

CHAPTER 40

The Pornography Plague

Suddenly it's everywhere. Almost every street corner newsstand has newspapers and magazines featuring naked men and women in bizarre poses. Articles accompanying the vulgar pictures commend the virtues of free sex: when you want, and with whomever you want. And it doesn't stop with the printed media. Films, plays and even music worship the joys of free sex. Whereas a few years ago pornography was hard to find, now it is difficult to avoid.

It's not surprising that men and women are interested in the naked human form. After all, it is the most complex, subtle and beautiful part of creation. This is why throughout history it has been the source of great inspiration for numerous painters and sculptors. However, that interest is easily misdirected, and pornography caters to misplaced and perverted interest. Whereas great art ennobles and uplifts the spirit, pornography appeals to a person's baser nature. People who are involved in the porn industry make large sums of money by exploiting this side of human nature.

One of the factors that have helped pornography to spread so quickly is that many people are emotionally starved. Since love is linked to sex, they are misled into thinking that pornography will satisfy this hunger. Yet while it is initially exciting and exhilarating, pornography results in an even greater feeling of emptiness. It is merely a substitute for love. Just as people become addicted to drugs, people become addicted to pornography and cannot control their desire for it. The British writer C.S. Lewis described this situation very eloquently:

"You can get a large audience together for a striptease act — That is, to watch a girl undress on stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate onto the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon. Would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?"

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Our mind is amazing. It easily takes in and stores the information it gathers through the five senses. The images we see and the sounds we hear are not easily erased. They stay in our mind and are readily recalled. These images affect us emotionally and are the source of information upon which we make decisions and judgments. What goes into our mind comes out later in what we say and the way we behave. Thus, if our mind absorbs a particular view of sexuality, it is later expressed in our sexual behavior. If we have good role models and read good literature, our

mind is filled with noble thoughts and feelings. But if films, magazines and books are filled with images of passion, rebellion, disobedience and violence, how will we become loving, considerate and faithful people? When we allow perverted images into our mind, we soon will believe that they are normal. Pornographic material exploits and dehumanizes sex. Human beings are treated as things and women in particular as sex objects. The message pornography sends is that women enjoy being abused and treated in this degrading manner. If we look at and read pornography, we will absorb these values and perspectives. Our mind will become corrupted. Once these images are in, they are very difficult to get out.

Pornography presents a false view of human relations. The ideal woman is presented as a sex idol. This image corrupts the true view of womanhood. Women are judged by their looks and not as a whole person with a personality. This attitude corrupts the relationship between men and women. In movies men and women frequently are seen to have sex without any subsequent complications. Life is not like that, though. Sexual encounters have an emotional dimension, and people who are promiscuous are not psychologically healthy. Pornography promotes an ideal that is actually unhealthy and false.

“The purpose of a woman is to express in the world in a concrete form the Eternal femininity, one of the sides of divine nature, and by this to bring all the world to loving harmony, beauty and freedom.”

—Nikolai Berdyaev, *Metaphysics of Sex and Love*



Pornography is...

1. **Anti-family.** Nearly all the sexual encounters in films and books are between people who are not married. Thus pornography minimizes the importance of family relations, ridicules marriage and glorifies promiscuity. Such images cannot but undermine marriage and the family.

2. **Anti-human.** Pornography is obsessed with the sexual function as if it were the only important aspect of life. It reduces people to bodies.

Women are judged by their body and not by their character. Stories lack plots with character, and pictures focus on the anatomy, not the face.

3. **Anti-women.** The outright degradation and humiliation of women are the central themes of pornographic pictures and stories. Women are consistently portrayed as objects of lust to be sniggered over and grabbed at, used and abused, and discarded in favor of another. Pornography is also potentially very dangerous to women. It encourages men to look at women not as persons but as sex objects to be used for self-gratification. Many murderers and sexual criminals confess that their crime was stimulated by pornographic material.

4. **Anti-children.** By sexualizing all relationships, pornography indoctrinates children with an amoral acceptance of promiscuity.

5. **Anti-sex.** Paradoxically, pornography is also anti-sex. It overrates the physical dimension of



sexual love while underrating the spiritual dimension. It reduces sexual love merely to the physical act. It fails to understand that sexual love can find proper fulfillment only in a loving, lasting relationship. Instead it makes sexual love, which should be private and intimate, a public spectacle. By exploiting sex for commercial gain, it denies the dignity and spirituality of sex.

6. Anti-social. Pornography always corrupts society. In societies where pornography has become more available, the number of serious sexual offenses such as rape has gone up greatly. As a result, the relationships between men and women in general become permeated by fear and suspicion. Pornography is also connected with organized crime, prostitution, drugs and political forces that want to demoralize the population. Often the subjects of porn films are women and children who have been forced into such work.

7. Anti-culture. Not all portrayals of the naked human form are pornography. Think of the

famous statue of the Venus de Milo. Art is uplifting and ennobling. Pornographic treatments typically degrade and destroy. The lifting of legal restrictions on pornography has not led to a flowering of culture.

