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## The Shimmering Cathedral: Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences and the Meaning We Make of Them

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

THE SHIMMERING CATHEDRAL –  
EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES  
AND THE MEANING WE MAKE OF THEM



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY  
PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2022



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Seth Daniel Jones

has been approved by  
the Evaluation Committee on March 10, 2022  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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The leadership at Portland Seminary were present and helpful, as they tested out their new doctorate structure on us, their first cohort across three programs to present in this way. Thank you, Loren, Cliff, Heather, Jen, and the rest of the crew.

And I thank my partner and spouse, Kathrin, and child, editor, and inspiration, Rhiannon, for patience, editing, encouragement, counsel, cautions, and perseverance during the last three years. In love and possibility, I dedicate this project to both of them.

## EPIGRAPH

The whole order of things is as outrageous as any miracle  
which could presume to violate it.

--G.K. Chesterton (from *Varied Types, Charles II. 1908*)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Epigraph.....	iv
Research Method .....	vii
Abstract .....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Project .....	9
THE SHIMMERING CATHEDRAL.....	12
Forward: Are You Experienced? .....	13
<i>THE EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE</i> .....	13
<i>TRANSITIONS AND CULTURE</i> .....	14
<i>“WHAT DOES THIS VALVE DO?”</i> .....	17
<i>EXPERIMENTING ON THE SPIRIT</i> .....	20
<i>EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELS</i> .....	23
<i>ASSUMPTIONS KNOWN AND MADE</i> .....	25
Chapter 1: Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences – .....	29
Crystal Blue Persuasion(s).....	29
<i>THE WEIRD</i> .....	29
<i>MYSTICISM</i> .....	33
<i>EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES</i> .....	39
<i>THE STRUCTURE OF AN ESE</i> .....	43
Part One: Set and Setting - The Where and When of ESEs .....	46
<i>Cartographies: Constellating the Pilgrimage of Faith</i> .....	56
<i>Liminality: Faith in the In-Between</i> .....	58
<i>Spaces and Places: The Nature of Faith</i> .....	60
<i>Time: When Are We?</i> .....	62
Part Two: Appearance - The Who or What of an ESE .....	63
<i>Entities and Discarnate Beings</i> .....	74
<i>Divine Beings</i> .....	76
<i>Bodies and The Sensual</i> .....	78
<i>Feelings and Ideas, Consciousness and Awareness</i> .....	80
Part Three: Revelation - The Why of ESEs.....	81
<i>Relationships</i> .....	93
<i>Life Beyond Life</i> .....	95
<i>Synchronicities: The Convergence of World and Faith</i> .....	98
Part Four: Disclosure - The Meaning of ESEs .....	100
<i>Musical Landscapes</i> .....	114
<i>Theologies and Mysticism</i> s .....	116
<i>Meaning Making and ESEs</i> .....	118
<i>The Shimmering Cathedral</i> .....	120
<i>New Pathways to Christ</i> .....	123
<i>Clanging Cymbals, Klaxons, and Millstones</i> .....	125

Project Launch Plan .....	129
<b>The Shimmering Cathedral - Project Development Goals</b> .....	131
Appendix A—Milestone 1 The NPO Charter.....	134
Appendix B—Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay .....	149
Appendix C—Milestone 3 DESIGN WORKSHOP Report .....	176
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	182
Design Workshop APPENDIX A - Workshop Documentation .....	185
Design Workshop Description.....	185
Design Workshop Documentation.....	187
<i>PAINS AND GAINS MAP</i> .....	187
<i>SPECTRUM MAPPING EXERCISE</i> .....	188
<i>ANTI-PROBLEM EXERCISE</i> .....	189
<i>NAPKIN PITCHES</i> .....	192
One Page Post Workshop Message To Shareholders .....	198
One on One Interviews Documentation.....	199
Appendix D—Milestone 4 [Design Research Report] / [prototype iteration report] .....	208
Appendix E—Supplemental Project Documentation .....	228
Bibliography .....	233

## RESEARCH METHOD

This Project utilized a blended methodology that draws upon bibliographic resources, data derived from stakeholder collaboration, and human-centered design and iteration processes to create a heuristic-based, application-oriented Project.

## ABSTRACT

This project portfolio presents the formational work for a book about Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs). The project seeks to create a spiritual cartography which helps guide clergy, professionals, interested persons, and experiencers as they navigate ESEs and the subsequent process of making meaning from such experiences, particularly in the context of Christian faith, but by no means limited to it. By way of a novel exploration of the structure of an ESE event and stories from scripture, it is hoped that pathways for creating a safe space to share ESEs in group settings will blossom. In the context of the local church, the value of sharing ESEs has shown to have the effect of creating curious, questioning, and thoughtful followers of Jesus. Making space to discuss ESEs, and having ways of talking about them, deepens our insight into the plethora of ESEs in scripture, and gives framework for talking about our own ESEs. The foundations for this work come from multiple directions and are heavily influenced by the rapidly accelerating research into psychedelics and their ability to manifest mystical experiences. This project brings together six completed chapters, plus outlines of uncompleted chapters, of a projected twenty-three chapter book on ESEs, entitled *The Shimmering Cathedral: Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences and the Meaning We Make of Them*.

## INTRODUCTION

When I was beginning to conceive of my project in the fall of 2019, I already had a pretty clear idea that I, at the very least, wanted to write a book about Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs). I did not have a clear idea of what that book would look like. My goal, upon reflection, was to create a safe space to have conversations about my personal ESEs, most particularly my participation in a study at Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelics and Consciousness Studies, in Baltimore, Maryland.

My context is a rural and tourist area in MidCoast Maine. I pastor a Congregational church that has been in the town of Rockland since 1838. It is comprised of primarily of those who are 70 and older. Sustainability and survivability are of primary concern into the future, but those concerns are constrained by intractable Northeastern reservedness which does not allow for conversation about difficult things. Even so, the church is friendly, committed to the faith, and involved in the community.

Beyond the church, I am well known in the community and have cultivated relationships around the town and state with other pastors, politicians, activists, artists, and ‘essential’ workers.

Between my church and the surrounding community, this is who I drew on for my Discovery Workshop on October 19, 2019. Seven of us gathered in person and I introduced the topic and my participation in the Johns Hopkins study. I gathered a neurologist, a drug counselor, an artist, a musician, and a few ESE experiencers. We followed the process presented in the DMIN 750 NPO Discovery Session document. We defined the audience for the project as mental health professionals and clergy. These audiences have been primary in my mind throughout the project development, but it has expanded to include more groups, particularly those interested in

the participation of religious communities in relationship to the exploding psychedelic revolution happening in the world right now.

The discovery session helped me solidify my NPO, which has been pretty stable throughout the program. The one-on-one sessions helped me clarify the importance and focus of the project, especially in the prescient conversation with the head of a non-profit focused on indigenous cultures, permaculture, psychedelic sustainability, and ‘good dying’. This person said that the West had lost its container for defining experience and the world and the understanding and study of ESEs could help us move forward with a new foundation.

The Design Workshop happened on October 24, 2020. This was conducted on ZOOM because of the pandemic. Five of the seven invited people were able to attend. These included a musician, a pastor, a drug counselor, and others. I went into the Design Workshop knowing my strength is in writing and communicating difficult ideas clearly. My primary focus going into the workshop was different possibilities that accentuated what I do well. By way of the Pains and Gains Map, Spectrum Mapping, and The Anti-Problem ‘gaming’ approaches to developing the project design, we determined three big ideas. First was to create a workbook which helps people integrate ESEs into their lives. Second was a book that facilitates language and communication between Christian faith and ESEs. And third, develop a podcast that explores ESEs and faith.

In follow-up with one-on-one interviews, a couple people suggested I take a broad view of ESEs and present a sort of world religion overview which encompasses those religions in the context of ESEs and mystical experience. I seriously considered this but rejected the recommendation. It seemed to me that it would be best for me to speak from that which I know best, the Christian faith and experience. That said, I firmly believe both topic and focus of my project is applicable across religious expressions without superseding the discrete, individual,



separate, and even contradictory claims of any given faith tradition. Regardless, the outcome of the Design Workshop led to the decision to create a book that maps the spiritual and mental topography of ESEs.

In terms of delivery of the project, the scope of the project is to create, for all practical purposes, a substantial submission that would lead to the publication of a book about ESEs. My benchmarks for making that happen was to prioritize which chapters to write first and set a word count goal. This goal was random but concerned with presenting something viable for this program. I chose to present 6 chapters, and to write 40,000 words towards the project. I met both goals. Editing limited the submission for the program to around 20,000 words, but I have presented 6 completed and edited chapters. Over the course of the fall of 2021, I wrote around 55,000 words towards the completion of the book I am writing.

Throughout the writing process, I commissioned five volunteer readers, of whom four were consistent participants. I submitted completed writing of the first two chapters to them for feedback. My readers were helpful, particularly a professor of world religions and mysticism, in helping me clarify particulars around the topic. Likewise, I secured an editor for those first two chapters who was exceptionally helpful in her feedback, particularly in style elements and phrasing, and in terms of clarifying remarks.

For the other four chapters, I presented those originally as a sermon series in November 2021. These were subjected to the feedback of my congregation at the church. More than any particular feedback of the sermons, I was most encouraged with how my presentation of ESEs over the course of a month created a willingness to share ESEs with others within the congregation. Those four sermons have been edited to fit the style of the book.

Throughout the doctoral process, I have relearned a simple truth again: the more one learns about any particular thing, one is not truly learning unless they have more questions than when they started. I do not see this as an obstacle and am instead comforted by the vastness of the topic I have attempted to cover during the program. If there has been any challenge, it is the lack of focus on ESEs from a Christian perspective, and even more so, a complete lack of information of how to understand the ESEs of scripture, which are multifold and numerous. This is advantageous in that it allows me to carve out a place that has not yet been explored. Likewise, it is dangerous since it allows me to ‘make it up’ since the arena has not been explored.

There is a ton of commentary on scripture and what it might mean that, for instance, Mary was visited by an angel, or that Peter experiences a multilayered visionary and synchronistic experience when he sees the sheet of animals and is then called to the centurion’s house. But there is no commentary on the experience itself and what is happening within the experience. In other words, the experience is all about the theological meaning instead of seeing if there is meaning within the experience itself.

Further, there is a whole lot of information on mysticism and the nature of extraordinary experiences, particularly regarding psychedelics, in the culture and in the academic realm, but very little if any reflection on those experiences from a Christian vantage point. This is, in part, historical and evangelical. ESEs and the encounters that are part of those experiences are labeled first as either God-ordained or satanic and demonic, and then explored based on the prior judgment. Instead, this project seeks to give credence and consideration to the ESE itself and then find out what meaning is available in the experience before we ever get to a determination of the theological implications.

What I just said has been a great and creative discovery, however. When scripture is read out from the ESE, meanings change radically, and insights abound. This is because the experiential is prioritized and seen as the seat of meaning-making, rather than forcing meaning to determine experience.

The biggest surprise I have had, and it is one that required a revision of my initial ideas for the project (as opposed to the book), is how people would interpret ESEs when I asked for people to share experiences. No one loves a good ghost story more than me. However, the understanding of an ESE I am trying to express in my work is that an ESE alters and transmutes a person's experience of the world going forward. The person is fundamentally changed by an ESE. Seeing a ghost may indeed do that, but if one's cosmology already includes that possibility and one encounters a ghost, it is likely nothing will change in one's life. This is not an ESE. It may be a confirmation of a prior ESE, but it is not what I am looking for in this project. I have had to revise how I talk about ESEs and what I am expecting from others in their discussion with me of them.

My project has gaps and shortcomings in several areas. First, when we begin with the ESE, the experiential, we rapidly come into philosophical, scientific, and medical realms where my knowledge is limited. Especially in this day and age of pandemic and division, with many agendas attempting to capitalize on a surface level understanding of the scientific and medical, and a collapse of the capacity to think critically in the philosophical, it is important to me to get any statement I make within those arenas to be clear, correct, and well sourced. ESEs cross over into consciousness studies, mental health concerns, strange corners of philosophy such as ontology, metaphysics, and semiotics (all headlined by, as always, French philosophers).

All of these – the scientific, the medical, and the philosophical – represent alternative avenues my NPO could have taken. Certainly, I touch on these within my project, but I want to try to build out of the stories of the Bible throughout my work. This grounds the work in a shared story, and it also models for others how we can share our own stories. With the focus on ESEs, however, all of these afford exploration in ways that inspire me. Namely, exploring biblical ESEs allows me a grounded way to speak about outrageously wild ESEs in the world. From the perspective of an ESE in scripture, a UFO encounter does not sound as imbalanced, especially when there is an understanding of the internal structure of such encounters. Likewise, the landscapes of a psychedelic experience are not as inaccessible and subjective when they are set against, say, the disciple John encountering angelic hosts and dragons in the Book of Revelation.

Going forward, my project will require further research in consciousness studies to help understand the landscapes of meaning making. Consciousness is ‘the hard problem’ of science (per Dr. David Chalmers) and the science around it is murky, confusing, and sometimes purely speculative. After all, how do you study the thing that allows you to study the thing you are studying? The project will also require some deep dives into philosophical reading in the realms of ontology and the meaning of meaning itself. The philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Umberto Eco, Michael Polanyi, Soren Kierkegaard, and others will be helpful here. Further, I hope to gather ESEs from other people in order to incorporate their experiences into the cartography I am creating.

My goal following graduation is to, very simply, complete my book. I have several other chapters completed beyond what I have submitted. They are simply unedited and unformatted. I would also like to find and create avenues that allow me to present what I have generated over

these past three years. By this, I mean conferences, interviews, articles to write and other ways to make myself available to speak and present on the topic of ESEs.

One of my disappointments along the research journey has nothing to do with the topic at hand and everything to do with the situation of the world. Doing a doctorate program during a pandemic was helpful in that it gave me something solid to focus on while the known world disintegrated out from underneath us all. Doing a doctorate program during a pandemic also meant possibilities of gathering with classmates and interested parties regarding my research was seriously limited and curtailed. This is not because we couldn't gather in person; it was because the pandemic was so overwhelming in its pressures, it limited the ability to participate in ways that felt more complete. Or so it seems to me.

Contrarily, one of the joys during this process has been influential friendships that I have made which have redirected my project in ways I could not have predicted. I am grateful to a few people in our cohort who have made this journey an exceptional experience and I pray we remain close going forward.

This experience has slowly helped me gain confidence in my academic sense of myself as an equal and one who has qualified knowledge in various realms, especially theology, the Bible, and semiotics. This confidence has been confirmed in my preaching at my church and also in my interactions with others. While I am somewhat allergic to being considered an 'expert' in anything, I do appreciate the dawning recognition by others and myself that I am knowledgeable and well-learned in interesting and obscure arenas.

Relative to my ministry, I am deeply aware that my sense before this program that American Christianity in particular, and probably Christianity globally, was changing rapidly is now confirming itself in the clear changes that are happening because of the pandemic and the

ongoing de-churching of the country. This is becoming increasingly clear in my own context. I do not believe it is a change I can affect in any way, either locally or culturally. However, I can speak into the experience of other people in such a way that gives place to the faith and its value in understanding the meaning we make of our experiences. By way of ESEs, there is a sort of ‘trans-subjective’ sharing that can occur which will perhaps provide a new way of being people of faith in the near future.

That hope leads directly into my hopes for my project. I hope my project and the book that comes from it, much less the other work I do around it, helps reshape our understanding of the Christian faith as an experience we have with God and Christ and one another first. My hope is that the understanding be accessible to those who are not followers of Jesus, not so they become followers necessarily, but rather that they are willing and able to participate with us in the discovery of new ways of being. Likewise, my hope is that the work is accessible to followers of Jesus so that they may develop a curious, respectful, and loving desire to share in the experience of wheresoever the Holy Spirit is blowing us next. Very simply, my hope is that we gain a confidence and trust in the Holy Spirit by rediscovering the foundations of the faith itself in the ESEs of the founders of the faith.

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8, Jesus to Nicodemus. NRSV).

## FINAL PROJECT

### INTRODUCTION

This project presents the formation of a book about Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs). My context is rural MidCoast Maine. I pastor a Congregational church founded in 1838. As an elder demographic church, sustainability and survivability are of primary concern. I believe that the future of the church is experiential, and we do not have a language to talk about ESEs that may happen to those who are committed to the faith and those who are seeking meaning for their experiences in the world. Therefore, the context for this project is broad, presenting a pattern and map, or cartography, for how a whole church can talk about ESEs. The context extends beyond churches to anyone who has had an ESE or someone who is guiding and counseling someone through an ESE experience. The NPO for this project states: ***A spiritual cartography to guide clergy, professionals, and interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and an understanding of the process of making meaning from such experiences is needed, especially in the context of the Christian commitment.*** This project presents the initial writings and outline of a book entitled *The Shimmering Cathedral: Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences and the Meaning We Make of Them.*

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Six chapters and outlines of a book that provides a cartography of the four aspects that one might encounter during an ESE, with the intention of helping either an experiencer of ESEs, or helping a spiritual or therapeutic worker to understand the contours and landscapes of the ESE. How we make meaning of the ESE in a Christian context is explored in the context of the

book. I have chosen the form of a book for this project, quite simply, because I am good at writing and believe it is the best way to articulate the focus of the project.

#### PROJECT SCOPE:

- To generate a viable roadmap to publication of a book
- To present at least six chapters framing the future book
  - Forward, Introduction plus at least 4 chapters
- To develop connections in interested sectors regarding the subject matter
  - I have joined four different groups concerning this topic
    - Ligare (concerned with intersection of Christianity and psychedelics), Faith & Delics (concerned with world faiths and psychedelics), Chacruna (concerned with indigenous ethics, world participation in plant medicine), and IANDS (International Association of Near Death Studies).

#### BENCHMARKS:

- Prioritize which Chapters to write (completed October 2021)
- Create and build Bibliography and Footnote index (ongoing through January 2022)
- Write Forward, Introduction and at least 4 chapters (Initial writing completed October-November 2021; editing and quality reading December 2021-January 2022)
- Secure Editor and Readers for Quality and readability (Editor and readers secured mid-October 2021)



The documentation of the project is straightforward. In the pages that follow, I present six completed chapters – a Forward, an explanatory chapter, and the introductions to the four parts of the book. I also present a brief outline of the intermediary remaining seventeen chapters, some with brief explanations of the scope of the chapter.

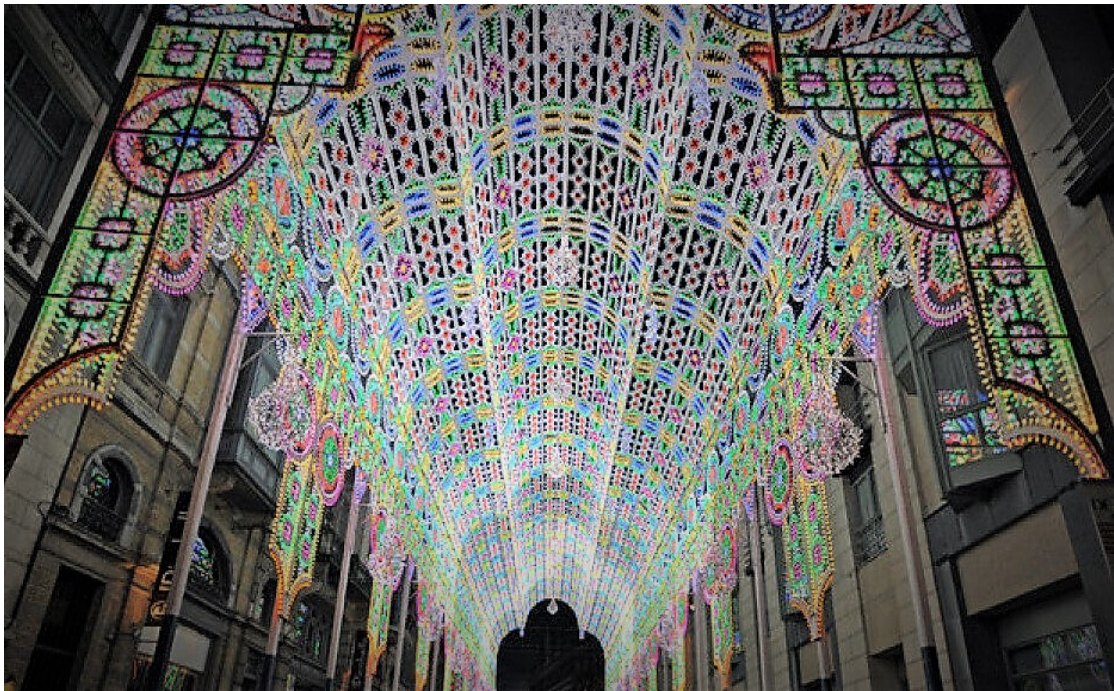
PRESENTATION/DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECT

THE SHIMMERING CATHEDRAL

*Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences*

*And The Meaning We Make of Them*

SETH D. JONES



Source: Lichtfestival Gent 2021, Previous Editions, 2012,  
<https://lichtfestival.stad.gent/en/vorige-edities/2012>,

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I would like to thank my cohort in the Doctorate Program in Semiotics, Church, and Culture at Portland Seminary, George Fox University, in Portland, Oregon for their inspiration and friendship. I am especially grateful to my small group with Bridget, Lori, and Mark, along with our Project Faculty leader, Phillip Newell, who has been a calming, gentle presence during some of the more stressful moments of the journey to a Doctor of Ministry. The guidance and care you each have provided is a great blessing.

The wisdom, teaching, and friendship of the teacher of the program, Dr. Leonard Sweet, has been a creative and meaningful relationship which has expanded my mind and soul. I am pleased to be a part of the Tribe of Issachar by way of Len's presence.

Thank you to the leadership and administration of Portland Seminary, especially Loren, Cliff, Heather, and Jen. We could not have done this without your help!

Finally, but not least, I want to thank my wife, Kathrin, and my child, Rhiannon, whose love, help, and confidence in me have been a constant blessing, for which I thank God regularly.

### Forward: Are You Experienced?

If you can just get your mind together  
 Uh-then come on across to me  
 We'll hold hands and then we'll watch the sunrise  
 From the bottom of the sea  
 But first, are you experienced?  
 Uh-have you ever been experienced-uh?  
 Well, I have  
 - "Are You Experienced?" The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Are You Experienced*, 1967

### *THE EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE*

The Extraordinary Spiritual Experience (hereafter known as an ESE) is foundational to every spiritual and religious movement and is central to every person who considers themselves spiritual and/or religious. ESEs are dynamic, profound events which reorient our awareness, spirituality, and perception. They are beyond the ordinary, pressing us to the very edges of understanding and comprehension, often defying our ability to put language to the event. An ESE circumnavigates a contoured and shifting landscape of the strange, unusual, and weird.

Individuals, in any time of history, and within or without religious and spiritual movements, also have a wide breadth of ESEs. These can be fairly mundane, such as synchronicities (apparently unrelated events which come together in a deep relationship of meaning), déjà vu (the feeling of having been to a place or time one has never been to), or "losing time" while driving or performing a task of deep meaning. The ESE can also be extreme, such as angelic visitation, near-death experiences, encounters with mythical or legendary beings like fairies and brownies, UFO encounters from observation to full-scale abduction, or cryptid encounters with Bigfoot or Nessie, or my favorite, the Hodag, which is a central Wisconsin creature of unusual description. ESEs can be spontaneous and come upon a person or people

without preparation or warning. An ESE can be facilitated by years of preparation in prayer and meditation, or by ingesting various substances, such as psychedelics or other mind-altering chemicals discovered by shamans and priests throughout history.

A religion's ability to share the meaning gained from ESEs with others both shapes and fuels the power of that religion to reach the wider world across generations. The desire of a spiritual tradition is to either communicate and replicate the ESE the original experiencer had, such as achieving Enlightenment, as in the tradition of the Buddha; or to create conditions whereby a follower can also have an ESE themselves, such as a Pentecostal prayer meeting that seeks to, among other things, verify, replicate, and extend the power of the Holy Spirit described in Scripture. Meaning is made for individuals and community alike in this interchange of spiritual and religious life through ritualized events such as worship, or by an experiencer communicating their ESE to others in various ways.

### *TRANSITIONS AND CULTURE*

The ways we transmit information facilitates how we communicate what has happened to us, particularly in ESEs. Since the early 1500s, when Luther and his followers created the first mass-produced viral literature event with the publication of the 95 Theses from the Wittenberg University Press, we have been a word-focused culture, particularly in the West.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the ubiquity of printed material available to many people, ideas and thoughts were transmitted by way of the spoken word. It is a wholly different activity to read something than it is to hear it.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 55-56. Pettegree doesn't use the language of "virality" I have used, but implies it heavily.

The mind responds differently and the brain routes information through different channels when we hear rather than read. The medium by which stories, thoughts, and ideas are transferred changes how we receive those stories, thoughts, and ideas.

Today, we are living in a time when we are crossing over from a word-focused world to an image-focused world. The change is as dramatic as the transition from spoken word to written word. This radical transformation began with the advent of the television in the 1950s, a passive medium, and has been fueled by the personal computer and the World Wide Web, an active, participatory medium. “The computer...converted the television screen from a monologue to a dialogue by making it interactive.”<sup>2</sup>

These changes are always driven by new technology and today that technology is the accelerated expansion of the internet along with social media platforms that generate images as much, if not more, than text. To put it another way, image now drives text, whereas before the text drove the image. Even the act of creating a text document on the computer screen is as much an imagistic exercise as it is an exercise in writing. One can move blocks of text to other parts of the document. The appearance of font, text size, page color, the layout on the computer screen itself—all of these speak to the image as much as the text on the page.<sup>3</sup> Leonard Sweet, professor of semiotics at Portland Seminary in Oregon, has been tracking and commenting on the transition from word to image for many years. He puts the shift this way:

In this new culture, images are central to personal life. To sculpt a metaphor is to transform the world. Good communication used to be concerned about focusing people's

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict between Word and Image* (New York, NY: Penguin/Arkana, 1999), 417.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 417.

attention so that they all ‘sing from the same page’; now it’s about teaching people how to sequence the same monitor, how to integrate sound and print and video.<sup>4</sup>

We are switching from a culture of explanation to a culture of narratives, of stories. The goal of a great storyteller is to transmit the story in such a way that the hearer *sees* the story. An image-based culture is a storytelling culture. And a storytelling culture is a culture seeking experiences because experiences create good stories. My work as a Christian pastor requires me to retell a particular set of stories in new ways. The Bible makes this relatively easy because the Bible is a book filled with extraordinary spiritual experiences which create powerful stories designed to be told over and over again.

There is a secret, though, to the art of retelling stories about God, faith, and communities of faith, regardless of the medium used. That secret is this: all these stories are meant to inspire each of us to also have our own extraordinary spiritual experiences. Eventually, our personal experiences begin to echo the stories that have been retold over and over. We begin to play a new instrument to add our own resonant sound into the orchestration of spiritual life. We add a slightly different color palette and brushstroke to the canvas of shared faith. Or at least, that is the goal: that each person experience directly the power of the divine in their own way and in their own lives, to facilitate an ESE, transforming the life of the individual and the community. As the Prophet Joel says,

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

- Joel 2:28, ESV

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 164.

“WHAT DOES THIS VALVE DO?”

When it comes to ESEs, we take for granted the stories we hear and read in our spiritual worlds. We tend to skip over the details of the experience and jump right to the meaning of the ESE. If we take some time, though, and just stay with the extraordinary part of the spiritual experience, we get some powerful insights into the divine and the human as well. ESEs, it turns out, have a structure to them, even amid high weirdness. There are common elements like *set and setting*, *appearances* of unusual spaces, entities, and sensations, *revelations* of exceptional importance to the experiencer, and, finally, the act of *disclosing* to others, which is where meaning finally begins to get made of the ESE. We will discuss this structure further in the next chapter.

The impact and effect of an ESE can extend over an entire life, and for a community, lifetimes. This is because an ESE is a transfiguring and transforming event. Even in the ancient world, moments of the strange, encounters with the inexplicable, direct dealings with gods and goddesses were considered life-altering, as Brian Muraresku discusses in his fascinating historical study, *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name*<sup>5</sup>. It matters little how “religious” or “superstitious” a culture may be, the ESE changes lives.

Some ways of knowing can only work from the personal to the universal. I have come to believe this is one of the deep teachings of the Bible. Spiritual depth depends on personal experience in order to learn more about and experience the relationship between God and ourselves.

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Muraresku, *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2020).



The ESE moves everything to a profound level. Where were we taken? Who did we meet? What does the ESE tell us about the reality we live in? In the ESE, we are transported, transmuted, and transfigured into a state of the “really real,” a phrase used by the mid-20th century theologian, Paul Tillich.

If we enter the levels of personal experience which have been rediscovered by depth psychology, we encounter the past, the ancestors, the collective unconscious, the living substance in which all living beings participate. In our search for the “really real” we are driven from one level to another to a point where we cannot speak of level anymore, where we must ask for that which is the ground of all levels, giving them structure and their power of being.<sup>6</sup>

Tillich is speaking to the nature of God when he speaks of the “really real,” but he is also speaking to the experience of the extraordinary and the spiritual as well. These two, the presence of God and the experience of the spiritual in the human experience, become inseparable in an ESE. The quality of an ESE is often described as “more real than anything I have experienced in everyday life.” As it turns out, there is a whole lot more to our experience than we originally believed. This is what makes an ESE extraordinary. The ESE pushes us beyond the known world, outside the agreed upon structures our lived experience demands we participate within, through the veil of consensus reality. Consensus reality is what lets me see the same dog you see, what tells us to obey the same stop sign we agree to obey when we get our driver’s license and is the lens through which we share similar delicate stories of social interaction, thus conferring and transmitting etiquettes, politics, and moralities upon our daily lives.

We live in a compressed world, an agreed upon world. As social creatures, we cannot survive without others impinging and influencing our perception of reality. Aldous Huxley called

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<sup>6</sup> William A. Richards, *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), 11. Quoting Paul Tillich.

the human brain a “reducing valve” as it can diminish our conscious awareness of the depths of the universe and spiritual realities. An ESE opens the valve and new information pours in.

...each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the *reducing valve of the brain and nervous system*. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet.<sup>7</sup>

The reducing valve is both a product of our survival and a needed tool to guaranty our survival as individuals and as a species. Confronting a continual world of the extraordinary and spiritual would overwhelm the capacity of the human creature to function in any survivable way. However, the fact of the matter remains, at least from the peculiar perspective of this project, is that which is beyond the reducing valve of the brain and the social mind will often break through, either spontaneously or by facilitation. When the extraordinary does break through, more often than not, the one who experiences that breakthrough moment is changed forever. Conceptual scaffolding corraling reality into a knowable and tangible coherent whole suddenly collapses. Solid social structures are seen through to be intangible agreements. The way one experiences one’s body moving through space and time is radically altered. Past betrayals, traumas, pains, and sufferings, reconfigure themselves into strange new meanings.

What then? What now?

Once the reducing valve is opened, it is almost impossible to turn it off again. Huston Smith, the great professor and author of *World Religions and Mysticism*, said once of his experience with psychedelics that it was as if a fire hose had been turned on in his mind that he

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<sup>7</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Delphi Complete Works of Aldous Huxley (Illustrated)* (East Sussex, United Kingdom: Delphi Publishing, 2018), Kindle.

could no longer turn off.<sup>8</sup> Once a person sees the “Fairy Folk,” for instance, that person has now also been seen by the fairies and their relatives. They will find you now that you have seen them. Once you become susceptible to the mystical experience, the capacity and ability to return to the experiential and mystical realms which have been opened to you are now unlocked when you desire to go there. Once you have been in the presence of the Divine, you do not forget the impact of the Presence upon your mind, soul, body, and strength. You are changed. The reducing valve is thrown open.

### *EXPERIMENTING ON THE SPIRIT*

My interest in creating this exploration of ESEs derives directly from my participation in a study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Psychedelics Laboratory. The study was designed to facilitate mystical experiences in clergy and spiritual leaders by way of high doses of psilocybin.<sup>9</sup> Psilocybin is the active ingredient in magic mushrooms and, for many people, will generate a 6-8 hour journey into altered realities and experiences. I participated in this study in December 2018 and January 2019. During my sessions, I had two extended ESEs as a result of my participation in this study. This will be discussed in detail later.

Psychedelics are a powerful wrench opening the fire hydrant to the extended perception of reality, or realities, that William James, Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, William Richards, and

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<sup>8</sup> From a talk with Dana Sawyer, emeritus professor of Mysticism and World Religions at Bangor Theological Seminary and Maine College of Art, and author of the authorized biography of Huston Smith and Aldous Huxley.

<sup>9</sup> “Effects of Psilocybin-Facilitated Experience on the Psychology and Effectiveness of Professional Leaders in Religion,” Johns Hopkins University, 2021, <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT02243813>.

many others speak of when they speak of mystical experiences, or ESEs. Right now, across America, Canada, and Europe there is a “psychedelic renaissance” occurring because of what these substances facilitate in the mind. Unlike the psychedelic revolution of the 1950-60s, the present-day psychedelic revolution is seeking to be measured, reasonable, and controlled. Aside from the underground movement that has been present ever since psychedelics were outlawed, there have been intensive studies into their impact in the realm of therapy for addiction, PTSD, and end-of-life. These studies have proven psychedelics can be an astonishing reorientation for the experiencer and the scientists who study the outcomes of these clinical trials. More importantly, and to the purposes of this project, there are now Jewish, Muslim, and Christian groups who gather regularly to discuss the convergence of psychedelics and spirituality. This project seeks to be an addition to this rapidly growing library of psychedelic research.

In the West, one of the reducing valves in place regarding ESEs is the need to reject the ESE as the product of superstition, madness, or irrationality. This strongly suggests the ESE event is a direct threat to the dominant worldview. This is also a partial explanation as to why psychedelics were such a threat to the establishment in the 1960s: the “freeing of the mind” and the facilitation of ESEs in the general populace doesn’t just overthrow governments, it radically destabilizes all the suppositions supporting those governments. Thus, among other reasons, psychedelics were classified as Class 1 drugs and banned in the United States in 1967.

In our present social environment, particularly in the United States, any challenge to either the rejection of ESEs (“It is just a product of your brain misfiring and you misinterpreting!”) or the promotion of ESEs (“I know this is God speaking to me and everything I experienced is completely true in every sense of the word!”) requires what is known as the “double-down,” a gambling term from blackjack. The double-down is also known in psychology

as “The Backfire Effect”.<sup>10</sup> When a passionate idea one holds is confronted by contradicting information, we often revert to deep evasions, rationalizations, and obfuscation until we harden our position against the challenging information. The stronger the double-down, the “truer” the statement appears to be to those who wish to align themselves with our side. The double-down generates a profound fundamentalism and elimination of nuance to any discussion. It is pernicious and deeply destructive to discerning thought and inquiry. In our talk of ESEs, we will seek to avoid the “double-down,” since the ESE event is itself the salient expression of nuance, an entrance into gray areas, a journey into the numinous and the ineffable.

At the same time, I take the ESE event seriously in this work. I am interested in what the world looks like if we begin with the experience itself and trust the telling of the experience as a reliable, though heavily influenced, witness to an extraordinary event. What changes in the experience of the world as a result? The story of what is different about the natural world, places and spaces, relationships, our encounters with the divine and other entities, music, ideas, and our faith, lives because of an ESE will tell us a great deal about the nature of our minds, our souls, and consciousness. This is why a travelogue or map makes a good metaphoric way of dealing with the ESE. We are on a journey of discovery of mind, soul, and heart.

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<sup>10</sup> David McRaney, “The Backfire Effect,” *You Are Not So Smart*, podcast notes, June 10, 2011, <https://youarenotsosmart.com/2011/06/10/the-backfire-effect/>.

## EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELS

In our travelogue, I am not attempting to be universal in my mapping of the ESE. I am creating a “first map” from the landscape I have perceived. Others are creating maps in their own ways as well.

