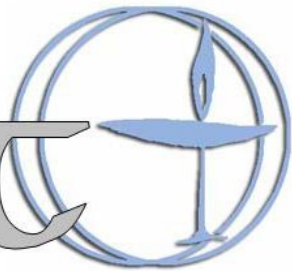


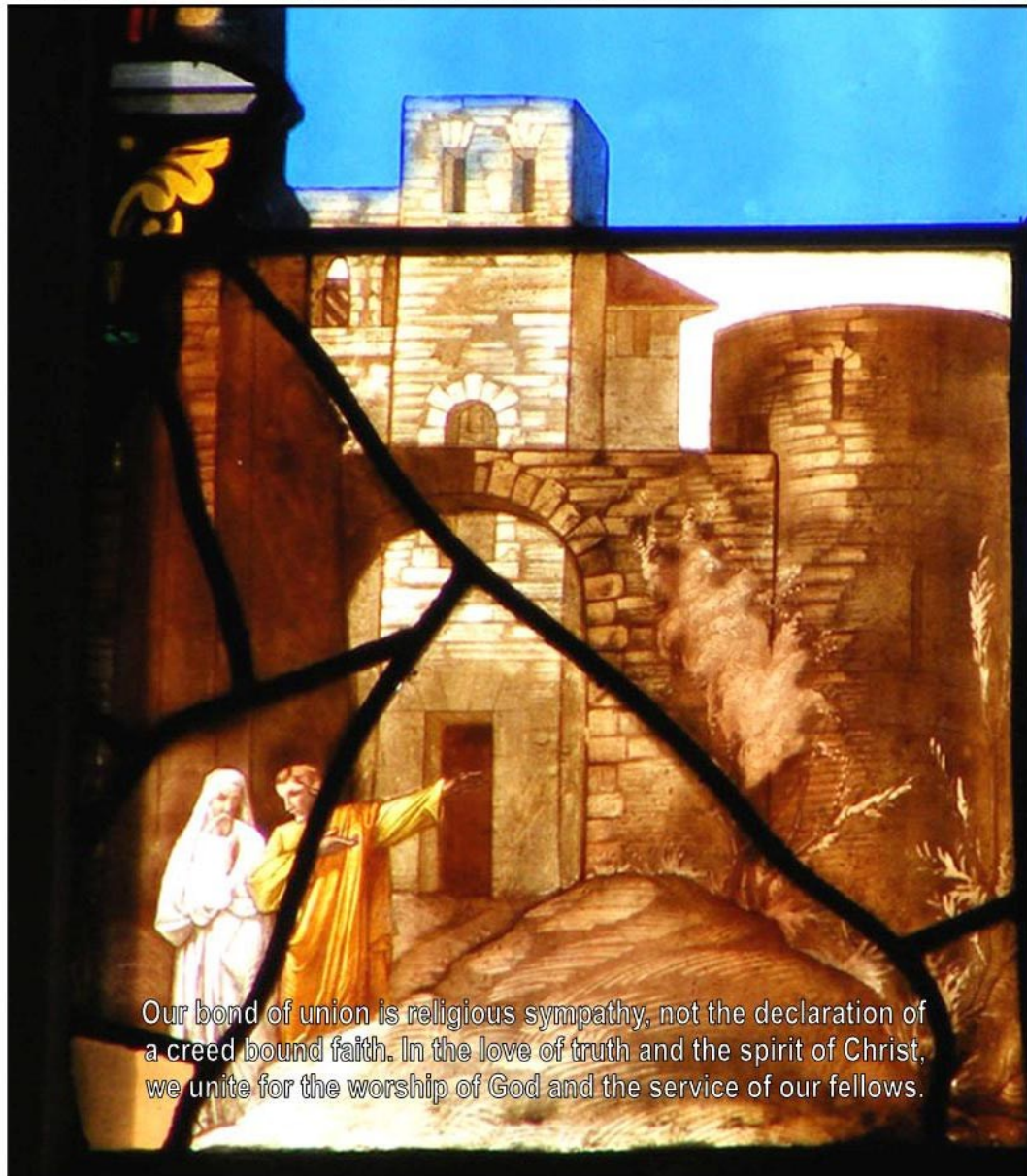
Oscailt



October 2021

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.17 Nº 10



Our bond of union is religious sympathy, not the declaration of a creed bound faith. In the love of truth and the spirit of Christ, we unite for the worship of God and the service of our fellows.

