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Satan will get you if you don't watch out

by Lonnie Roy, Raymond A. Eve, Anson Shupe

(This is Part 2 of a two-part article. Part 1 was printed last month in The Skeptic)

The Study

This study was originally intended to be focused on respondents living in Texasville; however, the issue of Satanism soon became extremely volatile in Texasville. We hesitated to conduct a survey in the community for fear of inadvertently contributing to the proliferation of the Satanism scare with a study of Satanism during this period of heightened emotional arousal. However, in the meantime, a pretest was performed on college students in preparation for the community study. The results were so surprising that they warranted reporting in and of themselves.

Data were collected for this study from a sample of slightly over 400 students at The University of Texas at Arlington, Texas. This institution is a large metropolitan state university located in the Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas area. The pretest survey was therefore administered to students who live in the "Bible-Belt" region. This may, in fact, be ideal as it provided the researchers with a concentration of conservative Christians in a geographical area that has been subjected to a proliferation of Satanism rumors, scares and local media coverage of Satanism over the past several years.

Students were primarily sampled in introductory English and introductory sociology courses in an attempt to obtain as diversified a group of students as possible.² The forty-four question survey provided information on the demographic, educational, and religious backgrounds of the students. Responses to the attitude items concerning religious conservatism, concern for the protection of conservative Christian values and world view, and fear of Satanism were measured by Likert (1932) scales with response categories ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Scales were developed to measure the respondent's fear of Satanism, level of desire to establish conservative Christian values in public life, and level of religious conservatism. The scale measuring the fear of Satanism, the dependent variable, was composed of five items. The level of concern for establishing conservative Christian values in society was measured by ten items. Religious conservatism was measured by four items. The religious conservatism scale was adapted from Shupe and Stacey's study (1982) of the Moral Majority and Kerlinger's (1963) scale of social attitudes.³

A Statistical Profile Emerges

Overall, there seemed to be widespread support for conservative Christianity among these students. Almost eighty percent of the students indicated that they believed that Heaven and Hell are real places where they believe they will go after death (79.5%). Two-thirds of the students believed that eternal life is the gift of God (66.7%). A large minority of the students believed that one must be Born Again to be saved (44.5%), and nearly two thirds believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible (60.9%). Additionally, nearly three fourths (73.3%) of the students believed that there must be a turning back to religion "for the survival of our way of life." Incidentally, most of these students self-classified themselves as religiously moderate or liberal (65%). Only twenty-five percent of the respondents self-classified themselves as fundamentalist or conservative (25.6%). Apparently, although many of the respondents profess to holding moderate or liberal religious orientations, they retain what is considered among sociologists of religion to be conservative or fundamentalist convictions.

A Christian Way of Life

There was also a noticeable level of support for the establishment or maintenance of conservative Christian values in society by the respondents. Forty-four percent of the respondents believed that "We must retain traditional values in order to survive." Half of the students felt that "National leaders should affirm their belief in a Christian God" (51.1%). Nearly half of the students (47.8%) felt that "the government must support religion to uphold morality," and that "we need more laws governing morality" (49.6%). Half of the respondents felt that "creationism should be taught in the public school systems" (52%) and that "some sort of religious education should be given in public schools (50%). Nearly seventy percent of the students (69.9%) believed that prayer should be allowed in public schools. Almost seventy-five percent felt that "If our way of life is to survive, there must be a turning back to religion" (74.7%). Over two-thirds of the respondents believe that our society has forgotten traditional values (68%). Finally, over half of the students believe that pornography should be illegal (58%).

Fears of Satanism

Concerning specific beliefs about the pervasiveness of Satanism and of respondents' feelings of being threatened by Satanism, two-thirds of the students (64.6%) felt that "Satanism is a real and immediate threat to the well-being of American families," and felt that "Satanism is extensive in U.S. society" (63.4%). Over two thirds (69.1%) believed that "More police protection from occult activities is needed." Over a third of the students (41%) felt that "Satanist activities represent a great and immediate threat to their own well-being," and over forty percent (44.9%) believed that "Satanism is pervasive in our public schools."

The data indicate that a majority of the respondents completing the survey believe that Satanism is extensive somewhere in society (much of it said to be occurring in our educational institutions). They also believe that Satanism threatens families in general, many believe that Satanism attacks their personal well-being. A large majority also wants more police protection against the alleged Satanist threat.

It was surprising that students at a state university, who are often viewed as largely secularistic in outlook, should have scored so high on many of these measures — particularly regarding their fears of Satanism.

