

Symposium: "Drugs, Psychedelic and Narcotic"

Sacramental Aspects of Drug Usage*

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INTRODUCTION

"Sacrament," as found in cultural anthropology and comparative religion is a universal need, rite, and experience—of unity (communion) with the deep mystery of existence, the world of ultimate reality (God, Ground of Being, Ultimate Absolute, Center, *Mysterium Tremendum*, the Holy) of which man is only occasionally conscious and feels precariously connected. It fulfills man's craving for atonement (at-one-ment), a bridging of the chasm which is original sin (alienation, expulsion from harmony with nature). This communion, this reintegration after fragmentation, this covenant and communal life with God, has been variously effected—by Christian agape meals, by Dionysian orgies, by sacrificial meals, etc. One common phenomenon in world religions has been the use of drugs (psychedelic substances) to obtain this end. The spectrum reaches from prehistoric Hindu soma or Aztec mushroom to modern-day mescaline, psilocybin, and LSD²⁵. The crucial difference between historic cultic uses and present psychedelic phenomena lies in the seriousness of motives, communal dimensions, exacting rites, cautions, and custody of the substances (Eleusinian mysteries). However, the psychedelic religious enthusiasts (Huxley, Watts, Leary) claim mystic phenomena, religious awakening, God-experience, and salvation-for-the-many. This is what,

*This paper was presented at: "Drugs, Psychedelic and Narcotic" Mendicino State Hospital, Talmadge, California, University of California, San Francisco Medical Center, Continuing Education in Health Sciences.

they point out, the churches have failed to provide. Individual researchers and control-group experimenters have attempted to document this. Conclusive evaluation of evidence is hardly possible at this time, but the phenomenon raises some challenging questions: re the nature of God (personal? transcendent?), the nature of man (immortal? individual? morally enjoined?), and the nature of institutional religion (competent? relevant?). At the very least, this challenge forces renewal of dulled traditions, clarification of religious insights. At most it may offer genuine religious renewal of as yet undetermined dimensions.

A few days ago, during semester examination period, I helped deliver to the college psychiatrist a student who was convinced that he was the second coming of Christ, who could anticipate news events and send out his own radio-like waves. Investigation revealed not only that the young man had suffered a "breakdown" some years before but that he had lately been on "acid." The incident was just another in a series to which I have been a helpless witness during the last four years—in which students and young friends have been caught in a drug vortex which leaves them confused, crippled, and sometimes mentally deteriorated.

I come, therefore, in sympathy with whatever hesitations my fellow panelists or my audience may have concerning drug usage and this caution and hesitation remains in back of my mind through whatever I have to say about my subject: "SACRAMENTAL ASPECTS OF DRUG USAGE."

The credentials with which I come are quite different from those of the other panelists. I am a college English professor who happens to have done specialized work in cultural anthropology, comparative religions, and in the sacramental aspects of the archetype and myth—a study initiated in preparation for my doctoral dissertation on the verse narratives of Robinson Jeffers—work completed at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1965.

I am also a Catholic priest (although a somewhat disaffiliated one at present) with advanced degrees in philosophy and theology, and a background in pastoral counselling.

As a priest, of course, I have been intimately involved in the concept and reality of sacrament. As a theologian in the ecumenical age, I am equally dedicated to a wide sensitivity concerning the religious experience all men hold in common and to the shared Christian heritage of mysticism so much of which is beyond the realm of sectarian differences.

As a lifelong admirer of the great mystic-activist, Ignatius of Loyola, I bring a concern for the universal availability of mystic experience to the common man, for the imperative that mysticism validate itself in love for men, and for the universal need to grasp the depth and height and breadth of the sacramental world we live in.

As a confessor-counsellor for the last ten years (and neighbor of San Francisco's Haight Ashbury district for three), I have been witness to the ideals, insights, and overview of a youthful generation which is accustomed to live in a world much larger than (not only different from) the one I was brought up in. And, despite the aforementioned reservations, I must say I find myself confronted time after time with testimonials of contemporary religious experience and sacramental "communion" which are confounding to me and would certainly be abhorrent to my mentors. It is to these testimonials (as also to the testimonials immemorial in the history of man) attesting to the validity of drug-induced religious experience that I turn our attention in this paper.

The field is so new, so uncharted, and so uncategorized that it goes without saying that my thoughts are mostly tentative—in fact they are intended mostly as questions.

We should begin with definitions, a procedure made hazardous because of the many viewpoints from which the concepts and terminology come. For a start, I will say something about "sacrament", "religious experience", and "mystical union"—looking at them separately although they will at times be almost interchangeable in these considerations.

