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# **Bought With a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God**

## **A Pastoral Letter**

by

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### **I. Introduction: “The life of man is the vision of God.” (Saint Irenaeus)**

In my forty years as a priest, I have seen the evil of pornography spread like a plague throughout our culture. What was once the shameful and occasional vice of the few has become the mainstream entertainment for the many – through the Internet, cable, satellite and broadcast television, cell phones and even portable gaming and entertainment devices designed for children and teenagers. Never before have so many Americans been so tempted to view pornography. Never before have the accountability structures – to say nothing of the defenses which every society must build to defend the precious gift of her children – been so weak.

This plague stalks the souls of men, women and children, ravages the bonds of marriage and victimizes the most innocent among us. It obscures and destroys people’s ability to see one another as unique and beautiful expressions of God’s creation, instead of darkening their vision, causing them to view others as objects to be used and manipulated. It has been excused as an outlet for free expression, supported as a business venture, and condoned as just another form of entertainment. It is not widely recognized as a threat to life and happiness. It is not often treated as a destructive addiction. It changes the way men and women treat one another in sometimes dramatic but often subtle ways. And it is not going away.

I know of this plague from my brother priests who routinely confront it in the confessional; from counselors who treat it through our various Catholic social service agencies; from Catholic school teachers, youth ministers, and religious education teachers who confront its effects in the

lives of our youth; from parents who speak of the challenge of raising children with modesty in our culture; and from my involvement in the Religious Alliance Against Pornography, an interfaith coalition of religious leaders.

Yet this plague extends far beyond the boundaries of church or school. The victims of this plague are countless. Today, perhaps more so than at any time previously, man finds his gift of sight and therefore his vision of God distorted by the evil of pornography.

As part of my responsibility to lead all the people in the Diocese of Arlington to the vision of God, I find it necessary now to address the tremendous moral, social, and spiritual dangers of pornography. In so doing, I ask Catholics and non-Catholics alike to pause and join my reflections in this pastoral letter which will: 1) examine the nature of the current threat; 2) address the arguments put forward by those who attempt to rationalize pornography and provide "cover" for pornographers; 3) offer concrete counsel – to all Christians, young people, couples, and priests – on how to guard against pornography and to free oneself from its slavery and seek God's forgiveness; and finally 4) reflect on the gift of sight and its fulfillment in divine contemplation.

## **II. The Nature of the Current Threat: A Grave Offense**

Artists have often portrayed the human body, clothed and unclothed, in various depictions and poses. While the danger of immodesty exists even with regard to works of art, the evil of pornography is greater and more insidious. Pornography depicts the body in solely an exploitative way, and pornographic images are created and viewed only for the purpose of arousing sexual impurity. Hence the production, viewing and spread of pornography is an offense against the dignity of persons, is objectively evil, and must be condemned.

In a culture that sees pornography as a mere private weakness or even as a legitimate pleasure to be protected by law, we must repeat here the Catholic Church's constant teaching. In simple terms, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* condemns pornography as a *grave offense* (CCC 2354).

The immorality of pornography comes, first of all, from the fact that it distorts the truth about human sexuality. *It perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other* (CCC 2354). Rather than being the expression of a married couple's intimate union of life and love, sex is reduced to a demeaning source of entertainment and even profit for others. Pornography violates chastity also because it introduces impure thoughts into the viewer's mind and often leads to unchaste acts, such as masturbation or adultery.

Pornography offends also against justice. 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* (CCC 2354). The “participants” are used and manipulated in ways incompatible with their human dignity. Everyone involved in the production, distribution, sale, and use of pornography cooperates and, to some degree, makes possible this debasement of others. Indeed, pornography has become a system and an industry of mutual degradation. That some may be willing participants in no way lessens the culpability of those who engage in the production and use of pornography.

Further, pornography represents a serious abuse of the means of communication, and, in that regard, is a violation of the eighth commandment. We must remember that the right to use the means of communication (i.e. freedom of speech) is not an absolute right. It must always be at the service of the common good. Civil authorities must ensure that the use of the means of communication be in accord with the moral law. To accomplish this, civil authorities *should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials* (CCC 2354).

I remind all the faithful, therefore, that the use of pornography – i.e. its manufacture, distribution, sale, or viewing – is gravely sinful. Those who engage in such activity with full knowledge and complete consent commit a mortal sin. Such actions deprive them of sanctifying grace, destroy the life of Christ in their souls, and prevent them from receiving Holy Communion until they have absolution through the Sacrament of Penance.

The gravity of this sin becomes clearer when one considers the tremendous damage the use of pornography causes to society. It damages first of all the family, the basic cell of society and the Church, because it tears at the marital bond. Since it *immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world* (CCC 2354), a man’s use of pornography turns his attention and affection away from his wife. It creates in his mind unrealistic and often immoral expectations for their intimate life. He begins to approach her only as a means to his own gratification and no longer as his “suitable partner.” Priests and counselors know very well how grave a threat pornography poses to marriage and how many families have already suffered sad division due to its effects.

