Folklore and the Internet

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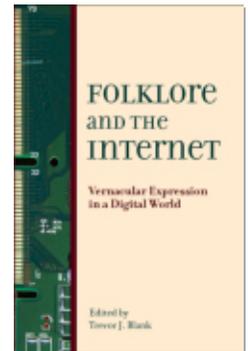Published by Utah State University Press

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Chapter 6

Crusading on the Vernacular Web: The Folk Beliefs and Practices of Online Spiritual Warfare

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A Spiritual Wrong Turn

Amateur website builders and evangelists "Dean" and "Susan" of Hillsboro, Oregon, believe that directly palpable, evil, spiritual entities act in the world today. They describe seeing strange eyes, white fogs, and dark shapes, hearing loud breathing, and even feeling sudden changes in temperature. While these are common elements in folk tradition (Ellis 2000), Dean and Susan place these experiences into their conservative evangelical Christian worldview. Compelled by a radical certainty imparted by these experiences, they participate in an online vernacular web of communication with others who share this certainty (Howard 2008a, 2008b). In this vernacular web, communicating about their direct experiences with spirits authorizes a shared belief in a literal reading of the Bible. For the participants in this online web of communication, those who do not accepted their literal readings of the Bible are believed to be under the influence of demons.

Since at least the 1970s, small-scale evangelical Christian media publications have developed a set of beliefs, based on the folk traditions surrounding demons and Satan, under the term *spiritual warfare*. Interpreting his personal experiences with these evil beings in terms of spiritual warfare, Dean interacts with others who share his beliefs by building amateur web pages. These pages then contribute to a vernacular web

of online discourse espousing the most conservative form of what has been termed "vernacular Christian fundamentalism" (Howard forthcoming a; Howard forthcoming b). This discourse occurs at the online nexus between vernacular fundamentalism and Christian folk traditions about demons, and two of its particular qualities result from the easy access to other people made possible by the Internet. First, because the Internet makes it simpler for Dean to locate many individuals with similar beliefs, online communication supports their interpretations of specific real-world experiences as demonic attacks. Second, because the Internet also makes it easier to locate people with ideas they consider to be inspired by Satan and his demons, spiritual warfare can proceed across the Internet itself to engage more (and more distant) targets.

Recounting his decision to begin to share his experiences with demons through the Internet, Dean recalled how "God said: 'I want you to write about this!' The new [web page] I just posted up there is called 'Demon Domains and Christian Fortresses.' That was something God wanted me to put up as fast as possible because . . . well, maybe he had somebody he wanted to see that" (Dean and Susan 1999). After putting up web pages like this, Dean receives supportive e-mails, and such e-mail exchanges often direct him to the pages and online postings of others who have undergone demonic assaults. Exchanging stories that are felt to demonstrate the veracity of their beliefs about demons, Dean and his fellow participants in this dialogue develop a radical certainty that they have attained a special understanding of demons and Satan.

Their use of the Internet, which enables them to locate geographically dispersed individuals who share this understanding, creates an insular enclave where repeated exposure to their shared ideas reinforces their beliefs. Because they view many ideas that diverge, challenge, or conflict with their own beliefs as deceptions created by Satan and his demons, the Internet functions not only to support their convictions but also to give them greater access to individuals whom they believe deserve to be the targets of their spiritual attacks. By allowing them to find these potential targets, the Internet seems to enable a particularly active kind of intolerance (Howard forthcoming b).

For Dean this intolerance has become particularly strong, a result of the ferocity of the attacks to which demons have subjected him and his family. He feels that demons single him out because he first invited their attention by getting involved in "occult" practices when he was a young man serving in the Navy. He later spurned these demons after he had a "spiritual rebirth" experience that precipitated his conversion to evangelical Christianity. As a result, Satan and his servants have a

personal vendetta against Dean and his family. During an interview, Dean showed me his "warlock" tattoo as proof he once was "into the occult." In fact, he was so deeply involved that he came to believe that a demonic spirit had entered his body and "possessed" him. His personality changed. He became distant and emotionless, and he felt that he gained minor supernatural powers: mind reading, seeing the future, and partial control of the weather. Because of these powers, he told me that he developed quite a reputation on board ship.

