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The Paganization Process

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# The Paganization Process

William Sims Bainbridge

## Abstract

Current debates about the extent and direction of secularization need to take into account the possibility of paganization—not the decline of religion but its fragmentation. One powerful factor that has been shaping all aspects of contemporary culture is revolutionary information technologies, notably the Internet. This article explores these issues through examination of the partial electronic resurrection of the Process Church of the Final Judgement, a religious organization that was well documented during its remarkable rise to public prominence in the years 1963–1975 but has apparently been defunct since then. Four current manifestations that are visible online are (1) Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, which was derived from one selected element of the former Process religious tradition; (2) musical groups such as Sabbath Assembly that offer desacralized forms of Processean transcendence in YouTube videos; (3) enduring bodies of Process literature distributed online that offer concepts, metaphors, and values that contrast with majority viewpoints; and (4) low-commitment online communities that provide a measure of social stimulation and fellowship, such as three Process groups on Facebook. Paganization challenges traditional definitions of religion, as the fact that the Process originated as a form of psychotherapy illustrates, and both new theories and new methods may be needed for Internet-based research into the dynamic between secularization and paganization.

Information technology is a prominent factor transforming the social conditions that shape religion, but it also provides a set of increasingly effective tools for conducting social research. In this article, I develop hypotheses related to general theories of secularization and paganization, using the striking example of the Process Church of the Final Judgement, which seems to be experiencing an online resurrection forty years after its apparent disintegration in 1975. The goal is not to test any of the hypotheses rigorously, but to conduct an exploratory expedition into new realms of culture and to view conventional religion from new perspectives. This essay also suggests additional methodologies for the growing body of research into religion's online expressions (Hadden and Cowan 2000).

The original Process was well documented by a social scientist (Bainbridge 1978, 1991, 1997) and a former leader of the group (Wyllie 2009). Therefore this article can be partially described as a revisit that compares a social reality at two widely separated points in time (Burawoy 2003), but the primary theme is hypothesis generation rather than simple description. The virtual revival of the Process does not guarantee its ultimate success as a conventional religious movement in the form of a well-organized denomination with local churches, and several vulnerabilities can be detected in surveying its current manifestations. That uncertainty actually fits the definition of paganization that is drawn from an essay on the demise of classical Paganism by James O'Donnell (1979). *Paganism* here does not refer to a particular religion but to an attitude that holds religion to be a private matter in a society in which a host of creeds and cults coexist in a dynamic system that lacks any central control. *Paganization* is a process in which formal religious organizations disintegrate, leading not to the death of religion but to the birth of many fragmentary social and cultural phenomena that serve religious or quasi-religious functions.

### *THE BEGINNING*

The Process was founded in 1963 as a form of psychotherapy called Compulsions Analysis, by Robert de Grimston and Mary Ann MacLean, who had met in London while in training in Scientology and adapted many of its methods. Another influence was Psychoanalysis, especially the psychotherapy developed by Alfred Adler (1954), which stressed the inferiority complex and thus set a high value on helping individual clients achieve personal goals. It is noteworthy that despite its pretensions a century ago to be based on scientific research, Psychoanalysis is not currently awarded scientific status and has been described by some scholars as an outgrowth of the Jewish mystical tradition or otherwise being quasi-religious in nature (Bakan 1958; Berkower 1969; Devereux 1953; Fodor 1971). Psychoanalytic concepts such as the subconscious mind and the superego could be based on functions that are located in specific regions of the human brain (Massey 2002),

but they also possess a definite mystical quality, analogous to the hidden soul and the divine spirit. Scientology was originally established in 1950 as a brand of psychotherapy called Dianetics and then was recast as a religion later that decade (Lewis 2009). While critics may say that Scientology and the Process sought status as religions to gain legal protections that were not available for experimental psychotherapies outside the medical profession, an alternative analysis would postulate that psychotherapy in general is a parareligious phenomenon that gained prominence over the past century as the result of secularization trends that left many people without the traditional religious affiliation that might have offered consolation and guidance in facing the difficulties of life.

Around 1966, the Process emerged from Compulsions Analysis through what some of its leaders explicitly called religious engineering. This involved not merely rational design of symbols and rituals, but also experimentation and eclectic borrowing from compatible traditions. One of the more technological components was an electronic device, the P-Scope, that was derived from the Scientology E-Meter, which itself seems to have been derived from experiments carried out early in the twentieth century within Carl Gustav Jung's branch of Psychoanalysis, the part of the movement that was most explicitly compatible with radical religious or mystical concepts (Binswanger 1919; Jung 1972). The P-Scope was used in therapy sessions in which a practitioner directed the client to go through various memory and self-reflection exercises while the P-Scope registered changes in the client's galvanic skin response that reflected emotional arousal and thus guided the questions and instructions given by the practitioner. The religious potential of this technology was illustrated when clients recalled earlier and earlier memories until they were recovering experiences that they believed had occurred during previous incarnations. Another example of the religious engineering of the Process was its remarkable skill in producing magazines, poetic scriptures, and radio programs, using these media for recruitment and fund-raising rather than becoming embedded in preexisting local communities as ordinary religious congregations are.

In 1970, the Process established four main chapters in New Orleans, Boston, Chicago, and Toronto. This followed four years of travel beginning with several months meditating and beginning to sketch religious scriptures at Xtul, an abandoned saltworks on the northern coast of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. Especially during this period of spiritual as well as physical wandering, another cultural influence became significant, what is alternately called the Golden Dawn, Rosicrucianism, and the Ritual Magick esoteric tradition (McIntosh 1972, 1987). For example, the Process leadership sojourned briefly in the ruins of Aleister Crowley's Abbey of Thelema at Cefalù on the north coast of Sicily (Symonds 1958). A number of details of the Processean rituals and symbols seem to have derived from this diffuse set of esoteric traditions, but one prominent feature was

a formal social structure that required members to go through extensive training exercises punctuated by initiations to higher levels of status.

