

Entheogenic Sects and Psychedelic Religions

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In a 1991 case related to peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*), U.S. District Chief Judge Juan Burciaga stated: “*The government’s war on drugs has become a wildfire... today, the war targets one of the most deeply held fundamental rights—the First Amendment right to freely exercise one’s religion.*”¹ Burciaga could rebuff the prevailing political mandate of religious discrimination only because he was about to retire. Unfortunately, the courts and law enforcement in the United States are rarely sympathetic toward the use of psychoactive sacraments. This article clarifies some of what is being suppressed with regard to churches that use peyote, other psychedelics, or *Cannabis*.

PEYOTE CHURCHES

NATIVE AMERICAN CHURCH (NAC). Peyote was declared illegal by the Spanish Inquisition in 1620. Spanish priests burned Aztec herbalists at the stake, and the Inquisition prosecuted peyote possession as far north as Santa Fe and as far west as Manila. Later, the U.S. government continued this campaign under the guise of trying to stamp out a “dangerous narcotic.” In 1906, local organizations arose in Oklahoma to oppose anti-peyote legislation. The first peyote church was incorporated as a legal defense in 1914. Current federal law requires NAC members to have at least 25% American Indian ancestry, although some chapters have Caucasian members. Most state laws also limit membership to Native Americans, though some states prohibit peyotism altogether, and a few states allow peyote to be used for bonafide religious purposes regardless of race. There are about 60 chapters of Native American peyote churches with various names. The national NAC leadership is dominated by Navahos, so chapters run by other tribes sometimes do not acknowledge any affiliation beyond the local level. The NAC has long been criticized for consuming peyote that is over-harvested from its natural habitat in Texas. Although a few NAC groups quietly operate small cultivation projects, there has been a consistent failure to promote widespread cultivation using the highly productive method of grafting onto faster-growing columnar cacti. Apparently, some Navahos once tried to graft peyote. Because they did not understand that it is necessary to wait five years for the grafted buttons to develop a high alkaloid content, they incorrectly concluded that grafting produces peyote of low potency.

NEGRO CHURCH OF THE FIRST BORN. John C. Jamison of Tulsa, Oklahoma was a black man who was raised among the Indians and spoke three Native American languages. His

small Christian church had an organizational infrastructure with at least six officers. Some members were drawn by the healings that Jamison tried to perform in the traditional Indian manner. Jamison conducted peyote ceremonies from 1920 until his murder by a lunatic in 1926. The government’s hostility toward peyote discouraged some of his black congregation. Jamison never succeeded in getting his organization officially incorporated. His road meetings were similar to those of the Native American Church, although he was criticized for introducing some modifications of the conventional ritual.²

CHURCH OF THE AWAKENING. This peyote church produced numerous small booklets.³ Originating as a study group in 1958 in Socorro, New Mexico, it incorporated in 1963. Its members were primarily mature middle-class Caucasians with a serious interest in mysticism. The leaders were Drs. John and Louisa Aiken. They traveled around conducting peyote meetings out of their mobile home. In 1967, the church petitioned the FDA for a religious exemption so it could continue to dispense peyote and synthetic mescaline. The government’s contradictory contentions were that the church was not a religion, and that a denial of the petition would not prevent the church from practicing its religion. The government indicated that although this church seemed harmless, an exemption for the Church of the Awakening would make it impossible to suppress out-of-control groups such as the Neo-American Church (see page 18).⁴

GHOST CLAN. This group reportedly operated in Mesita, Colorado in the early 1990s. It had legal problems due to the sacramental use of peyote.⁵

PEYOTE WAY CHURCH, (www.peyoteway.org). Newsletter: *The Sacred Record* (not published for the past three years). This sect in rural Arizona was founded by Rev. Immanuel Trujillo, Rev. Anne L. Zapf, and Rabbi Matthew S. Kent in 1978. Rev. Trujillo is an Apache who formerly served as a roadman for the Native American Church. The PWC is proud to be the only peyote group that officially espouses an interracial membership not conforming to the federal requirement of at least 25% Native American ancestry. The church has about 300 members of all races. Visitors to the church come from all walks of life; some have been Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Moslem, Wiccan, and atheist. The clergy maintain a life-style of “voluntary simplicity,” and eschew meat, alcohol,

