



# living counter culturally

talk sheet

Turning People  
into Things

Issued by authority of the Territorial Commander  
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let's talk  
about ...



Sexxx ...

By Malcolm Irwin

**I have difficulties with sex.** I feel I should explain. The difficulty isn't that I don't like sex (sex can be a lot of fun and incredibly good)—the difficulty is in the fact that I like it too much.

You see, sex is everywhere. It's at the movies, on the Internet, on television, in advertising, on billboards, in music, in magazines, at the local dairy, in the newspapers, and it's even watchable on some mobile telephones.

Sex is inescapable. It fuels controversy, makes headlines, creates life, starts scandals. And, as everyone marketing anything knows—cars, cheeseburgers, clothing, deodorants and liquor—sex sells!

We've demystified sex. It's lost some of its creativity, its intrigue, some of its original goodness. Sex is missing some of its mystery—some of what makes it sacred, some of what makes it holy.

*Sex can be holy? Something that God is in? Something that God is pleased with? Ever thought of that?*

**PONDER THIS ...** Thinking of the depth, the holiness and sacredness of sex, M. Scott Peck confesses: 'When my beloved first stands before me all naked, all open to my sight, there is a feeling throughout the whole of me; why? If sex is no more than instinct, why don't I simply feel horny or hungry? ... Why awe? Why should sex be complicated with reverence?'<sup>1</sup>

## The 'Sexualisation of Life'

The difficulty I have with this everydayness of sex—what some social commentators call the 'sexualisation of life'<sup>2</sup>—is that it has made sex into something that it is *not*.

We've made sex cheap. Confusing. Heartbreaking. Shameful. Disconnected from commitment, love and the pledge of a life-long partnership.

We've made sex into something that can be demanded, exploited, a commodity that can be bought and sold like merchandise on the market. Sex—like a new car, computer, house, MP3 player or a piece of clothing—is something that we *have to have*, something that we *have to continually get more of and trade more in* if we ever hope to be fulfilled or happy.

**There is something of the logic of capitalism and consumerism in this thinking, isn't there? But should sex be marketable and sellable like other tradable products?**

We've made sex dirty.

Naughty.

Pornographic.

Selfish.

Sinful.

Every day, everywhere, the symbolic XXX entices me to stay a little longer on the Internet, in a magazine or in front of the television, to see a lot more of what is to be claimed to be *free and harmless sex*.

But is it free? And is it harmless? Who pays the price of our sexual thrills?

Our daughters. Sons.

Boyfriends. Girlfriends.

Brothers. Sisters.

Classmates. People at the office. Our clients.

Our Churches. Communities.

Husbands. Wives.

Ourselves.

Or is it someone in a distant, foreign nation; someone that we never meet face to face, someone that is somehow lesser or less important than you or me?

*Who pays the price of our voyeurism?*

**We've made sex into a game.**

We playfully and without conscience cruelly 'evaluate' with a single look the sexual 'fitness' of others, determining within the opening and closing of our eyelids who is 'hot' and who is 'not'. Consider the girly gossip and the macho talk of 'conquests', 'optimum measurements' and 'ratings'.

Player Stats.

Positions.

Performance.

Scorings.

*The language of sport, no?*



Every day, everywhere, we make the **sexiness**, the **sexuality**, and the **sex** of someone into *something*. We take growing boys and girls, grown men and women, people created in the image of God, people with families, histories, feelings, hopes and dreams—*somebodies*—and we make them into *objects*. We make them into *something* to desire, look at, *something* to have. Crudely stated, we make them into *something* that we can fantasise touching.

It only takes a camera, a DVD player, a glossy magazine or Internet connection and, with the press of play, the click of a mouse or the ink of a laser printer, we can lessen and squeeze the incredibly complex and magical humanity of people into millions of tiny pixels on a page or screen. There is no commitment, no connection (which is exactly what we hope for in **sex**), no conversation, no dating, no flattery, no human contact, no promise of faithfulness, no responsibility, no sacrifice, love or security, no exchange of vows, no vulnerability—there is only the DVD, the Internet, the magazine and me with whatever sexual fantasy I can imagine seeing.

Downloadable **sex**.

Filmed.

Burned onto a compact disk or DVD.

Recorded.

Uploaded.