Immediately before studying the Process, I had carried out participant observation in Scientology, which gave me experience operating an E-Meter and a sense of the close kinship between the two groups (Bainbridge and Stark 1980; Bainbridge 1987, 2009). Scientology also drew on both the Psychoanalysis and Rosicrucian or Ritual Magick traditions (Bainbridge 1985). As Scientology grew, generally in the period when the founders of the Process were members, it developed a fine-grained hierarchical structure with graduation ceremonies, if not exactly initiation rituals. It is noteworthy that universities are among the other institutions of society having this feature, although the esoteric groups conceal the higher-level teachings and in varying degrees have the quality of secret societies, rather than publishing everything as secular scholars do.

A feature shared by psychotherapies and esoteric cults is that they are highly fragmented, are unstable, and lack the solidity of an established church. Psychoanalysis could be compared with some Asian religious traditions in which individual gurus have small numbers of disciples, some of whom may become gurus in their own right, as every psychoanalyst had to undergo a didactic analysis with a senior psychoanalyst. The esoteric cults remind us perhaps of the religious system of Paganism in the classical world before the consolidation of great empires, in which local shrines and small groups of priests and magicians shared some beliefs and practices with others in neighboring towns but did not belong to a large-scale formal organization. This brings us to the suggestion that the current debates about secularization should include the possibility that we are witnessing not the decline of religion but its fragmentation, which can be considered a form of paganization.

Herbert Spencer (1857) provided a conceptual basis for paganization when he argued that technological progress facilitated increased differentiation of culture and society. As society becomes more complex, specific social functions spin off from traditional institutions, causing institutions to specialize and ultimately reducing their significance. Today, we do not send a modern Moses to a mountain-top to get new laws suitable for our changing conditions; we give the task to legislatures. Spinning off a function can sometimes be beneficial to an institution. One case often discussed by scholars was the historical differentiation between magic and religion as religion gained a degree of invulnerability by avoiding making empirical claims that could be disproven, as can magical cures of diseases. Psychoanalysis, Scientology, Thelemism, and the Process all made exaggerated claims about how their concepts and procedures could benefit followers, which may be one factor that is encouraging fragmentation.

Studies such as a recent Pew survey (Smith 2015) seem to indicate that religious faith and observance are weakening in the United States, as has occurred in

Europe, and there are good reasons to respect the research on which these reports are based. However, they assume a definition of religion derived from the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition rather than other traditions—and certainly not from Paganism. Such surveys are not currently designed to track which aspects of religion might be morphing into different manifestations or indeed what the full range of offspring might be. Of course, leading traditional sociologists gave religion an enduring function, such as being a unifying force for society (Durkheim 1915; Parsons 1964), so we cannot be sure that on balance, paganization would be good for humanity. In any case, we should consider whether it might be happening, even facilitated by the Internet, on which millions of people worldwide pretend to worship the moon goddess Elune in the American massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*, which was developed by an American company, or receive instruction in Taoism in the MMORPG *Perfect World*, developed by a Chinese company.

In many respects, at its peak around 1971–1973, the Process presented itself as a remarkable contradiction, radical to the point of appearing lurid yet a compromise between esoteric Paganism and Christianity. Does one God exist? No, according to the Process, there are four equal gods, each of whom may have millions of followers: Lucifer, Jehovah, Christ, and Satan. Originally, a single God existed; but to play a game, He separated Himself into the Four Great Gods of the Universe and into all the myriads of lesser beings, including humans. Now—so the Processean proclamations asserted—the Unity of Christ and Satan and the Union of Lucifer and Jehovah would bring the world to a climax in which Humanity became the Devil, the Human Game destroyed itself, and God would be one again.

In 1974, a split between the two founders triggered the Separation, in which Mary Ann MacLean influenced the main faction to expel Lucifer, Christ, and Satan; rename itself the Foundation; and worship Jehovah alone. Meanwhile, Robert de Grimston attempted, to no avail, to revive the traditional polytheistic Process from small factions in New Orleans, Boston, Toronto, and London. Over the decades, the Foundation went through a remarkable evolution and is now a very successful animal welfare organization called Best Friends. With the development of Internet, many former Processeans and others who learned of the Process only after its demise began communicating, reviving aspects of its culture, and setting the stage for the research project reported here.

### *ANIMAL WELFARE*

The expulsion of three gods from the original Process in the Separation that produced the Foundation recapitulated the historical birth of monotheism and supported centralized control within the organization. The legal continuity of this part

of the movement is documented in amendments to the original Louisiana articles of incorporation of The Process Church of the Final Judgement dating from 1967. The name was formally changed to The Foundation – Church of the Millennium in 1974, The Foundation Faith of the Millennium in 1976, The Foundation Faith of God in 1978, and Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in 1993. As of July 2015, at least two online document providers offered copies of the official records updated to 2006.<sup>1</sup> The three variants of the Foundation name suggest evolution from a Christian-oriented “church” to a Jehovian group that briefly sought Jewish converts to its largest branch in New York City and from a millenarian group to one seeking more stability.

Born in the turbulent 1960s, the Process faced a continuing challenge as the population pool from which converts were drawn changed significantly (Tipton 1982). Early recruits were well educated, many of them artists or intellectuals, and around 1970, many of the recruits were middle-class young adults who had dropped out during the late 1960s. After that, recruitment became much more difficult, and many of the people who were attracted to the Process were troubled individuals from less educated social backgrounds. Core members of the Foundation were original Process recruits with both talent and idealism who struggled over two decades to reshape their movement into an organization that could survive while feeling that they were serving a higher purpose. Greatly reduced in numbers, they settled in Angel Canyon near Kanab, Utah, and narrowed their transcendental focus to the salvation of animal lives rather than human souls.

