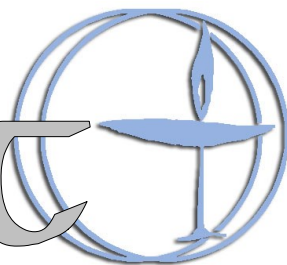


# Oscailt



March 2021

**IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE**

Vol.17 Nº 3



# Oscailt

**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.

**Oscailt** is Published by the  
**Dublin Unitarian Church**  
112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

Minister: Rev.Bridget Spain  
e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com  
Rev.Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus*.

~~hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org~~  
www.dublinunitarianchurch.org  
www.unitarianchurchcork.com  
www.oscailtmagazine.com

**Cork Unitarian Church**  
Princes Street, Cork.  
Minister: Rev.Mike O'Sullivan

Editor: Paul Spain

## To Subscribe

Annual subscription 12 monthly issues.  
€35 Posted for Ireland  
£35 Posted for England & Scotland  
Cheques and PO should be made payable to: *Dublin Unitarian Church*.

## Deadline

The deadline for articles to be included is the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month.  
Unsolicited articles, news items, letters, poems, etc are always welcome, however there can be no guarantee of publication. Copy should be sent by e-mail or at least typed, photographs should be 300dpi.

e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

## Advertising

Advertising rates available on request. e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

**Front Cover:** Scelig Micheal  
off the Co.Kerry coast.  
(photo P.Spain)

## CONTENTS

**AGM** 4

**Coptic Christianity**  
*Rev.Bridget Spain* 5

**Sorry Wrong Number**  
*Tony Brady* 11

**Book review** 19

# 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.

## DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.

**Service: Sunday at 11a.m. Phone: Vestry 01-4780638**

**Managing committee:-** Chairperson: Dennis Aylmer; Vice Chairman: Rory Delany;  
Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;  
Tony Shine; Denise Dunne; Emer O'Reilly; Andy Pollak; Peter White;  
Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne; Tony Brady.

www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

www.oscailtmagazine.com

e-mail: hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org

oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

**Minister: Rev. Bridget Spain:** Telephone: 01 - 8388 808  
Vestry 01 - 4780638 e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

Chairperson: Dennis Aylmer:- Tel: 01-2828921. e-mail: aylmerd@gmail.com

Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy:- Tel: 087-9346720

Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414, e-mail: roryjdelany@hotmail.com

Organist: Josh Johnston Pianist 086 892 0602

Caretaker: Kevin Robinson Telephone: 4752781

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.

**UNITARIAN CHURCH** Prince's Street, Cork.

**Service: Sundays at 11a.m.** www.unitarianchurchcork.com

Further information from 087-9539998

*Minister:-* Rev. Mike O'Sullivan Telephone: 023-8842800

e-mail:- osullmike@gmail.com Mobile 087-9539998

**Treasurer :** Brian Cluer e-mail: bmcleur@gmail.com

**Secretary :** Colm Noonan : e-mail : colm.noonan@gmail.com

# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephens Green Dublin D02 YP23.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## Sunday Rota for March 2021

### **7<sup>th</sup> March**

Service	<b>Rev.Bridget Spain</b>	<i>Old Habits die hard</i>
Reader	Janet Mulroy	

### **14<sup>th</sup> March**

Service	<b>Rev.Bridget Spain</b>	<i>Presbyterians and Unitarians</i>
Reader	Ray Naughton	

### **21<sup>st</sup> March**

Service	<b>Will O'Connell</b>	<i>Here Comes The Sun</i>
Reader	Mary O'Brien	

### **28<sup>th</sup> March**

Service	<b>Rev.Bridget Spain</b>	<i>Passover</i>
Reader	Sheila Hanley	

---

~~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.

# **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING PRELIMINARY NOTICE**

The 2021 A.G.M. of the Congregation will take place  
on ZOOM at 7.30 p.m.

**Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021.**

Send nominations, motions, and any  
other items for the Agenda to the:

[secretary@dublinunitarianchurch.org](mailto:secretary@dublinunitarianchurch.org)

The closing date for the receipt nominations etc.  
**Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021.**

*Dennis F. Aylmer*  
Chairman

# Coptic Christianity

As part of my training for Ministry I studied religions. The academic study of religion is very different than learning religion from a faith point of view. The academic study is not biased in favour of or against any particular faith. I believe that this neutrality allows me to see threads that connect religions; those things that are common to faiths as well as the differences in beliefs and practice.

