

The Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy Steering Group's paper on the proposed casino,

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Anschutz Entertainment Group, one of the members of the Meridian Delta Ltd. consortium, is building a 20,000 seat stadium inside the Millennium Dome, and Kerzner International has been discussing with Anschutz the possibility of opening a casino next to the stadium. If the number of regional casinos permitted by the Gaming Act rises then several large casinos of the type envisaged will be built in various parts of the country, and the Greenwich Peninsula, with its good communications both locally and nationally, is clearly a desirable site. If the Government gave permission for such a casino inside the dome, and Greenwich Borough gave it permission, then it would be built.

The Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy Steering Group, and particularly its Council of Reference, represents the current and future involvement of the faith communities on the Peninsula. It must therefore speak for the faith communities on this issue and also make clear its own position.

Our religious traditions lie along a spectrum. They all discourage their adherents from gambling, but some have a more permissive attitude than others. The Qur'an forbids gambling to Muslims: "O you who believe! Strong drink, games of chance, idols, and divining arrows are an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside so that you might succeed" (5:90). The Hindu Scriptures forbid gambling to Hindus: "Oh man! Do not gamble. Cultivate your cornfield. Enjoy that gain and deem wealth so acquired as enough" (reg ved 5:85:8); and so does Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i faith: "Gambling and the use of opium have been forbidden unto you. Eschew them both, O people, and be not of those who transgress" (The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p75, 155). Similarly a code of Sikh conduct and conventions, based on the Sri Guru Granth Sahib's discouragement of gambling, tells Sikhs not to "steal, form dubious associations, or engage in gambling." For Judaism and Christianity gambling, whilst not specifically forbidden, must be seen in the light of such important principles as love for one's neighbour (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31) (– for a gambler's gains are someone else's losses) and the responsibility to care for one's family (Ephesians 5:25ff) and for children. Children are a gift (Genesis 33:5) and a blessing (Psalm 127:3), and they need particular care (Matthew 18:1ff).

Whether gambling is forbidden or simply discouraged, this is often for a practical reason: 'that you might succeed': and this is where the agreement lies between the faiths, for they all recognise that gambling can prevent human flourishing and that it should therefore be avoided. So in the Sikh Scriptures, "the gambler's consciousness is focused on gambling" (Sri Guru Granth Sahib, page 1180, line 7); and a Buddhist text, *Digha Nikaya* reads: "There are these six evil consequences in indulging in gambling: the winner begets hate, the loser grieves for lost wealth, wealth is lost, the gambler's word is not relied upon in a court of law, he is despised by his friends and associates, and he is not sought after for matrimony, for people would say he is a gambler and not fit to look after a wife."

The Methodist Church and the Salvation Army commented in detail and at length during the consultation on the Government's Gaming Bill. They have welcomed new regulations designed to remove slot machines from shops where they can easily be

accessed by children, but are less happy with the idea of regional casinos able to install hundreds of machines with ‘variable stakes and prizes’, as they are surely right to believe that an increase in problem gambling will be the result. There is some relief that there won’t be slots for credit cards on these machines. The Church of England and other religious bodies have expressed their agreement with the Methodists’ and Salvation Army’s approach.

We live in a plural society and a secular democracy, and any Government must legislate for what it sees as the common good (which will not necessarily be that envisaged by any particular religious tradition), must preserve individuals’ freedoms (sometimes even if someone’s exercise of those freedoms might damage themselves and others), and must often choose between a variety of evils. The Government might argue that there are increasing opportunities to gamble in other countries and on the internet, and that it is sensible to try to keep gambling in this country where it can be both regulated and taxed. And Greenwich Borough might argue that if one of a number of large regional casinos isn’t built in this borough then one will surely be built somewhere else in London, some other community will reap any economic benefit which might accrue, and residents of Greenwich will still be likely to gamble there. We might not agree with these arguments, but we recognise that they might be made.

In such a context the faith communities’ task is to speak for the vulnerable: for people tempted to gamble, and for their families – for by doing this we love our neighbour. And here speaking for the vulnerable means pressing Kerzner to provide spaces in their casino where there is no gambling, where there are comfortable seats, and where there is someone to listen; it means ourselves providing care for those people who are having difficulties with a gambling obsession; it means services for families suffering from problem gambling – and all of this requires a positive relationship with Kerzner, Anschutz Entertainment Group, and the London Borough of Greenwich. Such a positive, communicative relationship is what we intend.

And in such a context it is also our task to continue to speak the wisdom contained in our Scriptures and the wisdom which has evolved in our respective traditions.

We believe that these two tasks are compatible with each other.

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