

Satanic Cults

A Skeptical View of the Law Enforcement Approach

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NOTE: The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the Department of Criminal Justice Services or the Commonwealth of Virginia.

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I wish to alert you to a dangerous cult that has implanted itself not only in Virginia but throughout the country. This group, called the Tnevnoc cult, is a "communal, sectarian group affiliated with a large and powerful international religious organization." I can communicate something to you of the methods and goals of the organization by describing the cult's recruitment and indoctrination practices. The cult aims to recruit young women, either teenagers or young adults, and does so openly at schools and colleges. Following indoctrination into the cult, young women eventually lose any power of will, succumbing entirely to the regimen of the cult.

Cult members must abandon their former lives, even surrendering their outside friendships and personal possessions. Cult members' activities, then, involve the cult exclusively. Members must arise at 4:30 in the morning, wear prayer beads attached to their wrists, engage in long, monotonous chants and prayers, and in one of the most bizarre activities, members consumed food they were told represented the dead cult founder's body. Women must even pledge in writing absolute obedience to the cult. To further distance itself from worldly affairs, the cult assigns new names to members and designates as their birthdays the dates of their entry into the cult.

After hours of performing menial tasks such as scrubbing floors coupled with the incessant recitation of ritualistic prayers, members might occasionally transgress rules which are punished harshly. For example, punishment might require women to go without food, having to beg on their knees for the crumbs from others' plates. But the most shocking ritual of all required members to become brides to the dead cult leader.

I hope that I have sufficiently aroused your curiosity, if not your indignation and anger that such activities could happen in the United States. In case you haven't figured it out, Tnevnoc is Convent spelled backwards. I have just described the socialization of young women into Christian convents. But, you say, convents are harmless, in a criminal sense anyway, and in part comprise established religion in our society. In short, convents are legitimate.

I have described the working of Christian convents in this way for a few reasons. First, I have used the jargon of police satanic cult seminars to describe a familiar phenomenon. Viewed in cult seminar terms, convents appear evil and pernicious. I sprinkled in the description words which are never defined by cult crime experts, that is, "cult" and "ritual." Cult crime experts, as they call themselves, by not defining such words, impart to them connotations of evil, the demonic, the supernaturally criminal. If you don't think my description of Christian convents provides a fair comparison to the way non-Christian religions are described at cult crime seminars, think again. When convents appeared in the United States during the last century, many citizens objected to their manipulative, authoritarian methods by describing the same practices in the same ways to arouse public mortification. Similarly, one reads newspaper accounts nowadays of how officers investigate ceremonial sites with altars, pentagrams, melted candle wax in ritually significant colors, all frequently involving innocuous teenage antics but sometimes attributable to small non-Christian groups who show no criminal involvement.

Law enforcement officials flock to training seminars about satanic cults and crime. The seminars offer a world view that interprets both the familiar and explainable--and unfamiliar and poorly understood--as 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. I suggest that the current preoccupation with satanism and cults involves nothing new: the phenomenon has a firm and documented historical and sociological context. I also suggest that the news media have largely defined the law enforcement model of cult activity since the evidence offered at cult seminars for cult mayhem is nothing more than newspaper stories. Frequently, though, the same news stories don't even attribute nasty incidents to cults, but the police have been quick to infer from them cause-effect relationships anyway. The law enforcement model of cult crime is ill-considered, based on nondocumented secondary sources or other unsubstantiated information, and is rife with errors of logic. Such errors include false analogies, faulty cause-effect relationships, and broad, unsupported generalizations. The cult crime model betrays an ignorance of a larger academic context of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history.

Even the law enforcement literature makes the same mistakes. For example, Law Enforcement News, a publication of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, began an article on cult crime with a titillating opener: "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 backyard by slashing his wrists and throat. Investigators find books on the occult and Satan worship in the boy's room."/2 The article, then, implied some connection between reading books on the occult and the murder/suicide. But did the boy have a collection of spiders? A stack of pornographic magazines under his bed? A girlfriend who just jilted him? A history of psychiatric treatment for depression? Newspaper accounts never mention other attributes of a crime scene since only those touched by a nameless, faceless evil will suit the reader's hunger for an

explanation of why good boys do terrible things. And the same newspaper article will be reproduced and circulated at cult seminars to substantiate the satanic connection.

The cult crime model is in part driven by Fundamentalist Christianity. The most notable newsletter circulating among cult crime investigators, the 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. But more of File 18 Newsletter in a moment. Other cult crime seminar speakers make a living at it: Thomas Wedge, a former deputy sheriff, maintains a Baptist line of thinking at his seminars by beginning with his brand of "Theology 101."³ And while cult seminar presenters caution about respecting First Amendment rights of citizens practicing unusual beliefs, the same officers can't help but inflict their bias on audiences: anything that is not mainstream Christianity is dubbed a "non-traditional belief." Cult officers distribute handouts at seminars showing symbols to identify at crime scenes, accompanied by their meanings. The cult cops attribute fixed meanings to the symbols as if satanists world-wide universally use the symbols in precise configurations with identical meanings. The handouts typically attribute no sources but many derive from Christian material. For example, the peace symbol of the 1960's 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 1950's using semaphore representations for the letters "n" and "d" for nuclear disarmament. But cult officers go on their merry way, uncritically disseminating borrowed, undocumented information.

