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**Blasphemy in Ireland? Everybody needs watching**

***Q:****Atheists are others are protesting a new law in Ireland, under which a person can be found guilty of blasphemy if "he or she publishes or utters matter that is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion." The penalty is a fine of up to about $35,000. Should Ireland or any nation have a law against blasphemy?*

Ireland got off to a bad start the first day of 2010, with the effectuation of the anti-blasphemy law levying a huge fine on anyone found guilty of publishing or even "uttering" anything "grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion."

1.....Life, liberty, property, and**freedom of speech** are the basic human rights. Yes, I know: they are not so listed in any constitution of any government. But are they not comprehensive of freedom's needs? If you are free to speak, is not freedom of assembly and of religion implicit in that? Accordingly, I consider Ireland's new blasphemy law to be in violation of an essential human need of the person and of society.

2.....In every human society, speech is *adequately regulated by social sanctions* and should not be throttled by legal sanctions. "Politically correct" speech should not be politically defined and enforced, nor should "hate speech" or "blasphemy" be subject to court punishment. Yelling "Fire!" falsely in a crowded theater is the exception "proving" (testing) the rule. But clearly non-criminal is speech violating NGO speech-codes.

3.....Partly because of Northern Ireland's control by Britain, separation of church and state has been slow in coming to Ireland. The 1972 referendum removed from the constitution the Roman Catholic Church's "special position," but the dominance of that church over the political life of the nation (as well as its religious and cultural life) has been profoundly corrupting: that church was watching everybody and everything, but was itself *unwatched*.

4.....The United States' formation, with its *checks and balances* in political structures, wisely avoided some basic errors of life in "the old country," the chief of which was precisely the union of an established church and the state. Ireland's present chief legal officer freely states his hope for the separation of church and state, and his sorrow that the Irish constitution prevents it.

5.....In the U.S., state and church watch each other, and the society watches both & is watched by both - a realistic triangulation of oversight because what Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature" do not always win their wars against the worse angels of our nature. Unlike the French Revolution, whose romanticism quickly deteriorated into tyranny, the American Revolution had the protection of the Bible's *realism about human nature*.

6.....The second clause of our First Amendment states the freedom of religion ("free exercise") from government. One beneficent effect of this wisdom has been the freedom of churches and religions to expand and compete. Its first clause is also a stricture against government, which is not to "establish" any church INSTITUTION (as, for example, the Anglican [Episcopal] Church was the only legal religion in VA, and the Congregational Church was the only legal religion in MA). This had no bearing on the Founders' preference for and even promotion of the Christian RELIGION (in contrast to the modern secular concept of "the equality of religions").

7.....What will move Ireland faster toward the separation of its established church and the state is the recent exposure - by two government investigating committees - of the long-practiced *child-abuse* by Roman Catholic priests, monks, and nuns. Now "out in public," the scandal was long quiet because of general reluctance, even fear, of criticizing the Church. But now, the new anti-blasphemy law adds weight to that fear, and is a drag on the movement toward the separation of the established church and the government.

8.....Finally, I must comment on another fear explaining the new anti-blasphemy legislation in Ireland. This fear is visible in the word "outrage." Among Irish Roman Catholics, blasphemy-profanity is so common that the Holy Name Society (founded by Roman Catholics to protect the names of God and Jesus from profane abuse by Roman Catholics) puts hardly a dent in the Irish common speech. Ireland need have little fear of Roman Catholic "outrage" over blasphemy. But the world (especially the nations of Europe) has increasing fear of *Muslim violent "outrage"* against what Islamists perceive as any public speech or image "abusive or insulting" to Muhammad, the Qur'an, or Islam. This fear is the world's most serious present suppressor of speech freedom. This fear, and its cause, bode ill for the future of religion and of humanity.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  JANUARY 4, 2010; 11:54 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:  [Send E-mail](http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/emailalink?sent=no&link=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html&title=Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching)   [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html&t=Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching)   [Twitter](http://twitter.com/home?status=Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20-%20http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html)   [Digg](http://digg.com/submit?phase=2&url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html&title=Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching)   [Yahoo Buzz](http://buzz.yahoo.com/buzz?publisherurn=washington_po284&guid=washington_po284:http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html)   [Del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us/post?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html;&title=Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20-%20On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog;)   [StumbleUpon](http://www.stumbleupon.com/submit?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html)   [Technorati](http://technorati.com/search/http:/onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/blasphemy_in_ireland_everybody_needs_watching.html)    
PREVIOUS:**[**EVERYBODY'S A BLASPHEMER**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb_silverman/2010/01/everybodys_a_blasphemer.html)**| NEXT:**[**EVEN JESUS WAS ACCUSED OF BLASPHEMY**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/nicholas_t_wright/2010/01/even_jesus_was_accused_of_blasphemy.html)

