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Campaign Against  
Indecency Mapped

GLORIETA, N. M.--(BP)--Southern Baptist churches are being called on to take an active part in a campaign to rid America's newsstands of a "veritable avalanche" of indecency and obscenity which has cascaded upon them.

The call was voiced by ministers and by lay men and women attending a week-long conference on obscene literature sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission at Glorieta Baptist Assembly here.

Expressions of shock and dismay came from those at the conference as speakers reported on the type of articles, cartoons, and pictures being carried by some of the new so-called "men's magazines" which have attained a circulation running into millions of copies a month within the past year.

In his keynote address to the conference, O. K. Armstrong, of Springfield, Mo., contributing editor to Reader's Digest, declared, "Many of these new publications that have appeared like a horde of locusts openly sneer at Christian morality, say that it is old-fashioned and out-of-date. They publish article after article glorifying immorality."

Ralph A. Cannon, pastor of St. James Methodist Church, Spartanburg, S. C., described how more than 15 new magazines appeared in a single year while he studied the literature question for the Methodist Board of Temperance. Each magazine, he added, went farther in breaking previously accepted standards of decency.

"These publications are aimed frankly at teen-age and college youth. They are winning a distressingly large audience," he warned. "They are a manifestation of a society that has allowed itself to become obsessed with sex. They are openly urging our young people to adopt a libertine philosophy that disregards all moral restraints."

Cannon congratulated Southern Baptists for being the first evangelical denomination to sponsor a serious study of the problem and said he hoped his own denomination and others will soon follow the example.

Glenn D. Everett, Washington correspondent of Religious News Service, told the conference that the FBI reports that 240,000 children 18 years and under had their fingerprints and arrest records for serious offenses sent in to the FBI last

year. This was 40,000 more than in the worst previous year for juvenile delinquency.

"Something is leading our children astray in numbers that are appalling," according to Everett, "and I think as we review these publications, some so raw that even incest can become a subject for cartoon humor, we see one factor tending to degrade our youth and give them impetus toward immoral thoughts and acts."

Everett warned that even the most vicious of these pornographic publications are being sold openly in corner drug stores, unrecognized by church people because they clothe themselves in conservative slick-paper covers and use articles by legitimate authors as a "front."

He said that the recent Supreme Court decision holding that obscenity has no standing before the law under freedom of the press can be a "powerful weapon" in demanding stricter law enforcement and enforcing voluntary bans.

Two Southern Baptist churchmen who are serving on official statewide bodies seeking to control this menace told of the need for public opinion to back up law enforcement agencies. Lewis A. Myers, Albuquerque, editor of the Baptist New Mexican, and James Wesberry, pastor, Morningside Baptist Church, Atlanta, told of the "deluge of filth" they found on sale in public places in their states.

Myers is chairman of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Decency in New Mexico and Wesberry is chairman of the Georgia Literature Commission.

They emphasized that action is needed by churches and by individual lay men and women to demand stricter laws and more diligent enforcement of existing laws.

Myers particularly appealed to churchwomen to take a part in the crusade for cleaner newsstands. He pointed out that if an entire generation of young Americans is influenced by the libertine philosophy advocated by some of these publications, women will lose their status in American society.

"Gone will be respect for womanhood," he warned. "In its place will be the concept that woman exists as a mere instrument for animal gratification of the male."

Armstrong, who is chairman of the newly-organized interdenominational Churchmen's Committee for Decent Publications, urged Southern Baptists to join hands with other Protestant groups and other forces for morality in their communities. They would strive to restore proper moral standards in the publishing industry.

A. C. Miller, Nashville, executive secretary of the Christian Life Commission, said "We do not seek a return to prudish puritanical concepts. The sex impulse itself is not bad. God has given it to man for a purpose. It is only when sex is misused that it becomes sin."

"We have a Christian ideal for society--one man and one woman wedded for life, building a Christian home," Miller declared. "That ideal must be held up before the youth of our nation and we must give a vigorous challenge to those who, greedy for the profit from the sale of sensational magazines, are assaulting Christian morality."

Miller said the Commission, in keeping with its name and purposes, would endeavor to lead Southern Baptists in the crusade for decent literature.