

Giving The Devil More Than His Due

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by David Alexander

(For occult crime "experts" and the American media, anti-satanist hysteria has become a growth industry.)

"Never attribute to Devil-worshipping conspiracies what opportunism, emotional instability, and religious bigotry are sufficient to explain."

-Shawn Carlson, Ph.D.

SATANISM is alive and well in the United States. It flourishes in the minds of a phalanx of Christian fundamentalists, political extremists, bereaved parents, opportunists, and mentally unstable individuals who have become self-appointed experts on satanism, occult crime, and devil worship.

These pundits of the puerile have created a lucrative "information industry" selling what they claim are documented facts through books, seminars, lectures, and tapes. In reality, what they offer is little more than fundamentalist Christian dogma, the aberrations of mentally ill individuals, the misdirected grief of bereaved parents, and the fantasies of self-seeking opportunists disguised and promoted as scholarship and criminology. "Satan-mongering" is a growth industry promoting "information" on what is, by every independent investigation, a nonexistent problem.

Unsuspecting police agencies, news reporters, editors, and producers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and talk show hosts around the country have become the unwitting voices of the "new witch hunters." Exploiting the irrational fear of the superstitious, the credulity of the well-intentioned, and the media's insatiable appetite for ratings-through-sensationalism, a few fanatical individuals and their organizations have built an industry of fear by spreading nonsense as scholarship.

These are some of the conclusions that were reached after an extensive investigation into satanism and those who profit from it. Entitled "Satanism in America," the two-hundred-plus-page report is the result of a three-year study by its principle author and investigator, Berkeley physicist Shawn Carlson, who led a team of researchers under the auspices of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER), chaired by Dr. Gerald Larue, emeritus professor of biblical history and archaeology at the University of Southern California and the American Humanist Association's 1989 Humanist of the Year. It is the most exhaustive study of its kind ever undertaken.

The report concludes, in part:

It is now abundantly clear that a small minority of ultra-right-wing fundamentalist and evangelicals, believing in both the reality of Satan as a personality and that the Tribulation is at hand, are responsible for the misinterpretation, the dissemination and in some instances the outright fabrication of "facts" to support what is essentially a religious doctrine. These people are not researchers in pursuit of truth, but crusaders against the Antichrist whom they believe a priori is living now among us. We submit that people so deeply committed to this religious view can hardly be counted upon to render skeptical and well-reasoned critiques about the dangers of Satanism or occultism in American society.

THE central assertion of all the "experts" is that there is a vast, highly organized network of devil worshippers in the United States that has infiltrated all levels of local, state, and federal government, not to mention society at large. This conspiracy is supposedly responsible for tens of thousands of kidnappings and child molestations, not to mention the fifty thousand to two million children--depending upon the "authority" cited--who are "ritually" sacrificed to the devil each year. These serious accusations, if true, mean that we are living in a much different country than we all think we are.

Think about the logistics required to kill two million people a year. A recent example will pride us with some perspective.

During World War II, millions of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, Poles, and others considered "subhuman" by the Nazis were rounded up and systematically exterminated. A researcher from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles told me that approximately eleven million people (five million Jews and six million others) were liquidated before and during World War II. The Nazis ran six major killing centers and sixteen hundred smaller camps. Researchers estimate that there were over one hundred fifty thousand people involved in running and servicing the death camps, from railroad clerks to the guards who ran the gas chambers. It was a large operation which ran at its peak from 1941 to 1944. It takes a large and efficient organization to exterminate two million people a year. There was plenty of evidence available at the end of World War II supporting the horror stories of death-camp survivors. Could an organization of one hundred fifty thousand crazed baby-killers--an organization a hundred times larger than organized crime--exist without any of us catching on? Where is the evidence for such an operation in this country?

Even the low estimate of fifty thousand "ritual" victims a year is a little less than the total number of Americans killed in Vietnam during the entire war. Virtually everyone in the United States over the age of thirty knew someone who was killed in Vietnam or knows someone who knew someone who was killed. How many people do you know who have been "ritually" sacrificed?

Moreover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation compiles statistics about crime in the United States. If, as some "experts" claim, there are fifty thousand unreported "ritual" sacrifice murders being committed, then we must have a nation of very inefficient police and sheriffs' departments, as that figure is two and one-half times the twenty thousand murders annually recorded by the FBI. It is ludicrous to claim that there are an additional fifty thousand murders being committed without any law enforcement agencies being aware of the problem.

The concern over child abductions is also vastly overblown. The overwhelming majority of child abductions occur within the context of domestic disputes, with the perpetrator being one of the parents. According to records compiled by the National Child Safety Council, a branch of the Department of Justice, the number of children who are kidnapped by strangers is lower than one hundred per year! Of these, over the past five years, approximately half the children--less than two hundred fifty--are still missing. While it is very sad and destructive to a family when it happens, the abduction of children by strangers is a relatively rare occurrence in the United States.

Here's an additional statistic from the FBI: over two thousand children are murdered each year by their own parents. Statistically, a child has a greater chance of being kidnapped or murdered by his or her parents than of being kidnapped by a stranger or "ritually" sacrificed by devil worshippers.

