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# Death and Dying in the Satanic Worldview

CIMMINNEE HOLT

Satanism is for the living.

Gilmore, *The Satanic  
Scriptures* (2007)

## INTRODUCTION

Satanism professes to be an atheistic yet highly dogmatic New Religious Movement (NRM hereafter), which incorporates theatrical ritual as part of its practice. Despite its atheistic stance, the Church of Satan (CoS) has a distinct notion of a non-spiritual afterlife. As such, Satanism is a curious anomaly for scholars of religion; it piqued my interest to investigate this seemingly paradoxical claim. Initial Internet research reveals a fascinating aesthetic aspect of their ritual practices; many public images of Satanic<sup>1</sup> altars are comprised of traditional symbols of death: skulls or bones, either human or plastic, as well as knives, swords, and combat instruments (Church of Satan, *Altar Egos*, 2010). Members of the Church of Satan, that is Satanists, assert that they are a life-affirming religion, yet reject the notion of an external mystical dimension and a spiritual afterlife (yet retain a particular understanding of a “worldly” afterlife), while also actively engaging in ritual practices infused with death imagery. As such, this paper seeks to explore Satanism as both a reflection of sociological postmodern approaches to death and dying – that is, focused on the individual – and also as a fairly atypical example of a religious movement which acknowledges the absolute reality and finality of death. The Satanic cosmos centres around the individual who proactively examines who they are and what they want to become. A life well-lived is the manifestation of Satanic principles. Death is an accepted end to their finite nature but also a harsh reminder not to neglect what life offers. The notion of death serves as a prompt to embrace all aspects of life, pain and pleasure, good and bad. The unusual

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<sup>1</sup> The adjective form of the noun Satan is typically written in the lowercase, while adjectives within other traditions, such as Buddhism and Christianity, are written in the uppercase. Within the context of this paper, it is more appropriate to capitalize the adjective form “Satanic” as it is derived from internal Church of Satan literature, which applies the uppercase. For these reasons, the uppercase Satanic is used to respect the tradition itself, and to render the capitalized adjective form equal with other traditions, e.g. Satanic altar, Christian shrine, Buddhist stupa.

notion of a "worldly afterlife" in the CoS will be fully explored in relationship to their approach to death and dying.

## SATANISM

Anton Szandor LaVey founded the Church of Satan in 1966 in San Francisco (Barton 1992, 82). He was the High Priest until his death in 1997 and wrote the prime text, *The Satanic Bible*, which outlines the main tenets of the religion. The major principles are briefly: atheism, Epicureanism, responsibility, ethics, aesthetics, scepticism, and ritualized psychodramas or, "intellectual decompression" (Gilmore in Strombopolous 2006). In order to provide a general overview of the tradition, we shall discuss each of these themes in turn.

LaVey explains in *The Satanic Bible* that he considers all "gods" to be an externalized representation of humankind's ego (91). Therefore, religionists are in essence worshipping themselves. LaVey suggests that since humankind seems to require ritual and dogma, we are served best by eliminating the intermediary and worshipping ourselves directly (91-95). The current High Priest of the Church of Satan, Magus Peter H. Gilmore (LaVey's successor) elaborates on this notion of atheism begetting self-veneration,

Satanism begins with atheism. We begin with the universe and say, "It's indifferent. There's no God, there's no Devil. No one cares!" So you then have to make a decision that places yourself at the center of your own subjective universe, because of course we can't have any kind of objective contact with everything that exists [...] So by making yourself the primary value in your life, you're your own God. By being your own God, you are comfortable about making your own decisions about what to value. What's positive to you, is good. What harms you, is evil. You extend it to things that you cherish and the people that you cherish. So it's actually very easy to see that it's a self-centered philosophy. But it also requires responsibility, since you are taking on for yourself the complete onus for your personal success or failure. You can't be praying to a God or blaming a devil, or anyone else, for that matter, for what happens to you. It's on your own head. (Quoted in Shankbone 2007)

Gilmore clearly affirms that Satanists eliminate notions of a spiritual dimension of any kind and underlines personal responsibility as foundational to the Satanic philosophy. Magister James D. Sass, a high-ranking member of the Priesthood of the Church of Satan and author of supplementary texts on Satanism, explains, "For practical purposes 'spirituality' may be defined as a hypothetical non-material facet of human life, belief in which is unwarranted but unfortunately epidemic" (pers. comm., March 15, 2008). Sass asserts that words such as "mind", "soul", and "spirit" are used to describe our mental

and emotional lives (pers. comm., March 15, 2008). By abolishing the division between the spiritual and the temporal, the Satanist then views himself as a purely carnal being. This being is his own “god”, who takes control and responsibility for his life’s direction, choices, and actions (LaVey 2005, 44). Gilmore refers to this notion as “I-Theism” (2007, 209). This term is to be understood as the notion that the individual is solely accountable for the outcome of her own life. This is a pivotal feature when illustrating the Satanic worldview, especially as it relates to its approach to death and dying. Satanic philosophy directly emanates from this standpoint, placing emphasis on life itself, and deriding any glorification of death and a spiritual afterlife. That is, the self is paramount and the individual is uniquely responsible for every circumstance in her life. LaVey proclaims that instead of seeking an external spiritual communion, Satanists will fully embrace their carnal nature and revere themselves without shame (2005, 45).