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: Detail from the Anderson memorial window, top left.
(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 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.

A New Normal

In just a few weeks the last restrictions imposed by Government for public safety reasons will lapse. Covid will still be with us but hopefully with vaccines and knowledge of how to treat the illness Covid will become a minor inconvenience we will live with. Covid came like a whirlwind. It interrupted life for months on end and it will bring lasting changes to our lives.

It has changed how people attend church. While our church doors were closed for months on end technology allowed us to hold a service every Sunday. Technology allowed us to meet for virtual coffee during the darkest days of the pandemic. The web camera brings our message beyond the church walls.

Now we are returning to more normal conditions. Since September the church doors have been open for members to attend. We take care to ensure the safety of those who come on Sunday. We wear masks, sanitise hands, limit the number in church and keep a social distance. We will continue to be cautious and so that members will feel confident and comfortable coming to church.

Some parts of church are sorely missed. I particularly miss hymn singing and of course we all miss having children in church. We look forward to sharing coffee downstairs in the New Year.

Some regular events are set to resume. In October we recommence our series of discussions on different faith systems. In the spring a group met to talk about other faiths. In this new part we will read translations of sacred texts from those faiths. Everyone is welcome to join in the discussion. We begin our first session on Thursday

7th October at 7.30p.m. via Zoom. The text is the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tau. The translation by Stephen Mitchell is the easiest to read. Tony Brady will include a link to join the class via the weekly email. Everyone is welcome to join in. Further sessions will be arranged to suit participants at our first meeting.

We will have our membership Sunday, on Sunday 31st October. Membership is open to those who have been attending the church for at least one year. So if you have been attending since before Covid and would like to formalise your membership please let me know.

Welcome back everyone I look forward to meeting you in person.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

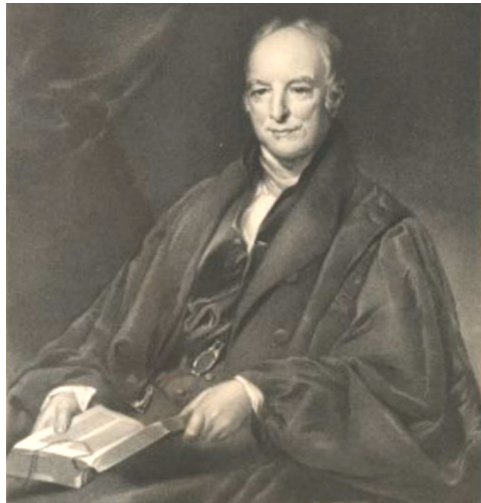
Northern Lights 2

This article is the second in a series of occasional articles intended to highlight our historic and deep connections with the Non-Subscribing Presbyterianism of counties Antrim and Down and the prominent and vital role played by people from Ulster in the building and maintenance of Unitarianism in the Dublin

Rev. William Hamilton Drummond D.D.

When the Strand Street and Eustace Street congregations transferred to St Stephen's Green in the 1863 and 1867 they brought with them many items that are still in the possession of our congregation today. One of these items is the large portrait that has hung over the fireplace downstairs in the church vestry keeping an eye on all proceedings in the room for almost 160 years. The portrait was presented to the sitter by the Strand Street Congregation in 1846. On 31st January of that year *The Freeman's Journal* reported that:-

'The Unitarian body of this city met yesterday at their meeting house on Strand Street to present their pastor, the Rev. W.H. Drummond, D.D., with a portrait of himself for which he was required to sit by the laity of this denomination. An address was read on that occasion, with an answer from Dr. Drummond. In connexion with the presentation a soiree was held in the Northumberland Buildings, which was numerous and respectably attended, and the evening passed off very agreeably'.