The evidence offered by the Satan-mongers is primarily the loosely detailed stories of alleged participants--individuals who often claim to have been high officials of devil-worshipping "cults" and who assert that they have taken part in a variety of felonious behavior, including rape, kidnapping, and "ritual" murder. Coincidentally, these same people have books, tapes, and seminars to sell about their "experiences" in order to "educate" the conscientious police officer, the religiously gullible, or the talk-show host hungry for ratings-through-sensationalism. As anxious as they are to get their stories out to a credulous public (and to sell their books and tapes), these born-again hucksters are strangely reluctant to provide details (names, dates, locations, and so forth) to any law enforcement agency or to assist them in any way in investigating their allegations. Police agencies that have tried to investigate these claims have run into a stone wall.

AN understanding of this social phenomenon is not possible without examining some of the personalities involved.

{amazon asins=0882898760 align=right}/amazon}{amazon asins=0671694332 align=right}/amazon}Michelle Smith is the author of *Michelle Remembers*, one of the seminal books in the current hysteria over satanic conspiracies in the United States. Smith had an alcoholic father who abandoned the family and a passive, distant, alcoholic mother who died when Smith was fourteen. After a miscarriage in 1976, Smith began her second round of psychiatric sessions and, under hypnosis, recalled her abuse and mistreatment as a child at the hands of a "satanic" "cult." She claims to have witnessed numerous paranormal happenings, including an actual visitation from Satan incarnate, and she describes satanic rituals, implements, and ceremonies in some detail. Unfortunately, experts on the occult insist that what she ascribes as sacred to satanists is completely inconsistent with satanism and devil worship.

As for bringing Smith's tormentors to justice, it should be relatively easy to identify them, even years later, since the members of this "cult" reportedly cut off the middle fingers of their left hands as a sign of obedience to the Prince of Darkness. Unfortunately, no independent evidence has surfaced to corroborate any of the claims made by Smith. Her therapist, Dr. Lawrence Pazder, became so involved with his patient that Smith eventually divorced her husband and married Dr. Pazder, who was the coauthor of *Michelle Remembers*.

"Lauren Stratford" claims that as a child she suffered "ritual" abuse at the hands of her parents' devil-worshipping group and that later she bred babies for sacrifice to Satan. In her book *Satan's Underground*, "Stratford" recounts having witnessed a miraculous healing by Satan as well as several other weird paranormal happenings; no evidence, however, is offered to support her claims. "Stratford" is also strangely inconsistent about exactly how many babies she bore for sacrifice. During an appearance on "Sally Jessy Raphael," "Stratford" claimed to have given up one baby for sacrifice, but on "Oprah" she upped the number to three.

"Dr." Rebecca Brown and her patient "Elaine" have appeared on "Geraldo" to discuss their experiences with satanism. Brown and "Elaine" have cowritten two books, *He Came to Set the Captives Free* and *Prepare for War*, both published by Jack Chick Ministries, an outfit which specializes in fundamentalist tracts and lurid, anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon comic books. In *Prepare for War*, Brown lists a number of "doorways" to satanic power and demon infestation. These include fortune tellers, horoscopes, fraternity oaths, vegetarianism, yoga, self-hypnosis, acupuncture, biofeedback, fantasy role-playing games, adultery, homosexuality, judo, karate, and, of course, rock music, which is identified as "a carefully masterminded plan by none other than Satan himself." This book has been recommended as a serious reference in law enforcement training material. With all of the problems modern police agencies have to face, one would not think that "demon infestation" would be high on the list.

{amazon asins=0883683210 align=right}/amazon}{amazon asins=0883683237 align=right}/amazon}"Elaine" whose real name is Edna Moses, claims to be a former high priestess of a satanic "cult" who was "rescued" by "Dr." Brown, a self-proclaimed "satanic 'cult' detoxifier" who has allegedly "rescued" over one thousand satanists. According to Chick Ministries, both of these women are "available to assist with interpretation of signs and symbols, to answer questions, or be of assistance should you have an emergency need in the 'rescue' of a Satanist"

What Geraldo Rivera, ace investigative journalist, and Jack Chick have not told you---or did not bother to find out---is that "Dr. Rebecca Brown" is the defrocked Indiana physician Ruth Bailey, who had her medical license removed by the Medical Licensing Board of Indiana for a number of reasons. Among the board's seventeen findings are: Bailey knowingly misdiagnosed serious illnesses, including brain tumors and leukemia, as "caused by demons, devils, and other evil spirits"; she told her patients that doctors at Ball Memorial Hospital and St. John's Medical Center were "demons, devils, and other evil spirits themselves"; and she falsified patient charts and hospital records. The board's report states that:

Dr. Bailey also addicted numerous patients to controlled substances which required them to suffer withdrawal and undergo detoxification, and that she self-medicated herself with non-therapeutic amounts of Demerol which she injected on an hourly basis.

A psychiatrist appointed by the board to diagnose Bailey described her as "suffering from acute personality disorders including demonic delusions and/or paranoid schizophrenia."

