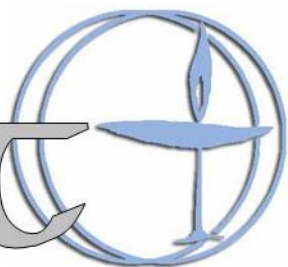


Oscailt



May 2023

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.19 Nº 5



Are you interested in helping out at evening events?

The Managing Committee is seeking interested people to help steward evening events in the church.

**Full training will be given
and a fee of €50
will be paid to cover time and expenses.**



If you would like to be added to the panel of stewards,
please send an email
to eventsunitarianchurch@gmail.com
with your name and phone number.



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 15th 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: Detail from the Wilson Memorial Window, bottom centre.
(photo P.Spain)

CONTENTS

The limits of our horizon <i>Rev.Bridget Spain</i>	2
A Cautionary Tale <i>Doireann Ni Brian</i>	6
JUDAS ISCARIOT AS SAINT <i>Dr.Martin Pulbrook</i>	10
Should we 'cancel' Bishop Berkeley? <i>Aidan O'Driscoll</i>	12
Book Review	15



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 *os-cail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

The limits of our horizon

Throughout the history of evolution every culture has developed some form of religion. Religions try to provide answers for the mysteries of life. Religion may try to regulate the behaviour of its members. They try to answer what is unknown, for example the origins of life and our destiny when we die. Even though religious leaders deny it religious beliefs evolve. They change because of the passing of time, new knowledge of the world, or perhaps in response to the influence of a charismatic leader such as Jesus or the Prophet Muhammad.

Jesus didn't establish a new religion, he developed new thinking about the Jewish faith. The Prophet Muhammad explicitly said that his teaching was the correction of errors that had developed in the accounts of God's revelations to Abraham, Moses and the other prophets....

The great western religious traditions trace their origins to Abraham and we can identify developments, changes and eventually splits in those belief systems.

When Pope Benedict died, he was hailed as a great defender of "the truth". Of course, Benedict's truth was Catholic teaching. There is no single identifiable truth that is fixed and unchanging. Everything is relative. For example, if I were to take a gun and kill someone I would be guilty of murder. However, the waters are easily muddled. What if someone is terminally ill, should I withhold pain relief because a side effect will be to shorten their life? We can take it a step further. Our western lifestyle, i.e. us, we are causing the deaths of thousands of people in many parts of the world because of climate chaos. Is this murder?

Truth is depicted in our stained - glass window. She is left of centre. Vital but off centre there is no ultimate religious truth; the human story is a work in progress. Humanity is still a work in progress. Truth deserves honesty of human ignorance.

A "truth" I was taught as a child was that I was born to "know love and serve God on earth and be happy with him for ever in heaven". Knowing, loving and serving God on earth meant that I should follow the rules of a particular Christian denomina-

tion. At death I will go up to heaven or down to hell. That belief system no longer rings true for me.

I see all religions as solutions to human curiosity and the longing to try to understand existence. Humans create our versions of Gods. Two great threads flow through all religions: these are a longing for love and an absolute need for justice.

We need love to thrive and flourish. When we live in love with one another and in harmony with the earth, we experience a sense of being at home; of living in our true nature. Unfortunately, it is also human nature to become distracted from our better nature. It is spiritual practices or religions that draw us back to living in love. Which religion is the right religion? The right religion is the one that works for you; the one that makes you more loving and the one that fulfils your sense of justice. The one that satisfies your truth.

The Christian premise that this life is a once off test, with the reward of heaven or hell when we die, was more acceptable when it was believed that the world was just six thousand and twenty seven years old- That particular figure was arrived by Trinity College's Bishop Ussher who used the Bible to calculate the age of the world.

In this version of the human story God was a continuous presence guiding the people at all times. Now we know that the story of the Universe is far more immense. We know only a miniscule part of that story. The knowledge of the shortcomings of some religions has made religion almost irrelevant in Western culture. Western culture at this time does not feel the need for God..... Is this good or bad?