The Christian sees sacrament as a sign of God's continuing covenant with his people in life and history transformed in Jesus. *The New (Dutch) Catechism* describes sacrament in terms of outward signs or rites celebrating key points in man's existence, which bring redemption, as God divinizes men in them [1]. Rahner describes these sacral events as final, definitive, victorious pledges of righteousness in Christ coming at decisive moments of each person's (and each community's) salvation history [2]. Following a classical sevenfold division, Rahner identifies these moments as: initiation into the body of God's people (Baptism), mission to the world (Confirmation), reconciliation with God and His people (Penance), anamnestic presence in the banquet celebrating unity (Eucharist), prayer and unction when mortality presses (Anointing), transmission of office and charism (Orders), and wedded love subsumed into Christ's love (Matrimony).

But certainly "sacrament" need not be limited to such sectarian, particularized definitions. The experience of sacrament transcends cultures, religions, races, and civilizations. One need only turn to a work such as

Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* [3] to see that there are elements of human life-experience which are instinctively recognized as holy, as touching Otto's "*mysterium tremendum*," [4] the East's "Ultimate Absolute," Tillich's "Ground of Being"—bringing an awefulness, overpoweringness, an immense energy and urgency. It is understood to touch and heal the wound described by Fromm in his *Art of Loving* as that separateness and aloneness which man suffers as man and which arouses existential anxiety [5]. Instinctively and incessantly, man seeks to bridge the gap, to be united with the core of reality, with the holy, with the whole; this is the experience of sacrament.

The sacramental experience finds the world primordially young and organically whole—a vision lost through successive alienations in time, guilt, and abstraction. It is this world that Faulkner deals with in his novella, *The Bear*: the mysterious, incomprehensible, and holy realm which must be reached by rites of initiation and ordeals of courage and integrity, successively stripping away the veils. It is the world that overwhelms Robinson Jeffers on his Carmel coast and makes him ashamed to be of a race of men who cluster incestuously in cities and are wilfully ignorant of the "excesses of God." The cultural anthropologist notes in man the deeply felt yearning for atonement and identifies it as the motive for the primitive rituals celebrating a common life with the "year god" (Frazer's *Golden Bough*), the corn spirit, and the scapegoat. These rituals dramatized the cycle by which life (and divinity itself) was renewed each year (Winter to Spring), a primal action which Aristotle recognizes as the origin of Greek tragedy [6].

These rites were "sacramental" in ways surprisingly parallel to Christian sacrament—signs which effected what they signified—bringing life to earth again in the resurrection of the God, with man acting as both participant and facilitator-priest. The most repulsive of primitive man's rituals, human sacrifice, is at root a desperate expression of this need for participation in the divine unity which is life at its most profound level, the victim being representative of the god who must go through death and fragmentation so that he might be reintegrated, fresh, innocent, and vigorous. Feasting on flesh of the sacrificed god (if not the flesh of a human surrogate, then that of an animal) was a vital sacramental act. The Bacchantes, therefore, who tore the goat-god into gobs of quivering flesh in an annual frenzy on their mountain, were, albeit grotesquely, expressing the need to be orgiastically and physically-metaphysically united with the deep mystery of existence from which their rational, "civilized" lives had exiled them.

"Sacramental," therefore, is a word relating man to a world of ultimate reality of which he is only occasionally conscious and feels precariously connected. It speaks of depth and intensity, transcends ordinary categories of space and time; in fact, it overturns them.

In discussions of drug experience, "sacramental" is often complemented by two other words: "religious" and "mystical"; they need examination partially because they are so similar. "Religious experience" might be viewed as the sacramental expressed in more personal terms and implying continuous duration. In Joachim Wach's analysis, it is a dynamic relationship with what is experienced as the ultimate reality, an encounter involving the integral person, mind, heart, and will: this in the most powerful, comprehensive, and shatteringly profound act of which man is capable, and issuing in an imperative to action [7].

"Mysticism," if it can be distinguished from "religious experience," is the direct apprehension of the numinous, the overwhelming experience of possession by God [8]. Mystical union differs from religious experience more in degree than in kind, the difference being carried by the word "union." According to mystical commentators, its effects are the increased ability to love, humility, and self-sacrifice. Classically its traditional grades are distinguished into prayer of quiet, full union, and spiritual marriage [9].

Some make a distinction between natural and supernatural mysticism, the latter being an experience which only a special grace makes man capable of receiving. However, the phenomenology of the state is liable to be the same (as will be seen), the difference then depending more on faith and philosophical presuppositions than on observable evidence.

Having examined the "terms," we are ready to come to grips with the thesis with which this paper is presuming to grapple: the contention of many, if not all, within the LSD cult that what has been recognized immemorially as mystical experience, is participated in during certain deep psychedelic sessions, that a LSD trip is almost inevitably a religious experience, and that the drug itself can validly preempt the category of "sacrament."

Setting aside, for the moment at least, those several "sacramental" actions and rituals of passage which celebrate situations archetypal to man (rebirth, vocation, purification, hierogamies), we will concentrate on that singular religious rite which is so central that all else is somehow only a function of it that is, the sacrament of "communion," which Christians call the "Lord's Supper." The LSD cult looks primarily to parallels with communion when it speaks of "sacrament."