The Satanist, as her own “god”, acts in a manner that benefits the individual most. Indulging responsibly and legally in the pursuit of pleasures, be it professional or personal, is a prime Satanic ideal. It must be underlined that Satanists accept the consequences of their actions and consider self-control a desired trait (LaVey 2005, 81). “Indulgence, not compulsion” is an often-repeated mantra (LaVey 2005, 81). This can be understood as noting that rebellious compulsion is considered foolish at best, deplorable at worst (LaVey 2005, 81-86).

Scepticism is perhaps the default Satanic approach to conventional ideas. Satan is used as a symbol of challenge; the word “Satan” is translated from Hebrew as “adversary”, “opposer” or “accuser” (LaVey 2005, 55). Accepting unexamined assumptions blinds the Satanists to nuanced understandings. By subjecting established ideas to re-evaluation, the intellectual goal of the Satanist is to approach self-education enthusiastically, organically, and holistically in order to gain keen and creative insights into human nature (LaVey 2005, 25, 53; 1972, 19).

“Looks mean everything,” wrote LaVey in *The Satanic Witch*, a book that details methods of manipulation, or “Lesser Magic” (2003, 121). Satanists understand that how one presents oneself aesthetically is an important form of communication. Daily interactions require mediation in order to achieve one’s goals. Part of these negotiating tactics involves dress, speech, mannerisms, and behaviour that facilitate fluid navigation in the world. Satanism advocates enhancing natural physical attributes, not conforming to conventional standards of beauty. A distinction must be made that Satanists are not prone to whims of popular fads, preferring to demarcate themselves from identical “fashion drones” (LaVey 2003, 151-159). Instead, the ideal Satanist sets herself apart by considering her overall aesthetic and showcasing her natural charm (LaVey 2003, 15-20).

“Greater magic” is the term used for rituals which LaVey defines as psychodramas or “intellectual decompression” (2005, 119-120). There are three main rituals delineated in *The Satanic Bible: Lust, Compassion, and Destruction*. The Lust ritual is meant to make possible the fulfilment of sexual attraction. The Compassion ritual is performed for one’s self or a loved one facing problems. The Destruction ritual is designed to overcome issues arising out of conflict with someone you hold in contempt (LaVey 2005, 114-115). All three rituals are intended to function simultaneously as alleviating anxieties arising out these respective situations and also to achieve the desired result: the consummation of sexual desire, the resolution of a problem, or the ruination of an enemy. As Satanism focuses on man as a carnal animal, natural emotional responses are neither denied nor shamed. However, in keeping with the idea of responsibility, erratic or harmful outbursts of impassioned responses are considered lacking in discipline (LaVey 2005, 119-120). The rituals are designed to be a channel for these intense emotions. Within this paper, the terms *Church of Satan Ritual*, *Satanic Ritual*, and *Magical Ritual* will be used interchangeably; that is, as rituals performed by Satanists.

Gilmore attests that Satanic rituals are “self-transformative psychodrama” (2007, 223). My research into psychodrama reveals that the development of dramatherapy (or psychodrama) in the field of psychology has as its premise that actions in themselves create new realities, the *doing* is a catalyst to change (Djuric 2003, 9). Psychodrama is an active form of group psychotherapy wherein an individual acts out scenes from their lives on a stage, with props and other members of the therapy group who all interchange parts. This role playing has as its goal to reveal concealed dimensions of knowledge to gain new insights into relationship dynamics. By re-establishing connections to distant and recent pasts, the protagonist is enabled to act “as if” when faced with painful or traumatic events. A cathartic experience, within this safe environment, triggered by the physical movements, is the ultimate goal. This catharsis will help to restructure how the protagonist then approaches similar situations in the future. The website for the American Society of Group Psychotherapy & Psychodrama writes,

That the “body *is*,”<sup>2</sup> in fact, “the unconscious mind.” That it holds the story of our lives that has been learned and lived in action and relationship. This highly sensorial method of role play creates a healing environment that allows for a fuller expression of all aspects of self and other. It is a method that can extend itself towards and adapt to any level of society, a method for the future. (Dayton 2010)

This association between the mind and the body within psychodrama states that negative events in our lives create imprints on the limbic system in our brains, which “stores highly charged emotional memories, modulates motivation, controls appetite and sleep cycles, promotes bonding and directly processes the sense of smell and modulates libido” (Dayton 2010). These imprints become hard-wiring for similar situations, and can have the “freeze or flee” effect (Dayton 2010). Role play in group therapy psychodrama offers a controlled space for participants to practice effective and productive modes of behaviour modification, to create new imprints on the limbic systems (Dayton 2010).

