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Who is Jesus?

XXXChurch.com takes direct approach with pornography

By Mark Landsbaum
CHRISTIAN EXAMINER

CORONA, Calif. — Two hip, admittedly “irreverent” pastors have stirred passions for three years waging war on pornography. They fight by loving the porn-addicted, and even porn purveyors.

Their strategy is laced with contemporary humor and ageless pathos, but not always warmly received by all Christians. Why not?

For starters, their Web site is called, “XXXChurch.com—the No. 1 Christian porn site.”

They titled their upcoming campaign, “National Porn Sunday,” hoping 200 churches will simultaneously discuss from the pulpit pornography’s evils, then invite parishioners back in the evening to see a documentary film explaining how Craig Gross and Mike Foster fashioned their Southern California ministry to rescue people from porn, offering love and, of course, accountability software, a 30-day confidential, “revolutionary new way to get help from pornography,” books, CDs and T-shirts.

The provocatively titled film reveals the seldom seen, troubled existence of porn stars and pornographers, but also of pornography addicts.

Lest anyone get the wrong impression, there is zero porn at XXXChurch.com because, “...We are here to give you truth and inspiration, not nude pics.”

Their ministry has taken Foster and Gross to a pornography convention in sin city itself, Las Vegas, distributing Bibles and trying to be salt and light. They joined forces with pornography filmmaker Jimmy D (real name Jimmy DiGiorgio) to create clever, contemporary videos, and their own story has been produced by secular filmmaker Bill Day, in what Gross terms, “a Michael Moore-type” documentary.

“The movie tells the story about pornography that the media don’t tell you,” Gross said in a recent interview. “We have a culture where (sex) is glamorized. Guys and girls grow up now thinking this is normal ... in relationships. It’s a lie that they are sending us.”

Critics abound

But Gross’ and Foster’s message isn’t welcomed in all quarters. Gross said Trinity Broadcasting Network refused them air time, as did Pat Robertson’s 700 Club, until it was telecast, “on a day when Pat Robertson was not there.”

“We faced a lot of resistance from church groups, but that’s the kind of resistance Jesus found,” Gross said.

XXX Church approaches pornography, he said, in “a way the church hasn’t done before.”

Is that a good idea, or even necessary?

“I think the church is losing its influence on the culture today,” Gross said. “If we don’t catch up with the times and deal with topics in relevant ways, we’re in serious trouble ... Triple X church is a bold, aggressive approach, but we live in a time when that’s needed. The church has sat around and waited for people to come to their buildings. It’s not how Jesus operated.

“We’re trying to get out there in dangerous places and meet the people ... not just hang with people who know the truth. In three years over 50 million people have come to the Web site.”

Gross described the ministry’s targets as viewers of Howard Stern, The E Channel and MTV, and indeed their irreverent commercials have aired on programs considered vulgar by most Christian believers.

Reaching out to pornographers, Gross discovered Jimmy D’s “got two kids, an 8-year-old and a 20-year-old. And he wants to do the right thing ... Jimmy D hasn’t met the Lord yet. I can’t

expect him to quit his job because he met me. I can only be there to help this guy."

Sin in the church

Gross contends those overtly involved in the porn industry have much in common with the 37 percent of pastors who "struggle with porn," and many other believers.

"I see the same guy in Jimmy D as the guy sitting in church whose wife doesn't know he's struggling with porn," Gross said.

The problem isn't merely 25 million Americans visiting cybersex sites weekly, or 280,000 X-rated Web sites generating up to \$20 billion annual sales. The XXX Church also targets what leads to porn addiction.

Mainline magazines today feature what "was porn five years ago," Gross said. "The whole point of it is to get you ready for that stuff ... The less clothes pop icons wear, the more popular they become."

Nevertheless, Triple X tactics skirt some conventional Christian approaches when reaching out to the lost.

The XXXChurch.com Web site proclaims, "We have Bible studies and sermons that you can listen to and a prayer wall where you can post prayers. However, we refuse to have this be your typical Christian Web site with crosses and Bibles all over the place and communicating things that most in the world can't relate to...."

Similarly, the Web site flippantly explains its "doctrinal statement" this way: "Uhhhhhhhhhhh. We believe what Billy Graham believes?!?!?"

Serving the lost

It may not be a surprise then to find that such a ministry is led by pastors willing to officiate a non-believer's wedding, pornographer Jimmy D's daughter.

"His daughter is not a believer, either," Gross said. "We have no idea (what kind of service it will be). For us it's an honor to be able to be involved in this guy's life.

"Non-Christians are allowed to get married ... I believe we'll be able to share with them what Christ is all about and what His idea of marriage is all about ... If you're hung up on that, it's ridiculous. I think He (Jesus) would rather do a non-Christian wedding than a Christian's wedding. We're all children of God. It would be the most horrible example of a Christian if we had an impact on this guy's life and we're asked to do his wedding and we didn't do the wedding.

"I'm convicted by what I do. Anyone with half a brain would understand this is a great thing."

Such emphasis on hip, culturally relevant strategies might raise the foundational question, "Is the Gospel sufficient?"

"I think the gospel by itself is enough to address every problem," Gross said. "But making people aware of the gospel is the mission."

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