Fundamentalist Christianity motivates the proponents of cult crime conspiracy theories in other ways. For example, arguing against their theory is, to them, attacking their world view. Special Agent Ken Lanning of the FBI understands this quite well. Lanning, an agent who specializes in child abuse cases, has offered skeptical observations about satanic crime at many seminars, only to be branded a satanist himself by Christian groups. Lanning has noted the irony of this, since he raises his own family according to Christian principles. But to some cult crime officers, arguing against their model denies 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 leader. Chicago police investigator Jerry Simandl has demonstrated the cult officer world view in his work. He doesn't just investigate crimes, he also interprets cult behavior--particularly that which threatens Christians-- according to the cult seminar world view, interpretations that were once the province of crusading clergy. He can tell whether a church vandalism was mindlessly committed by kids or purposefully by a cult group: "For example, an organ might be vandalized by having its keys broken. That means the vandals were seeking to deny a congregation the ability to 'communicate with God' through music."⁴ Simandl draws amazing inferences about a crime that experiences the lowest clearance rate because we are frequently left with no suspects and no evidence beyond the vandalism. And it apparently occurs to no one to link a church vandalism to, say, a bias crime, a term coming to the fore these days in law enforcement practice, a term now taking on a legal definition.* But no: the vandalism so shocks Christian sensibilities that the cult officer--armed with his new world view that cults cause crime--can only interpret the crime as satanic.

As I noted before, cult crime officers do not define their terms: the words "cult," "occult," "satanic," and "ritual" find casual usage, the words imbued with demonic and evil associations. 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 confrontation between good and evil. So back to the File 18

** "Bias crimes, or incidents of hate violence, are words or actions intended to intimidate or injure an individual because of his or her race, religion, national origin, or sexual preference. Bias crimes range from threatening phone calls to murder. The impact of these types of offenses is far more pervasive than impacts of comparable crimes that do not involve prejudice because the consequences frighten an entire group. The fear that such acts generate . . . can victimize a whole class of people." From Justice Research, November/December 1987, p. 1, published by the National Criminal Justice Association.*

Newsletter. The publication's editor, police officer Larry Jones, believes that a satanic network exists in all levels of society, a network that maintains extreme secrecy to shroud its program of murder. Defensive about the lack of physical evidence of cult mayhem, Jones states:

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 [sic] 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. This 'vertical conspiracy model' is consistent with the 'authoritarian'. . . structure seen in many cult and occult groups.

Those who accept this theory as a reasonable possibility need to rethink the meaning, scope, and effects of the term conspiracy!⁵ In other words, if the evidence doesn't seem to fit a particular conspiracy theory, just create a bigger conspiracy theory. Other hints of File 18 Newsletter's Fundamentalist bias show through in other ways. Writer Arthur Lyons recounted receiving a copy of the newsletter accompanied by an article from a Christian magazine, Passport, entitled, "America's Best Kept Secret."⁶ The article described the "best-kept secret" as the conspiracy of satanists in America among all classes and races, and the article further noted the "Wicca Letters," a spurious document which offers a blueprint for takeover by satanists. Jones has apparently not decided to abandon Passport of late: in a recent issue of File 18 Newsletter (Volume IV, No. 89-4) the Passport article is once again available with an accompanying videotape for "an effective training combination." But Jones and other cult officers impose any model they can contrive on a hodge-podge of ideas, claims, exaggerations, or suppositions.

For example, cult investigators would have us believe that cult practitioners learn skills in the vivisection of livestock and household pets. One investigator, retired police captain Dale Griffis, says that "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."/7

A sheriff's investigator, in a memorandum about cattle mutilations, interviewed a young woman who claimed to be an ex-satanic cult member who had mutilated animals. Her cult, which consisted of "doctors, lawyers, veterinarians" were taught by the vets how to perform the 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 would never touch the ground. . .They some times do three or four cows./8

Of course, the cult members went to such lengths because they delight in baffling the police.

The sheriff's investigator reported to his supervisor each detail of this story from a convincing woman, but he was obviously unacquainted with a principle of logic, Occam's Razor. This principle suggests that when faced with two hypotheses for an explanation, each of which can explain the phenomenon, one chooses the simpler. The investigator never considered here 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 officers, will attribute deaths to cultists, and newspapers will use one of my favorite adverbs for such activities: the animal was killed and organs were surgically removed. Did a surgeon do the work? Can a police officer tell the difference between a hole in a cow's head put there by a bullet, scalpel, or predator's bite? But back to Occam's Razor. Imagine the woman's story: trucks with 200-foot booms are not plentiful and would appear conspicuous in rural America, particularly when the cultists call in helicopter air support.

In other areas, cult crime officers simply deny facts. For example, one of the recent murders dubbed satanic by cult officers 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... [T]he only true and lasting solution to 'devil worship' or satanic involvement is a personal encounter with true Christianity... /9

Jones's earlier guess that a "vertical conspiracy" might exist, that a higher authority directs groups to murder as a form of worship to Satan within an authoritarian cult led by a charismatic leader, is a ghost of the cult officer's mind: the police have identified no such groups.

Characteristically, law enforcement cult seminars all parley the same model of satanic cults, circulating the same second-hand information, most of it without documentation or sources for quotations. The model convinces many because it takes phenomena familiar to the officer and imbues them with new meanings: officers learn a new vocabulary to describe old phenomena and therefore see the cult problem as a new threat to public order.