Satanic ritual functions similarly to psychodrama, although the objective is slightly different. In psychodrama, the intent is to fix events that have already happened. While this can be a goal in Satanic ritual, it is not the prime function. LaVey defines magical ritual as the “manifestation of the will” (2005, 110-111). Satanic ritual has as its objective to be pre-emptive about future events, to imprint on the brain desired results. This imprint is done by using imagery that provokes a personal response in ritual (LaVey 2005, 113). The symbols, highly idiosyncratic in nature, are meant to provoke poignant and potent emotional reactions (LaVey 1972, 15). A high-ranking member of the hierarchy of the Church, Magister Phineas, states, “Satanists use any symbol they chose for their own purposes. If [a] figure means something to one Satanist, then they use it. Those who do not identify with it, disregard it” (quoted in Frost 2008). By virtue of this emotional response, Lust rituals do not only help alleviate anxiety, but they are also the genus for the ideal romantic relationship (LaVey 2005, 114, 132). It could be said, then, that Satanists are attempting to create new limbic hardwiring proactively. Satanists posit that rituals are cathartic, that some change has occurred (LaVey 1972, 15-27). Greater Magic rituals function as transformative; the shift in perspective is felt solely in the individual on a personal and emotional level, and, possibly, affects change outside of ritual (LaVey 2005, 119-120). Ritual magic can be understood as a method to actively shift your perspective during the rite in order to achieve one’s desires outside of the ritual chamber.

This “intellectual decompression” (or psychodrama or magical ritual) permits emotional release in order to maintain psychological control over the events in one’s

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis added.

life. Once a ritual is performed, and extreme passion is given its every outlet within the confines of the rite, it is then recommended that the celebrant disregard any further distress surrounding the particular issue as this serves only to exacerbate anxiety (LaVey 2005, 126). The rites focus intent and condense desire in order to alleviate anguish. This in turn empowers the Satanist with an acute understanding of their situation in order to act with a clear mind set on achieving one's desires (LaVey 2005, 126). Living well is a prime ideal, an ideal maintained by their notion of magic which functions as a bolster to psychological and emotional self-awareness and control.

## METHODOLOGY

My initial research into the Church of Satan began in 2006 with a short paper designed to illustrate the inherent problems in conducting Internet research on New Religious Movements; inconsistencies, contradictions, schisms, mudslinging, inaccuracies, and inflammatory accusations from journalists, ex-members, anti-cult groups, and various critics of NRMs all contributed to a murky and overwhelming area of research. There are scarce academic sources for reference on the CoS, and the few existing scholarly works are surface studies based on Satanic Literature, Internet research, and pan-Satanism sources (Lewis 2001, Petersen in Lewis and Petersen 2005). The Church of Satan website, commenting on James R. Lewis' efforts at Internet research for a "Census of Satanism", states that, "we think it worthwhile that true Satanists should steer clear" as Lewis involves other groups that self-identity as Satanists that are unrecognized by the Church of Satan (Church of Satan, *Pages/News44*, 2010). There are a number of these disparate groups that self-identity as Satanists. The great majority of these factions are theistic Satanists, that is, they believe in the existence of a spiritual Satanic entity. As such, they are diametrically opposed to the atheistic stance of the Church of Satan, which views Satan as a symbol and as a metaphor for how they see themselves. As far as my research has ascertained, theistic Satanists are primarily (although not exclusively) active on the Internet, as opposed to physical assembly, have several unorganized divisions with multiple nuances of how the entity of Satan is perceived and understood, and have ephemeral philosophies that are influenced by the writings of Anton Szandor LaVey and other occult authors (Lewis 2001, *xiv*). As such, the various theistic Satanic groups are omitted from this paper because their understanding of ritual, death, and the afterlife is then atypical of members of the Church of Satan.

Scholars of New Religions Movements (such as James R. Lewis), as well as theistic Satanists, have tended to refer to the Church of Satan as LaVeyan Satanism to



distinguish it from theistic Satanism (2001, *xiii-xiv*). It is, however, significant to note that members of the Church of Satan do not self-identify as LaVeyan Satanists but simply as Satanists. Since the Church of Satan was the first organized Satanic religion, founded and based on the book *The Satanic Bible* by Anton Szandor LaVey (first published in 1969), the members of the Church deride the need to use labels applied by external social scientific categories or their theistic Satanic detractors (Gilmore in Shankbone 2007).

Current High Priest of the Church of Satan, Peter H. Gilmore, explains, “We don’t think [theistic Satanists] are Satanists. They are devil worshippers, as far as I’m concerned” (Quoted in Shankbone 2007). Perhaps more delicately phrased, the Church of Satan concludes that since they were first to codify Satanism as a religion, they hold the rights to the moniker of Satanist and the strong symbolism and responsibilities attached to the label. As James R. Lewis writes in his book *Satanism Today: An Encyclopedia of Religion, Folklore, and Popular Culture*,

However one might criticize and depreciate it, The Satanic Bible is still the single most influential document shaping the contemporary Satanist movement. Whether LaVey was a religious virtuoso or a misanthropic huckster, and whether The Satanic Bible was an inspired document or a poorly edited plagiarism, their influence was and is pervasive (xiv).

For these reasons, within this essay the terms *Satanism*, *Satanic*, and *Satanist* will refer solely to members of the official Church of Satan, as established by Anton Szandor LaVey, and systematized in the prime text, *The Satanic Bible*.