At the time of the presentation Drummond was 68 years old and had been a minister to the Presbyterian /

Unitarian congregation of Strand Street for over 30 years. In addition to his title of Unitarian Minister, accounts of Drummond's life also describe him as a *Biographer, Controversialist, Hymn Writer, Poet, Polemicist, Scholar and Theologian*. He was also a well-known defender of animal rights, his arguments on their behalf being published as *Humanity to Animals, the Christian's Duty* (1830) and *The Rights of Animals and Man's Obligation to Treat Them with Humanity* (1838)

William Hamilton Drummond was born in Larne, Co. Antrim in 1778 to Rose (née Hare) and William Drummond, a Royal Navy surgeon. He was educated at Belfast Academy and then Glasgow University but financial circumstances prevented him from completing his degree at Glasgow.

Drummond returned to Ulster without graduating but continued studying for the Presbyterian ministry. He was sympathiser of the United Irishmen and a friend of some of the principals of that organisation. In later years he edited the memoirs of Archibald Hamilton Rowan. Although not a participant in the 1798 rebellion he narrowly escaped death when a gun was placed at his head and he was threatened with death for his known sympathies. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Antrim in April 1800 without having to subscribe to the *Westminster Confession* and in August of that year he was installed as a minister to Second congregation (*now All Souls*) Belfast. In 1815 Drummond accepted a call from Strand Street Presbyterian Meeting House, to come to Dublin to be the assistant minister to Rev. James Armstrong. (In 1841 James Armstrong's son, George, would become Drummond's assistant at Strand Street and afterwards at St. Stephen's Green). At the time of Drummond's arrival in Dublin there were six Presbyterian congregations in the city. Four of them were theologically Trinitarian and subscribed to the Westminster Confession and the other two, Strand Street and Eustace Street, were Unitarian / non-subscribing congregations. Drummond was a committed Unitarian and several of his discourses in support of Unitarianism were committed to print. Following a marathon public debate between two clergymen in 1827, Thomas Maguire a Roman Catholic and Richard Pope an Anglican, Drummond issued '*The Doctrine of the Trinity founded neither on Scripture nor on Reason and Common Sense but on Tradition and the Infallible Church*'. The publication, which brought Drummond into conflict with leading Calvinists and Church of Ireland members, went to three editions and was widely read across Ireland and Britain. A

year later he issued his *'Unitarian Christianity the Religion of the Gospel and the New Reformation a Chimera'*. Later publications included *'Unitarianism no Feeble and Conceited Heresy Demonstrated in Two Letters to the Archbishop of Dublin'* and *'Original Sin an Irrational and Unscriptural Fiction'*.

In the 1840s Drummond was named as a defendant in a legal case that was taken to deprive the Strand Street congregation of receiving any benefit from the General Fund, a fund set up in 1710 to support Protestant Dissenters in Dublin. (*We still receive a small annual payment from the residue of this fund*). In an earlier case the Lord Chancellor, Edward Sugden, had found against the Eustace Street congregation. In response to Sugden's judgement Drummond issued a public letter under the title *'An Explanation and Defence of the Principles of Protestant Dissent'*. Following a hard fought campaign the cases against the two Dublin congregations, and similar cases against congregations in Ulster and England, were eventually resolved by the passage of 'The Dissenters Chapels Act 1844' at Westminster.

In addition to his reputation for writings on behalf of Unitarianism Drummond also acquired a reputation for his poetry and for his writings on antiquarian subjects. His knowledge of the Irish language was obviously proficient as he translated a collection of Irish poems into the English language. He was a founder member of the Belfast Literary Society and in Dublin he served as the librarian for The Royal Irish Academy.

Drummond was married twice, first to Barbara Tomb, who died young, and second to Catherine Blackley. Two of his sons became Unitarian ministers of great reputation; Rev. Robert Blackley Drummond at St.Marks Edinburgh, and Rev.James Drummond who became an assistant minister at Cross Street, Manchester, to William Gaskell, husband of the novelist, Elizabeth Gaskell. James went on to become principal at the (unitarian) Manchester College. A grandson, Rev. William Hamilton Drummond (1863–1945), be-



came the unitarian minister at All Souls Belfast and then the editor of *The Inquirer*. The names of both Williams, grandfather and grandson, are recorded on a memorial wall panel in All Souls. (photo). Drummond died on 16 October 1865 at his home at 27 Lr.Gardiner Street. He was buried in Mt.Jerome cemetery. The inscription on his gravestone reads:

WM. HAMILTON DRUMMONDD.D.

