

Church of Satan/ Anton LaVey

By Michael Veronie

Founder: Anton Szandor LaVey (1930 – 1997), a.k.a. The Black Pope.

Founding Date: 1966

Official Publications: There are two major works written by LaVey that are meant to be instructive for the practice of Satanism: *The Satanic Bible* (1969) and *The Satanic Rituals* (1972). Additional books include *The Devil's Notebook*, *The Satanic Witch*, and *Satan Speaks!*

Organization Structure: The First Church of Satan was originally founded and headquartered in the home of Anton LaVey, a three-story Victorian house painted black in San Francisco. Members of the Church of Satan conduct ceremonies in various “grottos.”

Unique Terms: Black Mass (mocks the Catholic Mass), Grotto (refers to the individual churches or “covens”), Nema Natas (“Satan Amen” backward), All Hallow’s Eve (Halloween).¹

Other Names: The First Church of Satan (not to be confused with a rival group that bears the same name).

HISTORY

The Church of Satan was the first organized satanic church in modern times, although satanic worship and rituals go back at least to the enlightenment. Anton Szandor LaVey was born in Chicago but grew up in California. As a child, LaVey learned about various superstitions from his grandmother, which led him to become interested in dark tales and to read horror books such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. He was an avid reader and maintained unusual interests such as developing melodic lines and chord progressions on the keyboard which he would later use to sway the emotions of his audience as he played in bars, carnivals, and spook shows.²

LaVey was considered an outcast by his fellow classmates and eventually dropped out of high school. He began hanging around other outsiders and started working in the circus and in carnivals. Some of the early jobs he had in the traveling carnivals included working as a cage boy and helping with music. Later, he began to assist with the big cat shows and in the development of spook shows. He would play music for lewd shows on Saturday night, and then play for tent revivals on Sunday morning. His cynicism of Christianity grew as he saw the same people at both events, embracing sin on one night and acting as though they were saints the next morning.³

After his carnival days, LaVey moved back to San Francisco and worked as a photographer for the police department while studying criminology in San Francisco City College. He married his first wife, Carole Lansing, and had a daughter in 1952. Around this time he began to read the works of Aleister Crowley, a forefather of the

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satanic movement. Eventually he met some of Crowley's disciples. LaVey was disappointed in them when he saw that they were not as wicked as he imagined they would be after having read Crowley's works. LaVey began to work on the side as a psychic investigator on cases that police could not or refused to take. This led him to realize that many people sought supernatural explanations for things they could not explain. "His rational explanations often disappointed the complainants, so LaVey invented more exotic explanations to make them feel better."⁴

In 1956 he bought a three-story Victorian house in San Francisco that may have at one time been a speakeasy. He painted it black. Three years later he met another woman, Diane Hegarty, and divorced his first wife. He never married Hegarty, but together they had LaVey's second daughter, Zeena Galatea. LaVey and Hegarty eventually separated; he met Blanche Barton who bore LaVey his only son—Satan Xerxes Carnacki LaVey, born in 1993.⁵

LaVey befriended a few California socialites and formed what he called a "Magic Circle" that would meet and discuss the dark side of life. LaVey would often lecture on the many cultic topics that he had been researching. Around this time he began to codify his unique philosophy. When one of his friends suggested that he form a new religion, he agreed, and in 1966, on a traditional witches' holiday, he officially formed the Church of Satan. On the day of the formation of the Church of Satan (hereafter CoS) LaVey ritualistically shaved his head and began wearing a black suit and clerical collar.⁶ From that time on he referred to 1966 as *Anno Satanas*, or the first year on the satanic calendar.⁷

In 1968 LaVey produced an album called the Satanic Mass, and on the cover was a symbol designed by LaVey which he employed in order to encompass the satanic philosophy he developed—the Sigil of Baphomet. The symbol is an inverted pentagram that envelopes a goat's head. The beard is the bottom point, the horns are the two top points, and the ears are the two side points. Included on the symbol is the Hebrew word for Leviathan, which translates to "serpent" in English. The next year LaVey published *The Satanic Bible* which outlines his philosophy and teaching, and in 1972 he published *The Satanic Rituals* which is meant as a companion to the earlier book and contains instructions on how to perform satanic rituals. LaVey played the role of Satan in the movie *Rosemary's Baby*.⁸

It should be noted that a number of critics, including rival satanic groups, have disputed and discredited many of the historical claims of the CoS. According to published reports, family members (including his daughter, Zeena), and public records, there are numerous discrepancies in the LaVey legend that often find their way into print. Critics claim these inconsistencies include LaVey's birth name (Howard Stanton Levey not Anton Szandor LaVey), his Grandmother's birthplace (the Ukraine not Transylvania), and the claim that he was descended from Gypsies. In addition, rival detractors have charged that there is a complete lack of independent evidence for the claims that LaVey's performed in an orchestra with the San Francisco Ballet, that he was enrolled in the city college, that he had a job as a photographer for the San Francisco Police Department, that he was employed by the Beatty Circus, or that he was the actor who played the part of the devil in the movie *Rosemary's Baby*.⁹

Many groups have splintered off from the CoS since its founding. In 1973 The Church of Satanic Brotherhood formed, but disbanded after only a year when one of the leaders announced his conversion to Christ.¹⁰ Another group that splintered from the CoS is the Temple of Set, a more mystical group. "Setians are a particularly elitist group, and draw heavily from Egyptian mythology in formulating their satanic philosophy."¹¹ Contrary to the CoS, Setians believe in an actual Satan and the supernatural realm.

