

# PORNOGRAPHY AND BEAUTY:

The Understanding of Pornography in Psychology and The Thought of  
Wojtyla/John Paul II

By: Patrick Williams

## Introduction

Bishop of Arlington Paul Loverde understands the problem with pornography in our society: “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 darkening their vision, causing them to view others as objects to be used and manipulated.”<sup>1</sup>

Pornography in the United States is rampant. The pornography industry in the United States pulled in over thirteen billion dollars in revenue in 2006, over the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Worldwide, it is estimated that it pulled in over 97 billion dollars. The average child is first introduced to porn at the age of eleven.<sup>2</sup>

Although the numbers for Catholics are not known, we can see from our Protestant brethren the impact of pornography from within our churches. Pastors.com reported a poll where 54% of their pastors responded that they viewed porn within the past year. Promise Keepers, a large Christian organization whose main purpose includes the purity of men, reported 53% of their members at a large stadium sized event admitted viewing porn in the last week. Many of the members chose not to respond because of fear in the way the data would be used.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Loverde, in his pastoral letter *Bought With A Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God*, emphasizes that the problem with pornography is

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<sup>1</sup> Paul S. Loverde, *Bought with a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God*, (2006), no. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Toptenreviews.com, Jerry Ropelato (2007), 20 April 2007 <<http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>>

<sup>3</sup> Crosswalk.com, Mike Genung, 20 April 2007 <<http://www.crosswalk.com/1336107/>>

not simply limited to young people and married and engaged couples, but is also shared by priests. He takes the time to explain the role of celibacy in a priest's life and how pornography can still be a temptation, but a problem with it does not have to be the end of the priest's ministry.<sup>4</sup>

The culture of death has reared its head in virtually every segment of society in the form of these images. A solution to the problem cannot simply be a condemnation and a war against the culture, although both are necessary. We must start with the redemption of Christians and let that light flow from the Church to the rest of society.

The Protestant world has many resources to help Christians fight problems with pornography. Web sites such as XXXchurch.com exist to help men and women deal with pornography addictions by providing information on how to combat their problems, and they also provide online forums allowing people to first seek help anonymously. Pure Life Ministries, a more intense ministry, has a six-month to one-year solution to get a man out of his surroundings and live a monastic kind of life in order to help him get over his pornography addiction. Many books have been written on the subject and each has its own benefits and failures. The biggest problem with all of these materials is that they lack the teachings of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II, which have transformed the Christian understanding of sexuality and the redemption of sexuality. We must take this new understanding as a starting point to both understand the problem at hand and find a solution that takes into account the fullness of man and God.

We shall start with a look at John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* to understand the breakdown of man that occurred through sin and how he can understand his recovery in

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<sup>4</sup> *Bought with a Price*, no. 4.

light of man's original innocence and his final destination in Heaven. This leads to an understanding of being as gift, which was demonstrated by Cardinal Ratzinger. Being as gift is broken by narcissism, which is both the cause and result of pornography problems. Then we will take a look at *Love and Responsibility* to see how man's attraction has been skewed to view his partner as a body instead of as a person. By reintegrating the ethos of attraction, we can once again see the other for their intrinsic beauty. The male problem with pornography will be shown as a distortion of beauty. Finally, we will analyze the meaning of art and what makes pornography different. Our purpose is to show that the problems with pornography can be fought with a reinterpretation of the meaning of beauty. This will be done by showing how the thought of John Paul II can be reconciled with psychology in this area.

## How we started: separation of mind and body

In *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul II traced through Genesis, demonstrating how man should be in light of his creation, the fall of man to sin and its ramifications and his final end as a glorified body in Heaven.

