A RESPONSE

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Mr. Whitley's monograph on secularization and culture change is a veritable tour de force of the literature on the sociology of religion and social change. One aspect of change which has intrigued sociologists is, of course, the interaction or reciprocal effect which change in one part of a system (however described) has upon other aspects of the same or related systems. The author has taken the concept "secularization" and has attempted to show the consequences of this philosophy, value, or process upon systems of religious belief.

The erudite and inclusive way in which the problem of sources is approached includes frequent (perhaps excessive) documentation from a lengthy yet selective bibliography. This makes it difficult to pinpoint one or more definite themes which the writer is trying to share with his readers.

The reader is allowed a choice of six analytical ways to approach the term (concept) of secularization.

1. as the decline of religion
2. as conformity with "this world"
3. as disengagement of society from religion
4. as transposition of religious beliefs and institutions
5. as desacrilization of the world, and
6. as movement from sacred to secular society (generally)

The sixth option is given preference by the author since it functions to bring together both a sociological and a theological interpretation of social change and its direction. One does not feel, however, that any consensus is ever achieved as to what is meant when we talk about secularization.

Although I share what appears to be Mr. Whitley's distaste for definitions, yet in the interests of clarity and understanding, some ground rules need to be adopted when one discusses religion. Thus, such words or phrases as — "religious-item, content, belief, artifact, affirmation, ritual, phenomenon" — and "religion, religiosity, the church, morally relevant biography, moral univere of meaning, conscience, transcendence of biological nature, theological expertise," and so forth are frequently found in the text without clarification as to how they are distinguishable one from the other or as to how they are being employed by the author. This leads to some semantic questions about

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what is meant by "systems of religious belief." Are we discussing religion as an *institutional* structure of every society, as a set of *personal* beliefs, activities, preconceptions, as an *abstract idea*, "a consciousness," in the mind of man — or what?

One must grant that the scope of this article is extremely broad and encompassing. The writer's initial suggestion, namely, to envision a society at one end point of a continuum of sacred-secular, a "society without religion" is rejected (with valid reason). Likewise, a society totally involved with "conformity with the world" and the "pursuit of instrumental tasks" (a secular society?) is equally unimaginable.

Alternative possibilities contained within the extremes of the continuum are suggested. For example, is it possible that the so-called "loss of religious functions" are merely functions which have been picked up (differentiated) by other institutions or by individuals? Rather than disengagement of society from religion, have "religious" roles and responsibilities, values and conceptions been subsumed under some other aegis? One potential *central theme* which might be extracted from this dissertation is that religious values and commitments have increasingly become "inward" and "privatistic" subject to the *personal* will and conscience of the individual rather than dictated by an institution, an authority, the "book," traditional models, or whatever.

The writer arrives at this speculation through an analysis of the effects that science and technology (cause and effect relationships) psycho-therapy (professional-client relationships supplanting — by transposition — the shepherd-flock, confessional relationship) have had upon belief systems. The supernatural, and after-life, concerns about the divine origin of the universe are preempted by a here and now, humanistic orientation. Rationalism and pragmatism supplant the mysterious, magical, and eschatological. Religion (or its institutional forms) are relegated to the realm of the irrational; modern man is here to exploit the forces of the profane and material world.[1]

Whitley[2] warns of the potential use of the Secular-Religious polarity as an idealogical weapon available to groups holding value-laden political or social philosophies, as for example — the optimistic rationalists, Marxists, or Existentialists. In this event, labeling an object, process, value as either Secular or Religious can be pejorative on one side or supportive of religious forces and institutions on the other. The author disclaims any "unitary process" called Secularization that arises

[1]Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 51.
[2]David Martin, "Toward Eliminating the Concept of Secularization" in, Gould Julius, *Penguin Survey of the Sciences*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1965, pp. 169-182.

in response to something called religiousity. He quotes, but does not comment, on the famous French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, who locates all religous items, mysteries, rites (at least of primitive people) as part and parcel of man's becoming conscious of a sense of membership in his "society." These items to Durkheim, are sacred only in the sense that man's attitudes or allegiance towards them creates the aura of "sacredness." Consistent with this point of view, *every* item or belief in a society would have emerged from essentially *worldly* concerns and the dichotomy Secular-Religious would be a false one, from the very beginning.