Live **sex** cams. Real-time **sex** shows.

Explicit images that we can browse, buy, file, save, share, post on BeBo, MySpace or YouTube. And then, when we're bored or fearing embarrassment, we can simply delete them, erase them from our hard drives, though, strangely, not from our memories. Human beings created in the image of God, naked living souls, captured on film or in cyberspace, glossy snapshots of **sex** that we can never get enough of and never fully enjoy.

**Sex** is no longer what we freely and lovingly give ourselves to, nor is it what we equally or openly share in—**sex** is simply *something* that we *take*.

**FROM THE BIBLE ... The Scriptural story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel II) is a classic tale of how a mistaken image of **sex** and power can lead to the cruel practice of 'getting' and 'taking' **sex**.**

**The New Revised Standard Version interpretation of this text makes it explicitly clear: 'So David sent messengers, and he took (Bathsheba), and she came to him, and he lay with her' (2 Samuel II:4).**

**Sadly, notes Walter Brueggemann, this '... was a quick "take", but one with endless consequences ...'**<sup>3</sup>

## 'I-it' or 'I-thou'?

I have a confession to make. I've gained some of these insights into **sex** and **sexualisation** through painful personal experience. I'm guilty of entrenching and flirting with this selfish and cruel practice of **sex**. I'm guilty of looking at people incorrectly. I'm guilty of *not* seeing the image of God that is in people and sadly, to my shame, because of this, the 'inhospitality of my sight', I'm guilty of treating people inhumanely.

I know, I should explain.

'A hospitality of sight'<sup>4</sup> is concerned with learning to see people through the grace-full eyes of Jesus (which implies that our own eyes and ways of seeing might be in need of healing).

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber coined a couple of phrases to describe how people in everyday life adopted different attitudes in the way they 'looked at' each other and treated each other.<sup>5</sup> He divided people into two camps: the 'I-its' and the 'I-thous'.

The 'I-its' dehumanise others, looking at them like they were somehow 'less-than-human'. They look at people like they are 'objects' (what Martin Buber called 'objectification') and treat them like they are 'things' to control, get, have, manipulate, or possess.

The 'I-thous' dignify others, looking at them like they are equals, fellow humans. They look at people like they are 'subjects' (what Martin Buber called 'subjectification') and treat them like they are gifts of God, carriers of the same image of God, sacred—someone they can learn from and partner with.

*There is a massive difference here, isn't there?*

'I-it'	'I-thou'
<u>dehumanise</u>	<u>dignify/equals</u>
<u>less-than-human</u>	<u>fellow humans</u>
<u>objects</u>	<u>subjects</u>
<u>objectification</u>	<u>subjectification</u>
<u>things</u>	<u>gifts</u>
<u>control</u>	<u>learn from</u>
<u>possess</u>	<u>partner with</u>

There is enough cultural, historical and personal evidence to suggest that the 'looking' and thinking of the 'I-its' have dominated how we interact with people every day and everywhere.

It's in our churches, our homes, in our government, at the office, on the Internet, in our music, in our playgrounds, on the television, in our schools and in our shops. It's in our failure to connect and identify meaningfully with the human stories we 'see' on the evening news; it's in our failure to interact equally and trade fairly with people who are somehow 'different', 'foreign' or 'distant'. It's what has fueled my own personal struggle with pornography. Sadly, it's what continues to shape how we see and think of each other **sexually**—and that is *not good*.

Buber's argument is that the I-thou relationship between us and God is the foundation for all other relationships. An authentic I-thou relationship with God stimulates an I-thou (not I-it) relationship with the world. That's because God can guide our attitudes and ways of looking at others. *Questioning how we 'look' at others in terms of I-thou instead of I-it becomes a helpful ethical check.*

## Hell on Earth

The 'I-its' create hell on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Hell on earth. The darkest, deadliest, loneliest and most oppressive place where God is not felt or seen and from which there seems to be no escape.

