

Elder David B. Haight

Recently new temples were dedicated in Sydney, Australia, and in the Philippines.

One of the inspired dedicatory prayers offered by President Gordon B. Hinckley implored God our Father to "bless thy saints in their faith . . . [to] remain true as . . . [a] covenant people . . . , that they shall grow in wisdom" he continued, "both spiritual and temporal . . . [that] they [shall] grow in virtue and in knowledge and in love for thee . . . [and that] the evil designs of . . . [thine] enemies be frustrated" (*Church News*, 30 Sep. 1984, p. 10).

Plague of pornography

It is about the "evil designs of thine enemies" that I shall speak. I have prayed for spiritual guidance, and that I might be able to communicate to you in a thoughtful manner my frank and candid expressions of concern over the spreading of evil in our society today.

Over the past twenty years a plague of pornography has swept across most countries of the world with increasing momentum and devastating impact. What began a few years ago as a few crude picture magazines that startled sensitive people has grown to hundreds of publications, each seeking to outdo the others with increasingly shocking content.

So-called "adult" bookstores, selling materials that appeal to the prurient mind, are now open in nearly every city. Obscene materials once available only by mail and in a plain brown wrapper now are prominently displayed on the magazine racks of many local convenience stores and other business establishments where they are readily accessible to the young and the old alike.

Theaters showing X-rated films and worse have become established in most cities. It is reported that one particularly offensive movie, filmed at a

cost of forty thousand dollars, has earned revenues of over six hundred million dollars.

It should come as no surprise that grand juries have found that 90 percent of all pornography is dominated by organized crime. Large profits from one project become a source of funds for still larger and more sophisticated enterprises as a growing tidal wave of smut dashes against the weakening bulwarks of morality.

New technologies that can bless our lives in so many positive ways are also being used to spread pornographic corruption. Video recorders now can bring to homes great classics of music, history, art, and drama. But they also bring into some of these same homes lurid portrayals of debauchery that contaminate those who view them and extend their corrupting influence to our communities and society.

Cable television and satellite transmissions, with their powerful capacity for good, are not only being used, but are also being abused. State and national laws necessary to govern their proper use are not yet established, and they are almost totally unregulated. Greedy men have been ready to exploit this vacuum in legal regulation without regard for the consequence to its victims.

A controlling habit

Some may ask "What is pornography?" It was United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart who said that while he could not exactly define pornography, "I know it when I see it," he said (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378-U.S. 184, 1964).

Pornography is not a victimless crime. Who are its victims? First, those who either intentionally, or sometimes involuntarily, are exposed to it. Pornography is addictive. (See *ENSIGN*, March 1984, pp. 32-39.) What may begin as a curious exploration can be-

come a controlling habit. Studies show that those who allow themselves to become drawn to pornography soon begin to crave even coarser content. Continued exposure desensitizes the spirit and can erode the conscience of unwary people. A victim becomes a slave to carnal thoughts and actions. As the thought is father to the deed, exposure can lead to acting out what is nurtured in the mind.

Degrades and exploits

But there are other victims. Crimes of violence have increased in the United States at up to five times the rate of population growth. A 1983 University of New Hampshire study found that states having the highest readership of pornographic magazines also have the highest number of reported rapes. Pornography degrades and exploits men, and women, and children in a most ugly and corrupt fashion.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all is in the lives of children who become its victims. The saddest trend of our day is the alarming, large increase in child abuse. Much of it occurs within families and involves corrupting the divine innocence that children have from birth. We sing, as we did this morning, "I am a child of God, and he has sent me here. . . . Lead me, guide me, walk beside me, help me find the way [that I might] live with him some day" are part of those words ("I Am a Child of God," *Sing with Me*, B-76). The Savior reserved His harshest condemnation for those who would offend little children. He said: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for . . . it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:10, 14).

The Lord further commanded: "Neither commit adultery . . . nor do anything like unto it" (D&C 59:6).

"The early apostles and prophets [warned against] sins that are reprehensible . . . —adultery, . . . infidelity, . . . impurity, inordinate affection, . . . sexual relations outside of marriage,

. . . sex perversion, . . . preoccupation with sex in one's thoughts. . . . [And] one of the worst of these [sins] is incest . . . [or] sexual [relations] between persons so closely related that they are forbidden by law to marry" (Spencer W. Kimball, *President Kimball Speaks Out* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], p. 6). Incest is an ugly sin, and this sin particularly may irreparably damage its innocent victims.