At universities such as Johns Hopkins, New York University, The College of London, and UC-Berkeley, to name a few, scientists are attempting to map the realms of conscious experience by way of psychedelics. This has been done before in various ways by Masters and Houston<sup>11</sup>, Stanislov Grof<sup>12</sup>, David Luke<sup>13</sup>, and many others. In the realm of psychedelics, it is general knowledge different substances take you to different realms. The LSD journey can be much gentler and deeply altering of the present environment. The psilocybin/mushroom trip can jet you off into other dimensions, or perhaps transmute you into an animal or a god. The DMT (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms and other psychedelic plants) experience is quick but will introduce you to the self-transforming machine elves and other beings who believe they have control over the universe. The salvia divinorum journey is just a few minutes, but you can live a whole life in another world in that time. These would be what are considered “facilitated” ESEs, recognizing that not all experiencers have ESEs or would categorize their experience as “spiritual.”

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<sup>11</sup> Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (London: Turnstone Books, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> Stanislov Grof, *The Way of the Psychonaut: Encyclopedia for Inner Journeys* (San Jose, CA: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, 2019). Among numerous other titles as well.

<sup>13</sup> David Luke, *Otherworlds: Psychedelics and Exceptional Human Experience* (London, UK: Muswell Hill Press, 2017).

Throughout the history of Christian meditation and mysticism, other travelers have sought to be cartographers of interior spaces including St. Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of Bingen, St. John of the Cross, St. Seraphim Rose, Emmanuel Swedenborg, William Blake, Jacob Boehme, Padre Pio, to name a few. Alongside these individuals would be the transforming group experiences of visitations by the Virgin Mary and Jesus to many throughout history, often in one place.<sup>14</sup> All of those mentioned had ESEs which defined and directed their lives of faith. Most often, just one ESE event provided the scaffolding to build an entire spiritual life. These would be “spontaneous” ESEs, or “non-facilitated.” In other words, the ESE came upon these experiencers with no apparent preparation (with the caveat that one could easily argue a life of prayer and reflection are excellent ways of fertilizing the soul for an ESE).

This work then will be something like a contour map which might be used to help someone integrate the spaces, locations, beings, and experiences that can arise in an ESE. My hope is to provide some awareness and confidence in travels to the more untamed, wilder places—places such as encounters with other beings, dimensions beyond death, the crossing over of one sense into another (synesthesia), deep encounters with founders of faiths, bizarre time disjunctions—and place them in a context that is accessible, useful, and, above all, expressive of the vast, thriving, frothing diversity of experiences available to us in this strange embodied journey upon this strange place in space.

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<sup>14</sup> For the sake of brevity, I do not include radical Christian offshoots like the Shakers, the Mormons, the Christian Scientists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and many other radical branches all generated by ESEs in the founders.

### *ASSUMPTIONS KNOWN AND MADE*

ESEs are common experiences, though, and the modern world does not accommodate them well. This project assumes the ESE is real and that the encounters with dimensions, entities, and alternate histories were actually experienced in some way. There is meaning in the ESE to be had and that meaning is beyond the merely subjective. To put it less abstractly, the meaning available from a personal ESE has meaning for others as well, and it is likely the experience was not meant to be just for you.

There are several assumptions at the center of this work. First, I assume we are not merely material beings. Human beings are not only influenced by their material experience of the senses and environment, but also by the realities of the metaphysical and spiritual. We are, as Jeffrey Kripal says, at least two people: material experiencers of this world, and something else entirely that has access to worlds, experiences, and realities beyond the physical. As Kripal likes to ask, “What does this make us?” He calls this the “Human as Two” idea that permeates philosophical, religious, and spiritual thinking from time immemorial. “In other words, there is ego, there is the human subject, there is ‘you’ and ‘me’. And then there is mind, which may not be restricted in any way to a brain, a skull, an individual ego, a culture, or a religion”.<sup>15</sup>

The Extraordinary Spiritual Experience is a doorway into that “Part Two” of what makes us human, the metaphysical and spiritual, that which cannot be explained by the materialism and hyper-realism of the age. Understanding the shapes, contours, waystations, markers, and landscapes of those places have profound impacts on how we understand our world, our

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<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Kripal and Whitley Strieber, *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained* (New York: Jeremy P Tarcher/Penguin, 2016), 50.



communities, our lives of faith, and who we think we are, including how we measure, investigate, and engage this world.

My intent, then, is to provide a strange, yet accessible, map of Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences. As with all things mystical, there is a point at which the personal universalizes and the universal personalizes. I recognize my personal experience washes through this work. That is intentional. And yet, these realms and touchstones along the road are shared by others who have gone before me. Therefore, I recognize this entire project is neither original nor derivative, but, instead, stands on the work, scholarship, and experiences of those who have gone before me.

Second, I assume that at the core of every religious movement, every spiritual work (written, spoken, or performed), and every movement of faith there is an Extraordinary Spiritual Experience. Indeed, many religions are founded entirely upon the report of an ESE. Muhammad receiving the Quran in the cave (Islam), Buddha achieving/receiving Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree (Buddhism), Arjuna encountering Krishna in the whirlwind during battle (Hinduism), Lao Tsu's flash of insight as he observed a river (Taoism), Moses conversing with G-d in the shape of a burning bush (Judaism), and Mary's visitation by an angel (Christianity) are all examples of an ESE which shaped entire faiths.

As I read the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, I see in them, from start to finish, a working out of how to understand profound, world-changing ESEs. For those who wrote these sacred texts, ESEs were embedded into the understanding of the universe. The orientation toward the material world and one's experience in it was so entwined with the spiritual and divine, it was not even particularly shocking to hear of a God separating a sea, speaking to a messenger, organizing events in such a way that slaves could escape tyranny, or raising someone from the dead. Unusual, out of the ordinary, yes; but inconceivable and unbelievable, absolutely not. Even

so, those events were extraordinary enough to be shared as stories in communities until they were written down and passed from generation to generation.

In the study of new religions and spiritual movements, what rises to the surface is the ESE which prompts the primary experiencer to begin a new way of life. At the core of every religion, regardless of whether it is ancient or quite new, is a “contact event,” an encounter with an entity, force, or reality that is so extraordinary that it redefines the experiencer’s entire worldview. Diana Pasulka, professor of philosophy and religion at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, says in her book *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology*:

In the history of religions, a contact event is followed by a series of interpretations, and these are usually followed by the creation of institutions. Such interpretive communities are often called religions or religious denominations. Institutions have a stake in how the original contact event is interpreted. A familiar example is the communities of interpretation that surround the religion of Christianity, of which there are thousands.<sup>16</sup>

Third, my goal in this is not to prove ghosts are real or that UFO abductions are provable events. I trust science. I also believe science cannot explain everything. My interest is not whether ESEs are scientifically verifiable, but what an ESE says about how we think and how we construct our world. From a positive perspective, in an ESE we are seeing an external representation of how our brains make patterns and meaning in the world, and therefore ESEs can provide a kind of mapping of the activity of the brain and the unique capacity of the human mind to make repeatable patterns. Or, in at least as likely a possibility, we are seeing in the ESE examples of phenomena that can be perceived by the mind and brain of a person which are not detectable by current methodology and research. This project will not be a proof-texting of either personal experiences as proof of the super-natural or of the Bible’s witness to the absoluteness of

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<sup>16</sup> Diana Walsh Pasulka, *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 12.

what ESEs present to us. That said, it is important for the reader to know that I *believe* in many of the ESEs of the Bible and in the perceived experience of those who share their ESE stories. I *know* most of these will never be proven, since they are, first and foremost, acts of faith. In that regard, I also *believe* that acts of faith and spiritual practices are another avenue to what is true, good, and beautiful about our lives on this planet.

Finally, to be fully transparent, I am a follower of Jesus Christ. While I have a deep respect of other faith traditions, this work will be focused primarily on Christian history and examples. My hope is that this study, while influenced by my faith life, is not to the exclusion of other faith traditions, or to the exclusion of those without any tradition. My hope is that my Christian-informed life will find common weft with the spiritual warp of other traditions, in such a way that we weave a more complete tapestry of understanding and experience. Meaning-making is always a communal, historical, and interpersonal activity, and my desire is that such meaning-making take place in the folds of hope, faith, and love that my particular faith commitments demand of me.

Today, we are no longer embedded in a singular spiritual understanding. There is no “Judeo-Christian” culture, no “Christian” nation. Maybe there never was. Regardless, such a world is no longer possible in our connected, globalized, technologized world. We live a half-life defined by the illusion of materiality. The spiritual, and especially the religious, is, in many ways, an imposition on the psychic and consensus reality we now occupy. As a Christian pastor, I sometimes feel as if I am trying to wrench a God-oriented sensibility into the daily experience of those whom I serve (much less myself). The words of the father who brings his convulsing child to be healed by Jesus have never been truer than now, for all of us, regardless of our tradition: “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief” (Mk. 9:23-24, ESV).

## Chapter 1: Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences – Crystal Blue Persuasion(s)

“Maybe tomorrow  
When He looks down  
On every green field  
And every town  
All of His children  
And every nation  
There’ll be peace and good brotherhood  
Crystal Blue Persuasion  
It’s a new vibration  
Crystal Blue Persuasion”

- “Crystal Blue Persuasion”, Tommy James and the Shondells, *Crimson & Clover*, 1968

### *THE WEIRD*

On May 8, 1373, Julian of Norwich , an anchorite nun in Norwich, England, received an answer to prayer. In his recent book about the wisdom of Julian, theologian Matthew Fox, says that Julian “had prayed for three things: to participate in the sufferings of Jesus, to undergo a life-threatening illness (likely the plague), and to experience the grace of the triple-wound of contrition, compassion, and unbearable longing.”<sup>1</sup> On that May evening, at thirty years old, Julian received sixteen “Revelations of Divine Love” over the course of about twelve hours, while on what she thought would be her death bed. Instead, she awoke with a clear and profound progression of images and ideas given to her by God. For the rest of her life, Julian sought the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Fox, *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic and Beyond* (Bloomington, IN, iUniverse, 2020), xxvii.

meaning of these visions through writing and putting the ideas to practical use with the people of Norwich and surrounding areas. Out of a little cell built into the side of the Norwich cathedral, people would come from all around seeking her life-giving wisdom and healing advice. Her ESE radically altered her life and how she understood the world. The change in her was perceived and received by those around her as a blessing of the Holy Spirit. Julian built the remainder of her life, until her death at seventy-four years old, on this strange and powerful twelve-hour experience.

ESEs are an encounter with the inexplicable, the transcendent, the divine, the weird, and the strange. As we will explore, there is an escalation of ESEs, ranging from the transmutation of the natural world to mind-bending encounters with mythical entities and divine beings which often trigger a radical revision of one's philosophic and spiritual view on the world to the deeply unusual and disturbing event of, say, a UFO encounter, lost time, or overlapping synchronicities, which can deconstruct one's entire perception of what is real.

While ESEs often transcend categories, at least in this earthly plane, one category which includes most ESEs is the "weird." The "weird" is, at its simplest, the intuitive sense that we have reached the edge of what our categories of explanation can describe. These categories do not need to be exacting cosmologies, extended theologies or even confirmed truths. The categories can be very simple, such as, "we live and die and that is all there is," or "only one thing can occupy a space in time." One day, though, this person with these hazy categories has an experience which defies all prior experiences. For instance, in Charles Fort's wildly idiosyncratic collection of weird events, *The Book of the Damned*, there is a whole chapter dealing with wheels and orbs in the sky at sea. One incident with multiple witnesses across several states is described as follows:

...upon the morning of Dec. 20, 1893, an appearance in the sky was seen by many persons in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. A luminous body passed overhead, from west to east, until at about fifteen degrees in the eastern horizon, it appeared to stand still for fifteen or twenty minutes. According to some descriptions it was the size of a table. To some observers it looked like an enormous wheel. The light was a brilliant white.<sup>2</sup>

There is no explanation, or at least no explanation in the categories which exist within most of our minds. As is often the case, there are resonances in the Bible to such occurrences. There, we have many examples of weird events. An ESE like the one described above by Fort happens in the Book of Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel sees vast spinning wheels in the sky:

As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like <sup>b</sup>the gleaming of beryl. <sup>c</sup>And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. <sup>17</sup> <sup>d</sup>When they went, they went <sup>e</sup>in any of their four directions <sup>f</sup>without turning as they went. <sup>18</sup> And their rims were tall and awesome, <sup>g</sup>and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. <sup>19</sup> <sup>h</sup>And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; <sup>i</sup>and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. <sup>20</sup> <sup>j</sup>Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, <sup>k</sup>for the spirit of the living creatures <sup>l</sup>was in the wheels. (Ez 1:17-21).

In Scripture, these ESEs are often described without commentary. Everything in the Bible is deliberate, in the sense that what is important is written down, so this is a stand-out event. How, indeed, could it not be? When we, in the modern world, see and experience these things, we say to one another, “That was weird”, which also means, “I have no categories which explain what just occurred.” The weird is that which exists at the edges of our categorical understandings. When we come to the edges of our knowing, the answers we find create more questions. There is an intuitive sense to these questions. They echo in the chambers of our soul, and there is a deeper sense that any answer we find to these questions will be deeply

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned*, accessed November 1, 2021, <http://www.resologist.net/damnei.htm>.

unsatisfying. The deeper answers will slip through our minds, making it difficult to describe and explain to others. As is often the case, weirdness generates more weirdness.

Erik Davis, an author and researcher in new religious movements, the structure of unusual experiences, and an epic explorer of the weird, suggests the weird has three domains: an aesthetic domain, a domain of deviancy, and an ontological domain. The aesthetic domain is, for all practical purposes, a genre of expression which includes “the uncanny, the fantastic, the perverse, and the macabre side of the supernatural.” In the deviant domain, the weird are those things that deviate from “the norms of informed expectation and challenge established explanations, sometimes quite radically.” It is in this domain we refer to another person as “weird,” for example. The third domain, the ontological domain, is the focus of our interest. “Ontological” means a thing presents itself as either having an existence in and of itself, or points towards an independent, objective existence in reality. It is the quality of an object “being in itself,” having an existential presence regardless of context. Davis says of this ontological domain of the weird:

In this view, weirdness is a mode of reality, of the way things are or the way they appear to be (which may be just two sides of the same strange coin). Weirdness here is not simply an artifact of our bent minds but a feature of the art and manner of existence itself...<sup>3</sup>

It is this “mode of reality” aspect of the weird, the ontological, that our exploration of ESEs is most interested. One of our working assumptions in this work is the world has a weirdness that seems external to our perception of it, that the world presents itself as bizarre, strange, and unusual, that weirdness is somehow an objective aspect of the universe. This

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<sup>3</sup> Erik Davis, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), 9. Includes all quotes in paragraph.

presentation comes to us, however, in a way that can only be processed subjectively. In the realm of the weird, we walk in a twilight between the objective and subjective, which only adds to the experience and perception of the weird. To quote science writer John Horgan who discusses this twilight zone aspect of the weird in the introduction to his book, *Mind-Body Problems*, the work “presents my subjective views of my subjects’ subjective views of subjectivity. It’s subjectivity all the way down.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the exposure and awareness of the weird becomes a deep view into a condition of how we perceive and understand reality itself. It is in this way the ESE says something true and meaningful about the nature of our souls, our being, and the world we experience and perceive. The ESE speaks to the mystery that is the defining superstructure of what we call “reality.”

### *MYSTICISM*

The exploration of Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences is complicated by the fuzziness of the words used to define and describe what is being encountered in the ESE. “Extraordinary,” “Spiritual,” and “Experience” are all words that have much historical precedence in the literature. They are also words that, for all practical purposes, allow us to project wildly onto their definitions and meanings. I can tell you what I mean by these words and then tell you what I think about them, even though these same words may mean something completely different to you and someone else. This is true of all words, of course, but the subject matter amplifies the meaning problem I have described.

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<sup>4</sup> John Horgan, “Introduction: The Weirdness,” *Mind-Body Problems*, accessed October 24, 2021, <https://www.mindbodyproblems.com/introduction>.



When we speak of an ESE, we are speaking of experiences that, more often than not, defy the capacity of language to carry meaning and understanding for what is going on. Take as an example the song which is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. “Crystal Blue Persuasion” is a song about mystical experience. It is also an unapologetically religious song. What is the “Crystal Blue Persuasion?” For a long time, many people thought the phrase was code for LSD or synthetic psilocybin. It is worth noting that the medical grade psilocybin given for studies at Johns Hopkins Psychedelic Laboratory is a crystal blue pill.

The true story of the song is far more interesting, however. Tommy James grew up Catholic. Then, while on tour, he went to a Billy Graham rally where his faith was renewed and reborn, and he became an evangelical Christian. Later, at the end of a concert with his band The Shondells, a young man handed Tommy a poem called “Crystal Persuasion” about the Book of Revelation, which Tommy was reading at the time. Tommy was taken by the poem and the synchronicity. He added “Blue” to the chorus to mellow out the phrasing, creating one of the great pop songs of the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

Tommy James wrote a deliberately religious pop song and then added a word for musical effect. The lyrics reference the Book of Revelation. For me, this entire song snaps into focus if I know that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is always portrayed in the Catholic Church wearing deep blue. Mary is a persuasive presence in Catholic theology, and by persuasive, I mean she always persuades us towards Jesus, rather than forces or demands faith. Mary is portrayed as a gentle, motherly presence holding us close and pointing out how Jesus is always for and with us.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Myers, “How Tommy James’ 1969 Hit ‘Crystal Blue Persuasion’ Came Together,” *Wall Street Journal*, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-tommy-jamess-1969-hit-crystal-blue-persuasion-came-together-11622561204>.

Tommy could have picked any color. Part of the influence for the structure of the song came from the horns in Hugh Maskela's "Grazing in the Grass," a Latin pop groove that sweeps a person up into a musical landscape. Tommy James, based on this, could have just as easily chosen "Crystal Green Persuasion." Green is as calming as blue, and certainly as evocative, but he chose "blue." It's because of this choice that, I, as a listener, can connect with the general mystical persuasiveness of the song, and also associate it with Mother Mary—whether Tommy James intended that association or not. There is now a permanent mystical connection to Mary for me with this song, a connection which language cannot adequately explain. Indeed, this is why music is often an alternate language for the mysterious. The mystical demands expression, even if the modes and genres of expression fail to persuade or draw the reader, hearer, or experiencer into the mystery. J.F. Martel, filmmaker and one of the hosts of the "Weird Studies" podcast, speaks to these aesthetic elements of expression and the mystical, when he states, "Met on its own ground, the work of art as vector of symbols is an inexhaustible producer of meaning. Invariably, the work reveals more than its creator ever intended and more than any interpreter can fathom."<sup>6</sup>

When we take such mystical views into account, when we observe the world and the creative output of human beings from a mystical position, we sense and understand the world quite differently. We begin to understand the world from the alternate perspective of the extraordinary and spiritual. It matters greatly what such words mean, and we need to recognize that such words are infused with the tradition that influence an author. Experience, tradition, and reason all plays into how we make meaning of the mystical, the strange, the weird, and the

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<sup>6</sup> J. F. Martel, "Notes Towards an Interpretive Method," *Reclaiming Art*, accessed October 26, 2021, <http://www.reclaimingart.com/journal/notes-towards-an-interpretive-method>.

extraordinary. The stories of our chosen faith and spiritual worldview set the context for both experience and meaning.

Mysticism then, for the purposes of this work, means a perspective which recognizes the presence of something other and beyond the merely human at work in an experience which is designed, either prior to or upon reflection, to make that something other or beyond implicitly and explicitly present in the mind of an individual. A perspective of the mystical is any point of view which seeks out the presence of this something, or someone, other and beyond in any given situation. Mysticism is the word we use to describe the conclusions and explorations of extraordinary states of awareness and consciousness which an individual experiences when they relate to the other, the beyond, and the eternal. Mysticism is the source of the spiritual in an ESE.

To function in this consensus reality, the mind must create divisions, compartments, and categories. The mystical, however, dissolves the division between the individual and the other, between the one and the many, between subject and object. The mystical perspective is often born and developed because of an ESE. We could say that mysticism is a way of speaking about our human experience from the perspective of whatever is beyond the divisions and categories created by the mind. Even so, by its very nature, the mystical, the mysterious, is always just beyond our capacity to know and understand in any rational, scientific sense.

A mystic, then, is a person who has had an encounter with those things which are other and beyond. Having had an ESE or ESEs, the experiencer seeks to share either the method of perception or the resulting worldview from their own ESE. Either willingly or unwillingly, the mystic, the experiencer of the ESE, places themselves in the center of the great paradoxes which propel faiths and spiritualities into the future and make them last through time. The mystic

becomes a sentinel of the barely perceived and fundamental strangeness of the mysteries of the universe.

Aldous Huxley, the English writer and philosopher of world religions and mysticism from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed what he called the “perennial philosophy.” He determined the perennial philosophy to be a repeatable category across world religions by which one could understand similarities in mystical experiences of practitioners of all religious and spiritual traditions. In the introduction of his essay, “The Perennial Philosophy,” Huxley defines the idea as:

the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being - the thing is immemorial and universal.<sup>7</sup>

This is a broad and comprehensive definition for the Perennial Philosophy, and a good general window into what is going on in an ESE. Many philosophers and religious scholars agree with this definition, Huston Smith being the most notable. Huston Smith was an influential religious scholar, who studied at the University of Chicago and taught at George Washington University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Syracuse University. Smith saw in the perennial philosophy the foundation for all mystical experience and used the philosophy as the structure to write his most influential book, *The Religions of Man*. Smith saw the power, strength, and value of religious institutions and structures in providing their followers with a connection and access to the mystical experiences of the founders of those faiths, though he did

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<sup>7</sup> Aldous Huxley, “The Perennial Philosophy,” *Delphi Complete Works of Aldous Huxley (Illustrated)* (East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2018), e-book.

not necessarily consider religion, in and of itself, mystical. Rather, religions are containers which hold the potentialities for possible mystical experiences.

Regardless, Huxley and Smith took seriously encounters with the supernatural and ESEs, and understood that such encounters happen around the world. Whether the source of those encounters were belief or religion or lack thereof, the events were taken as real and profound experiences deserving of study.

While there are some powerful critiques of the perennial philosophy, particularly from Jorge Ferrer<sup>8</sup> and Jules Evans<sup>9</sup>, it is important to understand that the perennial philosophy is not a monolith. Instead, the perennial philosophy says there is a structural similarity in how the mystical experience confronts the ineffable, mysterious, and divine. Without spending too much time defending the perennial philosophy, it is an influential way to consider ESEs and the mystical worldviews arising from those events.

For our purposes, let us respect the fundamental differences between all faiths and spiritual movements in this complex world. I do not believe we can truly accept a faith as our own until we confront the essential and qualitative differences that faith presents to the world relative to other beliefs and spiritualities. At their core, the claims of different religions can and often do directly contradict each other. The goal is to communicate better and build bridges between different ways of thinking and perceiving. This requires that diversities and contradictions be respected and celebrated, not overcome. In his book *The Religions of Man*, Smith says:

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<sup>8</sup> Jorge Ferrer, "The Perennial Philosophy Revisited," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 32, no. 1 (2000): 24.

<sup>9</sup> Jules Evans, "What's Wrong with the Perennial Philosophy?" *Embodied Philosophy*, accessed November 3, 2021, <https://www.embodiedphilosophy.com/whats-wrong-with-the-perennial-philosophy-2/>.

We shall all have our own perspectives, but they can no longer be cast in the hard molds of oblivion to the rest. The Cosmic Dancer (Nietzsche's image), the World Citizen, will be an authentic child of his parent culture but related closely to all. He will not identify his whole being with any one land however dear...His roots in his family, his community, his civilization will be deep, but in that very depth he will strike the water table of man's common humanity and thus nourished will reach out in more active curiosity, more open vision, to discover and understand what others have seen.<sup>10</sup>

### *EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES*

In 1205, at 24 years old, St. Francis of Assisi had an ESE at the little chapel at San Damiano. There, he heard a voice calling him to rebuild the church.

Prostrating himself before an Image of the Crucified, he was filled with no small consolation of spirit as he prayed. And with eyes full of tears he gazed up, and he heard with his bodily ears a Voice proceeding from that Cross, saying thrice: "Francis, go and repair My House, which, as thou seest, is falling utterly into ruin."<sup>11</sup>

For a while, St. Francis believed it was simply this little chapel that was meant to be rebuilt, but through prayer and reflection, he began to understand that Jesus meant the entire church. This ESE was just one of many that transformed a wealthy playboy into a legendary force in the Western world.

St Francis' ESE is emblematic of what is meant when we speak of an ESE—an event significantly reorienting one's mindset in such a way that one's entire intellectual, spiritual, and existential relationship to the world is completely changed. In the example of St. Francis of Assisi, he affected a large reforming change in himself, his village of Assisi, and throughout the entire Catholic Church of the time. His reach extended into other cultures, other religions, and into the care and tending of the human and non-human world.

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<sup>10</sup> Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1986), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Saint Bonaventure, "The Life of St Francis of Assisi," Ecatholic2000, accessed October 17, 2021, <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bonaventure/assisi/francis.shtml>.

“Extraordinary,” in the phrase “Extraordinary Spiritual Experience,” simultaneously refers to the origin of the experience—it is from outside the person—and to the outcome of the experience—the altered behavior and approach to the world. We see this clearly in St. Francis’ ESE at San Damiano. A divine being, Christ on the Cross, profoundly influenced Francis to radically alter his way of being in the community and the world. For all practical purposes, even if one digs underneath the glittering and haloed stories of his biographers, San Damiano was where St. Francis’ ministry really began, and the transforming aspects of the Franciscan movement originated.

The word “Spiritual” in the phrase “Extraordinary Spiritual Experience” is used to differentiate this experience from the merely human. There is, however, significant cross-over between an ESE and extraordinary feats and experiences that do not transcend to the beyond and the eternal. “Spiritual,” for the purposes of this study, means anything *relating to, consisting of, or influencing the spirit and the supernatural, which directly or indirectly affects the soul*.<sup>12</sup> This definition presumes the existence of a reality that is beyond and inclusive of the material, observable world we appear to occupy. For our purposes, we presume an ESE encompasses the merely human within the spiritual. The particularly human is enfolded into the universally spiritual in an ESE event. Certainly, there are extraordinary events that do not become spiritual, just as there are spiritual events that are not extraordinary. The border between the mundane and the spiritual can often be difficult to define and varies from one individual to another, a hazy, shifting boundary which expands and contracts in any given weird and strange situation. In that boundary, an ESE is an encompassing event that restructures a person’s faith life, transforms

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<sup>12</sup> “Spiritual,” The Free Dictionary, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/spiritual>.

one's relationship to the divine, and influences, alters, and changes one's behavior and relationship to the world and the people in their lives.

"Experience" is, in some ways, the most problematic word in the phrase. At its simplest, I mean any event that happens to a person of which that person also has an awareness. Any number of things happen to an individual during a day. Those events which rise to the level of awareness are "experienced." Those events which have staying power, which are etched into our memories, rise to the level of "an experience." An experience can generally be recalled and remembered, and more so, an ESE can be recalled throughout one's life, in exceptional detail, often even repeating or reliving the ESE for the experiencer upon remembrance.

An ESE crosses over many disciplines of research and fields. For our purposes, we will draw heavily from the cross-disciplinary study of Semiotics. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, is an area of study which lends itself well to how best to understand ESEs. At its simplest, a sign signifies a thing, command, place, or direction. A stop sign tells us to stop. A street sign signifies the street we are travelling upon. Signs are often dependent on a cultural or linguistic foundation, such as a pine tree signing a Christmas tree. A symbol always points beyond itself to a larger meaning. Symbols often transcend culture, language systems and logic. The American flag symbolically points beyond itself to the history, values, and potentials of the democratic republic it symbolizes. The Cross of Christianity symbolically points beyond itself to the birth, ministry, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the example of St. Francis, a symbol—the Cross—transmitted a message to Francis that radically altered the church, the institution which formed around the symbol of the Cross. A symbol is a device designed to hold and curate knowledge across time and culture. A person can either prepare themselves to receive the knowledge, as might a monk or student of the faith—the



transfer is facilitated, or the person may receive the knowledge that the symbol seeks to impart during an ESE—the transfer is spontaneous, as it was with Francis.

In a conversation with artist Allyson Grey, a visual artist who “received” a mystical alphabet in a facilitated mystical experience, she remarked that she believes we live in a fully “symbolic universe” and that “everything is symbolic.”<sup>13</sup> Images, gestures, language in both sound and visual form, even the flora and fauna of our environment, all are symbolic expressions seeking to be interpreted and made meaningful.

Our example of St. Francis at San Damiano represents precisely what a symbolic universe, as Allyson Grey presents it, would do. By way of signs and symbols, reality makes its deeper ways known. We seek and look and catch glimpses, and in seeing, we are also seen. Symbols and signs will use perceivers to open ways to share knowledge and make their presence real. In doing so, we see more deeply into the depths of creation. The thought is strange, ancient, and imminently transcendent. This is why we have a focus in this project on the weird and the unusual; this way of understanding makes the universe and how we experience it very weird. ESEs occupy these symbolic and signifying realms. Making space for the discussion and sharing of ESEs is how we can access the deeper meanings, along with the connections to the divine and one another.

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<sup>13</sup> Allyson Grey, interview with author, Church of Sacred Mirrors, Wappingers Falls, NY, March 2019.

## *THE STRUCTURE OF AN ESE*

An ESE is an event transcending the ordinary and, as a result, defies rational or agreed-upon explanations. The experiencer is either transported to another reality, or this reality is warped and altered in inexplicable ways. An ESE is a transformational event that fundamentally alters the experiencer's prior understanding of the world. For all practical purposes, there is a Before ESE (B-ESE) and an After ESE (A-ESE). A person who has had an ESE will define their lives according to the experience and will set their internal clock to it.

ESEs open new vistas of our present reality. The experience is as if a veil is lifted, and we get to see some of the machinery, landscapes, and individuals on the other side of that veil. Understanding ESEs, however, does not require we believe or disbelieve what is beyond the veil. They do require, however, that we take the perceptions of what was experienced beyond that veil seriously.

We often skip over the ESEs presented in Scripture or in another person's life story and jump straight to the meaning of what happened. Like so many things in a world which is transitioning how it understands previously defined symbols and ideas, we need to slow down for things to make sense.<sup>14</sup> Meaning cannot be made until we slow down and spend some time in the elements of the ESE itself to understand what is happening. This is hard, though. For the Christian, we are dealing with 2,020 years of interpretation and commentary on the meaning of the primary ESE of the Christian Testament, the Resurrection. To complicate the making of

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<sup>14</sup> This is being written in November 2021, twenty-one months into a global pandemic. Historically, pandemics unzip the foundations of understanding, presaging massive changes socially, politically, and culturally. Along with the digitalization of the world, there are no stable cultural and social anchor points anymore.

meaning, there are deeply committed persons and groups with specific agendas regarding the meaning they would like others to have regarding ESEs.

It is worth taking the time to simply marinate in the ESE, even so. There is a shared structure to the ESEs found in the Hebrew and Christian testaments, which I believe informs and reflects the structure of most, if not all, ESEs. This structure can help us understand the faith we participate in, the people who have experienced an ESE (whether that ESE is from our tradition or not), and, most of all, ourselves. Through the study of ESEs, we can understand the power of the divine and our participation with one another in a vastly diverse landscape of wonder and possibility.

Structurally, ESEs share a pattern:

- Contextualized, usually within a liminal space (the Set and Setting)
- Experienced or encountered directly (the Appearance)
- Made meaningful, and/or authoritative (the Revelation)
- Shared with others, which is part of the meaning-making process (the Disclosure)

While many ESEs will follow the pattern, some ESEs will elide and combine these four aspects. For instance, the Appearance may arrive at the same time as the Revelation. Other ESEs may short-circuit the process, such as the Appearance of some entity or, say, time distortion, with no Revelation. An ESE may occur and there will be very little meaning to be made of the experience since there is no message or realization which comes forth from the ESE. Thus, the only thing left to disclose is the bizarreness and weirdness of the occurrence in and of itself.

Following this structure, this book will be loosely divided into the four aspects of an ESE. After a brief discussion of the value of maps and cartography, Part 1 will be concerned with Set and Setting, which will begin a tour through the idea of liminality, then the natural

world, spaces and places, and relationships. Part 2 will consider Appearance, where we will meet entities, discarnate beings, and divine beings, and explore the body and sensual experience. Part 3 will listen for Revelation, which is the messaging of the ESE from the voices of life beyond this life, and feelings and ideas. Part 4 will follow the experiencer into their Disclosure to the world, which may come in the form of music and artistic expressions, theologies and mystical insights, and community interactions. We will conclude with an exploration of the foundations of this study in my personal experience, an exploration of meaning-making after an ESE, and what ESEs mean for the future of our lives of faith and the church.

**Part One: Set and Setting - The Where and When of ESEs**



*Green Donkey*, Marc Chagall, Tate Gallery, UK. 1911.

Numbers 22:20-21

That night God came to Balaam and said to him, 'If the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them; but do only what I tell you to do.' So Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the officials of Moab. (NRSV)

Luke 1:26-27

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (NRSV)

I have chosen two ESEs from scripture to frame our exploration of the territory and landscapes of ESEs - Balaam's Donkey (Numbers 22:20-35) and Mary's Annunciation (Luke 1:25-39). By way of these stories, we will see how ESEs point us to an incredibly complex, wild, and strange world. It is in this world, this strange experience of life, that we find our faith and find our way to God. The Bible is rich with ESEs, and Scripture provides maps for making meaning of ESEs.

ESEs require that meaning be made of the experience. We are meaning makers and pattern seekers, and ESEs transmit meaning, regardless of how complete their expression is to us. Even though ESEs demand meaning be made, we cannot make meaning of them right away. This is the mistake we make when we read scripture. We jump over the ESE to the meaning, or we read the ESE and assume the meaning from the outset, either by our own thoughts or, more likely, what we have been told by a preacher or commentator. ESEs, whether in scripture or in the world, demand we slow down and find out what is really going on, to dive into the experience itself. Just as ESEs alter the lives of experiencers, so also immersing ourselves in the ESEs will alter how we understand the narratives of the Bible.

When we slow things down in our journey into the landscape of ESEs, a structure begins to emerge, a way of understanding these weird events that helps us get even deeper into the meaning that the ESE seeks to reveal. That is, in fact, what an ESE is trying to do - convey some sort of meaning or sense to us. But it is hard to discern this meaning, or meanings, because we already walk around with frameworks of meaning, with ways of making sense of the world. An ESE forces us out of those frameworks and into new ways of thinking and experiencing the world. ESEs break down barriers and boundaries. They deconstruct patterns and habits of thought and mind. The challenge is to overcome the natural desire to maintain constructs and

patterns from the past, since an ESE will, by their very nature, reframe, restructure, and reconstruct how we perceive those constructs and patterns that form how we understand the world.

ESEs in the Bible help us understand ESEs we may have already had and prepare us for our own ESEs. The ESEs in Scripture are a model to frame and help make sense of these deep spiritual experiences that happen repeatedly in the lives of those in the Bible and in the world. ESEs are staged events or encounters, with diversity and fluidity in how we understand those stages, of which there are four. The stages overlap, do not complete, and continue through time and generations, depending on the ESE. The first aspect of an ESE, which we will focus on in this part of the book is the ‘set and setting’, the where and when of an ESE.

Where and when an ESE takes place is an essential aspect to the entire event. Taking the time to learn about the set and setting of an ESE can tell us much about the experience that is about to happen or the experience that has happened. Set and setting encompasses the context of feelings, tradition, culture, and personal state of mind and body when the ESE occurs. The set and setting can, in some sense, be controlled or planned, but it is almost always concurrent with a liminal time and space<sup>15</sup>.

The phrase “set and setting” comes from research into psychedelic medicines. Psychedelic means “mind-altering”. Psychedelics, like LSD, Magic Mushrooms, DMT, and ayahuasca, to name only a few, are the focus of much research going on right now around the world since psychedelics show promise for the treatment of a whole host of mental disorders, along with strong therapeutic outcomes for existential concerns. The research is important for

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<sup>15</sup> See “Liminality,” 49.



this work on ESEs because part of that research has to do with mystical experiences and the structure of consciousness. This will become more important as we get deeper into our journey of ESEs and will be explained later in Part Four: Disclosure.

