

CLEANSSED

A Catholic Guide
to Freedom from Porn

Marcel LeJeune

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By Marcel LeJeune


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Foreword

Cleansed is a perfect title for this Catholic guide to freedom from porn. Marcel LeJeune does not sidestep the alarming and grotesque proportions of the current epidemic of pornography, nor does he hesitate to detail the devastating effects of the scourge of porn addiction on individuals, relationships, and society. The underlying theme he weaves throughout the book, however, is the good news that there is indeed a path to freedom from pornography use and addiction, and that the Catholic faith offers real hope to anyone struggling with porn. There are effective ways to be restored, healed, liberated, forgiven . . . cleansed.

Pornography has a long history. While some continue to debate what constitutes porn, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is very clear:

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. (no. 2354)

Our author puts it simply in these words: “Pornography is material that portrays suggestive behavior in order to arouse sexual desires and reactions.”

The all too evident reality is that over-sexualized and pornographic imagery saturates our culture. It is available everywhere and to everyone. The Internet, for all of its benefits, has made pornography instantly accessible and seemingly anonymous. Everyone is vulnerable: men and women, young and old, married and single, laity as well as clergy and people in consecrated life. Pornography production and use is always harmful and always wrong. Yet there are ways to escape its grasp.

Marcel LeJeune writes convincingly about why porn matters and the damage it does to individuals, families, and society in his first two chapters. In Chapter 3, “How Did We Get into This Mess and How We Can Get Out?” he notes the currents of relativism, utilitarianism, and hedonism, which are so pervasive in our time and that are behind much of the sexual chaos that confronts us. He underscores the effect of the contraceptive mentality in stripping sex of its intended purpose—“babies and bonding”—with the result that pornography redefines the purpose of sex as pleasure alone. The world of porn disregards, denigrates, and denies the beautiful gift of human sexuality as God has designed it—for procreation and for the union of the spouses.

In the early chapters of the book, LeJeune offers a compelling analysis of the problem. His style of presentation engages not only those who are already struggling with pornography, but also others—parents, educators, clergy, counselors—who

share the author's concern and commitment to help people become free of this burden.

The rest of the book, filled with realistic and promising advice and strategies, offers a well-reasoned and very practical action plan, a path to freedom from porn. At the center of the path to being cleansed is the Good News of Jesus Christ who, in the power of his mercy, restores hearts, heals wounds, forgives sin, and opens wide the door to new and abundant life. Christ can also transform our culture when we who are his missionary disciples agree to share in his work. This is a central dynamic of the New Evangelization.

Chapter 4, "Strategies for Individuals Who Struggle with Porn" details "18 Strategies to Stop"—from getting rid of all porn and future access to it, to finding an accountability partner and group, to regular exercise, as well as avoiding alcohol while engaging in the battle to overcome the temptation. Several of the strategies are specifically religious such as regular participation in the Eucharist and confession, prayer, fasting, and Scripture reading, Marian devotion, and involvement in service to others. The recommendation to seek professional help is the last strategy listed, but clearly an important one for anyone who is frustrated by unsuccessful efforts to win the battle against porn.

A highlight of this book is the chapter entitled "Virtue is NOT a Dirty Word." We need to do a far more effective job teaching our people (and that includes ourselves) about virtue. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, given us by God in Baptism and strengthened in Confirmation, are at the heart of Christian discipleship. Then there are the human virtues, defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as "firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect

and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith” (no. 1804). These virtues, like our bodies’ muscles, must be exercised in order to grow strong. Like every Christian, the man or woman struggling with pornography will find the virtues of patience, chastity, humility, perseverance, and temperance to be potent medicine in the journey toward healing and forgiveness.

The book concludes with a look at the Catholic antidote to porn, an attitude that is rooted in our finding our identity as human persons in Jesus Christ and living fully in God’s love, truth, and grace. The author calls upon Saint John Paul II’s teaching on the theology of the body as a needed counterpoint to contemporary ideas about sex. It communicates a new path for us, one that is, our author assures us, “a path of freedom, holiness, and purity. It calls us to love and virtue. . . . [I]t rightly teaches us the holy purpose of our bodies.”

I am grateful to Marcel LeJeune for this thoughtful, engaging, and very practical book. In the face of the challenge of pornography in our day, this book is a timely, much-needed, and promising resource in response to an urgent pastoral need.

MOST REVEREND RICHARD J. MALONE, TH.D., STL
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Chairman, USCCB Committee on Laity, Marriage,
Family, and Youth

Author's Note

If you are using porn and want to stop, there is hope!

