

Psychedelism: Dionysus Reborn

Theodore Lidz and Albert Rothenberg*

RECENTLY, one of the organizers of the program of the League for Spiritual Discovery was quoted as saying, "We want to turn on as many people as possible. We want to turn them on to be more alive, more aware, more full of love and joy. Tim is the most beautiful human being. He has such innocence, such pure, joyous love, it can be done anywhere. . . ."¹ The agent through which the turn-on is accomplished is d-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25). Marihuana also has been used for the same purpose. "Tim" refers to Dr. Timothy Leary, formerly an outstanding psychologist and now the central figure in the programs of the League. The use of LSD and marihuana by this League is, of course, not unique. Ingestion of psychedelic or "mind-expanding" drugs has become fairly widespread in this country in recent years, particularly among young people. Hardly a day passes without some reference to this problem in the popular and professional newspapers and periodicals. A dazzling array of medical, legal, ethical, and social issues has been stirred up. In their midst, the League for Spiritual Discovery has emerged as a religious movement advocating ritual use of the drugs. When questioned directly, the leaders of this movement do not deny its religious orientation. As a religious movement utilizing drug ingestion, the League for Spiritual Discovery is not really new. It resembles, in highly sophisticated form, the major religion of the American Plains Indians, The Native American Church. Peyote, the drug ingested in ceremonies of this church has been used by members of the League and other drug takers and has similar effects to those produced by LSD.² The idea to organize the League seems to have been based partly on the successful existence of a church emphasizing drug ingestion in this country. As a development in modern Western culture, however, the League for Spiritual Discovery has a great deal in common with a major religious movement in early Western civilization, the Dionysian cult.

In view of the intensity of the LSD experience, the decline of traditional religions, and the turmoil in the world today, it is no surprise that a psychedelic religion has developed. Prior to the advent of LSD, there had been great interest in Eastern religions in this country, particularly Zen Buddhism and others which emphasized attention to inner psychological states. Indeed, it

* Dr. Lidz (M.D. Columbia Univ. 36) is Chairman, Department of Psychiatry, Yale University. Dr. Rothenberg (M.D. Tufts Univ. 56) is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Yale University, and Associate in Psychiatry, Yale-New Haven Hospital.

† This investigation was supported in part by a Public Health Service Research Scientist Award to Dr. Lidz and a Research Scientist Development Award, Number MH 23-621, to Dr. Rothenberg.

¹ Elenore Lester, "Taking a Trip with Leary," *New York Times*, December 4, 1966; Section V, p. 5.

² See R. E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*; New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966; pp. 36-66.

is fair to generalize that an interest in inner experience has been characteristic of Western society in this century, particularly since the Second World War. Speaking broadly, this interest seems to have resulted from the increased understanding of inner experience provided by the psychological sciences combined with a reaction to mechanization and technology and a general disillusionment about the certainty and reliability of the external world.

In order to demonstrate the similarities between the League for Spiritual Discovery and the Dionysian cult it is necessary to describe the worship of Dionysus in some detail.

THE WORSHIP OF DIONYSUS

According to ancient Greek legend, Dionysus was the youngest of the twelve Olympian gods. He was the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes. According to a common version of the myth, Hera, Zeus's wife, became jealous, and prior to Dionysus' birth, she approached the pregnant Semele in the disguise of an old neighbor. She advised Semele to ask her lover to reveal himself to her in his natural form; otherwise Semele could not be certain that the father of her unborn child was not a monster. If her lover refused, Hera added, Semele should deny him further access to her bed. Accordingly, Semele asked Zeus to reveal himself and when he refused she followed Hera's advice, making Zeus intensely angry. He appeared to her in the form of thunder and lightening and she was burned to death. Miraculously, the unborn Dionysus was saved by the god Hermes, who plucked him from Semele's womb and sewed him up inside Zeus's thigh. There, Dionysus matured for another three months and was delivered, the Twice Born. However, Hera ordered the Titans to seize the baby, tear him to shreds, and boil the parts in a caldron. A pomegranate tree sprouted from the ground where his blood had fallen and the pomegranate

later became one of the symbols associated with Dionysian worship. Despite the completeness of his destruction, Dionysus was again rescued: This time his grandmother, Rhea, the earth goddess, reconstituted and resurrected him. Thus, he became known as the god of the double door, the god who died and was resurrected twice.

