

CHAPTER 33

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MODERN RELIGIOUS SATANISM

A Negotiation of Tensions

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CIMMINNEE HOLT
AND JESPER AAGAARD PETERSEN

Up until the twentieth century, the word “Satanism” was mainly used as an accusation of heresy, as Christian factions made claims and counterclaims disputing authoritative theological doctrines. During the Enlightenment, currents of philosophy, theosophy, art, and literature began to portray the devil in sympathetic terms, embodying Enlightenment ideals: Satan as rebel-hero, challenger of the status quo, and freethinking aristocrat. These depictions of Satan as iconoclast, cynic, and radical freedom fighter represented a shift toward modernity and its heralding of autonomy, free will, and liberal thought (see Faxneld 2011, 2013; van Luijk 2013).

Despite these early modern currents of sympathy for the devil, Satanism as an organized, codified, and distinct religion was popularized by American Anton Szandor LaVey when he founded the Church of Satan in 1966, a religion that has dovetailed into a “satanic milieu,”¹ with multiple satanic individuals and groups self-identifying as practicing religious Satanists. This milieu contains a small amount of stable satanic groups combined with a high turnover of loosely identified Satanists, all vying for their definition of “true” Satanism, yet the satanic environment itself remains consistently growing and present as a religious movement. Contemporary Satanists represent a spectrum of ideas ranging from firm atheistic worldviews (viewing Satan solely as a metaphor) to theistic (Satan as a spiritual entity engaged in the machinations of the world) to esoteric (focused on magical and occult pursuits) to polytheistic (Satan as but one deity of many), all using satanic imagery—or a deity with similar oppositional characteristics²—to represent late modern ideals of antinomian individualism. This multiplicity in the satanic milieu is one of tension: internal conflict between satanic groups fighting for authoritative definitions

of Satanism; external tension with the popular understanding of Satanism as criminal devil worship; and measured tension in their oppositional stance to institutional religion, conventional mores, and social sacred cows. In this chapter we will provide a historical survey of modern religious Satanism based mainly on an examination of seminal scholarship, with a particular attention to the push and pull within the satanic milieu and beyond.

THE HISTORY OF SATANISM: THREE PHASES

Reflecting academic advances in the field, scholars divide the development of modern religious Satanism into three phases: first, early coverage from sociologists examining Satanism emerging from the radical counterculture movements of 1960s America; second, relative inactivity during the 1980s and 1990s, as interest in religious Satanism becomes dwarfed by the media-fueled moral panic surrounding the now-debunked “satanic ritual abuse” scare; and third, an upsurge in renewed scholarly interest since approximately 2000, with the increase in observable Internet activity from divergent, schismatic, and independent self-identified religious satanic groups. Within each of these phases, Satanists engage with both internal and external tensions, embodying their (satanic) oppositional stance and attempting to wield control over satanic discourse. Contemporary religious Satanism is consciously engaging with tension in the popular, countercultural, esoteric, and satanic milieus, as it negotiates the changing demands of modern society.

THE EARLY YEARS: THE 1960S AND 1970S

LaVey staged several theatrical events to promote Satanism and his newly founded Church of Satan in the years surrounding 1966. Presented as entertaining tidbits, titillating photo essays of nude female altars appeared in “gentlemen’s magazines” (*Hustler*, 6.6. Dec. 1979; *Jaybird Journal*, 1967), men’s periodicals (*Argosy*, June 1975), pulp tabloids (*The Exploiter*, 4.4. Jan. 24, 1975), and general interest quarterlies such as LaVey’s cover on *Look* (Aug. 24, 1971). Mainstream newspapers also covered the Church of Satan, such as the Navy funeral of mate third class and Church of Satan member Edward D. Olsen (*The Miami News*, Dec. 12, 1967), a story about LaVey’s pet lion Togare (*Waterton Daily Times*, Mar. 4, 1967), a satanic wedding (*Times Herald*, Feb. 2, 1967), and articles focusing on the growth of Satanism (*The Deseret News*, Oct. 16, 1971). By 1972, *Time Magazine* published the cover article titled “The Occult Revival: A Substitute Faith,” which mentions the Church of Satan and other occult activities (June 19). In 1986, LaVey made the cover of *The Washington Post* (Feb. 23). The articles present Satanism as curious entertainment, highlighting its carnivalesque quality. Academic studies on

religious Satanism remained few, even as the sensationalized aspects of the Church of Satan made local and national news.