For now, Dr. Ido Hartogsohn, researcher in the history of psychedelics, clarifies set and setting, stating:

Set is understood as anything related to the internal state of a person, including personality, preparation for the experience, intention, as well as "mood, expectations, fears, wishes" (Metzner and Leary, 1967: 5). Setting is understood as anything related to the environment in which the experience takes place, including the physical environment, the emotional/social environment, and finally the cultural environment--the ideas and beliefs which are prevalent in the society regarding drug effects and the world in general.<sup>16</sup>

When we speak of Setting, we are talking about place and time. The stories of Balaam and Mary are helpful in making this clear. Often, the place that an ESE occurs is changed by the ESE. There are places that become 'holy' because of the ESE that has occurred in that space. The fountain of Lourdes, for instance, is a pilgrimage place in France where Jesus' mother, Mary, appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in February of 1858. Bernadette was sitting by the Grotto of Massabielle, where water flows from underground into a small pool. Mary appeared to her and disclosed various revelations to her, among them that healing is available for those who are ill. Almost immediately, the Grotto of Massabielle became the Fountain of Lourdes, attracting the sick and lame from all over Europe. The Catholic church confirmed several of the healings and declared that the water of Lourdes is holy water, the same water that fell on Jesus at his baptism. This is an example of a place that has been transformed by an ESE.

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<sup>16</sup> Hartogsohn, Ido, "Constructing Drug Effects: A History of Set and Setting." *Drug Science, Policy and Law* (January 2017). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050324516683325>.

Balaam is a prophet for hire in the kingdom of Balak, which is located in “Pethor, which is on the Euphrates in the land of Amaw” (Num 22:5). No one really knows where this is anymore, but it is likely in what is now Jordan. The important element of the story for us is that Balaam’s encounter takes place on a road from Pethor to Moab, which is where Balaam is going so that he can bless the troops of Moab in their war against Israel.

In-between places are key to ESEs. Balaam is on a road between two places. “In-between” is what is meant, in its simplest form, by liminality. The best definition of liminality is “an in-between place where change and transformation takes occurs”<sup>17</sup>. This is what will happen to Balaam. He will be changed in this place. Balaam’s destination is important as well. He is going to Moab. Moab was on the east side of the Dead Sea and was considered a fertile, mountainous region.

Moab was named after the son of Lot and one of his daughters, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:36-37). Moses was buried in Moab, though no one knows where (see Deuteronomy 34:6). Ruth, one of Jesus’ ancestors, was from Moab as well. The Moabites were often at war with Israel and worshiped other gods. When Americans think of Moab, they might think of Moab, Utah, which is a high desert region in the eastern part of the state. The Mormons, who settled Utah, think of Biblical Moab as the verdant and beautiful valley we walk through just before entering paradise, which is Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey.

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<sup>17</sup> This definition is taken from a variety of sources. Most particularly from Bjorn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern* (Burlington, VT, Ashgate Publishing Co., 2014); Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago Press, 1960); and lectures and conversations with Dr. Leonard Sweet in the Doctor of Semiotics, Church, and Culture program at Portland Seminary, Portland, OR (September 2019-August 2021).

Moab, then, is the setting of Balaam's story with his donkey. He is on the road to the place of the ancestors of the faith, and in that in-between space on the way to the valley just before paradise angels show up and animals speak.

The other aspect of setting is time. The annunciation to Mary and the conception of Jesus is an ESE of the highest order. We have angels, spontaneous pregnancy, prophecy all coming together in the person of Mary. But the first thing Luke tells us about this event is not where, but when. Luke says, "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God..." (Lk 1:26). Time is as important as place in Scripture and in ESEs. When people remember where they were when Kennedy was shot or when terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center, they remember the date and time, as well as place and people who were present with them. A person will often remember exactly when an ESE occurred, just like many people remember when they were baptized. Time matters. It matters as much as place.

When is the "sixth month" that Luke mentions? The 'sixth month' is one of the great mysteries of this story. The first possibility is that the sixth month is correlated with the Jewish calendar, which would be the month of Adar. The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, so Adar is between February and March in our Gregorian calendar. Adar is marked by the festival of Purim, which is the holiday that celebrates Queen Esther and the Israelites victory over the near genocide that was almost committed by Haman, the administrator of Artaxerxes, the ruler of Susa.

The problem with correlating Mary's ESE with Adar is that time was measured in Nazareth at that time by the Greek calendar, since Nazareth was under the Roman Empire at the time and was heavily influenced by Greek culture, and Luke, the supposed author of this Gospel was most likely not Jewish. Luke was very Greek.

The sixth month in the Greek calendar was the month of Poseidon, or January. Poseidon is the god of the oceans, the water god. In John 2:1-11, Jesus turned water into wine, a miracle in and of itself, but in the context of religions of influence around Jesus, Jesus was laying claim to both the world of Poseidon (water) and Dionysius (wine) in that miracle. In John 4:10, Jesus called himself ‘living water’ to the woman at the well. And finally, when Jesus died on the Cross in the Gospel of John, both water and blood spilled from his side when he was stabbed by the centurion’s spear (John 19:34). In focusing just on the nature of time regarding Mary’s ESE in Luke, we are deep into a semiotic reframe of the meaning of the ‘sixth month’.

The most likely, and simpler, meaning of the sixth month, though, may be that this event was in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. Luke 1:24 says, “After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion.” Then, in verse 26, two verses later, Luke writes, “In the sixth month...”. This is an easier explanation, but the explanation is not to the exclusion of the setting we explored regarding water and it’s meaning for Jesus.

Set refers to the state of mind of the experiencer, the influences of family and friends, culture, and status, and the expectations that are brought into the ESE. ‘Mindset’ is probably a better term, rather than ‘set’. If an ESE is facilitated by way of meditation, spiritual ritual, or through plant medicines (the indigenous description of psychedelics), the mindset of the experiencer can have some influence on how the ESE will present itself.

The Bible is notoriously poor about presenting us with how people felt and what their mindset was in the stories we read. This is because the sense of interior experience was not understood in the same way as we understand it in the modern world. We think of ourselves as producers of feelings and thoughts, regardless of our conscious awareness of that production.

Thoughts and feelings, in the modern view, come from within us and project out into the world. But in the ancient world, feelings and thoughts were believed to come from outside a person. Feelings and thoughts had forms that existed outside the person, and as a result, feelings and thoughts were considered communal rather than individual; people participated in a flow of the fluid of ideas and thoughts. Some people were interpreters of those thought and feeling forms.<sup>18</sup>

As moderns, we project wildly into how people were feeling in Scripture. We pretend we know what they were thinking and feeling when things happen to them because that is how we would feel if such a thing were happening to us. It is important for us to realize, though, especially when thinking through an ESE, whether our own or another person's experience, that we cannot know what another person is thinking or feeling. At the same time, there is one thing we can say about an ESE which was true in ancient times as now, and that is what we often say when we hear about an ESE. We say, "Wow. That was weird. That was strange. That doesn't fit with anything I know." This was true for Mary.

We get a bit of a clue to what Mary's mindset was when the angel showed up. It is the same throughout the Bible when angels show up. First, Luke tells us Mary was 'troubled' or 'perplexed'. Second, the angel seems to know what this really meant. It meant Mary was afraid, because the angel said, "Do not be afraid" (Lk 1:29-30).

With Balaam, his mindset can only be conjectured. Balaam was on a journey to a gathering for war and all the tension and expectation that entails. He was a paid prophet, meaning he was paid by others to bless and sanction battles, gatherings, and whatever the ruler of

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<sup>18</sup> This idea has several sources which now occupy my received knowledge. First, this idea comes from Dr. David Fredrickson, Luther Seminary, Professor of New Testament, classes in Luke and the Letters of Paul, 2006-2008. Secondly, James Hillman holds this view, relative to archetypal psychology. See James Hillman, *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire* (East Sussex, UK: Routledge Press, 1990), "Many Gods, Many Persons", 49-63.

the kingdom determined was needed from a prophet. Soon, though, we will find out Balaam was angry. He was angry at his donkey. That is all we have for Balaam's mindset.

ESEs are powerful events that transform how we see the world. We become transformed by the spiritual, by the infinite, by the strange and unexpected by way of the ESE. Our mindset will be altered. Our sense of space and place will be transformed as well. The spaces and places of this earth will look very different after an ESE than before. The world after an ESE is forever changed from what it was before the ESE.

In Part One, we will speak briefly about the value of maps and how a good map contributes to the navigation and reflection we engage in regarding ESEs. Then we will talk about liminality. Liminal spaces are fundamental to ESEs. Recognizing the presence of liminal spaces helps us understand the 'thin places' which open up within and around us when an ESE occurs. We will take an excursion through the natural world and constructed places and find out how place can provide the catalysts for an ESE. Then we will end Part 1 with a discussion about the nature of time. Time gets weird in an ESE, because time is one of the strangest aspects of our human experience whether we have had an ESE or not.

*Cartographies: Constellating the Pilgrimage of Faith*



*Psalter World Map*, created 1262-1300, British Library manuscript collection

I'm so glad that he let me try it again  
 'Cause my last time on earth I lived a whole world of sin  
 I'm so glad that I know more than I knew then  
 Gonna keep on tryin'  
 Till I reach my highest ground  
 Till I reach my highest ground  
 No one's gonna bring me down  
 Oh no Till I reach my highest ground  
 Don't let nobody bring you down (they'll sure 'nough try)  
 God is gonna show you higher ground  
 - "Higher Ground", Stevie Wonder, *Innervisions*, 1978

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

- Matthew 2:1-2 (ESV)

It is assumed by tradition that the wise people (the word ‘magi’ in Greek is a neuter term) did not just come from a little ways to the East, but from very far away, perhaps as close as Saudi Arabia or as far as China. Regardless, the magi traveled an enormous distance. In the ancient world, the night-time sky was also a map. By tracking closely the movement of the stars across the sky over time, one could also identify what locations were under which stars at a particular time. If something unusual occurred in the sky, such as a comet or supernova of a nearby star, a good navigator could make a close guess as to what was beneath that light source. Further, the night-sky was tethered closely to the cosmologies and theologies of the region, and so prophecy, prediction, and signs were part of the observation of the planets and stars.

In this moment, we get a glimpse into ancient uses of the sky as a map. The magi have tracked the signs of the sky to Jerusalem, which would have been the known city to travelers of such a distant place. Bethlehem was a small village. The map of the sky, then, led the magi to the best known place. The map got them close to where they needed to be. The map of the sky drew them to worship a king they did not know in a village nearby. The story of the Magi is a kind of extended ESE. They have shown themselves to be receivers of information in unusual ways, from the skies and from dreams. The map of the night guided the magi to a cartography which would shape their, and our, very souls.

- Map-Making and how we find our way
- Contours and Landscapes
- Travelogues and ESEs



*Liminality: Faith in the In-Between*



*“Fairy tales do not tell children **dragons** exist. Children already know the **dragons** exist.  
Fairy tales tell children that **dragons** can be killed.”*

GK Chesterton – Orthodoxy

Clowns to the left of me!  
Jokers to the right!  
Here I am stuck in the middle with you.  
Trying to make some sense of it all  
But I see it makes no sense at all.  
Is it cool to go to sleep on the floor?  
I don't think that I can take anymore.

-“Stuck in the Middle with You”, Stealer’s Wheels, *Stealer’s Wheels*, 1972

While not all spaces or experiences are liminal, all ESEs generate a liminality. This is because an ESE requires change and transformation. An ESE will bring us to the place between what was known and what is now unknown. We may have markers to the known—streets, landmarks, pictures on the wall— but the ESE will shift our perception into the unknown. If anything, the markers make the disjunction more exceptional rather than less.

In indigenous cultures, the liminal is often ritualized so that the one who is to be transformed—an initiate into adulthood or a shaman preparing for a journey to the spirit realms— will have anchors in this world. Ritual in this sense is a kind of launching pad for the journey of the soul. Known spaces become gateways to the realms of ESEs. Eventually, these spaces become so attuned to the act of reaching for the in-between that the space itself becomes an in-between place where the act of simply being present in the space can be the entrance into liminality, triggering an ESE.

As we will see, nature, human constructed spaces, relationships can become the site for the in-between to assert itself. Once the liminal becomes known, we will often reach for the anchors to the reality we have known, or to the consensus which tells us the way things should be, or both. But an ESE has its own gravity and will pull the experiencer out of the known and into its own construct of a new reality.

- Liminal Spaces and What They Are
- ESEs and the In-Between
- Hyper-Liminality

*Spaces and Places: The Nature of Faith*



*Sky Top Lakes, Beartooth Mountains, Montana*

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,  
 your faithfulness to the clouds.  
 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
 your judgements are like the great deep;  
 you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.  
     How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
 All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
 They feast on the abundance of your house,  
     and you give them drink from the river of your delights.  
 For with you is the fountain of life;  
     in your light we see light.  
     -Psalm 36:5-8 (NRSV)

The Extraordinary Spiritual Experience reorders how we perceive and receive the natural world around us. The sounds of insects and birds becomes musical. The shapes of trees and the interplay of the negative space and light between branches as shades of green ripple in the breeze become performance art pieces. The drifting of fog in the morning sun on a hot summer morning becomes an avant-garde dance.

There is an ‘implicit order’ (David Bohm<sup>1</sup>), or a kind of ‘tacit knowing’ (Michael Polanyi<sup>2</sup>) to these displays. Depending on the nature of the ESE, there is a possibility that one will begin to see that the universe has a certain aesthetic that is observable at all levels. From the mathematically hazy probability clouds of quantum mechanics to the microscopic constructs of cells and crystals to the biomass of flora and fauna to the bizarrely made creatures that roam the earth and sea, including the strangest of all, the human being, one begins to see an artistic sensibility in all things.

This is the awareness of what is known as The Aesthetic Universe (JF Martel<sup>3</sup>). The awareness is mystical in the sense that many of the world’s great mystics speak of this aesthetic in the experienced, created world, in its most spectacular and most horrifying expressions.

- The Aesthetic Universe
- The Organic Beautiful
- The Great Chain of Being
- Thin Places
- What Do We *Really* Experience?

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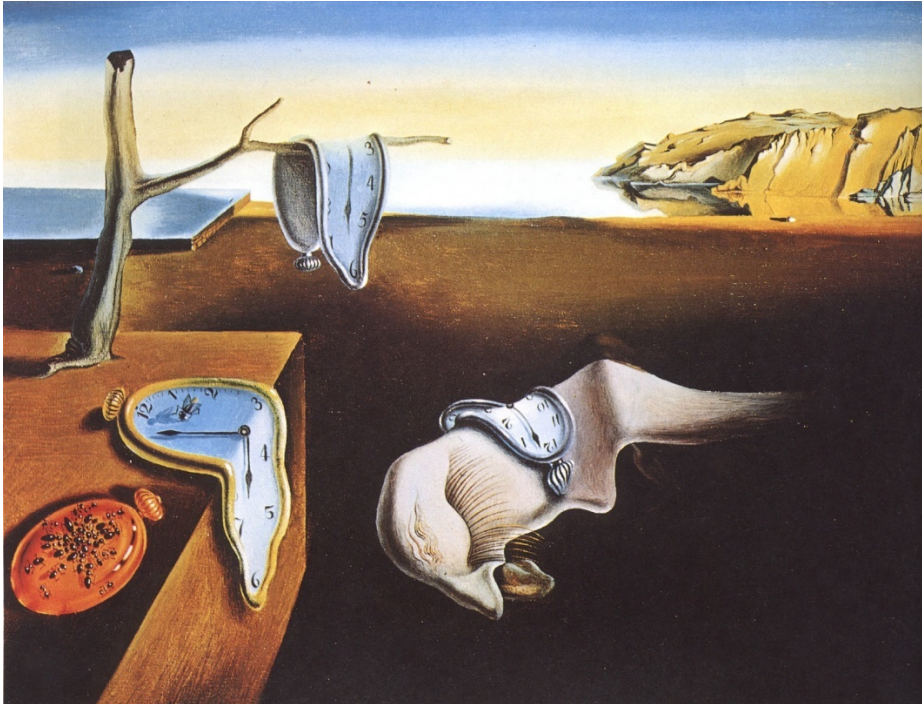
<sup>1</sup> David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> J.F. Martel, *Reclaiming Art in the Age of Artifice: A Treatise, Critique, and Call to Action* (Berkeley, CA: Evolver Editions, 2015).



*Time: When Are We?*



*The Persistence of Memory*, Salvador Dali, Museum of Modern Art, 1931

Sometimes you picture me  
 I'm walking too far ahead  
 You're calling to me, I can't hear  
 What you've said  
 Then you say, "go slow"  
 And I fall behind  
 The second hand unwinds  
 If you're lost you can look and you will find me  
 Time after time  
 If you fall, I will catch you, I'll be waiting  
 Time after time  
 If you're lost, you can look and you will find me  
 Time after time  
 If you fall, I will catch you, I will be waiting  
 Time after time  
 -"Time After Time", Cyndi Lauper, *She's So Unusual*, 1983

- Linear Time
- Stacked Time
- Circular Time

## Part Two: Appearance - The Who or What of an ESE



*The Annunciation, with Saint Emidius*, Carlo Crivelli, National Gallery, London. 1486

Numbers 22:22-27

God's anger was kindled because he was going, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey turned off the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back on to the road. Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again. Then the angel of the Lord went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. (NRSV)

Luke 1:28-30

And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. (NRSV)

Where things occur and when they happen are extremely important when we talk about ESEs. What we are thinking and feeling prior to and during an ESE can have great influence on how we experience the event. We call the confluence of where, when, and what we are feeling and thinking the ‘set and setting’. The other word for set and setting is ‘context’. The context of any given experience or event makes all kinds of difference in how we understand and interpret what we experience, what is happening, and how we remember events.

After we establish the set and setting of an ESE, the stage is set for the ‘appearance’ of a who or a what. When we hear ‘appearance’, I suspect many of us first think of a person, a being, or an animal, perhaps. But the appearance aspect of an ESE can include such things as body symptoms, seeing things at the edge of our vision, time distortions, the sense that the world is tilting 3.14 degrees to the left. The ESEs in the stories of Balaam and Mary have the appearance of angels, a created divine being. ESEs may have the appearance of discarnate entities, meaning something like spirits or ghosts. If things really bend weird in an ESE, you might encounter what are called ‘self-transforming machine elves’<sup>4</sup>. In the appearance aspect of an ESE, one might encounter strange time shifts, alterations of the environment, unusual body sensations, geometric shapes, multi-dimensional spaces and shapes (known as Kluver form constants<sup>5</sup>), alternate timelines, and other anomalies.

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<sup>4</sup> A term coined by Terrence McKenna for entities he regularly encountered on psychedelic journeys. The self transforming machine elves are a kind of interdimensional trickster. See akirathedon. “Terence McKenna Self Transforming Elf Machines | Meaningwave | Akira the Don.” *YouTube*, 4 Oct. 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYF\\_qziF\\_Xs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYF_qziF_Xs).

<sup>5</sup> Bressloff, P C, J D Cowan, M Golubitsky, P J Thomas, and M C Wiener. “Geometric Visual Hallucinations, Euclidean Symmetry and the Functional Architecture of Striate Cortex.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B* 356, no. 1407 (March 2001): 299–330. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2000.0769>.



When strange beings or experiences appear, it is very difficult to understand what exactly is going on, or what the meaning might be. This stage of an ESE is not the time to try to make meaning of the experience, however. Sometimes, in an ESE, all we get is an appearance. There is no revelation, and our disclosures, our attempts to make meaning of the experience, only lead to more confusion and meaninglessness. When the ESE does not go beyond the appearance aspect, often what has appeared becomes an empty space where we can project cultural, traditional, and personal meanings in order to force the experience to make sense. We are, after all, meaning and pattern creating beings.

Even so, many ESEs do not move beyond the appearance aspect. The experience may be extraordinary, but it might not be identifiably spiritual in any way.

As an example, on November 15, 1966, a couple was driving along the road in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. The driver glanced over and saw a black shape flying alongside the car. He yelled and his partner also looked over, seeing a black shape with wings and glowing red eyes flying beside the car. They sped up to try to get away, but the creature kept up with them. If this were just one couple to see something like this, well, you could chalk it up to some sort of hoax or combined vision. But later on, the same day, another couple also encountered the creature. They described it like a giant moth with the limbs of a human. Thus was the creature dubbed by the newspaper in Point Pleasant, “Mothman”. The appearance of the creature defied explanation<sup>6</sup>.

The story gets weirder. Over the course of the next year, there were more sightings of the Mothman. Sometimes, these sightings were combined with premonitions of a disaster that was

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<sup>6</sup> “Couples See Man-Sized Bird...Creature...Something.” *Point Pleasant Register*. November, 1966.  
<http://www.westva.net/mothman/1966-11-16.htm>

forthcoming. These premonitions came to a culmination on December 15, 1967, when the Silver Bridge, which connects Point Pleasant, West Virginia, to Gallipolis, Ohio, collapsed during rush hour traffic. 46 people died in the bridge collapse. The Silver Bridge collapsed because a single eye-bar failed. There were no redundancies in the bridge design, so one single failure of a primary connection meant the whole bridge was imperiled. It was also the end of sightings of the Mothman<sup>7</sup>.

The Mothman Prophecies by John Keel is the definitive book on the subject. John Keel is a researcher of weird and wonderful stories, and this one is at the top of his list. Keel ties this story into fairy stories from the Middle Ages and other cultures with unusual beings. Often, these beings are kinds of warning signals for an impending disaster. Was the Mothman trying to warn the town of Point Pleasant? Or was the weird appearance of the creature just a coincidental experience that ended because people's attention was now on a monstrous human disaster?

An ESE is made extraordinary because the event transcends the ordinary. That which appears to the experiencer stands out because of its unusual or displaced nature. In Scripture, we are dealing with encounters with God and God's holy messengers, angels, or with the demonic, agents of chaos and evil, as in Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (see Matt 4, Mark 1, Luke 4). The identity of the being(s) or entities encountered may not be revealed immediately in the ESE. This is why appearance is separated from the next stage, revelation, which is the aspect of an ESE where some message is transmitted. Sometimes, the appearance and the revelation occur simultaneously. I use appearance here to mean anything that shows up that does not yet have meaning or understanding to establish the origin or purpose of the appearance. Once meaning

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<sup>7</sup> John Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies: A True Story* (New York: Tor Books, 2013).

and understanding of purpose are presented, the appearance becomes revelation, which will be revealed in Part 3.

The Prophet Ezekiel begins his ministry with an amazing ESE. He does not really understand what is appearing to him and uses the phrase “in the likeness of” several times in his description. Because an ESE is often presenting something to us that is either not of our experience or not of this world, we can only say it is like something we already know. Notice Ezekiel’s description of his ESE:

And above the expanse over their heads there was **the likeness** of a throne, <sup>in</sup> appearance like sapphire; and seated above **the likeness** of a throne was **a likeness** with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and <sup>there</sup> was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was **the appearance of the likeness** of <sup>the</sup> glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ez 1:26-28)

Ezekiel seems to not know that he is encountering a vision of the Lord until he perceives a “likeness of a bow on a rainy day. This was the **appearance of the likeness** of the glory of the Lord” (Ez 1:28). The appearance of the Lord in Ezekiel is continually referred to as *likeness*. This Hebraism of doubling “appearance”, which is stated 7 times in just these few verses, with “likeness”, which is stated 3 times, is a clue that we are dealing with a dazzling appearance in a profound ESE.

In Mary’s ESE, we are told by Luke that the angel appearing to Mary is the Angel Gabriel. Gabri-el is translated as “God’s Hero”. In the Jewish tradition, the angel Gabriel is the angel assigned to communicate God’s judgment and wrath to humanity. Mary never acknowledges that this is Gabriel. This suggests Luke, who is influenced by both the Judaism of his day and the Greek influences in Israel at the time, is trying to say something significant about

the nature of Jesus' presence among us. The Gospel of John suggests in several places that the mere presence of Jesus in the world is a judgment upon the world.

The angel Gabriel, the angel Michael, and Satan are the only named angels in all of Scripture. Micha-el means "Who Is Like God" and was considered to be the angel assigned to communicate God's lovingkindness to the world. In terms of an ESE, Mary's annunciation story tells us that who or what is showing up is really important. Mary seems to know it is an angel appearing to her. Angels are hard to miss. According to Ezekiel, angels are glowing, fearsome creatures with four faces--one like a human, one like a lion, one like an ox, and one like an eagle--and four wings, under which there are many hands. They arrive on huge spinning disks. Angels appearing are not a normal occurrence, either for Ezekiel, or Mary, or in any other encounter in Scripture.

The angel that shows up in Balaam's story does not even appear to Balaam. It appears to the donkey Balaam is riding, or rather, the donkey is the only being in the story thus far who can see the angel. *Balaam's donkey is having an ESE.* The angel who shows up to Balaam's donkey holds a sword, just as the angel at the gate of the Garden of Eden holds a flaming sword.

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 1:24)

The angel at the gates of Eden is said to be Uri-el, which means "the flame of God". Is this Uriel showing up to the donkey? Perhaps. Fortunately, Balaam's donkey talks.

Unfortunately, his donkey never tells us which angel is appearing to the team.

(As an aside, notice that the names of angels almost always end in "-el", which means "God", or "of God". You may have heard the name "Kal-el", pronounced "Kohl-el". This means "The voice of God". It is also Superman's name on his home planet of Krypton.)

The important thing about this aspect of the ESE, the appearance stage, is that we really don't know what is going to happen or what the appearance really means. Meaning cannot be made from beings or things merely showing up. All we know is that who or what is showing up is radically different from our normal day to day world. The encounter is extraordinary, beyond our normal experience. These things happen and we ask, perhaps like Mary, "*What does this mean?*"

The appearance stage may not be an entity. It could be an experience, such as the sense of lost time that sometimes occurs after a person has been abducted by fairies. It is said, in WY Evans-Wentz's great book, *Fairy Faith in Celtic Lands*, which collects fairy stories from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, that a couple hours passed in the fairy realm is years in the human realm<sup>8</sup>. This is what is meant by lost time. It is not a coincidence that lost time is also the experience of UFO abductees. Jacques Vallee suggests that UFO stories have distinct parallels to fairy stories<sup>9</sup>

Often, the appearance of time differentials is a precursor to the remembering of the ESE itself if one has forgotten the experience out of shock or trauma. Or the appearance may be associated with a discontinuous experience related to the times themselves. In other words, we may see things that are out of time with the time we are living in.

In 1928, there was a multiple witness experience at the opening of Charlie Chaplin's movie, *The Circus*. Outside the theater, an unusual looking woman walked by, dressed unusually, and acting strangely. The bizarre act she was participating in was loudly speaking into

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<sup>8</sup> Evans-Wentz, WY, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1966), 470.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Vallee, *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers* (Brisbane, Australia: Daily Grail Publishing, 1969/2014), 35-58.

a handheld device that appeared to answer back when she spoke. To the witnesses, it appeared to be a kind of telephone, unattached by wires<sup>10</sup>. Where was she from? Perhaps, rather than from a “where”, she was from a “when”.

The appearance aspect is often the most compelling part of an ESE. The bizarre and strange can stand on its own without explanation since it is so completely different from our lived experience. If the appearance occurs without revelation, the appearance stands as an anomaly to our understanding of the workings of the universe. The appearance, on its own, provides breadcrumbs into the maze of the weird and bizarre. Author JF Martel says of this aspect, regarding the apparently miraculous, “Every miracle is but an index pointing us to the most fundamental event of its kind, the weird miracle of experience itself.”<sup>11</sup>

The appearance stage is simply the showing up of the entity or experience. There may or may not be any ability to know who or what is being encountered in the ESE, and all the experiencer may know at this point is that something beyond the ordinary is happening. The appearance may not even be a spiritual event yet. All Mary knows when the angel Gabriel shows up is that an angel has shown up. Things get even stranger when the angel starts speaking. People throughout history have understood the strangeness of this event.

Artist depictions of Mary’s ESE move from attempts to normalize and humanize the experience to portraying the incommunicable mystery of an angelic visitation. The painting at the beginning of this chapter was painted by Carlo Crivelli in 1486 and falls into the latter category. Crivelli’s annunciation picture depicts an extreme perspective, reflecting the extreme

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<sup>10</sup> Von Braschler, *Time Shifts: Experiences of Slipping into the Past and the Future*, (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2021). Position 6.22

<sup>11</sup> Email conversation with JF Martel, dated January 10, 2022.

perspective of God entering creation. Note what is happening to Mary. A beam is entering her ear from the circular shape in the sky in the upper left quadrant of the painting.

Often, the gathering of angels was depicted as a cloud in medieval art. The cloud in this picture should bear significant familiarity to modern people soaked in UFO stories for over 70 years now. The interpretation of an ESE is always shaded with the influence of the culture which surrounds both experiencer and interpreter. Crivelli would have been far more influenced by medieval theology and faith than UFO subcultures (anomalous sky events were not unheard of in Crivelli's time, of course). The point is that sound and hearing were of far more importance to the medieval culture than they are for those of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As Paul says, *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (Rom 10:17). The creation of the universe in Genesis was by sound, the Kal-el, the voice of God. In medieval theology, it was understood that hearing is the pathway of faith. Seeing confirms what we have heard. Therefore, hearing is the most trustworthy sense, not sight. Mary hears her annunciation. Light converts into sound, and sound converts into the conception of Jesus.

Sight transforms the world into an object. Sound treats the world as a subject. Sight is distancing. Sound is enveloping. When visions are seen, paradoxically, reality is blinked. When visions are heard, leaders open themselves up to what the world needs and to new possibilities of truth. Jesus identified himself by what he heard: "what I have heard...I tell the world."<sup>12</sup>

So many of us walk around with a preconceived idea of what our faith lives mean and what kind of world we live in. We expect an ordered universe because we have been taught in our churches that this is a created universe, and created things, especially those created by a

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<sup>12</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 57.

loving, personal, and all-powerful God, are generally ordered things. Events and living things in our lives and world appear to have a discernible repeatable pattern. There is a cause and effect.  $A+B=C$ , except when it doesn't, and the "when it doesn't" happens way more often than most of us would like. Human beings do not deal with disorder well.

In this moment of appearance during an ESE, where we really do not understand what is happening and nor do we have any meaning to place on what is showing up yet, what is important is that, in both the story of Balaam's donkey and Mary, God's agents and messengers are showing up. God shows up. The agents of God appear. As one commentator says about Balaam's ESE, "Balaam finds that this God can send angels upon God's errands, that there is no escape from His presence nor evasion from His will"<sup>13</sup>. God is present and appearing even in the things we do not understand. The stories of Balaam's donkey and Mary's annunciation press us deeply into the mysteries of creation itself. There is so much we do not know, and so much beyond our perception and meaning-making and experience. Even so, situations, beings, and entities will appear.

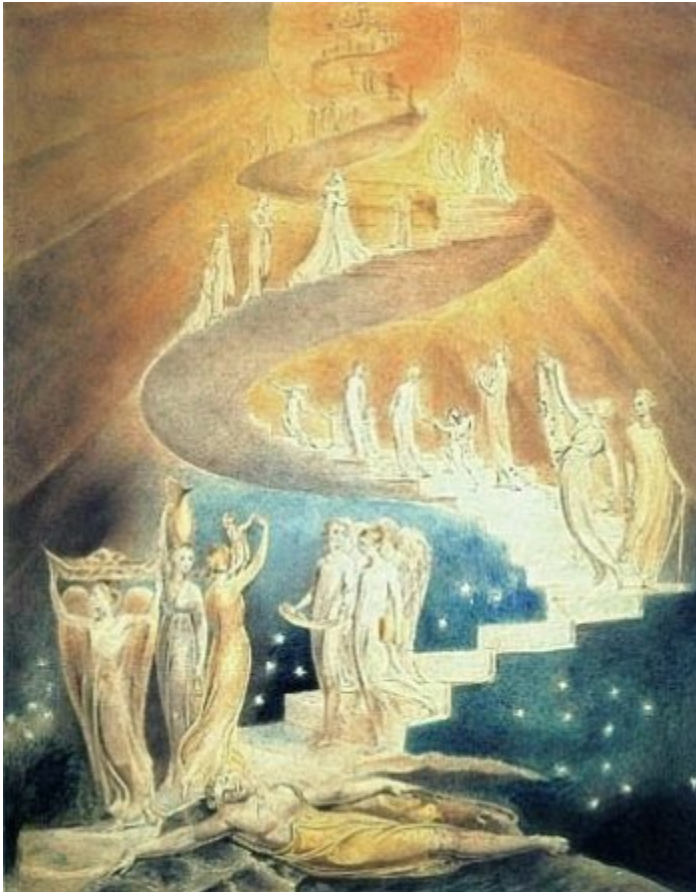
In this section of the book, we will explore various types of appearances. First, we will look at what may be the most dramatic – the appearance of entities and discarnate beings, followed by divine beings. Then we will consider the appearance of symptoms, bodily experiences, and the sense of the body in ESEs. This leads into how feelings and ideas are altered and distorted by ESEs. Here, we will consider aspects of conscious awareness and how an ESE alters perception.

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<sup>13</sup> Rev. Robert A Watson, MA, DD, *An Exposition of the Bible: The Book of Numbers* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Company, 1914), 473.



*Entities and Discarnate Beings*



*Jacob's Ladder*, William Blake, British Museum, @1800

In the fuze  
 I build myself up  
 From a language called real time  
 With physical flakes and molecules  
 Information machines  
 Closing the casket  
 How do you spell heaven?  
 -"How Do You Spell Heaven", Guided By Voices, 2017

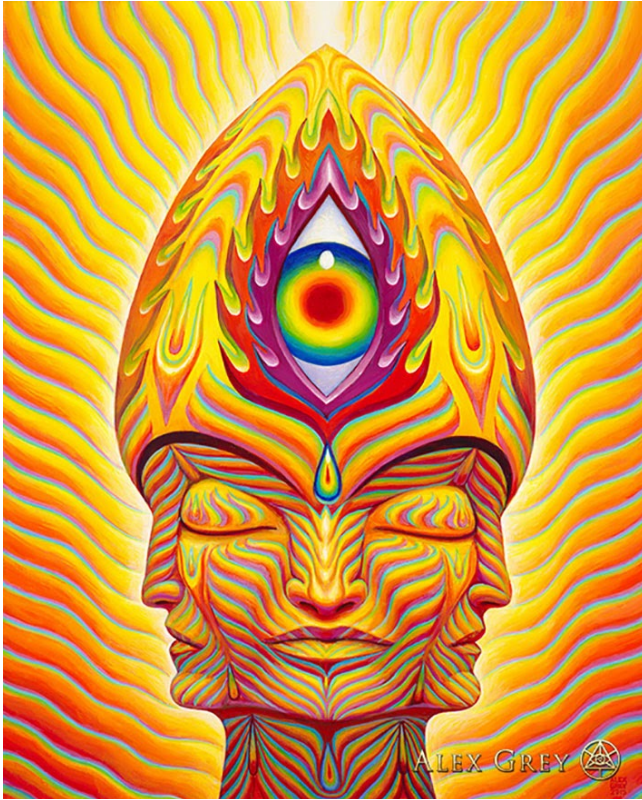
As we get deeper into our understanding of ESEs, we cross a horizon where there is a ‘weirding of the weird’, a ‘queering’ of the strange. At the edges of that horizon, we discover a whole host of beings, some with bodies and some without bodies, or at least beings without material bodies. We will deal with bodies themselves in a couple chapters, but for now let us understand that there is a spectrum of embodiment in our encounters with beings that should not exist.

At one end of the spectrum are hidden, but fully embodied beings, such as elves and brownies and gnomes. As we move from that fully embodied edge of the spectrum, the beings we encounter appear able to move between worlds and through things. Here we have fairies and dimensional beings. And finally, there are fully disembodied entities, which include ghosts, spirit beings, and others.

