Aspects of Secularization in the West

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It has become fashionable among sociologists of religion to dispute the contention that this is a secular age. Some, like Luckmann, refer to man's ultimate concerns as his invisible religion—as if "religion" were incapable of diminution. Others, such as David Martin, argue that this age is no more secular than any other, and point to the relatively low degree of religious practice (in the churches) in past centuries. Yet others, and Andrew Greeley is conspicuous among them, point to the interests of the young in meditation, the establishment of new communes, and the emergence in the West of a number of exotic new cults from India, Korea, and the Middle East.

Yet it seems to me true to assert that this age in the West is secular in a sense that has never been true of any previous historical period— all the new marginal manifestations of religious curiosity notwithstanding. Let me deliberately correct that last statement. It is not the "age" which is secular, in the sense that earlier sociologists and philosophers sometimes spoke of a cycle of ages. Rather, it is the structure of modern society that is secular. There may be a developmental sequence, at least with respect to Western society, but all that need be asserted is that there has been a developmental process in social organization. And modern social organization implies secularity.

Defining "society." Modern social organization is the organization of a *society*. By "society" I mean not merely a social collectivity, but something more specific. I mean a self-defined, autonomous, ongoing, internally structured, coherent system of segmented relationships that embrace more or less totally a large number of people who share at least the broad outlines of a cul-

tural system and who are controlled by an identifiably common normative framework and, more important, a common political system. Society is thus a structured system of considerable scale and complexity.

It remains one of the misfortunes of sociology that we use the term "society" to describe social collectivities as different in scale as an Australian aboriginal tribe of two hundred people and the United States with its two hundred million. I wish to suggest that the differences between those two social phenomena are far greater than the similarities — that we cannot be satisfied to put both into the same generic category "society."

The place of religion. Within a large-scale social system there are to be found, invariably, religious institutions, religious subcultures, and individuals who manifest religious dispositions. All of these are inherited from the past; all of them have their origins in the "pre-societal" stage of social organization. But societies — such as our modern nation states — are historic entities, and all of them have evolved from less elaborated, less extensive forms of social organization. In those earlier social aggregates, religion had a vital part — a part far more significant for the operation of everyday life than is the case in the modern large-scale societal systems.

Despite the continuance of religious institutions, subcultures, and individuals, the very assumptions on which modern social organization proceeds are secular assumptions. The processes of production and consumption; the coordination of activities; the agencies of control; the methods of transmission of knowledge — all are organized on practical, empirical, and rational prescriptions. Societal organization demands the mobilization of intellectual faculties: it contrasts with the requirements of communal organization, which relies on the mobilization and manipulation of affective dispositions.

Within a societal system, action of a mystical, magical nature or action oriented toward the supernatural is pushed to the mar-

ginal "voluntary" areas of activity. It has no place in the official arena of action. "Uncertainties" are officially seen as elements *not yet* under complete human control, rather than as matters that are decided by the gods — even though individuals may still choose to have recourse to theories that transcend empirical-rational knowledge to cope with their own personal uncertainties.

Societal systems arose very slowly over the course of history, and in their emergence both religious ideology and religious organization played a part — quite expectably, for religion spoke the language that men already knew, and so new ideas had to be expressed in terms of the old. Science or new knowledge was first expressed as an enlargement of religious understanding and was accorded religious significance (consider, for example, the religious dispositions of men like Kepler, Newton, and Faraday). Thus it was that radically secularizing developments were first enunciated within the framework of religious discourse. The very process of development of larger social systems was facilitated by religious agencies. Thus the early nation states were brought into being by assertions of their religious legitimacy; the growth of nationalism was attended by religious arguments. At a different level, the socialization of new classes — such as the new industrial workers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain — were socialized by the religious agency of Methodism to values already diffused to mercantile classes by Calvinism. Thus a phenomenon like Protestantism, or Methodism, represents both an adjustment of religion to new conditions and also a process of secularization — the elimination of mystical, sacerdotal elements from the religious system.

Religious community vs. secular society. As will already be clear, my argument demands that the concept of community be set over against the concept of society. It is an elaboration, from the perspective of religion, of the central thesis of sociology — the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft.* If we regard the community as the ongoing local group, and society as the autono-

mous, internally structured system of segmented relationships of large numbers of people, we can make the further point: the community is essentially religious; the society is essentially secular.