Refusing to appear before the board, Bailey moved to California, changed her name to Rebecca Brown, and began working with Jack Chick. Despite this questionable background and the fact that she has been denounced by numerous Christian ministers, Brown continues to appear on talk shows and at police training seminars spreading her nonsense.

PAT Pulling is the founder of Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD). First published in 1974 and translated since then into a host of languages, "Dungeons and Dragons" is the most popular of the fantasy role-playing games. These games are sophisticated versions of "cops and robbers" or "cowboys and Indians"; they are vehicles through which adolescents and adults can exercise their imaginations. Since 1974, there have been over five hundred different fantasy role-playing games introduced into the market.

{amazon asins=0910311595 align=right}/amazon}Pulling founded BADD after her son, Irving "Bink" Pulling II, committed suicide. Pulling blames her son's death on playing Dungeons and Dragons and on a curse placed on him the the game's leader or "dungeon master" a week before his suicide. In her book, *The Devil's Web*, Pulling states that there were no indications her son was troubled and that she had no warning of his impending suicide [which she later contradicts herself in a talk-show].

Pulling appears on talk shows and advises police departments on teenagers who play fantasy role-playing games. In her *Interviewing Techniques for Adolescents*, she offers the following profile of teenagers who are potentially suicidal or who are "headed for an involvement with Satanism": adolescents between the ages of eleven and seventeen, from all walks of life, from middle-class to upper-middle-class families, over or underachievers, intelligent, creative, or curious. Some are rebellious, some have low self-esteem, some are loners, and some have been abused physically or sexually. Unfortunately, this is hardly an exclusive list, as one or more of these criteria could be applied to every teenager in the country.

She also states that fantasy role-playing games are the number two method used by satanists to seduce children, right after "Black Heavy Metal Music." Other methods of recruitment include: "obsession with movies and videos which have occult themes, collecting and reading/researching occult books, involvement with 'Satanic 'Cults,'" through recruitment; and some are born into families who practice 'satanic "cult" "rituals.'"

Among her many suggestions for the police officer interviewing a troubled adolescent is to ask if he or she "has read the *Necronomicon* or is familiar with it." This advice betrays Pulling's lack of skills as a researcher. The *Necronomicon* does not exist. It is the fictional creation of H. P. Lovecraft, the popular fantasy-horror pulp writer of the 1930s. The book,

described as having been written in blood on parchment made from human skin by the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, was supposed to contain all sorts of ghastly occult lore; those who read it went insane. Since 1978, several clever promoters have produced books called *The Necronomicon*. Most are gibberish; one version repeats its Romanized Arabic text every ten pages, the author having assumed that the majority of readers would never wade through more than ten pages of his nonsense. Needless to say, none of these books is an authentic occult text written by a mad Arab in human blood; they are simply moneymaking schemes capitalizing on a notorious name.

In her capacity as "occult investigator," Pulling has made a number of outrageous charges that she fails to support with evidence. In an interview in the Richmond, Virginia, *News Leader*, Pulling estimated that "about eight percent of the Richmond population was involved in Satanic worship at some level." This number, called "conservative" by Pulling, comes to about fifty-six thousand people---more than the number of Methodists in the area, as the interviewer was quick to point out. Pulling then attempted to correct herself, arguing that she had meant the number of people actively involved in "the occult," whatever that distinction may mean.

Pulling's profile of potential recruits or victims is as flawed as her statistics. She claims that virtually any child between the ages of eleven and seventeen is a candidate for seduction into satanism. Furthermore, this seduction supposedly takes place at times when a parent is least likely to be present. Therefore, if you have an intelligent child from a good background and he or she is out of your sight, the child is open to recruitment by satanic "cultists" who, according to Pulling, are everywhere.

Pulling's main claim--that her son was driven to suicide by playing *Dungeons and Dragons* without having exhibited any earlier signs of trouble--is contradicted by statements she made which were published, oddly enough, by one of the Satan-mongers who supports her work. Larry Jones is the founder and director of the Cult Crime Impact Network, Inc. (CCIN), and publishes *File 18* which is directed toward law enforcement agencies and the clergy. Jones's organization is housed in the Trinity Fellowship Church in Boise, Idaho. There is nothing objective about his newsletter, as its stated position is: "The only true and lasting solution to 'Devil-worship' or Satanic involvement is a personal encounter with true Christianity and with the central figure of that faith, Jesus Christ."

Jones published a transcript of a lecture Pulling gave in 1986 at the North Colorado/South Wyoming Detectives' Association Seminar in Fort Collins, Colorado. Pulling stated then--but not in any of her own publications or subsequent interviews--that several weeks before his death, her son had been displaying "lycanthropic" tendencies such as running around the backyard on all fours and barking. Pulling was also quoted as saying that, within the month before her son's death, nineteen rabbits he had raised were inexplicably torn apart, although no loose dogs were seen, and a cat was found disemboweled with a knife. Other sources indicated that Bink was despondent over "fitting in" at school and had written "Life Is a Joke" on the blackboard in one of his classes. Shortly thereafter, he shot himself in the driveway of his home.