Especially inspired by MacLean’s personal sense of outrage over mistreatment of animals, the Process had published a booklet calling animal abuse “the ultimate sin.” A few German shepherd dogs were treated almost like members, frequently being present for rituals; and at Xtul, the group and its dogs lived together very close to nature. Thus the evolution from Process to Foundation to Best Friends was a logical progression rather than some kind of conversion—a concentration on one element of an originally complex system. Prominent other examples include yoga and meditation when practiced outside their native Hindu or Buddhist religious contexts.

A laudatory book by a nonmember did not stress this continuity between Best Friends and the Process, however: “In the summer of 1982, a group of young men and women pooled their resources and bought 3,000 acres of high desert in the wilds of southern Utah. Nineteen years later they had brought into being the most beloved animal sanctuary in the world” (Glen 2001: xv). In 2004, *The Rocky Mountain News* published an article, based largely on an interview with a leader of the group, that made it very clear that Best Friends had its origins in the

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<sup>1</sup>[docslide.us/documents/best-friends-animal-society-articles-of-incorporation.html](http://docslide.us/documents/best-friends-animal-society-articles-of-incorporation.html);  
[www.scribd.com/doc/2682018/Best-Friends-Animal-Society-Articles-of-Incorporation](http://www.scribd.com/doc/2682018/Best-Friends-Animal-Society-Articles-of-Incorporation), accessed July 3, 2015.

disreputable Process but had moved far beyond its past to serve high values (Kilzer 2004). That was in February, and in May of that year, William H. Kennedy published *Lucifer's Lodge*, claiming that the Process had been the inspiration for sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests, an accusation that lacked evidence. Two books that inaccurately linked the Process to the Manson Family murders had sullied the group's reputation years before (Bugliosi 1974; Sanders 1971), so the connection to the Process was a public relations challenge for Best Friends. It posted some of its history on its website, and today an expanded version can be found, dating from 2013, which observes: "The group evolved through several different spiritually-oriented incarnations, and then moved on from each of them. It was all part of a search to find our true calling in life, which was right under our collective nose in the form of the animals who had always had a special place in our lives and work."<sup>2</sup>

The year 1993, when Best Friends first proclaimed this identity, was when the technology underlying the World Wide Web was made available to everyone, royalty-free, and soon talented members of Best Friends were making expert use of the Web to spread their message of love for animals and to seek donations. Today, both the group's website and YouTube offer many adorable videos of dogs, cats, and human members of the group engaging in outreach activities. As a non-profit organization, Best Friends must be transparent in its finances, so each year it posts the reports that it files with government. A 2014 report listed \$81,423,064 in total assets, financial contributions in the most recent nine months of \$48,239,427, and payment of \$19,095,964 salaries and wages over that same period. That report described the organization as

a Utah nonprofit organization with the mission of developing no-kill programs and partnerships to bring about a day when there are no more homeless pets. Best Friends' leading initiatives in animal care and community programs are coordinated from its Kanab, Utah headquarters, one of the country's largest no-kill sanctuaries. Best Friends develops and refines model programs that are shared with other organizations and people, so that more animals can be saved. This work is made possible by the personal and financial support of a grassroots network of members and community partners across the nation.<sup>3</sup>

Best Friends extols humane values but does not publically worship Jehovah or Christ, let alone Lucifer or Satan. It illustrates one of the fundamental mechanisms of paganization in the modern world: preservation of some cultural element of a religion but disconnection from supernatural beliefs. Desacralization is the loss of sacred significance for some element of a religion. Since the Renaissance,

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<sup>2</sup> [bestfriends.org/News-And-Features/News/Before-Best-Friends](http://bestfriends.org/News-And-Features/News/Before-Best-Friends), accessed July 3, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> [bestfriends.org/Who-We-Are/Financial-Information/Financial-Reports](http://bestfriends.org/Who-We-Are/Financial-Information/Financial-Reports), accessed July 3, 2015.



ancient pagan religions have experienced a degree of popularity but in desacralized form. Spectacular examples can be found throughout classical music, such as *L'Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi (1607), *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Christoph Willibald Gluck (1762), *Das Rheingold* by Richard Wagner (1869), *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky (1913), *Trionfo di Afrodite* by Carl Orff (1953), and *Pervigilium Veneris*, which was set as an oratorio by Timothy Mather Spelman in 1931 and by George Lloyd in 1980. The same has happened for the Process, which created many chants and songs for its rituals and included talented musicians among its members.

### *MUSIC*

In the early 1970s, three of the Process chapters had bands that played in public, touring coffee houses and even appearing on local television. A large corpus of songs, hymns, and chants were composed or arranged by members, occasionally using traditional melodies but usually original. The first impact on music outside the church involved Funkadelic, a psychedelic rock, soul, and funk band, which incorporated Processean material into its record liner notes for *Maggot Brain* (1971) and *America Eats Its Young* (1972), as described recently by its leader, George Clinton (2014: 113):

There was a group called the Process Church that had been founded by a British couple as an offshoot of Scientology, and in the late sixties they started hanging out with the band, mainly in Boston. They would feed the kids in Boston Common and they ran what was basically the first day-care center that I can remember, offering to watch children when mothers went to work. We ended up excerpting some of their thinking in the *Maggot Brain* liner notes, which seemed fine at the time—it was a form of self-actualization, not an uncommon or unpopular philosophy at the time. We did the same thing for *America Eats Its Young*, but with far different results. In the summer of 1969, a career criminal (and part-time songwriter) named Charles Manson led a band of followers on a killing spree in upscale residential neighborhoods in Los Angeles, murdering a number of people, including Roman Polanski's wife, Sharon Tate. The killers were under the influence of a crazy-quilt mythology that somehow tied together the Beatles' "Helter Skelter," race war, and Satan worship. There was some thought that Manson had drawn on some of the writings of the Process Church. I thought there was a difference—he talked about something called the Final Church of Judgment, and the group hanging around with us was the Church of Final Judgment—but this was probably too fine a distinction for a public still trying to get a handle on a killing spree. *Rolling Stone* gave us a hard time for the association in their review.