One night, having trouble sleeping, Dean went to a part of the ship's living quarters where there was enough light to read and met another sailor there. When the latter saw Dean's warlock tattoo, he stated he was a Christian and confronted Dean : "'God's given me the ability to tell when a person's possessed.'" As he looked at Dean, Dean felt that "something shrank into a cold hard knot in my chest and started moving around like it was trying to hide." Dean believes the demon was fleeing from the Christian and "flipping out." Shortly after this experience, God came to Dean and gave him an ultimatum: "God told me. He said: 'Now. Decide who you want to follow.' And He has since told me if I was to continue to follow Satan, I would be dead." Because of his rejection of Satan, however, Dean has regularly experienced demonic attacks ever since. The devils attack him, they attack his wife, and they have attacked his son and daughter. He and Susan take these episodes very seriously (Dean and Susan 1999).

As is common in Christian folk traditions, Susan and Dean believe that Satan was once one of God's angels. Among these conservative Christians, Satan is thought to be a master of deception who has spawned non-Christian religious belief systems throughout the world in order to lead humans into error. For them, occult practices—including witchcraft, ESP, and even ghost beliefs—are all potentially demonically inspired errors. Ghosts contacted through Ouija boards or in séances are actually demons. Even UFOs are considered to be demons masquerading as aliens in an attempt to lead humans astray.

Demons, however, are not all-powerful. They must be invited into an individual's life. They can gain that invitation when people explore non-Christian religious beliefs and practices, like Dean did when he was young. New Age religions, American Indian spirituality, and even some forms of Christianity are termed *cults* and thought to bring their followers under the influence of demons. Once initial contacts are made between these forces and specific individuals, the demons can begin to manifest themselves in more directly destructive ways. Because Dean initially invited demons into his life but then became a true Christian, he

and his family suffer particularly ferocious demonic onslaughts by them.

Dean and Susan reported having many physical demonic attacks while living in a particular apartment when they were first married. After the regular attacks had stopped, they learned from the landowner that their upstairs neighbor had been evicted and was discovered to have enacted strange occult rituals. The proximity of the apartments, Dean contended, allowed the demons his neighbor was contacting to enter into Dean and Susan's apartment as well. From Dean and Susan's perspective, anything they view as a cult can function this way. One well-known group Dean considers a cult is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

During our interview, Dean gave an example of how a spiritual attack can originate from a real-world wrong turn. One afternoon Susan was walking home from the local store. She choose to take a shortcut through a "Mormon church's" parking lot that was just across the street from their home:

> As soon as she walked in the door [at home] she became violently sick. And just for it to come on that suddenly? I had a feeling . . . As soon as I mentioned it, she turned around and saw the church [through the window]. I said, "That's it!" So what we did was I took and bound and got rid of the demons that were causing the sickness. As soon as I did it she stopped being sick. And what God told us was that even unwittingly she had invaded their territory, which gave them [the Mormon demons] the right to attack her! And I was really worried about that . . . I says, "God? My daughter has to pass by the church every day when she goes on her way to school." What he told us was: "Their authority ends at the street. As long as you don't go on their parking lot, they can't touch you." (Dean and Susan 1999)

In addition to the testimony of Dean and Susan, this chapter documents other participants in the online vernacular web of expression that has emerged among fundamentalist Christians who believe they are engaged in an ongoing war against demon spirits. In the case of this particular vernacular web, the access it creates functions to encourage particular forms of intolerance. Out of a perceived need to share strategies for combating evil spirits, many educated and skilled amateur website builders see themselves as crusaders in a world led astray by the homosexual rights movement, government conspiracies against Christians, New Age spirituality, and other belief systems (Howard 1997, 2000; Wojcik 1997). Creating a vernacular web of online discourse, these individuals can communicate within a discursive enclave that reinforces their extreme views. At the same time, access to the diversity of people

and ideas that is possible online has led some of these individuals to engage in a spiritual warfare tactic of aggressive "witnessing." When their divine experiences are frequent and ongoing, both certainty and intolerance are forged into their most extreme forms. Alternate views are not merely considered to be wrong—they are perceived as Satanic and need to be actively combated. For these individuals, the Internet serves as an active battleground.

