

Toxic Eucharist

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3
4 *The eating of deity as flesh and blood is the ritual that characterizes the Christian*
5 *Mass. It is supposedly a commemoration of the Last Supper as recorded in three of the*
6 *canonical Gospels. The Gospels, however, do not specify that the rite should be*
7 *repeated, only that the supper will occur again in the otherworld. The disciples after*
8 *the Crucifixion shared property and ate together, but not the sacramental flesh and*
9 *blood of deity. The first evidence of a sacred meal is Paul's First Corinthians about*
10 *twenty years after the Crucifixion. He reprimands the congregation for doing the rite*
11 *incorrectly, which is the reason that quite a few of them have sickened and died. He*
12 *defines the Eucharist of flesh and blood as different from common food and claims*
13 *that the misuse of it is the reason for its poisonous effect. He then proclaims the*
14 *Christian Mystery. This is something defined in Mark as stories whose meaning is*
15 *accessible only to the elite. To Paul's Corinthian congregation, the immediate referent*
16 *for Mystery would be the great Eleusinian rite celebrated nearby, where the divine*
17 *flesh was materialized as the grain of Demeter and the holy blood of sacrifice was the*
18 *wine of Dionysus.*

19
20 **Keywords:** *Eucharist, Last Supper, mushroom, Mystery, Passover, St. Benedict, St.*
21 *Catherine, Agape, St. Teresa of Avila, Mount Athos*

Immortal Longings

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24
25
26 Although the Eucharist eventually emerged as the defining ritual of the
27 Christian communion with deity, it is not clear what was its origin, nor how it
28 was enacted in the earliest gatherings of the adherents to the new religion. The
29 word Eucharist is derived from the Greek Εὐχαριστία for 'thanksgiving'
30 (Modern Greek εὐχαριστῶ, 'thank you'), and it occurs in verbal form in the
31 four canonic biblical accounts of the Last Supper, 'He gave thanks' (Matthew
32 26: 26-29, Mark, 14: 22-25, Luke, 22:14-20, and Paul, 1 Corinthians, 11: 23-
33 26). Of these, Paul, writing within two decades of the Crucifixion, is the
34 earliest, although Paul was not a witness of the event and never knew Jesus
35 personally. The Gospel accounts were not compiled at the earliest until the last
36 third of the first century from various sources, supposedly representing the
37 words attributed to the purported authors, and Mark appears to be the source
38 for Matthew and Luke. A hypothetical Q document (from German *Quelle* for
39 'source) is posited as a compilation of sayings attributed to Jesus, recorded in
40 writing from oral traditions, as an additional source also for Matthew and Luke,
41 but not Mark. The canonic order of the Gospels represents Augustine's
42 erroneous view of the sequence of their composition and transmission. The
43 more mystical John is dated to the second century, perhaps after the
44 apocalyptic Revelation of John of Patmos and perhaps influenced by it. The
45 prophetic ultimate verses of John (John, 21:22-23) probably indicate that it was
46 written or redacted after the death of John, which occurred as foretold in the
47 gospel. The John of Patmos would probably have been excluded from the
48 canon as it was defined in the fourth century, except that the identity of the

1 author of Revelation was confused with the evangelist, the most beloved of the
2 apostolic disciples (as documented self-servingly only in John— six times: 13:
3 23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20, 21:24) and the one given additional authority in
4 the probable emerging cult of Mary as the one who protected the Holy Mother
5 after the Crucifixion (according again only to John, 19:25-27).

6 John does not include an account of the Last Supper's institution of the
7 Eucharist, although he knows of the supper (John, 21:20, 13: 1 *et seq.*,
8 preliminary washing of the disciple's' feet, etc.). This omission is either inept
9 redaction of oral traditions or a glaring lacuna in what would become the
10 defining ritual of the divine Communion, the central event in the celebration of
11 the Mass. Instead, Jesus, in John's narrative of the feeding of the multitudes,
12 defines Himself as the 'bread of heaven,' more efficacious than the manna of
13 Moses (John, 6:22-39).

14
15 'My father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who
16 comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him,
17 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life.
18 He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never
19 thirst. . . I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and
20 are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it
21 and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats
22 of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh,
23 which I shall give for the life of the world.'

24
25 The wording is redundant, stylistically repetitive for naïve emphasis. John
26 is unique in recording such an identification of the true bread as the bread of
27 Life, the flesh of deity. He alone also counters the natural repugnance to
28 engage in cannibalism. His incredulous audience argued among themselves
29 (John, 5.56).

30
31 —How can this man give us his flesh to eat (τὴν σάρκα φαγεῖν)?

32 —I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and
33 drink His blood (πίητε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα), you will not have life in you. Anyone
34 who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise
35 him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food (βρῶσις) and my blood is real
36 drink (πόσις). He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains (μένει) in
37 me, and I in him.

38 This explicit disquisition upon the flesh and blood is all the more
39 remarkable in that John does not include an account of the inauguration of the
40 Eucharist at the Last Supper. For John, the event is sacrosanct, its secret
41 meaning narrated elsewhere. There are two versions of the miraculous feeding:
42 the 'Feeding of the 5,000,' reported in all four of the canonical gospels
43 (Matthew, 14:13-21, Mark, 6:31-44, Luke, 9:12-17, and John, 6:1-14); and the
44 'Feeding of the 4,000,' only in Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-9). In all
45 accounts of the mass feedings, including John, Jesus 'gave thanks' (the
46 defining εὐχαριστήσας) at the commencement of the meal, as in the etiology
47 for the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

1 The feeding miracles were an offering of bread (five or seven loaves) and
 2 fish (two). The loaves as the flesh of deity are probably identical in
 3 significance to the fishes, the latter encoding the secret sign of Christianity as
 4 the anagram for the holy name as the five letters ΙΧΘΥΣ which spell ‘fish’
 5 (ἰχθύς) with the doubled meaning as Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ for
 6 ‘Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior,’ the Eucharist being one of the seven
 7 sacraments indicating grades of initiation into the mysteries of the religion,
 8 each an outward sign of Grace (Χάρις, as in εὐχαριστήσας). The Eucharist is
 9 central in the traditional order, number four, preceded and followed by three,
 10 for the total of seven, the steps of passage from birth to death. The encoded fish
 11 sign was drawn with two intersecting arcs, also resembling an elongated loaf of
 12 bread.

13 John is also the only account of the episode of the Samaritan woman at the
 14 well (John, 4:4-26). Its analogue is the wine of the Eucharist supper, and the
 15 similarity to the bread that feeds the multitude is remarkable in that the water
 16 of Christ satisfies not a temporary thirst, but the thirsting for eternity.

17
 18 —‘Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again. But whoever should drink
 19 of the water that I shall give him shall certainly never thirst for all eternity; but
 20 the water that I shall give him shall be in him a spring of water welling up for
 21 everlasting life.’

22 —‘Master, give me this water, so that I not thirst and keep coming here to draw
 23 water.’

24
 25 In the Orthodox tradition, the thirsting woman at the well is venerated as
 26 the folkloric saint named Photini (Φωτίνη), ‘Illuminata.’ ‘Illuminated’ or
 27 ‘Enlightened’ is a code designation for an initiate admitted to the knowledge or
 28 gnosis of the elite or elected in a religious cult. This is termed a Mystery, from
 29 which the profane are excluded. It was such Mysteries that Jesus was said to
 30 have imparted to John as he slumbered, leaning upon the Christ at the Last
 31 Supper (attested in the fourth century: Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 24,2;
 32 Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 119, 2).

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 35

1 **Passover**

2

3 As a dining prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharist of the Last Supper
4 narratives has its ethnic precedent in the Jewish custom of giving thanks at the
5 beginning of the meal (berakhah or ‘thanksgiving’), breaking the bread and
6 blessing the wine, and then sharing the cup with the guests (kiddush). The Last
7 Supper was celebrated at Passover, the feast that commemorated the account in
8 Exodus (12:1-13:10), where the houses of the Hebrews in Egypt were marked
9 with the blood of the sacrificial lamb, as an identifying sign to spare them from
10 the destruction visited upon the land of Egypt as the vengeful spirit of the Lord
11 passed over it.

