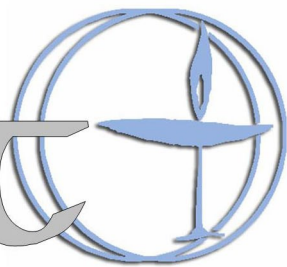


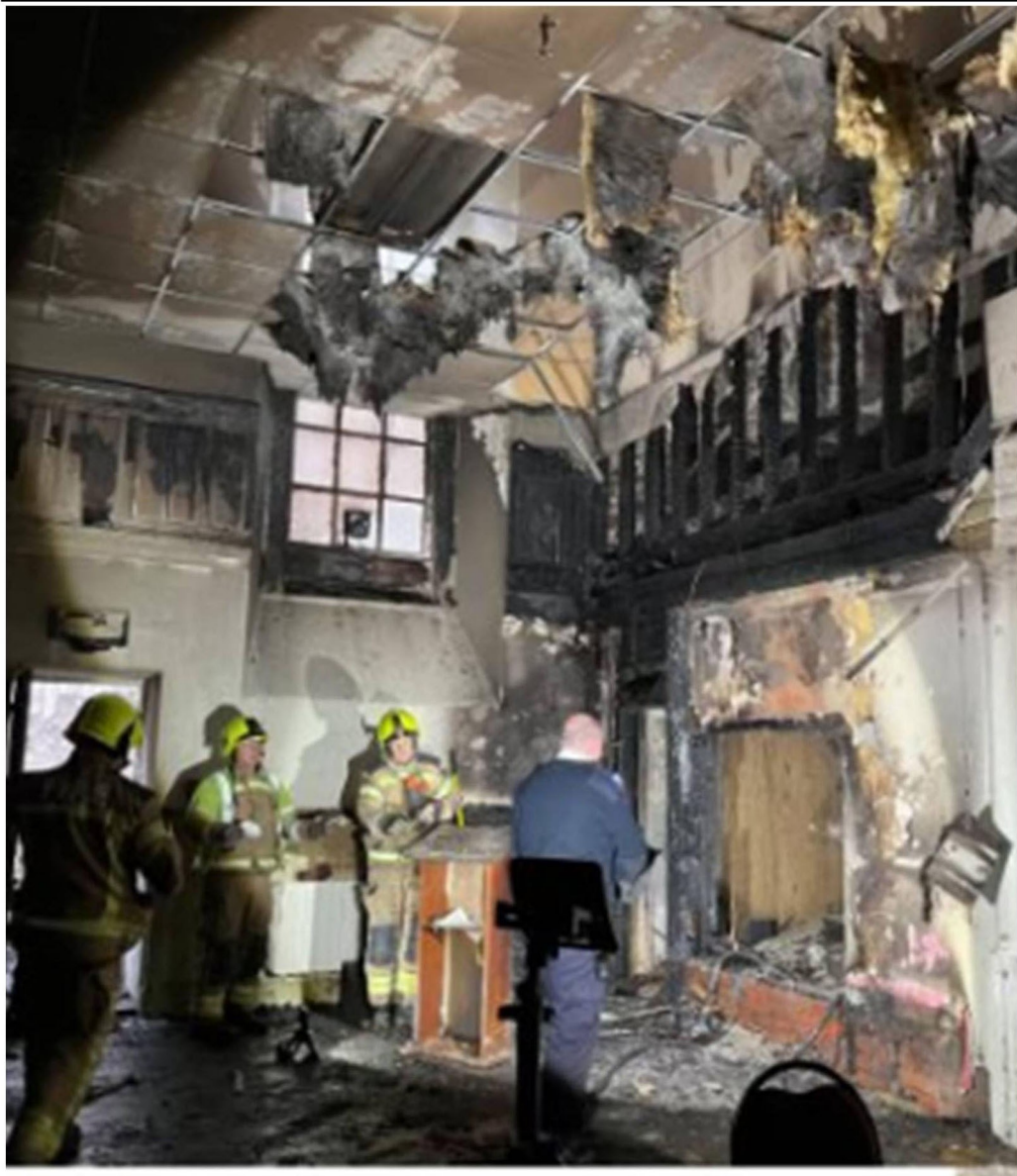
# Oscailt



March 2024

**IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE**

Vol.20 Nº 3







**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:** Fire damage to the interior of the worship space at Cork Unitarian Church  
(photo:- Cork Fire brigade)

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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 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.