Although born of a mortal woman, Dionysus was elevated to the circle of the ruling gods. He was worshipped according to an elaborate ritual which included the achievement of ecstasy through drinking wine. Indeed, Dionysus supposedly created wine and spread viniculture throughout the ancient Western world. Details of the Dionysian ritual or Bacchanal varied according to the cult, but certain features remained essentially constant. A goal of the ritual was to achieve a state of abandon, to relinquish rational thinking and attain, to use Plato's term, a kind of "madness." Ordinarily, the state of mind was stimulated by abandoned bodily movement such as ecstatic mountain dancing, as well as copious wine drinking, and at least one cult, the cult of the Maenads, also chewed on ivy leaves.³ In some groups, human sacrifice was incorporated into the ritual, particularly the act of rending a body asunder. Such violence was carried out in a state of abandon and was by no means considered inconsistent with the basic orientation of the worship. To the ancients, Dionysus was a god of joy, a joy which meant freedom from all restraint.

The call of Dionysus was very strong. His followers, particularly the Maenads, left their homes and flocked to the mountains. Again and again, it is recounted that members of the cult left the humdrum routine of their daily lives to find Dionysus in the wilderness and dance through the night. "Soon the whole world will dance when Bromios [Dionysus] leads his throngs into the mountains. Into the mountains where

³The Greeks attributed a sense of expansiveness of the mind to the chewing of ivy leaves. See G. Hegi, *Illustrierte Flora Von Mitteleuropa*, Vol. 5, 2; Munich, 1936; p. 294ff.

the women flock, driven from the shuttle and the loom by the goad of Dionysus."⁴

Certain other features of the Dionysian ritual are worth emphasizing. Plato first distinguished four kinds of madness, by which he meant some kind of divine inspiration rather than insanity. Among the four types, he distinguished between prophetic madness, whose patron god was Apollo, and ritual madness, whose patron was Dionysus. Nietzsche developed Plato's original distinction into a concept which contrasted Apollonian and Dionysian forces or principles: Apollonian meant rational and Dionysian meant essentially irrational and demonic. E. R. Dodds has argued that Nietzsche's antithesis between the two principles did not reflect the actual difference between Dionysian and Apollonian worship in the Archaic Age.⁵ Dodds considers the distinction to lie in the different social functions of these forms of worship. For one thing, the worship of Dionysus was more democratic, with Dionysian joys accessible to all, including slaves. His worship could be accomplished through the simple ingestion of alcohol whereas the worship of Apollo required access to the oracle at Delphi, available only to the wealthy. Dodds has suggested other social functions of Dionysian worship, one of which we shall mention later.

Another important feature of Dionysian madness was its eventual association with artistic inspiration. Dionysus, the Master of Illusions, became the god of the theater in the sixth century B.C. The earliest Greek theater consisted of a chorus dressed in goat skins singing the tales of Dionysus' adventures. The notion of his association with poetry has persisted to the present day in the idea of the "frenzied poet." Nietzsche, in fact, particularly related his Dionysian principle to poetry.