tobacco, and junk food. Rev. Trujillo also declared “Television is an instrument of the Devil.” The church’s leaders have a home-based business creating and selling “Mana” pottery and paintings. Peyote cultivation is promoted as an alternative to over-harvesting wild populations. The church’s greenhouse was constructed partially from funds donated by the Friends of the Peyote Road when that non-profit group disbanded. The greenhouse also currently houses some plants that survived the most recent raid on the now defunct Peyote Foundation, which was driven out of nearby Pinal County. Rather than conducting road meetings in the style of the NAC, the PWC offers “spirit walks.” The spirit walk is a solitary peyote meditation in the wilderness after a 24-hour fast. The church provided over 40 spirit walks in 2001. Until recently, the church never requested financial support for any of its services. Now, it asks for a \$200.00 donation for each spirit walk (\$150.00 for members). PWC owns 160 acres in the Aravaipa Valley (50 acres more than the Vatican). The Peyote Way previously operated under the names “Trinity Pentecostal Church of God” (1971–1972) and “Church of the Holy Light” (1972–1977).

PSYCHEDELIC CHURCHES

LEAGUE FOR SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY (LSD).

In 1966, Timothy Leary founded The League for Spiritual Discovery at the huge estate of millionaire Wall Street stockbroker Billie Hitchcock in Millbrook, New York. The League is described in books such as *Millbrook: The True Story of the Early Years of the Psychedelic Revolution*.⁶ The League embodied the best and the worst of the “psychedelic revolution” of the 1960s. The Millbrook commune was the site of innovative human potential movement activity. It was also frequently the scene of poorly-managed psychedelic experimentation by people who often were not given proper preparation and supervision.

NEO-AMERICAN CHURCH (a.k.a. “Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church” and “Original Kleptonian Church,” www.okneoac.com). The church produced books,⁷ and a newsletter called *The Divine Toad Sweat*. It is only a coincidence that the church’s logo depicted a three-eyed toad, because at that time it was not known that *Bufo alvarius* toad secretions could be smoked for psychoactive effect. The group was founded at Millbrook in 1964, and is now located in Austin, Texas. Although the Neo-American Church was a minor Millbrook phenomenon existing alongside the League for Spiritual Discovery, it has survived decades longer than Leary’s group. The Neo-American Church uses LSD, peyote, and other psychedelics. The founder was the late Arthur J.

Kleps, the “Chief Boo Hoo,” who aggressively flaunted social norms with vulgar profanity and public alcoholism. The church’s web site promulgates the historical revisionist theory that the Holocaust was a hoax, and that American troops were the true mass murderers in WWII. There are also anti-Semitic rants about how the “parasitic Jewish cosmopolites have seized control of the American media and replaced indigenous American culture with a depraved and corrupt alien pseudo-culture of their own devising.” The only half-way serious thing to come out of this group was a volume of recipes for manufacturing drugs titled *The Psychedelic Guide to Preparation of the Eucharist in a Few of its Many Guises* (Robert E. Brown & Associates 1968).

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THE PALEO-AMERICAN CHURCH. This faction in Warren, Vermont broke away from the Neo-American Church in 1969. Leader High Thorn stopped using psychedelics when he became a student of Zen in the early 1970s, but he continued to run this entheogenic sect. The church’s posters proclaimed: “The hallucinogens are the sacraments of the Paleo-American Church.”

THE CHURCH OF THE GOLDEN RULE. Rev. Bill Shyne ran this group in San Jose, California. It broke away from the Neo-American Church prior to 1970.

THE CHURCH OF THE SUNSHINE. Published *Creed of the Church of the Sunshine* (1980–1981) and their newsletter *The “L” Train* (1980–1981). Jack and Mary Jo Call founded this group after leaving the Neo-American Church. They promoted the sacramental use of psychedelics such as LSD, mescaline, psilocybian mushrooms, and *Cannabis*.

PSYCHEDELIC PEACE FELLOWSHIP. Michael Itkin, a gay rights advocate and early proponent of Liberation Theology, ran this group in New York City in the 1960s. They were “open to all persons seriously interested in the relation of the psychedelic experience to the nonviolent revolutionary movement, whether or not they have used the psychedelic sacraments.”⁸

UNIVERSAL LIFE CHURCH, (www.ulc.org). Supposedly there were dozens of small psychedelic groups that were discreetly chartered under the ULC in the 1960s.

