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If Jim Jones Asked You to Take Poison, Would You Do It?

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 STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
 by [illegible] La Vey  
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Once again a dramatic news event gives rise to discussion of the catch-all term, *cult*. As it happens, in the case in point the label is used correctly. The isolated group of Christian fanatics belonging to the Peoples Temple who staged the mass suicide in Guyana as a show of faith in their spiritual leader is properly defined as a cult. This is not always so, however, as any group which engages in activities that titillate the collective imagination of the general public is often inappropriately described as a cult. It is a surefire grabber, as it is usually associated with colorful supportive terms fore or aft, such as: bizarre cult, weird cult, sex cult, charismatic cult leader, powerful cult figure, and so on. Since most characteristics of cultic behavior are generally presumed to be of a negative, or at least unorthodox or anti-social, nature *any* group reported to be a cult is regarded as guilty, through preconditioned association, of whatever that term rightly or wrongly implies.

The Church of Satan has on countless occasions been inappropriately described as a cult by ignorant or uncaring media people. Hence the widespread misconception of what we represent and how we relate to the rest of society. In light of the hysteria created by the Peoples Temple debacle, and subsequent discussions in the news media between presumably learned scholars on the mechanics of cultism, it is important to point out the distinctions which render *cult* a misnomer if applied to the Church of Satan. Some of those distinctions are provided by eminent sociologist Dr. Marcello Truzzi, in an article which originally appeared in *The Sociological Quarterly*, 13 (Winter 1972):

Four sociological criteria determine that the Church of Satan is not a cult but a church: (1) it is very large; (2) it is bureaucratically organized and hierarchically governed; (3) people become members of the church only through complex testings and initiations; and (4) *the success of the church no longer centers around its founder's charisma.*

I have italicized Dr. Truzzi's fourth criterion in order to emphasize that which I feel to be most germane to the matter presently under scrutiny. The influence of a leader upon his adherents.

This is the first time readers of the *Hoof* have heard from me. I chose this occasion for the simple reason that the observations made in this article I am in a better position than anyone else to make, and it is important that they be made at this time. The topic of this piece crystalized when my husband casually remarked to me, regarding the Guyana incident, "You know, I wonder how many mothers still ask their kids, 'if so-and-sp told you to jump off a cliff, would you do it?'" It was a simple thought, but provocative nevertheless.

Many thoughts had been vaguely floating through my mind concerning what I had already known about cults and their leaders and what I had recently heard and read relative to cultic phenomena in general and the Peoples Temple in particular. I of course recognized the general differences between a Jim Jones and an Anton La Vey, but the specific distinctions suddenly came into sharp focus. It occurred to me that the same basic personality traits which I feel make my husband a fine parent also make him an effective and noble leader. I can think of no exception in all the time I have known him that his creativity has not been coupled

with and enhanced by his generosity. Materially, he is acquisitive and tenacious. But creatively, he is magnanimous and philanthropic. He is not selfless, though, for the greatest pleasures he derives come as a result of the *consequences* of his inspiration and creative gifts. I think this is best illustrated by the following excerpts from sociologist Randall H. Alfred's study on the Church of Satan in *The New Religious Consciousness* (University of California Press, 1976):

La Vey expects his followers to profit from his example, not by imitation, but by application: "One cherished child who can *create* will be more important than... fifty who can *believe*."

La Vey emphasizes that "one of the most important 'commandments' of Satanism is: *Satanism demands study--not worship!*"

Anton La Vey the High Priest, like Topsy, just grewed. He did not set out to dominate the minds and souls of men and women. His ability to inspire and motivate are inherent--it has always been there and probably always will be. By simply pursuing his natural interests and inclinations, he became a person to whom others were drawn, and when his guidance was sought he obliged with no small amount of pleasure. Perhaps because of overuse or misuse, the term, *charisma*, has, curiously, become mildly pejorative. Thus I hesitate to apply it to my husband, though many others have. The negative tinge, I think, stems from the fact that if an observer cannot fathom why a certain individual is influential he will cop out with "charismatic" as a nebulous and therefore safe adjective. Unfortunately, this widespread literary laziness has reduced the tag, *charismatic leader*, to something akin to *criminal genius*. So, the foregoing reservations aside, charisma, I suppose, sums up whatever it is, in addition to demonstrable ability, that he has and people sense in him. If that is so, it then becomes difficult to reconcile the fact that this elusive quality is also possessed by others, to a greater or lesser degree, who are essentially destructive personalities. It finally comes down to what one does with what one has.

