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QUIET NEW ULM, MINNESOTA, WITH ITS TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY HOMES AND DOWNTOWN GLOCK-ENSPIEL, SEEMS ABOUT THE LAST PLACE ULTIMATE EVIL WOULD LURK. WHICH MAKES THE OCCULT AND SATANISM SEMINAR SEEM OUT OF PLACE IN THE JUNIOR HIGH-SCHOOL AUDITORIUM WITH ITS MURAL DEPICTING ROBUST, HONEST WORKERS UNDER A RAINBOW.

CULT COPS



Yet on this balmy May evening, 85 teachers, police officers, and youth workers have filed in to hear that Satanism is all around them. David Gleason, a criminal justice instructor from Lakewood Community College in Minneapolis, is here to alert them to the warning signs of the beast.

The seminar attendees, like thousands of cops, counselors, and parents, are worried about what seems to be a growing litany of bizarre and violent crimes linked to so-called Satanic cults. In addition to disturbing national cases such as Richard Ramirez, L.A.'s Night Stalker, who painted pentagrams at the murder scenes of some of his victims, Minnesota has had its share of macabre crimes linked by police and the media to Satanism. In recent years, police have investigated teen suicide pacts, attempted child grave robberies, decapitated trinket-stuffed goat carcasses, and, in 1980, the case of a psychotic woman who killed her 20-month-old grandson because she believed he was possessed by Satan.

Ritual child abuse was alleged not only in California's McMartin Preschool case, but in Minnesota's Scott County child sex abuse investigation. And there have been scattered rumors that 11-year-old Jacob Wetterling, who was abducted last fall near St. Joseph, was the victim of Satanists.

In 1988, John William Doughty, a former mental patient, convicted rapist, and professed Satanist, was sentenced to 30 years for kidnapping an 18-year-old woman. Doughty took her to a Minneapolis park where he tried to cut her feet off with a knife.

That same year, three St. Cloud teenagers were charged with murdering a man near the Mississippi River. Charges say two of

the boys licked the victim's blood from their hands.

This year, Twin Cities investigators have connected at least two crimes with Satanism. One was a fatal Minneapolis child abuse case in which a 19-year-old mother had "666" and "devil" tattooed on her arm. The other was the grisly discovery of the dismembered body of an 11-year-old boy at the base of the Ford Dam on the Mississippi. Medical examiners determined the body was that of a boy who had drowned last summer. The embalmed body had been stolen from a Minneapolis cemetery crypt.

The Satanism jitters were felt in New Ulm last month when a local couple, both artists, decorated their carriage house with a statue of the Greek god Pan. Their windows were broken by people who feared they were Satanists.

With all this in mind, the seminar attendees in New Ulm, who have paid \$10 to \$12 apiece, eagerly listen to Gleason out of concern and curiosity.

"The rise in teenage involvement and the criminal acts being committed because of their beliefs in Satanism have risen dramatically in the past few years," Gleason says. Satanic recruiters promise the teens supernatural power, he says. "We didn't see as much of this in Minnesota as we did in other states. But we are seeing it on the rise. Satanism is found in every community in the state."

Gleason tells the crowd that Satanism, which started in the Dark Ages as a rebuttal of Christianity, stands against everything the people in the auditorium hold dear. "You can do no wrong in Satanism," he says. "In a true Satanic cult, it's always the direct opposite of Christianity. Symbols, for instance, are Christian symbols upside down."

Gleason, who says he has been researching Satanic and occult groups for four years and often works as a police consultant, moves on to the high point of his lecture — a videotape of a Geraldo Rivera Satanism special first aired two years ago.

"Our guests have met the horror first hand," Geraldo says, leading into his prime-time special, which is punctuated with screams and clips from old horror films. A couple of not particularly intelligent teenagers on the show claim Satan worship gave them power.

Geraldo comments in voice-over, "It certainly gives them the power to scare the hell out of the rest of us." He ends the show with more scenes from Hollywood's incarnation of Satanism, asking, "Can we combat this evil that some men and women still worship?"

Turning off the VCR, Gleason says, "Some people criticized him for this being too sensational. But it wasn't."

With the Geraldo special, a video of an unidentified anti-Satanism crusader (who links Hitler and his storm troopers to Satanism), some handouts on how to spot Satanic involvement, and a slide show, Gleason quickly lays out the fundamentals of Satanism to the group. If Gleason and Geraldo are right, teenagers are increasingly becoming participants in Satanic-inspired violent crimes, or are themselves becoming victims of sexual abuse, torture, and murder. The good people of Nicollet, Blue Earth, and Brown Counties shake their heads as Gleason describes cattle mutilations, multiple teen suicides, sexual abuse of children in

BY GLEN WARCHOL



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN BARBER

front of pictures of Jesus, Satanic breeding of children for sacrifices, and the devouring of human hearts (a seminar participant moans, "My God!"). It doesn't seem to matter that Gleason seldom gives dates, names, or more than general locations for the crimes he describes.