Most contemporary commentators who deal with this subject, LSD and mysticism, relate the present phenomenon with an amazing history of sacramental usages involving various grains, seeds, hemps, and mushrooms in the rituals of world religions. Masters and Houston [10] connect the beginnings of Hindu religious practices with the introduction of a mysterious substance "soma," divine elixir and food, into India in 1500 B.C. by Arian invaders. The eminent authority Sampurnanand elaborates on the sacral treatment that

surrounds "soma" in an ancient cult and ritual much like the Eucharist of Christian nations. He sees it as signifying, in successively deepening stages: plant, symbol of all plants, strength and substance of all things (like Christ, the vine?), the mystical energy "prana" with which the universe functions, and, finally, the substance which is Shiva and Shakti, consciousness and will, god and god's power [11]. Smith widens the lists of sacramental substances to include hooma (hemp) of Zoroastrians, the vine of Dionysus, benzoin of Southeast Asia, Zen tea, picturi of Australian aborigines, and the mysterious "kykeon" eaten and drunk at the climactic close of the sixth day of Eleusinian mysteries [12].

Masters and Houston discuss the Aztec sacrament, recorded from Cortez's time, called *teonanacatl*, "flesh of God," a mushroom [13]. They then discuss the usages of belladonna, datura, and henbane as a spectrum of history from Delphi to the witch phenomena three centuries ago. Particular attention is given to the cactus button, peyote, a psychedelic that was used sacramentally by Aztecs and Huichols till it was banned by the Inquisition. Ironically it survived in Northern Mexico, when it was appropriated by American Indians (Apaches, Tonkawas, Comanches, and Kiowas in the 1870's) and now constitutes the central rite of the Native American Church, numbering some 225,000.

Wasson, in two fascinating studies of the mushroom cult in Mexico, traces the cultic use back through 2000 years in stone mushroom-effigies which seem to be symbols of the divinity [14]. He notes striking parallels with the mysteries of Eleusis which celebrated its rites during the season of the mushroom, the Greeks naming that fungus, "food of the gods." The Eleusinians were notorious for the reserve and secrecy with which they surrounded their rites; so much so that the exact nature of their "sacrament" is still only conjecture.

Wasson notes that when and where mushrooms were unavailable in Mexico, morning-glory seeds (of the family of LSD-25) were used in their place. In his second article, "Notes on the Present Status of *Ololiuhqui*," he widens his study to four hallucinogens: *picietl* (tobacco family), *peyotl* (cactus), *teonanacatl* (mushroom), and this *ololiuhqui* (seeds of morning-glory), psychotropic agents which were revered as keys to a knowledge withheld from men in their normal mind-states. So much did these practices of sacred-psychedelic cult parallel the formulas and rites of the Christian Mass, that the Spaniards reacted quickly with repressive measures where ever they were found out. This same scholar traces the rites, vigils, religious accessories, and Christian-pagan prayers of these underground cults up to the present day when they characteristically survive in some villages side by side with the Roman religion, the people sometimes belonging to both cults.

To further demonstrate that cults using drugs as sacrament did not grow up only in isolated places and a few cultures, Cohen fills out the geographical and historical spectrum even further with examples such as cohoba (a snuff) used for religious and communal purposes in South America, telepanthmi, used to foretell the future (and to find lost cows) on the Amazon, and ibogaine, used by Bantus in initiation rites [15].

In our own country, cultural anthropologists have observed the phenomenon of the Native American Church with some fascination, concentrating especially on its ritual, its reverence toward the peyote button (which is called Christ's flesh), and its impressive self-definition. Slotkin has done the basic work on the peyote religion [16]; Brand describes it more popularly, having been initiated into its rites as a devout spectator of the Indians' night communion ceremony [17]. With impressive seriousness these "savages" have developed their church over the last one hundred years as a countermeasure to the pressures of cultural change. Their aim has been to promote self-respect, industry, sobriety, and brotherly love—and to recover some of the myth, ritual, and identity lost since the devastating reservation-restrictions overturned their traditional ways of life. Their ceremony is sacramental both as divine banquet and as a complex of rites associated thereto, involving the totality of their lives—as they celebrate marriage, healing of the sick, laying of the dead to rest, etc. All is done in the context of a nocturnal communal meal, a sharing of the sacred peyote buttons, one of which is initially enthroned on their altar. For years the Indians have, understandably, been misinterpreted and harassed by fearful white missionaries and government officials [18] but persevere through court decisions which so far have favored them. They have provided a cue for several parallel cults which also appeal for immunity under the freedom of religion amendment. These are principally John and Louisa Aiken's "Church of the Awakening" and Timothy Leary's "League of Spiritual Discovery."

