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Everything you need to know about the Satanic Temple, which the US government just officially recognized as an organized religion

Susanna Heller May 10, 2019, 1:29 PM



Lucien Greaves, spokesman for The Satanic Temple, with a statue of Baphomet. The Washington Post/Getty Images

- The US government has recognized the **Satanic Temple** as a tax-exempt organized religion.
- The Satanic temple is a non-theistic religious group.
- It is based out of Salem, Massachusetts, but it has branches across the US and world.
- Founded in 2013, it has roots in political activism.
- It is different from the Church of Satan.
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The US government has recognized the Satanic Temple as an organized religion. On April 25, the IRS gave the group the same tax exempt status that it gives to religious groups.

"We are pleased to announce that for the very [first] time in history, a static organization has been recognized by the United States federal government as being a church," the Instagram post stated.

It continued: "This acknowledgment will make sure The Satanic Temple has the same access to public spaces as other religious organizations, affirm our standing in court when battling religious discrimination, and enable us to apply for faith-based government grants."

Founded in 2013 and based out of Salem, Massachusetts, the group has been around for over five years. It has its roots in political activism and was founded as a sort of "anti-religion," as the New York Times reported in 2015.




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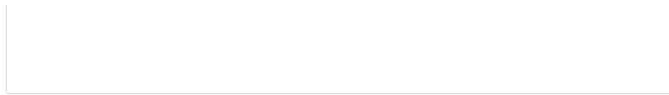
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The Satanic Temple is a nontheistic religion

Followers of the Satanic Temple does not worship Satan.

According to its website, at its core, the Satanic Temple seeks "to encourage benevolence and empathy among all people, reject tyrannical authority, advocate practical common sense and justice, and be directed by the human conscience to undertake noble pursuits guided by the individual will."

"This idea of worship, it's usually kind of insulting to people who identify with Satanism, because that implies a sense of servility. Satanism is about personal sovereignty and independence and freedom of will," Lucien Greaves, a co-founder and spokesperson for the Satanic Temple, told Public Radio International.



Lucien Greaves, a founder and spokesperson for the Temple. Elise Amendola/AP Photo

The group has certain distinct iconography, like the goat-headed statue Baphomet. Speaking to Public Radio International, Greaves explained that while the statue holds significance to the group it is not considered a deity.



"Words like 'spiritual' or 'holy,' I think — one of the first things that people need to realize about us is that we don't advocate for any supernatural beliefs. We're a nontheistic religion," Greaves said. "We don't subscribe to supernatural explanations or accept them as legitimate."



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According to its website, the group has [seven key tenets](#). Here they are in full:

1. One should strive to act with compassion and empathy toward all creatures in accordance with reason.
2. The struggle for justice is an ongoing and necessary pursuit that should prevail over laws and institutions.
3. One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone.
4. The freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend. To willfully and unjustly encroach upon the freedoms of another is to forgo one's own.
5. Beliefs should conform to one's best scientific understanding of the world. One should take care never to distort scientific facts to fit one's beliefs.
6. People are fallible. If one makes a mistake, one should do one's best to rectify it and resolve any harm that might have been caused.
7. Every tenet is a guiding principle designed to inspire nobility in action and thought. The spirit of compassion, wisdom, and justice should always prevail over the written or spoken word.

It's not interchangeable with other Satanist groups

Although they are often referred to interchangeably, the Temple is [different from the Church of Satan](#) which was founded in the 1960s by Anton Szandor LaVey. Although both groups don't worship Satan, they are not the same and have different core beliefs.

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The [Church of Satan](#) describes itself as "self-centered" group "with ourselves being the most important person (the "God") of our subjective universe, so we are sometimes said to worship ourselves. Our current High Priest Gilmore calls this the step moving from being an atheist to being an 'I-Theist.'" To that group, Satan "is a symbol of pride, liberty and individualism."

However, [according to the Satanic Temple](#), the biggest difference between the groups is Temple's commitment to activism.

The group was founded out of political protest

The Satanic Temple was founded in 2013 by Lucien Greaves and Malcolm Jarry in opposition to the George W. Bush administration's

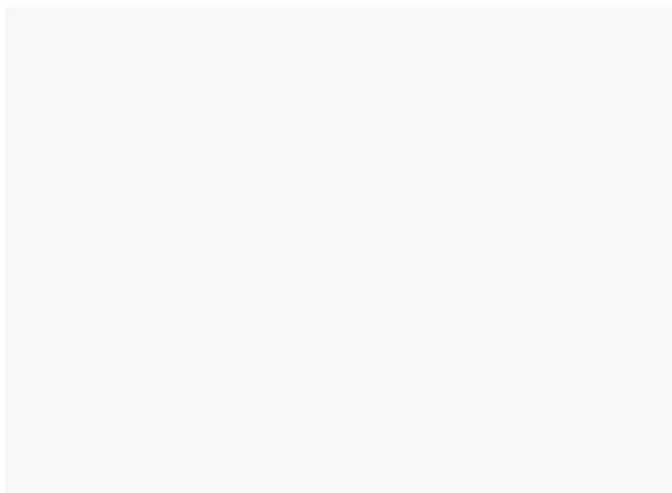
[White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives](#), the New York Times reported.

"Imagine if a Satanic organization applied for funds, it would sink the whole program," Jarry told The Times of the initial concept behind the temple.

So the temple's first act of protest was a mock rally in 2013 in support of then-Florida Gov. Rick Scott's push for in school prayer, the [Huffington Post](#) reported.

