

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.

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Front Cover: Montage of pictures of the Falkiner boys and memorial in the church. (photo P. Spain)

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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 man's ears to open up with the 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.

Re-Opening

When Covid arrived in March 2020 in my optimism I expected that the church would be closed for three months or so then church life would resume as normal. How mistaken I was. Like everyone during the past nineteen months we have had to adapt to unprecedented times. We missed out on many important occasions. We had to cancel our Coming of Age Service, we missed membership Sunday and of course the Carol Service which for many is the highlight of the year. Sunday Club has disappeared, temporarily I hope! When Services were allowed in the church, under Covid restrictions there was no singing.

In the wider life of the church baptisms and weddings have been cancelled and rearranged sometimes several times over. One of the great losses is that we were unable to gather at the funerals of beloved friends and family members. The rhythms of monthly charity collections is lost, we've missed out on supporting Simon through our pre-worn clothes collection. We missed welcoming visitors on Culture Night.

Technology has been invaluable during lockdown. Yet virtual coffee or a circle in the Green is not quite the same as meeting in person in the Damer Hall. Broadcasting services via the web camera is probably here to stay. I hope that the web camera will not replace people gathering in community for prayer and reflection.

Technology has allowed the Managing Committee to hold monthly meetings. It has enabled the work of the Refugee committee to continue. It allows meetings of anyone interested in reading and discussing scriptures from other traditions. The monthly book club has continued to meet during Covid.

The good news is that we are beginning to open up. This will be a gradual process. I hope that soon people will be more confident about being able to attend church in person. Last Sunday 24th October 2021, wearing our masks we managed to sing hymns and it felt good.

Looking forward, November will be a busy month with more than half a dozen organisations coming to the church for services of remembrance. It is heartening that these groups are finding a home in our church community. There will be four or five baby welcoming services and in December there are a number of weddings. The Worship Sub committee are working on ways to raise the profile of our church.

If Covid numbers are kind to us we hope that within a few weeks that we can assemble some singers and that when we gather on Sundays we will hear the choir practice for the carol service.

Sounds like heaven. Remember that everyone is welcome to be part of this re-opening.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

November 2021

Remembrance Sunday 2020

To day, as we have for more than one hundred years we pause to remember young men of this congregation who died in the course of the First World War. Even though they died more than one hundred years ago there are good reasons to remember them and that war. The conflict that took their lives was exceptional.

There is the numbers sixty million combatants with about nine million fatalities. Over the four years of war six thousand soldiers died each day. Every soldier witnessed unimaginable brutality.

Countless young men who returned home were mentally damaged; many never fully recovered.

Those who died were generally young - some were just teenagers. We know that some children faked their ages to enlist. These children believed the propaganda that the war would be over in months and they didn't want to miss the adventure.

Three hundred and forty six British soldiers were shot for cowardice. Most of them were actually suffering mental breakdowns. It took until 2006 for 307 to be officially pardoned.

The rows and rows of war graves give us some idea of the scale of young lives lost. A huge number of soldiers do not have a grave. The Tyne Cot memorial records the names of 34,887 British and New Zealand soldiers who died during a fifteen month period, who have no grave. One of the names on that memorial is George Stride Falkiner who died in 1917 aged 19. George went from boarding school into the army. His 22 year old brother Frederick is buried nearby in plot 1.AA. 20 in Tyne Cot.

The deaths of the young men from the Dublin Congregation are recorded in the Annual Reports with the words they "*fell in defence of our Empire*". Had they survived the war they would have returned to a changed political landscape and to a country that was hurtling towards civil war.

All religions address the ethics of killing in war. The protagonists in the Great War were Christian. Christian teaching says "Thou shall not kill" and Jesus instructed his followers "Love one Another" these tenets of the Christian faith are clear and unambiguous; they are always ignored. In the First World War those who refused to

fight because of their Christian beliefs were persecuted both during the war and in the years that followed.

The Buddhist scripture the Damapada has these prophetic words:

“Never does hatred cease by hating in return.
Only through love can hatred be brought to an end.

Victory breeds hatred the
conquered dwell in sorrow and resentment.

Let us overcome violence by gentleness
Let us overcome evil by good.”

At the end of the Great War the “Victors” deliberately imposed terms that were designed to destroy the German economy; they succeeded. As the Buddhist text says “*the conquered dwell in sorrow and resentment*”. In Germany in the 1920s as unemployment and inflation soared, the atmosphere in Germany was full of resentment; that resentment proved the fertile ground that allowed the Nazi ideals to take root and flourish. Following four years of killing the desire of the “Victors” for revenge was understandable; taking that revenge was the direct cause of the Second World War.

