

2-2021

From Recreational to Sacramental: Observing Past Entheogenic Practices and Considering Their Potential Application in the Future of Christianity

Heath Hollensbe

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FROM RECREATIONAL TO SACRAMENTAL:
OBSERVING PAST ENTHEOGENIC PRACTICES AND CONSIDERING THEIR
POTENTIAL APPLICATION IN THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

HEATH HOLLENSBE

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2021

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Heath Hollensbe

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2021
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Karen Claassen, DMin

Secondary Advisor: David McDonald, DMin

Lead Mentor: Leonard I. Sweet, PhD

Expert Advisor: Karen Claassen, DMin

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GLOSSARY

Advance. Coined by Dr. Leonard Sweet, this is a semiotic re-signing of the concept of a “retreat”. A religious retreat is often a period of seclusion for prayer and meditation. However, the re-signing of this word maintains the premise that Christians do not “retreat” from culture but advance within culture.

Ayahuasca. A psychoactive beverage prepared from the bark of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis*.

Cannabis. The psychoactive dried flower buds, leaves, preparations, or chemicals derived from the cannabis plant.

Cannabinoid. Any of various naturally occurring chemical constituents (such as cannabidiol or cannabinol) of hemp or cannabis, including many that possess psychoactive properties.

DMT. A naturally occurring hallucinogenic drug, chemically similar to ayahuasca.

Entheogen. A substance, typically of plant origin, ingested to produce a non-ordinary state of consciousness for religious or spiritual purposes.

Ecopsychology. A therapeutic ideology that attempts to treat people psychologically by bringing them closer to nature.

Evangelical. A sect within Protestant Christianity, which primary foci are personal conversion, the authority of scripture, and the doctrine of salvation by faith.

Gnosticism. A collection of religious ideas and systems originating in the first century AD among early Christian and Jewish sects. These various groups emphasized

personal spiritual knowledge over the church's orthodox teachings, traditions, and authority.

Hemp. The cannabis plant's fiber, extracted from the stem and used to make rope, strong fabrics, fiberboard, and paper.

Hallucination. A situation involving the perception of something that is not real.

Hallucinogenic. Any substance which causes hallucinations.

Ibogaine. A crystalline alkaloid hallucinogen obtained from the roots, bark, and leaves of the Tabernanthe Iboga plant found in Africa.

Marijuana. Cannabis consumed as a psychoactive (mind-altering) drug.

Mescaline. A hallucinatory crystalline alkaloid and the chief active principle in peyote buttons.

Psilocybin. A hallucinogenic obtained from fungus.

Psychedelic. Relating to or denoting substances that produce hallucinations and apparent expansion of consciousness.

Salvia divinorum. A plant species with transient psychoactive properties when its leaves are consumed by chewing, smoking, or brewing them in tea.

Sacrament. A thing of mysterious and sacred significance; a religious symbol. Sacraments are signs of mysterious and sacred significance, in which a connection to the Divine is provided to people.

Shaman. A person who acts as an intermediary between the natural and supernatural worlds, especially among certain tribal peoples.

THC. Either of two physiologically active isomers from hemp plant resin and the chief intoxicant in marijuana.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to consider whether Jesus followers in North America could begin to adopt entheogens as items of sacramental worship.

Section One will describe the opportunity on the horizon for the institutional church in North America.

Section Two will focus on alternative readings of biblical texts and look at the basis of convictions about entheogenic use. By looking at the history of entheogens around the world, I attempt to show that entheogenic use is not a new trend to adopt, but part of religious history.

Additionally, I will present a proposed path forward on culture-wide adoption of entheogens.

Section Three will consider the potential of entheogens as sacramental objects. I will use my semiotic training to re-sign the concept of “sacrament” by focusing on sacraments throughout Christian history and present a larger scope of what could define sacramental.

Section Four will describe what an entheogenic spiritual retreat would look like. Since sharing my experience, many have approached me to lead them through a similar experience. In this section, I will suggest what that environment and setting might look like.

Section Five will include the mechanics of hosting an entheogenic retreat. This section will feel highly pragmatic as I delve into the artifact’s schedule, budget, purpose, form, and function.

Section Six will share what I have learned throughout the process, will note problems that have come to light through the process, and will offer helpful suggestions for the future of research and conversation in this area.

The evangelical church in North America has often shown up late to culturally relevant conversations. For there to be beauty that grows from the rubble of a post-Christian church, it will be of importance for the church to provide a Christ-following analysis of whatever new topic might be on the horizon.

SECTION 1:
A POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY ON THE HORIZON FOR EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH AMERICA

This was the sixties, an era of liturgical reform and experimentation. Our worship, I wrote to my superiors, was about as dull as it could get. I had read some scholarly guesses about a mushroom cult in Palestine in the first century in which Jesus must have been involved. I thought it was worth a try. I arranged for the purchase of some mushroom caps, peyote it was, and introduced them at the next celebration of the eucharist. It was the most terrific experience anyone had ever had in worship, absolutely dazzling. But I didn't want to do anything that was in violation of our church constitution and finding nothing in our Book of Order on this, could they please advise me on whether I was permitted to proceed along these lines. I have since learned that in at least two seminaries during these years, professors of worship and liturgy were conducting just such experiments, using hallucinogenic drugs in eucharistic worship.¹ –Eugene Peterson.

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.² Though it has been documented extensively throughout tribal and classical cultures, visionary plants throughout early Christian religious practice have been a controversial topic for quite a while. There are religious stories that have perplexed theologians for years. Moses claims to have seen a burning bush. Paul observed Jesus on the road to Damascus. St. Teresa had ecstatic visions. John accounted for bizarre events that he encountered on the island of Patmos.

Time and energy have been spent researching cultures whose spiritual disciplines accommodate the use of hallucinogenic substances but whose elements of worship have

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Mount Pocono, PA: Gracewing, 1993), 78-79.

² John R. Baker, "Psychedelic Sacraments," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 37, no. 2 (2005): 179-187.

been given very little attention by many mainstream followers of Jesus. Therefore, the question must be asked whether or not there is a significant global community of spiritual seekers, who participate and benefit from hallucinogenic properties, and who have been overlooked by many who claim Christianity as their religion. If so, what potential is there to learn from their years of mind-altering spiritual encounters, if any?

Hallucinogens have played a significant role in Christianity for some time, and it is possible that some of the Christian faith's most significant role models were more accepting of mind-altering substances than would typically be acknowledged.³

Many people who would claim the title of "Christian" in the United States today may be unfamiliar with the religious history of mind-altering substances and their use as a means of encountering the Divine.⁴ This dissertation will examine the role of natural hallucinogens as an aid to kinds of meaningful spiritual experiences that most Western Christians are not currently utilizing.

³ For some reason, the current culture of evangelicalism has become more known for what they are against than what they are for. Evangelicalism is increasingly notorious for being particularly resistant (or even dismissive) of many cultural advances. While I wish that I could spend more time on this, length considerations do not allow. However, a book by Franky Schaeffer provides a convincing argument regarding the sacred/secular divide, which I believe affords insights as to why this is the case. See Franky Schaeffer, *Addicted to Mediocrity* (Ashland, OR: Blackstone, 1997).

⁴ Amerindians belonging to the Native American Church employ peyote in their rituals and are strongly against any government control of this plant. They believe that peyote is a natural gift of God to humankind and that no government should be allowed to interfere with its use. They argue that when it comes to natural plants, no authority should prevent individuals from eating hallucinogenic plants.

Clarifying Definitions

An entheogen is a chemical substance, typically of plant origin, ingested to produce a non-ordinary state of consciousness for religious or spiritual purposes.⁵ “Entheogen” is derived from two Greek words, *éntheos* and *genésthai*. The adjective *éntheos* translates to English as “full of god, inspired, possessed.” These plants were known by names such as “the food of the gods” and “sacred medicines” and have been recorded in the cosmologies of societies worldwide as inspiring the origins of culture and religions before becoming degraded as “hallucinogens” in the modern world.⁶

While many synthetic entheogens have been developed in laboratories, the focus for this dissertation will remain on natural substances, which have not been created or modified in a testing room. The intent of concentrating solely on non-synthetic substances will be to keep the conversation focused on elements that many believe have been provided by God to humanity as a gift for divinely intended purposes. By allowing human-made synthetic substances to enter into the conversation, the integrity of divine provision becomes more complicated.

Through extensive research, it has become increasingly clear that my curiosity has not found much resonance among many who claim the same Christian faith. While this topic has been considered academically, historically, culturally, and theologically by several others previously, it has not gained much traction among leaders within

⁵ “Entheogen,” *Oxford Lexico*, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/entheogen>.

⁶ See J. Baker, trans., *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Enthopharmacology and its Applications* (Rochester, VT: Park St. Press, 1998).

Christianity and especially not within evangelicalism. Because of this, I found it even more compelling to attempt to enter into this conversation.

The term “sacrament” is a familiar term to those in the Christian tradition, though pinning down an accurate definition is complicated as familiarity has not demanded a clear definition. Consequently, routine sacramental practices, such as the Eucharist and Baptism are often carried out without critical scrutiny. To animate the conversation, a focus on clarifying the definition and purpose of “sacrament” will require a significant amount of unpacking and re-signing, which will become a primary theme of this thesis.

For many, the word “psychedelic” invokes images of the 1960s and the dawn of the modern drug culture. In contrast, “sacrament” usually refers to Christian rituals. At first blush, these two terms might appear to refer to somewhat different domains of human activity with quite divergent value systems. While the information contained within this document may seem foreign regarding its compatibility with Christianity,

...historians have held conflicting views on these drugs. Many have dismissed psychedelic drug use as an embarrassment and refused to take seriously claims of drug induced spiritual enlightenment or correlated notions of cultural revolution. There have been, however, few studies written by historians of religion, who have been left with the daunting task of connecting illicit and controversial substances with spiritual practices.⁷

The fascination of this potential congruity has led to an interest in further delving into the marriage of these two components. This will be the fuel that sources the completion of this dissertation.⁸

⁷ Chris Elcock, “Psychedelics and the Religious Experience,” *Nova Religio* 20, no. 4 (2017): 94-99, <https://online.ucpress.edu/nr/article-abstract/20/4/94/70948/Psychedelics-and-the-Religious-Experience?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

⁸ It is crucial to clarify that psychedelics should in no way be confused with highly addictive, often toxic drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines (including alcohol and nicotine). Unlike these

The Pending Opportunity

As the medical and recreational use of cannabis and psilocybin mushrooms expand across the United States, this is an ideal opportunity for followers of Jesus to consider intellectually engaging this topic, as well as the many complexities that are associated with it.⁹ Throughout history, the people of God have quite a history with both influencing culture and being influenced by culture. I suggest that there are reasons why maintaining a posture of acceptance could benefit followers of Jesus.

Marijuana use is growing among Christians in North America as legislation loosens on both medical and recreational fronts.¹⁰ Psilocybin mushrooms are being used for significant research in caring for individuals with crippling mental health diagnoses. Alcohol has found a significant resurgence in acceptance among Christians since prohibition. Therefore, entheogens may hold a similar future.

As legislation and familiarity with these substances continue to increase over the next few decades, it is essential to trace what fuels various levels of acceptance and positions regarding Christian morality. Likewise, alternative factors (pain management, health benefits, legality, denominational stances, and end of life fears) could play a more significant role in these delineations than we might first consider. Increasingly, profound religious experiences are now occurring and being documented through the laboratories of medical professionals and social scientists. For these purposes, I am keenly curious as

often deeply destructive drugs, the substances focused on throughout this dissertation are non-addictive and non-toxic.

⁹ A new acceptance of drug culture is gaining popularity across America. As this section is being written, Oregon became the first state to decriminalize possession of hard drugs.

¹⁰ Prominent Christian leaders, such as Craig Gross and Jonathan Merritt, continue to become increasingly vocal proponents of this trend.

to how Christians will navigate the future of entheogens while pursuing a Christ-honoring life.

Uncovering the Divine Throughout History

Evangelicals are in crisis.¹¹ Evangelicalism has never been known for an appreciation of mystery or mystical pursuits. The evangelical tradition has stripped away mystery and mysticism and opted for a cut and dried approach to religion.¹² As a result, it appears that evangelicals are less likely to engage a subject, for which they hold preconceived judgments. A topic of consideration however, might be to study the practices and beliefs of those around the world who have existed for thousands of years and who share an interest in encountering the Divine.

A more robust understanding of humanity's long history of consuming natural substances (to become closer to their creator) will add context to the conversation. "Native Americans are thought to have used mescaline for spiritual purposes for as long as fifty-five hundred years. Cave paintings of human-like figures with mushrooms have been found on the Tassili Plateau in Northern Algeria, dating to 5000 BCE."¹³ There is a mystical consciousness in all of the great religions across the world, and Christianity is no exception. Every religion has words that point toward a highly desired and valuable

¹¹ While I desire to spend a great deal of time unpacking this, length considerations do not allow. However it does not take significant observations to understand that as the United States continues to head into post-Christendom, statistics are not pointing positively toward the strength and growth of evangelicalism.

¹² I would like to argue that a primary part of this reasoning is fear. Specifically, fear regarding loss of control. However, length considerations do not allow.

¹³ See William Richards, *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experience* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).

state of spiritual awareness. In Hinduism, it is samandhi, nirvana in Buddhism, sekhel mufla in Judaism, baqá wa faná in Islam, and wu wei in Taoism.¹⁴ Evidence confirms that there has been an appreciation and acceptance of the consumption of psychedelic substances (and medicines) by Christians over the last 2,000 years.

For many, the concept of “producing God” would demand caution or skepticism, as a mystical experience is understood to be a gift that is received and not manufactured as a byproduct of human effort. Because of this, language such as “discovering God within” would be much more accurate and beneficial.¹⁵ A commonality among spiritual seekers throughout various world religions is “how secure they appear in their certainty of the reality of a sacred dimension of consciousness and how little they care about what words one may choose to describe it.”¹⁶

Religious Leaders in Clinical Studies

When psychologist William Richards approaches religion, he witnesses mystical encounters around every corner. In light of this, Johns Hopkins has tasked him to conduct a research project where psilocybin mushrooms are administered to leaders of various world religions. He states that “there are—it is so hard to put this into language—sacred eternal experiences that the human being is capable of having. They seem to be at the origin of most religions. What we call the eternal seems incredibly real. People see incredible things with their eyes closed that are often very, very beautiful, including

¹⁴ Richards, 10.

¹⁵ Similar sentiments such as the concept of the “imago dei” would be beneficial to the conversation. However, due to length constraints, this cannot happen here.

¹⁶ Richards, 41.

visions of Jesus. That seems to happen whether people are of religious training or not. It does not seem to be something that is learned. It seems to be something that is genetic.”¹⁷

It is through this research that Richards is beginning to believe that God is moving through these psilocybin mushrooms. He goes on to say, “The deep mystical experiences are always discovered as gifts received. That is what we call grace, religiously. One of the spiritual insights that occur reliably is the sense of the interconnectedness of us all, the family of man...which, I think, is desperately needed in this world. We are getting so isolated and afraid of diversity.”¹⁸ While conclusive evidence of this research has not yet been revealed, there is significant evidence that demonstrates an openness to investigating what role, hallucinogens could play in the future of religion.

Shamans and Their Service

It would be difficult to engage this topic without observing the long-held practices of shamans who have served various people groups around the world for countless millennia.¹⁹ Regarding the role of a shaman, the most universally accepted definition is to act as a guide to states of ecstasy for the sake of interacting with the spiritual world as the mediator between that world and the community that the shaman is representing.²⁰

¹⁷ Julie Zauzmer, “At Johns Hopkins, Clergy Try Mind-Altering Drugs for Scientific Research,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/07/24/at-johns-hopkins-clergy-try-mind-altering-drugs-for-scientific-research/>.

¹⁸ Zauzmer.

¹⁹ Alternatively, their female counterparts are often called shamanka’s.

²⁰ There is a correlation between shamans as mediators of the divine in contrast to the role of Jesus as a mediator of man before the ultimate divine. Mircea Eliade’s *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* is a great resource. See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Though many Christians would not hold a keen familiarity with shamanic practices, they are often much closer to multiple spiritual disciplines than are often given credit. In cultures spanning the globe, the shaman figure stands out as the one who bridges the mortal and spirit worlds.²¹ Often living at the edges of society but functioning at its center, shamans were entrusted with the ability to communicate with nature spirits, ancestors, or a culture's gods and goddesses and could function variously as an oracle, doctor, psychotherapist, and more.²² Traditional shamans lived in stable yet unique relationships with all the forces and beings in the world around them (both positive and negative), striving for a perfect balance. Shamans of tribal societies still exist and operate in the world today, leading communities into spiritual trance states via psychedelic plants. Many shamans provide services and products free of charge because they believe that the plants are a sacrament and should not be charged for. There is a significant amount of spiritual care that is often considered by those who believe that they are "called" to administer these sacraments.²³

Within numerous societies that practice shamanism, often there is a preference for the practitioners to be female. Many of the oldest ceremonial megalithic sites are associated with women shamans and oracular tradition and prophecy. The site of the

²¹ It should be noted that while many appreciate the work and wisdom of shamans, they are not always accepted with open arms. Shamans' stories of being demonized, persecuted, and even killed by religious groups (specifically missionaries) is well documented.

