Why Should We Oppose the 'Sexploitation' Industry?

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As we look at the evils of our day, including the widespread dissemination of pornography, what shall we say? Shall we say it is not our business, and people should be free to go to hell in their own way? Shall we say the whole thing is a trivial issue and allow it to surround us, pervade our thoughts and corrupt our minds? Shall we continue with pornography, so that the Mafia may flourish? So that some may be satiated with sexual perversion?

The Nihilism of Pornography

If Christians are to put away sin and prove to be neighbours to others, then as we care for their souls, we must not disregard their minds and bodies. Rather, we must marshal our arguments for serious rational and spiritual confrontation with evil, so that we may both counter the prevailing destructive impact of pornography and replace the attitudes which foster it with those loving, caring responses which alone can eliminate the hunger for such material.

The first thing we can say, then, is that pornography is anti-life. To reject pornography is not to be negative towards life. On the contrary, it is pornography itself which is nihilistic, reductionist and destructive. It is a negative influence in society and in personal lives. Actively countering such a force, therefore, is positive. We need not apologise when we proclaim love not lust, and reject anything less than the best for men and women made in God's image.

In particular, pornography is anti-relationship and thus anti-family. Through its obsession with sexual function, pornography carefully avoids any recognition of the value of family relationships. Marriage is ridiculed, promiscuity promoted, homosexual relationships glamorised and group sex endorsed. Sexuality is integrally related to the family unit and its use for non-relational gratification is wrong. One modest benefit arising from the flood of pornography is that, against the sharp alternative of the pornographic society, the value of biblical family ideals is even more clearly evident.

Pornography is anti-human. By its preoccupation with organs and functions, pornography departs from the representation of real people. Stories lack plots with character, pictures portray anatomy often without the face whereby a human being might be
identified. By this subhuman approach, pornography dehumanises. It treats sexual behaviour between humans as of no greater significance than the copulation of animals. In fact, pornography presents sexual acts with animals as if they could be simply another variety of human experience. In Leviticus 18:23, such acts are condemned as 'perversion'.

Pornography is anti-woman. The outright degradation and humiliation of women are the central themes of pornographic stories and pictures. In soft pornography, the victimisation is less obvious but nonetheless present, as women are treated as sex-objects, disposable creatures to be ogled, used and abused, and then discarded in favour of another.

Many individuals who would resist the temptation to adultery and the use of prostitutes will fall for the substitute of pornographic publications to provide sexual gratification. In view of Jesus' teachings about lustful thoughts (Matthew 5:28), it is difficult to see how this is any more defensible morally. So there is a need to alert people to the dangers of promiscuity expressed in fantasy as well as in behaviour.

Pornography is anti-children. It creates an environment which is inimical to the psychological and moral development of children. It promotes a sexualisation of all relationships, so that it has become almost impossible for adults to meet, hitchhikers to ride or women to be out alone without the situation being construed as an opportunity for physical sex. Children are developing their view of the adult world in this context. A great deal of sex education is seeking to indoctrinate them from their earliest years with an amoral acceptance of promiscuity. They are bombarded with adult sexual images long before they are emotionally prepared. Far worse, a sizeable number are more grossly exploited as models and prostitutes, as victims of incest and the attacks of child molesters. No one has produced credible evidence that any of these risks has been reduced since pornography openly began to promote such ideas. The western world has not seen such deliberate and widespread abuse since the days of the industrial revolution, when children were physically maltreated in the mines and factories.

Paradoxically, pornography is anti-sex. To reject pornography is to take a stand for sex as a special way of expressing and deepening interpersonal commitment. Pornography fails to understand sex as a sacred gift intended for joy, intimacy and deep fulfilment in a loving, lasting relationship. Instead it makes a public spectacle of what should be intimate acts. It takes what should be deeply personal and exploits it commercially, thereby denying the dignity and spirituality of sex. It even undercuts any idea of sex being fun in relationships which are strong and secure.

Psychological analyses of Playboy philosophy have emphasised that the preoccupation of such magazines with the physical aspects of sexuality arises not from satisfaction or pleasure but from attempts to counter deep-seated fears of true sexual encounter. Everything is kept superficial and undemanding; ideas of commitment or marriage are avoided or deliberately ridiculed. It is not surprising, therefore, that recent content analyses of Playboy magazine have shown an increasing use of violent themes.

Pornography, by its influence on customs and conventions, is anti-social. Defenders of pornography will argue that the decision to read or see it is a private one, of no concern to anyone else. Yet all the indications are that use of pornography has social repercussions. Evidence is accumulating all the time concerning individuals whose anti-social behaviour (including sex crimes and crimes of violence) has led to a real growth in the incidence of sex crimes in recent years. The result is tragic not only for the victims, but for society, as it becomes permeated by fear and suspicion. The availability of pornography is strongly implicated as one of the factors in the corruption of society.

Victor Bachy, Professor of Communications at the University of Louvain, Belgium, after examining what has happened in Denmark over the last decade, came to the conclusion that statistics are largely meaningless there. What really matters is the widespread and
insidious corruption which spreads so much further than pornography itself. He describes Vesterbro, the porn centre of Denmark:

In Vesterbro, most of the shops are barely a facade. What counts is the rest. The sale of porno texts and pictures is allowed, but the realities are not, and their exhibition is forbidden . . . All the necessary personnel is hired (from) among the socially handicapped and kept in place through the cement of drugs. The whole thing is managed, organised, kept under strict control by big bosses, high-class criminals, international gangsters and magnates of finance. The methods of recruiting the female personnel resemble those of international procurers and white-slavery . . . The liberalisation of pornography has not created Vesterbro, criminals, drugs, procurement. It simply has, in this area of Copenhagen, permitted the installation of criminality at the highest level. The disease that was prevailing has become a general cancer. The indirect consequences of the 1969 law might well be far more important and more serious than its direct effects.