Pornography’s availability and intrusion injure the common good by producing a consumerist and licentious view of sexuality, particularly women. Inculcating and guarding the precious virtue of chastity becomes increasingly difficult when pornography infects a majority of media outlets. Society’s interest in preparing young men and women for marriage also suffers when the media presents as a mercantile plaything the holy act of intimacy that is proper to the sacred bond of marriage.

Perhaps worst of all, however, is the damage that pornography does to a man's "template" for the supernatural. Our natural vision in this world is the model for supernatural vision in the next. Once we have distorted or damaged that template, how will we understand the reality? Our Lord has given us the gift of sight with the intention that we ultimately may see Him. The sinful use of this faculty both warps our understanding of it and – worse still – cripples our ability to realize its fulfillment in heaven. What man should use for receiving the true vision of God and the beauty of His creation, he uses instead to consume false images of others in pornography. How can we understand the supernatural sight of God desires for us – i.e. the contemplation of God in the beatific vision – once our natural sight has been damaged and distorted?

### **Christians in a Secular World**

Christians are intrinsically a people set apart. The reality of Baptism constitutes us as a community called into the desert, a people consecrated for relationship with the Creator of all things. Yet, like the people Israel who were called out of Egypt, members of the Church, too, find themselves inextricably tied to the same culture of death from which God has freed them.

[I]n the desert the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "Would that we had died at the Lord's hands in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!"

Exodus 16:2-3

It is not surprising, then, that we find ourselves assuming secular attitudes and becoming confused about the true nature of sin. This confusion becomes deadly when we use it to justify our own sinfulness, or seek to "define away" the evil nature of sins that tempt us. This is nowhere more evident than in the confusion that some Christians experience about the true nature of pornography.

Young Christians struggle to live the demands of discipleship amid the pressures of the surrounding culture. This process of integration becomes more difficult in a culture which, over the last generation, has abandoned the virtue of chastity.

Spouses – especially husbands – striving to grow in the fidelity inherent in their marital vocation, encounter temptations to escape and seek false comforts in images and fantasies.

Priests and religious, having committed themselves to a chaste and celibate life, find themselves in the midst of a culture that views celibacy as

an impossible and even unhealthy goal. In moments of doubt, they may reach out for the false comforts of impurity. Their failure is all the more grave because of the scandal it brings to the Church.

Single men and women are distracted by these fantasies from their most important task of discerning God's call in their life. In moving from impure thoughts to images to actual sexual misconduct, they undermine the foundation of trust and fidelity required for future happiness.

No person living in our culture can totally separate himself or herself from the scourge of pornography. All are affected to a greater or lesser extent, even those who do not directly participate in the use of pornography. Yet if those who have given in to this vice were to answer honestly whether pornography made them happier or better persons, only the most dismissive would answer "yes." An honest assessment reveals that the use of pornography is debilitating spiritually, socially and emotionally.

Why then do so many give in to temptation so obviously contrary to the good of the human person? At least in part it is because of the doubt and confusion caused by the false arguments of those who justify this behavior.

It is to these false arguments that I will now turn before offering counsel.

### III. False Arguments

#### **"There are no victims, so no one is being harmed."**

The justification of pornography often begins by viewing the activity as a private exchange between the viewers and those who produce and distribute the material. In this view, there is a "free" choice on the part of consenting adults to meet a "need" and to be compensated for meeting that "need." The illusion inherent in this rationalization is that all the participating parties complete the exchange as the same persons, with no harm done, as when they entered. Like all rationalizations, this is an illusion.

The first illusion is that the viewing of men and women in intimate relations does no harm to them as persons. Often this is not true on even a physical plane. Preying on the vulnerable and needy, the pornography industry often entices them into deeper and more dangerous behaviors until physical harm is inevitable.

Yet the very nature of pornography commits violence against the dignity of the human person. By taking an essential aspect of the person – human sexuality – and making it a commodity to be bartered and sold, to be used and discarded by unknown others, the pornography industry commits a most violent attack on the dignity of these victims.

*Eros*, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great "yes" to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 5

Every year, thousands of men and women are lured into the pornography industry by the promise of easy money. The industry preys on the most vulnerable: the poor, the abused and marginalized, and even children. This exploitation of the weak is gravely sinful. Whether need, confusion, or alienation leads men and women to become pornographic objects, their choice to do so certainly cannot be seen as free. Those who produce and distribute pornography leave a wide path of broken and devalued men and women in their wake.

More and more of these victims are younger, even children. When these, the most vulnerable and innocent of our society, become victims of the dehumanizing demands of an industry willing to destroy innocence for profit, it is an unspeakable act of violence.