These are the beings that also occupy the pages of fairy tales and folk tales, many of which go back more than 6000 years and have genealogies that track across the formation of language itself. Encounters with them often take on mythic resonances, and their presence in ESEs beg a deep question regarding the role of language and storytelling in how we conceive of ESEs, much less the existence of ‘the good people’.

- Mythic Encounters With Other Beings
- Epic Weirdness
- Influencers and Guides

*Divine Beings*



*Divine Being*, Alex Grey, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, Wappinger Falls, NY

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?'

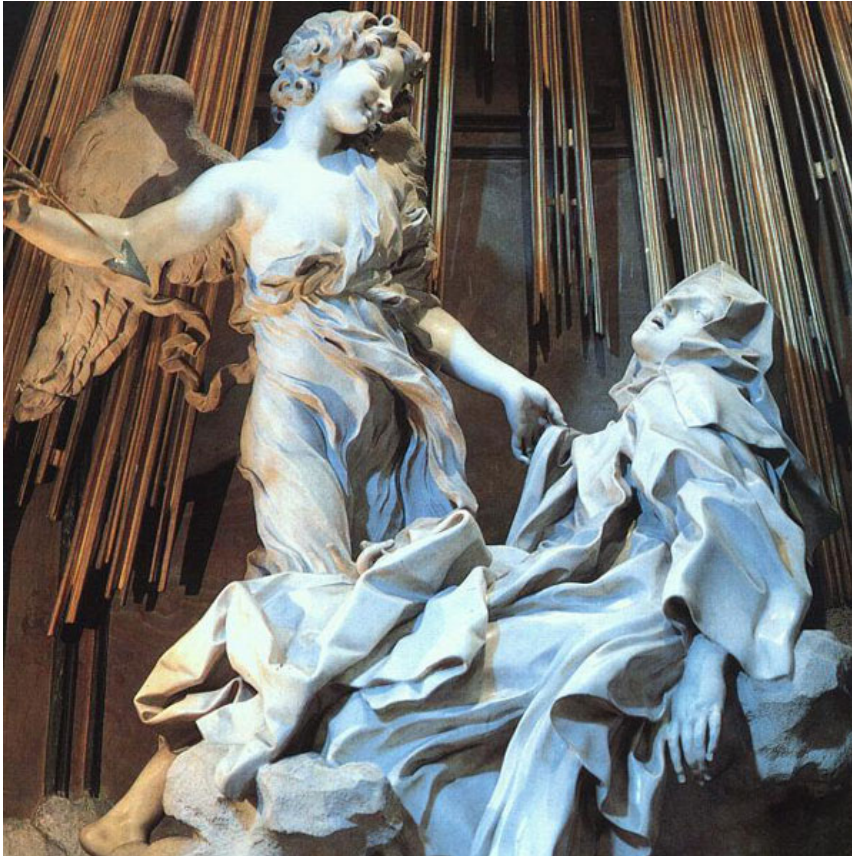
-Mark 8:27-29

I staggered back to the underground  
And the breeze blew back my hair  
I remember throwin' punches around  
And preachin' from my chair

Well, who are you? (who are you? who, who, who, who?)  
I really wanna know (who are you? who, who, who, who?)  
Tell me, who are you? (who are you? who, who, who, who?)  
'Cause I really wanna know (who are you? who, who, who, who?)  
-“Who Are You?”, The Who, *Who Are You?*, 1978

- Becoming A God
- Seeing and Hearing Other Gods
- More Questions Than Answers

*Bodies and The Sensual*



*The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, 1647-52

Virgin Mary was tired  
 So tired of listening to gossip  
 Gossip and complaints  
 In the  
 In the  
 Rosegarden  
 Rosegarden funeral of sores  
 -"Rosegarden Funeral of Sores", Bauhaus, *In the Flat Field*, 1980

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'  
 -Luke 22:19

As we have seen up to this point, an ESE often has the effect of extending and opening a person's sensitivity to the environment, the liminal, the divine, and other people. It may be that, once one has experienced the strangeness of an ESE, all things now become strange. We begin to see the creatures in our lives—dogs, cats, parrots, hamsters, ferrets, fish—as strange inhabitants of the same planet as us, made strange by the same things that have ‘weirded’ us. We begin to notice their physicality because our ESE has made us keenly aware of our own physicality.

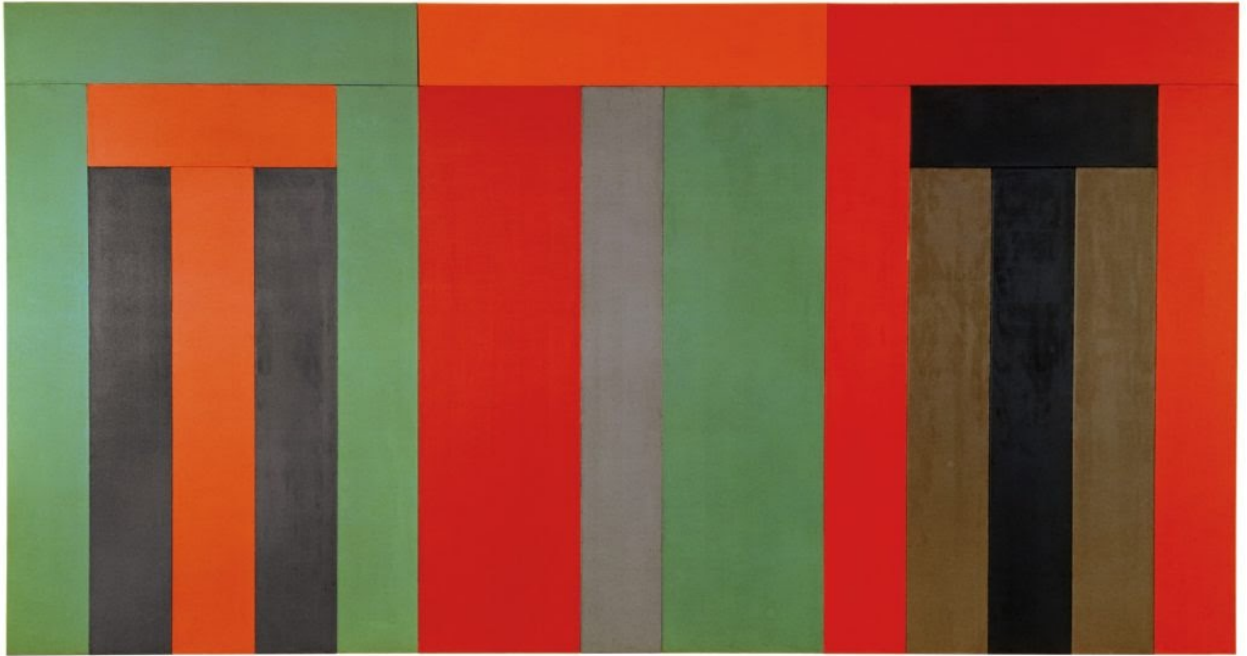
Bodies are deeply strange, especially human bodies. We are fantastically sensitive and our conscious awareness of different senses range from as few as nine to as many as twenty-one. It turns out that we are as exquisitely attuned to our environment as any land or sea creature, perhaps even more so. Part of the argument for conscious awareness, which is known as the “hard problem” in the study of consciousness, is not that it expands our awareness, but that it limits it so that we are not completely overwhelmed by all the information that pours into our brains at any given moment.

As mentioned in the Forward, perhaps the brain is more like a reducing valve which moderates the flood of information flowing in from all our senses. An ESE will open that reducing valve and the experiencer will have far more access to their senses than they did before. Along with more access comes more information, and with more information means a more extended, attenuated, nuanced understanding of the nature of the environment in which we all move. Bodies are how we move through time and space, and in that movement, we are vastly arrayed receptors of all kinds of information and knowing.

- Attenuated Creatures of Exceptional Sensitivity
- Symbiotic Psychodynamics



*Feelings and Ideas, Consciousness and Awareness*



*Thira*, Brice Marden, Modern Museum of Art, 1980

I looked out this morning and the sun was gone  
 Turned on some music to start my day  
 I lost myself in a familiar song  
 I closed my eyes and I slipped away

It's more than a feeling (more than a feeling)  
 When I hear that old song they used to play (more than a feeling)  
 I begin dreaming (more than a feeling)  
 -"More Than A Feeling", Boston, *Boston*, 1976

ESEs present and create other pathways of knowledge and perception. How feelings are interpreted or altered. Ideas that form as a result are created from different access to information than what was available before the experience. Feelings and Ideas as external to the person.

- More Than A Feeling
- Flashlights and Lanterns

**Part Three: Revelation - The Why of ESEs**



*Balaam and the Ass*, Rembrandt, Musee Cognacq-Jay, Paris. 1626



## Numbers 22:28-35

Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?' Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!' But the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you in this way?' And he said, 'No.'

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face. The angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me, and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away from me, surely I would by now have killed you and let it live.' Then Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, 'I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will return home.' The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, 'Go with the men; but speak only what I tell you to speak.' So Balaam went on with the officials of Balak. (NRSV)

## Luke 1:31-38

And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her. (NRSV)

In 1205, at 24 years old, St. Francis of Assisi had an ESE at the little chapel at San Damiano. There, he heard a voice calling him to rebuild the church.

Prostrating himself before an Image of the Crucified, he was filled with no small consolation of spirit as he prayed. And with eyes full of tears he gazed up, and he heard with his bodily ears a Voice proceeding from that Cross, saying thrice: “Francis, go and repair My House, which, as thou seest, is falling utterly into ruin.”<sup>1</sup>

For a while, St. Francis believed it was simply that this little chapel was meant to be rebuilt, but through prayer and reflection over time, he began to understand that the message Jesus gave him meant the entire church. This ESE was just one of many that transformed a young, wealthy playboy into a legendary force in the Western world.

St Francis' ESE, just one of many throughout his lifetime, is emblematic of what is meant when we speak of an ESE - an event that significantly, if not radically, reorients one's mindset in such a way that the activity, thinking, and one's entire intellectual, spiritual, and existential relationship to the world is completely changed. In the example of St. Francis of Assisi, the revelation at San Damiano affected a large reforming change in himself, his village of Assisi, and throughout the entire Catholic Church of the time. For himself, Francis became a compassionate and giving person, having once been self-involved and flagrant with his wealth and behavior.

In his village of Assisi, Francis became a kind of Pied Piper for all the young adults in town. He attracted the best and the brightest to his growing community of radical Jesus followers. For the leaders of Assisi, they were horrified. There were wars to fight, businesses to run, and taxes to collect. Francis undermined all this. His influence on the western Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Bonaventure, “The Life of St Francis of Assisi”, Ecatholic2000.com, <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bonaventure/assisi/francis.shtml>, (accessed October 27, 2021)10/27/2021

Church of the day grew slowly and eventually engulfed the cardinals and the Pope himself. In the tradition of the Catholic Church, Francis and his transforming work is considered the First Reformation. Francis' reach eventually extended into other cultures, other religions, and into the language used for the care and tending of the human and non-human world. Francis' influence reaches us even today.

Until something is communicated and revealed in some way, there is generally very little information about who or what is being encountered in an ESE. Jesus could appear and show or tell the experiencer nothing. One could say the revelation is in the appearance itself, but that leaves empty spaces that we will fill with our own meanings. How does one communicate the meaning of the appearance if there are no words or symbols to pass on to others? If there is no revelation, how do we know why the event is happening at all?

Without the message, without the revelation, we fill in the gaps.

We are pattern-forming and pattern-seeking creatures, and it is within the patterns that we find meaning. Without a discernible reason for the being or situation showing up in our ESE, we are left to make up the reasons why on our own.

Revelation, in our stages of an ESE, is when the entity, event, or encounter shows or tells the experiencer what is going on and who or what is being encountered, sometimes followed by instructions going forward. The revelation is often the unveiling of the purpose, or the command, or the identity of the ESE. When angels appear in the Bible, they reveal their purpose. Sometimes, the revelation is with words. Sometimes, the revelation is with signs and symbols. Words may make the revelation more clarified, but signs and symbols often make revelations more complex and clouded.

When the Angel Gabriel shows up to the young Mary, Scripture tells us "she was greatly troubled" (Lk 1:29). Seeing this, Gabriel answers with the traditional words of comfort, "Do not be afraid" (1:30). Then Gabriel reveals the purpose of his troubling visit—that Mary will be the mother of the Son of God, Jesus. In a specific place to a specific person (set and setting), an angel has appeared to Mary (appearance), and told her why he has appeared (revelation). Mary's life from this moment forward is completely changed by her ESE.

The message Mary receives seems as if it would be overwhelming. We do not get much in the way of interior process and feeling when we read the Bible, and in Mary's story, we are not told of her overwhelm, nor do her words really express it. The story allows, perhaps intentionally, for us to project ourselves into her experience, in all its earthly and heavenly promise. Nonetheless, Mary aligns herself with God's will as revealed by the angel. She says,

‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her. (Lk 1:38).

Mary has a lot to think about now. Not the least of which is, how will she communicate this ESE to her family and village, much less her arranged husband, Joseph? That is a discussion for our next section, Part 4, the aspect of Disclosure.

For now, the revelation from the angel is that God desires Mary to be the mother of the Son of God. And Mary responds by agreeing to this message. The revelation by way of the angel Gabriel has completed its course.

Balaam experiences two revelation messages from two different sources in an extended ESE. In the introduction to Part 2, the aspect of Appearance, we saw that Balaam's donkey was having an ESE when it saw the angel with a sword in the road. Upon seeing the angel, the donkey behaves as donkeys are meant to behave. Donkeys balk at danger. They are independent and capable of decision making, and their decisions are primarily loyal and protective of humans

and fellow donkeys. Balaam shows himself in this story to be woefully ignorant in animal behavior and he appears to have very little regard for the loyal and devoted nature of donkeys in general.

At this time in history, donkeys were considered regal beasts. They were highly symbolic, often of peace and gentleness, and considered to be highly intelligent. This is because donkeys are extremely loyal, loving creatures with exceptional intelligence. Donkeys were domesticated 3000 years before camels were, so they have been friends of humans for over 6000 years. Donkeys were often buried with kings in Egypt and surrounding areas. James Gorman of the New York Times says of donkeys:

You may have heard, for instance, that donkeys are stubborn. But Ben Hart, a trainer who works for the Donkey Sanctuary in Britain, put it this way:

“Anybody who says a donkey is stubborn has been outsmarted by a donkey.” They are cautious, he said, not contrary. They like to think before they act. The reason may be that their ancestor, the African wild ass, is not a herd animal. Wild asses have individual territories, and each must decide where to go and when to eat, run or fight. Donkeys have retained some of that thoughtful intelligence, said Dr. Marshall, who was not at the symposium. They like to decide for themselves. So if you try to lead a donkey over a shadow on the ground that looks a bit like the edge of a cliff, the donkey may balk.<sup>2</sup>

One would think after someone has ridden a donkey their whole life (Num 22:30), they would know their donkey. Balaam does not. The outrageousness and sheer tragedy of this is captured by the donkey’s first words to Balaam: ‘What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?’

Then the donkey says, after Balaam’s threat to kill the donkey,

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<sup>2</sup> James Gorman, “Where’s the Love for Donkeys?”, *New York Times (Online)*, (New York: New York Times Company. Oct 31, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/science/donkeys.html>, accessed October 28, 2021.

‘Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you in this way?’ And he said, ‘No.’ (Num 22:28-30)

The tragedy of this broken relationship is also captured by Rembrandt’s painting of the donkey at the beginning of this chapter. The donkey is clearly distressed and rightfully so. His plaintive and fearful eyes, which Rembrandt has made the focus of the painting, as they look back at Balaam, reflect the words the donkey speaks in Scripture. All eyes are on Balaam, stunned at his poor treatment of his lowly creature.

We are getting ahead of ourselves a bit. Let’s just stay with what is happening in this story. **A donkey is talking.** It doesn’t matter if you see this as a ‘real’ story or not. Something is being revealed here that is so important that it makes more sense for an animal to say it than a human. Between this story and now, donkeys have fallen in stature in the human mind. They are exceptionally abused in many places around the world and are considered a disposable creature, as opposed to the noble and regal horse, a latecomer to the domestication game.

What if the animals could speak? What if they do, in their own way? Proverbs 12:10 says of our relationship with the animals,

The righteous know the needs of their animals,  
but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

Knowing the needs of our animals is exactly the opposite of cruelty. Knowing their needs, in fact, can only lead to kindness.

Psalm 8 says,

what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?  
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honour.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen,  
 and also the beasts of the field,  
 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
 O Lord, our Sovereign,  
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!

We make a grave error when we get hung up on what dominion means in Psalm 8, as well in Genesis (see 1:28). This Psalm is echoing the words from Genesis when, upon creating the living things, God looked at them and declared them all good (Gen 1:24-25). The praise that is happening in this Psalm is that the animals reflect the majesty of God. If a thing reflects the majesty of God, should we not honor it with the same concern we honor God? This is where our stewardship, our dominion, of the creatures of this earth begins.

And so, Balaam's donkey speaks.

While Mary gets one revelation, Balaam gets two. One revelation is his 'come to Jesus' moment about his treatment of animals, from his articulate donkey. The second revelation is from the angel. Balaam wishes he had a sword to kill the donkey, but the angel has a sword and is prepared to kill Balaam. The angel says to him,

'Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me. <sup>33</sup>The donkey saw me, and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away from me, surely I would by now have killed you and let it live.' (Num 22:32).

The second revelation is that Balaam is on the wrong path. He is not following God's will. Balaam sees and hears the angel because he has finally seen and heard the pain of his animal companion.

The revelation in Balaam's ESE is layered and complex. Through the appearance and revelation of the angel and his donkey, Balaam realizes he is in fact on the wrong path. Not following God's will has led Balaam to commit violence against one of God's creatures.

Mistreatment of animals arises from not following God's will. By the goodness of creation itself that God has declared, we can move beyond the mistreatment of animals and say that the mistreatment of creation and humans arises from not following God's will.

The gravity of all this, the sheer weight of the violence committed and its effect upon his lifelong companion, causes Balaam to repent. He says,

'I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will return home.' (Num 22:34)

The wrong road Balaam is going down is shown to be a metaphoric road because the angel tells Balaam to keep going in the direction he is headed.

But now, there is a fundamental change. Balaam knows his own way is no longer trustworthy. The angel tells Balaam to keep going down the road, but from this moment forward Balaam can only speak the words God tells him to speak. Balaam's sources of hearing God's will are non-human, one being the most earthy of earth creatures, the donkey, and the other the most ethereal and heavenly of spirit creatures, the angel. The voice of God's will for Balaam will be from extraordinary sources. This is what he is now called to listen for from here on out. Balaam's complex ESE not only changes his past, but also alters how he approaches his future.

This discussion of revelations pushes into the next part of this work, which is Disclosure, which is the beginning of making meaning of ESEs. Even so, in the moment of revelation much personal and cosmic meaning can be conveyed, as we see in both our stories today. The aspect of revelation will continually push us beyond the ESE to make meaning of what has happened. It is very hard to just stay with the experience of an ESE, because meaning-making is very much part of the structure of an ESE itself.



The revelation of an ESE may not always be words spoken, however. When words or clear ideas are transmitted, that is a blessing, especially for when we prepare to disclose our ESE to others. Sometimes, though, the revelation will come in the form of symbols and signs. The interpretation and understanding can stretch out for years and years.

Symbols float through cultures and time and as a result, can make understanding at once very intimate and very difficult. Symbols have a fluidity yet are contained by the story and concept they seek to reveal and disclose. Symbols are vehicles of transmission that carry story and myth across boundaries, generations, and language. Symbols invite the experiencer to fill the symbol with meaning and reflection. But this invitation is not random or unbound. Symbols constrain the invited meaning-making by the story they seek to transmit. Symbols work in at least two directions, and probably more. Symbols transmit, and people interpret the transmission they receive from the symbol. Symbols are best thought of as immaterial transport devices for ideas, concepts, and sensate forms across time. Symbols are vehicles of revelation, and revelations require meaning making, and meaning making can only happen when the interpretation of the symbol is in communication with other meaning makers<sup>3</sup>.

The best example of this kind of symbolic revelation comes from an ESE confirming the holiness of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis had a habit of praying in a cave near La Verna. Sometimes he would pray for many hours and one of the brothers would bring him water and bread in the cave. Then, on September 14, 1224, according to witnesses and Francis himself, a seraph with a flame in the image of the Crucified Christ descended on Francis. When the flame

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<sup>3</sup> In this sense, symbols are what I have called ‘trans-subjective objects’. People can share similar interpretations, feelings, and understandings of symbolic objects because that is the intention of the symbol. In that shared and continuing interpretation, the symbol gains strength in meaning and coherence over time. The strength and coherence create shared meaning over time for those who encounter the symbol. The symbol becomes the vehicle of meaning.

lifted, Francis was imprinted with the wounds of Christ in his palms and his feet. Many saw this as a testifying experience to the holiness of Francis, but Francis was embarrassed and ashamed of his wounds, feeling he did not deserve such a 'gift' and that it focused attention on him rather than Christ. Francis never knew what to make of the stigmata, as the ESE is called in the Catholic tradition. He was at once grateful and ashamed and could not create meaning of why he was chosen to carry the wounds of Christ. The revelation did not afford him personal meaning. Francis could not connect the story of Christ on the Cross with his personal experience of the wounds of Christ. The symbol of the wounds transmitted image and pain and suffering, but not meaning for Francis. Or to put it another way, the revelation of the symbol of Christ's wounds on the Cross was greater than Francis' ability to understand. Francis suffered greatly from this symbolic revelation. The pain from the wounds was profound, and he stayed with him all the way to his death two years later on October 4, 1226<sup>4</sup>. The stigmata were one of the miracles which the church used to determine Francis' sainthood, among others.

As with all aspects of the ESE, one aspect may flow into the other. Sometimes, the set and setting only matters after the ESE. Sometimes, the set and setting is an aspect of the appearance. Sometimes, the appearance and the revelation are the same thing, or occur at the same time. Sometimes, there is only an appearance and no revelation. Much meaning can be communicated in the revelation, either by word, idea, sign, or symbol, but the ESE does not stop with the revelation. If the ESE does stop with the revelation stage, then the process cannot complete and meaning cannot be made in any helpful way, as it was with Saint Francis of Assisi. There is one more stage, then, and it is the final stage that is required for meaning making to

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<sup>4</sup> Julien Green, *God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers. 1983), pgs 251-271.

arise. That stage is when the story is told to others, when the disclosure happens to and with the community. Disclosure will comprise Part Four of the book.

In this part of the book, we will look at how the revelation stage of an ESE impacts our understanding of relationships. We see people differently after an ESE and seeing people in new ways affects how we relate to them. How we understand the continuity of our lives is profoundly impacted by what is revealed in an ESE. Near-Death Experiencers have a profound understanding of that impact and so the relationship between ESEs and life beyond life will be explored. The stage of revelation has the strange effect of altering the perception of time. Events begin to interact in such a way that meaning is carried in unique ways. This is called ‘synchronicity’ and we will seek to understand such encounters by way of ESEs.

## Relationships



*Icon of Christ and His Friend, Abbott Mena, 8<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt, The Louvre, Paris, France*

But each time I tell myself that I  
 Well I can't stand the pain  
 But when you hold me in your arms  
 I'll sing it once again  
 I said come on, come on, come on, come on, yeah, take it  
 Take another little piece of my heart now, baby  
 (Oh, oh, break a-)  
 Break another little bit of my heart now, darling, yeah  
 (Oh, oh, have a-)  
 Have another little piece of my heart now, baby  
 Well you know you got it, child, if it makes you feel good  
 -"Another Little Piece of My Heart", Big Brother & The Holding Company, *Cheap Thrills*, 1968

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

-John 15:15 (NRSV)

- I Am You, You Are Me
- Empathy and Sympathy
- Extending Beyond the Self and Selves

*Life Beyond Life*



*Albion Contemplating Christ, William Blake, 1757*

In my time of dying  
 Want nobody to mourn  
 All I want for you to do  
 Is take my body home.  
 Well, well, well, so I can die easy  
 Well, well, well, so I can die easy.  
 Jesus gotta make up, sure know  
 Jesus gotta make up  
 Jesus gonna make up my dyin' bed.  
 Meet me, Jesus, meet me  
 Ooh, meet me in the middle of the air

-“In My Time of Dying”, Led Zeppelin, *Physical Graffiti*, 1975

Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’  
 Jesus said, ‘I am; and you will see the Son of Man  
 seated at the right hand of the Power’,  
 and “coming with the clouds of heaven.” ’

-Mark 14:61-62 (NRSV)

One of the landmarks, then, of the ESE is some sense of a life after this life, a profound sense that conscious awareness continues beyond this perceived physical experience. It comes as no surprise that this is a big deal in the Christian faith, my chosen religious affiliation. And a question that might arise is, Why should we take seriously an experience that merely confirms what you already believed?

I have a good friend, Rev. Peter Panagore, who has built a life on his Near Death Experience. In my discussions with him, we have many moments of intersection in our experiences. He tells the story of taking questions from a group of people and someone asked about what he believed about God. My friend said, “I don’t believe in anything. I know things, and my experience showed me God is fully real. This is a thing I know. I don’t believe in God. I know God.”<sup>1</sup>

How does a belief become a knowing? I think one must be rigorous in considering questions such as this. Discussing ideas with others, reading and studying, deep thinking - all of these provide pathways, guardrails, directions, and maps to a deeper understanding of one’s beliefs. Much of what we do in our spiritual and intellectual lives is reinforcement of prior ideas as a way to justify and conform our minds to ideas we hold. To know a thing or person or idea, however, is to have had an intimate, humble, profound engagement with that thing, person, or idea. As much as I can know anything, I know the presence of my spouse and child, my dog. I know the feeling of the guitar and hear the music I strum out from it. Knowing is close, sensual, engaged. And once that closeness, sensuality, and engagement is experienced, one cannot say

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter Baldwin Panagore, *Heaven is Beautiful: How Dying Taught Me That Death is Just the Beginning* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Co, 2015).

they did not know what happened. It is an experience that is not subject to belief anymore, but to knowing.

This is the effect of an ESE. This is why we should take them seriously, regardless of what one believed prior to the experience. It is precisely the ESEs' confirming impact that suggests something has moved from belief to knowing, from intellectual distance to personal and profound intimacy.

- NDEs (Near Death Experiences) and ESEs
- Die Before You Die
- Change Your Death, Change The World



*Synchronicities: The Convergence of World and Faith*



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Latin 1429

With one breath, with one flow  
 You will know  
 Synchronicity  
 A sleep trance, a dream dance,  
 A shared romance,  
 Synchronicity  
 A connecting principle,  
 Linked to the invisible  
 Almost imperceptible  
 Something inexpressible.  
 Science insusceptible  
 Logic so inflexible  
 Causally connectable  
 Nothing is invincible  
 If we share this nightmare  
 Then we can dream  
 Spiritus mundi  
 -“Synchronicity I”, The Police, *Synchronicity*, 1983

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.'

-Acts 10:17-20 (NRSV)

The synchronicity experience is the moment when numerous unassociated experiences line up to create an alignment within the ESE experiencer's life and generate meaning that was not present prior. It is as if the events themselves carry meaning from unconnected points of reference and bring them to the person so they can connect the meanings of the discrete events. Synchronicity can itself be an ESE, but more often awareness of synchronicities is an effect of having had an ESE.

- Many Miles Away
- The Effect of The Affect

#### Part Four: Disclosure - The Meaning of ESEs



*Painting in the church of El Sitio, Suchitoto, El Salvador*

Numbers 22:36-38

When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, on the boundary formed by the Arnon, at the farthest point of the boundary. Balak said to Balaam, 'Did I not send to summon you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honour you?' Balaam said to Balak, 'I have come to you now, but do I have power to say just anything? The word God puts in my mouth, that is what I must say.' (NRSV)

Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.' (NRSV)

By way of Balaam and his talking donkey, much less his encounter with an angel in the road, and by way of Mary, mother of Jesus, with the angel Gabriel, we begin to see that these extraordinary spiritual experiences in Scripture ask us to sink ourselves deeply into the epic strangeness of what is going on in these stories. In a deep engagement with ESEs, though, we must allow ourselves to get used to a universe that is much more complex and stranger than we often allow ourselves to accept. An ESE, facilitated or spontaneous, opens the reducing valve of the mind, as Aldous Huxley said. Once opened, we must deal with a whole vast universe of inexplicable things.

Let's review where we have been:

We began in Part One with set and setting. Set means the state of mind and how we are perceiving at the time of an ESE. Setting is the space we experience the ESE within and where an ESE is occurring. When we speak of space, we also mean the cultural, local, and personal objects and influences that surround the experiencer. The setting may have great significance to the experience or none at all. Setting can also affect the set, our state of mind.

The next aspect of an ESE, Part Two, is the appearance. This stage of an ESE speaks to whatever is showing up and can include everything from divine beings to discarnate and disembodied entities to fairies and brownies to cryptids, like Bigfoot or Hodags, to bizarre bodily experiences to unrecognizable dimensional spaces. Sometimes, what is appearing is intelligible and fits our cultural and experiential background. Sometimes, the appearance does not make

much sense at all. Sometimes, an ESE will simply be a thing appearing and we are left to our own devices to figure something meaningful out of the appearance<sup>2</sup>.

Other times, we have the third aspect of an ESE, which is revelation, Part Three.

Revelation is the stage where an ESE tells us why what has appeared has shown up. Sometimes, there is a message disclosed from the beings or creatures that have appeared. Sometimes, the revelation might be a powerful personal insight from the ESE. The revelation is an internal meaning that has been shown to us. The revelation is the beginning of making meaning of the ESE.

Meaning making of an ESE is often a long-term effort, however. The extraordinariness of the experience, in conjunction with the weirdness of the spiritual element of the ESE, does not lend itself to quick interpretations, particularly when we keep the ESE to ourselves. The meaning-making is limited to our own reflection and self-awareness, which can only get us so far. This is because ESEs are, finally, communal. Full meaning cannot be made until the ESE is shared with others. This engagement with the community is the fourth aspect of an ESE, called the disclosure.

It is a hope of this project that understanding an ESE and having some sense of the movement of an ESE, we can begin to create safe spaces for people to disclose their experiences and generate a conversation that deepens meaning and understanding. As a resident of the United States, I live in a profoundly individualized culture. An ESE is often seen as a purely personal

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<sup>2</sup> It bears repeating that my concern in this project is not whether these aspects are real in any material sense. We are concerned with mapping experience and acknowledging the transformative element of the ESE encounter. It would be disingenuous, however, for me to suggest I am completely agnostic to some of the weirder elements of ESEs. I recognize, however, that my personal belief based on my own ESEs does not constitute any sort of proof that these things are 'real' in the ontological sense. Rather, the experience is very real, in a phenomenological sense.

encounter that carries meaning solely for the individual that has had the experience. But for millennia, ESEs were considered to have meaning for the entire community. They were experiences that carried a revelation for many, not for one. ESEs, once we have a sense of the pattern of them, provide an opportunity to recover the communal and participatory engagement that the spiritual demands and seeks.

The disclosure, then, is the open-ended process that seeks meaning across time and place. Meaning-making is fluid, slippery, and subject to revision over time and across personal and cultural boundaries. While meaning-making requires community, that community may have layered definitions as well. These layers may include a close community of like-minded, committed people, as in a church or a circle of friends. It may include an academic community where ideas and experiments are tossed back and forth and analyzed for depth and understanding, as in a research lab. The community may stretch across time and place by way of books and writings about the subject, or today, YouTube videos and social media. This seeking of meaning across multiple channels is a primary part of an ESE. The structure of an ESE demands meaning be made of the experience by way of disclosure to a community of interest.

Let's briefly see how this works with Balaam and Mother Mary. When we look at Balaam, his disclosure is quite lengthy. What we do know from our time with Balaam and his donkey is that Balaam can only say anything that the Lord has told him to say. Balaam has a brief discussion with the king Balak, who says (I am paraphrasing), "Why are you late? I brought you here to speak a word of victory to my troops before war. In fact, I paid you to do so." Balaam responds (again, I paraphrase), "Yes, about that. I no longer have the power to just say anything. Now, whatever God puts in my mouth, I must say" (Num 22:37-38). Balaam does not



disclose that he got all this from a talking donkey and an angel in the road. Even so, the next two chapters are Balaam's prophecies of the destruction of Balak's kingdom.

Balaam is called by vocation and call to disclose dimensions of his ESE along the road with his donkey, but not everything. His prophecy is part of not only Balaam's process of making meaning, but also Balak and all who hear Balaam. The meaning making of Balaam's ESE even stretches to those of us who read these passages.

With Mary, we see a deeper disclosure. Mary visits Elizabeth, who carries the child John, who will become John the Baptist. When Mary and Elizabeth meet, Elizabeth tells Mary, "The child in my womb leaped for joy at the sound of your greeting" (Lk 1:44). The gathering of the women generates one of the most powerful poems in Scripture, Mary's Magnificat, which is a hymn of joy and hope regarding the meaning(s) of the coming birth of her son.

Balaam's prophecies and Mary's Magnificat are the initial forays into finding the communal meaning of their respective ESEs. The way Luke has constructed his Gospel, we can read Mary's initial disclosure of her ESE in the Magnificat as the beginning of Mary's meaning-making. When reading Luke, we need to remember that Mary's perspective drives Luke's narrative. One way to imagine the Gospel of Luke is to see it as Mary making sense of the life and story of her son, Jesus, a story which begins with an ESE. Mary's ESE with the Angel Gabriel looks very different at the end of the story than at the beginning. The meaning making is continuous throughout Mary's life, and because Luke has written it down, we are now also included in Mary's meaning-making these many years later.

Disclosing something deeply personal like an ESE can be awkward. Worse, the disclosure to others may not bring any clarity initially. It is however the beginning of meaning-making. In the same way Jesus' life, death, and resurrection call us to develop a taste for



ambiguity, ESEs call us to develop some experience with awkwardness and lack of clarity.

Telling people personal things can be uncomfortable, and faith communities need practice in disclosing the strange, unusual, and difficult. As my spouse, Kathrin, says, “Any disclosure is a leap of faith and a leap into faith.”

As a model of the aspect of disclosure, let me tell you a personally significant ESE. Like Balaam and Mary, some parts of my ESEs are worth telling and others aren’t. Some parts of an ESE are meant only for the person; other parts are meant for others to hear. I hold an unproveable belief that the ancient world was much better than we are at discerning what was for others and what was not, particularly where ESEs, dreams, and visions were concerned. They could tell what was personal, what was for immediate family and friends, and what was for a whole community or nation. Maybe they knew more about the process of meaning-making than we do. But we can learn again the discernment of the ancient world.

Three years ago, I was in a study with Johns Hopkins University for clergy and spiritual leaders. The host of the study was the Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research. The study was about the facilitation of mystical experiences<sup>3</sup>. In this work, there have been several references to spontaneous and facilitated ESEs. Spontaneous ESEs are those ESEs that come upon the experiencer with no preparation or expectation, and facilitated ESEs are prepared for by meditation, studying certain rituals, or by way of particular substances. The study I was in at Johns Hopkins were facilitated experiences designed to trigger mystical

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<sup>3</sup> Johns Hopkins University. 2021. “Effects of Psilocybin-Facilitated Experience on the Psychology and Effectiveness of Professional Leaders in Religion.” Clinical trial registration study/NCT02243813. [clinicaltrials.gov. https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT02243813](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT02243813).

experiences in people who have been primed for the mystical by way of study, career, and belief.

Twenty-four spiritual leaders were part of the study, which took almost 6 years to complete. Each of us went through the study separately and without knowledge of who the others were. I went through the study in December of 2018 and January of 2019. Each of us came from several different faith traditions, but most participants were of Jewish and Christian background.

The leaders of the study facilitated mystical events by way of a class of substances in the world that do this very effectively and have for millennia. These substances have been used by indigenous groups of people all around the world, by great civilizations like Greece and ancient India, and now by researchers in universities and studies around the world. These substances are called ‘psychedelics’, or ‘mind-manifesting/altering’ substances. At high doses, these substances can facilitate or trigger mystical experiences. This is what the study I was in wanted to find out: will people who are already primed for mystical experiences have mystical experiences when they take high doses of psychedelics.

