

DRAGONS IN OUR  
'DARKEST HOURS':  
SLAYING ALL DAY THE  
LEWIS WAY

Karise Gililand on Combating the Dragon  
of Sexual Exploitation

It is the magician's bargain: give up our soul, get power in return But once our souls have been given up We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls.<sup>1</sup>

C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

Larry Nassar. Harvey Weinstein. #METOO. The headlines are ablaze with revelations of shocking abuse of women and children. Mothers clutch their children, wondering how to avoid this. How did we

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper One, 1974), 58.

come to this? How did we create malicious monsters who care not for our virtue or well-being, but see another human being as a product to be consumed? In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis warns of such a battle between men, and “men who make other men what *they* please.”<sup>2</sup> In a society permeated with men who trade souls for power, we risk the ultimate consumption of ourselves. We are a village imprisoned under the gluttonous gaze of a drooling dragon. We are a people in need of a knight

Last weekend, I took my daughters to see *The Darkest Hour*, a PG-13 movie based on the behind-the-scenes life of Winston Churchill during those dark and early days of World War II. The loss of life and limb was a given; it might not be for the faint of heart. I did not know that there would be shots fired at my own heart and at the hearts of my children. As we waited for the movie, the previews scrolled. As per the usual, the previews related to, and were rated about the same as, the movie we were there to see: war, adventure, leadership. Until, that is, the new Sundance film popped up. Knowing Sundance leans noir, edgy, and sometimes risqué, knowing this film was unrated, and not knowing anything about the plot, I made my children bury their heads and cover their eyes and ears.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 59.

Thank God.

The "acclaimed" Sundance film was not just rife with sexual experience, but the story of a pedophilial "relationship" between a man and a boy. Filmmakers didn't even attempt to employ the "two consenting adults" argument. We've rolled right past glorifying adult sex outside of traditional relationships to pederasty.

In the film, the boy is portrayed as both the instigator of the relationship and heartbroken when this obviously sexual relationship has ended. The message: it is not only right and good that such an abusive relationship exists, but you should be sad when it is over, when the abuser finally stops. It is not enough for the decidedly avant-garde filmmakers to have pushed the cultural edge, violating traditional sexual mores by utilizing relationships with a negative power differential in sexual ways, fornication, pederasty, and pedophilia in the plot line; they base the emotional pull of the movie on reinforcing the justification used by pedophiles everywhere: the child-victim "wanted it." Ministry Safe,<sup>3</sup> a consulting company developed by two Fort Worth, Texas, attorneys who try cases involving sexual abuse, reminds its audience that the perpetrator almost always uses this justification

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<sup>3</sup> [www.ministrysafe.com](http://www.ministrysafe.com).

for his or her actions. In their training sessions, they show video interviews with convicted pedophiles in which the perpetrator rationalizes his behavior by saying that the victim got something they wanted as well; they were using some sort of a contractual favor. In interview after interview, the mind-sickness leading to such behavior has the perpetrator convinced that the victim is desirous of the abuse. Rolling nausea overcomes one watching the Nassar trial testimonies; time after time, 156 times to be exact, abuse was justified as a "treatment" or something that the child-victim "needed."<sup>4</sup> There is neither "art" nor "treatment" that should convince or desensitize us to abuse. The victim is *a victim*. The perpetrator is not benevolent.

Having understood both the consumptive nature of lust, and the errant justifications associated with abuse, it should be no surprise that Dr. Nassar had copious amounts of child porn on his computer. 37,000 graphic images and videos, to be exact.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Vic Ryckaert, "What we know: Larry Nassar and the USA Gymnastics abuse scandal," *Indy Star*, January 25, 2018, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2018/01/25/what-we-know-larry-nassar-and-usa-gymnastics-abuse-scandal/1064636001/>.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Mencarini, "FBI: Ex-MSU doctor Nassar had 37,000 child porn images, abuse videos," *Detroit Free Press*, December 21, 2016, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/12/21/larry-nassar-child-porn-msu/95712364/>.

appetite fed on each viewing and experience, the dragon grew, and the flames rose higher and higher until they burned everything in sight, victim and perpetrator alike. The judge in the case said Nassar, “should never again be around children” and “would not hesitate to reoffend.”<sup>6</sup> He is both a prolific destroyer and utterly destroyed. “You go down this path and then you wonder how I got down this path to begin with,” Nassar said. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis expounds on this idea philosophically, “Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well.”<sup>7</sup> The voyeur’s pornography is a portal but also a chasm. Lewis explains the repugnant trade, “[i]t is the magician’s bargain: give up our soul, get power in return,” which results in our “be[ing] slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, a man such as Nassar thinks that he controls his desires, and the subjects of those desires, only to find that his bad judgment has left him inescapably imprisoned. Edmund Spenser’s knightly epic, *The Faerie Queene*, explains the dragon’s trap: “The hand