It is for communities that religion has fulfilled its essential functions in the past, rather than for societies. The confusion about the functions of religion stems from the Durkheimian tradition. The so-called "society" in which Durkheim examined the functions of religion was, after all, a "society" on a very small scale. In effect it operated more as a "community," which must be the case with all very small tribes. One cannot extrapolate — as sociologists have too easily tended to do — from that particular case to the large-scale societies of the modern world.

For almost all men, life has been lived in communities throughout the whole course of human history — until the very recent past. During the course of history there have been, from time to time, occasional, spasmodic, and unsustained tendencies toward a societal form of social organization. This occurred with the development of ancient empires, but in every case the attempt to establish centralized control was continually jeopardized by the powerful claims of local leaders and by the limited vision of men in their allegiance to essentially local goals and relationships. The possibility of establishing a sustained and complex system of relationships, with articulated internal subdivisions and competent chains of command, to govern all the essential activities of life has existed only in recent history. In European history, until the emergence of the centralized nation state, local allegiances always challenged loyalties toward the greater centers. The supposed unity of the Western Church was always compromised by the persistence of local magic as well as by dissident and recrudescent heresies.

Certainly some intellectuals, the elite strata of their time, had a societal vision. They divided society into "strata," made mental constructs of hierarchy and order, and presented an idealized and normative pattern of empire. But these intellectuals,

legists and advisers to monarchs, lived at the center. They were not sociologists with an empirical awareness of social reality. Often they were nearer to being theologians or metaphysicians, who conceptualized an ordered society before such an entity had come into being as an empirical reality. The fact was that local life was only occasionally and spasmodically invaded by the effective exercise of centrally organized power. Local executants were only occasionally wholly under the control of central rulers, and then only in such matters as taxation, military organization, and, at times, the maintenance of public law. In a wide variety of pursuits, local people were relatively unaffected by central power, and lived their lives according to local demands and in accordance with local custom.

What we call "societies" were, in the past, often no more than loose agglomerations of communities, partially and spasmodically drawn into association and into shared involvements by the centralized political agencies. Central political power was often unstable. Religious power was frequently in dispute, as in the period when Europe was divided under two, and later, three different clerics, each claiming to be Pope. Only success in the power struggle determined who had a legitimate claim: had the struggle for power had a different result, we should have had a different line of "legitimate" popes, and even, at times, a different body of orthodox religious doctrine.

For the mass of ordinary men, the abiding realities of life were their local associations and commitments. Most men lived and died in the same locality in which they were born, succeeding their fathers in their occupations, statuses, and possessions. Even after the great migrations of population, whether occasioned by discoveries overseas or by the development of industry, men reverted to living their lives in local communities. This was still the stable form of social organization, and after the great migration (to the city, or to North America), men set about recreating community life.

Survivals of community. The development of new means of communication, new forms of energy, new techniques of control, and a new rationalization of labor have all led to the breakdown of effective community life. But even in the modern world, the concept of community is still in extensive use. We project the idea of "community" onto all manner of social agglomerations — onto entities far too internally segmented to be communities in the real sense. Thus we loosely refer to nations, industrial cities, even to groups of nations, as "communities." Catholic theologians use it about the Catholic Church — that vast amorphous mass of the believing and the half-believing.

We continue to use the concept of community not because it is accurate, but because it is rhetorical. It is language not to describe the facts, but to stir the emotions. We use it because it is language that summons responses and commitment. Thus, in the West, the rectors of large, impersonal universities tell freshman students that "this is not an institution, this is really a big family." Politicians use it to stir their constituents — use it glibly, or cunningly, or with heartfelt conviction, but always inaccurately. A community really involves face-to-face relationships of known persons. As such the community is a vestigial remnant of the past in contemporary Western life. Society, in contrast, involves the interaction of role-performances of unknown role-players. It can be described in essentially abstract categories, such as "races," "social classes," "salaried workers," and "teenagers."

The community is affective, customary, and constituted of stable units with ongoing, sustained relationships. It lives in continuity with the past,and the past is a vital determinant of the present. In contrast, the society is a centralized, rationally articulated system, increasingly organized and consciously planned. It is increasingly dominated by instrumental values. In place of the old moral controls of the local community, it establishes technical controls. It is described in abstract concepts and categories, not in concrete terms, and the concepts

are those that transcend local experience. People begin to live in accordance with these abstractions rather than at the dictates of concrete experience. A society can be described and analyzed only through such intellectualized abstract concepts, whereas a community often appears to elude the attempts to describe it in such terms, sociologists frequently commenting that we lack appropriate terms to indicate the precise texture of social relationships, the quality of atmosphere, the "feel" of local situations.