Sources for this essay include analyses of death and dying by sociologist Tony Walters applied to Satanic literature and information provided by two people authorized to represent the Church of Satan: second degree Warlock JPL and third degree Reverend JR. My first contact with each respective informant was through a Bulletin Board System (or BBS), an online discussion forum run by a member in the Church of Satan. The CoS has an official Chat Room Policy regarding Internet interactions. It states,

The Church of Satan DOES NOT have an official chat room.  
We have NEVER had an official chat room.  
There are no chat rooms affiliated in ANY WAY with the Church of Satan.  
The Church of Satan actively discourages participation in ANY chat room.  
(Church of Satan, *Chat Room Policies*, 2010)

Some members, however, host and run their own forums for use by Satanists. These are considered the property and domain of the individual owner of that BBS or chat forum,



and not an official Church of Satan run chat room (Church of Satan, *Chat Room Policies*, 2010). I have omitted the name of the specific online BBS forum wherein I made first contact with my informants for two reasons. Firstly, the CoS does not encourage people to garner information from online forums and stresses their principal literature as the prime reliable resource (Church of Satan, *Chat Room Policies*, 2010). Secondly, I have chosen to keep as much distance from my informants and their CoS affiliation as possible, using initials as per their request. Data collected from informants was conducted through emailed correspondence in which they filled out a questionnaire. At the time of the initial research into this particular topic on Death and Dying in 2007, I had not met any Satanists in person, although I had developed an email correspondence with several such individuals on a semi-regular basis. I asked the two informants named above to participate for this paper, stating that pseudonyms would be used. Only the information collected through the questionnaire about Death and Dying is included in this essay. Secrecy and anonymity are paramount given that revealing their religious affiliation publicly could harm them in their respective careers. For this reason, the questionnaire did not include demographic information except that both informants are male. Age, location, and profession are undisclosed.

As this paper was being prepared for publication (in February 2011), I contacted Reverend JR to ask for an additional comment on the Church Satan's position in regards to participation in academic research. He states that,

The CoS receives dozens (perhaps far more through administrative channels) of "academic inquiries" each year, and very few of them are serious; hence very few are taken seriously. Further, there is ongoing concern that we will be misrepresented by those who do inquire. This is true in almost any printed medium which we do not exercise direct control over; frequently an answer is given and a statement taken, but later we find that it has been "interpreted" in a way that we feel has missed the point and sheds little light on what we intended to say...Finally, perhaps understandably due to the nature of the organization, we are often suspicious of the motives of outsiders seeking information about us, if for no other reason than because nobody wishes to participate in something in good faith only to find that their words have been taken out of context and used against us. Hence it is typically necessary for trust to be established prior to any such interview. (pers. comm. Dec. 22, 2010)

My first short papers on the Church of Satan received a mostly favourable reception by CoS members; indeed, I made a concerted effort to understand and explain their foundational tenets as accurately as possible, while also expanding on my ideas and applying academic theory in appropriate and critical ways. This has allowed a less suspicious reception to my inquiries and, given the above statement by Reverend JR, established a certain amount of trust.

Both Reverend JR and Warlock JPL are deemed authorized representatives of the Church of Satan as they were awarded a title. Titles range from 1st degree to 5th degree; a 1st degree is a registered member without an official title beyond membership, who may then be awarded high titles according the CoS criterion; 2nd degree is Witch/Warlock, 3rd degree Priestess/Priest or Reverend, 4th degree Magister/Magistra, and 5th degree is Magus/Maga (Church of Satan, *Affiliation*, 2010). These members of the hierarchy of the Church of Satan have received recognition in the form of a title for applying Satanic theory in practice. As such, they are also authorized from the Church of Satan's administrative board to correctively represent the CoS publicly, should they so choose (Reverend JR, pers. comm. Dec. 22, 2010).

As stated, I made first contact through a BBS forum, presented myself as a researcher, exchanged some public posts and private emails over a period of time, and eventually asked each informant to fill out my questionnaire. I chose to ask these two specific gentlemen because of their ease and clarity of written expression and their willingness to correspond in good faith. The advantage to having access to data collected from a questionnaire is that it provides an individual and personal aspect to the ideas explored in this essay. Satanic literature, while clear and explicit on Satanic philosophy, provides little information on how Satanists choose to live, or understandings of the Satanic philosophy in Satanists' own words. A disadvantage to this small amount of data is that this essay cannot be understood as representative of Satanism as a whole. It is important to underline that no extensive data exists on Satanists themselves as the Church of Satan has never, nor will ever, release information about their members to the public; "an individual's membership is held in strictest confidence by the Church of Satan" (Church of Satan, *Affiliation*, 2010). My request for an online questionnaire was directed to each informant individually, and not a request through the administration of the CoS. For this reason, individual Satanists' participation in my academic research is by mutual consent of myself as the researcher and the informant. Our correspondences are outside of the auspices of the administration of the Church of Satan. The very small window into this mostly reclusive NRM presented in this paper is not to be considered an in-depth or all pervasive representation of Satanists. Much of my anecdotal evidence collected throughout the past four years suggests that Satanists vary greatly in their ritual and lifestyle preferences; therefore, this essay is to be considered a small fraction of personal insight into Satanic tenets and external academic sources.

