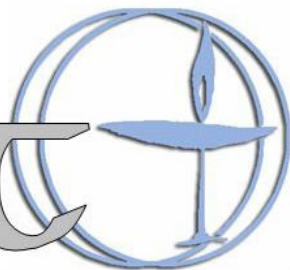


Oscailt



April 2024

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.20 Nº 4



Annual General Meeting

Sunday 28th April 2024

Notice

The *Congregational Annual General Meeting* will take place in the church after Sunday Service on Sunday 28th 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

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

Denise Dunne

Chairperson



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
St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church
112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

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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.

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Front Cover: Detail from the center top of the Wilsom Memorial Window.
(photo P. Spain)

CONTENTS

Can We Explain Existence?
Gavin Byrne 2

AN EXTRAORDINARY GRAVE
Frank Tracy 7

REMNANTS
Maeve Edwards 11



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.

Can We Explain Existence?

I will begin by agreeing with Lao Tzu who said that knowing we do not know anything is real wisdom. And also Socrates, who said in his final verdict about the knowledge of the world: “One thing only I know and that is that I know nothing”.

Does my existence and your existence and the existence of the world around us explain themselves?

Science helps and goes some way in tackling this question - but we are not there yet. Science agrees that our universe is some 13 billion years old; that a great collision of gases formed matter; stars formed; life emerged. Telescopes in space are searching for those first lights - looking back in time to help us understand the origins of all known realities. And of course, in this discourse we inevitably ponder the question; how did it start? who created this? from what or from whom do we get our existence?

Existence is beyond the power of words says Lao Tzu. But of course, we are Unitarians, so we’re going to try anyway, despite what he or others say.

Let’s begin our explorations with those who considered this question long, long ago and have influenced so much of the discourse of the past thousands of years.

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says ‘if there is nothing eternal, then there can be no becoming: for there must be something which undergoes the process of becoming, that is, that from which things come to be; and the last member of this series must be ungenerated, for the series must start with something, since nothing can come from nothing’. Aristotle was writing in the 300s before the common era. *Metaphysics* is the study of existence and the nature of things that exist. Thomas Aquinas, Dominican friar, teacher and priest, read and studied Aristotle in the early 13th century. Today, is Thomas’s feast day in the Roman Catholic calendar (Sunday 28th January 2024). And I think, his ideas are worth considering, for his ideas had a substantial influence on Christian thought for centuries.

He was a philosopher who invites us to look at the world,

the stuff of the senses to make the case for the existence of God. He says that we can achieve true knowledge using our reason. And where there is apparent contradiction, we fall back on our faith as revealed in sacred scripture. At the age of 19, Thomas entered the Dominican order but was kidnapped by his brothers with the support of his family and held captive for two years as they tried to convince him not to continue his vocation. They instead wanted him to go to the much more venerable and illustrious Benedictine monastery at Monte Casino. The Dominicans were mendicants; itinerant preachers who did not live in grand monasteries with all the privileges that are bestowed on its inhabitants.

Thomas believed that for believers, a full understanding of their faith demands a realisation of the ways in which the world of finite things discloses to the reflective mind the God in whom they already believe with a faith sustained by prayer. Now people weren't reading the bible. The bible wasn't available until centuries later. Their faith was mediated by the clergy. Christians accepted what their church taught them about the world, even today that is true - but there were pockets of dissent; heretics were making their mark and Thomas's own religious order was established in 1221 to counter those heresies. The particular heresy Dominic was concerned with was the idea that the world of physical things was evil but the world of the spirit or soul was good. These ideas scandalised the church at the time and led to a vicious and violent crusades against these people. But back to Thomas.

Philosophy and its sister study, natural theology, was not something very mainstream in Christendom in the 13th century. But Thomas argued that the natural world is full of evidence of the existence of God. He wrote his Five Ways - five arguments for the existence of God - using natural knowledge or sense knowledge. This is Natural Theology - basically talk about god without revelation - and by revelation, we mean that which is contained in the scriptures and accepted through faith. In Roman Catholic theology, revelation is extended to include truths contained in church doctrine as set out by the pope. Thomas himself was declared a Doctor of the church after his death and his teaching had a huge influence on the development of dogma and doc-

trine that mainstream Christianity is so well known for. I briefly want to present the first two ways.

