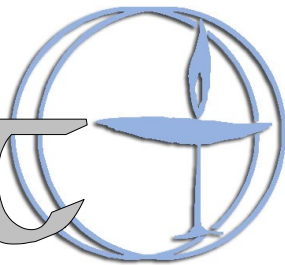


# Oscailt



February 2021

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.17 Nº 2



**Oscailt** since January 2005 has become the monthly magazine for Irish Unitarians. Originally it was the calendar for Dublin but due to popular demand by non members this new format was born and continues to grow and flourish.

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**Front Cover:** Detail from the Digby window.  
(photo P.Spain)

## CONTENTS

### Sunday Rota February 2021 3

### Moving Mountains

*Elaine Harris* 4

### Stop being so religious

*Rev.Bridget Spain* 9

### Last Supper

*Dr.Martin Pulbrook* 13

### William Arthur Digby

*Rory Delany* 15

### Book Review

17

### Conspiracy Theory

*Rev.Mike O'Sullivan* 20

### Letter of Thanks

24

# Oscailt

Our magazine title, *Oscailt*, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the mans ears to open up with Aramic word "Ephphatha" - open ! The Irish word *oscailt*, (from the verb *oscail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

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PodCast of the church service is available on the church website.

LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH  
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT  
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.

TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE

TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM

TO SERVE MANKIND IN FELLOWSHIP

TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW IN HARMONY  
WITH THE DIVINE

THIS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD.

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**Dublin Unitarian Church**  
112 St.Stephens Green Dublin D02 YP23.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

**Sunday Rota for February 2021**

**7<sup>th</sup> February**

Service **Rev.Bridget Spain** *Security Serenity Peace of Mind*  
Reader Frank Kelly

**14<sup>th</sup> February**

Service **Rev.Bridget Spain** *Coptic Christianity and Ireland*  
Reader Patrick Rogers

**21<sup>st</sup> February**

Service **Pamela McCarthy** *Aunt Jobiska*  
Reader Dorene Grocock

**28<sup>th</sup> February**

Service **Rev.Bridget Spain** *Harvesting Hope*  
Reader Andrew Connolly

**Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.**

**On our WebCam, click and connect at  
[www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)**

**PodCast are also available at the same website.**

# Moving Mountains

*one stone at a time*

This address is inspired by an address by an American Unitarian, the Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen from the summer of 2019 and I've borrowed her title too "Moving mountains, one stone at a time". Elizabeth prefaces her address with the following:

**As Unitarian Universalists, our journey is to transform the big and the small, to transform ourselves, and to transform the world.**

Lao Tzu said "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step".

And the title of this address also echoes Confucius' words: "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones."

**Today I'm exploring what taking that first step can do to transform ourselves and the world**

The concept of changing yourself to change the world is one embraced by many philosophies and belief systems.

The Persian mystic Rumi said

"Yesterday I was clever so I wanted to change the world,  
Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."

The Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt has written, "The truth is this: If there is no justice, there will be no peace . . . if we cannot bring justice to the small circle of our own individual lives, we cannot hope to bring justice to the world. And if we do not bring justice to the world, none of us is safe and none of us will survive"

And you don't have to look too hard for examples of people who have achieved great things after taking a first, small step.

Small steps like a 15 year old Swedish girl standing all alone with her sign outside her school protesting about climate change and now that first small step by Greta Thunberg has inspired millions of other young people globally to strike for global climate change and forced this area of concern to be higher up on the agenda of many reluctant politicians.

Small steps like when, in 1984, a 21-year-old cashier in Dunnes Stores, Henry St, Mary Manning, refused to put some South Africa oranges through her till in a protest against the South African apartheid regime. She was suspended and nine of her colleagues walked out the door with her and this small step led to a wide-spread boycott of South African goods and eventually resulted in the Irish government being the first in the western world to ban the importation of South African goods. The impact of this small act, this single step, can be measured by the fact that Nelson Mandela said it gave him “great hope and inspiration” whilst he was still in prison.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg said: “Real change, enduring change happens one step at a time” and instinctively we know this is to be true.

Anyone who has tried to change anything, be it something with a global impact or just a change we want to see in ourselves, knows it’s that first small step that is key, it’s that getting up and deciding to start and then to take the next small step and the next one and sometimes to go back to the beginning again and start all over again with another small step.