The self-proclaimed cult experts who teach the seminars advise officers not to interfere with constitutionally-protected civil liberties, yet proceed to do just that. Investigator Bill Lightfoot, Richmond, Virginia, Bureau of Police, recommends confiscating books on the occult whenever law enforcers find them during investigations (ritual crime in- service seminar, Petersburg, VA, September 13, 1988); other cult experts such as Dale Griffis have advised officers to ask public libraries to turn over to police lists of patrons who have borrowed books on the occult.¹⁰ The same self-proclaimed experts take the bigoted stand that because a person commits a vile crime and identifies himself as a satanist, then by extension all satanists must have condoned the crime; the crime must be sanctioned by the satanic order or church. That relationship between the person and the belief, then, justifies police surveillance of non-Christian groups. By contrast, we don't follow the same reasoning when Christians or Jews commit crimes. In Richmond recently, police arrested a man who had years ago murdered his family. He had since been living under a new identity with a new wife. The fact that the murderer was a conservative churchgoing Christian did not lead anyone to label his acts as Christian crime, but if the man had professed a belief in Satan, or in any other so-called "non-traditional belief," such as Yoruba, voodoo or hoodoo, cult cops would be quick to label the crime as evidence of cult activity in America.

Larry Jones provides an example. In his File 18 Newsletter, he discusses some "non-traditional" beliefs and ends up finding fault even where he can't connect crime with the belief. In a discourse on Wicca witchcraft, 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."¹¹ So in a treatment of Wicca he can only find fault by abstracting this standard of absolute conduct that measures somehow the legitimacy of belief systems. While concluding nevertheless that Wicca is benign and that its practitioners claim no connection with satanism, Jones lumps Wicca in with "Luciferian" Aleister Crowley with his ties to Black Magic organizations. Larry Jones forgets that if a belief system "opens its door to excesses," the history of Christianity provides no small example of excesses committed for holy purposes.

One doesn't condemn Christianity because Jim Jones and his group--all Christians--committed mass suicide or because the Pope spurred a murderous crusade in the Middle East some centuries ago. Whether or not people can get criminal ideas from belief systems--whether from Buddhism, Christianity, voodoo, Islam, or anything else--has little to do with the belief system but rather with a person's own psychological make-up. And in this realm the police have no jurisdiction. It is not a law enforcement responsibility to guess at what might prompt a citizen to commit a crime. Police arrest people who commit crimes under the influence of alcohol, but we don't

blame the alcohol. People who have domestic disputes live in homes with guns and knives, but we don't take away such weapons to prevent a crime.

In the cult crime seminars, cult officers give a disjointed history of satanism and witchcraft and usually peg two contemporary satanists who have molded the 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 part of the century, promoted the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis, "the largest practicing satanic cult operating today," according to Griffis (advanced ritualistic crime seminar, Richmond, VA, September 22, 1989). 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, [Satanic Bible](#) and [The Satanic Rituals: Companion to The Satanic Bible](#), can be dangerous. In particular, cult officers cite LaVey's nine principles of the Church of Satan which include:

1. Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence!
5. Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek!
8. Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they lead to physical or mental gratification!/12

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, apparently, added a more wicked dimension to this philosophy for in his Book of the Law he states, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."/13 Taken in context, however, the book consists of a metaphorical jaunt through the ancient Egyptian pantheon full of erotic and Masonic allusions. What Crowley said was not meant to be taken literally, but figuratively.

A reading of Crowley's text reveals that the damning statement refers to people inevitably moving through their lives according to their destinies, that people will act according to experience, impulse, and the "law of growth." In other words, people are going to do what people are going to do. Put another way, people are what they are. But Crowley did not worship Satan nor spur his followers to worship Satan.

I heard Investigator Lightfoot (noted earlier) give a cult crime seminar (September 13, 1988, Petersburg, VA) in which he held up a copy of Crowley's book and said that short of obtaining one from a member of the highly secretive Ordo Templi Orientis, one can only obtain a copy from an obscure Pennsylvania occult bookstore. He said that he could not reveal how he obtained his copy. I happened to examine the officer's copy, noted the reprinting publisher's name and address, and called their customer service representative. The company, Samuel Weiser, publishes quite a few books under the New Age category. I asked how to obtain a copy of

Crowley: she replied that I need only send a check for \$5.50 and I would soon receive one. When I told her what Lightfoot had said about the difficulty of obtaining a copy, she exclaimed, "But we'll sell it to anyone who asks!" She apologized, though, because the book was only available in soft cover, not hardback.

LaVey, on the other hand, operates without mysticism or even a deity. To the Church of Satan, the Evil One is no deity but rather a symbolic adversary. The Church of Satan 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./14

LaVey, then, tries to subvert Christianity by offering what Christian churches forbid. Since people's guilt, apprehension, and anxiety make them ill rather than 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. Some members have even found the Church of Satan therapeutic: the Church engineered, for example, a psychodrama in which a woman afraid of her domineering husband role-plays him to help reduce his menacing effect on her. An anthropologist confirmed the therapeutic value of Church of Satan membership for some people years ago in an academic study based on months' long participant observation./15

Church of Satan deities even invoke fictional sources, such as H.P. Lovecraft, H.G. Wells, and Ursula LeGuin. Writer Arthur Lyons observed, "In joining the Church of Satan, these people not only managed to inject a little mastery and exoticism into their otherwise banal lives, they achieved a mastery of their own fates by the practice of ritual magic."/16

If LaVey's ideology is contrived of fiction, symbolism, and a deliberate antidote to Establishment Christianity, and Crowley retailed in what we now call New Age thinking, why the law enforcement interest? Cult officers focus on these two because they have published, because their philosophies are within easy reach. They make easy targets. One article in a law enforcement journal even pointed out that LaVey uses a symbolic Satan and noted in context that the Church of Satan 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."/17

Again, in the fashion of Larry Jones, law enforcers can't resist criticizing others' beliefs. Consider, for a moment, law enforcers teaching cult seminars by parading books by LaVey, Crowley, and others, noting the dangerous ideas these books represent. But what is this? Is this crime prevention? Is crime prevention served by providing officers with lists of dangerous books? If we wanted to alert officers to books that might incite people to slug it out, we'd also have to list [The Autobiography of Malcolm X : As Told to Alex Haley](#), [Mein Kampf](#) by Adolf Hitler, the Bible, the Koran, to name a few.