Very early in my studies I noticed that there is a common pattern in religions; the pattern is repeated in political organisations. Like Irish political parties; the first item on the agenda is “the split”.

Most religions originated from the inspiration of a charismatic leader for example the Buddha, Abraham, Jesus, the prophet Muhammad. The leader attracts followers. Some time after the death of the leader disputes arise about the interpretation of the teaching. There is a split. All parties to the split believe that their interpretation is the correct version of that faith.

This is particularly true in the case of Christianity. We who grew up in the Christian tradition were told that our version is the correct one. Christianity is somewhat unique in that from its earliest years beliefs **about** Jesus were of paramount importance. The disputes were about the nature of Jesus; was Jesus human or was he divine or a mixture of both. No one disputes the teachings of Jesus; Christians are willing to die for what they believe about Jesus.

From its inception there were many different forms of the Christian faith. We know this because as early as the second century, C.E. Ireneaus, the Bishop of Lyons, wrote an account of all the incorrect versions of Christianity. Christianity is diverse it always has been.

The Coptic Christian church of Egypt is one of the earliest forms of Christianity and it still survives. Its headquarters is in Egypt it has churches in Africa, Ireland, United States, Canada and Australia. The estimated membership is between 5 – 20 Million. Coptic Christianity is not commonly known in the west; it has influenced some of the great movements within the Christian faith. **Coptic Christianity may have unexpected connections with Ireland.**

We are familiar with the major divisions within Christianity.

There is Eastern Orthodox Christianity that arose from a split from Rome in 1054 and the further split from Rome at the Protestant Reformation. We are less familiar with **Oriental** Christianity, Oriental Christianity has its roots in the Coptic Church. Like Roman Christianity Coptic Christianity experienced splits.

Tradition says that the apostle Mark established the Christian Church in Alexandria Egypt in the year 42CE. This predates the earliest writings in the New Testament; it is a mere decade after the crucifixion. The Coptic Church traces its lineage in an unbroken line to the apostle Mark. Coptic is an ancient form of the Egyptian language; this form of Egyptian uses the Greek alphabet. Coptic is still the language of Church liturgy but preaching is in the local language.

Coptic Christianity is firmly Trinitarian; it recognises seven sacraments. It encourages devotion of Mary as being the Mother of God. Followers are recommended to pray seven times each day and fasting is important. In all there are 240 fast days in Coptic Christianity. Priests are married and women have only a minor part in church life.

Egypt was always a melting pot of different civilisations. In addition to the native Egyptians there was a sizable population of Jews and Greeks living in the city of Alexandria. We know that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek for the benefit of the Greek speaking Jews living in Egypt.

In the year 42CE the apostle Mark ministered to the native Egyptians using their Coptic language. Some of the earliest fragments of the Gospels that have been found, are written in Coptic.

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire persecution of Christians stopped. With martyrdom no longer an option ardent Christians sought different forms of intense religious practice. Anthony the Great was one of the first men to go to live in the desert. It was in the desert that Coptic Christians developed Monasticism. Christian Monasticism was instrumental in moulding the Coptic Orthodox Church's character of submission, simplicity and humility. These early monks are known as the Desert Fathers; by the way there were Desert

Mothers as well. Women too went to live in seclusion in the desert.

A further reason the monks went to the desert was their belief that the Church should not become part of a powerful secular Empire. This would not help to create a truly Christian Society. How right they were!

Anthony the Great was the earliest and most noted of the Desert Fathers. Around the year 270 CE Anthony decided to follow the teaching of Jesus which said “sell what you have give to the poor and come follow me” he then moved to the desert for more complete seclusion. The Desert Fathers did not greatly concern themselves with Theology they emphasised **living out the teachings of Jesus**.

Others followed Anthony; it was said that “the desert became a city”. A pattern emerged; these Christians formed small groups of two to six persons. They lived and worked separately. They chanted psalms as they worked they came together for prayer.

The sayings of the Desert Fathers have been recorded. There are about 1200 of them these sayings were used by the early Benedictine monks. In these sayings I can see some of meditative practices of Buddhism. For example

*“Take care to be silent. Empty your mind. Attend to your meditation in the fear of God, whether you are resting or at work”*

or

*“Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you all”.*

*“Wherever you are stay there”*

I see in these sayings the very essence of Buddhism.