Pornography is anti-environment. It is paradoxical and illogical to become angry at pollution of the natural environment and remain unmoved at the tawdry, garish, obscene and embarrassing displays of pornography on newsstands, outside movie houses and in the daily newspaper advertisements. We recognise the hazards of mercury in our water, fertilizer in our food and smoke in the air we breathe. Ought we not equally to be concerned at the visual pollution which assaults anyone who walks through Times Square, Hollywood, Piccadilly Circus or, to a lesser extent, almost any city in the western world?

The effects take such a long time to reveal themselves; it took a long time before people realised fully the dangers of car exhausts and cigarette smoking. Scientific evidence has now conclusively demonstrated these dangers. So, too, long before the evidence demonstrates all the ill effects, we may respond sensitively to the creeping pornographic pollution which threatens to stifle conscience and corrupt behaviour. And already the evidence is beginning to appear. Should we wait for the scientists' final proof (for it may never come), or shall we speak prophetically of the dangers of immorality?

In many places, the availability of pornography depends on the assumption that community standards have changed so that sensible mature citizens now accept its presence. There is really no evidence to sustain this proposition (polls of public opinion invariably indicate a wish for tighter controls), but so long as responsible citizens remain silent, certainly the appearance of change is there. So long as the aggressive minority shout for removal of restrictions and the voice of decency remains muted, the politicians and legislators may be forgiven for believing there has been a change.

On the other hand, there probably has been a change in attitudes—even among Christians. That is one of the insidious consequences of environmental pollution. We all experience a tolerance shift, so that what was unacceptable five years ago becomes marginal today, while the marginal of yesterday is the normal of today. We should take note of this and examine to what extent standards have been subtly but significantly lowered.

Pornography is anti-community. A whole new multi-million dollar industry has developed to supply the insatiable and ever-changing demand for pornography. Because it panders to human weakness, exploiting authors, models, publishers, retailers and customers alike, it has largely fallen into the hands of syndicated crime. Through close association with drugs and prostitution, a whole criminal subculture has begun to flourish. Inevitably, bribery of law enforcement officers, corruption in high places and violence against those who speak out have become commonplace where pornography prevails.

Removing criminal sanctions against pornography has not helped, as many claimed it would. It has simply made it easier for the criminal subculture to monopolise the market, maintaining an outrageous profit margin at lower risk. The bright hopes that people would lose interest and behave responsibly if only they were not constrained by the law rests firmly
on the humanist philosophy of the goodness of humanity, and denies the weaknesses of
human nature. The biblical view of humanity as sinful could scarcely be more dramatically
confirmed than by the escalation of corruption that has followed the removal of legal
sanctions.

Pornography is anti-culture. Much debate has arisen over the assertion, made by its
defenders, that pornography deserves the same protection as fine art and literature. One of
the hallmarks of art is that it ennobles and enriches. Pornographic treatments typically
degrade and destroy. Certainly there will be occasions when the effect, the possible cultural
merit, of a particular work will be disputed. But the material classified as hard-core
pornography makes no such pretensions.

One of the strongest objections to pornography is that it not only presents a distorted
and false view of the world, but also, by its very presence, excludes more enriching
presentations. Just as cancer cells multiply and overwhelm healthy cells, so art and literature
are attacked by pornography. Theatre owners claim it is difficult to screen family
entertainment because of competition from salacious films. Novels may be rejected unless
spiced with heavy sexual content. Radio City, New York, claims it has had to discontinue its
family entertainment after twenty-five years due to pressures from pornographic centres in
nearby Times Square. The Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, and the traditional fine theatre
and music of that city, lost patronage as sex shows and porno shops became a major tourist
attraction. The promise that removal of legal restraints would lead to a flowering of culture
has not been fulfilled. Indeed, as we have seen, people of culture rue the present
impoverishment. There is little doubt that wide dissemination of pornography drives out true
culture just as counterfeit currency drives out the true coin.

Pornography is anti-conscience. It is by conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that
we become aware of the moral law of God and distinguish good from evil and right from
wrong. Just as through constant exposure to violence in the media people lose sensitivity to
real violence, so too our conscience can be blunted by pervasive pornography. We begin to
accept the idea that people may be used as objects and that sex may be used
indiscriminately. When we cease to care about the abuse of sexuality, we are losing concern
for an essential part of human nature. If we are content with our own personal integrity and
fail to care about the social impact of pornography, we may soon cease to care about other
social problems as well—injustice and poverty, for example.

Pornography is anti-God. It is completely opposed to the teachings of Jesus about
purity and love. His teachings set men and women free from enslavement to lust.
Pornography, in the name of liberation, enslaves to an obsessive preoccupation with lust.
Further, it deliberately attacks that which is sacred to the Christian faith. The violation of
nuns, perversions practised by priests and the use of churches for sacrilegious orgies are
favoured themes. The person of Jesus himself is desecrated by obscenity and blasphemy
with the purpose of ridiculing Christian beliefs. The hate and anger directed against women
in so much pornography is also vented against God himself.

When Danish pornographer, Jens Thorsen, proposed to make a pornographic film
about Jesus Christ, the Christians of Denmark finally took action against what had been
occurring for some years in that country. They said, ‘If we allow this, then as a country we
deserve judgement’. They fought and won. Others have done similarly. When an attempt
was made to make the film in England, the producer was refused entry to the country. In an
unprecedented way, through the initiative of concerned Christians, public reactions against
the film came from the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Catholic
Archbishop of Westminster and the Queen herself. Should we do less to protect the name
of Jesus Christ?