'Belief Shifts': Ireland's Referendum and the Journey from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*

I would begin this chapter with two pieces of narrative: one from fantasy literature and one from recent political discourse. The fantasy writer Terry Pratchett wrote a book in his Discworld series about religion, gods and belief entitled *Small Gods*. In the Discworld, he created a country called Omnia, a theocracy within which everyone and everything revolved around the worship of the Great God Om. Omnianism was the hegemonic ideological position in this country, and the capital city was made in the image of the Great God Om:

> It extended for miles, its temples, churches, schools, dormitories, gardens, and towers growing into and around one another in a way that suggested a million termites all trying to build their mounds at the same time. When the sun rose the reflection of the doors of the central Temple blazed like fire. They were bronze, and a hundred feet tall. On them, in letters of gold set in lead, were the Commandments. There were five hundred and twelve so far, and doubtless the next Prophet would add his share. The sun's reflected glow shone down and across the tens of thousands of the strong-in-faith who laboured below for the greater glory of the Great God Om. Probably no one did know how many of them there were. Some things have a way of going critical. Certainly there was only one Cenobiarch, the Superior Iam. That was certain. And six Archpriests. And thirty lesser Iams. And hundreds of bishops, deacons, subdeacons, and priests. And novices like rats in a grain store. And craftsmen, and bull breeders, and torturers, and Vestigial Virgins . . . No matter what your skills, there was a Place for you in the Citadel. (Pratchett 1992, 10)

Those who believed and carried out the rituals prospered; those who did not were subject to the 'quisition' (a parody of the inquisition). The premise of the book is that of a reciprocal

relationship between gods and belief. In this universe, gods grow according to the amount and strength of belief in them. The process is described as beginning organically as a shepherd, seeking a lost lamb, 'finds it among the briars and takes a minute or two to build a small cairn of stones in general thanks to whatever spirits might be around the place':

> Often it stops there. But sometimes it goes further. More rocks are added, more stones are raised, a temple is built on the site where the tree once stood. The god grows in strength, the belief of its worshipers raising it upwards like a thousand tons of rocket fuel. For a very few, the sky's the limit. (Pratchett 1992, 7)

It is an interesting idea, though in fact it is one that can be seen throughout the world: in real terms, the strength of Islam is on the rise, due largely to the fervent belief of its adherents, though regrettably this is resulting in destructive as much as in creative acts, as evidenced by the increase in terrorism throughout the world which claims to be based on the notion of *Jihad* in the *Koran*. Similarly, the strength of Christianity, in all its forms, can be seen to be on the wane, certainly in the western, developed world, as evidence by the increasingly secularist and pluralist cultures within which it must preach its faith.

However, Pratchett's book has a twist: as in the manner of many religions, there is a second coming, and the Great God Om returns to earth. Given that there is a whole country that is dedicated to his cause, and given that this country is a theocracy where the highest priests are *de facto* the political and cultural leaders of the society, one would surmise that his strength would be truly awesome: this assumption would be wrong. Revealing himself to a simple novice monk called Brutha, Om is surprised that he has been incarnated as a tortoise, as his more traditional incarnations have been those of a bull or a lion or an eagle. He appears to Brutha because he senses his true belief, but as the novel progresses, it becomes very clear to Om that 'the thing about Brutha's flame of belief was this: in all the Citadel, in

all the day, it was the only one the God had found' (Pratchett 1992, 83). So, despite the structural centrality of Omniamism in the country of Omnia, the actual real belief in Om has been attenuated to one rather simple-minded novice. Later in the book, Om explains the process as he sees it:

> 'Right,' said Om. 'Now . . . listen. Do you know how gods get power?' 'By people believing in them,' said Brutha. 'Millions of people believe in you.' Om hesitated. All right, all right. We are here and it is now. Sooner or later he'll find out for himself . . .
> 'They don't believe,' said Om.
> 'But—'
> 'It's happened before,' said the tortoise. 'Dozens of times. D'you know Abraxas found the lost city of Ee? Very strange carvings, he says. Belief, he says. Belief *shifts*. People start out believing in the god and end up believing in the structure.' *[italics original]* (Pratchett 1992, 166)

