

Dealing with Addictions to Pornography

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The Catechism defines pornography as "removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties" (no. 2337). Sadly, pornography is a pervasive, multi-billion dollar business in our country alone, with revenues generated from movies, cable and dish network television, magazines, books and other materials. U.S. News & World Report claimed that the pornography industry grossed roughly \$8 billion in 1997 and continues to escalate each year. Just one example of the extent of this industry is that in the year 2002, 630 million "adult" videos were rented in the United States.

Moreover, the Internet is the cheapest, fastest and most anonymous pornography source. Internet pornographers made over \$1 billion in revenues dealing their merchandise online. The threat of pornography over the Internet cannot be discounted: 70 percent of children viewing pornography on the Internet do so in

toward conceiving a human life. (While not to belabor a point, of the nearly 90 million viewers watching the Timberlake-Jackson peek-a-boo song, 20 percent were children between the ages of 2 and 11 years. Think of the lasting impact upon these young people.)

While some individuals try to justify the use of pornography to enhance their marital intimacy, the majority of these individuals fantasize about those characters and scenes in the pornographic materials rather than their spouses. Such a situation reduces the sacred love between spouses into an adulterous act — one spouse using the other's body as a source of sexual self-gratification while "making love" to a fantasy figure. Dr. Cline reported, "Partners almost always report feeling betrayed, devalued, deceived, ignored, abused, and unable to compete with fantasy." No wonder the American Psychiatric Association found that 20 percent of porn addicts divorce or separate because of their addiction.

These assertions against pornography are also supported by criminal evidence: A proven direct correlation exists between crimes of rape, prostitution, child abuse and the physical abuse of a spouse to the proliferation of pornographic materials and the presence of live porn and sexually-oriented businesses in a community. Several examples support the correlation: In 1991, the Los Angeles Police Department found in a period of ten years that pornography was involved in two-thirds of all child molestation cases. One out of every six persons in our federal and state prisons is a sex offender, and sex crimes are second only to drug crimes. Finally, in 1988, the Federal

Bureau of Investigation reported that 81 per cent of violent sexual offenders regularly read or viewed violent pornography.

As Christians we must be on guard against pornography, not only avoiding any use, but also rejecting any image or thought which may arise accidentally, such as when we innocently go to a movie. We must be very prudent in selecting what we view and even to what we listen. We must protest against those sources of pornography that are infecting and debasing our society. Moreover, in our prayers, we must pray for the virtue of chastity, begging the Lord for the grace to be chaste and to respect the dignity of all individuals, especially those members of the opposite sex. If we should fail, and we purposely participate in some form of pornography or accept some form of pornographic imagery or thoughts which may not have been deliberately sought after but nevertheless accepted, we need to repent, go to confession and receive absolution. The Catechism teaches that pornography "is a grave offense," meaning objectively in the area of mortal sin. Never do we want to make light of this sin and allow it to take root in our lives.

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public schools and libraries. All of us realize that we are surrounded by various forms of pornography, whether noticing the "adult" section of videos at Blockbuster, surfing the Internet, seeing advertising that is clearly sexually suggestive or innocently going to a movie that just happens to have some kind of sex scene. Just think, the 1998 Super Bowl included not only a cavalcade of sexually suggestive commercials but also a half-time show with a raunchy repertoire of dancing and lyrics. This performance climaxed with Justin Timberlake ripping-off the clothing of Janet Jackson to expose her right breast — an act repugnant not only because it revealed part of Janet's anatomy that should have remained covered, but also because it was an aggressive and violent action of a man against a woman. (Maybe in the future the Super Bowl will be known as the Toilet Bowl.)

The Catechism gives three reasons why pornography is wrong and sinful: First, pornography offends against the virtue of chastity. Called to lead a chaste life, each Christian must respect the sanctity of his own human sexuality, which involves the integration of his physical and spiritual being. He must also respect the holy state of marriage: Our Lord taught in reply to the Pharisees' question about divorce: "Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and declared, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become as one'? Thus they are no longer two but one flesh" (Mt 19:4-6). Therefore, the conjugal love which reflects the sacramental union of husband and wife, and the enactment of their vows is also sacred: the conjugal act ought to

express that faithful, permanent, exclusive, self-giving and life-giving love between husband and wife.

However, the respect for marriage and its conjugal love is not simply limited to any physical expression. The respect also includes the spiritual dimension: Jesus taught, "You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart'" (Mt 5:27-28). Therefore, chastity "involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift" (no. 2337). On the other hand, pornography is an act of spiritual adultery, which leads to the spiritual disintegration of the person and may lead to physical adultery or other illicit sexual acts.

Second, pornography offends the dignity of the participants (actors, vendors, public). Each one is exploited himself or exploits others in some way for personal pleasure or gain. In all, the dignity of the human being — whether the person posing, the person producing, the person distributing, or the person enjoying — is debased.

Finally, those who engage in pornography immerse themselves in a fantasy world, withdrawing from reality. While genuine love always involves a self-giving of oneself for the good of others, pornography entices a person to withdraw into a selfish world of perverted fantasy which may later be acted out to the detriment of oneself and others. This problem has increased dramatically, since the Internet offers "virtual reality" sexual interaction.

The sinfulness of pornography, however, is not simply linked to a "one time, one action" phenomenon, but may become like a spiritual cancer that corrupts the person. Dr. Victor Cline posited four progressive effects of pornography: (1) addiction, where the need to view pornographic materials leads to a loss of free control over behavior; (2) escalation, where the person becomes more dissatisfied with normal sexual behavior and delves into progressively harder pornography, usually to attain the same level of sensation and arousal; (3) desensitization, whereby the user is no longer morally sensitive to the shocking, illegal, repulsive, perverted or immoral quality of the material, but instead views it as acceptable and begins to look upon others as objects; and (4) acting out, where the fantasizing becomes overt behavior.

Without question, pornography has a devastating impact upon all of society, especially women and young children. Pornography teaches that women enjoy "forced" or perverse sexual activity; advocates prostitution, exhibitionism, and voyeurism as normal behavior; and regards women as sex objects to be used for one's self-gratification. For some men, the regular use of pornography normalizes aggression toward women in sexual and other interpersonal encounters, and increases the tolerance for such aggression against women in the larger culture. Sadly, the greatest impact may be on the young, especially males 12 through 17 years of age, because pornography portrays sexual activity outside of marriage as acceptable without the dire consequences of AIDS or other venereal diseases, and without the responsibility