

Youth

Fisher professor discusses cults' allure for young people



The Rev. Sun Myung Moon leads a youth rally for the Unification Church.

C-J file photo

By Rob Cullivan

What do Mormons, Moonies, Catholics, and Kellogg's Cornflake-eaters have in common?

Now, and in the past, they all might be considered members of cults — as defined by Nathan Kollar, that is.

Any group that sets itself above or against the values of mainstream society can be considered a cult, according to Kollar, a professor of religious studies at St. John Fisher College. At one time or another, each of the aforementioned groups has fit Kollar's general definition. Cults usually last only one generation, however, often because their vision dies along with their founder or because the group's ideas are eventually accepted into society's mainstream.

Kollar explored cults and their attraction for youths in a workshop Saturday, Dec. 3, at St. Francis DeSales Parish in Geneva. A dozen religious educators from the Diocese of Rochester attended the day-long look at a phenomenon that often receives attention only when it ends in tragedy, as in the case of the 1978 mass murder/suicide of more than 900 followers of Jim Jones.

Cults are stereotyped as evil movements brainwashing young people into blind allegiance to peculiar values, but Kollar believes that cults can be a natural — and sometimes healthy — response to the challenges that confront each generation.

"The cults are a barometer of crisis and ultimately influence mainstream religion," Kollar said, noting that the Mormons, severely persecuted in their early days in the United States, are now considered more mainstream than many other religious groups.

Society's current technological advances pose ethical questions that previous genera-

tions did not have to face. Such dilemmas create a strong desire for simple answers to complex questions, Kollar asserts. "Cults give society options," he said, remarking that, "a lot of institutions are seen as very unresponsive today."

Young people looking for security in a troubled world may turn to cults for direction, he remarked. Surprisingly, many young people who join cults come from loving, middle-class families. "Some cults offer a personal, warm world," he said. "Some middle-class kids have had such a good family life that when they get exposed to the big, impersonal workplace or university, they don't know how to handle it."

Cults also offer young people a way to create their own identities. "Cults give them an opportunity to say, 'No' to their parents," Kollar said. "A person, in a playful way, can determine their personality, and then go back to 'normal' living," he commented, noting that most people who join cults eventually leave them.

Workshop participants responded positively to Kollar's lecture, but one religious-education instructor from Auburn's St. Francis of Assisi Parish didn't agree with Kollar's assessment that most who join cults leave them. "I don't see it happening often," Peter M. DeBellis observed. He remarked that he has friends who have joined cults ranging from the Hare Krishnas to fundamentalist Protestant sects, and he said that most who have joined stay in the cult.

Catholics dissatisfied with the Church are often interested in joining cults, DeBellis said. "They single out what they see as one error — papal infallibility, or the Church being rich — and they blow it out of proportion," he said, noting that former Catholics who join non-

Continued on Page 15

Speaking Out

By Stephen Schott
McQuaid Jesuit High School

What do you get from going to Mass on weekends? Rejuvenation? Energy for the week to come? Closeness to God? A sense of community? Hope? These are the things that religion is supposed to give us. But for most teenagers, that one hour on weekends is used to nap or think about our homework or friends.

The role of religion in my father's generation was much different than the role of religion today. The religion he grew up with was meant to put the fear of God into you. You were given a sense of guilt that is unknown today. If you did something wrong, you hoped that lightning didn't strike you before you were absolved.

Today's religion is a bubble-gum faith. All religions are taking stands on the many issues that divide our society. But those people who call themselves believers often don't agree with the stands. People get remarried after divorce and women have abortions, but neither necessarily seeks absolution. Nonetheless, they affiliate with religion.

It is the obvious right of every individual to choose what is right for him/herself. But if none of a particular denomination's beliefs are consistent with your own, why do you belong to that religion?

Today's teens reflect the society in which they live. Our morality should surprise no one. It is merely an extension of society's own religion and the gods of that creed.

We care about money. We care about jobs to get that money. We care about cars, big-screen TVs with cable and ultra-

modern houses. We like to eat out. We like to call on other people to do our everyday chores. We worry about now, not later. We dream the yuppie dream.

Teenagers are not concerned about the homeless and starving. "Yeah. That's too bad. Hey, c'mon. That's depressing, man. Let's not talk about it!"