Marci Shimoff, an American author sums up this approach nicely:

“To make the quickest progress, you don’t have to take huge leaps. You just have to take baby steps - and keep on taking them. In Japan, they call this approach kaizen, which literally translates as ‘continual improvement.’ Using kaizen, great and lasting success is achieved through small, consistent steps. It turns out that slow and steady is the best way to overcome your resistance to change.”

As I spoken of here before, I’m a chemist and have worked at the bench, in industry and lecturing for over a quarter of a century and progress in my field is almost always through incremental steps, thousands of tiny steps each of which moves our knowledge and skill along centimetre by centimetre until the sum of the knowledge acquired leads to new drugs or vaccines or technologies.

Normally the path to the development of a drug or vaccine takes over a decade from identifying what we call the druggable target, though in vitro/ in-vivo pre-clinical development, to early stage clinical trials looking at if a drug is safe in a handful of volunteers, to large scale clinical trials involving thousands of volunteers, to look at how efficacious the therapeutic is. This process is necessarily very time consuming and expensive and the typical chance of success

from identifying the first potential drug target through to producing a tablet or a vial that you get in the pharmacy is estimated to be 1 in 10,000 – that means for every 10,000 initial possible druggable targets identified by a scientist in a research lab, only one ends up being manufactured. In the industry we call this the “leaky sieve” and lots of people, including me are trying to reduce these timelines and increase the odds of success for developing drugs. But progress has been very slow.

A stunning example of a change in the way we produce new therapeutics is in the development of a COVID 19 vaccine. You may have seen the very positive news reported this week of interim Phase III clinical trials of a vaccine being developed in collaboration by Pfizer and BioNTech. The progress of this vaccine through pre-clinical and clinical trials is extraordinary and truly is an example of thousands and thousands of scientists, clinicians and clinical trial volunteers moving a mountain one stone at a time.

By the time that the first cases of COVID19 were being diagnosed outside of China in early January 2020, scientists worldwide were already working on developing therapeutics and vaccines to combat it. All across the world in academic and commercial R&D labs, scientists were working on isolating the genetic component of the virus. Normally this happens in isolation in individual labs or with a very limited number of collaborators, but this time there was an understanding that this approach wasn't going to work, a fundamental change in the way research happens needed to occur. Many research groups began to published their results as open source – making them available for everyone else working in the field and this had the effect of significantly decreasing the time taken for the pre-clinical phase of the work on developing a new vaccine. Many prestigious journals expedited publishing articles containing this data and in some cases made it available for free. On March the 16<sup>th</sup>, the National Institute of Health in America announced the start of the first clinical trial for a potential Covid19 vaccine. To put this in context - this was 3 days after our government announced the first lockdown, just over 2 weeks since the first diagnosed case in Ireland and less than two months since the first COVID-19 case appeared in the United States.

In effect almost all R&D in the pharma industry pivoted and focussed on development of new vaccines for COVID19. By May companies, like Moderna and Pfizer were announcing that they were ready to enter into Phase 1 clinical trials for their vaccine candidates.

To ensure that a vaccine or a drug is both safe and efficacious you need to trial it in thousands of people – this is a process that typically take up to 5 years or more, and involves engaging clinics to take part, enrolling volunteers, dosing and monitoring the volunteers, but this year in the fight against a global pandemic, many people taking many small steps at the same time did the heavy lifting here. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers who wanted to be involved in the clinical trials were recruited, clinics and doctors rapidly enrolled them and scientists and clinicians and statisticians world-wide rapidly prepared for analysis of the trial data.

Many of the bodies that regulate the approval of drugs world-wide collaborated and agreed a broadly common approach for assessment of these new vaccines (this was really significant as it is something we've tried and failed achieve in the industry for decades). Interim trial data, that is the data from the trials while they are still happening, was released publically, allowing other groups to benefit immediately from those learnings.

At the same time companies and governments were collaborating in ways not seen before – plans were being made to produce commercial batches of the vaccines that were currently in clinical trials, even before it was clear if they were going to work or not. Telescoping of these steps that normally take place sequentially meant that the development timelines for the vaccine have been reduced from years to months and not only does it look very likely that there will be a number of viable vaccines available either later this year or early next year, but there will also be a sufficient supply to vaccinate billions of people.