### **Dehumanizing the Viewer**

The guilty within the industry are easy to identify, but they do not stand alone. The entire pornography industry exists to realize profit, and there can be no profit without customers. Those who seek out and use pornographic images are active participants in the victimization of others. Those who view pornographic materials cannot separate themselves from the moral responsibility associated with the victimization and degradation of the men, women and children those materials depict. And the viewers themselves are degraded.

It is a mistaken notion that the singular effect of sinful moral choices is the harm these choices cause to others. Certainly, the immediate effect of choosing to participate in pornographic viewing is spiritual and emotional violence committed against those whose images are viewed. Yet, the personal and existential effect on the one choosing to view pornographic images lies at the heart of these sinful actions.

The human person, the only creature with a moral sense, progressively builds or destroys his or her character by each and every moral choice. Thus one becomes virtuous by the very act of practicing virtue, and one becomes depraved by practicing acts of vice. When one chooses to view pornography, even if at first reluctantly, one becomes the kind of person who is willing to use others as mere objects of pleasure, disregarding their inherent dignity as a man or woman created in God's image. As the habit of pornography becomes more fixed, the characteristics of a person who debases and objectifies others and wills violence against their dignity become more pronounced.

It is in this sometimes gradual, sometimes sudden, transformation of the human character that sin exerts its strongest influence on the individuals and the culture. The young more readily manipulate and abandon friends to meet their temporary and often selfish desires. Spouses begin to gauge their partner on a scale of what they receive from the relationship rather than to self-giving marital fidelity. Young adults approach marriage as merely a non-binding contract that may be abrogated if the benefits of the married state no longer meet their increasingly unrealistic or even perverse desires and expectations. Priests and religious judge their ministry on personal satisfaction and advancement rather than sacrifice. The widespread use of pornography naturally leads to a degradation of human society because it degrades the persons who submit to it.

Pornography makes a lie of intimacy. Distorting that very human characteristic that promises an end to isolation, pornography leads the user not to intimacy, but to even deeper isolation. The divine purpose of human sexuality is to assuage the longing for communion with another and to bring the person into a bond of life-nurturing, and life-giving, love. In this human experience of intimacy with another, man's eternal destiny of perfect communion with his Creator is prefigured.

Jesus said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh."

Matthew 19:4-6

The false promise of intimacy offered by pornography leads instead to an even-deeper alienation that cripples the user's ability to experience truly intimate human contact. The user of pornography, while longing for intimacy, turns ever more surely back to himself, becoming ever more isolated and alone.

## Erosion of the Family

The most tragic and frightening victim of the scourge of pornography is the family. Although the "intimacy" promised by this vice is illusory and the happiness sought in its practice is transitory and destructive, the damage to the human relationships so necessary for the flourishing of the family is even more shockingly real and, in many cases, permanent.

The flourishing of the family is dependent upon the growth of family members in holiness and true human love. This is a love whose primary concern is for the good of the other. It is in this experience of human love that children grow in grace and wisdom and become integrated and virtuous members of society. True human love does not arise from selfish desire but rather from self-giving. It is in the example of self-giving expressed by loving parents that children develop the potential to commit to intimacy with another and to intimacy with God.

When family members turn to pornography in a distorted thirst for intimacy, they turn against and in some measure reject their commitment to their family. By doing this, they commit violence against the relationships which define their own vocation.

If the person is not master of self – through the virtues and, in a concrete way, through chastity – he or she lacks that self-possession which makes self-giving possible. Chastity is the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression. To the degree that a person weakens chastity, his or her love becomes more and more selfish, that is, satisfying a desire for pleasure and no longer self-giving.

*The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 16*

Once given over to this vice, the family member makes great efforts to keep this betrayal secret. Ultimately, however, it is vain to expect that a secret that distorts the core of human sexuality can fully remain a secret from those to whom we have pledged our love and our lives. The betrayal, even if not made completely known, will communicate itself through changes in the character of the betrayer. In the isolation and alienation of the person, the other members of the family feel the inevitable consequences of the alienation of intimacy inherent in the secret of pornography.

The first to feel the violence of pornographic use is the spouse. If pornography is a sin against the human dignity of those whose images are used, how much more so is it a sin against the human dignity of the one who was promised the exclusivity of affection? The use of pornography is a violation of the commitment of marriage. Even if tolerated by the spouse,

how can one possibly not feel rejection and betrayal when one's committed partner turns to illusion and fleeting happiness in pornographic images? This rejection, if left unhealed, will often lead to the permanent destruction of the marital commitment.

As is the nature of all sin, the ones who suffer the most are the innocent. Children who naturally strive to imitate and integrate the self-giving love of their parents instead find themselves faced with tension, betrayal and selfishness. It is understandable then that they may come to believe that true love, a sacrificial and self-giving love, is an illusion.

