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News Media Kidnapped by Satanists!

by John Thomas

The recent grisly murders in Matamoros, Mexico have raised media interest in Satanism to new and feverish levels. Even after law-enforcement officials emphasized that the Matamoros "cult" was basically a drug ring and that the cultic beliefs involved were probably related to the Caribbean religion palo mayombe, the local TV newscasts still headlined nightly stories about the "Satanist cult." Knowing a good attention-grabber when they see one, local editors and news directors got busy with articles and stories about Satanism. In April, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* carried a front-page story by Kathy Sanders titled "Satanism's wings cast shadow on corners of North Texas." The article claimed "[Satanism's] practitioners may range from mere dabblers who don't know exactly what they're getting into to an international network of families born into Satanism." The story offered plenty of anecdotes about the dabblers but not a scrap of evidence about the fearful "international network."

In May, all the broadcast TV stations carried special series on Satanism, with channels 4 and 8 giving it the most play. Channel 4 began its telecast with a dark and stormy night and simulated lightning flashes. Channel 8's Tracy Rowlett began his program by asking "Is evil our doing or are we directed by more sinister, even Satanic forces?" Mercifully, neither station sank to the level of Geraldo Rivera and his sleaze-TV special on devil worship last October. The Channel 8 story even interviewed a skeptic, who suggested that media overkill might long since have been reached. The Channel 8 series ended with a meeting of parents concerned about Satanism. Reporter Matt Quinn concluded that "The meeting was less about cults than it was about what people believe about cults and other things."

By June, *D Magazine* was ready with "Satanic Curses" by Carlton Stowers. The article concentrated on the growing interest of local teenagers in the occult, magic and satanic paraphernalia. Stowers made a strong case that young people pick up the accouterments of Satanism from trashy popular culture and often end up in unhealthy, anti-social and even criminal behavior. However, he avoided completely buying into the allegations of some self-styled Satanism experts that organized secret societies practicing murder, black magic and human sacrifice exist.

What about the stories of a wide-spread network of secret and murderous Satanic cults? Are devil worshippers all around us, apparently leading normal lives, passing as doctors, business executives, lawyers, even law-enforcement officers? Most of these allegations come indirectly through sensational stories in the popular media, and directly from a few law-enforcement officials who are making careers out of chasing elusive Satanists. Another source is the group of Satanist "experts" and consultants who travel about the country, speaking at law-enforcement seminars and similar meetings. Should we be skeptical that such "high-level" Satanists are real? Darn right, we should, and the reason is that there is no evidence that such organized cults exist.

In an excellent two-part series in the *Richmond News Leader* this April, reporter Rex Springston investigated the Satanic cult allegations and consulted experts in law enforcement, mental health and academic research. His conclusion: such high-level Satanic cults are a "national myth." Springston reports that millions of dollars and untold hours have been spent nationally investigating allegations of cult activities, with no apparent success. The FBI's Kenneth V. Lanning, the Bureau's expert on sex crimes against children, says: "Total up the stories and people are alleging the murders of hundreds of thousands of people, and we don't have a clue. If you believe this, this is the greatest ... criminal conspiracy in the history of mankind. Nobody is this good." Robert D. Hicks, a Virginia criminal justice analyst who is writing a book on Satanism, calls the stories "one big self-delusion ... an urban legend." Springston's consultants believe that the "survivor" accounts are most likely explained as delusions of mentally disturbed people. Many such people may be victims of real, but not Satanic, abuse. According to Dr. Martin T. Orne, a nationally known University of Pennsylvania psychologist, "People get deluded and go to therapists and tell them crazy stories. The therapists, instead of helping them with these crazy stories, start to believe it."