PSYCHEDELIC RELIGION: THE RENAISSANCE

What is the effect of this "sacrament," the nature of this "religious" experience and this "mysticism"? For the Indians it is a spiritual euphoria experienced in exact ritual and aimed at communal understanding, service, and self-discipline. For other Americans who seek the same kind of euphoric, supportive experience, it is commonly an individual "trip," solitary or accompanied by a "guide," sought out in sporadic sessions without identifiable ritual and with little sense of the communal dimension. It is too often entered on haphazardly, without preparation, without understanding, and out of motives which range from mere curiosity, "kicks," and devil-may-care to

spiritual and psychological desperation. For some it provides a hellish experience; for others, sporadic breakthroughs; for some it has become a way of life which, they say, offers incredible new dimensions to life and mind. The notable prophets of this new gospel ("good news") are men of no small charismatic gifts—such eminent names as Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, and Timothy Leary.

It was Aldous Huxley, reputable novelist-philosopher, who wrote the ur-Bible of the present psychedelic religious cult. In May, 1953, at the request of a friend, he took part in a California experiment with mescaline (a derivative of peyote). He recorded the resulting euphoric trip in what is now a handbook for psychedelics, *The Doors of Perception* [19].

"I saw no landscapes, no enormous spaces, no magical growth and metamorphoses of buildings, nothing remotely like a drama or a parable. The other world to which mescaline admitted me was not the world of visions: it existed out there in what I could see with my eyes open. The great change was in the realm of objective fact. What happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant.

I took my pill at eleven. An hour and a half later, I was sitting in my study, looking intently at a small glass vase. The vase contained only three flowers—a full-blown Bell of Portugal rose, shell pink with a hint at every petal's base of a hotter, flammier hue; a large magenta and cream-colored carnation; and, pale purple at the end of its broken stalk, the bold heraldic blossom of an iris. Fortuitous and provisional, the little nosegay broke all the rules of traditional good taste. At breakfast that morning I had been struck by the lively dissonance of its colors. But that was no longer the point. I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence." (pp. 16-17)

Huxley goes on:

"Istigkeit—wasn't that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? Isness. The Being of Platonic philosophy—except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea. He could never, poor fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than

what they were—a transcience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.” (pp. 17-18)

The author then expands on a point Henri Bergson had made—that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive. Each person, says Huxley, is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The brain functions to keep the individual from being overwhelmed by the mass of detail. Using a striking figure, Huxley pictures the brain as a reducing valve: It filters to a small trickle only that kind of consciousness that will help us stay alive on the surface of this particular planet. Language and philosophies elaborated through language are man’s inventions built upon this drastically reduced awareness. Of the world of word, logic, and symbol, Huxley says:

“Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born—the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people’s experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which, in the language of religion, is called this world is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed, and, as it were, petrified by language. The various other worlds with which human being erratically make contact are so many elements in the totality of the awareness belonging to Mind at Large (Huxley’s equivalent, at this point, for God).” (pp. 23-24)

This eminent writer then expands on the various by-passes to this mind-valve, so essential to our biological survival but so narrowing to our sense of reality—those spontaneously acquired by unusual individuals, poets, mystics, etc., those resulting from “spiritual exercises,” and those acquired through hypnosis or drugs.

His physiological explanation of the psychedelic process is simplistic, perhaps, and purposely mythical. Mescaline inhibits the production of enzymes regulating the supply of glucose to the brain cells; the brain, being starved, shuts down its inhibiting operation. Such an effect can be triggered also by the more traditional ascetic modes: fasting, vigils, flagellation, isolation, yoga, rhythmic song, and dance (all of which affect the body’s chemistry in parallel ways).

Huxley examines the resulting experience under four heads: (1) the effect on normal thinking-capabilities (not lessened), (2) change in visual perception (recovery of perceptual innocence of childhood), (3) reduction in practical motivation (made irrelevant in the presence of the psychedelic epiphanies), (4) shift in value judgment (the new world is experienced as incomparably "better").

Huxley describes his mescaline experiment as a series of perceptions, biologically useless but incredibly moving, as culminating in a final stage of egolessness whence there is an "obscure knowledge that All is in all—that All is actually each." The peyote pilgrimage comes as near as the finite mind can come to "perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe" in its revealed glory of naked existence [19], (p. 26).

Huxley seems to have fully grasped the dangerous implications of his discovery: the judgment upon the practical world, the temptation to "quietism," the overenthused response characteristic of religious conversion. He is anxious to locate ethical values in the experience: first in healthy negatives, in demythologizing the busy-work of the world's preoccupations, in seeing fully the phoniness of the "normal" self now intimately revealed, in recognizing the helplessness of words, and in exposing the insistent, narcissistic individuality which is at the base of man's alienation—an alienation which Huxley locates in the intrinsic fear of being overwhelmed by the greater reality, the personal terror before the *mysterium tremendum* and before the jarring incompatibility between man's egoism and divine purity, between man's self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God [19], (p. 55).

To our point, Huxley enters his plea for the mescaline experience—as being "what Catholic theologians call a gratuitous grace—not necessary for salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully" [19], (p. 73). He suggests a balance be achieved between the world of systematic reasoning which is aimed at practical survival (now preempting the field) and direct (psychedelic) perception of the fuller "inner and outer worlds into which we have been born."