The Second World War was not fought in the trenches. Fighting moved to the skies and civilians became legitimate targets. London and Hamburg, Coventry and Dresden, Berlin and Belfast these are just a few of the cities that were extensively bombed taking a huge death toll on the civilian population. In 1945 all major German cities were in ruins.

The war in the Pacific was remote from Europe. It too was a bloody affair. America fought from island to island step by step across the Pacific Ocean. Each island was taken at the cost of a great many lives. Japanese soldiers, American soldiers and civilian lives were snuffed out in an instant.

The war ended when America dropped two Atomic Bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In two explosions hundreds of thousands of people died instantly. In the following weeks and months tens of thousands more would die of burns and radiation sickness. Many years after the explosions people affected by radiation endured long term illness. In the years that followed children

not conceived in 1945 would be born with physical deformities and suffer life long ill health.

Throughout the world, war cemeteries with their rows of crosses are kept in impeccable order. During the early days of November memorials ranging from the huge ones at Tyne Cot to the small ones on village greens and those in churches such as ours will be dressed with red poppies. We will speak their names and we remember them.

Who is there to remember the names the civilian casualties of war? In the hundred years since the First World War, war has fundamentally changed. Until and even during the Great War it was soldiers who died. War is now mechanised and it is civilians who bear the brunt of the suffering.

When the first Atomic bomb was dropped it is estimated that about a quarter of a million civilians, ordinary people going to work on a Summer's morning were in an instant annihilated. The figure is a guesstimate there were too many casualties to count accurately. These hundreds of thousands of citizens are honoured in a few monuments. There is not a single name inscribed on them. Their individuality, their very humanity is obliterated they are statistics.

Right now there are wars in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan and many other places are experiencing conflict. The majority of casualties in these wars are civilians. These are the wounded and malnourished children, they are the parents grieving the death of their child. They are the millions of refugees existing in tents on the edges of Europe; we see them on our television screens.

America in particular learned an important lesson learned from the First World War. Instead of destroying the German and Italian economies after WWII and leaving the rest of Europe to fall into an economic depression America **showed leadership** when it gave financial assistance to Europe to rebuild its economy. America gave Europe what in today's money would be \$140 Billion to rebuild itself. West German was a beneficiary of Marshall Aid. This was how Germany recovered after complete surrender and the destruction of the country.

Likewise with Japan America rebuilt the country and established a democratic government there.

Instead of resentment Germany is a prosperous, democratic country. The greater part of Europe has enjoyed a peace and pros-

perity and security for seventy five years. Japan is now America's strongest ally in the Pacific.

In recent times there is evidence that European Unity is splintering with a corresponding rise in nationalism throughout the world. We should not take peace for granted. We have the responsibility to find what unites humans and we must never provoke division.

Remembering past wars should reinforce the knowledge that war is never the best option. The world cannot afford more wars because modern weapons have the ability to obliterate humanity from the earth. Today's weapons have the capability to destroy the fertility of the soil.

Imagine if humanity could let go of fear. Imagine if there was no need to invest in munitions and armies, air forces, arms and battle-ships. There are no victors in War, the only beneficiaries of wars are the manufacturers of weapons.

The young men commemorated in this church gave their lives believing that they were fighting "*the war to end wars*". Their sacrifice was in vain; as the song says:-

"its all happened again and again and again and again".

This morning we remember them and we pledge ourselves to work for peace.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

8th November 2020

Who do you say that you are?

The title for this talk is *Who do you Say that you Are?* You will remember a recent television programme of a somewhat similar name.

And Jesus, according to the Gospels, didn't query himself on who he was, but he asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And it was Simon Peter who answered, that he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God". The other disciples had said that some men believed he was John the Baptist, others Elias, Jeremias or one of the prophets. But from the text it seems Jesus didn't then respond to his own question: perhaps he didn't know the answer.

It is vital that we know ourselves, that we know who we really are, and from what setting we come. The phrase "Know Thyself", it is said, goes back to ancient Egypt and was later carved into the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in Ancient Greece. It comes up with Socrates who said "an unexamined life is not worth living", Plato, and many centuries later with Thomas Hobbes, Alexander Pope, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Samuel Coleridge.