12 Hence the bread was unleavened, prepared in haste because of the
13 imminent departure, without time for fermentation of fungal yeast, a flat bread
14 or matza, probably originally round like a disk. In Jewish dietary law, anything
15 that might substitute for leavening is strictly excluded. The Christian Eucharist
16 is also now traditionally unleavened and round, although the Orthodox Church
17 preserves the original use of leavened bread (pita flat bread) as in the earliest
18 versions of the Christian Eucharist, where the leavening or rising symbolized
19 the Resurrection. The supposed haste for departure from Egyptian bondage,
20 precluding the very few hours required for the rising of leavened bread, is an
21 implausible etiology, masking a truer origin.

22 The biblical Last Supper was technically not a Seder, since the ritual order
23 for the consumed items that defines the meal as a Seder was not set until the
24 second century CE. The Haggadah, which is the text recited at the Seder, could
25 not have been written before 170 CE since it quotes the second-century
26 Talmudic rabbi Judah bar Ilai. Ravi and Shmuel dated the Haggadah to about
27 230 CE. The Exodus account is an etiology for the absence of leavening, but its
28 ritual significance is as a springtime commemoration of the evolution of the
29 agricultural arts of cultivated grains from primordial antecedents, applied to the
30 historical tradition of the supposed liberation from the Egyptian bondage.

31 The paschal lamb which supplied the blood for the defining marker that
32 spared the Jews in the massacre of the first-born of the Egyptians became
33 assimilated into Christian tradition as Christ, the lamb of God, who would be
34 offered as redeeming sacrificial victim on the Cross of the Crucifixion, as
35 implied in the accounts of the Last Supper. However, the identification of the
36 wine as a cup of blood to be drunk is totally repulsive to Jewish deity
37 prescriptions, where the flesh of a slaughtered animal must be drained of its
38 blood in order to render it kosher (Leviticus, 17:14). Blood is specifically
39 prohibited in Genesis (9:4).

40

41 *Except meat (κρέας) in the blood of the spirit you do not eat.*

42

43 Passover is an annual festival, but there is nothing in the biblical account
44 to indicate that the Last Supper should be regularly repeated as the central
45 ritual of Christianity, only that it would be performed again in heaven, when
46 they would again see Him. The account of the supper at Emmaus (Luke, 24:28-
47 35; a very brief mention in Mark, 16:12-13, probably interpolated from Luke)

1 may reflect the same motif of access to divine visionary experience since the
 2 Eucharist meal of breaking bread at Emmaus results in the visual manifestation
 3 of deity as the previously unrecognized stranger and fellow traveler. They do
 4 not recognize Christ until He gives thanks (εὐλόγησεν) and breaks bread with
 5 them.

6
 7 And it came about that as He reclined with them, taking bread, He gave
 8 thanks, and breaking it, He gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and
 9 they recognized Him.

10
 11 The biblical Emmaus lay on the road to Jerusalem, but the topographical
 12 name was a commonplace, merely designating a site as characterized by its
 13 ‘thermal spring,’ perhaps an indication of the gateway for Jesus’ return from
 14 the chthonic realm. The same motif of spiritual manifestation occurs in the
 15 traditional identification of the revelation of Pentecost as occurring in the same
 16 chamber or ‘cenacle’ as the Last Supper, which may have been the first
 17 Christian Church where the Eucharist Mass was celebrated.

18 19 20 **Harmless Food**

21
 22 When the Church in the second century compiled a history of the early
 23 days of Christianity as the Acts of the Apostles, it recorded that the Christians
 24 adopted a communal mode of life, meeting daily in the area of the synagogue
 25 and breaking bread together in their homes (2:42-47; compare Acts, 4:32-35,
 26 on communal property).

27
 28 And they sold their possessions and real estate and shared them in common
 29 according to need, and daily persisting of one accord in the synagogue, and
 30 breaking bread at home, they took their nourishment with joy and simplicity of
 31 heart.

32
 33 This was their ordinary manner of nourishment, daily dining perhaps
 34 together, not a Eucharist sacrament, although Christ apparently materialized in
 35 the body at these meals (Acts, 1:4, συναλιζόμενος; 10:40-41).

36
 37 —He materialized (παρέστησεν εαυτὸν ζῶντα) after the Passion/Crucifixion in
 38 numerous signs (ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις) speaking about the Kingdom of God, and
 39 when he shared salt with them [συναλιζόμενος, i.e., dined], He . . .

40 —God raised Him on the third day and made Him manifest, not to all the people,
 41 but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him
 42 (οἵτινες συνεφάγομεν καὶ συνεπίομεν) after He rose from the dead.

43
 44 Nevertheless, it came to be rumored that they ate their Deity, perhaps in
 45 the form of human babies, and in general they were viewed with suspicion by
 46 their pagan neighbors for their disregard for the honors owed to the other gods
 47 and for their refusal to offer sacrifice to the deified Roman Emperor, which

1 was an act that suggested political subversion. One of the earliest Christian
 2 apologists, the second to third-century Berber Marcus Minucius Felix, parodied
 3 this infant cannibalism in his *Octavius*, a sophisticated dialogue between three
 4 lawyers, a pagan and a Christian, with Minucius as the moderator. The pagan
 5 claims that the Christians identify themselves with secret marks and insignia,
 6 lustfully commingle as brothers and sisters of a community in sexual
 7 debauchery, adore the head of an ass, and worship the genitals of their priest as
 8 their common parent. For the Eucharist, they cover an infant with bread and by
 9 this deception induce the novices at their initiation to devour the flesh and
 10 blood of the hapless ‘doughboy’ (Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 28).

11

12 Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it
 13 is well known. An infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary,
 14 is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: this infant is slain by the
 15 young pupil, who has been urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the
 16 meal, with dark and secret wounds. Thirstily—O horror—they lick up its blood;
 17 eagerly they divide its limbs. By this victim, they are pledged together; with this
 18 consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence.

19

20 These are the words of a pro-Christian apologist, representing a summary
 21 of the slanders commonly hurled against the Christians. Ironically, in the
 22 antisemitic medieval persecution of European Jews, the charge was often
 23 brought that they kidnapped and murdered Christian children to use their blood
 24 for the Passover matza (the ‘blood libel’) or that they stole the Eucharist bread
 25 and delighted in desecrating or torturing it as the Christ. Several medieval
 26 children were admitted to the canon and venerated as saints, supposedly as
 27 victims of the blood libel. The first was little St. William of Norwich, who died
 28 in 1144 at the age of twelve.

29

30 The slander of onolatry (worship of an ass) is documented by the
 31 Alexamenos graffito scratched in plaster on a wall of a room used as a
 32 classroom on the Palatine Hill in Rome. It is the earliest depiction of the
 33 Crucifixion, dated to around 200 CE. It shows a donkey-headed figure,
 34 crucified, viewed from the backside, to convey the obscenity of the ‘ass,’
 35 taunting the young student Alexamenos, who is depicted beside it, mocking
 him as a Christian for worshipping an ass.

36

37 The earliest evidence for the Eucharist in a non-Christian source explicitly
 38 counters this rumor. The description comes from a letter that the younger Pliny
 39 addressed to the Emperor Trajan while serving as governor or proconsul of the
 40 Roman provinces of Bithynia and Pontus in northern Anatolia around the year
 41 112 (Pliny, the Younger, *Letters*, 10.96; Ruck and Hoffman, 2012, pp. 285-
 287).

42

43 They have the custom of assembling together for the purpose of taking food—
 44 ordinary food, however, and harmless (*ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen*
 45 *et innoxium*)

46

1 Pliny did not personally witness one of their meals. His testimony came
 2 from certain Christians who had repented of their ways and from two slave
 3 girls serving as ministers of the cult, who as non-Roman citizens could be
 4 submitted to torture in the investigation, making their testimony supposedly
 5 even the more credible. Suetonius, who probably served on Pliny's staff, is the
 6 first historical mention of the Christians in a Roman source. He records that
 7 they were excessively superstitious and were fomenting dissention during the
 8 emperorship of Claudius (41-54 CE), who expelled them from the city
 9 (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25). He records that their leader was a certain Chrestos
 10 (Χρηστός, Greek for the 'best'), apparently a verbal corruption of Christ
 11 (Χριστός). And they were among those persecuted under Nero after the fire in
 12 the city of Rome in 64 CE (Suetonius, *Nero*, 16). The group that Pliny
 13 investigated also had the custom of assembling to greet the rising sun at dawn,
 14 reuniting later in the day for their communal meal. If they celebrated a
 15 Eucharist apart from the communal dining, it might have occurred at the dawn
 16 gatherings, but Pliny did not feel charged to investigate it.

