

Pornography

By Jim Seghers

Some time ago a young woman of about 17 was waiting for me after morning Mass. Ostensively, she wanted to ask a theological question. However, before she could complete her query she burst into tears and blurted out: "My father is addicted to pornography on the Internet!" It was an awkward moment because I felt so helpless in the face of her grief. She wept convulsively for about 15 minutes.

Earlier this week I had a wide-ranging conversation with a devout Catholic who is in his early seventies or late sixties. During our visit he shared that, were it not for prayer, he would be addicted to pornography on the Internet. Subsequently, when I looked through my mail I saw that the current issue of *Covenant Keepers* had arrived. It highlighted the growing addiction of Catholic men to pornography.

Covenant Keepers is a monthly newsletter to fathers published by St. Joseph's Covenant Keepers and the Family Life Center International in Port Charlotte, Florida, www.dads.org, fax: (941) 743-5352. Steve Wood, a convert to the Catholic Church, is the editor of *Covenant Keepers* and the founder of these two outstanding organizations. Steve, a classmate of Scott Hahn, was a former Presbyterian minister. The headline of the newsletter reads: "What Is Pornography Doing to Fathers & Their Families." This is an issue well worth studying. I highly recommend it to all adults, especially dads. It can be ordered directly from the Family Life Center.

Steve Wood writes of his own experience with this great evil. "At every Catholic men's conference I have spoken at over the past four years, I have encountered men addicted to Internet pornography ... Scores of wives have contacted the Family Life Center alarmed about their husband's addiction to pornography. These wives are fearful about pornography's corrosive effects upon their husbands, their marriages, and their children."¹ These wives have every reason to be alarmed.

The teaching of the Catholic Church is very clear on the evil of pornography. "Pornography, consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. 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 immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. *It is a grave offense.*"²

Marriage is innately difficult, even in the best of circumstances, and these are not the best of times. We sing about love, we talk about love, and we write books and poetry about love. However, there seems to be very little understanding of what love means and entails. Most couples approach their wedding day with high expectations of a fulfilling lifetime together. Yet many of these marriages crash within a few years. What happened to all those romantic feelings of love on their wedding day? They long ago faded from memory into bitterness and disappointment.

Shortly before my father died, he shared the following perspective with me: "Son, the greatest blessing in my life after the love of the Mother of God, has been the love of your mother." That was a stirring moment as I sat next to Dad with the tears flowing down my face. Of those reading this essay, I wonder, how many of you know men who feel this way about their wives? Is that the way you feel about your wife?

Marriage is difficult because loving is hard. It requires self-sacrifice and commitment. *Self-sacrifice* compels a person to put the other first and oneself last. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man

¹ *Covenant Keepers*, Fall 2000, Volume 6, Issue 5, p. 1.

² [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), #2354 (emphasis mine).

lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). *Commitment* enables a person to remain self-sacrificing when it is very difficult to do so. "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Lk 22:42).

Pornography thwarts genuine love by turning a man's focus inward on his own voyeuristic pleasure. Dennis Prager, a fine Jewish philosopher who lives in Los Angeles, told the story of an Orthodox friend who had his wife glean the newspaper each day and cut out any pictures or advertisements of immodestly dressed women. As a result when he read his newspaper, it was full of holes. Once at a retreat I was giving to about 40 women, I asked these ladies how many of them would be willing to do the same thing each day for their husbands. Only one or two raised their hands to express their willingness. Then I told the rest of the story. He told his wife that he didn't want to be sexually aroused in the slightest by any other woman. When I asked the same ladies how many of them would be willing to cut out the immodest pictures from their husband's newspapers if that were his motivation, almost all of them raised their hands in agreement.

Recently I talked with a young man who has been married for about a year. He and his wife are expecting their first child. Both are deeply committed to Christ and to each other. However, the glow and romanticism of the honeymoon is gone. They are coping with the problems of every day life: jobs, money issues, when can she quit work, morning sickness, medical bills and most definitely the rubbing of egos. Like all young couples, they are having their struggles. These problems are not critical. Rather they afford them the opportunity to grow by sacrificing for each other in spite of fatigue, financial concerns, misunderstandings, differing viewpoints, ego, and hurt feelings. Sacrifice is irksome. Love makes it bearable. Perfect love makes it a joy. An escape into pornography would seriously undermine this relationship. It would destroy the other spouse's trust, cast God out of the relationship and increase self-centeredness. They would then be on the slippery slope of another broken marriage.

Amid the paganistic environment in which we live, I believe that it is humanly impossible to love unselfishly and remain committed to the unselfish love marriage requires unless God is squarely in the center of that relationship. The sinfulness of pornography, however, pushes God out of the way and then devours what is left with the ferocity of a virulent cancer. It will inevitably destroy the marriage and damage the children. It is tragic, for example, how many young men have been lured into pornography because of the evil example of their dads.

