

Psychedelic Sacraments

John R. Baker, Dr.Phil.*

Abstract—The use of psychedelic substances within a context that emphasizes religious experiences and aims to provide spiritual insights is not a new phenomenon. However, the proscription of these substances in most modern societies leads to such use now typically occurring in an underground and idiosyncratic manner that often leaves individuals on their own with regard to the interpretation and integration of their experiences and insights. In contrast, the numerous examples in the ethnographic and the historical literature indicate that many cultures independently developed similar frameworks for using these substances for both individually and socially beneficial purposes and arrived at similar conclusions as to which of the substances available to them were the most appropriate for these purposes. This article focuses on a special type of socially sanctioned framework called a “sacrament” and contrasts this with other, more idiosyncratic forms of psychedelic use. It discusses how this framework helps to structure and channel the experiences induced by these substances, thereby increasing the likelihood of individually constructive and socially integrative experiences.

Keywords—altered state of consciousness, psychedelic, ritual, sacrament

For many people today, the word “psychedelic” invokes images of the 1960s and the dawn of the modern drug culture. In contrast, “sacrament” usually calls Christian rituals to mind, especially the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism. At first blush, these two terms might thus seem to refer to rather different domains of human activity and quite divergent value systems. The tendency to regard these domains as distinct may be understandable, but it is not without a certain irony. For although “psychedelic” is a neologism that was coined in the 1950s and became widely known in the 1960s, while “sacrament” is derived from a Latin term in use long before the Christian era, the substances and practices to which each is applied were once deeply interwoven. Decades of archaeological, historical, and linguistic research into numerous ancient practices has demonstrated that the modern use of psychedelic substances as sacraments has important antecedents in the past, while contemporary anthropological, pharmacological, and psychiatric studies have shown that psychedelic substances, when used in suitable contexts, can be valuable tools for

instilling worldviews and inducing experiences that can provide verification for a variety of culturally-supportive ontological assertions.

The articles contained in this issue of the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* offer evidence of the ways in which psychedelic substances are currently being used for positive and constructive purposes in a variety of contexts. They provide details about specific examples of such use as well as assessments of the types of physiological, psychological, and behavioral changes that these substances can produce when used under the proper circumstances. There are also articles that describe “drug tourism” (a modern phenomenon in which individuals travel to distant places to use substances and have experiences in a “traditional” setting) and other similar, more idiosyncratic contexts for such use. To complement these articles, in this contribution I will discuss the concept of psychedelic sacraments *per se*. I shall begin with some historical and linguistic considerations, and then briefly consider two different classes of psychedelic substances and how these have been used for personally valuable and socially integrative purposes. I will also contrast the terms “sacrament” and “sacramental” by considering the extent to which such use has become formalized and socially approved (or at least tolerated). This

*Professor of Anthropology, Moorpark College, Moorpark, California.

Please address correspondence and reprint requests to John R. Baker, Professor of Anthropology, Moorpark College, 7075 Campus Drive, Moorpark, California 93021.

will demonstrate that some modern frameworks for using psychedelic substances and contextualizing the unusual experiences they evoke are very similar to the ways in which similar substances have been used in a wide variety of cultures for millennia. Finally, I shall discuss some of the factors that help to make the use of a psychedelic substance into a sacrament.

ON "SACRAMENT" AND "PSYCHEDELIC"

Sacrament

The Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson & Weiner 1989, Vol. XIV: 335-36) defines sacrament as follows:

sacrament

1. *Eccl.* Used as the common name for certain solemn ceremonies or religious acts belonging to the institutions of the Christian church.

2. *spec. (with the)* The Lord's Supper, Eucharist or Holy Communion. Often called *the sacrament of the altar, the Blessed Sacrament*, and (esp. formerly) *the Holy Sacrament*. *Phr. to receive, take the sacrament, to communicate.* b. The consecrated elements, esp. the bread or Host. c. *to take or receive the sacrament (to do something, or upon a matter): to receive Holy Communion as a confirmation of one's word.* †d. used in oaths. *Obs.*

e. *the last sacraments*, Holy Communion and Extreme Unction administered to the dying; (...) *the sacrament of the sick*, in the Roman Catholic Church, Extreme Unction (now officially termed the Anointing of the Sick).

3. In widened application: a. Something likened to the recognized sacraments, as having a sacred character or function; a sacred seal set upon some part of man's life; the pledge of a covenant between God and man. b. A type, token, sign, or symbol. c. A mystery; something secret or having a secret meaning. d. *sacrament of the present moment*, any and every moment regarded as an opportunity for the reception of divine grace.

