

# IFH MONTHLY

Irish Freethinkers & Humanists

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1. WHAT'S IN *IRISH FREETHINKER* - SPRING 2024
2. CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM
3. 'HATE SPEECH BILL'
4. DENMARK AND BLASPHEMY
5. A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO KILLING
6. HEAVEN
7. PREAMBLE TO CONSTITUTION
8. HUMANIST MEETINGS IN IRELAND

## 1. WHAT'S IN *IRISH FREETHINKER* – SPRING 2024

The Spring 2024 edition of *IRISH FREETHINKER* is to be published in February and will be dispatched by post to subscribers; it is otherwise available for purchase in shops.

The contents are as follows:

- *Olympe de Gouges - French Feminist*
- *Losing Religion, Finding Myself*
- *The Evil of War*
- *Humanism & Christianity*
- *The Enlightenment & Modern Ireland: II*
- *Believers and Nonbelievers*
- *2022 Census and the Areligious*
- *Interview with Daniel Dennett*
- *Education and the Slavish Mindset*

The IFH website ([www.irishfreethinkers.com](http://www.irishfreethinkers.com)) continues to be developed and editions of *IRISH FREETHINKER* for the period before May-June 2020 and back to Autumn 2016 will be gradually put up on it, as eventually will back copies of *IFH NEWS* no 2 onwards. There is now also an online payment system on the website. Copies of recent editions of these items not online may be purchased through our site. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES FOR THE SUMMER '24 EDITION OF *IRISH FREETHINKER* IS 15 APRIL 2024 (Editor: ifh.sde@gmail.com)

## 2. CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM

*Daltún Ó Ceallaigh*

On Christmas Eve 2023, the *Sunday Independent* carried an article by David Quinn entitled *Christianity Paved the Way for Liberalism to Follow*.

Who is David Quinn? According to Wikipedia, Mr Quinn has been editor of *The Irish Catholic*, and is now the Director of the Iona Institute, an

advocacy group promoting the practice of religion and the traditional view of family marriage. Also, he is a member of the US-based Legatus group which promotes Catholic values in corporate business. He opposed the repeal of the constitutional ban on abortion and supports Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act which allows religious schools to discriminate and fire

employees who do not match their denominational ethos. He opposed the Gender Recognition Act and protested against legal recognition of same sex relationships in the form of civil partnership as well as campaigning unsuccessfully for a No vote in the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum. He has objected to measures concerning climate action, ranging from carbon taxes to cutting emissions, on the basis that their economic impact would be negative. In 2014, he made claims that the Irish Government would need to permit fracking in Ireland to address the growing demand for energy and has been critical in particular of climate activist Greta Thunberg.

Returning to his recent article, it is an exercise in the 'what might have been' of history. As he says to start with: "So, let's try and imagine what the world would look like had Christianity never been." He tells us that: "The Roman Empire of the West would still have been overwhelmed by successive waves of barbarian invasions. They would've conquered an empire without a trace of Christianity, one in which pagan religion still dominated, and the barbarians would have arrived with their own pagan religions." But, one could equally speculate that the Emperor Constantine might not have opportunistically 'converted' to Christianity, and instead have promoted Epicureanism, as outlined by the Roman Lucretius, or perhaps have adhered to the more balanced teachings of Zarathustra rather than those of Jesus. In either of the latter instances, the barbarians would not have been confronted with what the Christians called paganism. (Of course, that would probably still not have prevented the said Emperor in his personal life from murdering his wife and eldest son as he did subsequent to his actual Christian 'conversion'.) As for Christianity, it perhaps just had more of an appeal for him with its advocacy that one should render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's.

Quinn continues: "There would have been no church in the West to preserve the learning of

Ancient Rome and Greece." This is an extraordinary statement, even for a would-be neoscholastic such as Quinn. Christianity is notorious for its record of religious iconoclasm and intellectual destruction leading to the elimination both of ancient art and literature on the basis of their idolatry or 'heresy'. While the phenomenon was fortunately not uniform throughout Christianity, the world will never recover from some of the book burning in particular for which it was responsible. Of course, Christians brought the skills of reading and writing to Ireland and elsewhere, but mainly to propagate the mythology of Christianity. And the ancients were only allowed in on the act to a certain extent insofar as they could be usefully utilised by the new faith.