When sociologists eventually take notice of the Church of Satan in the early 1970s, they approach it as one of the emergent groups representing American counterculture activities, alongside the civil rights movement, second-wave feminism, antiwar protests, hippie culture, and domestically developed cults and sects as well as the inflow of new and alternative Eastern imports. From its onset, religious Satanism is among a series of movements, groups, and ideologies challenging convention during the social unrest of 1960s America. At its birth, Satanism's oppositional stance is but one of many in an environment rife with political and social tensions.

The seminal academic studies on the Church of Satan are from Marcello Truzzi (1972, 1974), Edward J. Moody (1974), and Randall H. Alfred (1976). An additional popular source that predates these scholarly efforts is the fiction writer Arthur Lyons, with his book *The Second Coming: Satanism in America* (1970).³ In these studies, Satanism is presented as part of the "occult revival" in Western society, alongside other esoteric practices and religions becoming repopularized at the time: Witchcraft/Wicca, Tarot, astrology, and Spiritualism. The authors provide a generally harmonious depiction of LaVey and the Church of Satan yet highlight that the Church of Satan stands slightly apart from its countercultural surroundings in significant ways. The Church of Satan is certainly iconoclastic, but the iconoclasm extends to its counterculture contemporaries. Satanism claims to free the individual from values and customs, including established religious institutions as well as "current sacred cows" (Alfred 1976, p. 488). Alfred describes LaVey as crushing an LSD tablet underfoot during a ritual to symbolically liberate oneself from the exalted "revolutionary" ideal that enveloped popular culture. All studies note LaVey's disdain toward recreational drug use and its biggest proponent, the hippie movement. LaVey was a "law and order man" (Alfred 1976, p. 485), denouncing anti-establishment laments yet advocating changing unjust systems from within (Lyons 1970, p. 180). Lyons comments, "we paradoxically come across a group of pro-Establishment Satanists" (p. 180).

Lyons names LaVey an "uncommon Satanic Master" with an unusual background (1970, p. 173), providing a range of biographical details. LaVey joined a circus at sixteen, later becoming an assistant lion tamer, a fortuneteller, a magician, and a hypnotist (p. 173). After leaving carnival life he played the piano in burlesque shows in San Francisco, then studied criminology, and was hired as a photographer for the San Francisco Police Department (p. 173). This experience shaped his perspective that mankind used the notion of "God's will" to avoid responsibility (p. 174). He began to study occult and magical practices and held weekly classes called a "magic circle" (p. 174). These meetings were the basis for the eventual forming of the Church of Satan. The details themselves are contentious: Various scholars, journalists, detractors, and Satanists have exalted, belittled, discounted, corroborated, and debunked claims made by LaVey and the Church of Satan. Our mission is not to evaluate the claims, but instead to emphasize that LaVey's adoption of the oppositional figure of Satan is reflected in this use of biographical storytelling: His (likely deliberate) weaving of fact and fantasy

reestablishes the tension through an air of mystique, as does the disputed mythic status resulting from antagonistic reinterpretation.

To continue on the issue of establishment and counterculture, Lyons underlines that the media representation of sexual orgies is inaccurate (p. 174). The Church of Satan strongly discourages members from joining on the basis of participating in group sex and emphasizes that women in the Church of Satan do not require the organization for personal dalliances (p. 174). Membership requires three letters, a written exam, and an interview with an Inner Circle member (p. 174).⁴ These measures act as a filter for “kooks” attracted by salacious details (p. 175). Further, Lyons asserts that there is little overt anti-Christian sentiment within Church rituals, and instead offers that the Church’s stance on other religions is one of “benign contempt” (p. 176). This disdain stems from the tendency of spiritual religions to diminish the importance of humans’ achievements and suppress humanity’s animal instincts (p. 177). Lyons observes that “sexual practices . . . such as homosexuality and fetishism, are usually considered by psychologists to be caused by neurotic conflicts imbedded deep within the participant’s personality” (p. 178). The Church of Satan strongly disagrees and again emphasizes that suppressing one’s natural desires is the cause of anxieties (p. 178). LaVey underlines that the Church’s position is not “free sex” but instead a freedom of choice for individuals to embrace their natural tendencies (p. 178).

