

Pretenders to the Throne: Regarding the Temple of Set

by Magus Peter H. Gilmore of the *Church of Satan* 14–18 minutes

HG Note: This is a Church of Satan critique of the Temple of Set.

Throughout the forty years of its existence, the Church of Satan has continued to expand while its character has undergone a number of carefully-planned developmental phases. In the process, we have at times found it necessary to eject individuals who have acted in ways that were not in keeping with our high standards for social behavior. We have also had a small number of individuals freely depart from us, finding our means too challenging to their false images of personal superiority. Neither types are missed, as the true elite of talented, highly-motivated, productive, creative, and above all independent individuals still find their way to us. They work to move the world, using Satanism as the fulcrum for their efforts.

There have been those who would attempt to imitate us, but they usually discover that our shoes are far too big to fill. Short-lived spinoffs have included The Church of Satanic Brotherhood, Ordo Templi Satanas, Order of the Black Ram, Church of Lucifer, Thee Orthodox Satanic Church and so on. None of these has prospered or even affected the course of Satanism, as they have quickly collapsed due to the lack of energy or direction. Since the death of our High Priest and Founder, even more imitators have emerged, trying to make their way to the center ring. These sorry clowns are banished by their own lack of competence to the side rings, quickly passed over as the discerning look towards us for the genuine star performers. See our [Bunco Sheet](#) for tips on how to identify these wannabes.

One group formed by ex-members of the Church of Satan which has continued to exist, albeit as a small and fairly clandestine vanity organization riding on the funds provided by its founder, is the Temple of Set. This bunch is significant only in that they have continued to try to ride upon the coattails of the Church of Satan, and indeed have even publicly claimed to be the successor to and custodian of the Church of Satan. You might have come across some advertisements or writing influenced by these Setians. Don't be fooled (unlike some "hackademics" who falsely claim an understanding of contemporary Satanism); they are not in any way associated with the Church of Satan and their tales of schism are convenient diversions. Let us examine from whence this group appeared and clear away their false claims.

In 1974 C.E. the Church of Satan instituted its fourth phase of development. The thrust of this phase was to reorient the members at all levels to proceed on a far more independent course. Previously we had issued charters for formal Grottos which were small congregations comprised of Satanists in specific geographical regions. It had been discovered that these formal Grottos led certain members to confine their efforts at personal advancement to the realm of the Grotto alone, rather than towards the success in the outside world—which is of paramount importance to Satanism. Certain members were far more interested in trying to gain elevated rank yet were merely competing in the Grotto's social arena. They neglected to develop their talents and forge ahead. Many other members were strong-willed individualists who did not mix well with other Satanists. Rather than functioning as bases for the development of Satanic strategies, these groups often became shields against true advancement, filled with huddlers who were solely interested in internecine strife. Not everyone involved fit this picture, but there were enough to make it obsolete as a system of growth.

The new phase stressed independent functioning, keeping individuals separated to pursue their own goals. If Satanists used their initiative to find their fellows and wished to informally create groups for socialization and ritual, that was most acceptable. But the momentum for the existence of these informal groups had to come from the social compatibility of the constituent members, not geographical proximity.

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This phase of isolation, which laid the groundwork for a much broader base for Satanism as a movement (seen in the established commercial acceptance of Satanic imagery in the popular Heavy Metal music business), was upsetting to the pen-pal and “coffee klatsch conclave” members, whom it was basically designed to ease out of the way. Michael A. Aquino, at that time the editor of *The Cloven Hoof*, had attained the IV^o and was injecting a strongly supernaturalist bent to the Hoof’s articles. Mr. Aquino had a history of creating documents which he claimed to have transcribed from superhuman entities. These include the *Diabolicon* (1970 C.E.), a series of statements from Satan, Beelzebub, Azazel, Abaddon, Asmodeus, Astaroth, Belial, and Leviathan, as well as the Ninth Solstice Message (1974 C.E.) which declared Anton LaVey a daimon.