But some officers claim that books on the occult have some inherent force of evil, that weak-minded people may pluck criminal ideas from them. One law enforcement book went so far as to state, "[The authors] urge you to continue your education in [satanism] by reading as widely as possible on the subject. But note: intense study of resource books and materials by occult sources or practitioners is hazardous. Preferred is studying overviews and synopses. . . Study and/or experimentation are to be avoided."/18 I have tried to show with Crowley and LaVey that their own purported guides to the occult hold no particular power or force other than what readers may impart to them. The satanic or occult books that cult officers use for show-and-tell either derive from scholarly sources or represent modern invention. Few can be traced to some remote, pre-Christian occult mysticism.

Cult officers not only cite LaVey and Crowley as some 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 popular game, Dungeons and Dragons. Yet as the game's designers take pains to point out, the D&D gods derive largely from the imaginations of game designers and the encyclopedia./19

Cult investigators have constructed four general levels of satanic or cult involvement. The outer, or fourth level, finds the "dabblers," mostly children, teenagers, or young adults who might play with satanic bits and pieces. Supposedly Dungeons and Dragons, heavy metal rock music, Ouija boards and the like rope kids into the occult. Investigator Lightfoot, like many other cult cops, maintains that satanic messages are present in rock lyrics when the music is played backwards. But cult officers don't distinguish between the presence of messages and their efficacy; they do not critically discuss what effect the messages have nor agree on their actual wording, and never describe how kids' brains are supposed to assimilate the messages anyway. No studies prove the efficacy of subliminal messages, satanic or otherwise.

Cult officers strike at Dungeons and Dragons as the essential evil where kids are concerned, estimating that anywhere from 95 to 150 documented deaths of children exist that can be attributed to the game. While similar figures appear in the press, the fact is that outside of reporters' suggestions, no documented killing or suicide exists directly attributable to playing the game. No reputable authority has ever detected a causal link between playing D&D and anything but a healthy adventure in the creative imagination.

The next level of involvement includes self-styled satanists, the killers such as John Wayne Gacey or Henry Lee Lucas. These men, social isolates and psychopaths, invented or borrowed satanic trappings to justify their crimes. This idea is the single most plausible component of the cult crime model: sociopaths or psychopaths may choose an ideology that helps them reconcile their crimes with their conscience.

The second level of satanists we have already discussed, the organized, public groups such as the Church of Satan or the Temple of Set. While cult officers are forced to admit that such groups have small, fluid memberships with doctrines that oppose violence and crime, the same officers recommend placing them under surveillance because they may harbor criminals or breed psychopaths. By this logic, then, we will have to do the same for most Christian churches. What's more, no one even knows how many cults exist in the United States. Estimates vary from 500

groups on up, with total memberships from 150,000 to over ten million. Which brings us back to the word "cult" and its lack of definition.

What and who are cults? Notoriously lacking from cult seminars is the voice of the "non-traditional belief." Law enforcers declare themselves experts in and give seminars on groups whose members they've never met. They interpret signs and symbols of groups that may not even exist. The scholar of comparative religion Gordon Melton has noted that, "The term 'cult' is a pejorative label used to describe certain religious groups outside of the mainstream of Western religion."/20 Melton's approach to surveying cults, which he has published in *The Encyclopedia of American Religions and Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*, prefers to remove bias and terms other beliefs as "alternative religions." I refer you to Melton for further discussion of cults, sects, churches, their definitions and attributes.

Finally we reach the last level of satanic involvement, the real evil meanies, the traditional satanists. These folks belong not to different denominations of the same thing but rather to an international megacult tightly organized in a clandestine hierarchy. Dale Griffis has been selling law enforcers on the model of these people as driven by mind control methods, slavishly participating in cult ceremonies including sexual assault, mutilation, murder, to name the most important activities. These satanists' belief in magic propels them to sacrifice people: they release some primal energy force through killing which enriches the participants. The abuse of children itself is a form of worship. While these satanists use their own children for sacrifice, satanists sometimes collect their lambs for slaughter at daycare centers. For example, Lightfoot noted one daycare center at which parents dropped off their kids at the start of the day, whereupon the daycare staff herded the kids onto busses, took them to an airfield, flew them to a ceremonial site, used them for rituals, sexually assaulted them and so on, then returned them to the daycare center by the end of the day. The parents picked up their kids, none the wiser.