The monotheistic concept of punishment or reward after death fulfils our desire for justice. We need to believe that goodness is ultimately rewarded and that the evildoer is punished. The longing for justice is also provided by the concept of reincarnation which is part of the teachings of Eastern philosophies. I feel more at home with the idea of reincarnation. I am very aware that I may have a Western simplistic understanding of this teaching.

Savell Hicks was minister in this church from 1910 - 1962. He preached about reincarnation. When a minister of one of the nearby Christian churches heard of this, he poked fun at

“that lot who believed that a door knob will become a person”. Perhaps given enough time it will !

I do believe that death is not the end of the story for humans. The survival of some part of us after death is supported by the laws of physics. The “first law of thermodynamics; that no energy is created in the universe, and none is destroyed”

This, scientific law confirms that at death the energy that comprises each one of us is not destroyed. It may be that we live many, many lives. If you find yourself thinking positively about being reborn over and over again, remember that our lives are privileged, the next life we experience may be a life of greater suffering.

The Universe is much greater than our lives. We perceive a fraction of the whole and we understand even less. This lack of understanding means that we cannot set “the truth” in stone. We must be aware of our ignorance.

There is an old saying in Ireland “Imionn na daoine ach fanann na cnoic” This translates as “the people go but the hills remain”; this is true **only** in the short term. Over time mountains grow and mountains are eroded. I recently watched a programme about the geology of Ireland which made me realise how we think of time as line, beginning with the big bang and moving in a line to the present day. But life is not linear, it is a circle. The Native American Indians knew this intuitively.

Thich Nhat Hanh. Pointed out that we would consider the dead leaves falling from the tree as useless but if we look they are providing a habitat for insects and worms. When the leaves eventually break-down they provide sustenance for the future new growth of the tree to renew its leaves. A very short cycle of life.

There are greater cycles. Google says Ireland is located at 53.7798° North latitude and 7.3055° W. with the Atlantic to the west. Ireland was born south of the equator. It has moved northwards and is still moving. The Atlantic is about 150 million years old and it also has a limited lifespan. It formed, it exists and it will die.

The limestone that forms the Burren was formed from

dead shell fish. The Burren limestone is dissolving and is being washed in underground rivers to the sea. What began as shellfish became mountains and the cycle continues as the mountain is now being dissolved, the stone now the remains of its stone nourishes shellfish off the coast.

Life is a cycle greater and more wonderful than our imagination. We see life with a very limited horizon. We must question our truths. At the moment we know that the most important truth is that “love one another”. As we see if we love one another, the circle of life confirms that that love will return to us.

There seems to be an astonishing range of religions and belief systems; yet with few exceptions they teach their followers to live by the golden rule of “treat others as you would wish to be treated”. As one Jewish rabbi said “all the rest is just commentary”. In Europe the religion of the majority is the Christian tradition.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

A Cautionary Tale

It was a normal Sunday morning in the Unitarian church. The choir, of which I'm a member and which comes in an hour early to practise two Sundays a month, was rehearsing at the top of the church. I wanted to practise my own alto line in a quiet space, so I went down to the back of the church, putting my bag, which contained my mobile phone, and coat into the pew where I would be sitting afterwards for the service with the other choir members. A mere few minutes later I went to that pew, and my little handbag/backpack was gone, and with it the lifeline which is my phone. I ran back to where the rest of the choir members still were, but it wasn't there, and then I remembered I had noticed a woman sitting on her own in the side pews near the door during our rehearsal. I assumed she was a visitor who had come in early. Because she was wearing a mask (this was in Covid time), I could only see her eyes. She had seemed to stare at me as I passed, but I didn't think too much of it. Now I knew that she had taken the bag.