The Mass Media Discourse of Spiritual Warfare

The discourse of spiritual warfare is part of a vernacular belief tradition reaching back long before mass media. Historically, fears of witchcraft and demon visits in dreams pervade European and American folk traditions (Ellis 2000; Hufford 1982, 1995; Kelly 1968). With a surge in media attention to the subject in the 1970s and early 1980s, conservative evangelicals reached what appears to have been a new peak in concern about Satanic influence (Aranza 1983; Victor 1993).

Since that time, the idea of spiritual warfare has been linked to a Bible passage from the New Testament. In Ephesians 6:11–17, the early church leader Paul exhorts the followers of Christ to "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Once saved, the believer was thought to have a responsibility to actively avoid sin and error. The "armour" aided in that struggle. Imagining demons and sin as terms for this internal struggle, Paul exhorts humans to rely on their faith in God to overcome both personal temptations and the worldly difficulties that sometimes exacerbate those temptations. Here, putting on "the armor of God" is an analogy for having complete faith in God's plan for one's life. In this benign form, spiritual warfare is an internal struggle between faith and temptation within the mind of each Christian (Dew 2008; White 1990).

A more extreme form of the spiritual warfare discourse, however, emerged in the evangelical mass media of the 1970s. One of the most influential media evangelists, Bob Larson, became famous for claiming that Satan and his demons are the sources of non-Christian religious systems. From Greek mythology to New Age beliefs, and from Native American religions to Mormonism, Larson defines over 3,000 non-Christian spiritual belief systems as cults in his well known books: *Bob Larson's Book of Cults* (1982) and *Bob Larson's New Book of Cults* (1989). The author of over thirty books and over one hundred DVDs and tapes, his other titles include *Talk Back with Bob Larson: Mormonism and Magic* (1988), *UFOs and the Alien Agenda* (1997), and *Larson's Book of Spiritual*

Warfare (1999). His website describes the association of non-Christian beliefs with demons, stating that "those who give themselves to the occult" have "demon-induced visions" ("What is a Demon?" 2003).

In addition to the books written by Larson, numerous other popular-press books describe how individual Christians can engage and defeat the influence of demons. Sometimes referred to as "deliverance ministries," this discourse takes as its premise the idea that demons exist and that lay ministers can call upon the Holy Spirit to confront and defeat them. In his influential 1973 volume, *Using Your Spiritual Authority*, Pat Brooks argues that all individuals who have experienced spiritual rebirth are authorized by the Holy Spirit to combat demons: "In other words, because I am *in Christ*, His authority is mine to use here on earth. His Holy Spirit makes available to each believer the power to use His authority" (19; italics in original).

One of the most well-known and still widely read texts is another 1973 book, *Pigs in the Parlor: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* by Frank and Ida Mae Hammond. The authors describe demonic attacks as the physical manifestations that have long been associated with ghosts or hauntings in European folk traditions, and they associate these phenomena with "sinful" activities. "Many have told of hearing voices or sounds in their houses. Such manifestations are sometimes called 'poltergeist,' a German word meaning "knocking or noisy ghosts" (Hammond and Hammond 1973, 141). In this text, the authors assert that "demon spirits can invade and indwell human bodies. It is their objective to do so" (Hammond and Hammond 1973, 1). Through references to the New Testament, the authors argue that individual Christians have been given the power to throw out these demons through the Holy Spirit: "Demons are spiritual enemies and it is the responsibility of each Christian to deal with them directly in spiritual warfare . . . the Bible shows us how the Christian can put pressure upon the demons and defeat them! He must learn the practical ways in which this is done" (Hammond and Hammond 1973, 5). The authors then describe various techniques for engaging demons directly. These techniques are common in the discourse and include the "binding and loosing" of demons, commanding demons "aloud," and the "laying of hands," among many others.

In this form of spiritual warfare, the belief that actively evil forces are seeking to have an impact on the lives of real people requires true Christians to act against the individuals who are influenced by such demons. Dean and Susan described this sort of spiritual warfare in their stories of the shortcut through the parking lot of a Mormon church and of being attacked by demons from a neighbor's apartment.

