

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

---

1-22-2009

### January 22, 2009: Rick Warren's Prayer

Bruce Ledewitz

*Duquesne University*, ledewitz@duq.edu

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



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

---

#### Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2009). January 22, 2009: Rick Warren's Prayer. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/243>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly Excellence and Professor of Law at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hallowed Secularism by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact [beharyr@duq.edu](mailto:beharyr@duq.edu).

Title: Rick Warren's Prayer

Date: 2009-01-22T13:31:00.001-05:00

1/22/2009--A Newsweek story already has noted how Reverend Warren prayed in Jesus' name only for himself—the one who changed “my” life. But the real story of Warren's prayer is that we have not been able to build a tradition of inclusive public prayer in part because the United States Supreme Court is so wooden in its interpretation of the Establishment Clause. In 1992, in *Lee v. Weisman*, the Court had a chance to endorse inclusive prayer at a high school commencement. The Board of Education sent guidelines to the rabbi who presented the prayer—guidelines that would have limited some of what Rick Warren said at the inauguration. The prayer in the case was much more inclusive than the fairly Christian performance by Warren. The Court held the high school graduation prayer unconstitutional anyway. No prayer of any kind, no matter how inclusive, was to be allowed. This kind of ruling seems sort of silly today in light of the clear religiosity of the inauguration. The Court should be helping us build an acceptable sense of public prayer. By holding to the secular paradigm of the wall of separation and government neutrality toward religion, but then refusing to enforce those norms in a public setting like the inauguration, the Court is creating constant controversy, encouraging secularists it does not intend to really support and threatening believers with anti-religious precedent. If the Establishment Clause does not require government neutrality, then we would be better off in every sense and from every point of view, if the Court would say plainly what it does require. I hope it will be held to require not government neutrality toward religion but much stricter nonsectarian expression. God by all means, but not Jesus on public occasions. And, in the wholly inclusive words of Reverend Joseph Lowery, "Let all those who do justice and love mercy say amen."