

Pornography and Censorship

Barrington H. Brennen, January 23, 2012

The subject of censoring pornography in the public media is a very sensitive one and challenging to write about. But it has been on my mind a lot and I know some might misunderstand my views or deliberately twist them to suit their own purposes. First of all, I am not in support of pornographic movies, magazines, games, photos, or literature. As a Christian, I wish it never existed or we had no pornography on our television channels or satellite dishes. On the other hand, we are not in a utopia and this is a pluralistic society where all beliefs, opinions and values are protected by our nation's constitution. In addition, not everyone is a Christian or even a believer in God. Even that is protected by our constitution. I am happy for that.

The challenge I have is when individuals pressure the Church or an association of churches to force the government to require all citizens to have the same values and practices. While some may not want to put pornography in this category, I cannot but logically admit that although porn can be considered evil, government cannot legislate moral and individual values. These are personal decisions.

It is my view that the larger the number of volunteers viewing of pornography, the greater is the evidence of the weakness of the church. Wow! That might be too strong a statement. The following questions may explain that statement. If the church believes that pornography is evil, why are so many churchgoers watching it? Is it because the church is not really preaching about the real, Biblical, social gospel? This is the gospel that impacts every-day living—the mental, spiritual, physical, and social. This is the gospel that motivates not just extrinsic behavior but also intrinsic values that transcend the immoral and social pressures in society. This is the gospel that teaches how to recognize the stupidity of immorality so that the learners can apply it to their lives. This gospel does not teach arrogance and pride where its followers believe that their righteous behavior automatically gives them brownie points for the kingdom.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

What then should be the church's approach when it comes to what it calls moral issues in society—pornography, gambling, legalizing of marijuana, nude clubs, etc? It is my view that the church must first make sure its members are practicing pure Biblical living standards and that they are living that way simply because it is a result of a loving relationship with Jesus, and nothing more. The wise Christian knows, that in this sinful world, the bottom line is that Jesus saves and not the absence of pornography or gambling in one's life. In addition, the wise Christian knows that Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives the power to avoid pornography, gambling, etc. Good church leaders do not simply tell their congregants that pornography or gambling is wrong, but teach them how to know for themselves the dangers or risk factors. When Jesus says do not do something there is usually a real practical reason behind it. Hence members are better equipped to withstand the onslaught of immorality in society.

Here is what some may call a liberal view on censorship published in 2004 in an article "Censorship and Pornography." I present it here for your thinking: "Many liberal objections to censorship of pornography point to the practical costs and dangers of censorship, arguing that even if pornography does cause some harm to others, the risks involved in censoring it are too great. They point to the difficulties involved in formulating a legal definition of pornography' that will be sufficiently precise to minimize the danger that censorship laws targeting pornography will be used (intentionally or unintentionally) to censor other unpopular material, including valuable literary, artistic and political works. Censoring pornography may thus place us on a dangerous "slippery slope" to further censorship of other material; and may have a general "chilling effect" on expression, making people reluctant to say or publish things that might be construed as pornography and for which they could be prosecuted."

If more of our people, who say they are Christians, were truly living Christian lives, we would have fewer problems in our country.

The second thing a church can do is to encourage the government to have a referendum for such issues to give an opportunity to all citizens to express their opinion with a vote. This, in my view, is good leadership. It is my view that it is not the church's role to force government leadership to pass laws pertaining to its own views, practices, and values. Perhaps this is difficult for some Christians to understand. The Bible says in Matthew 5:13 and 14 that followers of Jesus are to be "salt" and "light" of the world. Salt is used for flavoring. Light is used to dispel darkness and for healing. These two words suggest influence, not coercion. The lifestyle and attitude of the Christian will provide a positive influence in the society. Jesus said himself, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 15:35.

The only role of the church as an organization is to ensure fair play and religious liberty for all. The Christian Church is to ensure that all faiths/religions, including those that are non-Christian, have the freedom to grow, and proclaim their teachings without fear, intimidation, or ridicule. No government should make laws to prevent that. Should it be the same with pornography and gambling? Or at least shouldn't the government allow the people to speak on these matters? It is my view, and mine alone, that the church should have a loud voice on moral issues or immoral living but first through the loud "voices" of the holy lifestyles of their followers and not through forced legislation. The church wants to ban gambling and pornography, but some of the pastors are known to have extra marital affairs, abuse women and children, and are disingenuous with money. What hypocrisy! Maybe that's our problem in the society. Far too many Christians are duplicitous and the world knows that they are.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

While I am against pornography, I am still forced to ask the question: What will happen if the government without a national referendum enforces laws that many think restrict personal expressions and freedoms they believe are protected under the constitution? Imagine with me for a moment. If a referendum to ban pornography or

gambling is passed by a great majority of voters, it may suggest that the majority of residents in the country truly will not be using porn or gambling and very few will go under ground to access it. On the other hand, if the law against porn or gambling is passed without a referendum, when the leadership is not aware of the real voice of the people, it is more likely that thousands will continue these behaviors.

As stated earlier, the best solution is personal censorship. Parents and churches are to work together in teaching proper values to ensure immorality does not flourish in our society. I prefer personal censorship any day than legislative censorship. We do have a limited kind of legislative censorship already through our national film board for movies shown in our theaters. That is good. But we need to move forward with caution. Christians, stand up with your godly lifestyle. Its effects will last through eternity. Its practices will transcend illicit, immoral, and illegal behavior.

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