Consequently, the social context of the birth of the Church of Satan is significant. The Church is indeed directly addressing the historical particulars of its time, at once rejecting conventional views (in terms of religion and sexuality) and deviating from many of its counterculture contemporaries (in terms of political violence and drug use). From its onset, the Church is deliberately coopting counterculture rhetoric yet stations itself as critical of the contemporary radical and hedonistic social ideologies from which it emerges. LaVey’s claim that Satanism was “nine parts social respectability to one part outrage” (Barton 1990, p. 16) indicates that LaVey’s positioning of Satanism between the lines of decency and blasphemy creates a useful tension, as it draws interest because of its titillating imagery and then presents its own critique of convention *as well as* other countercultural ideologies (Petersen 2009). LaVey’s manipulation of tension is then twofold: He uses the sensationalistic imagery of Satan by staging theatrical events to promote his oppositional countercultural agenda while concurrently assessing the counterculture as just another reactive ideology.

THE MIDDLE YEARS: 1975 TO 2000

In 1975 Michael Aquino, a Magister in the Church of Satan and editor of its newsletter, *The Cloven Hoof*, left the Church to found the schismatic Temple of Set.⁵ Tensions between LaVey and Aquino increased over a foundational premise of Satanism, but there is some confusion as to which premise. In Aquino’s account, conflict arose as entry to the Priesthood was to be awarded based on material success, not esoteric

knowledge (Aquino 2013a, pp. 559–581, 1150; Petersen 2009, p. 235). LaVey, on the other hand, wanted to take the Church in a different direction and was displeased with Aquino's meddling in administration and his "ego-motivated and over-intellectual" stance (Lyons 1988, p. 126; Petersen 2009, pp. 238–239). Later, both combatants interpret the tension in *theological* terms: LaVey maintains Satan as a symbol and metaphor and Aquino perceives Satan as a supernatural entity engaged in the machinations and history of the world. These distinctions come to characterize much of the contention between satanic groups in the later period. As a result, detractors of the Church of Satan accuse it of being overly focused on material gains and thus esoterically void and magically sterile (Lewis 2001a, p. 256; Lyons 1988, p. 18); the Church of Satan labels all other satanic groups as mystical drivel or simply "nuts" (LaVey in Barton 1990, p. 70; Petersen 2009, p. 219).

Aquino's subsequent reinterpretation of Satanism supplants Satan for Set, calling his new religion "Setianism." Aquino reframes LaVey's Church of Satan as a defective esoteric philosophy that nevertheless served one important function: It managed to tap into a metaphysical force—a force Aquino was now more qualified to access, independently of the Church of Satan. On June 21, 1975, Aquino performed a ritual in which Satan appeared to him as an oryx-headed god of death and destruction, the Egyptian god Set, dating back to 3400 B.C.E. (Lyons 1988, p. 126). This event is detailed in Aquino's *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*, in which this manifestation of Satan claimed that a new era had begun in 1904 when a guardian angel, Aiwass, appeared to Aleister Crowley, ushering in the "Aeon of Horus." This is followed by LaVey's Church of Satan as the "Aeon of Satan," and finally Aquino's "Aeon of Set" (Aquino 2013b, pp. 317–319). Aquino received a mandate from Set as the steward of this new era, a movement away from the Church of Satan, and consecrated the Temple of Set (p. 318). In contrast to LaVey, Aquino fully embraces the occult tradition and reinterprets esoteric ideas as evidence for Set's influence in history, such as the existence of secret societies, occult writings, or events that challenged societal norms (Keane 2009, p. 6).

In contrast, LaVey is critical of not only the countercultural but also the occult. The Satanism of the Church of Satan is a marked transgression from other magical groups, as LaVey viewed past occultism with disdain, calling it "occultnik" drivel and "mulligatawny" ("On Occultism" 1971; "Satanic Bunco" n.d.). LaVey frames magic in scientific terms—a combination of psychology, biology, and performance art—and by doing so implies a denouncement of occult pursuits. He situates himself as a "black magician" using stereotypical diabolist imagery and occultist knowledge (Petersen 2011, p. 128) but rejects mystical and spiritual elements of traditional occultism (p. 130). The emphasis on magic as a psychological phenomenon is an appeal for legitimacy through science and rationality (p. 130). The Church of Satan holds its dual positions as countercultural and pro-establishment, magical yet firmly secular, and, surprisingly, both radical and conservative. Thus, the Church of Satan has deliberately constructed an environment of tension with conventional society, esoteric groups, and counterculture movements, all while using its controversial nature by relying on sensationalist portrayals in the media.