17 The sun worship is not otherwise attested as a Christian ritual, but suggests
 18 syncretism with Zoroastrian Mithraic rites (introduced into Southern Italy in 67
 19 BCE and prevalent in Rome at the time of Nero) or with the Therapeutae, a
 20 Jewish monastic sect settled on a low hill on the shore of Lake Moeris near
 21 Egyptian Alexandria, perhaps Christians and similar to the Essene community
 22 on the shore of the Judaic Dead Sea. Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish
 23 philosopher roughly contemporary with Jesus, wrote eulogistically of their
 24 piety (Philo, *De vita contemplativa*, 85-89; Ruck *et al.* 2001, pp. 158-163).

25
 26 Like persons in the bacchanalian revels, drinking the pure wine of the love of
 27 God (ἀκράτου σπᾶσαντες τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς), they join together ... being intoxicated
 28 all night till the morning with this beautiful intoxication, without feeling their
 29 heads heavy or closing their eyes for sleep, but being even more awake than when
 30 they came to the feast, as to their eyes and their whole bodies, and standing there
 31 till morning, when they saw the sun rising they raised their hands to heaven,
 32 imploring tranquility and truth, and acuteness of understanding. And after their
 33 prayers they each retired to their own separate abodes, with the intention of again
 34 practicing the usual philosophy to which they had been accustomed to devote
 35 themselves.

36
 37 The earliest Christian source for the Eucharist as a rite does not occur until
 38 the first century in the Greek work titled the *Didache* (Διδαχή), the 'Teaching'
 39 or 'Catechism,' a compilation from various sources. It specifies the word for
 40 'thanksgiving,' and mentions the food as the 'holy vine of David' and 'the
 41 broken bread scattered on the mountain, gathered and become one,' while
 42 terming them 'spiritual food and drink' for eternal life.

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 44
 45

1 **Asleep in Corinth**

2

3 As the earliest testimony of the Eucharist rite, Paul's account is
 4 particularly significant. As a saint of the Church and perhaps its designing or
 5 founding father, his credentials are impeccable. Paul redefined an ethnic Jewish
 6 cult for the 'nations' (ἔθνοι, *gentes*, 'gentiles'), the Hellenistic world, making it
 7 largely inimical to its origins in matters as fundamental as compulsory
 8 circumcision and dietary restrictions. Apart from the rumors of bacchanalian
 9 revelry and sexual debauchery in the later sources, he records the disturbing
 10 detail that some people in Corinth have found the Eucharist lethal (1
 11 Corinthians, 11:30).

12

13 For this reason [namely doing the Eucharist wrongly], many among you are weak
 14 and sick (ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοί), and quite a few (ἱκανοί) are dead.

15

16 Paul uses the euphemism 'fall asleep' (κοιμῶνται), which twice in this
 17 same epistle clearly means 'are dead' (1 Corinthians, 15:51-52, 14-20).

18

19 —Look! I am telling you a Mystery (ἰδοὺ μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω). We shall not all
 20 fall asleep (πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα), but we will all be changed, in a moment,
 21 in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet's blast. For the trumpet will sound,
 22 and the dead will be awakened (ἐγερθήσονται) incorruptible, and we shall be
 23 changed.

24

25 —If Christ is not awakened (ἐγήγερται), empty is our gospel, and empty your
 26 trust in Him. We are found bearing false witness of God, that He wakened the
 27 Christ, whom He did not waken. If indeed the corpses are not wakened, empty is
 28 your trust in Him, for you are still in your sins. Then even those who fell asleep in
 29 Christ [i.e., died as Christians] have perished.... But, as it is, Christ is awakened,
 30 the first-harvested fruit (ἀπαρχή) of those who are asleep.

31

32 The *aparche* was a tithe, the portion of the harvest owed to the deity or the
 33 temple, as recompense for the right to profit from the rest of the harvest. It was
 34 due on Passover. It involved not only a dedication of the tithe to the temple, but
 35 also the offering of a sacrificial victim, originally a human in the persona of the
 36 primordial ploughman, as recompense to the primeval forces of primitivism,
 37 disrupted by the incursion of cultivation (Ruck 2017, pp. 261 *et seq.*). Biblical
 38 exegesis forces this sleep in Corinth to mean spiritual weakness as death, but
 39 the context of the last trumpet blast clearly refers to the clarion call for the
 40 resurrection from death as an awakening. It is highly unlikely that they died
 41 from consuming an inordinate gluttonous amount of Communion bread and
 42 wine as their ordinary mode of nutrition.

43

44 Paul's congregation could not have understood his proclamation of a
 45 Mystery, except in terms of what a religious Mystery was in general in the
 46 Greco-Roman world, and in particular, with regard to the great Eleusinian
 47 Mystery celebrated annually at the sanctuary just forty miles northeast along
 the shore road toward Athens. Most of them, if not all, would have been
 initiates, as probably was Paul himself (Lannoy 2012). The ancient Mysteries

1 afforded a face-to-face encounter with deity, a communal shamanic experience,
2 accessed via a sacred psychoactive potion, the ingestion of the deity as
3 materialized in an entheogen, usually a botanical item that incorporated the
4 spirit of the deity.

5 This is the origin of the motif of eating the flesh and blood of the deity, the
6 most common Greco-Roman god being Dionysus, who was immanent in the
7 fermented juice of the grapevine and the wild psychoactive plants that were
8 considered the naturally toxic antecedents of the wine as the product of
9 viticulture and the sophisticated science of oenology to manufacture ethanol
10 via the controlled fungal growth of yeasts. Dionysus/Bacchus is a god of
11 intoxication. One honors him by drinking him, with the proper theological
12 etiquette, thereby inducing a sacred drunkenness. The Eleusinian Mystery itself
13 honored Demeter and her daughter Persephone, and they were represented in
14 the grain crop and the manufactured bread, with a theological motif parallel to
15 the evolution of viticulture, namely, the art of agriculture from more primitive
16 antecedents to the edible grasses. Similarly, Demeter was eaten as the bread.
17 The role of Dionysus in the sacred myth of Eleusis was an element in the secret
18 of the Mystery. Dionysus with his liquid food of the wine was paired with
19 Demeter and the solid food of bread as the two great divine benefactors of
20 civilized humankind. The congregation in Corinth would necessarily interpret
21 the Christian Eucharist against the background of the Hellenic precedent of
22 Dionysus and Demeter, as would the larger Hellenistic Greco-Roman world to
23 which Christianity was proselytized. But in Corinth, Paul's words to his
24 congregation could have had no other more immediate referent.

25 The face-to-face encounter in the Mysteries was orchestrated by an
26 alteration of consciousness accessed by an intoxicant, a kind of bacchanalia,
27 like the pious nightlong revelry of the Therapeutae, drunk on the wine of god's
28 love. Such pious revelry could easily devolve into events that gave rise to the
29 slanders of sexual debauchery, sometimes not merely rumors, but what actually
30 happened as in the second-century BCE bacchanalian celebrations in Southern
31 Italy, curtailed by the intervention of the Roman Senate (*Senatus Consultum de*
32 *Bacchanalibus*), or similar revelry like the Cotyttia Festivals and the
33 supposedly august annual festival of the Bona Dea. It is an inevitable human
34 reflex to attempt to experience or enact a metaphor as an actuality (Ruck 2019).
35 Mystical rapture is commonly experienced or interpreted as orgasmic rapture
36 with deity.

37 The actual nature of the Eucharist ceremony was sometimes a similar
38 ecstatic debauchery as intentionally practiced in certain gnostic sects of early
39 Christianity, anathematized in what became the official history of the
40 transmission of the faith. Gnostic is roughly equivalent to mystic as referring to
41 visionary religious experience, and it is a tradition established well before
42 Christianity. Some thirty-six named sects are listed as heretical groups of early
43 Christians, with additional ones arising in the medieval period. There was no
44 dogma or theology in place at the Crucifixion and Resurrection, other than an
45 expectation that Christ would return within the lifespan of his disciples and
46 initiate a new world order, a Hellenizing of an ethnic Messiah cult that

1 originally envisioned a restored Jewish divinely validated political state, a
 2 kingdom of God on earth, that was finally realized in the political ascendancy
 3 of the papacy. The metaphysics of the personae of deity, the virgin incarnation,
 4 and the eternal existence of the soul were all matters of theological dispute,
 5 settled into dogma by a succession of Church councils. The essence of the
 6 earliest cults was the divine communion with deity accessed by the Eucharist,
 7 with Jesus reconfigured in the mode of a Greek hero cult and increasingly
 8 syncretized with the god Dionysus, hence accessed by Agape versions of the
 9 bacchanalia. Various charismatic leaders vied for primacy through demonstrations
 10 of miracles and tricks of charlatanry and purveyance of mystical ecstasy.

