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Pornstar Ron Jeremy stares down pastor Craig Gross during The Great Porn Debate Tuesday night in Student Center ballrooms. More than 1,200 people filled the ballrooms to watch the two debate the ethics and nature of the pornography industry.

Ron Jeremy debates pastor

Capacity crowd listens to pornography discussion

By: Jeff Engelhardt

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More than 1,500 people listened to a debate that involved both Jesus Christ and Jenna Jameson Tuesday in the Student Center Ballrooms.

World-renowned porn star Ron Jeremy came out to a standing ovation from a standing-room-only crowd to debate the founder of the XXX Church Craig Gross about the impact of pornography on society.

Jeremy argued pornography serves as entertainment and can be empowering while Gross argued pornography ruins lives, breaks up relationships and is degrading.

Gross, who founded the XXX Church to help people struggling with porn addiction, said he constantly receives calls and e-mails about women wanting to get out of the business and people who struggle with their porn addiction.

"It's degrading to women; it's not empowering," Gross said. "Just because they make the bigger check does not mean they are empowered."

Jeremy said women often do make better money than men and have lived happy lives in the industry. He said women are taking control of the industry and gave examples of women producing sex magazines at Harvard and Boston University.

Both Jeremy and Gross agreed that young children being exposed to porn is a problem. Gross said the porn industry was to blame for careless marketing while Jeremy said the problem was bad parenting.

Jeremy said the porn industry does not condone marketing to a young audience, and parents should take advantage of the security software available.

"If we see companies trying to target kids, we crush them like a bug," Jeremy said.

And though Jeremy and Gross spent most of the night debating porn, both said there were flaws within their respective institutions.

Gross, who travels to porn conventions and offers help to those seeking it, said the conventions are always welcoming to him. He said Christians are not as welcoming to the porn community, and Jeremy agreed.

"You get better treatment in my organization than I do in yours," Jeremy said. "You're more like Jesus. He went to the problem and so do you. I don't think it's a problem, but I can respect what you do."

Gross said he hopes his efforts help change that.

"It's a little backwards right now," Gross said. "Sometimes it's Christians who can be the least welcoming, and we need to change that."

Jeremy said the Internet is a problem for his industry both economically and socially. He said people who make those videos come up with ideas he would never be able to produce.

"The Internet is a wild frontier right now, and I can only defend what's in my industry," he said.

Gross and Jeremy took questions from the audience including how to get started in porn, how porn affects social life and the image it portrays for women.

Christine Holuj, a senior from New Lennox studying art, asked Jeremy and Gross about how the image of porn star has affected women. She said she has been studying woman sexuality in the media and was interested to hear from two different views.

"It was way more impressive than I thought, and they were very fair to each other," Holuj said. "But I agree with the pastor that the porn star image is always in your face and affects a lot of girls."

Kevin Kirkwood was not as impressed with the debate and thought the \$14,000 it cost could have been better used, though the event drew so much interest that about 400 people were turned away at the door.

Kirkwood, a graduate student from St. Louis in workforce education and development, said the debate was more of a discussion.

"I don't really think (Gross) represented the Christians, and I don't think (Jeremy) represented the porn industry," Kirkwood said. "They already knew each others' views. It was a waste of university money."

Steven Wisowaty thought the event was informative and entertaining.

Wisowaty, a senior from Gurnee studying technical resource management, said his favorite moment of the debate was students' questions.

"I don't know who won; it was back and forth," Wisowaty said. "But the funniest part was when the kid asked if Ron Jeremy ever had a hard day at work. That was good."

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