Some Correlates to Strong Fears of Satanism

While there were few strong demographic correlates (for factors like age, race, or sex, fear of Satanism was correlated quite strongly with respondents' levels of religious conservatism ($r = 0.53$; $Pr = 0.01$).

Ninety-four percent of fundamentalists reported medium to high levels of such fear, compared to 71% of self-defined religious "moderates," 56% of religious "liberals," and only 30% of those calling themselves "agnostic or atheist." Hypothesis One is clearly and strongly supported in this sample. The more religiously conservative individuals' attitudes were, the more likely they were to express high levels of the fear of Satanism. This result is not surprising, nor inconsistent with the findings of many other researchers, as we have previously discussed.

The data also indicate that there was an even stronger positive correlation between the fear of Satanism and respondents'

level of concern for conservative Christian values in public life. We measured this by forming a scale which represented the total of the items listed above as measures of support for conservative Christian values in public life and then relating this to respondent's reported fear of Satanism. The resulting correlation was quite strong ($r = 0.65$; $Pr < 0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis Two was also strongly supported. The respondents' concerns about threats to conservative Christian values in public life were even more strongly correlated with fears of Satanism than were their levels of religious conservatism per se (albeit the difference in the magnitude of the two effects was relatively small).

Discussion

The relationships between religious conservatism and the fear of Satanism, on the one hand, and between the desire for a society based on conservative Christian values and the fear of Satanism on the other, were each found to be significantly and moderately strongly correlated with fear of Satanism. The traditional status variables of income and race were noticeably not found to be correlated with the fear of Satanism. Although educational level (class standing), age and sex were significantly correlated with the fear of Satanism, the correlations were extremely weak.

One implication is that in order to explain certain religious conflicts in the late Twentieth Century that take place in rapidly modernizing societies we will need to look beyond religious conservatism or fundamentalism per se, or concepts like Biblical literalism or inerrancy, as the prime movers of such conflicts. Confronted with dramatic increases in urbanism, cosmopolitanism, scientific authority, rationalization of production, racial and ethnic intermingling, and the ethical relativism required by these trends for day-to-day living, it is not surprising that the conservative Christians in this sample feel their way of life to be under attack or in danger of being destroyed. Since they typically reject a "modern" cognitive framework, (Eve & Harrold, 1991) it seems logical to them that their way of life and ability to pass it along to their children is under attack by Satan and his dark legions. From their own phenomenological perspective, such fears are not "illogical."

Many observers of phenomena like the creation/evolution conflict and panics over alleged Satanist activities expect that those most likely to be creationists and to fear that Satanist activities are broadly afoot are some combination of uneducated, low income or authoritarian Christians. However, Eve and Harrold (1991) have demonstrated that, at least for creationists, (and for this sample of students) the desire to establish conservative Christian norms in society is not entirely synonymous with any of these terms. Instead, they retrieve from relative obscurity the German term "stunde" — a concept first put forth by Max Weber to describe a "vertical" status cleavage (as contrasted with horizontal ones, like social class or caste). Vertical status cleavages tend to cut across class lines and are more concerned with the defense of a threatened lifestyle or world view than with strictly material or economic factors.

The findings of our research seem to support this proposition. The status cleavages for the students in this sample that fear Satanism the most do appear to be vertical ones, centering on religious orientation and the defense of a lifestyle for society based on that religious orientation, not on traditional status ties such as educational level, income, race, age, and sex. Instead, the conflict is best understood as a conflict between a traditionalist world view based on conservative Christian values and cultural modernism which is more likely to accept some degree of ethical relativism and is characterized by emphasis on science and empirical rationality as the ultimate measures of truth.

The struggle between Christian traditionalism and modernism creates fertile ground for symbolic issues to lead to moral crusades to redress the sense of threat felt so acutely by those on each side of such a conflict. Fear of Satanism may be just one of several issues that symbolizes a threat to the cultural transmission of a conservative Christian lifestyle. In this way it can be likened unto the textbook, pornography and creation/evolution debates previously mentioned. They all consist of sporadic attempts to protect or revitalize traditionalism, with its social reality firmly grounded in spiritual concepts. There is a special urgency among conservative Christians to pursue their defense because they are faced with modernist movements that emphasize values of cosmopolitanism, secularism, materialism, and man-made solutions to social problems.

Those students that fear Satanism the most in this sample are more likely to believe that America has forgotten traditional Christian values, to believe that those values are under attack, and would see those values revitalized in society today.