I imagined that like most handbag snatchers, this woman would have taken my purse – containing all my credit and ID cards and some cash, as well as my phone - and then dumped the bag, so I ran around to the various blocks of flats behind the church and looked in dustbins as I went. My husband Andy and Paul Spain went to search the bushes in St Stephen's Green, to no avail. I went back to the church, as I was due to do a reading during the service that morning, but as soon as I'd done my reading, I decided to go to Kevin St. Garda station, the nearest police station to the church and report the theft. I had to wait for ages for anyone to come to the front desk, and eventually, when a Garda did appear, she asked me for all the details and wrote it all laboriously in her notebook. 'What', I asked, impatiently, 'are you going to do with that?'. Oh, I'll transfer it into the computer system (there was a computer sitting in front of her as she hand-wrote her report) and send it on to Pearse St. They're the ones who cover St. Stephen's Green. Who knew?

I was too hyped up to go back to a calm church service, so having borrowed money to buy a tram ticket (my travel card was

in my missing purse), I made my way home. I then remembered that my iPad, which was at home, had a Find My Phone app, and so I searched it. Lo and behold, it found my phone, and the little icon popped up in a housing estate off the Lr. Churchtown Rd in Dundrum, a few kilometres from where I live in Rathmines. Delighted with this information, I phoned the Dundrum Gárda station, where I was told they couldn't possibly turn up at someone's doorstep and accuse them of having stolen my bag, but if I wanted to try doing it myself, I could. 'Give us a ring if you run into any problems', said the Gárda!

Meanwhile, Andy had come home and agreed that we would drive to Dundrum and take our chances. But I noticed that the little icon representing my phone had started to move around, so that it was no longer in the housing estate. My iPad only works on wifi, and so there was no point in bringing it with me to Dundrum to track the thief, who was clearly on the move with my bag and phone. Then Andy remembered that my friend, Seán, lived in Dundrum. I rang to check he was at home, and arranged to call to his house and use his wifi to connect my iPad and get an update on the thief's whereabouts. So we jumped in the car and headed for Dundrum. On arrival in Seán's house, we hooked up the iPad and found the thief had moved again. Seán then suggested he would sit in his kitchen with my iPad, track the thief's movements, and keep in touch with us on Andy's mobile phone so that we could carry out the chase.

So off we set up Sydenham Road (the current location of the phone) and from there into the Dundrum Shopping Centre, with Seán giving regular updates on Andy's phone. The problem was, the thief was moving quickly from one shop to the next, and it reached the point where Andy and I were running at speed through the shopping centre in hot pursuit, looking like escaping thieves ourselves. Eventually the real thief left the shopping centre, moved and was half way up the Lr.Churchtown Road. We ran back to Seán's, got the car, and headed for the phone's location. Then Seán announced the thief had turned back to Dundrum; so we dumped the car (on a double yellow line, of course) and ran back to the bus terminus in Dundrum. There was a bus parked with the engine running, and I leaped onto it, shouting to the driver not to move yet, ran up the stairs, where there was a young couple sitting at the back of the bus. I blurted out to them that my bag

had been stolen and that I wondered did they know anything about it, and then realised they clearly were not the culprits, apologised, and beat a hasty retreat.

Outside the bus, there were 3 women sitting on a bench. Two of them were clearly not the thieving kind, but the third looked familiar. Remember, I had only seen her eyes in the church because of her mask, but those eyes were, I was pretty sure, the same ones I'd seen that morning. She had clearly just been shopping, and was surrounded by many bags. "Can I have my phone back, please?" I said. (By then I was so obsessed with getting the phone and all it contained back that I had forgotten there was a bag, as well). "What are you talking about?", she said, indignantly. "You're the woman who stole my bag in the Unitarian Church this morning", I answered, whereupon she displayed outrage at what she deemed a false accusation, said she was a store detective and knew all about things like this, berating me for speaking to her in those terms, and throwing it all back on me. As I began to doubt myself, I had a spark of inspiration. Andy still had his phone to his ear - with Seán at the other end, listening - and I lied through my teeth and said, "Well, my husband is on the phone to the Gardaí and they're on their way down". "I'm not talking to any f..ing guards", she shouted, and took off at speed with her several bags of shopping and, I suddenly noticed, my little black backpack over her shoulder. 'Give me back my bag', I screamed, as Andy and I started to chase her up the main road to Churchtown. She turned round to take a swipe at me, and I, for some reason, was worried she might break my glasses, and ducked. She shot across the road, with Andy in hot pursuit. He grabbed the bag from her shoulder and ran back to me. He says she then got into a taxi, though I didn't notice that.

