

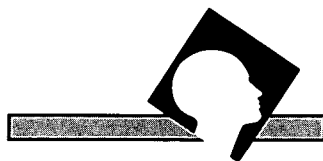
Police Pursuit of Satanic Crime

Part I

ROBERT D. HICKS

Law-enforcement officials throughout the United States flock to training seminars about satanic cults and crime. In Virginia alone, cult-crime officers gave at least 50 seminars in 1988. The seminars, orchestrated by a loose network of investigators, ex-police officers (now cult consultants), therapists, and clergy, offer a world-view that interprets the familiar and explainable—and the unfamiliar and poorly understood—in terms of increasing participation by Americans in satanic worship. The seminars further claim that satanism has spawned gruesome crimes and aberrant behavior that *might* presage violent crime. In particular, law-enforcement officials have developed a model of “the problem,” a scheme widely disseminated through police-training seminars as well as through networks of investigators, newsletters, and public presentations. Is this concern justified?

I argue that the current preoccupation of law-enforcers with satanism and cults has not been prompted by anything new: the phenomenon has a firm historical and cultural context. Further, I suggest that the news media are largely responsible for the law-enforcement model of cult activity, since the evidence officers cite for cult mayhem is generally based on nothing more than newspaper stories. Frequently, these news stories do not even attribute nasty incidents to cults, but the police infer causality anyway. I suggest that for police the actual problem with cults, in terms of their threat to public order, is very small, has nonsupernatural explanations, and requires no new law-enforcement resour-



The law-enforcement model of cult crime exaggerates levels of satanic and cult involvement, is derived largely from news articles, and is rife with errors and ignorance.

ces. Newspaper accounts substantiate and fuel police interest in cults. For instance:

—In July 1988, the Myrtle Beach, Florida, *Sun-News* reported that police arrested four teenagers for vandalizing a cemetery, allegedly trying to remove body parts from a grave for satanic rituals (Edge 1988). The judge denied bond because she felt that, once freed, the boys would run amok during upcoming Walpurgisnacht (April 30), a satanic holiday. The boys, the judge felt, couldn't control their own behavior once in thrall to Satan.

—In February 1989, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that police arrested two brothers for trying to kill a judge through a hoodoo spell. (Hoodoo, a variant of voodoo, survives in the American South primarily among impoverished blacks.) The brothers had arranged with a Jamaican "voodoo priest" to cast a death spell using a photograph of the judge and a lock of his hair. Although the brothers got caught by ingenuously asking the judge's wife for the hair and the photograph, the police nevertheless charged them with conspiracy to commit murder based on the hex alone (McCoy 1989).

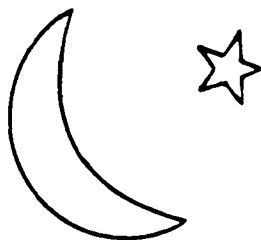
—In Virginia, in October 1988, a *Style News* article described cult paraphernalia left at a popular riverside park, but a park official wasn't worried: the paraphernalia could not be the work of dangerous satanists because "real satanists don't leave any traces," he observed (Bacon 1988).

—The *Kansas City Times* reported in March 1988 that a Chicago police investigator said of cult crime, "I think it's going to be a growing problem as we go into the nineties." He further noted that, although there are no national statistics on the problem, a network of satanists does exist—people who perform child molestation and murder as a form of worship. A

"Signs of Satan"



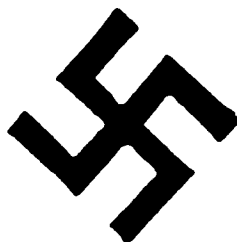
Horned hand



Symbols representing the moon goddess Diana and the morning star of Lucifer.



Lightning bolt



Swastika

deputy sheriff warned that satanists are responsible for as many as 50,000 human sacrifices a year, "mainly transients, runaways, and babies conceived solely for the purpose of human sacrifice" (Berg 1988).