There is ample territory for future research concerning fears of Satanism. Especially important is the extension of the

research reported here to the investigation of similar issues among non-students and we need to examine larger samples. Here, we have only explored these issues among a relatively small number of university students. However, the moderate to strong correlations found among these students would suggest that the strongest tendency toward Satanist panics will be found in geographic or cultural subareas of society whose world view are most immediately threatened by modernist and postmodernist trends. Thus, we may expect the "scare" problem to remain, or even intensify, in the future.

The need for further studies is more than merely of heuristic importance. Failure to recognize that much of the fear of Satanist activities has its origin in symbolic issues surrounding a struggle between traditionalism and modernism for control over the means of cultural reproduction has resulted in a new wave of "witch hunting." For example, "cult crime seminars" are offered daily to law enforcement officers, social workers, and child and adolescent care staffs.

Claims are made of 50,000 to 2,000,000 ritualistically abducted, bred, and even "sacrificed" individuals per year (Carlson and Larue, 1989). We cannot as yet, with only the current data on hand, prove for certain that many of these allegations are probably best understood as symbolic manifestations of diffuse anxiety brought on by the symbolic conflict we have described above. However, in light of the fact that to date virtually no hard evidence has emerged to obtain even a few convictions for Satanic crimes (out of literally thousands of allegations), perhaps we have provided an alternative explanation that could be substantiated by further research.⁴

END NOTES

2. The data are admittedly regional, and as this study is exploratory in nature, our data cannot be argued to provide a rigorously representative national sample regarding Satanist-fear phenomena. Nevertheless, the frequent recurrence of essentially the same rumors with parallel cultural details in so many different locations around North America suggests that they may share a similar background of fear, concern, social strain, and interpersonal contagion (cf. Eve and Harrold, 1987, found creationist belief among college students far more uniform around the country than most would expect).

3. Factor analysis was employed as a measurement of the validity of the scale items for Fear of Satanism, desire for conservative Christian values in society, and conservative Christianity. All items had factor loadings of at least 0.67, 0.52, and 0.78, respectively. Copies of the questionnaire and original items are available from the authors.

4. Even the so called "hard evidence" (graffiti, vandalism, ritual sacrifices) of Satanic activities have been refuted by several experts. Bill Ellis (1991) has shown that most of the instances offered as proof of Satanic ritualistic crimes, decried by "anti-Satanists," are actually various forms of "legend-tripping." Ellis maintains that these trips are frequent among adolescents. They are designed to be recreational rather than religious and involve the acting-out of pretension of local ghost stories and folklore. He points out that many of the alleged Satanic worship sites are actually locations frequented by youths, over many years, for this purpose. The activities exhibited in "legend-tripping," according to Ellis, are intentionally designed to be startling to adults and, thus, may involve illegal acts (some violent, but rarely), but do not involve the actual worship of Satan or witchcraft.

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1996 NTS Directors and Officers Elections

By Mike Sullivan

As listed in the December issue of *The Skeptic*, the members of the North Texas Skeptics met on January 13, 1996, for the annual business meeting and elections of directors and officers. The NTS members present nominated and elected a new Board of Directors. The new Board then elected officers and named staff members for 1996. NTS Treasurer Mark Meyer also presented a financial report for the organization, which will appear in the March issue of *The Skeptic*.

The members first voted to raise the number of directors from five to seven, to provide a greater number of people able to represent the membership at business meetings and still provide a quorum. The vote was unanimous in favor of the change, and nominations were accepted for the new board. Seven nominations were made and seconded, and the vote of the members for the nominations was also unanimous. The new Board of Directors for 1996 consists of Geoff Adams, Greg Aicklen, Danny Barnett, John Blanton, Mike Sullivan, Joe Voelkering, and Virginia Vaughn.

The Board of Directors then nominated and elected the four Official positions for 1996: Virginia Vaughn, President; Joe Voelkering, Vice President; John Blanton, Secretary; and Mark Meyer, Treasurer.

The Board then voted to sustain the same two staff position as for the past several years: Mike Sullivan, Newsletter Editor; and Keith Blanton, Associate Newsletter Editor. A motion was made and carried to add a third staff position of Webmaster, to which Greg Aicklen was named.

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The Third Eye

NEWS AND COMMENTARY FROM THE WEIRD WORLD OF THE MEDIA

By Pat Reeder

I am completely iced in as I write this, due to a winter storm that has nothing to do with the fact that it is February, but which is the result of — brace yourself — global warming. According to such infallible oracles as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorial pages, as well as that respected science program *Hard Copy* (whose sole "scientific expert" during a recent cataclysmic climate story was a spokesman for the Environmental Defense Fund), global warming is to blame for all sorts of catastrophes, both real and imagined, including the cold weather this winter, the heat last summer, the return of *Coach* to ABC's Tuesday night lineup, and every other cyclical plague that bedevils mankind. And since we're all going to freeze to death due to global warming . . . I mean, fry due to global cooling . . . oh, hell, as long as we'll ALL ABOUT TO DIE, anyway, I'm just going to slap a bunch of news items together, call it a column, and go drink hot chocolate until the Grim Reaper shows up.