Just as it is a vain hope for a spouse using pornography to keep this sin a secret, it is also a vain hope to think that the material itself can be kept a secret. Children encounter the very material that has caused damage to their family and are introduced to an understanding of sexuality not intended by their parents. Instead of learning and experiencing the nobility of the human person created in the image and likeness of God, they experience the degradation of the human person reduced to a commodity, an object.

### **“The temperate use of pornography can be therapeutic.”**

Some assert the position that acting sexually, in general, and the use of pornography, in particular, meets the most basic of human needs. This position posits that pornography can provide a modicum of human satisfaction and comfort for those who find intimacy in marriage impossible or at least unavailable. Examples are cited of spouses separated by distance, single men and women not yet able to marry, husbands and wives suddenly deprived of marital intimacy owing to age or illness. In each of these cases, the attainment of some level of human (i.e., sexual) satisfaction, even if inferior to true marital intimacy, is offered as a temporary relief to a person longing for human contact.

This view presupposes that sexual activity alone, or the viewing of others in sexual activity, is somehow of the same nature as true human intimacy. In fact, the intimacy longed for by all persons is the antithesis of the exploitative and dehumanizing experience of the use of pornographic images. Rather than providing comfort or satisfaction, the use of pornography inevitably leads not only to repeated unsatisfying experiences, but demands an escalation of stimulation. Each escalation and each experience demeans and desensitizes the viewer to the beauty and nobility of the human person.

Rather than provide some touch of human intimacy, the continued use of pornography limits the person's possibility, and even the ability, to attain intimacy with another person. How is it possible to enter into a relationship of love and respect when the preparation for this human encounter is solely based on carnal “need”? How can the trust necessary for true intimacy be

achieved if actions are determined by secret desires? The use of pornography damages the very human qualities that make intimacy possible: specifically respect, trust and the willingness to sacrifice for the other.

The same persons who portray the meeting of biological needs as intimacy also portray faithfulness as a sacrifice too onerous for fulfillment. All married couples will face times when marital intimacy is not possible. For some, these times may be prolonged. To pose such deprivation as an excuse for the use of the pornographic is to cheapen the promise of faithfulness upon which any marriage is founded. To embrace pornography as a substitute for marital intimacy is a tacit admission that the spouse is a means to meet biological "needs" rather than a partner in the communion of human love.

Some struggle with compulsive and occasional obsessive temptations to impurity. In a mistaken attempt to control these temptations, they may turn to the use of pornography as a "lesser evil." This use of pornography is wrongly justified as a "safety valve" allowing for the satisfaction of these compulsive desires in a way that is not harmful, as it only involves the individual. This rationalization misunderstands the true damage of sin. While providing seeming relief from temptations, the use of pornography by these individuals only provides further fuel for their obsessive impulses.

In a similar way, some struggle with temptations that are dangerous and destructive: same-sex attraction, attraction to young persons and sadistic fantasies. In the hope of maintaining these temptations in secrecy, these persons often resort to pornography as a means of controlling impulses. The deception will feed, rather than subdue, temptations. The discontinuity between the public and private self widens to the point where fantasy can no longer be separated from reality. In fact, it is often the use of this "fetish" pornography that solidifies the temptation rather than relieving it. The repeated use of pornographic images and fantasies transforms the temptation into a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. The one who turned to pornography to escape a temptation becomes the embodiment of that temptation.

There cannot be a "temperate" use of pornography, just as there cannot be a "temperate" use of hatred or racism. To pose such a possibility is to accept giving in to evil one step at a time. Any seeming relief will be fleeting and the long-range consequences will make future resistance even more difficult, possibly escalating into an addiction.

**"Pornography can be an aid in maturing, both emotionally and sexually."**

Often the use of pornography is seen as a "natural" part of the maturing process, a means by which the young come to understand

themselves as sexual persons. Parents, possibly remembering their own struggles, may turn a blind eye to the use of pornography by their children. Rather than encourage the young to gain self-mastery and self-respect, this view presents the young with a future that is dependent on whim and opportunity.

By its nature, pornography encourages an expression of human sexuality which is not only deformed but also severely limited and patently false. The use of pornography by young people prevents an understanding of human sexuality integrated with the self-expression and intimacy that is the full expression of the human person. Instead of growing to an appreciation of the sacredness of the person, young people caught in the web of pornography begin to relate to others and themselves as objects.

Self-mastery is an essential element to emotional security. Without the self-mastery that comes from controlling and, when necessary, struggling with one's destructive behaviors, including pornography, maturing young persons find themselves in the fearful condition of being unable to control either the world or themselves. A young person who has abandoned the hope of self-control is also unable to control what he does to others.

Pornography cannot aid in gaining maturity because all it offers is a lie about the human person: that a person can be exploited. The use of pornography by the young makes their authentic sexual and emotional development more difficult because of the false presentation of human interaction. Young people must be counseled to strive for the maturity of self-control and modesty and so become fully integrated persons, respecting both themselves and others.