The author, additionally, quotes sources which find it difficult, if not impossible to document empirically what a Secular or Religious society is, let alone to trace methodologically the "decline" or "emergence" of one or the other type of society. Although I share the skepticism of some of the so-called empirical evidence used today in the social sciences, I feel Whitley overlooks some valid efforts in this field. Thus, would it not be of some merit to weigh the available data showing increasing Secularity? For example, indices could be employed to show growth or decline in church building (in relationship to demographic factors), growth or decline of church attendance, the amount of theological or religious content in art, literature, or music, "sacred" or "secular" topics in church sermons, church activities and pronouncements as, for example, contrasts between the behavior and interests of Fundamentalist and Social Action types of congregations, cross-cultural and cross-temporal studies which could document the in-put (or lack of) from religious institutions to the maintenance of other institutional functioning (e.g., schools, political structures, law, economics, warfare, etc.). Weber's "ideal type" construct would undoubtedly serve here as the heuristic device it was intended to be for analysis both within and between social systems. Might August Comte's (the father of modern sociology) theory of *stages* be confirmed? In this instance specifically, could the movement from a theological to a metaphysical, and finally to a scientific "stage" be traced and could it be proven that modern western man has indeed moved from ways of thinking, acting, and believing dictated by theologies to contemporary approaches dictated essentially by scientific methods and empirical evidence? Personally, I do not feel as impotent as Professor Whitley about our capacity to find evidence to support these "social facts."

Perhaps the author's investigation could more fruitfully have answered a parallel question, namely, "what is meant by religion or religious belief systems?" He correctly describes the pluralistic situa-

tion found today in religious belief systems. There is little — either in a body of religious truths or in religious values — that could elicit any degree of consensus from modern, industrial, mass culture. Yet the questions of "ultimate significance" (the *meaning* of life, love, suffering, death) still remain to plague modern man just as they did his forefathers. The myriad choices, the manifold religious and secular responses compound the task which Mr. Whitley and his readers share. It would appear that all prior forms of social and religious cohesion have been ripped asunder and that few if any "shared norms" or "legitimate claims" remain.

Given this dilemma, it appears to me that the writer posits the retrenchment of individuals into a state of psychologism or privatism. Here, individuals will pick and choose from a "bewildering assortment of religious themes" whatever of value they wish; their choices will be essentially affective and emotional, and above all they will be realized in non-institutionalized ways. "Official models" will dissolve and will have salience or be retained primarily as "rhetoric."

This conclusion, it would appear, is untenable to sociologists whose basic wares are *institutionalized* norms, roles, and relationships. Lack of meaningful norms would premise the "end" of a social system; a state of anomie and alienation would certainly ensue.

One can concur with Whitley that there is much in the way of impressionistic evidence to support this position. Could it be, however, that this is a short-term temporal perspective? Might modern western man be living through a genuine revolutionary period in which the component elements of society are being shaken at their roots? Might *new institutions* be in the process of emergence from the rubble and chaos observable today? Might these institutions be more relevant, more able to accommodate to human needs, more capable of dealing with the rapid changes which the technological revolutions have thrust upon them? Formal religions with all of their stress upon the supernatural, the mystical, the magical, the reverent could be transforming into institutionalized systems of philosophical beliefs denuded of some of those facets which are so incongruous in the modern world.

The final statement in this challenging article lays bare the existential situation which a concerned professor of theology confronts. The author's reflections upon the perimeters of his profession are no doubt indicative of the state of confusion in academia as a whole. In man's quest for community, for wholeness as a person, perhaps standard courses or curriculae are found wanting. The ecumenical movements, both within and outside of the churches, may render the dia-

lectic over sectarian and denominational trivia (religiously, politically and economically) obsolescent.

Current flirtations in our country around the perimeters of religious forms and practices—e.g., a drama like Jesus Christ Super-Star, Leonard Bernstein's Mass, the Jesus freaks, the Hare Krishnas, the communes and cooperatives, the devotees of Yoga — might all be manifestations (perhaps aberrant ones) of the desire to achieve the essence of community which Durkheim and others profess lies at the root of all religious reverence. Rather than transposition, could religious institutions and their leaders become eclectic enough to encompass these expressions within their own boundaries? In turn, these deviant expressions will — if they are more than mere fads and fashions — themselves tend to become institutionalized and formalized. It may well be that the "establishment" in our theological institutions is far more distressed by the diversity and heterogeneity within its own ranks than by an invasion of *secular* motifs and beliefs. Hopefully, multiple "systems of belief" are emerging and will test the capacity of existent systems to withstand overlap and interface. If they are pliable, they will accommodate to these insistent sources of change so that the appalling loneliness of privatism will not further engulf our troubled generation.

How, if not through some community values and precepts, will children be socialized into an identity with their society (narrowly or broadly perceived)? Man will presumably always celebrate those episodes of "ultimate significance" — life, hope, good fortune, love, birth, death. Whether he does this in a temple, before an altar, to a priest, is not the real issue. The critical question is that he never become so totally alienated, so anomic, so nihilistic, that he celebrates alone — as priest, as supplicant within his own being — his church.

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