DOG COMMUNE. In the late 1960s near Los Angeles, a group had the LSD-inspired belief that all life had equal value. They became fruitarians who only ate fruit that had fallen to the ground. Later, LSD visions revealed that God

existed on Earth incarnate in dogs, and that all of humanity's problems were caused by the mistreatment of "man's best friend." Members of the Dog Commune herded dogs, raided animal shelters to liberate their canine deities, and were among the first animal rights groups in the United States to try to stop exploitation of dogs in scientific experiments.⁹

SHIVALILA. Gridley Wright organized this LSD-using Hindu sect in Bakersfield, California. In the 1970s, the commune practiced psychedelic tantricism, and offered free seminars teaching women conscious conception and trauma-free childbirth.¹⁰

THE CHURCH OF THE TREE OF LIFE. Newsletter: *Bark Leaf*. Handbook: *The First Book of Sacraments of the Church of the Tree of Life*. Founded in 1971 by life-extension expert John Mann, this now defunct California organization was essentially a mail-order supplier of non-scheduled psychoactive substances such as 5-MeO-DMT. They also supported conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War.

CHURCH OF THE ONE SERMON. This was Leonard Enos' one-man operation in Lemon Grove, California. Its main activity was publishing various editions of an early—and fairly inaccurate—manual on *Psilocybe* mushrooms.¹¹

THE FANE OF THE *PSILOCYBE* MUSHROOM ASSOCIATION, (www.thefane.org). Founded in 1973, this Canadian group offered guided sessions with sacramental mushrooms. They had difficulty getting incorporated due to the authorities' concern that they were advocating the consumption of an illicit sacrament. A copy of the latest issue (1998) of their newsletter, *The Sporeprint*, is available for \$5.00 (see the web page listed for their mailing address). In the past, some of the occasionally produced newsletters were called *Sporatic*.

TEMPLE OF THE TRUE INNER LIGHT. The temple's web site can be easily located on a search engine, but the long URL does not work if used directly. An unofficial site is: www.csp.org/nicholas/A58.html. This Manhattan group asserts that anybody who is not a member of their church is doomed to be endlessly reincarnated in horrific hell realms. The members believe that their leader Alan Birnbaum is Jesus, and that they are the reincarnation of His disciples. Birnbaum formerly ran a Native American Church branch in New York, and had legal problems due to peyote. The public is invited to the Temple to participate in guided communion with DPT. The session occurs in a dirty room, sometimes with the gurgling sound of the toilet perpetually flushing in the background. The communicant must listen to a tape recording of excerpts from religious texts with a background soundtrack of sentimental music. Temple members advocate healthy lifestyles, and abstain from meat for moral and health reasons. The church gives guidance on nutritional healing of

addictions, depression, and disease. Communion schedule and further information are found on the church web site. They published *The Testimony to the Psychedelic* (1981, now out-of-print).

RELIGION OF DRUGS. Published: *The Religion of Drugs: Constitution*. U.C. Santa Barbara student Norm Lebow founded this group in 1982. Lebow's LSD-inspired agenda was a peaceful revolution toward a Marxist utopia.

THE NEW AMERICAN CHURCH. Publication: *New American Church* by Joel Bartlett, Albany NY, 1987. Founded by Joel Bartlett, this group believed "LSD is the true Christ," but they also used *Cannabis* and psilocybian mushrooms. After taking these psychedelics, members would watch an "Altar of silent T.V.'s on different stations."¹²

THE CHURCH OF THE PSYCHEDELIC MYSTIC. This church was mentioned in Thomas Lyttle's 1988 article "Drug Based Religions and Contemporary Drug Taking," which appeared in the 1988 *Journal of Drug Issues* (Vol. 18, No. 2), but no other information is available.

THE CHURCH OF THE TOAD OF LIGHT. Albert Most wrote *The Psychedelic Toad of the Sonoran Desert* (Venom Press. Denton TX. 1984). This pamphlet was so popular that the veneration of *Bufo alvarius* is now firmly entrenched throughout the Sonoran area. There are even toad devotees as far away as Germany who smoke exported venom. Al Most and his friends formed an informal congregation of toad worshippers.¹³ It seems unlikely that the group ever incorporated. Nonetheless, Most did sell T-shirts for \$12.00 with a toad logo bearing the caption "Church of the Toad of Light." This was advertised as "The Official T-shirt sanctioned by the high council." (NOTE: To respect the rights and health of animals, toads should only be milked by properly trained people. Untrained persons can obtain similar potent tryptamines from various chemical supply houses.)