In recounting another case of direct demonic attack, Dean explains how his use of the Internet brought him in to dangerous contact with these evil spirits:

> I had gotten a letter from a Christian and her sister had just been hammered by a coven [of witches] and I guess they were just attacking her from [*sic*] some reason. I didn't really find out what exactly she did, but I guess they were really hammering her hard. And she told me about it. One night I was driving to work and maybe it's Ecclesiastes that talks about "hedges"—where you can put a hedge around something? So what I did was I commanded that a hedge be put around this coven. And just as I said that all of a sudden it was like I was looking into a dark place and saw this pair of yellow eyes swing around and look westward. Like it was trying to figure out where this hedge had come from. So I said, "OK. It's searching." Well . . . about a week later . . . two weeks later, just in downtown Hillsboro, right in front of the courthouse, we were stopped at a red light. And the light turned green. Somebody ran right out and smashed right into our jeep. Now the jeep's got plastic running boards which can't stop anything. This van, even though it hit straight on, somehow got jerked around so that it took almost the whole front side [of the jeep] off even though it hit originally right by the driver's side . . . by my door. Even the cop that investigated the accident says "That's not possible!" So . . . it was kinda funny 'cos a couple weeks later I got on the Internet and there's a Christian chat room called JCN Home. They have some people from the occult get on there. And I logged on and one of them says, "Feeling a little worse for wear?" And they put "smirk" in parentheses. And I says, "What do you mean?" And they said, "We heard about your accident." So basically it was a direct assault. And the only thing we could figure—because even the cop who investigated the accident said it couldn't possibly happen—was that when the van slammed into the running board something grabbed the other end and jerked it around so that it took off the front end of the jeep instead of plowing right through my door. So yeah. Angels do react. Especially with Christians. (Dean and Susan 1999)

As this story makes clear, the mass media discourse on spiritual warfare that focuses on demonic attacks and the need for Christians to combat those attacks now manifests itself online. In this environment, however, two new aspects of spiritual warfare have emerged. First, those who adhere to even the most extreme and intolerant understanding of spiritual warfare can find not just books to support and explore their beliefs, but can also interact with others who actively experience demons, much as they do. In this way, they create a vernacular web of

expression that supports, extends, and encourages their intolerant beliefs and practices without publishers, editorial boards, or institutional religious figures to temper their intolerance. Secondly, intolerant discursive practices can now be enacted online. Because the Internet gives these individuals easy access to people with whom they disagree, acts of spiritual warfare can be actively waged online with very little potential for nonspiritual repercussions. For these two reasons, the online environment has proved a rich battleground for individuals who see themselves as engaged in this crusade against the demon world.

To document this vernacular web, a common search engine that organizes its results in a hierarchy by relevance was used. The first hundred websites that contained the words "spiritual" and "war" or "warfare" were cataloged. Any sites that were part of an institutional church or other website, as well as those built by individuals who were located outside of the United States or who were trained as professional ministers, were eliminated. Additionally, a messianic Jewish site and three Catholic sites were excluded. After these exclusions, forty sites created a sample set of the online discourse emerging from the practices and folk belief surrounding spiritual warfare.

The Vernacular Web of Spiritual Warfare

In my winnowed sample of forty web pages, there is one page that contains a devotional poem about spiritual warfare (Christy 2008). Six pages are on sites debating the theology of spiritual warfare. Twelve other sites focus on how individuals might engage in spiritual warfare in an effort to avoid personal temptation and sin. On these sites, demons are described as manifesting themselves in the daily challenges faced by many Christian believers, ranging from sexual temptations, to spousal abuse, to self-doubt. Because the sins these temptations can provoke are perceived as being outside of proper Christian action, believers assume that such desires or compulsions are the product of demonic influence. To overcome these internal devils, individuals can turn to Christ in personal prayer as a means of actively struggling against their personal weaknesses.

