

gruity and conflict I can agree — but tragedy? Stenson's interest in existentialist categories leads him to turn humor inside out. If a comic statement is essentially tragic, what has happened to our language? Wit and humor reveal important aspects of human experience. They should not be forced to encompass all reality.

Wit is violent and painful. It deals with the conflicts and tensions of significant reality described by existential philosophers. Puns are gentle and tame; they reveal the similarities in life. Puns enrich our apprehensions and are therefore inherently sacramental. Yet Stenson relegates sacramentals, or "lesser blessings," to puns and preserves the more complex and important sacraments for wit (p. 149). His first analysis would make the comparison of wit with conversion and pun with sacraments more consistent. But having ascribed to wit the importance of the tragic and the serious, Stenson wrenches the logic of his own position, to keep such an important aspect of religious practice as sacraments within the scope of wit.

In spite of some excesses, Stenson's overall effort is a success. He stresses wit because he thinks it is a kind of paradoxical language that can make sense (meaning) out of the nonsense (logical self-contradictions) of religious affirmation. Contemporary man, including those who proclaim the death of God, must see that religious statements, like humorous ones, deal with two realities at once. Humor may surprise sometimes, but often it tells the truth. Can't religion be recognized as doing the same? Today's cultured despisers of religion may regard statements of faith as silly. But really, Stenson says, they are the pitifully obtuse folks who remain sober-faced at a party, who in the midst of laughter fail to see the point. Stenson makes his.

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The Timely Man

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APOLOGY FOR WONDER

By Sam Keen

New York: Harper and Row 1969 218 pp \$5.95

Sam Keen is a representative of the post-death-of-God theology, a theology that tries to make the Christian faith acceptable to modern man by appealing to phenomenology — an appeal that works toward the conception of God (or religion) by beginning with a study of universal phenomena pointing to a transcendent aspect of life.

Keen's basic a priori is theological: that common grace makes possible "trust in the context within which action must take place and confidence in the ability of the self to undertake appropriate action" (p. 203). This affirmation is not an explicit theme in the book, but it must be recognized in order for one to understand the perspective of Keen's analysis of human nature and life.

Wonder is the motif of this study. For the author, wonder is passive awareness of the beauty and wholeness of nature which is not subject to laboratory analysis. The wonderful, the holy, and the valuable are essentially one entity, not separate entities. The experience of wonder in one's life is prerequisite to "authentic humanness."

In his historical survey of wonder in human experience, Keen looks at the primal, the Greek, and the Judeo-Christian man. These three men (constituting the "traditional man") cannot be pitted against each other. There are differences, but there is also a unity in their common experience of the wonder-full cosmos. The squabble between Athens and Jerusalem is a family affair; traditional man saw the cosmos as a teleologically ordered system governed by a divine rationality comprehensible to the human mind.

Traditional man, *homo admirans*, stands in stark contrast to modern man, *homo faber*. *Homo admirans* lived in a cosmos already "partially informed by patterns of meaning and value;" *homo faber* lives in constant anxiety and chaos "which he alone must shape and make meaningful" (p. 80).

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Keen traces the decline of reason that led man to a stance of total contingency. First, Hume and Kant showed that the mind *creates rather than discovers* order in nature. Sartre and fellow atheistic existentialists developed the full implications of this relativistic insight: life is "absurd;" existence is simply "to be there." To this "accident" of being, man responds in two opposite ways, says Keen — primarily in the Apollonian way, connoting a conservative, orderly society; and secondarily in the Dionysian way, implying a reckless, uninhibited outlook on life.

The Apollonian way is closely related to *homo faber*. Modern man reacts to contingency by incessantly *working* to create meaning. Man cannot accept his life as a good gift of God. Rather he must continually strive to become human, to have dignity. Man as *maker* turns his body and mind into tools and seeks thereby to hollow out a niche of meaning in the alien universe. Man seeks *meaning* by gaining controlling knowledge over his environment. He seeks *control* by imposing structure and law and scientific method. Keen holds that any philosophy of life (such as Marxism, scientism) that pictures the world as a totally closed system is a "sick" philosophy; it is "ideopathological." Such a closed system, he believes, leaves no room for wonder and hope and thus results in a despair which is neither healthy nor mature.

Conversely, the Dionysian way knows no limits, norms, or boundaries. Response to life is as accidental, free, and chaotic as life itself. Those who walk in the Dionysian way are such personalities as Altizer and Marcuse, and the followers of their type of philosophy — the drug culture and the hippie movement. The Dionysian consciousness of perpetual spontaneity is schizophrenic and equally as disastrous to human freedom as the Apollonian way, says Keen. Keen applauds the Dionysian recognition of the repressive nature of present-day Apollonian society. But he criticizes it for not being a "responsible" alternative. It does not set forth a workable social order in which day-to-day responsibilities can be carried out.

Keen's mediating solution is to take the best of both modern life-styles in what he defines as "polychrome existence." His motto is: "There is a time for everything under the sun." The "timely man," *homo tempestivus*, is the ideal man. He knows when to contemplate the wonderful, and when to discipline his life by work. Like the

dancer, he moves "gracefully" to the beat and rhythm of the music, for it is "impossible to create a casuistry of appropriate responses" (p. 198). The ethic advanced by Keen, in the end, seems similar to Richard Niebuhr's ethic of the responsible self.

My quarrel with Keen is not with his ethics nor with his theological presuppositions. The main objection I see to his thesis is his theological sellout to modern man — a sellout which need not be and against which his discussion of traditional man mitigates.

The idea of trust, which undergirds this book, Keen derives from theology, as is seen in the mention of God, gift, and grace in his excellent phenomenological study and in his "quasi-theological postscript." This is fine and good for the religious man — which Keen presumably is.

But trust is also the only viable option for the secular man, says Keen. Rather than ground the reasons for a viable trust in his whole phenomenological study of man (especially the "traditional" man he lauds), Keen essentially says that trust is the best route to take, because it alone leads to a mature, healthy view of life. Whereas in chapters two to four he contends for the traditional man's view of at least a partially rational universe over against the contingent world of modern man, in chapters five and six he seems to capitulate to the modern world view himself. That Keen no longer holds traditional man's world view as in any way applicable to modern man is seen in his fervent plea that at least modern man should hold on to trust, which he may root "in a positive doctrine of the absurd."

Keen admits that man's denial of the transcendent may be the best, after all, for now man has no separation between the sacred and the profane. Everything "sacred" is imminent and near. Modern man can celebrate (secular parallel for Christian "worship") in his "one-story, undifferentiated, contingent world." In letting go of his earlier contention for some universal norms in the history of society, Keen loses any ground for appeal to trust other than "it makes for a more healthy life view." This basis for trust merely begs the question of whether to accept a positive or a negative life view if one is trying to be *realistic* about life and not merely "mature." In sum, Keen has sold out to modern man's contingency but still pleads for "trust," although he has no phenomenological basis on which to do so.

Langdon Gilkey, one of the most respected names in American theology today, has written *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language*,¹ which also attempts to confront modern man with Christianity through a phenomenological approach. Unlike Keen, however, he does not capitulate to modern man's limited and narrow world view. In fact, Gilkey questions whether modern man, in the final analysis, is significantly different from traditional man.

Underneath modern man's "coming of age" and technological superiority Gilkey sees man with his fellow humans of all ages experiencing a sense of the transcendent in the depths of his being. Modern man's experience of the ultimate void (contingency) presses him "toward an anchorage in a transcendent totality of being" where life assumes both intellectual and existential meaning (p. 335).

REFERENCE

- 1 Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1969).