Late Rector to the Congregation of
Protestant Dissenters Strand St. now Stephens Green
Serving a Ministry of 50 years. He was the sincere and zealous
advocate of what he believed to be the truth and the
uncompromising champion of the right of private judgment.

He was summoned home in the 88th year of his age

October 16th 1865

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will to men"

This Tablet was erected by his widow CATHERINE.

She died at Greenisland, Belfast 22nd April 1878, aged 85 years
and is interred at Carnmoney.

Rory Delany
Dublin Unitarian Church

- October 2021

I contain multitudes

My address this morning is entitled ‘I contain multitudes’, after a line in Walt Whitman’s famous poem ‘Song of Myself’. The address itself reflects on contradiction, a word or a concept often considered in a negative way. Instead, a case will be made for seeing contradiction in a more positive light, and will argue that the embrace of contradiction adds a richness to our personal and social lives.

Walt Whitman, born in 1819 in New York state, is America’s world poet a latter-day successor to Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Yeats. Along with Emily Dickinson, Whitman is considered one of the architects of a uniquely American poetic voice. His overarching themes the individual, the nation, the body, the soul, and everyday life and work mirror the primary values of America’s founders. Because of his friendship and association with Henry Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, he, and indeed these three writers, are much loved in the hearts of Unitarian Universalists.

Whitman’s great poem ‘Song of Myself’ is, in its way, an American epic. It is a sprawling combination of biography, sermon, and poetic, even Biblical, meditation, and is a poetry, largely written in free verse, of commonalities, truths, inclusivity, complexities, and contradictions. In ‘Song of Myself’ Whitman uses the figure of the self (or ‘I’) to speak not just for himself, but for the many, to explore a unique combination of American, and indeed human, experience in all its conflicting and contradictory dimensions. It includes the much celebrated three lines:

*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

Contradiction is my favourite word in the English language. When I encounter a contradiction, my eyes light up. When I hear a contradiction, my ears move into a Maeve Binchy-like listening mode. I listen to a statement of a position, or outcome, *opposite* to one already made, and I look forward to some vigorous argument. But so often, there are, as we are fond of saying, two sides to the story, two sides to the strongly held position, to the possible outcome, to

the subject or phenomenon under discussion. Indeed, each apparently contradictory account, idea, or outcome may be equally true or valid in different circumstances.

The context is key. The circumstances, in all their complexity and practicality, must be best fully understood and considered. Then, a blunt, categorical, *either-or* declaration or solution – a black and white mindset – can evolve into a more nuanced, inclusionary, *both-and* approach to understanding and resolving contradictions.

It is noteworthy that the oft-used Gaelic language expression, *trí na chéile*, suggests ‘trying to cope with confusion’. We say that things are *trí na chéile*, that they are muddled and mixed-up. And for some, especially those of a black and white outlook, contradiction and ambiguity are indeed confusing and represent a confused state of mind. Yet in its quite literal translation, *trí na chéile* means ‘through its other’, implying that understanding, and a way-forward, come from a through-otherness.

Seamus Heaney has written about this idea of through-otherness in the context of identity and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. He spoke of ‘the need to get to a place of through-otherness’ in which community divisions are healed by common actions and shared identities. There is need for the one (side) to see itself through the lens of the other; it may be a confusing and convoluted process, but it is necessary and rewarding. Arguably, much of the success of the Belfast Agreement of 1998 reflects this process. According to the journalist Paul Gillespie the agreement is ‘based on the mutual recognition of separate and divided communities and their commitment to equality... where separate identities must be equally recognised before they can become more fluid.’ Crucially, in the agreement, both the British and Irish governments concur that the citizens of Northern Ireland can be ‘British or Irish or both’.

