

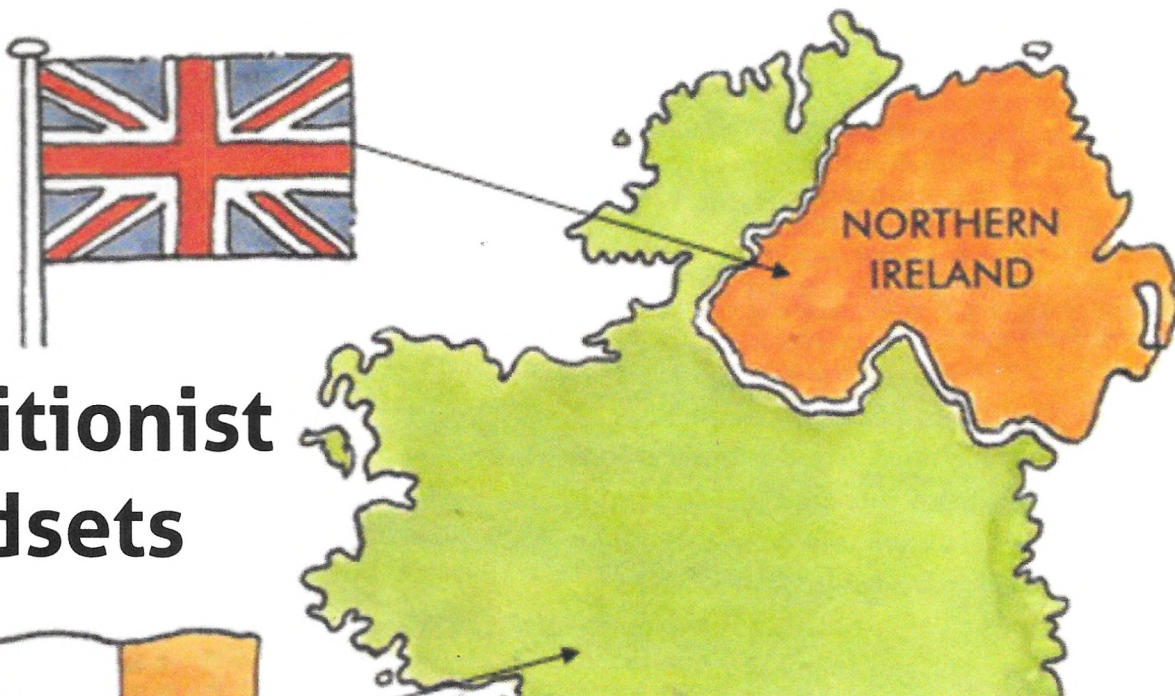
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Partitionist Mindsets

<p>Archbishop James Ussher (1654) (1625-1656)</p>  <p>4004 BC October 23 9:00 AM</p>	
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The Failed Putsch of The Creationists

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The Takeover of Dublin's National Maternity Hospital
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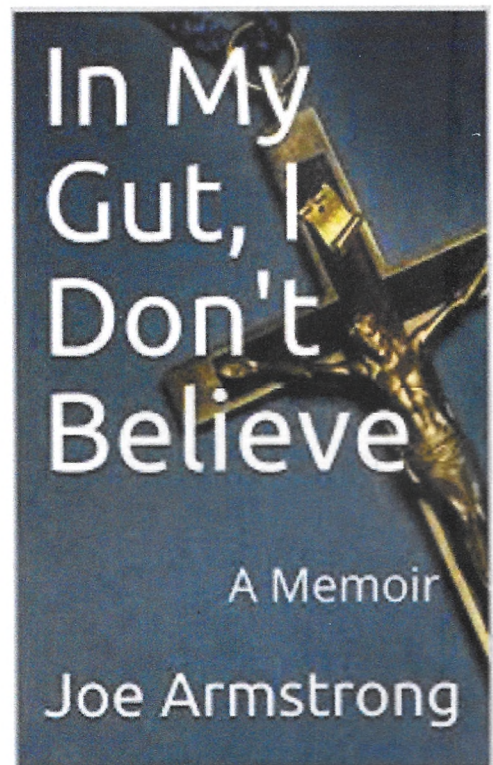
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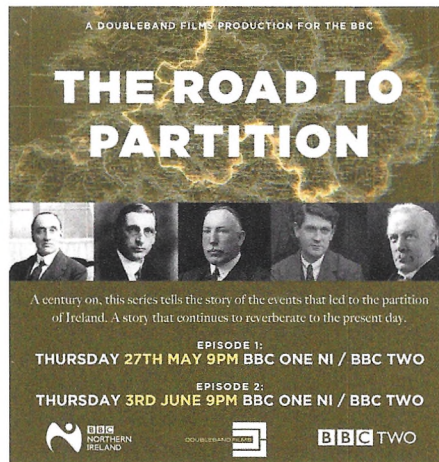
**Remember your
humanity, and
forget the rest.**

– Bertrand Russell

Partitionist Mindsets

Roger Kelly

BC Northern Ireland's *The Road to Partition*, recently shown on TV, was expertly made and raised many questions about the events leading up to partition as well as the contemporary state of political uncertainty today. The comment was made in one of the episodes that as with the UK's botched Covid response today, the British Establishment does not emerge in a positive light regarding David Lloyd George's plan to fob off nationalists with the promise of some sort of Home Rule.



Prime Minister Johnson's Brexit programme and the crazily formulated Northern Ireland Protocol which resurrects the notion of 'Perfidious Albion' can be seen as another historical legacy of the disastrous outcome of the political manoeuvrings within the British ruling class.

Thomas Hennessy, Professor of Modern British and Irish History at Canterbury Christ Church University, stated that "Britain had gone to war for small nations in 1914 but now it is coming home to roost". He was referring to the crisis at the time in Ireland when British imperialism was confronted head-on.

The two-part documentary was to some extent aimed at a British audience, a demographic often assumed to be ignorant about the intricacies of Northern Ireland affairs. However, most viewers in the Republic of Ireland are no better informed about the wee province's difficulties, and it would have assisted them in gaining a greater understanding of the history of partition and the attitudes which created it and which remain today.

On a lighter note regarding the psychological aspects of partition in present-day Ireland, the former Ulster and Ireland rugby star Tommy Bowe recently urged the Irish Government to issue free bus passes for visits to Northern Ireland tourist attractions to encourage cross-border understanding. Tommy had been speaking at an all-island economy event and called on people on both sides of the border to take pride in the Good Friday Agreement. He said that as a Catholic born in the Republic who grew up in Monaghan, studied in the north, played rugby for Ulster and had worked in Dublin, he was the epitome of an inbetweener. He questioned how many schoolkids or university students from south of the border had visited Belfast, or anywhere else in the north.

His idea for free bus passes sounds a bit contrived to visit places like the Marble Arch Caves, Portrush Strand or the Cathedral Quarter in Belfast, and likewise to encourage young people from the north to kiss the Blarney Stone, hit the beach in Ross-lare, or have a pint in Temple Bar. Nevertheless, the proposal does have merit in building relationships north and south to make a better future and fits into the Taoiseach's 'Shared Ireland' discussion project.

Interestingly, efforts by the Irish Freethinkers and Humanists (IFH) to discuss the possible development of an all-island humanist association recently met with little enthusiasm from the Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI). Some have interpreted this as an unwillingness to engage in Northern Ireland as it would clash with the UK Humanists. It is worth noting that the latter duplicitously set up a N.I. branch a few years ago and have selfishly sought a monopoly on state humanist ceremonies, though recently an independent celebrant has obtained this right. Maybe the HAI fear a new British celebrant colonisation of the 26 counties!

Efforts by the Irish Freethinkers and Humanists (IFH) to discuss the possible development of an all-island humanist association recently met with little enthusiasm from the Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI)

2022 is the 300th anniversary of the death of John Toland (below), Ireland's first secular philosopher, who was born in Inishowen, Co Donegal, in 1670. The IFH has suggested to other humanists that a weekend

conference at Queen's University should be held next year to celebrate his contribution to freethinking and philosophy in Ireland. As yet there has been little response.

It is sad that a partitionist mindset not only resides in reactionary organisations and political parties but also seems to have permeated humanist associations as well. □



Is Unionism in Terminal Decline?

Andy Barr

THE future of Unionism looks decidedly bleak, and I am not complaining. The 6 counties were set up 100 years ago on a sectarian head count, with a two thirds Protestant, Unionist majority. Even the 9 counties of Ulster would have given the Unionists a majority, but they rightly realised that the ‘Fenians’ would have outbred them in a short time.

Ok, it has taken 100 years and Unionism is in a slight minority, but that slight minority is in the process of tearing themselves apart, all self-inflicted with their reactionary anti-Gay, anti-abortion, creationist, extreme right wing ‘kick the Pope’ politics. I have to say that I wouldn’t include Doug Beattie’s Ulster Unionist brand in the above characterisation, but I would be surprised if he could take other than a small minority of the sectarian DUP electorate with him.

As for the Democratic Unionist Party, a significant number of senior members recently walked out of the leadership ratification meeting before the new leader Poots gave his speech at a Belfast Hotel. The walkout was said to be a protest at the ‘brutal’ way Arlene Foster was ousted as leader in May. It was described by a well-known figure in the DUP as the “worst meeting he had attended in over 40 years as a DUP member”.

Alex Kane, writing in the *Irish News*, described the process as a sort of freak show and wrote: “It’s a bit like that moment in *Fawlty Towers* when Basil and Manuel are rolling round the floor and a psychiatrist, who is a guest, mutters: ‘There’s enough here for an entire conference’. That’s how bad it is”.

Arlene Foster who also walked out of the meeting has made it clear

that she intends to leave the DUP. On her final day as leader, she said of the leadership under Edwin Poots: “I think we are regressing and becoming narrower. It’s quite nasty, frankly.”

Perhaps one of the most astonishing remarks came from Ian Paisley Junior who claimed that the ousting of Ian Paisley as DUP leader “killed him.” His father helped to form the DUP in 1971, and held the leadership of the organisation until 2008, some 37 years. You would think that a change in leadership by that stage was somewhat overdue.

The DUP is known as a party that has opposed the enactment of civil rights, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, power sharing, abortion rights, change in homosexuality laws and Equal Marriage

In 2007, Ian Paisley under the Good Friday Agreement, became First Minister in the Stormont Assembly. Four years earlier Arlene Foster left the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and joined the DUP together with Jeffrey Donaldson. Arlene was part of what was described as a ‘right-wing cabal within the Ulster Unionist Party’ known as the ‘baby barristers’. They actively opposed David Trimble, the UUP leader at the time, and were a thorn in his side because he supported the Good Friday Agreement.

The DUP is known as a party that has opposed the enactment of civil rights, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, power sharing, abortion rights, change in homosexuality laws and Equal Marriage. It is said that much of their values are based on creationist ideas. Poots for example, is a

young earth creationist and rejects the theory of evolution.

When it comes to politics, they follow the right-wing conservative route. Under the leadership of Ian Paisley Snr, the DUP helped form the Third Force, an Ulster loyalist defensive militia. In 1981 Paisley said that it had between 15,000 and 20,000 members. The DUP is largely a middle (and upper) class organisation at the top, and they are ace at using the working-class loyalists to back their policies. All in all, it’s quite nasty, frankly.

Some of us have thought that about the DUP for a long time. But the DUP of 50 years in the making is in disarray and, as someone once said, “never interfere with the enemy when he is in the process of destroying himself”. It is difficult to have any empathy with any of these players who have opposed everything from women’s rights to Irish language rights and have done little if anything to protect the NHS.