The 'dehumanization' of people—this every day and everywhere 'objectification' of humans—the seeing and treating of people like they're somehow 'discardable', less than human (even inhuman), like they're only 'things', this is why there is:

- a profitable global **sex** industry trafficking children and women
- slavery, including **sexual** slavery
- abortions of convenience
- child abuse
- unwanted pregnancies
- gender inequalities
- domestic violence
- prostituted men and women
- rape

Surely this is hell on earth? Do you see the connection between a distorted image of **sex** and these horror stories? These *hellish* issues stem from:

- our degrading of humanity and our devaluing of humans
- the domination of 'I-its' in how we interact with people
- how every day and everywhere we make people into inhuman sex 'objects'
- how we squeeze people into pornographic pixels
- how we mistakenly think of sex

**PONDER THIS ...** The Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, says: 'The main challenge in the fight against human/child trafficking is to reduce the demand, whether for cheap goods manufactured in sweatshops, or for underpriced commodities produced by bonded people on farms and in mines, or from services provided by **sex slaves**.'<sup>7</sup>

## Reduce the Demand.

Globally.

Nationally.

Locally.

Personally. You, me, everyday, everywhere.

### STOP THE DEMAND:

- it's what happens when we stop ignoring the divine image of God that the Scriptures say is in everyone (see Genesis chapters one to three)
- it's what happens when we stop interacting with others like they're somehow 'less-than-human', somehow 'sub-human', somehow of lesser importance than you and me
- it's what happens when we stop treating people like they're objects, like they're something to have, control or use.

### STOP THE DEMAND:

- it's what happens when we stop purchasing clothing, coffee, chocolate, shoes, technological toys or jewellery that is made with exploited labour—unfair labour traps people in poverty and can drive them to prostitution
- it's what happens when we stop defining ourselves and others by how we look, by what we've got on, by where we live or by what we own
- it's what happens when we stop flirting with cheap **sex** and the cheaper **sexual** thrills, the kind of '**sexual** fix' we get from playing with the pornographic pixels on the Internet or the printed page.

### STOP THE DEMAND.

NOW.

EXACTLY WHERE YOU'RE AT.

STARTING TODAY.

Stop depreciating **sex**. Stop paying for **sex**. Stop purchasing **sexual** fantasies.

Stop spelling **sex** XXX.

# M.A.S.I.C.

## Background

The Moral and Social Issues (Ethics) Council (MASIC) studies and formulates Salvation Army responses on significant moral, religious and social issues. Its aim is to help The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory take a proactive stance in relation to such issues, and to support Salvationist decision-making in everyday life.

**MASIC 'Living Counter Culturally' Talk Sheets are intended as Internal Discussion and Resource documents for Salvationists. They provide biblical and theological reflection on the intersection of faith in the everyday world.**

## The 'Ethical Life'

The 'ethical life' is the Christ-like life. Through Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection, our broken relationship with God is restored. We are then able to grow more and more like Christ, our Saviour and Lord. His words and example and the teaching of the Bible help us in this journey. Growth in Christlikeness is expressed in the integrity of our character (who we are), in our ethics (the choices we make) and in our lifestyle (our actions). We live a Christ-like ethical life in our everyday activities when there is a clear synergy between the leading of the Holy Spirit and our own choices:

**'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.'** (Galatians 5:25)

Growth in Christlikeness requires us to stand against evil and sin. We find the strength to do this through spiritual disciplines of prayer (including confession) and Bible reading, as well as through accountability to other Christians. Christlikeness can be evident in all aspects of our life, including our social concern for others.

## FOR MORE INFO:

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3. Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Redescribes the World* (Fortress Press).
4. A concept from Greg Russinger and Alex Field (eds), 2005, *Practitioners: Voices Within the Emerging Church* (Regal Books).
5. Martin Buber, cited in Michael Frost, 2005, *Seeing God in the Ordinary* (Hendrickson Publishers).
6. See Rob Bell, 2007, *Sex God* (Zondervan) for deeper exploration of this thought.
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## BIBLICAL REFLECTION



Simon:

WHAT OR WHO?

(Luke 7:36-50)

There is a critical episode in the life of Jesus, a fascinating encounter at the house of Simon, a local holy man and Pharisee. Smack in the middle of a dehumanising, discourteous and estranged dinner conversation, Jesus interrupts the inner monologue of Simon and says: 'Do you see this woman?'

It's a haunting challenge, isn't it?

'Do you see *this woman*?' 'Do you see *this man*?'

Do you? Do I?

Do we see a created image of God or only the naked and seductive images of porn?

