

# Position paper on the MCSA and the use of lottery money

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## 1. Preamble

The MCSA has stated on several occasions that, as a denomination, it does not condone the practice of gambling or participating in any game of chance. According to its Laws and Disciplines, Conference pronouncements and position papers, the MCSA:

1. does not allow any game of chance to take place on Methodist property;
2. does not allow any game of chance to take place outside Methodist property, but in the name of the MCSA;
3. does not allow the direct fundraising for the MCSA or structures connected to the MCSA by means of games of chance;
4. discourages its members from participating in games of chance and
5. challenges the six governments within which the MCSA functions to eradicate gambling altogether.

It has become regular practice for ministries or activities which have a formal relationship with the MCSA to apply for and receive funds from the South African national lottery<sup>1</sup>. These organisations have sought clarity from the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the MCSA on whether such practice contravenes the Laws and Disciplines of the MCSA or the spirit thereof. This paper aims to address this query using the Wesleyan quadrilateral as set out by Albert Outler as the yardstick.

When considering the dilemma, a clear differentiation needs to be made between actively participating in gambling or any game of chance, and the process of receiving grants from organisations which generate income through gambling and/or games of chance. The argument can be made that even in receiving money which comes from a source of gambling or games of chance, one is indirectly culpable of encouraging these practices. Is it within reason that one can refrain from raising funds directly by means of gambling or games of chance, but receive grants from a party whose sole purpose is to raise funds by these means?

On a matter of internal consistency, can the MCSA on the one hand condemn the practice of gambling, yet on the other hand receive grants that can only exist because of people's participation in this form of gambling?

The argument needs to be clear on two issues. First of all, is the MCSA's belief consistent that gambling and participating in games of chance are acts that go against the tenets of the Christian faith? Secondly, can the MCSA or any organisation linked to it operate with a clear conscience if it chooses to apply for and receive grants from, for instance, the South African national lottery?

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<sup>1</sup> DEWCOM acknowledges that national lotteries exist in most countries in which the MCSA operates. For the purpose of this position paper, the context in the RSA is used to build an argument, which can be tested and expanded upon in other member countries.

## 2. Scripture

When referring to Scripture, an acknowledgment needs to be made that the issue of receiving income from the national lottery is not quite the same as that of directly participating in a game of chance. There are also varying degrees of gambling ranging from, for instance, buying a raffle ticket (for a small prize) to structured commercial gambling in facilities like casinos. Rather than complicating the argument by describing each of these variables in turn, gambling is addressed as a generic term. It may well be that some of the arguments given below are of greater relevance to certain forms of gambling activity than to others.

Concerning gambling per se, it needs to be stated that there are no references in Scripture which explicitly condemn games of chance or gambling. In other words, there is no verse in the Bible which states “Thou shalt not gamble”.

To the contrary, there are several examples of where the “the casting of lots” is either divinely instructed or commonly used in order to make decisions. Divine instruction is found mainly in the accounts of the division of land after the entry into the Promised Land. See in this instance Numbers 26:55,33:54, 34:13 and 36:2. Furthermore, there are examples of the casting of lots used to determine God’s will (Joshua 18:6-10 and 1 Chronicles 24:5 and 31). Various offices were also decided upon by the casting of lots (1 Chronicles 24:5,31; 25:8-9; 26:13-14; Acts 1:26). The account of Jonah’s identification on the ship is also well known (Jonah 1:7), as is the process of distributing Jesus’ garments at his crucifixion (Matthew 27:35).

One may argue that both the intent and the results of the casting of lots differ from the intent and results of gambling and participating in games of chance. Whereas the casting of lots in biblical times was a tool (using chance) to expedite decision-making processes, gambling and games of chance in modern times focus on personal enrichment, more often than not coming from winning at the expense of other people’s loss. Scripture has been used in denouncing the participation in games of chance by referring to motive as well as the effects it has on a person and/or their communities. Scripture addresses attitudes and beliefs which are commonly associated with participating in games of chance. The following list is not exhaustive, and admittedly differs in strength of argument, but aims to illustrate the biblical arguments commonly used to speak against gambling and participating in games of chance.