So to Thomas's First Way. This involves a reflection on the reality of movement and change. By acknowledging these and by reflection upon them, we are led, he argues, to posit a being which is not subject to movement. He states: 'Now anything changing is being changed by something else'. Thomas uses the example of fire and wood and their movement from potential to actuality. '...the actual heat of fire causes wood, to become actually hot, and so causes change in the wood'. He also uses the simple example of a stick - unless it is moved by a hand, the stick will not move anything else. And so 'we are forced', he says to come to a first cause that is not itself subject to change. 'And this' he suggests, is what 'everyone understands by God'.

The Second Way is similar to the first, for it is dealing with the cause of change. In the first way Thomas is reflecting on things changing, by them being acted upon. Now he is considering things as agent causes. There is a chain of cause and effect, leading to a first cause. 'In the observable world causes are found ordered in series: we never observe, nor ever could, something causing itself, for this would mean it preceded itself, and this is not possible'. So the universe, and the things contained therein depend on other things for their existence. Everything that sustains me in existence is other than me. So it is with the universe. 'So we are forced to postulate some first agent cause, to which everyone gives the name God.'

BUT: We know that things exist and we understand them as finite, coming into being, and going out of being. This pencil, I will use and pair down eventually to nothing. How can we move from affirming that things are, whether they explain themselves or not, to affirming the existence of some being that has all the opposite characteristics of what we know to be real, i.e., an unmoved mover. It is quite a leap.

Generations of theologians and philosophers have been arguing ever since. David Hume, the 18th century philosopher argued against such natural theology - gaining knowledge and indeed belief in god this way by observing the natural world. He says: 'What a noble privilege is it of human reason to attain the

knowledge of the supreme Being; and, from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its supreme Creator? But turn the reverse of the medal. (the other side of the coin). Survey most nations and most ages. Examine the religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are any thing but sick men's dreams' .

I wrote an essay about Hume's arguments as a philosophy student in the '90s. And I argued that Hume was 'hard-hitting, blasphemous and honest' .I can't remember what mark I got for that conclusion in that particular essay. Hume worried about getting into trouble with the established church and his most controversial writing was only published posthumously - he concluded his treatise on this subject with: 'Ignorance is the mother of Devotion: A maxim that is proverbial, and confirmed by general experience'. Look at the bloody divisions among people whose objection to the other is based on religion. He was arguing that all our knowledge is subjective - others at the time said 'no', the truth of the world was objectively known and available to any human being.

If Thomas were here today, he would appreciate our spirit of looking to science, using our reason and our commitment to seeking out the truth wherever it may be found. We should constantly challenge ourselves to look beyond our own particular worldview - this is what Thomas did by embracing the pagan Aristotle and many early Islamic philosophers, namely Averroes and Avicenna. Today, I'm sure he would look to those thinkers and dreamers, philosophers and theologians from many traditions who have contributed to this question in the centuries after him - and imagine what he would have written given the advancement of scientific knowledge since his time.

Thomas of course could not explain the existence of god or indeed the world using reason alone. He says; "it was necessary for the sake of human salvation that certain truths that surpass human reason be made known to us through divine revelation".

So finally; Does my existence and your existence and the existence of the world around us explain themselves?

I don't know. But what I do know is that I do exist;

should I even concern myself with whether or not God exists? Perhaps God will show me in good time; perhaps when I leave this particular plane of existence. I don't wish to sound dismissive of faith, belief in God - for I don't discount a creator, Aristotle's first cause, creator of beauty and truth. But I will not labour it - I will seek him or her out among the ordinary and the beautiful, the painful and the joyful. I need to get on with living and try to be the best I can be. There is something which may be more mysterious and maybe more vital to us - our soul, our anam, or breath or that which gives us essence. And that is something, I will like to explore, next time I'm up.

