

Satanic Temple Unveils Baphomet Statue at Arkansas Capitol

The Satanic Temple has unveiled its statue of a goat-headed, winged creature called Baphomet in a rally at the Arkansas State Capitol to protest a Ten Commandments monument already on the Capitol grounds.

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By HANNAH GRABENSTEIN, Associated Press



The Satanic Temple unveils its statue of Baphomet, a winged-goat creature, at a rally for the first amendment in Little Rock, Ark., Thursday, Aug. 16, 2018. The Satanic Temple wants to install the statue on Capitol grounds as a symbol for religious freedom after a monument of the Biblical Ten Commandments was installed in 2017. (AP Photo/Hannah Grabenstein) The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — The Satanic Temple unveiled its statue Thursday of a goat-headed, winged creature called Baphomet during a First Amendment rally at the Arkansas State Capitol to protest a Ten Commandments monument already on the Capitol grounds.

With Satanists, atheists and Christians among those in attendance, several speakers called for the removal of the Ten Commandments monument or for state government officials to install Baphomet as well. The Satanic Temple said the Ten Commandments monument violates constitutional freedom of religion rights and that installation of their statue will demonstrate religious tolerance.

Satanic Arkansas cofounder Ivy Forrester, who helped organize the rally, said "if you're going to have one religious monument up then it should be open to others, and if you don't agree with that then let's just not have any at all."

The statue of Baphomet, who is seated and accompanied by two smiling children, can't be installed under a 2017 law that requires legislative sponsorship for consideration of any monument.

The Satanic Temple has said it will sue the state, claiming religious discrimination. But when the Satanic Temple tried to join a case the ACLU had already brought against the state, the ACLU asked the court to bar the intervention. A judge has not yet ruled whether the Satanic Temple can join the case.

The Ten Commandments monument was sponsored by Republican Sen. Jason Rapert and installed quietly in 2017. Less than 24 hours after its installation, a man drove his car into the monument, smashing it to pieces. The same man also destroyed a Ten Commandments monument outside of Oklahoma's state Capitol. The Satanic Temple had originally tried to install its Baphomet statue there, but Oklahoma's Supreme Court ruled the Ten Commandments monument was unconstitutional and it was taken down. The Satanic Temple then suspended its Oklahoma campaign.

In an online statement, Rapert said he respected the protesters' First Amendment rights, but also called them "extremists" and said "it will be a very cold day in hell before an offensive statue will be forced upon us to be permanently erected on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol."

About 150 people attended the rally, which had a substantial police presence. A smaller group of counter-protesters holding signs with Bible verses stood quietly nearby, occasionally singing Christian songs.

The rally was peaceful. One speaker — a Christian minister — was interrupted by a yelling counter-protester, but police escorted the man who was holding a large wooden stick away from the stage.

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