

BLASPHEMY

Real Cases of the Chilling Effect caused by Irish Blasphemy Laws

Defamation Act

Blasphemy is defined in Irish law as uttering material which is "grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion". This provides an incentive for the adherents of various religions to be insulted.

Free Expression

Every person alive today currently believes some things that are wrong. The only way that we can learn and progress is by challenging our ideas to correct our mistakes and improve our knowledge. For this reason, the Human Right to freedom of expression, includes the right of the listener to have their most sincere beliefs questioned.

People Have Rights

A person's beliefs do not have rights but individual citizens do. Since 1989, incitement to religious hatred has already been a crime in Ireland (Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act). There is no need for a separate blasphemy law.

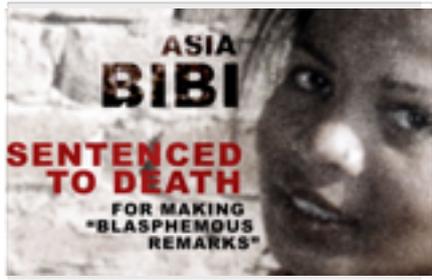


Censorship in Irish Media

During May of 2014, Atheist Ireland agreed to write a piece for a regional Irish newspaper, on the responses to some secular principles, of each candidate and political party contesting the European Elections. The submission included the following paragraph:

"The difficulties with the Irish Constitution are not limited to the preamble though. For example, if the elected representatives of the Irish people wished to allow a conscientious atheist to become a judge, they would be constitutionally prevented from doing so. Furthermore, the Catholic Church can tell atheists that some day an Iron Age Jew will return to earth (riding on a cloud, while blowing a trumpet) and resurrect their dead bodies, for the singular purpose of torturing them in fire for all eternity. However, if an atheist simply states what they might think about this doctrine of Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus and the character of Jesus Christ who preached it, they can be prosecuted





Our International Responsibilities

Many countries around the world apply capital punishment for blasphemy. There are people currently awaiting execution by their State, for offending religious sensitivities.

At the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2009, Pakistan proposed the adoption of precise wording from the Irish blasphemy law, as part of efforts by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to limit Human Rights on freedom of conscience.

As Professor Heiner Bielefeldt, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion, has advised Atheist Ireland to convey to the Constitutional Convention: *"I wouldn't expect any harsh verdicts being handed down in Ireland, but those countries that continue to have an intimidating anti-blasphemy practice like to quote European countries to unmask Western hypocrisy."*

Ireland cannot credibly oppose the death penalty for blasphemy in other countries, while those same nations seek to copy the precise text from our Defamation Act 2009, in order to justify their own positions.

for blasphemy in the civil courts."

The sub editor refused to publish the full paragraph as he believed (probably correctly) that some of his Christian readers would be offended by the idea of Jesus riding on a cloud while blowing a trumpet. It was pointed out that since in Matthew 24:30-31, Jesus prophesized his own return in exactly these terms, it would in fact be blasphemous to suggest that the second coming would not occur in exactly this manner.

The sub-editor had little interest in debating the theological or legal definition of blasphemy and simply wished to avoid any prospect of litigation. As such, the easiest thing for him to do was simply to censor these words. Atheist Ireland was prevented from informing the public debate about the impact of the blasphemy law on secular citizens, because the words of Jesus Christ were perceived as too ridiculous to be tolerated by Irish Christians.

It is not just regional newspapers that are subject to this chilling effect either. Also in May 2014, our blasphemy law caused RTÉ to censor a sketch that was due to be broadcast as part of an episode of *The Savage Eye*. It seems we need a law to protect Irish citizens from jokes about lascivious nuns.