Decline of religion. The foregoing remarks may appear to be a long digression from my subject. But in reality they come close to the heart of the thesis I wish to propound. Religion functions in communities. It uses the same affective language, deals with interpersonal contacts, and simultaneously describes and engenders just those qualitatively different contexts that are so difficult to describe in dispassionate, objective terms. Sometimes religion has been functional for societies, of course, but where that has been so, the function has been political. Religion has been a unifying ideology, providing a reinforcement in emotively powerful terms of political identity. The basic functions of religion, and the locus of its operation, exist in the community.

Religion is always moulded on the type of personal social relationship that prevails within the community. But in the modern situation we no longer live in a community-centered world. Our social experience is of a societally organized system, in which conscious planning replaces received traditions. We have moved from the given nature of custom, sanctified by the religious legitimation of the past, to the conscious construction of procedures dictated by our strong interests in regulating the future.

Community is in marked decline throughout the world, and most of all in advanced nations. My thesis is that secularization is the decline of community: secularization is a concomitant

of societalization.

In the modern world religion is a remnant — a recollection of what was once thought to be "the natural order," the order involved in community life. The change that has occurred is not simply a matter of men ceasing to believe in the supernatural. It is much more a matter of the creation of a social context in which empirical-rational thinking is demanded because the social order itself is no longer invested with sacred meanings and mysteries, but is regulated by technology. Technology is the encapsulation of a form of rationality. The machine, and even more the electronic device, the computer, stand as the epitome of man's accumulated rationality. When all men operate as specialists, as role-performers, each uses rational skills and empirical knowledge in coordinated effort. Each uses his own abilities at their most proficient. The cumulative effect is the creation of an increasingly rational-technological total environment. This cumulative effect makes it difficult for any one individual to think and behave in ways other than the prescribed rational manner that technological order dictates. It makes it difficult for men to act affectively or to find affective satisfactions in everyday life.

The very commodity which religion purveys had relevance to the community, but is irrelevant to a societally organized system. That commodity is salvation. Taken in its widest sense "salvation" extends from immediate relief, solace, security, reassurance or the removel of curses, to such all-inclusive ideas as the continuance of life after death, or the resurrection of the body. Salvation was something given by the gods, by supernatural sources. But in modern society, with its calculated operations and abstract categories, its rational procedures, bureaucratic planning, and pragmatic tests, men are taught to save themselves. Their goals are instrumental, their techniques are scientific, and the type of reasoning which they must necessarily engage is empirical and procedural. Supernatural salvation, or even supernatural help, by faith in higher powers becomes less congenial to

the ideas and assumptions of everyday life. Since life has itself become more thoroughly regulated; since we expect to be able to solve our human and social problems by science and planning; since the hardships we suffer are no longer "unexplained" and "unpredictable," so there is less thought of a compensatory life hereafter.

Latent religious functions. Not only is there less belief in, or search for, supernatural salvation in the modern world, but the social functions of religion disappear as community is replaced by society. These social functions may be characterized as follows:

1. Religion was an agency of social control, a system of taboos and prescriptions, legitimated by reference to supernatural order. In the West "heaven" and "hell" were the concepts employed, and we have good studies tracing the decline of their use in sermons over the last three centuries. They become less congruous with the growing body of modern knowledge, and no longer provide reference points for the framework of order in daily life at local level. Control in societal systems ceases to depend on supernatural concepts, shifting from moral suasions to technical imperatives.

2. Religion subserved social cohesion, providing supernatural legitimation for the values men held in common, values they saw as characterizing their social life. Religion helped to "objectify" those values, giving them the appearance of some supra-social authority. It specified, as Durkheim showed, the occcasions for reunion, when the group could take solemn cognizance of itself by projecting a god (or gods) in terms of which a community could acquire an objective sense of itself.

3. Religion legitimated group ends and activities, the policies that were followed, the wars that were to be fought.

4. Religion interpreted the cosmos, giving sense to the physical and the social world, and meaning and purpose to the lives of men, even if that meaning was more on the order of affective reassurance than of intellectual discourse.