The schism is a result of two interconnected dynamics. The first causality is the tension between Satanism understood as individuality and nonconformity, while a second dynamic is the constant reinterpretation of the definition of “Satanism” by various offshoots, and their attempt to redefine, and protect, these particular interpretations (2011, p. 118). The Church of Satan’s founding can be framed as a schism from preexisting Christian ideas as well as the stereotypical view of Satanism in Western popular culture: As LaVey reappropriates Satan as a positive symbol of self-empowerment, so does Aquino coopt this symbol and rename it Set.

From approximately 1975 to the mid-1990s, satanic groups were relatively quiet. LaVey retreated from public life, allowing authoritative statements to come from the Church’s administrative Council of Nine. No public or theatrical events were staged by the Church during this period, as LaVey organized the Church as a “loose cabal” of individuals, likely as a response to the multiple schisms. In this new schema, members are encouraged to achieve success outside of the Church by applying satanic principles and to assemble as they see fit. Between the mid-1970s and the surge of Internet activity around 2000, most Church members made contact through written correspondence, newsletters, and unofficial meetings between like-minded Satanists, much like most of the occult milieu and New Age movements at the time (Campbell 2002, p. 15). During the middle years, and up to and after the death of LaVey, the Church’s structure ensures a stability that is not reliant on close social ties between members, nor on LaVey’s personality (Davies 2009, p. 77). The geographically dispersed membership combined with the diffused authority allows a relatively independent “cabal of individuals” (p. 77).

Inactivity from satanic groups could be the result of lessening interest, yet another important social event had influence: the hyperbolic reaction to the now-debunked moral panic on satanic ritual abuse, which forced occultists of all kinds even more underground (Lanning 1992; Victor 1993). Dubbed the “satanic panic,” it was a period where a media craze presented that a large, subversive, and organized group of Satanists were regularly corrupting youth, often sexually assaulting or sacrificing them in satanic rituals. At the height of the panic, several people were caught up in the sweeping accusations and criminal charges. Few academic studies on *religious* Satanism were pursued at the time,⁶ as most attention focused on satanic ritual abuse. The media rarely acknowledged Satanism as a distinct religion and instead reinforced the stereotypes and the hyperbolic ritual abuse panic. Given this, it is important to emphasize that silence among satanic groups at the time does not necessarily indicate inactivity; many could easily have maintained a low profile in order not to be caught up in the widespread allegations.

Despite the relative dormancy of satanic groups, the ritual abuse scare demonstrates the dangers of courting controversy when media outlets are the most influential power in swaying public opinion. Rumors and panic escalate, and fears of dangerous cults corrupting youth in heinous and criminal ways intensify into full-blown witch hunts. As “mass-media accounts have catered to the public’s curiosity” about cults and new religions, they have “a profound mediating influence on the general public’s perception” (van Driel and Richardson 1988, p. 171). In the case of the ritual abuse scare, media

coverage *generated*, not merely covered, the scare itself. Contemporary scholars and most law enforcement agencies now recognize that fears of a global satanic conspiracy were the result of mutual influences: evangelical exorcisms, sensationalized news coverage, and dubious “experts” capitalizing on public panic, all informed by surrounding negative discourse on cults and brainwashing (Frankfurter 2003; Lanning 1992; Victor 1993).

LaVey could not necessarily have predicted the turn of popular sentiment toward New Religious Movements (and Satanism in particular) fueled by the anticult movement. The moral panic of the 1980s and early 1990s is, however, an instance of courting media attention to disastrous and dangerous consequences. Both the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set had representatives attempt to explain Satanism and Setianism as law-abiding worldviews, yet as the media controlled the platform, they were often victims of ambush journalism. Unlike today, where anyone with access to the Internet could potentially have their counterpoint explained and investigated, the news media controlled the flow of information without contest, and tensions surrounding the ritual abuse scare made for good (and profitable) entertainment.

