

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Hallowed Secularism

The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian
Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly
Excellence and Professor of Law

10-12-2007

October 12, 2007: The Limits of Religion

Bruce Ledewitz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism>



Part of the [Constitutional Law Commons](#), and the [Law and Philosophy Commons](#)

Title: The Limits of Religion

Date: 2007-10-12T15:42:00.000-04:00

10/12/2007--Rereading what I have written in several recent posts, I am led to wonder, why not just be religious? It sounds so good. The problem has nothing to do with the Church and its stands on issues. These things don't help, but they are not the crucial matter. Nor is the matter institutional. I don't like the clergy acting as if they are intermediaries, but if that were really the issue, we secularists would just form our own Christian/Jewish sect. Secularism is growing because of the spirit of the age. Our religions form a coherent whole. You cannot really pick and choose what to believe. At least, you cannot pick and choose at the foundation. Speaking for the moment only about the Biblical religions I know, there is too much at the foundation that is not believable. Terms here are notoriously slippery. The concept of God has been reworked by theologians like Mordecai Kaplan to exclude the supernatural. Other kinds of reinterpretations of miracle have been attempted. So, it is not easy to state the bedrock that is not possible and then to consider whether this has not always been true of human beings. I'll start with a Christian doctrine that cannot be avoided. In his book *Jesus*, Pope Benedict discusses the second Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount in the Book of Matthew: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The Pope points out that the sufferer is not truly comforted by standing under the protection of God's Kingdom. "[T]rue comfort only appears when the "last enemy," death, and all its accomplices have been stripped of their power." And this—the end of death—is what Jesus ultimately promises. For those of us who are naturalists, this promise of ending death makes no sense. First, death is a natural process, not an enemy. Second, death cannot be overcome. I'm not looking forward to the rapid decline I have already started. I am not happy to see my parents aging. Death is not simply the end of life. Death is also decline and pain. So, I understand why death is called enemy. But, all the same, death is what makes life, life. Life does not go on forever. We each die and our species dies too. We are part of a great cycle. It is ingratitude to life that seeks immortality. Nor is it possible. We are by nature finite. In science fiction, many injuries can be healed and rejuvenation is sometimes possible. But even in science fiction, there are limits built in to the natural order. There are borders beyond which human science cannot foresee. Death is always a possibility. This promise of an end to death is simply not credible—at least to the secularist.