²² See Karen Frances Eng, "In 21st Century Korea, Shamanism is Not Only Thriving but Evolving," TEDFellows, March 1, 2018, <https://fellowsblog.ted.com/in-21st-century-korea-shamanism-is-not-only-thriving-but-evolving-fla8862a7bc8>.

²³ Due to length considerations, I cannot provide a colorful narrative regarding these responsibilities. However, "trip sitters" are often honored to be asked to assist people in their hallucinogenic experiences. It is an honor that is not taken lightly. In fact, it is often seen as a pastoral request. Many decline, because they believe that they are not in a space to successfully lead others in this capacity.

Temple of Tentyra in Egypt was chosen because of the distinct existing feminine energy that many felt radiating from it.²⁴ Even today, with increasing frequency in the Western context, it is women, not men who lead and guide the majority of ayahuasca ceremonies.²⁵ This is exciting to witness, as women's roles in Christianity are continuing to expand.

Stated Expectations

It would be foolish to presume that presenting a topic with such varying degrees of acceptance would readily be easily accepted by those who claim to be followers of Jesus. Humans will inevitably grow up with specific stereotypes, regardless of how obstinate we resolve not to allow this to occur. However, "throughout the ages, most religious institutions have respectfully included, and accommodated experiences called spiritual or religious, however engendered."²⁶ My sincere request is that as this information is presented, honest intellectual considerations will be given to the content that is being provided. While it would be entirely reasonable to approach controversial or unfamiliar topics with hesitation and solidified convictions, I hope that open-mindedness and curiosity will lead to a deepened interest in this discussion and that, as always, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth.

²⁴ Barbara Tedlock's book provides a strong account for the role of females in the history of shamanism and corrects the commonly held view that shamans are primarily male. See Barbara Tedlock, *The Woman in the Shaman's Body: Reclaiming the Feminine in Religion and Medicine* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2006).

²⁵ In fact, Maria Sabina, a female shaman from the heart of the Sierra Mazateca is one of the leading names in the popularity of hallucinogenic mushrooms.

²⁶ Richards, 28.

SECTION 2: ENGAGING A GROWING OPPORTUNITY

Numerous historians and ethnobotanists believe that entheogens played a part in the development of world religions and form the basis of countless spiritual traditions. Many ancient cultures and religions used psychotropic drugs to alter perception and instigate religious ecstasy.²⁷ Though considerable primitive artifacts of humanity include descriptions of shamans distributing hallucinogenic materials, psychedelics have become taboo in western life because they tend to pose an empirical threat to western conservative ideals.

While there will always be opportunities for those who intend to abuse a good thing, entheogenic practitioners believe that the ritual consumption of entheogenic plants assists them in achieving spiritual and existential insights that beget positive improvements in their health.²⁸ The pursuits of many shamans and other religious leaders who administer entheogens have often centered around providing a journey, which allows the seeker to experience the Divine.²⁹ In light of this (and being a hopeful proponent of entheogenic possibilities), it would be beneficial to move away from language that

²⁷ “Entheogenic Origins: Generating the God Within,” Google Arts and Culture, October 4, 2020, https://artsandculture.google.com/usergallery/entheogenic-origins-generating-the-divine-within/xgISmK_1b74AKg.

²⁸ See Marc G. Blainey, “Forbidden Therapies: Santo Daime, Ayahuasca, and the Prohibition of Entheogens in Western Society,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 1 (2015): 287-302.

²⁹ While I wish that I could spend time speaking about the Eleusian Mysteries, length constraints will not allow. However, initiates (even prominent ones such as Plato) would drink *kukeon*, a beverage that had mind-altering capabilities, which far outstripped those of alcohol. Many were permanently transformed by what happened. The mysteries were wildly popular and only ended when the Christian emperor Theodosius outlawed the “mysteries” in 392 AD.

associates entheogens as “drugs” and instead create a space where they can be viewed as medicines. This would parallel the vocabulary of numerous academics and psychologists currently studying the medical potential of hallucinogens, and it would be favorable to do the same here.³⁰

Entheogens Around the Globe

One of the connective tissues in the quest of this research is recognizing the ancient spiritual rituals that have been, and still are, taking place across the world today.

The peyote cactus has routinely been consumed for over 2,000 years within Mesoamerica and continues to be used sacramentally by the Huichol Indians of Mexico. Omer Stewart suggests that current South American peyote ceremonies are essentially different from those in Mexico (though they have common similarities), though Christian missionaries’ overtones have begun to influence aspects of the ceremony.³¹

Stones depicting hallucinogenic mushrooms in Mexico and Guatemala place mushroom worship as far back as 1,000 BCE.³² The Spanish conquerors detailed the consumption of psilocybin mushrooms as a vital part of religious life to indigenous peoples.

³⁰ While length considerations will not allow me to speak into the process of federal regulations here, it is my hope that if research continues to show the positive effects of psychedelics, that a path to healthy oversight could bring these to mainstream medicine through appropriate licensing and FDA regulations.

³¹ See Omer Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

³² It is not clear if these effigies refer specifically to the psilocybin mushroom and/or to fly-agaric. The natural presence and ethnographic and/or linguistic data of their use in those regions have been evidenced. Due to length constraints, see R. Gordon Wasson, *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

Ancient shamans from the Amazon would craft a tea out of the vine of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the plant *Psychotria viridis*, and the bitter result would be ayahuasca. The result was an intense hallucinogenic experience that would often result in a night of music, contemplation, and spiritual encounters. Amazonian shamans still administer this tea in regulated situations with similar results. Urban Brazilians have created thriving churches of ayahuasca.³³

Soma is an obscure substance, which identity has been forgotten over the last few thousand years. The *Rig Veda* speaks positively about this hallucinogenic.³⁴ From the 1,028 hymns contained within the document, over 120 praise the preparation and virtues of this hallucinogenic. While many suggest that this is the *Amanita Muscaria* mushroom, other academics suggest various alternative options. What is central to all contributors is that this entheogen held a central place in Eurasian religion.

In the Republic of Gabon, the religion of Bwiti continues to grow. To be initiated into this religion, it is customary for an individual to consume the powdered bark of the *Tabernanthe iboga* root in extremely high doses. The primary chemical, ibogaine, produces a dream-like state that is often compared to a near-death experience with accompanying beautiful visions. The participant often experiences a “re-birth” of themselves, allowing them to develop a state of compassion for all living things. Though non-native missionaries contributed to this tradition’s violent suppression by destroying its temples and exterminating its religious leaders, Bwiti is now the equivalent of a state religion.

³³ See Juan R. Duschene-Winter, *Plant Theory in Amazonian Literature: New Directions in Latino American Cultures* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot, 2019), 96.

³⁴ This is a Sanskrit text and one of the oldest known to humanity.

Cannabis is one of the oldest (and most universally used) plants in the world. In ancient Sufi, Taoist, and Vedic religions, it was often used in conjunction with the spiritual discipline of prayer. Sacred use is still found within Hindu, Rastafarian, and Coptic traditions.

Entheogens in Early Christian Art

While at first these might sound like extreme situations, even Christian art in religious locations worldwide has been shown to display curious “entheogens” in ancient religious artwork, further testifying to the long history of hallucinogens in Christianity.³⁵

A question that could be considered is whether or not there was something categorically different about the early church, which generated a connection to the Divine through entheogens. Dr. Jerry Brown suggests that we know that early church fathers and gnostic gospel church leaders indulged in entheogens, and that it was in the Inquisition that a change was made regarding the use of entheogens in religion.

Current Churches Leading the Way

A large global community currently considers the consumption of hallucinogens or other foreign substances to be a part of their religious rituals. Gabola church, a congregation in South Africa, believes its congregation connects with God through

³⁵ The work of Dr. Jerry and Julie Brown has been of great interest in my research pursuits. This duo traveled throughout Europe and has documented hallucinogens in Christian art dating back to the 9th century. Their theory holds that the Psychedelic Gospels suggest that psychedelics played an important role in the origins of Christianity, and that the ongoing significance of psychedelics in Christianity is visually documented by their presence in early and Medieval Christian art found in churches and cathedrals throughout Europe and the Middle East. Their work is widely available and can be studied in their book, *The Psychedelic Gospels*. See Jerry and Julie Brown, *The Psychedelic Gospels: The Secret History of Hallucinogens in Christianity* (Rochester, VT: Park St. Press, 2016).

consuming large amounts of alcohol during services. Pope Tsietsi Makiti says, “every church is connecting to God in their way, but we are connecting to God under the influence of liquor.”³⁶ Shamanic communities in Peru seek to live in harmony with the natural world and recognize an interconnection and interdependence, or sacred oneness, among all things. They hold no separation between spirituality and health, food and medicine, or human beings and the natural world.³⁷

Though sacred plant medicine continues to be illegal in the United States, it is becoming increasingly popular among westerners, with people traveling to remote places to experience for themselves the spiritual medicine of shamanic healing traditions.³⁸ Western science increasingly recognizes the positive, life-changing benefits of psychedelics in ridding individuals of post-traumatic stress disorder, for example, or in the case of those with terminal cancers, of their fear of death.

The Zide Door Church is an entheogenic church that recognizes cannabis and psilocybin as sacraments. Their services are held at 4:20 pm on Sundays. Before and after the services, members are allowed to purchase various psilocybin and cannabis products.³⁹

³⁶ See Kyla Herrmannsen, “South Africa: Gabola Church ‘Connects with God by Drinking Alcohol,’” *BBC News*, August 1, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-53724453>.

³⁷ See Jeanne Achterberg, *Imagery in Healing: Shamanism and Modern Medicine* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2002), 82.

³⁸ Teresa von Kerckerinck, “Know Thyself: A First-Person Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experience of Using the Shamanic Sacred Plant Medicines Ayahuasca and Willka” (PhD diss, Saybrook University, San Francisco, CA, 2014), Academia, https://www.academia.edu/10003218/know_thyself_a_first_person_hermeneutic_phenomenological_study_of_the_lived_experience_of_using_the_shamanic_sacred_plant_medicines_ayahuasca_and_willka.

³⁹ The Zide Door is led by Pastor Dave Hodges. More information can be found at www.ZideDoor.com.

Developing Convictions

While there are many different convictions about what makes something spiritual or not, there is no generic “one-size-fits-all” approach to this topic. Indeed, some individuals enjoy consuming hallucinogens for recreational purposes. On the other hand, there are groups of people, who have purposefully intended to use hallucinogens to engage in spiritual pursuits. People drink a beer recreationally during a sports game on a Sunday afternoon after having consumed Eucharistic wine for spiritual purposes a few hours earlier. Some individuals who enjoy trekking into the woods to experience nature camping also enjoy a spiritual retreat in seclusion in the same woods at a different time. It boils down to the activity’s intent or one’s personal motives. Throughout the New Testament, it is clear that Christ has come to bring freedom, and we have been invited to taste and see that the Lord is good. What individual has been given the authority to determine when and how these pursuits are accomplished appropriately? Who can determine when wine is consumed for spiritual or recreational purposes?

Culturally, each individual has convictions that act as personal “lines in the sand” as to what is acceptable and what is not, but to factually determine a conviction’s imperial basis is far trickier. This has become increasingly clear to me, as I began to consider the basis of convictions and where they originate. I have spoken to certain evangelicals, who have no problem working on the sabbath and yet are adamant that swearing is a sin. Others have no problem rolling through stop signs but would never watch a movie rated PG-13 or higher. A few weeks ago, I spoke to a group of Christian college students, who held no convictions regarding the overconsumption of alcohol on weekends but were deeply religiously convicted about eating meat.

While it would be reasonably easy to look at some of these examples and find a few laughable, to the individuals I spoke with, these were deeply held convictions. So, on what basis are we able to minimize another's heartfelt convictions? Simply because an activity is not one that a specific individual might reject or affirm does not negate or affirm a global standard of conviction.⁴⁰

Another element of discussion that is worth considering is the intent that motivates actions. By observing the life of Jesus, it does not take long to see that the religious leaders often challenged Christ to succumb to the law's technicalities. In these situations, Christ is often seen frustrating the religious leaders by exposing their motives.⁴¹ When it comes to the issue of items available for human consumption, Jesus even addresses this topic. Wine had long been a consumable product that was known to lower inhibitions and provide a cheerful spirit. However, at the Last Supper, Jesus resigns the alcoholic liquid and declares that it should be a primary method for remembering Him. While the world would consume to forget their issues, Jesus re-signed wine as an object of sacramental remembrance.⁴² The purpose for my suggestion of entheogens as an item of spiritual sacrament considers falls under the same intention.

⁴⁰ It is crucial to reinforce the intent of this dissertation. At this point, it could be easy to head down a path that I do not intend to go. It would be fascinating to turn and look at the nature of convictions and what is right or wrong when it comes to those convictions. As that would be a natural progression in the argument, I need to state that this is not how I intend to advance this dissertation. I am far more interested in asking whether or not there is an opportunity for genuine spiritual seekers to connect with the Divine through a means which is generally considered "sinful" by a majority of Christians in North America. Should we celebrate when a lost person returns home regardless of the means, or are there specific parameters on how that should or should not occur?

⁴¹ One of the most familiar instances is when Jesus heals a disabled man on the Sabbath. John 5:1-18 provides the encounter.

⁴² Matthew 26:17-30

While many have consumed hallucinogenic compounds as a means to "finding themselves," I specifically argue entheogens (over hallucinogenics), as the vocabulary provides the differential framework for those elements' spiritual motivations.

An Entheogenic Approach to Biblical Oddities

To look for corroborating evidence of entheogens in early Christianity, we must turn to the written Word, to the texts of the New Testament and the gnostic gospels, and also to the commentaries of church fathers and other writers, including poets, patricians, and historians. Since Christianity emerged in a Mediterranean region rife with Egyptian, Greek, Judaic, and Roman mystery cults, many of which possessed a sacred pharmacopeia, there is robust documentation of early entheogen use.⁴³ In light of this long tradition of early entheogenic use, it is not surprising to find that

...Christianity had psychedelic mystery traditions throughout its history, nearly up to the modern-day. From the Nazarene apocalypticists having visions of the end-times to the various gnostic magic and mystery traditions, to the orthodox appropriation of various pagan entheogenic experiences, psychedelia has been a part of Christianity since its earliest days.⁴⁴

Medicine men of the Amazonian jungle or Siberian plains go into their hunts alone to encounter their familiar spirits. The High Priest enters the Holy of Holies alone to commune with YHWH before the Ark of the Covenant/Alliance. Israelite priests, like

⁴³ See Jerry and Julie Brown, "Entheogens in Christian Art: Wasson, Allegro, and the Psychedelic Gospels," *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2019): 142-163, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335738532_Entheogens_in_Christian_art_Wasson_Allegro_and_the_Psychedelic_Gospels.

⁴⁴ Brown and Brown, "Entheogens in Christian Art." See also Thomas Hatsis, *Psychedelic Mystery Traditions: Spirit Plants, Magical Practices and Ecstatic States* (Rochester, VT: Park St. Press, 2018), 170.

some shamans, used plant preparations entheogenically to facilitate the encounter, to trigger visionary, auditory, and other experiences of divinity.⁴⁵

The implications of the use of entheogens throughout scripture extend past ethnographic curiosity. The Old and New Testaments continue to guide many people's philosophical orientation today and are the primary influence regarding an individual's conduct in morality, politics, and law. Given the lingering effects of the "War on Drugs" and the continuing human interest in mystical experience, drugs, and scripture, it is no surprise that several attempts have been made to mine the Bible for evidence of entheogens.⁴⁶

Alternative Readings of Scripture

Benny Shanon holds various interesting perspectives on entheogens regarding how they have been translated through scripture.⁴⁷ In one of his most famous writings, he suggests that an ayahuasca analogue was made by brewing one of the locally abundant DMT-containing acacia species with *Peganum harmala*.

Many have suggested that the ergot fungus, which parasitizes various plants, may also be responsible for the "manna" that was daily provided to the Israelites in their

⁴⁵ See Danny Nemu, "Getting High with the Most High: Entheogens in the Old Testament," *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 3 (2019): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1556/2054.2019.004>.

