

VII THE OCCULT

INTRODUCTION

Not to believe in the existence of Satan and his influence is extremely dangerous, for this is just the attitude that will allow Satan to capture your heart. It is a form of backsliding and evidence of a weakening faith so that even in the church of Christ and in the proclamation of the gospel these demonic powers are increasingly ignored. (Kuyper, trans. 1991, p. 58)

One of the startling things that has happened in recent history is the penetration of western society by eastern mysticism, satanism, and the occult. There is a revival of interests in evil spirits, demon possession, and exorcism. In 1991, *Time* magazine featured an article on the mystery of evil (Morrow, 1991, pp. 48-53). Advocates of occultism have attempted to legitimize it by pointing to parapsychology and graphology as two fields in which the claim to scientific status is often advanced (Elwell, Ed., 1984, p. 787). It simply presents itself as a kind of spirituality which is in keeping with contemporary science (International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education [IAPCHE], 1992, p. 130). In evangelical circles, Frank Peretti's novels, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*, which deal with the interaction of demons and angels with human beings, have become bestsellers.

DEFINITION OF THE OCCULT

The term refers to "hidden" or "secret" wisdom; to that which is beyond the range of ordinary human knowledge; to mysterious or concealed phenomena; to inexplicable events. It is frequently used in reference to certain practices (occult "arts") which include divination, fortune-telling, spiritism (necromancy), and magic. (Elwell, Ed., 1984, p. 787)

WITCHCRAFT AND SATANISM IN CANADA

Witchcraft

The term witchcraft is derived from the Old English "wicce" (female magician) and "wicca" (male magician). It is related to wiccan, the "practice of magical arts." Witchcraft is sometimes considered the performance of magic for evil ends. Witches are thought to be in league with cosmic forces of evil (Crim, Ed., 1981, p. 805).

Witchcraft has cast its spell on a growing number of Canadians. Lucie DuFresne, manager of an Occult Shop in Ottawa, ON is a practitioner of the Wiccan religion. She says that being a Wiccan means believing in the Goddess of the Earth, of nature. Because of the tolerance shown to Wiccans, the number of witches in Canada has grown rapidly. More than 300 known witches practise their craft in Ottawa. Experts estimate that up to 50,000 Canadians practise the Wiccan religion. A *Toronto Star* article, sympathetic to "white" witchcraft, told the story of Leslie Carter, a modern-day witch and priestess in the Covenant of the Serpent's Wing. Her group is one of the many in Toronto following the pagan Wiccan religion (McAteer, August, 1991).

Satanism

The practice of witchcraft is not the same as Satanism, though from a Christian perspective the two are obviously related. "White" witches, for example, claim that their powers do not come from Satan. Real Satanists boast that their religion is the oldest in the world, having its origin in the Garden of Eden.

Across North America, Satanists have been prosecuted for or linked to murders, kidnappings, child abuse, cannibalism, mutilations, grave robbings, and church desecrations. Alberta's leading authority on satanic-cult crime, RCMP constable Jim Brown, believes that "there could be a very strong connection between children and satanic cults. Children have a strong significance in satanic rituals, and there are suggestions that they may be used [in the rituals]" (Kinsella, March, 1987). The Calgary Police Service and the RCMP reported that in Calgary alone there are supposedly 5,000 practising Satanists (Kinsella, March, 1987). In 1987, a Hamilton, ON court made two little girls and their infant sister Crown wards and denied their parents access to them. The two girls had told chilling stories of belonging to a satanic cult, which practised cannibalism and bestiality. Joan Belford of the child services branch of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services says, "Some kids are showing evidence of disturbance that is different from anything anybody else has ever seen and they can't categorize it or explain it any other way than by saying some very traumatic ritualistic experience has happened" (MacLeod, March, 1990).

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The Bible reveals the existence of a spiritual world. There are two kinds of spirits-angels and demons. The demons are subject to the rule of Satan. They have influence on the earth, not only in the spiritual realm, but also in the physical, visible, and material. The demons misuse their powers in their attempt to destroy both God's earth and the human race.