This book contains direct and honest language about sexuality. It is not meant to be read by children. Nor is this book a substitute for professional help, if needed, by those who suffer from sexual addiction. Rather, this book offers hope and practical strategies for those who are caught up in pornography and for their families. It can also help families prevent pornography from entering their homes. Yet this book, by itself, won't cure any addict. The answer, instead, is to choose to accept God's love and grace into our hearts. Then we can live a life pleasing to God, even if that means taking the narrow path, humbling ourselves by seeking help, and changing the ways we act day to day.

I am a husband, a father, and a Catholic campus minister who has seen many lives crushed by pornography and other sexual wounds. Although I am not a counselor, a psychologist, or a priest, I have also seen lives transformed by forgiveness, grace, love, virtue, and sexual healing. In fact, what I love most about my job is being able to witness conversion of hearts and lives.

If you believe you are a sexual addict or someone who can't seem to find the inner strength to turn away from sexual

brokenness and sin, I hope you will seek help. If you struggle with your sexuality, then do not hesitate to seek and find someone who can help you take the next step to sexual health and wholeness. It is worth whatever sacrifice you might need to make. While I don't claim that this book is the cure-all for sexual problems, I believe it can help many people turn their lives around.

Introduction

You aren't perfect. I'm not perfect. None of us is. Yet the amazing thing about our imperfection, which we riddle with sin, is that despite it all God's love for us never stops. As a young adult I felt inadequate, unworthy, and humiliated because of my bad habits and sin. Yet I still chased after happiness by seeking sex and using others. It never worked. None of those things ever brought lasting happiness. They brought brief moments of pleasure, but those never lasted. I got through it all only because of an encounter with Jesus that shook me to the core. I finally found the love I had wanted all along!

All those who use pornography have a warped understanding of their self-image, their dignity, what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, relationships, family, love, God, guilt, forgiveness, and sex. This is why everyone—man, woman, or child—will struggle once they start using porn. It warps us. It attacks the very core of our humanity, and it will lay waste to our joy and peace.

It isn't enough to ignore the realities of what porn does to us and others or to simply try and justify our actions. To use porn is to accept a lie about love instead of continuing to look for the

real thing. No regular user of pornography is able to see himself or herself (or any other human) in the way each person is meant to be seen: as a reflection of the Creator.

I have been working with sex addicts since I first entered campus ministry in 2002. I have seen many college students, children, parents, clergy, grandparents, and single people during this time. No part of our society is untouched by pornography. Soon after I began working in ministry, I realized that I was unequipped to deal with the problem. So I started doing some research, only to find that the Catholic Church had few resources at the time to help those struggling with their sexuality. Not giving up, I started reading about sexual addiction, the effects of pornography, and the mounting scientific and practical evidence that pornography damages individuals, families, and society. This convinced me that I had to do something and find help somewhere.

I eventually heard of a research facility that specialized in the study of addiction and found two professionals there who were doing studies in sexual addiction, recovery, and how to work with people of faith. It was a good fit for both parties. I needed their expertise in recovery and addiction, and they needed people of faith to work with. We started a collaboration that lasted for years.

Our collaboration helped me to learn about the science of how addiction affects the pleasure center of the brain and how it rewires the neural synapses that are meant to help us seek what is good for us. The researchers started to find, however, that most sex addicts who tried to stop on their own failed miserably. This meant that if I wanted to help those who were asking me for assistance, I would have to give them more than a good book or a presentation. They needed my love and my time.

I started to learn how faith could be used in helping others by modeling how to integrate prayer, spirituality, Scripture, and the theological virtues (i.e., faith, hope, and love) into the day-to-day struggles of the sex addict. I also learned some small group techniques of working with those who struggle with their sexuality. While I am not a professional counselor or therapist, I still use some of the best practices of those disciplines in the accountability groups I work with.

But no group is without struggles. I found out a lot about what to do and what not to do—often by doing the wrong thing. I also learned that God’s grace is more than enough to conquer any issue, no matter how powerful it is. Furthermore, I learned something that every reader of this book should know: nothing you can do will make God stop loving you! Our actions are never powerful enough to stop God’s love for each person, no matter what we have done. Our Lord’s tenderness and mercy never end. We need only go to him humbly to receive the power of his love. True freedom from the unhappiness of porn cannot be found without God, because our sexuality (not just the other parts of our lives) needs redemption and grace to be properly ordered.