David Quinn

Thus, Plato with his material-ideal dualism, was incorporated into Christianity by St Augustine, in the form of a body-soul dichotomy that was to be developed centuries later by Descartes. However, Aristotle was only saved from oblivion by the Arabs whence he again entered into the European intellectual world through Latin translations in the 13th century, and notably influenced Thomas Aquinas, who then tried to produce logical 'proofs' for the existence of a god.

## EUROPEAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Quinn goes on to credit Christianity with helping "to create a European consciousness." One wonders then why there were so many European internecine wars throughout the Christian centuries right up to the 20th. It is also this "consciousness" that he sees as preventing the Islamisation of Europe in earlier times rather than certain ethnic states simply defending themselves against Muslim onslaughts, such as at Poitiers and Vienna, revealing how high flown is his imagination. But his wings of fantasy do not let him settle there. He goes on to opine that China's lack of Christianity eventually permitted communism whereas, one assumes, had it been Christian, it would instead be now mercifully characterised by neo-liberal capitalism.

And what about women’s rights? Just think of mediaeval Japan, he suggests, the implication apparently being that Christian Europe compared favourably! Has he read the abysmal depictions of women by the church fathers of Christianity? He then flies across the Atlantic to refer to the non-Christian Aztecs and Incas with their human sacrifices, apparently oblivious of the tortures and burnings at the stake by the Inquisition.

There is no stopping him. “Secular liberalism”, he advises, “is a natural outgrowth” of Christianity, because the latter preached universal love and equality. Black slaves in America or the proletariats of the industrial revolution, for instance, might not have

agreed. Nor perhaps would those peoples colonised by those with the bible in one hand and the sword in the other.

Human rights and modern morality, he avers, came more from Christianity than the Enlightenment! So, why did Enlightenment philosophers have to battle so much with the churches? Otherwise, does he not understand the writings of secular Humanist philosophy? Has he ever seen the picture of members of the Catholic hierarchy, as late as the 20th century, standing beside nazis with arms outstretched in the fascist salute?

If there were a prize for fatuous nonsense in 2023, David Quinn would win it hands down. •



**3. ‘HATE SPEECH BILL’**

*The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill (‘Hate Speech Bill’) is currently before the Seanad. We quote below from the main parts requiring scrutiny and evaluation by Humanists and all democrats.*

**PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS**

3. (1) ... “protected characteristic”, in relation to a person or a group of persons, means any one of the following, namely -

- (a) race,
- (b) colour,
- (c) nationality,
- (d) religion,
- (e) national or ethnic origin,
- (f) descent,
- (g) gender,
- (h) sex characteristics,
- (i) sexual orientation, or
- (j) disability.

(2) In this Act, in relation to the protected characteristics -

- (a) references to “religion” include references to the absence of a religious conviction or belief,
- (b) references to “descent” include references to persons or groups of persons who descend

from persons who could be identified by certain characteristics (such as race or colour), but not necessarily all of those characteristics still exist,

(c) references to “national or ethnic origin” include references to membership of the Traveller community (within the meaning of section 2(1) of the Equal Status Act 2000),

(d) “gender” means the gender of a person or the gender which a person expresses as the person’s preferred gender or with which the person identifies and includes transgender and a gender other than those of male and female,

(e) “sexual orientation” has the same meaning as it has in section 2(1) of the Equal Status Act 2000,

(f) references to sex characteristics shall be construed as references to the physical and biological features of a person relating to sex, and

(g) “disability” has the same meaning as it has in section 2(1) of the Equal Status Act 2000.

## OFFENCE OF CONDONATION, DENIAL OR GROSS TRIVIALISATION OF GENOCIDE, ETC

8. (1) ... a person shall be guilty of an offence under this section if the person -

(a) communicates material to the public or a section of the public, or

(b) behaves in a public place in a manner, that condones, denies or grossly trivialises -

(i) genocide,

(ii) a crime against humanity,

(iii) a war crime, or

(iv) an act specified in Article 6 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal, where such communication of material or behaviour is directed against a person or group of persons on account of their protected characteristics or any of those characteristics and is done with intent to incite violence or hatred against such a person or such a group of persons on account of those characteristics or any of those characteristics.

### EDITORIAL COMMENT

First of all, it should be noted that the reference to “religion” as a “protected characteristic”, is qualified as including “the absence of a religious conviction or belief.”