I've found myself reflecting on the arc of this work and although it's a million miles away from most of our daily lives, it is amazing to think of the progress being brought about by millions of tiny incremental steps by hundreds and thousands of volunteers and scientists and clinicians in labs and hospitals and manufacturing plants all over the world and that some day soon all this effort will hopefully mean that you and I can be back in our church in Stephen's Green in person, enjoying singing our hymns and sharing our time of community prayer and reflection.

But for now we're all stuck at home, watching this service on zoom and our world has shrunk to a physical radius of 5km. This has been a very challenging time for everyone, even if we have been lucky and our loved ones have not contracted COVID19, we have



been physically separated from those we love, we've missed graduations and birthdays and weddings and funerals, some of us have lost our employment or our businesses and everyone is struggling with the limitations these restrictions have imposed.

Our world is smaller and more isolated and it can be easy to feel that this leaves us unable to engage and contribute in ways that we might have before. But maybe, just maybe there is an opportunity in this enforced pause, maybe there are new, tiny, tentative first steps we can take – maybe it's to try something we've always wanted to do, maybe it's to write a note to reach out to someone we've lost touch with, maybe it's to write a card to a prisoner of conscience, I'm sure each of you can come up with many more meaningful examples that have resonance in your lives, something that speaks to you and moves you. And maybe now is the time for that teeny tiny step, one you don't have to announce from the rooftops, one you don't have to tell anyone else about. Maybe it's time for that one step that suggests itself if you listen to that quiet voice that speaks when you give yourself the time and place to hear it, one that might just make your soul sing – and who knows it might just be that first step on a precious road to moving a mountain!

*Elaine Harris*

Dublin Unitarian Church

# Stop being so religious like that!

The poet Hafiz wrote

*What  
Do Sad people have in  
Common?  
It seems  
They have all built a shrine  
To the past  
And often go there  
And do a strange wail and  
Worship.  
What is the beginning of  
Happiness?  
It is to stop being  
so religious  
Like  
That.*

This poem was written more than seven hundred years ago; it addresses the perennial issue of the place of change within religion. Should religion remain forever set in stone or should religion change and develop over time? This is an important question particularly for Unitarians; we are often accused of not having **core beliefs**.

In the Judeo Christian tradition we are told that God is eternal - God has always existed. That God created human beings in his image. Being created in the image of God allocates to humans a privileged place in the created world and has led to the quip that “if God created humanity in his likeness then humans have been quick to repay the compliment”. Meaning that God is a human construct used to keep social order and as a crutch to help humans live with the reality of death. Just to reiterate that I have no definition for the word God I use it to include the mystery of our origins, existence and destiny.

We are also told that from time to time that God directly intervened in human affairs. God did this in order to inform humans how they should live in order to be in right relationship with God. So God sent the prophets, he gave Moses the commandments and in due course sent Jesus as a messenger.

This is the story of one religion - it is the one we inherited. But there are other stories and other faiths. Are **we** the inheritors of the only true account of God and his interaction with humanity? Or is it more probable that all religions are the fruits of human endeavour to understand the puzzle of existence?

Are Unitarians wrong when we say that there are many paths to God all of them valid? The path we follow is probably due to the accident of where we happened to be born. Is it acceptable to pick and mix our spirituality from different faiths or should we remain firmly within the bounds of a liberal form of Christianity?

I am sceptical of accounts that several thousand years ago God communicated directly and exclusively with one particular nation. I believe that as human beings we have within us an element of the spiritual. To put it differently humans are spiritual beings living a human experience. I believe that through out history that many people have explored the spiritual part of human nature and that they have gained valuable insight into how we can live the best life possible.

What constitutes the best lived life differs over time and in different circumstances. None of the ancient religions **directly** address caring for the environment; this was not an issue in their day. It is important for the people that inhabit a world of seven billion people. There is no single answer to how humans should live. When we look at the history of religions we see that often fresh religious insight emerges from the times of wars and upheaval.

An example of this is the teachings of Confucius. Confucius lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE at a time of political upheaval. His teaching emphasised tradition, ritual and duty; Confucius was very rigid about how people should live. We can see that at times of upheaval and uncertainty Confucius sought order in society.