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<sup>6</sup> Justin Hinkley and Beth LeBlanc, “Ex-USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar sentenced to 60 years in federal child pornography case,” *Indy Star*, December 7, 2017, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2018/01/25/what-we-know-larry-nassar-and-usa-gymnastics-abuse-scandal/1064636001/>.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

or foot to stir he strove in vain/ God help the man so wrapped in Error's endless train"<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to victims as less-than-human targets, pornography is that ultimate reductionist experience. Humans and the beauty of sexuality are reduced to a product of consumption, a pheromonic vending machine in which one salivating customer eats what will ultimately destroy him, while the product, another person, is immediately devoured. Nancy Pearcey, in *Love Thy Body*, says, "Young people . . . dissociate their bodies sexually from who they are as a whole person."<sup>10</sup> If anything is refuted in the testimony of victims of abuse, it is this post-modern dissociation. The ramifications of violation are emotional, physical, sexual, relational, spiritual—there is a direct correlation with sexual activity of any kind - including the viewing of pornography—and our whole selves. In simplest terms, pornography destroys with dragon-like dereliction. What the jaws can't bite, the claws can't catch, the flames will reach and burn. No individual person, and therefore, no culture at large, being made up of

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<sup>9</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Fairie Queene*, trans Roy Maynard (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 118.

people, can withstand it. It will, like the dragon in *Faerie Queene*, "strangle us unless we strangle it."<sup>11</sup>

The dragon creeps ever closer as we allow it, enticed by whatever desires rule us. Adult audiences of such aforementioned previews are, in effect, being groomed. "Grooming" is the term used to describe the process by which a perpetrator gains the trust of the victim and in the case of minors, their families. This may be through authority and medical sympathy, as in the case of Dr. Nassar. The perpetrator plays on the normal expectations and emotions felt by parents and students, using slow gateway methods of breaking down resistance. This process is used time and again by those who would abuse children, especially sexually. You, the movie-going audience, are being groomed through the gateway of beauty - enticed by a normal desire (for beauty and love) into an abnormal, abusive relationship. Slowly, the filmmakers attempt to groom the audience using stunning visuals, settings, music, and actors. The perpetrators of this crime - and that is what it is, no matter how one tries to sell it - are hoping you'll be so distracted by beauty that you won't see their insidious intent. The dragon lays the trap - and waits.

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<sup>11</sup> Spenser, 27.

(If throwing out such a fully-loaded, not rated - too much for an R or NC-17 - preview in a PG-13 historical, documentary-esque movie setting, one underage, high school students will likely attend, isn't an underhanded, backdoor tactic, I'm not sure what is! Hitler was not above violating treaties; neither does a dragon participate in non-aggression pacts)

Such high irony as we consider the fate of Weinstein and company, who are on the one hand demonized, while Hollywood rewards this pedophilia as not just romantic but "good and true and beautiful." Make no mistake, the actors and the cinematography in that Sundance film are stunningly, engagingly, and bafflingly beautiful. Pornography and pedophilia packaged in a sophisticated and polished approach, argued by a beauty embezzled. But we have read this story before. George MacDonald's beautiful *North Wind* warns little Diamond of the trap of deceptive beauty: "You must not be ready to go with everything beautiful all at once."<sup>12</sup> Lewis's *White Witch* was "more beautiful" and her beauty made a salivating,

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<sup>12</sup> George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* (CCEL, 2009), accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/macdonald/backofnorth.ii.html>.



simpleton of Uncle Andrew.<sup>13</sup> Tolkien's dragon, Smaug, sits upon a sparkling treasure, beauty so deceptive that men scarcely notice the fire that awaits them.<sup>14</sup> The Arkenstone enralls the King to madness and destruction.<sup>15</sup>

How then to defeat such a masterminded scheme of beauty as a trap? Enter the Red Crosse Knight of Holinesse, Spenser's champion and a favorite of Lewis, saving beauty from its violation, from its privation, from that lack which makes it not what it is but almost its less-powerful opposite; in Spenser's world, beauty is protected, championed, and heralds the triumphant.