As regards “gender”, in contrast to what used to be traditionally the case in relation to sexuality, this is not taken in the Bill as a synonym for the “sex” of a person. Therefore, it is effectively asserted that there are more than two genders, based on self-identification as distinct from biological determination. However, that leaves one free to adhere to the position that there are still

only two sexes, namely, female and male. Although that would be confusedly contested by some identitarians, we would maintain that that is scientifically the case. Sex is about reproduction and reproduction is achieved by the combination of male and female. As for phenomena, such as what used to be called a hermaphrodite (now often termed intersex), these are atypical manifestations such as occur throughout nature. In other words, they are the exceptions, which prove the rule.

In respect of the “Offence of condonation, denial, or gross trivialisation of genocide etc”, this has to be in the instance of where “communication of material or behaviour ... is done within intent to incite violence or hatred ...” The latter is an important qualification, because mere holocaust denial is a punishable offence in other jurisdictions. Such denial is, of course contemptible, but the progressive way to deal with it in a liberal democracy is through factually discrediting and deprecating such an assertion. Imprisonment is not an answer to a false argument and is in danger of giving spurious martyrdom to certain individuals.

Despite what has been said above, Humanists have to be vigilant that an attempt is not made to reintroduce an offence of blasphemy by the back door. For example, to take an illustration, religious fundamentalists may attempt to represent any depiction of Jesus of Nazareth as a charlatan as an offence under the legislation. This kind of thing may eventually have to be played out in the courts.

## 4.

## DENMARK AND BLASPHEMY

Denmark has recently found itself embroiled in a contentious debate over the potential introduction of a new blasphemy law. This proposal has not only captivated the nation but has also garnered international attention, reigniting discussions about the delicate balance between religious sensitivities and the cherished right to freedom of expression.

Blasphemy laws, historically rooted in the notion of safeguarding religious sentiments and so-

cial harmony, have long been a subject of debate. However, the modern world has increasingly gravitated toward secularism, underpinning the paramount value of freedom of expression.

From a secular standpoint, the primary concern revolves around upholding the principle of freedom of expression and preserving the separation of religion and the state. Secularism champions a society where individuals are at liberty to ex-

press their beliefs, engage in critical discussions, and even critique religious ideologies without the looming spectre of legal repercussions. This principle plays a pivotal role in fostering a diverse and open society where ideas can be freely exchanged and knowledge can flourish unburdened by religious dogma.

Critics of the proposed Danish blasphemy law argue that while respecting religious beliefs is essential, it is equally crucial to allow for critical examination and discussion of those beliefs. Freedom of expression implies that individuals should be able to express their opinions, even if they challenge established religious norms. Constructive criticism and open dialogue can lead to a deeper understanding of various viewpoints, fostering personal growth and social cohesion.

Implementing stricter blasphemy laws can have a chilling effect on freedom of expression. The fear of legal repercussions may cause individuals to hesitate before voicing their opinions or engaging in discussions related to religious matters. This chilling effect can stifle creativity, impede open debates, and hinder the progress of a diverse and inclusive society.

A secular perspective emphasises the significance of promoting tolerance and understanding among diverse religious and non-religious com-

munities. Instead of silencing dissent, societies can encourage dialogue, education, and respectful engagement. Allowing different perspectives to coexist enables people to learn from one another and construct bridges of understanding that contribute to a harmonious society.

Several countries have recently abolished or relaxed their blasphemy laws to prioritize safeguarding freedom of expression. This approach recognises that individuals have the inherent right to express themselves without the looming

threat of persecution, even when their opinions challenge established religious beliefs.

The proposed Danish blasphemy law is a contentious issue that warrants careful consideration from a secular perspective. Balancing

the right to freedom of expression with the need for respect and understanding can be a challenging task, but it is vital to create a society that values diversity, encourages open dialogue, and respects individual rights. As the debate unfolds, it is crucial for all stakeholders to keep these principles at the forefront, ultimately striving for a solution that respects both religious sensitivities and fundamental freedoms.