Then we have Lau Tzu who was born around or shortly after the time of Confucius. Lau Tzu is the author of the Tau Te Ching. In contrast with the teachings of Confucius Lau Tzu told his followers to relax and just be:-

*“Be content with what you have;*

*rejoice in the way things are,  
when you realise that there is nothing lacking  
the whole world belongs to you."*

He said of ritual that "*Ritual is the husk of true faith,  
The beginning of chaos*".

In these two ancient faiths we see how they developed in response to the experiences of ordinary people of their time and **as a reaction to one another**. This pattern is repeated in the history of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions. It is a religion based on rituals performed by members of the Brahmin priestly cast. It is important that the rituals are performed in exactly the correct manner. Sidharta Gautama who became the Buddha grew up in the Hindu tradition. Having dedicated himself to Hindu practices he found them to be unsatisfactory and went on to develop his own spiritual path. Buddha's insight was that rituals do not change the individual. Through meditation the Buddha penetrated the true nature of existence. According to Buddhism the knowledge of the truth of existence is transformative. This knowledge cannot be achieved through prayer or ritual it must be experienced by the individual.

Christianity developed from within the Jewish tradition. It divested itself of most of the Jewish laws but with one important exception. The practice of sharing bread and wine which is a central part of Christianity is in fact an ancient Jewish tradition.

There are other examples where religion developed in reaction to perceived problems within an existing tradition. Disputes between Hindus and Muslims led to the formation of Sikhism; the reformation was in part a reaction to traditions that had grown up in the Catholic Church.

From this morning's reading we saw that Anthony de Mello used the riches of other traditions to vitalise his spiritual practices. We saw that his students, those who attended his retreats and the readers of his many books found the practice to be beneficial. The official church felt threatened by them and it tried to silence him.

The Dalai Lama spoke about the merits of different religions. Religions he said are like medicines the best medicine is the one

that works for you. A particular antibiotic may not work for one person but may be a perfect cure for someone else. So too with religion different religions suit different people.

For example this church has its roots in Christianity; however I can't imagine members of this church at an evangelical prayer meeting!

Despite the differences between different religions all of them have as their starting point, the golden rule, *treat other people as you would wish to be treated*. If we all followed that rule the world would be heaven on earth. However religion is more than just the "golden rule" it is about self knowledge and tuning into the spirit.

Sages tell us we do this through quiet meditation and contemplation and through experiencing our connection with all living things. It is work we must do ourselves – it cannot be delegated to a priest or a church. Every soul has the knowledge of what is the right path for them. When de Mello followed **his** right path his teaching inspired his students. When he followed an inauthentic path this work was meaningless.

Religion that is alive changes and develops. Real religion is life enhancing it is generous. It brings out the best in us. Genuine religion is not something we inherit or read in a book that is the first step we grow our faith within ourselves.

*Rev. Bridget Spain*  
Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

Dublin 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021

# Last Supper

## *The Romanian 'Last Supper' picture*

In November 2019 I bought from a curio and second-hand shop in Dublin a 2-record LP set (undated, but I guess from the 1970s) entitled “*Romanian Byzantine Liturgy*”, produced under the auspices of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church. What interests me here is a picture on the front of the record-sleeve, described as “The Last Supper, miniature from a Romanian manuscript of the 17<sup>th</sup> century”. The picture is reproduced on the back cover.

What is of particular interest is that elements of the picture date to a very long time before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in fact to very earliest times. And it is some of these that I wish to examine now. The survival of these primitive details should come as no real surprise; for in the days of hand-written manuscripts successive generations of scribes tended to copy and re-copy things handed down from generation to generation and from century to century. And it is in this context, of survival of something very primitive, that this Romanian picture is of such particular and considerable importance.

The picture includes thirteen people, Jesus and his Twelve Disciple, and I wish to identify four of the twelve here.

(1) Twelve of the thirteen are depicted with a halo, and only one - going round the table from Jesus's left, to the very end of the bench at the middle in the front - without. This must - for obvious reasons - be Judas Iscariot.