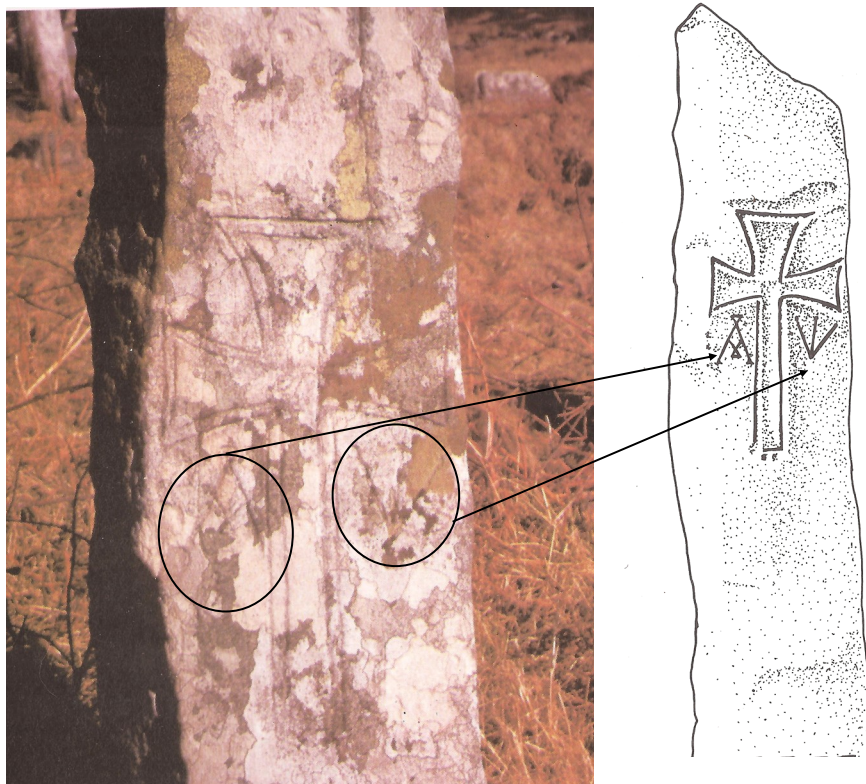
The Council of Nicea in 325A.D. is important for Unitarians. It was at this council that the bones of the Doctrine of Trinity were agreed. The Council was called to settle a dispute concerning the nature of Jesus. Arius argued that as Jesus “proceeded from the Father” there must have been a time when Jesus did not exist. The parties in the dispute were on one side Arius and on the other were Alexander and Anthanasius. Arius as we know lost the vote hence Christianity adopted the Doctrine of Trinity. Arius,



Alexander and Athanasius – who gave his name to the Athanasian Creed - they all belonged to the Coptic Church in Alexandria.

In March Ireland will celebrate our national Patron St.Patrick who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. There were Christians in Ireland long before the arrival of Patrick.

Celtic Christianity was based on communities gathered around a monastery and it's Abbot; they did not operate in the Roman tradition of dioceses and Bishops. Very often in the Celtic Church the post of Abbot was in the stewardship of the local ruling family. Celtic Church only joined fully with Rome in the year 1152 at the Synod of Kells.



A standing stone inscribed with a Coptic cross and facing towards Scelig Micheal. The entrance door of Monasteries in Ballin Skellig Co.Kerry also face out to sea and Scelig Micheal.

Irish Christianity had none of the power structures of the Roman Empire. The simplicity of Irish Monks brought a more authentic Christianity to places such as Iona, Switzerland, France and Austria. This was a golden age for Ireland; Celtic Monks made Ireland the “island of saints and scholars”, their Christianity is based in Coptic teaching and not Roman tradition.

Monasteries were located in remote places with close connections to nature. Just think of Glen da Lough and of course the ultimate secluded monastery “Scelig Micheal”. This monastery is set on bleak rocks seven miles off the coast of Kerry; it is perhaps more remote than the Egyptian desert.

The beehive huts of the Skelligs are for individual monks with communal areas for prayer this is the same monastic pattern as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. The religious patterns established by Christians in the deserts of Egypt made their way to what was at the very edge of the known world. For those looking for seclusion there was nowhere that was more remote. It is said of the Skelligs “The ocean was their desert”

There are six known examples of Coptic iconography carved into stone shrines. These are called Gable of Tomb Shrines of the six shrines five of them are around Ballinskelling facing out into the Atlantic and Scelig Micheal. It is striking that a monastery following in the tradition of the Desert Fathers; has Coptic inscriptions in the surrounding area.

