

# Intrigued by the Occult

By Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

**The modern world, and especially the history of the present century, can only be understood in terms of the unusual activity of the devil and the “principalities and powers” of darkness....**

**In a world of collapsing institutions, moral chaos, and increasing violence, never was it more important to trace the hand of the “prince of the power of the air.” If we cannot discern the chief cause of our ills, how can we hope to cure them? (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare*)**

Today in our increasingly pagan culture, literally millions of ordinary men and women are intrigued by the mercurial enchantment of the genuinely psychic: that twilight zone of reality where one crosses over into the mysterious and uncharted regions of the supernatural.

If the world of the psychic, mystical, and occult is anything, it is fascinating. Whether people seek this world in Hindu and Buddhist gurus, the human potential movement, astrology, novel forms of psychology, shamanism, the holistic health circuit, psychic development, parapsychology courses, or a local medium, they are frequently captivated. Indeed, only the power of the occult to enamor and seduce can explain dramatic conversions among businessmen, medical doctors, Hollywood celebrities, scientists and, indeed, people from all walks of life. All of them are hopeful about the prospects of their newfound interests.

Because tens of millions of people have recently converted to the occult, many advocates are convinced that a new horizon has emerged on the “wasteland” of materialism. They promote a sometimes-militant spirituality and believe the last three decades have witnessed an unparalleled spiritual revolution. They foresee dramatic cultural change and the beginnings of a worldwide spiritual movement that will affect social institutions everywhere. Participants claim mankind is at the forefront of a wonderful New Age of human enlightenment.

Unfortunately, what they may have failed to realize is that the “New Age” of enlightenment is, in fact, a return to modernized versions of ancient and consequential forms of pagan spirituality, which are as old as mankind itself.

The dangers are not recognized today for a variety of reasons. In America we tend to be isolated culturally and historically; we have little sense of the harmful consequences of paganism demonstrated throughout history in almost all cultures. Also, the names have changed. For example, what were once commonly accepted as dangerous witchcraft practices are now frequently seen as expressions of human potential. Finally, the categories of true and false spirituality are often confused. Even occult practices may be seen through the lens of Christian presuppositions and redefined as something godly.

For example, many people today assume that because God is loving and good, all forms of spirituality—including all forms of the miraculous—must originate in God and, therefore, are something divine. Hardly a thought is given to the possibility that spiritual evil might also exist in a personal sense, and that it, too, could produce the miraculous or that it might be far more dominant in the religious and other affairs on this planet than may first seem plausible.

Regardless, few people will deny that occultism today is everywhere. The choices are as vast as the terrain is complex and, for many who look on in disbelief, simply incredible. Examples include: psychic UFO contact, powerful near-death experiences, astral travel,

bizarre mystical revelations, astrologic medicine, kundalini arousal, energy channeling, mysterious “men in black” and “walk ins,” tarot cards, past-life therapies, psychic healing (or even surgery), contact with the dead, and encounters with various strange “creatures.” These and a thousand other diversions dot the spiritual landscape like stars on a brilliant night. There are even a dozen “games” which seek to encourage contact with occult powers: the Ouija board, Leela, Osiris, Cartouche, Star + Gate, etc.

But even for those committed to the new spirituality, questions sometimes arise in the consciousness like the notes of an uncertain melody. What does all this really mean? Where do these powers and phenomena come from? Why are they appearing now? How do I fit in?

Of course, those who actively endorse the psychic and the occult do so for personal reasons. They have experienced the calming benefits of meditation, the security of a guru’s direction, the tantalizing fascination of exploring altered states of consciousness, the guidance of a Ouija board, the thrill of a séance, the hope of knowing the future. People today are, after all, looking for answers, and the psychic world offers not only excitement but, for many, answers to the gnawing need for direction and purpose in life. How comforting to no longer fear death because you have contacted a “deceased loved one” and know he or she exists in joy on “the other side.” How encouraging to find in astrology and other forms of divination supernatural guidance for living in an increasingly uncertain world. How reassuring to sense a growing psychic power and the upwelling pride of “human potential.”

