

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

5-10-2016

May 10, 2016: The Beginning of the End of Religion as a Political Force

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. (2016). May 10, 2016: The Beginning of the End of Religion as a Political Force. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1014>

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: The Beginning of the End of Religion as a Political Force

Date: 2016-05-10T05:52:00.001-04:00

5/10/2016—The decline of religion in America as a potent social force can be documented in different ways. For one, all those surveys showing a growing group of “nones”—their response to the question, what is your religion? This is so especially among the young. And there is the parallel drop in attendance at formal religious institutions, especially the mainstream Protestant, Catholic and liberal Jewish denominations. But you can also look at the matter of the decline of religion socially, legally and politically. Socially, the fracturing of social structure that lies behind the rise in mortality rates among Whites involves the decline of religion and other forces of hope. David Brooks wrote about that today in the New York Times. Legally, you see the decline in the movement from Establishment Clause type cases, in which religious symbols are used by government, to Free Exercise type cases, in which religious believers are the plaintiffs complaining that government is infringing on their freedom to practice religion. These cases are now brought under statutes. But the most startling aspect of the decline is political. This year’s candidates are the least religious I can remember—although Ronald Reagan did not seem particularly religious. On the Democratic side, Bernie Sanders has not practiced his Jewish faith—although he is much more respectful of religion than some of his secular supporters. Hillary Clinton has tried to convince the voters of her deep Methodist roots, but I doubt most people associate her with Christianity. Then there is Trump, who receives votes from people who identify with religion, but who seems almost totally devoid of basic Biblical knowledge—he called one of Paul’s letters “two” rather second, for example. This year, there really is no religious vote that someone could cast even if she wanted to do so. And the next President will be even less religious, publicly, than President Obama, who was himself not particularly religious. This is an important trend, not likely to reverse any time soon.