Dr. LaVey then began to implement the phase which had slowly been evolving over the previous two years. Additionally, he was losing his tolerance for the mysticism that some members had adopted. LaVey had even outlined the basic concepts for this formal phase during the summer of 1972 C.E. in a letter to Aquino, stating that the social Satanists and their limelight-loving priests contribute nothing to Satanism as a movement, and that they would fall by the wayside when they didn’t receive the attention they sought by starting their own churches. LaVey wrote that he had far more respect for his underground clergy who were very productive in the real world. Aquino did not accept this, especially Dr. LaVey’s awarding of priesthoods to non-esoteric, non-public achievers and thus LaVey determined that Aquino would no longer be privy to even the limited amount of information regarding underground activities that had previously been given to him. LaVey was determined that the status of Church members should reflect their standing in the world outside of the organization. Degrees are not reflective of simple book learning and esoteric knowledge, but the actual application of Satanic principles towards personal advancement. To this end, the Church would honor values given to it in kind with degree recognition as would be deemed appropriate by Dr. LaVey. The achievement of degrees via written tests was not to be abandoned at this time, but this additional means of advancement was now open to the above-ground members. This approach was formalized by the new phase in 1974 C.E. and outlined to Aquino in May, during one of his rare personal meetings with Dr. LaVey.

Aquino did not protest this policy at the meeting and later claimed this alternate route to advancement as a public reason to announce a break with the Church of Satan, accusing Dr. LaVey of selling degrees. He wrote letters to his handful of pen-pal cronies, fellow mystics who had also mourned the new phase, and they too resigned to go off with Aquino and form their own group. Aquino had wanted to start a Second Church of Satan but was thwarted by copyright/trademark laws. Instead, recalling his readings of Egyptian history and mythology, he claimed to have invoked Satan (in whom he literally believed as an entity) and to have been answered instead by Set, the “actual Prince of Darkness” who, through a series of realizations in Aquino’s mind, caused him to record as Set’s answer a document which he titled the *Book of Coming Forth by Night*. This supernatural

revelation supposedly gives him the right to supercede the Church of Satan. Doesn't that tale sound familiar?

Aquino attempted to make interested parties believe that the entire Priesthood of the Church of Satan followed him in departing. That was untrue, especially as there were many underground members, including priests and higher, of whom he had no knowledge. His own claims for numbers of departed Church of Satan members fluctuates in his own writings. The Church of Satan was at that time, and still continues to be, a large and highly stratified organization with many discreet individuals placed in positions of power. As Orwell had envisioned in his classic 1984, it is not an organization in the usual sense as it is held together by an idea whose time has come, which is indestructible. The departure of less than thirty members can hardly be called a schism. This was in reality a welcome housecleaning of an element that had become less than desirable when considering the future development of the Church of Satan. And thus the fourth phase functioned as planned and Aquino became one of those who, as predicted in 1972 C.E., would fall by the wayside.

The ex-Satanists who formed the Temple of Set follow a path quite different from that of the Church of Satan, which has never veered from its dedication to rational self-interest, indulgence, and a glorification of the carnal and material. Their belief in Set as an actual entity with whom followers, particularly their priesthood, may commune is in marked contrast to our disbelief in any external deity figures. The essence of Setian doctrine asserts that Set caused the intelligence of the human species to manifest, and that this conscious act is counter to the "inertia" of Nature. Set is thus the God of the "non-natural," who promotes individual consciousness in opposition to the collective blending that in their perspective is thought to be the mechanism of Nature. The followers of Set are named his "elect" and are considered to be special among the human species. Through the process of "Xeper" (pronounced "kheffer"—an Egyptian word meaning "to become") Setian initiates attempt to willfully evolve into a God-like state. This is not expected by them to occur in a single lifetime, and so the "isolated consciousness" of the individual Setian attempts to "Remanifest," essentially to reincarnate, to continue the process of evolution towards a Set-like final state.