Supposedly, then, we have much to fear from these satanists. Ex- deputy sheriff Thomas Wedge, who makes a living giving cult seminars, says, "It doesn't matter what you and I believe. It's what they believe that makes them dangerous . . . For the first time, we in law enforcement are dealing with something we can't shout at. . . can't handcuff."/21 Larry Jones has echoed the same sentiment, even pointing out that Christian police officers are particularly well qualified to confront the menace. Cult officers say that the ranks of secret satanists boast the intelligentsia of our society, hence the moneyed power behind the rituals. Patricia Pulling, a mother whose son committed suicide which she attributes to playing *Dungeons and Dragons* and who founded *Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD)*, maintains that satanic ranks include "doctors, lawyers, clergymen, even police."/22

Despite this large-scale conspiracy, police still have uncovered no evidence of cults' murderous activities. Police say that the lack of evidence owes to the cults' success: cultists eat bodies or dispose of them without a trace. FBI's Ken Lanning has pointed out many times that human history cannot produce a single example of any large scale organized murder (on the order of 50,000 human sacrifices a year, as some cult officers claim) without someone breaking ranks sooner or later. No such enterprise has ever existed, one that can commandeer so many people to carry out for so long thousands and thousands of violent crimes. People in any group change

their minds, get jealous, build empires, develop rivalries, disagree, ally themselves in factions. Why should satanists be any different?

Cult officers cite two prime examples of the work of traditional satanists: cult survivors' stories and child abuse cases. Cult survivors are the offspring of satanic parents bred to a life of abuse and witnessed murders. The prototype survivor is Michelle Smith who, with her psychiatrist husband, Lawrence Pazder, wrote [Michelle Remembers](#) (1980). By her own admission, Smith endured a rough, unhappy childhood with a violent, alcoholic father. After years of psychotherapy with Pazder, a new story emerged. Without prompting, Smith entered a trance in which she regressed to a childhood persona. In that persona, she told of ceremonies she had witnessed replete with black candles, black drapes, goblets, dismembered bodies, sexual abuse, having dismembered baby limbs rubbed on her, imprisonment in a snake-infested cage, confrontations with red spiders, and watching satanists rend kittens with their teeth. And all of this through the introduction of Michelle to satanism by her mother. Some curious loose ends remain, though. Smith's father denied the incidents, Smith loved her mother very much, as did her two sisters, not mentioned in the book, who never witnessed any satanic involvement. One sister has been deeply distressed at Smith's representation of her mother. Not mentioned either was the Catholic Pazder's divorce, Smith's conversion as a Catholic and her own divorce in order to marry Pazder, practices frowned upon by the Catholic Church, yet the book extols Catholic ceremonies and ritual as a way to combat Smith's terror./23

Nevertheless, Pazder reacts to the lurid stories of his patient thus: "I happen to believe you. . .for many reasons . . .but mostly for what I feel with you. It feels real. . .I think the way you are expressing the experience is very touching. It is authentic as an experience."/24 Remember, this is a psychiatrist's talk, not a police officer's. Feeling the authenticity of Smith's experience may aid a physician's clinical work. Police officers must approach such stories differently. Smith is cited as a Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) sufferer, a complex phenomenon that afflicts some genuinely abused people, but not others. For a fuller clinical description consult the DSM-III-R, or [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR Fourth Edition \(Text Revision\)](#), third edition, revised, 1987. Recent research even reveals that distinct physiological changes accompany personality changes in MPD sufferers. Such changes include rapidly appearing and disappearing rashes, welts, scars, switches in handwriting and handedness, allergies, vision changes and even color blindness. Such symptoms might easily confuse and alarm an investigator.

The preoccupation of cult officers with MPD sufferers presents police with some contradictions. On the one hand, police cite the growing number of cult survivor stories and their sameness as evidence of the satanic underground (that is, people who have never met telling identical tales). Yet most MPD sufferers, usually young women, do not present verifiable stories. None has yielded physical evidence of crime other than physiological symptoms which are part and parcel of MPD anyway. Hypnosis for police purposes produces no results. MPD sufferers can take years to interview to ascertain even a few facts.

But another interpretation of cult survivors' claims can be offered. As Ken Lanning has noted, he has been unable to find accounts by cult survivors of Smith-like tales before the publication of her book. The mass media have fanned Smith's experience through the tabloids and TV sets of

the world, supplemented by the slasher films and television shows that produce quite creative and believable monsters. Some MPD sufferers describe ceremonies and rituals that can only be traced to fiction since many of them have no historic derivation.

Stories of ritual abuse (that is, abuse committed incidental to a ritual as a form of propitiation, as cult officers use the term) present no new phenomena, as folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand has described in his popular books about urban legends, [The Choking Doberman: And Other Urban Legends](#) (1984) and *The Mexican Pet* (1986). Stories of abduction and mutilation of children, plus regular appearances of Satan pervade European and American history. Brunvand describes urban legends as "believed oral narratives," though not necessarily believed wholly by their narrators all of the time. Some stories are rumor, or "plotless unverified reports" as opposed to the legend, or the "traditional believed story." Most importantly, "urban legends. . .often appear to be 'new' when they begin to spread, but even the newest-sounding stories may have gone the rounds before. A 'new urban legend,' then, may be merely a modern story told in a plausible manner by a credible narrator to someone who hasn't heard the story before, at least not recently enough to remember it."/25

One can find abundant folklore literature--particularly the dictionaries of folklore motifs--which contain all the satanic stories that appear in the cult seminars, folklore with a very long history. I'll give an example of a recurring urban myth the spreading of which takes place every few years. A spurious police circular found its way through South Carolina a few years ago telling of an LSD-impregnated Mickey Mouse transfer, thus endangering children./26 Without verifying the circular, the Pendleton, South Carolina, Police Department warned the community about the transfers. After the public sufficiently worried itself, someone checked out the source and found it was bogus. The same story, with the same anonymous police circular, recently traveled throughout New Jersey alarming citizens and police./27