In the beginning, man was completely integrated in body and soul. He identified himself with his body, seeing the difference between himself and the animals in his ability to do work by tilling the land and his right to name the animals. Through corporality, these differences revealed his own rationality, distinguishing him from the beasts around him and establishing that his body revealed himself, yet he was unable to understand much of that revelation. When God created woman, the man recognized her as being like him, but different. She was like him in rationality and dignity, but was different because she complemented him as a different sexual value. Through their

conjugal one flesh union, she revealed to him that he was made for unity with another. This unity is not simply physical, but signifies something about the depths of man and what he was created for. The body was understood by both to reveal the person. The two were without shame because there was no concupiscence and they could see one another clearly as whole persons, structured for love. This structure is man giving himself to woman and woman receiving him, which is reflected in their own bodies.<sup>5</sup>

The introduction of original sin destroyed man's ability to understand the other as a complete good, giving him the inclination to use the other. Concupiscence caused man to see woman as an object for his own gratification because he was now inclined to see her as simply a body. Each covered himself, knowing from his own inclinations that the other would also see himself as an object. The whole person could no longer be seen in the fullness of personhood, but as a reduction to simply a body, giving birth to lust. Paradoxically, the more one would see of the other, the less one would see the other.<sup>6</sup>

The redemption of man by Christ's sacrifice allows him the possibility to once again be good. Man can now see woman more clearly as the complete person that she is, body and soul. This does not, however, take away his tendency to use her. In this redemption comes man's understanding of his destination as a resurrected and glorified body in Heaven, which can never be seen with eyes of lust.<sup>7</sup>

## Being and narcissism

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<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Translated by Michael Waldstein. (Boston, Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 131-224. Referenced as *Theology of the Body*.

<sup>6</sup> *Theology of the Body*, 234-263.

<sup>7</sup> *Theology of the Body*, 379-411.

*The Theology of the Body* presents an understanding of man as engendered with the tendency to give himself to woman, who receives him by giving of herself. Cardinal Ratzinger wrote an article entitled “Truth and Freedom,” describing man as one who receives himself – everything that he is – from another. This other is primarily God, but it is also his parents and everyone he has ever had contact with. Because of this, he is not his own. He is meant to be for another. Just as everything he is comes from another, his entire being is intended for another.<sup>8</sup> This “being from” and “being for” illustrate being as gift.

This gift of self is broken through narcissism, where the self turns inward and away from the other. This narcissism began with the fall of man and continues in man now as a contributor to the problem with pornography. Man’s desires are erroneously aimed at himself when he uses pornography instead of pointing towards another and desiring what is good for her. The narcissism grows as he views more and more pornography because he is continually distancing himself from others. As narcissism takes hold of the individual, he experiences feelings of anger directed at those around him, causing the person to feel more alone and to consume more pornography, which only increases his narcissism and deepens the problem. This problem must be recognized to find a solution, but a solution to this problem has to include a total change in man’s vision.<sup>9</sup>

## Ethos of seeing

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Truth and Freedom,” *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Spring 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Richard P. Fitzgibbons, “The Selfish Spouse,” *The Institute for Marital Healing*, <http://www.maritalhealing.com/conflicts/selfishspouse.php>.

*Love and Responsibility* is a book that combines philosophy, a touch of theology, anthropology, and psychology for a broad synthesis of man. In this book, Wojtyla outlines the different stages of love starting with attraction. In some way, attraction is a form of love; however, love itself cannot be reduced to mere attraction. Attraction is an event of love that starts with an encounter of two persons. In this encounter, each will observe the “goods” of the other. These goods are the values that one finds appealing in the other. The values can vary greatly depending on the goods present in the observed person and what the observing person considers to be a value.<sup>10</sup> Physical beauty is a value and a good of the person, but so are various personality traits, activities enjoyed, and other values the person holds. In the first instance of attraction, there is no direct willing involved -- it is a cognitive function that also includes emotion and the will.<sup>11</sup> This first moment of love is affectivity; something comes from the outside and strikes a corresponding something in the person, which causes an effect within them.<sup>12</sup> Even though attraction is somewhat involuntary in the first moment, we are still called to conform our attractions to the truth.

The truth present in attraction is dependent on the authenticity of the perceived good, which can never be reduced to a partial value.

“When we speak of truth in an attraction (and by implication of truth in love) it is essential to stress that the attraction must never be limited to partial values, to something which is inherent in the person but is not the person as a whole.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, Translated by H. T. Willetts. (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1993), 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Jose Noriega, *Conjugal Love and the Gift of the Holy Spirit*, (unpublished, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, 79.

The perception of the beauty of a person must be both an inner beauty and an outer beauty for the attraction to be whole and not simply a partial value. He leaves this notion of a partial value with little development in *Love and Responsibility*, but he greatly expounds on it as pope in *The Theology of the Body*. By putting these two together we can see a necessary integrity of the person as body and soul for an attraction to be real and complete.