—The same *Kansas City Times* article, surveying the law-enforcement interest in cults, recounted the first of several preschool or daycare-center cases in which children's uncorroborated testimony caused indictments of many adults for sexual abuse. The children said that adults dressed in robes performed ceremonies involving not only rape but even murder, cannibalism, and mutilation (Berg 1988).

The readers of such accounts, given the impassioned testimony of police officers, therapists, teachers, and concerned parents, may well presume the existence of a problem of national proportions. The lack of criminal convictions for these crimes has not deterred satanic-conspiracy proponents.

In my role as a law-enforcement specialist with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, I have a professional interest in what has become a trendy topic on the police seminar circuit: cult crime. At first alarmed by what I learned at the seminars, I became progressively more skeptical, then even more alarmed by the cult experts' anti-intellectual and anti-rationalist stance. The law-enforcement model of cult crime appeared shoddy, ill-considered, and rife with errors of logic (faulty causal relationships, false analogies, lack of documentation, unsupported generalizations) and ignorance of an anthropological, psychological, and historical context.

One cannot easily analyze the law-enforcement concern with cults, for two reasons: first, the sources of information are irregular, sometimes

obscure or not verifiable (e.g., no public access to ongoing criminal investigations); second, the eclectic nature of the law-enforcement model of cult crime makes focused criticism difficult. The information law-enforcers use to document cult activities derives largely from newspaper articles. Reporters often cater to the lurid and the macabre, frequently implying cause-effect relationships or hinting at dark deeds.

For example, articles on teen suicides sometimes note that the victim was known to listen to heavy metal rock music or to play "Dungeons and Dragons," a fantasy role-playing game. Some law-enforcers and concerned parents perceive a cause-effect relationship: "Dungeons and Dragons" introduces young lives to the occult and may prompt suicides. Patricia A. Pulling, founder of the Virginia-based group Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD), implies such a relationship when she claims that many teen suicides are linked to the game, giving only newspaper articles (including even the *Weekly World News*) as her sources.

Law-enforcement literature makes the same kind of mistakes. For example, an article in *Law-Enforcement News*, a publication of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, began: "A 14-year-old Jefferson Township, N.J., boy kills his mother with a Boy Scout knife, sets the family home on fire, and commits suicide in a neighbor's back yard by slashing his wrists and throat. Investigators find books on the occult and Satan worship in the boy's room" (Clark 1988). But did the boy have a collection of spiders? A stack of pornographic literature under his bed? A girlfriend who just jilted him? Newspaper accounts don't often mention such other possible explanations.

The Cult-Crime Model

Fundamentalist Christianity drives the occult-crime model. Cult-crime officers invariably communicate fundamentalist Christian concepts at seminars. They employ fundamentalist rhetoric, distribute literature that emanates from fundamentalist authorities and sometimes offer bibliographies giving many fundamentalist publications, and they sometimes team up with clergy to give seminars on satanism. The most notable circular among cult-crime investigators, *File 18 Newsletter*, follows a Christian world-view in which police officers who claim to separate their religious views from their professional duties nevertheless maintain that salvation through Jesus Christ is the only sure antidote to satanic involvement, whether criminal or noncriminal, and point out that no police officer can honorably and properly do his or her duty without reference to Christian standards.

At seminars, cult-crime officers distribute handouts showing symbols to identify at crime scenes, accompanied by their meanings. The handouts typically attribute no sources, but many derive from Christian material. For example, the peace symbol of the 1960s is now dubbed the "Cross of Nero." Someone decided that the upside-down broken cross on the symbol somehow mocks Christianity. (In fact, common knowledge has it that the symbol was invented in the 1950s using semaphore representations for the letters "n" and "d" for nuclear disarmament.)

Fundamentalist Christianity motivates the proponents of cult-crime conspiracy theories in other ways. Apparently, arguing against their theory is, to them, attacking their world-view. To some cult-crime officers, arguing against the model denies

Fundamentalist Christianity drives the cult-crime model. Cult officers invariably employ fundamentalist rhetoric, distribute fundamentalist literature . . . and sometimes team up with clergy to give satanism seminars.

the existence of Satan as a lurking, palpable entity who appears to tempt and torture us. Satan becomes the ultimate crime leader: the drug lord, the Mafia don, the gang boss.