4. An oath or solemn engagement, esp. one which is ratified by a rite. (Chiefly as a Latinism.)

5. *Roman Law.* The *sacramentum* or pledge which each of the parties deposited or became bound for before beginning a suit.

6. *attrib. (sense 2)*, as in *sacrament-wine*; †*sacrament-box*, a pyx; †*sacrament-cloth*, a cloth or veil for covering the pyx; *sacrament day*, a day on which Holy Communion is celebrated; *sacrament house*, a tabernacle; *sacrament-money*, the alms collected as Holy Communion, formerly used as a fund for poor-relief; *sacrament Sabbath* = *Sacrament Sunday*; *Sacrament Sunday*, the Sunday on which the Lord's Supper is celebrated (in Scotland formerly only once or twice a year).

sacrament v. rare. to bind by an oath

1. *trans.* To bind by an oath or solemn engagement.

2. To make sacred, consecrate.

As most of these meanings indicate, the term "sacrament" is now widely associated with Christian beliefs and practices, especially the seven sacraments (baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, penance, ordination, marriage, and anointing of the sick) of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet it is remarkable that although the Church has recognized these

seven rituals as sacraments since the twelfth century, it has never provided any formal definition of what a sacrament actually is (Irwin 2003: 479).

Like many other elements of Christianity, the notion of sacrament is derived from earlier, pre-Christian beliefs and practices. The two sacraments that are said to be the most significant—baptism and the Eucharist—both have their roots in Jewish tradition, and are also based upon specific incidents in the life of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. (Indeed, most Protestant churches recognize only these two rituals as sacraments because they alone are explicitly mentioned in the Christian scriptures.)

Central to all Christian conceptions of sacrament—whether Catholic or Protestant—is the concept of "salvation," or deliverance from a state of sin. Christian dogma teaches that such salvation first occurs with baptism, a rite of passage that delivers the individual from the "original sin" of having been born and initiates them into the community of believers. The Eucharist (or communion) is a recurring ritual "feast" that serves both to restore the individual's relationship with the community and with God (an act often referred to as "redemption"; cf. Dobkin de Rios, Grob & Baker 2002) and to enhance the sense of community among the faithful.

The Latin word *sacramentum* was originally used to refer to the vow or oath with which soldiers bound themselves to military service. In Roman times, the term was also used as a translation of the Greek word for mystery, *musterion*. This in turn was probably derived from *muein*, "to close (the mouth)", i.e., "keep secret" (Jennings 1987: 501). *Musterion*, and subsequently *sacramentum*, was used to refer to the ancient "mystery cults" or "mysteries," the most famous of which were the rites of Demeter at Eleusis (Wasson et al. 1998) where, for almost 2,000 years, Greek-speakers of all backgrounds were provided with an experience that by all accounts changed their lives, but about which they were never allowed to speak. Although many tens of thousands of people must have been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries between about the sixteenth century B.C.E. and the fourth century C.E. (when the practices were outlawed by the newly Christian Roman Empire), no direct reports and only sketchy details are known from that time. "Mystery" is indeed an appropriate term.

Similar cults existed in other places in ancient times. Among the most famous of these were the soma cult of ancient India (Heinrich 2002) and the cult of Mithras (Hoffman et al. 2002). It has also been argued that such cults existed in both early Judaism (Merkur 2000) and early Christianity (Ruck et al. 2001). These various "mysteries" all appear to have involved the use of some type of pharmacologically active substances or preparations which produced existentially important experiences in the participants. The consistency and profundity of the effects and their outcomes has led various researchers (see, e.g.,

Merkur 2000; Wasson et al. 1998, 1986; Wasson 1990) to conclude that these preparations all contained some type of potentially psychoactive compound known as a "psychedelic."

Psychedelic

Again, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson & Weiner 1989, Vol. XII: 757):

psychedelic

A. adj. 1. a. Of a drug: producing an expansion of consciousness through greater awareness of the senses and emotional feelings and the revealing of unconsciousness motivations (freq. symbolically). **b.** Of, pertaining to, or produced by such a drug. **c.** Concerned with or characterized by the use of such drugs. **2.** Producing an effect or sensation held to resemble that produced by a psychedelic drug; *spec.* having vivid colours, often in bold abstract designs or in motion.