He says:

"This given reality is an infinite which surpasses all understanding and yet admits of being directly and in some sort totally apprehended. It is a transcendence belonging to another order than the human, and yet it may be present to us as a felt immanence, an experienced participation. To be enlightened is to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness—to be aware of it and yet to remain in a condition to survive as an animal, to

think and feel as a human being, to resort whenever expedient to systematic reasoning. Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be." [19] (pp. 77-78)

Huxley then cites Aquinas, who, after he had gone through the door in the wall of perception by a "mystic grace," looked on his former world (of Aristotle, the Sentences, the Questions, the Propositions, the majestic Summas) as being of no more worth than straw. Giving witness to the lasting effects of the mescaline experience (which he unequivocally equates with the mystic), Huxley sees the man who comes back through the wall as never quite the same: as "wiser and less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend" [19], (p. 79).

An orientalist and scholar in his own right, a prolific writer on Eastern wisdom, Alan Watts is guru to the psychedelic movement's mystics. He speaks enthusiastically and knowledgeably about religion (albeit unorthodoxly for some) and elaborates on religious rites and traditions of mysticism. He sees in the use of psychedelic drugs the fulfillment of every formality of religious "sacrament." That is, he identifies the drug as a means of grace, an unmerited gift of spiritual power, which, in the tradition of true mystics is to be judged by subsequent actions [20].

Currently very much the zealot and messiah of the cult, Timothy Leary is the founder and mainstay of the "League of Spiritual Discovery." Writing most eloquently and enthusiastically on the drug as religious experience, he has become the foremost proponent of salvation-for-the-many through drugs. In establishing criteria, he says that religious experience is "an ecstatic incontrovertibly certain, subjective discovery of answers to four basic spiritual questions": (1) What is the ultimate Power and Basic Energy which moves the universe, that creates life? (2) What is life, where did it start, where is it going? (3) What is man, whence did he come and where is he going? and (4) What is my place in the plan? [21] Not all agree that Leary's grasp of criteria is particularly informed, acute, or even pertinent, but there is no denying the messianic zeal with which he makes his points. On a long-play Capitol recording entitled "LSD" he heralds a "speedy evolution of a new indigenous religion" and warns the incredulous and up-tight generation that the present so-called "addicts," like it or not, are the future thinkers, architects, and leaders of the world [22].

Certainly a more circumspect witness is Huston Smith, professor of philosophy at M.I.T. In an interview with *Motive* magazine he describes

his first "trip" as an "emanation theory of the world, in which from a divine center there flowed forth—streamed forth—Being" [23]. Elsewhere he has elaborated on this in a definition: "By a religious experience I mean one which elicits from the experiencer a centered response, a response from the core of his being as his being includes thoughts, feelings and will. . . a religious experience triggers in the experiencer a triple movement: of mind in belief, of the emotions in awe, and of the will in obedience. A religious experience is awesome, convinces the experiencer that its noetic disclosures are true, and lays upon him obligations he acknowledges as binding" [24].

A collection of essays, entitled *Utopiates*, reports an extensive study on 92 participants who were attracted to use LSD for nonreligious reasons, yet who, when given special questionnaires, witness to distinctly religious phenomena, 60% reporting a marked change in their religious understanding, 40% seeing death with greatly reduced anxiety, 30% believing their moral standards changed toward "increased personal responsibility" [25].

In their own way, also prophets of the religio-mystical experience as made accessible through drugs, Masters and Houston examine the evidence and testimonials with seeming objectivity. They weigh pros and cons—including, in a two-page summary, violent opposition on the part of the movement's primary scholarly antagonist, Dr. Charles Zaehner, who writes from an orthodox Roman Catholic viewpoint and calls the psychedelic mystic cult a snare and delusion, a presumptuous, second-rate, pantheistic substitute and pretender [26]. Masters and Houston summarize most of the laboratory experiment done on psychedelic mysticism. Such research is curiously limited, at least as revealed in currently available literature. Authors and editors have a disturbing tendency merely to repeat the same lists of control groups, most or all of which were carried on before restrictive laws were enacted.

One milestone seems to have been the so-called "Miracle of Marsh Chapel" at Boston University during Holy Week, 1962. As part of his doctoral dissertation in the philosophy of religion, Dr. Walter Pahnke, a doctor of medicine, set up a test situation in which to probe mystic typology along categories used by Stace in his classic *Mysticism and Philosophy* [27]. Dividing 20 theological student volunteers (persons who had never taken such drugs) into five groups of four persons (two guides to a group), he had them attend a three-hour Good Friday service with two in each group being given a strong dose of psilocybin, the other two being given a placebo which was designed to produce a tingling sensation only. After a sermon and organ interlude, nine of the ten on the drug and one on the placebo experienced dramatic religious phenomena [28].

Leary's experiment with 69 full-time religious professionals is also cited

as substantiating evidence for the religious nature of the drug experience under certain conditions. Seventy-five per cent of those tested experienced "intense mystico-religious reactions and considerably more than half claim that they . . . had the deepest spiritual experience of their life" [29].