11 Selected for special attention by the historians of the early Church was the
 12 flamboyant magus named Simon, who supposedly pretended to be another
 13 Jesus risen from the dead (Acts, 8:9-24). A magus was a priest of the
 14 Zoroastrian Persians and master of the *haoma* sacrament and that meaning
 15 probably dominates over their reputation for sorcery and spiritual
 16 materializations as magicians. He may not be historical, but a garbled mythical
 17 construct of a rival messiah cult (Ruck *et al.* 2001, pp.210-211). Simon was
 18 supposedly a Samaritan, a Jewish esoteric mystic of the merkabah (flying
 19 chariot throne of deity) tradition, derived from Ezekiel's visionary inauguration
 20 or call to prophecy (Ezekiel, 1:1-28), his vision of the chariot's flashing wheels
 21 like living creatures during a thunderstorm, a vision strongly suggestive of the
 22 fruiting Amanita mushroom caps (Heinrich 1995; Ruck *et al.* 2001), and the
 23 probable referent in Paul's heavenly ascent for his Mystery encounter with
 24 deity (Segal 1990; Boyarin 1994). A call to prophecy is apt to involve the
 25 shamanic agent that accesses altered consciousness.

26
 27 And as I looked at the living creatures, I saw wheels on the ground . . . They were
 28 like a wheel inside a wheel . . . The rims of the wheels were full of eyes all round
 29 . . . The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.
 30

31 The eyes are a typical metaphor for the white scabs on the cap of the
 32 mushroom that affords transcendent vision and wheel is a common glyph for
 33 the mushroom cap, as on the throne of the Aztec Xochipilli (Wasson 1980), a
 34 deity of shamanic trance, and in Nonnus' account (Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 7.318-
 35 333) of the insemination of Semele by Zeus with her son Dionysus (Ruck *et al.*
 36 2020). These wheels became the four roundels that each encloses the image of
 37 one of the four evangelists of the gospel in Christian art.

38 In an obviously mythologized account of his agonistic confrontation with
 39 Peter as the leader of the Christians in Rome, he fell to his death or occasioned
 40 serious limb fractures in the forum or in the presence of the Emperor, while
 41 demonstrating his ability to fly. He was considered the father of all heresies in
 42 the Christian diatribes, which delight in condemning and deriding him. He
 43 claimed to have discovered the fallen Divine Wisdom or Sophia in a prostitute
 44 from Tyre, his version of the Magdalene, and he traveled about with her as a
 45 reincarnation of the Helen of Troy. His divine epithet was Faustus, the 'favored
 46 one,' an epithet of an initiate, and he is the probable source of the Faust legend
 47 of an allegiance with the devil to attain wisdom.

1 The Mysteries were never something solved by a simple verbal
 2 formulation, but rather something inexpressible experienced by the initiate,
 3 learning through suffering, the incomprehensible rendered known through
 4 doing. The essential was the experience of dying before the advent of death and
 5 returning benefited with the knowledge of the incomprehensible event. Thus,
 6 Christmas addressed the mystery of the origin of existence and Easter, with the
 7 preliminary of the divine communion, the eternal nature of that existence.

8 The primary heresy was gnostic dualism, the acceptance of two opposing
 9 powers or principles in the universe, which called into question the primacy of
 10 the monotheistic deity and diminished the dominion of the Catholic Church
 11 which was its terrestrial administrator. Valentinius (Βαλεντίνος/Βαλεντίνιος),
 12 an Alexandrine Egyptian theologian in Rome of the early second century, was
 13 a disciple of Theudas (Θευδάς), who was himself a companion of Paul
 14 (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 7.17). Valentinius' Gospel of Truth
 15 survives in the Nag Hammadi Library. Paul allegedly had taught Theudas the
 16 secret wisdom that he shared with only his closest disciples. The line of
 17 transmission is securely established, although the identity of Theudas is
 18 questionable, perhaps a conflation of two different persons of that name, the
 19 Theudas of Acts, 5:36, whose rebellious event took place in 6 CE, and the
 20 'charlatan prophetic' Theudas of Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, 20.97-98) in 45
 21 CE.

22 The heretical sects had a reputation for herbalism and sorcery, which is
 23 probably as fundamental and important as attempts to reconstruct their
 24 complex dualist philosophy. The Valentinians were quite numerous and split
 25 into an eastern and western tradition. The latter was termed Marcionism, after
 26 Marcion (Μαρκίων) of Sinope on the Anatolian coast of the Black Sea, who
 27 was operative in Rome in the mid-second century and excommunicated in 144
 28 CE. Marcion considered Paul the only true apostle of Christ, using an
 29 expurgated version of the Letters, rejected the Old Testament, accepted the
 30 validity only of Luke, to which he made revisions, rejecting his identity as a
 31 physician, and saw God as incomplete. In the anti-heretical diatribes, Marcion
 32 was attributed a notorious expertise in drugs. Irenaeus accused him of
 33 pharmacological devilry, compounding special so-called aphrodisiacs. He
 34 used them to conduct 'secret sacraments' 'to deceive, victimize, and defile.' He
 35 even seduced the wife of one of Irenaeus's deacons to join his sect (Irenaeus,
 36 *Against Heresies*, 1.13. *et seq.*)

37
 38 —She then makes the effort to reward him, not only by the gift of her possessions
 39 (in which way he has collected a very large fortune), but also by yielding up to
 40 him her person, desiring in every way to be united to him, that she may become
 41 altogether one with him.

42 —Moreover, that this Marcion compounds philters and love-potions (φίλτρα καὶ
 43 ἀγώγια), in order to insult the persons of some of these women . . . confessing,
 44 too, that they have been defiled by him, and that they were filled with a burning
 45 passion towards him (καὶ ἐρωτικῶς πᾶν αὐτὸν πεφιληκέναι). A sad example of
 46 this occurred in the case of a certain Asiatic, one of our deacons, who had
 47 received Marcion into his house. His wife, a woman of remarkable beauty, fell a

1 victim both in mind and body to this magician, and, for a long time, travelled
2 about with him. At last, when, with no small difficulty, the brethren had
3 converted her, she spent her whole time in the exercise of public confession,
4 weeping over and lamenting the defilement which she had received from this
5 magician.

6 —He devotes himself especially to women, and those such as are well-bred, and
7 elegantly attired, and of great wealth, whom he frequently seeks to draw after
8 him, by addressing them in such seductive words as these: "I am eager to make
9 thee a partaker of my Eucharist" (Μεταδοῦναί σοι θέλω τῆς ἐμῆς χάριτος).

10
11 Valentinian Marcionists became 'pregnant' with divine grace and imparted
12 it to one another with a 'kiss.' Even in Paul, the reception of Grace (Χάρις,
13 compare Εὐχαριστία) is repeatedly described as a spiritual and ecstatic
14 experience. The 'Thanksgiving [Eucharist] Prayer' survives in the Nag
15 Hammadi documents. It makes clear what the gnostic initiate was thankful for.

16
17 We give thanks to you (εὐχαριστοῦμεν). Every soul and heart is lifted up to you .
18 . . We rejoice because while we were in the body, You made us divine through
19 your knowledge.

20
21 Spiritual gnosis experienced through the body—this is the grace for which
22 they are thankful, the soul's ascent to the realm of Light while still in the body.

23 Paul in the context of religious Mysteries uses the metaphor of a drink that
24 overpowers death (1 Corinthians, 15:54-55).

25
26 Death has been drunk down (κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος) in victory [over death]!
27 Where, Death, is your victory? Where is your toxic sting (κέντρον) [implying the
28 cattle goad of sexual arousal and the bacchanalia celebrated with the deity as a
29 spiritual lover]?

30
31 The metaphors of a drink and the estrus arousal instigated by the cattle
32 goad's sting, like the bite of the cow-fly (οἴστρος, cognate with 'estrus'), the
33 former herdsman of the cow-maiden Io, are not expectable metaphors, except
34 as reference to the visionary sacrament of the Mystery. Christian invectives
35 against the heresies delighted in ridiculing the sexual improprieties of the
36 Eleusinian mythical tradition, but no evidence exists of physical sexuality as an
37 element in the beatific vision afforded the thousands of initiates each year into
38 the communion of the Mystery.