It is hard to discern any Processean influence on Funkadelic's music, although the title of one song was "A Joyful Process," and the title and lyrics of another song harmonized with Process teachings: "If You Don't Like the Effects, Don't Produce the Cause." Negative publicity from the Manson murders may have discouraged other bands from association with the Process, and it disintegrated soon afterward. However, one of the most remarkable popular culture radicals, Genesis P-Orridge, became the key figure in reviving musical interest in the Process, through a lengthy process he described to me:

I first came across "The Process" in London in the 60's and was immediately fascinated and compelled (yes a compulsion!). I felt that a part of my "destiny" was linked with theirs. So much that my sense of cultural inevitability, and my awareness of not being clear enough to be readily slipped in. But I began saving everything I could find, and still have that archive to this day.

I went through my own activities. Ending up doing Performance Art with COUM Transmissions. Causing a scandal celebre in 1976. I founded Throbbing Gristle, and the genre Industrial music through that band. I quit and began Psychic TV and founded Thee Temple Ov Psychick Youth, which I terminated in 1991, but chagrined TOPY's have continued a "cowboy" version I am told since then. I tried to include many references to The Process in that 10 year project. Usually covertly.

I saw that as an invocation [sic]. My aim, to meet in an unbiased, not loaded way some original Processeans. To try to set up a new climate that would enable a re-evaluation and rehabilitation of the IDEAS which I found constantly relevant and powerful.

In 2009, Genesis P-Orridge collaborated with a former leader of the Process, Timothy Wyllie, and Adam Parfrey of Feral House, who was publishing Wyllie's book about the Process, titled *Love Sex Fear Death*. The event was a reenactment of a Processean Sabbath Assembly, the group's most elaborate ritual, traditionally held every Saturday evening and filled with both music and poetry (Hultkrans 2009). On April 19, 2013, P-Orridge introduced a musical group called Sabbath Assembly at the Roadburn Festival in Tilburg, Netherlands, with this invocation:

Consciously or unconsciously, apathetically, half-heartedly, enthusiastically or fanatically, under countless other names than those by which we know Them, and under innumerable disguises and descriptions, men have followed the Great Gods of the Universe ever since the Creation. Each one according to his nature.

Jehovah is Strength. Lucifer is Light. Satan is Separation. Christ is Unification. These are the great powers of the universe, and all mankind is subject to their will.

One of the websites of this musical group says, “Sabbath Assembly is an occult rock band based in TX and NYC. At its inception the group formed to play the hymns of the Process Church of the Final Judgment, an Apocalyptic religious sect from the late 60’s. The band currently performs and records original songs that maintain its ties to mystical theology.”<sup>4</sup> At Roadburn, it followed Genesis by singing one of the original Process hymns, with a stanza for each of the Four Great Gods of the Universe, and this chorus:

We give our lives we give our love  
And praise you to the stars above!  
We feel your power your burning fire!  
You raise our spirits ever higher!

This was one of nine original Processean songs offered on a CD titled *Restored to One*, advertised thus:

Restored to One is a modern response to the musical activities of a cult known as The Process Church of the Final Judgment, who used music to spread their visions of Gnostic reconciliation in a time of cataclysmic change. Sabbath Assembly has re-charged the original hymns of The Process Church and worked them into moving renditions that unite the trinity of rock, psychedelic and gospel into one triumphant re-awakening.

While several Sabbath Assembly CDs are currently for sale in different formats, much of the group’s Process music can be heard for free online, either from their own website or from a couple dozen YouTube videos, some of the best of which are listed in Table 1, along with Process-inspired music by other groups. The data in the table date from July 1, 2015, and it must be admitted that the numbers of views, while significant, do not put Sabbath Assembly among the elite of very popular groups.

The video for “In the time of Abaddon II” is a collage of images, including a mysterious photograph of Robert de Grimston, the iconic symbols of the cult, and a picture of an initiation ceremony from the early 1970s mixed with more recent scenes. The first half is a recitation of The Prophecy of the End from the original Sabbath Assembly ritual, with Genesis P-Orridge in the role of Sacrifist, beginning as follows:

Sacrifist:  
This is the Prophecy of the End.  
The Gods are with us. Christ is among us.

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<sup>4</sup> sabbathassembly.bandcamp.com, accessed July 4, 2015.

As herald of the Time, a wave of pain and suffering sweeps the earth from end to end.  
 And fear is growing in the hearts of men.  
 Assembly:  
 And we shall conquer fear with love.

The “Hymn of Consecration,” also derived from the Sabbath Assembly ritual, was sung to introduce a ceremony for Acolytes of the Process who were ready to become Initiates and commit themselves to intensive study of the teachings. During an initiation, the Sacrifist would bless the Acolyte with water for Christ and fire for Satan, demanding dedication to their coming Unity. One verse of the hymn explains the role of fire:

Purify me with the Fire  
 Satan, test me in your Pit of Fire, desire  
 Purify me with the Fire  
 Satan, I will meet your demands and defy Fear  
 Purify me with the Fire

