

The Legends(s) of John Todd

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THE BEWITCHING OF THE CHURCHES

It is an embarrassment to have to write about the John Todd phenomenon (see page 38). Several Christian leaders who travel the nation nonetheless tell us that Todd is the most talked-about topic of these days. Letters continually land on editorial desks, asking in effect, "Is what John Todd is saying true?"

No, it is not. Todd was not at the pinnacle of a witches' conspiracy for global conquest as he claims to have been. He has not launched key organizations of the charismatic movement or the modern gospel music industry by signing a few checks for them from witch headquarters. He has not been to many of the places (like Duke University and Viet Nam) he says he has been.

His memory is fitful. He cannot even seem to remember his right age from one reporter to the next. Important details of the story he tells change from town to town. In 1973 he was a hero among certain charismatics. By 1978 he was well received as a supposedly converted witch by certain strongly anti-charismatic fundamentalists. Among them he tended to keep quiet about his former charismatic ties.

Todd has told many people about his conversion under Baptist auspices in San Antonio in 1972, but he has not breathed a word about how as early as 1968 he was a penniless storefront preacher in Phoenix who left trinitarian Pentecostalism for the Jesus Only brand. Instead he seems to indicate to his modern-day followers than in the sixties he was up to his amulet in witchly affairs.

Affairs? He has had many, according to the evidence. Indeed, even the legitimate witches blush: he has, they say, given the craft a black mark.

Some people call Todd an out-and-out liar. Some think he is out to make Bible-believing churches look silly--- a sort of witch's version of a practical joke. Others think he is an emissary of Satan sent to confuse and divide Christians. What we find almost incredible, and certainly depressing, is to learn of the number of Christians who have believed him. It is for this reason that we are devoting so much space to the subject.

Considerable evidence suggests Todd to be a sick man who must be helped before someone is shot to death. He has exploited and abused those who have believed in him. What is needed is for people to stop believing in him so that he can be helped. In this respect his best friends may be his worst enemies. Love and prayer, yes. Submission, no.

And what of the Christians who have been accepting Todd and his message? Realizing how they allowed themselves to be misled, they might become aware of how their defective love for brethren with whom they disagree made them easy prey for someone like Todd. One can disagree with distinctive charismatic doctrines, with political decisions of President Carter, or with the nature of certain religious music without blaming it all on witches.

We can learn too from the response to Todd. Some of us are altogether too gullible--- too quick to believe negative reports about those with whom we disagree, and not quick enough to believe substantiated negative reports about people who tell us what we were already inclined to accept. Many unscrupulous individuals take advantage of gullible Christians who would not be duped by a Jim Jones, but then give credence to the claims of a John Todd.

Those who accepted a key element in Todd's logic ought to be ashamed. The absence of evidence does not prove that one is telling the truth. If Todd said he fought in Viet Nam and murdered an officer in Germany but that no records are available because the Pentagon destroyed them, then our inability to confirm Todd's statements does not become proof that he is telling the truth. Records could be lost or destroyed, but in that case the assertion remains unsupported.

After one California pastor discovered some of the truth about Todd, he confessed in essence that he had allowed himself to be deceived, and he apologized for having had Todd in the pulpit.

That is the kind of apology that needs to be heard from quite a few pulpits.

THE LEGEND(S) OF JOHN TODD

Is witch-turned-evangelist John Todd a prophet sent from God to warn America about an impending takeover by sinister forces, or a fraud?

Fundamentalists across America disagree over the question, charismatic leaders are fighting mad, and some supporters

are stockpiling food, stashing weapons, and building fortified "retreat" hide-aways in preparation for a last stand against the hordes of evil.

Todd, 29, meanwhile has announced that he is through. He told friends in the Los Angeles area last month that he has been shot at frequently and that his house was firebombed. Therefore, he said, he will take no more speaking engagements; he, his wife, and three children will head for a secret retreat location.

"I tried to wake up the people in this country," he is quoted as saying. "But they didn't want to listen."