One such site portrays new converts to Christianity as particularly susceptible to the influence of Satan and his demons. Under the subheading "Once You Are Saved, There Is a Battle To Be Fought: It Is Called Spiritual Warfare," the website warns new converts: "Do not underestimate Satan and his powers of deception ("Spiritual Warfare Battle—Spiritual Warfare" 2008). Another site expands on a belief in the active

influence of Satan: "Does the newspaper or some other form of entertainment keep you from obeying God, and take time that should be spent reading your Bible? You say, 'I don't see it that way.' Did you know these are Satan's words?" ("Spiritual Welfare: Cares, Worries, Pleasures" 2008).

Beyond the three forms of this discourse represented in these first nineteen sites, the twenty-one remaining sites in the sample are devoted to promoting the techniques and practices of aggressive spiritual warfare. These latter sites engage a variety of tactics common among the more internally focused sites previously discussed. However, they also include very different sorts of spiritual warfare tactics that focus on demons as external actors instead of internal manifestations of temptation. One of the most common of these specifically outward-looking tactics is called *mapping*. Based on the assumption that Satan and his minions are active forces in the world, creating error and sin, Christians discuss how to locate, or "map," and delineate both discursive and geographic places where demons are thought to be exerting their influence.

The website Battle Ax Brigade describes the technique of spiritual mapping at some length. The self-identifying mother and homemaker who built the site defines spiritual mapping as the first in a series of actions necessary to combat demonic influences on other people:

> Spiritual mapping is the process of collating and putting spiritual information concerning a region or people on a map . . . It allows us to see how the enemy is strategizing and exposes Satan's hidden agenda for that particular region or people group. ("Spiritual Mapping for Effective Spiritual Warfare" 2008)

Citing a passage from the Bible, Mark 4:22, the website builder goes on to describe mapping in more detail. She suggests that a team be formed of ten to twelve Christians and that this team should expect to spend two years on any mapping project for an average-sized city. The team members should collect information about a wide variety of groups of people in the area, including: "Cult and Occult Churches, Cult and Occult Establishments, Pornography, Freemasonry, Aborturies, Homosexual Works, Prostitution Works." As the team locates places where demonic influence is strong, they should mark the locations in different-colored pens on a city map. She encourages establishing a post office box under an assumed name and requesting materials from organizations to discern if evil is present in them.

She even suggests that "a study of the history of land and its people" can be useful. In particular, "we must be able to understand the mind set, habits, and customs of the 'original people.'" To exemplify her point, she

describes a case where she had a team mapping her own region. They
"recognized that its earliest people were a particular tribe of Indians,"
so they "concentrated" their research on "finding out the unrighteous
practices and beliefs of these people."

> Another mapping team discovered in their area that the original
> Indians of their community were fascinated with tattooing their
> whole bodies, and considered it to be their clothing. Today public
> nudity is a real problem in that community. Also, there are unusually
> large numbers of tattoo parlors there. These facts better equip them
> to target their warfare. ("Spiritual Mapping for Effective Spiritual
> Warfare" 2008)

From the perspective of this website builder, the traditions of Native
Americans were born of Satanic and demonic influence, and the fact that
Native Americans once lived in a specific location led this woman to
assume that their influence was the root of current practices she consid-
ers sinful.

She goes on to suggest that team members might need to engage
in "reconnaissance." She notes that this activity should "not to be done
by one person—remember the enemy knows you are invading his terri-
tory." She even recounts a specific case from her own experience where
two women attended a local political function, pretending to be a homo-
sexual couple in order to "infiltrate" the local homosexual population.
She notes that popular rock concerts, "psychic fairs," Nation of Islam
meetings, and other public gatherings are all reasonable targets.

In addition to mapping, several of the websites exhibiting this form
of discourse discuss tactics that target the evil spirits directly. This tar-
geting is generally described as being done through prayer, and many
sites offer a wide variety of examples to be used. Some of the most com-
mon prayers are those that call on God to establish a "hedge" between a
person or place being attacked by demons and the demons themselves.

In addition to this sort of hedging, "binding" prayers are mentioned
as being used to trap evil spirits in particular places. All of these tactics
are usually described as "delivering" individuals from demonic attacks.
Because these prayer-based tactics are enacted either by individual
Christians in private or by small groups of Christians, they do not neces-
sitate any direct discourse between Christian believers and their targets.
Instead, they use the Internet primarily to focus on sharing practical
information with like-minded Christians. However, a few sites discuss
a more aggressive deployment of the Internet. Some sites, such as Battle
Ax Brigade, call for "witnessing" or "prophesying" online.