Dionysian worship seems to have been a culminating development in ancient Greek religion. Not only was Dionysus the youngest of the Greek gods, but also he was the last to ascend to Olympus. Many of his characteristics paralleled those of Jesus Christ, and he seems to represent a crucial aspect of Greek tradition which blended with Hebrew tradition in the development of Christianity. Dionysus was the only one of the Greek Olympian gods who was born from the union of Zeus with a mortal woman. Unlike the other gods, he was a proselytizer. According to mythology, it was necessary for him to travel around most of the known boundaries of the ancient world in order to spread his religion and he was resisted. Euripedes' play, *The Bacchae*,⁶ which is based on the Dionysian legend, emphasizes the nature of his birth and the great opposition Dionysus encountered in trying to assert his religion. In that play, Dionysus refers to himself as the "son of God," an expression used by no other gods in the Greek drama. In an episode similar to Jesus' opposition to the power and formalism of the Hebrew priesthood, Dionysus is depicted as opposing the power of the King of Thebes. He stands before the king and is ordered into custody, as was Jesus before the procurator of Judea.

Other elements of the Christ story are also present. Dionysus died and was resurrected twice. According to Frazer, death and rebirth was characteristic of ancient gods who were associated with agriculture, and resurrection was symbolic of the annual advent of spring after winter.⁷ In this respect, both Dionysus and Christ are similar to the earlier Near Eastern gods, Tammuz and Adonis. However, certain details of the Dionysian epic and ritual are more closely analogous to those of the Christian epic and ritual than to the ac-

⁴ Word in bracket ours. Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*; Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press, 1965; p. 133.

⁵ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*; Berkeley, Univ. of Calif. Press, 1964; see especially pp. 68-69.

⁶ Gilbert Murray, translator; in *The Complete Greek Drama*, by Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr.; New York, Random House, 1938; pp. 227-288.

⁷ James G. Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, edited by T. H. Gaster; New York, Criterion, 1959.

counts of the earlier gods. Some time after Dionysus ascended to Olympus, he rescued the shade of his dead mother from Hades and placed her in heaven among the stars, anticipating the assumption of Mary, Mother of Jesus, by several centuries. Without stretching the analogy too far, it also seems reasonable to suggest that the drinking of wine in the Christian Communion may, in addition to its roots in the Hebrew sacramental use of wine, have some relationship to Dionysus, the wine-god. There also seems to be a parallel between Christ's wounds and the pomegranate which sprouted from Dionysus' blood; the pomegranate, as Robert Graves has pointed out, is a fruit which splits open like a wound and shows the red seeds inside. Furthermore, it symbolized death and the promise of resurrection.⁸

The similarity between Dionysus and Christ suggests that Dionysian worship has had an indirect impact on Western tradition. Christianity itself could not be characterized as an ecstasy cult, but the emphasis on passion, joy, and particularly the confessional as a purgative has much in common with the Dionysian concept. As a late development in Greek religion, Dionysian worship seems to represent a shift from a belief in anthropomorphic gods who influenced events of the world and to whom devotees directed libations and prayers, to a god who blended that orientation with diffuse mystical experiences and attention to inner psychological states. The advent of Christianity also represented a shift toward greater mysticism and a greater focus on inner feelings than was present in the religion of the Hebrews at the time. Although Dionysus was not specifically a messiah he is clearly an epiphanic god, who comes and reappears⁹ and provides a sense of deliverance. Actually, the worship of Diony-

sus seems to have developed at a crucial transition point in Western civilization. Dodds, in his brilliant exploration of the psychosocial and historical roots of this worship, makes the following observation:

The joys of Dionysus had an extremely wide range, from the simple pleasures of the country bumpkin, dancing a jig on greased wineskins, to the . . . ecstatic bacchanal. At both levels, and at all the levels between, he is Lycias, "The Liberator"—the god who by very simple means, or other means, not so simple, enables you for a short time to *stop being yourself*, and thereby sets you free. That was, I think, the main secret of his appeal to the Archaic Age: not only because life in that age was often a thing to escape from, but more specifically because the individual, as the modern world knows him, began in that age to emerge for the first time from the old solidarity of the family, and found the unfamiliar burden of individual responsibility hard to bear. Dionysus could lift it from him. For Dionysus was the Master of Magical Illusions, who could make a vine grow out of a ship's plank and in general enable his votaries to see the world as the world's not. As the Scythians in Herodotus put it, "Dionysus leads people on to behave madly"—which could mean anything from "letting yourself go" to becoming "possessed." The aim of his cult was *ecstasis*—which again could mean anything from "taking you out of yourself" to a profound alteration of personality. And its psychological function was to satisfy and relieve the impulse to reject responsibility, an impulse which exists in all of us and can become under certain social conditions an irresistible craving.¹⁰