Until a year ago Todd was unknown in most church circles. On January 1, 1978, he joined independent Faith Baptist Church in Conoga Park, California. That same day he headed East where a speaking tour had been arranged by Pastor Tom Berry of the 3,000-member Bible Baptist Church in Elkton, Maryland. The tour, which began with two meetings in the Elkton church, was prolonged as word spread about Todd's sensational revelations.

"We've had many great preachers in our pulpit, but there was more talk around town after he left than with any other preacher we've had," reported Pastor Dino Pedrone of the Open Door Church in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where Todd addressed more than 1,000 people last February.

Pedrone, who had invited Todd on Berry's recommendation, recorded Todd's talks and circulated copies of them widely. The church, he said, gave Todd about \$1,000 for a rehabilitation center for ex-witches that Todd supposedly was establishing. (Pedrone says he has reservations about Todd now, and that he would probably not invite him back.)

In June, a reporter covered Todd's appearance at a large Baptist church in Zionsville, Indiana, and United Press International flashed the story across the nation. Meanwhile, taped cassettes of his messages were being circulated everywhere, often anonymously. And for every person with reservations about Todd, there were others, including Berry, who seemed convinced that Todd's messages were authentic.

Berry has produced a manual, "The Christian During Riot and After Revolution," that incorporates Todd's views. It includes a section on "the morality of killing," and tells Christians to buy weapons and ammunition, and to build retreats.

As Todd tells it, he was born into witchcraft and became a Grand Druid high priest in the Illuminati, a secret group of powerful conspirators, which, Todd says, plans a world takeover. He says he was also a member of the "Council of Thirteen," one of the chosen few who rank just below the world-ruling Rothschild family, Jewish bankers with roots in eighteenth-century Europe who Todd claims are really demons.

Todd says he joined the army to establish covens of witches, that he became a decorated Green Beret in Viet Nam, and that he was later transferred to Germany, where he killed a former commanding officer in a two-hour shootout in Stuttgart. He says the Illuminati got him out of jail and that the Pentagon destroyed all his military records.

The Illuminati, Todd says, have already begun implementing their plans for a world takeover. He says an upheaval is slated in the United States in 1979. Todd also publicly claims that President Jimmy Carter is the Anti-Christ, and that his sister Ruth Carter Stapelton is a leading high priestess of witchcraft who taught Todd the finer points of the bewitching arts. The President, Todd alleges, takes orders directly "from the Rothschilds."

According to Todd, Carter would push through legislation that would outlaw private ownership of guns, remove tax exemptions from all churches except those associated with the National Council of Churches, ban conversion to another religion, and prohibit the storing of food and medicine. The Rothschilds, Todd alleges, will create a false fuel shortage, confiscate all guns, and call for the murder and torture of all Christians (whose names have been stored in computers). Congress will be suspended and martial law established, with one policeman for every five people. There will be economic chaos.

To survive, Todd says, Christians must arm themselves, build up food supplies to last five years, hide in wilderness fortresses, and kill attackers.

The worldwide conspiracy is so extensive that Christians can trust no one today, not even America's best-known evangelical preachers and lay leaders, says Todd. He charges that while he was a high-ranking witch he sent an \$8 million check to Pastor Chuck Smith of famed Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, to set up the Maranatha music company and launch "Jesus rock" music. (Smith denied the charge in his church publication.)

Todd claims that he delivered \$35 million to founder Demos Shakarian of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship; he alleges that Shakarian is a leading figure in the Illuminati. The witches, Todd says, also helped build Melody-land Christian Center in Anaheim, whose pastor--- Ralph Wilkerson--- is part of the conspiracy. Todd similarly implicates the CBN and PTL Christian television networks and their leaders. He hints that glossolia, itself, is an invention of witches.

