

# Man killed 'life-long' friend over can of beer

A MAN who stabbed his 'life-long' friend in a fight over a can of beer has been found not guilty of his murder but guilty of manslaughter.

The five-day Central Criminal Court trial heard evidence that Paul Keating, 51, knifed father-of-six Mark Richardson, 47, in the chest at his family home.

The stab wound severed the main pulmonary artery causing very heavy bleeding.

Keating of Harmonstown Road, Artane, Dublin 5, pleaded not guilty to murder but guilty to the manslaughter of Mr Richardson on March 16, 2017. The victim died in hospital an hour after the stabbing at his home on Harmonstown Road.

By Alison O'Riordan

Keating told gardai it was the last thing on his mind to injure his friend, that he had just 'lost it' when the deceased had him by his neck and that he felt sickened by what he had done.

A jury of six men and six women yesterday found Keating not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter by unanimous verdict.

Members of Mr Richardson's family wept when the verdict was announced.

During the trial, Aisling Kenny, the partner of Mr Richardson, gave evidence that she saw Paul Keating stabbing his friend with a long kitchen knife after

they got into a scuffle.

Dean Connors, Mr Richardson's adult son, testified that a 'discussion' arose between his father and Keating as to who owned a can of beer that his father gave him when he visited that evening.

Kim Valentine, partner of Mr Connors, gave evidence that she heard a kitchen drawer 'being slammed open' before she saw Keating stab Mr Richardson with a kitchen knife.

She said that Keating 'just snapped' and she saw 'a whole change'.

Judge Robert Eagar adjourned sentencing until December 14 and remanded Keating in custody until that date.

## Dr Mark Dooley



### MORAL MATTERS

## Question your religion, but respect faith

**W**HAT constitutes the spiritual life? For most people, it means living a selfless existence in which others take priority. In the great religious traditions, this means observing laws and commandments which are divinely decreed.

The religion that does not ask us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and love the enemy is no religion at all.

That is why, at their best, religious and spiritual people are tolerant, merciful and deeply caring. Their mission in this life is to lessen the burden of it for others.

It is true that not all religious people are loving, caring and kind. Across the world, violence caused by religious hatred is commonplace. Yet, what would the world look like if it had not been civilised by the religious attitude?

We owe to that attitude our great traditions of art, architecture and music. More importantly, the divine injunction to do unto others as you have them do unto you, has become the moral bedrock of Western society.

It is rooted in our hearts and has made us the people we are.

We stand in the shadow of sacred things despite having taken a secular turn. For those who take them seriously, sacred things are a source of meaning and consolation. At the most crucial times of life – birth, union and death – we still look to the sacred to make sense of our joys and sorrows.

Next week, we shall be asked to vote in a referendum on our blasphemy laws. For many, those laws should have no place in the constitution of a modern European nation. What's more, they are widely considered a violation of free speech.

But should protecting the sacred from abuse or insult be considered a denial of free speech?

After all, we don't consider it a denial of free speech when we enact laws to protect minorities from abuse. If anything, we regard it as fundamental to their human rights.

Do religious people not have similar rights? It is true that we have laws against the incitement of religious hatred. But does mocking or insulting sacred things count as incitement to hatred?

To make fun of the Eucharist, for example, may not incite hatred,

but it will deeply wound many people. That is because, for them, it is the most sacred thing this side of eternity. It is the cornerstone of their beliefs and their existence.

Do those people not deserve the same rights and protections as others?

At a time when our language is being radically pruned so as not to offend anyone, should we not also have laws that prevent abuse of sacred things? Is it that, unlike others, religious believers are fair game?

This is not to say that religions should be permitted to hide behind blasphemy laws to avoid scrutiny.

Asking the hard questions of any religion is an imperative – especially in an age of terrorism and fundamentalism.

But there is a big difference between criticising the practices of religious people and insulting those things which they hold most sacred.

Critically questioning the teachings of a particular preacher, imam or priest is neither blasphemy nor sacrilege.

But to gratuitously mock the sacred rites, rituals and beliefs of religion is to offend what is, to millions, the beating heart of life itself. It is to wound people at the deepest level and to attack what is most intrinsic to their identity.

**I**F sacred things were respected, what need would we have of a law against blasphemy? Indeed, what we need are less laws and more respect for those things which matter most to people. But who can trust that such respect will be observed without some legal protection?

It is very easy to insult spiritual or religious people, their sacred values and holy rites. But it is not so easy to repair the damage done to ordinary believers.

For it is the faith of the elderly lady, the child kneeling beside her bed, or the grief-stricken soul sobbing by the tomb, which gives comfort beyond anything the world can offer.

Respecting this is to acknowledge that, even if we are not religious, many of our fellow citizens are. For them, life acquires its value in light of the sacred. To insult it is, therefore, to plunder what is most precious to people who have caused you no harm.

Respect is not something we can legislate for but is something that stems from the law of the heart: 'Do unto others...'

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