

Porn Remains Big Business

By Jay Merwin
Religious News Service Staff Writer

In many cities it is no longer necessary to dart furtively into a lawless pornography emporium to watch peep shows and "triple X" rated movies. Video equipment stores now sell them in video tape and disk form, sometimes on the same selection rack with "Patton" and "The Bible."

The advent of popular video tape and disk technology has brought hard-core porno out of back alleys and a sequestered urban "combat zones" and into general shopping districts. New portable video cameras and player-records enable consumers to watch more sporting and cultural events as well as make "do-it-yourself" pornography films. And the burgeoning cable television networks have already brought X-rated movies into the living room.

For example, Playboy Enterprises has produced two pay-TV network specials featuring its own brand of "tasteful nudity." Playboy rival Penthouse plans to enter the market by offering pornographic movies through a Penthouse Home Video Club. According to Don Myrus, director of Penthouse Press, the company's product will be of higher quality than the standard porno fare in which he says the scenes are "raunchy" and "the girls aren't pretty enough." The club will select films that "meet certain criteria," he said. After all, "we've got a reputation to maintain."

The pornographic disks and tapes are less often sold by salesmen dealing out of the trunk of a sedan, than by legitimate distributors whose wide-ranging catalogues of "general audience" material happen to include "adult selections" as well. Two major distributors in the Greater New York Area said X-rated material accounted for more than three-quarters of their sales to electronics stores in New York City and its immediate environs. Neither one does business with explicit porno shops.

Elliot Richards, vice-president of the International Home Video Club, believes that "every guy who buys a video tape is going to buy a porno collection too."

Or as Arnie Saltzman of the Video Center in Fairlawn, N.J., puts it, "You can't get your wife to go to a porno film, but you can show her one at home."

These technological innovations, together with the sexual awakening of the 1960s and the gradual relaxation of obscenity laws have thrust the pornography industry into the realm of competitive big business and overwhelmed anti-pornography organizations.

The California Department of Justice has estimated that the volume of pornographic trade stands at more than \$4 billion a year — nearly as much as the combined revenue of the general audience motion picture and record industries. The accounting is difficult for the thousands of adult bookstores and peep-show houses that make up the largest component of the porno business. But a Los Angeles Police Department survey of dealer invoices revealed that sex shop merchants gross about \$125 million annually in that city alone.

The top 10 "men's magazines," which include "Playboy" and "Hustler," took in about \$475 million last year. With an average audience of two million a week paying an average of \$3.50 a ticket, the nation's 780 porno film theaters did \$365 million worth of business in 1979. Another \$100 million is generated annually by sales of lubricants, vibrators, massagers, rubber replicas of genitalia and other sexual "toys."

Local church groups and some national religious organizations have had only scattered success in combatting the influence of pornography in communities. In 1978 the Archdiocesan Council of the Laity in St. Louis teamed up with two independent anti-pornography groups to stop over-the-counter sales of "Playboy," "Penthouse" and other



similar magazines. Together with Blasphemy in Media and Morality in Media, they convinced 7-11 Stores officials to discontinue sales of those magazines in all city outlets.

Four years ago, pickets and protests by Carolinians for Biblical Morality led to the arrest of a porno drive-in theater operator in Columbia, S.C. After his release on bond, he announced that the theater would cease all hard-core porn showings. Since then, the protest group, led by the Rev. Richard Bello of Capital City Baptist Temple, has taken aim at adult bookstores and massage parlors in Richland County.

And in Larned, Kan., a porno theater owner gave up showing X-rated films rather than face the "hassle" of dealing with citizens' groups organizing a petition drive. Signatures to the petition demanding that the shows be cancelled were collected through several local churches.

Perhaps the largest and most active anti-pornography organization is Morality in Media, an interfaith group founded by Father Morton A. Hill, SJ, and Rabbi G. Neumann. The New York-based group has started a National Obscenity Law Center which serves as an information and research clearing house to aid court prosecutions of pornography cases.