It is clear that Bink Pulling was a seriously disturbed young man whose behavior could be interpreted as demonstrations of great rage and frustration. Yet his mother continues to insist she had no warning that her son was troubled.

Contrary to Pulling's claim, there is no independent verification from any respected authority that fantasy role-playing games contribute in any way to teen suicide. Dr. S. Kenneth Schonbert of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York conducted an in-depth study of over seven hundred adolescents who had attempted suicide. Not one case indicated that any role-playing game was a reason for their attempt. The Associated Gifted and Creative Children of California conducted a survey of all major American cities in which coroners were asked to review the psychological autopsies of adolescent suicides. Not one case indicated that *Dungeons and Dragons* or any other role-playing game was a contributing factor. The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta released its own report which found no compelling evidence that suicide was more prevalent among teens who played *Dungeons and Dragons*. Finally, the American Association of Suicidology in Denver, Colorado, a widely respected source of information on teen suicides, agrees that the evidence shows role-playing games are not a significant cause of teen suicide.

MAURY Terry is the author of *The Ultimate Evil: An Investigation of America's Most Dangerous Satanic 'Cult'* (he also supplied an introduction for Pat Pulling's book). In his book, Terry attempts to link mass murderers Charles Manson, David "Son of Sam" Berkowitz, Henry Lee Lucas, and several others into a nationwide satanic conspiracy of immense proportions. Terry "documents" his thesis through egregious leaps of logic, bits of oddly interpreted "evidence," and the highly suspect testimony of such "experts" as David Balsiger, who will be discussed in a moment.

Terry creates implausible connections---for example, between the Son of Sam, the Process Church of the Final Judgment, and the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). He concludes:

Since the [Son of Sam] letters contained so many clues, I went back to them and to other Berkowitz writings with which I was now familiar. Doing so revealed definite connections to Process-like terms. For instance, Berkowitz has written he needed a "messenger

on earth"; and messenger was a Process rank---as were "father" and "master" The Borelli letter contained the phrase "honour thy father" using the British spelling of "honor." The Process was founded in Britain, as was Aleister Crowley's OTO chapter. Additionally, the Breslin letter said: "Now the void has been filled"; and the "bottomless void" was definitely Process terminology. That letter's return address, in part, said "Blood and Family"; and the Process had referred to itself as "the family"

Obviously, Maury Terry has not been exposed to much training in logical thinking or rational investigative techniques. His theory is conspiracy "reasoning" at its best.

Terry's lack of logic was not without a price. The California-based Ordo Templi Orientis brought a defamation suit against him. The New York Law Journal for June 24, 1988, reports:

Defendants, publisher and author of a book expounding the theory that a nationwide Satanic 'cult' is responsible for numerous notorious murders in recent times, were sued for defamation by an organization the author alleged was part of the Satanic network. The court refused to dismiss the action, finding that the allegations in the book, reiterated by the author in two television interviews, gave rise to a cause of action if plaintiff could substantiate the facts averred in its complaint.

The case was settled out of court with an undisclosed sum of money paid to the OTO, as well as an agreement to strike all references to the OTO in future editions of the work.

{amazon asins=0882700960 align=right}/amazon}The allegations against the Process church in Terry's book were copied virtually verbatim from a now-obscure book, The Family, published shortly after the Manson murders. The author of The Family lost a defamation suit brought against him by the Process church; part of the settlement included striking all reference to the Process church from future editions. So much of the book was based upon these false allegations that it wasn't possible to remove them all and still have a book. The Family subsequently went out of print. Terry has not been sued by the Process church because it no longer exists; thus, he is able to reprint with impunity material which has previously been judged inaccurate and libelous.

David Balsiger, one of the "experts" cited in Terry's book, is coauthor with Les Jones and Mike Warnke of The Satan Seller, a book that purports to be Warnke's "confession" as a former priest of a devil-worshipping 'cult' (Warnke also claims to have been a high-ranking member of the Illuminati). Warnke's credibility--such as it is--is severely damaged by his refusal to identify his former co-conspirators. Throughout The Satan Seller, he maintains that the members of his former 'cult' are involved in rape, animal mutilations, and drug smuggling. Yet, despite his newfound born-again beliefs, Warnke has yet to supply law enforcement agencies with names, dates, or any other evidence necessary to assist them in investigating his claims. It's interesting to note that the first edition of The Satan Seller was published in 1972--before the appearance of the first "satanic victim" Michelle Smith--and contains no mention of child abduction, child sacrifice, or child pornography rings. Warnke himself admitted on "The 700 Club" that he had no knowledge of the child sacrifices that other "survivors" talked about. Now he claims that devil 'cults' murder two million children a year.

