



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Articles:

- 📖 Turning Dimes into Dollars  
*(The Pornographic Culture, pp. 17-23)*
- 📖 Avoiding the Mess in Mass Media  
*(The Pornographic Culture, pp. 88-92)*

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:  
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### Christian Reflection

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# Avoiding Pornography's Mess

With demanding consumers, willing producers, and savvy business executives, the pornography industry has become diverse and pervasive in North America. How can adults and parents discern the commendable while screening out the objectionable in our popular culture?

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 6:3-10

### Responsive Reading†

**May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

**Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the god of peace will be with you.**

### Reflection

Why is pornography increasingly diverse and pervasive in our culture? Part of the answer, of course, lies in the desires of its consumers and proclivities of its high-profile producers. Martinez turns our attention to the business side of the industry and startles us with other reasons for pornography's influence.

- ▶ *The demand for pornography is 'inelastic.'* Since its consumers want immediate gratification, they are relatively insensitive to changes in price. Consequently, retail markups on pornographic products are fairly high, with sales totaling more than \$10-12 billion in 2000.
- ▶ *Pornography increasingly is accepted as a legitimate industry.* Lax social standards of decency, coordinated lobbying efforts, well-attended conferences and conventions, and the participation of large, mainstream corporations in its distribution are major factors in its increased legitimacy. "The gap between outright pornography and the sexual content permeating mainstream media productions has narrowed considerably as entertainment providers sense their viewers' increasing appetite, or demand, for nudity and explicit material," Martinez observes. Large corporations like Yahoo, AT&T, and General Motors have lent their expertise to its distribution.
- ▶ *The pornography industry's sophisticated business model increases profits and attracts business allies.* Well-educated business graduates have created a network model similar to that of Hollywood, using leading edge VCR and Internet technologies and increased marketing of the industry's "stars."

"As the industry's profits continue to grow, it is likely that its lobbying efforts will seek out and find new political and cultural allies. The quest for the legitimacy that is the most important source of sustenance for any industry will then be complete for



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pornography,” Martinez warns. “Its toxic mess of distorted desire ... increasingly will seep through to other businesses such as hotels, mainstream publishing, television networks, entertainment venues, and the Internet.”

As pornography continues to gain legitimacy, reap huge profits, and shape popular culture’s guiding values, we must become more discriminating consumers of contemporary entertainment. Carl Hoover directs us to Internet resources that help us to discern the commendable and praiseworthy in popular movies, television programs, music, and video games. *Rating systems* provide an initial, general level of screening. “Ratings can be too generic for parents and adults looking for specific guidance,” Hoover laments. “Furthermore, most ratings systems evaluate only levels of sex, violence, and profanity. They rarely address moral issues of lying, greed, self-centeredness, excessive consumerism, or prejudice.” He recommends timely *reviews*, whether the judgment of friends or of media critics, for a more detailed account of an entertainment’s content and value.

These resources can help us practice Jesus’ admonition to “be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

### Study Questions

1. What aspect of the pornography’s strategy to become accepted as a legitimate industry most surprises you? As it increasingly becomes legitimate, how does pornography’s influence in our lives become more difficult to resist?
2. 1 Timothy 6:3-10 warns Christian teachers that their communication will become warped if they prefer money over the teaching of the true and good. How does this apply to other communication, such as the entertainment industry? If love of money is our problem, what cure does this passage prescribe?
3. What is “the greatest threat to the continued growth of the pornography industry” (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 19)? How does the industry confront this threat?
4. Examine the ratings and reviews sites that Hoover mentions. How helpful do you find their information? What other resources help us evaluate films, television programs, music, and video games?

### Departing Hymn: “Teach Us to Love the True”

Teach us to love the true,  
the beautiful and pure,  
and let us not for one short hour  
an evil thought endure.  
And give us grace to stand  
decided, brave, and strong,  
the lovers of all holy things,  
the foes of all things wrong.

*Walter J. Mathams (1913)*

*Suggested tune: DIADEMATA*

† Adapted from Philippians 4:7-9 (NRSV).

# Avoiding Pornography's Mess

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To consider the role of business in the pornography industry.
2. To provide resources for screening the content and value of contemporary media entertainment.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting. DIADEMATA (commonly paired with the hymn text, "Crown Him with Many Crowns") will probably be a familiar tune to use with the text "Teach Us to Love the True."

