



## Temple of Set

Post Office Box #470307; San Francisco, CA 94147  
(415) 771-9155 \* Internet: <http://www.xeper.org>

Michael A. Aquino, Ph.D.  
High Priest of Set

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Dr. Jeffrey B. Russell  
4796 Calle Camarada  
Santa Barbara, CA 93110

Dear Dr. Russell:

My attention was recently called to a passage in your *Mephistopheles* in which you apply a variety of derogatory labels to the Temple of Set and its religious philosophy. As the Temple's senior representative, I feel that a response is in order.

Had such a criticism resulted from a methodical and factual analysis of the Temple's actual principles and policies, we would endeavor to receive it graciously and to apply it constructively towards the improvement of our substance and viability. None of our publications is cited in your bibliography, however; not did you contact the Temple to obtain our official position on any of the issues you singled out for your contemptuous diatribe. My attached comments to your published passage show how thoroughly you have misrepresented the Temple as a consequence. We can conclude only that you chose to indulge yourself in a tabloid-level emotional outburst under the assumption that your professorial credentials would allow you to provoke us with impunity.

In the course of my own doctoral studies at U.C.S.B., the academic professional's responsibility for meticulous and dispassionate research was constantly emphasized - a responsibility which I myself have since sought both to observe and to convey to students in my own university teaching. Such high standards are ill-served by the unprofessionalism evidenced in this passage of yours, and I cannot think that the History Department would take comfort in having its name even indirectly associated with the book in question.

Under the circumstances I feel that your unqualified apology and retraction are called for. In the meantime a copy of this letter and the attached analysis will be provided to all persons who contact the Temple of Set concerning your book.

Very truly yours,  
*Michael A. Aquino*

cc- Chancellor, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Chairman, History Department, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Editor, *Daily Nexus* (U.C.S.B. newspaper)

[Russell]: In retrospect, the Satanism of the 1960s to 1980s will be seen as an odd form of chic. A distinction should be made among "Satanic" groups. Some are merely frivolous, like the so-called Temple of Set with its breathless sexual hedonism in occult trappings. Others, whose prototype was the Manson family, practice real cruelty. A third variety that pretends holiness is exemplified by the Jim Jones cult that in the name of Christianity led hundreds to grotesque suicide in the Guyana jungle.

[Aquino]: How may any religious movement establish that it is not "frivolous" but is rather serious and deliberate? I would think first by the veneration in which its founders hold its origins and secondly by the dedication with which its adherents explore and apply its distinctive precepts.

Two events catalyzed the creation of the Temple of Set: (1) The rejection of Anton LaVey's financial corruption of the Satanic Priesthood by a majority of the existing Priesthood, and (2) the appearance of the *Book of Coming Forth by Night* - a text purportedly inspired by Set and admonishing the Priesthood to form a new Temple of Set to supersede the Church of Satan.

The founders of the Temple of Set incorporated it as a church, and it qualified for state & federal tax-exempt status as such. In the subsequent twelve years the Temple's many initiates have produced a wealth of commentaries upon its principles and their implications. Some have been conceptually and logically precise; others have been more artistic, emotional, or reflective. In none of these writings has our sincerity ever been questioned. To be sure, we have occasionally smiled at some of the more exotic implications of our philosophy as it was initially apprehended. This has helped us to appreciate the perils of oversimplification, and to be mindful that many an attractive theory is not - at least in its original form - very practical.

Does the Temple of Set honestly believe that it is an initiatory vehicle ordained by and consecrated to Set? Yes, it does. Has it conducted its affairs under the assumption that it is ultimately responsible to Set and not just to the desires of its membership? Yes, it has. Hence I submit that we are not a "frivolous" institution.

We have never advocated a "breathless sexual hedonism" as you suggest. As a matter of fact we have had very little to say about sex, feeling that it is peripheral to our essential interests. Only in the introduction to one of the sections of our reading list is there any official statement by the Temple concerning sex, and it is this:

Sex and magic have never been very far apart. This is both because sorcerers and sorceresses tend to be rather hedonistic individuals, and because the sexual drives can be used for purposes of ritual magic. Historically Black Magical societies have been accused of being obsessed with sex; a Black Magician might well retort that his/hers is the **rational** approach and that the critic is suffering from a bad case of Judaic/Christian repressed/sex neurosis.

