

The ABC of Santo Daime:  
From Ayahuasca to Santo Daime<sup>1</sup>

Claude Bauchet

**« Examinar a consciência**

**È a primeira lição... »**

**« To examine one's conscience**

**Is the first lesson... »**

**Madrinha Rita**

Preface to the French edition

Around the year 1930, Raimundo Irineu Serra, who became known as Mestre Irineu, founded a spiritual lineage, the ritual of which centres around the partaking of ayahuasca as a sacrament. He named the lineage "Santo Daime" (which can be translated into French as "Saint Don", the "Holy Gift"), a syncretic religious movement which embodies Christian tradition, shamanism, and spiritual values arising from the interactions in Brazil of Amazonian Indians, Africans, and Asian peoples.

There are already several French books about ayahuasca, but apart from some papers by Patrick Deshayes there are to my knowledge no publications in French on the Santo Daime.<sup>2</sup> The French edition of this book *ABC of Santo Daime* by Maria Betania Albuquerque Barbosa, translated from Portuguese, therefore appears at an opportune time: written in a simple and educational manner, it provides for us the keys to the alphabet of the Santo Daime.

It is impossible to explain in depth the full experience of Santo Daime, as it is unique to each person who undertakes the practice. One can make some explanations, as this book does, about Santo Daime history, doctrine, religious ritual, and its past and current social and

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<sup>1</sup> BAUCHET, C. 2016. O ABC do Santo Daime. In: ALBURQUERQUE, B. *De l'Ayahuasca au Santo Daime*. Paris: Conjonction.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Deshayes is a researcher at the Équipe de Recherche en Ethnologie Amérindienne - CNRS. One example of his writing is in the *Revue Socio-Anthropologie* N° 17 -18, 2006, titled: « *Les trois Monde du Santo Daime* » [The three worlds of Santo Daime]

cultural realities; but the only way to gain a deep understanding is to experience it for yourself.

I personally came across ayahuasca shamanism in 1996 during a short trip to Peru, and I returned to France with my worldview quite shaken. A year after my return, I learned of a small group of people in the south of France who used ayahuasca as a sacrament, as part of the religious ritual of Santo Daime. In truth at that time I was attracted more by the psychedelic experience of ayahuasca than by religious experience. I was not disappointed because I received confirmation that "When the student is ready, the Master arrives."

Many talk about ayahuasca intellectually, but to know the taste of milk one must drink it; otherwise, one is limited to boring preconceptions.

So I practiced many rituals with my new friends in the south of France, and each time I found myself convinced that Santo Daime holds an essential biochemical key to access the self-knowledge that I had been seeking for a long time. At that period I was struggling in a deep malaise, moving between psychoanalysis and psychotherapies, researching the diseases that plagued me from the inside and ruined my outer being.

To continue this path, which I foresaw would be a very serious undertaking, I decided to go to its native place, to inquire at the source; so I travelled to Brazil and visited the main churches of the Santo Daime in the major cities: Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Manaus, Belem, and Rio Branco. Then I journeyed to the village of Mapiá located at a day's canoe ride from Boca do Acre, a small town on the edge of the Amazon forest: we travelled along the Rio Purus and Igarape Mapiá (the Purus River and Mapiá River). About a hundred families associated with the mother church of Santo Daime live here, in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. It would take more space than this preface permits to describe the experience of this journey into the depths of the Magic Forest.

I returned to France convinced of the authenticity of this spiritual path, of this Brazilian religion which springs from traditions rooted in the history of the Brazilian people, and from the ingestion of ayahuasca for religious and healing purposes, practiced for centuries by many tribes in the Amazon.

Using terms from the philosophy of our Western culture, I would say that the Santo Daime is a spiritual school where the researcher can access a metaphysics of Being, and thereby exit from Plato's cave. There is no shaman, no guru; only our consciousness expanding in divine intoxication which allows us to "See" and to practice asceticism in everyday life.

In France, since 20 April 2005, the main components of our sacred drink have been classified as Category 1 narcotics, a classification which forbids us to practice our religion, since our

sacrament is inseparable from our ritual. We are therefore confronting a clear case of violation of religious freedom, and of cultural distinctiveness, which is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The brief history which follows reminds us of the facts of this case:

In November 1999, six practitioners Santo Daime in France were arrested. Half of them were held in prison for three weeks on charges of "use and international trafficking of a narcotic [the DMT contained in ayahuasca is prohibited by international conventions], organization of criminal conspiracy, and organized fraud with a sectarian background."

On 15 January 2004, the Criminal Court of Paris pronounced suspended sentences against the six defendants.