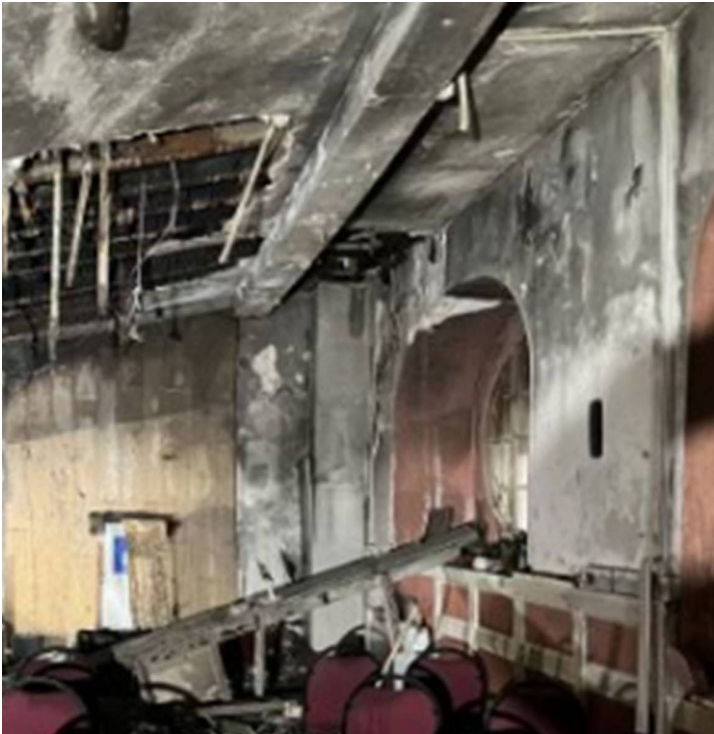
# Fire at Cork Church

On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> January at about 8a.m. a member of the managing committee arrived at Cork church to do some work. When he opened the front gates he noticed that there was smoke coming out of the front door, he instantly called the fire brigade who arrived and set to work to extinguish the fire.

Five appliances from Cork City Fire Brigade's station on Anglesea Street attended the scene and it took approximately 30 minutes for the fire to be extinguished.

"I am very upset to hear the news about the severe damage of fire in the historic Unitarian Church," the Lord Mayor commented in the wake of the incident.

"This church has survived more or less intact for over



300 years. It is testament to the present day guardians under Rev.Mike O’Sullivan that the building still has much relevance to the life of Cork and to the lives of citizens today.” The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Kieran McCarthy, has said.

In a statement later on Monday, the Minister Reverend Mike O’Sullivan and the Church Committee were devastated and are assessing how to proceed going forward, the statement said.

Cork Unitarian Church said while the roof remains intact and weather proof the building has been “saved”, but the internal damage to the building is significant.

“The historic building is saved but the usability of the interior for church for services and all other activities has been severely compromised.

It added that the Minister wished to express, on behalf of the church community, his “deepest thanks and appreciation to the Cork City Fire Brigade and the Garda Síochána”.

The cause of the fire has not yet been established, however, it is understood that the Gardai said that there was no sign of a break-in to the premises. The Fire Brigade said the understanding is that it is not currently being treated as a malicious incident. No one was injured as a result of the fire.

The Minister Rev.Mike O’Sullivan intends to continue broadcasting Sunday service at 11.00a.m. until further notice.

*Rev.Mike O’Sullivan*

Minister Cork Unitarian Church

# WHO WAS JAMES THE ELDER?

I want to start this article by posing the leading question “Who was James the Elder?” You may well ask whether such a person ever in fact existed; for nowhere is he mentioned in the New Testament. As we shall see, he must have existed, and was originally an important figure in the Gospel story. And his omission from the surviving record thus prompts the suspicion that this was a deliberate omission; for the evolving institution simply did not wish us to know about him. He was an awkward hang-over from a time before the emergent authoritarian Church had rationalised and sanitised, for public consumption, the real details of its origins and foundation myths.

Let me enunciate a vital principle of detective work. When a written record is consciously modified in order to hide or suppress information, such detail is inevitably missing in the key place where it would have occurred. But unless the forger is of a high degree of cunning or intelligence, subsidiary leads will be left elsewhere as to what has been removed. And, on the evidence, the early Church leaders responsible for the creation of the canonical New Testament were in no way skilful forgers. They were men of great power and influence, used to being obeyed unquestioningly. If they said something was so, woe betide anyone who asked awkward questions or suspected that the truth might be otherwise.