### **“Christian opposition to pornography comes from the Christian hatred of the body.”**

Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were brought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.

I Corinthians 6:18-20

Those who defend the “free speech” rights of pornographers often present the Church’s defense of purity as puritanical rather than pastoral. Defenders of this criminal enterprise pose as defenders of a true humanism, portraying Christian teaching on chastity as “anti-human.” The Church is presented as hating the human body and so reacting against human nature.

This lie has been restated so many times through the long history of the Church that many accept it as central to Christian thought. In fact the exact opposite is true. The Church has always condemned a dualistic understanding of spirit as good and the body as evil. God created all things, both spirit and matter, and saw that all these things were good (cf. Gen 1). It is the resurrection of the body which is our hope, and our recognition of the body as an integral part of the human person is the foundation of Christian chastity.

The Church does not pose an opposition of body and soul but rather the necessary completeness of both body and soul for a true and life-affirming wholeness. Far from denigrating the human body and treating sexuality as an evil thing, the Church affirms the sacredness of the body. Because of this sacredness, the marital act is recognized as having a sacramental and sacred character which the Church seeks to protect.

Supporters of pornography, on the other hand, do advocate such a dichotomy of body and soul. When one views the body as something of no consequence to the person, one has little regard for how the body is portrayed. The presumption is that the body is something apart from the person and so of no lasting consequence.

#### **IV. What Can Be Done: A Word to the Public Sphere**

##### **Counsel for All Christians**

Be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world.

Philippians 2:15

Christians should not be surprised to find themselves part of a culture that, in many ways, is contrary to the Gospel and repellent to Christian virtue. It was the same in the time of Saint Paul and in some sense, for every generation of believers. But Christians of every generation are called to live in conformity with the truth of Jesus Christ and to stand apart from those aspects of culture which are contrary to this truth. A most effective way in which believers can combat the plague of pornography is by the witness of their lives.

Culture is formed by the choices of free people. It is important that we choose morally uplifting and life-affirming pursuits that contribute to the common good and the flourishing of all persons. Within one's capabilities, each person should make every effort to contribute healthy and chaste entertainments that can be shared by all. In the fields of art,

literature and music, we must never compromise our own Christian dignity to suit the expectations of a decadent culture.

Form close bonds of Christian friendship in order to receive mutual support and affirmation. When appropriate, use these friendships to explore and shape the culture around you. It is in these bonds of friendship and family that authentic human intimacy can in fact be found.

Christians today live in an age unprecedented for the ability to communicate and find information. Through television, film, wireless communication and the Internet, we find ourselves with almost unlimited information at our fingertips at any time of the day or night.

Sadly, a great amount of the information available on the Internet is pornographic in nature. Some will find this instant access to impure images a temptation difficult to overcome. Do not justify the presence of a snake in the home for the benefits it may bring. We must remember our moral obligation not to place ourselves knowingly or deliberately in the occasion of sin. The inconvenience of losing instant access to information will be far outweighed by the ability to live an integrated and pure life.

Spiritual growth is impossible without an honest admission of guilt and reconciliation. All Christians should avail themselves of the grace of the Sacrament of Penance and make this sacrament of mercy the cornerstone of the struggle against pornography.

Finally, never underestimate the efficacy of Christian prayer. Pray for the victims of pornography, that their precious human dignity may be healed and restored. Offer concrete acts of penance through spiritual works and fasting for those who manipulate others in this crime of pornography, and who share in the complicity of its distribution. Through these acts of reparation, offer to God an acceptable sacrifice pleasing in His sight.

Entrust the Church always to the protection of Saint Joseph.

O Saint Joseph, you were chosen by God to be the foster father of Jesus, the most pure spouse of Mary, ever Virgin, and the head of the Holy Family. You have been chosen by Christ's Vicar as the heavenly Patron and Protector of the Church founded by Christ. Protect the Holy Father and all bishops and priests united with him. Dear Saint Joseph, be my father, protector, and guide in the way of salvation. Obtain for me purity of heart and a love for the spiritual life. After your example, let all my actions be directed to the greater glory of God, in union with the Divine Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and your own paternal heart. Finally, pray for me that I may share in the peace and joy of your holy death.

Amen.

## Counsel for Young People

I turn with particular concern to my young brothers and sisters in Christ. I fear that the full burden of our culture's surrender to pornography will fall on your shoulders, both now and in years to come. Not only have you been targeted by this criminal enterprise as a source of financial gain, but you also have to endure the impoverished notion of intimacy that results from a culture that has confused love with self-gratification. Know first that God has destined you for a true and fully human love that finds its center not in manipulating others but in sharing and flourishing in a communion with your beloved.

Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.