Some people will have mystical experiences, ESEs, with these substances. Some people won’t. The team at Johns Hopkins, headed up by Dr. Roland Griffiths, have been studying psychedelics since 2000. Several thousand people have been through various studies with psychedelics for treatment with addiction, depression, end-of-life treatment, and PTSD. Each participant has a couple sitters or guides who are with them as they go through a 6–7-hour experience. This is cutting edge research that is blossoming in many forms around the world.

The study was designed to facilitate a mystical experience with psychedelics, and for me it most certainly did. I have had several significant ESEs throughout my life. All of them were spontaneous, prior to my participation in the Johns Hopkins study. My ESEs, prior to the study at

Johns Hopkins, are the reason I am a pastor in the church. Then in April of 2018, a friend in sent me an ad he saw seeking recruits for this study. I followed through and qualified.

When Dr William Richards, who designed this particular study, asked me why I wanted to participate in the study, I said, “I have had glimpses of what is beyond the veil and want to see the superstructure of reality.” I have a sense that what I saw during my experience was a deeper glimpse of that superstructure. Before my Johns Hopkins experience, I had no experience with psychedelics. They scared me. My fears of psychedelics were formed by the anti-drug movements of the late 1970s and 1980s. But with Johns Hopkins, I was in a safe, controlled, observed environment 650 feet from the entrance to the best emergency room in the country. So, I said yes to the study.

There were two sessions in the study, which took place in a calm room on the campus of Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. The room was softly decorated with low lighting, pictures on the wall, and curated music played through recessed speakers on the ceiling. The study was designed around a substance called psilocybin, which is the active ingredient in ‘magic mushrooms’. Psilocybin creates a 6–8-hour experience. Psilocybin, and all psychedelics, removes the reducing valve that maintains the guardrails, boundaries, and sensations of everyday life. In my study, I have come to believe these substances do not just show us the inside of our personal mind, but also show us the structure of the mind itself. This is why psychedelics are being used to study the nature of consciousness. This is also why this book is structured the way it is. Psychedelics and ESEs provide us an insight into the landscapes of minds and the map we use can be helpful in how we help others navigate their ESEs.

I am still making meaning of my experiences and that is part of why I am disclosing those experiences by way of this project. Given that is true of my personal experiences and my

Johns Hopkins experiences, I have realized it is also true of the ESEs we claim as part of our faith. ESEs demand we make meaning of them with other people. This extends an ESE into and through time. As an example of what this means, we are still making meaning of Jesus' ESE and the ESEs of the disciples. We are still making meaning of our faith. The meaning of an ESE does not stay static. Instead, the meanings move, weave, and slither through time, place, and culture.

My experiences at Johns Hopkins strengthened my faith. I am still not sure how, but an effect of an ESE, and particularly psychedelics, is to reinforce and reframe one's beliefs in such a way that they help align a person with their external experience of the world. Even though my faith was strengthened, I didn't see God or Jesus in my sessions at Johns Hopkins.

What I did experience during my first session was that the universe is a vast, shimmering, multi-dimensional cathedral built with transparent bricks that glitter with iridescent colors, some of which are not on the color spectrum. I was led into the cathedral by the appearance of an angelic being who led me down a huge onyx spiral staircase. High up in the arches of the sanctuary, crows flew back and forth. I somehow knew they were messengers of some sort. Sound vibrated with color, and resonated off the glittering windows and high, curving walls. Then, I crossed over into another part of the cathedral. This crossing over was almost like a death. I hurt and was afraid. I could feel life pulling away from my body. There was a time of emptiness, lost time, as if I was being transported by a device designed to shuttle a person from one world to another.

On the other side, a woman named Jean met me. Jean was a member of the church I pastored at the time. For almost a year and a half, Jean and I met weekly to discuss her eventual death from lung cancer. As with so many meetings like this, I learned far more from Jean than she did from me. We became close friends during those meetings.

After Jean met me, she took me on a tour of the undercrofts of the vast, shimmering cathedral. Then, we went up a short ramp out of the lower levels of the vast, shimmering cathedral and came onto me a cobblestone street in Paris, just off the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. It was night and the chairs were leaned against the tables and the moon reflected off the shiny rocks in the street. Jean told me that this is where she hangs out now. Heaven, it seems, is Paris at night.

Almost 3 years later, I remember all this like it happened yesterday.

Sometimes, ESEs transmit a revelation, or message. The message I received in this first experience was one that filled me with grief and now directs my life. That message was “Beauty is leaving the earth, and some must choose to be curators and carriers of beauty so beauty can be remembered in the future.” This is part of the meaning making experience of my ESE, which still continues, but for now it tells me I must always be looking for the beautiful because I need to remember it for others.

The intent of disclosure, or at least this disclosure, is not to convince a person to believe it to be ‘real’ or even as a testimony of faith, even though I consider my experience to be a clarifying journey of the spirit. Disclosure helps us understand the power of ESEs to change lives. In the studies at Johns Hopkins, it is the ESE, the mystical encounter, according to researchers, that changes people<sup>4</sup>. ESEs reveal to us that the universe is infinitely more complex than what we perceive and are told to perceive.

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<sup>4</sup> “Mind Meld 144 | Cataloging the Ineffable with Dr. Matthew Johnson.” 2019, *THIRD EYE DROPS* (podcast), February 18, 2019, <http://thirdeyedrops.com/matthew-johnson-2/>, accessed 1/8/2022.

We are profoundly sensitive creatures. We may be the most sensitive creatures on the planet<sup>5</sup>. This means we are first and foremost experiencers of the world. Some of those experiences reach beyond this material world into the forms of the worlds of mind, and then beyond there into the spiritual worlds. These experiences and realms are real, in the sense that when we experience them, they come to us as an experience of, as Paul Tillich says, the ‘really real’.

We are an exquisitely attuned instrument which receives and perceives far more than we are aware. In saying this, we are deep into the realms of the mystical. How shall we make meaning of what we have brought back from the mystical awareness, from the ESE we have experienced or heard about? I believe that whatever our faith commitment may be, we need to begin to share with one another what those forms of mind and spiritual realms are like for one another. This is really what we are up to on Sunday mornings: making meaning together of the deeper things of this universe and what we know of God.

ESEs are inherently weird. If we give any credence to the appearance and revelation of ESEs, we must recognize there are significant dangers as well. Some people have significant disorders that generate ESEs. We need to discern the experience from the disorder, helping a person distinguish what is real, in the sense spoken of above, about the experience they have had and what is an indicator of a serious situation. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Another danger is that people can be misled rather easily by various means. Charismatic spiritual leaders can use ESEs to lord it over others or use their own ESEs against others. These leaders can use the intimate information in the disclosure of an ESE to manipulate followers into

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<sup>5</sup> Whitley Strieber and Jeffrey Kripal, *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained* (New York, NY: Jeremy P Tarcher/Penguin, 2016), 48-51.

all manner of behavior and choices that go against one's free will and desire. In this, I speak from experience, having spent twelve years in a New Age martial arts cult. The leader of the cult was masterful and adept at using ESEs to maintain power over his students. The extraordinary, the spiritual, and the experiential can be used to harm and control other people. We need to stay awake to the very real, and sometimes deadly, dangers of being manipulated and misled by way of ESEs.

Let's reflect for a moment on followers of Jesus. Followers of Jesus gather in places of worship to celebrate several ESEs every year as high holidays. We celebrate the Annunciation of Mary, Jesus' birth, Jesus' baptism, Jesus at the transfiguration, Jesus' resurrection, or Easter, the arrival of the Holy Spirit to the disciples after the Resurrection, which is called Pentecost - fantastic ESEs, each one. The entire construct of Christian worship and tradition is built completely on ESEs. People do not commit their lives to a good idea or an interesting thought. People commit because of an experience they have had, or because they trust the experience someone else has had. People are curious about ideas. People are committed to ideas that become experiences.

The future of the church is the experiential. The Christian church should be at the vanguard of being the safe place to share ESEs, to be a gathering place to learn about the beings and ways of being that are of this world and beyond this world.

As followers of Jesus, we are asked and called to participate in the great, creative life of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in this set and setting we all occupy. As individuals, how we participate is as different as each person. As a church and as an individual, we make meaning of the experiences that arise from our participation in the life of faith. What appears and what is revealed in that process will make for profound disclosures, which inform the meaning each of

us make of our encounters with the ineffable and mysterious God. Some of us have had ESEs that are life changing. We can only make so much meaning on our own. We need other experiencers with whom to share, to whom we can disclose.

As followers of Jesus, as those who have been invited into the unpredictable, winding, shimmering gathering of God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ, we are participating in an extraordinary, spiritual, ongoing experience that reaches all the way back to the moment Mary said to Elizabeth, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God’s servant” (Lk 1:46-48a). Even now, we are still making meaning with her, with her Son, and with his disciples.

The act of disclosure can come in many forms. The arts are a uniquely effective way of communicating the disclosure of an ESE. Part Four will explore that communication by way of music, often called ‘the universal language’. ESEs transform how we hear and see. ESEs also restructure and reconstruct how we make spiritual sense of the world, so we will consider how ESEs transform theologies and mystical worldviews. Consciousness and awareness are said to be expanded by ESEs. What that means constitutes a shifting and diverse landscape and so we will take some time to find our way through the act of making meaning. Finally, we will conclude with a personal reflection on my personal experience that gave rise to this work, followed by a brief discussion of what all this means for the future of our faith lives with Christ and the church.



*Musical Landscapes*



*Since I Have Been Loving You (Led Zeppelin)*, sound painting by Melissa McCracken

This whole damn world could fall apart  
 You'll be okay, follow your heart  
 You're in harm's way, I'm right behind  
 Now say you're mine  
 You've got the music in you  
 Don't let go  
 You've got the music in you  
 One dance left  
 This world is gonna pull through  
 Don't give up  
 You've got a reason to live  
 Can't forget  
 We only get what we give

- "You Get What You Give", The New Radicals, *Maybe You've Been Brainwashed, Too*, 1998

What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also.

-1 Corinthians 14:15 (NRSV)

Music is included in the ESE cartography, however, because music is a powerful agent for defining the liminal space of the extraordinary. What is the difference between seeing something and smelling something, between tasting something and feeling something against your skin, between a moment of imbalance and hearing? The boundaries between the senses are undefined and hazy.

For some people, synesthetes, those boundaries are easily crossed so that sounds become colors and shapes, smells have shapes, and numbers have auras. Synesthesia, though, is also a component of the ESE experience, and particularly in the psychedelic experience, sound and music can take on the characteristics of other senses.

In my Johns Hopkins experiences, I could see the music as it played. This however, is not so surprising for me. I have always experienced music as occupying space. Sounds have shapes for me, and sometimes color. Also, when I was younger, I used to be awakened by trumpet blasts and orchestral sweeps.

Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid says, “Music is the gate which separates the earthly from the eternal.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2010), 158

*Theologies and Mysticism*



*Disputation on the Holy Sacrament*, Raphael, Apostolic Palace, Vatican, 1509-1510

I believe in the kingdom come  
 Then all the colors will bleed into one  
 Bleed into one  
 But yes I'm still running  
 You broke the bonds  
 And you loosed the chains  
 Carried the cross  
 Of my shame  
 Oh my shame  
 You know I believe it  
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for  
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

-“I Still Haven’t Found What I Am Looking For”, U2, *The Joshua Tree*, 1987

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

-Mark 12:30 (NRSV)

ESEs change theologies and induct the experiencer into the nebulous and noetic fellowship of mystics throughout history.



*Meaning Making and ESEs*



*Le Tribu de Joseph*, Marc Chagall, 1964

Home is where I want to be  
 Pick me up and turn me round  
 I feel numb, burn with a weak heart  
 I guess I must be having fun  
 The less we say about it the better  
 Make it up as we go along  
 Feet on the ground  
 Head in the sky

It's ok I know nothing's wrong... nothing

-“This Must Be The Place”, Talking Heads, *Speaking In Tongues*, 1982

Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,  
 an advantage to those who see the sun.  
 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,  
 and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.  
 Consider the work of God;  
 who can make straight what he has made crooked?  
 -Ecclesiastes 7:11-13

The meaning of an ESE, or the deconstruction of meaning that occurs following an ESE, is not a static thing. Meaning changes over time. For most, the meanings gleaned in an ESE are fundamentally altering on all levels of being. The ways in which meanings are made will be explored here.

*The Shimmering Cathedral*



The Cannabis Church Sanctuary in Denver, Colorado

Prepare yourself you know it's a must  
 Gotta have a friend in Jesus  
 So you know that when you die  
 He's gonna recommend you  
 To the spirit in the sky (spirit in the sky)  
 Oh he'll recommend you to the spirit in the sky  
 That's where you're gonna go when you die (when you die)  
 When you die and they lay you to rest  
 You're gonna go to the place that's the best  
 -"Spirit In the Sky", Norman Greenbaum, released as single, 1969

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...  
 -1 Peter 2:4-5 (NRSV)

ESEs are not easily fit into boxes of definitions. Often, researchers of mystical events try to categorize them into categories that often overlap one another. They are useful, in and of themselves, and we have seen some examples of those categories in some of our descriptions of ESEs in our cartographical journey to this point. But the simple fact of the matter is that ESEs are dealing with realms just beyond understanding and language. At a certain point, language cannot describe the synesthetic experience of the environment, the nighttime visit of the dead and now present spouse, the transformed landscape affected by the Wee Folk of the Forest. The categories and processes that allow us to communicate with other people collapse. Even so, those who are experienced are compelled to share what they have encountered with others.

In 2018, a close friend sent me an ad he had come across on social media. It was for a Johns Hopkins study at their Psychedelics Laboratory. The study sought clergy and spiritual leaders who had no experience with psychedelics. While I have had a lifelong interest in psychedelics and have had numerous mystical experiences, I had never taken them. I filled out the short questionnaire, hit “Submit”, and got a call the very next morning from John, the very friendly administrator for the laboratory. John asked me some more questions and spoke with me for a while. A week later, I was cleared to come down to Johns Hopkins for a full medical exam and psychological profile to get into the study.

This is the chapter in which I share the continuing meaning I am making from my experiences, integrating what has been explored throughout the book. This section will also serve, hopefully, as an example for others in the process of integrating an ESE. It will integrate the entire scope of the book.

- The Shimmering Cathedral
- Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations (IDIC)



- The Personal and The Cosmic

*New Pathways to Christ*



*The Cosmic Christ*, Alex Grey, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, 2000

Watch the mountain turn  
 To dust and glow away  
 Oh Lord, you know there's got to be a better way  
 And the old masquerade is a no soul parade  
 Marchin' through the ruins of time  
 To save us He gave us sweet cherry wine  
 Sweet cherry wine, so very fine  
 Drink it right down  
 Pass it all around  
 So stimulating, so intoxicating  
 Sweet cherry wine  
 Drink it with your brother  
 Trust in one another, yeah, yeah  
 -"Sweet Cherry Wine", Tommy James and The Shondells, *Cellophane Symphony*,  
 1969

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive\* language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

-Colossians 3:8-11 (NRSV)

What would it mean to have our communities of faith begin with where all our faith stories begin - with the Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences of those who founded our faith? And then share and seek our own ESEs, becoming communities of experience, integration, and empathy?

*Clanging Cymbals, Klaxons, and Millstones*



*The Triumph of Death*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1562, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks!

--Matthew 18:6-7 (NRSV)

It would be a mistake to finish an entire book about ESEs and not talk about how they can be misused, either by the experiencer or by those who would take advantage of those who have had an ESE. ESEs have an unusual capacity to self-verify and legitimate the realities that have been exposed by the experience. ESEs have the ability to generate a conviction of ‘absolute truth’ about what has appeared, what has been revealed, and what is meant by the experience. This radical confirmation is very attractive and those who have not had an ESE can be drawn to the beacon of a person who advertises and publicizes their ESE for the purpose of gathering others around ‘their truth’. Likewise, for one who has had an ESE, the strength of the revelation

and the call to action that the meaning of the ESE brings with it can be hard to resist. To believe one is called by God to lead people to whatever ‘promised land’ has been shown the experiencer has a powerful history. Some of that history is inspiring and moving, like the story of Saint Francis of Assisi, or perhaps Saint Joan of Arc. Some of that history can be utterly horrifying and deathly disastrous. The story of the Munster Rebellion, which occurred from 1534-1535, is the tale of a spiraling ESE that turns an entire city into a cult. Executions were common. Many people died from starvation as the surrounding towns attempted to end the cult by a siege.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, we have to rely on the testimony of the experiencer for the veracity of their ESE report. James (Jim) Warren Jones told his congregants he was called by God to lead them to a communal paradise in Guyana. In 1978, 909 people died in the makeshift village called Jonestown. Jim Jones believed the US government was coming to ruin their created paradise and had his followers drink orange Flavor Aid laced with cyanide.

These are extreme examples of the misuse of ESEs. Cults abound around the world. Cult leaders thrive on misusing the ESEs of their followers. We would make a grave error to believe church leaders are immune from this misuse of ESEs.

- Personal Experience with Cults
- Faith, Conspirituality, and Truth
- Care and Sharing of ESEs Without Harming Others

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Carlin’s *Hardcore History* has a 4.5 hour podcast about this event. The research is exceptional. <https://www.dancarlin.com/product/hardcore-history-48-prophets-of-doom/>.





*Christ's Ascension*, William Blake, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK. 1806.

## ASSESSMENT

This project can be assessed according to the completion of chapters, the collection of comments and editing from readers and a professional editor, and word count. According to the scope of the project and the benchmarks described in the Prototype Iteration Project from the fall semester of 2021, my intention was to write at least 40,000 words for the book. My hope was to have at least 4 chapters written. I achieved the 40,000 word mark but have used about 20,000 words for the completion of this project. I have 6 chapters – a forward, an opening chapter, and four introductory chapters to each of the four parts of the book.

Over the course of the last months of 2021, the forward and opening chapter were passed through five readers and a professional editor. One of the readers, who originally agreed to participate, did not participate. The comments required a rewrite of the first chapter. The other four chapters were originally presented as a sermon series on ESEs to my congregation at Rockland Congregational Church. Those sermons were then rewritten for the purposes of this project.

I have put in the appendices of the Project Portfolio comments from readers and notes from the editor. I have also provided a link to my sermon series on ESEs, which the introduction to the four parts of the book are based upon. Likewise, I have provided a few screenshots of the Google Slides outline for the book that I used to present to my working groups throughout the Design and Delivery processes of the D. Min. program.

## PROJECT LAUNCH PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

This project is designed to present the formation of a book about Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs). The context for this book is broad in the sense that it is presenting a pattern and map, or cartography, for how a whole church can talk about ESEs. The context extends beyond church to anyone who has had an ESE or is someone who is attempting to guide and counsel someone through an ESE experience. This project presents the initial writings and outline of the book entitled *The Shimmering Cathedral: Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences and the Meaning We Make of Them*.

### NPO STATEMENT:

***Create a spiritual cartography to guide clergy, professionals, and interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and the subsequent process of making meaning from such experiences, in the context of the Christian commitment.***

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

A book that provides a cartography of the different elements that one might encounter during an ESE, with the intention of helping either an experiencer of ESEs, or helping a spiritual or therapeutic worker to understand the contours of the ESE. How we make meaning of the ESE in a Christian context is explored.



## AUDIENCE

To expand upon the above intention of the book, the intended audience for this work would be, in the broadest sense, anyone who has had an ESE or anyone who is interested in ESEs. More particularly, my hope is that this work will provide at least a two-fold purpose: to provide guidance in safe ways to navigate and open discussions about ESEs in church and faith gatherings, and to provide guidance for spiritual leaders, clergy, and therapists to help them talk with ESE experiencers about what they have encountered. A very specific audience to which this work is also directed is the rapidly growing work in psychedelic research around the world. Many people who have had psychedelic experiences have also had an ESE in the context of their journey. Having a contour map to guide the experienced through a spiritual understanding of what they have experienced is lacking in the community and is much needed.

## DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

### BENCHMARKS TO BE MET:

- Complete remaining chapters of book
- Rebuild Psychedelic Pastor website/blog ([www.psychedelicpastor.com](http://www.psychedelicpastor.com))
- Revise Forward to better reflect intentions of book
- Secure Readers for remaining chapters
  - at least 3, no more than 6
  - Post writing to website/blog for public review
- Secure editor for rest of book
- Create portfolio submission for publishers
- Find conferences and speaking opportunities to share findings from book

- Church/Spirituality conferences
- Psychedelic conferences
- Podcast appearances
- Find a publisher
  - Determine whether publishing house or self-publishing is best route
- Publish book

The Shimmering Cathedral - Project Development Goals					
Action items	Priority	Start date	Due date	Status	Notes
Complete Remaining Chapters		03/01/2022	12/31/2022		
Rebuild Psychedelic Pastor website		02/15/2022	03/01/2022		
Start Discussion Group		03/01/2022	ongoing		
Revise Forward		04/01/2022	05/01/2022		
Secure Readers		04/01/2022			
Secure Editor		04/15/2022			
Create Submission Portfolio for Publishers		06/01/2022	08/01/2022		
Find at least 2 conferences to speak at		02/15/2022	05/01/2022		
Secure Publisher		10/01/2022	01/01/2023		
Publish Book			05/01/2023		

Each of these milestones will be assessed according to, first and foremost, their deadlines and the meeting of said deadline. Any writing will be assessed according to the secured readers and secured editor. For the ongoing parts of the project – website, discussion group, conferences – those will be assessed according to the feedback of the participants. The website will be most difficult to gauge feedback, since numbers of clicks and views are not a good metric of quality for a book project. The website will be subjected to qualitative feedback from selected site visitors, who will look for inviting presentation, format, recent standards, and ease of access. This qualitative sense will also extend to writing as well. Along with readers and editor above, which is focused on the technical as well as quality, chosen readers for the website will be primarily asked to look for quality and readability. The ultimate assessment of the project will be the final product, namely the publication of the hoped-for book, which I hope to have in the hands of a publisher by the summer of 2023.

#### ITERATION PROCESS

Based on the prior process of the entire Doctor of Ministry program, I will implement the ‘crowd-sourcing’ impact of gathering people together to review, discuss, and revise the sections of this book.

By way of accountability, I will have a reserve of readers with whom I hope to set an expectation of a chapter every couple of months or less for them review. I will have an editor who will help me revise and maintain quality over the course of the remaining writing.

By way of maintaining interest and intensive reflection, I will set up a small group at the church I currently serve to read and gather to discuss each chapter as it is completed. This will be less concerned with specific editing concerns and more concerned with generating interest and

discussion in the community. I have yet to decide if this will be online via ZOOM or some other platform (Twitch, YouTube, etc.).

Along similar lines, I will be exhuming and reviving my comatose website and blog at [www.psychedelicpastor.com](http://www.psychedelicpastor.com). I secured this site soon after my Johns Hopkins experiences and it has lain dormant for about 3.5 years.

The ongoing writing process will require reading, research, and gathering of resources to produce a book that adheres to a standard I developed early on in the Doctor of Ministry process for my writing and preaching, which is also very simple:

Is the product Beautiful, Loving, and Meaningful? This is intended to correspond to the Biblical idea of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. The standard is intended to be a quality guide.

## APPENDIX A—MILESTONE 1 THE NPO CHARTER

- **Extraordinary Spiritual Events (ESEs) and The Meaning We Make**
- ***Personal Research Manifesto***
  - My research for this project will be to maintain a rigorous openness to the stories and experiences I collect and adherence to external research and my theological commitments.
- ***NPO Statement***
  - *Create a spiritual cartography to help clergy and other professionals navigate ESEs and the process of making meaning from the experience.*
- ***NPO Scope***
  - The scope of the NPO will be in the light of my personal ESE experiences, while at the same time researching spontaneous ESEs from Christian history, induced ESEs - primarily from the psychedelic world, and collected ESEs from congregation members and members of the surrounding community. The focus will be on the space between the ESE and the meaning made from the ESE, the liminal arena where I believe meaning occurs. I will be examining Biblical ESEs (yet to be determined), descriptions from Christian mystics and their writings, and personal accounts, in conversation with my own ESEs from my participation in the Johns Hopkins Study of Spiritual Leaders and Psilocybin.



○

- A liminal stream at Cascade Falls in Saco, Maine

- ***NPO Context***

- I will be listening and collecting data from people who have had ESEs. I live in the demographically oldest county in the USA, and probably the least churched county in the NorthEast. I will begin with the church I serve, about 70 attending members (avg age 70), then the surrounding community (Rockland has about 6700 people, about 9800 in the county). Beyond that, I have contacts in the psychedelic community that have asked to be regularly updated on this project. Per the NPO Discovery Session, maintaining contact with those in the clergy and mental health community in order to help ‘guardrail’ the conversation will be important.

- ***Root Causes***

- During the Discovery session and the one on one interviews, it became clear that having arenas to dialogue and share about ESEs is very important. Along with that, developing a language to converse with the unusual landscape of these experiences would be very helpful. In my Discovery session, *cultural resistance* became a primary concern/cause.

This is double-sided: in the world of science and psychology, psychedelic experience in particular is front-page news every week. The avenues for dialogue and engagement are expanding rapidly. Then there are those who are entering into this dialogue for the first time and bring with them cultural attitudes of the past. Navigating this will be important, particularly for the ‘churched’.

- Many, many people have ESEs; some people have multiple ESEs. Conversing about these, from the world of clergy and mental health, without concern for diagnosis or spiritual malaise on the one hand, and at the same time discerning the spiritual and personal importance, in terms of spiritual and mental health, of the ESE will be a tight-wire act I look forward to.

- ***Discovery Session Stakeholders***

- Neurologist
- Retired woman with childhood ESE
- Yoga teacher/spiritual direction trainer
- Musician
- Woman with ongoing ESE
- Life coach with numerous ESEs

- ***One-on-One Interviews***

- Person with many ESEs
- Former coordinator of Johns Hopkins Psychedelics Lab
- CEO for multi-pronged foundation

- ***Academic Resources***

- Key fields
  - Scientific psychedelic studies, podcasts and articles
    - Podcasts: Psychedelics Today, Entheogenic Revolution, MAPS podcast
  - Mystical history of Christian faith
    - Particularly early Church Fathers and Mothers, Celtic Christian history, and medieval and modern mystics
  - Books and articles in the area of depth and archetypal psychology
  - Liminal studies and religious history studies, particularly in unusual experiences and movements
  - Podcasts: Weird Studies, Stuff You Should You Know, Rune Soup.
- Discovery Session Description
  - We gathered at 9:30am on Saturday, October 19th. There were snacks and coffee! Six people gathered together. I had seven on the list, but the seventh was sick on that morning. I introduced everyone to each other as they arrived, rather than going around the room to share introductions.
  - I started the session at 9:40am. I began by explaining what Portland Seminary was looking for in this process and that it was intended to help focus my project. I brought the book 'Being Wrong' and discussed blind spots and biases in the process.
  - Then I described the background that led up to the choice of my topic/theme - Extraordinary Spiritual Events/Experiences and Meaning-making. I spent a while describing my experience with the Johns Hopkins Psychedelic Study for Clergy that I was part of in 2018/2019. Then I expanded the background to ESEs more generally.
  - We followed the process described in the DMIN 750 NPO Discovery Session document.
    - The 'discovery' of who the Audience is for this project was insightful. Going into this, I had not given much thought to who would most benefit from the work I will be doing. The stakeholders came up with 28 different groups of people. We were able to group them under about 5 categories or so.

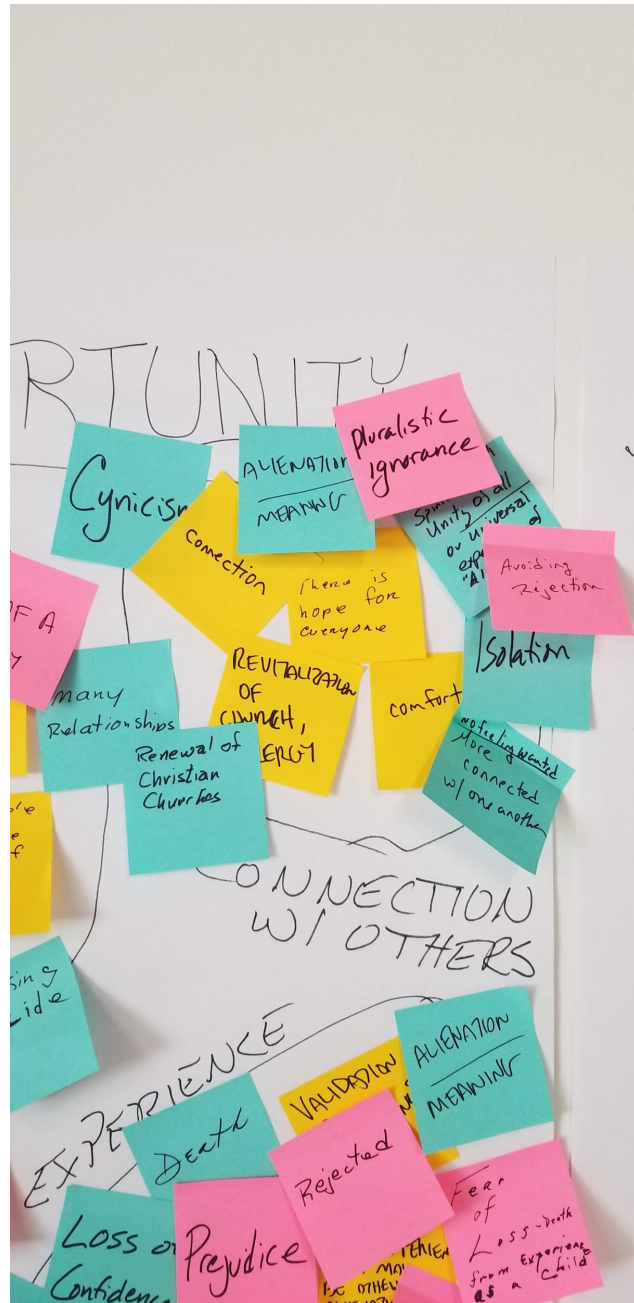






■ Connection with Others

- The 'pain points' or symptoms here were
  - Pluralistic ignorance
  - Avoiding rejection



## ■ Cultural Resistance

- The 'pain points' or symptoms here were
  - The addiction crisis
  - Bias
  - "Drugs"
  - Lack of knowledge
  - Scientific materialism

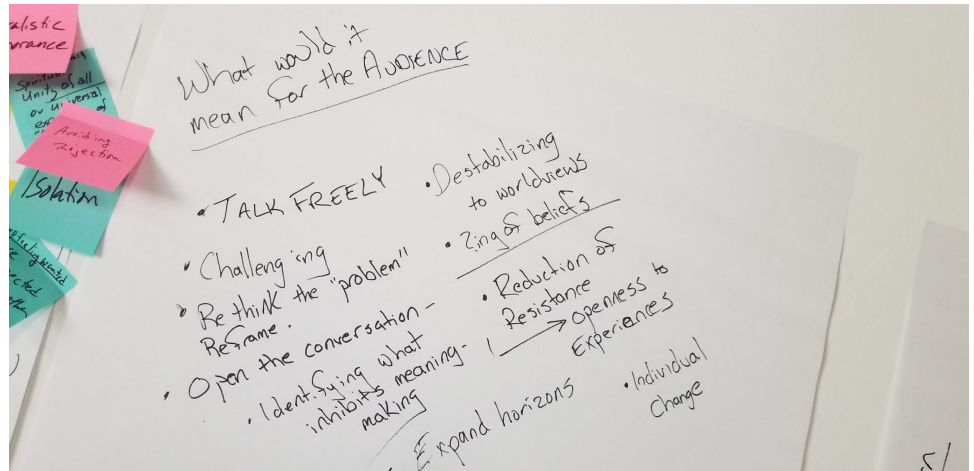
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- As in, rejection, fear, death, prejudice, etc
- The 'pain points' or symptoms here were
  - Rejection
  - Prejudice
  - Fear of loss
  - Not knowing
  - Other opinions
  - Need to fit in

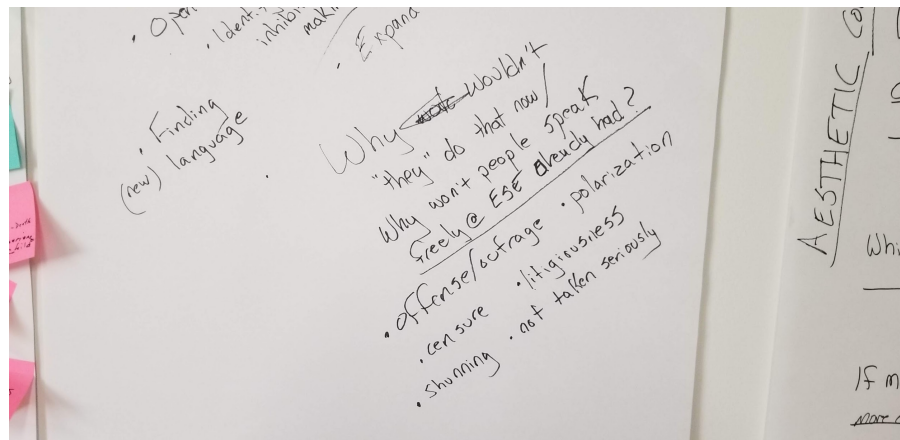


- We discussed what it would mean for the Audience of clergy and mental health professionals to take seriously ESEs.
  - It would mean
    - People could talk freely
    - Be challenged
    - Be able to open a conversation about ESEs
    - Destabilized worldviews
    - Questioning of beliefs
    - Reduction of resistance in the community
    - Identifying what inhibits meaning-making
    - Expanded horizons
    - Individual change and transformation



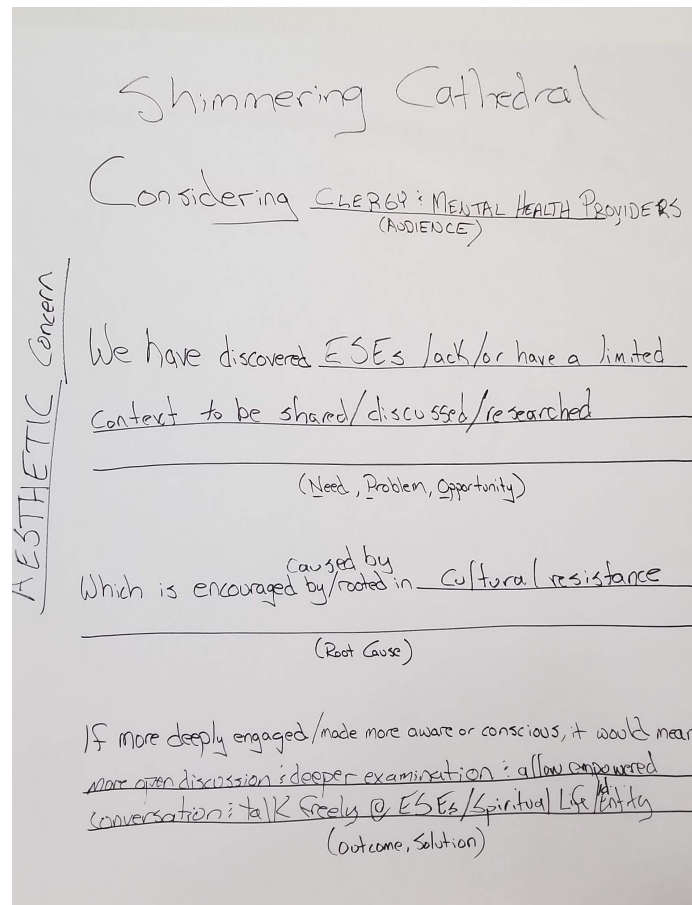


- As to why clergy and mental health professionals wouldn't be speaking freely about ESEs already, we came up with
  - Offense and outrage, especially around destabilized worldviews and the question of beliefs
  - The present polarization in the culture
  - Censure
  - Litigiousness
  - Being shunned, especially in the mental health community with the implication that ESEs may not be a sign of mental illness or imbalance
  - ESEs aren't taken seriously



- The group felt we had dealt with the feelings and emotions around the issue and so we moved on to the Discovery Statement
- Discovery Statement
  - Considering *clergy and mental health professionals* (Are you including spiritual directors under clergy?)
  - We have discovered that ESEs lack/or have a limited context to be shared/discussed/ and researched
  - Which is caused by **rooted in** cultural resistance

- If more **deeply engaged/addressed**, it would mean *more open discussion and deeper examination which would allow empowered conversation to talk freely about ESEs and our identity as Christians.*



- 
- Key Insights from Discovery Session
  - I found this process to be fascinating and insightful. I was most surprised by several directions this went:
    - I was surprised that Mental Health Professionals were a primary audience. Clergy weren't nearly as much of a surprise.
      - One person suggested *humanity* as the audience, and I had to suggest a little more focus. (Good call)
    - I was particularly surprised how much attention Cultural Resistance became a theme or symptom surrounding the discussion of ESEs.
    - By the end, what really stood out for me is that people, or at least the people I asked to be a part of this session - all of whom had significant ESEs in their background, were exceptionally desirous of a language, a way, or an avenue to discuss their experiences in a way that was empowering and welcomed and able to communicate across subjective boundaries.

