

## The Tree of Good and Evil in Our Own Lives

Sister Yvonne Mary Loucks, RSM, Ph.D.

**“The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not [n]eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” (Genesis 2. 8-10, 15-17)**

What is the urge within us to do what we should not do? Where does it come from? What is that little mental line of permission that feeds curiosity and assures us that we can just go ahead and take a look and another look at some object of our curiosity? Of itself, curiosity is actually a very creative attribute of the human mind, and it often urges us on, particularly with respect to research. “The computer revolution,” James Leach, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities announced, “holds out the prospect that the digital library could become an international citadel for the pursuit of curiosity.” While Leach considers the wonder of the digital world of borderless limits to knowledge, others caution against the vice of curiosity in the realm of this “expansive empire of digital information” as spiritually and morally dangerous. The vice of curiosity is powerful and it drives us to follow our interest as far as it goes because there is always more and better information out there. We begin looking on the Internet at a particular item of interest, and hours later we are still in front of the computer examining endless data that we have actively sought. At this point we might come to our senses and ask, “What am I doing?” When this activity begins to fill my days and my nights both actively and passively by just thinking about it when I am not doing it, I have become hooked.

St. Augustine says that at this point I am “shackled to an inferior love.” Paul Griffiths, professor of divinity at Duke University, says that “curiosity distracts men from the study and worship of God and it can also distract men from secular obligations by so occupying their minds that there is no room left for other considerations.” This can happen more easily with the exploration of any information electronically. So it also happens this way with the exploration of pornography.

Is anyone exempt from the dangers of getting hooked on pornography? Does anyone have the capacity to override natural sexual curiosity and just look once, or once again, or keep looking and remain free? A spiritually dangerous attitude about this dilemma is to imagine that only those with a weaker temperament might get caught or hooked. In the Garden of Eden the devil very rationally asked Adam if he thought that God would really let him die if he ate the fruit that was forbidden. Don't we pose that same question to ourselves too? Don't we very rationally give ourselves permission to do certain things for various reasons that serve as momentarily convincing excuses?

Of pornography, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “[Pornography] 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. It is a grave offense” ([CCC 2354](#)). Pornography violates human dignity, and reduces us to less than a bestial form of life. As human beings we need to learn to master our inclinations weakened by curiosity, and learn to practice a safeguard through the virtue of continence.

Blessed John Paul, in his October 24, 1984 General Audience catechesis, spoke about the need for the virtue of continence in the control or mastery of our curiosity, especially when it involves sexual matters.

Continence consists in the capacity to dominate, control and direct drives of a sexual character and their consequences, in the psychosomatic subjectivity of man. Insofar as it is a constant disposition of the will, this capacity, merits being called a virtue. We know from the previous analyses that concupiscence of the flesh, and the corresponding desire of a sexual character aroused by it, is expressed with a specific impulse in the sphere of somatic reaction and also with a psycho-emotive excitement of the sensual impulse.

No one is exempt from being faced with the little lie first spoken to Adam by the serpent who suggested that “surely you don't believe that this is problematic, do you?” When we find that we have believed that lie, and find that we have accepted the suggestion that pornography is manageable in my life, we have become “shackled to an inferior destructive love.” What recourse to true peace is left for us when we realize this has happened? The Church offers us the Sacrament of Penance to begin to heal our wounded urges. “Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at

the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion" ([CCC 1422](#)). The sacrament of Penance opens the door to true healing.

Works Cited.

[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), 2nd ed. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. Web.

Additional Reading:

Catechism of the Catholic Church [2337-2359](#) : “The Vocation to Chastity”

The Bible, Online [Revised Standard Version](#)(RSV) or [New American Bible](#) (NAB)

[Colossians 3: 5-10](#): “Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry...”

[1 Corinthians 6: 12-19](#): “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.”

[Titus 2: 2-13](#): “For the grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age...”