39 Paul delineates the difference of the Eucharist sacrament from ordinary
40 communal banqueting (like the apostles after the Crucifixion and Pliny's group
41 of Anatolian Christians), which the Corinthians apparently have been
42 practicing as a picnic supper, a potluck, but each eating only what he has
43 brought without sharing it with the congregation (1 Corinthians, 11:20-22).

44
45 When you come together in one place, this is not eating the Lord's Supper
46 (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). For each one partakes of his private supper in eating, and one
47 man goes hungry, and another gets drunk [depending upon what each has brought
48 of food and drink for his own consumption]. Don't you have houses for eating

1 and drinking? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have
 2 not [i.e., people with little means who bring paltry fare to the meal, eating a
 3 pauper's feast in their midst]? What shall I say to you? Should I praise you? I
 4 praise you not!

5

6 Eventually, the Christians made Baptism into the new faith a prerequisite for
 7 attending their communal meals, to exclude those looking for a free dinner, but
 8 drunkenness and libertinism persisted in what was called the Agape (Ἀγάπη)
 9 'Love fest.'

10 Paul defines the Eucharist as something apart from the communal feasting (1
 11 Corinthians, 11:29).

12

13 If you do not discern (διακρίνων, discriminate) the body [of the deity] when you
 14 eat and drink, you eat and drink a judgment (κρίμα, cognate with 'crime') against
 15 yourself.

16

17 That is the reason that they are sickening and dying. They are desecrating
 18 the sacrament by eating it as ordinary food. This cannot refer to the total
 19 quantities of communal food eaten for physical nourishment, but to the
 20 sacramental food of the spirit. This is the food of the Eucharist, imbued with
 21 divine spirit and power, the food that can alter the mode of consciousness. Paul
 22 is offering a definition of what we now call an entheogen. To eat it
 23 recreationally debases its sanctity, an affront to deity, and produces potentially
 24 toxic reactions, instead of divine communion. This admonition to discern the
 25 deity in the sacrament is difficult to reconcile contextually with the food of the
 26 picnic or potluck supper, and it probably indicates that the text of Paul's letter,
 27 although largely authentic, has suffered editorial revision at some point before
 28 its inclusion in the canon of New Testament documents. The same confusion
 29 exists in the accounts in Acts of the daily communal dining of the apostles and
 30 the tradition that Christ materialized among them at those meals.

31

32 Just such a profanation of the Eleusinian Mystery occurred in the year 415
 33 BCE, when it was discovered that numerous prominent citizens were
 34 performing the ceremonies at home with drinking guest, using the sacred
 35 potion recreationally for profane intoxication. Paul's Corinthian parishioners
 36 were apparently doing something similar with the Eucharist. But
 37 transubstantiated bread and wine, even if the ritual purports to change their
 38 physical essence or nature, are metamorphosed into the body and blood of the
 39 deity only metaphorically, and still would not have altered their basic chemical
 40 potential. Paul's Corinthians were misusing a sacrament that had actual
 41 toxicity, physical toxins, not spiritual. Here at the moment when the events of
 42 the Last Supper were first defined as the central ritual of the Christian Mass, it
 43 would seem that the bread and wine was actually psychoactive, that is to say,
 44 an entheogen capable of accessing an altered state of consciousness, which
 45 improperly employed could cause sickness and even death.

45

46 The bizarre tale about a certain young man perhaps too appositely named
 47 Eutychus (Εὐτυχός) or 'Lucky' indicates the nature of Paul's Eucharist ritual. It
 is preserved in Acts (20:7-12) although in a garbed narrative, surviving

1 undetected in the canonic text, the only one of the several such works accepted
 2 into the official compilation of the New Testament. The event occurred at the
 3 end of Paul's five days at Troas, the Roman city supposedly built on the site of
 4 the legendary Troy.

5
 6 On the first day of the week, when we [presumably Luke speaking] were gathered
 7 to *break bread*, Paul spoke with them, intending to depart the next morning, and
 8 he extended his discourse until midnight. There was a considerable number of
 9 lamps lit on the upper floor where we were gathered. A certain young man (τις
 10 νεανίας) named Eutychos sitting on the windowsill, being carried off by a deep
 11 sleep (καταφερόμενος ὕπνω βαθεῖ) as Paul spoke at length—carried off by the
 12 sleep (κατενεχθεὶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου) he fell from the third floor (ἀπὸ τοῦ
 13 τριστέγου) and was picked up as a corpse (ἤρθη νεκρός). Going downstairs, Paul
 14 fell on him (ἐπέσεν αὐτῷ) and embracing (συμπεριλαβὼν) him, he said: 'Don't
 15 get upset. His spirit is in him (ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐστίν).' Going upstairs
 16 [apparently leaving the boy where he lay (?)] and *breaking bread and tasting it*,
 17 he discoursed quite a bit until daylight, and departed. They took the boy (παῖδα)
 18 home alive and they were in no small measure comforted.

19
 20 'Break bread' (κλάσαι ἄρτον) is accepted as code for the Eucharist, the
 21 Lord's Supper. It is unlikely that they were breaking bread continually from
 22 sunset, when presumably the lamps were lit, until daylight. The phrase
 23 indicates that it was during the Eucharist ceremony that the sleeping trance
 24 occurred and that the event was a ritual that was something that lasted the
 25 whole night, from the lighting of the lamps until daylight. The Communion
 26 was not a lecture. The never-ending discourse probably does not reference
 27 Paul's verbal prolixity, but the ritual formulations or chants for the whole
 28 nightlong ceremony. In the opinion of the narrator, supposedly the apostle
 29 Luke, traditionally assumed to be the author of the Acts, often identified as a
 30 physician (although both are traditional questionable inferences, nowhere
 31 explicitly stated, and the first person narrator of Acts may not be identical with
 32 the third person narrator), the boy showed all outward appearances of death,
 33 but Paul miraculously revived him, during the nightlong Eucharist. Lucky had
 34 experienced the initiatory scenario of dying without dying. His youth as a 'boy'
 35 is probably also not an incidental detail. The phrase for his sleep is probably
 36 also significant since the verb is redundantly repeated, καταφέρειν: he is
 37 physically 'carted off' to his entranced consciousness— καταφερόμενος ὕπνω
 38 βαθεῖ/ κατενεχθεὶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου. The occurrence of the event at the legendary
 39 Troy perhaps suggests the mythical analogue of Elpenor's fall from the roof of
 40 the sorceress Circe in Homer's *Odyssey* (MacDonald 1996). The early
 41 Christian writings may have been modeled on Hellenic paradigms,
 42 proselytizing propaganda casting Jesus in the mold of acceptable epic heroes
 43 (MacDonald 2000). Surely, we are not expected to interpret Paul's 1
 44 Corinthians as a referencing the congregation at Corinth enacting the Eucharist
 45 with such lengthy discourse that some fell asleep and not a few have died.

46 In the Acts of Paul, written in the mid-second century and deemed
 47 apocryphal and heretical because it encouraged a female ministry and was

1 accepted by the Manichaean Christian sect, a similar tale is told about
 2 Patroclus (named for Achilles' warrior lover), the alleged cupbearer (οἰνοχόος)
 3 of the Emperor Nero (implying the Classical role of Ganymede, the catamite of
 4 Zeus), who came in the evening (ὄψε) to hear Paul and fell to his death from a
 5 window (ἔπεσεν ὁ Πάτροκλος ἀπὸ τῆς θυρίδος) but was restored to life by
 6 Paul. Paul's gathering occurred in the granary (ὄρριον), an unexpected venue
 7 for such a gathering, except that they were employed outside of Greece for
 8 local enactments of the Eleusinian Mystery (Pons 2002). Paul stands accused
 9 of corrupting such young men as Patroclus to enlist in the army of the Lord,
 10 like recruits into the warrior brotherhood of Mithras.

11

12

13 **Face-to-Face**

14

15 Paul describes the Christian mystery in terms borrowed from his
 16 philosophical Platonic training, like Philo, as a Hellenized Jew. Paul displays a
 17 masterful eloquent command of the Greek language, which testifies to the
 18 training and education he must have been afforded by his parents (1
 19 Corinthians, 13:12).

20

21 For now, we see through a mirror (δι' ἐνόπτρου), enigmatically (ἐν αἰνίγματι);
 22 but then, face-to-face (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον): now I know (γινσκνώσκω) in
 23 part; but then shall I know (ἐπιγνώσομαι) even as also I am known
 24 (ἐπεγνώσθη).

