

Occult music may lead teens to dabble in Satanism

By Sean McNamara
Freelance writer

ROCHESTER — New York's Cardinal John J. O'Connor recently told Catholic News Service that he never foresaw the controversy he would generate by charging March 4 that some rock music helps the devil's work.

In the week following the remarks, made during a homily on Satanism, the cardinal received "more mail in a shorter period... than on anything that I've done or said."

The response Cardinal O'Connor drew is indicative of the attention now being focused on rock music and its lyrics.

Long before the cardinal made his remarks, the Parents Music Resource Center, an Arlington, Va.-based organization, thrust the issue onto the public agenda.

Founded by Tipper Gore, U.S. Sen. Albert Gore, has asked Congress to require warning labels on all albums containing explicit lyrics about quality, drugs, violence and sex.

The campaign for warning labels on records stems from the case of a New Jersey teenager who killed his mother and then himself, according to Jennifer Norwood, executive director of the PMRC. After the murder-suicide occurred, Norwood said, the boy's father told her that he had been unaware of his son's involvement in the occult and heavy-metal music.

"There is an abnormally high correlation between teens who listen to music about the occult and involvement in it," Norwood said, noting that such involvement can lead to violence.

Parents need the record labels, she contended, so that they can see the warning signs in their children's behavior. "It's

so parents can be a little bit more aware," Norwood said. "I think awareness will help."

Webster Police Officer Ken Eagle agreed. "For a kid who is desperate and despondent and listens to (music with Satanic themes), it has a very powerful message," he said.

Engle, who frequently gives presentations on Satanism for parents and teens, believes rock music, drugs and Satanism are intertwined. In his work with parents, he spends one night each on drugs, music and the occult.

Parents attend his talks "because they are concerned about what their kids are listening to," said Engle, who teaches parents to identify drug use and involvement with the occult among their children.

Yet some experts believe concerns about the effects of rock 'n' roll on teenagers are simply products of generational misunderstanding.

"Each generation looks to different areas for the source of sin," observed Nathaniel Kollar, a professor of religious studies at St. John Fisher College. "They look to how one is thinking and acting different — to one group of people who have a different perspective. Therefore, it would be natural for (Cardinal O'Connor) to find Satan in the music."

On the other hand, some teens may be attracted to Satanism simply for the effect it will have on their parents.

"If you are a teen looking to have an adolescent rebellion, Satanism is one way of contradicting mom and dad's value system," explained Father Gary Bagley, youth director for the Diocese of Buffalo.

"Going against (parents') moral code is another way not only to deny the religious value system of the adults, but to negate it. Satanism is basically theism turned inside out," the priest observed.

Teens typically become involved in the occult because "even within the teenage peer group, it gives you a certain kind of status," Father Bagley said.

Usually, these teens are loners, rebelling not only against their parents, but also against their peers, Father Bagley said. They reject conformity — such as popular hair and clothing styles, and musical preferences — shifting to the "fringe" occult, where they can become experts and exercise a kind of self-determination they find lacking in their lives, the priest said.

The attractiveness of Satanism as a weapon of teenage rebellion has not gone unnoticed by record producers, who use it to sell more albums, Father Bagley observed.

"The people who do popular music know there are certain hooks you can hang marketing techniques on," he remarked. "Popular music is publicity. The people who are trying to sell records are looking for publicity, so as a result, they will use the occult to be a kind of attention-getter."

The pursuit of publicity and attention,

however, violates one of the basic tenants of Satanism — secrecy. "Real Satanists don't look for publicity," the priest noted.

Engle concurred, noting that the publicity that attends such groups disproves their supposed nature. Observing that most teens involved in the occult are "at the dabbling level," the officer explained that true Satanic cults obscure themselves in a veil of secrecy.

Real Satanists do not overtly recruit members, and are so cautious that they leave behind no evidence of their rites, Engle said.

Nevertheless, Nick Costello, who also lectures throughout Monroe County on the occult, Satanism and rock music, said he has seen evidence of teenage involvement in the rituals, sacrifice of animals.

"Are there Satanic cults and that type of thing in Rochester? You bet there is," Costello said, explaining that some Satanic groups drink cats' blood and mutilate other animals. Other groups force members to engage in ritual sex, Costello added.

In addition to occult-oriented music, Costello said, fantasy role-playing games can lead teens into Satanic involvement. The games, in which players assume the identities of fantasy characters and act out complex plots, "give a sense of extensive power," Costello said. "You are what you want to and you do what you want to do. It's like having two people in one body."

Like record producers creating occult-

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Our Lady of Lourdes, Brighton

Do you consider song lyrics when buying music?

Tim Miller, 16:

I choose by lyrics. A lot of the music I listen to is kind of social protest oriented. They see what is wrong with the world and comment on it. Yes, I do like the lyrics. Negative lyrics don't bother me. I appreciate that it's just their way of speaking. It just doesn't change my views on anything. It makes you think about things.



Meaghan Driscoll, 14:

I think I pay attention to the lyrics, but I listen to a certain type of music, so when I buy it, I don't have to worry about it being negative. I listen to U2 and I think when I really concentrate on the lyrics, it makes me think about what I listen to. If I like the music, then it's fine.



Kathleen Sullivan, 16:

With the music I listen to on the radio, I have no choice on what they are going to play. But if I buy a record or tape, I buy it after I listen to the lyrics. People like U2 and Tracy Chapman really have something to say with their lyrics. Some of the groups who are really negative, I just laugh at. I blow them off as if they were a joke.



AS TEENS SEE IT



Darren Francis, 16:

I choose music by lyrics. I listen to mostly heavy metal. There are groups that are Satanic and I have listened to them, but the lyrics don't bother me. My faith is strong enough to realize that this is just some people's point of view. Other bands like Stryper (a Christian rock group) come off as being fake. They try to be heavy metal and they aren't. My favorite bands aren't Satanic; they're Whitesnake and Guns 'n' Roses.



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