

IFH NEWS

Irish Freethinkers & Humanists

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THEY SAID

1. WHAT'S IN *IRISH FREETHINKER* - SUMMER '23

The 2023 Summer edition of *IRISH FREETHINKER* will be published in May and dispatched by post to subscribers, and will otherwise be available for purchase in shops.

The contents are as follows: The Way I Have come To Think; The Linen Hall; Fear; World Without Borders; In My Gut, I Don't Believe; Mary Wollstonecraft; Humanism and Atheism; A Humanist Hero; The Huxleys & 'The Best Idea Ever'; Secular Society of Ireland; Are You With Me?; They Said; History of Naturalism.

The IFH website (www.irishfreethinkers.com) continues to be developed and editions of *IRISH FREETHINKER* for the period before May-June 2020 and back to Autumn 2016 are gradually being put up on it, as eventually will be back-copies of *IFH NEWS*. There is now also an online payment system on the website.

2. FORTHCOMING REFERENDA IN REPUBLIC

TIME TO ACT NOW! ... ON RELIGIOUS CLAUSES IN THE CONSTITUTION WITH NEXT REFERENDUM VOTES

It has been announced that there will be referenda later this year to deal with the question of gender equality. Referenda are expensive exercises and the opportunity should be taken in them to deal with outstanding, important issues. These include the religious oaths for office holders and servants which should be provided for instead by statute law. The relevant articles are reproduced below.

The Constitution of Ireland contains the provisions set out below.

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.”

PRESIDENT

“In the presence of almighty God I do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will maintain the constitution of Ireland and uphold its laws, that I will fulfil my duties faithfully and conscientiously in accordance with the constitution and the law, and that I will dedicate my abilities to the service and welfare of the people of Ireland. May God direct and sustain me.”

COUNCIL OF STATE

“In the presence of almighty God I do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will faithfully and conscientiously fulfil my duties as a member of the council of state.”

JUDGES

“In the presence of almighty God I do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will duly and faithfully and to the best of my knowledge and power execute the office of chief Justice (or as the case may be) without fear or favour, affection or ill-will towards any man, and that I will uphold the constitution and the laws. May God direct and sustain me.”

It should be noted that there were no such stipulations as the foregoing in the constitutions of 1919 and 1922.

OTHER RELIGIOUS REFERENCES

Article 6

All powers of government, legislative, executive and judicial, derive, *under God*, from the people, whose right it is to designate the rulers of the State and, in final appeal, to

decide all questions of national policy, according to the requirements of the common good.

Article 44

1. The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to *Almighty God*. It shall hold *His Name* in reverence, and shall respect and honour *religion*.

2.1 Freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of *religion* are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen.

2.2 The State guarantees not to endow any *religion*.

2.3 The State shall not impose any disabilities or make any discrimination on the ground of *religious* profession, belief or status.

2.4 Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different *religious* denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending *religious* instruction at that school.

2.5 Every *religious* denomination shall have the right to manage its own affairs, own, acquire and administer property, movable and immovable, and maintain institutions for *religious* or charitable purposes.

2.6 The property of any *religious* denomination or any educational institution shall not be diverted save for necessary works of public utility and on payment of compensation

COMMENTS

In the first instance, the Preamble is legally unnecessary. Moreover, it is not only theistic, but is specifically Christian and trinitarian. Therefore, it is incompatible with the philosophies of non-trinitarian Christians (particularly as regards Unitarians who have a long tradition in Ireland, especially in the North), non-Christian theists (e.g. Jews and

Muslims), and Humanists.

In regard to the oaths, they are also theistic and incompatible at least with a Humanist position.

The situation of the oaths in particular has led to the ridiculous and inauthentic state of affairs whereby non-theists have been forced to take them in order to assume the roles concerned.

Articles 6 and 44.1, strictly speaking, have no place in a secular constitution, but they are in fact not of much practical relevance.

GENDER EQUALITY

The main purpose of referenda later this year will be to address what the Government calls "gender equality". What this fully means is not

yet clear. It is nonetheless inspired by the following provisions of the Constitution:

Article 41

2.1 In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common cannot be achieved.

2.2 The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of duties in the home.

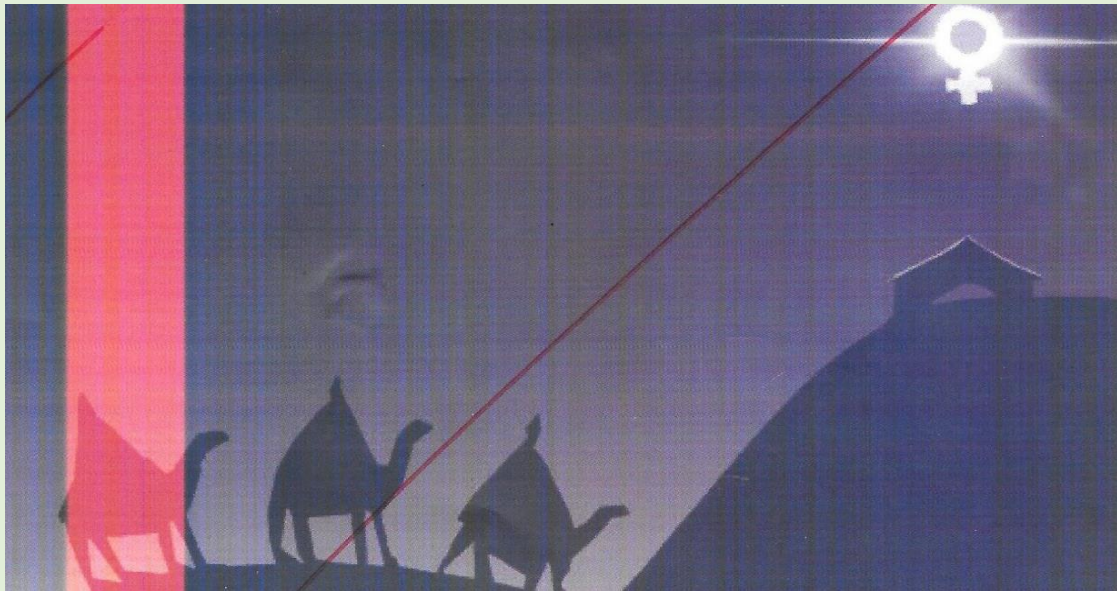
There was originally a proposal that these provisions simply be deleted. However, the alternative view was put forward by various lobby interests that they should, instead, be replaced by provisions which covered in a gender-balanced way for care in the home. We await texts from the Government.

3. NOTHING NEW ABOUT VIRGIN BIRTHS

BERWYN LEWIS, Journalist & Author

My thoughts turned to a famous baby on [Stephen's Day]. He was conceived through parthenogenesis, a sort of asexual fertilisat-

miraculous. Bees do it. Birds do it. Even crayfish and some sharks do it. And, while researching my novel, Venice's Virgin Mo-



ion process which avoids messy exchanges of bodily fluids and can lead to a virgin birth by a woman. It also avoids troubling questions of paternity.

History is littered with parthenogenesis or virgin births and they're not all

ther, I discovered that humans have been laying claim to virgin births since time began with the first of the big bangs.

A virgin roll-call might include Romulus and Remus, twin founders of Rome, born of the virgin Rhea Silvia. In ancient Egypt,

Ra (the Sun) was born of a virgin mother, Net; Horus was the son of the virgin Isis.

The Phrygo-Roman god, Attis, was born of a virgin, Nana, on December 25. It resonates because he went on to be killed and was resurrected.

In ancient Greece, Dionysus was the son of either the virgin Semele or the virgin Persephone. Persephone was also the virgin mother of Jason. And Plato's mother, Perictione, was [alleged by some!] a virgin.

The list goes on. Hinduism, Buddhism and ancient China all have their share of them and none is more or less believable than any other myth, fable or symbol.

Virgin births are all about the hymen, a membrane, and whether or not it is intact.

Throughout the ages, virginity has been

big business. For instance, in 17th century Venice, muslin bags were stuffed with mashed hearts of hares and inserted in the cavity on the wedding night so that the nuptial bedsheets were stained with blood to demonstrate the newlywed bride was a virgin. By passing the bloodied sheet test the bride proved she was worth every ducat of her dowry. In those pre-DNA days, it also dispensed with any future disputes about the legitimacy of heirs.

But there's a dark underbelly to virgin-birth stories. Claims of divine intervention aside, virgin births may have a more human explanation - tragic demonstration of the extreme measures women have been forced to take to save themselves and their reputations.

4. BAPTISM BARRIER IN SCHOOLS

CARL O'BRIEN, The Irish Times

Catholic bishops have expressed concern over the ability of Catholic primary schools to remain true to their ethos following the removal of the so-called “baptism barrier”.

The concerns are contained in records of meetings between Department of Education officials and representatives of Catholic bishops – the Irish Episcopal Commission – regarding attempts to transfer more Catholic schools to multi-denominational patrons.

Almost 90 per cent of primary schools are currently under Catholic patronage, while about 5 per cent have a multi-denominational ethos.

The programme for government commits to improving parental choice by meeting a target of delivering 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030. In 2018 legislation was introduced to remove the baptism barrier, which allowed Catholic primary schools to use religion as a selection criterion in school admissions.

Department of Education records released under the Freedom of Information Act show Irish Episcopal Commission representatives expressed their willingness to engage with a “reconfiguration” process for schools to provide more choice for parents following the ban on the baptism barrier,

However, it notes that the commission “made it clear to the department that they are concerned about their ability to cater for the many parents who wish to continue to enrol their children in schools of Catholic ethos and the ability of those schools to be true to that ethos and their characteristic spirit”.

“We understand that this concern exists in relation to existing schools which, in accordance with the provisions of the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018, cannot prioritise applicant children on the grounds of religion, and that where a school is oversubscribed, this can result in

some Catholic children not getting a place in school while children who are not Catholic do get a place.