First stop, Howick, South Africa, where a Boer cousin of the Loch Ness Monster has reared its ugly head. Local businessman Bob Teeny says he first spotted the 60-foot beast under a waterfall last October. Teeny claims that within the next few weeks, he will "unveil evidence proving the existence of the Howick Monster that will shock people . . . It will prove beyond a doubt that these things exist." I anxiously await this evidence, although I confess to having some teeny doubts, after it was noted that Mr. Teeny is Howick's official publicity spokesman.

The Howick Monster is going to need a good press agent if it plans to overtake Nessie in tourist drawing power. Even as I write this, crowds are overflowing Inverness, Scotland, for its first major movie premiere, complete with Hollywood stars and studio executives (and if you think Nessie is a big reptile, you oughta meet a studio executive). The film is a new romantic comedy filmed on location at Loch Ness, featuring Ted Danson as a Nessie hunter, with a special guest appearance by his old toupee as "The Monster."

Speaking of celebrity ghouls, the ghost of comic Redd Foxx is refusing to get off the stage and go on to the next stage. *Inside Edition* reports that professional Elvis impersonator Jesse Garon was such a fan of the late *Sanford & Son* star, he bought Foxx's home in Las Vegas. But he was soon unnerved by lights being turned on and off, and he kept hearing a voice talking in other rooms. So he called in a psychic, who confirmed that it was indeed the ghost of Redd Foxx (the voice must've been saying a lot of four-letter words). She claimed Foxx is still furious about the IRS seizing all his property for back taxes, although my theory is that he was upset because he thought Elvis had moved into his house. Garon moved to a hotel, saying he's a big fan of Foxx, but he really doesn't want to live with the guy's vengeful, disembodied spirit. Personally, I find this view a bit narrow-minded. If you agree, then be aware that Garon has put the house on the market for \$400,000. I'll bet the asking price would've been \$200,000 if it didn't come with a celebrity ghost.

Our friend Hugh Aynsworth of the *Washington Post* reports on a fraudulent product that supposedly helped trace stolen cars, lost golf balls, and just about anything else. It was a little plastic box, allegedly full of high tech electronics. The maker claimed it could even trace missing persons and escaped criminals, if you put a Polaroid snapshot of the person inside it. Of course, it was really completely useless. It was sold all over the country, at prices ranging from \$389 up into the thousands. Fortunately, very few individuals were bilked. The device was mostly purchased by police departments.

Speaking of nonsensical, high tech gobbledygook, the Scientologists have been all over the news of late. They won a copyright case against an escapee who dared to post their super secret religious screeds on the Internet, along with all the other worthless gibberish available there. The "church" didn't like this, since people normally have to pay them a lot

of money before they are spiritually advanced enough to catch a glimpse of the more advanced rantings of crackpot sci-fi hack, L. Ron Hubbard.

Fortunately, Germany's courts are a bit more clearheaded than ours. A court in Kassal, Germany, ruled recently that Scientology is not a religion, but a business in which members pay high fees and receive commissions for recruiting new members. And a Duesseldorf court banned a real estate company from training young people because they pressured them into submitting to harsh interrogations taken from the Scientology "personality test." Following the rulings, German Family Affairs Minister Claudia Nolte launched a major government campaign against Scientology. She said it "aims for world domination and the destruction of our society," called it aggressive and totalitarian, and urged that it be stripped of tax privileges and put under surveillance. That's right: they're so fascistic, they make Germany nervous! If you want more specifics, check out the latest issue of Spy magazine, featuring an article by an author who went undercover to write an expose on Scientology, and who is still looking over his shoulder.

The international success of Scientology reminds me that Ripley's Believe It Or Not is in the news. Hearing of Madonna's advertisements for a sperm donor (now, THAT belongs in Ripley's Believe-It-Or-Not!), officials from the Ripley museum chain offered to loan her two African fertility totems which were placed in the lobby of their corporate headquarters last year. They claim that since the ebony statues, depicting a tribal queen holding a baby and a king with a sword, were . . . uh, "erected" . . . half the female employees (6 out of 12) have had babies, and even a few Airborne Express couriers who dropped by for pickups ended up making deliveries. Of course, this could simply mean that one of the junior executives has been a very busy man. But once the story broke, dozens of women started dropping by to rub the statues, although Madonna has yet to show up. Maybe his sword isn't big enough.