Another group, the National Federation for Decency, has concentrated exclusively on boycotts of companies that sponsor sexually suggestive and violent television programs as well as those that advertise in "soft-core" men's magazines. The names of these companies and lists of their products are circulated regularly through a national newsletter that goes out to about 130,000 churches in all 50 states.

Under pressure from the federation boycott, Sears, Roebuck & Company withdrew all its advertising from four prime-time television shows. The company said that the shows, "Charlie's Angels," "Six Million Dollar Man," "Three's Company" and "Barnaby Jones," were either excessively violent or sexually explicit.

Recently, religious anti-pornography groups have been joined by feminists who repudiate pornography as a violent exploitation of women. Feminist author Susan Brownmiller, a founder of Women Against Pornography, believes that

material which "dehumanizes women should be legally defined as obscene and banned from display."

Last Fall, the group led a march of more than 5,000 people to New York City's Times Square porno district and later conducted "consciousness-raising" tours of the area.

Unsure of how to reconcile their objections to pornography with First Amendment free speech guarantees, most mainline Christian denominations have stayed clear of the issue.

An insidious wrinkle to the pornography business is the growing dominance by organized crime. On Valentine's Day, 1979, FBI agents arrested 54 porno kingpins, some of whom had known connections with mob families. But if the defendants are convicted at a trial next year, there are plenty of other entrepreneurs to take their places.

Some in the industry even believe that periodic police crackdowns are good for business. "We who are in the forbidden fruit business make money because the people who buy our products think they're forbidden," says David Friedman, chairman of the Adult Film Association of America. If pornography were no longer associated in the public morality with scandal and shame, he says the business would "wither on the vine."

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Deaths

F. Dickson

Auburn — Funeral services were celebrated for Frank F. Dickson in St. Alphonsus Church Nov. 5. Mr. Dickson died in Auburn Memorial Hospital Sunday.

Quiz on Page 8.

PUZZLE ANSWERS FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1980

I. 1. Matthew 2. baptism 3. door 4. wash 5. woe 6. lava 7. home 8. foot 9. due 10. force 11. fool 12. Hi

Key Passage I: "You brood of vipers! Who told you to flee from the wrath to come," he said.

II: On that day a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding.

III: May God, the source of all patience and encouragement, enable you to live in perfect harmony with one another according to the spirit of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and voice you may glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nov. 2, 1980. He had lived in Auburn for 57 years.

A communicant at both St. Alphonsus Church and at St. Joseph's Church in Rochester. Mr. Dickson served as a Eucharistic Minister and was a member of the Holy Name Society, the Legion of Mary and the Third Order of Carmel.

Rev. John Flick

Funeral rites were celebrated, Nov. 27 and 28 for Father John M. Flick, CSSR, who died Nov. 25, 1980.

Redemptorist Provincial Joseph Hurley celebrated the Mass of Christ the High Priest and Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey presided at the Mass of Christian Burial which was held at Our Lady of Victory.

He is survived by six sisters, the Misses Ann, Margaret, Norma and Eileen of Auburn; Mrs. Frank (Alice) Knapp of Oswego, and Mrs. Jerry (Martha) Donovan of Garnerville; a brother, Adrian J. Dickson of Waterloo; and several nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews.

Father Flick was professed in the Redemptorists in 1926 and ordained a priest in 1931. He took on the assignment to St. Joseph's/Our Lady of Victory in 1969.

He is survived by a cousin, Mrs. Dorothy Prosser of Kingston, and a niece and grand nephews.

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

WILL HOLD AN

ADMISSION DEGREE RITE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1980

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will honor the Order of the Knights of Columbus by his acceptance of Knighthood in Council No. 178.

All Brother Knights in good standing are encouraged to be present on this occasion to show their enthusiasm to have Bishop Clark as a Brother Knight of Columbus.

8:00 p.m.

670 Thurston Road