⁴⁶ The "War on Drugs" was a global campaign organized by the U.S. Government. Well-known leaders, such as Richard Nixon and Nancy Reagan were key spokespeople in this campaign. Many experts point to the negative aspects of the campaign, which offered misleading information to evoke fear and control. I would love to unpack the long-term effects of this campaign on American citizens, but length considerations do not allow. See also Nemu, 118.

⁴⁷ Shanon is Professor of Psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His paper "Biblical Entheogens: a Speculative Hypothesis" contains many of his unconventional interpretations of biblical passages.

wandering. Although the ergot is toxic, the powerful visionary D-lysergic acid amide, can be prepared from it. The swiss chemist Albert Hofmann commented that “the separation of the hallucinogenic agents by simple water solution from the non-soluble ergotamine and ergotoxine alkaloids was well within the range of possibilities open to early man.”⁴⁸

The Bible claims that the Israelites used a process of “ground [manna] in mills or beat it in a mortar.”⁴⁹ This is the process that would be used to extract psychoactive or alkaloids from ergot. “Manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin” or “white, like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.”⁵⁰ This suggestion should at least be entertained as the honey dew ergot produces a taste like honey and dries on the plant as small, resinous, white pellets roughly the size of coriander seeds.⁵¹ Additionally, Moses declared, “Let no man leave of it until the morning.” Notwithstanding, they did not listen to Moses, but some of them left it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank.⁵² A quick decay encourages the idea of an infection of the ergot, which indicates the necessity of a fresh provision daily.⁵³ Others would suggest that while manna was

⁴⁸ Hofmann used honey dew ergot to synthesize lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). See R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A. P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1976).

⁴⁹ See Numbers 11:8 (NIV).

⁵⁰ See Numbers 11:7 (NIV) and Exodus 16:31 (NIV).

⁵¹ See Jan C. Zadoks, *On the Political Economy of Plant Disease Epidemics: Capital Selecta in Historical Epidemiology* (Wageningen, The Netherlands: Wageningen Academic Publication, 2008), 168.

⁵² Exodus 16:19-20 (NIV).

⁵³ While it would be fascinating to expand this story to consider the implications of a “double portion of manna” provided by the Divine, length considerations do not allow this. While this line of thought does not argue for or against my reasoning, it would raise fascinating questions regarding the reasoning or intent of God modifying the portions to make them ingestible on the Sabbath.

described as “angel food,” it is described that way not because it was provided by angels but because it caused partakers to see angels.⁵⁴

Another argument that when considered literally provides a suggestion regarding the perspective on the likely existence of hallucinogenic elements in the garden is found in the phrase, “and the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’”⁵⁵ Certainly, non-synthetic hallucinogenic plants and fungi had the potential to grow in Eden. If these plants, shrubs, cacti, and fungi were part of Eden, these were not against the rules of what was forbidden to consume as directed by God. Back in the “garden,” maybe the forbidden fruit was forbidden for a reason. Who needs the fancy building, the priest, and all the rest of it, even the Bible, if all you really need is the fruit?⁵⁶

Additionally, psychedelics primarily function on the “default mode network,” which is responsible for our awareness of self in both time and space. Psychedelics lead us to the state where there is no distinction between self and other, or self and totality. This is a state of perfect unity with God, as noted in Genesis. Psychedelics take us back to the “Garden of Eden.”

Considering this assertion, we must think about how we approach the earth. Throughout history, various people groups have used nature and natural substances are

⁵⁴ See Psalm 78:25 (NIV).

⁵⁵ Genesis 2:16-17 (NIV).

⁵⁶ See Brian C. Muraresku, *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name* (New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 2020), 51.

meant to encourage our devotion to the Divine and our experience of our Creator.⁵⁷ In fact, in anthropological studies, many maintain that various religions have their roots in the wisdom gained from eating psychedelic mushrooms.⁵⁸

When attempting to combine historical Evangelical views with the topic of a potential new opportunity, Biblical interpretation must be consulted.⁵⁹ Is Scripture the final authority on an issue, and does a specific interpretation of the text assume that authority?⁶⁰ Many alternative theologians have produced fascinating theories about alternative approaches to specific texts. For years theologians studied the “wine and gall” that was offered to Jesus during the crucifixion. Some propose that offering Jesus this mix was an act of mercy by the Roman soldiers. Poppy seeds in small doses are opioids, but in larger doses are a sedative that would have essentially rendered Jesus unconscious so that He did not need to endure the full effects of the crucifixion pain.⁶¹

⁵⁷ John 1:3 (NIV)

⁵⁸ While I would like to spend more time on some of the semiotic nuances, time constraints do not allow it. However, there is a line of argument that suggests that if mushrooms can account for the origins of Judaism or its predecessors in Egypt, they may also account for the practice of male circumcision, which makes the penis look like a mushroom.

⁵⁹ While I desire to make the connection to anthropological studies and the evolution from generalized religiosity to the Abrahamic traditions, length considerations do not allow. However, I believe that this is an important conversation as it is not difficult to connect this topic to the current Evangelical conversations regarding institutionalized religion versus the organic nature of faith.

⁶⁰ While on first reading, this question may appear obvious. However, it is crucial to consider the Holy Spirit's role in interpreting and understanding Scripture. The reason for this is that even great minds differ on the interpretation of Scripture and context. I suggest that the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth, but that must be combined with various disciplines – archaeology, academia, anthropology, etc. One thing that is being revealed with increasing clarity is that there is convincing evidence that mind-altering substances are both used and described in Scripture.

⁶¹ Jesus rejecting pain-reducing substances on the cross could be an argument against using anything in the present. In comparison, there is significant substance to unpack regarding the uniqueness and role of Christ's suffering. However, due to length considerations, that extends beyond the scope of this document.

Last year, archaeologists found traces of burnt cannabis on ancient limestone altars outside of Jerusalem. In fact, “The new research applied modern chemical analysis techniques to the residues on each of the two altars. The smaller of the two altars were found to have a mixture of animal dung and cannabis that contained sufficient THC (the psychoactive compound in cannabis) to get those breathing in its fumes high.”⁶² Certain theologians and academics believe that the phrase *calamus*⁶³ found in Scripture would be best translated as “cannabis.”⁶⁴ Perhaps the more significant issue is less about whether or not references to entheogens are found in Scripture and more about how Scripture should be interpreted.

In Evangelical Christianity, a common nickname used to describe God is the “Great Physician.” While this phrase is not found in Scripture⁶⁵, the sentiment is reflected in the very nature of the heart of Jesus to heal that which is broken.⁶⁶ While most of Jesus’ miracles are seen in physical healings (rarely dealing with mental sickness), even the Pharisees had difficulty seeing through their frustrations about the letter of the law to the beauty of the lives restored by Jesus’ healings. When our suffering might not be

⁶² <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/cannabis-found-altar-ancient-israeli-shrine-180975016/>

⁶³ Found in Song Of Solomon 4:14.

⁶⁴ For further reading, see Benny Shanon, “Biblical Entheogens: a Speculative Hypothesis” and Danny Nemu’s “Getting High with the Most High: Entheogens in the Old Testament.” Both of these make a comprehensive case that manna, the anointing oil, holy incense, and other Old Testament worship features created altered states. One thing to recognize is that if this is true, then cannabis is named in the list of desirable objects.

⁶⁵ Many would point to Matthew 9:12 as a reference for this nickname, which refers to both Exodus 15:26 and Psalm 103:3.

⁶⁶ Matthew 9:35-38 provides a fantastic insight into the heart of Jesus as a healer. His compassion led him to travel, teaching and healing all diseases and afflictions.

immediately relieved through prayer, it does appear that God has given us natural elements to aid in our suffering during our time on earth.⁶⁷ Paul allows wine as a permissible helper to stomach issues; perhaps the same could be said about entheogens for mental health?⁶⁸

While most Evangelical Christian theology does affirm a future restoration of all things, there is a wide margin of interpretation as to why God does not immediately provide healing. Some will argue that the effects of sin have tainted this earth, and very little can be salvaged from our current state. On the other hand, some would encourage us to continue exploring what is currently available to us as a means of God providing all that we need to thrive on our current planet.⁶⁹ I am convinced that God has provided us all that we need for health and happiness and that we are still playing catch-up when it comes to discovering the natural elements that have been made available to us by the Divine. Through cautious yet hopeful exploration, might Christians be some of the first adopters and proponents of these positive discoveries?

⁶⁷ It is essential to state that Evangelical Christians often take no issue with medical interventions pertaining to sickness, from cancer treatments to surgical procedures to prescription opiates. As government-funded research continues to consult the potential of psilocybin mushrooms, I predict that the adoption of these substances will not be far off – even among Evangelical Christians.

⁶⁸ While this is not a position that could have been scientifically proven until our current technological advances are allowed, the medical community is continuing to document positive mental health experiences associated with doses of psilocybin.

⁶⁹ This is why I am a proponent of the sciences leading us into blurrier areas than the lines of right and wrong, or what is permissible versus what is not. Less than 100 years ago, the unlikely discovery of a dangerous mold on a staphylococcus plate led to discovering the most widely used antibiotic in the world – penicillin. I have no doubts that the sciences will continue to encourage us to look at how unlikely compounds can be purposed for beneficial medical advances.

Other Avenues to Consider

One other facet, which often misses the considerations of opponents of entheogenic consumptions is the shamanic (or priestly) order and the respect that often guides these spiritual ceremonies. In collecting historical data for this document, this became one of the most beautiful elements of my understanding of this world. During the action of entheogens in sufficient dosage, true “mystics” fast for five days before consuming their “shrooms” in order to purify their bodies, in order to have a more complete, spiritual experience. In fact, they weaken their physical self to empower their spiritual self.⁷⁰ This is no different than what Jesus was obeying when He was driven into the Wilderness.

Clarifying Drug Culture

The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies defines “drug” as “any substance or compound that’s administered or ingested to produce some sort of effect. It is something that the body does not have any inherent use for.”⁷¹ The Association does not make the [drug] itself, and “it’s not an endogenous compound. However, the drug comes in and mimics the endogenous compound in some way and alters the body’s functioning.”⁷² With this definition, it is worth considering whether or not it is the “substance” that is evil, or if it is the intent of those who desire to abuse that drug to be

⁷⁰ See Sean Williams, *Jesus and the Magic Mushroom* (Self-published: CreateSpace, 2009), 28.

⁷¹ This is another reason to consider entheogens as medicines, rather than drugs.

⁷² Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

the larger cause of sinister motives? While the topic of hallucinogens is an easy target, we must determine a baseline of what makes something inherently wrong, dangerous, or sinful. Is it the object, the motive, or the distortion of intended use that creates the consideration of deeming something as “sinful”? For instance, a new set of lingerie and overnight accommodations at a hotel would be fitting for a married couple celebrating the anniversary of their marriage. However, those same accommodations for an unfaithful spouse on a business trip would not be received with welcome acceptance. The lingerie or the hotel room are not inherently sinful. Sin has far more to do with the variables of the situation, such as intent and the motivations of individuals involved. Few evangelicals consider Tylenol to be bad, despite it being a synthetic drug, though evangelical sub-culture is strong on anti-drug language. This is where vocabulary, as well as definitions regarding convictions, gets muddy. Once an agreement on vocabulary gets distorted, so do the interpretations of the words, depending upon the listener.

A Christian Approach to Healthcare

When considering how to initially approach these kinds of questions, Douglas Estes says, “We’re asking specific 21st-century questions: “When to use cannabis, when to use ecstasy. Is it right? Is it wrong? Should it be legal? Is it illegal?”⁷³ And we’re asking those kinds of questions directly of scripture, which is not really prepared to answer those questions in the way we want to pose them. “Scripture is about who God is and what God’s plan is. That’s what we need to have straight so that when we now start

⁷³ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>. Douglas Estes is a biblical scholar and Associate Professor at South University.

asking these modern-day questions, we can explicitly see how they fit into that narrative.”⁷⁴ He then continues by unpacking the taboos within certain circles. He says, “For drugs, or any chemical, it’s not uncommon for them to start out as taboos if they don’t already exist in a culture where they are embraced. For example, tea—everybody’s fine with tea. But there are some communities where the drinking of tea and caffeinated beverages is a taboo.”⁷⁵ However, throughout history, Christians have often led the way in medicinal benefits and healthcare for everyone. So why is there a reluctance to hallucinogens, which are gaining popularity in the medical community for treating life-long psychological issues? Furthermore, the philanthropy among Christians in the early life of the church was quite astounding. Rather than viewing illness as punishment for sins, early Christians believed that the sick deserved both medical assistance and compassion.⁷⁶ Early Christians caring for those who were suffering desired their health at all costs. Perhaps the notion that we have moved away from this level of compassion to accommodate what we believe to be acceptable and non-acceptable medicines exposes the prejudices of our particular interpretations of scripture or of the tribe that a particular individual may associate with.

⁷⁴ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁷⁵ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁷⁶ See Gary Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 71. Ferngren’s descriptions of the commitments of early Christians to care for the sick adds a complexity to this conversation, which I believe is necessary for opponents of this thesis to consider.

The Path Forward

Because Estes' comments were so moving and convicting to the suggestions I am attempting to make in my thesis, I believe that he should be consulted as the religious community in North America engages in conversation about hallucinogens from a religious perspective. The pathway for the progression of illegal substances becoming legal in the United States is as follows:

Taboo—Medical—Re-Signing a Cultural Narrative—Recreational—Right

Estes says,

If you've moved beyond the drug being a taboo, more often than not, you're moving into it being understood as having some sort of therapeutic or medical or healing properties. When speaking of 'medical marijuana,' who is not in favor of healing? People are very open to thinking about compounds as having healing properties, which can be used for the benefit of getting rid of pain or suffering or disease.⁷⁷

This can be witnessed in the historical move from 1996 when California decided to legalize medical cannabis.⁷⁸ After this move, several states followed the trend and began legalizing medical marijuana to serve those who were able to benefit from the medical benefits of this plant.

The “next movement is when you want to change the cultural narrative from healing into recreation. If a drug is okay to be used in healing, then maybe it is okay for relaxation or entertainment. People were very much on board with medical marijuana, but

⁷⁷ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs' Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁷⁸ ProCon.org, “Historical Timeline: History of Marijuana as Medicine—2900 BC to Present,” Encyclopedia Britannica: ProCon, last modified, August 28, 2013, <https://www.procon.org/historical-timeline-history-of-marijuana-as-medicine-2900-bc-to-present/>.

now we see it moving into recreational marijuana usage.”⁷⁹ Estes is correct, as this was the progression for many states, once familiarity with cannabis expanded. On December 6, 2012, the State of Washington became the first U.S. state to legalize recreational use of marijuana.⁸⁰ From this point “once you move into the recreational narrative, the next thing is [saying that] marijuana is needed to enrich people’s lives.” People will say, “we smoke marijuana in order to make our lives more enriched.”⁸¹

According to Estes’ logic, the final stage is moving from recreational to a right. People have the right to smoke, the right to get high however they want, moving from a notion of enrichment (a drug makes one into a better person) to enhancement (a drug makes one into the person he or she wants to become).⁸²

In light of the stages of cultural acceptance proposed, it would be beneficial to consider what a Christian view of healing can and should look like. According to Estes, “a Christian vision for healing should be all-encompassing. It should not just be focused only on the pharmacology or the biology of a person’s condition. Medical interventions have an important place in that conversation, but they are not the only voice. A Christian

⁷⁹ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁸⁰ “Marijuana Decriminalized in Washington State,” *BBC News*, December 6, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-20621210>.

⁸¹ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁸² Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

has a broader view of what health looks like; they will be able to incorporate that medical information into an understanding of who they are and what they are made for.”⁸³

Moving from Atheist Toward the Divine

We have all viewed videos of teenagers slurring their words and acting out of their minds after being administered nitrous oxide during dental surgery. However, the typical response to those videos is laughter, not condemnation. So, why are specific natural consumptions more culturally acceptable than others? Is it because of the cultural conditioning that has happened slowly over time? Or does it have more to do with the credentials of the individual administering a specific medicine? What about when natural substances could save people from severe addictions? Is it the role of a follower of Jesus to determine how a person is healed?⁸⁴

A far-reaching question is whether or not it is the role of a Christian to determine how an individual is saved. In medical studies, “God encounters” and mystical experiences have been described after ingesting classic psychedelic drugs, such as psilocybin, N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), and mescaline, all of whose actions are mediated at the serotonin 2A receptor.⁸⁵ Historically, psychedelic-containing plants and

⁸³ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁸⁴ Dr. Jacques Mabit has for many years been offering heroin and cocaine addicts incredibly effective treatments with Ayahuasca at his Takiwasi clinic in Tarapoto, Peru. His research can be viewed at www.Takiwasi.com.