This is true freedom: living as we ought to live and living within the love of Jesus Christ, not merely doing whatever we want. True freedom is found in the person of Jesus Christ—who is Truth itself—which is why this book is ultimately about the interior battle each person wages. The goal of this book is to help you find freedom and healing in your own life and family and to shield your home from the evil of pornography, to protect yourself and those you love.

I want to reiterate: this book cannot substitute for professional help for a sex addict. If you believe you are sexually

addicted, by all means follow the advice in the book, but don't stop there. Please seek professional help. Even if you are not an addict and have a history of struggling with your sexuality, a good professional counselor (a Catholic or Catholic-friendly one is highly preferable) can almost certainly help you. Don't let the fear of counseling, psychology, or the like stand in your way to a healthy, happy, and better life.

Why Porn Matters

For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:20)

No child has ever wanted to grow up to be a sex addict. In fact, no adult in his right mind would ever want a sex addiction either. Yet we are quickly becoming a culture of sex addicts who casually hype our addictions as a healthy personal expression of our individuality. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider Jimmy's story—a sex addict who never wanted the life he found himself in at the age of thirty-five, when he was already married and had children.

When Jimmy was three, his parents divorced. He bounced between his mom's house and his dad's house year after year. Neither of his parents seemed to want him around, and he certainly didn't connect with either of them. By the time Jimmy was ten, both of his parents had remarried and Jimmy had

several step-brothers. He didn't get along with any members of his new family, and he never felt comfortable in his own skin. He disliked the way he looked, and that led him to disliking who he was. By the time he was a teenager, he had learned to hide his self-loathing with a macho persona that portrayed confidence, but inside he hid fear, self-hatred, hurt, and insecurity.

Jimmy had seen magazines portraying nude women as a young boy, because his older step-brothers had them. He was fascinated by the bodies of the women he saw and thought about them frequently. He started to visit a certain neighbor's house a lot more because he knew he would have easy access to the stash of magazines kept in the garage. The boys would constantly tease one another about wanting to look at the magazines, but their curiosity would always be stronger than the desire to avoid a bit of pestering. Porn became a frequent habit, and masturbation wasn't far behind.

By the time Jimmy got to high school, he had gone through different phases of indulging his desire for porn and masturbation while also yearning to quit looking at it and to gain some self-control. But he found he couldn't stay away from it for more than a month or two at most. It was as if a Siren were always calling him back to her. He didn't have the strength to get away.

Once Jimmy got into college he found even more opportunities for sex all around him. Most of his buddies had porn in their dorm rooms; strip clubs would let him in once he could drink legally, and he even started to have "hook-ups" with women he met. After several years of sleeping with a number of young women, Jimmy fell in love with one of them. Deb was the girl of his dreams. She was willing to have sex with him, which seemed like the best of everything he had ever wanted. He was

head over heels in love with Deb and felt he would do anything for her—anything but stop looking at porn and masturbating.

After several years of dating, they were married. Because they had frequent sex, Jimmy didn't look at porn quite as much, but he never gave it up completely. Then, after their first child was born, Deb and Jimmy couldn't have sex for an extended period. Jimmy went right back to porn. It didn't tell him to wait, like Deb did. It didn't need foreplay or have to feel "in the mood," like she did. In fact, porn never said no to Jimmy. It was the mistress always willing to appease him.

After a few years, Deb started to put on a few pounds, and Jimmy just wasn't as attracted to her as he once was. Deb started to notice a growing distance in their relationship. They rarely had sex and Jimmy wasn't interested in spending much time with her anymore. They started to argue more, and the tension between them was almost palpable. She felt as if he didn't love her anymore, and she started to resent Jimmy. In turn, Jimmy turned more and more to porn. During this time a younger coworker started to make passes at him.

The temptation seemed like a pornographic fantasy come to life, so Jimmy had an affair. Deb didn't find out until three years later, at which time she kicked him out of the house for a month. By that time they had two kids who couldn't understand why Daddy wasn't at home anymore.

Jimmy finally broke off his affair, and Deb convinced him to start counseling. They found that the root of their problems was a porn addiction that started when Jimmy was young. His self-loathing, his broken family, his failure to deal with his problems—all of these were papered over with a porn problem that masked his pain. Now thirty-five, Jimmy feels his life is

going nowhere. As a couple, Jimmy and Deb desperately want to get out of the mess they have found themselves in, but the pain sometimes seems like too much.