Do we see what the I-its see or what the I-thous see?

Do we see objects or subjects?

Do we see a *someone* or only a *something*?

Do we see a 'what' or a 'who'?

Do we see a human? A person with a family, a history, with hopes and dreams like ours.

'Do you see *this woman*?'

It's a hopeful challenge too, isn't it?

The same eyes that dehumanise and objectify others, can—with the help of Jesus, a little intentionality and some good friends—learn to see *differently*.

We can learn to see people through the eyes and mindset of the 'I-thous'. Every day, everywhere and with everyone, we can dignify the people we encounter or interact with by *naming* them 'brothers and sisters', 'equals', 'friends', 'partners', 'good', 'important', 'free', 'guest', 'included', 'loved', 'sacred' and 'valued'. These names not only change how we look 'at' people or what/who we see 'in' people, these names hold the hope of changing how we *think* of people and how we *treat* them.

**MIKE FROST SAYS THIS:** 'Sometimes we live under the burden of being unfairly "named" by our families or communities. Sometimes we're named as "a-good-for-nothing", or a "bad apple", or a "daydreamer". Sometimes we live with the burden of a name that we might have once earned but no longer want to carry. It would be the work of an apprentice-child of God to rename people, to declare: "You have been known as Simon, but I see you as a rock."'<sup>8</sup>

Imagine the healing impact of this I-thou *naming* on people.

Imagine what could happen if we named *everyone, everywhere* 'family'. Or what if we could name *everyone, everywhere* with the more daring label, 'made in the image of God'?

Everyone, everywhere *family*.

Everyone, everywhere *made in and sharing in the same sacred image of God*.

*Imagine it.*

What difference would that make to you and me?

What difference would that make to the human being who is reduced to millions of pornographic pixels for our sexual pleasure?

What difference would that make to how we think of *sex*?

## ENGAGEMENT

### The Story of Simon (Luke 7:36-50)

1. What do you think of Simon?
2. How is Simon seeing the woman?
3. If you were there, what would you have seen?
4. What would you have made of the sexually-charged act of the woman letting down her hair?
5. What would you have thought of the woman?
6. 'Do you see this woman?' Jesus said. What do you think of Jesus' challenge?

## GOING DEEPER

### Starting a Sexy Conversation

1. How do you define sex? Do you think sex can be good or holy? What is the difference between 'making love' and 'having sex'?
2. Is sex everywhere? If it is, where do you see it?
3. Have we cheapened sex? How?
4. Are the ideas of faithfulness and love still connected to our practice of sex? What do you think is the impact of depreciating sex?
5. What do you think is the impact of pornography? On men? Children? Women?
6. How do you see people? Children? Men? Women?
7. What is the impact of looking at people through 'I-it' or 'I-thou' eyes?
8. Do you see a connection between our cultural images of sex and hell on earth? Do you see a link between our attitudes towards sex and the global trafficking of children and women?
9. What part can you play in reducing/stopping the demand of exploitative sex?
10. What do you think of the suggestion that if we could only name people differently that it could help to see and treat them differently? Is that possible? Practical?
11. Who do you need to re-name? How would that change how you see and treat them?

# PORNOGRAPHY: I Want to Break Free

By Christina Tyson

**When he was in college, the early Methodist leader John Wesley wrote a letter to his mother asking for a clear description of sin. She replied: ‘... whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you ...’**

Everyone has at least one area of weakness. One area where we can be more easily tempted and may experience the shame of repeated failure. For some, that area of weakness is pornography—and in today’s world, accessing porn is a breeze for those with a penchant for it.

Pornography is material designed to produce erotic stimulation in males and females, but its themes are often aggressive and always dehumanising, typically treating women in particular—and even more disturbingly, children—as sexual objects.

While the boundaries of tolerance and the pressures of permissiveness continually push back standards of what is classified as obscene and pornographic, the dangers of such material are unchanged. First and foremost, pornography is a challenge to the stability of relationships, particularly within marriages. Lawyers identify the use of online pornography as a contributing factor in divorce cases, perhaps as many as half.

As well, and despite its preoccupation with the human form, pornography dehumanises sexual intimacy. The focus of pornography on short-term satisfaction and fantasy scenarios elevates sensation over relationship. Love and commitment is edited out of the pornographic narrative.