In 2006 a book of Psalms was found in the Faddán Mór Bog in Co. Tipperary. The book contains sixty vellum pages held within a leather cover; it is modestly decorated. The book is dated to the early eighth century C.E. that is the early seventh hundreds. During the course of its restoration it was discovered that the inside cover of the leather binding was lined with Papyrus. This eighth century book proves that the early Irish monasteries had connections with Christianity in Egypt.

We tend to think that two thousand years ago people were primitive maybe less intelligent than we are. These connections between Egypt and Ireland paint a very different picture. These people believed and practiced a Christianity that was not based on power or empires. They felt compelled to

bring their faith beyond Judea throughout the Mediterranean and outward to the very edge of the known world. Theirs was a form of Christianity that was closer to the actual teachings of the Jewish Rabbi who lived in simplicity and poverty and who went placidly to his death.

*Rev. Bridget Spain*

Minister Dublin Unitarian church

**Dublin 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021**



Beehive huts on the Skelligs

# Sorry Wrong Number

I don't know if many of you listening to this have had experiences of synchronicity.

You know that experience when something occurs which is in perfect alignment with your current thoughts or ideas?

An example might be, one day you are thinking about someone that you haven't seen in years but on your walk in the park that very day you bump into that person.

Or you think about someone you haven't heard from in a while and they happen to phone you at that very time.

I've had a few remarkable examples of synchronicity in my time which I can share with anyone who asks but I won't bore you with the details just now . (and I have to add at this point the usual health warning attached to Unitarian sermons – you don't have to accept a word of what I say – and there is no such thing as Unitarian set of beliefs except maybe to say “have a think about this and then make up your own mind”)

Anyway to get back to serendipity, which is what gave rise to the title of this sermon which is “Sorry Wrong Number”

A few months ago my wife Fran answered the phone to someone who said “Hi Fran, is Tony there?” Fran passed the phone to me and the lady introduced herself.

Her name was totally unfamiliar to me but you know how memory can sometimes play tricks on us. I apologised for not being able to figure out who she was.

We went through various possibility of connection, was she in the church, no.

Had we been on some course or in some class together. No. Was there any work connection. No

Were we involved in any common activities. All no.

“But you are Tony” - Yes.

“And your wife is Fran” - Yes

It was all very strange.

Did we know of one another through meditation?

No, but she told me she was very interested in meditation and I told

her I was too, so the two of us, complete strangers, went on to have a long and interesting chat about her meditation practice

The lady shared 4 ideas that I am going to share with you today. She says these 4 practices help her remain positive and I hope these simple ideas will do the same for you and for me

---

---

#### Point Number 1

Make time every morning to run through all of the things you have to be grateful for.

Gratitude is a fundamental attitude if we want to live a happy life.

It is the opposite of that sense of entitlement which leads us down and down into an endless spiral of wanting

You might ask what have we to be grateful for?

Well just about everything

When you stop to think of it even how amazing it is to be alive

And what a gift it is simply to have been born into this world

(Never mind all the day to day benefits)

Just the thought of this leave us filled with a great sense of gratitude

Seven hundred year ago Meister Eckhart, the German theologian, philosopher and mystic left us these words:

“If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough”

Just imagine

“If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough”

And so it is, thank you is enough

So message number one from our mystery caller

Begin the day with Gratitude – now that can’t be a bad idea

---

---

#### Her Point Number 2

Avoid negative thinkers and the endless bad news in the media

Now it is important to keep ourselves reasonably up to-date with events – but do we really need to follow the news 24/7?

Some items capture our attention more than others, the virus,

Brexit, the US election.  
But isn't once a day enough of this diet of trouble?  
This is not to suggest that we close our eyes to what is going on in the world  
But to keep a balance so that we have time to devote to our own goings on and the needs of the people around us  
And we have to remember to energise ourselves by being around positive and enthusiastic people.  
We all know people whose simple presence puts us into a good mood  
We smile even at the thought of them

---

And, of course, we have come across the opposite as well  
But when it comes to dealing with negative thinkers, offer just a little support, if you can.  
We are not responsible for the goings on in the heads of other people.  
Let's do our best to try to help, but don't slip into a black hole of negativity by remaining too long in negative company  
We all remember the poem "Desiderata" and its lines  
Avoid loud and aggressive persons  
They are vexatious to the spirit  
So message number 2:  
Avoid negative thinkers and the concentration on bad news in the media