So, in all sorts of ways, in all sorts of contexts, the injunction to self-identify has always been with us, as those of us living in Ireland well know.

Here, we'll just concentrate on the matter of our religious/historical/social/community identity, which is a significant background to our personality, and character. We can then privately go on to pinpoint what else makes us, what we really feel, as distinct from what we were trained to feel, what are our ethics, our talents, or lack of them, are we introverts or extroverts, do we accept, even understand, our sexual orientation (you will have seen that Superman, the comic hero has finally come out as bisexual) where are we on the spiritual spectrum, is our career, even if its prestigious, the right one for us, is our marriage/partnership healthy?

Some weeks ago, walking as many of us are doing frequently, along by the west pier in Dun Laoghaire my companion, someone for whom I've abundant admiration, suddenly bent down, picked up a snail and tenderly left it on a leaf away from the path. She was afraid it might be stood on and perhaps that the hot gravel was too much for the snail. I was bemused and related this incident to a sensitive relative. He said he would of course do exactly the same thing, as did another friend, a friend who while strolling the Dodder identifying

plants, trees and every living thing, recites reams of Wordsworth. (Indeed, this friend isn't too sure whether we should kill rats and snakes)

So, my moral compass was a little shaken. It made me, a frequent garden snail killer, hesitate, wonder if there was a chink in a flabby moral armour, had I the feet of clay of someone who believed he was at least averagely compassionate. So, do I really know who I am, do you? Have we self-knowledge? There is interestingly an answer to this in the title of Fintan O'Toole's new book, "We don't know Ourselves", although it is a phrase sometimes used by the recipients of joyful news. O'Toole, of course, is touching on something bigger, do we as a nation, know ourselves, do we think we know who we are, as distinct from our assumption that we are what we would like to be.

Leaving aside the efforts we should make to see ourselves as others see us, and the moral issue around the snail (snails are now much safer in my garden), and of course much bigger ethical issues, it is vital for our mental and spiritual health that we understand and accept who we are, that we obey the injunction, "Know Thyself" and as a corollary that who we decide we are should generally be accepted by others.

Why do we need self-knowledge? We need self-knowledge, according to the School of life, because it, offers us a route to greater happiness and fulfilment, while a lack of self-knowledge leaves us open to accident and mistaken ambitions. "Armed with the right sort of self-knowledge we have a greater chance of avoiding errors in our dealings with others and in the formulation of our life choices".

We can I believe get somewhat of a fix on who we are by examining our ethnic, religious, social and community history. For example, how did we and more particularly those who came before us, act and react to the foundation of this State 100 years ago, and to its emerging decades? Indeed, we might look at Protestants to illustrate the point.

Deirdre Nuttall has written a wonderful book, *Different and the Same*, which illuminates the difficulties faced in this State since 1922 by many Protestants, people I as a child and teenager in Dun Laoghaire would rarely have met. It was a bit like what Austin Clarke depicted in the poem just read, *The Planter's Daughter*. Her house was "known by the trees" and "old men drank deep/and

were silent". She was there, in the village, but she wasn't there for them nor they for her. Indeed, someone told me recently she knew no Catholics when growing up in rural Ireland. That, of course, would be rare now.

The reasons for this are perhaps obvious. The Ne Temere decree made parents nervous that their children would form attachments to Catholics, marry them, and any grand children would be lost to Catholicism. There were worries that farms would pass into Catholic hands. Indeed, sadly many Protestants didn't marry, or married cousins because of this worry. And, many Protestants feared losing their culture, a culture which often harkened to the days of Empire, and a culture which often grudgingly accepted the State's foundation, and was dismayed by our subsequent retreat from the Commonwealth.

Tony Farmer, in his book, *Privileged Lives, A Social history of Middle-Class Ireland 1882 to 1989*, says the common Church of Ireland attitude to the new Free State was to abstain. Many Protestants, as the writer Brian Inglis testified, "as soon as they found out that the new Irish Government could be trusted not to expropriate their land, debase the currency, or make general legislative mayhem, they settled down to ignore its existence".

Alex Findlater, the renowned grocer, said Irish Free State politics was simply not mentioned at Protestant tables. For Archbishop Gregg, of Dublin and later Armagh, the severance from Britain was a disaster, for him the British were the trustees of Christianity in a fallen world. It was a society in which the Protestant committee of the Bull Island golf club committed, in the words of Inglis, "slow social suicide" by excluding families "in trade" as the phrase went, Roman Catholics and Jews.