The whole history of Dissent and of the Enlightenment has been of emancipation from the power of those who rigorously enforced “their truth”. And now, in a free-er world, we are called to hunt down those surviving ‘loose ends’, and to recover the ancient truths hidden and suppressed on the say-so of the authoritarians. And the story of James the Elder is one of those “ancient truths”. And the truth to be revealed in this case is of shattering proportion.

When I was a boy, we lived in Leicester, and occasionally attended Services at the Anglican Church of St. James the Less, on the edge of the city’s Victoria Park. James the Less was one of the junior members of The Twelve, so called, apparently, to distinguish him from the James who was the elder brother of John, the two of whom were sons of Zebedee. But actually “the Less” is a misleading description, and there must over the years have been scores of Chris-

tians who have believed that James was “the Less” simply because he was junior to the senior James the son of Zebedee. But that is as it happens incorrect.

“The Less” is not descriptive of status or importance, but of age or seniority in relation to another family member, and hence “younger”. The Latin is “aetate minor”, “younger”, or “aetate major”, “older”. Hence we have Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger in Latin literature; and, in politics (among many other examples), William Pitt the Elder and William Pitt the Younger. The relationship involved is not necessarily of father and son, but may be of uncle and nephew, or of two male members of a family with the same name but separated by several generations. The New Testament James, therefore, was properly “James the Younger”. \* And that he could be called this involves inevitably the fact that he was named after an older member of his immediate family whose name was also James. And so we return to my initial question, “Who was James the Elder?” For we have established I think beyond doubt that such a person must have existed.

Let me digress for a while to consider the question of calculated suppression of information by the early compilers of the New Testament.

In 1953 R.L.Bruckberger wrote an important and thoughtful book about Mary Magdalene. And in it, without departing in any degree from Catholic orthodoxy - for he was an ordained Catholic priest, whose writings, for publication, needed an official imprimatur from the censor -, Bruckberger raised the important question: why was mention of Bethany and its significance limited to John’s Gospel? and why was there such silence - reserve almost - about Bethany in the first three Gospels? Bruckberger was of the opinion that Mary the hairdresser, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene were one and the same person - not, in itself, a heretical opinion -, but he felt quite unable to offer any rational explanation for the reticence in Matthew, Mark and Luke about Bethany and the family there.

Clearly mention of Bethany risked, for the early Church with its “revised truth”, touching on a raw nerve. What can there possibly have been to hide? I think the answer is simple, staring us in the face as it were. I have suggested previously elsewhere that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that she was a member of The Twelve. Once the early Church had decided to suppress acknowledgement of

Jesus's marriage and of Mary's apo-stolic membership, it must have been felt by some that to touch on Bethany at all risked unwelcome exposure of original truth. And so silence came to be enjoined as policy in this area.

That Bethany once featured more fully may be seen from a passage of 'long' Mark discovered at Mar Saba Monastery in 1958, in which Jesus, at Bethany, teaches Lazarus about the Kingdom. Bethany would certainly have featured more fully in full 'long' Mark, and in original Matthew and Luke, before the excisions were made by the authorities.

Let me give another example of suppression of original truth. In the Gospel of Peter fragment, there is an extraordinary passage between the laying of Jesus in the tomb on Friday evening (after the Crucifixion) and the discovery of the empty tomb on Sunday morning. Soldiers see two men in white approach the tomb and enter it, and leave a while later supporting an injured man between them; and this version of events must also once have been present, according to the evidence, in the Gospel of the Hebrews - part of the Matthew family - and the Gospel of James. The implication is clear that Jesus did not die from his crucifixion wounds, but was helped away from the tomb alive by friends. But the emergent institution wanted a different version of events to propagate, and thus came to suppress the real facts.

Manipulation of the Gospel Story so that these ran in accordance with the institutional leaders' wishes, rather than simply reflecting reality, involved not only calculated suppression of actual evidence but also creative invention of false and imagined perspectives. The early Muratorian Canon suggests that, at one stage, some Church leaders wished the Gospel of John to be the only allowed and recognised Gospel for Christians. Pressures eventually led to the acceptance too of Matthew, Mark and Luke; but had John alone survived, with its heavily modified theological perspectives (completely unoriginal to, and distorting of, the historical truth), the recovery of the original religion of Jesus would have been ever so much harder.