25

26 Surely the accumulation of the verbs for 'knowing' is intended to convey
 27 the motif of gnosis. The beguilingly reversed image reflected in the mirror is an
 28 enigmatic clue and an invitation to step through the interdimensional barrier to
 29 the world beyond to the true images that give meaning to this world of
 30 delusionary appearances. Paul described his own face-to-face encounter with
 31 the Deity as a shamanic rapture. He is generally understood as modestly
 32 referring to himself as the man he knows in Christ (2 Corinthians, 12:2-4).

33

34 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.
 35 Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know—God knows. And I
 36 know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know,
 37 but God knows— was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things,
 38 things no one is permitted to tell (*ἀρρητα ῥήματα*, ἄρρητα ῥήματα, 'unspeakable
 39 words'—the phrase for the Mystery).

40

41 The Second Corinthians was written in 57 CE; fourteen years prior would
 42 43 CE, which corresponds with the period of unrecorded activity between Saint
 43 Paul's departure from Jerusalem (Acts, 9:30) and his arrival at Antioch (Acts,
 44 11:26). It was these 'unspeakable' things that Paul was supposed to have
 45 imparted to his closest disciples like Theudas, the 'unspeakable' mysteries that
 46 passed on to Valentinus and Marcion. Paul and John would certainly have
 47 crossed paths in Ephesus, where the evangelist is reputed to have housed the

1 Virgin Mother after the Crucifixion, dying himself at a very advanced age at
 2 the end of the first century, the only one of the original twelve apostles to die
 3 of natural causes. This is referenced at the end of the Gospel of John, in
 4 contrast to the martyred Peter, although several attempts were made against his
 5 life in the hagiographic tradition, the most notable being the episode of the
 6 poisoned cup to whose toxins John proved immune (Pseudo-Abdias/Obadiah,
 7 *Historia certaminis apostolici*, ca. sixth-tenth centuries), interpreted in the
 8 Renaissance as a reference to the Eucharist cup (Ruck and Hoffman 2012, pp.
 9 121-125). Jesus mingled the Holy Spirit with the poison in John's cup and
 10 converted the water into a 'draught of life' (second-century apocryphal Acts of
 11 John).

12 Paul never knew Jesus before the Crucifixion, but the mystical encounter
 13 face-to-face with deity, is recorded as the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor,
 14 witnessed in three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, 17:1-8, Mark, 9:2-8, and
 15 Luke, 9:28-36) and the pseudonymous Epistle of Peter (2 Peter, 1:16-18). The
 16 opening of John about the logos, is thought also to reference the vision. Within
 17 the later Church, certain monastic traditions sought such a personal encounter
 18 with deity with heretical versions of the transubstantiated bread and wine, not
 19 substances magically imbued with the spirit of deity, but substances with
 20 chemical attributes capable of accessing altered states of consciousness.

21
 22

23 **Monk's Flesh**

24

25 Such secret rites, reserved for the more elite inductees into the religion,
 26 might be expected to have persisted in certain, mystically oriented monastic
 27 communities in the evolving history of the Church. As secrets, they would have
 28 been displayed covertly in theological art recognizable only to the community
 29 of initiates—probably an element, in fact, of the initiation— or only
 30 inadvertently disclosed in garbled narrative accounts not understood by the
 31 hagiographers.

32 Thus, the involvement of psychoactive fungi in monastic dietary regimes
 33 is preserved in the Romansch metaphor for mushrooms as 'monk's flesh/meat'
 34 (*Mönchfleisch*, compare 'nun's flesh/meat,' *Nonnenfleisch*) (Hoffman *et al.*
 35 2001; Grimm and Grimm 1838-1854). This was not meant to indicate paltry
 36 fare of an ascetic dietary regime, but something that nourished the spirit, a
 37 Eucharistic entheogen, as the Old German folk verse indicates (Wasson
 38 correspondence, Wasson Archives, Harvard University; Grimm and Grimm,
 39 *DW, s.v., Mönchfleisch*).

40

41 —*Ich hab nichz an meim Leib, das mich zu gaislichen Dingen treib; und suchet*
 42 *Ich drei Tag order vier, Ich fund kain Mönchfleisch nindert an mir.*

43 —'I have nothing to love that drives me to spiritual things, and seek I three day or
 44 four, find I no monk's meat nearby [around me].

45

46 The verse references Fastnacht, Old High German Fasching (supposedly
 47 cognate with dietary 'fast' but probably participating in 'fascination,

1 bewitchment, crazy') or Carnival, Mardi Gras, the last night before Lent, when
 2 just the opposite of Lenten or paltry fare is requisite. The *Mönchfleisch*/
 3 *Nonnenfleisch* is a spiritual stimulant, inducing visions of the Carnival horde of
 4 demonic apparitions. The *Nonnenfleisch* are now replaced by *Nonnenfürzle*,
 5 *pets-de-nonne*, *pets de soeur*, 'nun's farts' or nun's puff's, round-domed, deep-
 6 fried beignets, popular around Mardi Gras; the shape is apparently reminiscent
 7 of the fungal cap that was its original form. The origin of the name is said to be
 8 a mystery. They are supposedly a version of *paix-de-nonne*, 'nun's peace,'
 9 descriptive of the altered state of consciousness. Fastnacht, with its variant
 10 names, is an ethnic celebration of the Alpine Germano-Franco peoples, a
 11 region rich in the growth of mushrooms. It was celebrated as a *Bacchusfest* or
 12 bacchanalia (Grimm and Grimm, *DW, s.v., Fastnacht*). Some stouts brewed by
 13 Monks in Germany were known as 'liquid bread' because the monks drank it
 14 during fasts and Lent, demonstrating that sobriety was not a requirement for
 15 fasting.

16 St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) according to her Italian biographer,
 17 her spiritual advisor, who succeeded her as head of the hospital for the poor,
 18 where she worked without pay from 1490 for nine years until her health began
 19 to fail, employed agaricks (Italian *agarico*, Amanitas, either *muscaria* or
 20 *pantherina*) in a regime of extreme self-mortification (Marabotto 1551;
 21 Catherine 1551; Craveri 1981; Maineri 1737).

22
 23 [with the result that God] infused such suavity and divine sweetness in her heart
 24 that body and soul were so full as to make her unable to stand.

25
 26 Catherine sprinkled the agaricks along with dust of aloes on what little
 27 food she consumed to render it unpalatable. The aloe has a bitter, acrid taste
 28 and could be employed that way as a denaturing additive to food making it
 29 unfit for eating, but the role of the agaricks surely is symbolic as a demonic
 30 marker, making it loathsome, a deterrent for the appetite. Whatever the precise
 31 species that she ingested, it was not chosen for its culinary suitability. Teresa
 32 and her spiritual advisor apparently were unaware of the inevitable visionary
 33 potential of the saint's denatured food (Piomelli 1991; Samorini 1994; Ruck *et*
 34 *al.* 2006). Teresa received the stigmata and survived for decades often on a diet
 35 only of the Eucharist (anorexia mirabilis, Forcen 2013). She suffered almost
 36 constant visions and spoke frequently with deities, enraptured in divine love,
 37 leaving a record of her rapture in her detailed descriptions of purgatory and
 38 paradise, often overwhelmed and lying prostrate upon the ground. Among her
 39 relatives were two popes and her father became viceroy of Naples.