Hence there was the Pirates of Penzance in the church hall, badminton games between different C of I parishes, private viewings of Queen Elizabeth's coronation, the Boys Brigade, discreet Poppy Day collections.... in some senses a parallel society, all fuelled I'd suggest by an oft-times ungenerous emerging State which sometimes refused to recognise that there lived among us a minority of a different hue, and a rampant RC church which insisted on the (now-deleted) Special Position of the Catholic Church in the Constitution.

This minority, as W.B Yeats said, were "no petty people" although I think he was referring more to the upper echelons of the Anglo Irish, a sector deliberately excluded in Nuttall's book. But

Protestants were a niche population (and historically perhaps we could include ourselves here) which broadly speaking did not belong to the perceived official national narrative. As many Protestants interviewed in Nuttall's research said, they were often made to feel they were not really Irish and were sometimes embarrassed by their ancestry, Cromwellian, Planter or whatever. Indeed, some would search around for nationalist connections such as links to the United Irishmen in order to dilute any perceived non-Irishness.

Edna Longley, the literary critic, remarked in 1989 that if Catholics were born Irish, Protestants had "to work their passage to Irishness" and that if southern Irish Protestants are now more or less "uncomplicatedly Irish" the journeys to get there are anything but uncomplicated, according to an intriguing book called *Protestant AND Irish* (edited by Ian D'Alton and Ida Milne).

And it must be recorded that particularly in rural areas some Protestants reported that they had more in common with their Catholic neighbours who were as financially stretched as they were, than they had with the Big House. In one case, the Protestants had to wait outside their church on Sunday until the gentry arrived and were comfortably in their pew. Positive relationships across the religious divide are also recalled in the book "Untold Stories, Protestants in the Republic of Ireland 1922-2002", one witness referring to how RC and C of I adherents "treated each other with genuine courtesy, would have been good neighbours one to another, but the overwhelming sense was one of difference".

And, I haven't forgotten Northern Ireland where the nationalist/Catholic minority suffered so much. In the 1920s, my father's family were forced onto the Dublin train by a loyalist gang. He later studied to be a priest, left before ordination, and fell in love with my mother, a woman who had been brought up from the age of eight by grandparents, Empire loyalists, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Castle Catholics if you will, who stood when "God Save the King" came on the radio.

So I'd suggest that to have self-knowledge we have first to accept and embrace all aspects of our ancestry, whether we are a hybrid coming from a mixed culture (like me...I was delighted by the way when DNA indicated I was 2% Asian)...or whether our lineage is clearly Huguenot, Palatine, Planter, Gaelic or

whatever our religious persuasion, although these labels can be much diluted over centuries by inter-marriage, fosterage, or adoption.

And this identity/self-knowledge issue touches to on how we or our ancestors have behaved. A week ago, Diarmaid Ferriter, UCD's Professor of Modern Irish History, in a lively conversation at the Dublin Festival of History—he was talking about his new book on the Civil War—said we have to be ready to embrace and admit the awful things done by both the pro and anti-Treaty sides, actions which could be and were sometimes as despicable as those by the Black and Tans.

In another context, the 1798 and the 1641 rebellions had their atrocities (Scullabogue and Portadown) which were hardly mentioned in my (Catholic) school history syllabus. A neglect which did no service to our young ears or healthy historical inquiry, to the mental maturity of our citizens, or to the forging of a modern nation.

In fact, we liberate ourselves by accepting who we are, and were, what we or our ancestors did and didn't do, as I believe Germany has done. It's striking how many young people are taken to Berlin's Holocaust memorial beside the Brandenburg Gate, how in many museums and in public discourse that country has recognised its evil past. Munich, once the nerve centre of Nazi activity, was accused some years ago of amnesia in regard to its past, although a museum there also shows posters from modern Far Right parties to indicate the dangers of such beliefs. (Indeed, Germany, as an aside, I believe has more openly accepted its Nazi past, than Austria).

So a vital part of knowing ourselves, to be able to answer the question "Who do you say that you are?", comes through acknowledging from whence we came, embracing/accepting, our family/community past which is in essence for us an accident of birth and history. Philippe Sands, the historian, in his award-winning book, *East West Street*, describes Lviv, the central European city from which his grandfather came, and from which the entire Jewish community had been extinguished.

