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One is a minister who looks like a movie star. The other is a movie star of sorts who looks like an average Joe.

They're Craig Gross, pastor of a Grand Rapids ministry that fights porn, and Ron Jeremy, one of the biggest adult film stars.

The unlikely couple are debating the impact of erotic films during a seven-day, seven-state tour billed as the Porn Pastor vs. the Porn King. The only Michigan appearance is 8 tonight at the Intersection arena in Grand Rapids.

It's the latest marketing salvo by Gross' group, XXXChurch.com, an Internet-based ministry that has taken old-school evangelicals and turned them on their well-coiffed heads.

Gross, 31, who still dresses like the skateboarder he was growing up in California, hosts church breakfasts dubbed Porn and Pancakes, distributes Bibles at adult film trade shows and drives around in his "porn mobile," a black SUV with the slogans, "XXXChurch.com/ The #1 Christian Porn Site/ A Porn Site for the Whole Family."

"We try to do stuff that's fun, clever, odd enough to get people to talk," he said. "If people talk about it, then we get our message across."

The irreverent Gross, who isn't afraid to make fun of himself, will seemingly go to any length to draw attention to his Internet site, which helps porn addicts.

He also isn't afraid of making enemies. The Web site receives hate mail from two groups that couldn't be more different -- the porn industry and the religious right.

"Your theology is way outta whack," one person wrote. "That is the most disgraceful blasphemy I have ever heard."

'Get your butt out of the pew'

Gross, a seminary-trained evangelist, is serious about porn. For too long, mainstream religion has ignored the issue, he said. Churches have support groups for other issues but are embarrassed to address X-rated material.

"People who have problems with us are on the sidelines," Gross said. "We won't take criticism from someone who never stepped on the field."

Fellow pastor J.R. Mahon, whose hyper personality contrasts with the laid-back Gross, said churches should go to the people who need help, not wait for them to come to the church.

"The American church is great about sitting in the pew, judging the world," Mahon said. "If you really want to make a difference, get your butt out of the pew and do something."

XXXChurch tries to find a middle ground. It's not trying to stamp out porn, which would be impossible anyway, given an industry with annual sales of \$13 billion and growing.

If porn workers or fans think they have a problem, the ministry wants to help them deal with it.

Foes have commonalities

In one corner is Gross: a 31-year-old Sacramento, Calif., native with chiseled cheeks.

In the other is Jeremy: a 54-year-old from Queens, New York, who has slept with 4,000 women, and describes himself as short, chubby and hairy.

The debate opponents would be surprised to learn they have a lot in common.

They're relentless self-promoters who are well-educated and don't smoke or do drugs.

They're funny and disarmingly open about their motives with the debate, which is charging \$10 admission: Gross wants to publicize his ministry while Jeremy wants to make a buck.


When Jeremy and Gross first toured together, two years ago at college campuses, Jeremy drew standing ovations and long lines of autograph seekers.

When it comes to fan favorite, celebrity trumps all. Gross will be hoping to use that celebrity, even one nurtured by porn, to help spread the word of God.

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