**Table 1: Selected YouTube Videos Illustrating Process-Influenced Music**

| Group   | Title                     | YouTube ID  | Length | Views  |
|---|---------------------------|-------------|--------|--------|
| <i>Direct Revival of the Music Created Inside the Original Process</i>                                      |                           |             |        |        |
| Sabbath Assembly  | We Give Our Lives         | 9NXDgha91oU | 4:38   | 162    |
| Sabbath Assembly  | In the time of Abaddon II | jYZzstcJjnk | 4:02   | 17,984 |
| Sabbath Assembly  | Hymn of Consecration      | 09DdYIE11D4 | 6:34   | 23,526 |
| Sabbath Assembly  | We Come From the One      | h_9NmQV_-tI | 4:56   | 16,223 |
| Sabbath Assembly  | Exit                      | pqA2D5IjHQk | 5:18   | 19,179 |
| Sabbath Assembly  | I, Satan                  | m9iGhXJhI5g | 4:25   | 22,527 |
| Sabbath Assembly  | Lucifer                   | 3d9eWUq08eA | 3:21   | 8,420  |
| <i>Hardcore Music Inspired by the Ideas and Symbols of the Process but Not Directly Re-viving Its Music</i> |                           |             |        |        |
| Funkadelic  | A Joyful Process          | NOGPWRK58ng | 6:23   | 3,353  |
| Psychic TV  | Terminus-Xtul             | eedwjxSSAR8 | 13:19  | 15,080 |
| Skinny Puppy  | The Process               | 7yOr2l7aAm0 | 4:47   | 10,956 |
| Integrity   | Humanity is the Devil     | ThWnkjhnVqo | 34:29  | 3,476  |
| Electric Wizard   | The Processean            | IfoTdULs0RA | 11:13  | 5,484  |
| Monastery   | The Process               | A13idpfX6kE | 6:34   | 7,565  |
| New Processean Order  | Hymn to Lucifer           | rcWnNUUQVjE | 3:59   | 995    |
| Lay It On The Line  | A Prelude To The Process  | A3v5OY0xD7c | 12:05  | 397    |

The images in this video are chiefly black and white scans of desiccated human skeletons in the Sedlac Ossuary in the Czech Republic. “We Come From the One” expresses the Processean theology that we are all fragments of God, who shattered to create the universe, and begins with Genesis P-Orridge reciting the Invitation: “May the life-giving water of the Lord Christ, and the purifying Fire of the Lord Satan, bring the presence of Love and Unity into this Assembly.” The images are a remarkable 1907 short film, *Le Spectre Rouge*, depicting a struggle between a demonic magician and a good spirit in a Satanic grotto. “Exit” recycles shots from the 1972 Christian end time movie “A Thief in the Night.” It takes its title from a collection of Robert de Grimston’s essays and includes this chorus:

There is an exit from confusion  
 An exit from despair  
 There is an exit for everyone  
 An exit that we can share

“I, Satan” and “Lucifer” are more recent, dating from 2014 and lacking narration by P-Orridge. Both are rather astonishing in their graphics—beautiful, exotic, and evocative. One way to understand Process theology is to postulate that the Bible is only half of the ancient revelation, an alliance between Jehovah and Christ that has distorted the past two millennia and can now be rebalanced through the unity of Christ and Satan and the Union of Jehovah and Lucifer. The notion that Lucifer was the same as Satan was simply Jehovian propaganda to defy the Union and must now be swept away by the God of Light. The Lucifer song had been written by Brother Christopher of the Boston chapter of the Process, around 1971:

Deep in my darkest night, before the light of day  
 You bring the morning near, to wash my fears away

Show me the way to go home  
 Show me that I'm not alone  
 Show me the light I have known  
 Show me Lucifer, Lucifer, Lucifer

Other bands on the list, beginning with Skinny Puppy, seem to have been influenced by Genesis P-Orridge, but the members of New Processean Order and Lay it On The Line are actual, self-professed Processeans, despite being too young to have belonged to the original group.

*WEBSITES AND BOOKS*

For the past twenty years, individuals interested in Processean culture and theology have exchanged e-mail messages, often with photographs or scriptures attached, and periodically some of them have developed blogs or even launched websites. Many early websites of all kinds were short-lived, and all five Process sites listed in 1999 in the University of Virginia's online encyclopedia of new religions movements had vanished fifteen years later.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2: The Range of Process-Related Websites**

| URL  | Name  | Nature  |
|--|---|---|
| <a href="http://www.satanservice.org/propaganda/process.html">www.satanservice.org/propaganda/process.html</a>   | "Sympathy for the Devil" by Gary Lachman                                    | An article that originally published in <i>Fortean Times</i>        |
| <a href="http://www.blackgnosis.com/2012_12_01_archive.html">www.blackgnosis.com/2012_12_01_archive.html</a>   | "The Process Church of the Final Judgment" by Michael Lee Röhm              | Two extensive blogs offering much historical information            |
| <a href="http://www.blackgnosis.com/2012/11/glory-to-gods-in-highest.html">www.blackgnosis.com/2012/11/glory-to-gods-in-highest.html</a>   |   |   |
| <a href="http://www.weltschmerz.org/process.org">www.weltschmerz.org/process.org</a>   | "As it is... as it was" by Loki der Quaeler                                 | An archived Process site dating from 1994–2001                      |
| <a href="http://www.process.org/discept">www.process.org/discept</a>   | "The Process Is ..." by Loki der Quaeler, Doug Mesner, and William Morrison | A blog inspired by the Process but not limited to it                |
| <a href="http://www.processchurchofthefinaljudgment.com">www.processchurchofthefinaljudgment.com</a>   | The Process Church  | The website of a Processean group trying to relaunch                |
| <a href="http://theprocesszine.tumblr.com">theprocesszine.tumblr.com</a>   | The Process Zine of the Final Judgment                                      | A fanzine edited by Michal Matysiak in Poland                       |
| <a href="http://kaliyugaeditions.weebly.com">kaliyugaeditions.weebly.com</a>   | Kali Yuga Editions  | The website of a publisher that issued a book of Process literature |
| <a href="http://feralhouse.com/propaganda-and-holy-writ-of-the-process-church-of-the-final-judgment">feralhouse.com/propaganda-and-holy-writ-of-the-process-church-of-the-final-judgment</a> | Feral House publisher, specializing in unusual books                        | A book reproducing three Process artistic magazines                 |

<sup>5</sup> [web.archive.org/web/20060828130118/religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Process.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20060828130118/religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Process.html), accessed July 7, 2015.