All of Springston's experts point to the a simple fact that deflates the organized-cult stories; namely, that there is no evidence of such activities. Thousands of people are supposedly murdered, yet we get few missing-person reports and find no bodies. Mothers in satanic families are supposedly bearing babies for human sacrifice, yet not one ever has second thoughts or goes to the police. None of the stories of people claiming to be cult survivors can be verified or corroborated. More than forty investigations of Satanic child abuse have been launched, Springston reports. There have been hundreds of arrests, but few convictions, with those convictions not depending on evidence of a Satanic conspiracy. What do the Satanism alarmists have to say about this? They often claim that the total lack of evidence is proof that Satanists are at work! Satanists are so skilled, for instance, at destroying bodies or removing traces of blood, that their killings leave no physical evidence. Therefore, no evidence is evidence. This is the old fallacy of the Argument From Ignorance, trotted out again to prove whatever the proponent would like to be true. Lack of evidence, of course, can prove anything. Perhaps Whitley Strieber is right, and UFO aliens are at work, not Satanists? Take your pick.

Many people are interested in the occult and may take the reality of black magic, unseen forces and psychic powers for granted. You only need look at the hundreds of shelf-feet devoted to such topics in our major bookstores to be convinced. According to Carlton Stowers' article, Anton LaVey's 1969 low-life classic, *The Satanic Bible*, is a hot seller in Dallas. No doubt also, a disturbing number of young people are affecting the trappings of a vaguely defined Satanism, as they understand it from pop culture. And, given these trends, we can easily believe that persons who think that black magic is real, and that the secret Satanic cults do exist are easy prey for criminal gangs which exploit these beliefs for control. But the reality of secret, high-level murderous devil-worshipping cults? Don't buy it.

The topic has many dimensions. It takes in the occult, pseudoscience, the social psychology of superstition and mass hysteria, the role of the news and entertainment media in passing on and amplifying urban myths, and more. Satanism seems to attract and congeal the free floating fears and discontents of middle America. What are the roots of random murder, sexual abuse of children, the rising violence and power of drug gangs, the faceless anonymity of urban life, the nihilistic posturing of many youth? Could it be the power of Satan? Personifying evil and assuming impossible conspiracies may oddly relieve anxiety, but do little to solve real problems. We need a rigorous analysis of the evidence for present-day Satanic activities as well as a cultural history of these beliefs. In the meantime, we can reserve judgment on the wilder claims of Satanic activity until we get some evidence to back them up.

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A Critical Look at Creationist Credentials

By Ronnie Hastings, Rick Neeley and John Thomas

Rev. Carl E. Baugh, the Paluxy River creationist and fossil man-track advocate, claims to hold a master's degree in archaeology from Pacific College and a doctor of philosophy degree from the College of Advanced Education. Rev. Baugh makes these claims on the back of his book *Dinosaurs*. The letterhead of the Creation Evidences Museum also refers to Rev. Baugh's Ph.D. He is usually referred to as "Dr. Baugh" by the newsletter of the local Metroplex Institute of Origin Science. Since such impressive credentials can carry a lot of weight in the creation/evolution debate, we thought it worthwhile to examine them carefully.

Rev. Baugh's Ph.D. dissertation was submitted to the College of Advanced Education in Irving, Texas (said to be the "Graduate Division of the International Baptist College") in conjunction with Pacific International University. His vita makes no mention of archaeology, but mentions a "Master of Arts, Luther Rice in conjunction with Pacific College of Graduate Studies". The dissertation submitted by Rev. Baugh contains no listing of his graduate committee. Though it is supposed to be on anthropology, it has little anthropological content. The writing is more an antievolutionary tract. Its extensive section on missions is the work of someone else photocopied and inserted. It contains Christian evangelical language more appropriate to an ultra-conservative seminary rather than an institution granting science degrees. It is a work appearing to seek a degree in something quite different than anthropology.

The College of Advanced Education is a small house located near the Sherwood Park Baptist Church in Irving. There is apparently no other campus, nor is there a science library or research facilities. There are no course descriptions, catalogs or written degree requirements. We spoke to Don Davis, a representative of the college, who told us that it is a Bible college only and no longer grants science degrees. (Apparently Rev. Baugh's degree was the last). Mr. Davis admits that the college is not accredited in Texas. We had the impression that the only requirement for attending the college is a religious conviction and an intent to work as a professional in Bible-related studies.

