

[1969. Review of *Sense and Nonsense in Religion*, by Sten H. Stenson. *Christianity Today* 4 Jul.]

### **A Poor Defense of Religion**

*Sense and Nonsense in Religion*, by Sten H. Stenson (Abingdon, 1969, 255 pp., \$5.95), is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, professor of philosophy, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Professor Stenson at first intended to write a devastating criticism of all forms of religion. Then he decided to write a defense – against the four charges that religion is sick, silly, meaningless, and self-contradictory.

The last is the basic accusation and depends on the assertion that “of the proposed solutions of the problem of evil... none has stood up to criticism.” Job’s solution is particularly bad: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty.” Job’s solution, however, and Calvin’s, and even my own development in *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, is not open to the charge of self-contradiction. The usual charge is that Calvinism is too logical.

Professor Stenson does not like logic. That is why religion, though self-contradictory, is acceptable. “Religious testimony is a mythopoeic... expression of... momentous insights.” “The Bible is a myth... a collection of... shaggy dog stories, witticisms, puns, and so on.” The author openly accepts the allegorical method of interpretation and says, “This is not reprehensible.”

But this, I submit, *is* reprehensible. It enables a man to impose all sorts of contradictory interpretations on a text. “There is no one... true theological interpretation of religious testimony.” The proposition, David was King of Israel, can mean, LSD gives an experience of God. This is no scholarly method. Careful study gives place to hunch and impulse.

As an illustration of religious doctrine the author draws a physically impossible three-tined tuning fork. An elementary lesson in drawing would point out the mistake. In religion the stupid mistake is to remain. The author deprecates reducing ambiguous language to logical form. “This common hope of the thirties and forties is no longer a deliberate or popular program” – as if it were not the hope and deliberate program of the eighteen thirties, the twelve thirties, the three thirties B.C., and of all rational mankind.

Anti-intellectualism, stubborn irrationalism, and existential freedom in exegesis make a poor defense of religion against the charge of being sick, silly, and meaningless. It would have been more scholarly for the author to remain true to his original intention “to write a devastating criticism of all forms of religion... the ultimate irrefutable philosophical destruction of all forms of Western belief.” That would have been at least intelligible.