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November 15, 2007: American Religious Democracy in the News

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Title: American Religious Democracy in the News

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11/15/2007--This is what I heard on the news this morning. Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue leads a prayer vigil for rain. Meanwhile, GOP Presidential candidate Mitt Romney tries to figure out whether to address his Mormon faith directly, before the South Carolina primary. And the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issues voting guidelines for the faithful in the 2008 elections. I suppose the Democratic Presidential candidates were continuing their praise-of-God tour, but that information was too predictable to make the morning news. Sounds like the title of my book, *American Religious Democracy*. Of course, everyone knew that religion in America is politically important. My book merely expressly challenged the secular litany that ours is a secular democracy. It is not. The above account of the day's news should also remind us that there is nothing neutral about the secular proposal of separating church and state. For example, I heard one critic complain about the Governor of Georgia adding his official presence to the private prayers for rain that ordinary people were no doubt already uttering. This was a violation of the separation of church and state. But this complaint, which is perfectly reasonable if government is not supposed to be involved in religion, supposes that there is no God who can make rain. For everyone would have to agree that if there were a God who could end the drought, then, given the catastrophic nature of the drought, it would be a governor's civic obligation to propitiate that God and to pray for rain. Thus, to claim a separation of church and state is to take a theological position either that there is no such God or that whatever God exists does not do rain. There is nothing neutral about religion here. Separation is a religious claim (or, you could say, an anti-religious claim—still, not neutral). I need to add that I agree with the theology of the critic. There is no God who makes rain. But I understand that statement as the theology that it is. It is the theology of secularism. So, what does the Hallowed Secularist say about prayers for rain? That will await the next blog entry.