SATANISM TODAY AND THE SATANIC MILIEU

LaVey briefly returned to public life a few years before his death in 1997, but posthumous legal battles that erupted over ownership of the Church of Satan and royalties from LaVey’s writings resulted in a reshuffling of organizational authority. Blanche Barton, LaVey’s companion at the time of his death and mother to his youngest child, became Magistra Templi Rex, and Peter H. Gilmore and his wife Peggy Nadramia were appointed the new high priest and priestess of the Church of Satan. LaVey’s biological heirs maintain the royalties to his works. Philosophically the Church of Satan has continued practically unchanged and is the largest organized satanic group. They maintain an active online presence, with the official website, various social media profiles, a news feed publishing commentary on events and promoting projects from Church members, as well as Gilmore, Nadramia, and other official representatives conducting regular interviews.⁷

The satanic milieu itself, however, has been drastically transformed: Since the advent of the Internet there has been an observable resurgence of religious Satanism online, with multiple self-identified satanic groups or individuals on websites, blogs, chat forums, and social media sites. As the satanic milieu is varied, obtaining reliable data in terms of membership numbers is a challenge. Kennet Granholm suggests that Satanists “regularly generate a level of mass media and public interest not implied by [the] relatively low membership numbers” (2009, p. 93). While this is certainly true (and in many cases deliberate), it brings us no closer to the actual numbers of practicing Satanists. In the 1970s, quoted numbers ranged from seven thousand to one hundred thousand (Alfred 1974; Lyons 1970; Truzzi 1972; Woods 1971). In the 1980s and

1990s, Setians numbered forty to fifty (Harvey 1995; Scott 2007), and Satanists listed as between three hundred and an improbable one million (Lyons 1988; Taub and Nelson 1993). In the past decade, quoted numbers range from a few hundred (Granholtm 2009; Hjelm et al. 2009; Introvigne 2009; Lewis and Petersen 2005), to one to four thousand (Bromley 2005; Evans 2009; Hanegraaff 2006; Lewis 2011; Mombelet 2009), to an estimated range of thirty thousand to one hundred thousand worldwide (Matthews 2009, p. 160, supported by Faxneld and Petersen 2013). The drastic differences in quoted numbers reflect that scholars do not possess enough data to make realistic appraisals of self-identified Satanists. As a disparate movement, making inroads into satanic communities is challenging due to their tendency to be secretive: Few Satanists openly identify their religious inclination, and quantifying observable Internet activity is but one small source of data.

Most importantly, satanic groups have developed independently from the Church of Satan or the Temple of Set. The new Internet platform is rife with groups claiming legitimacy and authority over the definition of “true” Satanism. Contemporary scholarship on religious Satanism has dovetailed alongside this increase in satanic groups. In the past decade or so several scholars have taken up the challenge of mapping and expanding on satanic activity.

Satanists, also, are invested in its growth and structure. An example of its variety is Diane Vera, a prominent theistic Satanist based in New York City (Faxneld 2013, p. 215). Vera has monitored and encouraged the rise of theistic Satanism for the past decade or so and maintains lists of satanic groups on one of her websites: Church of Lucifer, Church of Theistic Satanism, Dark Pagans, Demonolatryas, First Church of Satan, Joy of Satan, Luciferians, Modern Satanic Church, Order of the Nine Angles, Reformed Church of Satan, Temple of Set, as well as Christian-based duotheists, Coven of Bel’s Fire, Cathedral of Satan, Church of the Infernal, Order of Phosphorus, Synagogue of Satan, Temple of Hel, and Temple of Kal. Vera identifies herself as an Azazelian polytheistic Satanist (Vera, *Theistic Satanism*, accessed March 2, 2015; Vera, *Thoughts by an Azazelian*, accessed March 2, 2015).⁸ Scholars have not made deep progress into most of these groups; many may be sole practitioners or small groups of less than ten, probably active solely on the Internet, while a few other groups have begun to create firmer ideologies, assemble offline, construct hierarchies, and increase membership.

Vera disparages the Church of Satan’s dominance of satanic discourse. She writes: “We need to prove to the academic world that we exist in sufficiently large numbers to be worth studying,” and so encourages theistic Satanists to participate in academic studies in order to prevent the Church of Satan from succeeding “in their attempts to monopolize the definition of ‘Satanism’” (*Theistic Satanism*, accessed June 3, 2012). Theistic Satanists are by no means a homogenous group, and conflicts between them are frequent, yet most view the Church of Satan with disdain.

Again, we see another play on the theme of opposition: Satanists opposing each other over the question of legitimacy and the definition of Satanism. The contested authority over the “true” definition of Satanism is the prime internal conflict within the satanic milieu (Petersen 2013). As the Church of Satan defends its stronghold over defining

Satanism, other Satanists, in turn, use the oppositional notion of Satanism against the Church: One of the main counterclaims is that Satanism, by its very nature, is oppositional, and therefore it is considered “satanic” to redefine and reinterpret it, defying and opposing the Church of Satan.