### 2.1 Greed and vanity

The first set of arguments addresses the vices associated with games of chance. Why do people gamble? First and foremost, gambling offers the expectation of greater reward than the effort or resources “invested” based not on expertise, but on chance. Games of chance elicit in the individual the expectation of gaining something which may be associated with comparing one’s own lack of resources with those in the possession of others. Exodus 20:17 is perhaps the most well-known text which speaks against this form of coveting.

References such as Proverbs 13:11, Luke 12:15, Ephesians 5:5 and Hebrews 13:5 suggest that wealth accumulated by means of vanity and covetousness are neither sustainable, nor does it encourage a healthy relationship with either God or one’s neighbour. In 1 Timothy 6:10, the author advises that a covetous and greedy relationship with money is destructive.

The expectation that if a person is able to gain resources through winning (and the chances of this – excuse the pun – are extremely slight), the prize will never prove to be enough. Greed leads to more greed (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

The basis on which games of chance operate is by focusing on more than merely personal pleasure and entertainment. They focus on greed and create false expectations, whereby the participant operates under the hope of gaining enormous amounts of resources in a very short time and with very little effort. This is especially true for those who buy lottery tickets. It is well known and well researched that gambling can become addictive. This addictive behaviour can result in the squandering of existing resources with the hope of accumulating more, but results in greater financial difficulty.

## **2.2 Work**

The second set of biblical arguments suggests that participating in games of chance or gambling go against the Christian belief of the meaning and value of work. Proverbs 13:11, Ephesians 4:28 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10 indicate that work is honourable and a noble way in which individuals contribute to their communities and subsequently gain materially. The notion that one can gain materially by means of chance neither contributes towards the well-being of community (as it depends on the loss of others for personal gain), nor does it encourage personal satisfaction for gaining materially in an honourable fashion (for similar reasons). Further to this argument, the intentional squandering of material resources cannot be condoned, as it does not suggest responsible stewardship of that which has been placed into our care (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

## **2.3 Personal devotion**

Arguments against gambling further maintain that a covetous relationship with money (as is the focus in gambling and games of chance) is indicative of an unhealthy state of personal devotion. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus' challenge is directed at those who seek their salvation in both God and material well-being. An idolatrous relationship with material wealth is further explored in passages such as Acts 20:33-35, 1 Corinthians 6:1-12 and Romans 13:1-7.

## **2.4 Chance**

Lastly, and most contentiously, Scripture (as indicated in an earlier section of this paper) seems to indicate that games of chance seem to display the will of God. Proverbs 16:33 and Jonah 1:7 are but a few references which seem to create a causal link between God's will and the results of chance. It may be argued from this perspective that one can deduce that all history depends on God's will and that no unnecessary confidence should be placed in chance outside the will of God. Theologically, this would mean that the problem of predeterminism surfaces in this debate. Is it God's will that some should lose in a lottery and that others should win? From a Wesleyan perspective, we cannot adhere to this teaching, as it implies that the poverty and addiction to games of chance by many as well as the fortuitous gaining of material wealth by others through games of chance are a direct consequence of God's hand at work in these people's lives.

From the perspective of Scripture, we can therefore deduce that:

1. gambling and games of chance as we experience them today are both different from the casting of lots as found in Scripture;
2. Christianity's objection to gambling and games of chance rests on the understanding that gambling per se operates from the premise of personal greed, with a trust in chance to gain from the loss experienced by others. Gambling in no way promotes the twofold law of love;
3. the MCSA's existing polity on gambling is therefore biblically sound. From a biblical perspective it is morally questionable to gain funds through grants which are generated by means of games of chance.