B. sb. 1. A psychedelic drug. **2.** A person who takes a psychedelic drug or has a psychedelic life-style.

The word "psychedelic" was coined in 1956 by the Canadian psychiatrist Humphry Osmond in correspondence with the English essayist and novelist Aldous Huxley. Osmond had provided Huxley with his first mescaline experience, and the two had subsequently been challenging one another to come up with a term to accurately describe the effects of the drug. Prior to that time, the effects induced by mescaline and such related substances as LSD had typically been characterized by terms that suggested that some type of pathology was involved (e.g., "toxic psychosis," "psychotomimetic"). This reflected the fact that much of the early scientific and medical research into these substances had been conducted with psychiatric patients in clinical settings. Osmond's and Huxley's own experiences (see Huxley 1970), and their knowledge of others who had undergone experiences that were also not pathological, convinced them that the existing models and terms were not adequate for referring to these substances and their effects.

"Psychedelic," as Osmond conceived it, means "mind manifesting." Rather than inducing some type of short-lasting pathological effect, Osmond (and Huxley) thought that mescaline loosened or unlocked hidden facets of the mind, thereby revealing memories, images, emotions and ideas that were normally invisible or unavailable to the conscious mind. They, and many others of that time, began to see these substances as powerful tools for exploring the psyche.

The insight that mescaline was somehow different from such other substances as alcohol, opium, or nitrous oxide was not a new one. Louis Lewin, the father of modern toxicology, classified mescaline (together with hemp, fly agaric, the nightshades, *caapi*, and several other plants) as a *Phantastica*, which he described as agents that "induce a clear stimulation of the brain that is also recognizable in the form of sensory delusions, hallucinations, illusions, and

visions, and may be accompanied or followed by disturbances of consciousness and other symptoms of disruption of brain functions" (Lewin 1980[1927]: 48). Because of the profound effects that LSD and mescaline can have upon sensory (especially visual) processing, "hallucinogenic" became a popular term in the 1950s. However, both it and "psychedelic" acquired a great deal of (counter)-cultural baggage as a result of the wave of experimentation with these substances that began in the 1950s and peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, and these words continue to raise flags in many circles. More recent terms that have gained some currency (and which have helped to put some linguistic distance between contemporary drug studies and the activities of those years) include "psychoactive," "entheogen," and "psychointegrator." In the context of the present discussion, "psychoactive" (a catch-all term for any substance that affects the functioning of the mind) is too broad to be of much use, while "entheogen" (a term derived from *entheos*, "god within" and *gen-*, "becoming"; Ruck et al. 1979), has ontological implications that go beyond the scope of this article. The term "psychointegrator," which implies that these substances induce a constellation of positive neurological and psychological effects, thereby resulting in higher or improved functioning (Winkelman 1996), may prove to be more appropriate, but experimental data in support of this view remain outstanding.

Since the present discussion is primarily concerned with the phenomenology and interpretation of the experiences which these substances evoke (i.e., what a person who has ingested such a compound will tend to experience and how these experiences will be understood) in this article I shall continue to use the term "psychedelic." The implication that mescaline, LSD, ayahuasca, and other similar substances reveal normally hidden or inaccessible aspects of the mind emphasizes the effects that are germane to the present discussion while leaving aside questions as to whether a "god within" is involved or if the experience and its aftermath are indeed indicative of higher levels of functioning. (As several of the other articles in this volume demonstrate, however, many people who use these substances do believe that they help to reveal an aspect of divinity within, while both the acute effects and the longer-term outcomes suggest that an improvement of various physiological and psychological systems may indeed be taking place.)

What substances can be characterized as psychedelics? Lewin's description of *Phantastica* as agents that induce "hallucinations, illusions, and visions" tends to rule out the opiates (codeine, morphine) and stimulants (caffeine, cocaine) as well as alcohol, ether, and nitrous oxide, which can produce marked psychoactive effects but only rarely (or with excessive use) affect visual or other sensory processing. For the purposes of this article, a useful classificatory schema is that of Hanscarl Leuner, one of the early German pioneers in the therapeutic use of

psychedelics. Leuner (1981: 33-35) distinguished between "Hallucinogens of the First Order" and "Hallucinogens of the Second Order." The first category is comprised of such substances as LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, psilocin, tryptamine derivatives, and, marginally, hashish, which are capable of inducing "productive optical phenomena such as illusions, visions, pseudo-hallucinations, and full-blown hallucinations, 'I' disturbances and a disturbance of the experience of time and space, but without a pronounced dulling of consciousness and without substantial mnestic impairment" (1981: 33). The second category consists of atropine, hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and other natural and synthetic anticholinergic substances, which have "comparatively weak hallucinogenic properties that are masked by severe dullings of consciousness and pronounced, long-lasting mnestic disturbances" (1981: 33-4). Leuner's distinction provides an interesting starting point for considering some examples of "psychedelic sacraments."