There are, of course, many dangers in the developing situation, not least in the threat from working class loyalists of a violent reaction, when they see their sense of identity being eroded. The problem is “who do they fight”? It’s not Sinn Fein who has got them in this situation. The DUP supported Brexit, which was driven by English nationalism, and it was so obvious this would result in a border down the Irish sea and the almost certain election of Michelle O’Neil as first minister at the next Assembly elections – thus further eroding the confidence of loyalism.

Unionism has led its supporters into cul de sacs before and managed to extract themselves. Can they do it again? Doubtful. □

Who Represents the 27%?

Brian McClinton

ACCORDING to the latest *Life and Times* Survey, published in June and relating to 2020, as many as 27% in Northern Ireland regard themselves as having no religion – a figure that has more than doubled in a decade. It is also nearly as many as those who are Catholic (28%) and more than Presbyterians (18%). Yet religion maintains its privileged position in many areas, including politics, education and the media.

In politics it is not generally acceptable to declare yourself as atheist or agnostic. In recent times the only MLA to come out as a non-believer was Anna Lo, who is not actually a native of the province. A BBC survey in 2015 found that seven MLAs were actually non-religious but all except Anna wished to remain anonymous.

Religion is still widely regarded as a badge of respectability so that to come out as non-religious is seen as signing your own political death warrant. Yet it would presumably be applauded by at least 27% of the population and probably by many believers who would appreciate the honesty and who see can through the pretence of piety.

This hypocritical display of piety plays a part in preventing many politicians from acting to reduce the overbearing influence of religion in many areas of life, including the laws on social issues such as abortion and gay issues. Local MLAs continue to stall on implementing abortion reform, and the DUP has consistently opposed gay rights from the days of its foundation under Paisley. These reactionary attitudes persist in the main churches. The Presbyterian Church forbids gays from becoming full members.

Northern Ireland has been persistently behind most other advanced societies in these matters, precisely because of the negative and decidedly 'unchristian' influence of narrow

religious dogma by many of the leading politicians and the clergy.

Education is another prime example. The churches have too much influence on the ethos of most schools and in insisting on collective worship and a narrow RE curriculum which is predominantly Christian in character. It is, however, encouraging that a father and daughter are challenging this exclusively Christian-focused education in the courts and that they have been granted a full hearing in November.

The churches are also mainly responsible for keeping the children apart. It is an absolute disgrace that,

Perhaps, finally, those who say that Northern Ireland needs a Humanist party have a real point

well into the 21st century, 93% of children are still educated in religiously segregated schools. They are likely to go through their entire school life without having a serious conversation with someone of the other 'tribe'. This segregated education is clearly a major cause of division in the wider society.

All the evidence indicates that prejudice, hatred and sectarianism are fuelled by a lack of contact and reciprocity. On the other hand, compassion, empathy and friendship grow when we are together and can know one another.

The question, then, is why does this segregation persist? Is it fear of bringing our conflict into the classroom? Or, more likely, is it because vested interests want to keep it this way? The main churches, in particular the Catholic Church, argue that we should be proud of our educational diversity and pluralism as opposed to the dull uniformity of education in other countries.

Yet this is a disingenuous argument. It is only diverse for the religious organisations who have an input into them. It crucially lacks diversity for the children who are educated separately. It is they who need to experience the diversity of the community themselves so that they understand the different perspectives and engage directly with them.

They can only successfully do that by being educated together throughout their formative years. The time is overdue when our local politicians begin the process of ending the iniquitous system which, scandalously, keeps them apart.

As for the media, the *Irish News* is clearly a Catholic newspaper and the *Belfast Newsletter* is a Protestant journal. The *Belfast Telegraph* has recently become less purely Protestant, but all three are religious in basic outlook, with religious correspondents, religious columns and church notices. The broadcast media are also religious in tone, especially on a Sunday. The BBC still refuses to allow non-believers to present *Thought for the Day*.

Where, then, can the 27% have their voices heard? Humanist organisations have a limited impact. They may be able to challenge some of the laws through the courts or in occasional media contributions, but changing the ideologies and mindsets of Orange and Green is the real task. This transformation can only be achieved through education, publicity and power and, as we have seen, the obstacles in the way are currently formidable.

Perhaps, finally, those who have long maintained that Northern Ireland needs a Humanist party have a real point. The 27% can then begin to organise throughout every town in the province and demonstrate to a wider public that they have a progressive vision which seeks to move the society beyond the narrow ground of God and Ulster. □

Religious Oaths out of Step with Modern Ireland

Brian Whiteside

As we marked the tenth anniversary of the Queen's visit here on May 19th, I recalled two other events which happened that same day. Garret FitzGerald died. And Enda Kenny held a meeting which I attended along with the religious leaders of our country.

This plenary meeting was part of the Structured Dialogue Process which had been set up in 2007 as a platform for leaders of the various religions and other "non-confessional philosophical groups" to make the government aware of any issues they might have. It was felt that, with the religious leaders congregated in Dublin to dine with the visiting monarch, it would be a good opportunity to hold such a meeting.

I had attended a number of bilateral meetings with the government as I was, at the time, a director of the Humanist Association of Ireland. We had presented a document entitled *Equality for the Non-Religious* and distributed it to all participants in this dialogue process. The document set out very clearly those areas in our Constitution, our laws and in custom and practice, where non-religious people were discriminated against.

Very little progress was being made and there was a growing frustration that this might simply be a talking shop. But then the invitation came for the plenary meeting of May 19th 2011. This meeting, attended by politicians, senior civil servants and leaders from all the different religions, would, we hoped, be an opportunity to air some of our issues with the other participants.

Enda Kenny welcomed everyone and said how wonderful it was for such a diverse group to be assembled in the same room; this reflected a new Ireland, a more tolerant and

pluralist country. He then invited the Catholic representative to speak, and he thanked the Taoiseach and said how wonderful it was, indeed, for us all to be gathered together on this occasion. There followed a recitation of the same platitudes from the rest of the religious leaders.

Eventually the Taoiseach turned to me and asked, "Brian, would you like to add anything from a humanist perspective?" I reiterated how good it was for all of us to meet like this and then added that, as the only representatives of the non-religious community, we probably had more on our agenda than any other

A sizeable and ever-growing percentage of our population no longer subscribes to any religious belief

group. I referred to our *Equality for the Non-Religious* document and said that I would like to focus on just one topic. We were in the midst of a presidential election campaign at the time so I asked:

"How embarrassing would it be for our State if in November we elected a president who declined to take up office because he/she could not in all conscience take the religious oath required by the Constitution?"

This was followed by a period of silence as I looked around the room at these eminent religious leaders pondering something which, to them, up to that moment had probably been utterly unthinkable. Then Enda Kenny leaned over his Secretary General and addressed his Minister of Justice. "You'd better take a note of that, Alan".

We're still holding our breath.



Some people wonder why I get so incensed with this. What harm does it do? Are there not more important things to worry about? Well, I believe this is important; a sizeable and ever-growing percentage of our population no longer subscribes to any religious belief – are they to be ignored?

Similarly with members of the Council of State and our judges, a religious oath is required on taking office. At a meeting in 2007 I challenged the then Minister for Justice, Brian Lenihan, on this point. He replied that he knew 'lots of judges' who were not in the least religious who had no difficulty taking the oath. When I pointed out how disingenuous and hypocritical this was he conceded that I had a point.

Some time ago I met with a very senior Catholic churchman who told me he found it extremely offensive for non-believers to take religious oaths; he favours change. Going home that evening I reflected on Garret FitzGerald's life and his ambition for a Constitutional Crusade. I remembered the last time I met him when Garrett told me he was 'nearly a Humanist'.

It is now only four years till our next presidential election. As Ireland becomes ever more secular the chances of a non-religious citizen being elected is growing all the time.

This situation has been known for a very long time and was highlighted at the meeting on the day the Queen came to Dublin ten years ago. Is four years enough time to get our house in order or are we headed for a possible constitutional crisis?

Brian Whiteside is a humanist and a funeral celebrant. He is a former member and director of the Humanist Association of Ireland.

Ten Myths about Israel

Ilan Pappé • Verso Books • 2017

Ken Murray

ILAN Pappé is an expatriate Israeli historian. He is a graduate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and has a PhD from the University of Oxford. The journalist, writer and filmmaker John Pilger has described him as Israel's bravest, most principled, most incisive historian.

Pappé is one of a number of Jewish Israeli 'New Historians' who make a nonsense of the notion that criticism of the Israeli government is anti-Semitic. His books include *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* and *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories*.

In his book *Ten Myths About Israel* the myths he refers to are used as headings for ten chapters:

- 1) Palestine Was an Empty Land;
- 2) The Jews Were a People Without a Land;
- 3) Zionism is Judaism;
- 4) Zionism is not Colonialism;
- 5) The Palestinians Voluntarily Left Their Homeland in 1948;
- 6) The June 1967 War Was a War of 'No Choice';
- 7) Israel is the Only Democracy in the Middle East;
- 8) The Oslo Mythologies;
- 9) The Gaza Mythologies;
- 10) The Two-States Solution is the Only Way Forward.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the myth that Palestine was: "A land without people for a people without a land". Shimon Peres, former President and Prime Minister of Israel, once proclaimed: "The country [Palestine] was mostly an empty desert, with only a few islands of Arab settlement; and Israel's cultivable land today was indeed redeemed from swamp and wilderness". Another former Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol said: "It was only after the Zionists made the desert bloom that they [the Palestinians] became interested in taking it from us". The Jewish intellectual and founder of cultural Zionism, Asher Ginsberg (1981), had a different viewpoint: "Palestine is not an uninhabited country... it is difficult to find any uncultivated land anywhere in the country".

Chapters 3 and 4 investigate the origins of Zionism, the international reaction to Zionism, and the subsequent schisms within Zionism. Even before the emergence of Zionism in the late 19th century, political support for 'the return to the land of Israel' had international backing from such eminent figures as: Queen Victoria, Napoleon, King Edward VII, US President John Adams and, later, Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour and Woodrow Wilson. The Christian belief that 'the gathering of the Jews in Israel' as a prerequisite for the 'Second Coming of Jesus', thus fulfilling biblical prophecy, would have been positively encouraged by many, if not all, of the 208 delegates at the First Zionist Congress, held in Basel, Switzerland in August 1897.

Pappé is one of a number of Jewish Israeli 'New Historians' who make a nonsense of the notion that criticism of the Israeli government is anti-Semitic

Chapter 5 deals with Palestinians 'voluntarily' leaving their homes and their country. David Ben-Gurion in 1937, addressing the Royal Peel Commission and waving a copy of the Bible, stated: "Our right to Palestine does not come from the Mandate Charter, the Bible is our Mandate Charter". Then, at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive in June 1938, he states: "I favour compulsory transfer [of Palestinians], it would be the greatest achievement in the history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine".

Chapter 6 addresses the origins of the 1967 Six-Day War. The author takes the view that it was considered a 'fatal historical mistake' by some in the Israeli government and military that the war of 1948, which took over approx. 80% of Palestine, did not also takeover the remaining areas that are now the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The war of 1967 provided that opportunity – and was taken.

Chapter 7 confronts the question of just how democratic Israel is (or is not). One example given is the Israeli Law of Return. This law grants automatic citizenship of Israel to every person of the Jewish faith in the world, offering property for sale in Israel and even in the occupied Palestinian territories such as the West Bank. This right of return does not apply to the more than seven million Palestinian refugees around the world – in contravention of UN resolution 194, the Geneva convention and the universal declaration of human rights.