CHURCH OF THE NORTH AMERICAN SHAMAN. This short-lived organization in the 1990s was based in Austin, Texas. It recognized seven botanical sacraments: *Trichocereus* species, peyote, *Salvia divinorum*, psilocybian mushrooms, seeds of morning glory and Hawaiian woodrose, and tobacco. It should be noted that it is an unskillful legal strategy for a church to have multiple Eucharists. In the past, when the courts deigned to consider religious defenses during drug prosecutions, they only listened to arguments involving a church that had one house. The logic was that a sacrament might be legally valid only if it is essential and indispensable for the practice of a faith. Thus having multiple sacraments implies that no particular one is essential (despite the "two species" of Eucharist recognized in Catholic communion). This reasoning is diametrically opposed to the actual practice

of herbal mysticism, whereby most indigenous groups use numerous plants.

INTER-FAITH ASSEMBLY OF THE PSYCHEDELIC CHURCH OF GOD. Bartlett J. Ridge founded this group in the mid-1990s. Soon after writing the bylaws to the church, Ridge abandoned the project and moved to Vietnam. Ridge is best known for his previous work organizing the DSM Reform Initiative. This was an attempt to remove pejorative wording about psychedelics from the upcoming revision of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The American Psychiatric Association ignored Ridge's suggestions when publishing the *DSM-IV* in 1994.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF *SALVIA DIVINORUM*, (www.xenopharmacophilia.com/ee/skamaria.html). This non-profit religious organization exists only on the Internet. The organization's founder is Rev. MeO. His pseudonym refers to the abbreviation for "methoxy," a side-chain on various psychoactive molecules. Rev. MeO indicates that this church was created as a legal defense: "Our goal is to secure, through the idea of 'grandfathering', the freedom to legally utilize our Sacrament, *Salvia divinorum*, in the sad instance that the United States Federal Government outlaws Ska Maria in the future." It is believed that *Ska Maria Pastora* (Mary Shepherdess) refers to the Virgin Mary, and may represent a Christian overlay onto an ancient Mazatec deity that is thought by some to inhabit *Salvia divinorum*. A small community devoted to *Ska Pastora* arose in the United States after the discovery in the early 1990s that the effects of the leaves were amplified by "cheeking" rather than swallowing. A few of these North Americans observed traditional Mazatec practices such as only using leaves harvested by a virgin or other "innocent" person, and having the practitioner or group leader face east during the session. By 2000, the crass mass-marketing of *S. divinorum* to young people resulted in sensationalistic TV news and print media reports about "Legal *Salvia Divinorum*," an "LSD-like drug,"¹⁴ with one such report inaccurately characterizing the origins of the sacred use of this plant as "...Mazatec shamans in Oaxaca first [doing] bong hits of salvia to commune with their pagan gods..."¹⁵ Rev. MeO has now concluded that his church is unlikely to have the power to mount an effective defense against any future scheduling by the DEA.

THE INTERNATIONAL COPELANDIA CHURCH OF GOD, (www.copelandia.org). This "virtual" church opened in 2001. The web site offers an on-line bookstore, library, moderated discussion group, and links to suppliers of entheogenic plants. There is a stained glass window depicting a crucifix on the home page, and a *Bible* search engine. Aside from this Christian imagery, the site seems especially oriented toward sacramental mushrooms. Rev. Joshua Copeland runs this church. His surname is a pseudonym derived from

Copelandia—a mushroom genus containing psychoactive species, some of which are popular in Hawai'i.

THE CHURCH OF GNOSTIC LUMINISM, (www.luminist.org). Their web site contains a draft proposal for creating a church that will have an eclectic theology derived from a smorgasbord of world religions. To protect the natural environment, the church proposes that toxic waste be shot into the sun, and it wants harmful industries relocated to outer space. There is also a proposal to mine mineral wealth from the moon and asteroid belts, hence the motto: "Heal the Earth that gave us birth; seize the stars whose wealth is ours!" This group's sacraments are mescaline, psilocybin, LSD, *Cannabis*, ayahuasca, toad venom, MDA, MDMA, and "designer psychedelics." The church says it needs to fill several official offices, including a position for an alchemist who "will undertake the acquisition, production, and oversight of the physical sacraments of the Church."

ASSORTED HERMETIC SECTS. Organizations that legally incorporate and which openly present themselves to the public may be making a noble stand for their Constitutional rights. However, given the illegality of using entheogens under most circumstances, many groups prefer to keep a low profile. Most of the leaders of underground groups base their techniques on psychedelic psychotherapy, Native American shamanism, and/or Asian mysticism. There are numerous ayahuasca circles, particularly along the California coast, that have no affiliation with the Brazilian churches. There are several practitioners in California who trained under Dr. Salvador Roquet, the maverick Mexican psychiatrist. And there is a low-profile California sect that takes a yogic approach, where the ultimate goal is for the disciple to meditate in a full lotus position continuously for at least ten hours while under the influence of over a thousand micrograms of LSD. These and other similar groups are held for spiritual development or advancing human potential. Such discreet networks rarely come to the attention of the authorities or the news media.