A current group that is using the shocking image of Satan to advance their agenda is the Satanic Temple, led by Lucien Greaves (a.k.a. Doug Mesner). Greaves made headlines by proposing to erect a satanic statue on the grounds of an Oklahoma capitol building as a response to an erected monument of the biblical Ten Commandments—a clear violation of the separation of church and state (Cornell n.d.). The Satanic Temple is highlighting two legal issues: the ostensible separation between church and state, and Christian privilege hegemony in American institutions. Greaves explains: “The idea was that Satanists, asserting their rights and privileges where religious agendas have been successful in imposing themselves upon public affairs, could serve as a poignant reminder that such privileges are for everybody” (in Banner 2014). Interestingly, soon after the Satanic Temple’s statue proposal made international news, the Universal Society of Hinduism also applied to erect a statue of Hanuman on the grounds of the Oklahoma capitol building.⁹ The broader implication is that Christian privilege is being contested by forcing officials to recognize the diversity of American society. These types of events highlight that in order to allow a mainstream religion (Christianity) license to have prominence in state institutions, it (legally) opens the door to fringe and marginal religions.

Greaves’ Satanism emphasizes political activism, using public outrage to draw attention to their collective concerns, and has embarked on several campaigns: distributing satanic activity books to schoolchildren in Florida as a response to providing the children with copies of the Bible; staging a homosexual kiss-in on the grave of Fred Phelps’ (Westboro Baptist’s founder and notorious antigay crusader) grandmother; an adopt-a-highway initiative to spread understanding about the Satanic Temple and civic responsibility; and several other campaigns, many funded by crowdsourcing. Nevertheless, they go beyond mere pranksterism; their website states that they are invested in encouraging “benevolence and empathy in all people” (“Our Mission,” accessed March 1, 2015). That is, they are interpreting Satanism to emphasize political and social activism in the name of “noble pursuits.” Challenging Christian privilege via spectacle is their primary means of participating in current debates, with aims of improving society as a whole, which they claim is “the hope of all mankind and the highest aspiration of humanity” (“Our Mission,” accessed March 1, 2015). The Satanic Temple, then, is using its fringe status for shock and awe but with the ultimate concern of transforming society as a whole in a more secular, and thus more satanic direction. Consequently, from the Satanic Temple’s perspective, it is less about promulgating Satanism as such and more about promoting secularism and social justice.

As with most high-profile events on Satanism, Greaves is not without his critics. The current High Priest of the Church of Satan, Peter H. Gilmore, comments:

A self-proclaimed Satanist group has recently gotten media attention, though one may wonder if it is a political activist prank rather than a legitimate philosophical

organization. Mounting public stunts geared to be as obnoxious as those perpetrated by certain Christian activist groups¹⁰ suggests that they are looking to leverage contemporary social media and blog culture so as to grab people's attention. It's working. But is it provoking thought or simply making Satanism look as ridiculous as the theist belief systems that are being mocked? (Gilmore 2013)

Gilmore's concern is not only the muddying of the public perception of Satanism—he is clearly invested in controlling the satanic discourse—but also one of challenging the idea that Satanism, by its nature, is for all humans. Gilmore states unequivocally that Satanism has no ultimate concern beyond the individual Satanist's desires. There is no apocalyptic vision in Satanism, no aspiration for mass conversion (Thomas 2014). Gilmore (in accordance with LaVey's writings) emphasizes that Satanism is not for the masses; it is deliberately dancing the fine line of marginality in order to maintain its critical position. It is neither rejecting society nor embracing it but posits any engagement with social issues as outside Satanism per se—that is, outside organizational interests.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Various satanic groups and individuals are currently embroiled in a “process of othering,” as Satanists mutually exclude each other (Petersen 2009, p. 6). Many scholars note that most Satanists do not identify as a cohesive group but act as a “diffuse ‘occultural’ movement” (Petersen 2009, p. 5; see also Lewis 2010, 2011; Dyrendal 2009). Despite this, we can identify three ideal-typical categories: rationalist, esoteric, and reactive. Rationalistic Satanism is the highly secularized and atheistic stance, such as the Church of Satan's (Petersen 2009, p. 6). Esoteric Satanism is a religion of self-actualization, a theistic tradition incorporating paganism, Western esotericism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Petersen 2009, p. 7). Reactive Satanism is unorganized youth rebellion engaged in various defiant or even criminal actions (such as church burnings). This last category is not considered part of religious Satanism, and the overwhelming majority of satanic groups strongly condemn criminal activity.