"Pacific College", through which Rev. Baugh claims his archaeology degree, is the same institution referred to as "Pacific College of Graduate Studies" in his vita, as well as a "Pacific International University" mentioned as acting in conjunction with The College of Advanced Education. All refer to the same institution, Pacific College, Inc. of Victoria, Australia, which operates under the assumed name "Pacific College of Graduate Studies." Pacific College was incorporated by Clifford A. Wilson, an Australian creationist who is the co-author of *Dinosaurs*. According to its statement of purposes, Pacific College is to "...provide members (including student members) with an opportunity to gain knowledge of the Christian faith..." and promote other similar religious activities.

According to Professor I. R. Plimer, head of the department of geology at the University of Newcastle, Australia, and member of the Australian Research Council, Pacific College, Inc. is not an accredited institution in Australia, and degrees issued by it are not valid academic degrees.

Under the Texas Education Code, no institution may grant academic degrees unless it is accredited by one of the accrediting agencies named in the Code, or it holds a certificate from the Texas College Coordinating Board authorizing it to grant degrees. Also, an institution may not use the term "college" or "university" in its name without such a certificate.

We were informed by the Coordinating board that the College of Advanced Education, International Baptist College and Pacific College, Inc., a/k/a Pacific College of Graduate Studies do not hold certificates of authority to grant degrees in Texas.

International Baptist College is a Missouri corporation, but according to the Missouri Department of Higher Education, it is not listed among institutions certified in Missouri to grant degrees, or among degree-granting institutions exempt from certification (under Missouri law., schools with a religious affiliation are exempt from such certification). In any case, it could not grant a degree in Texas by extension or otherwise without approval by the Coordinating Board.

When we contacted Rev. Baugh, he admitted that the College of Advanced Education, International Baptist College and Pacific College are not accredited institutions in Texas. However, he claims that his degrees are valid, since his work was done by "extension", a questionable claim under the Texas law. Despite his claim that he holds a Ph.D. in anthropology, Rev. Baugh told us that he is now transferring his credits from the College of Advanced Education to Pacific College.

Rev. Baugh's factual claims about the coexistence of human and dinosaur footprints can be (and have been) judged on their merits,* without regard to his academic credentials. However, examination of those credentials is also important, because an advanced degree in a relevant subject bolsters the credibility of opinions about the scientific consensus on evolution, particularly among members of the general public trying to make sense of the creationism debate. Readers can judge for themselves whether Rev. Baugh's "Ph.D." degree would be likely to instill confidence in his opinions.

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Meetings on Mantracks and AIDS

Dr. David Dunn, our scheduled speaker for May, was unable to attend. He will appear to talk about the creation science movement August 20. We called on Ronnie Hastings to give us an update on local creationist activities, and he responded with his usual enthusiasm and thoroughness. Ronnie showed a videotape of the alleged Paluxy mantracks and explained why they cannot be considered human footprints. He also summarized 1987's "man tooth" controversy and filled us in on the current activities of Rev. Carl Baugh, Don Patton and the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science.

At the June meeting, we heard from Dr. Gordon Green, Director of the Dallas County Health Department, speaking on the AIDS problem and pseudoscientific drugs and cures. Dr. Green, previously a research scientist with the U.S. Public Health Service, arrived in Dallas in 1983, just in time for the explosion in AIDS-related deaths. He crisply summarized what is known about AIDS (a lot, actually), dispelled some common misconceptions about it, and described some of the remedies and treatments being pursued by desperate victims. The black-market treatments range from drugs now undergoing trials, but so far unproven, to the most outrageous nonsense. Dr. Green also conveyed some of the frustrations of doing science and giving scientific advice to public officials, in a highly politicized atmosphere.

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Skeptic Test Results

Several months ago, Dr. Art Babick asked members of NTS to take the Watson-Glaser critical thinking appraisal and the Myers-Briggs type indicator. Fourteen of you responded, and Art has given us the statistical results. He also gave some members of a local psychics group the Myers-Briggs test, but unfortunately, the psychics did not take the critical thinking test.