#### DEATH AND DYING

Having outlined a few of the basic tenets of Satanism, let us now move on to address Satanic approaches to death and dying by addressing the concept of an afterlife. LaVey contends that Satanists may think of “god” in whichever way they wish but prefers to view power as a balancing factor in the universe (LaVey 2005, 40). That is, the universe is entirely indifferent to human beings. The natural forces of the world are not theistic in essence, therefore Satanists reject the notion of a god invested in the actions of humankind (LaVey 2005, 44-45; Gilmore in Shankbone 2007). Time wasted on fear of judgment in an afterlife is a “spiritual pipe dream” peddled by religious leaders (LaVey 2005, 25, 40-41). My two sources contacted for this essay, Warlock JPL and Reverend JR, personally self-identify as atheistic and Satanic. Perhaps the most important factor for Satanists is that they categorically reject the idea of an afterlife. This notion exhibits itself twofold. Firstly, by embracing one’s carnal and finite nature, a strong emphasis is placed on excelling at living well. Secondly, while I have stated that Satanists do not adhere to the idea of an afterlife or any spiritual dimensions to humankind, if we shift our perspective slightly, we begin to see that there does indeed exist a Satanic eschatology.

LaVey states that religious clerics of all sorts dispense the notion of an afterlife in order to keep people complacent with their current situation (2005, 91). The promise of a glorious eternal afterlife functions as a means of social control (2005, 92). The notion that humankind is purely carnal, along with the fact that they consider themselves to be their own “gods,” translates into placing the prime importance on real life achievements and enjoyment as the individual Satanist sees fit; “Life is the great indulgence - death the great abstinence” is an often repeated mantra (LaVey 2005, 33). This central point of focusing on real life endeavours functions as a version of life after death in the Satanic philosophy. Since there is a fundamental effort to improve quality of life and achieve excellence in various areas of interest, these accomplishments operate as promoters of the Satanist’s prestige and reputation. Although death is an unavoidable circumstance of animal life, LaVey contends recognition of merit while alive is, “Life after death through fulfilment of the ego” (2005, 91). The idea that an individual has sole and complete control over the circumstances in which to provide meaning and passion to his life is a self-reinforcing philosophy. Emphasizing one’s natural abilities increases acknowledgment of their achievements, which in turn increases their notoriety, which in turn fulfils their Satanic eschatological ideal pre- and posthumously. It this recognition of achievements, in a chosen field, that ensures the life after death.

A very important distinction must be made at this point; the Satanist seeks not fame simply for the sake of adulation or worship. Quite the opposite is true, in fact, since such pursuits are based on fickle, impermanent, and uneducated public opinion. It

is the individual choice of each Satanist to seek fulfilment in personally gratifying ways (LaVey 2005, 91-95). Since skill, innovation, ambition, creativity, and personal and professional accomplishments are prime examples of executing a model Satanic lifestyle, these ideals build the individual's charisma as defined by Max Weber.

[Charisma is] a certain quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or *at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities*<sup>3</sup>. (Weber in Barnes 1978, 1-18)

The ideal Satanist sets herself apart from the ordinary through competency, study, aesthetics, critical thinking, psychological discipline, and emotional control maintained by ritualized decompression psychodramas.

Weber contends that rituals are charismatic displays of authority. However, Satanic rituals are charismatic displays of autonomy. Primarily, these rituals are powerful exhibitions of authority over the self; the Satanist is master of his own destiny. Once a person has control over their own consciousness, manipulation of others is a secondary benefit. I must underline that when referring to manipulation (*Lesser Magic*) it is not with a negatively disposed connotation but with a realistic outlook on quotidian social interaction. A Satanist who wants a specific goal will use whatever legal means necessary to achieve it. It is an orchestration by words, actions, aesthetics, intellect, and seduction; whichever method is most effective for any given situation. Weber's theories of charisma are contingent upon assent by the followers of the charismatic authority -- that is, as a social type -- and can exist only in a social context. However, if we shift this perspective slightly, this social context can apply to the individual Satanist and subsequently to Satanic eschatology. In this way, we see how,

The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life. If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles. If he wants to be a warlord, he must perform heroic deeds. Above all, however, his divine mission must 'prove' itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by the gods. (Weber 1968, 22-23)

The above quote refers to a leader who implies connections to a higher power. The Satanist, however, embraces carnal self-deification (Church of Satan, *Esprit de Corps*, 2010). Therefore, he is responsible to himself, to maintain his own ideals, and prove his own strength by the measure of his proficiency. Weber's theories of cause and effect still apply. If Satanists want success in financial, artistic, or scientific areas, they must demonstrate and implement talent, motivation, and enterprise. Satanists do not gain the

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<sup>3</sup> Emphasis added.

authority over a flock of followers but plan to become masters of their own circumstance and design the lifestyle they chose. This authority is not recognition by disciples in a social context, as Weber defines it, but is instead recognized by the Church of Satan's administrators as they award titles to those who demonstrate excellence in their areas of expertise (Church of Satan, *Affiliation*, 2010). By building on their own charismatic display of autonomy and exhibiting mastery in their respective fields, individuals increase the likelihood of more people remembering them after death. Satanists are, literally, creating their own afterlife in the memories of those they have affected. As already stated, LaVey describes the Satanic notion of an afterlife as "Life after death through fulfilment of the ego" (LaVey 2005, 91). In order to condense this idea into a phrase, I call this phenomenon *applied eschatology*.<sup>4</sup>

A similar notion of applied eschatology exists in the ancient epic of Gilgamesh. In that narrative, the three methods for achieving immortality were through lineage, the building of structures, and *heroic deeds* (Kramer 1988, 94-109). There was an understanding that nothing survives except reputation. This ancient idea is a precedent to Satanic applied eschatology, albeit revisited in a conscious and direct manner. Unlike Gilgamesh, Satanists are not seeking physical or spiritual immortality; rather, the quest is life itself and the pleasures it holds. By achieving one's desires, and excelling in one's chosen area of expertise, the afterlife is propagated here on earth in the memories of others.

