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Hallowed Secularism

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4-26-2008

### April 26, 2008: The Holidays of Hallowed Secularism

Bruce Ledewitz

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Title: The Holidays of Hallowed Secularism

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4/26/2008--Now that Passover is ending, it seems to be a good time to think about the holidays of Hallowed Secularism and their relationship to the holidays of Our Religions, specifically, Christianity and Judaism. The great themes of the Pilgrimage Festivals in Judaism—Passover: Freedom/ Shavuot: the Law/ Succot: Thanksgiving for the Harvest—already have their secular counterparts. America's liberation is celebrated on July 4. The celebration of the law could be Constitution Day, September 18. Thanksgiving is already the counterpart to Succoth and has been understood that way from the beginning. What is missing, and what is difficult to develop in secularism, is the theme of sin and repentance that Jews acknowledge on the Ten Days of Awe, culminating on the Great Fast of Yom Kippur. I would propose the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., on January 15, as a day of national fasting and renewal in light of the national sins of slavery and oppression of native people. I admit that this does not quite fit since it lacks the personal element. Yom Kippur is not a holiday of history, but is personal. What about the Christian holy days of Christmas and Easter? For a very long time, they will remain part of America's national rhythm. Christians will go on celebrating them when the culture has become thoroughly secular, just as Jews will celebrate their holidays. For the eventual secular majority, the Christmas-New Year period should remain a celebration of renewal, much as it is now. It would be wonderful if Christmas Day itself became an anti-consumption day, or sustainability day, instead of the commercial orgy it is now. As for Easter, the most orthodox Christian holy day, I always thought it should have been Earth Day. The theme of resurrection makes it the perfect day to celebrate the resurrection of the natural world in spring. On the other hand, Easter is the hardest holy day for secularism to understand because of its mysterious Christian origin. It would perhaps be best to leave it alone. As America becomes even more religiously pluralistic than it is now, the holy days of other religions will be added to the national calendar. Secularism, of course, will borrow these other themes as well.