Two Californian researchers, Oscar Janige and William Gothlin completed a study of 194 subjects taking LSD in a nonreligious setting. Though the categories of their questionnaire avoided religious terminology, the content of the response is reported to be impressively religious in point of view.

On the other hand, a comparison of two other studies constructed in parallel, the first by K. S. Ditman and M. Hayman using supportive environment and the second by Harman Savage, using religious stimuli in addition to supportive environment, indicates "setting" (stimuli) to be of crucial importance. From 75 to 90% of those in Savage's study reported "experiences of a religious or even mystical nature" [30].

DISCUSSION

Any conclusions from these studies, understandably, must be arrived at with trepidation. *A priori* the mystical state is dubiously subjected to scientific method. The weight to be given to seeming evidence is very difficult to determine. Subjective answers and percentages are at best flimsy and hazardous. This being the "evidence" and these being the spokesmen, what are we to say to the proposition that drugs can yield genuine religious, sacramental, yes, mystical experience? What are we to say to the claims of messianic seers who foresee salvation-for-the-many in LSD and similar substances?

What would *you* say? I find myself at a loss-caught between demanding more conclusive studies and refusing to believe in any case that the scientific method (especially as illustrated) is a valid tool to discern mystic states. Fortunately my assignment here was not precisely to be a judge; it was to examine the phenomena of sacrament and mysticism in human history, to relate them to the drug-cults of the ages and to the present psychedelic cults, and then to ask some questions, theological ones raised in the controversy both by the claims of the enthusiasts and by the vehemence of the institutional reaction. It was to establish a context and then to examine not the probabilities but the implications.

THE THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

The questions raised by the drug controversy are indeed radical ones: the nature of God (personal? transcendent?), the nature of man (how

limited? immortal? morally enjoined?), the nature of revelation (institutionalized?), and the nature of the church (competent? disoriented? relevant?).

Is God personal or is he an ultimate "It" or pantheistic whole? Psychedelic visions often seem to reveal an Ultimate Reality which conforms more to the theological tenets of Eastern religious thought than to that of the West: that is, a God which is the All, the impersonal Brahman, into which all is ultimately absorbed. But the experience here seems very much to be determined by the "set," i.e., the expectations and the mode of the experiencer. The Native American Church experiences God as a personal Father and its own drug epiphany sometimes takes the form of Christ walking among them. The crucial question seems to be the place of person within the modes of (ultimate) being and the pertinence of love in the mystic experience, love being based on *relation between persons*.

Is God immanent or transcendent? Seers such as Huxley, Leary, and Watts seem to think there is no contest—all evidence points to an immanent divinity, wondrously revealed. Yet others insist everything depends again on the "set" and "setting" [31]: God reveals Himself (Itself) according to the capacity of the beholder. Actually the crucial point here seems to be the willingness to be open to a distinction: cannot God be both immanent *and* transcendent: that is, be eminently within all creation, sustaining it as a participation in his Being and at the same time be not totally exhausted by it or not totally identified with it. This, of course, has been the most faithful tradition of Christianity: Not that creation is somehow a separate entity, a diversion of the Creator from which by logical argument one could arrive at God's existence, but that it is the very epiphany of God, it is God communicating Himself. Bishop Robinson points up the stupidity (inaccurate theology) of popular preaching which still speaks of God as though he were "a rich aunt in Australia" [32]. God's last and most perfect creation—is it not his own theophany in Jesus Christ? The event of Incarnation is so crucial to Altizer, the Death-of-God theologian, that he would seem to insist that God chose at that point in history to become *totally* immanent, yielding up his transcendence entirely—till creation become finally divinized [33]. Jesus then would be not, as Braden phrases it, a man arriving from outer galaxies as though by space ship, but a deeper immersion of God into this world. Altizer rejects the Resurrection, as popularly conceived, not as metaphysically impossible, but as a sort of divine "cop-out," God (in Jesus) returning to heaven. The doctrine of atonement is demeaning in this theologian's eyes not because man is not alienated and in need of being made-one-with God but because it suggests the picture of an almighty finger reaching down into the muck of creation to rescue a struggling insect. The new "radical" theologians demand a God wholly in this

world. Yet transcendence need not necessarily mean that God is outside. When confronted by the colossal failure of the Gospel's impact on the whole world, the Christian's embarrassed plea might be that the Father's revelation in Christ has failed precisely because the churches have been untrue to the implications of Incarnation—God made flesh, entering into matter fully, though not being exhausted by it, God entering into man fully, though not being exhausted by him.