Chicago police investigator Jerry Simandl doesn't just investigate crimes, he also interprets cult behavior, particularly that which threatens Christians. He apparently can tell whether an act of church vandalism was committed mindlessly by kids or purposefully by a cult group: "For example, an organ might be vandalized by having its keys broken. That means that the vandals were seeking to deny a congregation the ability to 'communicate with God' through music" (Clark 1988). Simandl draws amazing inferences about these crimes, although they have the lowest clearance rate because they frequently leave no suspects and no evidence beyond the destroyed property. The church vandalism so shocks religious sensibilities that some cult-crime officer—armed with the world-view that cults cause crime—can only interpret the crime as satanic.

Facing Facts

Evil is, indeed, the operative word. Law enforcers who meld cult-crime theories with their professional world-views have transformed their

legal duties into a moral confrontation between good and evil. Larry Jones, a police officer from Boise, Idaho, edits the *File 18 Newsletter*. Jones believes that a satanic network exists in all strata of society and maintains extreme secrecy to shroud its program of murder.

Defensive about the lack of physical evidence of cult mayhem, Jones writes:

Those who deny, explain away, or cover up the obvious undeniably growing mountain of evidence often demand statistical evidence or positive linkages between operational suspect groups. At best, this demand for positive proof of a "horizontal conspiracy" is naive. . . . Consider the possibility that the reason supposedly unrelated groups in different localities over various time periods acting-out in a similar manner, is that consistent directives are received independently from higher levels of authority. Instead of being directly linked to each other, these groups may be linked vertically to a common source of direction and control. Those who accept this theory as a reasonable possibility need to rethink the meaning, scope and effects of the term conspiracy! (*File 18 Newsletter*, 4[1], 1989)

In other words, if the evidence doesn't seem to fit a particular conspiracy theory, just create a bigger conspiracy theory. Jones and other cult-crime officers impose their model on a pastiche of claims, exaggerations, or suppositions. For example, cult investigators would have us believe that cult practitioners develop skills in the vivisection of livestock and household pets. One investigator, retired police captain Dale Griffis from Ohio, says: "Occultists will stun the animal on his back with an electric probe. Then they will spray freon on the

animal's throat. . . . The heart's still pumping, and they will use an embalming tool to get the blood out. It's fast and efficient. Hell, the farmer heard the animal whine, and he was there within five minutes" (Kahaner 1988: 146).

A sheriff's investigator, in a memorandum about cattle mutilations, interviewed a young woman who claimed to be a former satanic-cult member who had mutilated animals. Her cult, which consisted of "doctors, lawyers, veterinarians" were taught by the vets how to perform the requisite fatal surgery. The animal's blood and removed organs, it seems, were used for baptismal rites. She further related:

When using the helicopter [the cult members] sometimes picked up the cow by using a homemade . . . sling . . . and they would move it and drop it further down from where the mutilations occurred. This would account for there not being any footprints or tire tracks. . . . When using the van trucks they would also have a telescoping lift which . . . was about 200 feet long mounted outside the truck and would use that to extend a man out to the cow, and he would mutilate it from a board platform on the end of the boom and he would never touch the ground. . . . They sometimes do three or four cows. (Kahaner 1988: 148)

It seems that the cult members went to such lengths because they delighted in baffling the police.

The sheriff's investigator reported to his supervisor each detail of this story, but obviously he was unacquainted with Occam's Razor. Trucks with 200-foot booms are not plentiful and would appear conspicuous in rural America, particularly when helicopter air support is called in. The investi-

gator never considered the work of a predator, or even the action of a vandal. Of course, news accounts of such livestock deaths, particularly if related by cult-crime officers, most often attribute deaths to cultists and claim the animals were killed and the organs "surgically" removed. Did a surgeon do the work? Can a police officer tell the difference between a hole in a cow's belly put there by a scalpel and one caused by a predator's sharp teeth?