CANNABIS CHURCHES

THE SHIVA FELLOWSHIP. After studying Shaivism with hashish-smoking sadhus in Benares, Rev. Wilbur Leo Minzey founded this offshoot of the Neo-American Church. Minzey presided over 150 public ceremonies in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park from 1968 to 1971. These Sunday morning rituals involved singing, dancing, chanting, praying, and consuming *Cannabis*, LSD, and wine. At one celebration, Minzey was arrested for indecent exposure because he was clad only in a Hindu loincloth. After serving four months in jail, he returned to shepherd his flock. At a later service, he was arrested on *Cannabis* charges and imprisoned for five years.¹⁶ The Fellowship soon went defunct.

PSYCHEDELIC VENUS CHURCH (PsyVen). Rev. Jefferson F. Poland founded PsyVen in 1969. PsyVen was “a pantheistic nature religion, humanist hedonism, a religious pursuit of bodily pleasure through sex and marijuana.” This is reminiscent of the Tantric use of *Cannabis*.¹⁷ The church’s deity was “the sex goddess Venus-Aphrodite...in her psychedelic aspect. We see her presiding over nude orgies of fucking and sucking and cannabis: truly venereal religion.” The church operated in the San Francisco area, holding frequent orgies that combined a *Cannabis* Eucharist with a nude party; bisexuality was encouraged. Although male homosexuality is not practiced in Tantricism, a precedent for Poland’s bisexuality is the Persian Sufis who sought the divine through pederasty and hashish.¹⁸ PsyVen’s special ritual for Kali and Shiva had everybody take turns licking warm honey off of the genitals of a man and woman who were reclining nude, blindfolded on the altar. New recruits were mailed two joints upon receipt of the \$5.00 registration fee. Poland’s church had 700 members by 1971, but went defunct in 1973. Poland’s legacy includes two well-reasoned books advocating sexual freedom.¹⁹

THE HELLENIC GROUP, THE LONDON CHURCH OF APHRODITE. A PsyVen offshoot that was founded by Paul Pawlowski in London in 1971. This “sex & pot” cult dedicated its orgies to the goddess Aphrodite. Their motto was “Fucking, sucking and smoking is our religion.” The Hellenes distributed leaflets inviting the public to attend their first open meeting. The leaflet mentioned that the purpose of the meeting was to organize the incorporation of The Church of Aphrodite, which would use *Cannabis* as its sacrament. The police raided this event, and questioned Pawlowski. He admitted to authoring the leaflet, and told the police “mushrooms and plants were used in the religious ceremonies of the Hellenes and we wouldn’t be true to our religion if we excluded them.” The drug-sniffing dogs found no *Cannabis*. However the police gathered evidence, threatening to return with a warrant to arrest Pawlowski on charges of “inciting people to consume *Cannabis*.”²⁰

THE CHURCH OF ALL WORLDS, (www.caw.org). Published *The Green Egg* (now defunct). This neo-pagan group, incorporated in 1968, promotes safe sex within polyamorous “condom cadres.” Its current policy prohibits illegal drugs. The Church of All Worlds in St. Louis was raided by the police circa 1970–1971. The officers allegedly discovered five men and five women having a midnight orgy. The naked parishioners continued making love while being interrogated. While copulating, Rev. Melvin Thomas grunted his request that the police not disturb this religious ceremony because it was a regular part of their program of worship. Nearby, a 17-year-old girl yelled with joyous passion, causing Thomas to say, “Let not thine worship affect thee so deeply Sister Brown. Quiet down! Quiet down! Be noble and carry

on!” The congregation was forced to desist from further sex, ordered to put on their clothes, and was taken to jail. The police found opium and opium pipes, “thrill pills,” hash and *Cannabis*. Rev. Thomas said that the drugs were to them what wine is to Catholics and Protestants. Among the ten arrested was a social worker who said that the law should not interfere with their form of worship because all of their acts were done in the spirit of the Holy Ghost. Thomas denied that the foregoing account was true. He pleaded innocent to all charges. He was acquitted after spending \$250.00 on lawyer fees and two months in jail.²¹