So let no one imagine for one moment that the early compilers of the New Testament were honourable men in their attitudes to textual truth and integrity. They did not scruple or hesitate either to hide information or to invent it if such courses of action



suiting their designs.

And so we return to James the Elder. James was the elder brother of Joseph. James was also the first husband of Mary, and the actual father of her first-born, Jesus, and Jesus's younger twin, Judas Thomas – "theuma", from which Thomas is derived, is the Aramaic for "twin". But before Mary knew that she was expecting twins, James her husband most unfortunately died. In accordance with Jewish law, Joseph married his brother's widow, but Joseph and Mary then discovered, "before they came together" (Matthew 1.18) that she was "with child" (Matthew 1.18 again).

Later, James was born, the son of Joseph and Mary, and half-brother to Jesus. He was given the name James in honour of James, his mother's first husband, and became known as "James the Younger" in consequence.

The Church leaders suppressed these simple truths, and foisted the extraordinary notions of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth on an unsuspecting and credulous world. The time has come for us no longer to be either unsuspecting or credulous. We must now insist on the original version of events, the simple and unvarnished truth.

*Dr. Martin Pulbrook*

Address for Stephen's Green Unitarian Church,

21<sup>st</sup> January 2024

\*Interestingly, the Catholic Celation Decree (6<sup>th</sup> cent.) condemns a "Gospel under the name of James the Younger" - an interesting and rare chance survival of a truth is general suppressed.

# Are you Happy to be Content

My mother if she saw ostentatious wealth, say a sumptuous wedding couple, would often say “but are they happy? She knew, as many people do, that money does not bring happiness, and if it does it is for a very short time. Once any deprivation has been eliminated, the research shows, that for a limited trajectory the sudden wealth brings a happy buzz, which then plateaus, before the wealthy recipients return to their previous happiness level. The same phenomenon occurs in the development of countries.

And, surprisingly some influential thinkers believed that happiness is not possible for anyone. Even others, such as Sophocles, Euripides and Byron, thought it would be better if we were not born at all. For Ovid the only time man is happy is at his death.

Arthur Schopenhauer perhaps one of the bleakest philosophers in the western world, according to Stuart Walton (*Humanity, An Emotional History*), says that we are inextricably enmeshed in a tangle of misery and pain as if we had signed a bad contract without looking at the small print.

A uniform grey, Walton says, is our natural colour susceptible at best to being changed temporarily with entertainments, intoxication, or the rivalries of hard work and sexuality, but always seeping back to define us again.

For Schopenhauer our pleasures are illusory because there is no sensible intimation of them as pleasures compared with the gnawing authenticity of pain and disappointment. If life is a gift, he says, it is a piece of largess one might have politely declined.

And David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, believed that humankind was dismayingly good at contributing to its own unhappiness. The world God has designed, he said, is supremely efficient at denying us any happiness that we scarcely need to bother making it worse.

He believed there were a number of different causes for human misery, among them that there is no robustness in the human spirit to withstand the rigours of existence. There was, too, an immoderate tendency, he said, to ruinous extremes at work in nature to which man could only offer minimal resistance.

In the same depressing vein, he added, that we needed to look



**A place of worship since 1717**

## **UNITARIAN CHURCH CORK**

Registered Charity Number 0000246

**Due to the fire in the church in January 2024**

**The service will be broadcast on  
Facebook until further notice.**

**Service: Sundays at 11a.m.**

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

e-mail:- [osullmike@gmail.com](mailto:osullmike@gmail.com) Mobile 087-9539998

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**Treasurer :** Brian Chuer e-mail: [bmcleur@gmail.com](mailto:bmcleur@gmail.com)

**Secretary :** Colm Noonan : e-mail : [colm.noonan@gmail.com](mailto:colm.noonan@gmail.com)

**[www.unitarianchurchcork.com](http://www.unitarianchurchcork.com)**

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FREEDOM - REASON - TOLERANCE

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## **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**

Takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at [sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

## **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](mailto:eileendelaney76@gmail.com)



# Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephen's Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for March 2024**