The second narrative is rooted, not in fantasy, but in contemporary politics. On May 22, 2015, the Irish people participated in a constitutional referendum on two issues: the thirty-fourth amendment to the Constitution was about permitting same-sex marriage, while the thirty-fifth amendment suggested reducing the age of candidacy for the post of president of Ireland from 35 to 21. Ireland had long been seen as a theocracy in which the Catholic Church held a hegemonic position. Issues of law, health and education have all been subject to strong levels of control, both implicit and explicit, by the Catholic hierarchy, and this is especially true in terms of matters of sexual morality. In the 1980s and 90s, rancorous debates were held around issues of contraception, abortion and divorce, as a gradual process of secularisation challenged the older dispensation's view on these matters. As the Irish people became more educated (ironically often due to the good work of religious teaching

orders of nuns and brothers), and as the access to a broader range of media outlets through satellite channels, broadband and the internet became more prevalent, a plurality of viewpoints became available to the Irish people, and these meant that opinions were now being formed that were outside of the control of the Catholic Church. This picture is similar to what has happened in other developed countries, albeit at a much slower pace, and has been described by the work of Jean François Lyotard, who spoke of what he called the 'postmodern condition', which he defined as being an 'incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it' (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). These metanarratives are now broken down into a series of competing 'little narratives (*petits récits*)' (Lyotard 1984, 60), which must compete in the public sphere for any sense of belief, or commitment or value. Increasingly, this public sphere is operative online.

The thirty-fifth amendment was defeated, as people felt that 21 was too young to be a candidate for the largely symbolic office of president; also, it was very much overshadowed by the other issue, namely, the legalisation of same-sex marriages. The wording was straightforward, and as unambiguous as such a legalistic discourse can be: 'marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex'. The result came as something of a surprise, especially in terms of how decisive it was. A total of 1,201,607 people (62.1%) voted 'Yes' and 734,300 (37.9%) voted 'No'. The total valid poll was just under two million, which was the highest number of people to vote in any Irish referendum since the foundation of the State. All of the major political parties were officially in favour of the amendment, even if a significant number of the parliamentary party members of a more conservative bent were notable by their absence in campaigning for the measure. The Church, and its supporters, were significantly against the amendment, but were defeated by a factor of some 24% of those who voted.

One might well ask what a fantasy novel about religion and the thirty-fourth amendment to the Irish Constitution have in common, or even why Pratchett's novel is being mentioned in the first place. The reason is that fiction is often one of the clearest ways in which the real of any situation can be uncovered, and I will argue that the generic juxtaposition with which this chapter began will allow for a new and different understanding of the nature of the referendum result, and for some kind of explanation as to the current state of religion in Ireland. Fiction regularly provides access to truths about reality that otherwise remain unspoken. Jacques Lacan speaks of how language is always prone to leaving a gap in meaning – he stresses that what he calls the symbolic order, while necessary for communication, is nevertheless incapable of what might be termed full communication, or of accessing the real of a situation or emotion. Through its imbrication of syntax, linguistic structure, associative structure of the signifier through rhyme, and image-clustering, fiction allows 'a glimmer of signification [to] spring forth at the surface of the real, and then causes the real to become illuminated with a flash projected from below' (Lacan 2006, 468). For Lacan, the real is that which is always there but which is impossible to express fully in language, and he says that it 'carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it' (Lacan 2006, 17).

The language of fiction, which can focus on imagined details and singular incidents, has the capacity to provide access to aspects of the unconscious and the real, both of which are barred from normal language: as he puts it, what does not 'come to light in the symbolic *appears in the real*' *[italics original]* (Lacan 2006, 324). In this sense, Lacan sees that 'truth shows itself *[s'avère]* in a fictional structure' (Lacan 2006, 625), and this is possibly because when the reader knows that the genre is fictional, then there is a habit of connecting this fiction with different real-life situations and structures. Giorgio Agamben puts it very well when he notes that prose, 'takes place in such a way that its advent always already escapes

both toward the future and toward the past' (Agamben 1991, 76); in other words, fictional prose always has an effect beyond itself. In the case of Pratchett's comments on the way that the structure created around a religion becomes the object of belief, as opposed to the religion itself, there is a palpable correlation with the situation in Ireland in the current socio-cultural context.