A fire-and-brimstone fundamentalist evangelist would envy Gleason's presentation of the warning signs of involvement in Satanism: devilish symbols; "ritual behavior"; interest in heavy metal music; fascination with death; secretiveness about personal opinions and habits; hostility to authority and Christianity in general; and possession of wax, powders, tattoos, candles, gongs, goblets, or knives.

But Gleason is not a Bible-pounding preacher. He's what an increasingly vocal group of worried law enforcement experts call a "cult cop."

NATAS

WHEN CRITICS SPEAK OF "CULT cops," they're talking about the swelling ranks of police officers, former police officers, psychotherapists, and fundamentalist preachers who believe that a "Great Conspiracy" of Satanists is behind a bewildering and sickening assortment of gruesome, inexplicable crimes ranging from cemetery desecration to kidnap and murder. The believers in this conspiracy have almost become a kind of cult themselves, the critics say.

Magnifying the cult cops' influence is the news media, which usually accept without question their tales of the occult, the critics say. After discovering the Ford Dam body, whose head, hands, and feet had been sawed off, Twin Cities law enforcement officers quickly labeled it a "cult crime," and local newspapers and television stations proceeded to fill in the details from self-described Satanic experts before the medical examination was completed. The Satanic experts had made the usual connections with Satanic groups — groups composed, according to one local TV station, of "doctors, lawyers, and other professionals." The reporter wondered aloud how such people could do these horrible things and then return to their families and businesses.

At a press conference, St. Paul Police Chief William McCutcheon said he consulted with experts on occult crime and learned that "severing extremities is consistent" with certain rituals carried out by occult groups. "I mean, it's sick," McCutcheon said. "You can't say it any better than that. My God, think about that..."

Sgt. Cliff Hinchcliff, the occult crimes specialist with the Minneapolis Police who is handling the Ford Dam case, says he's been investigating Satanic and occult crimes for three years, after eight years as a homicide detective. His interest was sparked by seeing bizarre crime reports on national law enforcement teletypes. "Body parts being found and things like that. Sometimes it would coincide with an occult holiday. That's what sparked my interest," he says.

Hinchcliff, whose office is decorated with

a plastic skull or two in addition to the usual cop-shop clutter, says he did a lot of reading of reports and articles on the subject of Satanism and consulted other people — cops, therapists, and clergy. "We put our heads together," he says. Now, Hinchcliff, who has some criminal justice credits from North Hennepin Community College and Mankato State College but no degree, teaches the two-hour block of study on occult and Satanism required of every Minneapolis police cadet. He also gives Satanic and occult seminars throughout the upper Midwest.

"All kids are vulnerable," Hinchcliff says. "The lure [presented by Satanists] depends on what the kids are looking for. Kids may be seeking anything from drugs to power, to be a god-like creature themselves. What they are looking for will be provided."

Like most self-styled occult experts, Hinchcliff says he respects the First Amendment rights of Satanists. "The criteria for us is, if the belief system doesn't violate any laws, it's the right of the person to do anything they want," Hinchcliff says. "What we're looking for is criminal activity."

But that search is often frustrated, Hinchcliff and other cult cops say, because only a small percentage of the Satanic crime is reported. Why? Because most investigators don't recognize the signs of Satanism, many prosecutors are afraid that talk of Satanism might jeopardize their cases, potential informants are afraid to come forward, and inadequate statistics are kept on occult crime.

Cult cops and their critics agree that record-keeping in this area is inadequate. They disagree, though, on what accurate records would reveal. Cult cops believe Satanism is the root cause of many bizarre crimes and teenage problems. Their critics believe Satanic dabbling is just another antisocial behavior that is a symptom of larger emotional and social problems among teens. In the case of adult criminals who say they are Satanists, the critics argue it's a case of psychopathology seeking a justification.

"Yes, there are crimes committed in some form of Satanism," says J. Gordon Melton, a visiting scholar at the University of California at Santa Barbara, who has a Ph.D. in the history and literature of religion. "A widely scattered handful of informal Satanic groups do break the law. And in some cases, individuals operating on some twisted Satanic theme commit a crime. But Satanism isn't a cause, it's an effect. They're going to express their psychopathology some way — Satanism is the way they choose."

Other critics suggest that cult cops, too, choose Satanism — to explain the baffling and essentially unexplainable.

"The Satanic model is extremely appealing [to police]," says Robert Hicks, a law-enforcement specialist with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice services who has degrees in anthropology and has been observing anti-Satanists for several years. "It is extremely economical and tight — the appeal lies in its simplicity. Also, it's a damn good way to show that police officers are being proactive in some area of combating crime. You can give talks on Satanism to community groups, and the police officer takes on the role of leader, as somebody providing a service — 'We are on top of it.' It's an opportunity to create a triumph for

yourself when you have other problems that have no easy solution."

