

## Satanism

Satanism, sometimes called 'Devil-worship', is thought by some to be a religion that exists for the sole purpose of opposing and rebelling against God. Most Satanists reject that definition. They say that Satanism is a self-religion that encourages the development of "self" and has little interest in opposing Christianity. Nevertheless, the reality is that Satanists encourage blasphemy, vehemently oppose Christian doctrine and practice and judge Christians to be corrupt and hypocritical.

Satanism should not be confused with Paganism, which is a nature-worshipping religion that has no concept of Satan in its theology.

### God

Satan is the god of the Satanists. Some prefer to call him Set (Set was an ancient Egyptian deity) because, they claim, the concept of Satan was invented by the Christian church to frighten followers into submission. They would say that Satan, as a Christian understands him, does not exist. Instead they think of Set as a deity who can be approached as a friend and who, like the serpent in Genesis 3, dispenses knowledge (the Black Flame) to those who strive for it.

Some say that Set is a real being, an incorporeal entity and Lord of this world. Others consider him to be merely the archetypal rebel, the ultimate male principle, a figure representing pride, self-interest and self-gratification; the driving force in human evolution. They do not require belief in a personal being called Satan. They merely use the idea of Satan and the rebellious, offensive and provocative symbolism associated with him to encourage self-interest and individualism and promote opposition to institutional religion and the Christian culture.

### Divisions Within Satanism

The origins of Satanism are obscure. Its practice has been attributed to heretical groups throughout history. Many of the charges made were unfounded, especially those made by the medieval Roman Church.

Today there are several established and active Satanist groups (e.g. Dark Lily, the Order of the Nine Angels and the Church of Satanic Liberation), some of which are very secretive and about which little is known. However, within contemporary Satanism, two groups are the most important.

#### The Church Of Satan

On 30<sup>th</sup> April 1966, Anton Szandor LaVey declared the arrival of the Age of Satan. Declaring himself to be the Black Pope, he founded the Church of Satan in California and soon gained a lot of publicity by performing Satanic weddings and baptisms for famous people. The Church of Satan today is organised into local grottoes, most of which are now independent. Some operate under different names.

#### The Temple Of Set

Michael Aquino's Temple of Set (founded in 1975) although much smaller, is the Church of Satan's main rival. It shares some beliefs with the Church of Satan but is a more intellectual form of Satanism. It also takes the figure of Satan more seriously, understanding him to be a real personal being.

The Temple of Set is hierarchically ordered: the ruling body is called 'the Council of Nine' and the smaller groups are known as pylons. There are various degrees of membership and initiation ceremonies for each degree.

## **Man**

The Church of Satan stresses continuity between animals and humans and emphasizes evolutionary development. It teaches that the animal or physical appetites of humans are to be indulged rather than denied. Christianity, they say, has suppressed this side of human nature by labelling it sinful. Life is to be lived by the principle of survival of the fittest. Each individual should strive to overcome the weak who are to be pushed aside in the interests of attaining one's own potential. For this reason Satanists will distance themselves from the common herd. That said, LaVey was a firm believer in observing the rule of law, and his movement has maintained a strong opposition to the use of drugs.

The Temple of Set insists that humans are distinct from animals by virtue of their intellect and that this is not simply the result of evolution, but is a gift of Set to humanity. The Temple encourages the exercise of this gift to increase knowledge. That in turn leads to self-development and spiritual progress. The aim is not to worship Set, but to learn from him and eventually become like him.

## **How Do We Know These Things Are True?**

Satanism claims that its roots go back to prehistory, particularly to the mystery religions of Ancient Egypt and Greece.

LaVey wrote "The Satanic Bible" and "The Satanic Rituals" which remain key texts for many Satanists, whether they belong to the Church of Satan or not, as does The Black Flame, the Church's magazine published in New York.

The writings of Michael Aquino are also very influential as are those of Aleister Crowley who, although he would not have claimed to be a Satanist, laid the foundations of modern Satanism with a number of books produced in the early twentieth century. He claimed to have been visited, in Egypt, by a guardian angel named Aiwaz who revealed many things to him.

## **The Final Outcome**

Satanists do not believe in either heaven or hell and see no need of salvation. Here and now, they say, is your opportunity. Yet they do look to the future with hope. LaVey's Satanic Bible promises a future utopian era in which followers of the devil will inherit a place of prominence.

## **Distinctive Practices**

### **Magick**

Most Satanists emphasise the importance of ritual and ceremonial magick (spelt with a 'k' to distinguish it from the art of the conjurer) but their explanations of how it works may differ.

Some Satanists believe that changes can be brought about in the objective universe by applying the will. Ceremonial magick they say, particularly Black Magick as described in Aquino's book, Black Magic in Theory and Practice, brings about changes in the way the individual practising it sees the world. That, in turn, increases the strength of his or her will to make things happen. Others understand the Black Magick of Satanism to be calling directly upon demons to effect change in the material world.

### **The Black Mass**

The Black Mass is a parody of the Roman Catholic mass in which the host is desecrated and various rituals performed.

### **Ritual Sacrifice**

The Church of Satan frowns upon the practice of animal sacrifice. Nevertheless, there are those who do practice it in the name of Satanism.

Ritual sacrifices, which may involve the offering of blood, and the practices that accompany them, may be viewed as a means of destroying the consciousness of a sense of morality, reducing inhibitions and restraints and freeing the practitioner to express his or her animal instincts. In other circles they are seen as offerings to appease or win the favour of Satan.

### **Other Occult Practices**

Other occult practices, which may also be used by others who would not claim to be Satanists, are commonly associated with Satanism. They include spiritism, divination, astrology, channelling

### **The Appeal of Satanism**

Satanism is a growing phenomenon; its appeal is strong. Although it sometimes calls for a high level of commitment — particularly in the Temple of Set — its emphasis on self-development and even self-deification has a strong attraction in today's culture. Added to that are its promise of power and occult knowledge, its elitism, mysterious rituals and rites and the sense of belonging within a small group. Its rebellious, provocative stance is a further powerful incentive, especially for young people. For some rebellion against cultural and religious values is the motivating factor.

Among those who adopt Satanism there are many (usually adolescents) whose curiosity has been raised by gothic imagery, horror films certain types of rock music and the like. Although they claim to worship the devil, in many cases their activities — desecrating churches for example — are little more than teenage rebellion. Nevertheless there is the potential that they progress into Satanism proper.

Those who are convinced of the existence of a massive underground network of organized Satanic groups permeating all levels of society are almost certainly mistaken.

### **Questions For Discussion**

- 1 To what extent do you think sensationalism plays a part in our thinking about Satanism?