In Chapter 8 the author contends that the 1993 Oslo peace process was not a genuine quest for peace on behalf of the Israeli government as there was no real intention of addressing the three issues that troubled the Palestinians most: the fate of Jerusalem; the refugees and the illegal Jewish colonies in the West Bank. The implication is that the peace process was a successful ploy by the Israelis to deepen the occupation.

Chapter 9 deals with the Gaza Strip and focuses on three widely held assumptions: 1) Hamas is a terrorist organization; 2) The 2005 withdrawal from Gaza was an act of peace; 3) The war on Gaza was a war of self-defense. Pappé goes as far as categorizing the Israeli policy in Gaza as 'incremental genocide'.

In Chapter 10 Pappé strongly opposes a two-state solution. One of the many hurdles would be how to remove the 650,000 (and counting) Jewish settlers in the West Bank. When Israel evacuated settlers from Gaza in 2005, it was a brutal internal conflict that prompted a vicious right-wing backlash. There were about 9000 settlers in Gaza at that time.

At the outset Pappé warns that this is not a balanced book but "an attempt to redress the balance of power on behalf of the colonised, occupied and oppressed Palestinians in the land of Israel and Palestine". □

Europe's Mixed Message

Eamon Murphy

FIND Angela Merkel rather likeable. The German Chancellor has cultivated well the image of the compassionate and humane stateswoman, a rhetorical champion of multilateralism and a rules-based international system. In Germany, she is known as 'Mutti' (Mummy) among much of the population. She may even be quite sincere on the principles she advocates. However, I'm increasingly coming to see her as something of a stumbling block in achieving some of the goals she espouses.

Politicians with power, and particularly those who are heads of state of large economic and political powers such as Germany, must balance several priorities, many of which are competing. What should Frau Merkel do when taking a principled stand on an issue has the potential to conflict with hers and her country's self-interest?

For example, China's growing disdain for international rules and its bullying of its neighbours is obviously not something to be encouraged, but is it such a problem that foreign policy principles might overtake the interests of German industry? It would appear not, with Berlin taking the lead in pushing through the EU's recent investment agreement with China, despite everything we know about Beijing's lack of regard for democracy and human rights. It seems the importance of German exports trumps concerns around such matters.

Closer to home, Hungary is an important manufacturing hub for the German car industry. Despite Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán marching the country steadily towards authoritarianism, undermining democracy and the rule of law, Merkel is a key figure in blocking anything stronger than disapproving rhetoric from the EU to counter this development.

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which will bring Russian gas under the Baltic to Germany, is now nearing completion. Scrapping the project would show serious intent on the part of the west to uphold a law-based order, deny strategic economic security to the Kremlin, and show solidarity with the Ukraine. However, it would also have significant implications for the German economy and its energy security.

As I've noted, the German Chancellor is a proponent of multilateralism, and Germany, with its massive trade surplus, is a country that benefits hugely from a world where countries cooperate and trade more or less openly with each other. Yet the rules-based world order she champions appears to come second to the concerns of the German economy.

Too often Merkel is the voice of caution when the conversation turns to enforcing the rules, occasionally mixing up the need for moderation with hesitation and tentativeness. This sometimes sends the message to those with autocratic tendencies that they can act with relative impunity from the EU, so long as key strategic German interests are upheld. None of us should then be surprised when the best the EU can do in response to the recent disgraceful behaviour of the government of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus barely amounts to a trifle.

Lukashenko likely assumed impunity when he ordered the effective hijacking of a Ryanair passenger jet in order to imprison and torture journalist Roman Protasevich, a vocal critic of his regime. On the evidence of the response so far, he was probably right. The EU's response to this flagrant flouting of the rules-based order has been to advise airlines to avoid overflying Belarus and to bar Belarussian state carrier Belavia from European airports.

Some in the Lukashenko regime may also face travel bans and asset freezes. These measures are inconvenient, no doubt. But they are scarcely a threat to the power of a dictator. The response to Lukashenko's flagrant rigging of the most recent national election was even more tame.

There seems an increasing perception among many autocrats that, however much lip service western democracies give to upholding international rules and norms, they rarely put their money where their mouth is

There seems an increasing perception among many autocrats that, however much lip service western democracies give to upholding international rules and norms, they rarely put their money where their mouth is. Occasionally some economic action may be taken, but sanctions are rarely enough to provoke real change, at least not in any way likely to alter the cost-benefit analysis of autocrats who will fix elections, arrest political opponents, invade neighbouring territory, sponsor cyberattacks, or kidnap journalists in acts of air piracy. Indeed, these weak economic reprisals often simply feed into the narrative that their countries are forever under threat from western aggression, something often used to great effect at home.

Lukashenko is a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Is the west capable of sending a strong message to these two that they are not free to act as they choose on the international stage without real repercussions? The EU is never going to find it easy to reach agreement on a response. Its members have different interests and different histories in dealing with the behemoth to the east. For some, economic opportunities in Russia are of paramount importance. For others, scarred by decades of Soviet rule, security is uppermost in the mind. So long as key figures appear to prioritise their own interests above fair play, democracy and human rights, Europe will struggle to send the right message. □

Hellfire and Damnation

Tom White

MOST Irish people who claim a love of literature will have read (or attempted to read) the works of James Joyce. By far the most accessible of Joyce's prose is *Portrait of the Artist of a Young Man*, which contains an account of a lurid 'Retreat' – a clerical attempt to terrorise young Catholics with fiery oration about the hell fires of eternal damnation.

A similar nightmare passage is included in *Wuthering Heights*. The Bronte sisters lived most of their lives in a Yorkshire parsonage with their father, the Rev Patrick Bronte, who was a County Down convert from Catholicism and had changed the spelling of his surname from Brunty to Bronte. Emily B's literary version of a Yorkshire primitive Methodist sermon was born out of real life frustration that members of her father's congregation were being lured from him by local hellfire preachers.

Religion in Ireland has been heavily influenced by ultra conservative Jansenism on the Catholic side of the fence, and ultra conservative Auld Licht Presbyterianism on the other. Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church had its origins in the historic struggle between the New and Auld Light wings of the Church of Scotland.

The hellfire and brimstone merchants of the Auld Light were marvellously lampooned by the great Robert Burns (see his *Epitaph on Holy Willie*), but, like hardy garden weeds, survived the spray of his irony to spring up again in modern Ulster. Both Jansenism and Auld Light Presbyterians had little in common, but shared a core belief that humanity was born in sin, which meant that men and women were inherently evil and needed to renounce the devil before progressing to more lofty considerations.

Maybe it's an Irish thing that hellfire became so popular here...perhaps we all grew up trying to sit too close to the fire on cold winter nights?

But hellfire and damnation are not much fun, especially if you only half believe it. If you totally believe it, like Ian Paisley did, then the remedy was

simple: "Ye must be saved." Half-believing was, and is, a very uncomfortable place to be – the dreadful feeling that hellfire might be real if you hadn't been saved. Yet...there you are, suspended a mere heartbeat away from the pit of eternal damnation. Hellfire preachers knew, by instinct or calculation, that if you could instil fear into a congregation, conversions and adherence inevitably followed.

This emotional virus spread further than just the immediate congregation. My father fell victim to one such preacher when we were living near Lurgan, Co Armagh; he started attending this preacher's mission hall in lieu of official Presbyterianism. As a result, my father became convinced that he was going to hell. Deep depression set in, followed by a short visit to the mental hospital for some ECT treatment. Fortunately, that worked, but my father died a year or so later.

At least the infamous Pastor who brought short-term chaos and suffering to my family inadvertently provided me with sufficient emotional resistance to withstand indoctrination all my life. I could clearly see that the men (and a few women) who were peddling this nonsense were either mad or seeking power and money by spreading terror and division in the community. Their message was: "We, the saved, are better than you, the damned".

A year or so ago, I met an old friend who confided in me that his youth had been blighted by the same Pastor in more or less the same way. In his case it was his stepfather who started attending the Mission Hall, and came home to make my friend's teenage years a living hell. That same Pastor's voice can still be heard on-line. I can occasionally summon the courage to listen – but only when I feel the need to renew my belief that rationality and warm compassion are the only means to make sense of this sometimes bleak world.

The long-deceased Pastor would hate my base Humanism. Perhaps he'd be surprised that I don't wish him to be in hell, for how can you wish someone to be somewhere that doesn't exist? □

Poetry Corner



The Lost Heron

WITH ongoing Lockdown our journeys become little journeys. Every few days we walk from Joy Street to the Grand Canal, arrive at bountiful nature and tall trees where a lost Heron, still as a Church Porch, stands in the water, watching, listening, becoming a backdrop to couples getting photographed after leaving the Registry Office. Wild garlic scent all around, taking me to the Leitrim farm where we played as children. Neighbours visiting and asking my Father to dig out a few roots for them to boil and use as a cure for their old age pains.

Bicycles in the 1940s

WE loved getting away from the farm cycling to the store with a bag of eggs or taking lunches to the bog where we cut turf, shopping at Carrick town, visiting cousins and a spin on Sunday. Well worn and rusty Raleigh bicycles, for travelling on country roads, brought us to our destinations but pot holed roads gave us loads of punctures.

I was a mere two years old when the young master came to teach. The local priest asking my Mother to give him lodgings until he could afford a bicycle and go to live in the town. Later on, he never slapped me, yet I cried a lot of the time, watching the children suffer, the boys loved to mess with the bicycle, it was their only way getting back at him as he ruined their young hands with whining wallops from sally rods.

Mary Guckian

The Takeover of the National Maternity Hospital

A Briefing Document for Members of the Oireachtas

Dr Peter Boylan

BACKGROUND

IN 2008 the consultancy firm KPMG published a report recommending colocation of Maternity Hospitals with acute General Hospitals. In 2013 Minister for Health James Reilly announced that the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) would move to Elm Park, to colocate with St Vincent's Hospital (SVH). In 2014 the SVH Group demanded 'dissolution of NMH' and full ownership of new hospital. In the next three years arguments about ownership and governance delayed the project. St Vincent's wanted integration rather than colocation, i.e., NMH would become the maternity wing of SVH.

In 2016 the New Deputy Chair of NMH, Mr Nicholas Kearns, and then Master, Dr Rhona Mahony, agreed to the transfer of 100% ownership of NMH to the Sisters of Charity. "We are willing to dissolve the Charter and agree that the ownership of NMH will transfer to SVHG, a private company owned by the Sisters of Charity... the new NMH will be a 100% subsidiary of SVHG." The Board and Governors of NMH were not consulted. The Mulvey Report recommends the transfer of 100% ownership of NMH to Sisters of Charity, and was accepted by the NMH Board.

In 2017 there was public outrage when news of the ownership proposal became public knowledge. 104,000 signed a petition objecting. In 2017 the Sisters of Charity announced they are to 'gift' SVHG to 'the People of Ireland'. The Sisters in fact planned the transfer of ownership to St Vincent's Holdings, not 'the people of Ireland'.

In 2018 the Catholic Bishops' published a *Code of Ethical Standards for Healthcare*. In 2019 the Sisters confirmed that Vatican permission was required under Canon Law for transfer (alienation), despite denials from NMH. On 16th March 2020, the Sisters received permission to transfer their shareholding [called alienation under Canon Law], with the proviso that certain Canon Laws "are to be observed". There was an obligation to ensure that alienation would not lead to oversight, management or performance of 'immoral procedures'.