⁸⁵ See R. R. Griffiths, E. S. Hurwitz, A. K. Davis, M. W. Johnson, and R. Jesse, “Survey of Subjective ‘God Encounter Experiences’: Comparisons Among Naturally Occurring Experiences and Those Occasioned by the Classic Psychedelics Psilocybin, LSD, Ayahuasca, or DMT,” *PLOS ONE* 14, no. 4 (2019): 21-22, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0214377>.

fungi in ceremonial and religious contexts date back hundreds and likely thousands of years.⁸⁶ In fact, in a clinical research project at the University of Auckland, an exciting finding was detected among the participants in a psychedelic study, in which most of those who identified their religious affiliation as atheist before the experience no longer identified as atheist after the encounter. The difference was significant in all groups. This outcome is consistent with sudden religious conversion experiences that are well-described in psychology of religion literature, with Paul's experience of encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus as the prototype.⁸⁷ This led the researchers to suggest that an important future direction of research with psychedelic drugs will be to extend future research on psychedelic drug-occasioned experiences to assess possible religious orientation changes or affiliations, including identification as an atheist.⁸⁸ This is a serious point that must be considered. On one hand, evangelicals maintain a posture that hallucinogenic substances are "sinful," while on the other hand, there are studies documenting the reversal of atheism from the consumption of these medicines. This is a tension that is worthy of consideration.

Another element of the conversation that must be considered is the question of conscience. This must be done individually and corporately.⁸⁹ While it would be easy to suggest and affirm that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it," Paul suggests that it is less about what you do or do not eat and drink and more to do with our conscience in

⁸⁶ See Richard Evans Schultes, Alan Hoffman, and Christian Rätsch, *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2001), 81.

⁸⁷ Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson, and Jesse, 21-22.

⁸⁸ Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson, and Jesse, 22.

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 (NIV)

the matter. Paul suggests “eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,” however, where he draws the line is the question of whether or not we are seeking our personal good or the good of many. Are our actions causing others to stumble? Paul suggests that we are fine to go to a meal at an unbeliever’s house and to eat anything regardless of what it is without raising questions of conscience.

In 1 Corinthians 10:28-29, Paul states: “But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of your conscience. I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience?”

Our life’s purpose is not to count what we can get away with and still remain Christians but to glorify God. While it may seem that Paul is inconsistent, he is very consistent according to one principle: liberty within the limits of love. In light of this, Christians must consider their personal convictions and the community of those that they encounter regularly. However, it seems like Paul, much like Jesus, provides us freedom that many Evangelicals still have yet to take seriously. Where Christ pushed for unity and togetherness, we shackle ourselves to a generalized principle rather than living in the freedom of Christ and then self-limiting, not as a policing action, but as freedom governed by love. While this could suggest entheogenic use is not as prohibited as initially thought, it would be wise (and at times Christlike) for some to abstain for the sake of the weaker Christian who has addiction issues or confusion about the freedoms available to us.

In fact, a familiar argument in Evangelical Christianity is the idea of not being drunk on wine. This stems from Paul’s writings in Ephesians 5:18 which state, “And do

not get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit."⁹⁰ It is essential to see that Paul is not forbidding alcohol consumption but is warning against overconsumption, leading to reckless actions. Alcohol is a Central Nervous System (CNS) depressant. This means that alcohol slows down brain function and the body's neural activity. As this happens, various organs in the body begin to reduce function. It could be argued that it is not just the activity of over-consuming alcohol that is the sin, but the intention of becoming impaired to escape reality. Proponents of entheogens would suggest a break in drunkards' motives in that the purpose of entheogens is a reflective pursuit of understanding versus an avenue of escape. It would be more accurate to compare the intention of an entheogenic pursuit to the similarities of meditation (of which Christians are encouraged to do) versus the escapism that is often the motivating factor of alcoholics.

Saturated in Western Perspective

British writer Alan Watts, describes the psychedelic experience this way:

The idea of mystical experiences resulting from drug use is not readily accepted in Western societies. Western culture has, historically, a particular fascination with the value and virtue of man as an individual, self-determining, responsible ego, controlling himself and his world by the power of conscious effort and will. Nothing, then could be more repugnant to this cultural tradition than the notion of spiritual or psychological growth through the use of drugs. A "drugged" person is by definition dimmed in consciousness, fogged in judgment, and deprived of will. But not all psychotropic (consciousness-changing) chemicals are narcotic and soporific, as are alcohol, opiates, and barbiturates. The effects of what are now called psychedelic (mind-manifesting) chemicals differ from those of alcohol as laughter differs from rage, or delight from depression. There is really no analogy between being "high" on LSD and "drunk" on bourbon. True, no one in either state should drive a car, but neither should one drive while reading a book, playing a violin, or making love. Certain creative activities and states of mind

⁹⁰ Ephesians 5:18 (HCSB)

demand a concentration and devotion that are simply incompatible with piloting a death-dealing engine along a highway.⁹¹

Watts maintains a unique approach to why many western followers of Christianity have a widespread opposition to psychedelic drugs. He proposes that resistance to allowing the use of psychedelic drugs originates in both religious and secular values. The difficulty in describing psychedelic experiences in traditional religious terms suggests one ground of opposition. The westerner must borrow such words as samadhi or moksha from the Hindus, or satori or kensho from the Japanese, in order to describe their experience of oneness with the universe. We have no appropriate word, because our own Jewish and Christian theologies will not accept the idea that man's innermost self can be identical with the Godhead, even though Christians may insist that this is true in the unique instance of Jesus Christ. Jews and Christians think of God in political and monarchical terms, as the supreme governor of the universe, the ultimate boss. It is both socially unacceptable and logically preposterous for a particular individual to claim that he or she, in person, is the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of the world and to be accorded suitable recognition and honor.⁹²

The Medical is Leading the Path

One perspective that must be considered in the way this discussion is engaged is the separation of sacred vs profane. The rampant bifurcating of the sacred and the secular is far more common among those in the west. This perspective causes problems when we

⁹¹ Peter J. Columbus and Donadrian L. Rich, eds, *Alan Watts in the Academy: Essays and Lectures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017), 285.

⁹² See Columbus and Rice, 290.

start thinking about drugs, because we think about those drugs as doing things just to our bodies, rather than affecting our entire psychological, social, physical, spiritual unified being. “You don’t affect the physical without affecting the spiritual. You don’t affect the psychological without affecting the spiritual. You don’t affect the spiritual without affecting the physical or the psychological. They are all woven together.”⁹³ To consider this perspective seriously, we must understand the pathway for hallucinogens already opening in the United States. The medical benefits are continuing to show positive results, and in return, medical professionals are administering these substances to patients (under government approval) as positive results continue to trend upward.⁹⁴ It could be that we are still too early in the conversation and that it will just be a matter of time until religious leaders turn their interest to the medical benefits of psychedelics, as continues to be the growing stance on cannabis.

One facet that invites serious consideration is whether the trust that has been placed in government approvals and medical providers’ prescriptions informs personal convictions or vice versa. A more scrupulous approach toward our trust in certain professionals may have better regulated the distribution of prescriptions, which has landed us in our current opioid crisis. People did not consider whether opiates were dangerous or not, because the doctors they trusted prescribed them. Because of their doctor’s authority, people trusted them implicitly, not fully aware of how dangerous these

⁹³ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁹⁴ Psychedelics are incredibly beneficial instruments in psychology and religion, precisely the mystical aspect of religion. Thus, it should be questioned why there have not been more intentional efforts for the two worlds to find more frequent opportunities to partner.

drugs could be. The cultural authority that physicians have been given would be worth questioning. We have to be wise when we go to our physicians; we have to be wise when we go to our psychiatrists, and they recommend these drugs, because there may be consequences that go beyond how they are intended to treat some problem we have.⁹⁵ Even tonight, as this paper is being written, the breaking news headline on CNN is “OxyContin Maker to Plead Guilty to Federal Charges, pay \$8 Billion, and Will Close Company.”⁹⁶ This drug is a familiar, yet potent concoction of chemicals, which has been accepted by popular culture as an effective opioid, one that the CDC says claims the lives of 41 individuals a day in America.⁹⁷ The United Methodist Church, the nation’s largest mainline Protestant denomination, includes in its Book of Resolutions, “Psychedelics or hallucinogens, which include LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, PCP, and DMT, produce changes in perception and altered states of consciousness. Not only is the medical use of psychedelics or hallucinogens limited, if present at all, but the use of these drugs may result in permanent psychiatric problems. Therefore, as The United Methodist Church, we oppose the use of all drugs, except in cases of appropriate medical supervision.”⁹⁸ Does this suggest that even mainline evangelical denominations create blanket statements

⁹⁵ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

⁹⁶ See Chris Isadore, “OxyContin Maker to Plead Guilty to Federal Criminal Charges, Pay \$8 Billion, and Will Close Company,” *CNN Business*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/21/business/purdue-pharma-guilty-plea/index.html>.

⁹⁷ “Overdose Death Maps,” Centers for Disease Control, last modified March 19, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/prescribing/overdose-death-maps.html>.

⁹⁸ *United Methodist Church Book of Resolutions*, “Alcohol and Other Drugs,” accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-alcohol-and-other-drugs.2016>.

that put too high a trust in certain individuals or industries simply because the “medical” blanket shields those industries?

With this in mind, the question of how individuals should look at the rapidly shifting cultural landscape should be considered.

The conversation around healing should look different than conversations about drugs used in a recreational context, that should look different from a conversation about drugs as enriching, that should look different from a conversation about drugs as a means of enhancement. Any decision about drugs or healing should be based on biblical wisdom. How does Christlikeness act as our goal? Not the alleviation of our suffering, not the convenience that it offers, not the productivity that we can generate, but Christ has to be the endpoint.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Douglas Estes, “Christianity Today: From Marijuana to Magic Mushrooms: Weighing Drugs’ Benefits and Detriments,” Maps, May 6, 2019, <https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-to-day-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs%E2%80%99-benefits-and-detriments>.

SECTION 3:

A SEMIOTIC RE-SIGNING OF SACRAMENT

How odd it is that writers like Belloc and Chesterton may sing the praises of alcohol (which is responsible for about two-thirds of the car accidents and three-quarters of the crimes of violence) and be regarded as good Christians and noble fellows. Whereas anyone who ventures to suggest that there may be other and less harmful shortcuts to self-transcendence is treated as a dangerous drug field and wicked perverter of weak-minded humanity.¹⁰⁰ –Aldous Huxley

As part of my semiotic training, I find far more interest in re-signing and re-defining language, meaning, and definitions than I do dismissing them. It is for these reasons that this chapter is so important. Aiming to communicate an agreed-upon definition of “sacrament” that would be held by various branches of Christianity is more complicated than initially considered. While this dissertation’s literary constraints handicap a thorough unpacking of this topic, the concept of “sacrament” must be clarified.

How is it possible to place words on something so mysterious and personal? Is it possible to find an appropriate language that can harmoniously communicate mystery and attestation? In attempting to research a proper definition of a sacrament, the lack of substantive language became increasingly noticeable. With this growing awareness, how does one recognize and communicate a baseline that a majority would agree on? This is where it appears that language is going to fall short. However, in order to argue a case, this scarcity will not be acceptable, and so more creative efforts must be employed.

¹⁰⁰ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1987), 49.

The word “sacrament” is derived from the *sacrare*, which means to render sacred. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, the Greek word *μυστήριον*, or in Latin, *mysterium*, holds the element of the mysterious or the secret in its signification, as it appears in both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰¹ Throughout scripture, this definition is often found to refer to God’s secrets or hidden truths of the Christian faith.¹⁰² St. Paul refers to the sacrament of circumcision as a sign that expresses this mystery as something sacred or hidden, which at times is evident in the signification of something symbolic.¹⁰³

Through the early years of the church, many prominent leaders secured the idea of a sacrament as an object that would signify something secret or sacred or as something devoid of human knowledge and belonging to the solemn and consecrated.¹⁰⁴ While St. Thomas argues that the etymology of the word sacrament (as well as its signification) has an active or dynamic sense, he also conceives of the sacraments as medicines, as remedies by which man is cured of the effects of sin.¹⁰⁵ The idea of a sacrament as a type of remedy was a topic that was of great interest to theologians of the middle ages, including Peter Lombard.

Peter Lombard, the great master of theology in the middle ages, opens his treatise on the Sacraments by describing them as medicines which are applied by Christ Himself to our wounded human nature. Christ is presented as the Good Samaritan who bandages the wounds for fallen humanity and restores it to health. The Samaritan approaches the wounded man and applies for his cure the bandages of

¹⁰¹ It is fascinating to me that the mystery of sacrament has been boiled down to rote actions when it concerns the form of observance, potentially compromising and minimizing the intended mystery.

¹⁰² See Romans 16:25-26 (NIV), Matthew 13:11 (NIV), and Ephesians 5:32 (NIV).

¹⁰³ See Romans 4:11 (NIV).

¹⁰⁴ This is seen in Tertullian’s works, *Ad Martyres* and *De Baptismo*, as well as Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, *De Magistro*, and *De Doctrina Christiana*.

¹⁰⁵ The primary reason this topic is so interesting to me is that my own entheogenic experience has healed deep issues in my life. This story will come later in the dissertation.

the Sacraments, because God has instituted the Sacraments as remedies against the wounds of original and actual sin.¹⁰⁶

In agreement with the “healing” nature of sacraments, St. Thomas states, “a Sacrament properly so called is that which is the sign of some sacred thing pertaining to man; so that properly speaking a sacrament, as considered by us now, is defined as being the sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men holy.”¹⁰⁷

Defining the Form and Function of Sacrament

A sacrament is a sacred power that is believed to be transmitted through material elements viewed as channels of divine grace and adopted by the early church in the 3rd century. The term consists of the meshing together of the Latin word *sacer* (Holy) brought into conjunction with the Greek word *mystērion* (secret rite). *Sacramentum* was thus given a sacred mysterious significance that indicated a spiritual potency.¹⁰⁸ The Catholic Church’s primary seven sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.¹⁰⁹ The baseline requirement in both Catholicism and Protestantism is that Jesus is present in the sacraments. Under that consideration, there is a substantial argument that the practices of consuming entheogens (in accordance to long-held shamanic values and traditions) would

¹⁰⁶ C. F. Tierney, “The Sacraments as Remedies,” *The Australian Catholic Record* 31 (1954): 234.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica* (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1948), I, Q60, Art 2.

¹⁰⁸ See Edwin Oliver James, “Sacrament,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified May 27, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sacrament>.

¹⁰⁹ While the Eucharist may seem like a safe activity void of hallucinogens, it would be wise to consult the effects of ergotized beer and its effects on communities as consumed in Eucharistic practices. Though I wish more could be said here, time constraints do not allow.

fit into the category of sacrament far more effortlessly than many followers of Jesus may initially be willing to admit.

Christians would often agree that God is an infinite presence in which bottomless goodness is contained. The demonstration of this goodness is documented throughout history via the scriptures, oral tradition, and story. One of the first claims to this goodness is recognizing that God created humanity to reflect the image and likeness of God. Further, the incarnation of Jesus Christ was an act of goodness in that God descended personally to humankind in a familiar, human form, sharing knowledge and lessons with humanity in a way that was easy to understand, rather than speaking from a distance in concepts and vocabulary, which surpassed human intellect.

The attention toward the fundamental concept of “sacrament” is extensive within various schools of thought. Without a clear and defined understanding of the sacrament’s metaphysical understanding, it will be preposterous to understand the doctrine of “sacrament,” as well as its place in Christian theology with any coherency. While there is lingering disagreement about the number of sacraments, Catholics and Protestants alike maintain opinions on why they justify the sacraments that they deem appropriate. A severe rebuke from the Catholic church against the Protestant stance is that “Protestant teachings about the sacraments tend to over-emphasize the notion of sign to the point of excluding all efficient casualty of grace on the part of the sacraments of the New Law.”¹¹⁰ Dom Vonier even suggests that “Much confusion of thought in the doctrine of the

¹¹⁰ Peter Garland, *The Definition of Sacrament: According to Saint Thomas* (Ottawa, Canada: The University of Ottawa Press, 1959), 3. While I desire to dive deeper here, due to length constraints, I am unable. However, the Council of Trent both combatted and condemned the truncated doctrine of the Protestant sacraments.

sacraments would be spared, if we never let go of the elemental definition of the sacrament, that is a relation of signification.”¹¹¹

The Etymological Understanding

Semiotically, it would be prudent to observe the theology of sacrament through two lenses: etymological and signification. The primary reason for this approach is to maintain accountability to the way that meaning is often processed in the first place. Typically, etymology and what specific language signifies is not parallel. As culture redefines meaning and reinterprets language, the split between these two fields is often not recognized.

Initially, the word sacrament was used by pagans in two specific settings. The inaugural use of the word referred to money that was deposited into the bank when two litigants would be in a disagreement. The party who received the favored judgment would be allowed to collect their funds, while the money that belonged to the guilty party would be forfeited and used for sacred purposes. Sacrament was also used as the commitment that soldiers took to keep the promise of fulfilling the terms of their pact obediently.