THE RITUALIZED USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

We humans are ingenious in our abilities to discover and refine techniques for inducing altered states of consciousness, and have used many hundreds of plants, fungi, and even animals for this purpose (see Rättsch 2005 for a comprehensive overview). Indeed, the ubiquity of the human desire to experience nonordinary states of consciousness has led both Andrew Weil (1972) and Ronald Siegel (1989) to posit that this is an expression of a biological drive as basic as the drive toward food, drink, and sex.

Humans use drugs, which certainly provide the easiest and most obvious way to alter our state of consciousness, for a wide variety of reasons. The German anthropologist Andrea Blätter (1993) has identified seven basic functions of drug use: hedonistic/recreational, compensatory/safety valve, identity formation/group cohesive, religious, medicinal, economic, and political. Drug use seldom if ever fulfills only one of these functions, but typically serves a variety of purposes in a society. For the present discussion, the "identity formation/group cohesion" and "religious" functions are of primary interest (although other functions are often involved as well), for it is these, more than any others, that create the context for using psychedelic substances as sacraments and indicate why they can be so important for religious purposes.

At this point, a subtle but significant linguistic distinction is in order, and that is the distinction between "sacrament" and "sacramental" (both used as nouns). "Sacramental" is often used to refer to a "rite, ceremony, or observance analogous to a sacrament" (Simpson & Weiner 1989, Vol XIV: 336). Within Roman Catholicism, the term is used to distinguish the seven traditional sacraments from such other practices as making the sign of the cross or

genuflecting when entering a Catholic church. Occasionally, "sacramental" may also be used to refer to certain non-Christian activities. For example, a recent volume discussing the potential value which entheogens could have on religious experience and spiritual practice is entitled *Psychoactive Sacramentals* (Roberts 2001). Many of the articles contained in that volume describe individual experiences or the use of psychedelic (there referred to as "entheogenic") substances to advance a spiritual path. However, these do not involve *sacraments*, i.e., established ritual contexts for using and understanding such substances. At the risk of appearing to split terminological hairs, I feel that the distinction between a "psychedelic sacrament" and a "psychoactive (or psychedelic) sacramental" is an important one for the present discussion and should be made explicit. Tens of millions of people alive today have used psychedelic substances to explore their inner worlds, and many of these people have as a result obtained important religious and spiritual insights (cf. Stolaroff 1999; Bravo & Grob 1989). Others have found that their experiences either upended or strengthened their previous beliefs. There is thus a very real sense in which such use can be understood within a religio-spiritual framework. Most of this modern use, however (especially in Western societies), has not taken place within a socially sanctioned and culturally predefined framework. Such idiosyncratic use may indeed be characterized as a "sacramental," but I am arguing that it should not be regarded as a sacrament. Instead, I am suggesting that "sacrament" be reserved for ritual activities that are established within a cultural tradition and which therefore provide a shared framework for anticipating the encounter with a psychedelic substance, for shaping the experience itself, and for subsequently interpreting the experience in ways that are congruent with that culture (or at least some socially tolerated part of it, such as a "mystery" or "secret society").

Thus, a "sacramental" can be understood as a practice that may have religious and/or spiritual influences and outcomes, but which is more idiosyncratic than not, in the sense that there is substantial variation in the preparation, the structure and content of the psychedelic experience, and the follow-up period. In contrast, the word "sacrament" refers to socially recognized and at least somewhat formalized rituals that will exhibit far less variation in form and patterns of substance use over time. Of course, the line between these two is fluid, and can be expected to shift as social and historical changes occur. Practices that are now more accurately characterized as "sacramentals" would become "sacraments" if they became codified and at least somewhat tolerated, while "sacraments" that fall from social favor (perhaps because they are made illegal) might only be able to continue underground as "sacramentals" that may undergo rapid and substantial change. The key to the distinction I am making is the degree to which the beliefs and practices that surround the

use of psychedelic substances have become culturally codified and fixed in ways that begin to shape the participants' experiences before they even occur, and which continue to provide an interpretive framework for these experiences after they are over.