---

Next - Point Number 3 from our mystery lady  
If there is something bad or sad that you cannot influence or change, dismiss it from your thoughts altogether.  
Here the mystery caller reminds us to be aware of our area of concern and compare that with our area of control  
Many of us will have heard of the three circles we can use when we come to decide on the usefulness of our actions in the world  
They are  
our Circle of Concern,  
and within that our Circle of Influence  
and the inner circle called our Circle of Control

So we will take a look at these 3 areas  
Our Circle of Concern is the outermost circle  
It can be very wide

It could be, say, worry about the state of the Earth's environment  
It could be a concern about world peace or human rights in the world  
Now there is no problem with having a wide Circle of Concern  
We have to be concerned with the big issues – but the operative word is “concerned”

And our circle of concern could include something less global such as a general concern about the well-being of someone we care about but over whom we have no power of influence

For things which land in this circle we have concern but realistically speaking most of us should realise there is nothing we can do which affects the entire situation.

Now if you happened to be the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, then world human rights would not only be inside your Circle of Concern but it would also fall within your other two circles – your Circle of Influence and your Circle of Control. But most of us are not in the happy position of being able by ourselves to influence global events.

---

Which brings us to circle number 2 - our Circle of Influence  
On the inside of our circle of concern we each have our Circle of Influence

These are areas where we are possibly able to influence events and maybe inspire other people

So looking again at say the state of the world environment we may just find we have people we can influence and encourage and that is what we should try to do

This is a possibility we should consider – can we influence things for the better?

---

But finally the inside circle for each of us our very own Circle of Control

This is where we can in fact do something and this is where our energy is most usefully concentrated

Looking at applying our environmental concerns within that Circle of Control we see that we can do quite a lot.

We can refuse, we can reuse and we can recycle.

We can refuse to buy products in plastic bottles.

Remember the market responds to consumer demands, and when we buy something we can try to ensure that we make use of it to the end

of its useful life or we can pass things we are not using to someone who will have use for them. In other words try our best to ensure that products produced at the expense of the earth don't wind up in a dump.

And in our personal lives there is so much within our area of control We can decide how we spend our time and resources, we can take care of other people.

We can support our friends

We can do our work to the best of our ability

Practicing honesty and truthfulness in our day to day lives

So message number 3 is urging us to pay less attention to what is outside our control and concentrate on doing our best in the areas that are within our control

---

And finally to Point Number 4

The caller says try to see the positive side of everything that happens rather than dwelling on the negative.

As she said this to me (and this was in the middle of the pandemic) she added "Almost everything that happens could have been worse."

So think of the idea of the glass half full and concentrate on the positive

According to the Oxford English Dictionary positivity is:

"The practice of being, or tendency to be, positive or optimistic in attitude."

Positivity is a practice

It is not something that we are born with. It needs to be nurtured and it can be nurtured greatly especially in childhood. But adults can develop it too, just like playing the piano, or the organ, or learning the guitar, positivity is a skill we can develop the more we practice it.

In recent years, as we all know, we have learned that our brains are not static our brain structure changes according to our habitual thought patterns.

Brain plasticity, or neuroplasticity, refers to the brain's ability to change and adapt as a result of experience.

We have all heard about the brain's capacity to move functions from a damaged area of the brain to other undamaged areas, and there is also "structural plasticity" which is the brain's ability to actually change its physical structure as a result of learning.



So if we can develop an attitude of habitual positivity it can rewire our brains and help us overcome our negative thinking patterns.

If we practice positivity we can train ourselves to think and respond to situations more calmly and more optimistically.

Now positivity is not like a light switch where we turn it on and we find the light stays on we will have lapses. That is only natural, but if we can bring ourselves back, get up when we fall, hopefully, over time, we will find the lapses will be less and less and at least we will be more aware of them. It takes time and a little effort every day, but the rewards of a positive attitude can be life-changing and for the better.

So that is the message delivered to me by accident by someone unknown to me and now being passed on to you

1. Make time every morning to run through all of the things you have to be grateful for.
2. Avoid negative thinkers and the endless bad news in the media
3. If there is something bad or sad that you cannot influence or change, dismiss it from your thoughts altogether.
4. And try to see the positive side of everything that happens rather than dwelling on the negative.

---

But I am sure you are curious as to who was this bringer of a formula for a happy life and how did she happen to phone me?

I emailed the lady later on that day and she replied to say that my mobile number meant nothing to her – the mystery deepened further. Finally we discovered what had happened. She was looking to speak to a Tony whose wife was Fran – so far so good but the Tony she was looking for lived 11 kilometres from here and she had misdialled just one digit of the seven digit phone number.