Dodds' analysis provides a useful hypothesis for understanding the development of the current psychedelic ecstasy cult in the United States. It is commonplace knowledge today that modern American society is undergoing an important transition, a transition in which, particularly, the solidarity of the family has been sharply weakened.¹¹ The resulting emphasis on indi-

that Orpheus and Dionysus were identical and that the Orphic and Dionysian rituals overlapped. See especially Robert Eisler, *Orpheus—The Fisher*; London, J. M. Watkins, 1921.

⁸ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Vol. 1; Baltimore, Penguin, 1964; p. 110.

⁹ For a fuller discussion of Dionysus as a god of epiphany see Otto, in footnote 4; p. 79ff. Many writers have pointed out the similarities between Orpheus and the Orphic ritual and Christ and the Christian ritual. There is reason to believe

¹⁰ See Talcott Parsons, "The Stability of the American Family System," and Albert N. Cousins, "The Failure of Solidarity," in *A Modern Introduction to the Family*, edited by Norman W. Bell and Ezra F. Vogel; Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1960.

¹¹ See footnote 5; pp. 76-77.

vidual responsibility is hard to bear and conditions are ripe for a cult that helps one get out of oneself—that is, out of the conscious self. His analysis does not specifically make clear whether the conditions under which the Dionysian cult developed paralleled the later development of messianic Christianity. Many studies have indicated, however, that messianic religions have developed in circumstances where major cultural values have changed. It would appear that societies in which there is a struggle with the onerous burden of individual responsibility plus a need to assert new values characteristically turn to a messiah or savior to reduce the strain. This may also be true of the modern psychedelic cult. Before developing the connections between the Dionysian religion and the modern ritual LSD and marihuana cult further, however, it is of interest to look specifically at another ecstasy cult, The Native American Church. This church developed in a group which had already embraced Christianity to a large extent and represents an attempt to combine that religion with earlier tribal practices and beliefs.

THE NATIVE AMERICAN CHURCH

The Native American Church is the formal and legal name of a religious movement among the American Plains Indians which practices the ritual use of the drug peyote. LSD-25 is an analogue of mescaline, one of the chemical factors in peyote. The church was first organized officially in 1914 under the name "First-born Church of Christ" and some time after that the name was changed to the present one. The ritual use of peyote among the Plains Indians was actually antedated by many centuries by its ritual use in Mexico. Ritual peyotism or peyote eating is known to have existed in pre-Columbian times among the Aztecs and other tribes in Mexico, although the exact time of its inception is not known. The widespread introduction of peyotism among the Plains Indians of the United States

seems to have occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Ingestion of peyote produces visual hallucinations—particularly color visions—and kinesthetic, olfactory and auditory derangements. Typically, before these occur there is an exhilarating effect of the drug which tends to alleviate feelings of hunger and thirst and is thought to give courage in war. Among some groups the exhilaration is expressed by dancing. Gross behavioral changes also occur in some tribes, which are described as a "fit of madness." A man may rush backward and forward, trying to kill people and tearing his clothes to pieces. This active state merges into a phase of depression and visions in which the sharp images of color, lights, sounds, and organized hallucinations occur.

The standard ritual for peyote use is an all-night meeting in a tepee around a crescent-shaped earthen mound and a ceremonially built fire. After the smoking of cigars, corn shucks, or oak-leaf cigarettes and special purifying ceremonies, the peyote is eaten in the form of "buttons" or drunk as "tea." Then, a special drum, gourd rattle, and carved staff are passed around, while each person sings four special "peyote songs." At midnight and dawn, water is brought and there is a "baptism" or curing rite. In the morning, the rite is followed by a ritual breakfast of parched corn, fruit, and boneless meat. Among many tribes, preaching or a moral lecture by the leader and a confession of sins by the participants also sometimes occurs during the morning.