3 <sup>rd</sup> March	<i>Christianity a Call to Action</i>
Service	<b>Rev.Bridget Spain</b>
Reader	<b>Daphne Dunkin</b>
Flowers	<b>Janet Mulroy</b>
Welcomer	<b>Denise Dunne and Janet Mulroy</b>
Coffee	<b>Michael Robinson Jane Nolan Janet Mulroy</b>
<hr/>	
10 <sup>th</sup> March	<i>Turning the tide of the loneliness epidemic</i>
Service	<b>Tony Brady</b>
Reader	<b>Noeleen Hartigan</b>
Flowers	<b>Daniela Cooney</b>
Welcomer	<b>Frank Tracy</b>
Coffee	<b>Gráinne Carty Maeve Edwards Doireann Ní Bhriain</b>
<hr/>	
17 <sup>th</sup> March	<i>Favourite Readings</i>
Service	<b>Rev.Bridget Spain</b>
Reader	<b>Gavin Byrne</b>
Flowers	<b>Paula Mills</b>
Welcomer	<b>A.Connolly Crangle and Gráinne Carty</b>
Coffee	<b>Lorraine Doyle Paula Mills</b>
<hr/>	
24 <sup>th</sup> March	<i>Suffering that hides in plain sight</i>
Service	<b>Aidan O'Driscoll</b>
Reader	<b>Chris Quinn</b>
Flowers	<b>Rita O'Driscoll</b>
Welcomer	<b>Janet Mulroy and Paul Murray</b>
Coffee	<b>A. Connolly Crangle, Catharine Cook, Michael Robinson</b>
<hr/>	
31 <sup>st</sup> March	<i>Easter Sunday</i>
Service	<b>Rev.Bridget Spain</b>
Reader	<b>Jennifer Buller</b>
Flowers	<b>Jane Nolan</b>
Welcomer	<b>Sheila Hanley and Doireann Ní Briain</b>
Coffee	<b>Malachy Hevehan, Paul Murray, Janet Mulroy</b>

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.  
On our WebCam, click and connect at [www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

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:-** 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](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

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Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

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

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**Musical Director: Josh Johnston :-** 086 892 0602

**Caretaker: Kevin Robinson**

**Telephone: 4752781**

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

no further for proof of life's anxiety and tedium than the fact that we incessantly anticipate a life beyond life provided by religious belief.

St. Augustine also cast a cold eye on the possibility of happiness. The background, of course, is the Christian belief of Original Sin. He insisted that happiness lay only in the mind and memory. It was not a commodity that could be apprehended by the physical senses.

In a world where all is ephemeral only that which is immutable and true can be a source of genuine happiness. Rejoicing in God's existence renders the need for any other sort of joy superfluous. As Augustine put it, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in thee."

In the Jewish Christian tradition suffering is the price paid by humanity for displeasing God, forced out of Eden into a cold comfortless world from which we must permanently seek shelter, precisely because we now lack the direct protection of the Creator (Humanity, An Emotional History)

And unhappiness, too, has been seen by others as resulting from a lack or a loss. Freud located all unhappiness, melancholia, in a sense of lack but not so much as something missing, but as a loss, a sense that arises in early infancy as we are gradually separated from the maternal bond.

Darrin McMahon (The Pursuit of Happiness) writes that there is no greater modern assumption than that it lies within our power to achieve happiness.

The history of happiness began, he says, with the development of tragedy on the classical stage and in history itself. The tragic hero was the one who carried on beyond the merely human despite everything. This led hundreds of years later to the Enlightenment when man was introduced to the idea that everyone could and should be happy.

Such happiness was not a gift from God, or a trick of fate but a natural human endowment obtainable in theory, which leads us into current ideas of happiness and its lack, and of course some ideas on what leading thinkers have written.

There is a view, of course, held mainly by the citizens of Imperial countries that in their colonial ventures they brought happiness to the countries they overran. Alain de Botton (Status Anxiety) describes a 16th century report on American Indians who led mate-

rially simple but psychologically rewarding lives. Their community was small, closeknit, egalitarian, religious, playful and martial. They lived on fruits and wild animals and had few possessions. Even a chief might have had no more than a spear and a few pots. They also, according to the report, had an impressive level of contentment.

That is until the Europeans arrived. Within a few decades the status system of Indian society was revolutionized through contact with technology and luxury, and what mattered became was no longer one's wisdom or understanding of the ways of nature but one's ownership of weapons, jewelry and alcohol.

As De Botton says, they succumbed to the easy lures of the trinkets of modern civilization. The context is different, of course, but a similar bent towards material things emerges in a study in which people in a North America were asked to declare items as necessities.