SISTERS OF CHARITY/ST VINCENT'S HOLDINGS

The HSE is currently deciding whether to approve or reject transfer of SVHG by the Sisters of Charity to St Vincent's Holdings for €1.00 (one). In 2018 the SVHG was valued at €661 million, virtually all state funded. At present the Sisters of Charity remain the sole shareholders of SVHG. St Vincent's Holdings, incorporated 2020, is a private company with charitable status. The Directors are the sole shareholders. Currently it has three interim directors, due to step down in August

2021, (Mr James Menton, Ms Sharon McCabe, Mr John Compton). There are to be no less than three, and no more than ten directors, all self appointed. There is *no provision* for a public interest director/ministerial representative, a women's interest director, HSE representative, or any representation from the NMH itself on the Board.

Directors will be appointed for a fixed term of three years, and may be reappointed for two further three-year terms for a maximum term of office of nine years. There is provision for directors to serve for up to fourteen years if they are also a director of SVHG.

Core values are virtually identical to Sisters of Charity/SVH:

- (a) Human Dignity: Respect the dignity and uniqueness of each person.
- (b) Compassion: Accept people as they are, bring empathy and care to all.
- (c) Justice: Act with integrity which respects the rights of all.
- (d) Quality: Strive for excellence in all aspects of care.
- (e) Advocacy: Speak for the voiceless, act with and for them to achieve the appropriate quality of care.

The 2018 SVHG accounts state that the new St Vincent's company is obliged "to uphold the values and vision of Mother Mary Aikenhead". The SVHG is still today governed by the 2010 'Health Service Philosophy and Ethical Code' of the Sisters of Charity and does not provide contraception, sterilisation, IVF, abortion and other procedures prohibited by Catholic teaching.

Powers of the Directors include –

"5.11 To acquire, hold, sell, manage, lease, mortgage, exchange or dispose of all or any part of the property of the Company with a view to the promotion, protection or encouragement of its Main Object and to vary investments".

In the past SVHG mortgaged the entire site as collateral for a loan to build the private hospital. The Bank is still owed approximately €180 million

"5.29 To establish and maintain links with international and national organisations having similar objectives".

The Bon Secours Group, already established as a Catholic 'Public Juridic Person' out of the reach of the State, recently merged with their American counterpart.

If the HSE approve transfer, St Vincent's Holdings will own St Vincent's University Hospital, St Michael's Hospital, both publicly funded, and St Vincent's Private Hospital. In 2018 SVHG received €286 million in —>

State funding and NMH received €58 m. If the arrangement goes through, ownership of NMH will transfer 100% to St Vincent's Holdings. The Master of the NMH will report to the Clinical Director of SVHG. This represents full integration of the NMH into SVHG. It cannot be described as co-location.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Should this dilution of clinical and corporate authority for the Master be a source of concern? Yes, very much so. When it comes to the safe medical care of women, I have come over forty years to believe in two fundamental and essential principles. First, that maternity hospitals need their own governance and budgetary independence, and second, that religious teaching or belief should have no role in determining the care given to women.

In the past few years alone, I have given evidence at the inquests into the deaths of Savita Halappanavar in Galway and Dhara Kivlehan and Sally Rowlett in Sligo. I chaired the 2017 HSE Review of 153 adverse incidents in Irish maternity services which resulted from the RTE *Prime Time Investigates* report into adverse pregnancy outcomes in Portlaoise. I have contributed to reviews of adverse incidents that have included maternal and infant deaths in the maternity units in Portlaoise, Portiuncula, Cavan, Drogheda, Portlaoise and Clonmel. All these units are integrated into the general hospitals, and this was a key factor in the problems that arose.

In my direct experience of working in Ireland, the UK and United States, and indirectly in other hospitals I have reviewed around the world, women's health services are regularly the first area to suffer cuts and resource re-allocation when there is pressure on funding or clinical capacity. In practical terms this can mean that operating theatres are taken over for e.g. cardiology or orthopaedic procedures, because gynaecology is not prioritised. However, delayed operations can leave women in pain, incapacitated and with undiagnosed cancers.

In the design of the new hospital the operating theatres are directly linked to the operating theatres in St Vincent's. The Board of the NMH will be chaired every three years by SVH. There will be no public interest representative on NMH Board, and no women's health representative on NMH Board. NMH Board will be 4 SVH/4 NMH, one independent to be chosen by a committee of 3 from SVHG and 2 from NMH.

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The ownership structure has been described by legal advisors as 'unusual', 'not standard'.

- A. The sole owners of the NMH, St Vincent's Holdings, will lease the new hospital facility to the HSE for 99 years. There is no provision for what will happen after the expiry of the 99 years.

- B. Licences are to be granted by the HSE to both NMH DAC and SVHG DAC for the operation of the new hospital. The duration of these operating licences is planned to be 98 years, comprising four consecutive periods of 25 years, 25 years, 25 years and 23 years. The documents I have seen so far are silent on what is planned after 98 years. Governance will remain with the Holding company. It is not at all clear what in fact the HSE will acquire.
- C. Options exist for both HSE and SVHG DAC to acquire each other's legal interest in the new hospital.
- D. A legal arrangement to effect the unwinding of the legal structure is to be agreed between the HSE and SVHG DAC should it be triggered by a failure by either party to comply with their respective obligations or in the case of "certain insolvency events".

RELIGIOUS ETHOS

Does a religious ethos remain a concern for the new NMH? There can be no certainty on this point unless the NMH is a fully independent hospital. Note that the Values section of the proposed St Vincent's Holdings Constitution is virtually identical to the stated values of

the current Healthcare Regulations of the Religious Sisters of Charity, under which as of today procedures prohibited by the Catholic Church are not performed at any SVHG hospitals despite reassurances to the contrary. NMH will be subject to the Core Values of St Vincent's Holdings.

**Religious teaching or belief
should have no role in determining
the care given to women**

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is that the State must not approve the transfer of SVHG to St Vincent's Holdings for two reasons –

1. NMH would be owned by St Vincent's Holdings, the successor to the Sisters of Charity with the same, Catholic, core values. Women's reproductive healthcare would not be served by this.
2. The State would be acquiescing to the ownership of a large, publicly funded, hospital group by a private company, with all the implications that has for Slaintecare. □

• *Peter Boylan is an Irish consultant obstetrician and former Master of the National Maternity Hospital, Dublin (Hollis Street Hospital). His opposition to the plans to transfer ownership of the National Maternity Hospital to the Religious Sisters of Charity led him to resign from the board of the hospital over the issue. He campaigned for a Yes vote in the 2018 Irish Abortion Referendum, and participated in several TV debates.* ◆

The Nuclear Gamble

Seven decades without nuclear war provides as much evidence for God as it does deterrence

Craig Shrives

“

YOU can set your watch by that boy cleaning his shoes on the doorstep”, said the lady over the road to her husband. She was right. As the BBC News pips sounded at 8 o'clock, I would leave the house to polish my school shoes. I didn't want clean shoes. I wanted to avoid the news. The headlines of the late 1970s detailing the various standoffs between America and the Soviet Union scared the 10-year-old me to distraction. I'm now in my 50s, and, having recently ended a career as a government intelligence officer, those fears of nuclear Armageddon are not as crippling, but they remain. Allow me to explain.

Have you ever thrown three sixes with three dice? No? Try it. I promise it won't be too long before you answer yes to that question. You'll know that this is simply an analogy to help me explain time's cumulative effect on risk and why nuclear deterrence is bound to fail. Since the 1945 Hiroshima bomb, the world has seen several face-offs and proxy wars between nuclear weapons states (NWS), but none of these has escalated into a nuclear war. Of course, advocates of deterrence theory would insist that nuclear weapons are to thank for 76 years without WWII, but others, like me, argue that as we continue to roll the dice, our '666' event is inevitable.

Keep in mind that there are lots of recent examples of non-NWS acting militarily against NWS. This is useful to remember because it focuses the argument by limiting the benefits of nuclear weapon ownership to enjoying a special status among nations and to preventing only wars that would lead to 'mutually assured destruction (MAD)'.

Even though nuclear war has so far been averted, deterrence theory ought not to be relied upon to assure our futures, for it has many paths to failure. We have already taken some steps down a number of these paths since 1945, but so far we have not stepped on the nuclear trigger. These paths to failure include:

An Irrational Leader

Deterrence theory assumes that every leader holding a nuclear button is a rational thinker. Furthermore, it requires these leaders to remain cognitively sound under extreme stress and for their whole tenures. Now, look eastwards. Look westwards. Look around you. That is quite an assumption.

A False Alarm

The risk of a NWS 'retaliating' to a false alarm of a nuclear attack is difficult to quantify, but we must assume that, on any one day, it is minuscule. The problem, however, is that false alarms, which are typically caused by

software glitches or misinterpretations of natural events, are common. Notwithstanding the consequent cumulative risk, a false alarm sounded during a heated face-off between two NWSs would increase the risk of an unjustified retaliatory strike considerably.

An Accidental Nuclear Event or Strike

Since 1945, the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency has documented hundreds of 'broken arrow' incidents. This term refers to an accident involving nuclear weapons or their components (e.g., accidental detonation, jettisoning, theft, loss) that does not create the risk of a nuclear war. The term for such an accident that *does* create the risk of a nuclear war is 'nuclash'. Given the nature and regularity of broken arrow events, it is hard to describe a nuclash event (e.g., accidental or unauthorised launch) as an impossibility.

Escalation from Tactical Nuclear Weapons to Strategic

Not all nuclear munitions are big, strategic, city-flatteners like those used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Commanders have much smaller, more precise, tactical 'nukes' at their disposal now. Think of them as village-flatteners with a 300-mile range. Faced with a crisis, commanders could be tempted to deploy their tactical nuclear arsenal to change the momentum of a battle, and, once they've been used, it is easy to imagine the protagonists upping the ante to larger weapons.

A Compulsion to Strike First

As technology progresses so too does the notion that a country might be capable of destroying an adversary's nuclear weapons either before they can be deployed or while they are airborne. It is easy to imagine such a capability being delivered with a pre-emptive cyberattack, and it is easier still (because it nearly existed) to imagine it being delivered with a network of sophisticated anti-missile missiles.

Let's not forget America's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in the 1980s. The purpose of SDI (also called the 'Star Wars program') was to create an anti-missile shield over America. Of course, the initiative was eventually postponed because the then-technology rendered it ineffective. However, such aspirations still exist, and today's technology could deliver them.

As nations' defence strategies are updated to consider the possibility of a 'painless' pre-emptive nuclear strike, so deterrence theory erodes. More specifically, future standoffs between NWSs will become dangerously unstable as both the aggressor and the potential victim will feel compulsions, borne of either their over- or under-confidence, to strike first.

—>

Remember that every single dalliance on one of these paths to failure is a roll of those three dice. Pushing my analogy to the bounds of its usefulness, it is also probable that our dice are becoming loaded towards their 6s. A quick horizon scan of contentious issues involving today's super powers highlights some looming, potentially dangerous scenarios. In the near future, we should expect Russia 'to invade', in US parlance, the Ukraine or, in Russian parlance, 'to protect its ethnic community'. We should expect Russia to continue 'destabilising' or – depending on your viewpoint – 'stabilising' Syria. We should expect tensions between the US and China to heighten as China creeps towards the top spot and widens its influence, and we should expect US-Iranian tensions to escalate as Iran becomes increasingly frustrated with the NWSs' failure to disarm in line with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly called the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

What's more, the confidence-building, weapons-inspection regimes have now been abandoned, and communications between the big powers are currently at an all-time low. It seems that recent events have taught state leaders that blatant denial, even in the face of undeniable evidence (e.g., the Yuri Skripal and Jamal Khashoggi cases), goes unpunished on the world stage. Worryingly, today's leaders are not engaging on contentious issues with the same ideology-themed reasoning as previously. Today's style involves less reasoned debate and more Tweeting. If this continues, I expect that sound bites comprising fewer than 280 characters will prove to have been a poor tool for averting war.