This story of Jimmy and Deb is not the story of any one couple, but rather it describes the experiences of so many couples who struggle with porn addiction. I have devised it in order to highlight the core issue: porn destroys lives—not just the lives of the person who has the addiction, but those close to the person as well. Our society rarely talks about the reality of what happens to porn addicts and their relationships. Sex is powerful. It has the power to lead people to grow in love and to create life. But when it is misused, it also has the power to destroy.

The Power of Sex

Sex is the most powerful thing a man and woman can do together, because the sexual act makes new life. All of us have our beginning in the sexual act. Sex is a participation in the creative act of forming unique, unrepeatable human beings who are created by God for an eternal destiny and a beautiful purpose. But pornography doesn't care for this understanding of sex. Rather, it mocks the power of sex. Porn tosses this power aside, portraying it as a distraction from the alleged true power of sex, which is pleasure.

Pornography is material that portrays suggestive behavior in order to arouse sexual desires and reactions. It takes many forms and is found in every media format currently available: TV, Internet, photographs, movies, books, magazines, phones, and gaming stations, for example. A good way to determine if

something is pornographic is to ask yourself: “Does it depict lewd sexual behavior intended to arouse sexual desire?” If the answer is yes, there is a good chance it is porn.

Porn is available to everyone and doesn't discriminate against anyone. In fact, porn use crosses all boundaries of age, sex, race, sexual preference, religious affiliation, and profession. It is used by clergy and laity, old and young, men and women, straight and same-sex attracted. In fact, no group is immune to the appeal of porn. It preys on our instincts and desires, and then twists them into something they aren't intended for: using other people.

Working with college students, I have found that most people who use porn started at an early age, in their home. *If* their parents discovered they were using porn, that discovery took months or years. Porn users will tell you they mainly access porn in private, and many feel a deep sense of shame when using it. Furthermore, the feeling of shame may keep them from seeking the help they need to stop. Some are exposed at such an early age that they may not even know the full extent of what they are doing, because porn can be attractive (and toxic) to the youngest of children and the oldest of adults.

Unfortunately our culture's response to porn could be described as a shrug of the shoulders at best, and encouragement as a healthy part of our sex lives at worst. Our community standard now considers it more of a punch line in a sitcom than a menace to the health of our communities. Some tell themselves that everybody accesses porn and it isn't a big deal. You can find porn in supermarkets. It is available at the touch of a button on your remote control. It is accessible through phones, computers, and gaming systems. Others think it is depraved,

gross, or even evil, but they don't work to prevent its spread, since it isn't (or so they think) in their house or family. All of these attitudes have helped porn grow into the cultural powerhouse it is today.

First Exposure

I still remember the first time I saw an image of a naked woman. It was during the movie *Conan the Barbarian*, which my parents never would have allowed me to see if they had known about it. I can still remember the first nude scene as if it were yesterday. I was about ten years old when I saw the images, and as many of you who are reading this book can understand, that image is burned into my brain forever. There is no way to get rid of the image, even if I try to ignore it.

The power of porn is evident to many of us when we think of the sex scenes from movies we have seen, because the most memorable images are those that contain nudity and sex. This is because our brains were created to grasp these images and store them, since sex has the ability to engage us so powerfully. God created us this way to link two spouses through sex. It is a kind of marital glue that bonds spouses one to the other. When sex is misused it can be destructive, yet the "glue" still works to stick images into your brain. When I was ten I may not have fully grasped what I had seen and what the movie had done to me, and I certainly couldn't have told you what pornography was. But it affected me forever.

Take a moment to think of the ease of access the children of our world have to pornography today. Think also of the graphic

nature of these videos and images. What kind of impact do you think porn will have on the next generation? What kind of impact will those children, once grown, have upon the world at large? What does pornography's rapid growth and power over our culture mean for our grandchildren and their children? It frightens me to think of the social, relational, familial, and cultural consequences.

Porn and the Church

When you think of the Church's teachings on sex, is your first thought *no*? Many Catholics and non-Catholics believe that the Catholic Church has only negative things to say about sex, such as its dangers outside of marriage. I have to admit that, for a good portion of my life, that was what I thought about Catholicism and sex. I believe it was due to the way I had been taught as a child. More than anything we kids were taught to fear sex because it can cause disease and lead to teenage pregnancy. Not only that, it is a mortal sin outside of marriage. But the wider culture was selling sex as the greatest thing ever to happen. It was about pleasure, happiness, and fun! That was a big reason why I stopped practicing my faith as a young adult and why many others do as well. My sex education was a mixture of fear, anxiety, fascination, lust, and guilt. I primarily learned about sex through my brother, my friends, and pornography. It certainly didn't set me up for success. Rather, it turned into a recipe for disaster.