In 1970, 20% said a second car was a necessity, in 2000 the percentage was 59%.

The corresponding percentages for a second TV were 3% and 45% more than one telephone, 2% and in 2000, 78% car air conditioning, 11% and 65% home air conditioning, 22% and 70%, and a dish washer, 8% and 44% in 2000.

And as De Botton points out advertisements will fail to mention our tendency to cease appreciating anything after owning it a short while. "We are tempted to believe that certain achievements and possessions will guarantee us enduring satisfaction. We are led to imagine ourselves scaling the steep sides of the cliff face of happiness to reach a wide high plateau on which to continue our lives. We are not reminded that soon after reaching the summit we will be called down again into the fresh lowlands of anxiety and desire."

So far we have veered very much towards the depressing side of the argument on happiness, on those who believe that happiness is impossible, or that it is rare. We've had a brief look at the dangers of materialism, and we'll now concentrate on what thinkers have opined on the happy life, and how we might achieve it.

But first, let's look at the first president of Sinn Fein, Edward Joseph Martyn, (died 1923), if for no other reason than to see the preposterousness of many ideas from those seeking Utopia, a word which literally means "no place", but came to mean an ideal happy society.

The son of wealthy landlords he was sent to an English public school and disliking the curriculum decided to blow it up. He was only "nearly expelled". At Oxford he was a devotee of the aesthetic move-



ment. He was also then a unionist, reinforced by his life-long contempt for the common people and his hatred of democracy.

Martyn was also a scrupulously devout Catholic, and a misogynist, the result it is said of his mother's overbearing ways and his sexual orientation. He may have been attracted to nationalism by a semi-mystical delight in the Galway countryside and a growing dislike of England which he associated with modern democratic materialism.

He wanted to rid Ireland of all traces of the "unclean world" by restoring the Irish language and Celtic art. This Agathapolis or Good State would have no women, and no vice. The religion would be Catholic and the government a benevolent despotism, infinitely superior to democracy which is the rue of the "ignorant and the blind." The language spoken would be Greek, and the arts would flourish, especially sculpture, because the sculptors would gain inspiration by watching boys as they exercised. Dramatic arts would benefit too by the absence of female actors, and photography was regarded as a brutal barbarism.

The Faber Book of Utopias (ed. John Carey) has many such esoteric ideas on possible ideal and happy societies and not all of them are as daft as Martyn's, but they indicate that there were strenuous searches for the key to happiness, although the Taoist Chuang Tzu tells us that happiness lies in not striving for happiness.

Let's examine the culture of the emoji of the smiley face and the excruciating for some people of the saying, "have a nice day". The smiley has been described as a symbol of cultural aspiration, capturing perfectly the will to good feeling that has continued to propel us forward.

Michael Foley (*The Age of Absurdity*) writes that in the 1970s two Americans copyrighted the symbol whose world-wide popularity, he says, has rivalled that of the Cross. Sadly, the man who created this symbol only got 45 dollars, and when asked was he upset at missing such a large revenue stream, said, "He I can only have one steak at a time." A truly happy man, perhaps.

Foley says there has been a shift in values in modern society. Change is being favoured over stability, potential over achievement, anticipation over appreciation, collaboration over individuality, opportunism over loyalty, entitlement over obligation, and cheerfulness over concern.

It is, too, an age of delusion. Apparently everywhere and in all social classes, people report their happiness level at over five on a

scale of one to ten and are certain of even greater happiness in the future. An American psychologist, Jonathan Haidt says that most Americans and Europeans see themselves as above average on a wide range of talents, including virtuousness, intelligence and of course sexual performance. Ninety-four per cent of college professors think they do above average work, and similar percentages apply in the case of teachers and students. However, this desiderata delusion is weaker in east Asian countries, and according to Haidt is probably non-existent in Japan. The question is whether this is evidence of the beneficial influence of Buddhist culture which attempts to dispel illusion and reduce attachment to the self. It seeks to find balance, the Middle Way. This can involve ceaseless effort.

The key Stoic virtue is detachment, with the view that, if it is not possible to change the world, it is at least possible to moderate the world's influence on the self... it is not to avoid experience, but to make something of it. It is not what happens to you but how you react that chiefly determines whether you live, a contented or miserable life.