1 Timothy 4:12

Many in society have accepted the false expectation that youth cannot control their natural desires and practice the virtue of chaste intimacy. This belief – that it is unpractical or even unnatural to avoid impurity and the indulgence in pornographic fantasy – is a lie and far from the mind of the Church. The acceptance of this lie of immaturity becomes the excuse for ignoring the vital importance of strengthening the virtues of modesty and chastity so central to your future happiness.

The growth of intimacy that is at the heart of the experience of youth begins in the family. Here, in the mystery of human love and sacrifice, you first begin to explore the joy of intimacy and trust. In the sacred community of the family, you learn that your worth is not dependent upon your usefulness or your success, but upon the fact that you are valued as an irreplaceable and sacred person. It is also in this sacred community of the family that forgiveness, so central in our struggles against sin, is learned and first practiced.

Remember always your important role in the community of your family. Respect your parents' God-given role in guiding your life. Cooperate in their efforts to ensure your safety and guide your decisions. This is most important in your decisions to use various media and take part in recreational activities. As you develop a healthy sense of privacy, do not be misled into embracing secrecy. Privacy is the healthy and necessary understanding that parts of your experience – your thoughts, dreams and aspirations – are uniquely your own and so should be shared only when you decide to share in intimacy. Secrecy, however, is the enemy of intimacy and does violence against the bonds of family. Secrecy is a rejection of love.

Look to your brothers and sisters and remember your responsibility towards them. If they are older, encourage them with your praise of their

success. Remind them that you wish to imitate them in their virtue. If they are younger, assist your brothers and sisters, using the experience you have gained in your own struggles.

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.

1 Peter 3:15

Growing in intimacy does not end with the family. For youth, the development of the bonds of intimate friendship marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adult life. The forming of these friendships exerts a great desire for acceptance and belonging. Often described as "peer pressure," these expectations of friends are not only a source of temptation to experiment with destructive behavior, but also an opportunity to share things of true and lasting value. Resist giving in to the sharing of impure images from a desire to gain such acceptance. Reject the easy path of impure talk, immodest dress and pornographic entertainment. Be ready to explain to your friends why you have chosen to avoid this evil. Offer instead the example of self-mastery. Just as the self-mastery displayed in athletics, music, and academics draws natural admiration from peers, so too will self-mastery in purity draw admiration from friends who are facing the same uncertainties and temptations.

Any human struggle, including the struggle for purity and modesty, comes with the possibility of failure. It is often through failure and the persistence to succeed that mastery is achieved. You must not become disheartened if you should succumb to the temptations that surround you. Be persistent in your goal and turn calmly from your temporary defeat. Young people have a great affinity for the Sacrament of Penance. Because of your innate understanding of the tragedy of failure, young people naturally long for a means of returning to a state of grace. Take advantage of the opportunity of reconciliation. Participate in the Sacrament of Penance regularly.

Remember that God has created you for perfect intimacy with Himself. Your struggle against sin – whether involving pornography or other temptations of life – is actually your preparation for this true intimacy for which your loving Father has created you. In whatever vocation to which the Lord invites you, your successful battle against impurity will contribute to the true happiness that will be found in the intimacy of that call.

Feel always confident to turn for assistance in these struggles to beloved Saint Joseph, the true spiritual father for us all.

O loving father Saint Joseph who watched over and protected the Infant Jesus as He grew in grace and wisdom, watch over me, my family and my friends as we struggle to lead a life of love and friendship. Pray that I may be an example of a true disciple of your beloved Son and that all my thoughts, words and actions may be an inspiration to those whom I love. May I long to look to you as an example of true human intimacy and to treat others with respect and courtesy, thinking always of the good of others rather than the pleasure of self. Defend me against the temptations of impurity and allow me to serve as an example of modesty and chastity. Guide me on my journey that I may discover the vocation for which God has created me and in this vocation discover the joy that you experienced in your most Holy Family.

Amen.

### **Counsel for Married and Engaged Couples**

The true guardian and caretaker of the unique dignity of human persons is the family, and most particularly husbands and wives, who are custodians of the sacredness of life. Pornography not only poses a danger for the promise of faithfulness that is the fundamental elemental marriage bond, but also threatens the moral and sexual development of children whose nurturance is entrusted to the watchful care of parents. Husbands and wives are the most immediate and direct combatants in the struggle against pornography.

So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes it and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Ephesians 5:28-30

While husbands and wives share equal dignity as persons, they do not share temptations equally – especially the temptations associated with the scourge of pornography. It must be admitted that the use of pornography is largely, although certainly not exclusively, associated with males. If a marriage begins to be damaged by pornography, it will most likely be introduced by the husband.

Husbands, be aware that your solemn promise of faithfulness, which is the foundation of the formation of your family, is damaged by any use of pornography. Strive to bring honor to the promise you made at the

beginning of your married life. The times where intimacy is difficult are opportunities to practice the sacrificial love of a spouse that only your noble vocation illustrates most perfectly.