Avoid least approach toward evil

Yet, what impels these offenders to such terrible deeds? Police report that some 80 percent of those who molest young boys and girls admitted modeling their attacks on pornography they had viewed.

How has this evil gained such a foothold in our society? Have we ignored the warnings of our Church leaders? President Kimball declared: "So long as men are corrupt and revel in sewer filth, entertainers will sell them what they want. Laws may be passed, arrests may be made, lawyers may argue, courts may sentence . . . men of corrupt minds, but pornography and . . . insults to decency will never cease until men have cleansed their minds."

Continuing, President Kimball said, "When . . . [man] is sick and tired of being drowned in filth, . . . he will not pay for that filth and its source will dry up.

"Hence it is obvious," he continued, "that to remain clean and worthy, one must stay positively and conclusively away from the devil's territory, avoiding the least approach toward evil. Satan leaves his fingerprints" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969], pp. 229, 232).

Not condoned nor protected

This growing presence of obscenity has been aided by the lowering of media standards for advertising, by relaxed movie ratings, by television soap operas and situation comedies that

use their powerful voices to justify, glamorize, and encourage sexual relations outside of marriage.

Perhaps we have been intimidated by those who claim that producing, distributing, and using obscene materials is a basic right to be defended. This is not true. Even under the divinely inspired constitutional principles of this land, obscenity is not condoned nor protected. The United States Supreme Court has clearly held that criminal prosecution of those who produce and distribute obscene materials does not violate their First Amendment rights. (*Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15, 1973.)

Failure to enforce laws

This spreading evil has been aided by a failure to enforce laws designed to prohibit or regulate it. Although some additional legislation may be helpful, those who have been fighting the discouraging battle against pornography in recent years are in agreement that nearly 90 percent of all obscene materials could be eliminated from our communities if existing obscenity laws were strictly enforced. A few courageous cities have performed outstanding service by ridding themselves of X-rated theaters and so-called "adult" bookstores, and by limiting access to hard-core pornographic books and magazines. The citizens of Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, formed a citizen action group and determined that they were not going to allow such degrading material in their community. They closed an adult bookshop and a large distribution warehouse, and, as a result of their determined citizens' organization and involvement, they have had enacted a city public nuisance ordinance.

Courage and conviction

Lawmaking bodies will listen to effectively organized citizens. However, too often the trend is tragically

toward citizen apathy and a sense of futility.

And who is to blame? We could conveniently point the accusing finger at public prosecutors who are not vigorously enforcing the law. But we need men and women of courage and conviction in these offices of public trust if the awful tide is to be stemmed. But as one accusing finger is pointing toward those who make or enforce the law, another may point to ourselves, who may be equally to blame.

Community standards and concerned citizens

Fortunately, what is deemed legally obscene is partially determined by local community standards. We as citizens, by our own standards, are the ones who can help establish what offensive materials are—which ones are legally obscene—and cannot claim protection from the law.

Unfortunately, many people assume that even hard-core pornography is legal because it is so prevalent. But that is not true. Some public prosecutors may excuse themselves from seeking enforcement of obscenity laws by explaining that community standards determine what is obscene. They therefore conclude that because the community tolerates such material, its presence must reflect the accepted community standard. Concerned citizens—you and I—can change this misunderstanding.

What, then, is needed to reverse this ominous insult to ourselves, our families, and our communities? Only when men and women concerned for their families and communities let their voices and their influence be felt in thoughtful, rational ways will we alter the destructive course on which we are traveling. Silent indignation may be misinterpreted as approval. Irrational action may be ineffective because it is regarded as prudish rather than thoughtful.

Albert Camus wrote: "By your actions or your silence, you, too, enter the fray."

May I suggest a few things we could do to halt this deadly evil.

