

Table of Contents

- [*Ireland to hold referendum on blasphemy law*](#)
 - [*Atheists rally over blasphemy law*](#)
-

Ireland to hold referendum on blasphemy law

The Guardian (19.03.2010) / HRWF Int. (23.03.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Ireland is to hold a referendum on removing a blasphemy ban from the constitution, the justice minister announced yesterday.

At the beginning of the year, the republic introduced legislation making blasphemy a crime punishable with a fine of up to €25,000 (£22,800).

The law defines blasphemy as "publishing or uttering matter that is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters sacred by any religion, thereby intentionally causing outrage among a substantial number of adherents of that religion, with some defences permitted". The referendum will be held this autumn.

The advocacy group Atheist Ireland welcomed the decision today. When the law became operational, Atheist Ireland published 25 blasphemous statements on the internet to challenge it, including Richard Dawkins calling the Old Testament God a "petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; ... a capriciously malevolent bully", and Björk saying "fuck the Buddhists".

Atheist Ireland chairperson Michael Nugent said: "This is a positive move by the minister. We look forward to the autumn referendum as part of our overall campaign for an ethical, secular Ireland. We ask all reasonable citizens to work together to ensure that the referendum is won.

"We reiterate that this law is both silly and dangerous: silly because it is introducing medieval canon law offence into a modern pluralist republic; and dangerous because it incites religious outrage and because its wording has already been adopted by Islamic states as part of their campaign to make blasphemy a crime internationally.

"The blasphemy reference is one of several anachronisms in our constitution that will ultimately need to be changed. Other examples are the religious oaths that prevent atheists from becoming president, or a judge, or a member of the council of state."

Atheists rally over blasphemy law

Elaine Edwards

The Irish Times (04.01.2010) / HRWF Int. (06.01.2010) – Email: info@hrwf.net – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - ATHEISTS HAVE begun a campaign against the

Government's new blasphemy law, which came into force on January 1st as part of the Defamation Act.

The group Atheist Ireland has published 25 quotes it says are blasphemous, attributed to people from Jesus Christ to Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern.

Under the new law, which the group is campaigning to have repealed, blasphemy is punishable by a fine of up to €25,000.

It defines blasphemy as publishing or uttering matter grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby intentionally causing outrage among a substantial number of adherents of that religion, and intending by such publication to cause such outrage.

The Defamation Act states, however, that it shall be a defence to proceedings for the defendant to "prove that a reasonable person would find genuine literary, artistic, political, scientific, or academic value in the matter to which the offence relates".

Proposing the law last year, Mr Ahern said he was "bemused" by criticism. He said he could not "wilfully ignore the Constitution" and he had been advised by the Attorney General. Under the Constitution, the "publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law".

Mr Ahern said last year he did not believe there was a public appetite to amend the Constitution to remove the blasphemy provision.

The legislation says the term "religion" does not include an organisation or cult that has as its principal object making a profit, or that employs "oppressive psychological manipulation" of its followers or for the purpose of gaining new followers.

Chair of Atheist Ireland Michael Nugent said in a posting on the blasphemy.ie website the new law was "both silly and dangerous".

"It is silly because medieval religious laws have no place in a modern secular republic, where the criminal law should protect people and not ideas. And it is dangerous because it incentivises religious outrage, and because Islamic states led by Pakistan are already using the wording of this Irish law to promote new blasphemy laws at UN level."

He said blasphemy laws "silence people in order to protect ideas". "In a civilised society, people have a right to express and to hear ideas about religion even if other people find those ideas to be outrageous."

The 25 allegedly blasphemous quotes include utterances attributed to Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Mark Twain, Ian Paisley, Salman Rushdie, Pope Benedict XVI and an exchange between Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern and Labour's Pat Rabbitte in the Dáil during the passage of the Bill.