Seeking comfort in the illusion of pornography will incrementally corrupt your understanding of self, your perception of your beloved wife, and the model you present to your children. It is futile to believe that this secret preoccupation can be contained and isolated from family life. In small ways, the self-centeredness and disrespect of self and others, which lie at the heart of this vice, will become manifest within your relationships with your family.

Wives who find that their husbands have entered into a sinful attraction to pornographic images or stories must be loving and forgiving, but also stern in calling the spouse to return to his truly manly vocation of marriage. The betrayal of a spouse over a mere illusion is a bitter experience, yet one whose most sure antidote is love, support and counsel.

The field of psychological counseling, when in keeping with the proper understanding of the human person and natural law, can also be of great assistance. Many of them have found themselves incapable of struggling against impurity alone, and that the assistance of a counselor or a therapist has made a sizable (sometimes the decided) difference.

Husbands and wives must practice constant vigilance to ensure that the plague of pornography does not enter into their lives or their children. This vigilance begins with a prudential control of media available in the home. Encourage the use of uplifting and positive magazines, films and books. When exercising parental controls over media, provide children with understandable standards and moral reasons for recommending and rejecting media content. Always be clear and consistent when explaining these standards and demonstrate their importance by accepting the same standards yourself.

Insist on strict and clear controls on any child's use of the Internet. Internet use in the home should always take place in family areas. Children, or even older children, should not be provided Internet access in the privacy of their rooms. Technology controls on both computers and television should be a routine part of family media use.

Most importantly, husbands and wives provide the clearest and surest teaching of chastity through the love, devotion and self-sacrifice they display in their relationship one to the other. Recall always that the Lord has entrusted you by your very life together the perfect means to bring children to a true and mature understanding of human intimacy.

Entrust each other and your children always to the case of the perfect spouse, Saint Joseph.

O most provident guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ. Most beloved father, dispel the evil of impurity and sin. Our most mighty protector, graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness. And just as you once saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend this family from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity. Shield each one of us by your constant protection, so that, supported by your example and your help, we may be able to live a virtuous life, to die a holy death, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven.

Amen.

### **Counsel for Priests**

Let those who wait for you, Lord of hosts, not be shamed through me. Let those who seek you, God of Israel, not be disgraced through me.

Psalm 69:6

I now turn to my brothers in Christ, my brother priests, who must take up the serious task of leading the Christian people in their struggle against the evil of pornography. We who have been called to share in the sacred priesthood of Christ must also come to share in His purity. This is a lifelong and loving task which should bring us much joy and great humility. As we give praise and glory to God in our successes in this ministry, so must we also repent and do penance for our own failures and the failures of our brothers.

As priests, we find ourselves immersed in a culture that is often diametrically opposed to the virtues. While being students of the culture so that we may become more capable of evangelizing, we must always be alert lest we find ourselves being overwhelmed by the elements we wish to banish.

You and I are celibate men for the Kingdom of God. This tremendous gift of celibacy is an invitation to the intimacy that Christ shares with His Church. We must always embrace this gift with joy and grow in the self-giving love that is our inheritance. Submission to the lures of pornography is a serious sin against the gift of celibate chastity.

If any priest should find himself a party to this sin, he should seek assistance from his bishop or religious superior. Such failure does not necessarily mean the end of one's ministry. I would want to assist you in obtaining the spiritual, psychological and sacramental healing that will be necessary for a return to your labors.

All priests must be part of ongoing and frequent spiritual direction. These encounters with your director are a precious and intimate

opportunity to hear the voice of the Master and to respond to His will. Conversations with directors must always be frank and complete, hiding nothing of the frustrations and temptations of your ministry and revealing all your faults. Humble acceptance of direction is a sure defense against the dangers of impurity.

No priest can be an adequate minister of reconciliation without being a frequent seeker of absolution. Priests must practice frequent confession in the Sacrament of Penance. Delaying or diminishing the importance of confession is a sign of an unrepentant heart.

All priests should be accountable for their private actions as well as their public ones. Indeed, as ministers of Christ, no action is truly private except for your personal prayer, and even the fruits of this should be frankly discussed with your director. Never allow yourself to form a private life that is secret from your brothers. Priests must be especially diligent in this area when it comes to the use of modern technologies of communication. I encourage every priest to make himself accountable to his brother priests in the use of these technologies.

Finally, I would ask that all priests commend themselves to Saint Joseph, the exemplar of fatherhood, and to pray most frequently for his intercession both for yourself and for your brothers.

O Saint Joseph, who carried the Infant Jesus in your blessed arms and who, during the space of thirty years, lived in the most intimate familiarity with Him, take under thy powerful protection those whom He has clothed with His authority and honored with the dignity of His priesthood. Sustain me in my fatigue and labors; console me in my pains; fortify me in my combats; but above all, keep far from me all evils of impurity. Obtain for all my brothers the humility of Saint John the Baptist, the faith of Saint Peter, the zeal and charity of Saint Paul, the purity of Saint John and the spirit of prayer and recollection of which thou, my dear Saint, art the model, so that, after having been on earth, the faithful dispensers of the Mysteries of thy Foster Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, we may in Heaven receive the recompense promised to pastors according to the Heart of God.