Theodor Adorno's conception of 'truth content' (*Wahrheitsgehalt*), 'indicates the crux of artistic knowledge and of philosophical interpretation in *Aesthetic Theory*' (Zuidervaart 1991, xxii). Adorno sees the aesthetic as a form of thinking: 'the truth content of artworks is fused with their critical content' (Adorno 1997, 35). He also sees the aesthetic as composed of a dialectic between form and content, between fiction and reality and between language and the real. Adorno notes that aesthetic truth content and history are 'deeply meshed' (Adorno 1997, 41), and he is distrustful of pan-generic appeals to concepts of 'spirit,' as his is a particularist perspective, which foregrounds the necessity of 'critique' if the truth content of the aesthetic is to be revealed, and it is in this sense of critique 'that art and philosophy converge' (Adorno 1997, 88). Thus, in the present context, I would argue that Pratchett is making a deeply philosophical point about the relationship between religion as a structure and religion as a belief-system, or as a mode of access to, and explanation of, the transcendent. In Ireland, as in Omnia, the religious and political were structurally imbricated across all levels of society. The influence of the Church on education, health, legal issues and social policy has been traced in academic discourse, and indeed in this book, and hence this chapter will focus on one such social system in particular – that of marriage.

In Ireland, the result of the referendum was seen as a significant signifier of a new form of modernity, as all the political parties and many social groups were in favour of the legalisation of gay marriage. The Catholic hierarchy, and other pro-Catholic groups, were very much against this proposal, and in arguing their case, they had little enough to offer by

way of reason apart from the argument that, traditionally, marriage was between a man and a woman, and also that it was the societal structure wherein children were reared and looked after. Their campaign was quite negative in this sense, as indicated by the poster slogans that bedecked the country during the campaign:

Surrogacy? She needs her mother for life, not just for 9 months – Vote No;

We already have civil partnership. Don't redefine marriage – Vote No;

Children deserve a mother and a father – Vote No;

A mother's love is irreplaceable – Vote No;

Two men can't replace a mother's love – Vote No. (*Google Images*)

Those in favour of the change in the legislation had a more positive range of words to use:

Yes – Let's treat everyone equally;

Children deserve equality – Vote Yes;

Vote Yes because marriage matter;

Vote yes equality for everybody. (*Google Images*)

The fact that three of these slogans use the word 'equality' is telling: morally, it would be hard to argue against treating people equally, so by seeming to argue against this, the 'No' side were arguing that people should not be treated equally, which was a difficult position from which to mount a campaign. The demographics and the general mood towards secularisation would suggest that the referendum was likely to be carried, and in more recent social debates, the hierarchy and the Catholic Church have been less inclined to take a strong position. However, in this case, the Church and Catholic bodies such as the Iona Institute, were deeply involved in the campaign, and argued on quite essentialist philosophical principles regarding natural law and the traditional definition of marriage as between a man

and a woman. In a Pastoral Letter on marriage, the Irish bishops set out their conceptual stall in the first paragraph:

> Married love is a unique form of love between a man and woman which has a special benefit for the whole of society. The Catholic Church, with other Christians and those of no particular religious view, regard the family based on marriage between a woman and a man as the single most important institution in any society. To seek to re-define the nature of marriage would be to undermine it as the fundamental building block of our society. (*Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference* 2014, 1)

David Quinn, of the Iona Institute, writing in the *Irish Independent* on 21 May 2010, asked why is marriage 'treated uniquely', and went onto answer his own question: 'because it is unique. Out of all the myriad forms of relationships that people can form, only it can provide a child with a mother and a father who have made a formal, public commitment to one another' (Quinn 2010). While aware of the general drift towards secularisation and a concomitant pluralisation of social and legal structures, nevertheless the Church was trenchant in what they must have known was a lost cause. The reason for this is clear, I think, if we look at marriage in terms of its place in the very specific historical relationship between the Catholic Church and the Irish state, but not just from a historical perspective. It is widely agreed that church and state were hand in glove, to quote James Joyce, from the beginning of independence. This point has been made, and various examples –de Valera looking for church approval for the social aspects of the Irish Constitution in 1937; James A Costello's comment that he was a Catholic first and an Irishman second in 1949; the furore over the mother and child bill in 1951 – have been discussed at length. My aim is to take a step backwards from the particular instances, and to situate the Irish situation in terms of

some work done by the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies as a way of understanding how and why belief shifts.