I opened the bag to find my phone still in it, to my great relief. However, my precious purse was gone, and with it all my credit and ID cards, as well as the 70 euros cash. That had clearly been spent on the contents of the many shopping bags she was carrying. In their place was a pack of sandwiches (her lunch, I presumed) and a very large bunch of keys. We collected the car, and drove back to mission control, where Seán had been happily entertained through Andy's phone, by all the shrieking and shouting (mainly by me) as we confronted the thief. He did say he had wondered at one stage whether he should call the Gardaí. I decided I would drop up to the police station, hand in this woman's keys and report the whole drama. The Garda I spoke to there said with a wry smile that it was highly unlikely she



A place of worship since 1717

UNITARIAN CHURCH

Prince's Street, Cork.

Registered Charity Number 0000246

Service: Sundays at 11a.m.

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

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

Further information from 087-9539998

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

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

www.unitarianchurchcork.com

Jazz Vespers, first Friday of the month @ 6pm.

An ecumenical service with the Methodist church.

FREEDOM - REASON - TOLERANCE

Please Note

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell, or who has suffered a bereavement, and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please e-mail Rev.Bridget Spain.

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Childrens Programme - Sunday Club

Take place on the 2nd Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email
Denise at sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

Lunch-time service every Wednesday from 1.10 to 1.40 p.m.

Each week Eileen Delaney sends an e-mail circular as to
what is happening in the church and
the other activities associated with the church.

If you would like to receive this information you should send
your details requesting your name be added to the list to:-
eileendelaney76@gmail.com



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for May 2023

7 th May	<i>Buddha's Birthday</i>
Service	Rev. Bridget Spain
Reader	Tom McEnaney
Flowers	Colette Douglas
Welcomer	Colette Douglas, Janet Mulroy
Coffee	Tom McEnaney, Andrew Connolly Crangle, Gráinne Carty
<hr/>	
14 th May	<i>Theodora Parker</i>
Service	Rev. Bridget Spain
Reader	Maeve Edwards
Flowers	Frank Kelly
Welcomer	Frank Kelly, Lorraine Doyle
Coffee	Frank Kelly, Lis Ramirez, Colette Douglas
<hr/>	
21 st May	<i>T. B. A.</i>
Service	Madeline Stringer
Reader	Denise Dunne
Flowers	Denise Dunne
Welcomer	Daphne Dunkin, Paul Murray
Coffee	Maeve Edwards, Grainne Carty, Janet Mulroy
<hr/>	
28 th May	<i>Favourite Readings</i>
Service	Rev. Bridget Spain
Reader	Máire Bacon
Flowers	Jane Nolan
Welcomer	Paula Mills, Lorenzo Casella
Coffee	Paul Murray, Malachy Hevehan, Jane Nolan

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.
On our WebCam, click and connect at www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

Recordings of previous services are also available on the 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.

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.
Unitarian Church - Dublin Registered Charity Number 20000622

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

Managing committee:- Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne;
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;
Tony Shine; Andy Pollak; Peter White; Will O'Connell; Collette Douglas;
Malachy Hevehan; Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne.

www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

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*)

Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne:- Tel: 087-2450660

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

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

Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602

Caretaker: Kevin Robinson Telephone: 4752781

Recordings of the church services are available on the church website.

would come to him in search of her keys; but he took them anyway, asked for a description, and wrote a report of some kind. He remarked that I'd make a good detective! And there the story almost ends.