## Tradition

Perhaps the most explicit teaching by Mr Wesley comes in the form of a statement in sermon number 52, where he refers to gambling when he speaks out against those who “made a trade of seizing on young and inexperienced men, and tricking them out of all their money”. This teaching, as well as his teaching in “The use of money” (sermon 44), informs us that Wesley was fundamentally opposed to gambling and games of chance, and promoted responsible and prayerful stewardship of one’s resources. The global Methodist movement and its affiliates seem to agree on this opposing of gambling<sup>2</sup>. In recent times the British Conference has published statements on gambling, which may be of interest to the reader. These statements come in the form of both official declarations<sup>3</sup> and general information regarding the denomination’s beliefs<sup>4</sup>.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has the following directives regarding gambling and games of chance:

- Laws and Disciplines 9.37.3: “... gambling of any kind and raffles or other competitions that involve the principle of gambling is expressly forbidden.”
- Laws and Disciplines 9.38: "The raising of funds for Church purposes by means of raffles, gaming or any other method which involves gaming shall not be permitted, and entertainments which are not allowed on Trust premises shall not be held elsewhere in the name of the Methodist Church."
- Laws and Disciplines, Miscellaneous Conference Resolution 1.31: Conference notes with concern the tendency of some members, organisations and societies to raise funds through “games of chance”. It therefore calls on all ministers and lay leaders to desist from this practice.
- Statement in the 2002 Yearbook (pp.27-29)
- “Say no to gambling!” (pp.30-31 of 2002 Yearbook)
- Resolution 2.11 in the 2002 Yearbook (pp.45-46)

Except for Miscellaneous Conference Resolution 1.31, the other stipulations all refer to direct participation in gambling or games of chance by members of the MCSA or society at large, either on property belonging to the MCSA or facilitating gambling in the name of the MCSA in any other space. Furthermore it addresses the direct raising of funds by means of games of chance. To be more precise:

- Laws and Disciplines 9.37.3 addresses the event of games of chance such as gambling, raffles or other competitions involving the principle of gambling on MCSA property. The principle in this point is that activities involving gambling are not permitted on Methodist property. Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion, this law clearly stipulates that no lottery stalls or vendors will be allowed on Methodist property.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.google.co.za/url?q=http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Salvation-Army-Dialogue-Report.pdf&sa=U&ei=L8zvUsvrGZGqhAer4ICYDw&ved=0CDYQFjAE&usg=AFQjCNG1sEMpN3YJetOUHU0933fBgiNHw>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi\\_gamblingstatement\\_92.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi_gamblingstatement_92.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/views-of-the-church/gambling>

- Laws and Disciplines 9.38 addresses the direct use of gaming for the raising of MCSA funds, either on MCSA property or elsewhere in the name of the MCSA. It can be argued here that those who participate in lotteries (members or otherwise) first of all do not do so with the intention of raising funds for the MCSA or do so in the name of the MCSA wherever the lottery may be played. The gaining of grants is not an act of chance, nor is it participating in an act of gambling. Grants are applied for through a formal process, whereby the eligibility of the application is assessed and responded to.
- Miscellaneous Conference Resolution 1.31 addresses the direct raising of funds by members, organisations and societies by use of games of chance. Once again, for the purposes of this discussion, it would mean that churches or ministries that intentionally raise funds by means of playing the lottery would be in contravention of MCSA polity.

None of the stipulations raised above speak about the scenario in which organisations, ministries or activities linked to the MCSA are awarded grants from lotteries. Deontologically speaking, no organisation, ministry or structure with connections to the MCSA that has been awarded a grant from a lottery such as the national lottery (Lotto) in South Africa can be found guilty of contravening the Laws and Disciplines of the MCSA or any decree issued by Conference.

That said, it must be understood that even if a practice stands the test of law/polity, it does not necessarily secure it as being teleologically moral or considered to be an act of virtue. The point remains that money generated by the national lottery for the awarding of grants is raised directly by means of games of chance, dependent on the very traits described in Scripture which have led the MCSA to stand against gambling. It may therefore be argued that receiving grants from the lottery goes against the spirit of the said clauses in the Laws and Disciplines as well as the Miscellaneous Conference Resolution 1.31.

