner, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 65–68). The present survey of Christian arguments against gambling reveals the theme that gambling is to some extent an alternative to religion. Gambling offers hope of a better and new life, it opens a path for luck as a secular form of grace, it provides transcendental experiences, and it brings about a communion with fate, destiny, and the unknown.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships of concord and conflict that are formed between gambling and religion. Gambling and religion are here depicted as two spheres of ideas and activities. The letters A, B, C, and D in the figure signify culturally specific notions pertaining to fate, luck, the unknown, transcendence, the transformation of personal life, and other pertinent concepts and states of mind. Thus, their denotation will vary between specific cultures.

Figure 1. Gambling and religion in concord and in conflict.



Note: Shared (A, B...) or conflicting (A_1, A_2...) culturally specific notions of fate, luck, the unknown, transcendence, hope, the transformation of personal life, and other pertinent concepts and states of mind.

In a relationship of concord, there is considerable overlap between the two spheres. Gambling and religion fit well together. In a hypothetical world, where there was no chance and everything was fully predictable, there would certainly be no gambling and probably no religion. In a relationship of conflict, the shared domain is minimal, comprising only a few elements, such as the belief that God can reward the deserving with a lottery win, a belief of which official religion typically disapproves. Instead there are a number of elements that exist in various versions: for instance, 'luck' versus 'God's providence', and the hope of the lottery gambler for a better life versus the hope for salvation and grace of the Christian believer. Official religion thereby has one more reason, in addition to the moralistic and theological ones, for denouncing gambling. From a Christian perspective, gambling is wrong not only because it relies

on a wish to receive without giving and because it introduces chance into the ordered world of God but also because it in some respects offers an alternative path to experiences that are of a transcendental and religious nature.

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