The use of ayahuasca within the context provided by the União do Vegetal (UDV) provides an excellent example of a sacrament. The ayahuasca preparation is prepared by church members according to standardized recipes, typically with plants that church members themselves have grown or harvested. Members of the church are required to abstain from most other psychoactive substances. The persons who ingest ayahuasca are provided with guidelines for preparing themselves and are also supervised during and after their experiences. The contents of the experiences are interpreted using an explanatory framework that is well understood by the leaders and by the other members of the church. These steps all help to promote consistency in both the experiences themselves and the ways in which these are interpreted throughout the many individual churches that constitute the UDV. The earnestness of the church and the great success it has had in helping its members recover from addiction to alcohol and coca paste, and the supportive sense of community the church provides to families, have even resulted in the UDV being recognized by the Brazilian government. The UDV use of ayahuasca clearly takes place within a consistent and formalized religious context that promotes the development of a new, more psychologically healthy and socially integrated personality. Thus, the UDV use of ayahuasca is a sacrament in the sense that the term is being used here.

The use of ayahuasca within a drug tourism context is rather different. Here, the instructions offered to individuals before they are administered ayahuasca can vary greatly, the ayahuasca preparation itself may contain none of the actual ayahuasca constituents or can be very potent, and there may be other admixtures in the brew as well. Individual motivations for using ayahuasca also differ, and can range from mere curiosity to a sense of adventure to a desire for spiritual insights. The follow-up phases for interpreting and integrating the experiences also vary. Because of all of these factors, both the acute experiences and the long-term outcomes will tend to be shaped more by internal variables such as personality and the personal history of the person who is being given ayahuasca than by any external formalized ritual structure embedded within a religious tradition. In such cases, while "religious" motivations might indeed be at play in the minds of both the users and the persons who prepare and administer the ayahuasca to them, the identity formation/group cohesion functions of such use are clearly minimal or even absent (except perhaps when a group of family or friends ingest ayahuasca together). Consequently, while the context of such use may be described as a sacramental, it should not be characterized as a sacrament.

Of course, there are many other examples in which the religious and the identity formation/group cohesion functions of drug use do not co-occur, and yet the experiences are meaningful to the participants. A great number of psychoactive substances are used to both establish and maintain groups. In Germany, for example, alcohol is used for numerous social purposes. It is consumed and helps to break down individuality and create a group mentality at sporting events, automobile races, concerts, and other similar occasions. Alcohol is also the traditional drink of choice when two individuals shift their relationship with one another from the formal (as expressed by the use of the term *Sie* = "you") to the more intimate and informal (in which *du* = "you"). Although these ritual-like behaviors have structures rooted in tradition (e.g., the invitation to change status from *Sie* to *du* must come from the person who is older or has the higher social status), there is considerable freedom with respect to where and when, and what type of alcoholic beverage, will be used. (Such rituals can also be performed using nonalcoholic beverages, but they are far less common.)

American college campuses, which bring together students from a variety of geographical, economic, and social backgrounds, provide a rich environment for ritual-like forms of psychoactive substance use. Because most students do not know one another before they arrive on campus, there is a strong need to establish one's own identity and affiliate into groups. The collective use not just of alcohol, but of various other *drugs du jour*, helps to establish who is "in" and who is "out" in a certain group. Here, the first communal use of a particular substance may serve as an initiation that creates a sense of community among the users. The shared altered state of consciousness may also have an influence on the types of art, music, and dress preferred within a group, providing signs of group identity. The heightened emotions and trust engendered by the mutual risk-taking involved in using proscribed substances can also generate a strong sense of in-group identity and help to demarcate one's own group from outsiders. Depending upon the era and the region, the proscribed substances that have been used to create drug cliques and subcultures (in colleges and elsewhere) have ranged from tobacco to amphetamines, cocaine, and other stimulants, soporifics, alcoholic beverages, barbiturates, opiates, and other sedatives, cannabis, and of course psychedelic substances.

These examples reflect the basic human need to form groups and clarify one's own position with respect to others. But there is little in such practices that serves to establish or promote anything religious. In contrast to such contexts, in which the choice of drug that may be used to heighten the sense of group identity and cement relationships with others may be as much a result of market factors as anything else, the ethnographic literature demonstrates that it is precisely the psychedelic substances that tend to be used in contexts that also serve religious functions—and hence

may be described as sacraments—especially in rituals that are designed to initiate a person into a group (analogous to baptism) and in rituals that serve to reinvigorate the community and remind persons of their beliefs (analogous to the Christian Eucharist).