5. And religion facilitated the expression of emotion, prescribing the circumstances and styles in which men might, with approval, express joy, grapple with fear, indulge in a sense of grief, in ways and at times that did not disrupt the rhythms of group life. Since human emotion is potentially the greatest hazard to stable social life, religion was necessarily engaged in the management of the collective expression (and restraint) of the emotions.

Societalization. All of these were latent functions of religion. But societal systems have evolved alternative and *more conscious* mechanisms to fulfill these functions, in so far as they are still needed. The process of societalization is the process by which once latent functions are made manifest. It is the process by which the apparently "accidental" effects of particular social arrangements, which remained undiscovered until sociologists discovered them, are subject to rational thought and deliberative action. Thus instead of the latent functions of religion, modern society arranges its affairs by rational and technical procedures:

1. Social control is achieved by legal procedures and by strictly technical devices.

2. Social cohesion is prescribed in charters and declarations, constitutions and bills of rights. Beyond these the shared involvement in institutional life is underwritten by a vast substructure of legal arrangement, from unemployment insurance systems to credit ratings.

3. God no longer legitimates political action: elections and manifestos in the name of "the people" now legitimate political policies and programmes.

4. Explanations are now in strictly scientific terms. We turn increasingly to experts whose knowledge is based on the empirical and rational procedures of science to explain our world. The unexplained is no longer the "mystery," it is only the "as yet unsolved problem."

5. Modern society has evolved through a massive repression

of the emotions, but what now occurs is a redistribution of the times and circumstances for emotional life — with mass recreational facilities to stimulate emotional release in "controlled" contexts (as far as possible) so as to leave other areas of life (particularly work role-performances) free from the extraneous influence of emotion.

Thus there are many displaced functions of religion — all of which indicate the secularity of the model of operation of large-scale societal systems. But what of the manifest function of religion — the offer of salvation?

Community salvation. In practice salvation, or the means towards it, has always been available locally, within or associated with the community. In Christianity an echo of this is found in the idea of salvation "in the Church," the chosen community (evident in the thought of Luther and Calvin as well as in Catholicism). The great religions have in various ways all sought to impose more central authority on local believers, or have sought to make them conform to more uniform requirements — evident both in the pilgrimage (a relatively simple device for physical control) and in more intellectual and sophisticated theological systems. But neither pilgrimage nor official theology can obscure the significance of the local demand for salvation. The Catholic Church, by a historical accident, inherited the administrative structure of an empire and a conception of religion as organized through a centralized political agency. But the demand for salvation is always made by men at local level, and all religious systems have to make provision for local operation if they are to survive.

When theological formulae have ignored the demand for local salvation, religion has been diversified at local level to meet these demands. Thus the abstract conceptions of scholastic Buddhism, which made ultimate salvation too remote, suffered the penetration of local Buddhism by other theodicies. Mahayana Buddhism became penetrated and corrupted by Tantrist magic in

Tibet and accommodated local religious demands in China and Japan. In Theravada Buddhism the remoteness of salvation led to open competition among diviners and astrologers operating at the very gates of the temples, providing men with swifter reassurance than the official religion could make available. When official religion makes the steps to salvation too long, new systems, or older magics, emerge to provide men with the shortcuts they desire. The demand for "spiritual mobility" in the traditional world was as great as the demand for social mobility in the modern world. In Ceylon, we know, even the Buddhist monks make assumptions about salvation as if it were a proximate, not a remote prospect.

At first sight it may appear that the Catholic Church represents an exception to this proposition. But that impression is created only by the fact that historians have treated the Church essentially in its political aspects. They have discussed the controversy between Church and State: the internal power struggles of the higher clergy. They have been much less concerned with the essential *religious* functions of the Church — these they have taken for granted. But the central concern of the Catholic Church has always been the provision of means of salvation for ordinary men. Undramatically, repeatedly, and identically from one locality to another, the Church has ministered to the layman's demand for reassurance. Whatever the theological content of salvation, whatever the terms in which it is expressed, sociologically salvation is most easily identified as the same commodity. It is the provision of *present reassurance*. This is the sociological meaning of salvation (whether its theological meaning is post-mortem bliss, resurrection of the body, recovery from sickness, or the elimination of witchcraft). And to provide salvation, the Catholic Church was necessarily engaged in *local* activity. That activity was replicated from one locality to another. As with other religions, Catholicism was involved in providing the plausible and indispensable service of priests to laymen *within the local community*.