Kevin Kniffin and David Wilson published a study in which attraction was measured in two different cases. In the first, they compared the attraction experienced by participants who did not know the subjects versus that of those who knew them previously. In the second, the attraction felt between two participants who had never met was compared to the level of attraction that remained after they had come to know each other better. The study found that

“the fitness value of potential social partners depends at least as much on non-physical traits – whether they are cooperative, dependable, brave, hardworking, intelligent and so on – as physical factors, such as smooth skin and symmetrical features. It follows that non-physical factors should be included in the subconscious assessment of beauty.”<sup>14</sup>

This gives a metric to show that Wojtyla is correct in insisting that physical characteristics alone play only a part in what determines the attractiveness of the person. It shows that physical beauty is interpreted according to the whole person.

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<sup>14</sup> Kniffin, Kevin and Wilson, David, “The effect of nonphysical traits on the perception of physical attractiveness: Three naturalistic studies,” *Evolution and Human Behavior: Official Journal of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society*, Volume 25 Issue 2, (March 2004) 88-101.



Unfortunately, to view the other as beautiful – as a complete person – does not always occur, though it is certainly the goal.

This attraction can err as a partial value in two ways: the person considered as only a body and the person considered as only a soul. In the first, which is the most common, a person regards the other as a value only in so far as they have an attractive body and are only a physical/sexual value in the eyes of the observer. The observer reduces the observed to a mere object to be used to gratify their sexual desire. The other extreme is a spiritualistic attraction that does not involve the body at all. In our culture this often shows up when a person is said to have “a great personality.” Although this is not as bad as reducing the person to an object, it still fails to regard the other as a whole person.

What is needed to avoid these two situations is a recovery of the person as a whole value. Not only should both the beauty of the body and the beauty of the soul be taken into consideration, but they should also be integrated into an inseparable beauty. As one person comes to know the other more and more, the other’s attractive value changes. The other becomes more beautiful when more attractive values of the other are discovered and attachment between the two occurs. The opposite is true when unattractive values are discovered, causing the two to grow apart, or when a value that was considered attractive turns out to be false.

This understanding shows the importance of the integration of mind and body to attraction. When there is a disconnection between the attraction of the body and the attraction of the person as a whole, the person is more susceptible to the temptation of

pornography. Pornography is only a partial value of a person. It is a visual representation of the body that is separated from the good of the whole person.

The media contributes to the problem of pornography because it takes a particular representation of what beauty seems to be according to the “average American” and holds it up as not only the ideal, but also the norm. A constant exposure to this fabricated and over-sexualized norm can cause it to become the ideal for most of the population. The problem with this can occur in both men and women, but men are more susceptible. The understanding of the beauty of a woman as purity can be replaced with the understanding of beauty as a cheap and sexualized version of a woman. This causes the man to seek out beauty in sexual images of women, which predisposes him to the lure of pornography. When he actually starts viewing pornography, the cheapened version of femininity in his mind is reinforced, as is the understanding of beauty as purely physical. When this is taken to the extreme, he can often become addicted to pornography. In order to recover from a problem with pornography, he must do more than just try to stop viewing the images. He must learn how to reinterpret femininity as purity by converting his distorted view of femininity as sexual and recovering attraction as something ordered towards the whole person.

## Ethos of the image

In *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul II affirms the goodness of the body in art while at the same time revealing the many missteps that can be taken to bring the art down to the level of pornography. The human body in works of art is meant to express the depths of the person.

When man creates art, he captures a dimension of reality that is beyond the mere physical. The portrayal of the human body in art is delicate because it can be used for the sake of inciting lust rather than revealing the depths of the person.<sup>15</sup> The resulting impression of the body in art seems to be merely the interpretation of the art; however, there is an ontological connection that the artist makes with his work. The way that the artist sees the body comes across in the art because art is more than just a visual representation -- it has meaning built into it. When the art lacks true meaning of the person, it reduces the body of a person to an object to be enjoyed and used. He writes of the connection between man's dignity and art:

“But there are also works of art, and perhaps still more often reproductions, that stir up objections in the sphere of man's personal sensibility—not because of their object, because in itself the human body always has its own inalienable dignity.”<sup>16</sup>

The pope notes that it seems possible for the naked body to be portrayed in photography as art and not pornography; however, it would be extremely difficult. The mechanical representation of the body reveals the body without an artist's interpretation. The artist's job in the plastic arts, such as painting or sculpting, is not to make an exact replication of the body, but to put an interpretation of the body within the picture.