A comprehensive investigation of cattle-mutilation claims, carried out by former FBI agent Kenneth M. Rommel, Jr., made exactly these criticisms, and many others. Rommel (1980) concluded that virtually all reported livestock mutilations are due to natural actions of scavengers and predators. He cautioned law-enforcement officers not to use the term "surgical precision" and not to be misled by colorful statements by people interested in spreading rumors, theories, and fears.

Cult-crime officers may deny facts that contradict their theories. For example, one of the recent murders they dubbed "satanic" was that of Stephen Newberry, a teenager from Springfield, New Jersey, whose friends bashed him to death with a baseball bat. Even though Larry Jones quotes local investigators, a prosecutor, a psychologist, and an academic cult expert who claimed that no satanic sacrifice of Newberry occurred but instead blamed drug abuse, Jones nevertheless offers the opinion that the experts "do not give credit to the strong influence of the tenets of the satanic belief system over its initiates. In some cases the subjects become involved with satanism . . . prior to the onset of family problems. . . . The only true and lasting solution to 'devil worship' or satanic involvement is a personal encounter with true Chris-



The pentagram is another "sign of Satan."

tianity" (*File 18 Newsletter*, 4[1]:3).

The police have found no evidence to support Jones's earlier suggestion that a "vertical conspiracy" might exist—a higher leader directing groups to do murderous business within an authoritarian cult led by a charismatic leader.

The Cult-Crime Model: A Description

Characteristically, law-enforcement cult seminars all promote the same model of satanic cults, although largely without any substantiation or documentation. The model persuades because it takes phenomena familiar to the officers and imbues them with new meanings: officers learn a new lexicon to describe old phenomena and therefore see the cult problem as a new threat to public order. So what is the model?

The model, now almost seven years old, loosely postulates various levels of satanic or cult involvement (see box). Characteristically, the officers—the self-proclaimed experts who teach the seminars—do not define the object of their concern. They use the terms *cult*, *occult*, and *satanism* interchange-

ably but with the connotation of disruption, coercion, mind-control by a charismatic leader, plus, of course, criminality. The terms are extended to religious practices dubbed "nontraditional," e.g., voodoo, Santeria, Native American practices. The label masks an implicit bias that Christianity is the traditional belief, the norm. The same law-enforcers who employ the term *nontraditional* apparently don't see the irony of introducing their seminars with the caveat that officers must respect First Amendment rights and not interfere with noncriminal religious practices. Larry Jones also advises his readers not to interfere with constitutionally protected civil liberties, yet nonetheless judges non-traditional groups or cults according to his standards.

In a discourse on Wicca (as some witches call themselves), he posits, for example, that *any* belief system must set absolute standards of conduct. Relative ones won't do because they "open the door to excesses" (*File 18 Newsletter*, 3[3]:7). He can only find fault with Wicca by abstracting this standard that measures the legitimacy of belief systems. While concluding that Wicca is benign and its practitioners claim no connection with satanism, Jones nevertheless describes much of Wicca as derived from "Luciferian" Aleister Crowley, who allegedly had ties to satanist and black-magic organizations.

The cult-crime model begins with a brief, disjointed history of satanic practices. Typically, lecturers usher in pagans and witches as part of the satanic extended family, sometimes accompanied by specific details of how cultists ply their beliefs. One investigator generalizes that witches pray to 300 deities, and not for benign purposes: witches pray for something smacking of self-interest (from a Richmond Bureau of Police seminar,

Virginia, September 13, 1988). (Cult-crime officers imply that Christians never do this.) When satanists pray, they demand, he says. "Satanism is a self-indulgent religion" based on two themes: "All humans are inherently evil," and "Life is a struggle for the survival of the fittest."

The Satanists: LaVey and Crowley

The historical discourse continues by pegging two twentieth-century satanists who have molded the contemporary philosophy of their movement: Aleister Crowley and Anton LaVey. Crowley, described in police seminars as an "influential satanist," although indulging in pagan shenanigans during the early twentieth century, became involved with (although cult officers mistakenly say that he founded) the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis, "the largest practicing Satanic cult operating today." Further, say the police, the main belief fostered by groups deriving from Crowley's legacy involves "sexual perversion."