“We understand also that there is concern that such a situation could arise more frequently should the availability of places in schools of Catholic ethos in a given area decrease on foot of a reconfiguration of a school from Catholic to multi-denominational.

“While there are other challenges concerning curricular development, the admissions issue is a key issue for the IEC [Irish Episcopal Commission],” the record adds.

Notwithstanding these issues Catholic bishops have agreed to take part in a pilot initiative to provide greater choice for parents in eight areas where there are no multi-denominational primary schools. The pilot areas are Arklow, Athlone, Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, Limerick and Youghal.

As part of this process facilitators appointed by the Department of Education, along with local Catholic patrons, have been engaging directly with school authorities at a local level. For schools which may form part of this process, school patrons and facilitators have begun engaging with school communities.

The records state that if the plan for transfers to take place in September 2023 is

to be achieved, decisions would need to be made prior to the end of 2022. However, well-placed sources say the timeline has slipped considerably and tensions have arisen in the case of plans to transfer the patronage of a Catholic school in the Dublin suburb of Raheny.

All three primary schools in Raheny are under Catholic patronage: Scoil Áine, an all-girls school, Scoil Assaim, an all-boys school, and Naíscoil Íde, a junior school.

The plan has sparked opposition among some parents and school staff who are opposed to any changes in patronage and who do not want to become coeducational.

However, a group of parents who have established the Raheny Community for Co-Education group believe a majority in the area want a mixed, multi-denominational national school. Facilitation meetings have been held in the area with the aim of reducing tensions and achieving a consensus.

The tensions have revived memories of controversy in the Malahide and Portmarnock area in 2019 when parents were surveyed on plans to transfer the patronage from one of the local schools. It was accompanied by claims over what might happen to schools if they were taken over by a non-denominational patron such as the end of Christmas concerts or Easter celebrations.

Jan 3 2023

5.

WHAT IS HUMANISM?

Humanism continues a tradition which has existed for over 2,500 years and still flourishes today.

Humanist beliefs are based on the values of reason, equality, freedom and compassion. These values are not based on religion but are found in people themselves.

Humanists believe in morality and

ethics based on the need for humans to help each other, to treat each other with respect and compassion, and to protect the freedom of individuals, provided it does not infringe on the rights of others. Humanists value democracy, the rule of law and universal legal human rights.

Humanists reject misogyny, racism and

injustice of all kinds.

Humanists believe that personal liberty must be balanced with a responsibility to other humans, to the well-being of the planet, and to all sentient beings.

Humanists believe in scientific and philosophical inquiry, underpinned by ethical concerns for the well-being of humans and the natural world.

HAI www.humanism.ie

6. HUMANIST MEETINGS IN IRELAND

Belfast Freethinkers

Meeting quarterly, 8.00 p.m.
Holiday Inn, University St, Belfast

Contact: Roger 0777 858 3435
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

South Dublin Humanist Community (SDHC)

Contact: 086 857 2005
Janielazar@gmail.com
Mailing List:
southdublinhumanistcommunity

Humanist Association of Ireland

Monthly meeting at rotating venues, mostly Dublin
Details of next meeting at 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

Cork Humanists

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

Humanists West (Galway)

Last Sunday of month, 12 noon
Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd, Salthill
Contact: Garry O'Lochlainn 087 222 2726

Kilkenny Humanist Group

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

Mid-West Humanists (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary)

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

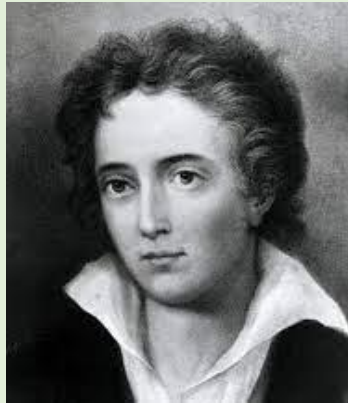
North West Humanists

2nd Tuesday of month
Radisson Hotel, Sligo
Contact: Gill Bell 087 295 8206
humainstgb@gmail.com

Waterford Humanists

3rd Monday of month, 7.30 p.m.
Phil Grimes Pub, John St, Waterford
Contact: Teresa graham22@gmail.com

THEY SAID



'If Hume is Locke made consistent, then Shelley is Hume made explicit.'

David Berman

On Puritanism: 'the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy'.

H L Mencken

'The infliction of cruelty with a good conscience is a delight to moralists - that is why they invented hell'. Bertrand Russell

'The doctrine of the soul that outlives the body is anything but righteous, because it necessarily devalues the lives we live on this earth.' Steven Pinker

'This physics of the ignorant is a vulgar metaphysics by which they refer the causes of things they do not know to the will of God ...' Giambattista Vico

'A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence.' David Hume

'Religion: a daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable'. Ambrose Bierce

'Religion is what stops the poor from killing the rich.' Napoleon Bonaparte

'If the gods have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not all-powerful. If they are neither able nor willing, they are neither all-powerful nor benevolent. If they are both able and willing to annihilate evil, why does it exist?' Epicurus

IRISH FREETHINKER & HUMANIST

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