Comments by a Japanese Sociologist

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The lecture on secularization delivered by Dr. Wilson at the National Education Center in Tokyo left a deep impression. Among the various ways of considering secularization, Wilson's is one of the most sociological and therefore particularly satisfactory from my point of view. His approach will in all likelihood prove effective even in Japan where religious traditions differ from those in the West.

In the comments that follow I do not propose to advocate a view of secularization at variance with the concept held by Wilson. Instead, I will limit myself to setting forth two or three points that suggested themselves to me in consequence of the stimulus of his lecture.

1. As Wilson avers, "The basic functions of religion, and the locus of its operation, exist in the community." What is meant by "religion" in this statement appears to be "religion in gen-

eral," but I am inclined to think it has particular reference to indigenous or traditional, established religion. In a community permeated with religion of this kind, it is extremely difficult for genuinely new religions to gain access. Consequently, the diffusion of new religions requires to some extent a course of development from community to society, a certain degree of societalization. In Japan since the first half of the nineteenth century, there have arisen a number of new mass religions such as Kurozumikyō, Tenrikyō, and Konkōkyō, religions that have transcended their place of origin and achieved widespread growth. This suggests the decline of community in Japan and, thus, the period in which societalization began at the local level.

In the secular society that emerges as a result of societalization, the influence of traditional religions on the masses decreases, and there is to some extent a subsequent dissemination of new religions. As Wilson points out, however, religion as a whole tends to become relatively weak and marginal. According to surveys on "The national characteristics of the Japanese people" conducted by the Ministry of Education Institute of Statistical Mathematics, Japanese people who profess some form of religious faith amounted to 35% in 1958, 31% in 1963, 30% in 1968, and 25% in 1973 — a steady decline. These data support Wilson's inference.

2. In "society," characterized as it is by such features as rational planning, technological development, and segmented social relationships among role performers, there is a decrease of agents that satisfy individual needs for affective expression. In present-day Japan, which is definitely a secular society, the fact that much debate has arisen over the family-centered life style symbolized by the slogan "private home-ism" implies that the Japanese family has become one of the more powerful among several agents for the fulfilment of affective needs. But among persons who cannot find this fulfilment in the family, persons who seek satisfaction in collectivities of non-relatives greater than the family, one tendency is to satisfy this function through

religion. This is probably the reason why new religions draw in great numbers of adherents, especially in large cities where nuclear families are numerous and contacts with relatives comparatively infrequent.

3. Religion in secular society, as a result of social adaptation, undergoes more than a mere centralization of its political operations. Does not the work of salvation itself become to some extent centralized and hierarchized? This is conceivable at least as regards Japanese religion in view of the emphasis it lays on pilgrimages to head temples or headquarters and on the veneration of chief abbots or heads of religious organizations. On this matter my view differs from that of Dr. Wilson.