- This has altered my original vision of the project in the sense of how it is focused and the outcome I wish to see from it. It also re-affirmed for me that I am onto something very interesting, strange and difficult to talk about. Which I like. (Looks like it served its purpose. Excellent!)
- I have a concern that I have not really tied in well with theological worldviews and faith. I am assuming the focus is itself theologically and spiritually inclined.
  - I am also not trying to prove something here, but instead to create a kind of spiritual topography of ESEs and the reality(ies) they are pointing toward. (So you aren't dealing with ESEs and any proposed truth claim associated with it/them?)



- Discovery session participants
  - 80 year old neurologist who works with veterans and PTSD. Grandmother appeared to him the night she died on the other side of the country.
  - 75 year old woman with a high school education. Life long resident of Rockland. Met angelic being on a path when she was 13 years old who erased her fear of death.
  - 58 year old yoga teacher/prison educator/recovery professional/spiritual direction trainer. Has many ayahuasca experiences. A published author on alternative approaches to recovery.
  - 72 year old musician who is very open to unusual spiritual experiences. One of my greatest advocates in the church I serve.
  - 52 year old woman who lives in a haunted house.
  - 53 year old woman who has many ESEs throughout her life. Abuse survivor and life coach who specializes in trauma and recovering from difficult life experiences.
- One-on-One Interviews
  - 50 year old woman who has many ESEs, primarily one with Mother Mary that changed her life. Also deeply 'experienced' with psychedelics and is in training to become a guide for those undergoing a psychedelic journey.



- 30 year old man who was the coordinator at the Johns Hopkins Psychedelics Lab during my time with the study. He is now studying neurology to receive an MD.
- 38 year old man who is the CEO for a foundation that funds projects in psychedelic studies, dying well, permaculture, and prison reform. Recently helped localize access for peyote for the Navajo by buying up several thousand acres around the reservation.
- One-on-One Interview Discoveries
  - F F - 10/30/19, Wednesday, 1pm
    - With what do you agree?
      - Agree with the focus and all of the ideas around it
      - Chapter or two on integration and professionals knowing how to discern around ESEs
        - Professionals knowing how to be with somebody during and after an ESE
      - Think of this as a 1st book? It is a wide-open field
        - Overview book that touches on the different things
        - *Frame for book - Pre-Experience/Experience/Integration*
          - *As structure for meaning-making*
    - With what do you disagree?
      - Need for community and community building through the discussion and sharing of ESEs.
        - Wasn't brought up in discussion
        - Fruitful experiences that demand sharing, need to be regarded as holy.
        - A way to champion each other
    - What is missing?
      - Book rec - Jordan Peterson *Maps of Meaning*, but be careful of becoming inaccessible in writing this
      - Get a group going? Role-play listening and presence and show up
        - Community piece
        - How-to piece
      - Training in how to make space for meaning-making
        - A framework for meaning-making within the context of church
          - Gateways rather than barriers to meaning
          - Possible Title
            - "Suffer the Healing"
  - J C - November 7, 2019 - 4pm - 4:55pm
    - Impressions
      - Confused by Themes section

- Connections with others facilitated by psych...
- Pain points - confusion
- Cultural resistance
  - Helping with addiction crisis
  - Relationships
- Basic and practical useful statement
- With what do you agree? Why?
  - Agree with the audience, esp within the confines of my background and where I will be applying
    - Expand to multiple faiths
  - Mental Health professionals
    - What kind would be a good question here?
  - Well targeted audiences, esp within Disc Stmt
    - Cultural resistance is a good one
    - JC has noticed openness in society
    - What are the incentives to discuss these things?
      - Illegality
    - How to talk about the experience without getting into diagnosis.
  - Spiritual emergency and spiritual crisis - through Stan Grof
- With what do you disagree? Why?
  - Disagree that ESEs aren't taken seriously
    - No way to talk about it
    - Sometimes there is no language to talk about these things
  - Underlying assumptions
    - All this stuff could undermine faith rather than build it up
    - Esp as related to my personal experience
    - Me - is the risk worth it? Can't predict what direction all these experiences go in.
- What is missing?
  - Cartography metaphor is very useful
  - Analogies and metaphor are the best way to talk about all these things
  - Nothing really missing
- Good place to begin
- C S - Founder and CEO of RiverStyx Foundation - Nov 22 - 1pm
  - Scale down definition of ESEs
  - What do you agree with?
    - Fascinating and timely.
      - Epistimology and phenomenon

- Metaphysical
- Boundary places between psychedelics and ESEs, like ESP.
  - Within psychedelic experience can be extraordinarily spiritual that is very real
  - Tailored to person and what they are looking for can only be explained by intelligence or being
    - Is it psyche or in the substance or God?
    - Or is it all psychological and neurological?
    - The reification of subjective experience
- Placement into the material world
  - Enhanced abilities
  - Tests for that- personally getting into tricky territory
- Group experiences
  - Native American church - shared communal experience
  - Liminal territory - somehow conviction beyond real
    - Extraordinary in seeing things OF this world
      - Energetic movement and essence of materiality
  - Closed eye, vs. open eye experiences
- Western loss of container and frame for understanding of ESEs
  - Going down to SA to take ayahuasca
- JH Experience is unique and can frame this very well
  - Context can help a great deal with the direction
  - Will ground this in a way that others can't

## APPENDIX B—MILESTONE 2 NPO TOPIC EXPERTISE ESSAY

### SECTION 1: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences in the Biblical World**

Extraordinary Spiritual Events (hereafter, ESEs) are experiences which put us into direct contact with the divine and impact the lives of those who experience them. ESEs carry their own meaning, and at the same time require the experiencer to make meaning of the ESE. The Bible is rich with ESEs, and Scripture provides maps for making meaning of ESEs. ESEs demand meaning, but the pathways to meaning are slippery, ethereal, as if we are looking ‘through a glass darkly’ (1 Cor 13:12). Meanings change over time, in different contexts. This project explores 4 ESEs in Scripture: Moses and the Burning Bush (Ex 3-4), Ezekiel’s Initiation Vision (Ez 1-3), The Transfiguration (Mt 17), and Peter’s Trance Vision (Ac 10).

The mark of verisimilitude in any ESE is not a simple gathering of evidence, or even repeatability, but the perceived encounter with the “really real”<sup>1</sup>. This project takes ESEs seriously and seeks to create a map of the ESE.

Paradox abounds, however. ESEs demand a universal, transpersonal, meaning, and that meaning is obscured, murky, elusive, and shifting. Even so, identifying the pattern of ESEs in Scripture will help us create a map of meaning-making as a foundation for ESEs beyond Scripture. Studying the pattern of how the Bible treats ESEs will help give insight into how we make sense of ESEs.

In Scripture, ESEs follow this pattern. ESEs are:

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<sup>1</sup> Richards, William A, *Sacred Knowledge : Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 11.

1. Contextualized, usually within a liminal space (the **Set and Setting**)
2. Experienced or encountered directly (the **Appearance**)
3. Made meaningful, and/or authoritative (the **Revelation**)
4. Shared with others, which is part of the meaning-making process (the **Disclosure**).

When we encounter an ESE story, there are variations in the pattern. While many ESEs will follow the pattern, some will combine aspects, such as the Appearance and the Revelation, as Ezekiel's Vision. Or some may 'short-circuit' the process, as in The Transfiguration, where the Disclosure is delayed until after the Resurrection.

The desire is to understand and map the strange contours of the landscape of the ESE. In this section, we will examine how these stories fit the pattern of an ESE.

## **Textual Discussions**

### *SET AND SETTING*

Where and when an ESE takes place is an essential aspect of the entire event. ESEs often occur in liminal spaces, spaces which are beyond, between, or removed from the normal passage of people and time. The key element to liminality as both a location and an experience is that it is defined by change and transition. Liminal spaces are defined by the transitions and changes which occur within and as a result of being within them. "It is via the liminal that persons and groups are taken apart, recomposed, and regenerated"<sup>2</sup>.

Moses encounters the Burning Bush *beyond* the wilderness (Ex 3:1), and at the base of the mountain of God, Horeb. Moses is a creature of the in-between from his birth to his death.

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38. <sup>2</sup> Thomassen, Bjørn, *Liminality and the Modern: Living through the In-between*, Ashgate Publishing, 2014,

Here, in the liminal wilderness, his life is utterly altered. The Set and Setting define the space for change.

Ezekiel's ESE is defined first and foremost by *time* as a setting (Ez 1:1a). The space is a communally defined liminal space of exile. Ezekiel's ESE occurs by a river, a recurring liminal theme throughout Scripture (Ez 1:1b).

The Transfiguration is a definitive ESE in the Synoptic Gospels. Here, the Set and Setting is defined by *time* - six days later, and by *space* - a high mountain (Mt 17:1). One of the effects of an ESE is the dissolution of time, or, in the Christian sense, an encounter with the eternal and infinite. The liminality of the ESE becomes immeasurable and perhaps even incommunicable.

Peter's ESE in Acts 10 is a complex story of intertwining visions and synchronicities. Focusing just on Peter, his Set and Setting is on a roof in the town of Joppa at high noon (Ac 10:9). The middle of the day is, in this case, defining for its 'in-between-ness' and liminality. The roof is set apart and above, like the mountain in the Transfiguration. As with Ezekiel, the heavens open for Peter in his trance (Ez 1:1; Ac 10:11).

Set and Setting encompasses the context of feelings, tradition, culture, and personal state of mind and body when the ESE occurs. The Set and Setting can, in some sense, be controlled or planned, but it is almost always concurrent with a liminal time and space. While Set and Setting do not determine the ESE experience, Set and Setting deeply influence the experience.

### *APPEARANCE*

An ESE is made extraordinary because the event transcends the ordinary. In Scripture, we are dealing with encounters with the Divine God of our faith and God's holy messengers, or with the demonic, as in Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The identity of the being(s) encountered may not be revealed immediately in the ESE. This is why Appearance is separated

from Revelation, though sometimes they occur simultaneously, as in Ezekiel's Vision. I use Appearance here to mean anything that shows up that does not yet have meaning or understanding to establish the origin or purpose. Once meaning and understanding of purpose are presented, the Appearance becomes Revelation.

For Moses, the Appearance occurs with a flame of fire out of a bush; "...it was blazing but not consumed" (Ex 3:2). The reader receives the Revelation that this is an Angel of the Lord, but it is not clear that Moses knows this, since God first reveals who God is in 3:6 after Moses' interrogation.

Ezekiel seems to not know that he is encountering a vision of the Lord until he perceives a "likeness of a bow on a rainy day. This was the **appearance of the likeness** of the glory of the Lord" (Ez 1:28). The Appearance of the Lord in Ezekiel is continually referred to as *likeness*. This Hebraism of doubling "appearance" with "likeness" is a clue that we are dealing with a powerful ESE.

On the mountain with Jesus and the disciples, the Appearance is a sort of multiplication of emissaries of the Divine. Jesus appears engulfed in light, and then in the presence of Moses and Elijah. A quality of the Appearance is a deep knowing of who is being encountered. Names are not spoken at the Transfiguration, but it is intuitively understood that the 'true prophets' of the faith are present in Moses and Elijah. In this case, the Appearance seems to elide with the Revelation of the ESE.

For Peter, we do not get an entity or person in the Appearance. Instead, what appears for Peter is "something like a sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners" (Ac 10:11). The trance state can access the bizarre, and the appearance of the bizarre and strange is an indicator of the realm of the ESE.

The Appearance stage is simply the showing up of the entity or experience. There may or may not be any ability to know who or what is being encountered in the ESE, and all the experiencer may know at this point is that something beyond the ordinary is happening.

### *REVELATION*

In an ESE, until something is communicated in some way, there is very little information about who or what is being encountered. Revelation is when the entity, event, or encounter tells the experiencer who or what is going on and who is being encountered.

In Moses' case, there are multiple revelations that lead to a deeper understanding of to whom he is speaking. In 3:6, the Lord reveals the Lord's generational authority. Verse 3:14 is the primary Revelation of Moses' ESE. The Lord reveals the Lord's name to Moses - "I am that which I am", or, as translated by Rabbi Isaac, "I am now what I always was and always will be"<sup>3</sup>. This is a moment of profound power. "The holy name of God contains power and embraces the secret laws and harmonious order which pervade and govern all existence"<sup>4</sup>.

Ezekiel, like Moses, receives multiple Revelations of who he is dealing with in his extended vision. But the Revelation of why the Lord has contacted Ezekiel is made clear in Ez 3:4-5. Ezekiel is to speak God's very words to the House of Israel.

At the Transfiguration, the Appearance and the Revelation elide. The seeing of Jesus lit up and hovering with Moses and Elijah is the Revelation. What appears to the disciples is the

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<sup>3</sup> Kooten, Geurt Hendrik Van. *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity. Themes in Biblical Narrative* ; v. 9. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006.,7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 3.



Revelation. “In a general way, therefore, one may say that the ascent of Jesus and the disciples to the ‘high mountain’ has as its goal an encounter with the divine”<sup>5</sup>.

Peter does not fully encounter the Revelation until he is at Cornelius’ home. Prior to the coalescence of synchronicities, Peter is puzzled (Ac 10:17). While it is not explicit, it is implied that Peter comes to a clear understanding of his vision when he discloses his interpretation with Cornelius, saying, “I truly understand that God has shown no partiality...” (Ac 10:34). Here, the Revelation elides with the Disclosure.

The Revelation is often the unveiling of the purpose or the command or the identity of the ESE. As with all aspects of the ESE, one aspect may flow into the other. Much meaning can be communicated in the Revelation, but more often the Revelation provides the bridge to the making of meaning.

### *DISCLOSURE*

Making meaning of an ESE is often a long-term effort. The extraordinariness of the experience, in conjunction with the weirdness of the Divine, does not lend itself to quick interpretations. ESEs are, finally, communal. Meaning cannot be made until the ESE is shared with others. This engagement with the community is called The Disclosure.

Moses didn't disclose his ESE until Exodus 4:28, when he told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the elders of the Hebrew people and disclosed the Revelations of the Lord to them.

Ezekiel’s Disclosure is presumed in our example from Ez 1-3. He is to go tell the house of Israel what he has encountered. But there is an interesting element in the Disclosure with

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<sup>5</sup> Puig I Tàrrach, Armand. "The Glory on the Mountain: The Episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus." *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 2 (2012): 162.

Ezekiel. Writing may be the primary form of Disclosure for Ezekiel. Meaning is made when the community encounters Ezekiel's text about an ESE. Per Ellen Davis, "the prophetic medium is actually the text itself...The ability of Ezekiel to manipulate words in order to convey meaning has been recognized quite rarely, (but is one of the singular most important features of the book...)"<sup>6</sup>.

In the Transfiguration, the Disclosure is delayed. "...Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (Mt 17:9). It may be that no meaning can be made of the Transfiguration until it is understood in the context of the 'super-ESE' of the Resurrection.

Peter's Disclosure of his ESE is mentioned above.

Meaning-making is fluid, slippery. The entire story of the Hebrew people from Exodus to Zechariah could be seen as a working out of the meaning of God's Revelation to Moses of "I am that I am". As followers of Jesus, we are still working out the meaning of the Resurrection, communally and personally. The Disclosure is the open-ended process that seeks meaning across time and place, providing a foundation for repeated engagement with the original ESE, in storytelling, in written word, or in study.

### **Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments**

Our map-building of the ESE landscape is the exploration of the contours of consciousness and our engagement with the divine and mystical. ESEs are dynamic, profound experiences which reorient our awareness, spirituality and perception. At the same time, they are beyond the ordinary. Categories fail rapidly in our study of ESEs. The goal in this exploration is

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<sup>6</sup> Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel. William A Tooman and Michael A Lyons, eds. James Clarke & Co. 2010, 113-4.

not so much to define and confine the ESE experience into a singular pattern, as much as it is to learn to track them through the atmosphere of our lives, to listen to the ESE for signs of the presence of the divine, the eternal, and the inexplicable in this world.

While the worlds we are exploring are not well-mapped, there are people who have traversed the landscapes before us. Christian mystics from the faith realm. From the scientific realm, researchers in psychedelic substances provide rough maps. The realm of social sciences provides touchstones in the study of liminality. And there is a sub-genre of researchers into the weird and bizarre who will be most helpful in our exploration.

## Section 2: Topic History and Key Voices

### **A Brief History of Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences**

*And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions (ESV, Joel 2:28).*

#### *Definitions*

In December of 2018 and January of 2019, I participated in a study of psilocybin-facilitated mystical experiences, sponsored by the Psychedelics Research Lab at Johns Hopkins University. Psilocybin “is a naturally occurring [psychedelic prodrug](#) compound produced by more than [200 species](#) of [mushrooms](#), collectively known as [psilocybin mushrooms](#).”<sup>7</sup> The phrase, Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs), is how I describe my encounters with entities, realities, and alternative avenues of thinking and reflection that arose from my experiences with high-dose psilocybin.

ESEs are described in several alternative ways in the world of sociology, psychology, and theology. William James called them *anomalous experiences* in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In the realm of psychedelic research, the phrase used is simply *mystical experiences*. And in a niche of Transpersonal Psychology, there is research in *extraordinary human experiences (EHEs)*.

For our purposes, Transpersonal Psychology has a helpful definition. EHEs, Extraordinary *Human* Experiences, are described “as unusual and ‘deviate from ordinary experience or from the usually accepted explanations of reality according to Western mainstream science’”<sup>8</sup>. This definition encompasses a wide variety of experiences - mystical/unitive states of mind, encounters with disincarnate and non-corporeal beings, Near-Death Experiences, peak and

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<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psilocybin>

<sup>8</sup> Tassell-Matamua, Natasha A, and Karen E Frewin. "Psycho-spiritual Transformation after an Exceptional Human Experience." *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 21, no. 4 (2019): 237-58. pg 237.

exceptional performance occurrences, healings, profound dissociative experiences and the sense of desolation<sup>9</sup>.

In this project, my interest is in the spiritual aspects of these events. While there is much overlap in the interests of Transpersonal Psychology and this project, we will focus on the spiritual contours and pathways that arise as a result of the extraordinary experience. This demands a working definition of the word, “Spiritual” (a difficult word to define in any study).

“Spiritual”, for the purposes of this study, means anything *relating to, consisting of, or influencing the spirit and the supernatural, which directly or indirectly affects the soul*<sup>10</sup>. This project therefore presumes the existence of a reality that is beyond and/or inclusive of the material, observable world we appear to occupy. Our focus will be Christian and monotheistic, while recognizing and respecting the reality of ESEs throughout all belief systems.

#### *A Timeless Engagement*

ESEs are common throughout history, civilizations, and cultures. ESEs do not discriminate between belief systems, class alignments, locality, sex, age, or any other designation. The vast majority of ESEs are individual encounters, though there are significant records of events involving groups of people, such as one of the appearances of the Virgin Mary at Fatima in Portugal, or the Marian encounters in Medjugorje, Herzegovina.

ESEs, when disclosed, or shared with the community, are usually absorbed into the lexicon of external verifications of the spiritual claims of that particular community and tradition. ESEs are legitimated by the witness to the experience, her transformation as a result of the

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* pg 238

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/spiritual>, modified

experience, and the meaning ascribed by the witness and the community in dialogue with one another.

### **Historical Overview**

Establishing an historical overview of ESEs presents some difficulties. There is an arbitrariness to the history, since ESEs are ubiquitous throughout history. The church, from very early on, distinguished between what it called Public Revelation, the disclosure of visions and visitations by way of Scripture, which ended with the visions given to St. John in the writing of the Book of Revelation, and Private Revelation, which are visions and visitations that come upon individuals at any given time after the completion of Scripture as we understand it. ESEs mostly fall under the latter category beyond the witness of Scripture.

Throughout Christian history, there have been greater or lesser acknowledgements of these Private Revelations. Throughout much of the history of the Catholic Church, private revelations were considered to be a kind of folk religion that buttressed the public and expressed theology of the church. Private revelation could lead a person to act in ways that deepened their personal connection to the greater church. The Catholic Catechism clarifies the nature of private revelation in this way: “Throughout the ages, there have been so-called ‘private’ revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church... It is not their role to complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “The Message of Fatima: Theological Commentary”, 2000. Accessed 4/16/2020.  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html)

With the Protestant Reformation, Private revelation was considered to be heresy of the highest order. ESEs were primarily construed to be the work of Satan, or at best, a distraction from a deep adherence to the Bible.

Unfortunately for the church on this side of Heaven, ESEs have happened, are happening, and will continue to happen. The goal, therefore, of this project is to try to develop an understanding of ESEs in such a way that we, as leaders of the church, can better communicate with the ESEs of those whom we lead, and to provide a topography of ESEs that allows us to see some of the shapes and contours of the landscape of the ethereal realities, entities and spaces many of us have traversed in our lives of faith.

Historically, saints and mystics in the history of Christianity have been the locus of ESE stories. With the modern era, ESEs became recognized in academic study, beginning with William James in 1902, the publication year of his lectures entitled *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

### *Saints and Mystics*

Writing about the experiences of saints and mystics is fraught with difficulty, since much of the biographical knowledge we have of most saints and mystics, even up into the modern age, is in the literary form of *hagiography*. Hagiography is the genre of literature which was used to show that a saint was justified in being named a saint within the canon of the church. The saint's story was adorned with symbolic experiences, dramatic conversions, often accompanied by visitations and visions, devotion to a teacher, examples of exceptional wisdom, and the likely

performance of several miracles either during the life of the saint, or following death, when the saint would appear to the sick or the needy<sup>12</sup>.

Hagiography notwithstanding, one of the goals of this project is to take the experience of ESEs seriously. Throughout the history of the Christian faith we have examples of ESEs which are seen as confirming the holiness of the one who has experienced them.

An ESE confirming holiness comes from the life of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1224), from his last years of life. Francis had a habit of praying in a cave near La Verna. Sometimes he would pray for many hours and one of the brothers would bring him water and bread in the cave. Then, on September 14, 1224, according to witnesses and Francis himself, a seraph with a flame in the image of the Crucified Christ descended on Francis. When the flame lifted, Francis was imprinted with the wounds of Christ in his palms and his feet. Many saw this as a testifying experience to the holiness of Francis, but Francis was embarrassed and ashamed of his wounds, feeling he did not deserve such a 'gift' and focused attention on him rather than Christ. The pain from the wounds was great, and they stayed with him to his death on October 4, 1226<sup>13</sup>.

The Order of Friars Minor and the Poor Clares received this ESE as a clarifying confirmation of the rightness of their commitment to Christ. If the leader of their order was worthy of the stigmata, then the Orders were certainly blessed by God to continue beyond Francis' death. The stigmata was one of the miracles which the church used to determine Francis' sainthood, among others. The ESE of St. Francis, his 'private revelation' in La Verna

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<sup>12</sup> Louth, A. (2004). Hagiography. In A. Casiday (Author) & F. Young, L. Ayres, & A. Louth (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (pp. 358-361). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pg 359.

<sup>13</sup> Julien Green. *God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers. 1983. pgs 251-271.



was not considered to be beyond the public revelation of Scripture, but rather a clarifying and confirming experience which supported Scripture.

### *The Modern Era and facilitating ESEs*

One of the most interesting aspects of this project is the lack of information on the structure and experience of the ESE itself. There is a lot of interpretation on the spiritual side, and a lot of research on the medical and psychological side, but very little on what an ESE is structurally. Part of this is because, in the spiritual arena, the focus is on the adherence of the ESE to the doctrines of belief in relation to the community of the experiencer, or the outright rejection, as in the Protestant church, of the experience. In the scientific arena, ESEs are considered, at best, a personal experience that allows for personal reflection, and at worst, an indication of a mental or physical illness or disturbance that demands treatment of some sort.

Both of these approaches clouds the ESE and dismisses the experiencer. When taken seriously, ESEs point to underlying aspects of our perceived reality and experience that suggest a vast world of potential knowing and knowledge, and a far more complex expression of consciousness than we thought possible.

## **Key Voices**

### *William James and The Religious Experience*

William James (1842-1910) is considered to be the “Father of modern psychology” and is one of the great American thinkers of the 19th century. In his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James explores the nature and categories of mystical experience. In both observation and study, James provided a foundation upon which all future study of mystical and ‘anomalous experience’ would be built.

*The Varieties of Religious Experience* sought to elucidate the depths of spiritual experiences, particularly mystical experiences. This led James to believe the material world floated on a superstructure of spiritual reality(ies) which could be perceived and experienced by way of the mystical and transcendental. “The whole universe of concrete objects, as we know them, swims...in a wider and higher universe of abstract ideas, that lend it its significance. As time, space, and the ether soak through all things so (we feel) do abstract and essential goodness, beauty, strength, significance, justice, soak through all things good, strong, significant, and just.”<sup>14</sup>

Later in his life, James became increasingly interested in psychic phenomena and spiritual experiences<sup>15</sup>. He would occasionally seek to facilitate ESEs by inhaling nitrous oxide and then documenting his experiences, since “the most curious proofs of the existence of such an undifferentiated sense of reality ... are found in experiences of hallucination”<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature; Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*. New York: The Modern Library, 1994. pg 64.

<sup>15</sup> Phil Ford and JF Martel, hosts, “Doomed to Enchantment: The Psychical Research of William James”. *Weird Studies Podcast*, Episode 44, April 9, 2019. Accessed 11/15/2019, <https://www.weirdstudies.com/44>.

<sup>16</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; 67

James tells us in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that the mystical experience, the ESE, is, according to his research and accumulation of stories of mystical encounters, perceived as an encounter with a profound and unassailable reality. These experiences

“are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are. One may be entirely without them (the experiences)...but if you do have them, and have them at all strongly, the probability is that you cannot help regarding them as genuine perceptions of truth, as revelations of a kind of reality which no adverse argument...can expel from your belief.”<sup>17</sup>

James’ research provided the justifying foundations for research into the effects of certain substances on spiritual understanding and the facilitation of mystical experience. While mind-altering substances like peyote, mescaline, psilocybin containing mushrooms, and other naturally occurring plant based medicines have been used for millennia by indigenous groups for initiation and shamanic rites, they had not been explored in any research context in the West. James provided a foundation for this research which led to the deepening and expanding study of psychedelic substances beginning in the 1940s.

#### *Psychedelics and Researching the Mystical*

In 1943, a Swiss research scientist named Albert Hofmann discovered the wild and untamed effects of a substance called lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD. Upon his discovery of the substance, Hoffmann forgot about what he had created, came back a few years later, and

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 83. Parentheses are mine.

accidentally got some LSD on his fingers, which absorbed into his system. This triggered a mild experience, which influenced Hoffmann to take 250 mg of the substance the following day. This triggered a 12 hour journey, which blossomed while on a bicycle ride. That day, April 19, 1943, has been called in some communities “Bicycle Day”.<sup>18</sup>

Within a few years of Hoffman’s discovery, research studies began around the world to try and apply the experiences of psychedelics to the problems of addiction, depression, schizophrenia, and other conditions. By the 1960s, all manner of psychedelic substances - LSD, magic mushrooms, DMT, ayahuasca, peyote - were in the population freely and abundantly. By 1970, for various reasons, psychedelic substances came to represent an existential threat to the country, and President Nixon assigned them Class 1 status, the highest felony criminal status for drugs. Overnight, psychedelics went from a freely accessible consciousness raising substance with profound avenues of mental health research to an illegal drug.

*Walter Pahnke, William Richards, Roland Griffiths, and Mary Cosimano*

In the 21st century, the presence of Roland Griffiths and William Richards, co-researchers at the Johns Hopkins Psychedelic Research Unit, looms large. Griffiths began research into psilocybin as a substance for healing mental illnesses and addiction in 2000, 30 years after psychedelics were ‘undergrounded’ as Class 1 illicit drugs. Since that time, psychedelic research has exploded into the culture, such that now, there are numerous studies on the impact of psychedelics in many different arenas of medicine.

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<sup>18</sup> Albert Hoffman, *LSD, My Problem Child*. The Psychedelic Library. Accessed 4/16/2020. <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/child1.htm>.

One of the primary areas of interest of Griffiths and Richards is the ability of psychedelic substances to facilitate mystical states that have tangible and life-altering effects upon those who participate in their use. Griffiths and Richards designed their study of facilitated mystical experiences on the work of Walter Pahnke, a PhD researcher at Harvard University who worked closely with Timothy Leary and was also William Richards best friend.

Pahnke is responsible for what is known as the Marsh Chapel Experiment, which took place on Good Friday, 1962, at Marsh Chapel at Boston University. The experiment was overseen by Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (Ram Dass). Before the service, at which Rev. Howard Thurman preached, 20 theology students were given a capsule, 10 of whom received psilocybin and 10 a placebo. Pahnke followed up with all the students and found that many of the participants who were given psilocybin had mystical experiences that, upon follow up, were also life changing.<sup>19</sup> One of the key people who was a participant in this experiment was Huston Smith, whose work in world religions and Christianity was deeply influenced by his participation in the study.

Griffiths and Richards have replicated the findings of the Marsh Chapel experiment in studies that occurred at the Johns Hopkins lab in 2002, 2006, and 2011. Most recently, and relevant to this project, they have attempted to recreate a variation of the Marsh Chapel study focused on Religious Leaders.<sup>20</sup> I had the privilege of participating in this study as one of 24 religious leaders who qualified. There were two sessions, overseen by the researchers and with

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<sup>19</sup> Doblin, Rick. 1991. "Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment': A Long Term Follow-Up and Methodological Critique." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* Vol 23, #1. pg 1.

<sup>20</sup> Clinical Trials.Gov. "Effects of Psilocybin-facilitated Experience on the Psychology and Effectiveness of Professional Leaders in Religion". Accessed 4/16/2020. <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT02243813>.

guides who were present during the 6.5 hour experiences. William Richards, who has a long history in psychedelic research, and Mary Cosimano, who is a social worker who has worked with the Johns Hopkins lab since its inception, were my guides.

The history of psychedelic research and the findings of these studies, particularly in their consistent mapping of the characteristics of the mystical experience, will play a large role in our understanding of ESEs. At the same time, it is the intention of this project to extend beyond the clinical aspects of these studies and into the theological implications for the follower of Jesus Christ.

### *Modern Religious Studies*

This project assumes that the nature and experience of ESEs are valid and profound opportunities to understand more deeply the contours and foundations of our faith. The focus is expansive and also peculiar, especially with the addition of psychedelics research. Understanding ESEs draws on multiple disciplines - religious history, indigenous practices, liturgy, social science, theology, semiotics, pop culture, neuroscience, and medical research. An area that has defied scholarship until recently, however, is the realm of the weird and the anomalous, even though the weird and the anomalous is the realm where ESEs occur.

We cannot talk about ESEs without talking about the paranormal. The paranormal is a broad category of experiences and actions which involves everything from ghosts to extrasensory perception to seances to clairvoyance to UFO encounters to Bigfoot sightings, not to mention Marian visions, angelic visitations, and messages from God. For many years, the study of the worldview, experience and structure of the paranormal was relegated to the fringe. It is interesting, however, that some of the most influential thinkers in religious studies and

psychology were drawn more and more into the paranormal and the weird as they delved further into their studies, William James and Carl Jung, to name two.

In the modern era, two authors who have taken on the task of making sense of the weird and paranormal, and the meaning that arises from the strange and fantastic, are Dr. Jeffrey Kripal and Dr. Diane Pasulka.

Dr. Kripal is a teacher in Religious Studies and has done significant research into the realms of the paranormal and the “Super Natural”, as he calls it. Kripal focuses much of his research on ‘comparative mysticism’. His focus is on Indian religious and mystic movements and on the peculiarities of the weird, such as the life and research of Charles Fort, who researched anomalous events around the world, and Jacques Vallee, a modern Renaissance man who created the internet and is a UFO researcher, as well as a venture capitalist.

Kripal believes we are at least two beings - a human functioning in a material space with material reactions, and a being who is connected up to the ‘hyperdimensional’<sup>21</sup>. In other words, we are designed to function in multiple realities, and the world we live in now is often at the expense of other realities that are also available to us. We come into contact with these other realities by way of anomalous events, or ESEs.

We have, according to Kripal and others, flipped things around with regard to how we perceive the world. Modern science has framed things in such a way that our brains are producers of experience. This is why ESEs are disregarded or relegated to mental illness,

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<sup>21</sup> Strieber, Whitley and Kripal, Jeffrey. *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2016. pgs 48-49.

chemistry abnormalities, or drug interactions, or any other material explanation. ESEs are, according to our present models, literally ‘all inside your head’.

Kripal, however, asserts that our brains and bodies are in fact highly sensitized and profoundly nuanced receivers of experience and information<sup>22</sup>. We are like walking antennae for the spiritual, the noetic, and the weird. We are essentially designed to be receivers of the spiritual for the sake of the spiritual. We are meant to be witnesses to the divine.

Diane Pasulka is a former student of Jeffrey Kripal and her focus is on the development of new religions and the structure of belief. Her focus is on alternative religious movements and the influence of technology upon those movements. Her book, *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology*, is an exploration of this focus.

Pasulka sees the ‘contact event’ as a defining feature of the apparent development of UFO communities as religious phenomena. This is important for this project because Pasulka is tracking the structure and nature of ESEs and the influence of these encounters. “In the history of religions, a contact event is followed by a series of interpretations, and these are followed by the creation of institutions. Such interpretive communities are often called religions or religious denominations. Institutions have a stake in how the original contact event is interpreted”<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pgs 51-54.

<sup>23</sup> D.W. Pasulka. *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2019. pg 12.



Pasulka's analytic approach to understanding the contact event, or ESE, and the relationship to the interpretive community provides some essential guidance in understanding how an ESE is received by a faith community.

### *Liminality*

As was mentioned in Section 1, the spatial elements of ESEs are very important. Where an ESE occurs is almost as informative as the ESE itself. By 'where' we mean both an actual 'where' as well as a psychic or psychological 'where'. The spaces where ESEs occur are called 'liminal spaces' or 'the liminal'. The liminal consists of spaces, "moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to novelty, imagination, construction, and destruction."<sup>24</sup> Conceptually, liminality has drawn a lot of attention over the past 65-75 years. The understanding of the liminal comes from several different fields - the study of folklore (by way of Arnold van Gennep, the grandfather of liminal studies, in his work *The Rites of Passage*, 1909), the study of indigenous cultures (by way of Victor Turner, a British anthropologist, whose writings culminated in *The Anthropology of Experience*, 1986), and the study of social science (by way of Bjorn Thomassen, a social scientist and anthropologist in Denmark, who wrote *Liminality and the Modern*, 2014).