(2) In John's Gospel (13.23 and 25) it is assumed to be John who leans at table on Jesus's breast. But the person doing so in the Romanian picture is clearly a woman. In my Dublin address “John and Mary” of 24<sup>th</sup> February 2019 (published in *Oscailt* in March 2019) I suggested that Mary Magdalene was one of The Twelve, and that when the ‘centralising Church’ “wrote her out of the script”, John became used in official circles as ‘substitute’. Interestingly and importantly, Mary, in the Romanian picture, it in her rightful place. And, intriguingly, where the men have golden haloes, Mary has a yellow one. One 19<sup>th</sup>centu-

ry reference book (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol.21, 1886, p.146) has remarked that saffron “was a royal colour in early ... times, though afterwards perhaps from its abundant use ... as a scented salve, it was especially appropriated by [prostitutes]” - thus the use of this colour in the Romanian picture may be an unwarranted slur on Mary’s character.

(3) John himself is described as “very young” in the *Pistis Sophia* (Book 1, bottom of p.66 in G.R.S.Mead’s edition and translation), and general church tradition holds that John was, by quite a long way, the youngest of The Twelve. Only two of the Twelve, apart from Mary, do not have beards in the Romanian picture, and the younger of these is clearly the man sitting next to Judas Iscariot. This must in the circumstances be John.

(4) If John was so young, his brother James cannot have been an older man, one of the several disciples with grey hair and beards. On the immediate left of Jesus and Mary is a grey-haired man. Beyond him, on his left, is a younger man, bearded but with a marked facial resemblance to John. This must be James.

*Dr.Martin Pulbrook,*

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019

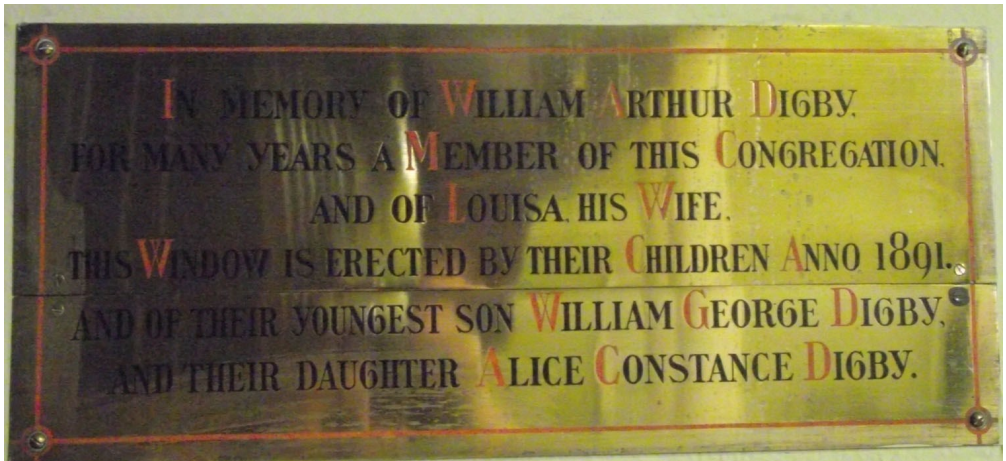
# William Arthur Digby

William Arthur Digby was a trustee of the Eustace Street Meeting House and of the Widow's Alms House on Cork Street that was in the ownership of Eustace Street congregation. He was also a trustee of some of the funds of that congregation. He lived on Eccles Street but later moved to Templeogue.

William Arthur Digby was born about 1816, and Louisa (Morrison) Digby his wife born about 1829, had at least four children all baptised at Eustace Street Meeting House, in the 1850's. These four included their daughter Edith (named on the headstone) who was about 22 years old when she died. They had at least three other children, including the two infants whose deaths are recorded on the headstone at Delgany Cemetery Co Wicklow. After his death in 1889 a legacy was left to the St. Stephens Green church, 'the Digby Fund'.

The plaque below is on the wall under the Digby Memorial window (picture front cover) we cannot find a signature on the window, it could be French, English or Irish in origin.

Delgany Cemetery Co Wicklow No.3148





The wording on the family gravestone

Sacred  
To the beloved Memory of  
EDITH FLORENCE DIGBY  
second and dearly loved daughter  
of  
WILLIAM ARTHUR and LOUISA DIGBY  
She died 1<sup>st</sup> October 1877  
at Delgany, Co. Wicklow  
"She being dead yet speaketh"  
"Let not your heart be troubled,  
neither let it be afraid"  
"In my Father's house are many mansions"  
Also  
of their beloved infant children  
FLORENCE MARY and ARTHUR FRANCIS  
who died at Idrone, Templeogue,  
Co Dublin in 1865 and 1867  
aged 16 months, and 18 months  
"Not lost, but gone before"  
Also  
To the Cherished Memory of  
the above beloved mother  
LOUISA DIGBY  
who died 4<sup>th</sup> April 1879  
aged 50 years  
"Unto the upright there ariseth  
Light in the darkness"  
Also of her husband  
WILLIAM ARTHUR DIGBY  
who died April 9<sup>th</sup> 1889, aged 73 years  
"The pure in heart shall see God"