So, if we agree that time's cumulative effect on risk will eventually see our luck run out, then the only way to avoid a nuclear exchange is to ensure that no such weapons exist. On this point, there is good news and bad news. The good news is that an international treaty exists to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons by non-NWSs and to kickstart the disarmament process by NWSs. The bad news is that this treaty, the NPT, is a weasel-worded ream of avoidable pledges, particularly its Article VI, the pillar which encourages the NWSs to disarm.

In fact, the NPT's Article VI fails on its first noun. Here's the opening line: "*There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control*".

"There exists an obligation...". This is odd wording. My suspicion is that the non-NWSs wanted "Signatories are obligated [legally required]", while the NWSs wanted "obliged [morally required]". Both sides likely settled for obligation, which covers both options, effectively booting the issue of legal adherence into the long grass. If you don't agree with this observation of Article VI's first noun, look at its first adverb, 'in good faith', and then the rest of the sentence structure. Clearly, the NWS signatories had no intention of signing a treaty that established a law requiring them to disarm, and so it has proved.

The only way to avoid a nuclear exchange is to ensure that no such weapons exist. On this point, there is good news and bad news

The NWSs' lack of adherence, as the non-NWS signatories see it, is causing frustration among those signatories that would, were it not for the treaty, have had nuclear-weapon aspirations, and the first one (North Korea) has now left the treaty and developed its first nuclear weapons, further loading our dices towards their 6s.

And, as the NWSs continue to do nothing on disarmament and even update their arsenals, we should expect others to follow North Korea out of the treaty.

As any actuary will confirm, deterrence cannot save us forever. We can of course pray to God to prevent that '666' roll, but if we

keep rolling, then He will eventually abandon us. □

IRISH FREETHINKERS AND HUMANISTS

It is hoped to resume meetings on Thursday 9th September in the Holiday Inn Express, University Street, Belfast. Members will be informed as soon as possible.

Details will also be given in the September-October edition of this magazine, for which articles and letters are welcome – deadline 12th August.

HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND MEETINGS

14th July:

Joanne O'Riordan speaks about her life and work as an activist for people with disabilities.

11th August:

Humanists at Risk Coordinator for Humanists International Emma Wadsworth-Jones addresses the Association.

8th September:

The Doula. Nikki Kavanagh gives a presentation about her work as an End of Life Doula.

Meetings are via Zoom

For further details, please visit

www.humanism.ie/get-involved/events/



Medical Ethics in Irish Hospitals

DR PETER Boylan has once again warned that the Sisters of Charity through either St Vincent's Healthcare Group (SVHG) or a new charitable company, St Vincent's Holdings, are doing everything possible to gain ownership and control of the new National Maternity Hospital ('Fresh thinking on National Maternity Hospital impasse vital', *Irish Times*, 5th May).

If they succeed the implication is that the new hospital, as part of St Vincent's, will be required to adhere to Catholic medical ethics.

This is not a unique case. We should remember that quite a number of hospitals which are controlled by Catholic organisations require staff to adhere to Catholic medical ethics when treating patients. This has meant that many patients, mostly women, have not received medical care or advice that would be considered the most appropriate in leading non-Catholic hospitals in Ireland and worldwide.

Even hospitals outside the formal control of Catholic organisations have found it difficult to avoid objections of Catholic staff to the provision of medical care not approved by the church.

It is long overdue for the Oireachtas to legislate to the effect that publicly funded hospitals must offer and provide all medical treatments within their medical competence that are permitted by law. It should be illegal for hospitals such as St Vincent's, the Mater, Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children and the new National Maternity Hospital not to consider or provide treatments on the grounds that they are forbidden by the Catholic Church.

A Bill to this effect, which should be easy to draft, should also apply to private hospitals and clinics that treat publicly funded patients.

AIDAN PENDER,
Chairman,
DAVID McCONNELL,
Honorary President,
Humanist Association of Ireland

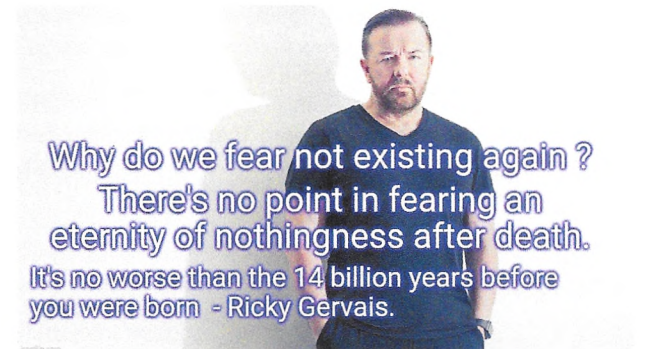
What Happens to Us When We Die?

BEFORE I was born, I didn't experience pain or suffering and had no worries of any kind. I had no friends or family or history at all. I couldn't think or feel anything because I didn't exist.

I was nothing before I came into existence and will be nothing again when I die. We all have this history. I can't prove this is what happens to us when we die but it's extremely likely given how we understand reality – the way nature works. Death is real and not an illusion and no scriptural story or claim can make it go away. One has to be in serious denial to believe otherwise.

Such knowledge or awareness gives life its richness and value. It inspires us to care and to be kind, for we are all going to lose everything eventually. So being kind to each other in the meantime makes perfect sense.

WILLIAM BURNS,
Belfast



Leisure

WHAT is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

WILLIAM HENRY DAVIES,
(1871-1940)



After Θ God

Joe Armstrong

explores the religious mindset – once held by its author - and examines transitioning from belief to unbelief, a journey that involved rethinking everything



Chapter 22

DON'T forget David,' my father wrote to me in his cherished letter weeks before his massive stroke in 1981. As he lay dying in Mercers Hospital that August, it became my bounden duty to find my brother.

David left home probably in 1972, when I was about ten. Fobbed off whenever I had asked about him, we assumed he was in London.

I rang dozens of people named David Armstrong in various phone books. I rang the BBC, the Irish embassy in London, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin and the Garda, who in turn spoke to Scotland Yard. He wasn't on any records held by either police force.

Officers from the Metropolitan Police went to his last known London address. All present were interviewed. Someone remembered the name from 'about ten years back'. The police said a BBC broadcast would only be considered if my brother was my dad's only relative. I contacted the missing persons services of the Red Cross and Salvation Army. They took David's details and told me they would contact me if they heard anything. Clutching at straws, I telephoned Jacinta, a neighbour from home then living in London who knew David. She promised she would keep her eyes peeled for him.

Someone suggested he went to Spain but the Spanish embassy told me no visa was issued to him between 1973 and 1977, dates based on my mother's misleading letter. Previously I recounted how, trying to solve the mystery of my missing brother, I had asked my mother to write to me 'stuff about Paul and David'.

My mother's subsequent letter lied by evasion: *'David was very fortunate in getting a very nice clerical position as junior clerk in the clerical department of Grangegorm. After two years he resigned and packed his bag for London and the big smoke. Be that as it may, he chose, apparently, to break away from his roots...'*

Now, as my father lay dying and knowing I was trying to find David, I asked her yet again to tell me anything about my brother that might help me trace him. Despite the imminent death of our father, she still withheld the truth.

I hardly knew Paul. Eleven years my senior, my mother had laid down her ultimatum about her elder stepson to our father when I was only five. Ejected from home, Uncle Joe took Paul in. I saw him only once in the next four years when he was brought back to paint a ceiling. Paul joined the Irish army and we went to his passing out parade. He married and, as a virtual stranger to me, I was asked, aged 14, to be godfather to his daughter.

I was getting to know Paul at the hospital and I liked him. I told him I was trying to find David.

'Do you know that he's gay?'

I was flabbergasted.

'Does Mammy know this?'

'Of course, brother! No doubting that!'

I thought of my mother's words 'married or what' in her serpentine letter to me: *'I must also confess, that having reared him, I am interested to know how he is getting along, and whether he is married or what.'*

My mother's deception, reiterated at my father's deathbed, pierced through me like a lance, lacerating further the hacked umbilical cord. I imploded with anger and knew I could never trust her again.

The Church, of which my mother was always so uncritical a member, teaches in its Catechism (1994, #2357) that homosexual acts are 'acts of grave depravity', 'intrinsically disordered', 'contrary to the natural law' and 'under no circumstances can they be approved'. All homosexuals are 'called to chastity' and, if they are Christians, to 'unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross' for the trials of their 'condition'.

I could only imagine how my unquestioningly obedient Catholic mother had reacted when she discovered her stepson was gay. Same-sex sexual activity was not decriminalised in Ireland until 1993, so for my mother her stepson was not only engaging in gravely sinful depravity but committing criminal activity too.

Mother did not do shame well. I recall her reaction to her only ever negative school report about me, the silence for days and eventually her selfish, 'I have never been so humiliated in my life!' Yes, it was all about her.

Imagine her response to David. I recall ongoing family tension. All I know is that David packed his bags and left home aged, at most, 17; at some point arrived in London; and chose not to inform us of changes of address nor to contact home again.

Knowing his sexuality, I contacted a London-based gay newspaper. They interviewed me and published an article on a distraught young man trying to find his brother as their father lay dying in hospital.

Prompted by the *After God* column in *The Irish Freethinker and Humanist*, Joe Armstrong's memoir *In My Gut, I Don't Believe* is available in paperback (£11.36/€13.30) and Kindle eBook (£6.99/€7.77) editions on all Amazon sites and Book Depository (€11.13 paperback to Ireland). ISBN:9780954661014.

"A fascinating, courageous and moving account of an individual leaving the trammels of religion for the good light of humanism – an educative story on many levels, well told."
– Professor A. C. Grayling

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Fermi's Paradox

Noel Byrne

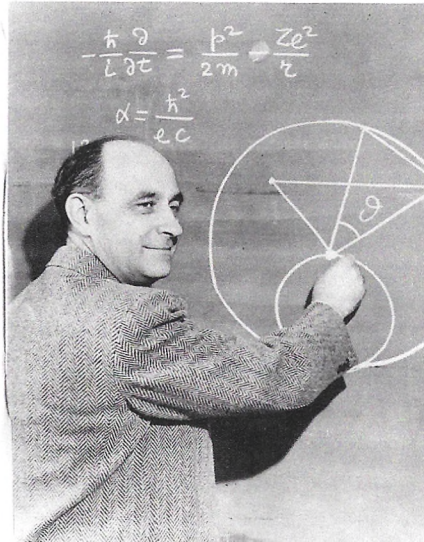
FERMI (right) was a Physics Nobel Prize winner in 1938. He was the principal architect of the atomic bomb. In 1950 in a casual conversation with other eminent physicists regarding UFOs and faster than light travel, he asked the question: "But where is everybody?" This has become known in science as 'Fermi's Paradox'.

'Is there anybody else out there?' is a question that has fascinated mankind since the beginning. Mythology and gods were the answers until recently when science started to probe the question. In 1961 the astrophysicist Dr. Frank Drake developed his famous 'Drake's Equation' regarding the possibility of intelligent life in the Milky Way Galaxy.