THE ETHIOPIAN ZION COPTIC CHURCH, (refer to: www.commonlink.com/users/carl-olsen/RASTAFARI/coptic.html). Published *Marijuana and the Bible* in 1986. In the 1970s, this sect imported millions of dollars worth of *Cannabis* into Florida. The mother church had a hilltop headquarters in St. Thomas Parish, White Horses District, Creighton Hall, Jamaica. The church’s approximately 40 members in Star Island, Florida smoked *ganga* and chanted in ceremonies thrice daily. Church doctrine proclaimed the following activities to be sinful: birth control, abortion, fornication, adultery, oral sex, masturbation, homosexuality, and the use of alcohol or any hard drugs. The head of Miami branch was Thomas Francis Reilly, a.k.a. Brother Louv. This former Catholic altar boy was one of the sect’s first Caucasian converts. At the time the IRS was prosecuting the church on tax evasion charges, the State Attorney’s Office actually declined to prosecute for drug smuggling and offered to drop public nuisance charges, if only the church would move to the countryside to avoid scandalizing its suburban neighbors with loud obnoxious behavior and the sight of prepubescent children smoking joints. The church defiantly snubbed this surprisingly generous offer. Consequently, the 1979 case before the Florida Supreme Court resulted in the Miami congregation being driven out of business. Carl Olsen, who published the newsletter *Coptic World* as the church was falling apart, later stated: “As far as I know, the church is defunct both in the United States and in Jamaica. It never was supposed to be an actual religion. The incorporation of the church was more of a response to attacks on the church than anything else. The City of Miami Beach had to prove we were a church in order to enjoin us from conducting ceremonies in our house on Star Island, and we took the opportunity to use that proof in our claim for sacramental use of marijuana.”²²

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF THE UNIVERSE, a.k.a. “The Church of the Universe,” (www.iamm.com). Reverend Walter Tucker founded the church in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in 1969. In the early years, many members with long hair and beards communed with God as they serenely strolled nude through a forest of hemp. Then in the 1980s, came legal harassment when some of the leaders were beaten and taken naked to jail, and the church’s Clearwater Abby

was demolished. The police stole the church's *Cannabis*, cash, and silver. This was followed by interminable appeals for various petty convictions. The group is currently involved in another protracted legal struggle to defend its sacramental use of the "Tree of Life." The reverends still go to court dressed only in blankets, as a reminder of when they were given blankets to wear in court after being taken to jail without clothes.

THE MISSION OF ECSTASY, (www.islandnet.com/~ifhunter/moe3.html). The Mission of Ecstasy was based in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. The group started as a weekly civil disobedience by political activists who were opposed to the drug war. In June 1995, they gathered at Bastion Square every Saturday to play bongo drums and smoke pot. The police suggested that they shift the event to Sunday so the drumming would not disturb office workers. The gathering then became "Sacred Sunday," because everybody held hands in a circle around a tree while a minister rang a bell followed by a short period of silence. This enabled the event to be legally regarded as a religious ceremony. The group became affiliated with the Assembly of the Church of the Universe, and began presenting *Cannabis* as a sacrament. Although there were some confrontations with the police, the authorities were generally pleasant because they considered the events to be well organized and under control. Membership in the inner circle of the Mission of Ecstasy cost a donation of \$10.00 to \$25.00, one gram of *Cannabis*, or one hour of labor. This entitled the member to purchase the sacrament through the church. The group's founder was Ian Hunter, who worked in anti-prohibition groups such as the Hemp Council and Sacred Herb: the Hemp Store. In 1996, Hunter spent three years in court defending his church's use of the "Tree of Life." He lost this case in the British Columbia Court of Appeal and in the Supreme Court. Hunter, who currently runs the Valhalla Institute for Alchemical, Shamanic, and Yogic Practices in Nelson, B.C., now regards himself as a "former reverend."

The Mission of Ecstasy web site states: "The repression of drugs, sexuality and domination of the spirit by mainline churches has us locked into a consumer-dominated, waste-creating, death-inspiring, machine-like monster that looks like it's going to crash and burn... What seems to be emerging is a collective consciousness that is rapidly waking up to a super-consciousness overmind... Will we develop a culture of telepathically-connected humans, sharing the stage in other dimensions with aliens while we become less aggressive and more connected under the natural time of the lunar calendar? Who knows?"