*Rory Delany*  
Dublin Unitarian Church

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for December 2020.**

# **Little Dorrit**

by  
*Charles Dickens*



“Little Dorrit” is similar in its style and length to many other Dickens novels. Dickens chose to write in about 16-20 monthly instalments, and was paid for each one, so it benefitted him to be verbose.

He is a good writer, but his style is of his time and I find it too long-winded. I described the book as reminding me of a pannetone Italian Christmas cake - acres of dry and dull sponge with the occasional piece of delicious fruit! Another member told me pannetone is meant to be dunked in an alcoholic drink, and this would certainly benefit Dickens’ work.

The heroine is far too good to be true. I only read a quarter of the tome, but what I learnt about her subsequent behaviour from my fellow readers did not make me think better of her! Many of the characters are ‘stock’, and even more of them are totally unnecessary, adding nothing to the plot.

800+ pages is too much to read in a month, even were it light and fluffy. I have suggested that if we ever try to read another Dickens, that we might try it the way the Victorians met it, in 20 monthly episodes. These books were, for them, the equivalent of Downton Abbey, or Upstairs Downstairs, and no-one tried to take it all in at once. I’m sure people back then discussed it over their tea, wondering if this character had any bearing on the story, and what would so-and-so do next.

I do love Dickens’ saying that an old lady was now in a nursing home of sorts, with ‘many other old ladies of both sexes’. My Dad used to use this saying of some of his colleagues, but I didn’t know where it came from. Along with the ‘Yes Minister’ type descriptions of the Circumlocution Office, it was one of the pieces of candied fruit in the dry cake!

## *Madeline Stringe*

Little Dorrit, more precisely Amy Dorrit, is the third child of William Dorrit who at the beginning of the story has spent 16 years in the Marshalsea debtors prison. In all that time he has done nothing to address the problems

which has led to his illegal incarceration. Amy cares for her father and unknown to him earns the money to support them by doing embroidery outside the prison. It is while doing this work that she first makes the acquaintance of Arthur Clennman.

As the story begins Clennman is returning to London to his mother after spending 20 years in China in business with his father who has recently died. As he has passed through areas of the world where plague is raging he is quarantined in Marseilles. While in lockup he makes the acquaintance of two prisoners Rigaud awaiting trial for murdering his wife and Cavalletto, an Italian, accused of minor smuggling. Both of these characters will eventually make their way to London and play significant roles in the development of the plot.

A host of other more minor characters assist in moving the story onward as well as becoming Dickens mouthpieces in passing harsh judgements on the extreme poverty and other injustices of early Victorian England. He reserves a special antipathy for the "Circumlocution Office" (The Treasury)

From early on we sense that Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennman are going to end up together but it is only in the last, rushed instalment of the story that this happens. Before this William Dorrit, through the assistance of Mr. Meagles, has regained the wealth which had been unjustly taken from him, has taken his family and friends on a hugely expensive European trip, has become increasingly haughty. He loses his fortune again and dies.

Arthur Clennman has also had financial ups and downs and has spent sometime in the same debtors prison where William Dorrit had lived for so long that he had acquired the title "the father of the Marshalsea". As the story ends, a close acquaintance of Arthur, the inventor Daniel Doyce, pays off his debts and gives him back his job. Once free of prison Arthur and Amy get married.

Like most of Dickens novels this is a very long read, 764 pages in the printed edition, I used in parallel with my Kindle. In all it took me thirty two hours to read the book. I am glad I read it and never found a sufficiently good reason to stop reading. It entertained me, gave me insights into life in early Victorian Britain and in London in particular and left me with the hope that the fictional characters Amy and Arthur attained the type of life together

that Dickens foresaw for them in the final paragraphs of the book. After taking part in the book club discussion I am less negative about “Little Dorrit” than I was initially.