A concrete example of liminal space is a wetlands or diverted stream in a river. These swampy, watery, stagnating areas are actually playgrounds of all kinds of constructive and deconstructive activity in the flotsam and jetsam of a waterway. Things rot, grow, expand, dissolve, and consume other rotting and growing things in these tributary areas. They are liminal spaces because what defines a liminal space is any space where transition and change is taking

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<sup>24</sup> Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living through the In-between*. pg 1. Thomassen is my primary reference for the history of liminal studies.

place. If change and transition are not taking place, then the space is not a liminal space. “If it is not about transition, it is not about liminality.”<sup>25, 26</sup>

A key to understanding liminal spaces is also where much misunderstanding about liminality occurs. Meaning is not made in liminal space. Transition, change, deconstruction of meaning, shifting symbologies are all characteristics of liminal spaces, but meaning is only made once we move out of liminality and back into a consensus reality where what has been discovered in the liminal space is now shared within the community of shared symbols and ideas. Only then is meaning made of what has occurred in the liminal. Many understandings of liminality have a presumption of meaning being made in such spaces, but this is not how meaning-making works.

This is best seen in cultures with strong rites of transition within the stages of life. Shamanic and indigenous cultures have powerful and facilitated rites which often require the ingestion of psychedelic substances, or rituals that stress the body to such a point that the mind and soul are opened to ESEs. In these cultures, liminality becomes ritualized as a container for the extraordinary encounter. This is because rituals and liminality are “essentially linked to processes of differentiation”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, pg 15.

<sup>26</sup> see Appendix 1

<sup>27</sup> Thomassen, pg 26

The liminal plays a large role in this project, since ESEs often occur in unusual or removed spaces. An excellent example of the impact of liminal spaces is the story of St. Francis of Assisi's ESE at the chapel of San Damiano:

One day when *he went out to meditate in the fields*, he walked near the church of San Damiano, which was threatening to collapse because of age. Impelled by the Spirit, he went inside to pray. Prostrate before an image of the Crucified, he was filled with no little consolation as he prayed. When his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross he heard in a marvelous way with his bodily ears a voice coming from that cross, telling him three times: "Francis, go, rebuild my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed!"<sup>28</sup>

This ESE occurs while Francis is alone, at an abandoned and ruined church outside the town of San Damiano. The church of San Damiano is clearly a liminal space which allows for Francis' ESE to occur - removed from the town, in ruins, alone. While in prayer, the cross speaks to Francis. The full meaning of the auditory and visual appearance does not become clear to Francis until he gathers a community to help him rebuild San Damiano. Only later does Francis realize Christ meant Francis and his friends to rebuild the church throughout the world. This ESE is the beginning of the creation of the second largest monastic order in the Catholic tradition.

### Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion

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<sup>28</sup> Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. *The Legends and Sermons about St Francis: The Minor Legend*. Commission on Franciscan Intellectual Tradition. Accessed 4/15/2020. <https://franciscantradition.org/francis-of-assisi-early-documents/the-founder/the-legends-and-sermons-about-saint-francis-by-bonaventure-of-bagnoregio/the-minor-legend/1775-fa-ed-2-page-686>.

*Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. (Acts 10:9b-10)*

This project makes several claims about ESEs.

First, ESEs are foundational to the understanding of Scripture and the stories and beliefs expressed by both the words written and the interpretations of the community of faith. From the Christian point of view, Jesus' resurrection is the pinnacle of ESEs for the disciples and therefore for us who claim to follow Jesus.

The second claim is broader. ESEs are 'real' in the phenomenological, epistemological, and even ontological understanding of those who have had them. This claim demands we take ESEs seriously as an avenue of expression through which God and Christ make themselves known to us. 'Real' here is meant in the sense of Paul Tillich, "that there may actually be a 'really real God'. ... there is good reason to affirm that there is indeed an eternal dimension of awareness deep in the core of the human mind where creativity, love, and beauty reign supreme."<sup>29</sup>

Between the serious consideration of ESEs in the realm of psychedelic research, fringe consciousness studies (ideas now mainstreaming into the culture), and the rare but present examination of ESEs in Scripture itself, there is currently no bridge connecting the two disciplines. How shall the Christian pastor understand the ESE a congregant brings to her in a personal meeting? How shall a Christian understand the ESE he has experienced, which seems to

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<sup>29</sup> Richards, pg 11

throw his entire faith into question? This project seeks to create a topographic map of ESEs in order to bridge that gap.

We, therefore, will be working in a relatively uncharted region of study in this project. There is a large liminal space where the ESE meets the faith, in experience and in interpretation and in literature and academic writing. This means going into realms of study that have been maligned and forced to the fringes for many years.

As we see in the Key Voices above, facilitated ESEs are the most vibrant landscape from which we can draw indicators for the landscape of ESEs relative to the faith. At the same time, the Biblical witness is rich with ESEs. We have explored only four Biblical ESEs in this paper, but Scripture is rife with ESEs from beginning to end.

As with any research topic, there are landmines buried within the premises made. One is the danger of taking ESEs so seriously to the exclusion of delusion and mental illness. What constitutes a serious and 'legitimate' ESE? Does the faith tradition (Christian or otherwise) have any guardrails in place to prevent driving off the cliff and giving credence where help is instead required? Have the guardrails narrowed the road so much that valid ESEs are no longer accepted?

Another danger is filling in the liminal space this project asks us to enter with personal wishes and opinion rather than voices beyond the personal. Admittedly, this project makes another claim that was not mentioned above: that, at the level of the ESE, the division between the subjective and objective becomes a meaningless interpretive device. The flow between the universal and the personal, as shown time and again in psychedelic research studies, is indistinguishable. Does this have meaning for us in our exploration of ESEs and therefore our understanding of Scripture?

Historically, we may be picking up pre-Enlightenment ideas about the self and our relationship to the Divine in asking these questions. The liminal space in which the ESE and the research into them takes place does not respond well to objective analysis, and at the same time, liminality creates a perspective of reality that allows for alternative ways of seeing and hearing. Or to put it another way, prior to the Enlightenment, the self was understood to be a receiver of spiritual and divine experience, rather than a producer of such experiences. If we are receivers, primarily, how does such an understanding of self and awareness alter our reading and hearing of Scripture, the faith, and the tradition?

The contours of ESEs are multivalent and are also omnipresent throughout belief systems and human history. This provides a wealth of experience to draw from, but it also is overwhelming and almost unmanageable. Do I draw from UFO experiencers to help map this out and correlate those experiences to Scriptural reference points (per Elijah being transported via chariot from the earth)? Or do I consider the spiritual conclusions drawn from Spiritualists who contacted spirits in seances (as did William James, who granted validity to some of their ESEs)? Do I limit my focus to my own experience and thereby risk subjectivizing my reading of Scripture and the arena I am interested in? Or will I fall prey to the academic relativizing that happens when objectivity is sought at the expense of personal experience?

The study of ESEs is slippery and elusive. ESEs do not allow for conclusive statements. They do, however, allow for and even welcome deep exploration, even with no promise of anything resembling answers. May the Holy Spirit be a profound guide in this research, such that what is in the heart of God be honored and what is revealed to our hearts be met with humility and possibility.

## APPENDIX C—MILESTONE 3 DESIGN WORKSHOP REPORT

### WORKSHOP REPORT

#### NPO STATEMENT

*Create a spiritual cartography to guide interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and the process of making meaning from such experiences, in the context of Christian commitment.*

#### NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

The nature of the ESE means the subject slips and slides into many places at once, and so the difficulty of maintaining boundaries for the subject is a little difficult. The non-negotiables are that ESEs have innate value, demand meaning, and alter consensus reality, thereby influencing worldview and faith. The boundary, or container, is Christian mysticism. This represents a cost. ESEs not only slip the boundaries of consensus reality, but also transcend particular religions and spiritual movements. The cost is that the audience for this project may be limited to the echo chamber of Christian thinkers and writers.

#### NPO CONTEXT

The ministry setting will be primarily the local church, where the individual has a safe space to express their ESE. The clergy/spiritual leader has a language provided by this project and thus a sense of the landscape in order to talk with the individual, creating space for contemplation and reflection. The community then has the ability to share their ESE, which is where meaning gets made. Denominationally, some mainline denominations will resist even giving credence to ESEs. In others, such as charismatic denominations, providing language and

contours to ESEs will overcome uncritical acceptance of such experiences. Within my denomination, Congregationalism, we will be dealing with the generational aspects of those who are 55 and over. I propose, however, that people of any age will be drawn into following Jesus at the level of the experiential, and particularly those experiences which are extraordinarily spiritual.

## ROOT CAUSES

Creating arenas to dialogue and share about ESEs is very important and developing a language to converse within the unusual landscape of these experiences will be very helpful. From the Discovery session, *cultural resistance* was a primary concern/cause. However, what came out in the Design workshop and the 1x1 interviews was that this project is intersecting things that no one has really discussed. The ESE is a realm of study which draws from many disciplines and rapidly moves beyond the merely subjective. I find this exciting.

Many people have ESEs; some people have multiple ESEs. Conversing about these, finding language beyond mere diagnosis or spiritual malaise and discerning the spiritual and personal importance of the ESE, in terms of spiritual and mental health, will be a distinct element of the project, given the lack of engagement around ESEs within the Christian context.

## THREE BIG IDEAS

1. Develop a workbook that helps people integrate ESEs into their lives
2. Write a book that facilitates language and communication between Christian faith and ESEs
3. Create a podcast that explores ESEs and faith.



## DEFINITION OF 'DONE'

The goal of the NPO is to have a cartography which describes the landscape of the ESE, from the moment of experience to the meaning-making after the ESE.

## 3 NAPKIN PITCHES

### Napkin Pitch 1

- *Big Idea:* A book that initiates and stimulates dialogue between ESEs and the Christian/spiritual community.
- *Audience:* The audience will be the Christian/spiritual community and the ESE community, which includes the scientific, mental health, and academic community.
- *NPO:* There is currently no language around ESEs and the process of making meaning of them in the Christian/spiritual community.
- *Benefit:* The reader would benefit from acknowledging the intrinsic value of the ESE. The author would benefit by the creative expression of his personal ESE shared with others.
- *Approach:* The approach broadens the context of the personal ESE, making the ESE a communal event, rather than personal. This potentially reintegrates the ESE into an indigenous understanding.
- *Risks.* Failure lies in rejection by scientific and spiritual communities, because it is too subjective, too exclusionary in Christian focus, and too outside traditional thinking.

- *Assumptions/hypotheses to test:* The assumption is that this book will be helpful in navigating the ESE experience. There should be some conformity with the ‘map’ and the experience.
- *Benchmarks of success:* The best benchmark of success would be the testimony of the reader relative to their ESE and how this work has helped them integrate their experience in conversation with the community.

*Other Approaches:* There is only one other book I know of even remotely addressing this subject, from an historical perspective. This work is unique in the direction of addressing faith and experience.

#### Napkin Pitch 2

- *Big Idea:* A workbook or app designed to help people integrate their ESE into their daily life, particularly around significant life experiences.
- *Audience:* Anyone who has had an ESE, or who is helping someone understand an ESE.
- *NPO:* Helps the person create their own language around the ESE and help them understand the changes that come about as a result from the ESE.
- *Benefit:* The user would benefit by the experience of making meaning through the workbook. The author would benefit by knowing that individual responsibility is being taken to make meaning.
- *Approach:* The approach provides integration through multiple situations and can be tailored to different life events.

- *Risks.* The process is not taken seriously, rejected because of cultural sense of ‘being crazy’. Failure to identify target audience.
- *Assumptions/hypotheses to test:* The assumption is that integration of ESEs is something that people want to do and are interested in doing so.
- *Benchmarks of success:* If an app, success could be easily measured by number of downloads. Providing a channel for feedback in the workbook/app would give clues to the value of the work.

*Other Approaches:* The psychedelic community has integration workbooks, as does the job search community. This is novel in that it deals with ESEs.

### Napkin Pitch 3

- *Big Idea:* A podcast that focuses on ESEs from a Christian perspective.
- *Audience:* Christians who have experienced ESEs, disaffected Christians, ESE experiencers, and the spiritually curious.
- *NPO:* This project would provide a channel for meaning-making around ESEs.
- *Benefit:* Both user and creator would benefit by generating a growing community of shared experience.
- *Approach:* The need is met by the podcast community and platform. All podcasts are determined by the individual take on a particular topic, as this would be.
- *Risks.* This could fail because of market saturation of podcasts, lack of interest, or simply the challenge of talking about faith, especially to unchurched or dechurched.
- *Assumptions/hypotheses to test:* The main test would be interest in the subject itself and if people are willing to participate.

- *Benchmarks of success*: Of all the projects, this one is easiest to track potential success. Tracking downloads and listener statistics would provide clear information of success.

*Other Approaches*: There are many, many Christian podcasts. There are quite a few podcasts on the strange, on psychedelics, and spirituality. I have not really come across one that deals with ESEs and Christianity directly.

#### DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

1. Student of the paranormal
2. Drug/alcohol counselor, spiritual director trainer
3. Congregational minister, D. Min in church dysfunction
4. Life coach and ESE experiencer
5. ESE experiencer

#### ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

1. Former professor of world religions and mysticism
2. Rabbi of local synagogue
3. Podcaster of weird things, filmmaker
4. Podcaster of weird things, professor of music history

#### 3–5 KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS

1. Moses and the Burning Bush - Exodus 3-4
2. Ezekiel's Initiating Vision - Ezekiel 1-3

3. The Transfiguration - Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 9
4. Peter's Trance and Synchronicities - Acts 10

### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Głaz, Stanisław. "Characteristics of Extraordinary Religious Phenomena Accompanying the Christian Religious Experience—Reflection." *Religions* (Basel, Switzerland ) 5, no. 4 (2014): 1146-160.

This article takes seriously the various mystical experiences of the “Christian Religious Experience”. The article claims that the spiritual experiences of the newer generations are far more interested in the spiritual encounter and experience, and are drawn by the personal experience and the claims of those experiences in others. The author seeks to create a sort of loose taxonomy of extraordinary spiritual phenomena.

The author is a professor of Cultural Studies at the Jesuit Academy Ignatianum, Krakow, Poland, and has been widely quoted by scientific researchers of religious phenomena. The author is clearly well-versed in Christian experience and theology, and occupies an unusual cross-over point between the devout encounter and the scientific/academic study of those encounters.

The intended audience is primarily researchers of religion and a call to take these phenomena seriously.

I find this work valuable because it seeks to understand, in a very broad sense the styles and structures of specific extraordinary phenomena in the religious and spiritual experience.

Masters, Robert E. L., and Houston, Jean. *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*. 1st Ed.]. ed. Delta Book. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

This book seeks to outline the contours of various experiences specifically related to the LSD experience. It takes a cue from William James' book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and the echo of the title is intentional in that it seeks to describe religious phenomena and the resultant changes in worldview and psyche that occur as a result of such experiences.

Dr. Jean Houston and her husband, Dr. Robert Masters, were at the forefront of psychedelic research and the human potential movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Houston has influenced many researchers and thinkers, including Joseph Campbell and Hillary Clinton. They created the Foundation for Mind Research.

This book is focused on the recurring themes of the psychedelic experience and how those experiences can facilitate mystical, spiritual, and active life changes. The work of Houston and Masters is an outgrowth of the studies of psychedelics across multiple disciplines happening in the 1960s and seeks to legitimize such experiences as intrinsically meaningful and valuable. This book provides an example of a sort of mapping of the extraordinary experience generated through psychedelics, which has a direct correlation to the study of ESEs.

Muraresku, Brian. *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2020.

Muraresku's book is the result of 12 years of research into the sources of Christian communion and religious experience. He makes the radical claim, backed up by archaeological and chemical findings, that early Christians ("paleo-Christians") were primarily influenced by Greek mystery cults and, especially, the psychedelic and mind-altering effects of their initiation rituals. The earliest communion experiences were intentionally psychedelic experiences whereby the worshipers *became* Christ by way of the wine mixture.

Muraresku is a lawyer in Washington, DC, and has cultivated relationships across the scientific and religious research spectrum that have verified his work. He intends his audience to be religious scholars, researchers in religious and mystical phenomena, and the lay person. Muraresku has written a radical, academically shattering work that defies academic traditions, but has pulled in researchers across the spectrum.

This book provides a powerful historical grounding for the validity and influence of the ESE in the earliest days of the Christian faith. This book came out in October of 2020, and upon its release, I immediately contacted the author. We have since developed a friendly relationship.

## Design Workshop APPENDIX A - Workshop Documentation

### Design Workshop Description

We met on Saturday October 24 at 9:30am on ZOOM. All five of the stakeholders were on-time and all were excited to participate. Stakeholders were - Drug and Alcohol counselor and spiritual director (M), close friend with a background in supernatural studies (M), Congregational pastor (M), well-read ESE experiencer (F), life coach (F).

I began with introductions, and then showed a 7 slide presentation on Google Slides outlining the background and focus of the project. I made sure the Need, Problem, Opportunity statement was clear to all. Then I reviewed the ‘games’ we would be playing to brainstorm the 3 project ideas. (Link to slides: <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/16GyGSj3W56MF2mL13Qb5FVa9Na-napQ13clQeOY566c/edit?usp=sharing>)

The first game was a **Pains/Gains Map** to determine aspects of audience. I had the stakeholders fill out a questionnaire before the session and then put answers on a two-columned sheet - a Pains side, and a Gains side. After a discussion, I had everyone vote for the 4 most important Pains and the 4 most important Gains.



The second game was **Spectrum Mapping**, to determine the scale of themes the project is dealing with. I had 5 categories chosen before the session and the group added 3 more. I asked them to fill in the table with whatever came to mind about any or all the categories. This created a table of many topics surrounding each category. Next, the game would have had us all vote on the most important topics in the categories. However, upon seeing the topics, I changed the rules and decided to leave all of them on the table as is. I see this table as providing a kind of ‘Rorschach’ to project onto, or a Gestalt to provide a platform, depending on the direction of one of the projects.

The third game was **The Anti-Problem**, which is designed to break open the project focus and see what comes up from a new perspective. I left the options open for this, but threw out a few suggestions - What would it mean if everyone else were in a liminal space, but you weren’t? Or, what if everyone else has had an ESE, but you have not? This exercise provided the most discussion and about half-way through, turned into a discussion about the dangers, possibilities, and frameworks available for the NPO focus.

After all this, we came up with three interlocking Napkin Pitch projects:

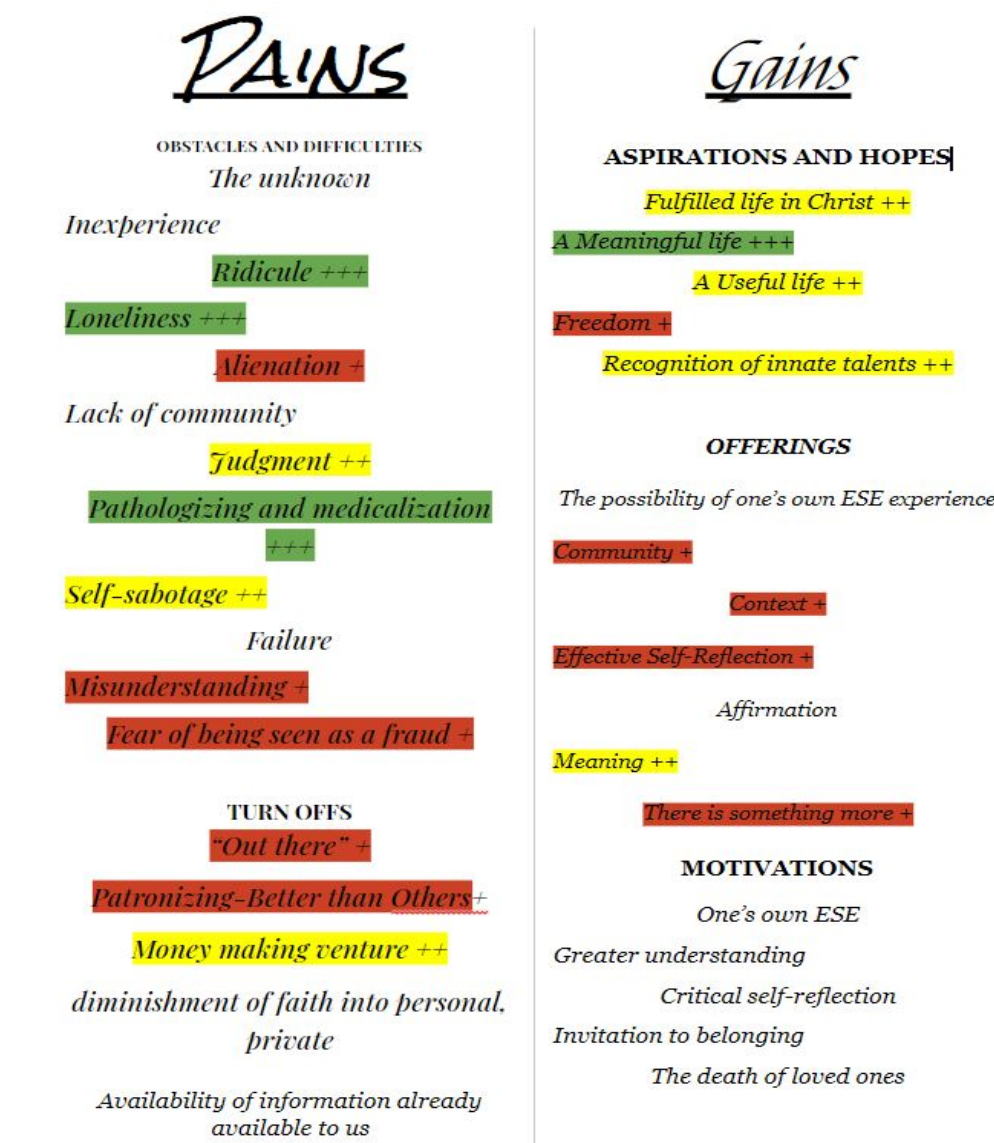
1. A workbook for integrating ESEs.
2. A book that facilitates language and communication between ESEs and Christian faith.
3. A podcast that explores the intersection of Christianity and ESEs.

Assuming 5 is the best possible experience, I give the Design Workshop experience a 4. I didn’t really know what was possible with this approach until I was done with my workshop. If I had a sense of what might come out of this going into it, I might have made some better design

choices. That said, I was impressed with the quality and amount of material that arose from this experience.

## Design Workshop Documentation

*PAINS AND GAINS MAP (Green represents highest vote count - “+”; red the least)*



## SPECTRUM MAPPING EXERCISE

## SPECTRUM MAPPING— What are your perspectives on these points of focus?

Laying on Of hands	Eucharist (trans- mogrification)	tongues	telepathy	Spiritual Experiences	12 Steps	prayer	Silence	Sacred text
meditation	dreams	utterances	prayer		synchronicities	Remote viewing a death	Stillness	Dance
Astral projection		Near death experience	clairaudience		Illness	Medical procedure gone wrong (or "correctly")	Music	
Location of prior crime	Woods	Mountains	uncanny	"Thin" Places	Scotland	my mind	THE TRUTH	hypnagogia
Area 51	Skinwalker Ranch	Abandoned Churches	Places of nature in the early hours of morning		awakening	Falling asleep	hermitage	labyrinths
Geological landmarks	Akashic records	Extreme weather	Places of battle /burials					
Overdose			Ayahuasca	Psychedelics	Scary	A gift from God?	psilocybin	
			DMT		LSD			Iboga
Survivor Of suicide	Assault	flashback (of crime)	Sexual abuse	Trauma	psychoses	psychic wounding	boundary piercing	disembodiment
Childhood traumas	Being able to identify those being abused (uninformed knowing)	Being Gaslit	hospice settings		Mind control			
Faerie (eldritch experiences)	Demons (entities/possess ion)	UFOs	cryptozoology	Other Realities	Afterlife	premonitions	Missing time	Assistance/advice from the dead
Visitation from the dead								

Meditation	Self reflection/insigh t			therapeutic	12 Steps			
	embodiment exercises	yoga	Somatic arts		active listening	Art therapy	ART	Music
Intentional communion with strangers	Eucharist celebration	Agape	fellowship	Community	sangha	sacred mirroring	Spiritual direction	
Eucharist		one with Christ		Christianity	healing	Resurrection	Radical Path	
		Mushrooms on architecture in churches and chapels	early church psychedelic use? (Brian Muraresku)					

*ANTI-PROBLEM EXERCISE*

# Anti-Problem

What would be our concerns if the focus of this project were  
exactly the opposite?

What if everyone else is in a liminal space but you are not?

Why am I not in a liminal space?

What is wrong with me?

If you are the only one not in the liminal space, you would be the one  
in the liminal space.

The hyper-materialist rationalist society we are already in is already providing the anti-story.

There is no place for ESEs in the context of spiritual life

Replace *create* with *negate* (as in, rather than a space for creating and relating ESEs, it is a place that negates ESEs)

What if the map/cartography leads out of meaning rather into meaning?

what if there is no map; it is just a grid?

Like the Matrix, or the 13th Floor, or Dark City.

What if maps are inherently anti-liminal?

The map is never the territory.

Maps can reduce phenomena to make it negotiable (unsurprising, safe)

Methodology perhaps rather than cartography?

Sense of exposition with cartography rather than way of  
discovery

Colonizing of the liminal - nothing new is being enacted

*(concern about my personal experience at JH)*

when experience doesn't match the narrative that others are trying to  
impose on the ESE

Danger of mapping rather than open-ended reflection

How to hear - how to mirror - how to reflect on these things

All ESEs lead to one truth; there is only one actual ESE.

One actual ESE "the perennial philosophy" -  
this does violence to personal experience

Privileged Experience

Psychedelics is currently dominated in research and participants by  
white men

Attitude toward ESEs can reinforce traditional roles --

The diminishment of ESEs to the merely experiential, the body or disembodiment,  
importance relative to life, methodology of diagnosis, trauma

***Methodology as framework for flourishing of the individual***

“the interpretive grid” - what is the meta question?

A. of G. - how is my methodology not doing violence to others’ experience

The validation of other perspectives

What is the relationship between the experience and the dominant interpretative grid?

Questions about language, interpretation, meaning, culture

Individualized meaning vs. communal understandings

What if this were about curiosity? Rather than...

Gold mines everywhere, or mine fields everywhere, or they are the same.

Everything is fact-based, data-driven, scientific - this project is the exact opposite.

NAPKIN PITCH WORKSHEET 1

**Proposed NPO:** *Create a spiritual cartography to guide clergy, professionals, and interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and the subsequent process of making meaning from such experiences, in the context of the Christian commitment.*

**Context:** Significant transition - life events - death of loved one, illness, etc.

**Concept:** Workbook designed to track and integrate ESE experiences

WHAT IS THE BIG IDEA?

Workbook to help people discern their own ESE - (integration workbooks for psychedelic experiences)
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

WHO IS IT FOR?	WHAT IS THE NPO?	HOW DOES THE USER BENEFIT?"
People who have had an ESE, or helping someone who has had an ESE		Helps them put meaning to it

"ILLUSTRATE OR DESCRIBE HOW IT WORKS"

<p>For hospice settings</p> <p>Rehab</p> <p>Different workbooks at different settings - Little Ali Inn in New Mexico</p> <p>Resources for others</p> <p>“Steampunk theology” - I like this</p>
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“WHY MIGHT IT FAIL?                      WHAT SPECIFICALLY ARE WE TESTING?    HOW MIGHT WE MEASURE SUCCESS?”

<p>Not taken seriously</p> <p>Distribution problems</p> <p>Finding a target audience</p> <p>“Are you saying I’m crazy?”</p>		<p>Turn it into an app and see how often it is downloaded</p> <p>ESE app</p> <p>*Integration in meaningful ways</p> <p>Reclaim the term extraordinary to apply to themselves as well as their experience</p>
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"WHAT MAKES THIS STAND OUT FROM OTHER APPROACHES?"

It acknowledges the experiences - does what it says it will do and takes the experiences seriously as a way to integrate difficult life experiences



## NAPKIN PITCH WORKSHEET 2

**Proposed NPO:** *Create a spiritual cartography to guide clergy, professionals, and interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and the subsequent process of making meaning from such experiences, in the context of the Christian commitment.*

**Context:** Christian communities and ESE experiencers

**Concept:** Book that connects the two communities

WHAT IS THE BIG IDEA?

A writing/book that stimulates dialogue about ESEs and the Christian community

WHO IS IT FOR?	WHAT IS THE NPO?	HOW DOES THE USER BENEFIT?"
<p>A lot of Xians don't know about the ESEs of other Xians</p> <p>Private</p> <p>Sectarian</p> <p>Would break that open</p>		<p>Acknowledges importance of 'simple' ESEs as being as valuable as 'world-changing' ESEs</p>

"ILLUSTRATE OR DESCRIBE HOW IT WORKS"

Methodology approach
A way to talk about ESEs - broadening the context -
A way to integrate the ESEs into the larger context
Making it a communal event rather than a personal experience
The value of Integration!

“WHY MIGHT IT FAIL? WHAT SPECIFICALLY ARE WE TESTING? HOW MIGHT WE MEASURE SUCCESS?”		
Not taking it seriously Seeing it as exclusionary to inter-faith discussion and denomination		More conversations about ESEs Especially in seminaries Role they have played in Xian history

"WHAT MAKES THIS STAND OUT FROM OTHER APPROACHES?"

Unique to its audience; no one else is working in this ‘mandorla’ between Christian faith, psychedelics, and ESEs

# NAPKIN PITCH WORKSHEET 3

**Proposed NPO:** *Create a spiritual cartography to guide clergy, professionals, and interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and the subsequent process of making meaning from such experiences, in the context of the Christian commitment.*

**Context:** Christian community and ‘weird studies’

**Concept:** Podcast that focuses on ESEs from a Christian perspective

WHAT IS THE BIG IDEA?

Podcast - Christianity and ESEs
“Christian band” example - a podcast about ESEs by people who happen to be Christian, rather than Christian ESEs (difference between Jars of Clay - Xian band - and U2 - a band who also happens to be Christian)
“Normal” conversations about extraordinary things

WHO IS IT FOR?	WHAT IS THE NPO?	HOW DOES THE USER
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BENEFIT?"

Christians		Community of shared experiences
Curious		
Experiencers		
Disaffected Christians		

"ILLUSTRATE OR DESCRIBE HOW IT WORKS"

<p>It's a podcast</p> <p>Conversations and interviews</p> <p>Ground rules for the conversation - cartography and methodology could guide the conversation</p> <p>Each conversation would be a different experience</p>
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“WHY MIGHT IT FAIL? SUCCESS?”	WHAT SPECIFICALLY ARE WE TESTING?	HOW MIGHT WE MEASURE
<p>Lack of interest</p> <p>Market saturation</p> <p>Talking to people about faith period</p>		<p>downloads and listener stats</p>

"WHAT MAKES THIS STAND OUT FROM OTHER APPROACHES?"

hasn't been done

bringing the dialogue of the normal/weird into christianity

### One Page Post Workshop Message To Shareholders

Dear , (sent to all Workshop participants - 10/29/2020)

Thank you so much for joining me on Saturday morning for this Design Workshop. Your input and participation was greatly appreciated and I am impressed with the things that came up and the directions this approach allowed us to go relative to the project focus (Need, Problem, Opportunity statement). The project focus I have proposed is:

*Create a spiritual cartography to guide clergy, professionals, and interested persons as they navigate Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs) and the subsequent process of making meaning from such experiences, in the context of the Christian commitment.*

We did not change that, but I may alter the project focus based on our conversation, particularly with regard to whether ‘cartography’ is less useful than ‘methodology’.

We came up with three ‘big ideas’.

First, an ESE workbook for people who are trying to understand the meaning of their ESE (Extraordinary Spiritual Experience), or help someone understand the ESE in deeper ways. Particularly, the workbook could be tailored to different environments - Rehab clinics, Hospice centers, Counseling, Psychedelic treatments, churches and faith centers. It was pointed out that all these places are potential spaces of liminality, some intentionally so. The finished product would be a published workbook, and success would be measured by the use of the workbook in different capacities. Moreso, success would be determined by the ability of the experiencer to integrate their ESE into their lives.

Second, a book that stimulates and provides ways of developing dialogue around ESEs and the Christian community. This would be a published book which breaks open sectarian and

private understandings of ESEs so that people across denominations and even faith commitments could use to better understand the world of ESEs and how they function. Success here would be, aside from sales, recognition of the value of ESEs in the faith life of church and spiritual community.

Third, a podcast about Christian faith and ESEs. This would involve regular conversations about ESEs, providing a platform of dialogue and validation and intensive questioning and insight into the impact and importance of ESEs. The goal here would be to create a community of people with shared, though quite varied, experiences. Success would be measured by downloads, of course, but more so in the increased exchange of ideas around the unusual and strange aspects of ESEs.

If any of you have any feedback about the session or anything that came to mind following the session, please do not hesitate to contact me via email, text, phone, etc. The goal of this approach to the D. Min. project is to facilitate multiple perspectives on the focus of the project.

Once again, thank you for your willingness to be a part of this work. Your time and presence was a wonderful part of the experience and I was glad to see all of you.

Peace and grace,

Seth

### **One on One Interviews Documentation**

#### **1X1 with Rabbi**

#### **WHAT YOU AGREE WITH/WHAT WORKS**

The importance of location relative to the ESE

Because of what happened there? Or because the location makes the ESE happen?

Re: Hebrew Testament names of places

Project is concerned with the nature of the ESE rather than the 'truth' of the experience

Discussion about focus - multifaith or specific to Christianity

Rabbi says multifaith focus seems more interesting

Examination between differences and similarities in other religions

Spiritual experiences of the indigenous

WHAT YOU DISAGREE WITH/ WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Need to acknowledge, or deal with, the line between ESE and mental health. What is the boundary? What are the spiritual perspectives on mental health?

WHAT IS MISSING?

A language about ESEs that transcends the religious language we put onto the experiences

Connection between location and experiences - difference between human created spaces and natural spaces - is there an innate sacrality to a particular space?

**1X1 with Former World Religions Professor, Consultant for Psychedelic Study**

WHAT YOU AGREE WITH

Approach - phenomenology - Roland Griffiths (JH Psychedelic Lab) trying to describe a certain type of experience

Not doing much to describe qualitative analysis - qualia vs. quanta

This project focuses on qualia

Stay with qualitative - people want to know what it means

Methodology is where questionnaire lies - think it is good

Cartography - be careful to not claim to perfectly map the landscape

Multiple qualitative standards

Book rec: Nelson Pike - **Mystic Union: A Phenomenology of Mystical Union** -

Jesuit priest

Stephen Katz - mediated human experience - used as protection in  
academy

“Perennial Philosophy” - Huston - unity of divine principles mean cross-cultural ESEs

Book rec: **Forgotten Truth**

Cartography around “Kinds of ESEs”

Book rec: **Mysticism and Philosophy** - Stace.

Roland uses this for his typology.

Keating -Book rec: **Cynthia Bergoldt** - Wisdom Jesus -

quasi-gnostic - lays out cartography of wisdom tradition in early Christianity



How do Xian groups who take these experiences seriously judge what is authentic and inauthentic? -

Especially - Quakers, Shakers, Pentecostals.

1986 St Cloud MN - Ben Johnson, Mike Brekke -  
questionnaire 600/2000 claimed ESE

Analysis of results - FIND THIS STUDY

Enlightenment = elitist/ How to overcome this?

Person on the street has no access.

Book could be aimed at average person.

Anchoresses - in Portland ME - Longfellow Square -

How does this tradition fit in?

Changes in behavior - therapeutic value - Roland puts a premium on this.

But Behavior is a by-product of the experience -

WHAT IS THE IMPLICIT VALUE OF THE ESE?

ESE as Self-authenticating truth -

Aesthetic experiences - Medieval religious experience was as much  
aesthetic experience as spiritual

Spiritual Not Religious - premium on personal experience

“I” want to have a personal experience

Questioning of authority Vs. Moral Life

Book rec: Habits of the Heart - Bellah *through vs in spite*

Caused us to feel like we can do it on our own - expertise we don't have

WHAT YOU DISAGREE WITH

Nothing

WHAT IS MISSING

How to speak at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, esp level 1-2

What Color Is Your Parachute - also a workbook -

find other workbooks to help form some ideas on what these should look like

### **1X1 with Filmmaker and podcaster on strange and unusual experiences**

WHAT YOU AGREE WITH

Project made him think of The Cross and The Mushroom

How do we make this part of the life of a faith community? Exciting idea

Right of Exorcism

Rigorous process to be approved for an exorcism-

Miracle process - rigorous process to verify claims

Recommendation - Aliens and Artists - ESE podcast - Stuart Davis

## Mantis entities

Platonic/Patristic fathers of faith - assumed a pluralistic world of many entities.