The Peoples Temple havoc has prompted at least one pious opportunist to blame the whole thing on, who else, the Devil. Billy Graham cites the incident as proof positive that there is a real devil and hastens to assure us that "those were not real Christians." Well *they* thought they were! And what's more, they epitomized the very attitude of self-denial and self-sacrifice which comprises bedrock Christianity. Christian doctrine is what taught them what Jim Jones was able to employ towards a mass confirmation of his own vast ego and glorification of *same* through grand scale "dying for the cause." What many analysts overlook, however, is that the nine hundred plus disciples of Jim Jones are, though tragic, a drop in the bucket compared to the blood that has been shed over the centuries in the name of Christianity. And their horrified reaction does not take into account the fact that, despite past and present bloodshed, our society still has not learned that it is precisely those values such are fostered by Christianity that initiate the sort of "brainwashing" that ultimately makes initiates *demand* restrictions, chastisements, and enslavement, in one form or another throughout their lives. Once set in motion at an impressionable age, behavior patterns owing to this indoctrination are not easily banished. This is why I seethe listening to lugubrious, shortsighted "experts" summarily dismissing the possibility of a Peoples Temple phenomenon happening in "established, respectable" religious structures. Naivete on the part of social critics lays young people (and older people who have never grown up) open to the manipulative prowess of fanatical leaders of *any* kind.

Many individuals have come to the Church of Satan with vestiges of masochistic inclinations imposed by ultra-establishment religious institutions. I have witnessed more instances than I like to recall in which one simply trades his white suit in for a black one, cut of the same cloth and fashioned identically to the one discarded. The residual masochism to which I refer manifests itself in many ways and is not instantly exorcised at the threshold of Satanism; even some early Satanists expressed a willingness to "die for the cause" or "die for Anton La Vey." Rather than merely tell them they had it all wrong, that that wasn't the sort of reversals he had in mind, La Vey shocked them into an awareness of their perverted selfishness, by saying, "It's a hell of a lot harder to live for what you believe in. Don't die for me; live for me, or rather for what I've created."

If anything is to be learned by an incident like that in Guyana it must be examined by exceptionally sophisticated analysts. Suddenly everyone's an expert! Newspeople, relatives of victims, a detective who allows his odd style of grief to be recorded on film while he searches for his dead daughter in a unique gehenna, and a ragtag of past and present carriers of the dread spiritual plague. Most who are issuing solutions to the puzzle are unqualified; the exceptions are glossed over because the sense they make is not nutritive to the prurient appe-



tites of the consumers they serve.

Mad leaders are ever in our midst, but seldom recognized. When they eventually are discovered, it is often found that they have eked themselves out a cloistered spot--geographically or metaphysically--from which their madness can coax others in the same direction, and when enough of them are "doing it" it becomes visible. The personality development in such an individual is crucial. The nuttiest ones have had the wherewithall to do things their own way but have never, until arriving at their ultimately attention-getting position, received the recognition or credit they crave. These are not inherently electrifying personalities. (An exciting person is a different type of cult figure, such as a movie star, an artist, or an eccentric, who does his or her own thing and others are gratified vicariously or through emulation.) The cult is what makes the cult leader sought after, not the drawing power of his own personality. He or she starts with a few zealots who are so desperate and indiscriminating that they will worship anything that gives them an identity. This nucleus becomes the cult leader's lodestone--the inchoate apparatus which will finally actualize his fantasized view of himself. If he is a good businessman he can be a virtual washout otherwise. At this point he personifies photographer William Mortensen's principle: *Is*, not *does*. The cult leader's initial handful of dolts make him an entity to be reckoned with in that they act as conspicuous placeholders for positions which more sophisticated followers will vie for and subsequently assume. The supposed charismatic qualities of the leader grow commensurate with the size and influence of the cult. Though his charisma is not innate, by this stage it is established, and if the top banana is separated from the bunch, the bunch shrivels and dies. The opposite is true if the group centers around an extraordinary individual who has never known what it is like to want for an identity or praise.

Noted psychologist Dr. Margaret Singer raises a point not included in Dr. Truzzi's criteria for a cult. She says, and I agree, that by definition cults have "self-appointed, charismatic leaders who say they have been given a special mission by some source greater than themselves." The reasons seem obvious to me: They appoint themselves because no one else will. (Anton La Vey was appointed, by a committee of twenty seven persons who also signed his Satanic doctorate and comprised the first registered members of the Church of Satan. The doctorate was *their* idea, and in many ways so was the Church of Satan.) They depend on a "greater source" to compensate for a nagging lack of self-confidence. The absent sense of self-esteem leads them to seek from others what they cannot find within themselves. Hence they are as dependent upon their followers for ego-fulfillment as they encourage their followers to be upon them. This parasitic arrangement is a classic case of the blind leading the blind. Dr. Singer further observes that these cult figures appeal to "lonely, depressed, unattached persons," in an attempt to allay their own barrenness. They demand dependency, in return for which their wretched disciples, Singer says, are given love, instant companionship, and group belonging. The cult is an *end*, rather than a *means* to an end.

