

# **‘Tsunami of pornography’ debases human dignity**

SAN FRANCISCO - Describing what he sees as an “electronic tsunami of pornography,” Archbishop George H. Niederauer of San Francisco told a Utah-based anti-pornography organization that pornography “debases the priceless worth and dignity of each human being and (God’s) gift of human sexuality.”

While pornography “is not a new challenge,” the archbishop told members of the Lighted Candle Society at its annual awards dinner in Salt Lake City May 8, “the explosive increase in the accessibility and availability of pornography is new and deeply troubling.”

“Every computer terminal is its pipeline, and cell phones and other hand-held devices, many of them marketed to children and young people, literally deliver pornography everywhere, to anyone,” he said in his keynote address.

Archbishop Niederauer was presented the Lighted Candle Society’s Guardian of the Light Award two years ago for his work as president of the Utah Coalition Against Pornography, a position he held for five years as bishop of Salt Lake City before being named archbishop of San Francisco.

The archbishop, who headed the Salt Lake City Diocese from 1994 to 2005, reminded his listeners that pornography “now generates more annual income than all three major professional sports combined, and causes as well the world’s fastest growing addiction.”

“We have all heard the discouraging numbers,” he said, noting research shows there are 68 million Internet “search engine requests for porn sites” every day, that 70 percent of men ages 18 to 24 visit porn sites each month, that “90 percent of 8- to 16-year-olds have viewed porn online,” and that “the average age of a child’s first exposure to pornography on the Internet is 11.”

However, he said, “what should motivate us most profoundly is not the amount of pornography there is but the kind of harm it does. Pornography assaults human

dignity and commodifies people and human sexuality. Porn starves the human soul in its spiritual dimension. ... The human person, an irreplaceable gift, becomes a throwaway toy."

The archbishop, who chairs the U.S. bishops' Committee on Communications and is a member of the Pontifical Council on Social Communications, cautioned that pornography opponents "need constantly to explore and articulate what we are for, not merely what we are against. Deploring and pointing with alarm are valid and effective only in light of what we value and defend."

Much of the archbishop's talk also addressed the motion picture industry which, he said, "is capable of so much beauty and so much trash."

Admitting he has had "a lifelong love affair with the movies," Archbishop Niederauer criticized "the nihilism that reigns in many quarters of moviemaking" today as well as "excessive violence" and dark portrayals of life.

He called on his listeners, film critics and moviemakers themselves to be wary of being cowed by a desire to seem "supersophisticated."

"The one thing we will not be called is prudes, so we laugh nervously at the vilest sexual aberrations, nod knowingly at the blackest, sickest kind of humor, even relish a bit of violence well carried off," the archbishop said. "Some of us want to come off as so worldly-wise that we defend any evil flashed on-screen by saying, 'Face it, the world is like that!'"

"Moviegoers can't be sponges," he added. "Just as in our experiences of other media, in watching films we need to become our own best filters."

At the awards dinner, the Lighted Candle Society presented Guardian of the Light Awards to nationally syndicated radio talk-show host Michael Reagan, the adopted son of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, and Pamela Atkinson, who succeeded Archbishop Niederauer as president of the Utah Coalition Against Pornography.

The society was founded in 2001 by John Harmer, a former California state senator and California lieutenant governor during Ronald Reagan's term as governor. Harmer and researcher James B. Smith recently co-wrote "The Sex Industrial

Complex,” subtitled “America’s Secret Combination: Pornographic Culture, Addiction and the Human Brain.”

In an interview with the Intermountain Catholic, Salt Lake City diocesan newspaper, Harmer said it is through the efforts of people such as Michael Reagan and Atkinson that the Lighted Candle Society is ready to achieve a much broader base.

“When I created the society, I was aware of many similar organizations doing the same work,” he said.

But Harmer said he found a void in research and the training of law enforcement officials and prosecutors to effectively fight pornography in the courts on behalf of individuals who have suffered because of the use of pornography.

“It is much like the court battles that have tackled tobacco marketing,” he said. “People have no idea how powerful and dangerous these images are and how pervasive they become to a person addicted to pornography.”

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Contributing to this article was Barbara Stinson Lee in Salt Lake City.