As for David Balsiger, Warnke's coauthor, he has quite a stake in the current anti-satanist hysteria. Balsiger owns and operates Writeway Literary Associates of Costa Mesa, California, which publishes his Occult Activity Profile, Witchcraft/Satanism Ritual Calendar, and Occult-Satanic Homicide Clues. He also publishes and distributes Jack Roper's Analyzing Occult Activity Supplement and the Occult Investigation Slide Training Series, aimed at the law-enforcement market. Balsiger has also written a number of "nonfiction" books, including In Search of Noah's Ark, and is closely affiliated with the Christian ultraright. His Presidential Biblical Scorecard, Candidates Biblical Scorecard, and Family Protection Scorecard all rate political candidates according to Balsiger's version of "biblical principles." His other activities and associations read like a shopping list for members of the extreme political right.

{amazon asins=0399113274 align=right}/amazon}I'll let Father Richard Woods of Chicago's Loyola University Theology Department have the last word on Balsiger and Warnke and their shared fantasy. Father Woods observes in his scholarly book, The Devil:

Purporting to be a veridical account of a young man's meteoric rise to power in a vast Satanic conspiracy and his abrupt fall from "grace," The Satan Seller would be an incredibly bad novel. But although he was a drug-drenched and paranoid speed-freak with

delusions of grandeur during the events narrated, Warnke (and his ghostwriters) assure us that the incidents occurred "absolutely as described." Truth is indeed stranger than fiction.

GERALDO Rivera must be included in any list of Satan mongers because his production company, the Investigative News Group, produced the television special "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground," broadcast by NBC on October 5, 1988. This program, watched by more people than any other television documentary in history, was distinguished by its almost total lack of credible information; it substituted sensationalism and hype for accurate investigation and scholarship. "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground" was cited by a New York sociologist as contributing to the escalation of a rumor panic in upstate New York.

Rivera often devotes his daily talk show, "Geraldo," to the topic of satanic crime, using as "authorities" many of the personalities investigated in the aforementioned CSER report. In one typical program, Rivera opened the show with the following statement:

Satanic 'cults!' Every hour, every day, their ranks are growing. Estimates are there are over one million satanists in this country. The majority of them are linked in a highly organized, very secret network. From small towns to large cities, they've attracted police and FBI attention to their satanist "ritual child abuse," child pornography, and grisly satanic murder. The odds are this is happening in your town.

With that introduction setting the tone, Rivera paraded a number of well-known Satan-mongers before his audience, with nary a critical question asked of the lot. He began by interviewing three parents whose children were allegedly molested by satanic day care workers. One parent mentioned that, while her child had been in therapy for some months, she did not realize the 'ritual'-satanic aspects of her child's abuse until she attended a seminar that educated her in this subject. Only after the mother attended this seminar did the stories of child sacrifice and other horrific details begin to surface. Unfortunately, Rivera did not pursue this, leaving his viewers in the dark as to what seminar this woman attended and who had organized it.

Rivera then introduced "Elaine" (Edna Moses, already profiled), "for seventeen years a high priestess of a satanic 'cult' that 'governed' five states." Elaine was shown in profile, behind a screen--a heatrical device designed to validate Elaine's fear of retaliation from her fellow satanists and thereby heighten her credibility. Elaine rattled on about her life as a high priestess in a satanic conspiracy bent on ultimately ruling the world. She contended that "ritual child abuse" was designed to make the recruitment of children into satanism easier when they were older and stated, "It is terrifying to think that over two million are missing in this nation right now and that a number of them have been murdered, maimed, or are in satanic 'cults' practicing satanism today." As we have already seen, that statement is without a shred of credible evidence to back it up. Rivera did not question it at all.

Next came "Dr." Rebecca Brown (the defrocked Dr. Ruth Bailey), whom Rivera introduced as the author of *He Came to Set the Captives Free* and the person who helped get "Elaine" and over a thousand others out of satanic 'cults.' Rivera asked Brown about her methods of "detoxing" a 'cult' member. One of Brown's suggestions was for the cultist to "get out of state, change your name, and disassociate yourself totally from the area you were." As we have seen, Brown took her own advice--only in her case the area she disassociated herself from was Indiana after the Medical Licensing Board declared her incompetent as a physician and questioned her mental stability.

Brown informed the audience that there have been numerous attempts on her life. Rivera questioned her on her relationship with the authorities. She responded, "I have a very distant relationship with the authorities because my job is to bring people out, not turn them in to the police. However, I do work with police and FBI pretty extensively. If I know of someone who is not willing to stop what they are doing, I'll be the first one to tip the police off." These conflicting statements were not explored by Rivera at all.

At the end of the program, Rivera provided his audience with the address of a post office box in Chino, California, for those who wanted to obtain information about Brown's book. A check with the post office showed that the box was rented to Chick Publications or Chick Ministries (the records are not precise), yet no mention of the connection between Brown and the extremist Chick Ministries was made by Rivera.

Rivera also introduced several other "experts" on the show, including Maury Terry and Detective Kurt Jackson of the Beaumont, California, Police Department. Jackson affirmed the existence of a vast, organized conspiracy of satanists intent on world domination. According to Jackson, the conspiracy met in Mexico City in 1981; information about its plans was supposedly intercepted

by a fellow law enforcement official.

