

Baldy Center Conference
**Re-Describing the Sacred/Secular Divide:
The Legal Story II**
Friday - Sunday, May 1 - 3, 2009

DESCRIPTION

This conference will bring together scholars of law, the humanities, and the social sciences for a sustained conversation regarding contemporary relations between law and religion. A reassessment of the social, cultural, and historical relations between law and religion is a pressing necessity given that public policy in this area is being reconsidered at every level of government in many parts of the world.

What, precisely, is modern religion under the rule of law? How has the historical trajectory of secularization altered religion and its relation to law? How has the legal regulation of religion affected the experience of religious practices, places, and objects, whether liturgical, social, individual, or communal? Many scholars in law and other disciplines would readily admit the importance of these questions regarding the definition and legal location of religion. Less widely appreciated is the potential of such questions to reshape our understanding of law itself.

Law constitutes at once a cosmology, an anthropology, a technique of textual interpretation, a regime of images or of representation, and even a soteriology. As such, law serves a social role that is analogous to, and is to some extent historically derived from, that formerly served by religion. This overlapping of functions defines a range of possible relationships that law bears toward religion, as complement and mutual support, competitor, or successor. Various sites for an investigation of new religio-legal realities, and of their histories, include human rights, economic activity, the transformation of geographically located religious traditions into more portable modernist ideas and practices, rapid migration, environmental degradation, entrepreneurial violence, and the proliferation of electronic media. The goal of this conference is not to provide an encyclopedic description of each of these areas, but to begin to develop theoretical and structural models that will both deepen our understanding of the dynamics connecting law and religion, and serve as the basis for further specialized research.

The first meeting of the conference took place in March 2008 at the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy at the University at Buffalo Law School. While there were many points of contact, particularly striking was the shared conviction that the stereotype of law as "secular," or as having undergone a straightforward separation from religion known as "secularization," is too simplistic an historical narrative to capture the range of transformations in the relationships between law and religion in different cultural and historical contexts.

The second conference, is being held from May 1-3, 2009 at the Baldy Center and a downtown venue and will include discussion of a set of finished papers that make a beginning at a re-mapping the locations of law and religion in relation to each other on a broader historical and ethnographic landscape.

<http://law.buffalo.edu/baldycenter/sacredSecularDivide09.html>

Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy, University at Buffalo Law School

511 O'Brian Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260 ♦ 716-645-2102 ♦ fax 716-645-2900 ♦ BaldyCtr@buffalo.edu