OUR CHURCH. Our Church was founded in 1988 and incorporated in 1994 in Arkansas. Rev. Tom Brown informed his county sheriff that he and ten other members of Our Church planned to grow *Cannabis* as a sacrament under the

then-valid Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. The sheriff waited until the crop was almost ready for harvest so he could accuse Brown of possessing the greatest quantity of herb. In 1994, the police seized 435 *Cannabis* plants and three peyote cacti. As has been the rule since the Supreme Court's decision on Stephen Gaskin's case involving a religious defense for *Cannabis*,²³ Brown was prohibited from mentioning religious freedom or even saying the name of his church at his trial. His 10-year sentence was later reduced to 5 years. His 39-acre blueberry farm was seized by the state, even though the "crime" occurred on an adjacent one-acre plot that was separately deeded to Our Church.²⁴

UNITED CANNABIST MINISTRIES. Comprised of three denominations: The First Hawaiian Church of the Holy Smoke, Puna Buttah Ministry, (both found on the web at: www.unitedcannabistministries.org), and Religion of Jesus Church (www.thereigionofjesuschurch.org).

The Religion of Jesus Church requires members to smoke *Cannabis*. The *Urantia* book and the *Bible* are its scriptures. Rev. Jonathan Adler of Hilo, Hawai'i is a 49-year-old Religion of Jesus Church minister who has smoked *Cannabis* since he was 17. Adler was arrested in 1998 for growing 89 *Cannabis* plants, each of which had a tag stating that it was for religious and medical purposes and that it was legal under Hawai'i law HRS 712-1240.1. Adler was tried in the Third Circuit Court for the commercial "manufacture of a controlled substance." Adler is certified by the Hawai'i Department of Health to grow, possess, and use medical *Cannabis*. The judge sustained the prosecutor's suppression of Rev. Adler's medical defense as irrelevant and inadmissible as evidence. In addition to affiliation with the Hawai'i Medical Marijuana Institute & *Cannabis* Club, Adler also claimed a religious right to use *Cannabis*. The case ended in a mistrial. In 1974, Adler was ordained at the church's divinity school in Kauai. He now heads the church's East Hawai'i branch. As sometimes happens in drug busts, the police stole the evidence. Rev. B.Z. Evans of Children of the Mist Church in Hilo, Hawai'i—who is another advocate of sacramental *Cannabis*—claims that Adler's 89 mature bud-filled plants disappeared and were replaced with scraggly little plants that collectively had under an ounce of buds.²⁵

CHURCH OF COGNIZANCE. This small Arizona outfit, which is presently developing its web site, is run by Dan and Mary's Monastery/Hemporium. Dan and Mary are a friendly older couple who live in a mobile home just off the highway at the top of the dirt road going to the Peyote Way Church. Their sacrament is *Cannabis*, and they make their living selling hand-crafted ceramic pipes.

COMMENTARY

Psychoactive plants, and more recently synthetic chemicals, have inspired religious experience throughout

history. The universality of the entheogenic epiphany is validated by the suggestion that animals engage in drug-induced “religious behavior” equivalent to the ecstatic posturing performed by humans undergoing a peak experience.²⁶ Countless individual practitioners engage in private spiritual exercises while leading otherwise ordinary lives as responsible citizens. Other people prefer to have an institution in which to process their psychedelic experiences. Isolated entheogen users may feel alienated as result of the discrimination imposed by the government, educational institutions, employers, and even their own families. This is particularly true for Americans living outside of urban cultural centers and the west coast of the United States. Membership in a supportive community can validate a person’s spiritual strivings, thus bolstering their self-esteem. A church can provide physical security in which to experience extreme alterations of consciousness. Ideally, the church would offer competent supervision of communicants who might find it difficult to safely manage drastic psychological fluctuations without the benefit of such guidance. Church elders should be able to train young people in the most beneficial manner of using psychedelics. Having such an option available to adolescents would also deflate the “appeal of the forbidden,” which sometimes motivates immature individuals to seek inebriation as a form of rebellion against authority.

On the other hand, a psychedelic church can easily drift into the same pitfalls as more conventional religious organizations. The theology could ossify into rigid oppressive dogma. Parishioners might be exploited and unfairly manipulated by hypocritical or dishonest clergy. There have already been many internal problems that have prevented some psychedelic churches from becoming successful. Sometimes the leaders are inefficient in managing finances, and in recruiting and training assistant clergy. Excessive *Cannabis* consumption may contribute to impaired memory, and could be partially responsible for the leaders of some groups being incompetent in attending to business details. In some cases, even those leaders who do not offend their neighbors by passive-aggressive acting-out are often maneuvered into a marginalized position, such that they become agoraphobic and discouraged. The short life-span of some psychedelic sects must be considered within the context of the high failure rate for utopian communities in general. The variety in character of psychedelic sects resembles the qualitative range found among mainstream denominations, where sincere voices are often inaudible amid the clamor of

televangelist hustlers, fundamentalist bigots, and sexual abuses by priests and ministers. Although some of the psychedelic sects have been unusual, none have been as destructive as many of the groups operating in the U.S. without any legal restraint on their use of brainwashing to recruit new members.