"Satanism is for the living," writes Magus Peter H. Gilmore, current High Priest of the Church of Satan, in *A Satanic Funeral Rite* (2007, 250). As discussed above, to expand on this emphasis on life and the Satanic view on death and dying, I sent a questionnaire through email to two separate members of the Church of Satan hierarchy authorized to represent Satanism, Reverend JR and Warlock JPL (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2007, and Nov. 1, 2007, respectively). Hereafter, all comments from either informant originate from these emailed correspondences. They both confirm that there is no official stance on how funerals should be conducted for Satanists. The rite outlined in the essay *A Satanic Funeral Rite* is suggestive, not prescriptive; funerals should be conducted according to individual preference (Gilmore 2007, 252). I enquired about

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<sup>4</sup> This phrase is borrowed from the eschatology of Paul of Tarsus (St. Paul). In his worldview, the Messiah's (Jesus of Nazareth) return was imminent, wherein God would establish his Kingdom on earth, bestowing eternal life on the righteous. For the followers of Jesus, Paul and his contemporaries, death was not a necessary step in order to be granted eternal life; they were already living in a divine state. Scholars refer to this notion as *realized eschatology*, a term popularized by C. H. Dodd (1884-1973). As of the time I submitted the original paper that discussed this theory, in November 2006, my research has not found any previous mention of the phrase "applied eschatology".

these personal individualized preferences of both my sources. Warlock JPL states that a secular ceremony containing no religious elements would be acceptable, but outward signs of his religious affiliation are unnecessary. He would like to be remembered fondly by loved ones and for his life to be celebrated. Similarly, Reverend JR agrees that those whom he knew and loved should attend his funeral. The funerary details are to be decided by family. However, as a “strictly endogamous man”, the Reverend maintains that his funeral would “naturally” be “Satanic in nature if not in strict ritual”. Both the agents demonstrate a common theme with their answers: that their funerals would reflect their worldview, despite no explicit references to Satanism. When Warlock JPL states that no “outward signs” of his affiliation are required, the implication is that Satanic elements are perhaps unseen, yet still present, in the underlying context. Reverend JR states this idea clearly, as he has an understanding that the details chosen by his family would still mirror his perspective on life: his Satanic worldview.

#### SATANIC DEATH AS POSTMODERN?

According to sociologist Tony Walters, there are historically three categories of approaches to death and dying in a Western context. They are the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern (1996, 199). Walters delineates these categories based on the authority that presides over the death. The clergy regulates the authority of tradition in the first approach, usually in a strict liturgical manner (1996, 195). The experts on death and dying in the modern approach are the medical professionals, the authority of expertise (1996, 196). The authority of the self strongly presides in the postmodern approach (1996, 197). That is, according to Walters, contemporary society approaches death and dying based on an autonomous authority. Emphasis is placed on personal emotions during the dying process as the death specialist role has moved traditionally from clergy member, to physician, to the individual (1996, 193-197). Contemporary funerary details act as a reflection of personal character and values, often mixing traditional religious proceedings with modern secular reinterpretations (Walters 1996, 197). How a particular religious group approaches death and dying mirrors their worldview; funerary rites are an expression of the lives lived (1996, 199). Given this assertion, I will examine Satanism as an example of this postmodern approach to individualized funeral rites, how it reflects the worldview of Satanists, and their approach to dying and death itself.

As already stated, Walters’ three forms of approaches to death and dying are based on the authority of the death specialist: the traditional, the modern and the



postmodern (1996, 199). Firm clerical authority presides in the first approach. Professional medical authority is the death expert in the modern approach. The authority of the self, and the individual desires of the dying, directs the postmodern approach. Walters notes that there is an increasing criticism of impersonal funerals (1996, 197). He contends that with the rise of the notion of the “individual” in Western society, the efforts to define personal identity are negated with conventional, standardized funerals where death does not reflect the individual life lived but more the grander social expectations (Walters 1996, 199-200). Walters argues that contemporary funerals are a negotiation that includes the dying, the witnesses to the dying person, old customs, and new components that directly correspond to the individual personality of the ill person (1996, 203). It is a process by which the persons involved (the dying, the family and friends of the dying, and even the funeral directors) all contribute to the final funerary rite, deciding which components best reflect the individual (1996, 203).