But what if all of this involves something different from what participants assume it to mean? What if people are being led into labyrinths they never expected—or even wanted? What if things *aren’t* as they seem? What then?

For example, to assume occult powers merely constitute part of human potential is, unfortunately, a faulty rationalistic assumption that prefers not to consider supernatural things like spirits. It is to evaluate psychic powers and phenomena on a surface level only, without looking deeper into what traditional religion or even occult traditions have to say.

Further, this approach ignores the consistent experience of psychics and occultists themselves who report that their powers come from the world of spirits they have contacted, whether or not those spirits were perceived in the beginning. Indeed, one reason many psychics initially assumed their powers were innate abilities of the so-called “higher self” is because the Spirits had first operated through their lives invisibly. But in the end, they realized the true source of their enablement.

In other words, people who think they are only developing mental powers that are fundamentally natural need to consider that their perspective is contradicted by occult history, religious tradition, the lives of participants themselves, and even standard dictionary definitions of the term “occult,” which all emphasize its supernatural nature. *The Oxford American Dictionary* defines the occult as “involving the supernatural occult powers.” *Webster’s Third International Dictionary Unabridged* defines the occult as “involving the action or influence of supernatural agencies.” No less an authority than the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the occult as involving various theories, practices, and phenomena “based on esoteric knowledge, especially alleged knowledge about the world of Spirits....”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Ron Enroth, professor of sociology at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California, and an authority on new religions and cults, defines the occult and its characteristics as follows:

**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.

Those phenomena collectively known as “the occult” may be said to have the following distinct characteristics:

(1) the disclosure and communication of information unavailable to humans through normal means (beyond the five senses);

(2) the placing of persons in contact with super-natural powers, paranormal energies, or demonic forces;

(3) the acquisition and mastery of power in order to manipulate or influence other people into certain actions. <sup>2</sup>

We use the terms “psychic” and “occult” loosely and more or less interchangeably. This is not to say they are always equivalent. The term “psychic” does not necessarily imply certain types of occult involvement, such as magic ritual or Satanism, although psychic activity is a component of them. Nor is it limited to the purely psychological, as if psychic abilities reflected merely latent human capacity. For our purposes, the term “psychic” involves the supernatural (that which is not part of human potential). Thus, we may say that a person who is psychically involved is also occultly involved, for both are dealing with hidden forces and experiencing, to various degrees, interaction with supernatural entities and phenomena. Whether or not the supernatural is believed in, perceived, or expected, it usually surfaces in the end.

Thus, whether we turn to the Hindu and Buddhist gurus, astrology and UFO phenomena, psychic healing, parapsychology, New Age medicine, the new religions or almost any other aspect of the occult, the lowest common denominator is always the presence of spiritism.

So the bottom line would seem to be this: If by definition the world of the psychic and the occult brings a person into contact with supernatural spirits, just who are the spirits? It is our belief that these spirits are not divine and that this conclusion can be reasonably proven by an objective examination of the evidence.

Although we do hold a bias against psychic involvement, we have tried to research this subject in fairness. In particular, we have attempted to assess what a wide variety of commentators on both sides of the issue have noted about the occult and its dangers.

We have done so because, at least initially, psychic involvement so often seems to be something positive—and because psychic experiences themselves can be extremely powerful persuaders that one has indeed come in contact with a divine reality.

In the coming months we wish to show why we think this perception is wrong and that, in fact, the reality encountered is usually the opposite of what participants think.

Camouflage and deception have always been key aspects in human warfare. If spiritual warfare exists, then the strategy of the enemy would be the ruse of divinity. If to some extent men are participants in an unseen battle, then appearances indeed may be part of the strategy.

#### **Notes:**

1. “Occultism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Micropaedia* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 15<sup>th</sup> edition, Vol. 7, 469.
2. Ronald Enroth, “The Occult,” Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 787.

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