

FOREWORD

By Matt Fradd

I was playing in a relative's garage, rummaging through an old trunk in the corner, when I found it: a glossy magazine picture of a completely naked woman. I gasped, and my heart seemed to stop—I had never seen anything like it. I felt a strong sense of awe, and also something like guilt. For although no one had ever told me I shouldn't look at pornography (I'd never even heard the word before), I somehow knew it was wrong. I also knew I wanted to see more. I was eight years old.

Though my first encounter with porn wounded the innocence of my childhood, more than two decades later there's something almost quaint about it. Today's kids don't have to stumble on faded centerfolds or sneak glimpses of late-night TV—they can tap a keyboard or screen and access a virtually infinite supply of graphic nudity and sex acts. They're awash in a sea of smut, and as our culture increasingly legitimizes, even glorifies it (or just defines it down), only heroic parental vigilance—plus God's providence—offers them any hope of escaping its influence.

As a U.S. Justice Department memo warned, “Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions.” If that sounds about right, it will be sobering to consider that it was written in 1996—before wireless broadband, before iPads, before selfies and sexting. Before pornography took over twelve percent of the Internet, with more than 25 million sites today raking in over \$5 billion a year. Before it was considered common practice, as it is today, for porn consumption to begin with a first encounter around age 11 and go on to radically shape the ideas that teens and young adults have about sexual intimacy.

This new edition of *Bought with a Price*, then, could not have come at a more critical time.

I'm sure that providence was watching over me as a boy, but my parents weren't vigilant enough. My friends and I began stealing pornographic magazines from the local shops, and soon I developed quite the stash. (When my father eventually discovered it, he just warned me, with a smirk, not to let my mother catch me.) My growing collection didn't sate my cravings, though, but only intensified them, and by my teen years the still images of *Playboy* weren't doing it for me anymore.

This is always the case with addiction, and neuroscientists are now explaining in scientific language what those of us who have been addicted to anything already knew: The addictive state leaves us in constant craving for a neurochemical cocktail (endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, etc.) that, with compulsive use, effectively re-sets the pleasure thermostat of our brain. The result is that alcoholics need more booze, drug addicts need bigger hits, and porn users need ever more intense kinds of sexual stimulation—just to feel “normal.”

I would go on to discover a new and profound normality—in fact, reality—at 17, when I abandoned the agnosticism of my youth and came to Christ. Suddenly I knew I was loved; I knew that the people I interacted with day in and day out had intrinsic worth; that, whether they knew it or not, God had thought them worth the price of His blood. This rocked my world. I could no longer justify degrading and objectifying women for whom Christ had suffered and died. And so I made the first and most important decision anyone can make in recovery: I admitted I was wrong, that my actions were bad, that I needed to change.

I believe that any attempt to come to terms with why pornography is evil must begin with this recognition of the intrinsic worth and goodness of the human person. For if we did not have inherent dignity, how could anything we did to ourselves or others offend justice? Or if, as the Gnostics taught, the flesh was just a prison for the soul, not part of what we essentially *are*, why would it matter how we used our bodies—or others'? You can't cheapen what is already worthless.

This is why Catholic teaching on human sexuality, expressed so beautifully in the writings of Saint John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, offers a noble vision of humanity. It insists on the integrity of the whole person: soul and body. It calls the flesh good and valuable, first because God created it and holds it in being, but even more so because God united Himself to it in the Incarnation. As the *Catechism*, citing the early Christian writer Tertullian, puts it,

'The flesh is the hinge of salvation.' We believe in God who is the creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh.

Although my change of heart about pornography was a black-and-white moment, my recovery from porn addiction was not. It would take more time and healing to break free. After I got married, my wife's love and the grace of the sacrament helped deliver me completely. And, just as my initial conversion had done, the beauty of marriage and fatherhood also helped put the ugliness of porn into crystal-clear perspective. I came to understand how when husbands and fathers use porn they not only make themselves slaves to sin, they also deeply wound their ability to love and protect in the way their vocation demands.

C. S. Lewis wrote presciently of the man who "keeps a harem of imaginary brides" that prevents him from achieving loving unity with an actual woman:

For the harem is always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no woman can rival. Among those shadowy brides he is always adored, always the perfect lover; no demand is made on his unselfishness, no mortification ever imposed on his vanity. In the end, they become merely the medium through which he increasingly adores himself.

This comports nicely with Pope Francis' admonition, from *Evangelii Gaudium*, that "Life grows by being given away, and weakens in isolation and comfort." I think of Christ's words from Luke 22:19 at the Last Supper—"This is my body which is given for you." Husbands and fathers have a special calling to imitate Christ in His self-giving sacrifice: in our work, in the way we love, in our patience and kindness.

But porn flips that on its head. It makes husbands and fathers say, "This is your body, taken by me." By turning men inward, pornography suffocates their vocation, robbing them of their power to be Christ-like lovers, protectors, and leaders of their families.

Most troubling of all, for both men and women (the latest studies show an alarming rise in porn use among the latter) pornography deadens the heart to spiritual things. *Bought with a Price* is full of wisdom and good counsel from beginning to end, but I think Bishop Loverde writes most urgently when he warns of the "damage that pornography does to man's 'template' for the supernatural." God gave us the earthly gifts of sight and sex and ordered them towards a heavenly end: everlasting life with Him. When we subvert use of those gifts, we lose interest in their true end. Our perspective gets stuck on earth and its low pleasures. Thus we endanger not just our temporal relationships but our eternal destiny.

That's the bad news—the worst news, in fact. The good news, as the bishop's bold and manful letter also tells us, is that healing is possible; purity can be achieved.

Perhaps you have been struggling to be free of pornography for a long time. Perhaps you've grown tired of promising yourself, your spouse, and God, that you'll never fall to this again, only to return—like the dog to its vomit (2 Pet. 2:22)—once more. *Bought with a Price* is a timely and urgent word which will, by God's grace, renew you and convince you once more that this is a battle worth fighting.

Remember, there is only one sin which God will not forgive. What is that sin? The one we refuse to ask forgiveness for. Be assured of God's love for you. Be assured of His infinite mercy. The same God who forgave Moses the murderer, Rahab the prostitute, David the adulterer, Peter the denier, and Paul the Christian-murderer will forgive you also, and convert your heart.

And there's even better news. Scripture promises that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). So we have here not just a struggle, but an opportunity to tap into a massive outpouring of God's grace. Think about it. Every person, every Christian, every saint who lived before the Internet lacked one gift that we have: the ability to choose Christ by rejecting, day after day, this uniquely modern and anonymous sin of porn. So let your heart not be troubled but grateful—for God's inexhaustible mercy, for the powerful help we get from the Church's sacraments and teachers like Bishop Loverde, and for this almost unprecedented chance to grow in virtue by striving to walk the path of purity.

Matt Fradd works for Covenant Eyes and is author of the book Delivered: True Stories of Men and Women Who Turned from Porn to Purity. A speaker and Catholic apologist, Matt has produced many resources on pornography and purity, including Porn: 7 Myths Exposed, The Ugly Truth, The Man Talk, and ThePornEffect.com. He lives in Atlanta with his wife Cameron and their three children.