LaVey, on the other hand, a former police photographer and circus performer, founded the Church of Satan in San Francisco in 1966 at the zenith of Haight-Ashbury hippiedom. Police officers teach that LaVey's two books, *The Satanic Bible* and *The Satanic Rituals Book*, can be dangerous, and they observe incredulously that both can be found in shopping-mall bookstores. In particular, law enforcers cite LaVey's nine dicta of the Church of Satan, which include (LaVey 1969):

Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence! . . .

Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek! . . .

Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they lead to physical or mental gratification! . . .

The Cult-Crime Model

This model is promulgated widely at law-enforcement cult seminars, largely without any substantiation or documentation.

Traditional Satanists: The first, and highest, level of satanists includes transgenerational family satanism, the cult survivors' tales, and daycare-center ritual abuse. Such satanists comprise an international underground, tightly organized and covert, responsible for upwards of 50,000 human sacrifices a year (some of which are babies bred for sacrifice).

Organized Satanists: The second level of satanic involvement includes public groups, such as the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set. Cult-crime officers' definition of this level as dangerous is ambiguous since organized groups formally proscribe acts of violence. But cult seminars imply *a fortiori* that such groups promote self-indulgence to the point of attracting psychopaths or criminals. Thus it is the perceived likelihood of public satanic organizations attracting bad people that justifies law-enforcement surveillance.

Self-styled Satanists: The third level of involvement includes self-styled satanists, such as mass murderers like John Wayne Gacy and Henry Lee Lucas. These men, also social isolates, invented ideologies to affirm their behavior. Some cult-crime officers even maintain that these criminals do their evil deeds as a form of satanic sacrifice to give

them power, but other law-enforcers, such as Griffis, believe that self-styled satanists borrow from the occult because satanic ideology permits or encourages their crimes. This idea is the most plausible component of the model: sociopaths or psychopaths, already distanced from common standards of behavior, may choose an ideology that helps them reconcile their crimes with their consciences.

Dabblers: Dabblers, those in the outer, or fourth level of cult involvement, are mostly children, teenagers, or very young adults who, in unsophisticated fashion, play with satanic bits and pieces. At this level, "Dungeons and Dragons" (D&D) and like games rope kids into the occult, as does heavy metal rock music with satanic lyrics. Some investigators here introduce the implantation (backmasking) of satanic messages in music. But the real *bête noir* of youth is the fantasy role-playing game, usually D&D. Says one investigator, "Every kid that plays D&D will not get into satanism, but how many kids do we lose before we have a problem?" (Richmond Bureau of Police seminar, Virginia, September 13, 1988). But through playing the game, "some kids cross over an imaginary line and start connecting their D&D world with the real world." In the seminars, cult-crime officers give estimates of 95 to 150 documented deaths of children directly linked to the game (based on news articles).

Cult officers maintain that LaVey's dicta foster in his followers the attitude, "If it feels good, do it," thus justifying criminal acts.

Aleister Crowley is said to have added a more wicked dimension to this philosophy, for in his *Book of the Law* (written before World War I) he stated, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" (Crowley 1976:9). The statement quoted by the law-enforcement officers out of context implies to them license for murder. In context, however, one reads a metaphorical jaunt through the ancient Egyptian pantheon full of erotic and occasionally Masonic allusions. One might infer from context that the law officers' quotation, too, is figurative speech.

The Book of the Law, as dictated by a shadowy prophet to Crowley, contains a damning quotation: "Love is the law, love under will. There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt." But the text even explains the credo by pointing out that people move through their lives according to their destinies, that people act according to experience, impulse, and the "law of growth." In short, people are controlled by destiny: they cannot act apart from it. "Do what thou wilt" means "Do what accords with your destiny." Crowley's most recent biography points out that he did not intend the phrase to mean, "Do what you like," but rather, as Crowley later wrote, "Find the way of life that is compatible with your innermost desires and live it to the full" (King 1978:36). The same biographer adds that an exegesis of the work may be impossible because Crowley himself claimed that he didn't understand all of it.