Tönnies, an early German sociologist and a contemporary of Durkheim and Weber, used the German words '*Gemeinschaft*' and '*Gesellschaft*' to distinguish between two fundamentally different structural paradigms for social relations. For Tönnies, social relationships were grounded either in sentiment, friendship, kinship, and neighbourliness (*Gemeinschaft*), or in contractual interests, rational calculation, monetary ties, and legal codes (*Gesellschaft*):

> The relationship itself, and the social bond that stems from it, may be conceived either as having real organic life, and that is the essence of *Community [Gemeinschaft];* or else as a purely mechanical construction, existing in the mind, and that is what we think of as *Society [Gesellschaft].* (Tönnies, Harris, and Hollis 2001, 17)

Gemeinschaft and *Gesellschaft* are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather abstract representations of social arrangements that may be found existing side-by-side in a given social context. For Tönnies, the sense of community is more attractive than that of society. As he puts it:

> All kinds of social co-existence that are familiar, comfortable and exclusive are to be understood as belonging to *Gemeinschaft. Gesellschaft* means life in the public sphere, in the outside world. In *Gemeinschaft* we are united from the moment of our birth with our own folk for better or for worse. We go out into *Gesellschaft* as if into a foreign land. A young man is warned about mixing with bad society: but 'bad community' makes no sense in our language. (Tönnies, Harris, and Hollis 2001, 18)

In general, Tönnies argued, elements of *Gesellschaft* increased as societies modernized (Witte and Mannon 2010, 153), and he has been accused of a cultural preference for the more

organic communal *Gemeinschaft* which seems to hark back to a time when societies were, in fact, small communities, connected by kinship, friendship and the common bond of shared working and family experiences. I would suggest that in this analysis of a structured society, of the way in which, as modernisation and postmodernisation begin to take root, the sense of *Gemeinschaft* begins to become one of *Gesellschaft,* is most revealing.   The gradual processes of industrialisation, and the movement from rural to urban life, which took several hundred years in Europe, happened belatedly in an Irish context, where the slow embourgeoisement of European culture was truncated into a few decades.   As has been argued coherently by John Littleton and Eamon Maher, the visit of Pope John Paul 2 to Ireland in 1979, while seen as an endorsement of the hegemonic position of the Catholic Church in Ireland, in fact was more a grammatical conclusion to that narrative of Church-State symphysis:

> The papal visit in 1979 saw massive crowds assemble at venues such as the Phoenix Park, Drogheda, Galway and Limerick. While allegedly providing a concrete sign of the good health of Irish Catholicism, in essence this visit marked the end of an era. (Littleton and Maher 2010, 7)

Vocations had already begun to decline in the 1970s, and the gradual permeation of the BBC and ITV channels across the country, as opposed to just the Eastern seaboard, meant that orthodox opinion was no longer the only voice heard in the media. By the 1980s and 1990s, these channels were now becoming more widespread across Ireland. People now had an element of choice in terms of forming their attitudes, and where heretofore the voices they heard were almost univocal – being Irish, Catholic, conservative and Republican – now there were pluralist voices on the radio and television, which often disagreed with the views that came from the traditional Irish perspective. As well as the television and the airwaves, travel

also broadened the mind. In 1985, Ryanair instituted a £99 return flight to the UK, which was less than half the price of the BA/Aer Lingus lowest return fare of £209. The advent of cheap air flights to and from Britain also meant that emigration was no longer a one way journey; now it was becoming the norm for people to come back to Ireland more often, and in so doing they brought with them attitudes, commercial goods and opinions that were alien to what had traditionally been an Irish, Catholic, Republican mind-set. As Kearney points out, there can be little doubt about the 'impact of social changes such as immigration or urbanization upon religion, education, and the family' (Kearney 2007, 29). In the mid-1990s, the internet became more readily available in Ireland and now, a broader and non-controlled world view, or to use Lyotard's terms, worldviews, were available on a computer screen (albeit at a very slow refresh rate) in houses across the country. In the 1980s, the first mobile phone calls were being made and by the 1990s phones and texts were becoming common. In contemporary Ireland, the internet, chat rooms, news feeds, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter mean that the information from a multiperspectival media world is available in one's pocket or one's handbag, and similarly, one can post messages, thoughts and images that can be seen world-wide almost instantaneously. This is very different from the more traditional modes of communication that were available in the more community-oriented Ireland of the past.