The Chumash, a native Californian hunter/gatherer group, used *Datura wrightii* in their puberty rituals. Initiates (both boys and girls) were required to observe strict dietary rules prior to ingesting the plant, which they believed would help them establish contact with a “dream helper” who would provide them with the supernatural power to be successful in life. Although few details of the Chumash use of *Datura* have survived the systematic destruction of their culture by the Spanish, some information is available about the male initiation ceremonies that took place in what is now Ventura, California. In these rituals, one boy at a time was initiated under the supervision of five older men. After being given an infusion of the root, the initiate would exhibit signs of dizziness and begin to tremble, at which time he was told to sleep and dream. During the next 18 to 24 hours, at least one of the five elders would always be present with the essentially comatose boy. When he began to revive, one of the elders would sing to him. Later, all five would ask about the initiate’s experiences and help him interpret them. During this time, they would also lecture the initiate about the values associated with adulthood. After their first experience with the plant, a person (male or female) was allowed to use *Datura* on their own for a variety of purposes (Applegate 1975).

Datura is a plant of the solanaceous (nightshade) family containing atropine, hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and other tropane alkaloids, compounds which Leuner classified as “Hallucinogens of the Second Order.” Solanaceous plants such as *Datura* figure prominently in initiation rituals throughout the world (e.g., Baker 1994; Johnston 1972). Other nightshades (*Atropa*, *Hyoscyamus*, *Mandragora*) were used in Medieval European rituals to initiate “witches” (Müller-Ebeling et al. 2003). Many South American groups also use species from another solanaceous genus, *Nicotiana* (tobacco), as part of their initiations to become a shaman (Wilbert 1991, 1987).

The use of these nightshades is not without danger. The alkaloid content and the relative amount of each individual constituent can vary greatly between different parts of the same plant and different plants found in the same locale. Other factors that can affect potency include the method of preparation and the season and even the hour of collection. It requires both experience and time to understand these variables, and even with supervision, fatalities can occur. The effects of the tropane alkaloids differ from those of other psychedelic substances, and excessive doses can lead to death through respiratory failure or cardiovascular collapse. Because of this, the distinction between the use of such plants for medicinal, initiatory, and other purposes is largely a function of dosage (Baker 1994). It is interesting

to note that in spite of their potent effects, there are few laws in any country governing their use (apart from those regulating the sale and distribution of tobacco). The potency and thus the effects of these plants is so unpredictable and dangerous that people avoid them on the basis of cultural tradition or word of mouth. And yet even these plants can be utilized in the context of a psychedelic sacrament that serves constructive, socially integrative purposes.

In contrast to the solanaceous plants, Leuner’s “Hallucinogens of the First Order” are not as dangerous and induce effects that are even more profound. Users do not lose consciousness, and retain their memory functions during the acute phase of the experience, making it easier to recall pre-session instructions during the experience and to reflect upon and discuss the effects afterwards. Numerous fungi and plants have been pressed into service for their ability to induce extraordinary experiences accompanied by visions full of content significant to the individual and constructive for society. The ethnographic literature (e.g., Dobkin de Rios 1990; Furst 1990; Harner 1973) that attests to the use of these substances for identity formation/group cohesion and religious functions is rich and demonstrates that unrelated societies have used them for millennia.

The peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*), the primary constituent of which is mescaline, has long been used in what is now Mexico and the southern United States for both medicinal and religious purposes. Although the Spanish attempted to eradicate its use, the cactus was so important to numerous native groups that they continued to use it in spite of both penal laws and the Inquisition. Some societies incorporated Christian elements into their peyote rituals, producing syncretic beliefs and rituals that helped bridge the gap between traditional and modern ways of life. During the 1800s, the ritual use of peyote spread into the reservations that the United States government was establishing in Oklahoma and other territories. Peyotism both reaffirmed a sense of “Indianness” in the face of severe pressure to change and provided healing for many of the ills that came along with conquest, resettlement, and cultural destruction. The desire to ensure that these benefits would continue, together with the need to be recognized by both the federal and state governments as an official religion, led to the incorporation of the Native American Church in 1918 (Stewart 1987).

There is now an extensive literature on the Native American Church and its various manifestations (see White 2000). As peyotism spread into new states and reservations and was adapted to local cultural needs, a number of peyote churches were established. Yet in spite of all these changes, there are still only two basic forms of the peyote ritual (the Cross Fire and the Half Moon). Because local leaders are allowed to structure the rituals as they see fit, these are readily adapted to local traditions and requirements (Stewart 1987: 339ff.).