## Reason

In consultation with various ministries and activities associated with the MCSA, the following points have to be considered:

1. Most of the ministries which have gained financially are registered as non-profit organisations, non-government organisations or section 21 companies. Each of these categories implies that these ministries operate under the governance of their own boards and can be considered to be independent or semi-independent of the MCSA. That said, all claim to have formal links with the MCSA with ministers or Methodist laity serving as board members. The relationship between the MCSA and these ministries therefore has to be assessed to determine to what extent they fall under the discipline of the MCSA. If these ministries were found to be operating under the discipline of the MCSA, it will need to be tested whether the gaining of lottery grants stands in contravention of this discipline. Where these operate independently but in association with the MCSA, the relationship between the MCSA and these ministries will need to be tested to ascertain whether a possible contravening of Laws and Disciplines may result in a change in the nature of the relationship between the MCSA and the ministries.
2. It is argued that these ministries need to raise their own funds for the continuation of the ministries of care which they perform. The national lottery is one avenue which has been explored and from which several ministries have benefitted. The MCSA is not in a position to fund the ongoing effectiveness of these ministries and out of necessity these ministries have had to turn to the national lottery for funding. If the MCSA were able to fund these operations, there would be no need to apply for lottery grants.

3. It is argued that although admittedly the grants mainly originate as a result of mostly the poor playing the Lotto, the ministries ensure that the funds return to the poor in the form of social upliftment services.
4. It is further argued that the money raised by what may be considered theologically questionable means is redirected towards doing good.
5. Furthermore, it is impossible for the MCSA to assess the origin of each and every cent raised for ministry. What about the situation where a person wins a large amount through a game of chance; will this money be accepted when the person wishes to tithe or bequeath an amount to the MCSA? Will the tithe or gift from a person employed by a brewery, for instance, be refused on the basis that the person's salary comes from those who may be addicted to alcohol? Is it equally valid then for the MCSA to question the origin of lottery grants?
6. The MCSA may have recourse for pursuing the constitutionality of its questionable ability to access grants generated through the national lottery on the following grounds: The national lottery is a form of tax generated for the partial purpose of making grants available for social development and upliftment. Although the MCSA has all rights to apply for a lottery grant, it must do so with the knowledge that it will, in a sense, contradict its own polity on gambling by effectively indirectly condoning the participation of individuals in this game of chance. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is framed in such a manner that all can lay claim to certain rights, but cannot exercise those rights if they impede the rights of others. The MCSA is protected under section 15 of the Constitution to exist as a denomination in the Christian religion. Furthermore, it is protected under section 9(3) of the Constitution which states that "The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, **religion, conscience, belief**, culture, language and birth" [own emphasis]. If the only way in which the MCSA is able to apply to state funding results in it contradicting its own beliefs, then the MCSA may have grounds to contest this avenue of administered state funds. It should be suggested that the South African government make available another avenue of funding in the form of grants, whereby the raising of funds through grants does not stand in contravention of the MCSA's and other denominations' rights and religious beliefs.

## Experience

It is the experience of those ministries which have gained from the national lottery in the form of grants that the grants have made a significant contribution towards the effectiveness and expansion of the ministries in many communities. They have also expressed that the national lottery grants are one of a very few streams of income which allow for actual running costs as well as the payment of salaries. Many other grants and gifts come with the express instruction that the money is only to be used for the direct benefit of beneficiaries of the ministries. Although application for lottery funding is stringent and well administered, no application to the fund is guaranteed. Funds requested cannot always be met by the grants and accountability for the use of grants is a prerequisite before any grant is awarded.

On the other hand, the perpetual participation of the poor as main contributors towards the raising of lottery funds remains an ongoing concern.

In terms of the two pivotal questions raised at the beginning of this paper, it is DEWCOM's suggestion that the following serve as a guide:

1. Is the MCSA's belief consistent that gambling and participating in games of chance are acts that go against the tenets of the Christian faith? The answer to this is that the MCSA's current polity is consistent and sufficient to guide moral decision-making with regard to gambling and games of chance.
2. Can the MCSA or any organisation linked to it operate with a clear conscience if it chooses to apply for and receive grants from, for instance, the South African national lottery? To this, the answer is complex. The MCSA or any of its structures governed by the Laws and Disciplines of the MCSA would be contradicting the spirit of its own polity if it applied to the national lottery to receive a grant. Ministries and activities (such as NPOs, NGOs and section 21s) may answer differently as their formal relationship with the MCSA varies. These organisations should be asked to assess their relationship with the MCSA and whether they fall under the direct polity of the MCSA.