Encounters with entities were taken seriously.

What does it mean for us?

Realist framework for ESEs(!)

Why question these experiences if those experiences happen? What else do we do that with? Why begin with questioning the ESE?

Xianity is now coming back around to the reality of other realities

Book rec: **Dominion** - Tom Holland -

Xianity preserves knowledge of ancient world

ESE research is acknowledging something that is already happening -

2 sides - bi-polar friend - mental illness and ESEs

How do you maintain consensus reality?

And acknowledge the ESE? And the illness?

Stakes are high. Deny ESEs, then religion becomes fossilized and turned in on itself

Key is all religions are reporting on similar experiences

Jung's distinction between ordinary dreams and big dreams in his biography

God beyond the gods stops human sacrifice

Humans all know that there are transcendental realities

Need to deal with these things as realities - not another therapy book

Hillman - need to read more of him - **Pan and The Nightmare**

#### WHAT YOU DISAGREE WITH

James, Kripal, Jung referenced in Topic Essay -

all assume a set of axioms re ESEs

Also doing same thing - they assume a Big C consciousness

When it comes to ESEs and the desire to default to symbolic - all are equal

Private event interpreted in terms of individual

But there are universal applications to the world, in their particularity and uniqueness

#### WHAT IS MISSING

Nothing missing

#### **1X1 with Podcaster on strange and unusual experiences and PhD in Music**

#### WHAT YOU AGREE WITH

Synchronicity - “A permanent adaptation” to the encounter with the strange and weird

Focus on the Magical

Wizard of EarthSea - Silent wizard who never does magic

Atlas of spiritual states - very interested

Book suggestion - Daniel Ingram - “Mastering the Core Teachings of The  
Buddha”

ESEs are not one-off things - parallels in other traditions -

“Makios” from the Path of Insight - Buddhism

Cartography is a good way of talking about it

Other people have walked this path

“Knowledges of Suffering” - Dark (K)Nights

Connections to mystic Christianity

Appearances - not self-explaining things - take place outside of ready categories

Dreams are a good example

Patreon exchange re: dream about pandemic in Oct 2019 - synchronicity

We are in a species wide initiation now

Religious aspect to what is happening

Instrumentalizing desire

**Sublime Terror** - something so much bigger and older

Disorienting experiences

Self-confirmation aspects of ESEs - certain states of Gnosis -

Philosophy - 'free will/determinism' - certain states of meditation

ESE can render these discussions/paradoxes moot

ESE is not propositional - but a Revelation and Disclosure

Self-validating - "not a fucking opinion" - *radical being unto truth*

Knowing vs. Belief - extinction of fear of death

Challenge to find someone who has had the experience/ who is willing to take it seriously

Richard Baker Roshi - *Enlightenment is an accident and meditation makes you accident prone*

#### WHAT YOU DISAGREE WITH

Methodology issues - reflects a style of thought that you are going to get your theory out of the material presented. A methodological approach puts the cart before the horse.

Mechanistic

#### WHAT IS MISSING

Nothing missing

## APPENDIX D—MILESTONE 4 [DESIGN RESEARCH REPORT] / [PROTOTYPE ITERATION REPORT]

### INTRODUCTION

I chose a different approach than what was prescribed by the documentation. Rather than coming up with different prototypes, I used one and revised it as I interviewed people. I did this because I knew I wanted to write a book. Rather than multiple prototypes, there is one progressive prototype, the final version of which represents the feedback I received.

Since this is the very first time Portland Seminary has implemented this approach, I hope all who review this will respect the intuitive sensibility we, as Doctorate students, bring to our various projects, and that the requirements will be expanded and modified for personal conditions such as what is presented here.

### PROTOTYPE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

- Prototype description.
  - Create an outline of chapters for a book which maps/contours  
Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences (ESEs), meaning-making, and  
following Christ.
- Goldilocks quality strategy.
  - Craft a Google Slide presentation for Zoom interviews that  
walk the shareholder through an outline of the book.
- Research question.
  - Will a book about ESEs be of interest to followers of Jesus and other  
spiritual paths?
- Assessment Benchmark(s).

- I provided an outline to seven people
- Recorded ZOOM interviews with all participants
- Prototype participant demographic description: 25-50 words.
  - 55 year old pastor colleague who leads an online church in California
  - Retired World Religions and Mysticism professor, published author on 20th century mysticism
  - 40 year old New York Times bestselling author on ‘primitive early Christianity’, lawyer, linguist
  - Non-binary student of history, trained EMT, 24 year old
  - 45 year old podcaster, filmmaker, author who specializes in ‘weird studies’
  - 65 year old pastor, author, YouTube online church leader, Near Death Experiencer
  - 42 year old international Israeli consultant, Reiki healer, matchmaker (!)
- Summarize what you learned:
  - What worked?
    - Using Google Slides
    - Including images with the individual slides
    - Descriptions of each chapter
  - What could be improved?
    - Bible references
    - More diversity in “Influences and References” and in interviews
  - What matters to the participants?



- All participants were excited about the topic and interested in the possibilities this book will provide
  - It mattered that this was a cutting edge topic and would be helpful in the small but rapidly expanding world of psychedelic research and chaplaincy
  - The combination of images and songs for each chapter was meaningful to all the participants
- What was your important discovery?
    - The interest level was invigorating. Part of it is who I chose. Part is the topic. All were deeply interested in the outcome of the project. My most important discovery is that there is a deep hunger for information about and around ESEs and meaning-making. Seeing others excited about the project makes me excited about it.

#### MOST VIABLE PROTOTYPE

My most viable (and only) prototype is an outline for a book that provides a cartography of the different elements that one might encounter during an ESE, with the intention of helping either an experiencer of ESEs, or a spiritual or therapeutic understand the contours of the ESE. I went in knowing this would be a book. The feedback I received from my shareholders was exceptional and helpful. In terms of viability, I think of myself as a writer. Even in my position of pastor, I consider my first work as that of a writer. It is my 'gift', and so I want my project to reflect that. In this regard, my gifts and the feedback I have received have affirmed the viability of the project. This is why I have modified the approach to the Prototype assignment.

The topic of ESEs is a point of great interest throughout history, and one that has little serious research behind it, until just a few years ago. Most research is multidisciplinary in approach, especially now. This in no way detracts from the profound contributions from people like William James, Aldous Huxley, and Sir Alistar Hardy. Rigorous academic writing on ESEs is meager, but present with some searching and research. There are a few present-day stand-out authors in the arena - Brian Muraresku, Jeffrey Kripal, Erik Davis, and Diana Pasulka, to name several. Research into ESEs means a large cross-over between popular accounts of high strangeness, sociological, psychological, literary, and scholarly input, and so discernment of what is of value is a high challenge.

Those whom I interviewed had many recommendations for books, videos and articles to read. Their formative feedback was personal and extensive, as you will see in the appendix notes. As a progressive exercise through the semester, I found the process to be engaging, enlightening and exciting.

Here is a link to my Google Slide presentation, which also is the Prototype which will guide my final Project:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/17r62TKbSS3AlQzMa6ySeSs\\_RzePTvtL6MuEuY9IzyKw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/17r62TKbSS3AlQzMa6ySeSs_RzePTvtL6MuEuY9IzyKw/edit?usp=sharing)

## APPENDICES

## STORYBOARDS

## Prototype 1 - ESE Book



### 2 - Create Book Outline

*Provide stakeholders with questions and ask them to share outline of book with others they know and identify interest*



### 1 - Contact

*Email stakeholders identified from networks created over past 1.5 years*



### 3 - Identify Interest

*Provide stakeholders with questions and outline*



### 4 - Reaching Out

*Stakeholders will share outline with others and gauge interest*



### 5 - Share Outcomes


*Gather with stakeholders and share information on what they discovered regarding the interest in the book*



## RECRUITING SCREENER

•

Who do you want to talk to?	What <i>exact criteria</i> will identify the people you want to talk to?	What screening questions will you ask? (Questions shouldn't reveal "right" answers.)
Students of Mysticism from any/all traditions	People who have studied, experienced, or are academically trained in mystical traditions	Do you have experience in a mystical tradition or practice?
Experiencers of ESEs from any/all traditions	People who have had or are influenced by someone else's ESE.	Have you had an Extraordinary Spiritual Experience?

<b>Who do you want to exclude?</b>  	<b>What <i>exact criteria</i> will identify the people you want to exclude?</b>	<b>What screening questions will you ask? (Questions shouldn't reveal "right" answers.)</b>
Those who hold hard materialist perspectives on this subject	Those who identify as Materialists	Do you think it is possible to have a spiritual experience that is not derived from the brain, that transcends the physical?
Those who reject a mystical worldview	Those who reject a mystical worldview	Do you accept the possibility that there might be mystical experiences which point to something beyond material existence?

## INTERVIEW SCRIPT

My interview script followed the trajectory of the Google Slides presentation. I presented each slide, allowed space for question and discussion, then moved on to the next. At several slides, I was open about particular concerns and asked for feedback about those concerns. Likewise, certain concerns were brought up by those whom I interviewed and those were noted and discussed.

As a brief outline, the interviews went like this:

-- Introductions, if required

- Background of project and reasons for doing it
- Permissions - “this is being recorded”, “how much time do you have?”, etc.
- Presentation
- Follow up questions (shown in slide at end of presentation)
- Thank you and ending

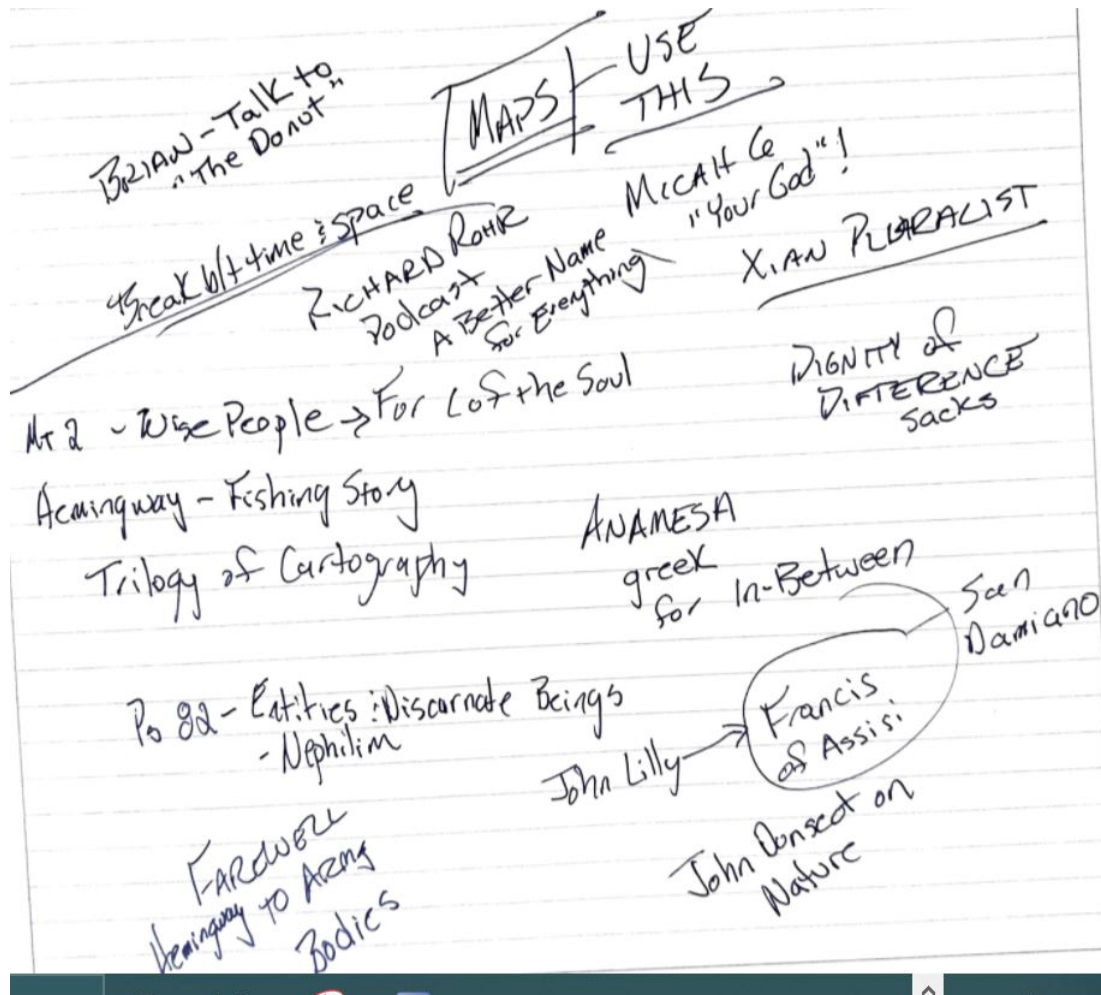
## DOCUMENTATION OF PROTOTYPE

See slide presentation (also linked above)

[\*Spring 2021 Project Prototype 1 - Further Bus Version\*](#)

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW NOTES

## First Interview - ZOOM - Congregational Minister from CA - March 16, 2021



## Second Interview - Author, Professor of World Religions/Mysticism - March 25,

2021

The songs are good. Recognizable everywhere.

Can quote lines from songs, not verses.

Furthur bus - Furthur in quotations. In the Smithsonian, genuine Americana. Not taking people to a specific place. Reference points for the search, not destination places.

Works with SBNR culture

Reveals humility

Mystical pushes woo-woo button. ESE is more popular.

Mystical has sensibility of arcane and secret

Prismatic cathedral

Explain Prolegomenon -

Would it be good to mention someone like Richard Rohr here?

Marjory Kemp was Julian's student

Definitions - stipulative definition "what you mean when you say it", not necessarily academic definition

Cartography - Kabbalah influence? Seeking spiritual Jerusalem

Liminality - space between worlds - the moment of transition. Children's lit - Alice in wonderland, secret garden, Chronicles of Narnia, George MacDonald!!-The Golden Key.

Natural World - Romantic movement - nature as gateway to beyond - John Muir

Christianity - Friedrich paintings - Derrick Jensen -

Places - Buddhism - tirthas - crossings or ford - pilgrimage destinations into another world - people go there to cross over - Tamlin fairy land

Relationships - love, empathy - 'traits matter more than states' Smith Huston - theme that develops throughout book - be explicit about this

Pascal - what is taken in as wisdom is given out as love

The litmus test of whether you got anywhere

GRATITUDE -

Entities and Beings



discomfort with inter-dimensional beings

Sepherot - aeons and archons -

Tibetan book of the dead

Bodies - "The Passion of St Theresa" rather than Ecstasy - Bible verse - Song of

Solomon! - Jung-anima and animus- Johnson "He" and "She" READ THESE

Define difference between Entities and Divine Beings - other beings like us vs unlimited powers

Jung and Hillman look at God as God principle - Joseph Campbell - Masks of God -

Life Beyond Life - Resurrection image works - Die before you die so that when you die you won't die.

Simultaneously re-birth and re-death.

Feelings and Ideas - express this differently - Chopin "caretaker of his talent"-live as long as he could for vessel of music- Intuitive awakening to the noetic - 'genius' related to 'genie' -

Synchronicity - Kismet - June Singer-written a lot on synchronicity - Vallee-book - Kripal

Synch. is a hallmark that you are getting somewhere - esp when they are happening again and again.

Music - the Sufis - trigger for shamanic cultures

mention synesthesia - Mickey Hart-Drumming on the Edge of Magic - Huston Smith friend! - Gyuto Monks

Theologies - experience is always first! A lot of theology is trying to reconcile mystical with everyday. Rumi - for the usual person there is no God for the awakened there is only God.

Ineffability - on some level theology is a poor substitute

Switch Meaning-Making with Theologies

ESE is often self-authenticating - drowning in meaning

Meaning-making comes in with the experience of life itself - Uniqueness of our time-  
 Huxley - greatest invention of scientific revolution is the idea of a working hypothesis - don't  
 have to turn meaning-making into dogma - "my best guess" - The Gospel of Mary M - 'do not  
 make your ideas into a law lest you be constrained by them' - real truth is in the experiential.  
 Always open-ended.

The Shimmering Cathedral -

The Museum of Modern Renaissance in Massachusetts

Mount Abu in India - look for images

“Shared love” rather than empathy!

add in - Page to point out the nature of consciousness is expandable can be deepened and  
 enriched and made more authentic - lantern vs. flashlight - living with mystery

Emphasize more - the dark night of the soul piece - learning to allow for it.

Mirabai Starr - writing about grief -

Songs from a Lead-lined Room

### **Third Interview - Author, Pastor, Near Death Experiencer - March 25, 2021**

"Public Mysticism"

Opportunity to experience the end of duality

Book is a sign of an after-effect -

End of book - the transformation is evident of a new way of doing theology

- reassess relation to the divine

Furthur bus is a very large signal - what is the intent and audience? Tells the reader something happened.

Vulnerable authenticity is what sells today - lay the cards on the table -

Yashanti - Resurrecting Jesus - book

Think about the word "Strange" in the Title

Liminality - shamanism -

Relationships - most important thing is the love that comes out of them - the unifying factor - mystics talk about this all the time - "Love" is the operative word for "God"

Entities - will be a hard chapter - unless people encounter these things it is very difficult for them to accept - "Even Satan can disguise himself as a being of light" also "suffer not a witch or psychic who lives"

Need to deal with what we are encountering in order to handle what we are encountering

Maybe bring the Wolf in - peyote experiences

Divine Beings - Jesus: You are Gods quote -

Mystical vs. Extraordinary Spiritual - thinking into resurrecting old words - mystical -

Spiritually Transformative Experience as another phrase used by woman in Canada

Feelings and Ideas as a whole other book? Way of hearing the divine, so that might be a tie-in

Synchronicities create meaning in hindsight

Jacques Vallee

Theology shattering experiences

Pantageles Suntra - cosmic music -

Book - 75 Trips - LSD and the Mind of the Universe - Professor Richard Bache -

People long for a mystical experience - used to be available for anyone who would make the journey -

Psychedelics change how we make meaning

Ontology of beauty as theme through whole book.

For people who either want or have had ESEs

Book - Bruce Grayson - After

Concern about me and my position and exposure - I did it legally so that helps - using the language of drugs

#### **Fourth Interview - Writer, 'Millennial', non-binary - March 18, 2021**

Change Prolegomenon to Forward

Define words clearly.

Semiotics is impenetrable on purpose

Avoid the rarified air of the tradition

Discussion based rather than thesis based

Brain scan research in children for Liminality chapter

Children's development - JC Pearce

Spaces and Places - jewish idea of naming places

Locational self-fulfilling prophecy

Talmud talks about Nephilim as dragons - concrete beings, not discarnate

St Sebastian for Dobies and the Sensual - how his torture is portrayed as sensual/sexual

Divine Beings - be aware of superiority issues here - 'supercessionist'

Feelings and Ideas - ESEs and intrusive thoughts - neurodivergent brain patterns -  
 phenomenon with OCD and ADHD where anxieties are coming from outside themselves -  
 "someone else's thought" - Art as received - Wrinkle In Time series is about all this READ  
 THEM

Gender and sexuality - have a section in the Bodies portion

Tiresias - writer

Asking people who have had an ESE what they think of those who 'transgress', who are  
 'trans'

Cultures that have multiple genders/sexualities

Terms to define - Mystic as a noun/ Mysticism/ Mystical

Address that I am not differentiating between induced and incidental ESEs - clarify it.

"The Divine Ecstatic" - in Emotions and Feelings - Mary Magdalene and Pentecost -  
 Silence as external - Elijah on the mountaintop - innately internal experienced as external

DON'T BE THE UNBIASED OBSERVER

But address the universality, be inclusive in discussion - acknowledge privileges up front

List all references - men, women, white, vs. other

**Fifth Interview -Bestselling Author on Early Christianity, Lawyer, Linguist -March  
 18, 2021**

I revised the presentation just before this interview. I think that will be my approach from  
 here on out - after each interview put in the new stuff I have received.

On The Road with Seth Jones

Tony Bossis - meaning making - Ted Talk - NYU

The edges of of the construct

Call Lisa Deam to interview

Post modern take on incarnation

Julie Holland - psychiatrist Drs for Cannabis - Good Chemistry-Science of Connection

Open access sanctuaries - Denise Demetriou

Noetic sensibility in Entities

John Mack in Entities along with Strassman

Read DMT The Spirit Molecule

Bodies - Richard Rohr

Intergenerational Trauma - Psychedics - Rahcel Yehuda

John 6:60

Contemplation in action - Mother Teresa - the fruit of love quote

Cynthia B - talk to her

Ilya Delio - same conceptual box

Why do you leave one cult for an even more illegal cult? Maybe community and love of stranger.

They rescue children from hillside.

Caritas - the thing that sets Christianity apart

Anything missed? - Body and sensation chapter - incarnational theology - unique to theology

Rohr - first incarnation - creation - second - Jesus - third - us

Compelling -

Collosians 3:11 - all in all

For the ESE there needs to be a mechanism to make it happen. What is our true nature?

All makes sense if divinity is present in all things.

Western civilization - speak from what you know.

Focusing on ESEs

other peoples - helps universalize the book

USE QUESTIONNAIRE!!

### **Sixth Interview - Podcaster, Writer, Filmmaker, Canadian - April 8, 2021**

John Tenney - paranormal investigator

Faerie story

First nation take

Sleep paralysis - see how your metaphysical assumptions interprets those things

Thomas Ligotti - Dreams of A Mannikin

Clouds are liminal

Meaning-Making - sense-making - what is this? Adam Roberts - Jeremy Johnson

Liminality - The Trickster and the Paranormal - Hanssen

structure and anti-structure -

Thin places - power of locations

Univosity - is-ness

Places -

Mark Fisher Weird and the Eerie - primacy of place

David Bentley Hart essay - Left hand path of decadence -

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/10/angelic-monster>

Entities - Michael Garfield - ontological reality - exist in itself

Divine Beings - Isaac the Syrian - a merciful heart is a heart that burns for all of  
creation...demons - Gods are saved as well - David Tracy-Analogical Imagination - Rahner-  
Anonymous Christian

Interviews with Exorcists - YouTube videos

Bodies -- Hesychastic prayer - uncreated light -

"energies of God" - whole body theosis - erotic side of mysticism - relics - body needs  
to be included

Kripal - Gender and sexuality

Dellieuze - What is Philosophy? Chapter on Art

Jung's essay on Art - On the Relation to Art

Gregory of Nyssa on Time - Augustine on Time

Bergson - Duration vs. Clocktime

Adventure Time -

PKD

von Franz - Matter and Psyche on Synchronicity

Music - Orpheus -

Meaning-Making - Avi-Vipassana video - Integration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=St2LHnUMeSg>

Theologies and Mysticisms - Integration on the communal level

Ontology of Beauty - Jacques Maritain Creative intuition in art and poetry - one of the  
three transcendentals

Matt Carden - dark illumination



**Seventh Interview - Jewish-American Relations consultant, Reiki Healer, Tel Aviv -**

**April 20, 2021**

How do psychedelics have the ability to support mystical experiences?

Liminality - think of absolute presence! Story element.

Children are in liminality.

Natural World - String of connection - nothing is separate - Feel it rather than just believe it

Entities - There is a reality to these beings

Divine - acceptance and respect in a religious context. How do we hold our truth and still offer love and respect?

Bodies - appreciation of body heavily impacted by psych experience - know rather than believe - trauma and how psychedelics support those with trauma

Feelings - Hilda Klint - artist - recently discovered artist - art was mystical and futuristic -

Collective consciousness - "downloads"- connectedness was easier before today -

Time - there is no time -

Synchronicity - higher plane of consciousness and connection with synchronicity - "magic occurs"

Theology - Maimonides

Pathways - Call to Action - "Mission"- Love and compassion as weaved in from the beginning

Conclusion - I want to read this!

## OBSERVATION NOTES

Observational notes are incorporated into notes from interviews.

## APPENDIX E—SUPPLEMENTAL PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

### Visual Outline of *The Shimmering Cathedral*

Screenshots of Google Slides presentation I used with interviews and stakeholders



**Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences  
and the Meaning We Make**

Project Design for 2021  
Doctor of Ministry - Semiotics, Church, and Culture  
Portland Seminary, Portland OR

**The "Furthur Bus" as Model and Metaphor**

In the final outcome of this book, my hope is a kind of travel guide through the landscapes of ESEs which will help experienter and helper (clergy, therapist, spiritual director, friend) integrate the ESE.

ESEs happen in a variety of spaces and environments. Sometimes, the ESE overlays known, consensus reality. Sometimes, the experienter is transported to other landscapes and worlds.

This prototype version of the book, named after Ken Kesey's bus - Furthur - which he used to travel with the Merry Pranksters, is intended to mimic the travelogs of the late 1800s when world travel was becoming a popular exercise for the leisure class. These travelogs would often drift from descriptions of lands and peoples into personal reflections and historical interludes to inform people about the environs they were about to encounter.

**The Vehicle Matters**





**Working Title of the Book**

The Shimmering Cathedral:  
Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences and  
the Meaning We Make -  
Strange Faith and The Foundational  
Experiences of Belief

**Prolegomenon (Forward)**

Title: The Integrity of Clouds  
Subtitle: Are You Experienced? - (Jimi Hendrix)

A discursive introduction to the rest of the work. Unlike a 'normal' introduction, I think of a Prolegomenon as a narrative reflective introduction to the work one is about to read.

Here I would discuss the Johns Hopkins study for clergy I was in as a gestalt for the exploration following the ESEs I had during my two experiences with psilocybin and the effect on my faith life; the value of exploring other realities as a spiritual exercise; and the centrality of the Extraordinary Spiritual Experience in Scripture and the Christian life.

Influences and References: Huston Smith, William James, Eric Davis, Jeffrey Kripal, William Richards, Diana Pasulka, Brian Muraresku, Roland Griffiths, Michael Pollan, Richard Rohr, Matthew Fox, various mystics

**The Extraordinary Spiritual Experience**

Title: Crystal Blue Persuasion - (TJ and the Shondells)

An opening chapter of definitions and defining boundaries of the work.  
Some of the terms to be defined:

Extraordinary	Meaning-Making	Mystic - Noun
Spiritual	Meaning	Mysticism - category
Experience	Supernatural	

Influences and References: Aldous Huxley, Michael Pollan, William Richards, Michael Polanyi, Jeffrey Kripal, Diana Pasulka, Erik Davis, Huston Smith

## Part 1 - Set and Setting

Introductory remarks on Set and Setting

7

## Liminality

Title: Stuck In the Middle With You - (Stealers Wheel)

Bible verse: "Become like little children"

*ESEs often come about in liminal spaces - set apart, in-between areas that remove the person and/or their awareness from the normal settings of daily life.*

*The liminal space can help trigger an ESE, or an ESE can create a liminal space by its occurrence.*

Influences and References: Bjorn Thomassen, Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Deleuze/Guattari, Michael Harner, Weird Studies



*"Fairy tales do not tell children dragons exist. Children already know the dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed."*  
GK Chesterton - Orthodoxy

9

## Places and Spaces

Title: A Little Old Place Where We Can Get Together - (Love Shack, B52s)

Bible verse: "I have gone to create a place for you..."

ESE Story - Wales

*An exploration of the types of spaces and places that are encountered in an ESE, and also the effect an ESE has on particular places. Beautiful, mystical places. Empty, dark, spaces.*

Influences and References: Jean Houston, William Richards, Susan Bratton, Jacques Vallee, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, St Francis (San Damiano)

Tintern Abbey, by JMW Turner



11

## Cartographies of the Soul

Title: Higher Ground - (Stevie Wonder)

Bible verse: "You are a lamp unto my feet" or "We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him"

*Presenting the ESE as a visit to a particular landscape and the idea of "cartographing" the markers of those landscapes; a topography of ESEs as a way of talking about the journey of the soul through this life.*

Influences and References: Jean Houston, Teresa of Avila, Cloud of Unknowing, John of the Cross, Lisa Deam, David Luke

Christus Mundi Map from 13th century



8

## The Natural World

Title: Velvet Green - (Jethro Tull)

Bible: With you is the fountain of life, in your light we see light

ESE Story - Hiking in the Beartooths

*Thin places are common vector points between the natural world and ESEs. The natural world as an expression of the divine. The 'Great Chain of Being' which wraps us into the experience and presence of nature. Animals and relationships relative to ESE.*

Influences and References: David Luke, Michael Harner, Karen O'Brien, Laura Beres, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, St. Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus



Sky Top Lake, Beartooth Range

10

## Time

Title: Time after Time (Cyndi Lauper)

Bible Verse: Ecclesiastes 3 or Matthew 16:3  
"interpret the signs of the times"

ESE Story -

*ESEs can either eliminate the sense of time or reconstruct how we experience time. It is not that time is meaningless; rather, that time is both not understood and also constructed. Time is essential to understanding the liminal. Time, as much as anything, points us to our need to construct reality.*

Influences and references: Stuart Davis, JF Martel, Julian of Norwich, Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep

Salvador Dali, The Persistence of Memory



12

## Part 2 - Appearance

Introductory remarks on the Appearance

13

### Divine Beings

Title: Who Are You? - (The Who)

Bible: Who do you say that I am?, Also, Psalm 82 - "God has taken his place in the divine council"

ESE Story - 2nd Experience at JH

*Encountering divine beings in ESEs can be a disturbing experience, or an exceptionally meaningful visitation. What do these beings imply about our worldviews and faith?*

Influences and References: Alex and Allison Grey, Huston Smith, Carl Jung, James Hillman, John Hick

Divine Being, by Alex Grey



15

### Feelings and Ideas/ Awareness and Consciousness (Tentative)

Title: More Than A Feeling - (Boston)

Bible:

ESE Story -

*ESEs present and create other pathways of knowledge and perception. How feelings are interpreted or altered. Ideas that form as a result are created from different access to information than what was available before the experience. Feelings and Ideas as external to the person.*



Thira, by Brice Marden

Influences and References: William James, Julian Jaynes, Victor Turner, Ursula le Guin, Madeline L'Engle

### Entities and Discarnate Beings

Title: A Girl With Kaleidoscope Eyes - (Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds - Beatles)

Bible verse: "Powers and principalities"

ESE Story - Seeing brownies/faeries in Canada

*Discussion of some of the beings encountered during ESEs: angelic beings, Egregors, demi-gods, machine elves, gnomes and faeries, demonic entities, Nephilim (?) etc.*

Influences and References: Terrance McKenna, Jeffrey Kripal, Teresa of Avila, Patrick Harpur, Mark Boyer, David Luke, Julian of Norwich

Jacob's Ladder, by William Blake



14

### Bodies and the Sensual

Title: Rose Garden Funeral of Sores - (Bauhaus)

Bible verse: "This is my body, given for you..." and/or Song of Solomon

ESE Story - 2nd Experience at JH

*The experience of the body during an ESE and the attitude toward the body following an ESE. Meanings and understandings of the nature of the body. Trauma and its impact on senses and the sensual. Gender and sexuality*

Influences and references: Thomas Huebl, Franzese and Felicitas, E. Hemingway (Farewell to Arms), Hemingway and Paris, Ian McNoughton, Stan Grof, Sally McFague

The Passion of St. Theresa, by Bernini



16

## Part 3 - Revelation

Introductory remarks on the Revelation

## Relationships

Title: Another Little Piece of My Heart - (Janis Joplin)

Bible verse: "I now call you friends"

ESE Story -

*How ESEs impact relationships and our understanding of relationships through the generation of empathy, love and compassion.*

Influences and References: Roland Griffiths, Jean Houston, Mary Cosimano, Ram Dass, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis de Sales, Jeffrey Kripal, Philip K. Dick



19

## Life Beyond Life

Title: In My Time of Dying - (Led Zeppelin)

Bible verse: "You will see the Son of Man ... coming with the clouds of heaven"

ESE Story -

*Death and "ego-death" in the ESE and what it does to our understanding of life in this world, and our perceptions of death. End of life concerns and the impact ESEs have on those concerns. Near-death experiences.*

Influences and References: Roland Griffiths, John of the Cross, Brian Muraresku, Peter Panagore, Julian of Norwich, Cloud of Unknowing, Swedenborg, etc...



20

## Synchronicities

Title: Many Miles Away - (Synchronicity II - The Police)

Bible verse: Peter and Cornelius Acts 10

ESE Story -

*The synchronicity is the moment when numerous unassociated experiences line up to create an alignment within the ESE experiencer's life and generates meaning that was not present prior.*

Influences and References: Carl Jung, William James, Huston Smith, Matthew Fox, Cynthia Bourgeault



21

## Part 4 - Disclosure

Introductory remarks on the Disclosure

22

## Musical Landscapes

Title: You've Got The Music In You - New Radicals

Bible: I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind

ESE Story - Hearing music when a kid

*ESEs are sometimes accompanied by celestial music or unusual sounds. ESEs also transform how we hear music during the event and afterwards as well. Music as a transport vehicle for ESEs.*

Influences and References: Jean Houston, Gabrielle Roth, David Byrne, William Richards



Led Zeppelin - Since I've Been Loving You, by Melissa McCracken

## Theologies and Mysticism

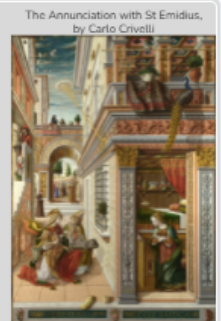
Title: Still Haven't Found What I Am Looking For (U2 - may use different title)

Bible: Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength

ESE Story -

*ESEs change theologies and induct the experiencer into the nebulous and noetic fellowship of mystics throughout history.*


Influences and References: Huston Smith, William James, David Bentley Hart, Mary Bednarowski, Nelson Pike, St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila, The Cloud of Unknowing, Julian of Norwich





**Meaning Making**


Le Tribu de Joseph (Jerusalem Window) by Marc Chagall



Title: This Must Be the Place - (Talking Heads)  
 Bible: Wisdom gives strength to the wise - Ecc 3  
*The meaning of an ESE, or the deconstruction of meaning that occurs following an ESE, is not a static thing. Meaning changes over time. For most, the meanings gleaned in an ESE are fundamentally altering on all levels of being. The ways in which meanings are made will be explored here.*  
 Influences and References: Umberto Eco, William James, Erik Davis, Diane Pasulka, Jeffrey Kripal, Troy Caldwell, Antoin Boisen, Richard Rohr, Matthew Fox, Weird Studies podcast

**The Shimmering Cathedral**


The Cannabis Church Sanctuary, Denver, Colorado



Title: Spirit in the Sky (Norman Greenbaum)  
 Bible verse: "You are living stones..."  
 ESE Story - 1st Experience at JH  
*In which I share the continuing meaning I am making from my experiences, integrating what has been explored throughout the book. This section will also serve, hopefully, as an example for others in the process of integrating an ESE. Integrates the entire scope of the book.*  
 One of the themes to be explored:  
 Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations (from the training of young Vulcans - Star Trek)

**New Pathways to Christ**

The Cosmic Christ, by Alex Grey



Title: Sweet Cherry Wine (TJ and the Shondells)  
 ESE Story -  
*The aesthetic universe and the ontology of beauty.*  
*What would it mean to have our communities of faith begin with where all of our faith stories begin - with the Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences of those who founded our faith? And then share and seek their own ESEs, becoming communities of experience, integration, and empathy?*

Here is the link to the full Google Slides presentation:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10\\_5WDw0NqHZGM5VhTIF8T6g4kjCluCJyQktJBaQ063Q/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10_5WDw0NqHZGM5VhTIF8T6g4kjCluCJyQktJBaQ063Q/edit?usp=sharing)

Here is the link to the ESE sermon series presented to Rockland Congregational Church during November 2021:

<https://rocklandcongregationalchurch.weebly.com/extraordinary-spiritual-experiences-series-nov-7---nov-28-2021.html>

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