Nevertheless, say law-enforcers, deviant people use Crowley's prescription to justify sex crimes, child-molesting, and murder. To add to the

mystery, one police investigator held up a copy of Crowley's book at a seminar, stating that one can obtain it only from a certain Pennsylvania occult bookstore or from the Ordo Templi Orientis, and that he himself could not reveal how he obtained his copy.¹

LaVey, on the other hand, operates without a deity. To the Church of Satan, the Evil One is no deity but rather a symbolic adversary. The Church of Satan, then, pulls a clever trick:

"What are the Seven Deadly Sins?" LaVey is fond of asking. "Gluttony, avarice, lust, sloth—they are urges every man feels at least once a day. How could you set yourself up as the most powerful institution on earth? You first find out what every man feels at least once a day, establish that as a sin, and set yourself up as the only institution capable of pardoning that sin." (Lyons 1988:111)

Since people's guilt, apprehension, and anxiety about such urges are worse than experiencing the urges themselves, the Church of Satan offers people a release: Indulge yourselves, says the Church, as long as you abide by the law and harm no one. Lyons (1988) reports examples of Church of Satan psychodramas that engineer people's confrontations with their own fears, such as a woman afraid of her domineering husband who role-plays him to help reduce his menacing effect on her. Further, the rituals of the Church of Satan frequently invoke fictional deities. "In joining the Church of Satan, these people not only managed to inject a little mystery and exoticism into their otherwise banal lives, they achieved a mastery of their own fates by the practice of ritual magic," Lyons wrote (1988:116). Lyons's point was confirmed by the

participant observation experiment of anthropologist Edward Moody, who found the Church of Satan therapeutic (1974).

If LaVey's ideology is contrived of fiction, symbolism, and a deliberate antidote to Establishment Christianity, and Crowley retailed in the metaphysical (what one would now call New Age), why the law-enforcement interest? Cult officers focus on these two because they have been published and their philosophies are within easy reach. No other "satanic" ideologies exist that have so openly and publicly philosophized. They make easy targets. One of the first articles on this subject in a law-enforcement journal even pointed out that LaVey uses a symbolic Satan and noted in context that LaVey's church even condemns sex crimes, including bestiality, but nevertheless stated, "It seems contradictory for a group to encourage all forms of sexual expression, and at the same time place parameters on that activity" (Barry 1987:39).

By touting certain books as evil and pernicious, cult-crime officers have appointed themselves conservators of our libraries. Cult consultant Dale Griffis has recommended that officers contact public libraries for names of patrons who have borrowed books on the occult (according to an Office of Intellectual Freedom *Memorandum*, American Library Association, January/February 1988, p. 7).

The cult-crime officers not only cite numerous books à la LaVey and Crowley as bona fide compendia of occult knowledge rising from the dim horizon of ancient history, but also cite as dangerous the occult symbols on rock music albums, the songs' lyrics, and the fantasy characters that appear in the advanced levels of "Dungeons and Dragons." Yet the game does not invoke any Mephisto-

phes from the *arcanum arcanorum* of medieval alchemists: the D&D gods, in fact, derive largely from the imaginations of the game designers and the encyclopedia (Michael Stackpole, game designer, personal communication, 1989).

Note

1. Taking the officer's statement as a challenge, I examined his copy, the title page complete with an ISBN number and the reprinting publisher's name, Samuel Weiser, Inc. With help from directory assistance, I contacted the publisher's customer-relations representative. I discovered that the company, which publishes many New Age books, still prints Crowley in paperback, so I placed an order for *The Book of Law*. I alarmed the representative by explaining what the officer had said about the impossibility of obtaining a copy, to which the surprised woman said, "But we'll sell it to anyone who asks!" I received my copy within ten days. (The officer who created the mystery over the book was an investigator for the Richmond, Virginia, Bureau of Police, lecturing on September 13, 1988.)

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Next: "Part II: The Satanic Conspiracy and Urban Legends."

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