The city has been called a number of names, passing from Austria to Russia, then back to Austria, then briefly to Western Ukraine, then to Poland, the Soviet Union, Germany, back to the Soviet Union, and finally to Ukraine. Its inhabitants surely will have various identities all now within Ukraine's jurisdiction. Similarly, massive border changes after two World Wars, posed many identity

challenges, not unlike those which have faced the inhabitants of Northern Ireland.

And if this analysis of our social, religious and political ancestry highlights distressing activities, assumptions, or uncivilised behaviour, we are not responsible, as the phrase goes, for the sins of our fathers, or their good deeds. We are only now responsible for ourselves, and like Bobby the Rabbit we have to go and face the world. In existential terms, we can make our own meaning, taking account hopefully of our true knowledge of our strengths, weaknesses, character and personality quirks.

A very wise friend says that our ancestral/religious history is essentially a yardstick by which we can measure our future. It can restrict us or open us up to boundless possibilities. It can empower or impair us. In the words of the kid from New York's Bronx, "you can't know where you going to until you know where you coming from".

Paul Murray

Dublin Unitarian Church

October 2021

Urgently Required: Firefighters for Planet Earth

This address today is a heartfelt appeal to each and every one of us to come to the aid of Planet Earth as we face the greatest crisis humankind has ever known. The latest Report of the IPCC, the International Panel on Climate Change, makes for very sober reading.

These are not just recommendations to tidy up the way you might paint or decorate your house. This is an urgent warning that we all need to take immediate serious steps if life and civilisation as we know it is to survive. The warning is as stark as that.

It's hard to believe that we can have had such an effect on our planet. But then we remember that there are over 7 billion of us, with 7000 million everyday actions. It all adds up.

So today we ask: "What might each of us do to avert this looming catastrophe?"

My reading today from Christopher Fry was written 70 years ago. It could almost have been written yesterday. A time when wrong comes up to face us everywhere.

But the poem is not pessimistic. Yes, it recognises the troubles of its day. But it goes on:

"Thank God our time is now when wrong comes up to face us everywhere, never to leave us till we take the longest stride of soul men ever took. And that is exactly what we are called upon to do. We have to take the longest stride of soul people have ever taken.

Why? Because of the latest report of the IPCC. The UN tell us that never before in the history of the world, have we been called upon to make such rapid changes in the way we manage our lives.

In the long history of the world there has never been a generation faced with the task of preventing the annihilation of all life on earth. But here we are – this is our generation – this is our challenge.

But do we really believe this? We look out our windows. Unless we are very unlucky the fires and the floods are far away. Just TV images. How can it possibly be that the warming of the planet by a few degrees can have such a devastating effect as to cast doubt on our prospects for survival as a species?

But the IPCC findings are based on clear scientific evidence. The combined work of thousands of scientists and climatologists. They talk of melting ice caps, rising sea levels, the flooding of coastal areas, the

loss of entire low-lying countries, extremes of weather, loss of habitat, loss of species, loss of biodiversity, poisoning of the oceans, the loss of pollinators, shortage of food and water.

I am optimistic by nature. It is against all I believe in to act as a prophet of doom and gloom.

But the simple fact of the matter is this: We have been warned that unless we take immediate urgent steps – all of us - this planet that we call home will become uninhabitable for huge numbers of us - if not for us all.

I think you will agree we have been dodging environmental issues for years. We have been pushing the can down the road for decades. Kyoto in 1997, Copenhagen 2009, Paris 2016 and all the years in between. In fact we have been discussing the climate since 1962 when we met in New Caledonia. This was 60 years ago when we discussed tropical cyclones and weather and climate issues. Talk and more talk, lofty ideas but painfully slow action - if any.

Now some people to their credit have been working for years on these issues. Initially these were the lonely voices. people on the fringes. the cranks among us, dismissed at the time as tree hugging vegetarians. And so we have allowed matters roll along ignoring that fact that we live on a planet with finite resources and with a delicately balanced life support system.

We have been pouring CO2 into the atmosphere to the point where temperatures are rising at a rate not seen since human life first emerged on earth. These rising temperatures were predicted to cause more frequent and more extreme weather events and we already see these incidents happening more often and with more intensity.

What we need now is an individual and a collective moment of enlightenment so that we can all work together to meet the clear and immediate challenge of disastrous climate change.