8. Anti-life. The sexual organs of men and women are precious and sacred. Why? They are the place where the ultimate act of love is consummated and through which life itself begins. By exposing his or her body to lustful scrutiny, a person is violating the purpose of life.

Pornography and freedom

It has been claimed that in a free society there should be no censorship and that freedom of expression should be absolute. Let's think about this. Are you allowed to carry out a conversation with your classmates during class time? Why not? Can you walk into a church during a service and start shouting? Should you be allowed to slander and tell lies about a person, thus destroying his reputation and possibly his career and livelihood? What about the freedom not to be slandered?

We can see that freedom is never absolute. It is always constrained by one's social context and by laws that exist to protect everyone's freedom. There is a time and place for everything. Freedom is valuable because it allows us to pursue truth, beauty and goodness.

Pornography has little to do with the free exchange of ideas and the pursuit of truth. By its effects it dehumanizes people and takes away their freedom. It is a way of making money by stimulating and exploiting people's baser desires. Since many people find it offensive, its open display prevents them from having the freedom to walk about without being visually assaulted by every newsstand. Although it is not



necessarily easy to draw the line between pornography and art, there is a difference.

The problem is what to do about it? What should one do about harmful temptations? A similar problem concerns alcohol, smoking and drugs. All are harmful, both individually and socially. What should be done about them? Should people be protected from temptation, or should they be allowed to do what is wrong and harmful to themselves and others? In many countries there has been a long debate about such questions. There are basically three approaches:

1. Ban them altogether.
2. Allow them.
3. Restrict and regulate them.

Each approach has been tried by different countries. In Muslim countries modesty is a very important virtue. So it is very natural that pornography should be banned. It is illegal to display it, sell it or import it. Of course, it exists underground and those who really want it can always find a way to get it. Still, it is removed as a casual temptation and does not assault the senses of people who do not wish to see it. Any attempts to introduce pornography are vigorously resisted by ordinary people.

In several Scandinavian countries there is no censorship at all. All types of pornographic films, magazines and books are freely available and openly displayed to the public. This removal of censorship was introduced by the government for ideological reasons and was not supported by the majority of the population. It has been followed by a rise in sexual crimes and increase in the divorce rate.

Several other countries have allowed pornography but tried to restrict it. In Britain, for example, there has been a long debate about what pornography is and

what art is. Gradually pornography has become more widely available. However, there is still censorship of films and magazines. Child pornography is illegal, and other forms of pornography can be obtained only in certain “adult” shops. Pornographic magazines sold in ordinary shops have opaque plastic covers.

In general, we need to recognize that it is quite possible to have a free society without pornography. In fact, pornography undermines the free market by corrupting human relationships and making exploitation more acceptable.

Questions for Discussion



- Discuss the eight points made against pornography. Are there any points that you think are not relevant? Can you think of any other points?
- Are there limits to freedom of expression? How should those limits be decided?
- Do you see any pornographic material where you live? What can be done to prevent the spread of pornography?

Eternal Femininity

Eternal Femininity... What is it? Is it the curves of a nude body on the cover of porno magazines? Or is it the pleasure of gradually getting to know more and more deeply the uniqueness of the woman you love? Let's read from the following letter written by the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky to his wife, Anna Grigoryevna:

Good morning, my dear angel!

Accept my hugs and kisses. I was thinking of you all the way here.

I've just arrived. It is half past eleven and I am a little tired. I am just sitting down to write. I had to wait for my train in Leipzig quite a long time. I was sitting in the station, imagining you asking me why I left my Anya. I remembered the whole of you, every tiny cell of your soul and of your heart. During this time, beginning in October, I have come to understand that you are such a wholesome, pure, shy, humble, beautiful and innocent angel who is trusting me. I am really unworthy of you. How could I leave you? Whatever for am I going? Where I am going? God entrusted me with you in order to protect all the particles of your heart, so that your heart may come into full blossom. God gave me to you so that I could make a vicarious sacrifice of all my sins. I must present you before God more developed and mature, free of anything that is damaging to one's soul and spirit. And I did not deserve it because I commit such wild actions like my silly trip here. I may influence you in a wrong way. I was terribly sad yesterday. I wish you were here so I could embrace you...

Anya, my pure light, my sun, I love you! When people part they have such deep feelings realizing how dear they are to each other. We are becoming one being out of two...

Ah, Anya, I need you. That is what I am feeling now! I remember your warm smile that permeates my heart. I miss you...

Good bye, my angel, my quiet, sweet, humble angel, please love me. I wish I could see you now, if just for one second. There are so many things we could discuss, so many impressions that have accumulated. It can't be all put into one letter. Besides, you know, I cannot write letters so well. Still, when I write several lines I feel better. So, I am going to write to you every morning. I need to write these letters because I am constantly thinking of you — every minute. For God's sake, take care of your health, try to find at least something interesting to do...

Good bye, my darling, good bye, my light.

Yours to the tiniest part of myself, kissing you endlessly,

Loving you,
Fyodor