So, in a country with fixed social, political and religious structures, governed autocratically and unquestioningly by the twin centres of power, the Catholic Church and the political elite, the restriction and strict control of information, allied to an educational system which perpetuated middle-class hegemony, meant that change was anathema to the elite in whose charge the governance of the country lay. In an undereducated, largely rural community, such power structures had little difficulty perpetuating themselves: they created narrow horizons of expectation, which limited any development or influence from outside. Information came from the pulpit on a Sunday, from Irish newspapers, which operated under

censorship and under legal frameworks that were intrinsically conservative, and under a constitution which recognised the 'special position of the Catholic Church'. Clearly, this closed type of society bore all the hallmarks of a *Gemeinschaft*. Martin Heidegger spoke of the notion of *Gemeinschaft* in terms of the comradeship experienced by soldiers in war. Genuine community was formed only 'when each individual bound himself to what is higher than either individual or community' (Zimmerman 1990, 74), and the Irish State, as it was in its early years, placed the Catholic Church in this position.

Much of this is commonplace knowledge; most cultural critics are aware of these changes. What has not really been discussed, however, are the structural effects of these changes on both Church and State in Ireland. Referring to our notion of fiction as a form of truth, this is probably best illustrated by taking a fictive Irish person in the 1960s. This person would have been white, Mass and confession-going, socially and attitudinally conservative, Republican to some degree, and politically conservative as the two main political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were ideologically similar but historically differentiated by their attitudes to the Treaty signed in 1921which gave the 26 counties a restricted form of independence, with partition as the price to be paid. This meant that politically, there was no connection between Ireland and the broader right wing/left wing ideological and political outlooks of Europe and the United Kingdom. Instead there was a strong desire to attain national unity, while at the same time there was an implicit desire to shape the 26 counties as a separate identity – as an Irish catholic organic community, valorising the classical qualities of the traditional family and community-oriented structure of the *Gemeinschaft*. Indeed the use of the word *gemein* implies a strong sense of community, of something that is put in common: 'the *Gemeinschaft* is opposed to the *Gesellschaft* a spontaneous community of feelings, of practices, of mores that belong to a formally

organized society, to an association by contract provided with rules and goals' (Lyotard 1994, 84).

I would argue that the somewhat *ad hoc* nature of our independence, which was a slow process, was a factor here. The Easter Rebellion was in 1916, but it was three years later, in January 1919, that the declaration of independence was proclaimed, and a further three years later, in 1922 the Free State came into being. The Irish constitution was published in 1937, and it would be another 16 years before the Irish Republic was declared in 1948. This was a very gradual process, and one that took place, I would suggest, without any overarching ideological imperative. As has so often been the case in colonial societies, the main unifying focus was the desire to achieve independence from the colonial power. It was only in the advent of this independence that people started to look at the type of post-colonial society that they would like to set up. Often fractures occurred in the independence movement, and, in the pattern in many third world nations, a war of independence was followed by a civil war and partition. To heal these divisions, certain signifiers of belonging were prioritised by the ruling elites, signifiers that stressed unity, togetherness and a sense of belonging – in other words, of sameness. To avoid reinforcing the divisions that already existed, there was a focus on looking into ourselves and into what made us similar, a point tellingly made by Seamus Heaney who noted that 'our pioneers keep striking / inwards and downwards' (Heaney 1969, 56), and the family is perhaps the ultimate source of such sameness. The *Gemeinschaft* has this sense of sameness at its core: it is created through the 'ties of kinship, fellowship, custom, history and communal ownership of primary goods' (Tönnies, Harris, and Hollis 2001, xvii-xviii). Kinship is key, and marriage is very much the primary unit of such organic communities, as it is the core unit around which a community of sameness and relationship is built. Tönnies makes this very clear:

The most important of these is *marriage*, which on the one hand provides the basis for a new family and on the other is formed by a free agreement between man and wife, although this can only be understood in terms of the idea and ethos of the family. Marriage in its moral sense, i.e. monogamy, can be defined as perfect *neighbourhood* – living together in constant physical proximity. Its whole nature consists in community of place by day and night, and the sharing of bed and board; the spouses' spheres of activity and influence are not just adjacent but identical, like the communal fields of fellow villagers. And likewise their *joint ownership of goods* can be seen most clearly in their possession of the same farmland. *[italics original]* (Tönnies, Harris, and Hollis 2001, 205)

Ireland, I would argue, was a *Gemeinschaft,* an organic community where the verities of sameness, or of what Heidegger would term gathering (*Versammlung*), were the core imperatives. Marriage, in the traditional sense of a relationship between man and woman, which produced children, and as a means of interpellating new people into the values and mores of the *Gemeinschaft,* is a core Ideological State Apparatus, to use the terminology of Louis Althusser. He differentiated between the Repressive State Apparatus (the army, the law, the police) and the Ideological State Apparatus (religion, education, the family, the legal and political establishments, the communications media and the arts) (Althusser 2001, 143). This is a way of replicating a culture through each generation, through education, culture and religion, because, as Althusser notes, culture 'is the ordinary name for the Marxist concept of the *ideological*' (Althusser 2001, 242). He views education as the apparatus that has 'replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church' (Althusser 2001: 154).

By making marriage central to the *Gemeinschaft* of Ireland, such ideological conformity was ensured from the beginning of the state. Marriage in Ireland was largely

sacramental, as already noted, but it was also generative of other sacraments for the children of such marriages. Therefore, marriage engendered the baptism of the child, the sacrament of penance, followed by that of first communion, and then later confirmation. Ideally the children would then progress to marriage, and the cycle would be repeated. The end of life was signified by the sacrament of last rites, where one's family surrounded the dying person as the priest ushered him or her into the next life. Thus from the cradle to the grave, the Church provided the ideological signposts which guided the Irish person through their lives, and as family was the central vehicle for the embodiment of this process, so marriage was the transcendental signifier in this whole process. By making marriage religious and quasi-transcendental through its sacramental nature, the Irish Catholic Church was creating what Julia Kristeva sees as a national community which is 'not a political one but organic, evolutionary, at the same time vital and metaphysical—the expression of a nearly irrational and indiscernible spirit that is summed up by the word *Gemeinsinn*' (Kristeva 1991, 176-177).

Thus marriage, from this perspective of maintaining the seminal significance and organic nature of the Irish *Gemeinschaft,* came to be of central importance, and over the years, the Church, with the compliance of the State, made sure that marriage was ideologically constructed to ensure the survival and strengthening of the Catholic worldview. This was especially true in the case of a marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant. In 1908, Pope Pius X, in his *Ne Temere* decree, deemed any marriage performed by a Protestant minister to be 'invalid', and mandated that if a mixed couple wished to be married by a Roman Catholic priest, 'they must sign a written promise that their children would be baptized, educated, and confirmed as Catholics' (Tobin 2012, 172). This decree was enforced rigidly in Ireland, and the net result was that if a Catholic married a Protestant, and they had four children, all of these would be Catholic. So of the six people involved, initially there

were five Catholics and 1 Protestant; by the time the parents dies, all that would be left was four Catholics. It could be seen as a nonviolent and insidious way of ensuring that the *Gemeinschaft* replicated itself and also of stating unambiguously that any forms of difference were gently, but permanently, attenuated. Although there were Protestant TDs, and indeed a Protestant President, 'until the 1960s Irish legislation was almost unquestioningly infused with Catholic morality' (Edwards, Dudley and Hourican, 2005), and those who were not of the *Gemeinschaft* were made feel isolated and marginal to the concerns of the nation.

Hence, as well as being a central pillar of the generation of a sacramental interpellation of subjects into the Catholic religion, marriage as a sacrament was also a central pillar in the gradual decreasing of the other religious group. Thus ideologically as well as religiously, marriage was a core instrument of social control and was constitutive of the *Gemeinschaft* that was Ireland, as it controlled the future by ensuring that children were interpellated as Catholics and were indicted into the ideological position of Irish Catholicism before being able to have any choice in the matter.