In this specific usage, *prophesying*, or *witnessing*, is the aggressive public profession of one's faith in Christ to an audience of individuals under the influence of demons or Satan. Because this kind of witnessing, by definition, seeks non-Christians for its audience, it is the most overtly aggressive tactic commonly used in spiritual warfare. While it might be difficult or dangerous for these Christians to confront many of the groups they believe are demonic in the physical realm, the Internet provides easy access to them. Through this medium, these believers can aggressively witness to groups that would otherwise be out of reach, difficult to find, or present dangerous repercussions.

The aggressive nature of this sort of online witnessing is particularly plain on an amateur website featuring a bright yellow page with a heading reading simply "Spiritual Aggression." The website builder states that "we must first fight the War before we can plant the crops" ("Spiritual Aggression" 2003). On another site, the website builder is particularly concerned with warning his Christian audience that they themselves will certainly come under attack if they engage individuals with divergent ideas:

> If we are effectively spreading the gospel message, through word and deed, then we will become engaged in spiritual conflicts. There is no doubt about it. Satan will send his forces to try to prevent us from fulfilling our commission. We will be confronted with demonic influences. (Keys 2008)

This website builder goes so far as to state that if a Christian is doing a good job of "spreading the gospel message," then she or her will be attacked. If an aggressive Christian does not confront non-Christians in a way that causes the latter individuals to resist, then that Christian is simply not trying hard enough to engage non-Christians.

One of the most aggressive websites in the sample is titled Battle Focused Ministries. As a former United States Army infantry sergeant, this website builder fully engages the militaristic language of spiritual warfare in an effort to teach fellow Christians how to combat evil spirits. On his website, he describes in very systematically militaristic terms how Christians can form "battle groups" based in their church communities. These groups need to train to become "battle focused":

> The term "battle-focused" refers to a concept used in the US Army to determine peacetime training requirements based on wartime missions. For Christians, "spiritual warfare" should not be separated from our mission to make disciples of all nations. We are in a spiritual battle for the eternal souls of all humanity. (Sims 2008)

Clearly, this individual sees his role on the world stage as taking part in an aggressive, even mythic struggle for "the eternal souls of all humanity." He even claims that those Christians who disagree with his militaristic approach are themselves demonically controlled:

> Most popular spiritual warfare instruction focuses on the individual Christian's struggle against his own weaknesses and his individual fight against evil powers. That emphasis on self is a symptom of modern society's corruption of Christian thought. (Sims 2008)

In another particularly aggressive example, a website titled Apocalyptic Hope imagines spiritual warfare as part of a literal Christian martyrdom that will occur during an impending world war pitting true Christians against all others. This website builder argues that the approaching return of Christ renders it imperative that all Christians actively engage in spiritual warfare. Here, the main page is a simple yellow background bearing, in large green letters, the heading "SPIRITUAL WARFARE 'To live is Christ, to die is GAIN' Philippians 1:21." By suggesting that there is something to gain through one's own death, the site builder implies that there will be some Christian reward for martyrdom in the struggle against non-Christians. Under the quote, there is a small graphic that depicts a knight's armor, shield, sword, and ax. Below the image, the web page cites the now familiar verse from Ephesians about the armor of God : "Putting on the Whole Armor of God" (Good 2008).

This website includes informational pages on microchip implants thought to be the Mark of the Beast, the One World Government, Antichrist, and other typical End Times topics associated with the Tribulation Period. However, the site is particularly concerned about the Tribulation Period as an approaching historical era when true Christians will be persecuted by the forces of the Antichrist (Howard 1997, 2006; Wojcik 1997). Associating the Antichrist specifically with Satan or one of his chief demons, the spiritual warfare discourse takes on a new sense of urgency.