In a recent attack, Todd alleged that television preacher Jerry Falwell, a non-charismatic, was "bought off" with a \$50

million check during a trip to the Middle East. (When some of his hard-core followers expressed dismay, Todd tried to have the remark erased from the tapes, according to an informant.) Falwell's church, Thomas Road Baptist in Lynchburg, Virginia, last month returned Todd's fire with a blistering editorial against Todd in the church newspaper, which is sent to many of Falwell's TV viewers.

Incredible as it all seems, thousands of church members, including a number of pastors, have apparently accepted all or most of Todd's message as gospel truth--- despite statements of outrage and denial by charismatic leaders, along with protests by experts in occult studies that Todd's accounts are simply false.

Most of Todd's listeners have assumed that he is also telling the truth about his conversion from witchcraft to Christianity, an event that took place in San Antonio in October, 1972, according to his testimony in numerous churches last year.

He says he embraced Christianity after reading a Chick Publications tract, seeing the movie *The Cross and the Switchblade*, and being exposed to the ministries of a Christian coffeehouse and the Castle Hills Baptist Church. The church pastor at that time, Jack Taylor, affirms that Todd indeed had made a profession of faith, though little else was known about him. Taylor later uncovered discrepancies in Todd's accounts and since has become a Todd critic.

STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN

"Strange things began to happen" when Todd returned to California from his first eastern tour in early April, 1978, says Pastor Roland Rasmussen of Faith Baptist in Canoga Park. Todd claimed several times that he had been shot at in the vicinity of the church parking lot.

Todd told Rasmussen that he had gone through a period of backsliding. He said he had sold occult books from a store he ran for a while in Dayton, Ohio, but emphasized he had never gone back into occult activity.

Then one of Todd's friends in the congregation, occult researcher Mike Griffin, informed the pastor about a startling discovery. Griffin had borrowed from Todd a recording made from a television newscast of a meeting the "ex-witch" had conducted in Ventura, California. Listening to it privately, Griffin heard more than the brief newscast since the taped cassette had also been used to record an earlier meeting where Todd was instructing would-be witches how to mix potions and cast spells. Todd's own statements during the recorded class session indicate that it was held on March 3, 1976, in the Dayton store known as *The Witches Caldron* [sic], and that he had been involved in occult practices since at least the previous March.

(On the tape, Todd--- his "witch name" is Lance Collins--- makes such statements as "I feel witchcraft is more powerful than Christianity" and "we're not Christians.")

Rasmussen called a meeting of the deacons on May 27, when they confronted Todd with excerpts of the tape. The pastor also reminded Todd that he carried no gun--- contrary to what Todd had told an Indiana audience from personal knowledge a short time earlier. Todd, offering virtually no explanation, shrugged and left--- after retrieving his automatic pistol that tumbled from his hip pocket when he got up from his chair. On the next night, the church voted unanimously to eject Todd from membership and remove endorsement of his ministry.

Rasmussen was introduced to Todd in June, 1977, by Jack Chick of Chick Publications in nearby Cucamonga, and Rasmussen was in turn introduced to Berry. Chick, a Baptist, says he first heard Todd in 1973 at a meeting of charismatic evangelist Doug Clark's "Amazing Prophecies" group. Impressed, Chick featured Todd in several Christian comic-book stories. Despite the controversy, he still believes Todd, though he admits to "not knowing what to believe" about Todd's charge that prominent charismatic ministers are agents of the Illuminati.

SUPPORT FROM CLERGY

Berry and four other prominent Baptist ministers, along with several associates, met with Todd at Villa Baptist Church in Indianapolis. They later released a paper reaffirming their beliefs that Todd is genuinely born again, that he is sincerely trying to serve Christ, and that his accounts of experiences in the ruling circles of witchcraft "are reliable reports."

Todd, however, hit the road again with a heavy schedule of meetings, some of them arranged by Berry. At a closed meeting of nearly 3,000 pastors and lay leaders hosted by Berry in a Maryland restaurant, Todd again recounted his experiences as a witch and as a member of the Illuminati. He also retraced his conversion in 1972 in San Antonio.

