

## Law Enforcement Against Entheogens: Is it Religious Persecution?

By Eric E. Sterling, From *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*, Edited by Robert Forte. San Francisco, CA: Council on Spiritual Practices (1997).

Throughout existence, the judicious addition of energy has been transformative, and has exposed God at work in creation, as the Great Designer of the interplay of the forces of life, as the Cosmic Choreographer. While everyone has the capacity to have direct experience of the divine, I don't think it comes easily, or the same way, for everyone. There are many techniques (or what we might fashionably call technologies) for adding energy, for inviting this experience, such as prayer, fasting, chanting, drumming, dance, or meditation -- and these include the sacramental use of psilocybin mushrooms, LSD, peyote, or other entheogens. All of these practices can change a person's interior chemistry. The plants and chemicals which facilitate awareness of the presence of the divine are called "entheogens," from entheos, inspired, from en + thoes (god). Some entheogens may be endogenous -- produced or released within the body by prayer or physical activity. Other entheogens may, when ingested, stimulate the release of internal psychic or spiritual energies that are usually held in check by habit or convention.

Having seen the guns of the crack dealers, the skid rows where the junkies shuffle, the hospitals where inconsolable babies cry, the men and women of the government forces and their allies are convinced that they are the "good guys," and it is their noble mission to "take out" the "bad guys." Empowered with broad statutes, regulations, and court orders, equipped with surveillance equipment, wiretaps, and techniques of coercion, the drug enforcement world brings these forces to bear not only on gangsters, but on people who produce, distribute, and use entheogens -- the generally nontoxic and nonaddictive substances, that when properly employed, can open the way to the higher reality.

Those who use these plants and chemicals not only feel as persecuted as the Pilgrims or Quakers were in the seventeenth century, we are as persecuted in fact. "Enthusiasts" of the seventeenth century in England, such as the Quakers, were jailed by the thousands to stop them from worshipping. Those persecuted included William Penn, a Quaker held in solitary confinement in the Tower of London for a year, who founded Pennsylvania as a haven for religious liberty. The "entheogenists" of the twentieth century -- without a haven -- are being arrested by the thousands every year on drug charges, with no recognition of the religious nature of their activities. America must not allow this most unAmerican religious persecution to continue in the twenty-first century.

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