This idea of dual citizenship is echoed by Richard Kearney, the Irish philosopher and public intellectual. He has written about the era of the Celtic Tiger and Ireland’s then decisive transition from a regional to an internationalised economy, and from an insular to a global culture. Kearney sees this globalising process as retrieving, in a postmodern guise, an ancient understanding of voyaging that goes back to the peregrinations of scholarly Irish monks during the eighth to the twelfth centuries. These monks brought, indeed exported, their learning, religious values, writing and silver

and gold craftsmanship throughout Europe. Kearney contends that today's Irish global managers and entrepreneurs 'hail from a generation of Irish citizens who claim a dual belonging to Ireland and to the world... [who] are "hibernicising" the world and globalising Ireland' (Kearney, 2008). He concludes: 'It is not, of course, an either-or. [It's both-and.] The Irish mind is both artistic and scientific... it is perhaps salutary to redress the balance and sing from two hymn sheets at once. As James Joyce rightly knew, the Irish are at their best when they have "two thinks at a time".'

Notions like 'two thinks at a time', through-otherness, through its other, seeing one through the lens of the other, are all ways of embracing contradiction and its attendant ambiguity. Such a mindset allows us to resolve much apparent contradiction. In like vein, the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, argues that a simplistic either-or approach permeates too many aspects of western thought, making different, and more progressive, ways of organising or understanding the world difficult to conceive. One of Derrida's fundamental strands of thought is that every phenomenon has its opposite, its Other, inherently stamped into it. How do we explain day without reference to night?

I came across an interesting contradiction recently in reading a review of a book entitled 'Stories We Tell Ourselves: Making Meaning in a Meaningless Universe'. The author, Richard Holloway, once a leading liberal bishop in the Scottish Episcopal Church, identifies human suffering as 'the greatest problem that confronts the religious consciousness'. He argues that someone of deep faith in a personal God cannot avoid the question: What kind of God would let children to die of hunger, be tortured, be recruited as boy soldiers, or be orphaned by a deadly virus? (Many of us remember the actor Stephen Fry's similar argument, even outburst, along these lines in Gay Byrne's programme *The Meaning of Life* in 2015.)

Yet the Buddha argues that suffering is at the core of human existence and how we navigate that suffering is the path to a dignified way of life. To suffer or not to suffer? Is there an irreconcilable contradiction here? Maybe not. If a Benevolent Creator were to erase all suffering from this world and ensure an omnipresent happiness, what would happen to the wonderful story of humankind with its trials and tribulations, its struggles and achievements?

Richard Holloway himself, the former bishop, resolves the contradiction by following Jesus and his teachings, while assuming God does not exist. 'I am a Christian without God', he says, and contends further in his book that 'One of the things I am trying to suggest is that

contradictory stories can honestly be told about the world’.

Making meaning, searching for spiritual insight, finding a religious faith, are each a fraught and challenging endeavour. Accepting the likelihood, and challenge, of contradictory thinking and argument can help. Making meaningful connections between apparent opposites can be profoundly satisfying. To struggle with some ideas that have long appeared inherently conflicting and oppositional, and to then find that these ideas are in many regards deeply interwoven and interpenetrated is an occurrence of intense insight – a genuine Eureka moment. Seamus Heaney’s notion of through-otherness is revealed with startling clarity.

So then, I can feel both Irish and European, and there is no contradiction? Of course there isn’t. I can hold progressive views on some topics and conservative views on others. Of course you can. I can attend a Catholic Mass on Saturday evening and come to Sunday Service at a Unitarian Church. Of course, there is no contradiction, only thoughtful inclusion.

Such acceptance of contradiction is thus relevant in our daily lives, and how we live with our neighbours, and within a wider society. Consider replacing a black and white, either-or, certitude with a more nuanced both-and approach that includes some characteristic Unitarian doubt. Accepting contradiction brings, at the least, good manners to human and civil discourse. We do not have to shout down, or dumb down, or ‘cancel’ our apparent opponents. More optimistically, we may find shared spaces of respect and friendship, of inclusion and possibility, that seemed previously untenable. Consider that we all ‘contain multitudes’ in however a lowly way.