Salvation from or through the counsel of local religious functionaries — whether priests or pastors — is everywhere recognized as the equal in worth of the offices of a Pope or an Archbishop. Salvation is conceived as available within the community of the faithful. When men envisage their greater well-being, their future in this life or the next, they envisage it in the reassuring context of the community. For it is in the community that their life has meaning and that they have evolved their purposes. Religion serves to sanctify the community and offers the community reassurance. But in the modern world, in the societally organized system, community ceases to be the principle of social organization. So it is that in the societal system, religion ceases to be the presiding agency in man's affairs. It is no longer the court of last appeal for social organization. It no longer legitimates social arrangements, relationships, authority-structures, customs. It becomes one among several other "social institutions."

Institutions amenable to specialization. Sociologists generally divide society into several institutions. Sociology textbooks set them out in neat and symmetrical order:
the family — the functions of which are the continuance of the species and the bearing and rearing of the young;
work and econmic organization — concerned with the maintenance of men and the allocation of resources;
the political system — concerned with the allocation of power;
the legal and penal systems — concerned with the establishment of control and maintenance of order;
the stratificational system — concerned with the allocation of status;
the educational system — providing socialization, training, selection and placement of individuals;
the recreative sphere — concerned with play activities.
The course of social development is the history of a process by which each of these areas has become increasingly autonomous

and differentiated. Each has grown specialized and acquired internal subdivisions and structures, and each has become increasingly subject to conscious, rational planning and organization.

But institutions differ in the degree to which essential functions may become centralized. Some institutions have their balance of operation within the community, and some within the society. The course of social development has been a process in which the locus of the operations of institutions have shifted from the community to the society. Institutions have become centralized and internally hierarchic on a rational scale. This is most evident in the sphere of economics and politics. Higher quality operations occur at more central places, and there is a hierarchy of command, and a rational division of function, between more important and less important operations. Thus, in law, more important cases are heard at more central courts. If you wish to invoke more powerful law, you go to a higher court; if you wish to appeal against a decision, you go to a higher court — and a higher court exists in a more central place. Even with education, the same principle of rational division applies. Local schools offer limited education. For higher education, you must travel to more central places. The highest national institutions are then concentrated in yet more distinctive centers, where the highest education can be obtained. In all these cases, then, the basic commodity offered is subjected to division: what is available at local level is weak, preliminary, limited. For more powerful, developed, or authoritative operations one must move to the greater center.

Exceptions. This principle applies in societal systems for all institutions— excepting only the family and religion. They are themselves much less capable of internal subdivision of their basic commodity. The basic commodity of religion is salvation — and salvation does not admit of rational, hierarchic, internal division or control. Salvation is an indivisible ultimate.

This may be said in spite of the way in which the purely politi-

cal organization of some of the great religions may have been centralized. In such cases, however, it is the political operation of the church that is centralized and hierarchized, not the soteriological functions — the key religious functions.

Another way of saying this is to say that institutions have been increasingly subject to rationalization. Cost-efficiency criteria have been introduced into the operation of all the societal institutions, and the hierarchic structure is itself an attempt to obtain the economies of scale, to gain advantages by a finer division of labour, to gain the benefit of increased capitalization. But religion deals in an indivisible ultimate. Its provision is not susceptible to rational procedures. It is essentially local and personal. Its precepts are frequently counter-rational, anti-economic. In Christianity, one example may suffice: Christ said, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it?" That is a religious prescription, a moral exhortation. It is not a criterion of rational economic action. The canons of rationality become indeed offensive to the spirit of religion, which emphasizes love, affection, modesty, duty — virtues that are in themselves non-rational, substantive concerns.