I do find there is a certain sameness about reading Dickens. The underlying structure does not change much from novel to novel. For example “Our Mutual Friend” is very similar in structure to “Little Dorrit”. Lizzie, the heroine of “Our Mutual friend” is much like Amy Dorrit, self effacing, reserved, at the beck and call of domineering parents but possessed of an inner resilience which allows them to gradually and calmly assert themselves . Somehow they both manage to triumph over all the adversities that impinge on their lives.

Regardless of how we feel about Dickens’ novels they retain an attraction for readers more than one hundred and fifty years after Dickens’ death. Many of the stories have been adapted countless times as successful plays and movies and musicals. Good bookshops continue to stock many of the most popular of his books. Criticism of Dickens has ebbed and flowed since his death but his appeal to the general reader remains. He continues to be by far the most popular of Victorian novelists. People clearly find in his novels enjoyment and insights into the nineteenth century world in which he lived.

*Tony Shine*

Dublin Unitarian Church

# Conspiracy Theory

I suspect for many of us the first time we became aware of the phrase “conspiracy theory” it was around the death of American president John F Kennedy. If you’re a bit younger, your first exposure was with the death of Elvis Presley. The theory that Elvis hadn’t infact died. It inspired numerous sightings and a hit song for Kirsty McCaul.

Conspiracy theories have abounded around the death of the famous, JFK, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and more recently, princess Diana. The earliest recorded such theory, concerns the Roman Emperor, Nero, who took his own life in 68 AD. It is here that you can see that these theories replicate themselves over and over again. Many in Rome believed that Nero had faked his own death, was lying low and would return to rule once more. Echoes of Elvis!

A conspiracy theory is defined as a “belief that some covert but influential organisation is responsible for an unexplained event” and one of the most bizarre concerning a person, was that which still persists around Paul McCartney. According to the theory, he was killed in a car crash in 1966. He was replaced by a look-a-like, an orphan from Scotland called William Campbell. What’s more the Beatles were all a part of it and left numerous clues in their songs and on their album covers.

Theories have also abounded around space; the 1969 Moon landing was staged at a secret location in California and around extra-terrestrial life and the existence of aliens. Area 51 in Roswell, New Mexico perhaps the best known. The blockbuster Hollywood movie, “Men in Black” which starred Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones was actually based on a conspiracy theory that believes the “Men in Black” do actually exist. And then there are the theories that aliens are here and have taken on human form. It is a theory pushed by former BBC presenter, David Ike, who has claimed that the entire Bush family, Margaret Thatcher, the British Royal

family and rather bizarrely, the comedian, Bob Hope were all aliens who took on human form.

And then there is a theory that has great traction at the moment, the New World Order. It believes that a group of international elites control the worlds governments, industry and media. What's more their Head Quarters is a secret city built under Denver International airport. I must confess, I have often wondered do the New World Order know their secret location isn't a secret anymore and has anybody else noticed the building work at Cork Airport? You haven't, I prove my point!

My own personal favourite in terms of relatively harmless conspiracy theories are the estimated 130 million people, who despite some pretty damning and conclusive evidence believe the Earth is flat. I'm assuming that an around the world cruise wouldn't be their choice of holiday!

In recent times these theories have come more and more into the mainstream, thanks to the widespread availability of the internet and social media. It is easy to laugh off many conspiracy theories, it is easy to be mildly amused by others. Many though are dangerous with dark and sinister motives.

A theory that begun hundreds of years ago concerning the Jewish race and banking was responsible for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi's with the most horrific consequences the world has witnessed. In recent years, there has been a dark and sinister element at play in America and it has been at the forefront of the Trump presidency. The events on Capitol Hill last Wednesday night (6<sup>th</sup> January 2021), were not spur of the moment, it was the drip feeding of conspiracy theories across social media for the past four years.

Here in Ireland, we have seen the rise of conspiracy theories around COVID-19 and this has led to reckless and irresponsible behaviour. Thankfully, it is a small minority whose voice is being heard less and less. They are now reduced to trolling news stories on Facebook and Twitter. I think as a result of this pandemic, we have all become adept

at our use of social media, we have learnt that the internet can be a dark place, full of dangerous and malicious information.

Comments I have heard aimed at and about the Chief Medical Officer Tony Hoolihan are disgraceful, designed only to undermine, disrupt and sow the seeds of division. That's what conspiracy theorists do. To them the world is a place that is dangerous, people cannot be trusted, people in authority are the enemy. They hide behind valued and cherished freedoms such as the right to protest and the right to free speech. They seek these values for themselves using them to subvert the democratic will, to sow hatred and division.