*Reproduced from the web site of  
RATIONALIST  
INTERNATIONAL*

**5. A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO KILLING**

Kill false prophets (Zech. 13:3)

Kill fortune tellers (Lev. 20: 27)

Kill anyone who sins (Ezek. 18:4)

Kill the curious (1 Sam. 6: 19-20)

Kill homosexuals (Lev. 20:13, Rom. 1 21-32)

Kill all non-Hebrews (Dt. 20:16-17)

Kill sons of sinners (Isaiah 14:21)

Kill nonbelievers (2 Chron. 15: 12-13)

Kill anyone who curses God (Lev. 24:16)

Kill any child who hits a parent (Ex. 2-15)

Kill children who disobey parents (Dt. 21:20)

Kill those who work on the Sabbath (Ex. 31:15)

Kill disobedient children (Ex. 21:17, Mk. 7:10)

Kill strangers close to a church (Num. 1:48-51)

Kill all males after winning battles (Dt .20:13)

Kill those who curse father or mother (Lev. 20:9)



Kill men who have sex with other men (Lev. 20:13)

Kill those who worship the wrong god (Num. 25:1-9)

Kill any bride not a virgin (Dt. 22:21)



**6. HEAVEN**

*A Poem by RUPERT BROOKE*

Fish (fly-replete, in depth of June,  
Dawdling away their wat'ry noon)  
Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,  
Each secret fishy hope or fear.

Fish say, they have their Stream and Pond;  
But is there anything Beyond?  
This life cannot be All, they swear,  
For how unpleasant, if it were!

Immense, of fishy form and mind,  
Squamous, omnipotent, and kind;  
And under that Almighty Fin,  
The littlest fish may enter in.

Oh! never fly conceals a hook,  
Fish say, in the Eternal Brook,  
But more than mundane weeds are there,  
And mud, celestially fair;

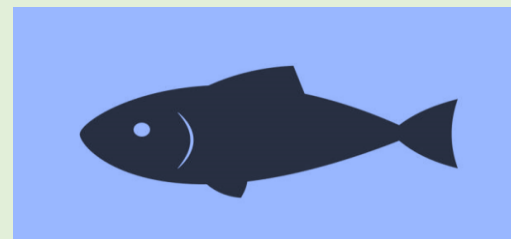
One may not doubt that, somehow, Good  
Shall come of Water and of Mud;  
And, sure, the reverent eye must see  
A Purpose in Liquidity.

Fat caterpillars drift around,  
And Paradisal grubs are found;  
Unfading moths, immortal flies,  
And the worm that never dies.

We darkly know, by Faith we cry,  
The future is not Wholly Dry.  
Mud unto mud! - Death eddies near -  
Not here the appointed End, not here!

But somewhere, beyond Space and Time,  
Is wetter water, slimier slime!  
And there (they trust) there swimmeth One,  
Who swam ere rivers were begun.

And in that Heaven of all their wish,  
There shall be no more land, say fish.



**7. PREAMBLE TO CONSTITUTION**

*The following letter was sent by IFH to the political parties on 15 January 2024. It does now look likely that there will be a question about the Preamble put to the people on 8 March, but the important point is that the matter has been flagged and will continue to be followed up.*

**To: General Secretaries -**

*Aontú, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Green Party, In-*

*dependent Ireland, Labour Party, People Before Profit, Sinn Féin, Social Democrats.*

*A Ard-Rúnaí,*

In March of 2024, referendums will be held to amend the Irish Constitution.

As you know, there will be two amendments, one concerning the definition of the family and the other concerning care in the home.

Holding referendums is an expensive business and full advantage of the exercise should be taken to secure further change which may be regarded as urgent.

The Preamble to the Constitution has previously been highlighted. This offends Unitarian

Christians, non-Christian religious, and Humanists. That is insofar as it is trinitarian, specifically Christian, and theistic.

It is held that such a Preamble as no place in the Constitution of a secular republic. Moreover, it is of no legal significance, while being unwelcome in its declarations as outlined, and its removal could take place without affecting anything else in the Constitution.

There is also the consideration that the Government proclaims that it is committed to reconciliation among different traditions on the island of Ireland. It should be pointed out that the Preamble is incompatible with that stance.

It is therefore being suggested that a broad REPEAL THE PREAMBLE (RTP) approach should be adopted as soon as possible to lobby for the removal of the item in question in March by way of an additional referendum question.