The Christian elements in the ritual are contained in modified passages from Christian hymns within the "peyote songs," the baptism, the confession, and the ritual breakfast. Many of these elements developed out of the widespread adherence to the white man's Christianity at the time of the development of the peyote cults among the Plains Indians, but, in many cases, they developed out of a self-conscious attempt to legitimize the religion in the

white man's eyes. Many Christians have been outraged, then and now, at what they have felt was slothful indulgence in peyote visions. Jonathan Koshiway, one of the most important figures in the development of The Native American Church, was actually a student of white Protestantism and specifically tried to create a rapprochement between it and the old native religion of his childhood. Significantly, along with various other similarities between the cult and Christianity, he stressed that the taking of peyote in both the dry state as "buttons" and the liquid state as "tea" was similar to the drinking of wine and tasting of the wafer during the Christian Communion.

In the light of the similarity between peyotism and the early Dionysian cult with respect to an ecstasy orientation, it is interesting to note the successful blending of Christianity into the peyote ritual. Although this blending was self-consciously achieved, it underscores the earlier parallels between Dionysian worship and Christianity. Again, passion, joy, and alleviation of guilt seem to be important psychological functions of peyotism. Furthermore, the spread of peyotism among the Plains Indians and the development of The Native American Church seems, like the Dionysian cult, to have occurred at a time of crucial cultural transition. LaBarre, a leading authority on peyotism, has accounted for its diffusion as follows:

The expressed intention of Indian policy of the period was the deculturation of the natives, to be obtained by sending the children to white schools, away from the influence of tribal life. But this policy prepared the way for peyotism in several ways: it weakened the tradition of the older tribal religions without basically altering typical Plains religious attitudes, and multiplied friendly contacts between members of different tribes. Friendships made as schoolboys account for considerable visiting and re-visiting from tribe to tribe, and nearly ideal conditions for the diffusion of the cult were established. When Eagle Flying Above (Pawnee) got peyote from White Eyes (Arapaho) the sign language was the vehicle used, but in modern times the use of

English as a lingua Franca is an enabling factor of great importance in the diffusion of the cult. Thus, ironically, the intended modes of deculturizing the Indians have contributed preeminently to the reinvigoration of a basically aboriginal religion.¹²

Although LaBarre emphasizes the weakening of older religions and the opportunities for diffusion brought about by the deculturation, it seems apparent that the general change in cultural values and the breakdown of family solidarity specifically at that time must have been factors in the development of the cult. Schoolboys away from the influence of family and tribe must have felt the new burden of individual responsibility particularly stressful and, like the Greeks in the Archaic Age, sought a means of escaping from the self. As for a messiah, peyotism has so far adopted the ready-made messiah of Christianity. However, the full story of this cult has not yet been told and the development of a new messiah may yet occur.

PSYCHEDELISM

The history of the interest in the effects of ingestion of LSD is generally well known. It first caught the attention of psychiatric and psychological researchers because of its ability to produce hallucinations and other behavioral aberrations which resembled the symptoms of psychosis. These effects earned LSD the designation "psychotomimetic." Since the first research in the early 1950's, LSD research has expanded to include attempts at elucidating chemical properties of the brain, studies of the effects of LSD in therapy, and general exploration of altered states of consciousness.¹³ From the point of view of psychological and psychiatric research in general, Mogar has pointed out that the widespread interest in LSD and other psychedelic drugs has gone hand in hand with a broader interest in altered states of

¹² Weston LaBarre, *The Peyote Cult*; Hamden, Conn., Shoe String Press, 1959; p. 113.