I think it now becomes clearer as to the huge importance placed by the Church on civil partnership, but more especially on the essentialist definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman, and also as being the fulcrum around which a family was created and sustained. The notion of same-sex couples being accorded equal status would deal a death knell to this hegemonic mode of control as such marriages would either be childless, or else would use what the Catholic Church would see as 'unnatural' methods of child production, such as *in vitro* fertilization, or surrogacy or donors in order to have children – children who, almost by definition, would not be Catholics. Thus the redefinition of marriage means a substantial and qualitative change in the whole nature of the society, as civil marriages between heterosexual or same-sex couples mean a significant loss of control over the institution by the Catholic Church in the present, and also a significant loss of

control over the ideology of the Irish people of the future. Without a Catholic marriage, there would be no sacraments of baptism, penance, communion, confirmation and last rites, which means that there is now a movement away from the organic *Gemeinschaft,* and a movement towards a more pluralist and democratically motivated notion of choice. The gradual process of secularisation and globalisation of which we spoke earlier had gradually weakened this organic community, and the plurality of views was also gradually introducing the more disparate notion of the *Gesellschaft*, and of the shifting of belief.

The change in the definition and ideological function of marriage was a further, and I would suggest, irrevocable, step in that direction. More choice, created by the pluralisation of opinion-forming agencies and a more educated population becoming active in the public sphere, meant that there has been a gradual loosening of the bonds of the organic community and the redefinition of marriage has been a classic example of the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft,* 'between the older organic societies and those fragmented and atomistic social agglomerations with which we are familiar in the modern world, with their profound subjectivization and their monadization of individual experience' (Jameson 1988, 140). In the *Gesellschaft*, the individual appears to be more the focus of attention than the structural community, and this is very much the type of society in which we are now living. Each individual, with their personal computer in the form of a phone or tablet, is both connected to, and at the same time cut off from, society, and by a swipe of the finger, the communities within which they participate can change a number of times in a short period. This is at variance with the notions of sameness and connection that categorise the *Gemeinschaft,* as the individual now has a choice of communities as opposed to the older system wherein the community had its choice of individuals and interpellated them accordingly, and the core agent of this process was marriage.

In the Irish *Gemeinschaft,* Church and State were at one in marriage – the sacramental and the societal were fused in the same ceremony, and the couple were enculturated into the process of replicating the organic community of Irish Catholicism, even if one of them was not an Irish catholic themselves. To refer back to Kristeva's point, such a ceremony is both organic and evolutionary but at the same time 'vital and metaphysical', and as such, marriage was the *fons et origo* of the Irish Catholic organic community. Now, however, civil marriage is part of the range of options available to couples, and the necessity of couples being heterosexual has also been removed. Hence, over a period of time, the younger generations will increasingly be members of a *Gesellschaft,* where there are individual options and choices available to them. The broader consequences for Church control over society are wide-ranging, as if an growing number of children are not members of the Catholic community in Ireland, then there will be an increasing demand for more choice in the provision of health and, crucially, education, and the process of pluralisation will increase exponentially, as the Church retreats from its position of societal and cultural dominance to one of ever-increasing marginality in a society 'as a conglomerate of alienated individuals' (Žižek 1991, 163-164). In such a secularising and globalising society, the question will be 'whether people have the feeling of belonging together *(Gemeinschaft)* or whether they see their ties with others more as a contractual link, something more exterior' (Ricœur and Taylor 1986, 189).

