

Satanism

History, Beliefs and Practices

Identity: Modern Satanism can be identified as the worship or service of Satan as (1) a real spirit being of great power, (2) an impersonal force for evil, or (3) the personification of indulging the base instincts of human nature.

Founders: Aleister Crowley (1875-1947); Anton Szandor LaVey (1930-1997)

History: Modern Satanism can be traced to an Englishman named Aleister Crowley. Crowley was raised in a Christian home, but soon was overcome by greed, lust and many consuming sins. His quest for power and religious experience finally led him to Egypt, where he discovered that what he felt was the ultimate power of the universe. But in self-indulgence and self-worship, Crowley turned to alcohol, drugs, aberrant sexuality and the Devil. He came to the U.S. and died here in 1947, but not before producing a number of influential writings and planting his ideology in the vulnerable minds of the searching and impressionable.

Crowley's many writings were studied by a former circus lion tamer and amateur magician named Anton Szandor LaVey. In 1966 LaVey founded the First Church of Satan, and soon authored his best selling *Satanic Bible* along with another book, *Satanic Rituals*. LaVey clearly incorporated many of the older symbols and rituals of witchcraft, including the Goat's head and the upside down pentagram. Although LaVey's "church" is apparently no longer "functioning," it has spawned a number of other satanic groups, including The Temple of Set, The Process Church of the Final Judgment, and a large number of nameless but nonetheless powerful independent groups. In his writing and teaching, LaVey makes it clear that he does not believe in a personal creature called "The Devil." Rather he identifies the Devil as symbolic of all human desires and self-indulgence. While he claimed that satanic worship is only symbolic, for many who follow his teachings or who have founded named and unnamed splinter groups Satanism is very real.

Texts: *Satanic Bible; Satanic Rituals*

Beliefs and Practices:

The foundation of LaVey's beliefs and much modern satanic practice are his Nine Satanic Statements. They have attracted intellectuals from every walk of life.

1. Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence.
2. Satan represents vital existence, instead of spiritual pipe dreams.
3. Satan represents undefiled wisdom, instead of hypocritical self-deceit.
4. Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it, instead of love wasted on ingrates.
5. Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek.
6. Satan represents responsibility to the responsible, instead of concern for psychic vampires.
7. 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.
8. Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental or emotional gratification.
9. Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years.

Getting involved in satanic activity and practices is often a gradual process beginning with simple *influence* that can progress to *obsession*, satanic *domination*, and finally *possession*. There are some simple warning signs that signal a person's involvement in Satanism, but they are not necessarily conclusive. These include wearing only black, wearing symbols such as an inverted crucifix, skull, a goat's head or the numerals 666. Less subtle,

but often more difficult to detect, warning signs can include drug abuse and rebellion against Christian teaching and authority.

A Lutheran Response

Scripture does not explain at length the origin or nature of Satan or the Evil One. The Bible simply accepts the existence of a personal evil being. This “Evil One” has many titles. Among the most familiar, the name Devil means “deceiver,” and Satan means “adversary.” According to Scripture, the Devil was a fallen angel who, together with other fallen angels, was cast out from heaven and God’s presence (Rev. 12:7-9; 2 Pet. 2:4). This evil adversary of God now seeks to “convert” believers in Christ back to their original sinful and destructive bent. Because Jesus describes Satan as “*the Father of lies*” (John 8:44), alert Christians are always vigilant of his ultimate goal of wanting to “consume” followers of God and of Christ (1 Pet. 5:8).

The Scriptures make it clear that humans have worshipped and served Satan ever since Adam and Eve did obeisance to him in the Garden of Eden. In the Old Testament, satanic influence is apparent in the practices of human sacrifice (Lev. 18:21) and religious prostitution (Hosea 4:13-14). When early Christian missionaries sought to spread the Word about Jesus Christ, they regularly encountered satanic opposition (Acts 8:9-24; 13:8-12; 16:16-18). Often satanic activities in the Scriptures take the form of occult rituals and practices. Satanism obviously survived into the first century, since evidence of centers of Devil worship is mentioned in three of the letters to seven early Christian churches (Rev. 2-3). In the fourth century, the Roman Catholic Church condemned aberrant religious practices, including the “Black Mass,” which utilized Christian religious articles in attempts to contact the spirits of the deceased and gain influence over others.

Even a cursory study of Scripture makes it clear that Satan is diametrically opposed to God and the teachings of God’s Word. Compare Satanism’s Nine Satanic Statements and God’s Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). Study Jesus’ teachings on the Ten Commandments (Matt. 5:21-48) and note how radically opposed those teachings are to Satanism’s self-indulgence (See also Col. 3:5). Jesus set the pattern for combating satanic influence and power when He turned to God’s Word to defeat the devil and his temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4). When Peter became Satan’s tool to try to prevent Jesus from going to the cross, Jesus gave the command for Satan to depart (Matt. 16:23). Satan must submit to the powerful name of Jesus (Luke 10:17).

Turning to the power of God’s Word and relying on the powerful name of Jesus is a strong formula for Christians who seek to follow Jesus. St. Paul emphasizes the power of God’s Word when he urges Christians to “take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” as the one offensive weapon to cut Satan down (Eph. 6:17). Furthermore, Paul instructs Christians to put on the spiritual armor that God provides when doing battle “not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:11-12).

Prevention is the best cure. Standing in the strong name of Jesus and using God’s spiritual armor, Christians are to “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). They need to be alert to the devil’s efforts to devour them (1 Pet. 5:8). They need to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) to see whether they “confess” that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (to shed His blood and die, to take our place, and to die in our stead). Followers of Jesus need to be bold and faithful witnesses to God’s truth (John 8:31-32; 2 Cor. 4:2) as through the strength that God provides through Word and sacrament they wrestle with the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

For Further Reading...

- Wendell Amstutz. *Exposing and Confront Satan: Information, Insights, Help and Hope*. Rochester, MN, 1990.
 Richard W. DeHaan. *Satan, Satanism and Witchcraft*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972.
 Bruce Frederickson. *Satanism*. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Revised edition 1995.
 Anton Szandor LaVey. *The Satanic Bible*. Avon, 1969.
 George Mather and Larry Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, pp. 241-50.
 Bob & Gretchen Passantino. *Satanism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

Carl A. Raschke. *Painted Black*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.
H. T. F. Rhodes. *The Satanic Mass*. Seacacus, NJ: Citadel Books, 1974.

Links and Websites

<http://www.scp-inc.org/body.html>

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/satanism/intro.html>

<http://www.equip.org/free/CP0907.htm>

<http://www.equip.org/free/DO040.htm>