

(Notes after a Peter Berger lecture on Jer.7.18, 44.15ff: "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven," 29 Oct 74, St.Peter's Lutheran Church)

1. Widows and orphans don't get to eat cakes baked for the Queen of Heaven (Ishtar, Astaroth, Astartu, Astarte): religions of pleasure/prosperity are always insensitive to social injustice. The deity, female or male, wearing the robe of voluptuousness will not wear the robe of righteousness. Cut off from cult, ethics dies. (*+ Aftar, a god; root means "to irrigate.")
2. Sacred sexuality always, whether male deity or prostitute, or female deity or prostitute, concerns itself with the fertility of womb/land, i.e. with getting—and therefore is insensitive to giving, i.e. the claims of the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, the widow and orphan, the stranger, the foreigner. Prosperity and greed blind their devotees to the unprosperous and raped. (An extension of Berger: these "notes" are recordings + my commentary, chiefly extensions.)
3. In the light of today's moral demands upon humankind, "a religion of pleasure is...obscene." (This was the prophetic burden of the Berger lecture.)
4. Jer. shows that "the transcendence of God (as Creator/Provider) and the needs of man are not in contradiction, but inexorably linked....The creation, hauntingly vulnerable, is to be celebrated" in the unity of cult and ethics, which is "true worship." The severance of cult from ethics sentimentalizes cult into pleasure-religion and moralizes-legalizes ethics into frozen, unresponsive, and therefore oppressive "righteousness," degenerate Puritanism--against which always appears (to use a term from British history) a Cavalier revolt. (Cp. Apollonian/Dionysian oscillation in Greek history.)
5. When worship is live and clear (as in Jeremiah's time), it is either good or evil; when, as now, worship is peripheral and fuzzy, "vague," life itself goes as dull as "a businessman in early afternoon after a heavy lunch." The chthonic will soon erupt, as it is now in "California Christianity," the Human Potential Movement, the nature-rhythm movements (body cults, astrology, etc.), charismatism, pneumatism, cyborg religion (bioenergetics, etc.).
6. Subtitle of the lecture: "2500 Years of Religious Ecstasy." This peak type of "standing out" (lit. meaning of "ecstasy") experience can be had either by hypertrophy (overfeeding: pleasure religions, "cakes") or hypotrophy (underfeeding: fasting and body-control religions, not even "bread"). Jer. and Berger do not deal with the latter. TM is an instance of combining the two in a secular fashion: having your cake while not eating your bread! (*Way #4.)
7. The prophets were not antisex (as in "1984"'s "Antisex League"), but anti-sacred-sex. The Hebrews-Israelities were "relaxed" about sex as natural, but uptight about sex as supernatural--and therefore would be uptight about much in our sexual revolution, which is "Astarte Rediviva," Norman O. Brown and "the ideology of the sexual revolution," "a resurgence of sacred sexuality" ("Astarte is alive and well") bubbling up within "secularized Astartism."
8. Our scientific worldview has "repressed" not only sexual-libidinous material (Freud) but the very domain of ecstasy, "declaring transcendence inoperable." Our "reality police watch over the boundaries of the culture, looking for evidences of transcendence as contraband goods," to maintain "the cognitive status quo" and punish offenders with job-loss, electrotherapy, etc.
9. Secularization has "demystified and trivialized reality," so that now the supernatural in any traditional form must return "in plain brown envelopes."
10. Sex as the sacrament for celebrating the rhythms of nature in womb/land always is "cheap grace."

11. What was in the cakes? Berger did not raise this question of chemopsychedelia, but I'd say soma is quite likely. It'd check with his description of Astarte religion as "the most archaic experience of consciousness-expansion.".....12. Implications for ecology: I complained that he called the eco-putdown on the Bible "inarguable"--whereas biochemist René Dubos in his THE GOD WITHIN says this notion is a dirty trick played by Buddhist missionary Suzuki beginning in 1950.....13. Biblical God/world polarization: "confronts."

14. No healthy society without healthy worship: hedonistic or hazy worship is "improper," even "sinful.".....
 15. Both social and religious offenses are "in breach of contract.".....16. When the attentional energy of the upper classes rivets on psychedellic fascinations, the prophet says "'Amend your ways!'" This word is hard to hear both because hedonism de-sensitizes and because "no voluptuousness in caring for widows and orphans."