If you look back you will see that we have never cooperated on a planetary scale to make a difference to the wellbeing of all humanity. It has always been a case of North against South, East versus West, the rich exploiting the poor, Capitalism fighting against Communism, Liberalism battling against dictatorships and the god of Commerce presiding over all and promoting its wares as if there was no limit to growth, as if having more and more and bigger and better was the gateway to happiness. And fascinated by this illusion of unlimited growth we have been speeding down the road to environmental bankruptcy.

Looking on the positive side, this emergency could be a real turning point in the history of humanity. If the environmental threat has thought us anything we have learned that we are all part of an interconnected and interdependent web. If one part suffers harm every part is

affected. We have seen this during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We can compare our collective life on this planet to the interconnected parts of the human body. We all know that if we have a sore foot our whole body feels the discomfort. If we catch flu our whole body feels sick. If we have a toothache the pain doesn't only affect our mouth – it puts our whole self out of sorts. Our bodies are one interdependent unit and we only experience good health when all our component parts work together in harmony. It is the very same with life on earth.

John Greenleaf Whittier, the American Quaker poet puts it this way:

All destinies are woven fast,
Linked in sympathy like the keys of an organ vast.
Break but one of a thousand keys,
and the paining jar through all will run.

Josh will agree with this as he sits here every week at the keys of our wonderfully restored organ.

Break but one of a thousand keys, and the paining jar through all will run.

So how can we finally co-operate for the good of the planet and for the benefit of all the creatures who depend on it?

First of all we need a collective approach. Each one of us is part of a community, a town, a city, a country. We all need to press our public representatives to take urgent action in response to the latest report of the IPCC. We all need to do this and we need to do it now – every one of us and we need to do it today or tomorrow – not next month.

Happily here in Ireland we have recently passed the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. But we need to follow through on this by regulations and budgets based on reducing our emissions year after year after year. This shouldn't depend on the concerns of any political party facing an election and trying to gather votes by populist policies.

Now we know there are no votes when it comes to belt tightening, asking people to accept a reduced standard of living, urging people to use their cars less - to fly less, warning us that we must limit our consumption. These things are not popular in the short term. But short term policies won't get us out of this mess. The policies of limitless growth and runaway consumption have brought us to where we are – a world in crisis.

We hear much talk of 2050. It is pie in the sky talking about how we need to reach zero emissions by 2050. 2050 is only 30 years away. We can't leave these adjustments to the last minute. We all know what

will happen if we think in terms of thirty year targets. The painful adjustments will be put off and put off until there is insufficient time left to reach the target. The corrections must begin now, this year, not in five years, not in 10 years. And they need to continue every year until some balance is restored.

Now what else can we do?

We must remember that our day-to-day decisions can make a huge difference.

How we travel: Think of our needless car journeys, hopping into a car for a short journey that could easily be made on foot, not using public transport where public transport is available.

A report in the Guardian newspaper tells us that frequent-flyers who represent only 1% of the world's population caused half of aviation's carbon emissions in 2018. 1% causing half of all the aviation emissions. In the same report we hear that airlines produced a billion tonnes of CO₂ in that same year, yet they received a 100 billion dollar subsidy by not paying for the climate damage they caused.

Now we watch almost every day the huge pressure governments face from airlines who want to get up and running quickly with their cheap fares. And there are tourism interests involved as well.

We all have a responsibility. It is difficult for people to resist the temptation to hop into a plane for no good reason when they are offered flights from Dublin to mainland Europe at half the price of a rail trip from Dublin to Cork. This wanton disregard for the environment has to be challenged. The financial cost of getting a person from a to b has to be far more than the ecological cost of the journey – far more – not less. By subsidising airlines who encourage flying because it is cheap we are pouring fuel into a building already in flames instead of using a fire extinguisher to get the flames under control and all this at a time when we have the clearest of clear warnings about the danger we are causing to the future of life on Earth.

And apart from personal transport and air travel we have to look at our buildings, how we heat and insulate our homes offices and factories? Think of all the roofs – millions upon millions of roofs - most of them doing nothing except providing cover. We can use these roofs to capture and make use of huge amounts of solar energy. Every payback in terms of our environmental impact is beyond price. We must reduce our demand for energy. Even simple steps all add up. Use led lights, only heat the water we need, avoid needless waste

The Native American people have what they call the “7th generation” principle. They tell us that in every decision, personal, governmental or corporate, we must consider how it will affect our descendants sev-

en generations into the future. Maybe we could apply this principle in our everyday choices

Think about our shopping habits, what we buy. Every single thing we buy has some environmental impact and we need to keep that impact to a minimum. How are the products packaged? Think of the environmental cost of one-use plastics – used only once for a few minutes and taking centuries to disintegrate. And how far have the products travelled? Is it really necessary to send apples from one part of the planet to the other?