But Todd apparently didn't tell everything. CHRISTIANITY TODAY has learned, for example, that Todd showed up in Phoenix early in 1968 as a 19-year-old storefront preacher with a wife named Linda and her four-year-old child Tanya. While staying with relatives, he called Pastor James Outlaw of the Jesus Name Church and asked to be rebaptized. Todd said he had been studying the teachings of William Brannam and wanted to be rebaptized in the name of Jesus only. (Brannam taught that God manifests himself in different ways but is always Jesus.)

Todd testified to Outlaw that he had been a witch while in "the navy" but was converted while attending a storefront Pentacostal church in southern California.

Outlaw says Todd disappeared and returned months later without Linda. Todd explained that God had given them a prophecy to split up and seek other mates. The pastor says he and his wife admonished Todd about the error of such thinking but nevertheless helped him get a job as a busboy in a Mexican restaurant. Then Todd disappeared again and did not return until late 1972 or early 1973. Outlaw introduced Todd this time to Pentecostal Ken Long, a local leader of the Jesus movement who operated the "Open Door" coffeehouse.

Long, who has since switched from Pentecostalism and become pastor of Bible Heritage Free Will Baptist Church in Phoenix, enlisted Todd as a coffeehouse worker. "Things began happening," declares Long. "John Todd did miracles." Long says he watched Todd heal a handicapped youth's leg.

On one such excursion, Long and Todd met Sharon Garver in San Antonio. She returned with them to Phoenix and married Todd in August, 1973. Meanwhile, Long says he began getting reports that Todd was trying to seduce teenage girls at the coffeehouse. (Two later confessed that they had sexual relations with him.) Four girls revealed that Todd wanted them to form a witches coven and that he told them that he was still in witchcraft. Long later removed Todd from the coffeehouse ministry.

Todd drifted from job to job and then struck paydirt. He gave his "testimony" for a Christian TV station. He claimed that the Illuminati were financing some fundamentalist churches, that he had been the Kennedy family's personal warlock ("John F. Kennedy was not really killed; I just came back from a visit with him on his yacht"), and that he had witnessed the stabbing of a girl by Senator George McGovern in an act of sacrifice.

More than \$25,000 was pledged during the telethon and management offered to employ Todd--- who was then, reportedly, packing a .38 snub-nosed revolver. He eventually declined. Doug Clark heard of Todd and invited him to appear on his "Amazing Prophecies" show. Overnight Todd became a hit in charismatic circles in southern California, and he and Sharon moved to Santa Ana.

Soon the Todds were hosting dozens of young people at a weekly Bible study in their home. A few young people were converted, said Sharon, but there were distressing things, too. She said that Todd was blending elements of witchcraft with his Christian teaching and seducing some of the girls, several of whom confided in leaders at Melodyland Christian Center. In an ugly confrontation with Melodyland church leaders around Christmas, 1973, Todd denied the charges and stormed out.

A MATTER OF RECORDS

Clark denounced Todd on TV, and the Todds headed back to San Antonio. Throughout their marriage Todd had been using drugs, says Sharon, and he was dropping in and out of witchcraft. He spoke of trying to reinlist in the army (he had served from February, 1969, to July, 1970), and he obtained his army records. (Although he is still telling audiences that the records do not exist, CHRISTIANITY TODAY has obtained a copy that shows he spent only twenty-five days overseas--- in Germany, not Viet Nam.)

Family members say that Todd was witnessing to Sharon's relatives about Christ but at the same time was trying to enlist them in witchcraft, apparently for sexual reasons. He made Sharon's teenage sister pregnant, alleged both Sharon and the sister. The latter says she finally received Christ several months ago, but had been turned off to Christianity almost completely by Todd. (Todd declined to be interviewed for this report.)

Finally, the lanky 6'4" Todd left Sharon in mid-1974 and went to Dayton where he met Sheila Spoonmore. The pair apparently lived together for about two years before getting married. During this period Todd operated The Witches Caldron [sic]. He attracted the attention of local authorities when parents of teenage girls complained he was corrupting their children's morals. One 16-year-old finally agreed to tell the police what was going on at Todd's house and store. She said that witchcraft initiation rites were carried out in the nude, and that Todd had forced her to have oral sex.