All of the skeptics scored in the 90th percentile for all of the five subgroups of the Watson-Glaser test. However, scores were significantly lower (though still high) for the category of inference (discriminating among degrees of truth or falsity of inferences drawn from given data). Art has no explanation for the divergence. The sample for the Myers-Briggs test was too small to classify the psychics and skeptics as definitely different from one another.

Let us know if you want a copy of these statistics.

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NTS Member Helps Psychics

Member Harold Cunningham has written and published a small book called *How To be A Psychic (And A Lay Psychologist)*. The book is written as guide to one wishing to become a "scientific" psychic. It covers the theory and practice of character reading and the psychological factors which cause people to subjectively validate readings and predictions by psychics, all in the best free-wheeling style of pop psychology. The book refers the reader to such publications as the *Skeptical Inquirer* and has a lengthy bibliography of skeptical literature. Harold does caution the aspiring psychic to avoid giving specific advice and to respect client's confidences, but we must admit to some ethical qualms over recommending character reading as a money-making business. Harold's tongue may be firmly in his cheek, but he says that several psychics have written to thank him for the helpful advice in the book! Anyway, if you want a copy, write Reality Publishing, P.O. Box 552, Bowie, TX 76320.

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NTS Member Compiles Two Bibliographies

Member Scott Faust has put together two bibliographies for us. One is a review of skeptical literature which complements our bibliography for librarians. The other is a bibliography of *uncritical* literature, covering Astrology to UFO's and everything in between. Constructing a list like the latter might seem like trying to drink out of a fire hose, but Scott has made a good start at it. The list could be useful for research on a particular pseudoscience or paranormal topic, or for conducting a library survey. Let us know if you want a copy of either bibliography.

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How to Test a Channeled Spirit

by James Rusk

Channellers claim to be the media through which disembodied spirits speak. The most famous (and probably richest) channeler is J. Z. Knight, whose spirit guide is Ramtha, allegedly a 35,000 year-old spirit who originally lived in Atlantis. Another fashionable channeler was the late Jane Roberts, who channeled Seth. Both women made a great deal of money on book and cassette sales alone.

There are now thousands of Channellers in the United States (see *Fate*, May, June, and July 1987). People are now claiming to be channeling spirits that range from Jesus Christ to a group of dolphins. Channeled spirits even appear on radio talk shows and answer questions over the telephone.

Any reasonable person can think of many non-paranormal explanations for the phenomenon of channeling: multiple personalities, self-hypnosis, outright fraud, etc. But suppose for a moment that at least one channeled spirit is real. How could one test it? Is there a fool-proof method for determining if a spirit really has access to knowledge denied the rest of humanity?

The dilemma is that any question for which the answer is known can never satisfy skeptics - there are too many ways to cheat. But, on the other hand, if the answer to a question is *not* known, how does one check it?

There clearly exist questions that will probably be answered at some future time. For example, one might ask, "What is the digit in the quintillionth place in the decimal expansion of pi." No one knows the answer to that, although someday a supercomputer will probably find it. Unfortunately, the answer might not be found until long after the channeler and the

person asking the question are dead.

The best question to ask is one that is very difficult, but whose answer - once stated - is easily verified. In his book [:Labyrinths of Reason](#), William Poundstone suggests that a maze is the best problem for a spirit to solve. Poundstone writes: "Let skeptics pick two random points in the labyrinth and ask the oracle to specify a route between them... If the points are twenty nodes apart, it would take centuries to find a path by ordinary means. Then wouldn't it be another 'hard' question? No, because it would only take about twenty minutes to verify the oracle's answer (traversing a branch a minute). A maze's solution is much, much simpler than the maze itself." (William Poundstone, [:Labyrinths of Reason](#), Anchor Press, 1988, p. 177)

However, the physical problems of constructing a sufficiently large maze and picking two arbitrary points make this kind of challenge very expensive and easily subject to cheating.