¹³ Robert E. Mogar, "Current Status and Future Trends in Psychedelic (LSD) Research," *J. Humanistic Psychol.* (1965) 5:147-166. See also footnote 2.

consciousness and internal processes. In recent years, researchers have increasingly turned to the examination of such processes as dream activity, creativity, and responses to sensory deprivation and hypnosis. A whole branch of psychology, called "humanistic psychology," has developed which pays particular attention to these processes. Mogar has described this development as the emergence of a "third force" in American psychology.¹⁴ He sees this "third force" as an alternative to the two previously dominant approaches of behaviorism and psychoanalysis, and describes it as an emphasis on personal growth and greater realization of human potentialities. Aside from this research emphasis, be it a "third force" or not, the interest in psychedelic drugs of Timothy Leary and his followers is more appropriately compared to religious movements than to approaches to psychology. Although Leary at first used LSD for research purposes, early in his work he (along with Richard Alpert) became interested in the "mind expansion" properties of the drug and its potentialities for producing a type of mystical experience. The present ritual use of LSD and marihuana is an extension of that early interest.

As a ritual drug cult, Leary's group seems to represent a direct resurrection of Dionysian worship. LSD and marihuana are ingested to produce heightened emotional experiences and an increased sense of awareness. Although there is no mountain dancing or violence in the altered state, the basic goal is an ecstatic spiritual experience. Leary's words to his participants or celebrants have been quoted as follows:

You are about to participate in a religious celebration. . . . all religions have their sacrament. . . . ours is LSD. . . . once you have taken that sacrament you are out of your mind and you come to your senses. . . . you drift into cellular timelessness. . . . men have always used chemistry to deepen spiritual experience.¹⁵

The phrase "you are out of your

mind and you come to your senses" draws a particular parallel to Dionysian abandon. In fact, Leary's reference, "men have always used chemistry," suggests that he has been specifically aware of a connection to the Dionysian use of alcohol.¹⁶ His use of the phrase "out of your mind" is not meant to refer to madness in the sense of actual psychosis. Indeed, the medical fact that LSD can precipitate psychosis is anathema to this group. The phrase is used in a very similar sense to Plato's original use of the term "madness," a state in which a person is outside himself. In distinction to Plato, however, Leary has not said that this state is divinely induced.

Another similarity between Dionysian worship and the LSD cult is the belief that LSD experiences enhance creativity. To date, there has been no evidence that such a claim is valid but the belief itself recalls Dionysus' position as god of the theater,¹⁷ Plato's description of creativity as a form of "madness," and Nietzsche's exposition of the Dionysian principle in art.

Like Dionysian worship, the LSD ritual is eminently democratic. Meetings are open to everyone and the experience is available to anyone by simple ingestion of the drugs. Furthermore, agitation to remove legal restrictions on LSD and marihuana has attempted to cast the issue into the civil rights arena. It has been asserted that legal suppression of the use of these drugs is

¹⁶ The term "Dionysian" is in common intellectual parlance and it is likely that Leary himself and other sophisticated observers of the "drug scene" have applied it to this movement. Most users of the term, however, have in mind Nietzsche's limited specification of "irrational" or "frenzied" and are unaware of the extensive parallels indicated here.

¹⁷ Leary's celebrations are highly theatrical. He utilizes lighting effects and sequences of performances and charges admission. Indeed, the *New York Times* reporter cited in footnote 1 reviewed the celebration almost entirely as a dramatic performance. The association between religion and theater is not new, as Leary himself has said, and has long been exploited by evangelists. Interestingly, the Dionysian influence on theater is commemorated in the use of the word "tragedy," which originally meant "goat song," the goat being one of Dionysus' animal representations. Tragedy is, of course, the serious and potentially moral aspect of drama and, in this sense, closely allied to religion.

¹⁴ See Mogar in footnote 13.

