A Critical Rejoinder

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In this relatively short essay Wilson defines the nature of the problem of secularization with great precision and offers an interesting analysis of this process. There would not be much point in elaborating on my agreement with the main line of Wilson's argument. Instead I will try to state as concisely as I can those points on which I disagree. They concern one of the presuppositions of his argument and one major conclusion.

Wilson's argument runs approximately as follows:

1. "*It is the structure of modern societies that is secular.*" D'accord: It is not the minds of men nor their lives of which one could rightly assert that they are more or less "secular." The concept aptly applies, however, to the principles of social organization of modern societies. These societies no longer *need* religious legitimations. To put it more fancifully, religion is no longer a constitutive element of modern social organization. Whether modern societies in fact still use religious principles of legitimation as in some "Christian" Western societies or manage to do without as in the Soviet sphere makes little difference to the structure of the relations of production and other societally central activities.

2. "*The community (Tönnies' Gemeinschaft) is essentially religious, the society essentially secular.*" D'accord: religion is a constitutive element of "community."

3. *Latent functions of religion are now filled by manifest, (more or less) definitely non-religious mechanisms.* There can be no doubt that Wilson's argument is cogent and compelling in this instance, too. Religion, like other large institutional domains of traditional society, is now functionally specialized.

But:

1. The assumption that community is essentially affective, society essentially intellectual is not tenable. "Community"

is "intellectual" as well as "affective." One need not invoke Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, or the bulk of cultural and social anthropology to prove the point. The principles of cognitive and rational organization in primitive society and in early civilizations are doubtless not *functionally* rational in the sense of Max Weber. But the classification systems, taxonomies, and mythologies (early as well as classical) which are important elements in the organization of community life and of kinship bonds evidently have a *logic*. The dichotomy affective/cognitive does not run parallel to the dichotomy community/society. One consequence of this (and perhaps also of Wilson's primary concern in his research with affectively rather "high" religion) is that religion/affectivity is seen as a pair that contrasts with the pair secularity/rationality. At the very least, Wilson should here allow for the Weberian distinction between various kinds of rationality or propose a typology of his own. Evidently what we now commonly call rationality is not a homogeneous quality.

2. If the latent functions religion traditionally and occasionally performed are now performed by other social mechanisms, this does not mean that its manifest function (and I think Wilson will agree with most other social scientists who have dealt with religion that this is its basic function) will thereby necessarily disappear. Why should it? The principles of social organization in "society" are "rational," but human life in the concrete amalgamation of "community" and society" is not.

3. The displacement of community principles of social organization by societal (functionally rational) principles in certain major areas of the social order does not mean that community as a central principle of organization in the daily lives of large, if not major, groups in the population of modern industrial societies will disappear. "Community" and "society" are not concrete historical phases of the social order. One can say, of course, that archaic societies and "community" are practically coextensive. But one cannot assert the converse, that "society" and modern industrial society are coextensive. This has obvious

implications for the fate of religion today. Religion, as Wilson points out, is not involved in "society" which is superimposed on the social structure of modern societies. Religion is still very much present, however, in the basic "community" layers of modern life which are less peripheral, it appears to me, than Wilson seems to think. And, finally, "society" does not determine the life of the individual — though the social structure clearly determines much of an individual's public activity. Therefore, the problems of life crises and of the meaning of everyday life — and not only those originating in the "suppression" of affectivity (through its banishment from the principles of social organization) — remain "religious" problems that are continuously being given "religious" answers.