What Jackson was obliquely referring to was the notorious "WICCA letters." WICCA is supposedly an acronym for the Witches International Coven Council (no one seems to know what the "A" stands for except that it is necessary to make the acronym work, the word "Wicca" being the correct terminology for the earth-spirit-based religion vulgarly known as "witchcraft"). WICCA is supposed to have met in Mexico City in 1981 to draft a plan for world domination. The source of this material seems to be Dave Gaerin, a deputy sheriff in the San Diego County Sheriffs Department. Gaerin reported his "discovery" of these letters in an issue of Exodus, a magazine published by a fundamentalist ministry in San Antonio, Texas. The original article described the "decoding" of these documents, without explaining what that term meant. The CSER research team was unable to locate anyone other than Deputy Gaerin who has ever seen the original documents.

The WICCA letters are clearly modeled after the notorious "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" and are taken seriously only by those who know nothing about occult history and witchcraft. In the WICCA letters, the occult word magic is spelled without the "k"--something that would never be done by anyone actually involved in the occult. Even those who support the notion of an international satanic conspiracy have called the WICCA letters ludicrous.

In all fairness to Rivera, it should be noted that the pressure of producing a daily talk show is tremendous and that talk show staffs often do not have the time or the interest required to thoroughly check credentials. Talk shows do not present facts and validated information; rather, they are "infotainment," shows loosely designed around interview or magazine formats presenting information as entertainment. These shows are never to be given the same credibility as the nightly network news or national news magazines such as Time and Newsweek. However, even with this understood, one would think that, given the scope and seriousness of the allegations made by these people, some checking would have been done. This is especially true in the case of Rivera's NBC special, "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground," since enough time and money certainly were available for adequate research. Of course, with adequate research, there would have been no sensational program, as research would have shown the problem to be nonexistent.

Talk show hosts have a tremendous influence on the public. Geraldo Rivera, Phil Donahue, Sally Jessy Raphael, and Oprah Winfrey, as well as their counterparts in a host of smaller markets, all have a loyal and trusting following. Clearly, this trust is not always merited.

ONE final Satan-monger of note is that grand old man of conspiracy theory and perennial presidential candidate, Lyndon LaRouche. Currently serving time in federal prison for his conviction on fraud and conspiracy charges, LaRouche blames his problems--- and those of much of the world--- on communism, drugs, rock music, humanism, role-playing games, homosexuality, and the New Age movement, which he believes are all part of an international conspiracy to usher in the "New Dark Ages."

LaRouche's organizations publish The New Federalist and Executive Intelligence Review. Their current resident "authority" on occultism is Bruce Director, who tours the country addressing church and community groups under the auspices of the Executive Intelligence Review News Service (EIRNS). His connection with LaRouche is not publicized.

LaRouche also founded the Schiller Institute, which publishes Save Your Child's Life. This pamphlet makes several astounding and absurd claims about witchcraft and satanism, cites false and alarmist statistics, and urges its readers to ban occult books from libraries, close down stores which sell occult or New Age paraphernalia, and stop the sale of rock music in their cities. A second LaRouche pamphlet, "Is Satan in Your Schoolyard?", is distributed by Sue Joyner, a "former occultist" and founder of Watchmen Alert to Cultic Harassment (WATCH), a ministry to witches and satanists. The cover of the pamphlet has a photo of "Satanist Robert McNamara, the former president of the World Bank" and charges that the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City "happens to be one of the major centers for the spread of Satanic sexual violence in North America."

LaRouche has formulated an inventive connection between his current legal problems and Wicca, which he wrongly holds to be a form of devil worship. Judge Williams of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia has ruled that Wicca is a legitimate religion which should be recognized in Virginia prisons; this same federal district court is presided over by Chief Justice Albert V. Bryan, Jr., who was the judge in LaRouche's trial. In addition, Judge John Butzner of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld and expanded the Wicca ruling; Judge Butzner also happens to be the person who denied LaRouche's petition that he and his codefendants remain free on bail pending their appeal. LaRouche also maintains that Mary Sue Terry, the state attorney general of Virginia who prosecuted his case, "announced that she was a drug pusher." (In fact, Terry merely stated publicly that she supported Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke's campaign to de-criminalize drugs.)

{amazon asins=0380015390 align=right}/amazon}TO be accurate, there is organized religious satanism in the United States. It is a small but legitimate minority church, its size and belief structure having nothing to do with its right to exist under the Constitution. The main satanic church, the Church of Satan, was founded in the mid-1960s by Anton Szander LaVey, a former circus animal trainer who was at one time best known for keeping a lion on the back porch of his modest Richmond District home in San Francisco. LaVey is the author of The Satanic Bible, which has reputed sales of over half

a million copies. In the book, LaVey rejects the Christian versions of both God and the devil.

A natural showman, LaVey plays his role well, shaving his head, dressing in sinister clothing, and calling himself "the Black Pope." He has become the main focus of attention for many unenlightened Christian writers who never bothered to read what he has written and therefore have no idea what he believes in. This ignorance has resulted in endless free publicity in markets that LaVey would never have been able to penetrate on his own. His best advertisers have turned out to be well-intentioned Christians writing to "protect" the public.