We just had a presidential election. Trying to get my friends to talk about the candidates was next to impossible. I didn't even try to bring up the issues. None of my friends could vote, so most of them adopted an "I don't care" attitude. They didn't understand that the candidates will affect their future, and that the issues will return in the next election.

The future threatens my friends' security. Having achieved perfection of the moment, they exist in their own little security bubbles. As long as they remain unharmed, they don't care.

Our gods are Don Johnson and Poison. Our attitude is "nothin' but a good time." Heaven on earth means having no responsibilities. Let someone else worry. I'm happy.

I was once told that there are two kinds of people — those who move the earth and those who ride it. I plan on making the earth move — by myself, if need be. I learned this attitude as a child.

Has religion failed? I think that it has failed to intimidate a world dominated by irresponsibility. Teenagers answer not to God, but to themselves. Yet this attitude could get them into big trouble in the long run. Happiness comes as a by-product of success and achievement. One must earn it. This is responsibility.

I hope that today's teenagers will grow into the world as have previous generations, but first teenagers must desire to do so. Everyone is afraid of growing up. But fighting it is useless. You must seize the day and go into the future with the enthusiasm it merits. It is necessary for society, but more importantly, it is necessary for you.

Happy ending marks fresh start

Coming of Age

By Mick Conway
NC News Service

Every once in a while something happens that makes me realize how fortunate I am to be working in the field of chemical dependency.

Recently, at the Gordon Chemical Dependency Center in Sioux City, Iowa, an adolescent treatment facility where I work, I witnessed a scene so poignant that it deserves retelling.

A young man, nicely dressed and

handsome, was talking to a counselor in the hallway. He had traveled a great distance to see the counselor and spoke eloquently yet simply of his appreciation for all the counselor had done for him during his treatment there.

He recounted some of the darkest moments of his battle with chemical dependency, his despair at having found his life in such desperate straits.

The counselor accepted the young man's appreciation and complimented him on the successful reorganization of his life. As they prepared to go their separate ways, they hugged each other.

"Thank you for rescuing me. I'll never forget you," was the young man's heartfelt farewell.

Later I talked to the counselor about the scene. He told me the young man had experienced a long, hard struggle with

Continued on Page 15

Bishop Kearney High School
In what ways are students affected by pressure to excel now, in future?

As Teens See It

JASON EDWARDS, junior:

One of the positive effects is that pressure helps us to deal with tensions associated in the fields we wish to pursue after college. Also, pressure helps us to make important decisions. On the negative side, however, if there is too much pressure on students, they may not be able to cope, especially if they excel in their studies.

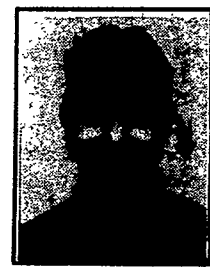
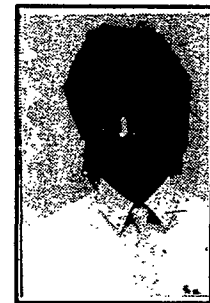


STEVE MONTROIS, senior:

When people realize their goal in life, pressure often makes them better prepared and more aware of their needs. Another positive effect is that a person may gain a sense of responsibility, as well as build character. Too much pressure has a negative effect, such as when one is being overwhelmed by tasks and constant worries.

PAUL BURKAT, sophomore:

As a sophomore, I face enormous amounts of pressure to be the so-called "best." This pressure from teachers and my parents is to encourage my success in getting high scoring grades in order to attend a well-known college.



HOUSE OF GUITARS
Most New Album And Tape Releases Just \$5.98
CD's From \$8.98 - \$11.98 Each

We received 25 correct entries identifying Harrison as the last name of George from the Beatles.

The winner was Paul Nichols of Canandaigua

MUSIC TRIVIA

This week's question:
What is Sonny and Cher's daughter's name?

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____
Zip Code _____
School _____

Rules:
Each week, the Courier-Journal, in conjunction with the House of Guitars will feature a Music Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon, and send it in to the Courier-Journal. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn. If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave.
All entries must be received within seven days of this papers issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

The Courier-Journal
Music Trivia
1150 Buffalo Rd.
Rochester, N.Y. 14624