If Walt Whitman contained multitudes, so also does another great American, and world, poet Bob Dylan, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016 ‘for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition.’ Celebrating his 80th birthday in May of this year, Dylan is, like Whitman, a protean personality in tune with the evolving angst of his era, a man of many parts, beliefs, complexities, denials, and contradictions. Content to reinvent himself on many occasions, he told *Newsweek* in 1997 ‘I think one thing today and I think another thing tomorrow. I change during the course of a day.’ In truth, Bob Dylan has been the curator of his own multitudes.

He acknowledges this in a poem-song in his most recent album released in 2020. Entitled ‘I contain multitudes’, in homage to Walt Whitman, it is a sprawling, meditative, reflection-on-life

song that offers, among many others, the following verse:

*Pink petal-pushers, red blue jeans
All the pretty maids, and all the old queens
All the old queens from all my past lives
I carry four pistols and two large knives
I'm a man of contradictions, I'm a man of many moods
I contain multitudes*

To conclude my address, and to celebrate the magnificent legacy of this man of contradictions, I quote the two closing lines from his iconic 1960's anthem, with its lyrics of anxious questioning and quiet ambiguity.

*'The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind'*

Aidan O'Driscoll
Dublin Unitarian Church

July 2021

Living out Religion

Yesterday twenty years ago America was attacked by terrorists. On a beautiful sunny September morning two airplanes deliberately flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre causing them to collapse. A third plane flew into the Pentagon and flight UA 93 disappeared from the radar. It later emerged that the passengers on this flight fought back against the hijackers. Their efforts prevented many more deaths.

The attacks were unusual in that they were witnessed by millions of people in real time. We saw fire fighters respond, we saw them as they made ready then risked their lives by going into the burning buildings. We saw the towers crash down on them and the wall of dust that flowed through the streets from the collapsing towers. We watched with horror as people held hands and jumped from the burning towers to their certain death.

That we witnessed the attack made it emotional and real. The reality of lost lives is reinforced as every time we hear the names of those killed read aloud. We hear their life stories and twenty years on we hear how their deaths continue to affect the lives of children not yet born when the parent died on 9/11.

In the wake of the attacks President George W. Bush addressed the American people he promised to avenge the attacks. This politician kept his promise. War was declared on terrorism and America led its allies in the Invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Bush promised to make American safe again and used the military might of the world's most powerful country in pursuit of security.

While there is reality about what happened on 9/11 the aftermath of the attacks lacks this clarity. We know that Saddam Hussein was quickly overthrown. The weapons of mass destruction reported to be held by Iraq, whose existence was used to justify the invasion, proved to have been a rumour. We can only guess at the number of Iraqi civilians who died in the twenty years since 9/11. One estimate puts the number in excess of two hundred thousand. The number of American soldiers who died in Iraq is in excess of three thousand six hundred. The number injured and maimed can be counted in millions.

Just days ago all foreign soldiers left Afghanistan. (31st August 2021) President Biden's stated reason for withdrawing troops is that during twenty years more than two and a half thousand American soldiers have died there and the Afghan war has cost America Three Trillion dollars.

Before the evacuation was completed the **supposedly** defeated Taliban took control of the entire country. The Taliban now patrols using American vehicles, wearing American uniforms, armed with American weapons. As ever there are no statistics for the numbers of Afghani deaths and injuries.

Seventeen terrorists committed the 9/11 attacks it is estimated that in 2001 there were about one hundred members of Al Queda. ISIS didn't exist then. The gut reaction to being hurt is to retaliate but is retaliation the wisest course?

The Buddhist scripture the Dhammapadam is more than two and a half thousand years old. It says-

“Never does hatred cease by hating in return
Only through love can hatred come 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”.

Those seventeen young men that led the attacks on America were filled with hate. Their actions initiated a circle of retaliation and hatred that continues. Darkness cannot dispel darkness only light can dispel darkness. “Hating does not cease by hating in return; only through love can hatred come to an end”.