Clearly these beliefs are fundamentally at odds with the philosophy of the Church of Satan. Satanists view themselves as animals who are part of Nature (7th Satanic Statement: "Satan represents man as just another animal,..."), and see any concept positing something existing outside of nature as being a spiritual delusion. We Satanists don't believe in reincarnation, and as skeptical materialists, reject the idea of evolving into some kind of deity as so much theistic faith. We already see ourselves as the gods of our own subjective universes. From personal observation and reading their literature, it would seem that the Setians have a consuming preoccupation with rank and status within their organization, thus titles and medallions indicating degree level are eagerly sought by members to affirm their position in the pecking order of the Temple's internal world (particularly evident at their conclaves). This is not surprising considering Aquino's background—a boyhood steeped in military academies and in pursuit of Boy Scout merit badges. The Church of Satan grants degrees, but these are still based on an individual's achievements in the outside world and his level of freedom from herd conformity and independence from forced interaction with the masses. They are recognitions of outstanding achievements, not indicators of a ladder that all must climb. Striving for fancy titles and rankings is not a part of Satanism. The literature of the Church of Satan is published and distributed worldwide to any interested individuals. The Temple of Set generally prints private literature available only to members, and some of it is limited to those of the correct rank. To further learn about these Setians, you might choose to contact them for information, but be forewarned that real Satanism is not hiding underneath their academic pose. A worthwhile and informative study by an

anthropologist who joined the Temple of Set is *The Magicians*, by Gini Graham Scott, Ph.D. (New World Books, 308 Spruce St., San Francisco, CA 94118). This will give you insights into their beliefs, practices, and social interactions.

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Interestingly enough, with the stepping down (for the second time) of Michael Aquino as High Priest of the Temple of Set and the accession of Don Webb, a change in emphasis seemed to be emerging. Webb stated in an article entitled “Concerning Satanism” that, “The Temple of Set has begun the process of distancing from the term ‘Satanism,’ a cultural fad of the latter part of the Twentieth Century of the Common Era.” We think that was finally an evolution towards honesty in their presentation of their philosophy, as Setianism is not Satanism.

Under the aegis of Michael Aquino, Webb and his supporters were later supplanted by Zeena and Nikolas Schreck, whose own checkered past is well-documented. After attaining the position of High Priestess of the Temple of Set, Zeena along with her consort Nikolas fomented a schism and departed to found a more orthodox, and even more stringently theistic, “Sethian” organization called “The Storm.” Rumor has it that the Schrecks took a significant percentage of the European membership of the Temple of Set along with them. If Anton LaVey were still around, we know he would have been amused.

We have dealt here at length with the Temple of Set to lay to rest their propaganda. They are not associated with the Church of Satan in any manner. We do not see them as being in any way significant to the present or future of Satanism, particularly as they are not, by definition, Satanists. Dr. LaVey’s successors proudly guide the Church of Satan, the flagship of the movement launched in 1966 C.E., and continue to oversee the forces which he put into motion. The Church of Satan is the foundry, forging the Iron Will that moves the minds and hearts of humanity’s “alien elite,” who claim the present and the future as their domain. They shall be the inheritors of our legacy as well as the writers of our history for the new millenium, and far beyond.

Revised/updated in December XL A.S., this article, in an earlier version, appeared in the British publication Dark Lily #13 as a response to the misinformation being spread by TOS in England at that time. It was unsigned, as were all articles in that publication. It was then speculated that Anton LaVey himself wrote this article (of course, it stylistically is nothing like his writing). I did indeed write this piece, basing it on research gathered during my many visits to San Francisco as well as my copious correspondence and meetings with Church of Satan members present during these events, and my reading of the majority of literature published by the TOS. This essay was occasioned by questions received by our various contacts regarding TOS and its curious, and dubious, claims.