

Dangers Lurking on the Internet

by Jim Seghers

Pornography

Pornography is big business. *U.S. News & World Report* estimated that it grossed \$8 billion in 1997. More current figures approximate the annual revenue at \$10 billion. Alarming, the pornographic bookstores, strip clubs, prostitution and 1-900 sex-talk lines are now joined at the hip with the Internet. This medium provides a graphic visual outlet that reaches into homes, schools, libraries and businesses. The *Industry Standard*, a magazine reviewing Internet business reports that Internet porn pulled in \$1 billion in 1998.

One scam that is said to be popular with porn sites is to lure voyeurs with an offer of free access. However, before one can have free access credit card information is required. The unsuspecting victim is informed that he can cancel the service before he is billed. That is true if the subscriber cancels the subscription via the customer service number. Good luck, because that number seems forever busy. Meanwhile monthly charges pile up!

The teaching of the Church in the *Catechism* is clear regarding pornography. "It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others... It is a **grave** offense."¹

Internet pornography has had an evil influence on many adults as well as teen-age boys and girls. The National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families (<http://www.nationalcoalition.org>), reports that the Internet creates a dangerous opportunity for adults to prey on children. The TV program *Hard Copy* recently aired a segment that reported the same danger. Chat rooms can pose special dangers to young people.

In order to protect children it is imperative that parents become educated in computer technology. They are also strongly advised to subscribe to an Internet service provider that filters out porn. Purchasing a software filter for one's home computers is also an option. Without this protection it is dangerous to allow children to surf the net. Curiosity is very powerful with children.

Pornography is dangerous for two reasons. First it's **gravely sinful**. Secondly, its **addictive nature** can trap a person into a hideous life of habitual sin. Pornography can enslave the soul just as drugs enslave the body. One former porn addict affirmed it "was like a drug injected into my veins." The obsessive-compulsive behavior pornography spawns is destructive to one's eternal salvation, emotional health, marriage, family life and career. I can still remember with chilling vividness the sight of a teen-age girl weeping uncontrollably because her father was addicted to pornography on the Internet.

¹ [Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2354.](#)

Nor should one underestimate the dangers of so-called soft porn. It desensitizes its users and leads to the hard-core varieties. Pornography in any form debases and strips away personhood, especially of women, reducing God's children to roles as mere objects to be selfishly used then discarded. It easily leads to cruelty, violence, and abuse.

Jeff Cavins of EWTN lays it on the line when he says, "If you can't handle the Internet, then pull it. Better to enter heaven without your PC than spend eternity in hell clutching your Macintosh." When it came to temptations against chastity, the saints knew what to do — **flee**. Petting rattlesnakes is safer than flirting with temptations against chastity. In this arena the person who runs away will live (spiritually) to fight another day!

Hate Sites

Problems with unlimited access to the Internet are not limited to the porn sites. There are literally thousands of sites that spew out racial, ethnic, and religious hatred. Among the favored targets are blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, and homosexuals. It is not surprising to discover that some of these sites are linked to porn sites.

Bombs Away

Amid the plethora of information available over the Internet, children can also retrieve detail instruction on how to build homemade bombs. Recently, several teens in the New Orleans, La. area were arrested for detonating homemade bombs that they constructed via information obtained on the Internet.

Depression and Loneliness

The September 1998 issue of *The American Psychologist* published a study conducted by the Carnegie Mellon University. It discovered that increased use of the Internet is associated with high levels of depression and loneliness. Researchers concluded that the use of the Internet itself was the probable cause of the subjects' decline in well being. The researchers concluded that relationships conducted without physical proximity do not provide the necessary personal support and happiness.

Public Library Policy - Be Aware

For some parents the above discussion may seem academic and remote because their children are carefully supervised and they may not have Internet access in their homes. However, there is a movement afoot, supported by the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Library Association, which could endanger all children. These organizations promote **open library Internet access to children of all ages!**