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SATANISM:

Meanings that have been assigned to "Satanism."

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Various meanings of "Satanism:"

When people think of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and many other religions, they have at least a general idea of what the religion involves. "*Satanism*" is an exception. In North America, many people use it as a general-purpose religious "snarl" word. Others consider a wide variety of beliefs and practices as Satanism.

Actual Satanic organizations:

- **Defining Satanists as followers of a Satanic religion:** Most religious historians, mainline Christians, liberal Christians, etc., view Satanism as Satanists themselves do: as a very small religious group that is unrelated to any other faith, and whose members feel free to satisfy their urges responsibly, exhibit kindness to their friends, and attack their enemies. Some have suggested, tongue in cheek, that this form of Satanism is the official religion of the corporate boardroom. There are perhaps ten thousand Satanists in North America. By far the largest Satanic organization is the *Church of Satan*, founded by Anton LaVey. They generally regard themselves as strong Atheists, Agnostics, or Deists. Membership numbers are kept secret and are quite impossible to estimate.

David Shankbone interviewed Peter Gilmore, the *Church of Satan's* high priest. Shankbone wrote an excellent synopsis of Church beliefs and practices:

"LaVey's teachings are based on individualism, self-indulgence, and 'eye for an eye' morality, with influence from Friedrich Nietzsche and Ayn Rand; while its rituals and magic draw heavily from occultists such as Aleister Crowley. They do not worshipĀ—nor believe inĀ—the Devil or a Christian notion of Satan. The word 'Satan' comes from the Hebrew word for "adversary" and originated from the Abrahamic faiths, being traditionally applied to an angel. Church of Satan adherents see themselves as truth-seekers, adversaries and skeptics of the religious world around them." <sup>1</sup>

- **Defining Satanists as followers of the Christian Satan:** Theistic Satanists (a.k.a. spiritual Satanists, Devil worshipers) worship the Christian concept of Satan as an actual deity. <sup>2</sup> An invocation to Satan written by Diane Vera begins: "*Satan, Lord of Darkness, King of Hell, Ruler of the Earth, God of this World!*" <sup>3</sup>

Satanists as defined by some evangelical Christians:

- **Defining Satanists as followers of a religion other than Conservative Protestantism:** Fundamentalist and other evangelical Christians generally believe that there are only two powerful supernatural forces in the world: their God and Satan. A few of them believe that if a person does not worship their God and hold their beliefs, then they must be worshipping Satan. The latter are, by definition, Satanists. Thus, they view all religions different from their own to be are forms of Satanism. This would include established world religions from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism, and might even include liberal and some mainline Christians. Satanists would then make up in excess of 90% of the world's population -- i.e. everyone who is not a conservative Christian. Using this definition, the term "*Satanism*" becomes almost meaningless.
- **Defining all non-Christians as Satanists:** Some feel that all non-Christian religions are forms of Satanism. This would imply that all Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims - in fact about 67% of the world's population are Satanists.
- **Defining all Non-Abrahamics as Satanists:** Others feel that all religions other than three Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are inspired by Satan and are thus a form of Satanism. By this reasoning, about 45% of the people of the world are Satanists.
- **Defining followers of certain small religions are Satanists:** Still others feel that the major world religions are not Satanism. However, they view a wide variety of unrelated religions and practices (such as Santeria, Vodun, other Caribbean religions, New Age, Druidism, Wicca, other Neopagan religions and religious Satanism) to be various forms of Satanism. They often include some non-religious groups and activities -- as varied as the Masonic order, the Occult, astrology, and tarot card reading -- within their definition of Satanism. There would be millions of Satanists in North America by this definition.

Describing Buddhists, Druids, Hindus, Jews, New Agers, Santerians, Taoists, Masons, Wiccans and other Neopagans, followers of Vodun, etc. as Satanists creates massive confusion in the minds of the public. None of those religions and spiritual paths teach the existence of an all-evil quasi-deity, similar to the "Satan" that Christian and Islam have traditionally taught.

A suggested definition:

Such definitions create great confusion, and stir up religious animosity against followers of benign faith traditions. They have been known to trigger genocidal proposals, lynching, attempted mass murder, fire bombings, shootings, common assaults, etc.

We strongly recommend that the terms "*Satanist*" and "*Satanism*" be used **only** with a qualifier to refer to religions that have some direct involvement with Satan in some form. Thus a "Satanist" is one who either:

1. **Theistic Satanist:** One who worships the Christian devil. Although the Christian Churches taught during the Renaissance that devil worshipers were very common, such individuals were in fact quite rare, and remain so.
2. **Religious Satanist: One who accepts Satan as a pre-Christian life-principle** worth emulating. They follow a number of religious traditions, of which the largest by far is the Church of Satan.

References used:

The following information sources were used to prepare and update the above essay. The hyperlinks are not necessarily still active today.

1. David Shankbone, "Satanism: An interview with Church of Satan High Priest Peter Gilmore," MySpace, 2007-NOV-05, at: <http://blog.myspace.com/>
2. Diane Vera, "Theistic Satanism: The new Satanisms of the era of the Internet," Theistic Satanism, at: <http://www.theisticsatanism.com/>
3. Diane Vera, "Ave Satana!," Theistic Satanism, (2002) at: <http://www.theisticsatanism.com/>

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Author: B.A. Robinson

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