Reactive Satanism, however, is still an important factor to consider when examining the tension that Satanists negotiate in terms of popular opinion. Though most groups are quick to denounce criminal activity, the negative imagery produced by reactive Satanism serves a dual function: It is both a magnet and a filter. The sensational aspect of Satanism draws the curious and deters the fearful or apathetic. Satanic groups run the risk of attracting people who view the movement as solely destructive and violent. The tension between religious Satanism and reactive Satanism, then, is one that is carefully negotiated: At the same time as they promote the oppositional sentiment behind their chosen symbol, they emphatically denounce criminal activity justified in Satan's name (Petersen 2013).

Another area of tension within the satanic milieu is in relation to the categories themselves: rationalist/atheistic versus esoteric/theistic. In the original formulation,

Petersen states that the lines of the satanic milieu are “fuzzy,” and individuals or groups understand the divisions with variety and nuance. The lines between the rationalistic and esoteric are particularly intertwined. For example, members of the “rationalistic” Church of Satan can be staunch atheists who view magic as optional but useful, others are widely knowledgeable about esoteric texts and ideas and consider magic an essential practice, while yet others are firmly secular in their worldview, with little interest in occult writings. Satanists categorized as “esoteric” range from gnostic interpretations of Satan that include magical and occult practices, with varying degrees of secular worldviews, some of which practically mirror rationalistic Satanism. The division between an atheistic/secular and theistic/esoteric Satanism is necessary for academics in order to quantify their areas of research and identify the larger themes within the movement. These distinctions, despite being useful, are not firm separations within religious Satanism itself. The internal tension between groups, then, is often negotiated between these ostensible separations between rationalistic and esoteric. The opposition to each other is flamed by the popular understanding of Satanism as reactive adolescent criminal activity and the desire to promote particular definitions of Satanism. Journalists and scholars, in tension with popular portrayals, then dissect these definitions.

Attacks on satanic groups and leaders, debates surrounding authority, and the relationship between the popular understanding of Satanism and the religious practice are social concerns enacted in public forums. The Satanist is constantly negotiating a generalized suspicion of malevolence from the population at large, and the specific mudslinging from within the satanic milieu. These tensions are negotiated through Internet blogs and videos, published literature, media portrayals, and scholarly studies. The social setting, even for participants ostensibly unconcerned with popular acceptance, is important. Their chosen symbol of opposition—Satan—requires a mainstream and hegemonic entity to position itself against: There is no counterculture without culture, no arcane without the common, and no perceived “Satan” without a perceived “God.”

NOTES

1. “Satanic milieu” is a term coined by Petersen, a phrase adapted from Colin Campbell’s seminal “cultic milieu” (Campbell 2002; Petersen 2011, p. 5).
2. It is not uncommon for Satanists of all sorts to arrogate myths and deities from other cultures (Indian, Norse, Celtic, etc.) yet gravitate toward deities portrayed with similar oppositional characteristics as the Western “Satan.”
3. Lyons produced a revised edition, *Satan Wants You! The Cult of Devil Worship in America*, in 1988.
4. The Church of Satan’s current membership requirements are less extensive: a one-time, \$200 fee, photo proof of identity, and a questionnaire for active membership.
5. Several smaller factions developed either schismatically or independently from the Church of Satan during the first two decades, though most died out after a brief period. For a complete history, see Lewis 2001a, 2001b, and Lyons 1970, 1988.
6. A notable exception is Gini Graham Scott’s study of the Temple of Set, renamed the Temple of Hu to protect identities, first published in 1983 [2007].

7. Members of the Church of Satan regularly assemble offline, though few events are officially sponsored by the Church; they are instead members convening for social gatherings and rituals as desired. When the Church does sponsor an official event, these cabals are usually not publicized beyond the membership, and attendees must pass through several stages of verification before receiving details of the event.
8. Several of the links on Vera's website are invalid as the date of publication, suggesting the highly transitory nature of many satanic groups.
9. As of this printing, there is a moratorium on applications in Oklahoma, as officials figure out a response to these types of challenges.
10. Likely a reference to the Westboro Baptist Church.

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