One can see the effect of attempting to make religion rational in an incident that reportedly happened in Italy some years ago. An Italian priest had the idea of keeping the unconsecrated host (the emblems partaken of during the Mass) in a vending machine The individual worshiper could then operate the machine and receive his portion. It had all the merits of rationality: clean, hygienic, efficient, no room for human error, no fumbling priest, equal quantities, and so on. Of course the Vatican disallowed this innovation, and many Catholics when told of it are embarrassed, incensed, or find the idea ludicrous. The fact is that a full sense of a religious act demands the participation of persons, demands their total involvement. Salvation must be mediated by human agents, not by a role-performer or a machine. The

involvement must be total, not segmentary, casual, or incidental. The relationships in religion are the epitome of the total human relations of the stable, static community. They are unlike the relationships conducted in the modern impersonal system. The demand is for interpersonal trust, faith, the meeting of whole men. It is not skills or techniques or machines that are wanted — efficiency is not the purpose of the operation. The criteria now so dominant in every department of life in the modern world are recognizably irrelevant in the truly religious act. But to put it another way, the type of relation found in the religious act, its emphases and values, also appear totally irrelevant to modern life.

Persons as means or ends. The language of religion is affective language: the symbols, especially in Christianity, are of love, the baby, the mother, the father, the son. The language is emotive, summoning affective responses. The demand in the West, by churchgoers, is still for ministers who are whole men, "good men,"warm, friendly, reassuring. They do not demand efficient men, technically competent men. These men are judged by what they are as persons, not by what they have learned in the way of skills or techniques. In religion men are the *end-concern* — hence the localism and community orientation still prevail. What is done in religion is replicated from one locality to the next, from one worship occasion to the next — the activity is an end in itself, self-justifying.

In modern society, however, men are not the end-concern — all too often they are only the means, the instruments used. As role-performers, men become the adjuncts to machine system. Their personal attributes, sensitivity, their dispositions, and purely personal needs become irrelevant in their role-performances. Thus it is that religious functions stand in such sharp contrast to the styles of organization increasingly employed in the contemporary world.

Religious institutions are thus at a disadvantage in the modern

world. Unlike the entertainment industry, unlike education, religion cannot easily gain the benefits of rational organizational organization and conscious planning. It remains concerned with personal aspirations, local salvation. It was rooted in the community and in the non-rational preoccupations of communal life. Only with great difficulty does religion assume elements of rational organization with which to compete against other agencies that seek the attention of men in the modern world. As we have moved to increasingly rational, consciously planned, and technologically developed patterns of social organization, so the weakness of religion has become apparent, and so the decline in its vigour and usefulness to modern man has become evident.

The anomaly of secularization. And yet there remains a paradox. Societalization imposes a process of rationalization and secularization, making religion appear obsolete. The assumptions in modern society are that man can manage by his own technical and rational resilience. Yet men remain partly non-rational beings. The very process of socialization demands the distribution of affective concern. The basis on which a man learns to cope with the world is one in which personal trust, local involvement, individual intimacies, are of central importance. We all grow up in the security of communal institutions. The child's very unreason is molded by stable, intimate relationships and local involvements. Yet what is he molded for? Traditionally, the world of socialization had strong continuities with the world in which the individual would live out the dispositions implanted in childhood — sometimes the actual "others" of the socialization situation would continue to be present for many years afterwards. But in the modern world there is profound discontinuity between the situation of socialization and the impersonal world in which the individual will live more and more of his later life. The early training that is to draw forth human qualities for ordered personal relationships in later

life is less congruous with the world that now exists. In the role-articulated society, love, trust, humanity are not the basis on which operations are conducted. Moral and humane faculties are replaced by technical criteria of efficiency.

The vary facelessness of the system makes trust, personal regard, affective relations less relevant, perhaps even an impediment to the smooth operation of highly routinized, mechanical operations.

Yet without trust, without mutuality, without civic responsibility and disinterested goodwill, even highly rational systems cannot work. There is still an ultimate dependence on human dispositions. Thus we have the paradox that societalization leads to secularization, but threatens the basic value-orientations on which any kind of human society must depend.

The human aspect of this social paradox is equally apparent. Men still seek community and its benefits. Many of the communal ventures of our time, from sectarianism to the hippy pads in the big cities of the West, are in their own way a search for the advantages and virtues of a world we have lost. There is a demand for meaningful, and therefore local relationships — for the benefits of life in the stable community. That demand is sometimes represented by sociologists as a religious quest. It may be that: or it may be the search for the stable social contexts of the past — contexts in which religion itself had meaning. It seems to me, however, that the process of societalization has effectively eliminated the basis for integration between religion and social life. Religion cannot solemnize and sanctify the computer, the electronic device — they need no such sanctification or legitimation. Religion in secular society will remain peripheral, relatively weak, providing comfort for men in the interstices of a soulless social system of which men are the half-willing, half-restless prisoners.