This is why porn, masturbation, and sex outside of marriage are still so powerful in our culture. Most people, both young

and old, don't have a good enough reason to say no to porn, because the yes is so powerfully attractive. In fact, the Church's teachings seem boring if all they have to say is no.

Yet today the Church's teachings on sex are much more about its beauty and power. When we understand why a *no* once in a while can be good for each of us, it can help us realize that *yes* is much bigger and better. Nevertheless, this will only happen when we truly understand what God wants us to know about sex and why the Church teaches what it does, and then choose to make these teachings our own. We will dive more deeply into the Church's teachings later in this book, but for now you should know that the truth the Church teaches about sex is anything but boring.

We should not deny that the Church says no to the culture's failed idea of sexuality. The Church teaches that any sexual act between one man and one woman outside of a marriage is wrong. We could add many other things to the list of what ails our culture. They include divorce and remarriage, pornography, masturbation, sterilization, same-sex marriage, contraception, abortion, in-vitro fertilization, and so forth. All these activities harm us as individuals, as families, and as communities. They harm our entire culture. Just as any loving mother does, the Church points out to us those things that may harm us spiritually, mentally, emotionally, relationally, culturally, and even physically. If a toddler stretches a hand toward a boiling pot of water and the parent does not correct the behavior, then the parent does not choose to love the child in that moment. The same could be said of a church that teaches that improper sexual behavior is harmful yet keeps silent. So the Church teaches that any kind of sexual act or thought that isn't in accord with God's design may damage us.

The Church tells us this to guide and help us. This is a loving thing to do. In fact, to fail to do so would be an unloving act.

What Is True Love?

To properly understand our sexuality, we must start with a true understanding of love. My definition of love has developed over many years of reflection and teaching others about relationships. Love is *choosing what is best for the other person despite what it might cost the one who loves*. Love is not merely an emotion, a feeling, or an act of having sex with someone. Love is not something that comes and goes and we can't control; rather, it is a choice lived out in our daily lives. Love is not about what I as an individual get out of it.

Every time we choose to say no to one thing, we choose to say yes to something else. When a wife says no to an extramarital affair, she says yes to her marriage, husband, and family. This also works in reverse, because every yes is a no to something else. When a father says yes to spending time with his kids, he says no to spending time doing something else. Therefore, saying no to porn is also saying yes to love and sexuality as they are meant to be lived out. Furthermore, any person who would say yes to loving others would say no to porn.

The moral teachings of the Church provide boundaries to guide our choices and help us have a proper understanding of what is good, true, and beautiful as we develop the internal habits and virtues that allow us to easily choose what is best for others and ourselves. These boundaries are not impositions on us, because we are still free to choose otherwise, even to the point of committing sin.

Yet if all we do is choose to follow the law, then no true conversion is taking place. In Romans 13:8, Saint Paul says, “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” If I truly love my wife, I do not need to worry about breaking the sixth commandment on adultery. True love fulfills all that the law requires and goes beyond it. In the same way, if you truly love God, you would never even want to worship another god. The law is there to guide us and help us. But one who truly loves doesn’t need the law anymore.

Too often the laws surrounding how Catholics ought to act have been the heart of what the Church has taught about sexuality. While we should not avoid the prohibitions of the laws, they should not be the focus of how we respond to the problem of pornography. No amount of fear tactics or negativity can sway someone away from porn once that person has been using it for a while. Rather than peddling what is bad, we need to focus on the beautiful and positive message that Christ has given us about sex. Sex can be a beautiful and amazing act, if we choose to use it in the manner God intended.

To help those who struggle with pornography, we will start with some recommendations and strategies that may be hard to follow. They might seem like an imposition, one that could even stifle our freedom and happiness. But the idea that unrestrained sex brings freedom and happiness is a lie. Our suggestions may seem difficult, because most virtues take hard work and time to develop. Most men and women will need discipline, accountability, support, prayer, and fortitude to make the changes necessary. The strategies are a first step, but not the final one. The ultimate goal is to develop virtue.

Virtue is the habit of doing what is good and true easily and quickly. But developing virtue doesn’t come easily. Anyone who

has tried but failed to stop using porn and/or masturbating knows this. Ultimately, porn has never brought anyone happiness—but virtue has. It is worth the time and effort.