Table 2 lists a range of Process-related sites that were available as of early July 2015, beginning with one of scores of journalistic stories that vary greatly in their accuracy but almost universally exploit the lurid reputation of the Process to excite readers. The efforts by Michael Lee Röhm and Loki der Quaeler exactly fit the definition of paganization suggested by O'Donnell's work, in that both were individual fans of the Process for whom the culture was significant but who do not belong to a formal group. The website that represents itself as The Process Church is indeed a small, cohesive group, which will be discussed in the following section about Facebook. The group's members are a mixture of elderly original members and new young adult recruits.

The remarkable quality and huge extent of scriptures and other writings of the 1966–1975 period have given anyone who possesses copies the opportunity to post them online and gain some public notice thereby. Independent publishers, notably Kali Yuga in Italy and Feral House in the United States, have sold well-produced modern editions of some of the most appealing Process literature. Processeans generally believe that Robert de Grimston took legal custody of the literature's intellectual property rights in a settlement after the Separation but has been content to let Processeans and their sympathizers share the culture as they wish. Both online databases and secondhand reports by former associates indicate that de Grimston is still alive but not in direct communication with his followers.

The Internet is radically changing the nature of most forms of publication, even books. For example, the online publisher Lulu claims to have published nearly two million items since its launch in 2002.<sup>6</sup> Currently, Processeans are aware of three books written by former members, two of them autobiographies and the third a novel, that were published through new means and can be purchased through Amazon.com. *Xtul: An Experience of the Process* by Sabrina Verney (2011) is especially valuable for the social science of religion because it recounts Verney's experience in the very early days of the Process in London and at Xtul. *Coast to Coast* by Jonathan DePeyer (2007) is an emotionally challenging account of the youth of a son of Processeans whose mother left the Foundation during the period when the group moved to the Southwest. *Beyond the Cabin* (2014) is a rather sophisticated *Bildungsroman* (coming-of-age novel) by Jared Nathan Garrett, another member of the second generation, fictionalizing and thus possibly intensifying the conditions that Garrett experienced by growing up within the Foundation. The true story of the Process is also inspiring science fiction that plays with the group's beliefs and practices, thus exploring possible future religious innovations (Bainbridge, 2015, 2016).

For many readers, Process literature is a substantial part of the esoteric library defined by cult leaders such as Aleister Crowley (1969) and Anton Szandor

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<sup>6</sup> [www.lulu.com/about/our-story](http://www.lulu.com/about/our-story), accessed July 7, 2015.

LaVey (1969). This genre has been called the left-hand path, although the meaning of this phrase is in dispute. It naturally reminds Processeans of Matthew 25:33: “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” In their reading, the sheep who have taken the right-hand path do good Christian deeds, while the goats are selfish Satanists, and the Processean symbol for Satan was indeed the face of a goat, borrowed from Eliphaz Levi. Other aficionados of this genre see different origins for this left-right distinction and read different meanings into it.

During this research in the spring of 2015, a would-be messiah named Malphas sought to interest Processeans in his book *The Black Ship: Concerning the Sovereign Company of Pandemonium the Royal Blood of Chaos and the Dominion of Eternal Night* (2012), a rather well written and intelligent book of personal rituals and theology. A key distinction Malphas makes between the two paths is that the right-hand path requires strong social connections with other believers, comparable to membership in a Christian church, achieving salvation through group rituals and sharing a common faith. For Malphas, the left-hand path takes one through total individualism, seeking to transform oneself by solo rituals consisting largely of focused meditations, preparing one to cooperate with other people who have taken the left-hand path but not binding the individual to them. This conception of the left-hand path is compatible with paganization and can describe the value of Process culture for many of the people who are currently attracted to it.

### FACEBOOK

Facebook, which is among the most popular social media, is especially well designed to promote low-commitment social movements that are compatible with paganization. Over the first half of 2015, I explored the pages most directly connected with the Process. Table 3 outlines the most important examples. Any person or group that has an English-language page in Wikipedia automatically is represented in Facebook, and the first two items in the table are of this kind. Facebook’s note on each of these two explains: “This Page is automatically generated based on what Facebook users are interested in, and not affiliated with or endorsed by anyone associated with the topic.”

One indicator of the social distance between some of today’s Processeans and the original group is the fact that the names of the founding pair are often misspelled, the way low-quality journalists did, as Robert DeGrimston and Mary Anne MacLean rather than correctly spelled as Robert de Grimston and Mary Ann MacLean. Also the group’s name today often is spelled “Judgment,” in the American manner, rather than “Judgement,” the original British spelling. Anyone who visits a page or looks at a posting on one may, with a quick mouse click, register a



“like” expressing interest, and the numbers of likes that were documented for these two pages early in July 2015 were frankly rather small.