Considering the accepted elements comprising what is termed a cult, it should be apparent that few if any qualify the Church of Satan for that appellation. The whole purpose of Satanism is to offer a distinct alternative to religions which encourage mindless dependence. Perhaps some who have had difficulty understanding our persistent championing of individual initiative instead of tightly controlled group activity will now begin to grasp our purpose. Satanism is a philosophy and a lifestyle which enhances each person's own pursuits. A couple of years ago we cut back sharply on social contact opportunities with certain elements of the Church, in an attempt to curtail the over-dependency within the organization which was becoming observable at that time. It was a sink or swim measure, for both the central bureau and the individual members, Contributing and Active. The fact that we are now *more* buoyant than ever before bears witness to the independent nature of the movement. Less than one percent expressed any discomfort owing to the non-social atmosphere, thereby assuring us that we can again, without fear of bespoiling the original concept, begin offering avenues of social exchange. We are confident that those who have proven themselves strong will not tolerate enervation from those who would demand programming. Leaders within the Church who themselves have been inspired by its founder must in kind teach through example rather than tightly monitored curricula.

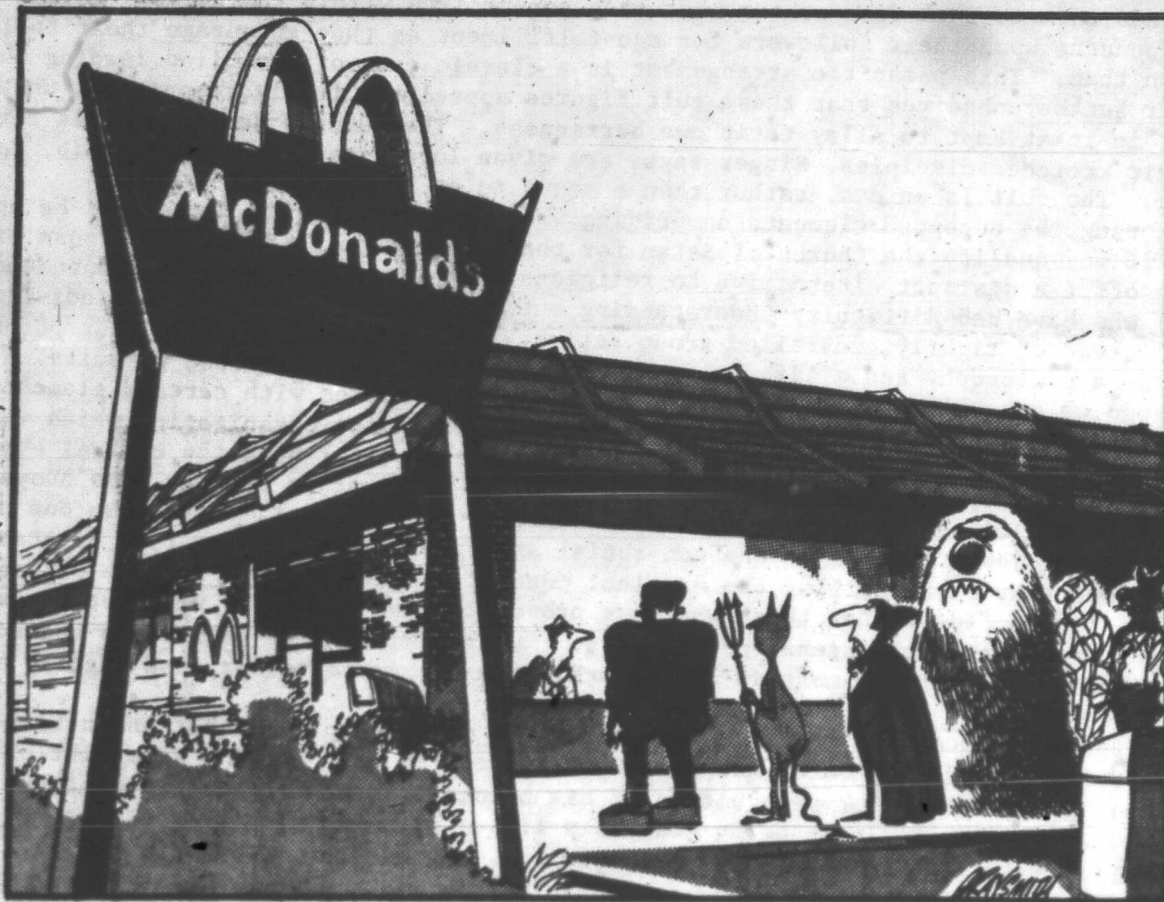
Does this insistence upon independence within the membership mean that Anton LaVey eschews demonstrations of appreciation of his creation? Of course not. Does a scientist or artist demur when opportunities for recognition of his accomplishments present themselves? The point is, Dr. Jonas Salk's name being indelibly linked with his discovery didn't require that he personally administer each dose of polio vaccine; nor did Louis Pasteur supervise all dairies using his pasteurization process. Anton La Vey has a pretty big ego. You know,

