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9-29-2007

September 29, 2007: Hallowed Secularism Constitution Day Address

Bruce Ledewitz

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Title: Hallowed Secularism Constitution Day Address

Date: 2007-09-29T17:17:00.000-04:00

9/29/2007--On Thursday, September 27, 2007, I delivered the inaugural Widener Law Review Constitution Day Address at Widener Law School in Wilmington, Delaware. The title of the talk was The Myth of the Great Separation and the Future of Secularism. The talk addressed the recent work of Mark Lilla and argued that there cannot be genuine political life in a democracy without a foundation of transcendent values. The liberal effort to create a government that is neutral with regard to the good life is impossible. This has implications for the separation of church and state. While organizational and even monetary separation is possible, no separation can ultimately exist between what Lilla calls political theology and political life. Lilla assumes that secularism must be atheistic and he further assumes that atheism can sustain a healthy politics. Lilla's argument is quite different from that of someone who holds that meaning can be developed independently of religion. That is clearly true, but when it occurs, the result is essentially Hallowed Secularism, that is, a secularism open to humankind's deepest questions. Lilla wants such questions banned from politics, in the name of peace. This is why Lilla relies so heavily on Thomas Hobbes. But this is the peace of the grave, not the peace of democratic life. I want to thank the Widener Law Review for the opportunity to give this address and I especially wish to thank Widener Law School Professor Alan Garfield, whose formal response to the address took issue with much that I have been saying on this blog and gave me a great deal to think about. I believe the talk and subsequent exchange will soon be available on the Widener Law Review website: <http://www.widenerlawreview.org/>