This brings us to the question of man's capacity for comprehending God. There was a time, in the 17th century, when debates about the nature of "grace" were as fashionable as TV specials. "Grace" implies that man cannot "do it himself"; however, if God be immanent in the last sense defined, if he is an intimate part of the process by very definition and if the world be transfigured by him, then where is the heady dichotomy over which to debate? Nevertheless, if "grace" is gratuitous, outside man's grasp, to the indignant theologian then chemical mysticism is an anomaly beyond bearing. It is too blatantly, too crassly Promethean. "Instant mystic" suggests an anomalous choice between the ascetic's weary road and an acid-head's casual trip, invoking a parallel on Ogden Nash's now famous short poem on seduction ("Candy is dandy/ But liquor is quicker"): "Fasting is dandy/ but LSD is quicker." However, the theologian must be acrobatically agile not to be caught in his own trap: If the mystic grace is gratuitous, who is to stipulate how it comes; is that not precisely the import of the parable of wages in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1 ff.): "I choose to give to this last as I have to you; am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, and the first last." This shifts the grounds of debate to God's Providence, and, since the mystic experience is not of itself a sign of sanctity but an enticement to it and anticipation of it, who can say that our unchurched and institutionally disillusioned modern man could not be finding compensation in a new mercy?

Another question is disquieting to the Western mind: Does not the psychedelic "trip" sometimes yield intimations of pre-existence and of reincarnation, therein implying a denial of immortality and individual identity. Without invoking again the predispositions in "set" and "setting," one might simply observe that experienced and discriminating guides have not been at hand nor have interpreters of traditional mysticism been instant in discerning the nature and extent of the mystic's intimate participation in the One: i.e., whether the "I" be so submerged as to seem annihilated when merely intimately united. The metaphor, imputed to Teresa of Avila, of a union like rain drops falling into the river, emphasizes the overwhelming, all-subsuming nature of the God-experience.

Then what of man's involvement in the struggle between good and evil in his world? At times the "voyage to the Centre" seems to disenchant the initiate of any real distinction between the two; the divine is experienced in terms of reconciler of opposites. Here is a bite much like the "quietist" [34] temptation: If evil be just appearance, if it is just part of the process, then one need not worry or interfere. In fact, intervention (or even concern) is a mark of the deluded who do not understand. The East itself, however, seems divided on this point. The Hindu Buddhist suggests that the world where evil appears is part of the Net of Illusion; the follower of Zen, finding the same world the embodiment of all that is, is sent out after initiation to serve it (and to lessen its evil?).

Immortality raises the question of heaven and hell. Surprisingly, the drug experience affords, if not substantial affirmation, at least some valuable insights for the Christian theologian. No popular discussion of Christianity in this day concludes without some repudiation of hell as outmoded and/or inconceivable; yet Huxley gives thought for a perfectly viable concept of hell based on the pattern of the "bad trip," locating the difference from heaven not in the reality experienced but in the orientation toward that experience. A theology of heaven is also thusly reinforced by psychedelics: its insistence that the Ground of Being, the Ultimate Absolute, the divine All, is ever present (and most present) independent of time and space, veiled by our everyday "survival-oriented perception," should remind the orthodox Christian of his own tradition—that whatever heaven be in its completeness, it is essentially possessed in the present living and that, if the Incarnation be truly pivotal, heaven is to be enjoyed by breaking through barriers here rather than by removal into an "other world." As Huxley puts it: "Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be." It is an ineffable world; his words are very close to Paul's "Eye hath not seen, or ear heard, nor hath it entered into the mind of man to conceive . . . (1 Cor.2:9); but its blissful realm is no distance away.

The psychedelic experience raises most radical challenges to the claims of the churches. It challenges their relevance in promoting the God-experience. Despite the prodigious organization of the institutions, modern society is quickly becoming disaffiliated, secular, and agnostic. The churches find themselves without a viable concept of God to offer. The God-as-crutch appeal of religion has long since been devalued by psychiatry; "God-the-Magic-Worker" has been dethroned by science. The churches find themselves preaching mysteries and salvation which the most vigorous and thoughtful of the new generation find totally irrelevant. Churches validate their sacramental and prayer-life by appeals to an unseen order by way of a blind faith, whereas the psychedelic cult, with immense advantage as

Wasson found in his study of Mexican cults, validates its sacrament and God-contact in the experience itself.

Another devastating challenge to the churches comes on the level of ethics, a dissent from the legalistic moral systems and institutionalized virtues which seem perversely to oppose, on principle, instinctively, all new insights and fresh values—thus, in effect, invalidating not the new experience but the church itself. There are marks of death here and, in the hypocrisies that ensue, corruption that follows death.

A third functional challenge is to the radical assessment the churches make of their own nature. The psychedelic quester asks: Should not the church's preoccupation be precisely with the metaphysical (with God, the dimensions of life and of Being, with the nature of time and eternity, with afterlife and transcendental wisdom) and not with anxious involvement in renewal, ecumenism, civil rights, social justice, these being secondary and distracting? Failing to provide the God-experience and to face God-questions, do not the churches sell themselves to humanitarian busy-work. The psychedelic religion, in fact, brings into question the whole practical, rational, structural nature of church-organized religion and turns in the opposite direction—to inner voyages which prescind from the complexities of the external world.

THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

The repercussions of psychedelic religion such as those just outlined are neither all positive nor all negative. Some of the questions raised must be clarified by research and debate. Some represent irreconcilable differences. One very positive eventual good, however, can be sensed in their onslaught: They challenge religion, in as much as it is alive, to renew its insights (often blunted or lost). For instance, at the very heart of the Gospel message is Jesus' admonition: "Martha, Martha, thou art solicitous about many things . . . Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her" (Luke 10:38). Writers from Huxley till now have deplored the lack of contemplative spirit in our society and in our religious view. Psychedelia's journeys "inward" have their excitement and vitality principally in their contemplative mode. Although there is in the drug cult, even at its best, a temptation to passivity (disengagement and quietism), only the escapist, predisposed by despair or nausea, will make the flight permanent. Mysticism has always been attacked for abandoning social responsibility; the great mystics, Western and Zen, have consistently fought the temptation and repudiated the allegation.

Although respecting, because of the need for survival, the narrowly

filtered perception that is our daily fare, Huxley notes the terrible sacrifice we pay daily for that utilitarian bias that commandeers all our energies. We so habitually perceive things for their use-value that we almost would boggle at valuing a thing for itself. We look at a door, for instance, always as a thing to gain access through, never as a thing of beauty, a mystery in itself; we are liable to look at a sunset only in terms of what kind of day it promises for the things we want to do tomorrow. Most of us have been thoroughly programmed from childhood to move toward goals; we run all our lives. The psychedelic's joy is to look on reality for its own sake, its own epiphany, its theophany. He sees the door, oblivious of the use-syndrome, as a glory of textures upon which he can spend an afternoon or a lifetime of wonder. Huxley describes the epiphanies that confronted him in a bamboo chair and the ravishing beauty of some lawn furniture caught in the sun [19], (pp. 22, 28 ff.). The psychedelic's preoccupation in life is to be drawn to wonder, to believe, to value intrinsic worth.

There is inherent here all the mystic depth implied in the word "epiphany." In the "drug-mystic's" claims, orthodox religion finds its doctrines on the indwelling God uncomfortably affirmed. The LSD trip blithely bypasses all the sterile sophomore debates over the existence of God to enter where God says: "Here, I am wherever there is being."

In an era of fragmentation, the rat-race, economic determinism, war anxiety, and racial alienation, the drug culture would center on insights of cosmic unity and peace. As Huxley says, for the psychedelic neophyte the world is never the same. If his visit to "inner worlds" has been benign, the immediate pressures of life rest more lightly because of a deep-lying detachment grounded in the assurance that the world is ultimately and profoundly beautiful, whole, and good. Is this perhaps like the inner peace which keeps the mystic activists (like Teresa and Ignatius) afloat in storms? Is this not perhaps a more promising direction for peace—away from the dulling escapes of alcohol and sleeping pills? A sense of the unity of all being, though it does not solve the enigma of death, puts many of death's anxieties to rest, time and space and biological survival having been relegated to just one level of reality.

Reverence is, in the main, a lost virtue. If the psychedelic's trip has been an integrating one, he can accept himself as part of a whole which accepts and loves him. He learns to love things for themselves and, as a corollary, not for their usefulness in stuffing the anxious vacuums of his ego. He learns, in a word, reverence for all being, which by its organic integrity includes himself.

RECAPITULATION

I have lapsed rhapsodic, you will say, about something that is intrinsically so dangerous and potentially so destructive that society has hedged it in with laws harsh enough to take the breath away. One might immediately reply to the hypocrisy of these laws and the negative results their repressive presence engenders. Better to counter with a caution and an appeal to reason. I have tried to limit myself to tentative, probing challenges. Clearly if I have written *only* in terms of "good trips" it is not because I fail to recognize that most trips are bad ones but because "bad trips" are already profusely documented: The dangers inherent in haphazard drug usage can be taken as solidly demonstrated. Therefore, my point has been, prescind-ing from "bad trips," what questions fundamental to the religious experience have been raised by "good trips." And what have the more serious and responsible drug advocates had to say about the possibility of making "bad trips" into "good trips" by understanding and experienced direction?

At the very least, I have been pointing to the many values in contemplative orientation and mystic sensitivity, protesting, if you will, that they have been left by default to enthusiastic but reckless newcomers whose messiah is, uncritically, a rye mold or a mushroom. In our concern over the mis-uses of drugs and over the deluding or deluded pied-pipers, we must admit we have been brought to the point of waking and doing.

We might, in fact, give thanks for this. And what if there be real mystic, sacramental experience possible for the common man, one day, traveling through inner space, at intervals, in a discrete rhythm of retreat from the practical world and return to it in fuller understanding and service? We must learn to separate our hypocrisies from our real fears and cautions. We can learn to guide researchers, to refine laws, to recapture initiative—thereby keeping all the cautions which have been instinctively kept by the cultures which have successfully used the psychedelic arts for their solace, enlightenment, and goodness. It is not inconceivable that hidden in the field of psychedelic excesses there be a pearl of great price.

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- [31] "Set" means emotional predispositions, expectations; "setting" means accompanying stimuli (place, symbols surrounding, music, companionship).
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