

War on porn

Pornography report gives religious leaders new ammunition for battle

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Religious leaders have a new Bible in the war on adult peepshows and hard-core sex magazines. It's the report of the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography.

Release last month of the 1,960-page report has sparked a call for a national religious battle over hard-core pornography.

The government commission found that heavy diets of pornography could trigger sexual violence, such as rape, and rekindle a myth that women want to be hurt.

In response, national religious leaders have asked church and community groups to push for enforcement of anti-obscenity laws.

The call to arms in Gulf Coast churches, however, has yet to be heard. It may arrive soon.

National leaders — including Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Orthodox Greeks — have labeled pornography a national "moral health issue."

"The debate on the issue of pornography in American life has now been mainstreamed," the Rev. Bruce Ritter told the Associated Press last month. "It is no longer a concern of only the extremists in this country."

Ritter is a Catholic priest who runs Covenant House, a shelter in New York City's Times Square area that helps teen-age runaways and prostitutes.

Ritter and other religious leaders called for enforcement of obscenity laws in a recent press conference in New York. They did not endorse blanket censorship.

On the Gulf Coast, few religious leaders need training in anti-pornography tactics.

Many lobbied for passage of Biloxi's regulated use ordinance, which restricts adult bookstores and theaters, or they backed Gulfport's anti-obscenity law.

At First Baptist Church-Biloxi, a committee soon will be named to deal with public morality issues. The committee will meet for the first time next month, says the Rev. Frank Gunn, church pastor, and it could organize letter writing campaigns about enforcement of DUI laws

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Biloxi

and the sale of pornography.

"We don't need to be silent," said Gunn, who is president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. "There is power in the voices of people. Real change can take place because of the pressure of people."

Gunn, like other religious leaders, said pornography plays a definite role in rape, incest, and sexual abuse, including the abuse of children.

"The FBI has estimated that one out of every four 12-year-old girls today will be raped in her lifetime," Gunn told church members recently. "Pornography can only continue to make us even more a sick society."

Gunn said the First Baptist committee will not be a "dictatorial or hatchet" group. Organized church work will focus on alternatives, such as religious films for parents.

The Rev. Joe Abel, pastor at Trinity Baptist Church in Biloxi, said he would join a coastwide anti-pornography group if it organized here.

Adult entertainment bars operate across the street



from Trinity Baptist on Southern Avenue. Abel, at one time, tried to organize an area anti-pornography group.

Said Abel, "People expressed interest, but it was hard to get [them] involved. And when you talk to older folks, they think you're talking about pin-up girls on calendars."

The Rev. Jerome Axton at Nativity BVM Cathedral collects anti-pornography reading material for the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi, but he said no anti-pornography

group has yet formed on the Coast.

But one Mississippi-based group has claimed success.

About two years ago, the Tupelo-based National Federation for Decency, began picketing retail stores which sold *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines. Though some some national chains have dropped the magazines, there is no indication of an impact on the Gulf Coast, which has no NFD chapters, a spokesman said.