Two weeks later I was on holiday with my walking friends in Corsica. I was on a beautiful sea-cliff walk one morning when I took a call from a Garda in Pearse Street Garda station, who said he'd been passed the report of the theft (he was just back from 2 weeks holiday), and was wondering if I would like any victim support. I politely declined, saying I was well over it, but asked whether they had made any progress on searching for the thief. Not a bit of it, though he did suggest I call in and see him when I came back, so he could complete his report! I made one attempt, but he wasn't in that day, and I didn't bother after that as it was beginning to feel like ancient history.

It's a warning to all of us in the church, though. Do not leave your valuables unattended. You never know who's going to sneak in and take advantage of your carelessness. Indeed, the woman who took my bag was so brazen, I wouldn't put it past her to try again.

Doireann Ni Brian

Dublin Unitarian Church

JUDAS ISCARIOT AS SAINT

In my address given in Dublin 21st August last year, printed in April 2023 Oscailt. (“Likeness of Jesus and The Twelve in an old Romanian manuscript”) I looked at this early representation of the Last Supper, a representation which has some startling implications; that Mary Magdalene was a member of The Twelve and that she, and not John, was in fact the disciple resting on Jesus’s breast on that occasion; and that the disciple Judas Thomas - the “Judas not Iscariot” of John 14.22 - was the identical twin of Jesus. On these grounds I placed the origin of this picture in very early times, certainly not later than the fourth century.

But I am sorry to say that I missed on that earlier occasion a third most important, primitive feature, relating to Judas Iscariot, of whom I wrote: “Twelve of the thirteen are depicted with a halo, and only one - going round the table from Jesus’s left, to the very end of the bench at the middle in the front - without. This must - for obvious reasons - be Judas Iscariot”. Well, I was wrong.

I have enclosed the right-hand end of the picture, as we look at it, so that we have included - in order from the top - Simon Peter, James the son of Zebedee, Philip, John and Judas Iscariot. If you look very carefully, you will see that Judas once had a halo too, which has been scratched or rubbed out. But the circular outline of this is still faintly visible. In other words we had depicted here a very early tradition in which Judas was a saint, not a traitor and sinner.

Could this possibly be correct? The answer to that intriguing question is “Yes, certainly”, I gave an address - in Dublin twenty-five years ago, on 24th May 1998, entitled “Judas Iscariot, faithful unto death.” And in that address I suggested that Judas was Jesus’s most faithful confidant; and that it was at Jesus’s express instruction that Judas went to the Roman authorities to tell them where Jesus was to be found. They both believed that the End of the World and the Rapture would follow immediately, rather than that Jesus would be captured. Then the Rapture did not happen, and Jesus was apprehended, Judas was so remorseful at what he had brought about that he went out and killed himself.

Judas’s reputation was then travestied by the emergent

Church, quite unjustly and unreasonably. But the early Romanian picture preserves a hint of the very primitive truth, that Judas had done nothing shameful, and was himself a Saint alongside the eleven other disciples.

Dr. Martin Pulbrook 16th January 2023



Should we ‘cancel’ Bishop Berkeley?

Good morning. I have decided to put my head above the parapet and engage in the culture wars: those swirling waters of identity politics, wokeism, and a cancellation ethos. Many are of the view that debate and argument in this arena are becoming increasingly antagonistic, angry, even intolerant. And tolerance, it must be remembered, is one of foundation pillars of Unitarianism.

I am going to read part of an opinion piece that appeared in January in the Irish Times about cancellation culture. But first some background...

George Berkeley, the 18th century Anglican bishop, is Ireland's most celebrated philosopher. He has both a prestigious university and a city in the United States named after him. Domestically, he is synonymous with Trinity College Dublin (TCD), where his name is lent to a college library. The Berkeley Library was completed in the mid-1960s and is regarded as a masterpiece of Brutalist architecture. Now however, Trinity College Dublin's review legacies working group is considering whether his name should be removed from this library.