"We were coming out to say how happy we were because now our Satanic children could pray to Satan in school," Jarry told The Times.

If its origins were rooted in trolling, the group now demands to be taken seriously. Speaking to The Times in 2015 the men said they were not interested in gaining tax-exempt status from the IRS, but the group just earned that designation last month. And over the last six years, it has made a name for itself by filing lawsuits and holding rallies defending its beliefs.

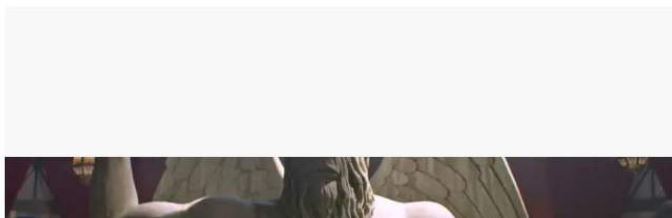


The Satanic Temple unveils its statue of Baphomet, a winged-goat creature, at a rally for the first amendment in Little Rock, Arkansas. Hannah Grabenstein/AP Photo

In 2018, the group held a rally in Little Rock, Arkansas, protesting the installation of a monument of the 10 Commandments in the town. To counter it, the group briefly installed a statue of Baphomet, the [Associated Press](#) reported.

"We have as little interest in forcing our beliefs and symbols upon you as we do in having the beliefs of others forced upon us," Greaves told [NPR](#).

Currently, [the group is suing the city of Belle Plain, Minnesota](#) for the right to display a veteran statue in a park, the Star Tribune reported. The city initially allowed the group to install the statue, but later revoked the acceptance.





The statue in Netflix's "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina." Netflix

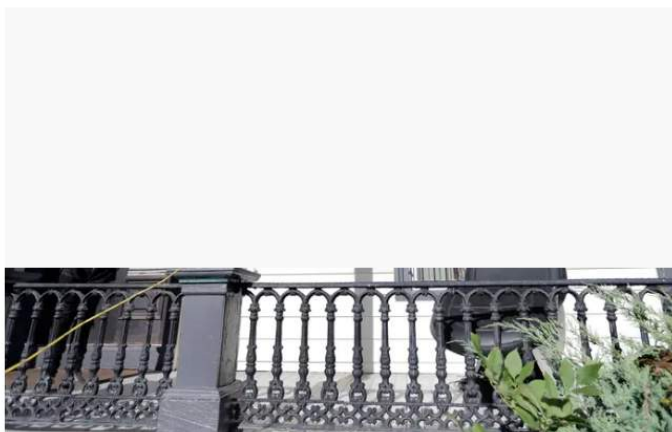
Perhaps most notably in November 2018, the temple sued Netflix over the use of a statue that resembled Baphomet in the "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina," alleging that the program implied that it stood for evil.

The Temple confirmed [Business Insider](#) that the two groups came to an "amicable" settlement over the situation.

Read more: [Satanists are threatening legal action against Netflix for ripping off their goat-headed Baphomet statue in 'Sabrina'](#)

It has a large global following

The Satanic Temple is based out of Salem, Massachusetts — as in where the witch trials took place in the late 17th century.



Lucien Greaves at the headquarters, which is a house. Elise Amendola/AP Photo

The group is headquartered out of an "old" house that has a room where members can meet, a library, and an art gallery. There are relics throughout — including 8-foot-6-inch bronze Baphomet, [Public Radio International](#) reports.

However, this chapter is just one of many.

According to [PRI](#), the temple has 20 chapters in the US, in places like Seattle, New Orleans, Chicago, Albany, and Austin. It also has international branches in Ottawa, Australia, Germany, and the UK. And more are reportedly on the way.



Lilith Starr, chapter head of The Satanic Temple of Seattle, pictured in 2015.
Elaine Thompson/AP Photo

Also helping the group gain visibility is a recently released documentary entitled "Hail Satan?"

The movie tracks the group's trajectory — from the first Rick Scott rally to where it stands now as a tax-exempt religious organization with a following of over 50,000.

Speaking to PRI, Greaves said the Satanic Temple has grown so much over the last few years because of the way it has harnessed its messaging in response to the current political climate.

"In a way, the Satanic Temple has enjoyed such expansive, explosive growth because of the rise of the theocratic right in the United States," he said. "Our expansive membership numbers are a response to the Trump administration and Pence being vice president. People are horrified."

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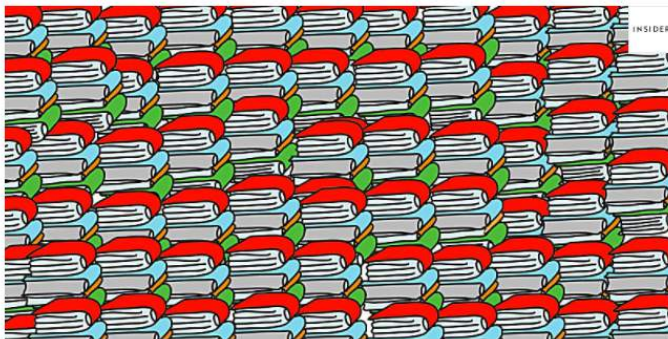
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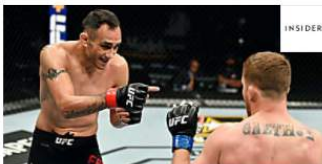
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