

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

7-21-2016

July 21, 2016: Lessons from My Uncle's Funeral

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). July 21, 2016: Lessons from My Uncle's Funeral. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1026>

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: Lessons from My Uncle's Funeral

Date: 2016-07-21T06:21:00.002-04:00

7/21/2016 – – My uncle passed away last weekend. Last night there was a memorial service for him in Ormond Beach Florida in a small synagogue that he and his wife of 68 years have been very active in. The service was reminiscent of the memorial service held for my mother back in 2007. That service was also held in a small synagogue that she had been very active in. When most people moved to Florida, they seem to lose institutional connections to any community. Of course it depends when in life one moves here. But I know a lot of older Jewish people who never set down any roots in Florida at all. Thus, their universe gradually constricts to family members. But my mother and my uncle were not like that. They engaged tremendous energy in their new synagogues. They took up important organizational roles. They gained new friends. And they were both loved in these new settings. There is a lesson here for secular life. My brother and I said to each other, after the service, that there could not be an event like this upon our deaths. Because we do not belong to synagogues, there is no institutional basis to our lives. Well, I suppose you should not live your life so that you have a nice memorial service when you die. On the other hand, my uncle and my mother were actually much happier than most people are because their lives still mattered, even quite late in life. Secular life tends to be institutionally isolating. There is no necessity for that course. But there is nothing built in to prevent it either. In addition, I am sure that both my uncle and my mother, neither of whom was probably religious in belief, also gained a lot of satisfaction from the ritual rhythm of Jewish life. Life is just better when you are going to synagogue every week and celebrating the holidays every year. What are the rituals of secular life going to be? What will be its community? What will be its rhythm? The difference between an empty secularism, which is the direction in which we seem to be heading now, and a hallowed secularism, which this blog is supposed to be about, lies in part in the answers to these questions.