This word was quickly hijacked by religious leaders and given a vaguer definition. Throughout scripture, the Latin word “mysterium,” which holds the tension of “mysterious” and “secret” in its very purpose, appears in both the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Scriptures. Various cults would intentionally use the word “mysterion” to protect the mysteries that were intended to remain secret in nature. The

¹¹¹ Dom Vonier, *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (West Chester, PA: Assumption Press, 2013), 22.

two-fold purpose of using this word was to re-enforce the mysteries themselves, because the secrets of the cults were only unveiled to those who had previously been initiated.

This parallels a Protestant approach to the concept of sacrament in that it is evident throughout scripture (and the polity of most Protestant churches) that sacrament symbolizes something mysterious happening, whether it be sacred or hidden, though often pointing to a symbolic representation of that which is being signified.¹¹² In their exposition of Christian doctrine, early Christian writers used the terminology of their time. In light of this, while attempting to understand the definition of “sacrament” in early centuries, it is essential to recognize that this word powerfully symbolized something secret or sacred, something removed from the common vocabulary to amplify the privilege of those who were set apart and consecrated. It is also essential to recognize that religion often contains elements of the sacred while simultaneously communicating with the Divine in forms revealed through divine revelation. Because of the mysterious nature of religion and personal experience, it is crucial to recognize that any attempts to clarify definitions will inevitably fall short as we name things according to what we understand them to be and relate to other things in light of their origin. As an unfortunate by product of this linguistic deficit, often multiple realities end up being called the same thing. On the other hand, similar experiences might be described with different language.

The fashion in which humanity processes knowledge dictates that humans name things as they know them, and these things are named not in a vacuum but in relationship to other things. The result of this is that multiple realities might be referred to

¹¹² Proponents of entheogenic use would look kindly on this definition regarding what they experience through entheogens.

simultaneously using different words. St. Thomas describes this phenomenon in observation as it relates to the sacraments. He writes:

All things that are ordained to one, even different ways, can be denominated from it: thus, from health which is in an animal, not only is the animal said to be healthy through being the subject of health: but medicine also is said to be healthy through producing health; diet through preserving it; and urine, through being a sign of health. Consequently, a thing may be called a sacrament, either from having a certain hidden sanctity, and in this sense a sacrament is a sacred secret: or from having some relationship to this sanctity, which relationship may be that of a cause, or of a sign or of any other relation. But now we are speaking of sacraments in a special sense, as implying the habitude of sign: and in this way a sacrament is a kind of sign.¹¹³

Then Aquinas goes on to communicate the explanation of the quality of the word “sacrament” from an analogical perspective:

Even an oath has a certain relation to sacred things, In so far as it consists in calling a sacred thing to witness. And in this sense it is called a sacrament: not in the sense in which we speak of sacraments now; the word sacrament being thus used not equivocally but analogically, i.e. by reason of a different relation to the one thing, viz. something sacred.¹¹⁴

The Symbolic Understanding

The intention of a specific focus on the symbolic understanding of a word is to explain the nature of the word being defined. In a fundamental sense, a sacrament creates sanctity, yet the very thing that signifies sanctity is only relatively speaking a sacrament. Peter Lombard opened his treatise on the sacraments by describing sacraments as medicines applied by Christ to our wounded human nature. This sentiment would be accepted by many of the theologians of the middle ages, and while this sentiment is beautiful and would be accepted by many branches of Christianity, it certainly leaves

¹¹³ Aquinas, I, Q60, Art 3.

¹¹⁴ Aquinas, I, Q60, Art 3.

much more room open for potential items and rituals of the sacrament than are currently accepted.

Something that should be noted is how many who adopt sacramental ideas tend to hold them as meaningful concerning the sign or representation rather than the etymological definition. In Protestantism, the two sacraments, Eucharist and Baptism, have less to do with the sanctification of a person and far more to do with the symbolism of what these activities represent. In the Eucharist, we are reminded of the body and blood of Christ shed for our sins. While we do not believe that the bread and wine itself makes us holy, we hold sacred the symbolism of what these elements point toward.¹¹⁵ Should there be a more fluid approach to the concept of sacrament than is currently the standard? Why are the two Protestant activities of sacrament virtually canonized in church rhythms? Is there space to adopt new methods of sacrament, and what would that look like? It was a common practice in early Christianity for small groups of people to gather together in secret to participate in the Eucharist.¹¹⁶ However, in many cases, the bread and wine were infused with psychedelic plants and fungi, and the group would sit together after a meal to experience powerful and beautiful visions. More often than not, these special ceremonies were led by women.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ The third-century Christian writer Hippolytus condemned some Christians for mixing the Eucharistic wine with drugs. In light of this, we must consider that at least some Christians were drugging communion wine, though we do not know with what. Nevertheless, hallucinogenics were not out of the question.

¹¹⁶ This is one of the primary reasons that I created my artifact with the specificity I did. As you will read later, the intent is a private retreat for those who want to gather secretly to participate in encountering the Divine through enteogens. If early Christianity allowed for this permission, I figured that I was in good company.

¹¹⁷ During the second half of the fourth century, Roman Catholicism rose by the efforts of dominating men, who took extreme steps to reduce the influence and role of women in leadership, as well as to remove the psychedelic elements from the Eucharist.

The Sufficiency of a Sign

In light of this, we can come to the understanding that seeing a “sacrament as a sign” is helpful. This however still does not address the entire topic, as it does not investigate the nature of the sign or whether it is sufficient. So, it is imperative to get clarity on what the nature of the sign might be. Semiotically, a sign is something that expresses something other than itself. Because a sign is understood to clarify or represent something different, there are many different aspects to which a sign may point. It takes extensive effort to consistently differentiate between a sign and the image that the sign is pointing toward. The most significant signs can easily showcase the image which it is desiring to represent without creating a distraction in-and-of itself. St. Augustine suggests that “a sign is that which conveys something else to the mind, besides the species it impresses on the senses.”¹¹⁸ Recognizing this, it is vital to consider signs, not just as objects, but in a way that encompasses the dependence it carries on the object that it is pointing toward and signifying. Additionally, a sign’s sacredness can increase or decrease based on the thing that it signifies and on the value that individuals (or collectives) place on the thing that it signifies. This causes somewhat of an enigma (and yet a collective beauty) to recognize how this plays out in religion. We have established that there is a consensus within Protestantism that the two common sacraments are the Eucharist and Baptism. Amidst many theological differences that span numerous denominations, these sacramental objects are universally accepted and revered. However, an alternative

¹¹⁸ Aquinas, I, Q60, Art 4.

observation at play is that these sacraments have not evolved within specific reformed denominations much since the Westminster Confession of Faith.

John Calvin defined a sacrament as an earthly sign associated with a promise of God. At this point, it should be increasingly clear that leaders throughout church history are (at best) describing sacraments in light of what they believe to be true about the signification of symbol. Taking Calvin at his word, rainbows would have to be considered a sacrament, but no research has led to this ever being taken seriously. However, because a great deal of the theology and church practice in western Christianity rests on the shoulders of John Calvin, it is imperative to recognize his stance on sacraments on a deeper level. Calvin writes,

The term sacrament, in the view we have hitherto taken of it, includes, generally, all the signs which God ever commanded men to use, that he might make them sure and confident of the truth of his promises. These he was pleased sometimes to place in natural objects—sometimes to exhibit in miracles. Of the former class we have an example, in his giving the tree of life to Adam and Eve, as an earnest of immortality, that they might feel confident of the promise as often as they ate of the fruit. Another example was, when he gave the bow in the cloud to Noah and his posterity, as a memorial that he would not again destroy the earth by a flood. These were to Adam and Noah as sacraments: not that the tree could give Adam and Eve the immortality which it could not give to itself, or the bow (which is only a reflection of the solar rays on the opposite clouds) could have the effect of confining the waters; but they had a mark engraven on them by the word of God, to be proofs and seals of his covenant. The tree was previously a tree, and the bow a bow; but when they were inscribed with the word of God, a new form was given to them: they began to be what they previously were not.¹¹⁹

It would be neglectful not to reflect on how effortlessly an argument could be made that many who participate in the consumption of entheogenic medicines in order to relate to the Divine could easily correlate their experience as sacramental based on the

¹¹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 253.

description provided by Calvin. In Calvin's writings, it appears that sacraments are fluid until they are penned in the Word of God. Additionally, Calvin proposed that a tree would be considered a sign of sacrament to Adam, so why would naturally growing entheogens not deserve to be considered in this discussion? Perhaps certain items may be considered sacramental (that is, they have some of the nature of sacraments), though they are not proper sacraments as individual confessions may define them. Perhaps this is what Calvin is attempting to acknowledge when he speaks of things that were "as sacraments" to Adam and Noah.¹²⁰ Have we ended up allowing a robust singular voice to dictate what we believe, causing us to follow Calvin's suggestions on sacrament over a larger pool of various opinions? In light of this, we must understand what kind of sign the sacrament is. Because natural objects will never adequately speak for a supernatural reality, we have to concede that sacramental activities are, at best, signs that signify something far more significant and mysterious.

Signs and Symbols

It is essential to understand the differences between signs and symbols. The purpose of a symbol is to constitute, before being a sign, a consistent and stable sensible being. Jacques Maritain defines a symbol as a sign-image.¹²¹ Therefore, things and actions, such as water, washing, or eating, which are found in the sacraments, are constituted beings in themselves before being sacraments. Because of this analogy that

¹²⁰ If time permitted, it would be wise to look at how Christianity has spread throughout generations before the Reformation via oral tradition. Understanding the dynamics of this method would expand the discussion significantly, but space constraints will not allow.

¹²¹ See Jacques Maritain, *Quatre Essais Sur L'esprit dans sa Condition Charnelle* (Paris, France: Alsatia, 1939), 70-71.

they have with the effects God wishes to produce in the soul, they are very aptly constituted by divine institutions.¹²² Consequently, the supernatural significance that a sign receives relies entirely on divine intention. Sacraments can not just be natural signs, not because they are only conventional signs, but because they are also supernatural signs, because their cause is supernatural. The sacraments hold the purpose of revealing truth and contributing to the sanctification of human beings. Sacraments are determining whether something is sacred or not, because there are signs of holy things which are foreign from the sacraments. Not all aspects of a holy thing are sacramental. In the same lens of critical thinking, we must also consider the process that leads to sanctification through sacrament. For instance, when St. Thomas suggests that a sacrament is “the sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men holy,” he suggests that sacrament is the sign of a holy thing so far as this holy thing, not the sign, makes men holy.¹²³ Additionally, if we were to understand sacrament as a grace that Jesus gives to his people, we must ask whether grace can come to man apart from through Christ.¹²⁴

Sacrament as a Remedy

We have momentarily discussed the idea of sacrament as a medicine or a remedy. To do justice to the understanding of sacrament from a medical standpoint, it will be essential to return to the etymological meaning of sacrament. Sacraments have been

¹²² Garland, 46.

¹²³ Garland, 52.

¹²⁴ Many theologians would be familiar with the idea of special revelation and how it is different from general revelation. While I do not have space to unpack this topic in this dissertation, it would be worth further discussion.

considered as a remedy (or a medicine) since writings that stem back as far as the early church. Just as the word medicine is etymologically derived from the verb to heal, the word sacrament would have its etymological derivation from the verb to render sacred. Just as the word medicine has the signification of cause of health, causing health, so the word sacrament would have the signification of cause of sanctity or sanctification.¹²⁵ This is important to understand, as we do not signify a physical sickness but a spiritual sickness that leads to death. Again, proponents of entheogenic consumption would find this to be a potential win to their argument regarding the healing of mental health, with increasing medical research confirming their suspicions. Aquinas would even consider the sacrament as a sign of grace through which God communicates grace to man, where man shows God the reverence that is appropriately due. He states, “In the use of the sacraments, two things may be considered, namely, the worship of God and the sanctification of man: the former of which pertains to man as referred to God and the latter pertains to God about man.”¹²⁶

A sacrament is a symbol. Symbols hold a different purpose than signs. For example, a wedding ring is a symbol for the love and commitment shared between two people entering into a covenant. This is different from a sign, as a sign references another reality, and because of this, we must consider that signs are purely conventional. For instance, there is no proper reasoning as to why green means “go” and red means “stop” to most Americans. To consider a sign as a symbol is important, because to say that the sacraments are symbols is to identify them as power-charged realities, which possess the

¹²⁵ Garland, 60.

¹²⁶ Aquinas, I, Q60, Art 5.

energy to make other realities present without being identical to that reality. This is easily seen in Jesus himself, who is a symbol. Jesus is the symbol of the Father. He points to and makes the Father present without being identical to the Father. Jesus is the Son of the Father, not the Father himself.

A Difference of Opinion Among Christians

The concept of the “fall of man” from the good graces of the Divine is a primary theme in Christianity. In Christian theology, this fall demands that a restoration would need to occur to restore humankind to a right relationship with God. Christ is the only means through which a human can be sanctified. However, there are external signs that reflect inner faith, and we call those sacraments. The *Summa Theologica* written by St. Thomas Aquinas has held a long-respected gravity regarding his comments on sacrament. Not only were they a basis for a great lineage of actions that Catholicism still relies on, but they have also become understood by Protestants to be a devout and weighty unpacking of the nature of sacrament in the role of a follower of Jesus. Aquinas writes,

Sacraments were not necessary in the state of innocence. This can be proven from the rectitude of that state in which the higher (parts of man) ruled the lower and nowise depended on them: for just as the mind was subject to God, so were the lower powers of the soul subject to the mind, and the body to the soul. And it would be contrary to this order if the soul were perfected either in knowledge or in grace, by anything corporeal; which happens in the sacraments...Sacraments are necessary for man’s salvation.¹²⁷

To this point, Protestants would not have a challenging time accepting the comments from Aquinas. However, the point that many Protestants would take another path comes when Aquinas states, “It is impossible to keep men together in one religious

¹²⁷ Aquinas, I, Q60, art 3 and I, Q61, art. 2.

denomination, whether true or false, except they are united by means of visible signs of sacraments. However, it is necessary for salvation that men be united together in the name of the one true religion. Therefore, sacraments are necessary for man's salvation."¹²⁸

Christians historically differ on what defines a sacrament.¹²⁹ Specifically, a figural reading's logic is to include water concerning two specific functions: deliverance and purification when it comes to Baptism. Jean Daniélou warns against "the error of certain exegetes who try to recognize a type of Baptism wherever water is mentioned in the Old Testament."¹³⁰ The most extensive water and deliverance story would be Noah and the flood, and already in the New Testament, this is figurately related to Baptism.¹³¹ The next is the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites as the pinnacle of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Pharaoh's power. This event is recognized as a figure of Baptism by Paul.¹³²

When relating to the Eucharist, there are two distinct dimensions concerning the specific Old Testament figures that are adduced. The first is the self-offering of Jesus, which can easily be paralleled to Old Testament sacrifices.¹³³ The second is the believers'

¹²⁸ Aquinas, I, Q60, art 3. Without word constraints, it would have been helpful to showcase the lingering controlling nature of the Catholic Church regarding sacraments and to provide alternative perspectives on the routine of sacrament in Protestant churches. A focus on the solidification of the erroneous doctrines of sacraments determined by the Council of Trent would also be helpful, but space constraints will not allow for that here.

¹²⁹ See Andrew Davidson, *Why Sacraments?* (London, England: SPCK, 2013), 66-74.

¹³⁰ Jean S. J. Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (London, England: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), 78.

¹³¹ See 1 Peter 3:18-22 (NIV).

¹³² See 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 (NIV). See also Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, eds, *Sacramentality and the Old Testament* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

¹³³ See Genesis 22 and the story of Abraham and Isaac.

participation in what Jesus has done, in which the prime symbol of participation is eating, as figured in various ways in the Paschal meal.¹³⁴ To provide fodder for a reconstructed definition of sacrament, we must also be willing to recognize the problems with Old Testament definitions of sacrament. Moberly suggests that “it makes it important no longer to take the meaning of ‘sacrament’ for granted, but rather to offer a brief account of precisely what it is that we are looking for in the Old Testament.”¹³⁵ A classic Anglican understanding of a sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace.”¹³⁶ Unfortunately, this definition could be perceived as too broad and therefore can create significant issues. The reason is that

...such a definition could depict much that happens within a life of covenant, observance or discipleship: actions of mercy, kindness, and justice could all be said to be the outward and visible signs of an otherwise inward spiritual reality. The ‘spiritual’ realm, in itself intrinsically invisible, is tested for its reality and demonstrated by ‘moral’ actions that are in principle visible and accessible.¹³⁷

The problem lies within the ability to demonstrate a spiritual reality in moral practice. There are numerous means to define that which is distinctly sacramental. For many Christians, a sacrament is typically a rite that requires prescribed actions that incorporate specific material objects. Additionally, it incorporates a core set of presuppositions regarding the incarnation. This suggests that the “material” and the “spiritual” are unified rather than opposing. Another angle that must be considered in understand what signifies an item or activity as sacramental is the historical interpretation

¹³⁴ See Exodus 12 (NIV) and Boersma, *Sacramentality*, 9.