In some cases, police have tried to keep citizens from believing macabre stories about garden variety violence. In Eloy, Arizona, a murdered man turned up in a trash bin, having died of head injuries, his throat slashed. Nevertheless, the police had been powerless to stem local rumors which persisted in creating the story that the victim had his chest opened up, his heart ripped out, his blood sucked./28 In Roanoke, high school faculty and some law enforcers have perplexedly tried to locate a gang of violent youths, The Posse, to whom students attribute much violence and disruption, but the local police have begun to suspect that the gang doesn't exist. The Roanoke County Sheriff said, "All you have to do is get two kids talking at a table in the cafeteria. Two other kids at the next table hear half the conversation, and a rumor is spread."/29

Sociologist David Bromley of Virginia Commonwealth University classifies such tales into three categories, one of which is the subversion myth where many satanic tales fit. These myths are "cautionary tales," stories that reveal tensions which "emanate most directly from pervasive anxieties about dangers to children."/30 Another sociologist, Jeffrey Victor, tracked down satanic rumors in western New York, stories which became widespread and publically accepted, stories Victor likened to a "collective nightmare." Throughout the region, rumors of cult meetings, animal killings, ritual drinking of blood, and an impending sacrifice of a "blond, blue-eyed virgin" reached a peak of hysteria on Friday the thirteenth of May, 1988./31 In this case, the Jamestown, New York, Police Department acted with remarkable restraint and insight and even

forestalled a mob bent on vengeance. The police headed off a group of armed and angry citizens that showed up at a rumored cult site. But another site, a warehouse rumored to harbor cult meetings, received thousands of dollars in damage.

I'll give you another example of the police response to myth and hysteria. The Allenstown, New Hampshire, Police Department received reports a few months ago that six cats had been found hanging from a tree, a decapitated dog turned up nearby, and the sound of drums could be heard in a state park at night. A woman walking her dog came upon what was described as a makeshift altar supporting a carcass of a mutilated beaver. The beaver had been skinned. Another beaver turned up, found upright surrounded by stakes. The police decided to turn to cult officer Sandi Gallant, San Francisco Police, for help, who--though in San Francisco and unable to inspect the animals--interpreted the findings as indicative of satanic rituals. Since the carcasses were found near May 1, the cult officer said that the recent Walpurgis Night, a satanic holiday, probably stimulated the sacrifices. The sergeant in charge of the investigation worried about these events, linking those who sacrificed animals to drug-taking, listening to heavy metal music, a view confirmed by a local Baptist minister who believed the devil responsible. The sergeant wanted to find the satanic group behind this. Characteristically, he said, "Their freedom of worship is protected. . .but we want to monitor them."/32 The next day, the Manchester, New Hampshire, Union Leader ran an editorial which stated, "We have reached a sorry state of affairs when following the Devil is defined as 'worship'. . ."/33

Within a few days, the mystery unravelled. In fact, no dead cats were found in trees. The beavers were legally trapped in the state park. Other dead animals reported by local residents were ones killed on the road and stacked off the road for later pick-up./34 But even though the phenomena turned out to be mundane, other law enforcers didn't remember the follow-up news story but only the original news report. After the whole incident passed from the headlines, the mayor of Manchester tried to ban the appearance of a heavy metal band in town because they would stimulate more incidents similar to what occurred in Allenstown, forgetting that the Allenstown events had non-satanic explanations./35

In another incident, a few years back in Brown County, Indiana, a New Age group called the Elf Lore Family (ELF) arranged to have a public gathering at a public park. ELF posters around town mentioned camping, feasts, dancing, "New Age workshops," "bardic tales and tunes," and other similar events. Many of the organizers described themselves as witches and even distributed "witchcraft fact sheets" to explain their beliefs./36 So far, no problem. But by the ELF weekend gathering, a local church group had planned a strategy to proselytize the ELFs, and the local sheriff's department became involved through a deputy who had attended a cult seminar given by two Indiana state police officers, self-proclaimed experts, who had in turn received their information from cult consultant Dale Griffis. Following the weekend, the local newspaper reported the event under the title, "Satanic rites held at Yellowwood Forest," the article discussing animal sacrifice, drinking blood in rituals, nude dancing, or dancing by people in "devil-like costumes." Finally, the ELFs were seen eating "raw flesh." The news reporter used one source for the article: the deputy sheriff. Neither a local Baptist minister nor the park conservation professionals nor the ELFs at all could corroborate the sacrifices, blood drinking, nude dancing, or any of the other sensationalistic claims of the local sheriff's department. The article dutifully noted, though, that "[the sheriff's department] could not stop the satanic rites

because of the Constitutional right to freedom of religion that protected the worshippers." But the ELFers are not satanic. The satanism was created by the seminar-trained police who spent much time and effort watching the ELFers simply because they were not Christians celebrating in a conventional way. The sheriff's department, by feeding information to a gullible journalist, created a new myth: the news article then becomes a cult seminar handout proving that satanic activity is rampant in the USA. An Indiana University folklorist who documented the event noted, "The influence of second-hand opinions proved especially strong among the law enforcement element." The preconceptions of the law enforcers colored their perceptions of an innocuous camp-out, and thereby created a legend.