On 13 January 2005 an appeal against the judgment was lodged with the Court of Appeal and the Court of Paris. The Court of Appeal acknowledged that:

- 1) Ayahuasca / Santo Daime is not prohibited in France
- 2) Santo Daime does not use DMT (dimethyltryptamine) as a narcotic in the sense banned by national and international conventions. The court acquitted the six accused.

Three months after this ruling, in April 2005, the Ministry of Health issued the decree which classified all the components of ayahuasca / Santo Daime as Category 1 narcotics. However, the order avoids all mention of ayahuasca and Santo Daime as such, which effectively disguises this prohibition which betrays the cultural and religious aspects of ayahuasca.

We protested at the State Council on 4 July 2005, calling for the repeal of this classification. However, the application was rejected at a State Council meeting of 3 December 2007, which exhausted all our legal remedies in France.

On 25 November 2011, on the advice of the head of the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Interior, we wrote a letter to the Minister of Health to request the opening of a dialogue. Our purpose in pursuing a dialogue was to obtain a waiver to use ayahuasca / Santo Daime in France as part of our religious ritual, while respecting the law and the requirements of Public Health authorities.

On 25 January 2012 we received a refusal from the Minister of Health (Mr Xavier Bertrand) which stated: "The freedom of religion that you claim cannot be exercised at the expense of public health, considering the dangers associated with the consumption of these plants and substances."

Alcohol and tobacco consumption in France accounts for more than 70,000 deaths a year; but there has been no single case of death due to the ritual ingestion of ayahuasca, in any country of the world. Readers can judge for themselves!

It should be noted that at no time did the Ministry of Health try to contact us to ask our opinion as citizens concerned with the prohibition; it also could not ignore our existence since we were there before the classification order ... is there a better example of arbitrariness?

On 26 July 2012, we sent a letter to the Interior Minister, Manuel Valls, again requesting the opening of a dialogue to jointly explore an exemption procedure to use ayahuasca / Santo Daime in our religious framework ... to date, September 2014, we still have not received any response!

In this context it is interesting that Giovanna Valls, the sister of Manuel Valls who has since become Prime Minister, in a book published in Catalan, recently testified to the healing of her addiction to drugs (heroin, cocaine, etc.) through treatment with Ayahuasca. The Prime Minister was very moved reading this book. See Giovanna Valls Galfetti, *Aferrada a la vida*, La Magrana, 2014.

In November 2012 four practitioners in the south of France were found to have received ayahuasca / Santo Daime (police agents accompanied the postal worker making the delivery). Our four friends, who defended religious freedom, were each sentenced to a fine of € 150. The recipient of the package of ayahuasca only, was in addition liable to a customs fine of € 1,575. These convictions, despite their apparent leniency, are unacceptable. The judgment states that the decree of the Ministry of Health "cannot be considered as a prohibition from practicing the religion, nor does it constitute a disproportionate reaction to the practice. The religious practice of Daime can in fact be undertaken without the use of Ayahuasca". Our religious ritual, as I have already indicated, is inseparable from our sacrament. Therefore, despite the wording of the judgement, it is clearly an attack on religious freedom.

This prohibition is unjust and the classification decree is not based on a public health issue. When this sacred drink is used in the context of our religious ritual and in strict compliance with the rules that accompany it, it involves no risk.

No, this decision is the result of a political decision in a surprising national consensus between left and right. Freedom of religion is one of the fundamental rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and this right is superior to all the laws that could undermine it. I say this in all humility, under the auspices of the Declaration and therefore of religious freedom. In the age of globalization, this prohibition is retrograde, arrogant, and filled with irrational fears. Perhaps we should simply wait until this ignorance dissolves by itself. In any case we remain vigilant in support of the legalization process because "we cannot hide our light under a bushel" (Gospel of St. Matthew).

With gratitude, affection and respect, I wish to pay tribute here to Padrinho Sebastião, the Sage of the Amazon rainforest, who transmitted to the world the Holy Light contained like a vibrant seed at the heart of our Sacrament; as well as to his family, particularly his wife Rita Madrinha; and to Padrinho Alfredo his son and successor, who continues through the work of his father, to bring to the world a message of peace, love, truth, justice, humility and praise to nature.

Viva o Santo Daime!

"Harmonia, Amor, Verdade e Justiça"

Claude Bauchet

(Paris, July 2014)

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Note by English translator:

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration is considered equivalent to International Law. It was adopted at the Palais de Chaillot, Paris, France. The relevant section of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is Article 18 :

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Toute personne a droit à la liberté de pensée, de conscience et de religion; ce droit implique la liberté de changer de religion ou de conviction ainsi que la liberté de manifester sa religion ou sa conviction, seule ou en commun, tant en public qu'en privé, par l'enseignement, les pratiques, le culte et l'accomplissement des rites.