Lao Tzu said: Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them - that only causes sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.

Gavin Byrne

Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



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 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

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 2nd Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at 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



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for April 2024

7th April *Anam, Nephesh, Psyche: Soul*
Service **Gavin Byrne**
Reader **Mary O'Brien**
Flowers **Mary O'Brien**
Welcomer **Michael Robinson, Mary O'Brien**
Coffee **Emer O'Reilly, Colette Douglas, Maeve Edwards**

14th April *Coming of Age.*
Service **Rev. Bridget Spain**
Reader **Peter White**
Flowers **Colette Douglas**
Welcomer **Denise Dunne, Janet Mulroy**
Coffee **Jane Nolan, Michael Robinson, Peter White.**

21st April *The Qumran Parable of the Tree.*
Service **Dr. Martin Pulbrook**
Reader **Emer O'Reilly**
Flowers **Emer O'Reilly**
Welcomer **Paula Mills, Emer O'Reilly**
Coffee **John Eardly, Dorene Grocock, Janet Mulroy**

28th April ***A.G.M. after service***
Service **Rev. Bridget Spain**
Reader **Denise Dunne**
Flowers **Denise Dunne**
Welcomer **Paul Murray, Charlie Kinch**
Coffee **Paula Mills, Mary O'Brien, Jennifer Buller.**

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:- 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.

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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.

GERMAN WAR CEMETERY
GLENCREE, CO. WICKLOW.

AN EXTRAORDINARY GRAVE

At the end of the 2nd World War, it was known that there was a considerable number of German military personnel buried in graves all over Ireland, many of them unmarked. At the same time relatives of those killed in action during the war were anxious to locate where their relatives were buried. During the early 1950s permission was sought from the Irish Government by the German Government to have the remains of their war dead in Ireland exhumed and reinterred at a single location. Permission was given in 1957 and work began on identifying the locations of the burials and on finding a suitable location for a military cemetery. A suitable location was found at an old disused quarry beside a river in Glencree, Co. Wicklow and work began on the design and layout of the cemetery. At the same time, a team of



pathology experts began the painstaking task of locating, exhuming and identifying the bodies. In all, a total of 134 bodies were identified.

56 of these bodies were German non-combatant civilian internees who drowned off the coast of Ireland when the British ship on which they were being transported to Canada was torpedoed by a German submarine, U47. A further 3 civilians were added who were 1st World War civilian internees at Oldcastle, Co Meath. One of these was a young man named Erwin Schatz.

So, in 1959, some 41 years after he was buried in Mullingar Mental Hospital, the body of Erwin Schatz was exhumed for reburial at Glencree. All of the exhumed bodies were placed in metal caskets and stored at an Irish Army barracks. When the exhumation process was completed, the caskets containing the bodies were transferred in Irish Army military trucks and reburied at Glencree. Because of the restricted size of the new cemetery, it was necessary for the remains of two people to be placed in each grave. This gave rise to a unique situation in regard to one particular grave. Grave number 5/6 in the front row contains the remains of Erwin Schatz and Rudolph Sochtig.

ERWIN SCHATZ

Nothing is known about the childhood of Erwin Schatz. According to the 1911 Irish census, Erwin (34) and his wife Auguste (28) were four years married and living at 10 Epworth Street, Belfast. Both of

them gave their place of birth as Germany and their religion as Jewish. There were no children listed on the census return. Erwin's occupation is given as 'photographer and picture framer'. At that time,

all of Ireland was part of Britain. Following the outbreak of war between Germany and Britain in August 1914, an order was promulgated that all adult male German citizens living in Britain were to be

rounded up and interned. In September 1914, Erwin Schatz, along with approximately 580 other male German citizens living in Ireland, was arrested at his home and interned at a newly established

internment camp at the old workhouse in Oldcastle Co Meath. According to the surviving list of internees, Schatz was the only Jewish person interned at Oldcastle. There is no record of what happened to his wife, Auguste, after his internment.