A problem with sex-magic has been that many practitioners, suffering from the aforementioned neurosis, have plunged into sex in the most animalistic way possible - as an indulgence for its own sake. This, for example, was the presumption of the Church of Satan. Aleister Crowley, however, mixed his sex-magical practices with æsthetic mysticism - a fact almost totally lost on his latter-day disciples, who more often than not either ignore the sexual component in his Workings or become obsessed with it.

The Temple of Set proposes an integral, non-compulsive, comfortable, and relaxed interrelationship between sex, æsthetics, and love - the neglect of any one of which will inhibit the efficacy of whatever magical Working is involved.

To label the Manson family or the Jim Jones cult as “Satanic” is merely to lump together things that you don’t like, whether or not the association is justified in fact. Within the Manson family Charles Manson was regarded openly as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ; the “Devil” -labels were applied by a sensationalistic press later on [and then played upon by the contemptuous Manson]. Similarly Jim Jones proclaimed himself to be **God’s** representative - not Satan’s - and his followers accepted him as such. It was not a “pretense” covering any Satanic doctrine or activity whatsoever.

To its lasting dishonor, Christianity has a long record of excusing the destructive consequences of its more barbaric doctrines by labeling the perpetrators as infidels or heretics of one sort or another. Need I remind you, a medieval historian, of the horrors of the Inquisition and the European “witchcraft” mania, to say nothing of the slaughter of the Thirty Years’ War - each side fighting in the name of “true” Christianity? You may keep the Manson family and Jim Jones; they are **your** children - not ours.

It is “logic” such as yours that the Nazis invoked to prove that Christ could certainly not have been a Jew, since he was an “Aryan” role-model and the Jews were “by definition” *Untermenschen*.

[Russell]: Anton Szandor LaVey founded his Church of Satan in 1966; in 1975 a schism produced the Temple of Set. Their Satanic Bible is a melange of hedonistic maxims and misinformed occultism. Like most occult groups, LaVey’s claims ancient origins; it pretends to arise from the cult of the God Set (Seth) in ancient Egypt. For modern Sethians, the Devil is no fallen angel but a hidden force in nature beyond the power of science or religion to explain. The notion that Satan is evil (they claim) has come from his detractors over the ages, whereas he really is identical with the hedonistic nature spirit Set.

[Aquino]: The *Satanic Bible* was authored by Anton LaVey alone. It was official doctrine of the Church of Satan, but it has never been official doctrine of the Temple of Set. It is cited in our reading list as an optional item for persons with a historical interest in the doctrines of the Church of Satan ca. 1968-69 [the time of its writing].

As for “misinformed occultism”: Your charge would carry more weight if you were correctly informed yourself. Anton LaVey has never claimed that the Church of Satan came from the ancient Egyptian cult of Set. The Temple of Set has never used the term “Seth”, nor do its members call themselves “Sethians”. Nor do we consider Set a “force in nature” [or “hedonistic”], but rather an entity distinct and apart from the observable and predictable forces of nature.

We “explain” Set to ourselves as carefully and precisely as we can, but - as in Plato’s Dialogues - there is inevitably a suprarational element which must be apprehended by intuition. Such is presumably the basis for true religion; hence we are ultimately a religion.

Of course the “notion that Satan is evil” has come from his detractors. From whom else **should** it have come? His champions?

[Russell]: Aside from the fact that Set was not a hedonistic nature spirit and that there is no etymological connection between Set and Satan, the claim is meaningless: it asserts that everything humans know about the concept of Satan is in opposition to the absolute, objective reality of Satan. It ignores the fact that we have no way of knowing the absolute reality of Satan, whatever it might be. The only thing that we can know about Satan is the human concept of Satan. The idea that the Devil is good, not evil, has further dimensions of irrationality, because the human

concept of Satan was developed in Mazdaism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam precisely for the purpose of personifying radical evil. Satan is by definition evil. The claim that the evidence in favor of the good Devil has been destroyed, leaving only the evidence of his “detractors,” is equally silly. For one thing, it constitutes an admission that the theory is based upon no existing evidence at all. For another, even the possibility of such “evidence” does not exist, because it would contradict the very definition of the subject. It is as if I were to argue that the term “Parliament” really refers to the KGB.