Which leads us nicely into Montaigne, who to today's ears has perhaps the best hints for happy living (How to Live, *A Life of Montaigne*, Sarah Bakewell). Here's a small number.

Don't worry about death

(it is only a few bad moments at the end of life.)

Pay attention (if you fail to grab life it will elude you)

Survive love and loss.

Be Born (question certainties and prejudices)

Neither exult when things go well, or

despair when they go awry, be on an even keel.

Live temperately.

Be convivial.

Be ordinary and imperfect.

So no matter what our views on happiness, and from where it comes, it is clear that current Western society expects to be happy, indeed sees it as a right. A right which sees drugs being used not for therapeutic purposes (which benefits millions), but for lifestyle enhancements. Already drugs have become like hair products or cosmetics, "brain styling".

A New York Times article asked what is the real difference between pleasing ourselves and fixing ourselves. With no baseline index of mood, and no objective standard of what it is to feel normal, there

is every reason to believe that our restless pursuit of “good feeling” will extend an even stronger pressure to define normal happiness upward. And the pharmaceutical companies will feed that pressure. The lure of happiness will find a comfortable place in the buying and selling of medication to alter mood. It already has, writes Darrin McMahon.

And discussing the genetic lottery by which some people have a DNA disposed towards unhappiness and other don’t, he warns that “the prospect of actually manipulating our genes to enhance our happiness is admittedly further off, but not that much further”. But if we decide to take a fateful step in the quest to live as gods, we should know that in doing so, we will be leaving a piece of our humanity behind.

And to end on an encouraging note, for at least some people in this church, Maureen Gaffney, the psychologist, writes that people in older age tend to be happier. “You experience less anger, you have more control over your emotions, your memory is increasingly bi-ased towards the positive, and you use more emotional intelligence”.

*(Your One Wild and Precious Life)*

*Paul Murray*

Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for January 2024.**

**Northern Protestants  
on Shifting Ground**

*by Susan McKay*

Susan McKay is an award winning Irish Writer and Journalist from Derry. In this remarkable book she talks to over one hundred people whom she 'uneasily' calls her own, those from a Protestant background in Northern Ireland.

McKay allows her interviewees to voice their opinions in their own words and by doing so she holds up a mirror and reveals many views of Northern Protestantism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

A wide variety of people were interviewed from all across the regions of the six counties such as church leaders, politicians, artists, writers, community activists, sports people, farmers, business people, students, ex security force members and of course victims and survivors of the conflicts.

With such a diverse pool of people to draw from we are given an insight into what the ordinary folk from the Protestant communities are thinking, feeling and how they are coping with the changes that have happened after the Good Friday Agreement and now with the impact of Brexit. The landscape is no longer such a familiar place and certainly feels like 'Shifting Ground' for many.

There are still ultra conservatives who want to preserve the Union at all costs and feed into people's fears about a border poll , some even use the threat of a return to violence if a poll takes place. Alongside this ' No Surrender' attitude there has emerged a more modern and level headed practical

outlook to the constitutional issue, religion , identity and social issues. For the most part people want to get on with their lives in peace, they want employment, good housing and education for their children. Many young people are tired of the ‘green and orange’ politics and they want ‘normal politics’ in a functioning society.

The book club readers found it to be a very well written and thought provoking book. It was a bit depressing at times as many of the people interviewed felt disillusioned ,betrayed and unrepresented by their politicians. But there was also much hope in the voices too, especially those of the many women who are emerging as community leaders and politicians.

The book club readers would highly recommend this book for anyone who is interested in the changing politics of Northern Ireland.. There are too many stories and voices to recount in this short review and to give them justice but there are many articles and podcasts on the book.

One that I would recommend is by our congregation member, Andy Pollok, called ‘Wrongfooted by History’.

*Alison Claffie*

Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church

# Annual General Meeting

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

## **Notice**

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The *Congregational Annual General Meeting* will take place in the church after Sunday Service on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2024. The meeting agenda and related items will be included in the Annual Report which will be available to all Members one week prior to the AGM.

Voting Members may submit motions for inclusion on the AGM agenda and may nominate other Voting Member(s) for election to elected position(s).

Motions or nominations for submission should be sent in writing to the Secretary, Trish Webb Duffy, at The Unitarian Church 112 St. Stephen's Green Dublin D02 YP23 or at [secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

The closing date for the receipt of motions, nominations, and other items for inclusion on the AGM agenda is Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

*Denise Dunne*

*Chairperson*