Today, some 250,000 American Indians follow the Peyote Way, which is part of a broader cultural revival among the "First Peoples" of North America. Peyote is considered a gift from the Great Spirit that possesses the power to cure (Maroukis 2004: 154-156). Peyote rituals provide a context for communicating culturally constructive values, and offer effective treatment for such destructive illnesses as alcoholism. These rituals adhere to an established structure that is nevertheless open to change, and make it possible for a person to experience the effects of peyote within a socially sanctioned and culturally appropriate framework that provides guidelines for using the cactus and anticipates, shapes, and interprets the content of the experiences it induces. This use of peyote clearly serves both identity formation/group cohesion and religious functions, and can be characterized as a sacrament in the sense discussed here.

These examples indicate that it is not the substance *per se* that determines whether a practice can be characterized as a sacrament, but the context and tradition within which it is used. Sacraments are established and standardized ritual practices with a high degree of cultural legitimacy. What makes these practices into sacraments is their ability to create a sense of group identity and promote social cohesion within a structured context that is understood as religious.

One factor that has not been discussed to this point is the role which suggestibility can play. Suggestibility is a psychological concept that refers to a nonrational tendency for people to unquestioningly accept statements put forth by others. Psychedelic substances create a state of hypersuggestibility in which persons are very open to being influenced by others. Many traditional cultures have utilized this condition to inculcate cultural values in young persons during their initiations into adulthood. In the same way, "counter-cultural" values may be inculcated in young persons in Western societies who use such substances under conditions that do not promote traditional cultural values (Dobkin de Rios & Grob 1994). The concept of suggestibility provides another tool for understanding the distinction between "sacraments" and "sacramentals."

THE ROLE OF SET AND SETTING IN SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTALS

The religious beliefs and practices that create the contexts for the use of peyote among Native North Americans, the use of ayahuasca by the União do Vegetal, and the use of various psychedelic substances in the ancient mystery cults of Asia and Europe are (or were) accepted by the social group and taught to individuals prior to their first experience with the substance. As a result, these beliefs and practices provide a culturally recognized framework for both anticipating and subsequently interpreting the

experiences, and also affect the structure of the ritual and the symbols used therein. This comprehensive framework thus conditions both the "set" of the individual and the "setting" in which the psychedelic substances are used.

The set and setting model was developed by Timothy Leary and his colleagues (1964) in the 1960s to aid in understanding the variables that can affect a psychedelic experience. Both long-term and short-term factors condition a person's set. The "long-range set" refers to the basic personality traits of the individual as well as his or her personal history. The "immediate set" consists of the expectations that the individual brings into the experience. The "setting" refers to the physical location in which the experience takes place, the other people and the objects that are present, and the more general cultural attitudes and beliefs about such experiences.

Considering the set and setting in which a psychedelic experience takes place provides an additional perspective for understanding why some experiences may be characterized as sacraments while others would be better described as sacramentals. Psychedelic sacraments occur in ritual contexts that are embedded within a tradition. Here, a person's initial psychedelic experience provides an initiation into key beliefs and values of the society, while subsequent experiences can both recall and reinforce those beliefs and values. Like the Christian baptism and Eucharist, psychedelic sacraments are religiously justified rituals that establish and promote a person's identity within the group and affirm the core values of a society. The initiate learns culturally integrative attitudes as he or she is preparing for the experience, and the experiences are interpreted in ways that are defined and consequently accepted by the social and religious community. The individual's set is shaped by the values and attitudes of the culture (religion), while the setting in which the experience takes place typically includes other people who possess similar knowledge and contains objects that symbolize the values and beliefs of the culture. Thus, in a psychedelic sacrament, both the set and the setting are heavily shaped by the culture in which the ritual takes place. The suggestible state that the psychedelic substance induces may be purposely exploited by elders to communicate cultural knowledge. As a result, the overall experience serves to validate and reinforce the traditional cultural beliefs and values that a person learns before his or her first encounter with a psychedelic substance.

In contrast, the use of psychedelics in the more idiosyncratic contexts of modern Western societies, where such use runs counter to prevailing attitudes and represents a type of antisocial behavior, will tend to be structured not by the knowledge and values of society at large, but by the knowledge and values of the individual. A person's set will likely be critical of at least some aspects of society (such as its laws prohibiting psychedelics), and the setting will

not usually promote identification with society at large (although it might provide identification with a subculture). Here, psychedelic experiences will tend to emphasize issues related to a person's individual identity and concerns. Moreover, because the individual is unusually open to suggestion during the acute phase of the psychedelic experience, he or she may be receptive to ideas and values that call traditional cultural knowledge into question.