Finally, it should be added that one should be careful about oppositional reaction to proposed repeal being that, instead, it should be redrafted. That could be a clever way of embroiling one in lengthy deliberations, probably designed to lead nowhere, and therefore of postponing any ta-

bling of a suitable amendment in March. The point should be underlined that, as there is no necessity for a Preamble of any kind, one should not get involved in a discussion about redrafting. There are other aspects of the Constitution that also should be repealed such as having religious references in oaths for the offices of President etc. But raising these at this time is not advocated so as to concentrate on the Preamble and maximise possible support in that regard.

Finally, on the technical point, what is now required is a simple Bill for repeal which involves no complexity in drafting or deliberation.

*Sinne,*



*Roger Kelly,*  
ADMINISTRATOR

*Daltún Ó Ceallaigh,*  
PUBLICATIONS OFFICER

## PREAMBLE

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred,

We, the people of Éire

Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial,

Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our Nation.

And seeking to promote the common good, with due observance of Prudence, Justice and Charity, so that the dignity and freedom of the individual may be assured, true social order attained, the unity of our country restored, and concord established with other nations,

Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution. ♦

**Belfast Freethinkers**

Meeting quarterly, 8.00 p.m.  
 Holiday Inn, University St, Belfast  
 Contact: Roger 0777 858 3435  
[roger.kelly.2@ntlworld.com](mailto:roger.kelly.2@ntlworld.com)

**North Down Humanists**

1st Sunday of month, 11.00 a.m.  
 Coffee Cure, Bangor Castle  
 Contact: Andy Barr, 078 889 20063

**North Dublin Humanist Community**

3rd Monday of month  
 Contact: Alan Tuffery  
[atuffery@tcd.ie](mailto:atuffery@tcd.ie)

**South Dublin Humanist Community (SDHC)**

Contact: 086 857 2005  
[Janielazar@gmail.com](mailto:Janielazar@gmail.com)  
 Mailing List: southdublinhumanistcommunity

**Humanist Association of Ireland**

Monthly meeting at rotating venues, mostly Dublin  
 Details of next meeting at [humanism.ie](http://humanism.ie)  
 or HAI Facebook Page

**Westport Humanists**

2nd Sunday of month at 12.30 p.m.  
 Wyatt Hotel  
 Contact: Seamus O'Connell  
 087 245 3536/098 50802  
[shayoc37@gmail.com](mailto:shayoc37@gmail.com)

**Cork Humanists**

Contact: Geraldine O'Neill 086 812 8892  
<http://corkhumanists.weebly.com>

**Humanists West (Galway)**

1st Sun of designated month, qly, 11 a.m.  
 Knocknacarra Cmty Centre (H91 E7KW)  
 Zoom meetings for other months  
 Contact: [Donalfinnegan@hotmail.com](mailto:Donalfinnegan@hotmail.com)

**Kilkenny Humanist Group**

2nd Sunday of month, 11.00 a.m.  
 Langton House Hotel, Kilkenny,  
 Contact: Patrick Cassidy 089 463 0005  
[patrickacassidy@gmail.com](mailto:patrickacassidy@gmail.com)

**Mid-West Humanists (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary)**

3rd Wednesday of month in Limerick  
 Contact: Peter 086 815 5102  
[info@midwesthumanists.com](mailto:info@midwesthumanists.com)  
 Also check <https://midwesthumanists.com>

**North West Humanists**

2nd Tuesday of month  
 Radisson Hotel, Sligo  
 Contact: Gill Bell 087 295 8206  
[humanistgb@gmail.com](mailto:humanistgb@gmail.com)

**Waterford Humanists**

3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of month, 7.30 p.m.  
 Phil Grimes Pub, John St, Waterford  
 Contact: Teresa [graham22@gmail.com](mailto:graham22@gmail.com)





## ***THEY SAID***



**... at bottom God is nothing more than an exalted father ...**

***Sigmund Freud***

**... what is wanted is not the will to believe, but the desire to find out, which is the exact opposite.**

***Bertrand Russell***

**... even those surest of heaven stay here to the last possible moment ...**

***Stanley Hall***

**... we have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor for enquiry ...**

***Tertullian***

**Reason is a whore.**

***Martin Luther***

**The supreme being for humanity is humanity itself.**

***George Novack***

**Religion began when the first scoundrel met the first fool.**

***Voltaire***

**From whence, then, could arise the solitary and strange conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world because, they say, one man and one woman ate an apple?**

***Thomas Paine***

**The real task is not to understand Christianity but to understand that one cannot understand it.**

***Soren Kierkegaard***

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