That one mistaken digit led her to me and now to you and to this service entitled “Sorry Wrong Number” now I am not suggesting that this is a miracle or anything of that sort.

It was just another one of those interesting happenings, a moment of synchronicity and there is no need to worry. I don’t believe in predestination or anything of that sort. I believe that everything is open

to possibility, and that nothing is fixed I would go so far as to say that even the one whom we call “God” doesn’t know the future. But that just my heretical opinion and how could I possibly know?

But how about the thought that there is much more to the universe than what we can see with the human eye ? Much more than we can discover even with our most advanced machines, all our advanced technology? The deeper we go within and beneath atoms and subatomic particles the more we are introduced to an ever more amazing and ever more fluid world.

When Albert Einstein was asked questions about God and about whether he (Albert Einstein) was a Pantheist this was the answer he gave:

“Your question is the most difficult in the world. It is not a question I can answer simply with yes or no. I am not an Atheist. I do not know if I can define myself as a Pantheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds.” He goes on: “May I not reply with a parable? The human mind, no matter how highly trained, cannot grasp the universe.

We are in the position of a little child, entering a huge library whose walls are covered to the ceiling with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written those books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books, a mysterious order, which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of the human mind, even the greatest and most cultured, toward God.

We see a universe marvellously arranged, obeying certain laws, but we understand the laws only dimly. Our limited minds cannot grasp the mysterious force that sways the constellations.” Words of Albert Einstein

If we watch out we may find little moments of synchronicity and serendipity that might just be a sign from the energy of the universe that all is well and all will be well.

I get that feeling when these things happen to me.

That all is well and that all will be well

*Tony Brady*

Dublin Unitarian church

Dublin - 24 January 2021





**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for January 2021.**



# **Travels with my Aunt**

by

*Graham Greene 1969*

Henry Pulling is the main character, a retired bank manager, a pedestrian gentleman living a small life alone among his dusty volumes and his dahlias. On the death of his 86 yr old mother he is 'agreeably excited by the forthcoming funeral'. His estranged 75 yr old aunt Augusta appears, sister to his mother Angelica, and she turns his life around. Within 24 hours he has tumbled with her in her flat, met her Sierra Leonean paramour and been approached by police who take his mother's urn which is found to contain marijuana. The book follows them as she leads him through a wild selection of cities and experiences reliving her subversive, flamboyant and amoral life and meeting some exceptional characters.

This emotionally stunted gentleman discovers Augusta is his birth mother and he loyally warms to some of her characteristics which strike a hidden chord with him. He has his eyes opened to a very different world.

This is the only Graham Greene book which he said he wrote 'for the fun of it.' He uses it to poke fun at 1950's morality and respectability and to reveal a seedier side to life.

*Marian McCaughley*

**Travels With My Aunt** by



*Graham Greene*

This novel is set in the late

1960's, a decade of great

societal change in the world. It tells the story of Henry Pulling, a bachelor who has retired from his job as a Bank Manager, he is the epitome of a character from middle class England in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. That all changes when he meets his bohemian Aunt Augusta, for the first time after her 50 years absence, at his mother Angelica's funeral.

Henry becomes embroiled, and not unwittingly in Augusta's world where we encounter characters such as Wordsworth, Augusta's current lover who is half her age from Sierra Leone. Wordsworth is under police surveillance and he hides cannabis in Henry's mother's funeral urn to avoid detection, and so begins a new chapter in Henry's life which is far from his safe suburban middle class existence of cultivating dahlias and his neighbour the 'Major' next door, Henry embarks on a series of journeys with Augusta firstly to Brighton then Paris, Istanbul via the Orient Express and lastly Paraguay. Along the way Augusta regales Henry with stories of her very colourful past which includes many unusual lifetime situations and lovers one of which has endured to the present, Mr. Visconti, a very dodgy character who collaborated with the Germans in Italy during WWII, and so we get the picture of the murky underworld that Augusta has been living in for the past fifty years.

Graham Greene is poking fun at society and it's 'norms' in this farce and we should not take it too seriously as we find ourselves being entertained by very unsavoury characters involved in embezzlement, money laundering and political corruption.

In the end Henry chooses a new 'business' life with Augusta and Visconti in Paraguay and leaves behind England's safe suburbia. I think Greene is questioning why we make certain decisions that shape our lives, are we free to make them or are we victims of circumstance?

*Alison Claffey*





**Unitarians are united in differences**

Original design by Richard Dennis