¹⁵ See footnote 1.

an abrogation of freedom similar to the suppression and oppression of minority groups. To a certain extent, the democratic aspect of the psychedelic movement has merged with a rebellious opposition to the status quo. Leary is fond of characterizing his enemy as the "middle-aged middle class" although he himself is over forty. Dionysus was opposed by royalty, the King of Thebes and the King of Damascus among others, and essentially the opposition to him also represented the older, more conservative elements in the countries he visited.

In drawing a parallel between the modern psychedelic ritual and Dionysian worship, we are stressing the continuity of a trend within a specific cultural context, Western civilization. It is apparent, however, that all three ecstasy cults we have discussed have a great deal in common. Of particular interest is the fact that psychedelism, peyotism, and the worship of Dionysus all have a strong therapeutic orientation. To a greater or lesser degree, all of these cults have claimed to cure various physical, emotional, or spiritual ills. This orientation is most explicit in peyotism, where the medicinal or doctoring function of the ritual antedated its religious aspect. Although the advocates of peyotism have claimed that all types of diseases are cured, it is immediately apparent to the sophisticated observer that these "diseases" represent various forms of psychopathology. As Dodds has pointed out, the curing aspect of the Dionysian ritual became manifest in the later cult of the Corybantes, which offered a specific treatment for madness.

The therapeutic claim of psychedelism has found some basis in research done with LSD in psychotherapy. The extravagant claims that one dose of LSD cures such "ills" as homosexuality, however, are in marked contrast to the experimental findings that small doses of LSD under carefully controlled psychotherapeutic conditions may hasten the development of insight. Of particu-

lar interest is the fact that LSD may be especially useful in the treatment of alcoholism. Peyote also seems to be effective against this condition.¹⁸ Again, the assertions of proponents of psychedelism and peyotism that the drugs themselves cure alcoholism seem excessive. However, the notion itself is of interest in the light of the similarity of these cults to Dionysian worship. It is almost as if these modern cults are trying to supplant alcohol in the tradition of ecstasy through an ingestant begun in the Dionysian ritual.

In the light of the many similarities, it is probable that all three ritual ecstasy cults have similar social and psychological functions. Although little information is available about the natural history of ecstasy cults, it has already been pointed out that all three seem to have developed at a time of breakdown of family solidarity and other major cultural changes, when the task of developing an identity as an individual has been intensified. All seem to allow an escape from the burden of individual responsibility. They provide a means for getting out of the self, to use Dodds' term, and they do so in a group setting. The importance of the group is a factor which indicates another common feature of these ecstatic rituals, a feature which anthropologists have pointed out as characteristic of religious movements, especially primitive ones: *They reject many cultural values but at the same time affirm basic underlying values.* For example, Leary rejects the American emphasis on achievement and individual responsibility but he affirms democratic values and the virtues of belonging to a group; interestingly, he also implicitly emphasizes the enhancement of the individual. The psychedelic experience is presented as self-knowledge par excellence. One experiences and explores the *inner reaches of the self*—areas not usually available to consciousness; Leary has even claimed that he has reexperienced his own individual

¹⁸ See footnote 2; p. 44.

genealogy. In the quotation presented earlier he refers to "cellular timelessness." In another place, he has claimed to have experienced himself as a simple cellular organism before evolution. Furthermore, he has told his celebrants, "... you are God within your body; I am God within my body."¹⁹ For Leary and other advocates of psychedelism there is no assumption that the experience may be of external or divine origin; it occurs from within the individual's own potentialities. In this way, psychedelism affirms the basic individualistic orientation of Western culture while at the same time providing an escape from individual responsibility.

If Dodds is correct, Dionysian worship also rejected cultural values while affirming an underlying adherence to a view of life as irrational, with human beings at the mercy of fate and the gods. From the first this ecstasy cult was a devotion to a god, a god who advocated joy but could also be tempestuous and violent. Peyotism also affirmed certain cultural values and the dominant Christian belief, and rejected other values and some aspects of Christianity.