[Aquino]: The connection between “Set” and “Satan” has been abundantly established in the literature, as I should think you would know if you have in fact read the works in your own bibliography. One of your cited books is Paul Carus’ *History of the Devil*, which recounts both Set’s original veneration as a beneficent entity and his later distortion into the prototype of “Satan”.<sup>1</sup> Amusingly Carus also speculates that the Israelites’ deity may actually be a corruption of Set:

If the time of the shepherd kings is to be identified with the settlement of Jacob’s sons in Egypt, and if the monotheism of the Hyksos is the root of Moses’ religion, what food for thought lies in the fact that the same awe of a fearful power that confronts us in life, changes among the Egyptians into the demonology of Set, and among the Israelites into the cult of Yahveh!<sup>2</sup>

I am frankly surprised that I should need to lecture a history professor on Judæo-Christianity’s extensive mythological roots in pre-existing and competitive religious cultures. At the very least I shan’t bore other readers of this critique by such an elementary exercise. For a tour of the original Egyptian “Hell” - and an introduction to its original Prince - you need look no further than the well-known Osirian *Book of Coming Forth by Day* (the “*Egyptian Book of the Dead*”), in which you will find the punishment, the lake of fire, the chains, a grouchy [and chained] Set, and the rest of it.

As for etymology, during the XIX-XX Dynasties Set was held in especial veneration by the Egyptian monarchy, and was frequently referred to as “Majesty of Set”<sup>3</sup> - a term pronounced *Set-hen* in contemporary hieroglyphs.<sup>4</sup> Assuming that the Hebrews [from the hieroglyphic *apirw* (“displaced persons”)] under their leader Moses [from the hieroglyphic *mos* (“son”, hence Thutmose = “son of Thoth”, etc.)] held the Egyptian dynasty and its patron deity in a particular dislike, the etymological jump from *Set-hen* to “Satan” doesn’t seem too terribly implausible.

If you don’t care for *Set-hen*, perhaps you might accept *Sâphôn*, the Egyptian hieroglyphic name for the stellar/circumpolar domain of Set, which was subsequently called *Sêphôn* by the *apirw*.<sup>5</sup>

Again it is surprising that I should have to remind a history professor - again one specializing in medieval Europe - how vehemently Christians have gone about destroying documents, monuments, and people partial to any deity besides their own. May I suggest that you drop by the UCSB Anthropology Department and have a chat with Brian Fagan, whose superb *The Rape of the Nile* (New York: Scribner’s, 1975) establishes his background in this subject. To be sure, Christianity had only a limited opportunity to deface and destroy the ancient Egyptian heritage; it fell to Islam to finish the job. As I recall, the entire contents of the ancient Library of Alexandria were burned as fuel for the city’s baths - because they might conflict with the *Koran*. But then Christianity had the Inca and Aztecs to “save” ...

Finally, for you to argue that a positive image for the Prince of Darkness is impossible simply because you have defined it otherwise is ludicrously reminiscent

of Lewis Carroll's Humpty-Dumpty. Who are **you** to claim exclusive power of definition? Obviously the same words are defined in many different ways by different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, etc., in various time-periods.

[Russell]: In short, the claims are not so much wrong as inherently meaningless. A proposition may be right or wrong only if it is internally coherent and can be subjected to testing. A proposition that contradicts itself is not simply wrong; it is absolutely without meaning. I have taken trouble with these absurdities not because the Temple of Set is itself important but because similar unawareness of the simple rules governing propositional knowledge has been increasing in literature since the Romantic period.

[Aquino]: I can respond only that I have taken trouble with **your** absurdities not because you are yourself important, but because your credentials as a Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara might lead readers of your *Mephistopheles* to think that your criticisms of the Temple of Set were factually-based. I daresay that in this particular passage *Mephistopheles* is a prime example of how "unawareness of the simple rules governing propositional knowledge has been increasing in literature since the Romantic period."

## Notes

1. Carus, Paul, *The History of the Devil*. New York: Land's End Press, 1969, pages #15-28. See also Chapter #23 "The Devil in Faith and History" in S.G.F. Brandon,, *Religion in Ancient History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969). See also Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (London: Open Court, 1904, pages #241-254).
2. Carus, pages # 18-19.
3. Ions, Veronica, *Egyptian Mythology*. New York: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1973, page #65.
4. See in particular Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford: University Press, 1927 (Third Edition, reprinted through 1979). Available perhaps more conveniently in the UCSB library is one of the rare original editions of Budge's *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (1920), which will suffice to substantiate these hieroglyphic translations.
5. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, page #249.