Why? Well George Berkeley was guilty of racial prejudice and slave-owning. He once described the Irish poor as “a lazy destitute race” and he bought a small slave plantation on Rhode Island. Since we Irish all deplore both racism and slavery, shouldn't we disown him?

In the words of Dr. Clare Moriarty, a distinguished scholar of both philosophy and mathematics, Berkeley was “unquestionably a great metaphysical thinker and a brilliant writer, but was also extremely morally fallible”. He seems to have had serious moral flaws – like much of humankind. So, do we cancel and delist him?

The opinion piece from which I will read is written by Nigel Biggar who is a retired professor of moral theology at the University of Oxford and a former professor of theology at Trinity College Dublin. It is entitled ‘Erasing Berkeley's name from Trinity would do nothing to combat racial prejudice in Ireland.’ I should point out that I fully agree with the sentiments expressed in the article. But I acknowledge that others could be of a differ-

ent opinion, and I would like to think that I would listen respectfully to their views.

In the early part of the piece, Nigel Biggar points out how widespread the practice of slavery and slave trading had been historically in the Greek, Roman, early European, and Arab worlds. He continues:

‘British and Irish slave-trading and slavery from about 1650 were nothing out of the ordinary. What was *extraordinary* was that from about 1770 – two decades after George Berkeley’s death – an anti-slavery movement began to grow in Britain. The result was that, through their united Parliament, the British and Irish were among the first peoples in the history of the world to repudiate the slave-trade and slavery in 1807 and 1833, respectively, and they were the leading people to devote themselves to the global suppression of slavery throughout the British Empire for the following century-and-a-half.

It follows that there is no direct causal line between the ugly racism that justified 18th century slavery and whatever racism persists among us today, because the highly popular abolition movement, and its humanitarian successors, were propelled by the Christian conviction that members of all races are equal in the sight of God.

Consequently, according to the historian of abolition, John Stauffer, “almost every United States black who travelled in the British Isles acknowledged the comparative absence of racism there. The famous black American abolitionist Frederick Douglass noted after arriving in England in 1845: ‘I saw in every man a recognition of my manhood, and an absence, a perfect absence, of everything like that disgusting hate with which we are pursued in the United States’”.

Therefore, to erase Berkeley’s name from TCD would do nothing to combat racial prejudice in Ireland today. Since he has never been venerated for his racist views of the Irish poor and slave-ownership, *to repudiate him, would not be to repudiate them*. In celebrating people, we admire them only for some things they’ve done. We admire Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King as heroic examples of non-violent

resistance – despite, respectively, their disparaging view of Africans and serial marital infidelity.

So, we should continue to celebrate George Berkeley as the outstanding philosopher he was. And when provoked by his name to reflect on his prejudices and obtuseness, we should lament them. But then we should spare some critical attention for our own moral flaws. That would make a difference.

Postscript: since highlighting Nigel Biggar’s article in the Church, several fellow Unitarians have brought my attention to possible resolution for institutions, authorities and individuals caught in similar cultural dilemma. Basically, provide more information, now relevant to the context. Rather than tearing down a statue or renaming an institution, provide the viewer or reader with an additional plaque that would make clear the circumstances in a relevant and modern historical context, ‘explaining their misdeeds as well as their good deeds.’

Aidan O’Driscoll

Aidan’s reading from Sunday 26th March 2023.

Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for March 2023.

Nation

by

Terry Pratchett

Nation is set in the mid 1800's in an alternate/parallel world very similar to ours. There is England and it's empire, countries such as the Reunited States, Further and Nearer Australia, the Russias and the Great Southern Pelagic Ocean (South Pacific) where the Nation live.

It opens with the western world in turmoil as a Russian Flu pandemic has wiped out tens of thousands of people including the king of England and 137 of his heirs to the throne. The 138th in line is Henry Fenshaw, the Governor of Port Mercia in the Pelagic Ocean and so to restore order a boat sets sail to bring him home. Henry's fourteen year old daughter Ermintrude (she prefers the name Daphne) is on her way to join him. She is on the ship Sweet Judy when a giant tsunami hits and shipwrecks it onto an Island in the Pelagic Ocean, the island of Nation. Daphne is the sole survivor (except for a foul mouthed parrot).