The relationship between Dionysus and Christ is of particular interest for the understanding of the modern psychedelic movement. For one thing, the psychedelic experience has itself been described as a kind of death and rebirth. Leary's first "celebration" was entitled "Death of the Mind," and during it he said, "You've got to die in order to live." To a certain extent, this is a metaphorical description of the feeling of throwing off old values and constraints and reconstituting the personality. On another level, it seems to be an internalization of the Christ symbol with its meanings of joy through suffering and absolution of sin through death. Also, it seems apparent that Leary himself has begun to take on some of the features of a religious

messiah. His dismissal from Harvard has given him an image as a martyr, and the description of him cited initially is strongly reminiscent of a description of Christ himself. Certainly the social upheaval today and the confusion of most young people provides a fertile ground for the rise of a messiah.

LSD and marihuana are used to a large extent by late adolescents and young adults who are at the time of life when it is necessary to find an identity, a capacity to emerge from the family and become an individual in one's own right. Using LSD they turn their backs upon learning through experience, becoming someone by integrating various identifications, finding one's way into life by utilizing knowledge; instead they seek to gain insight and understanding of their world and themselves through transcendent experience. They alter their states of consciousness and give up being responsible for themselves and directing their own lives. An experience comes to them simply as a result of their taking a drug, and it comes as a passive experience rather than through striving and learning.

One of the attractions of LSD and marihuana groups seems to be the opportunities they provide for joining together with others in an intimate way. Boundaries between the self and another are broken down by the drug or by other ritualistic experiences of music and dance. The youth seems to be turning his back on his parents' ways of stressing competitiveness and individual achievement, and to be trying to find himself through becoming a member of a collectivity, particularly a collectivity in which individual competitive striving is frowned upon and in which recognition and even a knowledge of God can be gained simply through participating in the ritual and using the drug.

One of the critical problems confronting youth today is the need to be themselves after an unusually long period of dependency upon the family in order to prepare for the future in a very com-

¹⁹ Michael O'Connell, "The British Scene," *Medical World News*, February 17, 1967; p. 73.

plicated world, a world in which minimal reliance can be placed upon following in the path established by one's predecessors. To get somewhere today, one must learn a great deal, use his intelligence, and learn relatively complicated skills. Seldom before in history has there been less reliance upon simply assimilating the ways of living and earning a living according to a family pattern. Erikson's concept of identity crisis and its exposition of problems of identity formation have been of overriding importance in psychiatric thinking within the past twenty years partly because achieving an identity as an individual independent of one's family has mounted to a major task during the past few decades. The child must grow up not only with the expectation that he will leave his family of origin but also with the expectation that he will relinquish most of the bonds to his parents and lose their guidance after he reaches adulthood.²⁰ Often he feels that he must find a very different way of life from that which his parents followed, and to a young person with this dilemma Timothy Leary can seem a virtual messiah.

The call of the psychedelic ritual seems as strong as or stronger than that of Dionysus. Like the Maenads,

members of the psychedelic cult have left their homes and renounced their previous lives. Many psychedelic followers have gone to San Francisco, where they have developed communities devoted to the achievement of mind expansion. Particularly, they have turned their backs on concern with success and any kind of material achievement. They earn only enough to enable them to survive, and gladly help to support friends. They renounce concern for the future and exult in the here and now.

Timothy Leary's paean to LSD is very tempting and very alluring. It seems to say: You do not need to study and to learn; you do not have to search after knowledge and truth; you do not have to strive to try to find a way and seek to become a success in the world. These are all illusions of the older generation and you have been brought up according to false standards. All you need do is join our circle, pick up the rhythm, take the drug, and you will find the truth. The ultimate knowledge is within yourself and you will find an ecstasy in which there are no longer any boundaries between you and others. There is no individuality; you will find yourself in losing yourself.

²⁰ See Theodore Lidz, *The Family and Human Adaptation*; New York, Internat. Univ. Press, 1963.

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY
YALE UNIVERSITY
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06519