**Table 3: Facebook Pages Related to the Process**

| <b>Title</b>  | <b>Address</b>   | <b>Likes</b> | <b>Members</b> |
|---|--|--------------|----------------|
| <i><b>Facebook-Generated Pages</b></i>                                      |  |              |                |
| Robert DeGrimston, Public Figure  | Robert-DeGrimston/132587346777685                        | 75           |                |
| The Process Church of The Final Judgment, Interest                          | The-Process-Church-of-The-Final-Judgment/133230823381638 | 274          |                |
| <i><b>Promotional Pages Created by Organizations</b></i>                    |  |              |                |
| Best Friends Animal Society, Animal Shelter                                 | bestfriendsanimalsociety                                 | 856,850      |                |
| The Process Church of the Final Judgment, Church/Religious Organization     | TheProcesschurch   | 2,672        |                |
| The Process Zine of the Final Judgment, Magazine                            | The-Process-Zine/260697207274362                         | 895          |                |
| Sabbath Assembly (official) Musician/Band                                   | SabbathAssembly  | 5,175        |                |
| <i><b>Membership groups:</b></i>  |  |              |                |
| The Process - Church of The Final Judgement, Public Group                   | groups/41914447583                                       |              | 245            |
| Process Church Of The Final Judgement, Public Group                         | groups/273754665374                                      |              | 29             |
| Reunion Group for The Process Church and The Foundation Faith, Closed Group | groups/141575203849                                      |              | 51             |

The Best Friends Facebook page is managed by the group itself and has a quite respectable 856,850 likes, far more than the 2,672 of the page that seeks to revive the original Process. Two other promotional pages created by organizations link to items in Tables 1 and 2: the amateur Process Zine and the professional Sabbath Assembly. Most significant in terms of traditional social science of

religion are the three membership groups listed at the end of Table 3. The group with 245 members represents the main network of sympathizers seeking to relaunch the Process, although neither commitment nor an initiation ritual is required to join. The closed Reunion Group requires permission to join, and applicants must prove that they were members of the original Process or Foundation.

The Reunion Group is administered by four former Processeans, who harbor some ambivalence toward the Process but consider their involvement to have been important life experiences. The group's "About" area says,

This group is for ex-members and friends to be in touch again. We've scattered to the ends of the earth and are doing so many different things. We have families, and careers, and new lives. Maybe some of us are missing some old and dear friends. Hopefully we will find each other here. If you know of other ex-members who are on Facebook, please invite them to join too.

The group has fifty-one members, but two of them are alternate identities for the same people, so the real membership is forty-nine. One of the leaders visited Best Friends in Kanab, Utah, in the spring of 2015 and shared pictures and text about the trip with fellow members of the Reunion Group. During the period of observation, two members separately shared terrible problems they were suffering, related to the aging process in the context of economic distress, and they received both practical advice and emotional compassion.

This congenial group of Processeans provided considerable information for this research study. For example, at one point, I asked whether it was correct that "Lucifer," performed by Sabbath Assembly, had originally been written by Brother Christopher. One of the most active members not only confirmed this fact, but also posted for the closed group a scan of original text of the song, handwritten and signed by Christopher, which he had kept for forty years. Further, the member reported:

A while back, I got contacted by someone associated with that group, wanting to know more about Processean Music. I talked with them over the phone and played several songs for them. . . . The understanding was that they would record the call for future reference but my performance as it was would not be used. Well, the first thing you hear on that YouTube file is me singing Lucifer over the phone, contrary to their promises. I don't know who crucified the song for their performance after that, but note that it bears little resemblance to what I sang for them.

Another member contributed a similar assessment: "Christopher wrote this brilliant piece. He taught it to us in New Orleans and Sister Bernadette used to sing it in the coffee house. It is a stretch, however, to equate the YouTube version

with the hauntingly beautiful song I remember.” In the discussion, it became clear that Bernadette was now a leader at Best Friends, using a different name; Christopher was happily married and living outside these groups; and the participants in the discussion looked forward to sharing more widely their knowledge of how the music was originally performed.

The larger group, with 245 members, contained some of the original members and had been created by them but was largely composed of newcomers. Much of the Process-related Facebook activity took place on that large group’s page as members posted pictures or statements and others responded with comments. On August 12, 2014, the group’s leader posted this question: “What calls you to this group? Write the first answer that comes to your mind.” A total of forty-five people provided answers, including these single-word responses, in chronological order: freewill, knowledge, understanding, learning, truth, fellowship, Lucifer, enlightenment, wisdom, transcendence, spirituality, Genesis, memories, curiosity, and history. Here, “Genesis” refers to Genesis P-Orridge rather than the book from the Bible. Some of the multiple-word responses were as follows:

Enlightenment and higher spiritual being.

Unique perspectives

De Grimston’s Teachings are compelling. The alchemy and transcendence of opposites.

Reconnecting with friends

I think the world could use reconciliation of perceived opposites.

Because nothing has ever made existence clear for me except The Process.

I’ve been interested in The Process for many years (since I first heard Skinny Puppy’s album, actually) and I find the history and the philosophy fascinating

I’m already here.

The devil made me do it

The Darkness hollows, the Light fills....

I wanted to hear about the Process from people who’ve actually practiced it.

Apocalypse - in the esoteric sense, but am certainly fine with corresponding results in the colloquial sense.

The insight that allowed me deeper understanding of my role in Christianity and the roles of the devils, Lucifer, Satan, astro-theology & the psychological aspects

I was introduced to The Process through the nonsense written in books like “The Family”. Although that lurid, gonzo, tabloid sensationalism can make for an entertaining read it never really rang true to me. Next I discovered how beautiful the graphics in the magazines were and that got me on to reading the true story which, rather than explaining things away, has drawn me in further. I’m fascinated.

Recently, the main online group has been active in posting more and more Process culture, including YouTube readings of the scriptures expressing the orientations toward war of Jehovah, Lucifer, and Satan. There is talk of a small group reassembling when they formally retire from their secular jobs. Whether or not that happens, the wide distribution of music, scripture, symbols, and even simulated artifacts in the form of newly crafted jewelry and clothing offers the possibility of revival of a radical religion that was once thought to be extinct.