Todd pleaded guilty to contributing to the unruliness of a minor and served two months of a six-month sentence in a county institution. Chick and a lawyer succeeded in getting him released early for medical reasons. (He was said to be having seizures.) He was placed on five years' probation which he promptly broke by leaving the state. He travelled to Phoenix, where Ken Long got him a job as a cook in a steak house. "Todd swore he was out of witchcraft for good," says Long, "but after only two weeks on the job he was talking to two girls about plans to open up an occult bookstore." Todd, however, abruptly left town, and Long has not seen him since.

Todd's occult operation in Dayton held a temporary charter as the Watchers Church of Wicca under the National Church and School of Wicca, headquartered in New Bern, North Carolina. Todd appealed to Wicca head Gavin Frost and civil rights specialist Isaac Bonnowitz [sic] to help him with the police problems in Dayton. Both men investigated quietly, and

Frost announced their findings in the Wicca news letter: "We found absolutely no foundation for the charges of persecution made by the Todds; rather, we found a very negative situation conducted by an ex-Satanist, ex-Christian priest as a cover for sexual perversion and drug abuse. Todd is armed and dangerous, and any activity by him should immediately be reported to the Church of Wicca." Todd's police record shows that a felony warrant was issued against him in New Mexico for passing a bad check. He was arrested in Columbus in 1968 for malicious destruction of property. He was treated for drug overdose at an army installation in Maryland in 1969. A warrant for his arrest awaits him in Ohio, as does a judgement against him for \$22,000 in a defamation case.

Todd claims many of the police are associated with Freemasonry, an Illuminati organization, and therefore should be considered enemies. In an interview, Berry said he thinks the theory is a plausible one. The freemasonry is what forced Strom Thurmond off the Bob Jones University board after Todd spread the word that the senator is a mason.

Todd was given psychiatric examinations twice while in the army. His records indicate evidence of an unstable home background and possible brain damage as a result of beatings. The second examination a few months later labeled his malady "emotional instability with pseudologica phantastica." Todd finds it difficult to tell reality from fantasy, says a medical report. It spoke of homicidal threats he had made on another, false suicide reports, and a severe personality disturbance. It saw no hope for change and recommended Todd's discharge.

Pastor Clifford Wicks of the 850-member Grace Brethren Church in Somerset, Pennsylvania, cancelled Todd after he delivered the third of four scheduled messages in his church last month.

Wicks said reaction to Todd was mixed and that some persons experienced revival. However, Wicks reported one particularly disturbing reaction to Todd. Some people in the community, expressing a sense of dismay and helplessness at the coming events as predicted by Todd, said: "Pastor, we will not allow them to torture our families; we have decided that we will kill our children before that happens."

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CONCLUSION: Without a doubt, John Todd has one of the most amazing stories about "the international Satanic conspiracy" of any person reportedly speaking for the Lord Jesus Christ today. In 1978 we were flooded with cassette tapes of his talks in churches, but free speech is free indeed within the auditorium of a local church. The complexion changes when rigidly put in black type on white paper, or broadcast over public communications media. Therefore, when we were deluged with requests to present Todd's message over our radio ministry, we asked him to document everything he had said. After the initial contact, when Mr. Todd agreed to be a guest speaker, providing documentation would be given, we never heard from him again. Anyone can accuse others of anything, or promote himself to any desired degree, as long as he is not asked to prove it. It was apparent to us from the questions fielded by Mr. Todd that he had been associated with witchcraft; all other claims and statements had to be accepted strictly on faith that he was telling the truth. Anyone making charges against so many prominent personalities should be willing to offer documentation.

We have no vendetta against John Todd. We reprinted the preceding article because we were deluged by requests for information about him. Perhaps the information from Christianity Today will encourage him to refute these accusations with proof of past activities and associations.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4:1)