When psychedelic substances are used within traditional, socially-accepted contexts, both the set and the setting will be largely shaped by factors outside of the individual and the experiences will tend to reinforce traditional cultural values. After all, one might think "if my culture can accurately predict and explain these extraordinary experiences, then the ways in which it constructs and explains the ordinary world must be accurate as well." In contrast, when the very same substances are used in societies which proscribe them and define them as "drugs of abuse," then neither the set nor the setting is likely to provide much reinforcement of traditional beliefs and values. Now, more idiosyncratic internal factors will play a substantial role in shaping the experiences and the ways in which they will be interpreted. Because psychedelic substances (especially Leuner's "Hallucinogens of the First Order") are not in themselves particularly dangerous when used appropriately by healthy individuals, a person's experiences may lead them to further question their society's values. After all, others might think "if they have lied to me about these insightful experiences, then they have probably lied to me about more mundane things as well." These experiences will tend not to promote traditional beliefs and values, and can actually lead to innovations that may call tradition into question.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In the 1950s, as researchers became more aware of the range of nonpathological effects of these substances, they coined the word "psychedelic" to acknowledge the wide variety of mental phenomena—both cognitive and affective—that they could invoke. Shortly thereafter, the set and setting model became the paradigm for understanding the effects produced by these substances. We now know that other variables can also play a role. Individual variation, both genetic and psychological, suggests that there will always be some differences in the types of effects they produce. As a result, factors outside of the individual—both social and cultural—play an important role in framing the experience and minimizing potential negative outcomes.

Psychedelic sacraments are rituals that are shaped by established cultural knowledge. They are recognized, and indeed grounded in tradition. Consequently, psychedelic sacraments help to maintain a society by teaching an individual about basic cultural beliefs and values, and they

represent a proven method for aligning the individual with the group. They promote the formation of the individual's own identity as a member of the group, thereby promoting the cohesion of the group. Because they also enable persons to have extraordinary experiences that the culture both anticipates and is able to explain, they provide affirmation of some of the most basic ontological assumptions of the society.

Psychedelic sacramentals are rituals that tend to be shaped by the individual or a small group (often with outsider status). They are proscribed by society, and often fly in the face of established cultural values. As a result, psychedelic sacramentals can call cultural beliefs and values into question, and may lead individuals to separate from the group. They can indeed promote an individual's own sense of identity, but this may not be an identity that promotes the cohesion of the group. Because they can provide persons with extraordinary experiences that the culture denies or explains away in negative terms, they can lead an individual to suspect the most basic ontological assumptions of the society.

Psychedelic sacraments represent perhaps the best way to structure the profound experiences induced by these substances in ways that are integrative for a society and its members. As the unintended lessons of recent social experiments with idiosyncratic contexts have demonstrated, the use of psychedelics in a society that emphasizes individuality and offers no generally accepted framework for using these substances leaves users of psychedelic substances largely on their own when they attempt to understand their experiences and leaves them open to suggestion from others, with varied effects. Of course, modern Western societies consist of numerous subcultures, many of which are more open to psychedelic use than the society at large. The values held by these groups range from the hedonistic and nihilistic (cf. Dobkin de Rios & Grob 1994) to the spiritual and religious and will affect the individual in corresponding ways.

Many societies have used psychedelics in "sacred" contexts in which they are conceptualized as a communion with a deity or deities and used for initiation into and intensification of a community of believers. If they are used within the context of a "psychedelic sacramental" (cf. Stolaroff 2001), the risk of personal harm can be minimized and effects that may be beneficial to the individual become more likely. But since such contexts of use still run contrary to the beliefs and values of the greater society, some degree of cultural criticism will remain. Societies which offer their members culturally recognized psychedelic sacraments minimize idiosyncratic interpretations and maximize the possibility that the experiences will be not just personally but also socially beneficial.

The fact that many (if not all) humans give in to the drive to alter their state of consciousness and experience

extraordinary states—whether through thrill-seeking or meditation, through trance or dance, or by traveling to foreign countries as drug tourists or participating in socially accepted psychedelic rituals—suggests that any culture that

wishes to channel this drive in ways that are beneficial to the society as well as the individual would do well to consider the lessons offered by the many psychedelic sacraments that have been developed across the world.

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