It is, of course, not beauty itself that is the problem. Beauty can also be a marker for the good. We ignore, at our apologetic peril, the argument from beauty. We should not dismiss beauty; we instead should acquire discernment. We recognize that when the enemy uses good beauty for evil, he is misappropriating. In *Faerie Queene*, the dragon foe of the Red Crosse Knight, Error, retained half of a woman's form. There's something especially revolting about this combination of evil and beauty.

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<sup>13</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

There's something particularly nefarious about the attempt to sell us rotten goods under the guise of gorgeous fruit. There's an immediate human engagement in beauty that makes us *expect* the good and true underneath it.

In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis recalls that we cannot decry the lack of honor among men when it is we who have created "Men without Chests."<sup>16</sup> It is, Lewis says, a case of "man choos[ing] to treat himself as a raw material" – human beauty is only used for commerce, for gain, for sale.<sup>17</sup> Such a trade is no good exchange; one barter instead for the ultimate lie. To touch the treasure, to be within reach, ever so close to the gold, one must placate the beast that guards the hoard. One feeds the dragon, the appetite for lust (a sure deviation of beauty), until it reverses and consumes him.

Distracted desire is not the only chink in the armor. Cold reason and justified power alone will also leave us vulnerable. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis reasons that, "the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some to make other men what they please."<sup>18</sup> To reduce beauty in sexuality to a bartered

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 59.

product is dangerous. To be purely analytical about this is to risk the consuming dragon: “analytical understanding must always be a basilisk which kills what it sees and only sees by killing.”<sup>19</sup> Unleashed, unguarded, it bites the hand that feeds it and keeps eating. We would only comprehend our fate from the depths of its bowels.

We must not play Chamberlain to such a dragon nor can we settle for an army of “hollow-chested” men to battle such a beast.<sup>20</sup> Beware proximity to the dragon’s mouth - and dragons need not bite, they also burn. This dragon of lust, once fed, only grows. That which we would feed, *will grow*. As Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne says, “Once a man has done good, it is easier next time to do good. And once he has done evil, it is easier next time to do evil.”<sup>21</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas concurs, “a habit of virtue cannot be caused by one act, only by many.”<sup>22</sup> The Red Cross Knight fights many battles of virtue along his journey. Aquinas asserts that the “passive

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Oxford Union, “Prof. Richard Swinburne | Religion Debate | Proposition (5/6)” (video), posted March 2, 2018, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DldKPf5QBn4>.

<sup>22</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, eds. Mortimer J. Adler, Philip W. Goetz, and Daniel J. Sullivan, trans. Laurence Shapcote, Second Edition. Vol. 18. *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Robert P. Gwinn, 1990), 14.

power is moved by active principle."<sup>23</sup> In *That Hideous Strength*, the fictional counterpart to *Abolition of Man*, the scientists are horrifically consumed by the evil that they thought they had harnessed. *The Abolition of Man* says it like this:

All Nature's apparent reversals have been but tactical withdrawals We thought we were beating her back when she was luring us on What looked to us like hands held up in surrender was really the opening of arms to enfold us.<sup>24</sup>

The principle of cold power emboldened became the motivation of passive power, destroying those that hold such principles dear

Lewis reminds us that we've already separated ourselves from the connection to nature when we "cut [trees] into beams."<sup>25</sup> We think nothing of what the first man to cut them might have felt. Lewis says that the "bleeding trees" of "Spenser may be far off echoes of that primeval sense of impiety" which separates a man from the holiness of nature, and from man himself as God's creation.<sup>26</sup> Such a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

separation “exacts” a price, “even if we have ceased to count it.”<sup>27</sup> It is this particular evil of separation to which the fictional scientist “Conditioners” in *That Hideous Strength* had already sacrificed, willing that others should be consumed, separated from their value as human beings, that the Conditioners might have their power-pleasure: *That Hideous Strength*, indeed.

This exploitation for the sake of power is not unlike the exploitation for sex trafficking, for pedophilia, for all sexual activity that requires the sacrifice of some other person for the gain of power or pleasure of another. What we once thought tamed and contained will turn on us - we should not be perplexed to find this the case. Having fed the dragon, having made the “magician’s trade,” we should not be surprised to find it has devoured us. It will do no good to call the army if it is comprised of hollow men; straw burns fast in the dragon’s flame. A man *with a chest*, a man of virtue is the bulwark. Spenser reminds us, “Virtue gives her self light, through the darkness for to wade.”<sup>28</sup> That Red Crosse Knight’s virtuous light is sorely needed in this battle with the dragon, in this our “Darkest Hour.”

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Spenser, 25.

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