While the Satanic worldview does echo the pervasive approach to individuality in regards to death and dying, I would disagree that Satanists fit too neatly into this sociological postmodern category; Satanists have somewhat of a more pro-active approach to death and dying as they deliberately consider their legacy before illness occurs as an integral part of their worldview and their perspective of death itself. This pragmatic factor is not mentioned in Walters’ postmodern category as he states that many contemporary approaches ignore death until they are faced with the undeniable fact of grief. Walters’ arguments reveal that contemporary considerations of death view it as a failure, instead of a natural progression of life; “Death is supposed to have been abolished,” he comments as he describes common postmodern reactions to death (1996, 197). As briefly explained above, Satanism advocates rejecting popular, unexamined assumptions. Satanism, then, perhaps represents more a form of radical postmodern individualism. Walters’ typology observes evolving behaviours in the approach to death and dying. However, Satanists are proactive instead of reactive (LaVey 2005, 45). The focus on remembering a deceased is not an afterthought suddenly brought to light because of unexpected, or even expected, death. Instead, it is a conscious action *before* death to be remembered for accomplishments. A shift is required in our view of Walters’ postmodern approach.

While Satanists do indeed demonstrate authority of the self, the prime focus is on the life that was lived *while it was being lived*, and not the funeral rite. Since all notions of a spiritual afterlife are rejected, death could be seen as mundane, while the life of the Satanist is seen as sacred. Satanic funerary rites are not rituals that satisfy a cosmic purpose, nor even necessarily a reflection of the deceased. As Gilmore states, “The



Satanist is dead; he or she will not know the difference” (Gilmore 2007, 251). The purpose of a funeral, then, is to appease the grieving parties after the death of the individual (251-252). Focus should be on concretizing the significance the deceased had on the lives of the ritual participants (252). Again, the notion of Satanic applied eschatology is present here. As High Priest Peter H. Gilmore writes in *A Satanic Funeral Rite*, “We believe that immortality lies only in the memories of the people whom the deceased touched in some way during their lives, or whomever they influence *post-mortem* via their lives’ creative output. [The funerary] rite is thus a tribute to the achievements of the deceased” (252).

#### SATANISTS AND DEATH IMAGERY

Another aspect of Satanism that I explored is the use of death imagery. It must first be underlined that not every Satanist shares the same aesthetic preference for ritual paraphernalia. An example of death imagery would be the theatrical shrine of Daniel Byrd, a Reverend in the Church of Satan. Byrd's ritual space features the official symbol of the Church of Satan, the Sigil of Baphomet, an inverted pentagram containing a goat head (symbolizing carnality), encircled by the Hebrew characters spelling out “Leviathan,” which references the sea creature that battles God in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>5</sup> The Baphomet is flanked by a white and black candle with an authentic human skeleton (named *Bianca*) lying below (Byrd 2009). While such imagery is often expected when associated with death and funerary rites, this is a very personal ritual altar. Similar use of skulls or bones (either real or plastic), candles, sombre atmosphere, and knives are prevalent throughout many public images of Satanic altars and are used in their various rituals (Church of Satan, *Altar Egos*, 2010). Therefore, it is evident that the death imagery is not reserved solely for Satanic funerals. Reverend JR does state that many Satanists may use items representing death as they are unusual and interesting relics. Reverend JR uses a Tibetan *kapala*, a human skull cup that he employs as a chalice, as well as military blades (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2007). Both items are associated with death: a visual epitome of death without live flesh, and an instrument for bringing about death, respectively. JR contends that such morbid imagery, “does not represent my own death or a fascination with my death – it represents the spirit of the conqueror who is *alive* to gloat over the dead beneath him” (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2007). In this sense, he says, the objects used are similar to warrior kings who collected the skulls of their enemies or feasted among their dead bodies. They are visual reminders not to oppose them. Carl

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<sup>5</sup> There are several references in the Hebrew Bible to the sea creature Leviathan. Some examples are Job 41:1-34, Psalms 74:14, and Isaiah 27:1.

Jung touches upon this notion of intimidation in his book *Symbols of Man*, “even today the destruction of an effigy or statue is a symbolic killing of the person depicted” (1964, 235). While Satanic rituals do not refer to the physical killing of an actual person, as absolutely no illegal activity is condoned (Church of Satan, *Affiliation*, 2010), the rites do represent a powerful draw to symbolically slaughter problematic conditions. As Reverend JR states, a “Satanic ritual seeks to evoke images of greatness and power so that your wish may manifest as reality” (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2007).

Warlock JPL constructs his rituals somewhat differently, relying mostly on imagination and mythology. He often uses the figures from different legends, such as the,

man eating raven fiends of First Nations mask dances, or generally, surprising transformations and reversals, like that implied by cannibals and vampires (those who honour with mystical power what they degrade by the contempt of eating it) or the pagan gods who oversee tragedy and destruction (such as Dionysis and Shiva) (pers. comm. Nov. 1, 2007).

These entities have deadly power, but, “deadliness alone isn’t interesting; what is interesting is the power that exceeds concept. This is, for me, not a representation of death, but rather of life, since power is what is essential to life and precisely absent in death” (pers. comm., Nov. 1, 2007). The Warlock’s approach is in keeping with the Satanic notion of humankind as carnal animals who are passionate, mortal, and violent. Jung explains this animal motif as representing humankind’s primitive and instinctual nature. Despite civilization, Jung contends that humans must, “realize the violence of their instinctual drives and their powerlessness in face of autonomous emotions erupting from the unconscious” (1964, 237). It could be understood that both the Warlock JPL and Reverend JR are then using the imagery to represent their primal natures within a specific rite; they have an outlet within the confines of ritual to express these passionate drives, fears, and desires.