Is there a better question to ask a channeled spirit? There are a number of problems in the branch of mathematics called number theory that require only one counterexample to disprove. For example, there is the famous Fermat's Conjecture. This says that for any integer exponent larger than two, there cannot be any integers x , y , and z (exclude zero) so that x to the n th power plus y to the n th power equals z to the n th power.

If the oracle says that Fermat's Conjecture is false, then the oracle should be able to provide the smallest counterexample to show it is false. This may still be a very large number. Any counter example would have to have more than a million digits!

Another mathematical possibility is Goldbach's Conjecture, which maybe even easier for the spirit. According to Goldbach's Conjecture, every even number larger than six is the sum of two odd prime numbers. This is simple to disprove: name an even number larger than six that is not the sum of two odd prime numbers.

However, the main difficulty with using number theory is that any counter example if one exists, is likely to be extremely large. All the "easy" possibilities have already been tried. If the counter example is so large that it cannot be checked within a reasonable time, then the number theory test of the channeled spirit would not be practical.

I suggest that the best question to ask a channeled spirit is one involving a cipher. There are at least two famous unsolved cryptographic messages. The Beale ciphers are over a century old, and only part of them have been solved. Since one of the remaining texts supposedly gives instructions for finding \$17 million in gold and silver, the channeler could conceivably become quite wealthy (see Paul Hoffman, [:Archimedes' Revenge](#), Norton, 1988, pp. 5970).

Another candidate is the Voynich manuscript, a very old, 232-page illuminated book. This cipher has never been decoded, in spite of years of attempts by the best military code breakers. Computer analysis shows it to be a real cipher, not gibberish.

The channeled spirit need not decode the entire manuscript. A page or two will be enough to know if the spirit is correct or not. With such a Rosetta stone, the rest of the cipher should be intelligible relatively quickly. In fact, one very important aspect of the test should be that the passage translated by the spirit should allow code breakers to unlock the rest of the message within a reasonable time. Professional code breakers will be able to tell at once if the "key" works.

Correctly deciphering a significant part of either the Voynich manuscript or the Beale cipher is a good test of the authenticity of a channeled spirit. First, the problem has no known solution. Second, the solution can be easily checked. And third, fraud or trickery are impossible. (Naturally, if someone decodes either the Voynich manuscript or the Beale cipher, other candidates will have to be found. There are several other possibilities.)

Any channeled spirit that failed such a test or refused to take such a test could be dismissed as not worthy of consideration. It may be that that particular spirit, if it exists, is not privy to knowledge hidden from us mortals. Or it may be, as skeptics have suggested, that there is no such spirit in the first place.

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Graphology Fills the Gap?

by John Thomas

Effective last December, a new federal law severely restricts the use of polygraphs for personnel screening. The federal government is exempted, but most private firms are affected. Personnel managers, being always in need of some way to separate the sheep from the goats, may turn to whatever screening tool looks good, whether or not it science. has any scientific credibility.

The October 1988 issue of *The Quill*, the newsletter of the Texas Institute of Graphological Science, shows that local graphologists will be happy to give employers what they want. The article reports the desperate need of many employers for an alternative to the polygraph and states:

"As is-evident, this new law opens up a whole new class of prospective clients for those professional graphologists who are willing to go out and solicit new business when the opportunity avails itself. There is no doubt that a good, qualified handwriting analyst can yield similar results more objectively and with less stress to the applicant than can the polygraph machine. Opportunity knocks, so let's get busy calling on those polygraph testing services listed in our telephone directory, offering them the benefits of a good graphological testing service."

The passage of the new federal law was pushed by a coalition of civil liberties groups and labor unions, with the scientific evidence against the validity of the polygraph being provided by members of the American Psychological Association. Without good evidence that the polygraph gave reliable results, its proponents felt all their arguments undermined. If the evidence in favor of the polygraph is weak, you should consider the evidence in favor of handwriting analysis: "non-existent" would be a closer fit than "weak!"

We hope that employers and personnel managers will be cautious and ask graphologists for scientific studies supporting their claims before subjecting employees to what is most likely just fortune-telling primping

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