¹³⁵ Boersma, *Sacramentality*, 15.

¹³⁶ This is according to the catechism in the Book of Common Prayer.

¹³⁷ Boersma, *Sacramentality*, 15.

between literal and symbolic differences. For example, it would be entirely plausible to “find accounts of premodern conceptions of reality that envisage the sacred as permeating everything in ways that are hard for those in the modern desacralized West to conceive.”¹³⁸ If Christian sacraments are a collection of actions, words, and gestures with material elements that carry core meaning for Christian identity, then the most obvious way to approach finding them throughout the Old Testament is to look for rites in the Old Testaments scriptures that are comparable to Christian sacraments. Nevertheless, even in doing so, we must concern ourselves with how we, specifically, are approaching the texts (literal or figural) and the mindset and worldview that comes with that reading.

The Ark of the Lord

This also begs the question, “When it comes to sacrament, where does the Divine place its value?”

As an example, we will look at the ark of the Lord. The ark is perhaps the most significant sacramental object in the Old Testament. The ark’s construction rested on Moses and was built to contain the presence (or power) of the Lord. The writings of 2 Samuel 7 suggest a potent yet vague concept of the presence of the Lord concerning the location of the ark. As history unfolded, so did the assumptions about the close relationship between the ark and the relationship to the presence of the Divine. Throughout various biblical accounts, it becomes increasingly clear that the ark was used

¹³⁸ Boersma, *Sacramentality*, 16. Due to length considerations, I would suggest reading Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: That Nature of Religion* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959).

as a symbol of God's power and was used for military advantage and positioning.¹³⁹

Admittedly, a peculiar narrative begins to develop. "Its concern, however, seems to be to show not only that the Lord is intimately connected with the ark, but that the Divine presence is dangerous to those who treat the ark complacently in one way or another, be they Israelite or Philistine."¹⁴⁰

Therefore, the people's priority was the object of the sacrament, while the heart of the Divine was less about the actual object and more about the heart that motivated the ark to be used as a weapon against the enemies of a particular people group. Therefore, it would be prudent to consider that our current trouble is that the idea of a sacrament is not nearly as constrictive as is our narrow acceptance of what might be considered a sacrament.

The Purpose of Wordplay

Sacrament is a problematic word to capture for many in today's world, because it is a reasonably alien idea. Because of the reverential history of sacraments, they are often described as foreign to this world and belonging to the order of "grace, not that of nature."¹⁴¹ Here we recognize a distinction between western and eastern approaches. Many orthodox (in contrast to many in the west) speak of the sacraments as "revealing the foundational yet hidden nature of the material world, which was created to glorify

¹³⁹ Due to word constraints, see 1 Samuel 4.

¹⁴⁰ Boersma, *Sacramentality*, 19.

¹⁴¹ E. L. Mascall, *Corpus Christi: Essays on the Church and the Eucharist* (London, England: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1953), 99.

God and to bring him near, but which has fallen.”¹⁴² Another way of describing this is that a “sacrament is primarily a revelation of the genuine nature of creation... In the Orthodox experience, a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the sacramentality of creation itself.”¹⁴³ This has far-reaching practical impact on us today. Western theologians worry that in light of contemporary moves to downplay the impact of the fall, such an approach might devalue the sacraments; eastern theologians are concerned that western theology has so accentuated the fall that it posits a rigid division between the cosmos and the heavenly kingdom, to which God has called us. However, both sides recognize that the sacrament includes that which properly belongs to the material world, even while it opens the door to the Divine.¹⁴⁴

While the term “sacrament” does not appear in the New Testament, apart from radical Protestants, who understand the sacraments to be merely propaedeutic symbols, the sacrament is understood to have a foot in both the seen and unseen worlds, showing that God’s kingdom is (or will be) one, as God is one, a sentiment that is keenly familiar to those who have been proponents of non-synthetic entheogens around the world for thousands of years.¹⁴⁵

Psychedelic sacraments occur in ritual contexts that are embedded within a tradition. Much like the Christian sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, psychedelic sacraments are religiously justified rituals that establish and promote a person’s identity

¹⁴² Hans Boersma, *Sacrifice and Sacrament* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2015), 70.

¹⁴³ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs Press, 2005), 33.

¹⁴⁴ See Boersma, *Sacrifice*, 70.

¹⁴⁵ Boersma, *Sacrifice*, 70.

within a group and affirm a society's core values. The initiate learns culturally integrative attitudes as he or she is preparing for the experience, and the experience is 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. The set also contains objects, which symbolize the values and beliefs of that culture. Thus, in a psychedelic sacrament, both the set and the setting are heavily shaped by the culture in which the ritual takes place.¹⁴⁶ The suggestible state that the psychedelic substance induces may be purposely exploited by elders to communicate that knowledge. As a result, the overall experience serves to validate and reinforce the traditional cultural beliefs and values that a person learns before their first encounter with a psychedelic substance.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Set is the mental state a person brings to the experience, like thoughts, mood, and expectations, while setting is the physical and social environment.

¹⁴⁷ Baker, 179-180.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Despite my persisting, undiluted atheism, and the many years in which I distanced myself from anything and everything that looked like religious faith, the psychedelic ceremonies in which I have participated all around the world—ceremonies often led by women and held in secret like the communion of the “primitive” Christians—have reintroduced spirituality into my life.¹⁴⁸
—Graham Hancock

Entheogens have been criminalized, because it is presumed that they are inherently harmful, so lawmakers believe they are protecting citizens’ physical and psychological health.¹⁴⁹ Entheogens do induce psychological states in which people must confront uncomfortable memories and subconscious neuroses. Unfortunately, this is a stigma that has become ingrained into Americans’ lives, who were raised under the war on drugs efforts by elected officials, specifically Richard Nixon. The most familiar campaign is that of Nancy Reagan and the “Just Say No” movement. While Reagan’s efforts helped curb a growing national problem, unfortunately, it was narrow-minded in its scope and ignorant in its construction, specifically by lumping entheogens in with highly destructive compounds, such as methamphetamines and cocaine. Sadly, it only takes living under a narrative for a generation or two until the stigma is solidified and people grow accustomed to the “facts” presented, whether or not those facts have honestly been tested or not.

¹⁴⁸ Muraresku, 11.

¹⁴⁹ This is proving to be true as data continues to show positive psychological results. This brings into question the agenda more than honoring the data.

With a desire for others to be able to experience the freedom that many have found through entheogens, I have decided to conduct a sacramental entheogenic experience for a small group of spiritual seekers, who desire to find avenues to connect to the Divine in a way that is not often welcomed in most traditional Christian settings. My attempts at convincing church leaders (let alone being taken seriously) of the benefits and history of entheogenic pursuits have often fallen on defensive ears. Because of that, I will be hosting a secluded retreat for those who want to experience the benefits of entheogens in their own lives.

In researching the historical and spiritual methods of communities that have participated in these journeys, several standard practices tend to be present in the religious variety of these retreats.¹⁵⁰ The following will document the artifact and provide information that helps paint a picture of what this advance will look like.

A Pesky Pandemic

It is no secret that 2020 has been a year unlike any other, as a global pandemic has caused the world to find innovative ways to live, while COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc on individuals and industries. In the beginning stages of this artifact, the world was by-and-large business as usual. As the virus continued to spread, government leaders continued to execute directives, which kept people from all walks of life on their toes. In the state of Washington, stay-at-home orders were mandated, and public gatherings were banned. These restrictions became more challenging to navigate, and so considering an

¹⁵⁰ Skeptics do not often consider this aspect. Often the lack of awareness regarding the intentionality of the process is neglected and renders the idea of consuming hallucinogens as a party drug. Tragically, this ignorance is often damning to both parties, as it does not provide a healthy understanding of the foundation of these spiritual pursuits.

alternative option for my artifact became a necessity. As Washington state moved to reopening, the possibility of this advance happening began once again to look promising. However, in September, another wave of the virus began to develop, forcing me to reconsider the changes of this event happening yet again. In light of this, I made last-minute modifications to the artifact and have added curriculum and written schedules. The plan of holding this event in 2021 is still one which I am hopeful will materialize. The following content is a roadmap of what I intend to execute as the pandemic wanes.

Why This and Why Now?

The artifact that I will be building out and working toward will be a secluded and safe advance, which will allow ministers an opportunity to partake in a sacramental entheogenic journey in a setting that provides the utmost confidentiality and safety. While I had intended to create a robust marketing plan that would allow me to advertise to those who have questions, it quickly became apparent that finding individuals interested in a spiritual retreat of this nature was not going to be an issue.

My interest in hallucinogens from a spiritual lens was not something that has long been a passion of mine. I was personally exposed less than twelve months ago in a moment of personal crisis. For years, I had served in ministry and poured myself out for the local church. My initial dissertation topic was focused on ways that the institutional church in North America could better accommodate artists and creatives. However, in the last months of 2019, I found myself in a moment of personal crisis. I was serving a large church in the Pacific Northwest but was so unhealthy and felt so alone that I began coping with the stresses of ministry (along with having to appear perfect) with extremely unhealthy habits. During this season, I found myself drinking copious amounts of alcohol

and losing my marriage and the respect of my children. It was a terrible cycle because, on the one hand, it appeared that I had it all together, which was necessary for maintaining employment. However, the awareness that I had of my personal lack of integrity was killing me slowly. In February of 2020, after a series of stupid life decisions, I hit rock bottom. I found myself at the “Departures” terminal of SeaTac airport, as my wife and children flew to Southern California, so that she could process what the future of our family would look like. I knew that it was time for me to get help.

The drive home was terrible, as I knew that I had only two options left. The first was to free my wife and children from the pain that I had caused them by removing myself from their lives altogether.¹⁵¹ The second was to get some serious help. I opted for the latter and called a close friend, who immediately came to Tacoma to spend a few days with me. During those few days, I was exposed to the power of non-synthetic hallucinogens in a way that I was unaware existed. Over the few following days, I came to experience the power of hallucinogens in a way that changed my life. During these experiences, I finally had the conversations with God that I had so often heard talked about from the stage.¹⁵²

The Changes Are Lasting

While I am keenly aware of the skeptics who doubt my story, I believe a few elements are a testament to the effectiveness of entheogens. First, I stopped drinking

¹⁵¹ Looking back now, I see what a ridiculous move suicide would have been. However, at the time, I felt that this was one of my only two options.

¹⁵² Though my first hallucinogenic experience was not intended for sacramental purposes, through my experience, I became interested in the sacramental possibilities, which led me to the unfamiliar world of entheogens and which now fuels my passion for this research.

alcohol immediately. I went from prolific nightly drinking to complete abstinence, resulting in a significant increase in health and happiness. I am now free from that addiction. Second, my wife and I have completely restored our marriage and are happier and closer than we have ever been. She continually makes comments regarding the change that happened in me over those few days. She has seen a “180-degree turn” in my overall engagement in life, as well as in my interactions with my children.¹⁵³ Third, I have experienced a deep connection with the Divine through my experience that continues even now. This is not a fabricated relationship but one that has become deeply meaningful and real for me.

While I could attempt to find more “socially acceptable” circumstances to blame my life circumstances on, the fact is that my single experience with entheogens was enough to change my life and to cause me to rewrite my dissertation topic, because I want to help those who are in the shoes that I once filled.

Not a Hard Sell

From my perspective, sharing my story could be a dangerous action that would potentially compromise the trust that many of my peers shared with me. However, the more that I shared, the more I was met with questions, curiosity, and openness that caught me off guard. Once my story began to gain traction, I had many people reaching out to me sharing their stories, some of which were extremely common to mine and asking if I

¹⁵³ I must say that while my experience is not uncommon, there is also a dark side to any mind-altering substances. It is well documented that people have unpleasant experiences with hallucinogens. “Bad trips” would be a popular term among those who are familiar with entheogens. This is why the “set” and “setting” are of great importance to those who are supervising an entheogenic experience. For me, each experience has been pleasant and cheerful, but I have personally had conversations with those who have been in a bad experience, and those are often unforgettable.

would be willing to lead them through an encounter that was similar to mine.¹⁵⁴ Currently, I have 49 individuals, mostly clergy, who have made me promise that I will lead them on an experience in the same way that I was led on mine. All of their stories parallel aspects of mine with the majority focusing on the loneliness of ministry and the impending consequences if profound lifestyle changes are not made. I have found this to be a telling exposé of what might be brewing among a more significant majority of church leadership than we might recognize.

Though my long-term focus will be on helping others find the Divine through these experiences, I am determined to keep my artifact open to church leadership initially. The reason for this is two-fold. First, I would find great personal satisfaction if I can safely and confidentially lead faith leaders on a journey that has the same effect that my journey did.

Secondly, my desire to continue paving the way for entheogenic consumption for those who are seriously interested in encountering the Divine has become one of my primary life goals. I desire to hear the feedback and thoughts of other religious leaders, so that they can provide me with comments, feedback, direction, concerns, and whatever else they would be willing to share with me.

Another reason I hold such a passion to assist people in an experience like this is that I have witnessed many people who move away from spirituality as they move toward hallucinogens. For many, it is not easy to find a symbiotic resonance between the two worlds. However, my convictions allow me to find co-existence between spirituality and

¹⁵⁴ While I prefer the word “encounter,” many would be familiar with the term “trip.” Essentially, I am speaking of the same thing. However, in an attempt to continue to destabilize the stigmas associated with drug culture, I am attempting to use my semiotic skills to re-sign even standard phrases.

hallucinogens with no problems. One of the most significant ways to honor the Divine is to hold the two in tension with one another and to give thanks to the Divine for the medicines that have been freely placed around us. By focusing on a sacramental approach to hallucinogens, perhaps the negative “drug culture” stigmas can be dissolved, as hallucinogens are re-signed to an appreciation for the gifts that the Divine has provided for all people.¹⁵⁵ While many critics have expressed concern that I might be an advocate for party culture, once I expressed that my specific desire was to delve into biblical engagement regarding this topic, curiosity often ensued.

Away We Go

This artifact’s premise would be to assist eight clergy in a three-day personal advance, as they seek to encounter the Divine through guided entheogenic experiences. This retreat would take place on July 23-25, 2021 on Lopez Island (located in the San Juan Islands off the coast of northern Washington state).

To control the desired outcome, this experience must be planned and executed with a specific intentionality. Throughout scripture, different experiences were set apart for particular spaces. Certain rituals were performed under specific circumstances and at specific times. This experience is no exception. This advance would create a space that accommodates the respect and intentionality often observed in shamanic religious ceremonies.

For this initial advance, applicants would be required to be personal friends who have already expressed an interest in consuming entheogens for personal spiritual

¹⁵⁵ This semiotic activity will take significant work to accomplish.

benefits. The retreat would take place on a Friday-Sunday and will take into account the primary factors common among those who consume hallucinogens.¹⁵⁶

Once a potential participant fills out the form on the website, I will host a Zoom interview to ensure that the specific participant would be a good personality fit for the advance.

There will be rigorous preparation leading up to the advance. Participants will read one specific book a month for the three months leading up to the event. Additionally, there will be a daily meditation that each participant will need to participate in. These meditations have a unique focus on the senses (touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight) and will require repeatable actions for thirty days. The practice will change every thirty days but should be adhered to for the entire ninety days leading up to the event.

The Schedule of the Artifact

For the actual event, the advance would begin with a van departing the Seattle-Tacoma Airport. We will begin the journey by traveling from the airport to the Anacortes Ferry Terminal, 98.6 miles away. Upon arriving at the Anacortes terminal, the vehicle would board the ferry for Lopez Island. After a forty-minute ferry ride, the vehicle would arrive at the Lopez Island terminal and then continue to the residence (located on the south side of the island 14 miles away). Upon arrival, guests would be asked to get situated on the property and get acquainted with the residence and the property. Experts warn of two fundamental considerations when preparing for a hallucinogenic experience:

¹⁵⁶ While the term “trip sitter” is widespread among those familiar with hallucinogens, I am attempting to destabilize the stigmas associated with drug culture. In much of my research, those “trip sitters” responsible for the health and safety of those that they are guiding often takes a far more pastoral role than common stereotypes afford.

set and setting. “Set” is the mental state a person brings to the experience, like thoughts, mood, and expectations. “Setting” is the physical and social environment. Social support networks have been shown to be particularly crucial for the outcome of the psychedelic experience.¹⁵⁷ To provide the most caring situation for those who are pushing their comforts to the side to understand entheogens, one of the most caring and pastoral aspects is to provide a safe set and setting, one where participants are comfortable with those they are around and the physical location of the experience.