Throughout history each tribe and nation has practised witchcraft in some form. In the Old Testament, Israel had to contend with Canaanite sorcerers (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 2 Chronicles 33:1-6). Sorcery was punishable by death. In the New Testament, Jesus battled Satan in the wilderness before he began his public ministry (Luke 4:1-13). There are repeated accounts of Jesus casting out demons. The book of Acts records the accounts of the magicians Simon Magus and Elymas (Acts 8:9; 13:8). The apostle Paul says that Christians are involved in a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12). He also spoke of "the deceitful spirits" who teach "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). But the New Testament also testifies that the devil and his cohorts are defeated enemies (Colossians 2:15).

REASONS FOR THE RISE OF THE OCCULT

Modern occultism is a reaction to Western rationalism and a mechanistic worldview, the denial of the supernatural in liberal theology, the influence of eastern mysticism, and the chaos and complexity of our times. Os Guinness claims that it is also a reaction to the failure of atheism. Atheism has suddenly produced an entirely new and

deeply religious era, an era whose central traits are the mystical and the subjective and whose by-products are the contentless, the counterfeit, and the confused. (Guinness, March, 1974)

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCULT

According to R. M. Enroth, professor of sociology at Westmont College in California, occult phenomena have the following distinct characteristics:

1. disclosure and communication of information unavailable to human beings through normal means (beyond the five senses);
2. placing of persons in contact with supernatural powers, paranormal energies, or demonic forces;
3. acquisition and mastery of power in order to manipulate or influence other people into certain actions. (Elwell, Ed., 1984, p. 787)

OCCULT PRACTICES

Necromancy

Necromancy, or spirit communications, also called spiritism, is the practice of calling up the spirits of the dead and communing with them in order to maintain fellowship or to predict the future (Crim, Ed., 1981, p. 535). This practice is strictly prohibited by Scripture (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6; Isaiah 8:19f ; 1 Chronicles 10:13). The most remarkable and clearest case of necromancy in the Bible is King Saul's visit to the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:1-25).

In modern necromancy, messages from the "other side" of the grave are received through seances, trances, mediums, table-turning, and ouija boards (Green, 1981, p. 120).

Fortune Telling

Fortune telling is primarily concerned with having power over the future. It includes astrology, palmistry, card-laying (tarot), and clairvoyance (Koch, 1970, p. 19).

Drugs and the Occult

The Dutch philosopher W. J. Ouweneel claims that drug users connect through their trips with occult powers. He says that the drug users' experience is a substitute for a real spiritual experience. Whatever he receives comes from the "father of lies" (Ouweneel, 1988, pp. 136f).

Occult Games

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), a popular version of several fantasy role-playing games, has been criticized for its occult overtones. The introduction to the official *D&D Players Handbook* contains the following statement:

This game lets all your fantasies come true. This is a world where monsters, dragons, gods and evil high priests, fierce demons, and even

the gods themselves may enter your character's life. Enjoy, for this game is what dreams are made of (Dokupil, 1982, p. 3)

The ouija board (the name combines the French and German words for "yes"), also has a strong occult link (Parker, 1990, p. 15). This game is used for fortune telling and communication with the spirits of the dead.

Gambling

Abraham Kuyper links gambling with the occult. He includes it with other types of games that encourage belief in the effect of a mysterious fate on our lives (Kuyper, trans. 1991, p. 64).

Magic

Kurt Koch defines magic as the attempt at knowing and ruling the spirit, human, animal, and plant worlds, together with the world of dead matter, through extrasensory means with the aid of the mystical and accompanying ceremonies (Koch, 1962, p. 20). It is the attempt to bring the spirit world under one's knowledge and control. Magic has been divided into white and black categories. The black magician is supposed to subjugate his enemies; the white magician seeks to help friends. But both are alien to God (Green, 1981, p. 118).