

In Pursuit of Satan: The Police and the Occult

Contributed by Robert D. Hicks
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Robert D. Hicks in his book, *In Pursuit of Satan: The Police and the Occult*, Buffalo (NY): Prometheus Press, 1991 (ISBN: 0-87975-604-7).

Book Review:

Hicks looks at the role of "cult cops" in establishing and supporting the rumors of a vast Satanic conspiracy which (according to proponents of the theory) is responsible for up to 50,000 human sacrifices a year in the United States, involves people in the highest levels of government and civilian life, and recruits new members through heavy metal music and roleplaying games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*.

He also looks long and hard at the stories told by "Satanic abuse survivors," mostly women and children, who tell lurid stories with similar details to social workers, psychotherapists, and talk show audiences, despite the lack of physical evidence to support these claims. He points out the massive amount of networking that goes on between "Satanic abuse survivors" and within the group of psychotherapists that deal with them, and that new details will often show up in patients' stories shortly after the psychotherapist hears of them at a conference or through a newsletter, suggesting that people with "multiple personality disorders" (who make up the majority of Satanic abuse survivors) are especially susceptible to hypnotic suggestion, and that the hypnotists may be implanting some of the details the patients recount.

He dissects the McMartin Pre-School case and several other, where, after leading interviews conducted by both police and non-police agencies, children claimed to have sexually abused or to have taken part in "Satanic" rituals (hundreds in the McMartin case). In the pursuit of convictions, contradictory evidence was ignored, the lack of supporting evidence was overlooked, and children denying abuse were talked into confessing abuse.

Hicks examines the "Matamoros Death Cult", where "Satanic" sacrifices were carried out by drug smugglers in order to obtain divine protection for their activities, and discusses the impact of the media coverage on the general public's knowledge and understanding of minority religions such as Santeria and Palo Mayombe, Voudoun, and Wicca and other pagan and neo-pagan religions.

Finally, he looks at some of the reasons that Satanic cults and ritual crimes are being touted by the police and the media as the explanations for otherwise "unexplainable" crimes, including the rise in fundamentalist Christian activism; subversion myths, where concerns about perceived breakdowns of social order are expressed by stories ("urban legends") which assign blame to an Other, which allows the rest of the community to feel solidarity; and "moral" or "rumor panics", where a "deviant" event leads a community to perceive evidence of a larger conspiracy, and to demand action by authorities.

The heart of the argument in favor of belief in a vast Satanic conspiracy is the stories of the "cult survivors" and the media coverage of the subject. The lack of evidence to support this theory is used as evidence for it -- the Satanic conspiracy is supposedly so sophisticated and so powerful that it rarely leaves evidence, and is in a position to cover up any that is found.

Hicks argues that the practice of police agencies attributing crimes to "cult" activity often interferes with their ability to find the actual causes of the criminal activity. Cult cops appearances in the media and as paid speakers or guests at local community meetings adds to the likelihood of "moral panics" occurring and "urban legends" being told as "true stories", and contributes to a hostile attitude towards new religious movements, and, especially, towards the religious practices of minority groups.

Notes: The figure of 50,000 victims of human sacrifice annually is one that seems to be generally accepted by the "cult cops"; Hicks attributes it to Deputy sheriff Larry Dunn, with support from survivor Jacquie Balodis, who says, "devil worshipers sacrifice 50,000 humans a year, mainly transients, runaways, and babies conceived solely for the purpose of sacrifice." (p. 58, from an article by Melissa Berg, "Satanic Crime Increasing? Police, Therapists Alarmed," *Kansas City Times*, March 26, 1988.)

The "FBI report" some posters have mentioned may actually be an article by Kenneth V. Lanning, Special Supervisory Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Satanic, Occult, Ritualistic Crime: A Law Enforcement Perspective," *Police Chief*, 46, no. 10:62-83 (1989). As others have noted, the 50,000 figure is unbelievably large. The FBI's Crime in the United States reported 20,045 total murders in the U.S. in 1990, down from 21,860 in 1980. By comparison, there were 62,000 reported residential robberies in 1990. Are we really supposed to believe ritual murder is nearly as common as residential robbery?

If these 50,000 really include a substantial number of babies bred for sacrifice, the numbers don't show it. There were 4,041,000 recorded live births in 1989, and only 40,000 deaths of infants under 1 year old, so 50,000 deaths would mean an unnoticed doubling of the infant death rate, or concealment of more than 1% of all pregnancies leading to live birth.