The 9/11 attacks took the lives of almost three thousand Americans. As a result of actions that followed the attacks more than six thousand American soldiers lost their lives, hundreds of thousands of civilians died; this grim tally does not include the physical and psychological injuries.

The world is a less safe place; 9/11 was followed by terrorist attacks in London, Madrid, Paris Nice, New Zealand, Germany the list goes on. British secret service reported on Friday that they had

prevented six possible attacks. The 9/11 attackers died in the planes; retaliation had to be directed at people who were innocent.

There are other stories of 9/11 and its aftermath that are less familiar. The story of Balbir Singh Bodhi and Frank Roque is one such story. Balbir Singh Bodhi was a Sikh, a husband father and a successful businessman. Frank Roque was a petty criminal. On the 15th September Frank Roque went out to as he said “to shoot some towel heads” adding “we should kill their children as well”. He thought Balbir’s turban meant he was a Muslim and shot him. Twenty minutes later his shots narrowly missed a Lebanese American then he went on to shoot up the house the home of an Afghan family. Frank is serving a life sentence in gaol.

Balbir’s niece is Valerie Kaur; she is a lawyer and peace activist. Her motivation for peace work comes firstly because she wanted her country to be a safe place for her young son to grow up in. She is also motivated by a promise she made as a child to her Sikh grandfather. Her first encounter with racism was as a six year old in the playground when she was told to go back to her country. Her grandfather comforted her and made her promise that she would not fall into hatred but to follow the Sikh tradition and be warrior for peace. Valerie tries to keep that promise.

Since 9/11 incidence of hate crimes have increased year on year. Valerie often records interviews with people she meets through her work as a peace activist. Shortly after the funeral of Balbir Singh she recorded Balbir’s widow Juginder. Juginder’s first words were “I want to thank the three thousand people who came to my husband’s funeral”. Juginder felt the love of those people who didn’t know her or her husband but who showed their love in the only way they could - my attending his funeral. Every time Juginder hears accounts of deaths caused by hate she tells everyone who will listen to her “**we have to love more**”. At one family gathering she asked “who do we not yet love?” The answer to this question was of course Frank Roque.

On the 15th Anniversary of Balbir Singh’s death the family phoned Frank Roque in jail. One of the few freedoms prisoners have is the freedom to decide who they will meet and who they will talk to. Frank Roque spoke to Juginder. Early in the conversation he is defensive. Eventually he made the offhand comment “I’m sorry it happened”. Balbir’s Brother said “are you saying that you are sor-

ry?” Roque replied “Yes I’m sorry for what happened when I meet your husband in heaven I will hug him and ask his forgiveness” The apology has given Balbir’s family peace. This peace took fifteen years to come into existence. Fifteen years of constantly taking small difficult steps on the road to love brought them to a good place.

Valerie Kaur works as a lawyer on behalf of the detainees in Gauntanamo Bay. These prisoners are the forgotten nameless tortured victims caught in the fallout from 9/11.

What if America had taken the path of reconciliation rather than the path of revenge? George Bush would have been accused of being “soft on terrorism” and probably not been re-elected. Six thousand American soldiers would be alive. Countless Iraqi and Afghanis would be alive. The list of what if’s is endless.

We come back to the words of the Dhammapadam

“Never does hatred cease by hating in return
Only through love can hatred come to an end”

We live with what is; not with what ifs and if only. We have work to do we have to be examples of love in action in our world. We can’t leave it to someone else making the world a better place is everyone’s responsibility.

I repeat the words of Lau Tzu from the service.

If there is to be peace in the world
There must be peace in the nations
If there is to be peace in the nations
There must be peace in the cities
If there is to be peace in the cities
There must be peace between neighbours
If there is to be peace between neighbours
There must be peace in the home
If there is to be peace in the home
There must be peace in the heart

When all the people of the world love
Then the strong will not overpower the weak.
The many will not oppress the few
The wealthy will not mock the poor
The honoured will not disdain the humble
The cunning will not deceive the weak.
Let us cultivate peace
Peace for our selves
And peace for the world.