And what about meat – we don't have to become vegetarian but can we decide to eat less meat, especially beef. Huge forests are being lost, turned into vast grazing areas to accommodate cattle to provide us with beef and the cattle giving off methane adding further to our emissions

So when we pick up something that we are about to buy can we pause first to ask ourselves:

“Do I really need this?” “What impact will this product have on the Earth?” Just look at the warnings on some of the packets, that big black X there for us to see. It reads “danger to aquatic life” Why continue to buy something like this? Money is the smallest aspect of the cost

Now these are uncomfortable challenges for people who have been fortunate enough to have what we want whenever we want it. A simple shopping trip must take into account the impact that our lives and our lifestyles are having on this planet and its people. The environmental crisis brings us face-to-face with a predicament we never had to seriously think about before now. But if we all work together, and when we hopefully come through this, we could find the world much changed for the better. We could use this climate emergency to create a more just and a hopefully more united worldwide community

You might well ask “I am only one person, does my action really make any difference?”

Yes, you can be very sure it does. Yes, each of us is only one person but there are 7 billion of us. The problem has been caused by us and it can be solved by determined actions, by our working together. Just think of the influence of religious communities who answer this call, the millions of followers of every faith. Even if all of us listening to this were heed the warning of the IPCC – each in our own lives – it would make a difference.

This working together is important because we have a huge mountain to climb. But Koun Yamada reminds us “No matter how high the mountains are, no matter how deep the sea of ignorance is, they will be as nothing before a boundless spirit of determination. And that is just what we need, a boundless spirit of determination to save Planet Earth.

So let each of us resolve today to play our part at this critical time

to be Firefighters for Planet Earth and to enlist our families, friends and colleagues, encouraging everyone to play a part. The latest IPCC report is a final wake-up call to humanity to take action now. Difficult as it is to take the idea on board the terrifying fact is that the very future of life on Earth depends on the actions of each one of us. We cannot just continue to sail on as we have been doing. If we drift along, sometime very soon, there will be a tipping point beyond which it will be difficult – if not impossible for humanity to bring itself back from the brink.

A Native American prophecy tells us “When the earth is ravaged and the animals are dying, a new tribe of people shall come unto the earth from many colours, classes, creeds and who by their actions and deeds shall make the earth green again. They will be known as the Warriors of the Rainbow.” Let us hope and pray that everyone who hears this appeal will enrol as a Warrior of the Rainbow and a Firefighter for Planet Earth and help bring this prophecy to pass.

Tony Brady

Dublin Unitarian Church

September 2021



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



East West Street

by
Philippe Sands

This is a book about the Holocaust. Not my subject of choice, having read a lot (enough) about it over the past 60 years...! It is a formidable piece of research, but the author unfortunately doesn't know that a story is snappier and more engaging if you don't include every single fact you have discovered. For example, did he really think we wanted to know the names and professions of seven or eight neighbours of one of his characters?

To save you the trouble of reading this slow book, here are the few interesting facts that were new to me:

- 1) Two Polish Jewish lawyers (both escaped from Poland, but their families didn't) were responsible for inventing the terms 'genocide' and 'crimes against humanity'. They didn't approve of each other's opinions. Both terms were used at the Nuremberg trials.
- 2) in either 1941 or 42, Baedeker produced a tourist guide to German Occupied Poland. !!!!
- 3) The author defines 'sovereignty' as being allowed to treat your citizens however you wish. The international courts haven't fixed this problem.

The rest of the book is nothing new. Nothing was particularly moving as the style was so dry.

I am told that the author gave a lecture giving the same material. This is probably a better bet, being, I presume, much shorter. I won't be watching it myself, but urge you to rather than use up hours of valuable time wading through the book. Unless you love and admire research for its own sake - in which case, why not go and research your own family history?

It would be a better use of your precious time!

Madeline Stringer



Phillippe Sands is an International Human Rights lawyer and Professor of Law at University College London.

In 2010 he was invited to give a lecture at Lviv University now in the Ukraine on the concepts of genocide and crimes against humanity. The city of Lviv, formerly Lemberg changed hands eight times between the two world wars, Sands says that

“The streets of Lviv are a microcosm of Europe’s turbulent twentieth century, the focus of bloody conflicts that tore cultures apart”.