In the Garden of Eden God confronts all the participants in the Original Sin. Speaking to Eve God warned women of the consequences of dealing with fallen men: "Yet your urge [or desire] shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master" (Gen 3:16). How many women since Eve have longed for their husband's heart, but did not have it? How many women since Eve have experienced instead their husband's tyranny and insensitivity? One of the greatest blessings a father can give to his children is the example of a husband who profoundly loves their mother. My father gave that to me. I want to give it to my children. Pornography kills the possibility of becoming a truly loving husband.

Pornography creates a fantasy world of vicarious self-centered stimulation. However, men need to live in reality, not in a world of escapism. I know a husband whose love for his wife expands when he sees his wife's scars and stretch marks. They remind him of the loving sacrifices she makes for him and their six children. This motivates him to strive to become more giving of himself to her and the children. That's reality because it is rooted in self-donation and commitment.

Pornography has become a multi-billion dollar business that breeds on its addicts. Like other addictions pornography requires new "highs" as past stimulus lose their impact. Like any other addition, pornography also enslaves. Once caught in its tentacles, it is difficult to break free. The current issue of *Covenant Keepers* offers a practical 12-steps guide to break free of this entrapment. Order it. At the end of this essay there will also be a list of support organizations that can help with this terrible dependency.

The best advice is to avoid any form of pornography. If you can't control the Internet, then get it out of your house.

Fr. Peter Damian Fehlner, a dogmatic theologian and superior of Our Lady's Chapel, New Bedford, Mass. run by the Franciscan friars of the Immaculate, expresses his concern over this dreadful evil. He noted that over the centuries the saints have stated that the vast majority of those who go to hell do so because of sexual sins. When it comes to pornography or any other sexual sin, cowardliness is a good tactic. He who runs away will live to fight another day.

Pornography is also becoming an increasingly serious problem with teens, both boys and girls. Studies show that 70% of porn traffic occurs between 9 and 5. Home computers with an Internet connection should have a filter if teens have access to them. Parents should also be vigilant in regard to their children's use of Library computers. Most of these machines have complete Internet access. Recently, I gave a series of talks to an eight grade boys and girls as part of their CCD program. At least 60% of them affirmed that they had a television in their rooms. Almost all of these sets had cable or satellite connections. It amazes me that the same parents, who would be horrified at the thought of feeding garbage to their children, allow television to feed garbage to their children's minds and hearts. Unrestricted television viewing also provides a lead-in to pornography. I asked these young people where their friends acquire most of their values. Their number one answer was "television." Their number two reply was "their friends."

Pornography in any form should be taken seriously. It is critical that we men become the guardians of our homes. This protectiveness must begin with the defense of our own souls. Chastity in marriage is just as important as chastity when we were single. The celibacy of our faithful priest is a witness to married men that affirms our capability to remain faithful to our wives in every way and for all of our lives. Our chastity becomes a gift to our children that guards them from the excesses of the pagan society in which we live.

If anyone has a problem with pornography, it is urgent that it be repented in the confessional. The support God gives through the graces of this sacrament is desperately needed. True repentance requires a determined resolution to avoid this sinful behavior in the future. That means avoiding the occasions of sin. The battle is more easily won at the beginning. However, once pornography becomes a habit it easily becomes addictive. When that happens additional support is often needed. In this regard the resources listed below can be of great help.

Obsessive-compulsive behavior is a grave warning signal that outside help is desperately needed. An example is the man who bought films and magazines from a pornography shop, then experience a temporary relief in his voyeurism. Subsequently, when he became racked with guilt he would throw everything out. Then the pattern would repeat. Denial of the problem is a great danger once a pattern like this emerges. If it is not addressed it can result in adultery, marital conflicts, incest, termination at work, squandering the family's income, and arrest. It takes great courage to face any addictive behavior.

RESOURCES:

Helpline for Pornography Addiction: 1-800-583-2964

Trained counselors are available during business hours to help those struggling with pornography. Help is also offered to the spouses of those addicted.

www.dads.org This is the site of St. Joseph's Covenant Keepers, which I recommend without any reservations. Go to "Links" then go to either "Help for Hurting Marriages" or "Help for Those Struggling with Pornography."

www.pureintimacy.org This support website is sponsored by Focus on the Family.

www.nationalcoalition.org This is the official website of the National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families.

<http://www.sexaa.org> Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) has group meetings that follow the AA 12-step model. Discernment is required because the quality of the local leadership and the make-up of the group can vary in quality.

www.sa.org Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) is another 12-step program. Once again, careful discernment is required in evaluating a local group.

February 21, 2001