The consequences for society are very much what we are seeing in the Ireland of today – a forward-looking place, which is open to many cultural, political and religious influences. Not all of these are positive, and there are many people experiencing feelings of alienation and a longing for the older sense of belonging and community that can express itself in a 'generally negative attitude in relation to modernity and their nostalgia for an original community of the *Gemeinschaft* type' (Mouffe 1993, 32). However, as the newer

generations replace the old, the Irish Catholic *Gemeinschaft* will become a fading memory and the individualised, consumer-capitalist-driven society that is in the process of development, will be the norm. The connections between Catholicism and Irish nationalism have already been noted, and here one might agree with Benedict Anderson when he talks about the consequences of this connection:

> If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings. As this affinity is by no means fortuitous, it may be useful to begin a consideration of the cultural roots of nationalism with death, as the last of a whole gamut of fatalities. (Anderson 1991, 10)

It is under the rubric of Anderson's notion of death that the essay concludes, as we look at the consequences of the move from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* for the Irish Catholic Church. The Church in Ireland was focused on becoming part of an Irish organic community, and it was entrenched in the structures and the mechanisms of the state from the beginning of Irish independence. Catholic priests and bishops have had *ex officio* positions on boards of management of schools and educational institutions at all levels in Irish society and have had de facto control over hospitals and health policy until relatively recently. Structurally, the Church was a partner with the State in the creation and perpetration of an organic community. In recent years, issues such as the ones discussed, as well as the infamous clerical child abuse scandals and institutional cover up of many such instances have left the Church bereft of moral authority which meant that in recent campaigns, they have been unable to mount as vigorous a statement of their own position, and the hierarchy have been quite restrained, using groups like the Iona Institute as proxies to voice their position. It is one of the core ironies of the Irish situation that it was the moral majoritarian position of the Catholic Church on sex outside marriage which resulted in so many pregnant young women being forced to

put their children into Church-run institutions, orphanages and Magdalen Laundries, as it was these very places wherein Church abuse of children and teenagers took place and led, in many ways, to the downfall of the structural hegemonic position of the Church in Irish society.

Having been so involved in the structural trappings of societal control and ideological formation, it could be said that the central Christian message, which is, after all, the core reason for the Church's existence, has become rather lost in the paperwork, and now, in a society which it no longer controls, and wherein it no longer has a strong moral or ethical authority, the Church is searching for a new sense of vocation. Whether or not it can find this, with falling Mass attendances, diminishing sacramental participation and a decline in the quality, and probably the quality, of vocations, is a moot point. Only prophets can predict what the future may hold, and they are thin on the ground in Ireland at present. However, just as we began with a fiction that spoke, in an oblique way, the truth about reality, so we will conclude with the same book. In *Small Gods*, there is a discussion between Om, the god turned into a tortoise due to lack of belief, and Brutha about an old scroll by Abraxas, a philosopher who had written on Religion. In this discussion there is an account of what happens to the core belief of a religion, or 'the worship of a godde', when it becomes part of the structural matrix of a society with lots of power and authority. It is a message that, while fictive, holds within it a strong grain of truth:

> Abraxas says here: 'Around the Godde there forms a Shelle of prayers and Ceremonies and Buildings and Priestes and Authority, until at Last the Godde Dies. Ande this maye notte be noticed.'
>
> 'That can't be true!'
>
> 'I think it is. Abraxas says there's a kind of shellfish that lives in the same way. It makes a bigger and bigger shell until it can't move around any more, and so it dies.'

'But ... but ... that means ... the whole Church ...'

'Yes.' (Pratchett 1992, 177)

The second last sentence, ending on an ellipses, is an example of the rhetorical trope of *aposiopesis*. This term is derived from is derived from a Greek words *apo* ('away from') and *siope* (silent) so it means 'becoming silent' and which signifies an unfinished thought. The *aposiopesis* here is telling as Brutha is unwilling to follow the comparison to its logical conclusion; just as the shellfish dies because it is gradually suffocated by the external aspects of its shell, so too the church will die as it is gradually suffocated by the external trappings of its own structure. The living, breathing shellfish dies because it can no longer move; the living breathing message of the church 'love your neighbour', and 'do unto others as you would have them so unto you', is similarly in danger of being lost in the welter of legalistic and conservative attempts to retain control of a *Gemeinschaft* that is no longer a reality. Irish society is now a *Gesellschaft*, and the Church must come to terms with this, and reimagine itself if it is to be a living participant of this new social and cultural structure. In future referenda and cultural conversations, the Catholic Church must be on the side of equality, fairness and a sense of justice, and if this means changing its rules then this must be done. Otherwise, the church, like Abraxas's shellfish, will wither and die, and we know this because this is a process that has happened before, and we are possibly in the middle of watching it happen again in an Ireland where belief has most definitely shifted.

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