



What do you make of Major Cleo Damon's decision?

Just before Christmas last year, Major Damon, who is the CO and area commander for Naples, Florida, turned down a \$100,000 donation to The Salvation Army. The would-be donor, David Rush, had recently won \$14 million in the Florida lottery, and he said the \$100,000 would be coming from that jackpot. Despite the fact that this one gift would have just about equalled the total that others had given in the local Christmas kettle appeal, Major Damon said, "No, thanks." His spokeswoman Maribeth Shanahan explained the decision this way: "We preach against gambling. To accept it would be to talk out both sides of our mouth."

Within days the story went global. Why? What made it news? Well, the first thing is that it's not often that you get anyone really questioning gambling any more, certainly not anyone who stands to lose out by questioning it. The second thing is that it's The Salvation Army. If the headline had read, "Cleo Damon refuses \$100,000 donation," the story wouldn't have made it out of Florida. But when Major Damon acted, he acted for the Army. Thirdly, I think people were quite startled to find The Salvation Army turning away money! One thing the public knows us for is Christmas kettles in the mall and website banners that say "donate on-line." They don't expect us to be picky.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Salvation Army.

203-290 VAUGHAN STREET • WINNIPEG, MANITOBA • CANADA R3B 2N8 • PHONE: (204) 957-2412 • FAX: (204) 957-2418
EMAIL: ETHICS_CENTRE@CAN.SALVATIONARMY.ORG

I don't know Major Damon. I might or might not have made a quite different decision. But either way, I have to tell you, I'm proud of him for having convictions.

Gambling *is* a major social force today, and it is creating social ills. Our Position Statement says, "The Salvation Army deplores the fact that, with the advent and proliferation of government lotteries, legislators have encouraged the tendency to prey on the greed and weakness of human nature. The Salvation Army continues to resist this insidious occurrence and cautions both governments and individuals of the inherent dangers in this gambling craze."

And it is a craze. It's hard to believe, but as recently as the mid-1970s lotteries were illegal in Canada. The law changed to help pay for the 1976 Montreal Olympics (a great show, but a financial catastrophe!). Now every provincial government is into the game in a big way. The Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, for one, boasts that gambling is multi-billion dollar business: gross revenues from lotteries, slots, casinos and race-tracks in Ontario were \$5.3 billion in 2001 alone. About a third of this was "profit" that the government used for various services.

If gambling was just a scheme for redistributing private wealth and funding government services, it wouldn't be so troubling. What troubles me deeply is that Ontario spends over \$300 million a year promoting its gambling business and less than \$20 million to help those who get into deep problems precisely because the advertising works. The Ontario

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Salvation Army.

203-290 VAUGHAN STREET • WINNIPEG, MANITOBA • CANADA R3B 2N8 • PHONE: (204) 957-2412 • FAX: (204) 957-2418
EMAIL: ETHICS_CENTRE@CAN.SALVATIONARMY.ORG

Lottery and Gaming Corporation itself admits that 5.8% of all Ontarians—that’s about the number of people who live in Scarborough—are “problem gamblers,” and half of them could be called addicts.

Somebody has to ask whether this is really the way a government should treat its people. And, I’m with Major Damon in thinking it is hard for the Army to preach against government gambling policy at one moment, and eagerly take our “cut” the next.

The fear of selling out or of being called hypocritical has to be balanced by other factors, though. We have to ask what our scrupulosity looks like from the vantage point of the needy. Hearing that the Army had refused Mr. Rush’s donation, comedian Angus Hamilton quipped, “If there is anything a homeless person cannot stand, it’s ill-gotten soup.” That’s a barb worthy of William Booth himself.

On the business of “tainted money,” General Booth is reported to have said, “The Salvation Army takes the money and washes it in the tears of the widows and orphans and lays it on the altar of humanity.” The majority of Salvationists I asked are sure that Booth would have taken David Rush’s money.

I can’t see the Founder taking it to buy better cars for corps officers or better offices for ethicists, however. Good as those expenditures are, I’d like to think General Booth would want to see a closer connection between the gambling winnings he took in and the healing

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Salvation Army.