It is no surprise that the ‘fathers’ of the concepts of genocide which is attributed to Rafael Lemkin and crimes against humanity to Hersch Lauterpacht formulated their ideas as both had studied at Lviv University during the 1920’s and would have witnessed first hand those ‘bloody conflicts’.

Sands explores how both men developed these concepts and their determination to have them included as indictable crimes to be charged against the Nazi regime and it’s practitioners at the Nuremberg Trial in 1946.

This is very detailed and could have been a very dry account but Sands also delves into their personal lives and family histories giving us very human minibiographies of the men whose legacy was to strengthen international law and whose hope was to safeguard the citizens of the world.

Sands also has his own personal reasons for his research as his maternal grandfather, Leon Buchholz was born in Lviv. Leon also lived in Vienna where he married Sands’ grandmother Rita and it’s where his mother was born in 1938.

The family ended up in Paris for most of the war years , but Leon and Rita never talked about the years prior to 1945, there was a veil of silence surrounding them. Sands goes on his own personal ‘Who do you think you are’ journey which is very poignant as we get to know members of his family from Lviv and neighbouring Zholkiew. Seventy or more of his relatives who lived in Lviv, Zholkiew and Vienna during the war were murdered in the Holocaust. Sands visits the killing fields of Zholkiew and says that for a brief moment he understood Leon’s and Rita’s ‘silence’.

There is a fourth protagonist in this story, Hans Frank who was Hitler’s lawyer in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Frank was the Governor General of Poland and oversaw the systematic murder of three million jews in Poland. He was found guilty at Nuremberg of the legal charges that had been formulated by Lauterpacht and Lemkin. Lauterpacht’s parents and all of his siblings were murdered while Lemkin lost 49 relatives in the Holocaust. Lauterpacht was present in the courtroom during the trial while Lemkin listened on a wireless from a hospital bed in Paris.

Sands does not go on a crusade against Frank which would be understandable, but he tells us his story within the bigger Nazi horror story in order to try understand one of the darkest times in human history.

Sands meets Niklas Frank, Hans Frank’s son at the Nuremberg Palace

of justice in 2014 in courtroom 600 where his father 's trial took place, Niklas was 7 years old in 1946, he says "This is a happy room, for me, and for the world."

East West Street is lengthy and detailed but also fascinating and very moving and more than worth while read.

Alison Claffey

I found East West Street so gripping that I could hardly put it down; I was fascinated by the author's grasp of the complex issues involved (legal and humanitarian), the clarity of his writing, and above all by the meticulous research which has preserved the stories of a number of people who contributed in very different ways to life in Europe during the second world war and afterwards.

Jennifer Flegg

I read East West Street just after it was published in 2017. Shortly afterwards the author, Phillippe Sands was invited to speak at the Dalkey Book Festival where I heard him speak passionately about the history of his family and about the law.

Following an invitation to give a lecture in Lviv, Sands delves into the past to discover what had become of his relatives who came from the region and as Jews had been torn apart by the second world war.

He gives a detailed legal history of the terms 'genocide' and 'crimes against humanity' as formulated by Rafael Lemkin and Hersch Lauterpacht respectfully, and both coincidentally had studied in Lviv University.

I found the book immensely interesting and despite the very detailed legal history a good read, particularly as Philippe Sands talks today about his work in the International Courts of Justice where crimes so prominent at Nuremberg are unfortunately very relevant today.

Margaret Leeson



On the Eve of The Gulf War

I didn't have a sister then
and wondered
did I not understand why
women will call each other 'sister'
as men say 'comrade'.
Then my first child
smiled up at me,
her lips curling around my breast
and suddenly all my sisters
from centuries past
and those to come
rose up beside me crying
Nothing has changed- nothing
You are one with us
We know the meaning
of why we are, and will be.
And my sisters around the world
cry out
Leave us alone
to tend our child, our baby,
Let our daughter play
and grow to nurse her own.
But we cry to men,
not the good men who watch
and listen and feel,

but to those who set themselves apart
from the reality of existence.

We cry

We are life, You are life, you are our sons
and they hear with their ears only,
not with their hearts.

For Man's world has changed-
the owner of chemicals or bombs
has no fellow feeling
with the possessor of flint spears
no feeling of continuity
no need to feel those brothers
smiling at them back up the years.
As my sisters may do.

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July 2021

(first written 16th January 1991, the day before my daughter's 11th birthday
and the start of the first Gulf War))