The Milky Way Galaxy is estimated to contain between 100 and 400 thousand billion stars and the same number of planets. The Milky Way itself is only one of between 100 to 200 billion galaxies in the Universe. Drake's equation takes N as the potential number of technologically advanced civilisations in the Milky Way Galaxy. There are then seven variables to be multiplied to determine N. They are: the rate of formation of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy; the fraction of these stars that have planetary systems; the number of these planets that have a suitable environment for life; the fraction of suitable planets on which life actually appears; the fraction of those life-bearing planets on which intelligent life appears; the fraction of those civilisations that develop a technology that releases detectable signs of their existence into space; and the length of time such civilisations release detectable signs into space.

This is a very problematic equation as there is no precise data for any of the variables. Answers from 50 to 5,000 have been arrived at depending on what figures are applied in the variables. It is also possible that there are variables we are unaware of that are not included in 'Drake's Equation'. How the Earth evolved is the basic premise behind the formula. It is presumed that what happened here will happen to a fraction of other stars as they evolve. Science is satisfied that the raw materials for life are out there in the universe. Frank Drake was also involved in setting up SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) in 1960.

The SETI Institute is now working for over sixty years. Its research is done with radio telescopes searching the sky and trying to detect radio signals from space. As yet there have been no true successes. SETI searches in



the radio frequencies between 1,000 megahertz and 10,000 megahertz. As the search may have to check frequencies as narrow as 0.1 hertz, that is around 100 billion separate frequencies to be searched. For the search to be successful there must be a civilisation with a technology at least as advanced as ours and capable of sending out signals of their existence. Any civilisation not so advanced could not be detected by the SETI method. It concentrates on detection and not broadcasting to possible civilisations. We are constantly leaking radio, television and radar signals into space anyhow, which is in effect broadcasting our presence. Any incoming signal would need to be interpreted and analysed to ascertain

what type of civilisation it comes from – mainly whether peaceful or otherwise. A method on how to interpret or analyse such a signal has not yet been fully devised.

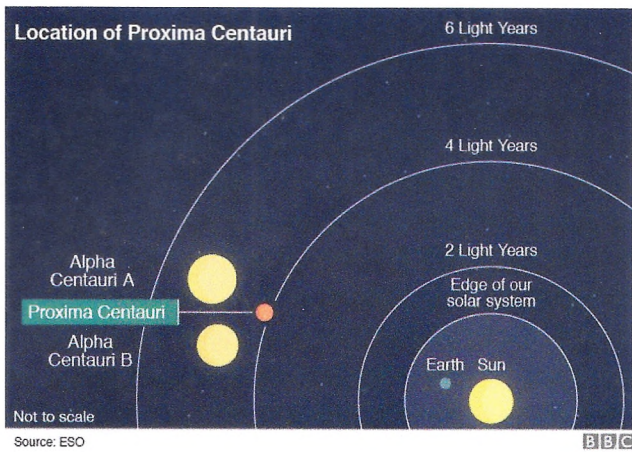
It took nearly 5 billion years for intelligence to arise on earth. So in the search by SETI it is presumed there is no point in looking at planets around stars which are less than 5 billion years old. By so doing SETI can eliminate billions of stars. Yet that still leaves billions more to examine.

In the SETI search for 'intelligence' they are using 'intelligence' in the sense of a civilisation that can develop sophisticated and complex technology. NASA also has its own SETI project and there are also SETI projects in several other countries including Russia and China.

To date over 4,300 exoplanets have been found in 3,200 planetary systems, and thousands more that require further observation to check that they reach the criteria SETI use for potential life. The principal criterion is whether the planet is in a habitable zone relative to its star, meaning it cannot be too close to the star as it would be too hot for life nor too distant, in which case it would be too cold for life, and it must have liquid water. Of these exoplanets, 24 are considered 'Super Habitable Planets', i.e. better than Earth. All of these are considered potentially habitable, but to date there is no evidence of life anywhere outside Earth.

As Mars is considered the only planet in our own solar system on which life might have evolved other than Earth, and is presently considered to be devoid of life for various reasons, it is clear that we must look outside our own solar system to find life.

The nearest star to earth, apart from our sun, is →



Proxima Centauri, which is 4.246 light years away (above). It has two exoplanets. Using our most sophisticated technology, if it took two years for the voyager spacecraft to reach Jupiter, at the same speed it would take 100,000 years to reach Proxima Centauri. Even if technology is considerably increased over the next few millennia, it is doubtful if such a journey could be made in less than ten thousand years.

Although the Earth is 4.5 billion years old, the Universe itself is approximately 13.8 billion years old. So if life evolved elsewhere, it may have an extra 8 to 9 billion years evolutionary advantage over earthly life.

In the 1970s the physicists Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe reignited the theory of panspermia. It is the opposite of the current scientific paradigm of abiogenesis, and postulates that Earth was seeded with life from space, as primitive life forms have been found in meteorites. Meteorites have been bombarding Earth since it was first formed. In modern times the meteorites coming to Earth are very small and harmless. However, it is known that many large meteorites have in the past blasted the Earth and have in fact caused at least one of the five major extinctions during its early history.

We may eventually find, in view of the number of planets out there, that life exists elsewhere in the Milky Way Galaxy. But, even if life is common, is intelligence something that has evolved elsewhere?

We assume that we are of cosmic significance. But are we? Looking at planet Earth and its inhabitants from an alien's point of view, how intelligent are we really? We are currently destroying and poisoning our planet – our own home – and this is not a wonderful indicator of an advanced civilisation. Although we are aware of how we are damaging our planet ecologically, we are not yet smart enough to stop destroying it.

We have even given ourselves the power to destroy our species with our own man-made weapons. We cannot even live together as one species on our little planet: we allow race, religion, ideology and culture to separate and divide us.

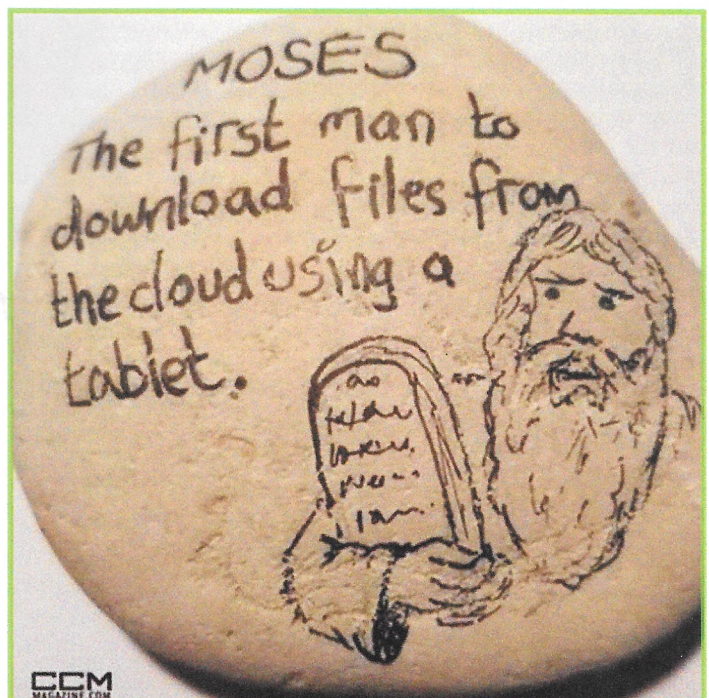
As we can't yet agree to live in peace and harmony among ourselves, it is questionable whether humankind can be called advanced. We evolved from a small group of proto humanoids and yet seem to keep differentiating, and separating through religion, language, culture, borders, tribes, and ideologies.

As a race we are too diverse yet to be considered properly civilised. We think we are wonderfully smart and clever as our technology, science and knowledge increases daily. Yet we have not yet been able to ensure that all of our progress and technology is channeled solely for beneficial purposes. To achieve that goal would be the sign of a true civilisation. It is possible that to a genuinely advanced alien culture we may be like a colony of ants. We presume we are special and at the top of the tree of life, but are we really?

So, in answer to Fermi's question, if there happens to be any eavesdropping, sophisticated and genuinely advanced civilised aliens out there, it is quite likely that they know about us but will not communicate until they are satisfied we have become truly civilised. Why would any genuinely advanced race want to communicate with a species surviving on a little speck in space, that is interested in designing nuclear and biological weapons and incapable of living peacefully and equitably?

We are currently destroying and poisoning our planet – our own home – and this is not a wonderful indicator of an advanced civilisation

As I look around our little world, and the state it is in, I sometimes wonder if we have yet found intelligent life on Earth, never mind civilisation? If we ever do manage to communicate with an outside species, it will at least finally end the apparently neverending god argument. □



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Art

Tidal Form

Colin Corkey



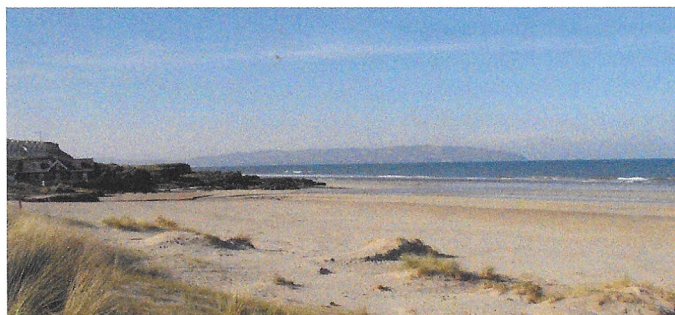
FOR as long as I can recall, I've always had a deep fascination for the sea. I'm intrigued by its sheer majestic powers, its continuous dual action of clean sweep as well as offering up a myriad of items for the ardent beachcomber. In his poem *The Wayfinder* Derry poet Sam Burnside refers to the tide-line as 'the place where the sea does its housekeeping'. Brendan Kennelly's short poem *Tide* opens with the following:

'I bring / a red rose petal, a white plastic spoon, a fly, a shell, a bee, / a bottle, a pebble...'

Each time I walk on Castlerock Beach (pictured right) is a new experience in terms of colour, textures, the infinite varieties of shells, pebbles and driftwood – always inspirational in providing invaluable possibilities for sculptural ideas. *Tidal Form* was

inspired by such a find, a piece of driftwood, bleached by sun and wind over time and left stranded and exposed to the elements for a further course of nature's honing.

In this sculptural ceramic piece my intention was to replicate something of the essential form that the forces of nature had already provided. I wanted also to suggest the undulating surface of the water as it leaves its impression on dry sands, along with its stranded offering poised high and dry.



Using a heavily grogged stoneware clay the sculpture is slab built and fired to 1260 degrees centigrade. It measures 43 cms in height, 46 cms in length and 15 cms in width. □



Prospero's Diary

NORTHERN HUMANISM COMES DROPPING SLOW

THE Welsh Senedd (Parliament) has passed a bill that makes the curriculum in all public schools in Wales fully inclusive of Humanism. The Bill will also change the name 'Religious Education' (RE) to 'Religion, Values and Ethics' (RVE). These are great steps forward for Humanism. Alas, in Northern Ireland education – to paraphrase Yeats – Humanism comes dropping slow. It lags well behind the rest of the UK and Ireland, with the main Christian churches, who have control of the RE syllabus, still seeking to indoctrinate children rather than broadening and opening their minds. Shame on them.

CULTURE WARS PREDATE CHRISTIANITY

TOM Holland, in the *Sunday Times* ('You can thank God for culture warriors', 2nd May) wants to have his religious cake and eat it. He believes that all the good ideas – as well as many of the bad ones – are derived from culture wars within Christianity.