There are several other, smaller satanic churches and worship groups within the United States, but the total combined membership of organized satanic churches has been authoritatively put at well under one thousand. No member of any of these groups has ever been implicated in any "ritual crimes." Moreover, LaVey's much-maligned Satanic Bible directs the believer not to engage in any antisocial acts; LaVey specifically singles out criminal acts against children, drug abuse, and harming animals as things that are absolutely forbidden by his religion.

Yet, thanks to the hysteria generated by the new witch hunters, millions of dollars and countless work hours are wasted by police agencies in attempts to investigate a nonexistent criminal phenomenon. Inaccurate information supplied by these supposed authorities at police seminars on satanic crime has caused well-intentioned but misled police officers to see occult or ritualistic aspects to crimes where none exist.

This is especially true in reports of satanic or "ritualistic child abuse." According to Inspector Sandi Gallant of the San Francisco Police Department, fewer than one hundred credible reports of "ritual child abuse" have been filed nationally over the past five years. None of those accused were members of any satanic church or identified devil-worshipping 'cult.' Only a fraction of those reports resulted in convictions. Of those cases that did result in conviction, the majority occurred in day care centers and involved a single pedophile or pornographer who, working alone, used "ritualistic" trappings to frighten children into participating and keeping silent. As the CSER report states:

Some allegations of "ritual child abuse" are frivolous. Child abuse allegations can be a powerful weapon in a custody dispute. This, coupled with the fact that interrogation techniques for abused children are highly experimental and have dubious results, makes it even more important that "ritual child abuse" cases be handled carefully and with a healthy amount of skepticism.

It is not as simple as "believing the children" or not, as some would have it. Unfortunately, this aspect of the issue is far too complex to go into in detail in this article. There are organizations such as Victims of Child Abuse Laws (VOCAL), a group of adults falsely accused of child abuse, with many cases on file in which children were coached, threatened, or--through their own malice--chose to lie. This is a dimension of the child abuse problem that requires much more investigation and research by competent professionals.

In a "standard" child abuse case, victims are often required to repeat their story as many as thirty times to a variety of strangers. When the abuse takes on "ritual" or occult trappings, the child has to retell his or her story upwards of ninety times, often being paraded on television to recount the horrors of the experience again and again in order to substantiate some individual's or group's position on satanism. For "the greater good," the child is made to relive the incident over and over, possibly compounding the damage and further postponing any sort of psychological healing.

MOST of the "experts" investigated by the CSER are either fundamentalist Christians or have received most of their information from fundamentalist Christians. Their simplistic approach echoes their religious beliefs: anything that is "occult" is necessarily satanic. Minority religious groups such as Wiccans, Neo-pagans, Santeros, and native Americans have all been accused of practicing devil worship. In other words, if it isn't Christian by the fundamentalists' definition of Christian, it is automatically satanic.

Congress has not been free of the taint of this irrationality. Senator Jesse Helms recently proposed an amendment to a Senate bill that would have eliminated tax exemptions for any religion that "has as a purpose, or that has any interest in the promoting of Satanism, or 'witchcraft' provided 'Satanism' is defined as the worship of Satan or the powers of evil and 'witchcraft' is defined as the use of powers derived from evil spirits, the use of sorcery, or the use of supernatural powers with malicious intent." This means, I suppose, that, if you get your supernatural powers from some other source and do not use them maliciously, you can operate a tax-exempt organization. The question that begs to be asked is: "If I have supernatural powers--from whatever source--why would I care if I had tax-exempt status or not?" Presumably, if the Helms amendment became law, those Christian groups that occasionally pray for the death of selected Supreme Court justices would have their tax-exempt status removed. In my opinion, Senator Helms is to representative democracy what Howdy Doody is to brain surgery.

Minority religions are being persecuted for no other reason than that they appear different and, by some definitions,

"satanic." Both psychological and physical damage is being done in highly localized "rumor panics" that are occurring across the country. Fed by inaccurate and often sensationalized reporting by local media, these situations are quickly capitalized on by the Satan-mongers.

This past Halloween in Tustin, California, for example, a number of cats were found mutilated. Investigators from Orange County Animal Control concluded that increased construction in the nearby foothills had caused a loss of habitat for coyote prey. Coyotes were being forced to invade the urban setting and prey upon cats, the condition of the cats' bodies clearly indicating predator attacks.

A tiny group of "true believers" saw the mutilation of the cats as evidence of "ritual" satanic activity and refused to accept the initial conclusion of the animal control officers. The county was forced into an expensive, in-depth investigation expending hundreds of work hours and tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars to make certain that no "ritual" satanic cat mutilations were taking place. Ron Hudson, chief of Field Services of Orange County Animal Control, told me that, in the interests of full objectivity, the office had all of the mutilated cats submitted to a necropsy by a veterinarian. Over one hundred animals were examined, after which it was duly announced that the evidence was consistent with the animal control investigators' initial conclusion--- that coyotes were preying on the cats.