40 Often the role of a psychoactive agent may be detected in garbled
 41 narratives preserved in the hagiography of certain saints. The role could be
 42 expected to involve the Eucharist since that is the motif that most clearly
 43 involves the ingestion of an entheogen, exactly as defined in Paul's First
 44 Corinthian. That this was a mushroom or belonged to the metaphoric complex
 45 of fungal growths is the hardest to argue, probably because of the aura of
 46 phobia so deeply ingrained in cultural ethnic traditions, what Wasson termed
 47 mycophobia (Wasson and Wasson 1957), persisting from ancient taboos upon

1 it as a sacrament. It is also, however, the clearest assimilation of the Greco-
2 Roman heritage of Dionysus and the bacchanalia (Ruck 2017a). The role of the
3 mushroom extends backward into Egyptian religion and ancient Judea and pre-
4 Christian Jewish religion (Ruck *et al.* 2020). It also is probably the original
5 botanical identity of the deified sacrament Soma of the Sanskrit Vedic texts
6 (Wasson 1968), and of the analogous *haoma* of the Persian/Iranian *Avesta*,
7 which developed into Zoroastrian Mithraism, as it was proselytized throughout
8 the Roman Empire, and still practiced until recently today with the *Amanita*
9 *muscaria* as sacrament by the marginalized Yezidi people (Ruck *et al.* 2011).
10 The mushroom is also fundamental to the mythological traditions of the Greek
11 heroes and in particular the tale of the hero Perseus and the migration of the
12 Indo-Europeans into the Greek lands and their assimilation of governance at
13 the city of Mycenae (Ruck 2017c). There is evidence in rock art of the
14 Neolithic (*ca.* 6000 BCE) that psychoactive mushrooms were involved in
15 religious rituals in Europe even before the Indo-European migrations out of the
16 central Asiatic plateau, perhaps spread northward out of southern Africa (Akers
17 *et al.* 2011). Even earlier at the site of Göbekli Tepe in southwestern Anatolia,
18 dating from the tenth millennium, some of the free-standing T-shaped
19 (mushroom-shaped) monoliths are carved with an ascending serpent
20 terminating with a mushroom-shaped head (Collins 2010, 2018). The
21 mushroom cult may have originated as the primordial religious awakening in
22 the central African homeland of the common human genome (Webster 2004).
23 This is the topographical region on the southern shore of the great encircling
24 Ocean stream where in Greek tradition, the goddess Persephone of the
25 Eleusinian Mystery picked the narcotic flower mythologized as the *narkissos*
26 (*νάρκισσος*).

27 The mushroom cults were either spontaneously generated at various sites
28 (as perhaps indicated by similar cults among the peoples of the New World, a
29 result of mystical shamanic botanical resonance or communication, Narby
30 1998; Geniuz 2009), or the spread out of central Asia with the Indo-European
31 migration was preceded by an earlier northward spread of the cult out of Africa
32 with the most ancient ancestors of humankind. The mushrooms, perhaps more
33 easily than other botanical specimens, are suggestive to the human imagination
34 of anthropomorphisms and zoomorphic manifestations. Although other
35 psychoactive plants were apparently also involved in Christianity's syncretism
36 of other religions, the mushroom is the item of prime focus for this
37 investigation of entheogens depicted in Christian art because it is the most
38 distinctive of its characteristic shape, without specification of species. If the
39 species can be distinguished, the *Amanita muscaria* and related species are the
40 most distinctive to identify because of the color and scabby splotches dotting
41 its expanded cap or pileus.

42 In the canon of saints, St. Benedict of Nursa offers a good example of
43 folkloric motifs in his hagiographic mythologized biography. When we come
44 to examine particular works of Christian art, it will be strongly suspect that
45 certain monasteries of the Benedictine Order that he founded preserved and
46 perpetuated the fungal Eucharist of their beatified leader. Benedict of Nursia

1 was the son of a Roman noble, who around the year 500 CE as a young man
2 secluded himself in a cave. Upon the death of the abbot of a nearby monastery,
3 he was invited as the replacement. The hostile monks twice tried to kill him,
4 first poisoning his drink and secondly his bread, both probably referencing the
5 Eucharist. The first attempt failed because the chalice shattered at the
6 transubstantiation, and the second because a raven stole the poisoned bread
7 away. If there is any truth in the hagiographic tradition, the poisoned bread
8 probably references the metaphor of the fly-agaric as raven's bread (Klapp
9 2013). Benedict founded twelve monasteries in the vicinity, and finally Monte
10 Cassino on a hilltop between Rome and Naples in the year 530 CE. His
11 iconography features the poisoned chalice and the raven, which can be read as
12 originally derived from a psychoactive Eucharist metaphorically identifiable as
13 raven's bread. This indicates an intentional role of the mushroom in the
14 Benedictine monastic regimen, unlike St. Catherine's apparently unwitting
15 repeated induction of a visionary state of altered consciousness.

16 St. Catherine of Genova bizarrely had a mythologized folkloric precedent
17 in the early fourth-century St. Catherine of Alexandria, who may be modeled
18 upon the roughly contemporary Alexandrian Neoplatonist astronomer and
19 mathematician Hypatia, who was murdered by Christians in the Library of
20 Alexandria. The legend of this Catherine of Alexandria suggests that she was
21 herself an anthropomorphism of the mushroom (Ruck and Hoffman 2012). She
22 was removed from the canon in 1969. The defining iconographic emblem of
23 Catherine of Alexandria is the radial spoked breaking wheel of her martyrdom,
24 an icon for the mushroom's gilled cap. When the wheel that was supposed to
25 break her apart, crushing her bones as it rolled over her, shattered and broke
26 instead, she was decapitated. From her decapitated head flowed divine milk
27 instead of blood. Sometimes the sword of her decapitation (or harvest, in terms
28 of her fungal analogue) is depicted piercing the wheel. The shattered wheel is
29 emblematic of her ecstatic transport, and the sword piercing it represents the
30 virginity she offered to her divine lover. She had vowed to marry only someone
31 of greater wisdom than herself, as the personification of Sophia, and this turned
32 out to be Christ. The sixth-century St. Catherine's monastery is situated at the
33 base of Mount Sinai where the Empress Consort Helena, the mother of
34 Constantine, identified what she thought was the burning bush of Moses'
35 encounter with Yahweh. The monastery preserves that bush still growing there
36 as a rambling rose. In the ninth century, a monk of St. Catherine's had a vision
37 of angels transporting the martyred saint's remains to the summit of the
38 mountain. He allegedly found her body there, at the site supposedly of the
39 original burning bush, intact and uncorrupted, smelling sweetly of myrrh, with
40 her hair still growing, like fungal mycelia. The exudation from her decapitated
41 head was marketed as a holy relic with purported medicinal properties, sought
42 by pilgrims to the site. Catherine, by folk etymology dating back to Roman
43 times, is derived from καθαρή for 'pure,' cognate with English 'cathartic,' and
44 she is patroness of urinary incontinence, from catheter, perhaps involving her
45 folkloric persona in the motif of the potentiated efficacy of the toxin of
46 *Amanita muscaria* as its metabolite in urine.

1 The fourteenth-century St. Catherine of Sienna was also betrothed to God,
 2 and received the circumcised foreskin of Christ as her wedding ring, invisible
 3 to ordinary sight, although several actual exemplars of the Holy Prepuce
 4 existed as holy relics, one the gift of the Byzantine Empress Irene, who gave it
 5 to Charlemagne. Charlemagne, upon his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in
 6 800 gave it to Pope Leo III.

7 Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) in her Spanish Autobiography left a
 8 detailed description of her orgasmic experience of engagement with the deity
 9 (Transverberation or penetration of St. Teresa), depicted in the 1652 Bernini
 10 installation, the Ecstasy of St. Teresa, located in the Santa Maria Vittoria in
 11 Rome.

12
 13 In his hands, I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to
 14 see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it
 15 penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them
 16 out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain
 17 was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the
 18 sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor
 19 will one's soul be content with anything less than God. It is not bodily pain, but
 20 spiritual, though the body has a share in it—indeed, a great share. So sweet are
 21 the colloquies of love which pass between the soul and God that if anyone thinks
 22 I am lying I beseech God, in His goodness, to give him the same experience.

23
 24 Her Carmelite nunnery is just a few blocks from the twelfth-century
 25 Church of St. Vincente. She must surely have noticed the mushroom in the
 26 tympanum of the great west portal to the church on the many occasions she
 27 must have passed through. We cannot know what she thought of it. The
 28 mushroom is placed between two smaller hemispheres within the
 29 hemispherical tympanum depicting two versions of the banquet, the
 30 terrestrial and the heavenly. The whole design of the portal with the central
 31 mullion as the stipe supporting the tympanum cap is an iconographic portal
 32 of the mushroom as gateway to the basilica and divine experience. Thus, it
 33 was customary to call the vestibule of the church its narthex, from the herb-
 34 collecting staff of the Dionysian bacchant revel as if the entrance to divine
 35 communion were through the medicine cabinet. The scenes depicted
 36 illustrate Luke, 16:19-31, the tale of the beggar Lazarus the beggar
 37 (probably the same tradition as the Lazarus (Λάζαρος, from Hebrew for
 38 'God has helped') who was risen from the dead (suggested by Luke, 16:31,
 39 otherwise related only in John, 11:1-44). Lazarus on the left, is the beggar
 40 at the door of the rich man longing to eat what scraps fell from the table of
 41 the terrestrial banquet. On the right, Lazarus sits at the heavenly banquet,
 42 while the rich man in hell calls out or just a drop of water to quench his
 43 eternal thirsting in the agony of fire. The mediating mushroom placed
 44 between the two scenes is distinctive as to the family of the Amanitas, with
 45 their downcast skirt of the annulus ring (Ruck *et al.* 2006, pp. 362-365).