before his *Satanic Bible* pioneered the social acceptance of a good ego the foregoing statement would have been derogatory. That's one reason he has a big ego. There are others, and they didn't begin with the Church of Satan.

The Church of Satan is, however, his pet. He likes to receive due credit, i.e. his name mentioned as the *founder* in news reports which might otherwise mislead potential beneficiaries of his work. Aside from the satisfaction he gains, whomever is being interviewed also gains through association with the REAL THING (try to count the many imitators). One can only conclude, therefore, that the interviewee's ego is in trouble if he is remiss in this regard. If that is so, then it offers considerable insight into the person's prospects, for it is commonly they who themselves become the best in any given profession or other area of endeavor who are quickest to cite their sources of inspiration. Witness La Vey's acknowledgement of others in his own works. A sound ego also frees him to praise and encourage on a personal basis. Compliments do not catch in his throat; there is no fear that by placing another person in a favorable light he will be outshined.

Frankenstein monsters admittedly abound as casualties of a religion based on telling people they are better than they thought. Balance is not easily achieved. It would have been far easier to author and lead a movement based on its leader's omnipotence, gleaned via infernal visions (and the press would eagerly assist, having tirelessly tried to extract such claims from La Vey for thirteen years). But then it wouldn't be Satanism. It would be something else. And Something Else doesn't work.

**Hoofnotes** - One cannot write or speak of programmed people without a comparison to zombies, or androids emerging. Of zombies we care little, for the supply in our present society far exceeds the demand. Humane as we Satanists are, we advocate that the most benign and admirable form of control over humankind is to simply create artificial human beings for the most obvious purpose. Two recent books on the subject are *The Robot Book* by Robert Malone (Push Pin Press/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: NY, XIII) and *Robots: Fact, Fiction, and Prediction* by Jasia Reichardt (Penguin Books: NY, XIII). The first is arty, clever, and sparse, while the second is well-researched, clinical, and informative. Both are timely, yet each misses the Satanic point completely. We're sure S. Freud, W. Reich, and Ira Levin would agree...  
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Robert Graysmith: San Francisco Chronicle, 13 October 1978



## **Dear Member of the Church of Satan:**

As you may or may not already have read in the final issue of the Cloven Hoof, we have experienced phenomenal expansion over the last few years, as Satanism permeates mainstream culture more and more. This was planned and initiated by Anton LaVey and ruling body of our organization. Now, as The Satanic Rituals foretold, we've steadied our steps. We have increasingly effective avenues of influence through which information can be disseminated, by overt and covert means, to secular society.

The Church of Satan, and its newsletter, The Cloven Hoof, has been a forum for Dr. LaVey's brand of elucidation and/or vitriol when other media sources dared not utter such unadulterated stuff for fear of their very existence. It has provided a link with the fountainhead of contemporary Satanism for those who feel isolated from Satanic thought. It has served as a think tank, inspiration, progenitor. Regardless of its initial distribution, The Cloven Hoof has been duplicated and recycled in many forms by many outlets. It has also been parasitically vampirized by academicians hiding behind their accreditation--not to mention copycat "Satanic" outfits whose total survival depends upon maintaining an illusion of affiliation with The Church of Satan.

As a consequence of our expansion, we have developed a battery of official affiliative outlets for merchandise and information that are geared more to the secular community, as well as serving members of our organization--the iconoclastic elite of the new Satanic Age. Since we've decentralized all merchandising, which until now covered our costs, your donations toward supporting our increasing Satanic endeavors are needed, and appreciated, even more.

Because of necessary administrative changes and revamping of our organizational processes, responses to correspondence over the past few months might have been sluggish, for which we apologize. However, we feel that the changes we've implemented will allow us to communicate even more effectively with valuable and productive leaders of our ever-active cabal, as well as with our most supportive disciples. Please refer to the appropriate addresses on the enclosed flyer for information, as desired. Remember to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope whenever you write to the Church of Satan, or any of our affiliating outlets.