Dallas radio station KLIF's afternoon talk show host, David Gold, prompted much futile screaming at our car radio recently, with his defense of some parents who allowed their diabetic child to die rather than give him insulin, because they were Christian Scientists. Ever since his religious conversion a year or so back, Gold has been regressing steadily to the Luddite stage, until he now can see no difference between taking a kid to the emergency room and lighting a candle for him. I don't deny anyone his religious beliefs, but even the most devout believer should not be allowed to give his child prayers instead of insulin; he should give the kid insulin, pray that it works, and thank God for medical science when it does. Gold also pointed to a recent study showing that prayer helped with some healing, but did not point out that it was actually a study of the power of positive thinking and deep relaxation: the patients themselves either prayed or meditated, and no study was done on the effects, if any, of one person praying for another.

Gold went on to defend the legitimacy of Christian Science, arguing that nobody would call it a "cult religion." No, cult religions must be founded by a guru with patently nutty ideas (like, say, Mary Baker Eddy) during reasonably recent times (say, the 1860s) and be denounced by rational people as quackery from day one. The only persuasive argument I've ever seen for it was made by H.L. Mencken in 1927, and I highly recommend that Gold consider it. Although Mencken considered Eddyism to be "pure balderdash," he claimed he was firmly against any laws to force medical treatment on its adherents or their children, because it might decrease the death rate among idiots. He feared that helping anyone who takes seriously "such dreadful bilge as in *Science & Health*" to stay alive and breed "would quickly bring the whole human race down to an average I.Q. of 10 or 15." However, I must warn Mr. Gold, there is a possibility Mencken was being facetious.

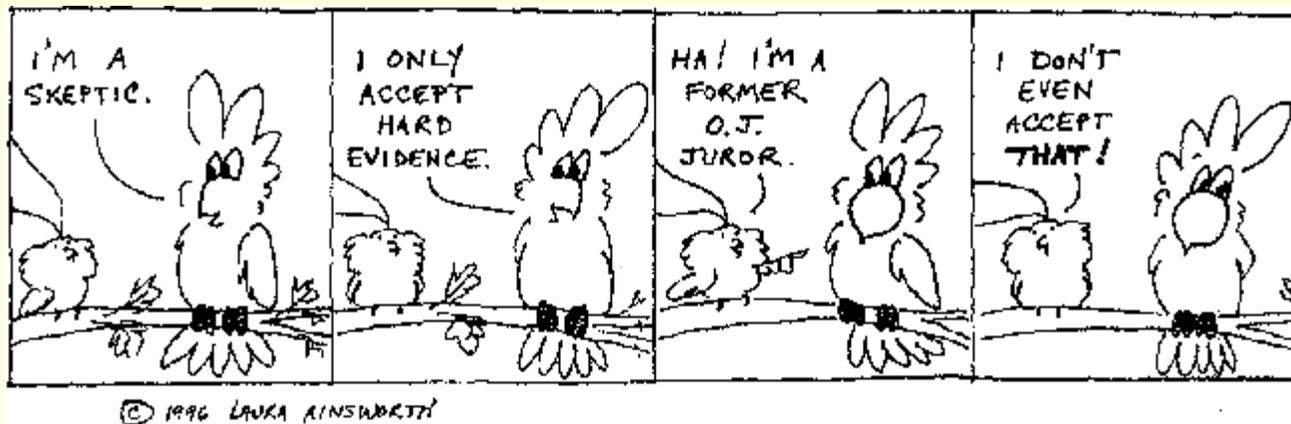
Finally, it was just announced that Bob Guccione, publisher of *Penthouse* (official motto: "I could publish this magazine with one hand!"), is ceasing publication of two money-losers, *Longevity* and *Omni*. If a magazine called *Longevity* can't even keep itself alive, perhaps it's best that it expire quietly, but the death of *Omni* is kind of a shame. A science magazine for people who aren't quite as smart as they think they are, *Omni* has had a long and checkered history of presenting smart, interesting science articles side-by-side with some of the worst pseudoscientific claptrap this side of the *Weekly World News*. Guccione announced that both magazines will lay off most of their staffs and continue in limited on-line editions. Let's hope *Omni* laid off whoever was in charge of writing all those articles about alien abductions. If aliens wanted to examine humans, they wouldn't be abducting *Omni* readers. They'd be hauling up *Penthouse* Pets.

Well, I gotta go. The Grim Reaper is knocking on my door to collect all my old issues of *Omni*. Personally, I blame its death on global warming. Now, where's my hot chocolate?!

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Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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