## Begin with a quote

Read Mercer Schuchardt's quote in the opening paragraphs of Martinez's article points to a tragic story about contemporary culture (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 17). "Agnostic or Anglican," he notes, "it's pretty hard to deny the complete cultural victory of pornography in America today." This observation summarizes the dramatic upheaval in our cultural landscape wrought by the popularizing and marketing of sexually explicit material over the last four decades. What story does it tell about our culture?

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently, and then voice common concerns of the group. Close by asking God to help members encourage and support one another to live faithful, transformed lives.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:3-10 from a modern translation.

## Responsive Reading

The leader begins, and the group reads the lines in bold print.

## Reflection

The first section of the lesson describes the contemporary pornography industry and its alliances within the business world in order to gain greater cultural legitimacy and increased profits. Martinez says that pornography's increasing influence in our culture cannot be fully explained by the "inelastic" desires of its consumers and proclivities of its producers. ("Inelastic" is a term used in marketing. He explains this term in his article: "Demand for a product or service is defined as 'inelastic' if consumers desire the product so much that they are relatively insensitive to changes in price. Smokers addicted to nicotine are another classic example of such inelasticity.")

The pornography industry's growth depends, in part, on (1) an emerging cultural consensus that the sex industry is an acceptable economic enterprise, and (2) the complicity of highly-trained business professionals who have led the industry to adopt sophisticated business models.

Martinez predicts that if these trends continue, the pornography industry's toxic mess of distorted

desire will gradually seep into ever-widening segments of mainstream business. What challenges does this pose for Christians?

We should resist vigorously the growing legitimization of the pornography industry. Christians can resist the values peddled by the pornography industry by wisely engaging with and abstaining from the culture. We engage the pornographic culture when we articulate positive, healthy views of human sexuality informed by biblical, theological, and Christian artistic traditions. Abstaining from this culture, Martinez says, is becoming increasingly difficult and problematic. The pornographic culture more and more shapes the content of mass media, from popular magazines to movies and music.

Navigating this entertainment marketplace calls for discernment. Note that Hoover recommends that we look beyond ratings systems and seek counsel in the careful, timely judgment of friends and media critics. Ratings tend to be too generic, or restricted to reporting 'measurable' levels of sex, violence, and profanity. Reviews can explore a wider range of moral issues and give us balanced, specific advice.

Where do members of your group turn for reviews and advice concerning popular culture? Perhaps some members will want to examine the Internet sources that Hoover mentions and then report back to the group with their findings.

### *Study Questions*

1. This is an opportunity for members to ask questions or comment on elements of Martinez's account of the pornography industry. One example of pornography's increasing influence in our lives is the narrowing gap between pornography and the sexual content for entertainment in mainstream media (including Internet, television programs, movies, music, and video games). Which came first, the spread of pornography or the lax social standards of decency? Members may mention specific ways in which the pornography industry seeks their attention, or the attention of their children.
2. When a teacher (or movie maker, etc.) is primarily interested in making money, her message becomes distorted toward what people want to hear (and are willing to buy). The cure for a love of money is contentment and godliness (1 Timothy 6:6-8). In other words, we must love what God loves more than we desire money. This does not mean that we be content with poverty, but that we learn to be content with 'enough' and that we not seek money for its own sake, or for winning comparison with others.
3. "The greatest threat to the continued growth of the pornography industry" states Martinez, "is an activist government that seeks to curtail the production and consumption of pornographic material" (19). Recognizing the seriousness of this threat, the industry actively engages in protracted legal battles and lobbying efforts, invoking free-speech arguments, to ensure that the industry remains as unfettered as possible in producing and distributing sexually explicit material. How active should government be in regulating this industry?
4. Members should be acquainted with rating systems; however, many may be unfamiliar with on-line review resources. Before the group session, you may want to suggest that members visit a number of the websites listed by Carl Hoover. Ask members to discuss what they found helpful or unhelpful about the websites they visited. Would members regularly use these resources? Where do members of your group find helpful reviews and advice regarding their personal or family entertainment choices?

### *Departing Hymn*

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.