Thus far I have mentioned cult expert Dale Griffis in several contexts. Although Griffis appears to act out of concern for improving law enforcement's handling of bizarre crimes, and although he certainly earns no big bucks on the lecture circuit, his effort misleads and confuses. Griffis, a retired police captain, used the title, "Ph.D." and other cult cops refer to him as "Doctor Griffis." In truth, Griffis holds a doctorate from Columbia Pacific University in California, a non-accredited non-resident campus that offers low-cost degrees with only several months of effort (according to the CPU brochure and detailed by John Bear in [How to Get the Degree You Want](#), Ten Speed Press, 1982, and by William J. Halterman, [The Complete Guide to Nontraditional Education](#), Facts on File, New York, 1983). Primarily, CPU offers credit for life experiences, the type of institution currently under scrutiny by Senate Bill 190 in California which aims to tighten licensing standards for such "diploma mills" (detailed in Community Crime Prevention Digest for May, 1989, p. 8). Griffis's degree is in law enforcement, based on a doctoral thesis, Mind Control Groups and Their Effects on the Objective of Law Enforcement, which carries no date and is even signed by Griffis with his title, "Ph.D."

The dissertation reveals Griffis's cult pitch: almost a fourth of it contains an ad misericordium argument that his message is grounded in sincerity, fidelity to the police brother-and-sisterhood, and concern for our posterity. The following statement is typical: "I am a veteran member of the 'Thin Blue Line' that which lies between chaos and democracy" (p. 88). Griffis relies heavily on the work of Robert Jay Lifton ([Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of Brainwashing in China](#)) to argue a priori that cults, nebulously defined, deceptively recruit members, place them under control of a charismatic leader, and direct members to commit crimes. To Griffis, the link between the existence of cults and crime is also a priori. Griffis even takes excursions into psychology with odd results: "Let it be noted that a common factor among recruits is that a high percentage suffer from sub-clinical depression" (p. 52). Griffis does not substantiate this assertion, but as proof he offers that "recruiters carry out their assignments with trained skills and precise detail. One only has to travel through O'Hare Airport to see this in operation" (p. 53). Of the estimated 3000 cults in the USA (Griffis's estimate, not substantiated), he asserts that "the interest, purpose, magnitude and ultimate goals differ from cult to cult; however, all demand in common devotion, obedience, and ultimately, submission" (p. 51). Again, Griffis offers such statements repeatedly but without substantiation, no critical review of pertinent literature on cults, nor with any professional correspondence with academic experts. And his dissertation has become his cult seminar platform. While the CPU degree might have academic standing somewhere, officers attending cult seminars point to Griffis as the man with credentials in both worlds--the police front line and the academy--to justify his role as cult ideologue.

I can't discuss myths and legends without referring to the Matamoros drug killings. When the news accounts first appeared in early April concerning the discovery of bodies on a Mexican ranch near the Texas border, the Associated Press dubbed the killings "satanic." That adjective graced many newspaper headlines for weeks. Now, information concerning the murders continues to be ambiguous because we have depended on second- and third-hand information about them. The Mexican police promptly placed their suspects before cameras to tell gruesome tales. We do not know much of the backgrounds of the murderers in the drug gang, but recent evidence suggests that the drug leader, Adolfo de Jesus Constanzo, hobnobbed with the Mexican city elite, providing drugs and limpias, or folk "cleansing rites," recruited assistants from the northern Mexican prosperous families, mostly young adults.^{/37} Apparently, Constanzo did not employ the semi-literate impoverished Mexicans from the northern part of their country, the same type recruited for other criminal activities: gun and stolen vehicle running and herding illegal aliens into the USA.

Where does the satanic label come from? Rex Springston, a reporter for the Richmond News Leader, decided to trace the label. In talking to the American investigators cited in the news releases, he learned that none of them classified the murders as satanic. Only the Texas attorney general's assistant responded that the attorney general might have used the label early on. So officials don't view the killings as satanic. Officials now think that most of the murders victimized rival drug dealers, not innocent people snatched off the street. The drug gang leader, Constanzo, according to current thinking, was a Charles Manson who gathered whatever symbolism and ritual he could to intimidate rivals and his own lackeys. So he invented his own symbology (not a belief system, which he did not invent) to justify his behavior, to offer his workers protection which he was in fact powerless to provide, to convince people to risk their lives to become involved with drug dealing where the monetary rewards for most are meager. Matamoros represents violence associated with the drug trade with a hint of borrowed religious ritual, nothing more. No evidence exists-- insofar as details of the incident have been made public--of any participation by Constanzo and his group in satanic activities, involvement with a satanic organization, or human sacrifice to propitiate the devil. By April 17, even the mass media had begun to focus on the incident as drug-related, not satanic, almost one week after the first reports of the killings.^{/38}

But although the Matamoros story is far from over, at least one local police investigator still misrepresents the events, thus creating urban myth. Detective Don Rimer, Virginia Beach Police, recently gave a seminar citing the Matamoros killings as satanic. Rimer was quoted in the newspapers as saying that the Matamoros killings "prove that human sacrifices by Satanists are not simply 'urban myths.'"^{/39} "Now, those people who talked about the 'urban myth' and asked, 'Where are the bodies?' are silent," the officer said to a citizens' group. Well, the Matamoros business displaces nothing about urban myth, proves nothing about satanism, and should be properly viewed in the context of Mexican border drug running and its associated violence.