Temptation has been described as ‘when what looks good is bad’. That’s pornography in a nutshell. We’re wired to be attracted to it and turned on by it. But pornography *is* bad. It damages personal relationships, self-esteem and the way we look at—and engage with—those around us.

## A Christian Problem, Too

**Pornography is a problem faced by Christians and non-Christians, females and males. Christian author Philip Yancey described his own battle in this area in *Rumours of Another World* (Zondervan): ‘At times I have given in to lust. I cannot deny that nude women, whether in art museums or magazines or over the Internet, exert on me a power like a gravitational force. Our culture has mastered the disconnected “technique” of sex, and I have fallen victim. I must also say, though, that when I resist the temptation and pour sexual energy into my marriage—a much more complicated and less selfish transaction, to be**

## LOOKING FOR HELP?

- [www.XXXchurch.com](http://www.XXXchurch.com) - an online community to help Christians struggling with pornography that provides accountability software to help online integrity (free download) plus filtering software
- ‘Valiant Man’ 10-week course by Dr Allan Meyer - [www.careforcelifekeys.org](http://www.careforcelifekeys.org)

**sure—the obsessive power of sexuality fades away. The air clears. Marriage becomes more of a haven. My life with God yields unexpected rewards.’**

One recovering pornography addict writes: ‘I was a Christian, so I felt really guilty. It was like I was leading a double life. When people made jokes about sex, no one imagined that I could possibly get those jokes. Sometimes they’d even apologise to me. I’d shrug it off, but on the inside I knew exactly what they were on about.

‘It wasn’t until some years into my marriage that I finally got help. I was honest with my spouse and some Christians that I really trusted. They didn’t judge me, but they did pray for me—both responses helped. I still slipped from time to time, but pornography never had the same hold on me as before.

‘I think a big thing was being willing to be accountable to other people. Before, I’d hidden my thought life from people. I was ashamed to admit I had a weakness, especially in this area. It’s a temptation still, but just a temptation; it’s not the overwhelming issue of my life. And God gives me the power to say no.’

## Have an Action Plan

As well as **prayer, accountability** and **ongoing support**, to really conquer a pornography addiction it’s essential to commit to an **action plan** that keeps temptation at a distance. As Galatians 5:1 says, ‘Freedom is what we have—Christ has set us free! Stand then, as free people and *do not allow yourselves* to become slaves again’ (Good News Bible).

This plan would obviously involve deliberately choosing *not* to access certain books, magazines, television or movies. So take advantage of the protective aspects of technology, such as using pin numbers on Pay Television so that programmes of certain ratings are automatically blocked. If you can’t trust yourself not to enter the pin number, ask a friend or your spouse to choose the number and keep it a secret from you.

Certain Internet content, including nudity, can also be blocked. Again, this often utilises passwords that function as an initial boundary against damaging material. If Internet pornography is a real problem, move the computer to the most public area of the house so that surfing can’t occur in seclusion. And if you stumble into something accidentally, block that site so that you don’t go there again.

**Joshua Harris writes in *Not Even a Hint: Guarding Your Heart Against Lust* (Multnomah Books): ‘Don’t allow sin to gain a foothold. Be radical. Don’t go online alone late at night or at any time when you’re feeling weak. One guy I know cancelled his Internet altogether. I know other people who always have their computer facing the door so that others can see what they’re viewing when they walk by. Some use software that automatically emails a list of all the sites they visit to an accountability partner.’**

We all have areas of weakness. But we are free beings because God has set us free through Jesus Christ. And just as we are free to choose to indulge in the tickle and tease of pornography, so we are also free to choose to devote ourselves more fully to the things of God.

After King David sinned by committing adultery with Bethsheba (and then arranged for her husband to be killed in battle!) he was confronted with by the prophet Nathan. David then acknowledged his guilt: ‘I had sinned and done what is evil’ (Psalm 51:4). He knew that God could help him so he prayed, ‘Create in me a pure heart, O God ... restore to me the joy of your salvation’ (verses 10-11). God answered that prayer. He will answer yours too.

**Remember that no sin is beyond the reach of God’s grace to forgive or power to overcome. The first step is reaching out for help—to God and other Christians whom you trust and who will support you as you break free of pornography’s hold on your life.**