This was, of course, ignored by the local extremists who exploited the situation by bringing in one or two outside "experts," forming an organization, instituting citizen patrols, and offering a reward for information leading to the arrest of the "satanists" who were perpetrating this atrocity. Although Orange County Animal Control acted promptly and properly, the county taxpayers will have to foot the bill for the hundreds of additional work hours needed to address the rumor panic brought about by a handful of people who believed that satanists were operating locally.

To date, cats killed by coyotes are still being found, but since it is no longer Halloween the media have little interest. It was a perfect Halloween story and received plenty of air time, with the animal control office's correct explanation only occasionally being included--and, even then, the reporter often ended the piece by saying "Regardless of which side you believe...." This is a predilection of the news media that is often overlooked by the general public: the journalistic device of giving equal weight to differing opinions in the interest of "fairness", even when one or more of the opinions have little or no basis in fact. It is easier for the reporter to report all views than to dig for the truth. This disposition of the media creates in the minds of the viewing or reading public the impression that all opinions have equal weight, when often they don't. Inflammatory groups such as those discussed here frequently consist of five or six people who are savvy enough to call a press conference and little else. This sort of reporting does not inform the public and does more harm than good.

The CSER report offers several recommendations to those interested in investigating satanism or supposed occult crimes:

- * Consult only credible experts. Avoid those who tell "survivor" or "breeder" stories unless and until their allegations are borne out by law enforcement investigations. Seminars on occult crime featuring these people should be avoided. The CSER report provides a list of experts whose information was found to be reliable and accurate.

- * Do not rule out talking to practitioners of the occult. Most occultists are law-abiding citizens and are quite willing to aid the police. Occultists are no more likely to protect one of their own than Catholics are likely to protect a fellow Catholic, and so on.

- * Concentrate on the central aspects of a crime and treat any occult trappings as peripheral. Do not go after larger conspiracies on general principle; do so only if the evidence in the case directly suggests such a conspiracy is involved.

- * Whenever possible, actively inform the public about the truths and myths of "satanic" crime. Critical investigation is more easily carried out in an atmosphere free of hysteria.

From the evidence provided in the CSER report, we can come to several conclusions:

- * There is no vast, organized satanic conspiracy in the United States.

- * Tens of thousands of children are not being "ritually sacrificed" every year.

- * The organized satanic groups that exist in the United States are small, legitimate minority religions which are protected by the U.S. Constitution. All of these groups expressly forbid murder, child abuse of any kind, and the "ritual" harming of animals.

- * "Ritualized child abuse" exists only on a very small scale. The ritual trappings are used as a tool to scare the victim into silence and are not part of some religious service.

- * Criminal acts attributed to satanists or devil worshippers are the acts of individuals or small groups of three or four

people who are not associated with other such groups. These self-styled "satanists" usually make up their own rituals and use devil worship to justify their antisocial behavior.

* Devotion to Satan or some evil force by individuals who commit antisocial acts is a symptom of their mental illness--not the cause of their behavior. Those "satanic" murderers who have been investigated have turned out to be individuals whose hatred of society, was manifested in devil worship and antisocial behavior-- not caused by it.

* For a variety of reasons-- including religious fanaticism, mental illness, bereavement, and outright opportunism-- a small number of people continue to perpetuate an industry of fear on a credible public to no good end.

Finally to fully understand this contemporary social phenomenon, we have to turn to history and the themes of traditional folklore. In his research on the great witch hunt in Europe from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, historian Norman Cohn discovered a single enduring paranoid theme: that somewhere in the midst of the larger society there lurks another society-- small, well-organized, and clandestine-- that threatens the existence of the larger society and is addicted to inhuman practices. Cohn found that this was a recurrent myth throughout human history. Ironically, this myth first appeared during the second century and was directed against the early Christians. It had its antecedents in earlier anti-Jewish polemics. Its most infamous recent appearance was in Nazi Germany, where it was used against the Jews. Its latest incarnation is the current wave of anti-satanist hysteria promoted by fundamentalist Christians and others with their own secret agenda. These modern-day witch hunters are distinguished by their use of modern communications technology to spread ancient foolishness.

As should be obvious by now, this article is in no way to be construed as an endorsement of belief in satanism. As an ethical humanist, I deplore the exposition of all nonsense, regardless of the label attached to it. However, this is a religiously and philosophically pluralistic society in which many belief systems are allowed to exist and flourish, no matter how disturbing those beliefs are to some. This is the price that must be paid if society is to remain free. The best answer to nonsense is good people continuing to speak out against it.

David Alexander has made his living as a professional magician, mentalist, and private investigator. He is currently the owner of Centerline Press, a small book publishing company.

The primary source for this article was Satanism in America by Shawn Carlson, Ph.D., and Gerald A. Larue, Ph.D., with Gerry O'Sullivan, April A. Masche, and D. Hudson Frew; special appendices by Kenneth Lanning, Robert Hicks, and Michael Stackpole. The report is available from Gaia Press, Box 466, El Cerrito, CA 94530, for \$12.95 plus \$1.50 postage.