It is uncertain which kinds of systematic data analysis will work well with Facebook, but I tried a number of explorations. For example, I checked the pages for the individual members of the Reunion Group to see which other groups they belonged to, finding no commonality among them other than a few who belong to a Best Friends public group. Individual members of the Reunion Group did serve as weak links to culturally similar groups, including the following:

*H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society* (41,372 members): Chronicling the strange goings on of the HP Lovecraft Historical Society. We encourage people to get involved with us and share their interest in all things Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos.

*Spiritual Free Thought Study Group* (17,427 members): A group of like-minded people whose purpose is to search for knowledge, seek the Truth, raise questions, raise more questions and together explore the paths of various answers to these questions. All views are respected and are valid.

*The Largest Baha'i Facebook Group Ever* (16,158 members): The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion. With more than five million adherents residing in over 124,000 localities, the Bahá'í Faith is established in 204 countries across the planet. The spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith affirm its overall purpose—to bring about the oneness of humanity.

*The Necronomicon Press (Lovecraftians Unite!)* (3,615 members) The Necronomicon Press was founded 1976 by Marc Michaud, and has been running ever since. The press publishes everything Lovecraftian, including not just work and analyses of Lovecraft, but other authors as well.

*Aura-Soma Friends* (3,219 members): This space is an opportunity for all friends of Aura-Soma Equilibrium to share their experiences with these vibrant colours. It is especially a place to share peace and inspiration, so that we are reminded to connect with the Star we are. This is an international group of many colours and backgrounds, all with the same aim to bring greater consciousness to the decisions we make each moment of our lives.

*Pagan Unity Festival* (2,208 members) For those who attend or are interested in attending Pagan Unity Festival in Burns, TN! PUF is a 4 day family friendly festival with workshops, music, rituals, drumming, shopping, food and fun!

These selected examples have far more members than the Process groups and cover a good deal of cultural territory, although all are potentially compatible with

paganization. The two Lovecraft connections illustrate the possibility that for many people, religion will morph into an artistic medium, aesthetically attractive but not salvational. Aura-Soma Friends illustrates how a commercial company selling products may claim quasi-religious qualities for its “soul system.” The Pagan Unity Festival is a privately owned annual event that includes rituals and classes taught by Pagan entrepreneurs.

### *ANALYSIS*

A vast array of social-scientific theories can be applied to secularization and paganization. For example, Stark and Bainbridge (1985) suggested that a natural sectarian tension cycle keeps religiousness constant in society, even as mainstream denominations lose faith, because new high-tension sects are constantly being formed to take their place. If this churning of the religious marketplace does in fact combine small-scale chaos with large-scale stability, there should be a cultural area surrounding low-tension denominations that generates cults that are fundamentally insignificant yet very visible in popular culture.

However, two very different cyclical theories also exist. Pitirim A. Sorokin (1937–1941) argued that every civilization is born in an ideational phase that is especially conducive to consolidation of a religious orthodoxy but that over time the civilization loses faith, becomes more sensate, and disintegrates into a period of bloody chaos that might be resolved in the birth of a new faith. If this theory is correct, then some small cult such as the Process could, even by chance, become the seed for the next great growth of religion, but only after a Dark Age. A curvilinear model of human families has been proposed by Blumberg and Winch (1972), who noted that families were small and possibly unstable in hunter-gatherer societies, became large and complex in agricultural societies, then perhaps have returned to their natural instability in postindustrial societies. Applied to religion, which after all has strong connections with the institution of the family, this model suggests that repaganization is the natural consequence of the completion of the agricultural and industrial revolutions in human technology.

Very recently, researchers from a variety of disciplines have begun to look at the sociocultural implications of the Internet—implications that many of them believe to be vast. One active area of research is the way in which death is handled online, whether in disputes over management of data the deceased had posted online or in consciously constructed online memorials (Moreman and Lewis 2014). Another active area is the remarkable popularity of fictional religions in MMORPGs (Bainbridge 2013; Geraci 2014; Nardi 2010). Experiencing cultic initiation rituals or even death and resurrection in one of these virtual worlds may have some of the psychological effect of real religion, based not on belief but on willing suspension of disbelief. A body of superficially secular theory proposed

by leaders in the social sciences or in the development of computer-generated virtual worlds has proposed a Proteus effect in which users psychologically blend with their online avatars and may thus even outlive their biological bodies (Blaskovich and Bailenson 2011; Kurzweil 1999; Rothblatt 2014; Yee 2014).

Given the often quite radical views of the cybernetic future that have been promoted by otherwise highly respected leaders in new technology development, it is possible that earlier developments such as the Process will be overshadowed and fade from public awareness as the original members pass away. Yet consideration of its current admittedly tenuous revival suggests four ways in which a religious group may dissolve into the larger culture in a way that feeds into a much larger process of paganization:

1. As specializations derived from selected elements of a former religious tradition, as illustrated by Best Friends
2. As desacralized genres of art and music that provide attenuated forms of aesthetic transcendence, such as the music of Sabbath Assembly
3. As enduring bodies of literature that offer concepts, metaphors, and values that contrast with majority viewpoints, such as the preserved scriptures of the Process
4. As low-commitment online communities that provide a measure of social stimulation and fellowship, such as the Facebook groups

A chief difficulty facing both theorists and empirical researchers is that paganization blurs the distinction between religion and other societal institutions. Conceptions of religion based on familiarity with Christianity have made it difficult to conceptualize some major Asian traditions, notably Confucianism and Zen Buddhism, so terminological problems have always been with us, if not always recognized. As Psychoanalysis, Scientology, and the Process illustrate, one framework for classification has been the legal system, which distinguishes medical organizations from religious ones and applies different principles to the two categories. But the changes that are apparently underway today challenge any simplistic system of classification. In the future, social scientists will need to find a proper intellectual balance between rigidity and flexibility in the definitions of terms. We will not be able to measure secularization, let alone properly understand it, unless we invest both energy and imagination in our research on this highly significant phenomenon.

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