**Comments**

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KHOTE 14  
1  
You missed the point of my paragraph you quoted. I was contrasting, by all caps, INSTITUTION and RELIGION. It's an anachronism to imagine the Founding Fathers' discussing establishing one religion rather than another: the only religion in general public sight was Christianity, which had no competitors.  
(Deism was, within Christianity, a variant theological form.)  
2  
Among the hundreds of religion-quotations from the Founders, a few were on the left.  
Those, of course, are the ones the Left now selects to quote.  
3  
Historians examine not just words but behavior. On religion, what was the Founders' behavior? All sessions of Congress to be opened by Christian prayer. Regular Sunday Christian worship under Congressional auspices. Christian chaplains in the military. Christian invocations and benedictions at public events. Crosses on military graves. Biblical quotations carved into Federal buildings (& atop the Washington Monument).  
4  
The great historians of the American civilization do not disagree with what I'm saying here. But by reading America's present-day public-school texts on the subject, one does get a revisionist perspective: they are written from the politically correct, egalitarian, multicultural point of view - which, apparently, is yours.

**POSTED BY: ELLIOTTWL | JANUARY 6, 2010 11:22 AM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20elliottwl%20%20|%20%20Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20%20|%20%204789668&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4789668%26blog_id=618)

6.....The second clause of our First Amendment states the freedom of religion ("free exercise") from government. One beneficent effect of this wisdom has been the freedom of churches and religions to expand and compete. Its first clause is also a stricture against government, which is not to "establish" any church INSTITUTION (as, for example, the Anglican [Episcopal] Church was the only legal religion in VA, and the Congregational Church was the only legal religion in MA). This had no bearing on the Founders' preference for and even promotion of the Christian RELIGION (in contrast to the modern secular concept of "the equality of religions").

This is double-talking crap. The second clause said NOTHING about sects or churches, it said "religion". You immediately go on to make the point about the founder's preference for the christian RELIGION. So which is it?

And if you really had any respect for the founding father's, you might want to spend some time reading the words they wrote about religion.

You know how to use the internet. But you don't know how to see that which you don't want to see. So you go on blindly believing that our founding father's made the distinction you are putting in their mouths. If there's really anything like blasphemy in this world, in our nation, it surely is you religious types claiming our founding fathers wanted your religion to be running our government.

**POSTED BY: KHOTE14 | JANUARY 6, 2010 4:18 AM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20khote14%20%20|%20%20Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20%20|%20%204789644&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4789644%26blog_id=618)

Free speech with regards to political and religious opinion is an absolute right, with no exceptions.

**POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONSDEN | JANUARY 5, 2010 2:38 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20DanielintheLionsDen%20%20|%20%20Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20%20|%20%204789507&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4789507%26blog_id=618)

Free speech is not an absolute right. Slander and hate speech are already illegal in most civilized countries, and this law is just an extension of that. Personally, I welcome laws that contribute to upholding public order.

**POSTED BY: SHUKRIS | JANUARY 5, 2010 2:01 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20shukris%20%20|%20%20Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20%20|%20%204789486&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4789486%26blog_id=618)

PaganPlace, I'm not sure Rev Elliott made that claim. He did state his interpretation, which as I read it, is in favor of freedom of speech (with VERY limited exceptions) and separation of church and state. Of course as we all know, the Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of the Constition \*cough\* \*cough\*

I'd be interested to hear precisely wherein your interpretation differs from Rev Elliott's. That would provide something specific for discussion. Cheers.

**POSTED BY: LABOO | JANUARY 5, 2010 1:17 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20laboo%20%20|%20%20Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20%20|%20%204789457&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4789457%26blog_id=618)

This is just so full of semantic nonsense to claim that the Constitution and Bill of Rights only mean what Rev Elliott wants them to mean.

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 5, 2010 12:48 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20Paganplace%20%20|%20%20Blasphemy%20in%20Ireland?%20Everybody%20needs%20watching%20%20|%20%204789444&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4789444%26blog_id=618)

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