The tsunami has wiped out everyone on the island except for one boy called Mau who is rowing home having almost completed a religious rites of passage task, the finale of which will be a ceremony where he will become a man and get his soul. But there is no one there, everyone has perished.

Mau is devastated and questions and then rejects the Gods but he also follows tradition by burying the people at sea so their souls can be released and they can become dolphins. Daphne watches Mau carefully and eventually their paths cross and Pratchett describes their encounter with great humour as there are misunderstandings, communication difficulties and suspicions and fears of the 'other'. They manage to overcome their misconceptions of each other and realise that they need each other to survive as this tragedy has made them equals.

In this alternate world language barriers are quickly overcome when other survivors arrive such as Milo and his pregnant wife Cahle and Pilu his brother who can speak the 'trouser men's' language. Ataba a holy man arrives with the unknown woman who also has a baby. Ataba challenges Mau to keep the religion of his ancestors alive even if he didn't have the ceremony to get his soul. Mau still rejects the gods yet he hears the voices of the Grandfathers as he tries to make sense of this new world.

Daphne is influenced by science as her father had schooled her in debate and brought her to lectures at the Royal Society. Her mother had died in childbirth with her baby son (an event that haunts Daphne) so Daphne was brought up by her Grandmother whose purpose is to uphold standards and keep everything proper, especially regarding young ladies. Daphne, like Mau hears the voice of her Grandmother as she tries to negotiate this new world. What would her grand-

mother say if she saw her brewing the special beer and spitting into it to make it safe for drinking, or that she helped deliver Cahle's baby in the special women's place.

The story races along as more survivors arrive and Mau, the legendary boy with no soul and Daphne, the 'ghost girl' of the trouser men, become by default the leaders of the new Nation. They face real outside threats from mutineer pirates and cannibals and they formulate plans to protect themselves and their island. The island has sacred stones as well as sacred caves where the ancestral Grandfather's bones are kept and Daphne suspects these artefacts are from another era so are not just sacred religiously but important scientifically.

Meanwhile Daphne's father, now King Henry the 9th has been located in Port Mercia and is now on his way back to Rule Britannia, but not before he finds his daughter, which of course he does. There is a tense meeting of east and west as the English land armed on the Island but Daphne is trusted by her father and with her intervention the clash of civilisations does not descend into violence. Yet the king wants the island /Nation to come under the protection of his Empire, but Mau refuses as he says they would be swallowed up and they will take their chances against other invaders. He says Nation will join the Royal Society which he has heard about from Daphne. King Henry also wants to bring back the sacred artefacts and stones to be studied by scholars but Daphne persuades him to leave them where they belong and that archaeologists and scientists can study them by coming to the island. (In the epilogue it says that among those who visited the island were Carl Sagan and Albert Einstein!).

There were mixed views on the book from the book club. Some felt there were too many themes covered and not so subtle explaining of the some of the issues covered such as religion, tradition, race, gender roles, identity, cultural differences, imperialism, colonialism and it's impacts... and there were more. However Pratchett can be forgiven for this as he primarily writes for a young audience.

The writing was good and the dialogue was very entertaining at times which helped with a story laced with deep topics. The characters too were well drawn, some of them very quirky and interesting such as Mrs. Gurgle a shamanistic old woman with no teeth! It was a good story but requires the reader to suspend belief in reality and to just GO with it.

A 50/50 recommendation from the book club.

Alison Claffey

Dublin Unitarian Church



Recital by

Shari McDaid, Flute

With

Liezl-Maret Jacobs, Piano.



A programme of music by
J.S. Bach, Francis Poulenc and George Enescu.

Sunday 21st May 2023

at 1.00 p.m.

In Dublin Unitarian Church

Admission FREE - - - - - FREE Admission

Plant Sale

Sunday 14 May 2023

