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of offending the pride, thereby incurring the wrath, of some unnamed deity inadvertently omitted from their local pantheon. The author of the Acts of the Apostles informs us that when Saint Paul preached to the Athenians, he sought to use this device to his evangelical advantage: "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17.23). Paul's aim, however, was not to add to that pantheon, but to displace it altogether by identifying Jesus Christ as the One True God and as the proper name of the Ineffable Principle (*Logos*).

But as Joseph Campbell, Sam Keen's longtime friend, observed, from the pagan point of view Paul's more extensive attribution involved "an elementary mistake; for the Ineffable is not named or by anyone proclaimed, but is manifest in all things, and to claim knowledge of it uniquely is to have missed the point entirely." This confuses the merely unknown with the genuinely unknowable: that which is beyond all names and forms, yet is to be directly experienced through fully awakening to the deepest rhythms of the ordinary acts of daily life.

The "Unknown God" of Keen's title, then, refers to that unnameable object of mystical experience which is nevertheless absolutely ubiquitous, manifest in and throughout the world. This is Eckhart's Godhead, the God beyond God, which is also present in Boehme's pewter cup; it is the eternal Tao that cannot be told, the nameless source of the mother of the Ten Thousand Things; it is the primordial Buddha-nature of enlightenment in which all things participate. "God is not an object to be known or a problem to be solved by human intelligence," Keen writes, "but is the ground beneath our capacity to understand anything, the totality within which we live, move, and have our being" (69).

Only by "getting rhythm and tuning in to the music of the spheres" (5) can we approach this Ground of Being, which is also our own ground, our very soul. Through song and poetry, art and myth, and especially through conscious participation in the rhythms of relationship—relationship to friends and enemies; to family members and lovers; to animals, plants, and soils; to our own *soma* and *psyche*—we experience the truth of the spirit. Keen's mysticism is thus light years away from the inward-turning, world-rejecting variety. "I have come to be suspicious," he writes, "of any religion or form of therapy that focuses exclusively on cultivating the interior life or



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The ancient Athenians erected a sacrificial altar adorned with the cryptic inscription "To an Unknown God" lest they run the risk

saving the soul and that does not include a celebration of the senses, an ecological vision, and a concern for social justice" (131).

Keen argues that the contemporary recovery of the sense of the mystical, and the living of an authentic spiritual life in all its dimensions, requires a careful navigation around the Scylla of authoritarian religious movements on the one side, and the Charybdis of secular materialism on the other. The Christian Right's idolatrous worship of Bible and Church, as well as the New Age's penchant for gurus and its own forms of uncritical literalism, receive equal criticism from Keen. Such movements, he suggests, would consign us to the infantilism of the Grand Inquisitor's "happy babes."

On the other hand, he deplores not only scientism, with its seductive but environmentally destructive and morally corrosive myth of technology-cum-economic progress, but also those culturally chic forms of postmodernism that mock the very quest for meaning. "Life has become MTV—one image, one experience placed alongside another without any connection. All dots and no connecting lines" (105). For Keen, however, it is the discovery and creation of "the patterns which connect" which goes to the very heart of the genuinely spiritual life—a life conceived as an ongoing, open-ended process that requires the courage and maturity to challenge and transcend the parochial, limited worldview which we inherit as children:

The animating principle in a human being is the spiritual instinct, the impulse to go beyond the ego to explore the heights and depths, to connect our individual life with something beyond the self, something more everlasting (even if ever-changing) than the self. Ultimately, our self-esteem comes from our discovery of a purposeful source of deathless meaning that transcends the self. . . . *Spirit* and *soul* are not occult entities but are the ways in which we define the essence of our humanness when we transcend our social and psychological conditioning and experience ourselves as being encompassed within a cosmos we perceive as sacred or holy. (58)

Keen knows quite well from his own personal experience of the temptations and dangers of the well-worn paths of religion and secularism. Having been raised in the crib of conservative Christian piety, Keen was weaned from his parents' Presbyterianism at Harvard and Princeton, where he learned to

philosophize and came to accept the death of the old biblical God. But dry reason eventually lost its savor, too. Subsequently he found himself succumbing to the lure of the Dionysian frenzy of the sixties, having left the security of his academic post to become, in his words, an "intellectual gypsy." *Hymns* artfully integrates many quite different styles and genres (essay, confessional, meditation, self-help).

Like virtually all of Keen's previous books, this one is an intensely personal statement, a piece of "autobiographical philosophy" (7) in which philosophical argument is framed by a narrative of the author's life-career. In this respect, *Hymns* is reminiscent of such works as Augustine's *Confessions* and Descartes's *Discourse on Method*—epochal works emblematic of two previous moments of cultural crisis. Like Keen, Augustine and Descartes were intellectually precocious sensitives who got caught up in the tumult of their respective times and left academia as a result. Like Keen, each resolved, in an arena of competing claims to authority, to become his own authority and to judge matters for himself, based on his own experience and reason. But Keen's aim in telling his story, much like Augustine's and Descartes's before him, is not narcissistic self-congratulation and self-absorption, but rather self-knowledge and self-transcendence.

In the earlier *To a Dancing God* (1970), Keen expressed his essential agreement with Freud and Jung that in the depth of each person's biography lies the story of humanity. Thus the writing of one's story is a primary means of establishing connections and a common reality (*koinos kosmos*); it is therefore a fundamental spiritual discipline, not merely a therapeutic device.

But it is precisely Keen's understanding of the proper relationship of the individual to the timeless stories that humanity has collectively told itself over time (the myths) that distinguishes the mysticism from traditional religion in all its varieties. In this respect, his approach exemplifies what I have elsewhere called "the new religious consciousness" (*Quest*, Summer 1995).

"Religion," Keen says, "offers authorized answers to life's most agonizing questions" (76), such as these: What do I desire? Who am I? Why is there something rather than nothing? Can I love? Am I free? Are there benevolent powers? Yet eventually,

Keen admits, "I began to love the questions themselves more than the answers" (15).

The religious life, he argues, "is a pilgrimage to a known destination. The end is given as well as the means. God is the goal of the search. Church, bible, guru, and the accepted disciplines are the means. . . . An individual believer may suffer from a crisis of faith, a dark night of the soul, but the way, the truth, and the life have already been set forth" (77).

The spiritual quest stands in stark contrast to the certainty given by the religious life, for in place of obedience, a person on the quest must cultivate "the discipline of doubt" (78).

The spiritual quest is the reverse of the religious pilgrimage. The quest begins when an individual falls into a spiritual "black hole" in which everything that was solid vaporizes. Certainties vanish, authorities are questioned, all the usual comforts and assurances of religion fail, and the path disappears. A spiritual quest is the effort to discover the meaning of life. It is experimental, an exploration of a country not yet mapped, whose boundaries are not yet known. The spiritual mind lives in and loves the great mythic questions. (77-78)

Keen's "unknown god" is thus neither the god of the philosophers—the absolutely self-sufficient unmoved mover, standing aloof and untouched by the strivings of those who would contemplate his glory—nor the jealous creator god of the Christian bible who, though active in history, has become estranged from his creation, thus requiring a mediator and vicarious atonement. His is a deity who comes into existence only in and through the continuing conscious acts of self-inquiry and self-transcendence of individuals. It is a god made, more than discovered; the creative energy of Becoming, rather than the static perfection of pure Being; not Lord and Master, but rather fellow pupil and player. Paradoxically, the unknown god, while not yet born, is brought forth in every authentically spiritual moment.

Spiced with self-deprecating humor and hilarious anecdotes, *Hymns to an Unknown God* is a wise, moving, absorbing work of practical value for those on the quest.

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