46
 47

1 **The Mushroom Eucharist Altar**

2

3 Such a psychoactive sacrament for the deeper Mysteries of Christianity
4 would certainly have been hedged with silence, denied under oath, sequestered
5 from the profane, reserved only for the elite initiated community. Once,
6 inadvertently, a naïve witness left the startling revelation that the Eucharist
7 altar in his august monastery was the holy mushroom.

8 Since as early as the third century, the easternmost peninsula of the
9 Thracian Chalcidice was identified as the paradise garden of the Virgin. Saint
10 Gregory of Palamas (*ca.* 1296-1357 or 1359, a monk of Mount Athos) in his
11 *Life of Petros the Athonite*, claims that the Virgin, accompanied by the
12 Evangelist John came ashore there, blown off course, while sailing to Cyprus
13 to visit Lazarus, and enchanted with the beauty of the place, she heard a
14 heavenly voice granting it to her as her special garden. Since then, it was
15 considered off limits for other females of whatever species. Again, Athos is a
16 testament to the cult of the Virgin that seems to have been associated with the
17 mystical evangelist of the Gospels. Since the ninth century, it was the Holy
18 Mountain, reserved for male monastic communities. The politically
19 autonomous monastic communities of the Holy Mountain sought direct
20 personal mystical contact with deity, on the model of Christ's transfiguration
21 on Mount Tabor and Paul's heavenly ascent to the Mysteries in Second
22 Corinthians. They practiced a variety of modes to access such vision,
23 influenced by eastern mysticism—to visually apprehend the deity through
24 one's transformed physical eyes—and were satirically termed 'navel-grazers,'
25 *omphalópsychoi* (ὀμφαλόψυχοι), 'people who have their soul in their navel'
26 (Siniosoglou 2011, 93 *et seq.*). The movement was the fourteenth-century
27 Hesychast controversy, from Greek *hesychía* (ἡσυχία), 'stillness,' and Gregory
28 of Palamas (1296/7-1357/9) was its chief exponent. Minningen, a resident
29 physician of the county of Middlesex Pauper Lunatic Asylum at Hanwell
30 (1839) employed the term *omphalosképsis* (ὀμφαλοσκέψις 'navel-inspection')
31 as a term for Eastern meditation. However, four marble atlantid columns (male
32 caryatids in the persona of Atlas) from the second century CE depict satyrs
33 contemplating their navels, implying the Dionysian nature of the subsequent
34 soul-vision (discovered in Rome, Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MR 183, Ma 597).

35 A document written in response to the Orthodox Church Council of Brest
36 in 1596 reveals that a mushroom was a Eucharistic sacrament in one of these
37 monastic communities. It is an epistle by a monk from the Holy Mountain
38 addressed to the six 'renegade' bishops who had voted to accept reunion with
39 the Church of Rome. In enumerating the miracles that had sanctified Mount
40 Athos, he describes the metamorphosis of the Eucharistic table into a holy
41 mushroom (Goldblatt 1994, Professor Goldblatt ignored an inquiry, asking
42 what word was employed for 'mushroom' in the text).

43

44 When the names of the forty martyrs were pronounced by the archpriest, there
45 began to grow from the foot of the holy table a holy mushroom with its cap in the
46 shape of forty apples, which ascended over the holy table and overshadowed the
47 entire sanctuary. And for this glorious miracle all present gave glory to God and

1 to the forty martyrs. And then all the infirm found in the cloister were healed
2 through the possibility of tasting the holy mushroom.

3
4 The Holy Forty (*Hágiōi Tesserákonta*, Ἅγιοι Τεσσεράκοντα, demotic
5 Ἅγιοι Σαράντα) were martyred in 320, victims of the persecutions of the
6 Emperor Licinius in Armenia, frozen to death, exposed naked on a bitterly cold
7 night on a frozen pond near Sebaste. Basil of Caesarea (370-379) gave details
8 of the torture in his homily delivered on their feast day, within a half century of
9 their death. Warm baths were prepared for anyone who would renounce
10 Christianity, and one who yielded immediately went into shock upon
11 immersion in the water and died. Thereupon, one of the guards saw a
12 supernatural brilliance over the others and converted to Christianity, throwing
13 off his clothing and joining the others on the ice, so that the number forty
14 remained constant. Basil was one of the Cappadocian Fathers, together with his
15 brother Gregory of Nyssa and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, promoting the
16 theological concept of the Trinity, one deity of equal essence distributed in
17 three personae of godhead.

18 The miracle of the holy apple-tree altar appears to be uncontestable literary
19 documentation for a mushroom identified as the Christian Eucharist among a
20 monastic community devoted to achieving the illuminated knowledge of the
21 Transfiguration, something anathematized by the Church as a heresy.

24 Church Dining

25
26 The clearest evidence for a psychoactive Eucharist in early Christianity is
27 the Basilica of Aquileia, just seventy-five miles north of Venice on the Adriatic
28 coast. Beneath the bell-tower of the eleventh-century Basilica, there is
29 preserved the mosaic that formed the floor of the fourth-century meeting hall.
30 It displays unequivocal baskets of snails and mushrooms, apparently, the
31 *Amanita muscaria* (Fabbro 1999). This was an Agape Hall, not a restaurant,
32 and the presence of the mushrooms cannot refer to ordinary culinary dining.
33 Such a rite was not a secret, but proclaimed by the building's decoration, and
34 not necessarily suspended even when the later basilica was built over it.

35 Frescos indicate, moreover, that Christian banqueting took place at the
36 tombs of the departed in the subterranean catacombs. This was not ordinary
37 banqueting, obviously, but the table scenes as depicted in the catacombs
38 resemble the assemblage of the Eucharistic Last Supper (Mururessku 2020;
39 Saxon 2012). To judge from the names on the frescos, the supposed deceased
40 were Greek women, whose names appear to be possible toasts as metaphors or
41 personifications of the transcendent result of the banqueting—not their tombs:
42 love making (Agape) and beatific trance (Irene, 'peace'):

43
44 [Graffiti, with depictions of a banqueting table and guests]:

45 *Agape, misce nobbis [sic]* ('Love, mix us a drink.')

46 *Agape, misce mi* ('Love, mix me a drink.')

47 *Irene, da calda* ('Peace, give me a cup of drink.')

1 Often seven diners are present, probably indicative of the seven holy
2 sacraments, the stages of initiation into the Mysteries.

3 As late as the third century, Saint Augustine spoke of celebrating feasts in
4 tombs and catacombs and of giving the label of religion to drunken revelry
5 (Augustine, *Epistles*, 32). These were where the mythologized history of the
6 persecutions claims that the early Christians hid from the Roman authorities—
7 in the catacombs, although it was no doubt ineffective and merely would have
8 rendered the banqueters huddled underground more vulnerable to attack. It
9 would be very inconvenient to arrange a full banquet underground, and the fare
10 was probably a Eucharistic drinking, a communion with the dead who might be
11 expected to materialize and join as spiritual presences in the ceremony. The
12 Christian banqueting in the catacombs had Roman precedent in the sacrificial
13 offerings for the manes on the three days of the year when the souls of the dead
14 were thought to rise from the dead. Offerings were placed on the grave site and
15 the mourners partook of a meal nearby. In addition to the private celebrations,
16 a universal festival, the Parentalia, was held on the final days of the year,
17 which in the old Roman calendar was the end of February. The Roman
18 converts Christianity were merely continuing in their traditional ethnic rites,
19 transferred to the new religion.

20 In the catacombs beneath St. Peter's Basilica, the Eucharist was celebrated
21 as a night-long communion amid the tombs of the martyrs, which were seen as
22 Christ's altars. One of the subterranean chambers has a frescoed ceiling, a
23 perfect circle within a perfect circle. Four bearded male figures converge,
24 holding a scroll in one hand, a magician's wand in his belted tunic, standing
25 upon a giant plant, probably fungal, suggesting that the entire circular chamber
26 is cast beneath the shade of the ceiling as a mushroom cap (Muraresku, 2020,
27 p. 263).

28
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