

PLAYBOY DECLARES VICTORY

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[Editor's note: This is a slightly longer version of an article that first appeared online at Newsmax.]

If they want to keep their jobs, the girls at *Playboy* have to put their clothes back on (or at least their pants). As reported in the October 13 edition of the *New York Times*, that is the considered judgment of the magazine's executives; even founder Hugh Hefner is on board. Have they gone prudish? No, it's strictly a business decision: porn is so popular that going the other way, they hope, may have a strange allure.

CEO Scott Flanders explains that *Playboy* is a victim of its own success. "That battle has been fought and won. You're one click away from every sex act imaginable for free. And it's just so passé at this juncture."

Flanders did not say who *Playboy* fought. Nor did he say what the victors won. The former is easy to figure out; not so the latter.

Marilyn Monroe graced the first issue of *Playboy* in 1953. Important as that was, it was the first installment of "The *Playboy* Philosophy" that was really ground-breaking. "Our society's repressive and suppressive antisexualism is derived from twisted theological concepts that have become firmly imbedded in Christianity during the Dark Ages," Hefner wrote. He blamed "totalitarian church-state controls of both Catholic and Protestant origin" for creating this alleged oppression.

The answer to the first question, therefore, is uncontested: *Playboy* was launched to battle Christianity, specifically Christian sexual ethics. But it is less certain who the victors are and what they won.

If *Playboy's* mainstreaming of pornography has triumphed over Christianity, it does not follow that *Playboy* won. In fact, by its own admission, it lost. To wit: In 1975, the magazine had a circulation of 5.6 million; today it stands at 800,000. And there is no assurance that when the girls put their pants back on the numbers will spike.

The Internet, as Flanders indicates, is responsible for making *Playboy* passé. But if it is the consumers of Internet porn who have won, what exactly did they win? By any honest assessment, they lost.

Those who traffic in Internet porn not only destroy their own lives, they destroy the lives of those closest to them. The research on this subject is not conflicted—it is near unanimous.

In 2010, a wide range of scholars issued a document that contained impressive data. "The Social Costs of Pornography: A Statement of Findings and Recommendations" found the support of agnostics and atheists, along with Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Muslims. Liberals and conservatives were represented, as well as specialists in economics, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, journalism, and law.

Its first finding was that the Internet has made possible a historic level of access to pornography. Second, it found that today's pornography is qualitatively different from what has been available in the past, and that addiction is now at record levels. The effect on women is dramatic: they feel betrayed and devastated by their partner's pornography problem.

Fourth, children and adolescents use pornography to coerce each other into sexual behavior. Fifth, the report found that "Women of all ages comprise 80% of those trafficked, children comprise 50%, and of those women and children 70% are used for sexual exploitation." Sixth, users undermine marital and other

intimate relationships.

This report is hardly unique. Many studies have found that marital relations suffer greatly. The users of pornography find it more difficult to get sexually aroused; they also lose interest in their partner. Just as important, partners are made to feel inadequate, and many see pornography as an expression of infidelity. Moreover, children and adolescents drawn to online pornography experience psychological and behavioral consequences that are traumatic.

If pressed, the magazine's executives might argue that despite the negative fallout that pornography entails, *Playboy* has succeeded in making men free. However, freedom was meant to be enjoyed; there is little joy in the objectification of sex. Similarly, sexual relationships between a husband and wife who are in love are edifying, but when sexual expression is reduced to the individual level, it corrupts the attainment of love.

The *Catholic Catechism* offers a powerful rejoinder to *Playboy's* idea of freedom. It says that "the exercise of freedom does not imply a right to say or do everything. It is false to maintain that man, 'the subject of this freedom,' is 'an individual who is fully self-sufficient and whose finality is the satisfaction of his own interests in the enjoyment of earthly goods.'"

The sad fact is that there are no winners in *Playboy's* battle against Christianity. Being "one click away from every sex act imaginable for free" has not made us a better society. Indeed, consumers of Internet pornography are increasingly dysfunctional. And because their loss is not confined to them, they ineluctably poison relations with others.

Winning battles with no victors sounds like an oxymoron. But in this case, it happens to be true. *Playboy's* hedonistic values may have triumphed over Christianity's more mature

understanding of sexual ethics, but it has left a trail of social and moral debris in its wake. That's not the mark of a winner—it's the signature of a loser.