The central aspect of satanic crime which has seared the American conscience is child abuse. Beginning with a daycare center in Manhattan Beach, California and another in Jordan, Minnesota, in 1983, stories of ritual abuse of children in daycare centers has spread to over 100 American cities. At the core of such stories, one finds stories by children. The same stories, uncorroborated by physical evidence or adult testimony, have resulted in indictments of innocent

people, their careers forfeited to the publicity. In the most comprehensive and critical examination of such investigations to date (conducted by the Memphis, Tennessee, Commercial Appeal), investigative journalists found that the system of prosecution fostered the spread of unfounded allegations. One social worker observed, "During the course of the investigation, virtually every name that was ever mentioned became a suspect." Alarmed at the manner in which parents and therapists prompted and rewarded children's testimony, a psychiatrist commented, "If [the investigator] got a child to the point where they believe [the child] helped kill a baby or eaten flesh, I want to know whether you're a child abuser."/40

The Jordan case, for example, began with a single child's allegation of molestation and quickly thereafter 60 children began to claim the same abuse. The phenomena reported by the children included being bussed to ceremonial sites, digging up coffins, dismembering bodies, being thrown into shark pits, cooking and eating babies, nude photography, and having foreign objects inserted into a rectum or vagina, performing oral sex on daycare staff, and sacrificing animals. In the end, though, after heated accusations, the FBI concluded that the children made up the stories of murders and noted that the investigations had been so flawed that people truly guilty of child molesting may have gone free.

So what has happened? Many states conduct trials unhampered by rules of evidence that apply to adults: all states have dropped the requirement that children's stories be corroborated by evidence or adults' testimony. Therefore an opportunity develops to suggest the story to the child: their stories evolve through coaxing until a coherent narrative emerges. Psychiatrist and child therapist Dr. Lee Coleman has noted that

[i]n all too many cases, the interviews with the children are horribly biased. The interviewers assume, before talking with the child, that molestation has taken place. The accused persons are assumed to be guilty, and the thinly disguised purpose of the interview is to get something out of the child to confirm these suspicions. It is all too easy, with repeated and leading and suggestive questions, to get a young child so confused that he or she can't tell the difference between fact and fantasy./41

Dr. Coleman provided the Commercial Appeal with the following interview between a social worker and a four-year-old:

Interviewer: What's Miss Frances doing while children are in the other room?

Child: I don't know.

Interviewer: Come here. . .I want to talk to you a second. (Boy's name), you do know. Look at me. Look at me. You know about the secret. But see, it's not a secret any more, because (another child) told us about it and (another child) told us about it, and your parents want you to tell us. . .You can be a very good boy and tell us about it. . .

Child: I don't know.

Interviewer: Yes, you do. [Later, near the end of the interview, the social worker asks if the same things happened to the boy that were reported by other children.]

Interviewer: She did it to you, too.

Child: No. She didn't do it to me.

Interviewer: It's not your fault, OK?

Child: She didn't do it to me.

Interviewer: Yes, she did; yes, she did (stroking the child's head).

Some therapists and counselors--and police officers--inject into these cases an ideology that presumes that children don't lie about abuse. We have even created aids to encourage and facilitate children's stories. Anatomically-correct dolls have proven useful, but not exclusively so: the dolls themselves can constitute leading questions by suggesting abuse, or the dolls themselves may have bodies so disproportionate and bizarre that children can't use them. And recently two psychologists have estimated that "for every person correctly identified as a child sexual abuser through such techniques, four to nine are incorrectly identified."/42 In abuse cases, children may undergo up to fifty interviews, most by parents and therapists even before the police become involved. Again, the same parents or therapists feel that the children must be believed because they have neither the experience nor vocabulary to talk about sexual molestation. But the parents and therapists ask leading questions, offer rewards, and refuse to accept children's denials that molestation occurred: the kids are called "dumb" for not admitting to abuse.

Law enforcers must remember that they themselves and the therapists pursue different goals in these investigations. Therapy overcomes trauma; police investigate offenses for prosecution. Of danger to law enforcement, one criminal justice academic noted that if in interviews, "children denied victimization, then it was assumed they were concealing the truth, which must be drawn out by some inducement or reinforcement. The therapeutic process thus became an infallible generating mechanism for criminal charges. . ."/43 Police must not simply believe the children; rather, as FBI's Lanning urges, police must listen. Don't ignore the possibility of bona fide molestation by losing a case in the pursuit of Satan.

So where do we stand? Child abuse does exist. Some people commit violent crimes while invoking the power of Satan. Such people may act with others. But law enforcers cannot demonstrate the existence of a widespread satanic conspiracy: the evidence doesn't exist. No evidence links fantasy role-playing games to teen suicides. No evidence supports the idea that daycare workers subject children to abuse in propitiation of Satan. No evidence exists supporting the literal truth of cult survivors' claims. Officers can and should stick to the Constitutional basics: they investigate irregular behavior based on a well-founded and legally-defined reasonable suspicion; they arrest based on probable cause. No one expects police to ignore pentagrams drawn in blood at a homicide scene: complete documentation of crime scenes has always been the rule. But we have no justification for carrying on unwarranted explorations of

the beliefs of the unpopular few, or from waving books at seminars and pronouncing them dangerous.

Law enforcers have taken on the role of religious theorists. As Gordon Melton observed sadly:

The Satanic literature has been carried almost totally by the imaginative literature of non-Satanists -- primarily conservative Christians who describe the practices in vivid detail in the process of denouncing them./44

Law enforcers do have tools adequate to do their jobs, if not always the money to buy them. Advances in criminal investigation from the Automated Fingerprint Identification System or from DNA typing promise to revolutionize the business. The FBI's serial crime psychological profiling model incorporates, without the satanic bias, the proper questions to ask to correlate a possible criminal ideology to ritualized (that is, committed similarly on multiple occasions) violent crimes.

In short, law enforcers must remove the "cult" from cult crime and do their jobs accordingly. Thank you.

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