

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

---

2-19-2012

### February 19, 2012: End of Religion II

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. (2012). February 19, 2012: End of Religion II. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/622>

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: End of Religion II

Date: 2012-02-19T08:26:00.002-05:00

2/19/2012--I have been working on a Manifesto for the future of Secularism and its relationship to religion. For now, the slogan I have is the End of Religion. But as the reader will see, this does not amount to a militant atheism, and certainly not to hostility toward traditional religion. I posted a prior version on January 25, 2012.

\*\*\*\*\*

Religion as we have known it seems to be coming to an end. While that statement might turn out to be premature, or even false, certain changes in American society seem unmistakable and irreversible.

The first change is that the beginnings of a genuinely secular society—one that does not parasitically rely on religion for its normative orientation—can be seen to be emerging. But this means that secularists have to grapple with whether and how secularism can ground meaning and value in human life. Secularists must confront the role of public ritual, for example, and the issues of human evil and human limit. The banal secular rhetoric that describes nonbelief as “rational” and as grounded in “reality” has not even come to grips with current philosophical debates, let alone with the rich religious philosophies of East and West. Nor has secularism learned the lesson taught by Ernst Cassirer in his confrontation with Nazism—that the repression of myth can have dangerous political consequences. In constitutional terms, an enriched secularism must reinterpret the Establishment Clause to permit a symbolically rich public square, not an empty one.

In the construction of such a deepened secularism—a hallowed secularism—religious insights can serve as important sources of wisdom and experience. But for such interchange to be fruitful, secularism must relinquish any residual hostility toward religion. Secularism must come to see itself as engaged in a search for human meaning and fulfillment that is parallel to, not opposed to, that of traditional religion. This means abandoning the current debate among legal academics over the legitimacy of exemptions to laws that threaten religious conscience. Such religious exemptions do not constitute special and unjust treatment because the secular search for meaning can also be viewed as a form of religious seeking. That is what occurred in an earlier period in the draft exemption cases, in which nonbelieving conscientious objectors were accorded protection under the rubric of religious exemption.

Religion also has a new role to play--a new orientation to adopt—vis-à-vis this emerging and groping secular society. Until now, believers simply resisted secularization, seeing it as a repudiation of God and of the unique and protected role of religion. But this resistance belies the wisdom of Gamaliel in the Book of Acts. If the growth of secularism is not from God, then there is no need to oppose it. And if it is from God, then opposition is useless, if not rebellious.

There are theologians who have seen this. Dietrich Bonhoeffer admired man come of age and wrote of a God who is teaching us to do without him, allowing himself once again to be pushed to the margin of human life. Bonhoeffer did not mean that religion would disappear, only that its cultural dominance would end. Somehow, Bonhoeffer welcomed this change. That acceptance is what religious believers must learn. Only then can religion play a role in the growth of a humane and generous secularism.