A good example of this can be found on the Whole Person Counseling website. Here, the website builder describes the need for immediate and ongoing spiritual combat in a personal-experience narrative about a wasps' nest. The story begins when the narrator was about to leave his office for the day. Heading out the door, he looked up above the door to see "a large wasp nest with live wasps crawling over it." He happened to have a glass of water in his hand, so he "decided to try a little experiment." Throwing the water on the wasps' nest, the wasps became "excited," but "with the cold water and cool air, they couldn't fly." So he took a mop, knocked down the nest, and stomped all the wasps to

death. The next afternoon, he went back to see if the nest was still on the ground. He found one wasp still alive. "So, guess what? I also stepped upon him." The website builder then explained the meaning of his story: "The church of Satan is praying that Satan will destroy your home, your life, and the life of your church. Today I must give us a 'wake-up' call to spiritual warfare and prayer" (Frasure 2008).

In the vernacular web of online communication about spiritual warfare, these crushed wasps serve as just one of example of a "wake-up call" to engage in aggressive witnessing. In this form of the discourse, the websites overtly call on Christian believers to use the Internet for the explicit purpose of locating alternate or diverge beliefs. After locating such beliefs, these Christians confront them with the radical certainty that because they are alternate, they must also be inspired by Satan or his devils.

For some of these vernacular Christian fundamentalists, even UFOs are seen as demonic illusions that must be combated. Many of those involved in this discourse believe that demons sometimes take on the appearance of space aliens in order to discredit the Bible and lead humans astray. For them, the existence of beings other than humans in the cosmos would contradict their interpretation of the creation story told in the first book of the Bible. UFOs cannot be piloted by nonhuman extraterrestrials unless those beings are demons. Demons choose to masquerade as space aliens in an effort to provide apparent proof that the literal interpretation of the Bible that characterizes vernacular Christian fundamentalism is wrong (Howard forthcoming a), since this interpretation assumes that God created the Earth and heavens for humans to inhabit and "have dominion over" (Genesis 1:26).

In an excellent example of sustained online aggressive witnessing, one site systematically inserts this fundamentalist Christian view of demons into the broader secular discourse on aliens. The site titled Alien Resistance.Org makes the alien-demon connection in a way that suggests its builders are seeking to bring this message to an audience of non-Christians. Alien Resistance.Org is, at first glance, a typical amateur UFO website. It has a black background dotted with little white spots indicating stars, and its title is written in a white technology-inspired font. There is a photograph of its primary builder standing in front of a sign that includes a schematized alien face with a red circle and a band across it to indicate "no aliens." Overall, the website maintains the slightly humorous tone that is common among UFO sites.

Despite this humorous exterior, the website's topic is a serious one, and its motive is aggressive witnessing within the secular discourse of

UFO theory. Just beneath the title graphic, there is a single line reading: "Re: How to Stop Alien Abduction, UFOs & The Bible, Genesis 6, The Nephilim, The Book of Enoch, UFO Cults, 1947 Roswell UFO Crash, UFO News." According to their online statement, the website builders originally entered the virtual community to "research" the UFO phenomenon: "[Our research group] began a systematic search of the UFO/abduction community, through the Internet, and the published findings of other researchers. The premise of spiritual warfare was beginning to develop" (Malone 2008).

Then the builders of Alien Resistance.Org discovered an active community of people who shared their belief in UFOs. However, unlike most UFO researchers, these individuals also found fellow Christians who had "invoked the name of Christ" to resist the alien attack. They collected these stories and then distributed them into the general, non-Christian, UFO discourse community. According to their own account, "the resulting article drew a large number of responses within the local area." Claiming that most of the individuals they found were Christians, the website builders state that these people "didn't feel comfortable discussing their experiences with UFO investigators due to the New Age inclination of many UFOlogists." As the researchers found more and more cases of Christians warding off aliens, "the data showed that in every instance where the victim knew to invoke the name of Jesus Christ, the event stopped. Period. The evidence was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore" (Clark 2008).

The discovery of these instances of spiritual warfare tactics warding off alien abductions led to the development of a website devoted to resisting aliens as demonic spirits. The site includes personal testimonies of demonic aliens as well as a variety of essays specifically arguing that aliens are in fact demons and must be actively resisted by Christians. It posits that aliens are not average "demons" but instead are even more deadly and dangerous spiritual beings who seek to mate and create offspring with humans, as well as torture them. In order to prove this point, the website builders cite over seventy-five different passages from the Bible.