Keep free from corrupting influence

First, let each of us resolve this day to keep our minds, our bodies, and our spirits free from the corrupting influence of pornography, including everything that is obscene and indecent. Let it have no place in our homes, our minds, or our hearts. The psalmist David wrote, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3-4). If those who hear my voice have in their possession offensive materials that should be destroyed, let this be the day of decision and action. If someone listening has been tempted or has thought of, or even considered abusing or offending a child, may he, this day, confess and repent and forsake such evil thoughts or actions.

James the Apostle and the brother of our Lord wrote:

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation. . . . Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:12-13).

Parents, discuss with your children of appropriate age, and in sensitive ways, the harmful effects and addictive nature of such material. Rigidly monitor the selection of television programs, movies, videocassettes, music, and other forms of entertainment for your family. Let us never, by purchasing these damaging materials, contribute to the financial success of those who deal in this material.

We would encourage you to foster in your homes a love of knowledge through uplifting literature; wholesome books; selective movies and television; classical and exemplary popular music;

entertainment that uplifts and edifies the spirit and mind.

Work with like-minded citizens

Second, let our voices be heard in our communities—members and non-members alike. If something offends standards of decency, our voices should be heard. We would encourage members to persevere in their efforts to work with local groups and to establish a visible relationship with other like-minded citizens, and seek to preserve our quality of life by encouraging steps against such material.

Should we not actively approach the management of some stores, movie theaters, bookstores, television and radio stations, with a request to withdraw indecent materials from public display or use or patronage? Of course, such efforts should be consistent with the constitutional process, exercising gentle persuasion.

Some nationally owned and franchised convenience stores and others have responded to the courteous request of their customers to discontinue selling certain degrading materials. We commend them for what they have done and would encourage others to follow their lead.

Support enforcement of laws

And third, we can make our own elected officials and law enforcement people aware that we support the fair enforcement of laws prohibiting obscenity and regulating indecency, thank them for their past service and present efforts, and encourage them to continue the difficult and sometimes thankless task of strictly enforcing the existing laws in a consistent and fair manner.

Support enactment of laws and regulations

And fourth, where legislation is needed to meet new technological advances in cable and satellite transmis-

sion, let us support the enactment of reasonable laws and regulations that would help reduce the number of those whose lives will otherwise become marred by addiction, child abuse, and many of the other social ills that pornography helps foster. These laws should be carefully drawn within constitutional limitations, so that the freedoms we seek for ourselves now and in the future are not denied for others.

Faith and prayer

And fifth, let us exercise our faith and prayerfully seek help from God our Father in this vital task. There are some who believe that the pornography industry is out of control, already too powerful to curb. I would disagree with this dim view, but recognize the immensity of the task before us. We know that people of good will, united in such a worthy cause, where the moral fiber of our nations may be at stake, and aided by divine power, can overcome any obstacle and meet any challenge to help our Lord and Savior to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

Personal morality

"There is a line of demarcation," said President George Albert Smith,

"well defined, between the Lord's territory and the devil's. If you will stay on the Lord's side of the line, you will be under his influence and will have no desire to do wrong; but if you cross to the devil's side of the line one inch, you are in the tempter's power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the Spirit of the Lord" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 232). As a man soweth, so shall he reap.

May we strive to purify our personal lives, strengthen our homes—and not just talk about it, but strengthen our homes—and recognize the evil forces that are working through insidious ways to thwart our eternal progress, I humbly pray, as I declare the reality of our eternal Father in Heaven and His beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. In His holy name, amen.

President Benson

Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Hugh W. Pinnock, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. He will be followed by Elder Spencer H. Osborn, also a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder Hugh W. Pinnock

The Holy Spirit sometimes works upon our minds fervently. We then know with a sure knowledge which subject to address. I shall speak of the inherent necessity of learning more thoroughly the will of our loving Heavenly Father.

Be as perfect as your Father

While serving in Pennsylvania several years ago, I was pleasantly surprised to be visited by a minister of a

huge Protestant congregation. We exchanged pleasantries and discussed the doctrinal subjects on which we could find benign agreement. Suddenly he interrupted our conversation by stating, "You teach one belief with which I could never agree. It is your idea that 'as God is, man may become.'" (See *History of the Church*, 6:302-17.) He held a well-worn white Bible in his hand. I asked him to turn to Matthew 5:48. His nimble fingers quickly turned to that reference, and he read, "Be ye