Kenneth Lanning, a supervisory special agent with the FBI and another critic of cult cops, says, "People are looking for simple answers to complex problems. There's no simpler answer than, 'The devil made me do it.'"

Scholar Melton says evangelical Christian police officers are a source of a lot of the occult crime frenzy. "Often small-town police are responding to the public pressure to do something. And there's the excitement of it. This is a glamorous thing to investigate as opposed to a domestic quarrel."

As for the public, the critics say, Satanism strikes at the center of most people's worlds with tales of horrendous crimes against the most innocent — children. With the help of cult cops and sensationalized reports, the result is a creeping, ever-growing hysteria.

"It's caused by anxiety over real changes," Melton says. "When people lose control of their lives, they fight back, and this kind of scapegoating is one way. This is very much a family issue, and in our society the family is under attack. Parents are losing control over their children's health [education] and sex education. They feel powerless. They don't know who they are threatened by. They can't pinpoint it."



FOR THEIR PART, CULT COPS AND THEIR followers see their critics as being either uninformed or deceived, or even, in some cases, as being Satanic infiltrators.

"If that is what they want to believe, let them believe it," Hinchcliff says of those who think Satanic theories are overblown. "I don't challenge them. They can call it anything they wish."

But Hinchcliff says there are "generational groups" of Satanists in Minnesota. "To give you exact numbers would be misleading," he says. But he puts it in excess of 100 individuals.

"We aren't ready to expose that [organizational conspiracy] aspect of it yet," he says. "But the time will come when it is openly discussed." For now, Hinchcliff says, the evidence can't be released out of concern for "the safety of the people who have talked to us."

Hinchcliff says the people he exchanges information with "have better sources than the so-called academic experts. We don't pass information to them anyway."

This common refusal by cult cops to cooperate with people trained in anthropology, sociology, criminology, and other related fields baffles academics interested in the phenomenon. "They are asking us to move against these people, yet they don't give us information or evidence to act," Melton complains.

"IF YOU GET A BODY WITH A BIBLE PINNED TO ITS CHEST — IS THAT A 'CHRISTIAN CRIME?' THE NEXT TIME A PRIEST MOLESTS SOME KIDS, ARE WE GOING TO CALL IT A 'CATHOLIC CRIME?'"

The critics also say the anti-Satanist investigators are not only wasting taxpayers' money by sidetracking police investigations in the pursuit of Satanists, but are also becoming modern-day inquisitors preying on society's deepest anxieties and threatening the civil rights of Americans who don't conform to mainstream religious beliefs or lifestyles. As the cult cops tap into the fear over child molestations and teenage alienation, the frenzy is compounded by an influx of new immigrants who are bringing with them unconventional — by mainstream Christian standards — religions. The critics point to a similar reaction that accompanied the coming of Roman Catholic immigrants at the turn of the century.

The FBI's Kenneth Lanning, like other critics, points out that police and the media rarely blame mainstream religions when a crime is committed by their believers. "If you get a body with a Bible pinned to its chest — is that a 'Christian crime?'" says Lanning, who works in the Behavioral Science Instruction and Research Unit at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. "The next time a priest molests some kids, are we going to call it a 'Catholic crime?'"

Most of the officers who have become self-styled Satanic, occult, or cult experts come from the lower police ranks, says Virginia's Hicks. "Very rarely do you see police executives getting into this." Many of the active Satanic officers are also involved in gang or organized crime units and are receptive to the idea of conspiracies. Yet, despite years of experience, they are ready to abandon proven investigative methods when they "identify" Satanic evidence at a crime scene, Hicks and Lanning say.

"They say the traditional tools of police investigation don't apply here," Hicks says. "What else do you need?"

Lanning recommends that any crime be methodically investigated according to conventional methods before labeling it the work of Satanists. "My greatest concern is that this hysteria leads officers in the wrong directions," he says. "Every crime comes down to sex, power, and money. Some people use a belief system to satisfy their need for sex, power, and money."

The Ford Dam incident could well be a case of the sort of fruitless Satanist hunting Lanning complains about. Critics say that unless the police are withholding crucial evi-

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About the illustrations: To cult cops, Satanic symbols are everywhere, ranging from the distinctive pentagram to reverse spellings of Satan. Of a more curious nature is the inverted cross of Nero — with its uncanny resemblance to the "peace sign."

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dence, the Satanism hypothesis doesn't hold together in this case even by the cult cops' own rule books for Satanism. "There is absolutely nothing in Satanic literature about hands and feet being a ritual tool," Gordon Melton says. "Something weird has happened — whoever did this, they are weird in the extreme — but it's the heart, blood, semen, those kinds of things [used in rituals]. You want a live body, you want the blood. Not just any weirdness will do."