“In painting or sculpture, man/body always remains a model that is subjected to a specific reworking by the artist. In film and even more in the art of photography, there is no transfiguration of the model, but the living human being is reproduced:

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<sup>15</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, 192-193.

<sup>16</sup> *Theology of the Body*, 376.

and in this case the human body is not a model for the work of art, but *the object of a reproduction* achieved by appropriate technologies.”<sup>17</sup>

This interpretation can give the viewer an understanding of some dimension of the person that cannot be given through a mechanical process. In true art, the body is not stripped of its dignity because it is not revealing the body exactly as it is, something to be shielded from another’s tendency to use the body as an object.

Mechanical reproductions can depersonalize the body because there does not have to be a connection between the subject being viewed and the viewer. There is an “abstraction” of the body such that it remains a body that is not attached to the whole of the person. Television and magazines had taken this to a new level, but the Internet has provided an unprecedented medium for the mass distribution and consumption of pornography. The Internet allows thousands of images to pour across the user’s screen in a small amount of time. The sheer multiplicity of the images further degrades the women because there is complete anonymity and little time that must be devoted to each of the images. Often an image will be used for a fleeting moment and then discarded, never to be seen again.

## A correct understanding of beauty

The pope rightly connects beauty with goodness in his 1999 *Letter to Artists*: “The link between good and beautiful stirs up fruitful reflection. In a certain sense, beauty is the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Theology of the Body*, 366.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), no. 3.

The temptation to pornography is founded in part upon a separation of beauty from the good, which is a result of the separation of mind and body. When beauty is no longer seen in terms of goodness, it is reduced to a corrupt understanding of the body. In pornography, there is a good, which is the beauty of the body portrayed; however, the lack of depth of the person causes their body to be viewed in an evil way. The body is interpreted as beautiful, but the reality is that it is a twisted version of beauty. This twisted version of beauty is not truly beautiful because the sexual acts are taken outside of their proper place between married couples, often becoming even worse acts that should not even be engaged by those married.

Many studies have shown that beauty is perceived differently depending on the culture. The public's preference in what a woman should look like has changed in America. Just fifty years ago, Marilyn Monroe's hourglass body shape was popular, but now it has been supplanted by a thinner ideal. Perhaps a solution to pornography addiction is to replace the man's twisted ideal of woman as overly sexualized with one that is pure. The avoidance of pop culture in television, movies, magazines, and other media may need to be avoided in order for this change to happen.

When beauty is recovered as purity and goodness, the person rejects pornography because there is no longer an attraction to it. The force of true beauty is great and can, even if slowly and imperfectly, replace the corrupt understanding of beauty. This requires openness to the saving power of God to transform the heart. The realization of a true understanding of beauty restores the sight of man to overcome his concupiscence, to

overcome his use of the other as a mere body. John Paul II knew this well when he quoted Dostoyevsky, “beauty will save the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Patrick,

Congratulations on our truly outstanding paper!! Your early identification of the problem of narcissism in the paper reflects a deep understanding of a root cause of the problem, which, unfortunately, is not adequately uncovered and addressed in present programs to help individuals with this serious conflict/disease. Each part of the paper is well developed and persuasive. Hopefully, it will contribute to a greater understanding of true beauty and to the healing of the plague of pornography.

I want to recommend that you mail your paper to the two Bishops who have written pastoral letters on pornography, Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City/St. Joseph, MO and Bishop Loeverde and to your own Bishop. I also want to suggest that you try to have this important article published. Finally, I hope you consider offering a series of conferences to the Catholic students at Texas A&M on pornography.

Finally, We are in the process of developing a chapter on our website on pornography and I hope to post links to articles. I would like to post your paper with your permission in the future.

Your grade for this paper is A plus.

Dr. Fitz

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<sup>19</sup> *Letter to Artists*, no. 16.