203-290 VAUGHAN STREET • WINNIPEG, MANITOBA • CANADA R3B 2N8 • PHONE: (204) 957-2412 • FAX: (204) 957-2418
EMAIL: ETHICS_CENTRE@CAN.SALVATIONARMY.ORG

hand he reached out. I think that he meant “washing [money] in the tears” to express a redemptive principle, not to advocate simple money laundering. I think he was calling us to fix our eyes firmly on those who have been most directly disadvantaged by the squandering of money in the first place. We should be aware that what ought to have been spent on “the widows and orphans” may instead have been wasted by the very people they were depending on. We should understand that money lands in the hands of those “industries” that make irresponsible drinking and problem gambling possible. By the time it becomes available as a donation or a “charitable grant” from government, it’s not money fresh from the mint; it’s money with a history. One could argue that history should guide what is to be done with it. For The Salvation Army to receive some of it to feed the hungry and clothe the naked could be seen as a way of redeeming it. The principle is profoundly Christian.

If the Army refuses gambling money because it’s more concerned about its reputation than the needs of “the widows and orphans,” that’s simply not good enough. At the same time, I think it’s not good enough simply to focus on the neediness of the “widows and orphans” and show no concern about the souls of those who put them there. David Rush seems to have thought that Major Damon was motivated by holier-than-thou self-interest: “Everybody has a right to be sanctimonious if they want to be,” he said. But suppose that Major Damon was not trying to be superior. Suppose he was trying to demonstrate to Mr. Rush (and the State of Florida) *why* the Army’s Position Statement says that Salvationists will “resist participation” in gambling. If he thinks there are good reasons for Salvationists

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Salvation Army.

to have this personal stand, and he really cares about the people who support the Army, doesn't it make sense for him to want them to think twice about the way they had generated the money they are donating?

Mr. Rush doesn't see his gambling as doing anything wrong (the newspaper reports him as saying he doesn't even really think of lotteries as gambling). And at one level, he's probably right. Whatever he wagered he probably could afford. He's not an addict. And he could well be more generous than the average guy. Consequently it would be unfair to do an Amos number on him and rail against him for exploitation. He's no Zacchaeus; he didn't steal the \$14 million. But is our position on gambling only that it's exploitative?

The Position Statement says we think large-scale government-promoted gambling tends to be harmful to people's relations with their neighbors. We don't mean it's only harmful to Salvationists' relations; we mean it's harmful in general.

It's not right for The Salvation Army to force its values down anybody's throat. But persuasion is not coercion. Jesus cared about the soul of Zacchaeus as well as the souls of those he'd stolen from. Shouldn't we then care as much about the spiritual well-being of donors who are unmaliciously and unintentionally doing things that hurt their neighbors?

The gospel is not only about redemption, it's also about reconciliation. When The Salvation Army can be used by God not only to help the needy, not only to rectify injustices, but also to rebuild community, it is especially blessed. I find myself wondering

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Salvation Army.

203-290 VAUGHAN STREET • WINNIPEG, MANITOBA • CANADA R3B 2N8 • PHONE: (204) 957-2412 • FAX: (204) 957-2418
EMAIL: ETHICS_CENTRE@CAN.SALVATIONARMY.ORG

what might happen if Mr. Rush were to meet some of those problem gamblers who had wasted much more than \$100,000 in futile attempts to hit it big. Might there be a healthy re-connection?

When we think that quandaries like Major Damon's are mostly about money, we miss the mark. They aren't. They are mostly about people. About people Salvationists are privileged to serve. About people we are privileged to have as supporters. About ourselves as recipients and channels of God's grace.

James E. Read

7 March 2003

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Salvation Army.

203-290 VAUGHAN STREET • WINNIPEG, MANITOBA • CANADA R3B 2N8 • PHONE: (204) 957-2412 • FAX: (204) 957-2418
EMAIL: ETHICS_CENTRE@CAN.SALVATIONARMY.ORG