

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

6-26-2009

June 26, 2009: No Political Wall of Separation

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). June 26, 2009: No Political Wall of Separation. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/298>

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.

Title: No Political Wall of Separation

Date: 2009-06-26T15:33:00.001-04:00

6/26/2009--With one exception, the controversy over the netroots nation panel for a new progressive vision of church and state comes as no surprise. After all, I am proposing a mixing of religious symbols and language in public life and that is precisely the kind of thing some secularists have been fighting for years. People who oppose my proposals do not even know that I am a secularist. Nor, by and large, have they read other secularists who are looking anew at religion for inspiration and social resources. But the one suggestion I make that I did not anticipate would be controversial is that there is no such thing as a political separation of church and state. I mean by this that the motivation of a voter to support or oppose public policy is really irrelevant to the merits of that voter's position. So, if a voter supports a carbon tax because God wants human beings to protect His Creation, that religious motive is not subject to criticism in and of itself. Obviously, the rest of us are unimpressed with this religious reason and we would not support a carbon tax because someone says this is God's will. To convince the rest of us, the religious believer will have to speak our language. Nevertheless, the believer does not need our permission to vote in accordance with God's will. If you think about it, motivation has to be usually irrelevant in a political debate. A lot of people simply vote their own material self-interest. So, rich people often support lower taxes. Poor people often support more government services. But no one suggests that such a motivation is subject to some special limit. Maybe people should vote the common interest, but they often do not. Of course some public policy positions are currently unconstitutional. If a Catholic wants to remove the right of choosing abortion, for example, that policy would be found unconstitutional. But the reason for that is not the religious motivation, but the substance of the policy being proposed. The same could be true of opposition to gay marriage if the federal courts were to find such a right. To my surprise, I am hearing from some critics that it is a violation of the separation of church and state for voters to vote their religious convictions. This just cannot be true. For one thing, we often don't even know why we support and oppose certain policies.