Amen.

## V. The Gift of Sight

**Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.**

Amidst the suffering and pain caused by the evil of pornography, we are called to be a people of hope, to behold the image of God in the others,

and to restore our use of sight by focusing on the goal of our faith and the final end of our sight.

The Church has always described heaven as the contemplation of the Lord face to face. *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). Our Lord speaks these words at the beginning of His public ministry. Thus He Himself reveals the connection between the virtue of purity and the faculty of sight. As the *Catechism* explains this Beatitude, *Purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God* (CCC 2519).

This Beatitude describes first an essential characteristic of the blessed, of those who have entered *into the joy of the Trinitarian life* (CCC 1721): they are *pure of heart*. This description serves also as a moral exhortation: we are to seek such purity of heart. In a general sense, purity of heart refers to the human person's capacity for love. It indicates a heart dedicated entirely to the Lord, not divided by passions or desires contrary to Him. Since *[t]he heart is the seat of moral personality* (CCC 2517), purity of heart means moral uprightness.

Yet purity of heart has a particularly close association with human sexuality – that essential aspect of the human person that *concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others* (CCC 2332). In this context, the Beatitude indicates specifically a heart purified of selfish or base sexual desires – a heart that does not view or desire another for selfish pleasure or gain. Purity of heart refers to the integration of one's sexual desires and actions with the truth of human sexuality and genuine self-giving.

The Beatitude's second part describes the reward for the pure of heart: *they shall see God*. Every Beatitude expresses some aspect of heaven – in this case, the vision of God. To “see God” has, first of all, a metaphorical meaning. It refers to the knowledge of God, the ability to “see” Him intellectually. Yet to “see God” or to possess the “vision of God” is not only an analogy of heaven. Rather, it has a profound literal sense as well. Because the human body will be raised on the last day, the just will literally “see” God with their own eyes. As such, to “see God” describes the ultimate longing of every human heart and the final purpose of human sight.

The Incarnation of our Lord brings to man the ability to fulfill the desire to see God. In his Gospel, Saint John gives eloquent testimony to this: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14). In his first letter also, Saint John bears witness to “[t]hat which was from the beginning... which we have seen with our eyes” (1 Jn 1:1). In the Person of Jesus Christ, God speaks to man face to face – and man sees the face of God. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that our Lord came into the world precisely to enable us to see Him. Thus, in His healing

of the blind (cf. Mt 9:27-28; 12:22; Mk 8:22-23; Jn 9), He reveals that He has come to restore the original purpose of our sight. Most of all, by His death and resurrection, our Lord redeems us and thus enables us to enter heaven, into the very presence of God.

Saint John, in fact, equates the vision of God with salvation itself: “[W]e know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Through our sight of Him we become like Him. By gazing upon Him, we receive salvation. Thus does the Church speak of heaven as “the beatific vision” – that is, the vision that makes us blessed. Thus did Saint Irenaeus write, “*The life of man is the vision of God.*” Here we see Him “in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12).

Drawing upon Scripture, the Church has continually reflected on this desire for and promise of the vision of God. She describes the virtue of faith as a way of seeing God and His truths. She describes contemplation – the height of prayer – in similar terms:

Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. “I look at him and he looks at me”: this is what a certain peasant of Ars in the time of his holy curé used to say while praying before the tabernacle. This focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men. Contemplation also turns its gaze on the mysteries of the life of Christ. Thus it learns the “interior knowledge of our Lord,” the more to love him and follow him (CCC 2715).

This ability “to see” spiritually has implications for moral life: *it enables us to see according to God, to accept others as ‘neighbors’; it lets us perceive the human body – ours and our neighbor’s – as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty* (CCC 2519).

Our sight, more than just a physical ability, also serves as an important means for understanding faith, heaven and salvation. Indeed, its proper end and fulfillment is the vision of God Himself. Man’s final purpose is caught up with his ability to see. With this profound truth in mind, we can better appreciate the grave threat pornography presents to the human soul, to the family and to society.

## **VI. Conclusion: “You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (I Cor. 6:19-20)**

We stand at a threshold – either we can continue to allow this plague to spread with fewer and fewer checks, or we can take concrete steps to uproot it in our lives, our families, our neighbors and our culture.

We are a people called to share in the pure and noble vision of God and His creation. We are also a people whose future glory has been bought with the precious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must never forget the high cost of this purchase.

A free people can combat the tremendous moral, social and spiritual danger of pornography with great courage. My fervent prayer is that Catholics, other Christians, and all people of good will understand this threat, confront it, facilitate true healing, and ever more fully live out our God-given use of human sight.

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