

Alleged son of Anton LaVey fails to prove identity

The evangelist claims he is a son of the late satanist

In his harrowing testimony, Jess LaVey tells how he was groomed by his infamous father—the late Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan—to become the next top leader of the international satanists' group. He recounts physical beatings and sexual abuse that occurred before he broke from his occult background and found Christ.

But critics say that Jess LaVey is not the son of Anton LaVey as he claims—and that the only connection he has with him is the same ability to gain attention through false stories.

Telling his story in churches, radio interviews and postings on the Internet, Jess LaVey said that he was born at the satanists' mother church in East Berlin in 1968. In April, Charisma News Service, Charisma's e-mail news service, reported how LaVey said his father was "a bizarre, sick man" who had raped him and forced him to attend rituals.

A pop icon of the 1960s and 1970s, Anton LaVey boasted membership of 50,000 for the Church of Satan. But many of his claims of his movement's supposed activities and influence have been widely discredited and dismissed.

Jess LaVey claims that he rebelled at the age of 10, sending away for a Bible correspondence course and later made contact with a church where at 14 he received deliverance from demons. He later graduated from Bible college and founded Sword of the Spirit Ministries. Based in Yucaipa, Calif., the 33-year-old

speaks about the dangers of the occult.

But John W. Morehead, a researcher with Watchman Fellowship, a cult-watching group, said that he has been unable to corroborate LaVey's claims. Records show that Anton LaVey had only three children, he said, and while several other people have claimed to be related to Anton LaVey, none of their claims have been substantiated.

"Sadly, many have claimed to be LaVey's child in order to gain financial support from churches and to give credibility to their ministries allegedly addressing satanism and the occult," Morehead said. In addition, Jess LaVey's descriptions of LaVeyian satanism "have no basis in fact and do not represent [it] as expressed in satanist literature."

LaVey supplied Charisma with several documents he said confirmed his identity. But these turned out to include a Social Security number issued to someone of another name and were said by an identities investigator to have been "clearly altered" in places.

When then asked to provide Charisma with an original copy of his birth certificate, potentially available upon request from the U.S. State Department, which records foreign births of American citizens, Jess LaVey declined. He also admitted that he knew the Social Security number on the document he submitted to Charisma as proof of his identity was not the correct number. He then refused to supply his true number because he said he did not want to entertain a fight in the media over his identity.

James Barkley, a pastor who helped minister to LaVey when he

attended a Vineyard church in California in the 1980s, said that LaVey had spoken at that time of his connection to Anton LaVey, but had never shown any documents confirming it. Barkley said LaVey seemed to have come from a background of occult involvement.

Of CNS' original report of Jess LaVey's testimony that now is in question, CNS editor Andy Butcher said: "Our initial inquiries were not as thorough as they needed to be. In the light of the unanswered questions, we regret having given the story further exposure."