Nobody ever wins a marathon without training. Neither will you win the battle over porn without training hard and changing your life. Building a life of virtue can lead to lasting and true happiness, which is what we are really seeking.

After examining this issue, some might want to know why others would ever use pornography if the results can be so devastating. The reason is simple: they believe it will make them happy, at least for a moment. Whenever we sin in any way, we are really looking to fulfill a desire for happiness. Sin might bring a moment's pleasure, but it never lasts. Porn might seem to help a person escape problems for a while, but it will create even more problems, and it never resolves the original ones.

I have found that the vast majority of those who struggle with porn have a lot of difficulty with relationships. Porn offers an imaginary relationship with an attractive person (or persons) who will never say no, who is always available and willing to have sex, and who won't hurt the seeker or need an emotional attachment. Of course, porn also results in despair, loneliness, and similar issues, because porn can't deliver on the promises it makes. Porn never brings love, peace, or lasting happiness.

Talking about a Revolution

The fruit of the sexual revolution is not only ripe, it is also rotten. We see it all around us in the daily headlines: teenagers who sext (send sexual pictures via text messaging) one another, same-sex marriage, the hook-up culture on college campuses,

free contraception as a “right” enshrined into government policies, human trafficking to support sex slavery, and the rise of porn as a social norm. All of these issues, and others, have at their core the false philosophy that sex is about pleasure alone. This view sees the other issues normally attached to sex (such as children, bonding of spouses, chastity) as merely tangential and always optional.

Let us be honest, the Church has been slow and inadequate in fashioning an effective response to the rapidly changing culture around us. In many ways Catholics have swept the issues surrounding sexuality under the rug for so long that many are either ignorant about just how bad it is or believe the Church’s teachings on sexuality are “out of date.” Some Catholics don’t want to talk about sex because they are afraid they will be labeled hypocrites in the light of recent sex abuse scandals. Still others have a partial understanding of the Church’s teachings and reject them. Finally, some don’t want to talk about these issues for fear of being immodest or hurting a child’s innocence.

We must have a better answer! We must propose a positive alternative of love, life, health, relationships, marriage, family, faith, and God. This means we must fight against pornography, which degrades all of these good things. Porn tricks us into believing other humans are not human at all, but rather objects for our own selfish use. In our mind’s eye we treat those involved in porn as objects for our pleasure, not as other humans for whom we truly want what is best.

Ultimately, porn leads us to the opposite of love. It is using the highest of all of creation (other human beings) as objects. It degrades and uses others as things. No human being—even porn stars, prostitutes, and adulterers—was created to merely be an object of lust!

Sex, like most things, can be used for good or evil. When sex is pornographic, it is always evil. Porn separates love from sex and raises pleasure as the sole goal. Once sex is no longer about love but about pleasure first, by definition it is selfish. You can't look at porn for your own pleasure and be doing it for the sake of others. In and of itself, it is an exercise of the ego—it is all about *me* and what I get out of it. Ultimately it degrades and punishes the very people the purveyors of porn claim to empower.

Don't be fooled into believing that porn is just a private issue. It is an exploitation of others in every way possible. It is a social problem because it affects marriages, families, relationships, children, groups, advertising, social norms, and other things. It is a spiritual problem not only for Catholics but also for Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews, who all believe it is sinful and harmful to our relationship with God. It is a mental problem because it can be highly addictive, and it is a physical problem because it changes our brains to function in a way they are not intended to.¹ We will explore these problems in depth in later chapters of this book.

Porn is ripping out the heart of millions of people and changing our world in a social experiment the likes of which we have never seen before. A pornographic mentality is at the heart of many of the problems in our culture today.

It is too late to stop the slide into a culture of pornography, because we are already there. What we can and must do now is

1. For more on the science of the brain, see *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* as noted in the resources section of this book. —Ed.

reach into this culture and help one person at a time, by offering a life-giving alternative of freedom from the slavery that porn offers.

But freedom never comes without cost.

Activities and Questions

1. Why is sex so powerful? Do you think the power of sex can be misused? If so, what are some ways we can misuse sex? If you don't believe it can be misused, why not?
2. Do you remember your first exposure to pornography? What kind of thoughts and feelings did you have? Why?
3. How were you taught about sex? Was it a positive or negative experience? How did this affect you as you have gotten older?
4. Are you more likely to say no to porn or yes to something positive? Why?
5. Write down all the positive things about sex you can think of. Which one is the best reason to say no to porn and yes to something else?