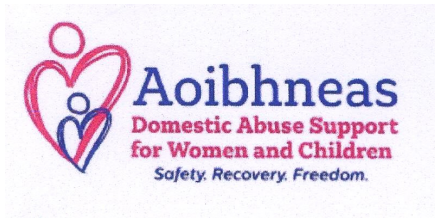
But let's end on a serious note! Remember I told you that Paul McCartney had been killed in 1966, well that's old news. Among popular conspiracy theories gaining traction today are that the Beatles didn't actually exist. The rap star, Jay Z is a time travelling vampire. That Barrack Obama controlled the weather to deflect attention from his policies. The dinosaurs built the pyramids and my own favourite from David Ike, the moon doesn't actually exist, it's a hologram placed in the sky by persons unknown.

And of course, there's a guy who works down at the chip shop who swears he's Elvis.

*Rev. Mike O'Sullivan*

Unitarian Church, Cork

10<sup>th</sup> January 2021



On behalf of the Board, Staff, and clients of Aoibhneas, we would like to say a huge *Thank You* for your generous donation, which supported our direct work with families who accessed our refuge accommodation, community and outreach service, court accompaniment service and 24 hour helpline in 2020 and over the Christmas period. Because of your generous and giving spirit we were able to give the families in crisis vouchers, toys, clothing, beauty hampers and food hampers.

Leading into the Christmas period we knew families experiencing, domestic abuse faced acute challenges where the trauma of abuse coupled with impact of COVID-19 and financial uncertainty brought on an increased sense of anxiety and worry. With your support and on your behalf, we were able to provide families with hope, safety and happiness at a time when uncertainty for everyone was high.

When women and children needed us most our local community business, and corporate network, responded to our call bringing both awareness and funding to our vital work. We have been truly inspired by your commitment to making a difference in these unprecedented and challenging times and it has uplifted us.

We remain responsive and flexible to women and children's needs as a frontline and essential service in COVID-19. Thank you once again for your generosity and please visit our website [www.aoibhneas.ie](http://www.aoibhneas.ie) or connect with us on our social media platforms to find out about our work and how you can continue to help!

Yours sincerely  
*Emma Reidy*  
ceo, Aoibhneas



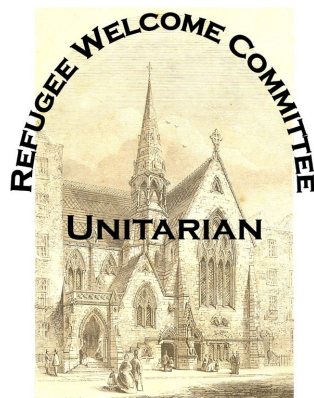
## Update on the Community Sponsorship Group.

Our committee met on zoom on Thursday evening 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Mary O'Brien updated us on the latest news of Syrian families due to arrive from refugee camps in Lebanon. Due to the current international situation with Covid 19, there have been many delays in organising the relocation of Syrian refugee families. Two other Dublin based community sponsorship groups, who initially hoped to welcome families last October, are still awaiting final arrangements for the date of their arrivals. They hope to welcome the families in early February. We have been advised by our Regional Support Organisation, the Irish Refugee Council (IRC), that we may still have a long wait before a family will be assigned to us.

Mary also reported that our fundraising is quietly building up and we have, for the second time, reached our target of €10,000 euro and indeed have even gone a little bit above that. Last March we were in the position of having rented a house, when we were informed that we would most likely not be welcoming a Syrian family in 2020. Through the IRC the house was offered to a family coming out of direct provision (DP) The committee took a decision at that time to use some of our fundraising to set the family up in their new home and we also helped several other families coming out of DP. This was done on a limited budget which was handled through the IRC.

A decision was made at our meeting that we will once again use some of our funds to help people in DP. The suggestion was made that we help students in DP who need access to a laptop for online school lessons and, to that end, we decided to use €3,000 euro to cover the purchase of as many laptops as that will buy.

We are still working in the background planning for the day when we welcome a Syrian family and we sincerely thank everyone who has helped us in so many ways to date.





The last supper picture, see Martin Pulbrook article page 13.