After LaVey died in 1997, his companion and assistant Blance Barton, the mother of his son, took over the leadership of the church. Peter H. Gilmore was appointed as High Priest of the church in 2001 and resides at the Church of Satan headquarters in New York City.¹² There are an estimated 10,000 members of the church.

DOCTRINE

It might surprise some to know that the CoS founded by LaVey never taught that there is an actual Satan. The CoS denies that anything supernatural really exists at all. While LaVey did perform magic incantations, he felt that the results garnered from such activity were “supernormal,” not supernatural, meaning that there is some natural explanation that has yet to be discovered for them. His form of Satanism, then, is a mixture of two ideologies: atheism and hedonism. Satan stands as a symbol for unabashed pleasure in life with no concern for moral constraints. The CoS “espouses any type of sexual activity that satisfies your needs, be it heterosexuality, homosexuality, adultery, or faithlessness in marriage.”¹³

The fascination of lewd sexual indulgences can be seen in the description of the traditional satanic Black Mass and satanic baptisms in LaVey’s *Satanic Rituals*.¹⁴ LaVey’s self-professed aim was to “throw off the chains of convention, base social conformity, religious oppression, and animal stupidity and embrace ‘the only countercultural, rational alternative,’ the freedom of fully realized human potential.”¹⁵

LaVey developed nine statements that make up the Satanic “creed”:

- Satan represents indulgence instead of abstinence.
- Satan represents vital experience instead of spiritual pipe dreams.
- Satan represents undefiled wisdom instead of hypocritical self-deceit.
- Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it instead of love wasted on ingrates.
- Satan represents vengeance instead of turning the other cheek.
- Satan represents responsibility to the responsible instead of concern for psychic vampires.
- Satan represents man as just another animal – sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all fours – who, because of his ‘Divine spiritual and intellectual development,’ has become the most vicious animal of all.
- Satan represents all the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification.
- Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years.¹⁶

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

It is best to keep in mind when talking to Satanists that they generally are both atheists and hedonists. That being said, it is best to deal with them on both levels. Some of the traditional arguments for God’s existence (cosmological, teleological, moral, etc.) may be appropriate in order to demonstrate the reality of the supernatural realm. Satanists share the same burden of proof as atheists in justifying their worldview with respect to the existence of anything at all (e.g., the universe) and the necessity of a moral lawgiver by which objective moral values are grounded. Satanists like LaVey obviously do assert objective moral standards when they assert their fourth

creed, "Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it instead of love wasted on ingrates," yet their worldview supports the existence of neither real kindness nor love. In the Satanist/atheist worldview, kindness and love are social constructions that have no objective meaning.

Another approach is to focus on the hedonistic aspect to their worldview. For a Satanist, this often involves a distorted view of Scripture. Satanists often mistakenly think that the Bible teaches that the way to heaven is by following its commands and precepts, when the Bible actually teaches that once one is born again the moral commandments in the Bible are a natural outflow of one's heart. Because of this misconception, most Satanists think that Christians are forced to follow biblical rules and laws contrary to what their heart really tells them. Satanists need to know that the Bible teaches that in God's presence is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). Conversely, Satanists need to see clearly that any pleasure they derive from sin is ultimately shallow and short-lived. It is sweet at first, but bitter soon afterward, and the philosophy of a Satanist eventually leads to a vacuous and wrecked life.

RECOMMENDED READING

Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult by George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols. Contains a chapter on Satanism, with an extensive overview of the development of modern Satanic groups. 384 pgs., endnotes, bib.

Handbook of Today's Religions by Josh McDowell and Don Stewart. A good work detailing the various forms of the occult including two chapters devoted to Satan and Satanism. 573 pgs., endnotes, bib.

Notes

- ¹ Bob and Gretchen Passantino, *Zondervan Guide to Cults and Religious Movements: Satanism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 89-92.
- ² Peter H. Gilmore, "LaVey, Anton Szandor," *Satanism Today: An Encyclopedia of Religion, Folklore, and Popular Culture*, James R. Lewis, ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 144.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 145.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Bruce G. Frederickson, *How to Respond to Satanism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988), 16.
- ⁷ Gilmore, 146.
- ⁸ Frederickson, 17.
- ⁹ For an overview of alleged discrepancies in the Anton LaVey story, see Zeena LaVey and Nikolas Schreck, "Anton LaVey: Legend and Reality" <http://www.churchofsatan.org/aslv.html> (accessed December 1, 2003).
- ¹⁰ James R. Lewis, "Church of Satan," *Satanism Today: An Encyclopedia of Religion, Folklore, and Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 51.
- ¹¹ Lance King, "Understanding Satanism," <http://www.spiritwatch.com>, (accessed December 1, 2003).
- ¹² Lewis, 51.
- ¹³ Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *The Occult: The Authority of the Believer Over the Powers of Darkness* (San Bernardino: Here's Life, 1992), 193.
- ¹⁴ Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals* (New York: Avon, 1972), 35, 208-213.
- ¹⁵ Passantino, 43-44; as quoted from Blance Barton, *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton LaVey* (Los Angeles: Federal House, 1990), 119, 126.
- ¹⁶ Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon, 1969), 25.



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