The FBI's Lanning won't comment on another jurisdiction's investigation, except to say, "Five, 10 years ago, the first assumption would have been necrophilia. Or it could have been some psychotic — just bananas. Now, it's Satanism."

lot of it is the product of anti-Satanist writers," Hicks says. "They are creating a Satanist model as if there is some universal Satanic belief. What makes these guys experts is that they go to other cult seminars. It is a proselytizing experience. They receive the word. Cult seminars are the arena where this conversion takes place."

"They enter a thought bubble where they embark on a logic that has no outside reference," Hicks says. "It evolves into more and more fantastic theories and conspiracies."

The critics do not deny that violent and bizarre crimes and teen suicides occur, and that evidence of occult dabbling is frequently found in such cases. They just doubt that the crimes or self-destructive acts can be directly and simply attributed to heavy metal lyrics, Satanic graffiti, or Dungeons and Dragons games. "If you looked in that kid's room, you'd probably find a Bible, too," says the FBI's Lanning. "But no one would write that down in his notebook."

CRITICS FIND IT IRONIC THAT THE OFTEN secretive anti-occultists rapidly are becoming something very like a cult themselves, with seminars that are little more than high-tech tent meetings. "There is a very firm belief system [among anti-Satanists]," Hicks says. "People are definitely proselytized. You behave like any other religious convert. You adopt a dogma. And there is no questioning of the dogma."

Critics say most of what defines "Satanism" — its rituals, signs, and artifacts — was invented by anti-Satanists beginning in the Middle Ages. And the process of creating the enemy continues today through the informational inbreeding at the seminars. "A

Regarding organized Satanism, scholar Melton says that all that can be determined from the evidence available is the existence of an organized and benign Church of Satan. And there are individuals and small groups who practice a learn-as-you-go Satanism, and some of these people commit crimes. Beyond that, there are some scattered individuals who commit crimes, for whatever reasons, that are attributed to Satanism.

"Is there this grand conspiracy?" Melton asks. "Are they killing thousands of people every year? Are they stealing bodies? Show us the evidence."

Hicks fears that the Satanism frenzy subjects certain groups — the Church of Satan is a good example — to police scrutiny simply because they have unconventional beliefs. And public figures have been

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smeared as being Satanist. To some extreme Christian anti-occult groups, Satanism, new age, and humanism are all considered related. "I still see anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic views in this," Hicks says. "Unfortunately, some of the cult cops parrot this stuff. They use these things indiscriminately. They roll them together."

"The prime harm is in the traumatizing of children in getting them to confess to Satanism," Melton says. The ritual child abuse stories are probably rooted in the trauma of conventional child abuse, he says. The stories about women used as "Satanic breeders" may come from victims of incest. But "It's just the good old garden-variety child abuse combined with Satan stories," he says.



RODGER OLSON, A THEOLOGIAN AT THE Bethel Bible College in Minneapolis, teaches a course in deity, mysticism, and the occult. Olson says he is not a Satanism expert, but is knowledgeable about occult religions. He says that in Minnesota, Satanism exists only in the form of small groups of practitioners.

"Most of what people call Satanists are young boys who make it up as they go along," Olson says. "The great conspiracy has never been shown to be true. But it's an article of faith with many people. I'm waiting for evidence."

But, Olson says, "A great many people are making megabucks on the hysteria, who are keeping the hysteria going."

Olson does not think society can ignore these emotionally troubled boys who begin dabbling in Satanism. "It is sinister, and society needs to delve into it. But it's not an area for religionists. Psychologists and school officials need to distinguish it from historic religions."

"I think that society needs to have witches," Olson says. "It's a basic need to have witches to look for."

Satanism is a symptom of social and family dysfunction that leads to "anomie," Olson says, the attitude that "I don't have to live by rules — lawlessness."

"Children are raised today in a very complex society," explains Olson. "Problems leap out of the television that they can't understand. We as a society don't have a very good way of giving children hope. It can seem that life is meaningless, that fate has the upper hand."

As for the mirror image of the Satanists — the cult cops — most critics say the media and the public have to apply critical thinking standards to what they are saying. But most aren't optimistic.

"I don't know how to stop it," says the FBI's Lanning, who says he has been accused of being a Satanic infiltrator. "We have the element of people's religious beliefs involved in this. You try to keep the religion out of the discussion, but it's just about impossible. Sooner or later it comes down to what you believe. Do you believe the devil causes evil or that all evil is a conspiracy of the Prince of Darkness? If you're a fundamentalist Christian, you could argue that all crime is Satanic crime. Once someone starts talking in these terms — what can you say?" ■

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