Once unpacked, and the attendees have made themselves comfortable, it will be time for our first meal. To continue building trust in the situation’s set and setting, the meal will also include conversations with everyone around a shared table. The purpose of this specific set up is to continue creating an atmosphere where individuals continue to become comfortable with one another and where conversations can move beyond surface dialogue into meaningful discussions.

After dinner, there will be a guided conversation with time for each of the participants to introduce themselves and share part of their story with the other attendees. This conversation will not have much to do with the experience and what the following day will contain. This discussion was strategically placed into the schedule where it was, so that it could continue to level the playing field when it comes to anxieties and fears. As a sign of respect, this session will be prefaced with the understanding that the participants

¹⁵⁷ See D. Shewan, P. Dalgarno, and G. Reith, “Perceived Risk and Risk Reduction Among Ecstasy Users: The Role of Drug, Set, and Setting,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 10, no. 6 (2000): 431-453, <https://researchonline.gcu.ac.uk/en/publications/perceived-risk-and-risk-reduction-among-ecstasy-users-the-role-of>.

will be required to be fully engaged.¹⁵⁸ I will lead a discussion with all of the participants. The chairs will be set up in a circular model, so that each of us can look at all the other participants. Each participant will be given 10 minutes to share their story, where they are from, and what brought them to this advance. The participants are encouraged to share as comfortably as they are willing. While there are no requirements on what must be shared, I have found that those who are willing to be completely open and honest get more out of the experience than those who remain reserved. This is also a time for the other participants to ask each other questions as their stories are being shared. Again, the primary purpose of these initial discussions is of utmost importance in creating a comfortable set and setting. Transparency and vulnerability are vital attributes.¹⁵⁹

After the opening dialogue is complete, we will give participants a few minutes to prepare for the evening's activity. While most retreats/camps would make evening activities optional, that is not the case for this advance. When we are together, we will try our best to create a situation where participants serve one another and operate as single unit. Because of this, we make these activities mandatory. This does not mean that it is necessary to participate in all of the libations, but it does require everyone to be in attendance and present as we are continuing to lay a foundation of trust and togetherness. While Saturday will be the crux of our time together, to jump into that day without doing

¹⁵⁸ This will not be a difficult ask, as all the promotional materials require phones and computers to be turned off for the weekend. There is a house telephone for any emergencies, and this number has been provided to specific family members.

¹⁵⁹ The times of discussion, as well as the evening activities, are strategically planned with the hope of allowing participants time to re-center themselves and each other. Because an event like this has the potential to create severe anxiety, it is of great importance to find situations where participants can re-group and gather together without the pressure of having "consuming entheogens" as the primary focus. It is in these moments of normalcy that relationships are built and trust is solidified.

the foundational relationship-building exercises ahead of time would be detrimental.¹⁶⁰

This evening's activity must not last later than 10:30 pm, as a decent night's sleep will be one of the best ways to prepare for what Saturday will hold.

Saturday will be the most intense portion of our advance. To prepare for what the day will hold, there will be a light breakfast and coffee, tea, juices, and waters prepared for our participants. These accommodations will be set up by 5:30 am to serve those who have flown in from other time zones. Saturday morning will be a morning to wake up and spend some time in meditation and contemplation. The guests will receive a handout on their pillows during the evening activity on Friday night suggesting that all participants plan on getting a good night's sleep, and then as they wake up on Saturday morning and enjoy a light breakfast, that they take a pen/paper and find a place on the property to spend some time in contemplation as they prepare for their journeys to begin. They will be asked to write down questions that they hope to get answers to, issues they would like to think through, and even any past trauma that they would like to examine. This is their morning to spend some time alone and wrap up their final thoughts before their encounter. Journaling is highly recommended at all stages of this process, and this morning's contemplation session is no exception.

After the morning activity, the group will gather for a final discussion before the consumption of entheogens. During this discussion, the focus will be on addressing what

¹⁶⁰ This is something that I have noticed to be very similar to my evangelical practices of consuming a sacrament. In nearly every piece of research that I have encountered, the most successful are done by shamans, who hold high respect for the process of entheogenic consumption. This is not unfamiliar to the seriousness that was often held by my pastors, who encouraged all who approached the table to do so with reverence and respect.

the day will consist of and the logistics of how the day will progress.¹⁶¹ This will be a time for participants to share what they desire from their morning meditation and a time for the group to address any significant hopes and fears that are still in the minds of the participants. This session's definitive goal is to address any of the underlying "set" and "setting" issues that may cause the experience to be unenjoyable.

Immediately following that discussion, the entire group will participate in a light lunch before getting ready for the experience. After lunch, the participants will be brought together (each with pen/paper in hand) and will gather for the experience. The group will gather together outside and sit on blankets as we begin the experience.

On this particular advance, the entheogen that will be administered is psilocybin mushrooms.

The group will not be required to sit together for the experience; however, there will be room outside on the grass for all participants to gather for the ceremony before consuming the entheogens.¹⁶² With all the logistics of the experience being discussed and out of the way, the participants will gather outside and sit or lay in a circle.

I will lead the participants in a prayer of gratitude as dehydrated psilocybin mushrooms will be handed to each participant. Once the participants are holding their entheogens, the leader will begin to share how psilocybin is certainly not an escape from reality, even though it occasions such an altered state of mind. Nevertheless, mushrooms do often offer dramatically new perspectives on one's life or life in general, which can

¹⁶¹ This is another attempt to create a safe mental space to inform the set and setting.

¹⁶² Should the weather turn, I have chosen this residence specifically due to the sufficient indoor space needed to accommodate the experience.

help people live more authentic and fulfilled lives moving forward.¹⁶³ From there, the group will offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for providing us with such a beautiful mushroom. Additionally, I will ask the group if there are any prayers that they would like to say as they hold the entheogens in their hands. When the group is done praying, the leader will instruct the group to take the entheogens together and remain respectful of one another as the hallucinogens being their work. The whole experience lasts between four and eight hours, averaging for most folks as a six-hour trip, but it can depend on the dose and the individual. Mushrooms take an average of about 30 to 45 minutes to start taking effect, but it could be anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours, depending on how they were consumed.¹⁶⁴ For this advance, each participant will be administered 2 grams, because many experienced facilitators of entheogens regard this as an appropriate dosage to be exposed to the mushrooms' healing effects without being incapacitated from too strong of a dose. Two grams or less is often called the "museum dose," and at this dosage, one's perception can be altered just enough while maintaining decent contact with reality.¹⁶⁵ The next few hours of the experience will inevitably be the most intense for the participants. Weather permitting, the group will remain outside enjoying the beauty of nature while the mushrooms begin to take effect. Participants will be

¹⁶³ See Michelle Janikian, "How to Take Shrooms," *DoubleBlind Magazine*, last modified August 7, 2020, <https://doubleblindmag.com/how-to-take-shrooms-shroom-dosage-shroom-effects/>.

¹⁶⁴ See Janikian.

¹⁶⁵ See Janikian. For the past few years, mushrooms have ranked as the Global Drug Survey's safest illicit substance, safer even than cannabis, because they put the least amount of people in the hospital. Nevertheless, the creators of the international survey note that this is likely partly due to the special care, preparation, and general knowledge of harm reduction that many mushroom users adhere to. Psilocybin mushrooms, and most psychedelics for that matter, are not considered addictive, because their experiences are generally too profound for compulsive use. In part, that is because mushrooms do not tend to give users an escape as alcohol or opioids can, but rather, they often offer a more in-depth look at oneself that is not always pretty.

encouraged to get to a place where they are comfortable and to prepare for the entheogens to begin working. During this time, all participants will occasionally be consulted to ensure that they feel well and to help calm any nerves that might arise.¹⁶⁶ For the next few hours, the participants will be able to journal what they are experiencing in the way that seems fitting on an individual basis. During these few hours, it will be the staff's role to continue to create a peaceful situation where participants will not need to worry about any external stressors. The staff will continue to check in with participants (specifically with an eye for those who may need more specific attention).

As participants experience the entheogens' mind-altering effects, the staff has been instructed to allow individuals to experience their journey without external processing. One of the most critical aspects of these specific hours is that the staff is not counseling participants with heavy emotional tactics.¹⁶⁷ The deep external processing will come later in the day, but for the hours that the participants are under the influence of the entheogens, they must experience their inner journey and reflect on their learning through their encounter. One of the most hazardous potentials is for an individual to process what he or she is experiencing at the moment externally.

As each participant will emerge from the experience at different times, we will ask each participant to remain in a posture of reflection until all participants have finished

¹⁶⁶ It will be the role of the advance leadership to continue to provide a safe situation, so that participants are able to enjoy the experience without their mindset leading them into an unpleasant experience.

¹⁶⁷ As the staff will not be allowed to consume entheogens during this advance, the staff must remain attentive to the individuals they serve during these hours.

their journey and have had ample time to reassociate with reality.¹⁶⁸ As participants return from their experience, various emotions and states of mind will need to be assessed.

Some individuals like to immediately gather with a group to process their experiences and share the gained insights through the experience. Others prefer to remain withdrawn and reflect on their experience in a more reserved fashion. This advance will give space for individuals to process in a way that is most beneficial to them. The schedule calls for a 6:00 PM dinner, and this allows for about an hour of processing between the end of the experience and the beginning of dinner.

Dinner will consist of all staff and participants gathered around a table, sharing a meal, and discussing what people experienced throughout the day. This will be a low-key meal, and the focus will be on sharing the experience with others and some general takeaways. The more in-depth discussion will come later in the evening.

After dinner, there will be a discussion time for participants to share their experiences. This will be a time of mandatory sharing and listening for each participant. Participants and staff will sit in a circle, share their experiences, and allow others to ask questions and share input. This is also an opportunity for the staff to share what they were experiencing with specific individuals throughout their time together earlier in the day. This is a time of honesty, openness, curiosity, and honoring one another for having gone through with this process.

¹⁶⁸ While aspects of this require individual experiences, the heart of the advance is a community event. Therefore, we will still serve one another by waiting for each other and moving forward together.

The Celebration of Eucharist

To close the evening discussion, the staff and participants will join in a mild liturgy and celebrate the Eucharist together. This Eucharist celebration is designed to evoke all the senses. The staff and participants will sit together in a circle with everyone facing each other. An instrumental record will be played. The background music will set the tone of the Last Supper. When the music has played for a few minutes, a candle and incense will be lit. This will give us the sight of the candle and the smell of the incense. There will be ten minutes of silence before I direct the participants to place themselves in the story as one of the participants slowly reads John 13:2-17:28. After this reading, I will distribute the bread to the person sitting directly across from me. The person will take and eat and then serve the person to their left (moving the bread clockwise around the group). After the bread is distributed, the wine is poured and follows the same pattern.¹⁶⁹ Once the bread and wine are distributed, the group will say a prayer together. Following the prayer, the group will stand up together, hold hands, and sing the Doxology.¹⁷⁰ This will close the primary time of discussion.

Immediately following this time of discussion will follow another “after hours” event for those who desire to participate. The late-night activity will not be mandatory, as it is understood that all participants have had a long day. For those who participate in the evening activity, there will be a suggestion to serve the other participants by having

¹⁶⁹ Regarding the sense: the music provides sound, the candle provides sight, the incense provides smell, and the bread and wine provide touch and taste.

¹⁷⁰ While most of this experience is individual due to the nature of the activity, it is essential to honor the Christian tradition of unity and togetherness. That is the purpose of such a highly intentioned evening event.

genuine and substantive conversations. This will be an excellent opportunity to ask questions, share some of the more complex issues that have arisen throughout the experience, and will serve as a time of authentic community building. For those who do not desire to participate in the evening activities, we will encourage others to do some personal reflection before getting a good night's sleep. The evening session's purpose is to allow various formats for each individual to process their takeaways from that day's activities. While there is no specific "lights out" time, we will encourage all participants to get a good night's sleep, as they consider what they have learned throughout the day.

Sunday morning begins with breakfast at 8:00 am. Because this will be our last meal together, we will have various options, as we provide a hearty meal to start the morning. This meal will be served in the kitchen, but participants will be encouraged to find a place on the property where they would like to sit, as they take in some of the last moments of the Pacific Northwest's beautiful scenery. This will also be a time when participants will be encouraged to process what aspects of their experience they will share with friends and family and how they will share it in a way that does not demonize them as "drug users." Because the topic is sensitive and still taboo (and illegal) in North America, this is a vital piece of the process to consider as the participants move toward heading back to their lives.

After breakfast, participants will prepare to leave Lopez Island. This will include showers, packing, and other activities that participants find necessary to close out their experience. Immediately following room cleaning with participants ready to depart the island, one final conversation will be held on the back porch of the residence. During this final discussion, participants will share what they have learned through the experience

and how their perceptions regarding entheogens have changed (if they have).

Additionally, participants will be encouraged to share their most significant takeaway with the group and provide honest feedback on how we could serve participants better in future advances.

In the culture of those who often consume entheogens, there is a very real stage, which many call the “evangelist” phase. While this term is often spoken in a light-hearted setting, it is a genuine stage, in which beginners have an extremely positive experience with entheogens and want to evangelize many of their friends and family to their newfound love. Unfortunately, this passion is often not received well and creates frustration for both parties. This final discussion will provide alternative approaches to describing entheogenic experiences in a way that is more easily digested.

At noon, the vehicle will depart the residence to the Lopez Island Ferry Terminal. At 12:45 pm, the vehicle will depart to the Anacortes terminal and will arrive 40 minutes later at 1:25 pm. Immediately following the arrival in Anacortes, the vehicle will continue straight to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport to drop off participants, so that they can make their afternoon and evening flights home.

As previously mentioned, this experience stems from my own personal story. Sadly, while individuals close to me have attested to my noticeable happiness and well-being, this story has not been appreciated or welcomed by many of my evangelical friends. Because of that, I wanted to provide a safe place for people to experience what they might be missing from their well-intentioned, yet closed-minded form of Christianity.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this advance was intended to take place in person in 2020. Unfortunately, with a global pandemic distorting the plans of gathering, this artifact has been severely modified. This artifact has been planned to successfully accommodate up to eight participants and three staff members by hosting a self-reflective advance on Lopez Island, Washington. This advance has been strategically prepared by me in consideration of entheogenic experts. I have made a career in planning and hosting events worldwide, and I find planning advances like this within my wheelhouse of passions and talents. The aspect of this advance that differentiates it from nearly every other religious retreat is the administering and facilitation of non-synthetic entheogens.

In the future, I desire for these events to be open to any individual who is curious about the potential benefits of entheogenic pursuits in encountering the Divine. However, because this will be the first advance of this sort under my leadership, I am only allowing eight individuals with whom I have a trusting relationship and who have expressed interest in this particular encounter.

The initial group consists of three staff members (myself and two others) and participants from various locations across the United States and Canada.

Each member will be required to fill out the application form and then make a payment on the website.¹⁷¹ Once their applications and payment have come through, the group will be introduced to one another over a series of digital meetings, which each

¹⁷¹ See <https://www.elysiansociety.com>.

participant will have to engage in as we prepare for the advance.¹⁷² Should there be any participants who are not respectful of the group and its intentions, that individual will not be welcome to the advance. To attend this event, we have taken measures to seriously engage the topic for months leading up to the event. There are a series of books and questions required to be intellectually engaged—one book per month for the three months leading up to the event.¹⁷³

The Demographics of Participants

The staff is made up of two males and one female. The female is a Nurse Practitioner and will be available to accommodate the hospitality elements and serve as a medical consultant should there be any need. A male staff member, who is a licensed psychologist, will be on site to ensure that there is help should a negative experience arise.¹⁷⁴ I will be the third staff member. Both of the mentioned staff members have committed to overseeing the meals and logistical considerations, such as getting to the residence before the advance and ensuring the property is appropriately situated.

The participants include five males and three females. All participants are active clergy who have approached me in consideration of an entheogenic experience. All participants are between the ages of thirty and forty. Two participants reside in Canada; the other six reside in the United States. Four of the participants are married, and four are

¹⁷² We will be using the Zoom meeting platform.

¹⁷³ This is another intentional attempt to weed out individuals with sinister motives.

¹⁷⁴ I am not ignorant enough to believe that this experience will go off perfectly. Due to the varying reported effects of hallucinogens, to expect that there will be a potential for a bad experience would be prudent.

single. Theologically, the eight participants make up various theological viewpoints: one Catholic, two Presbyterian, three Methodist, one Baptist, and one non-denominational. All participants were raised under the suggestion that hallucinogens are a sin and against reasonable practices of proclaiming Christians. All eight participants are open-minded and have sought me out regarding advice and suggestions for entheogenic facilitation.