Despite the differences in ritual items, the Warlock and the Reverend illustrate Satanic ideals with their imagery. Both state that, in the ritual use of these objects, life, being alive, and the conquering of death, however symbolic, reemphasizes their focus on life. These death items function as life affirming reminders, not life-denying relics. For both Warlock JPL and Reverend JR, Satanic rituals are considered self-transformative and, as Jung states, the use of potent imagery communicates with the unconscious. Satanists recognize the world as chaotic and that the sole power they wield is over their own lives. Satanism takes the idea of accepting their nature to a direct and conscious level. Not only does Satanic ritual act as a self-aware realization of

carnal emotions, but also as a method to gain control over this powerlessness that Jung discusses above.

Satanists do not consider themselves to be part of a community (defined as a group that shares a common geographic locality, history and culture) as they are an international organization comprised of distinct and greatly varied individuals. However, they do share a religious affiliation and a particular worldview. They reject the notion of community as a Satanist in good standing is unaffected by the amount of contact or participation they have in Church activities. All involvement is on an entirely voluntary basis, as emphasis is placed on how a Satanist lives in their everyday life, and how their accomplishments represent their Satanic worldview (Church of Satan, *Affiliation*, 2010). Because of this extreme focus on individuality, I enquired of my sources whether or not the death of a loved one would be approached differently than that of a fellow Satanist. Warlock JPL states, "The Satanist faces the challenge of being an individualist without being a narrow or petty creature unable to be touched by others; we...must learn to combine vulnerability and strength. Sometimes this means loving deeply and being affected by death, but nevertheless learning from it and making a fulfilling life for oneself under the new conditions of loss" (pers. comm. Nov. 1, 2007). Warlock JPL demonstrates that Satanism advocates an acceptance of natural emotions; Satan is used as the symbol to this very carnal humanity. Typically the temptations of the devil are sex, money and power. Satanists welcome these desires with full recognition of their nature (LaVey 2005, 46). However, these objects by no means exclude aspirations for intimacy, love, and friendship. In keeping with the idea that Satanists embrace life, the bonds between loved ones may run rather deep. To love someone, and by default to grieve their loss in the event of death, is a celebration, and not a suppression, of their humanity.

Reverend JR's response was also characteristic of the Satanic worldview. Expounding on the notion that survival is the highest law, the Reverend comments that it is natural to extend protection to those close to you; the Satanist values the life of loved ones as much as his own. Having experienced the death of his father, a policeman killed in the line of duty, the Reverend explains, "There is no denying that as a strictly atheistic man, I am forced to face the fact that my father is truly gone and I will never meet him again" (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2007). His father died heroically, remembered by thousands for his outstanding service as a respected member of his community and for his courageous final acts. The memory of the Reverend JR's father is an example of Satanic afterlife; it was the father's life that is important, not his death, and the imprint of that life on his loved ones creates a posthumous legacy. The Reverend informs me that his father requested Frank Sinatra's "My Way" to play at his funeral. Reverend JR

Holt

expresses that he felt his father had lived up to the sentiment of the song, a sentiment the Reverend shares in his own life (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2007).

#### DIE WITH YOUR BOOTS ON

This brings me to my final comment about the Satanic approach to death; I asked my sources whether or not they had considered the circumstances of their own physical death. Warlock JPL states that while he contemplates his own death, it is usually in the context of asking himself if he is,

relatively at peace with the prospect of inevitable death – of pain or humiliation in the moment of death, of being unable to do all that I want in life, to tell everyone how much they mean to me, of being remembered the way I'd like. I think it's important to live life without fear or anxiety, even in death (pers. comm. Nov. 1, 2007).

Reverend JR states,

I am only half joking when I say that I would like to die as I have lived – struggling and fighting. The author Robert E. Howard wrote in a letter to a friend: 'The best way to live is by hard slugging, the best way to die is with your boots on.' I agree with Howard's assessment, and though I naturally wish to avoid death as long as possible, I should like to be remembered as one who did not go quietly into the night (pers. comm. Oct. 26, 2008).

While differences in personal preferences are evident, both men indicate that their passions in life are more important than details of death. Warlock JPL and Reverend JR both express a desire to be remembered well after a life spent accomplishing their goals, both treasure and value their loved ones, and both explicitly state that fear and anxiety of death are detrimental to a well lived life (pers. comm. Oct. 26 and Nov. 1, 2008). For Satanists, these sentiments reflect their overall approach to death and dying. That is, by rejecting any considerations of a spiritual afterlife, they are adopting a worldview that fully embraces their particular preferences for a life with deep emotional bonds, hard work, recognized accomplishments, and a conscious, self-aware methodology to achieving one's aspirations. As LaVey writes in *The Satanic Bible*, "I am a Satanist! Bow down, for I am the highest embodiment of human life!" (LaVey 2005, 45).

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Holt

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