The Christian Roman Empire inaugurated a Dark Age of a thousand years in which Christians ruthlessly persecuted heretics and kept slaves but, says Holland, Christian theology taught that empires and slavery are evil. Well, no: the Bible was often used to justify them. The notions of equality, rights and progress did not originate with Christianity. Such ideas are found in Confucius, the Buddha and Lao Tzu. As for 'culture wars', the Greek philosopher Heraclitus argued that the underlying order was sustained by continual tensions between conflicting forces. The harmonious state is one where the citizens live in constant activity and debate. "Justice", he suggested, "is strife".

Holland needs to rid himself of the unhistorical idea that Christianity has a monopoly of goodness. Many of the best tunes are secular and many of the worst are religious.

MIKJÁLL THE ROCKLESS VIKING

IN May President Michael D. Higgins was interviewed by William Crawley on Radio Ulster's *Talkback*: "You know, people are talking as if they were attached to a rock, or something like that. Everyone is a migrant. My name in Irish is Ó hUiginn and when you do the genetic trace on it, it's the Irish for 'Viking', and the first of the Ó hUiginn is in the Inishowen peninsula in Northern Ireland. So I'm probably a Viking". And, he added, there are people from the north of the island who have been going on marauding raids to Scotland and there are people who have been coming back and some have stayed and some have not". He asked: "Why not take all their sounds and symbols and culture and languages and draw from them all?"



THE STUPIDITY OF VOTERS

THE Labour Party's defeats in recent UK elections are often attributed to the party being dominated by a London-centred elite out of touch with the ordinary working class. Keir Starmer and Jeremy Corbyn represent London seats, but so does Boris Johnson. And who are more out of touch than the two thirds privately educated members of Johnson's Cabinet? Or the 45% of Conservative MPs who were privately educated, compared with 15% of Labour? Or an old Etonian PM who thinks that John Lewis furniture is not good enough? And have the 'ordinary working class' benefited from tax cuts for the wealthy or financial favours for ministers' friends? It's food banks and zero hours contracts for many of them.

More widely, how did a decade of Conservative-imposed austerity and cuts in public spending benefit 'ordinary working people'? Why vote for a party that is the prime source of your grievances? Or one that advocated Brexit, thus also adversely affecting your living standards? Or a government responsible for the UK's highest Covid death rate in Europe, especially in the most deprived areas?

The Labour Party has been told that it needs to change or it will die. But maybe it's many English working class voters who need to change. They are exhibiting the stupidity of crowds (were they infected from Northern Ireland?). It doesn't seem to matter to them that they are ruled by a government of greed and lies so long as it delivers a large dose of English nationalism, populism and xenophobia.

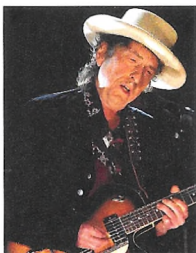
THE POOTS PUTSCH THAT FAILED

MANY commentators questioned Edwin Poots's fitness to be the new DUP leader since he does not respect the facts of cosmology. Asked in 2007 by William Crawley on Radio Ulster's *Sunday Sequence* how old the earth was, he replied, following Archbishop Ussher of Armagh in the 17th century, that it was created in 4004 BC.

Poots's young earth creationism is not his only scientific black hole. In 2011 a gay blood ban – in place during the 1980s AIDS threat – was lifted in Great Britain but, as Health Minister in Northern Ireland, Poots maintained it on the basis of ensuring public safety. He had said that those receiving donations had a right to be told they were getting 'clean blood'. Again, as Environment Minister in 2020, he told Stormont that his officials do not accept that there is a climate crisis. Maybe, as Tim McGarry suggested, the DUP policy was 'NO SURRENDER' to science. However, he is not alone. He led a takeover by a group of evangelicals which proved shortlived. Having proved itself to be the Doublecrossing Unchristian Party by removing Arlene Foster in a backstairs intrigue, it stuck the knife into Poots after 21 days of his leadership. But if you believe that a God created the world in 6 days, then 21 days must be a very long time to be leader of a party. *Prospero*

Bob Dylan at 80: 10 of his Greatest Songs Editor's Picks

BOB Dylan, the greatest songwriter of our time, recently celebrated his 80th birthday. Here is a pick of 10 of his greatest songs from 6 of his greatest albums. They are not necessarily *the* 10 greatest. That is really a matter of opinion. But they surely rank high in most people's lists. The albums are listed in chronological order.



THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN (1963)

Blowin' in the Wind

This anthem of the civil rights movement – “how many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?” – was sung by Peter, Paul and Mary the day Martin Luther King delivered his ‘I have a Dream’ speech. Dylan said that he wrote it in ten minutes, but it is one of his timeless masterpieces.

A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall

The context was the Cuban Missile Crisis when the threat of nuclear war was real, but it reaches beyond its immediate subject to create a poetic vision of hell on earth. He writes of a future son roaming a dying world, and the apocalyptic imagery remain potent today in a world of natural disasters, climate crises and endless wars.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A' CHANGIN' (1964)

The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll (see p21)

A favourite of the editor, it is a powerful attack on racism and injustice. In 1963 Hattie Carroll, a fifty one year-old black barmaid in a Baltimore hotel was hit across the head with a cane by a rich white tobacco farmer called William Zantzinger and died in hospital of a brain haemorrhage the following morning. Zantzinger was found guilty of manslaughter and given a six month sentence. The song builds in a measured, ironic tone to the closing words, “now's the time for your tears”.

HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED (1965)

Like a Rolling Stone

Rolling Stone magazine has this as No1 in its list of 500 greatest songs of all time. It's an epic of over 6 minutes which begins sneering at a spoiled, rich woman (possibly Edie Palmer, a one time girlfriend) who has fallen from grace and reduced to living homeless on the street, but then seques into compassion for all those who have dropped out of bourgeois living. He is ultimately referring to all of us when we are stripped of our pretensions.

Desolation Row

The title may be a conflation of *Desolation Angels* by Jack Kerouac and *Cannery Row* by John Steinbeck. Philip Larkin described it as a ‘marathon’ (over 11 minutes) with an ‘enchanting tune and mysterious, possibly half-baked lyrics’. Dylan himself described it as a ‘minstrel’ song inspired by “some ragtag minstrel shows in blackface at the carnivals when I was growing up, and it had an effect on me, just as much as seeing the lady with the four legs”. Yet it is also about the shared traumas of American anti-black racism and European antisemitism and the role of high culture

which allows these crimes to proliferate. And any song that manages to bring in *Hamlet*, Einstein, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot is definitely a cut above the average.

BLONDE ON BLONDE (1966)

Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands

This song, which takes up side four of a double album, is an 11-minute tour de force of ambiguous wordplay and mesmerising musical ebbs and flows. It is a loving portrait of a girl (“And your saintlike face and your ghostlike soul”), who was in fact Sara Lownds, his future wife. Never mind that we don't understand bits of it – what are “my warehouse eyes, my Arabian drums”, for example? The mysterious words and hypnotic music combine to create a surreal listening experience.

Visions of Johanna

In 1999 Andrew Motion, then the UK's Poet Laureate, judged it as the greatest song lyric ever written. The setting is possibly T.S. Eliot's poem *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, which also depicts a sad, empty world. *Visions* is another haunting and enigmatic work which eludes easy decipherment. What we do understand is the contrast between two women: the carnal Louise and the spiritual Johanna. The lover is with the former but the latter represents the unattainable perfection which he as both lover and artist seeks.

DESIRE (1976)

Hurricane

This pulsating polemic, running at over 8 minutes, is as hard-hitting as ‘Hattie Carroll’. Written with Jacques Levy, it fairly zips along in its raging account of middleweight black boxer Reuben Carter's imprisonment for a murder of which he claimed his innocence. After nearly 20 years in jail, he was released in 1985 after a judge dismissed the original indictments: “the trial was a pig-circus, he never had a chance”. Arguably, although it includes some poetic licence – for example, he was not ‘the No1 contender for the middleweight crown’ – the song did make a difference.

Sara

The closing song on the album is a poetic paean to his first wife, alluding to their relationship and their children together. Despite Dylan's pleading lyrics – “Sara, Sara, don't ever leave me / Don't ever go” – the couple divorced the following year. In 2018 the *Irish Times* said that it was “as beautiful an expression of the preciousness and frailty of human love as has ever been put on a record”.

ROUGH AND ROWDY WAYS (2020)

Murder Most Foul

In 2020, as he approached his 80th year, Dylan produced his 39th studio album and yet another political masterpiece. This 17-minute ballad about the assassination of President Kennedy presents the event as a major American trauma and sets it in the context of the country's cultural and political history. Dylan refers to ‘killers’, indicating a rejection of the sole gunmen version and intimating a conspiracy. The account is interspersed with song and movie titles and cultural references, all pointing to the artist's role in providing beauty and redemption in the midst of enduring human tragedy and malevolence. □

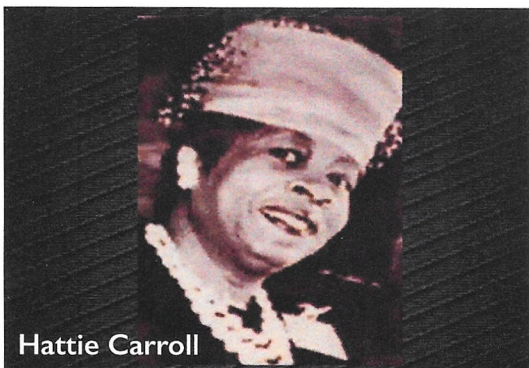
THE LONESOME DEATH OF HATTIE CARROLL

*William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll,
With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger
At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin',
And the cops were called in and his weapon took from him
As they rode him in custody down to the station,
And booked William Zanzinger for first-degree murder.
But you who philosophise, disgrace and criticise all fears,
Take the rag away from your face, now ain't the time for your tears.*

*William Zanzinger, who at twenty-four years,
Owns a tobacco farm of six hundred acres
With rich wealthy parents who provide and protect him,
And high office relations in the politics of Maryland,
Reacted to his deed with a shrug of his shoulders,
And swear words and sneering, and his tongue it was snarling,
In a matter of minutes on bail was out walking.
But you who philosophise, disgrace and criticise all fears,
Take the rag away from your face, now ain't the time for your tears.*

*Hattie Carroll was a maid of the kitchen.
She was fifty-one years old and gave birth to ten children
Who carried the dishes and took out the garbage,
And never sat once at the head of the table
And didn't even talk to the people at the table,
Who just cleaned up all the food from the table,
And emptied the ashtrays on a whole other level,
Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a cane
That sailed through the air and came down through the room,
Doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle.
And she never done nothing to William Zanzinger.
But you who philosophise, disgrace and criticise all fears,
Take the rag away from your face, now ain't the time for your tears.*

*In the courtroom of honor, the judge pounded his gavel,
To show that all's equal and that the courts are on the level
And that the strings in the books ain't pulled and persuaded,
And that even the nobles get properly handled
Once that the cops have chased after and caught 'em,
And that the ladder of law has no top and no bottom,
Stared at the person who killed for no reason,
Who just happened to be feelin' that way without warnin'.
And he spoke through his cloak, most deep and distinguished,
And handed out strongly, for penalty and repentance,
William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence.
Oh, but you who philosophise, disgrace and criticise all fears,
Bury the rag deep in your face, for now's the time for your tears.*



Hattie Carroll

STOP PRESS:

NATIONAL MATERNITY TAKEOVER

JUST before going to press, we received word that Social Democrats leader Roisin Shortall would be bringing a motion before the Dáil on Wednesday June 23rd in relation to ownership of the National Maternity Hospital (see pages 10 and 11). The motion noted most of the points highlighted already in this magazine, and continued as follows:

The Dáil further notes that:

- The cost of the construction of the National Maternity Hospital is likely to exceed €500 million.
- The Religious Sisters of Charity's holdings in SVHG were valued at €661 million in October 2018.
- The Religious Sisters of Charity have paid only €2 million (reported in 2017) of the €5 million redress agreed following the Ryan Report.