Rev. Bridget Spain
Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

September 2021



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



Death and Nightingales

by

Eugene McCabe

This is a dark Irish tale set in rural Fermanagh in the 1880's. Ancient rivalries abound between Protestants and Catholics, landlords and tenants, men and women. There is a sense of the politics and culture of the time as we encounter the influence of the clergy in all aspects of life on both sides of the religious divide. There's reference to a visit from Parnell, an entertaining Percy French concert in Enniskillen. There's Fenian plots linked to the Phoenix Park murders and subsequent R.I.C and Dublin Castle investigations, collaborations and betrayals.

The book opens on Beth Winter's 25th birthday, she is the Catholic stepdaughter of Billy Winters the local Protestant landlord. Beth's mother Cathy was pregnant with Beth when she 'duped' Billy into marrying her. Thus was the start of a complicated and fractured marriage based on mistrust, treachery and betrayal, mix that with alcohol and domestic violence and this is not a happy story. When Beth is about 12 years old the unhappiness is compounded as Cathy, now pregnant with Billy's child is gored to death by the bull that was part of her dowry, (the bull's name is Cooley, a nod to the Tain and Irish mythology)

Beth knows she will never inherit Clonuala and her future there is dependent on her 'behaving' herself, that is, she is to be Billy's housekeeper, cook and dairymaid while increasingly Billy's behaviour and attentions are becoming more inappropriate towards her. She longs to escape her life and feels trapped.

This is a very depressing picture yet there is a resilience and strength in Beth. She rescues a sick cow in the opening chapter. She handles the servants and farm hands well and has a very

affectionate friendship with the main female servant Mercy Boyle. The dialogue is rich between the two women and also the banter between the servants and farm hands provides much needed relief to such a dark and tense story. You get a great sense of the language and daily lives of the people depicted.

There are some lovely descriptions of the landscape and wildlife as the author brings us with the characters as they rendezvous at a lake, go to work at the quarry, or cut turf in the bog. There is a great sense of time and place.

The story takes a turn when after a long absence Liam Ward returns to take up his dead uncles' tenancy with Billy Winters, he meets Beth and they fall in love. They arrange to meet but Beth has reservations and doesn't show up. Liam disappears for six months and on his subsequent return there is suspicion and rumours of his Fenian support and activities. Liam and Beth embark on a love affair and arrange to go out to Corvey island which is owned by Beth, a legacy from her mother. As Liam is rowing he tells Beth to sit still as he cannot swim. There is a small cottage on the island where they stay and conspire to rob Billy Winters of his grandfather's gold so they can emigrate to Canada. Beth is now pregnant and she plans to tell Liam on the night of the robbery but as Beth is leaving the house with the gold she discovers from the local vagrant, Dummy McGonnell about Liam's betrayal and treacherous plan to murder and bury her. Liam had a debt he could not walk away from as he had robbed money from the Fenian brotherhood. Beth has no choice but to replace the gold in the cabinet but as she does so Billy catches her, beats her violently and throws her out of the house. Beth has nowhere to go but to Liam's cottage where she tells him of her pregnancy which flips his perspective on the situation and now full of remorse, which she knows is guilt, he agrees to go back out to the island where Beth can stay for a few days in hiding.

This is where Beth turns into a dark angel and is as ruthless as her stepfather. On the way out to the island she manages to capsize the boat and she lets Liam drown, then swims ashore and makes her way to the cottage.

Meanwhile Billy finds out (again, Dummy McGonnell) that she was headed to the island and finds her there alone. She

tells Billy of Liam's drowning and her pregnancy, Billy says they should marry as they are "tethered both to treachery" it is here that they acknowledge their intertwined tragic lives. Billy asks Beth if she is hurting and she replies "Unto death Mr. Winters, unto death".

The overall conclusion from the book club was that this is a very well written novel, rich in dialogue and prose and with characters, certainly not all likeable but for the most part believable taking in the context of the time. Most of us felt it was well worth reading but because of its dark overtones and themes it was not always an enjoyable read, but for me that is the hallmark of a good writer, one that stirs your imagination and takes you to another time and place, even if it is an uncomfortable one.

Alison Claffey



**The Doctrine of
this Church is**

Love

solves

Most Problems

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