The Budget and Travel

Fortunately, both staff members that will be assisting me in this advance have chosen to serve the participants free of charge. This will provide the opportunity for the costs to remain low for the participants. The cost of the advance is \$499 (not including travel). Once the participants land at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, the rest of the advance is covered financially. This includes transportation to and from Lopez Island, vehicles, fuel, food, entheogens, ferry tickets, and lodging. We will stay in a seven bedroom/eleven bathroom house on Lopez Island. The cost of the house is \$1604. This includes rent (\$476 per night) and the taxes and fees (\$652). The cost of the website is \$144 for the year, which includes website hosting and domain name. The budget for the food is \$250. The budget for gas is \$100. The budget for the entheogens is \$100. The cost of the ferry is \$182.05. This leaves a total of \$1611 profit for the weekend.

The advance was planned for the summer (to accommodate more positive weather potential) on Lopez Island. The typical weather during this time of year on Lopez Island shows highs of 71 and lows of 50.

The retreat is planned from Friday through Sunday. This allows most travelers to depart their living location early Friday morning. Because they are traveling to the west coast, this typically will allow them to arrive by noon. The event ends on Sunday, and we

have asked participants not to plan flights that depart before 5:00 pm. While this makes for a long day, the Seattle airport often has late night (or red eye) flights departing to most major destinations and can accommodate most participants' travel needs.

Clarifying the Win

Due to the nature of this experience, understanding what would deem it “successful” is significantly more subjective than many would prefer. The experience’s success ultimately depends on whether or not the participants experience something that brings them closer to the Divine.¹⁷⁵

There are markers to determine whether something is genuinely working in many retreat situations that determine whether the event is successful. When it comes to this experience, the attendance will be at capacity. Typically, a marker for successful engagement, attendance is often a surefire metric to consider. With this advance, we will be at full capacity (with many on a waiting list).

Another familiar marker for success is the budget. This advance’s financial plan has proven that there will be money made and a potential to scale growth to a broader level. From a financial standpoint, the markers are in place to ensure a positive financial outcome. In the future, higher advance costs will allow for an increase in profits.

A metric that is often measured in “religious retreats” is the emotional engagement that is derived from the participants. While I desire that this advance surpasses the participants’ expectations, this metric will be harder to measure on paper, as

¹⁷⁵ I am aware that this is a highly subjective measurement. These would be similar to most religious experiences, such as a person “experiencing God” in a corporate worship environment. Considering who can define the parameters of a “God encounter” is something that I wish I had more time to expand on. However, length constraints do not allow this.

a life-changing experience is the ultimate measure of success on this advance.

Additionally, this can be broken down into two recognizable variables: individual experience and corporate experience. Considering both elements, it will be an exciting observation to recognize whether an extreme reaction (positive or negative) of an individual will affect the pulse of the corporate experience. Unfortunately, because the research of this specific dynamic is difficult to find, it will be problematic to assume one way or the other.¹⁷⁶ However, there are markers that I believe will be able to document the success from an “experience” lens. Individually, it should not be difficult to understand what participants believe they have taken away from the experience. However, similar to a standard religious retreat, there is an element of spiritual awakening, which could be deemed as a sign of a “successful” experience. Our experience will not be any different. Healthy dialogue with the participants will describe whether or not the retreat provided a positive and successful experience for them. Additionally, it will be beneficial to study if the experience has caused any significant changes in mental health in the time that passes after the advance.¹⁷⁷ While retreats often document the “changes” or “transformations” that occur during the intended time together, to effectively document the success of this advance, it will be beneficial to follow up and see what changes are permanent after our experience. This will be done with a 30-day follow-up email, followed by two more emails (one at 90 days and one at

¹⁷⁶ Additionally, there is no research that I was able to uncover that focuses on how the individual experience of religious retreats can/will affect the corporate experience, whether positively or negatively.

¹⁷⁷ Comments from friends and family months after my experience confirmed that there was a significant life change in myself for the positive.

180 days). The purpose of these would be to check in with the participants to get a pulse of what lasting effects (if any) they are noticing after having returned to everyday life.

When it comes to reading a pulse on the effectiveness of the advance's benefits, I am able to determine what makes the event successful as it is the byproduct of my imagination. In light of this, the success metric is quite simple: Did the participants grow together through the experience? Did the participants come away with a deeply spiritual experience? If the answer is "yes" to either of these questions, then I would consider the purpose of our gathering to have been beneficial.

SECTION 6:
POSTSCRIPT

My desire is that my research and suggestions will provide the foundation for others to build upon as this conversation continues to flourish. As I was developing the research for this dissertation, there were a few elements that stood out to me. First, with COVID-19 continuing to rise across America, what does the new future look like? I was aware that the first round of quarantine was going to have an effect on whether or not I could gather individuals together to participate in this advance. While it would have been easy to pivot and distribute theentheogens and then gather the participants together over Zoom, that approach would compromise a key element that sits at the heart of this advance –community. It was of high importance to me that this was a community experience that needed to include everyone gathered together.

In the summer of 2020, states started reversing stay-at-home orders and allowing for gatherings. However, I was not prepared to facilitate this experience at that time. Sadly, in the fall and winter, cases began to rise and governing officials began to tighten restrictions on what types of gatherings could take place. To honor those officials and the participants of this experience, I made the decision to postpone until 2021. While it would have been significantly easier to host this experience to provide content for this dissertation, my integrity would not allow that.

My second great takeaway through this experience is that I am on the cutting edge of this opportunity in regard to western Christianity. While there was sufficient research to complete this topic, many of the questions that I had regarding this topic were left unanswered due to the lack of excess information. I found this to be fascinating as I

consulted with various colleagues in the same doctoral program who found little lacking in the research that they were building upon. For me, it was a different tune. This causes me to be excited about the potential of what is on the horizon still to be written about, but also a deep humility, as I am constantly questioning whether or not the research is limited because of the infancy of this topic, or because it is limited to a small group of heretics.¹⁷⁸

The biggest competition for the advance is the acceptance of entheogenic consumption overcoming the taboos and misunderstandings that usually accompany it. This is where I forecast the biggest hurdles needing to be overcome.

My biggest takeaway from this process concerns the intentionality of sacrament in a religious context. There is something that is mysterious and sacred about connecting with the Divine. The constant push from my advisor, colleagues, editors, and readers has been to fight to make the connection of what makes something sacramental and why it matters. Even in my attempts to push for a sacred adoption of entheogens, I found myself constantly fighting to make space for the spiritual element of the conversation without properly consulting various avenues (denominations, sects, people groups) of Christian thought. It is only through intense accountability that I was able to gain any substantial clarity on merging sacraments and psychedelics. The push from my advisors to consider the openness that many Christians hold regarding this topic was a great baseline to continue writing.

As I continue to speak with individuals who desire to see what personal benefits entheogens might provide for them, there is a growing tension with trying to reconcile the

¹⁷⁸ I would not choose to use “heretic” lightly. It is a phrase that I have been given many times by individuals who show little interest in my pursuits.

“negative” connotations with the perceived freedoms and liberties that are often constructed within the mental, religious frameworks by those seeking answers. Perhaps it is this very reason that many are moving away from the frameworks they were raised in, as they attempt to uncover the Divine in various settings. While this is a frustrating element to instruct repeatedly, glimpses of hope appear in the increased frequency of individuals who desire to seek the Divine through new methods as their levels of understanding continue to grow.

At the beginning of my studies, the general pulse of my propositions were tolerated at best. However, as I continue to research and expand my search, I have been warmly welcomed by followers of Jesus, who have dared to shake off the religious positions that have dictated their lives for a significant amount of time and have become more connected with the Divine through the consumption of entheogens. Through conversations with these various people groups, I have uncovered a community who has not only become more interested in encountering the Divine but who have also grown in love for one another, for humanity, and all aspects of creation. A bonding agent is found through experiencing the spiritual world through hallucinogens that many would describe as a “unifying of all things.” I hope that as complimentary research continues to emerge from the medical community, Christians would be willing to consider that perhaps the Divine has provided for us in natural objects since the Garden of Eden.

It is also important to remember that there were times in American history, where substances that are currently considered legal and recreational were outlawed.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, substances that now have the potential to demand a lifetime jail sentence

¹⁷⁹ Alcohol was outlawed from 1920 until 1933 in America.

were at one time widely available, and some were even considered to be a “cure-all for any number of ailments” and even “a most wonderful invigorator for the sexual organs.”¹⁸⁰ Regardless, it would be a good practice to consider seeking the root of our preferences and what we find acceptable. Do our thoughts sway with changes in legislation? Are we genuinely guided by what we believe Jesus is calling us to? Do we tend to loosen our stances when medical suggestions or advances confront our convictions?

Regardless of what background we come from or what stance we tend to take on a particular topic, we do not have access to full knowledge yet, but one day we will.¹⁸¹ We can take comfort in the fact that the teachings of Jesus have long attracted an eclectic group of people with diverse opinions and convictions, and that Christ Himself has made a place at the table for all types. As Christ called his disciples, he chose individuals with various backgrounds, thoughts, preferences, opinions, and convictions. Perhaps in this beautiful diversity, we come to find out more about the Divine, as we learn to love and serve one another. Perhaps the conversation is far less about what is acceptable and more about whether we are making space for those who are different from us to have a seat at the table.

Many people throughout history have found beautiful experiences through entheogenic consumption, and I trust that we will uncover more, as our minds are opened to the endless possibilities of where we might find the limitless Divine.

¹⁸⁰ I am referring to cocaine which was officially banned in America in 1914. See James Hamblin, “Why We Took Cocaine Out of Soda,” *The Atlantic*, January 31, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/why-we-took-cocaine-out-of-soda/272694/>.

¹⁸¹ See 1 Corinthians 13:12.

APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS OF ENTHEOGENS DESCRIBED

Cannabis – Cannabis is an annual, flowering herb that has distinct male and female individual organisms. Cannabis is known to produce psychoactive effects which have a multi-faceted nature. The primary psychoactive effects include an occurrence of relaxation, and to a minor degree, euphoria from the cornerstone psychoactive compound, tetrahydrocannabinol. Cannabis has a long history of medicinal use, measuring thousands of years and spanning various cultures.¹⁸² Many in the Rastafarian movement consider the marijuana plant to be the original Tree of Life mentioned in the Bible.

Psilocybin Mushrooms – A psilocybin mushroom, also referred to as a magic mushroom or a psychedelic mushroom, is a polyphyletic group of fungi containing psilocybin and psilocin. The dosage of mushrooms containing psilocybin varies depending on the mushroom's potency (calculated by the psilocybin and psilocin content of the mushrooms). This fluctuates significantly between the species but usually consists of 0.5-2.0% of the mushroom's dried weight. Hallucinogenic producing mushrooms have a long history of consumption among the natives of Mesoamerica for religious communion, divination, and healing from before 1000 BCE.

DMT – N,N-Dimethyltryptamine is a chemical substance that occurs in numerous plants and animals and which is both a derivative and a structural analog of tryptamine.¹⁸³

¹⁸² See M. Ben-Amar, "Cannabinoids in Medicine: A Review of Their Therapeutic Potential," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 105, no. 1-2 (2006): 1-25, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16540272/>.

¹⁸³ Teresa M. Carbonaro and Michael B. Gatch, "Neuropharmacology of N,N-Dimethyltryptamine," *Brain Research Bulletin* 126 (2016): 74-88, <https://wordwidescience.org/topicpages/n/n-n+double+bond.html>.

It is often ingested as a psychedelic substance and has historically been prepared by various cultures for ritual purposes as an entheogen.¹⁸⁴ African shamans have long celebrated the effects as an avenue to the afterlife. Considered the “God Molecule,” this hallucinogen has long been brewed with water to form a broth that certain African countries have consumed for years.

Mescaline – Mescaline is the active ingredient in peyote and is a naturally occurring alkaloid notorious for its hallucinogenic effects. It forms naturally in the peyote cactus, the San Pedro cactus, and the Peruvian torch.¹⁸⁵ Mescaline (Peyote) has been consumed for more than 5,700 years by Native Americans in Mexico.¹⁸⁶ Europeans recorded peyote in Native American religious ceremonies upon early contact, most notoriously among the Huichols in Mexico.

Ayahuasca – Also known as “the tea,” ayahuasca is a brew made from the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* shrub and the stalks of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine.¹⁸⁷ Evidence

¹⁸⁴ Dennis J. McKenna, G.H.N. Towers, and F. Abbott, “Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors in South American Hallucinogenic Plants: Tryptamine and β -Carboline Constituents of Ayahuasca,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 10, no. 2 (1984): 195-223, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0378874184900035>.

¹⁸⁵ D. M. Crosby and J. L. McLaughlin, “Cactus Alkaloids. XIX Crystallization of Mescaline HCl and 3-Methoxytyramine HCl from *Trichocereus Panchanoi*,” *Lloydia: The Journal of Natural Products* 36, no. 4 (1973): 416-418. See also O. Ogunbodede, D. McCombs, K. Trout, P. Daley, and M. Terry, “New Mescaline Concentrations from 14 Taxa/Cultivars of *Echinopsis* Spp. (Cactaceae) (“San Pedro”) and Their Relevance to Shamanic Practice,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 131, no. 2 (2010): 356-362, http://www.uvm.edu/~dbarring/241/241_PUBS/ogunbodede2010.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ H. R. El-Seedi, A. De Smet, O. Beck, G. Possnert, and J. G. Bruhn, “Prehistoric Peyote Use: Alkaloid Analysis and Radiocarbon Dating of Archaeological Specimens of *Lophophora* from Texas,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 101, no. 1-3 (2005): 238-242, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7754322_Prehistoric_peyote_use_Alkaloid_analysis_and_radiocarbon_dating_of_archaeological_specimens_of_Lophophora_from_Texas.

¹⁸⁷ R. Savoldi, D. Polari, J. Pinheiro-da-Silva, P.F. Silva, B. Lobao-Soares, M. Yonamine, F. A. M. Freire, and A. C. Luchiari, “Behavioral Changes Over Time Following Ayahuasca Exposure in Zebrafish,” *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 11, no. 139 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2017.00139>.

of ayahuasca use dates to at least 100 CE. In 2010, a bundle containing the residue of ayahuasca ingredients and various other preserved shamanic substances were discovered in a cave located in southwestern Bolivia.¹⁸⁸ In the 16th century, Christian missionaries from Spain first encountered indigenous western Amazonian basin South Americans (in modern Peru/Ecuador) using ayahuasca.

Ibogaine – Ibogaine is a naturally occurring psychoactive substance found in plants contained in the Apocynaceae family.¹⁸⁹ The first noted occurrence of Ibogaine administration occurred among the Bwiti tribe of West Central Africa, where it was a primary element in their spiritual practices. This entheogen was popular among many tribes located in Cameroon, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo. Many of the Bantu population hold a robust belief that Bwiti and the country of Gabon both have a strong connection to the biblical Garden of Eden and that the Iboga tree is associated with the Tree of Knowledge from that place.¹⁹⁰

Salvia Divinorum – This plant is a rare perennial sage that has only been found growing in a 200 square mile decagon of mountain wilderness in Oaxaca, Mexico. It contains leaves that are consumed ceremonially by the indigenous Mazatec Indians, who refer to it as “Ska Pastora” (The Shepherdess). This plant was given the name Divinorum,

¹⁸⁸ Melanie J. Miller, Juan Albarracin-Jordan, Christine Moore, and José M. Capriles, “Chemical Evidence for the Use of Multiple Psychotropic Plants in a 1,000-Year-Old Ritual Bundle from South America,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 23 (2019): 11207-11212, <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/23/11207>.

¹⁸⁹ X. Koenig and K. Hilber, “The Anti-Addiction Drug Ibogaine and the Heart: a Delicate Relation,” *Molecules* 20, no. 2 (2015): 2208-2228.

¹⁹⁰ “The Babongo,” *BBC News*, September 24, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tribe/tribes/babongo/index>.

because of the plant's traditional use in divination.¹⁹¹ This sage produces a resin that contains Salvinorin A, which is the world's most potent naturally occurring psychedelic. For generations, Maztec shamans were the only ones with intimate knowledge of Salvia's psychoactivity.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Aaron S. Reisfield, "The Botany of Salvia Divinorum (Labiatae)," *SIDA Contributions to Botany* 15, no. 3 (1993): 349-366.

¹⁹² "Shepherdess: The Story of Salvia Divinorum," *Hamilton's Pharmacopoeia: A Show About Psychoactive Substances*, Vice TV, November 9, 2016, video, 44:06, https://www.vicetv.com/en_us/video/shepherdess/5810db98f99e11d16392c45d. This particular entheogen provides a dichotomy of observed positive effects when taken under shamanic care versus the results of those who take it on their own with often negative experiences, therefore tarnishing the entheogenic approach to entheogens.

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