The website creates personal authority by stating that its builders are members of the large UFO theorist research group MUFON. In a bid to garner the attention of non-Christian UFO enthusiasts, they premise their entire argument from scripture by countering a perceived, already-held assumption that the Bible contains "primitive" and "superstitious" beliefs:

Modern UFO apologetics often make the argument that since the "primitive, superstitious people of Bible times" had no understanding of technologies which we take for granted today, they would see a UFO or an alien entity and—in ignorance—describe them as angels or gods. We believe the reverse is true—modern "sophisticated" man has little understanding of God. When we witness supernatural events, we super-impose our technological mindset to force a "scientific explanation," I.E., when God acts supernaturally in our realm, or when angels (good or bad) travel the skies, we rationalize away a biblical understanding of the phenomena, and force it to fit our chosen paradigm. In our modern efforts to reject the Bible, we instead embrace the UFO cult-inspired doctrine of "panspermia"—the idea that life was created or manipulated by aliens. ("Ephesians 6:12 in Relation" 2008)

The subsequent pages on the website then proceed to "witness" the message of the divine Word of God as presented in the Bible in support of their belief that aliens are actually extrapowerful demons.

Because these website builders specifically involve themselves in the online UFO discourse in an attempt to debunk what they perceive as "errors," the production of the web page itself can be considered a witnessing behavior. These individuals seek out secular UFO believers and communicate their Christian message to them. However, they do this with the powerful certainty that (despite the very idiosyncratic beliefs they hold) they are in fact right and, by virtue of that certainty, are obligated by their faith to share that knowledge (to "witness" it) to a community of nonbelievers.

The Mundane Casualties

In the vernacular web that has emerged from online communication about spiritual warfare, people's direct, real-world experiences of demons, spirits, and even UFO abductions seem to galvanize the faith of believers. When these episodes are supported by experiences of demonic attack, it seems that otherwise compassionate and well-meaning people are able to express intolerance for individuals whom they feel are under the control of Satan. With the Internet affording believers an increased ability to locate and communicate with other individuals on both sides of the issue, the problematic nature of the folk traditions associated with spiritual warfare seems to be exacerbated.

Publicly "demonizing" non-Christians on the Internet suggests that the people involved in this particular web of discourse contribute to

an acceptance of intolerance in two ways. On the one hand, the vernacular web of like-minded believers made possible by the Internet creates an enclave of adherents who accept a literal demonization of non-Christians. On the other hand, the access to nonbelievers afforded by the Internet makes it possible to verbally attack others. When groups of believers engage in this action online, it enables highly intolerant behavior to appear to be reasonable or even devout.

A final example from the forty websites in my spiritual warfare sample most clearly demonstrates the danger of this possibility. It is the closest that any of these sites came to actually advocating physical violence, and it is the most extreme example of spiritual warfare I discovered in the course of my research. Describing an act of spiritual warfare, the Christian believer imagines that the mere resistance to the Christian message by an unbeliever caused that unbeliever very real personal injury. No longer just advocating spiritual violence and not merely the victim of demonically aided physical injury, this individual claims to have actually caused casualties in the mundane world through his invocation of the sacred:

> I personally know of a number of people who came against me, and met with terrible judgment from the Lord. One man use to make fun by saying frequently, "seen any demons lately?", with a laugh. He unexpectedly was fired from his job, his wife divorced him, he was in an auto wreck that almost killed him, he turned into an alcoholic, and had a massive heart attack. ("End Time Deliverance Ministry" 2008)

In his testimony, the website builder describes physical violence brought on through his invocation of the spirit world. In the end, he even offers his audience a prayer that they can use to bring this violence down upon non-Christians:

> If you are under a lot of attack, you may want to specifically pray these scriptures against someone . . . Pray—Father, in the name of JESUS I send the judgment of God to (name names). I pray Deuteronomy 30:7, Psalm 109 and 140, Isaiah 54:17, and any like Scriptures on them, and anyone else coming against us, in the name of JESUS. ("End Time Deliverance Ministry" 2008)