Religious persecution of entheogen users has not been confined to our modern society. Peruvian ecclesiastic courts prosecuted sorcery from the 1700s until the 1920s, and some of these cases involved healing with San Pedro (*Trichocereus pachanoi*) cactus.²⁷ Even today, secular authorities in Ecuador occasionally imprison ayahuasqueros for supposedly violating laws against sorcery. Some groups, such as the *Dyidé* in Africa, were eradicated not due to their religious beliefs, but rather because of the political threat they posed to the power elite. The *Dyidé* was a Bambara spirit medium cult. It supposedly used a leaf infusion of *Mitragyna africana*, although it is not clear if voucher specimens were actually collected and preserved, and hence the preparation conceivably might have been misidentified. The *Dyidé* was openly active in Mali until the 1940s, when its growing anti-colonial activism led to its suppression by the authorities. The cult is still believed to be practicing amidst great secrecy in remote areas of Mali.²⁸ While such governmental repression is customary in much of the Third World, the “War on Drugs” is being used as a pretext for continued violations of Constitutional rights in a way that is a flagrant insult to the democratic pretensions of American society.

Some societies place no restrictions on religious freedom. For example, Brazil has over two dozen sects openly using *hoasca* (ayahuasca). The most famous of these are the *União do Vegetal* or *UdV* (www.udv.org.br) and its splinter groups, and the *Santo Daime* (www.santodaime.org), founded around 1930 by a 7-foot-tall black rubbertapper named Raimundo Irineu Serra. Both of *UdV* and *Santo Daime* have active missions in the United States and Europe. Less well known are groups such as *Barquinia* (a *Daime* offshoot founded by Daniel Pereira de Matos), and a movement practiced primarily within *Barquinia* called *Umbandaimé* (a combination of *Santo Daime* and the Afro-Brazilian spirit possession cult *Umbanda*). Of course, Brazil also has many non-entheogenic faiths such as *Candomblé Jeje-Nago* and *Umbanda*, and countless individual folk healers ranging from natives to Christian mestizos, and even *bruxos* invoking São Cipriano.²⁹ Such governmental tolerance of religious diversity should be a model for public policy in the United States.

The integration of novel belief systems is a necessary duty for people living in a free and open society. The idea

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that synthetic psychedelics could invoke the states of consciousness described in Asian mysticism originated with MIT professor Huston Smith around 1960, and was soon broadcast to the multitudes by Leary's team at Harvard. In the 1990s, many Americans shifted toward botanical psychedelics. Although shamanism might have been imported from any of several corners of the globe, the ayahuasqueros were indirectly promoted by a well-publicized "save the rain forest" campaign. The ultimate impact of South American shamanism on the northern religious landscape may be more dramatic than that of Asiatic mysticism. After all, the moral codes of Hinduism and Buddhism are at least superficially similar to those of the monotheistic religions, and the Eastern ideal of enlightenment is functionally interchangeable with the Western doctrine of salvation. However, South American shamanism is amoral. The same shaman who smokes tobacco to heal the sick, or to assist hunters in locating game, might just as easily use his powers to hex his enemy's children. Admittedly, this amorality is today often tempered by syncretism with Catholicism, and many indigenous healers would never consider dabbling in sorcery. Nevertheless, the psychic manipulations of the *curandero* are defined by their opposition to those of the *brujo*. The amorality of South American shamanism might pose challenges if translated into Euro-American societies.

One solution would be to hybridize an "ergonomic spirituality" embodying the best of innovative and traditional theologies. Such an endeavor would ignore unanswerable questions involving the existence of God or an afterlife, and cosmic eschatology would become the proper domain of physicists rather than myth-makers. While it would be admitted that our universe might genuinely lack an intrinsic moral order, people could still be encouraged to live by the ethics of pacifism, honesty, and a healthy lifestyle. The use of guilt and shame for unnecessary repression of erotic pleasure would be abandoned as a medieval pseudo-morality long-since invalidated by modern understandings of medical hygiene and contraception. Instead, the focus would be on instilling pragmatic ecological values that have overwhelming urgency in the modern world. The emphasis would shift to upholding the moral virtues of an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. Mind-expanding substances could inspire an intense transcendental experience to impel adherence to this ecotopian ideal in everyday behavior. •

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