

of the New Age movement and lists the various (seemingly harmless) New Age practices that can lead true believers into the occult.

What did we do about the coven in the town where I was priest? A few members of the youth group and I fasted on Fridays. Within six months the coven had moved out of our geographical parish, and within the year they had moved out of the town altogether. I don't know if it was our prayer and fasting that drove them out, but the Gospel says that a certain kind of demon only comes out through prayer and fasting.

Therefore, what is the best thing to do when confronted with someone involved in the occult? It might be right to confront them and show them what is wrong with their beliefs and practices, but that will probably not do much good. One of the symptoms of occult involvement is a kind of spiritual, moral and intellectual blindness. As St. Paul says in Romans 1:21, 24 "... their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Instead, when confronted with those who have given themselves to evil, I recommend skipping meals on Fridays, praying a few extra Rosaries, and invoking the holy angels -- especially St. Michael. It will not only bring down the witches in full flight -- it will also do your spiritual life a world of good.

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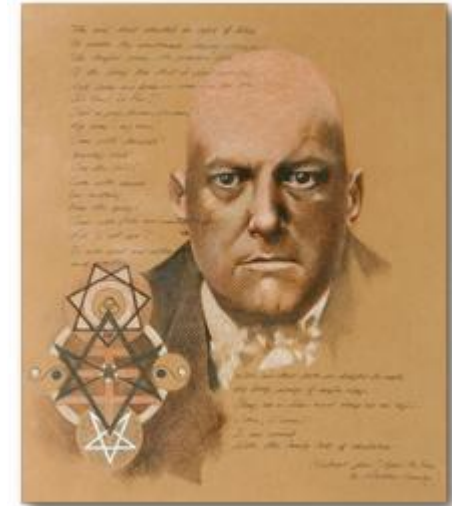
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Are Witches Real?

Fr. Dwight Longenecker



Aleister Crowley was an English witch.

He reveled in his description as "the wickedest man in the world" He was a shameless self publicist, a fraud and a charlatan, he was also an educated, intelligent and willful diabolist.

He was indeed very wicked and was definitely involved in just about every kind of vile perversion, drug addiction and occult religious practice imaginable. He died in Hastings, on the south coast of England, in 1947.

In 1982 I moved to Bexhill-on-Sea, a town one step along the coast from Hastings. I was newly ordained as an Anglican priest and was heading to my first parish. Living just around the corner from the ancient

parish church was a coven of witches whose leader claimed to be the successor of Aleister Crowley. The "witches" were well-known in the town. They lived in a kind of hippie commune, and their leader -- a lecherous man in his 50s -- frequented all the bars and pubs. Rumors abounded about their drug use, sexual immorality, corruption of young people and dark, occult practices.

As a young priest involved in the Christian youth work in the town, I came across several young people who had been involved with the coven of witches. One afternoon I witnessed an old priest deal successfully with what seemed to be demonic infestation of a 15-year-old girl who had been spending time with the witches. The stories the young people told were of seriously sick and genuinely horrifying attitudes and actions. More than once we had to deal with spiritual influences that were dark, destructive and demonic.

Are witches real? Of course they are. Are they skinny old women with green skin, pointy chins and warts on their noses, who cackle over cauldrons? Of course not. Do they attend an academy called "Hogwarts," play a form of hockey on their broomsticks and battle mythical beasts? Is "Samantha," a pretty middle-class suburban wife with magical powers and a gaggle of kooky and spooky family members, a witch? Of course not. All of that is an attempt to make us believe that there are not really such things as witches.

But there are. Witchcraft is alive and well in our modern, secular age. It has taken the name "Wicca" and claims an increasing number of adherents. Followers of Wicca profess to be modern pagans. They claim to draw on the powers of nature to heal people, foretell the future and put people in touch with their departed loved ones. The modern Wicca religion is descended from another British witch, Gerald Gardner, who, in the 1950s, synthesized various strands of ancient paganism into a new mish-mash kind of paganism.

Is there anything to it, or is it just a load of silly, New Age nonsense? Be assured that there is not only something to it, but something sinister. To put it bluntly, pagans worship the gods and goddesses of the ancient world. The early Christians understood quite clearly that the pagan gods and goddesses were demons. They understood that the pagan rites were sacrifices made to demons, and that through the pagan initiation rites devotees gave themselves to the demons and that as a result, the pagan worshippers were usually demon-possessed. That's why the preparation for Christian baptism involved careful catechesis over a long period of time with numerous exorcisms.

Is it possible for modern people to summon up the ancient gods and goddesses and offer themselves to be infested by such spirits? Of course it is. C.S. Lewis commented on the foolishness of summoning up evil spirits, saying that if they were called we should not be surprised if they arrive on our doorsteps.

Followers of Wicca are not benevolent New Agers who just happen to be vegetarian, sandal-wearing bearded weirdoes. Their religion follows ancient rites where they summon up the ancient gods and goddesses.

The 2001 census in the United States revealed 134,000 people who claim to follow the Wiccan religion. The numbers are doubtless far greater now. Not only are there more people involved in witchcraft than those who register formally, but because the movement is diffuse and secretive and sectarian, there are far more people involved in some form of occult practice than can be accurately numbered. In addition to those who are consciously involved in pagan witchcraft, there are a huge number of Americans who are involved in New Age behaviors that (while not openly identified as witchcraft) are nevertheless identical to occult practices.

If a person is involved in fortune telling of any kind, tarot cards, Ouija boards, séances, crystal healing, channeling, and astrology, they are involved in the occult. If they are involved in certain types of depth psychology, re-birthing, spiritualism, envisioning other lives, Native American spirituality, ecology spirituality and radical feminist theology, they are probably meddling with the occult as well. The vague attractiveness of the New Age movement as well as its spiritual danger is explained well in the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue's document called "Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life." This official Church teaching outlines the danger