The Dáil further agrees that:

- The Catholic ethos of the proposed new facility can no longer be a matter of doubt.
- Women's reproductive healthcare would be put at risk and their safety endangered if subject to Catholic ownership and ethos.
- A hospital built using State funds should be fully owned and operated by the State.
- Handing over ownership of a publicly funded hospital to a private company is in direct contradiction of the aims of Sláintecare.
- Where the State decides to build any new hospital or facility, it should endeavour to ensure that it owns the land on which the hospital or facility is built – as recommended in the Report of the Independent Review Group established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly funded health and personal social services.

The Dáil calls on the Government to:

- Purchase the site at Elm Park and thereby ensure that the State's substantial investment in this new facility is fully safeguarded and that a secular ethos will ensure that the full range of women's healthcare services under the law are available to all people using this hospital,
- Establish an independent board for the new National Maternity Hospital representative of management, staff, patients, along with independent nominees with expertise in obstetrics, gynaecology and women's healthcare,
- Reject the transfer of St Vincent's Healthcare Group to St Vincent's Holdings and seek the appointment of public interest directors to the board of SVHG

At the time of printing, we were unaware of the result, but the motion was expected to pass. However, much political pressure will still need to be applied to ensure a satisfactory outcome. □



The Best Catholics in the World

Derek Scally • Sandycove, 2021 • UK !6.99

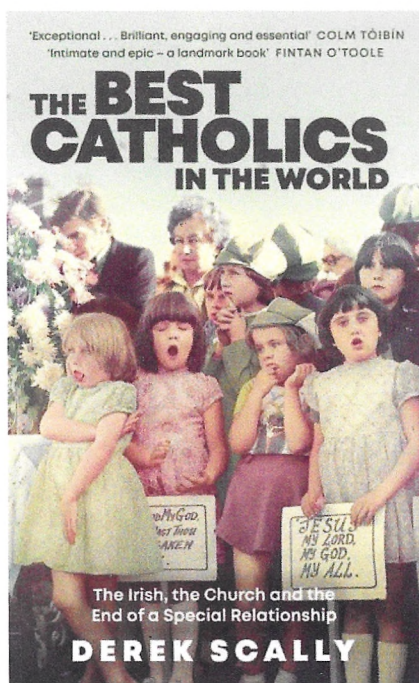
IN spite of a chorus of approbation from some famous supporters on its back cover, I found it hard to warm to this book. Derek Scally spent three years of his adult life travelling around Ireland (and beyond) looking for vestiges of Catholicism which survived the decades of scandal which have dogged it. Short of having to undertake a penance, why would anyone want to do that? Once that question settled in my head, I found it difficult to shift.

The author is a journalist by trade and a very competent one – Berlin-based correspondent of *The Irish Times* – and thereby, I think, lies the problem. The chapters in his book read like a series of separate articles rather than fitting together with intellectual coherence. Journalistic detachment produces great newspapers, not great literature.

But the author’s competence as a journalist brings many benefits; he gets to interview quite a few interesting characters during his pilgrimage, including senior clerics who were faced with having to deal with the consequences of the sins of their colleagues.

I love the extended pun... “millions of Irish people – with varying degrees of power, knowledge and agency – contributed to what became Catholic Ireland’s leaning tower of piety”. When the Magdalene Laundries scandal began to make world headlines, Scally reports: “The laundries were not my fault, my responsibility, but I felt strongly that it was my shame, as an Irishman, facing the dumb-founded stares of my German friends”.

I think he manages to nail our collective guilt, and the basis of our atonement, when he writes: “Understanding what made these institutions possible... is my responsibility and the responsibility of every Irish citizen”.



The history we have learnt in our schools has tended to mask craven complicity with myths of victimhood

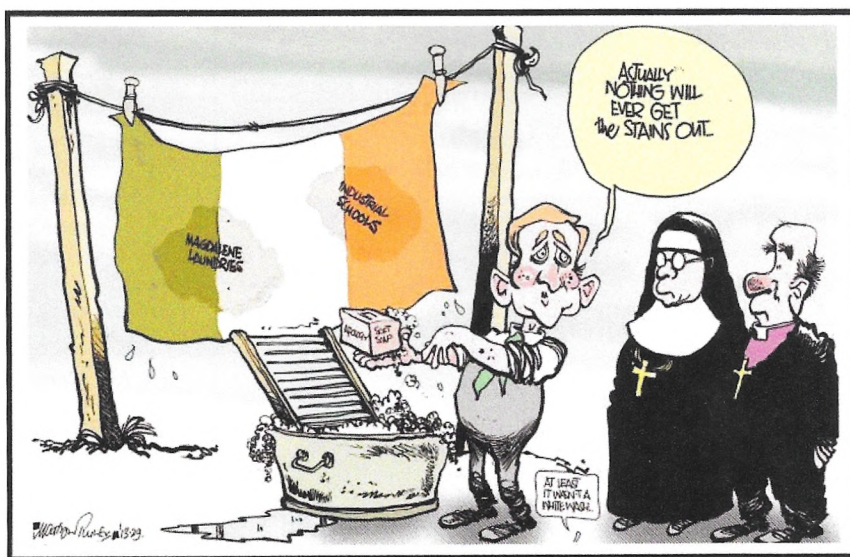
Scally believes that Ireland is a long way short of understanding its past. I agree: we have not successfully moved on. He throws us crumbs of comfort by stating: “In

no way can Catholic Ireland be compared to Nazi Germany”. Why not? I would have thought that othering young unmarried women as moral degenerates goes some-way down the road towards Nazi methodology.

He offers us the East German experience of recovering from the Communist era as an example of how we can manage our future – and in many ways the chapter ‘Us and Them’ is the most valuable in the book. He quotes Adorno: “The past is only dealt with when the causes of what happened are dealt with”.

Michael D. Higgins told him: “You cannot say people didn’t know what was going on. There was a colluding silence. And that colluding silence supported a State that didn’t want to intervene, and assisted that institutional regime.”

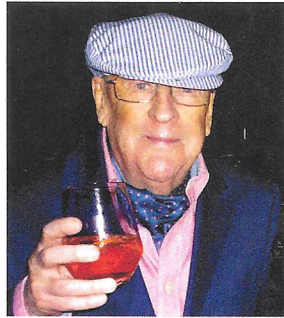
The fact is that Ireland has long had collusive and complicit relationships with occupying powers: first the British Empire, and then the Catholic Church. The history we have learnt in our schools has tended to mask craven complicity with myths of victimhood. We owe our children the truth, not the myth. □



George Broadhead: A Tribute

Stuart Hartill

EARLY in May I learnt that George Broadhead, instigator of the world's first gay humanist group, had died. George (right) was not only a remarkable (and funny) human being but also a good friend, a fellow Manxman and a keen supporter of Isle of Man Freethinkers since the early days.



George's parents kept a bed and breakfast hotel in Hutchinson Square, Douglas – according to George the first on the island to boast hot and cold running water in every room. The location is significant because in World War Two the entire Hutchinson Square area was requisitioned for a camp for Jewish internees and George's family were moved to a house about a mile away.

While such camps were scattered throughout the island, Hutchinson Square was unique because the “guests” included leading artists and intellectuals, such as Arthur Koestler and Kurt Schwitters. Unsurprisingly, it quickly spawned a highbrow camp newspaper, lectures, concerts and plays. George was particularly amused at my discovery that the plays included a daring skit on *Romeo and Juliet* entitled *Romeo and Julian* – quite astonishing anywhere in 1940, but especially for a small, conservative island!

With the end of the war the camps closed and resumed normal business as hotels again, just as George moved up to high school. In the early 1950s and already sure of his sexual orientation he left the island for university in the UK. He was quickly drawn into both the pre-legal gay scene around London and early efforts at law reform.

In the 1970s George was an early member of CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality), which had a more militant approach. He was also the prime mover in another campaign, marked as much by his impish sense of humour as his desire for justice.

When Mary Whitehouse brought her infamous libel case against *Gay News*, she was quoted as saying that “everything good and true” was being undermined in the UK by a “humanist gay lobby”. This puzzled and amused George. As both a gay man and a humanist he knew of no such lobby, but he thought it might be fun to realise Mrs Whitehouse's nightmare. After one small informal meeting the Gay Humanist Group (later renamed the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association) was formed – the first such grouping in the world and now one of the longest established national gay and lesbian groups in the UK.

I first met George when I contacted GALHA to let them know about changes in Manx legislation concerning homosexuality. He replied, mentioning his Manx roots and greatly

pleased that things were finally changing for the better. Through George, I was invited to contribute articles on Manx topics for the various gay humanist print and online publications.

George also mentioned that, having retired, he and his long-term partner, Roy Saich, were planning to revisit his childhood home, so I offered to ferry them round if they did so. Some months later, I spent a very pleasant day driving them around his old haunts and the tourist sites.

I sometimes drove with some difficulty, thanks to George's day-long flow of funny (and often scandalous) reminiscences from the passenger seat. During their visit they also attended our monthly *Freethinker* lunch, where he similarly amused and delighted the rest of the group. It was the start of a long and happy friendship.

One later campaign of George's particularly makes us proud. The island is still plagued by evangelicals who like to meddle in developing world affairs under the guise of health or education development. Unsurprisingly, this includes African countries where homophobia is made worse by such “overseas aid”. Some years ago, the Pink Triangle Trust began heavily contributing to a secular school in Uganda, a country where some of the most notorious religious prejudice continues. In return, one schoolroom there is named the George Broadhead and Roy Saich Classroom. Whenever Manx evangelicals try to crow to the press about their African work I now write to the newspaper, or ring the radio phone-in, to point out that only one classroom in Africa gratefully bears the name of a Manxman, and he is a gay atheist.

George continued to contact me about current Manx affairs – our last exchange only a few months ago. But I was by no means alone. As I learn from tributes to him on Facebook, even at 87 George sent out daily streams of e-mails to humanists around the world, followed campaigns, offered support and wrote letters to national newspapers. For example, less than a week before he died George had written to Leo Igwe, the notable Nigerian humanist, in connection with an African facing blasphemy charges.

But George was far from the po-faced political campaigner one might expect. As much as the defence of free speech and justice for gays, his life was a quest for the best music, literature and drama, the finest restaurant or hotel (preferably with art deco furnishings) and the perfect negroni. His constant partner on this quest for 57 years – from the barely legal days to civil partnership and eventually marriage – was Roy. Not too many heterosexual partnerships sealed with a traditional church marriage last that long.

Always snappily dressed, on Facebook he once posted a photo in a snazzy fedora and I remarked on his similarity to George Melly, quipping that maybe we should start calling him “Good Time George”, as in Melly's song. His response was a photo taken with Melly from the *Gay News* trial days, both loudly suited, both in fedoras and waving jazz hands.

It almost makes me wonder which George the song actually refers to. Like his namesake, George Broadhead was a joy to see in action and will be a hard act to follow. □