Life was very difficult for all of the internees at Oldcastle. Unlike military prisoners of war, the civilian internees at Oldcastle were a very disparate group of people with no common bond, organisational structure or sense of purpose. Given his religion and the fact that he was the only Jew in the camp, life would have been extremely difficult and stressful for Erwin Schatz. Erwin's physical and mental health steadily deteriorated and he was eventually committed to Mullingar Mental Hospital where he died on January 16, 1918. He was buried in the grounds of the mental hospital and subsequently re-interred at Glencree War Cemetery.

FELDWEBEL RUDOLPH SOCHTIG.

Rudolph Sochtig was born in Germany on December 8th 1913. As a young man he joined the Luftwaffe (German Air Force). At the outbreak of the 2nd World War, he held the rank of Feldwebel (Flight Sergeant). On September 27 1940 he was a crewmember aboard a Junkers aircraft (Ju 88A-5) which was on a reconnaissance mission flying up the Irish Sea when it was shot down by two RAF Hawker Hurricane fighters. A number of crew members were observed jumping out of the Junkers before it crashed into the sea. Three weeks later, Rudolph Sochtig's body was found washed up on a Wicklow beach, entangled in his parachute. He was buried with full military honours, as was the practice in neutral Ireland throughout the war for all military war victims, in Rathnew Cemetery, Co Wicklow. He was subsequently re-interred at Glencree War Cemetery. The grave of Erwin Schatz and Rudolph Sochtig in Glencree is unique among military graves worldwide for the following reasons: -

1. It contains the remains of a victim of WW1 in the same grave as a victim of WW2.
2. It contains the remains of a civilian in the same grave as a Luftwaffe officer.
3. It contains the remains of a Jew in the same grave as a Christian.

These two young German men departed from their homeland at different times and in entirely different circumstances. In normal times their paths would never have crossed. Rudolph Sochtig was only 5 years old when Erwin Schatz died. Never in their wildest imaginings could these two men have anticipated that they would eventually share a grave together, for all time, in a German War Cemetery in Glencree, Ireland.

A final extraordinary coincidence is that this unique grave is located close to the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation which for many years has done, and continues to do, so much good work in the field of conflict resolution and human reconciliation.

Frank Tracy

Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

It was for me to die under an Irish sky,
There finding berth in good Irish earth.
What I dreamed and planned bound me to my Fatherland,
But war brought me to sleep in Glencree.
Passion and pain were my loss, my gain.
Pray, as you pass, to make good my loss.

Stan O'Brien

REMNANTS

I'm at that stage in life when I'm close to doing a big clean out. Not that I've started yet, but I'm, what you might call, building up to it. My friends and I chat about it all the time. "Your children will toss the lot in a skip when you're gone" one says. "Better to save them the trouble". "Do what Marie Kondo advises," says another: "If it doesn't spark joy, let it go."

I peered into the cupboard under the stairs. It is chock-a-block with discarded raincoats, old winter boots and warped tennis racquets. What a great place to start! What joy there'd be in clearing this lot out. With determination, I reached for the small suitcase that had been taking up space at the back of this cupboard for years. I brushed the dust off it with a damp cloth, and sprang open the clasps, the right-hand one needing that special knack that only members of my family are familiar with.

Inside, remnants of dressmaking fabric lay in neat piles, as bright and vibrant as the day my mother placed them there. I could feel her presence as my hand folded back the layers. Red chiffon, emerald green satin, muslin, calico, organza, each fabric reminding me of a wedding, a christening, a special dress dance, a school play. There was the pink gingham of my older sister's summer dress, and underneath, the younger one's polka dot shorts; and look, the purple crimplene from my cat suit (copied from Emma Peel of the Avengers); the red and blue striped cotton curtains in the back bedroom, the velvet of the cushion covers on the fireside chairs, the gabardine for the boys' short trousers, the lace from our communion dresses. And this? Could it be the poplin she used to make dresses for our cousins the summer they came to stay when their mother was ill? And, further down, a tiny scrap of lemon seersucker from my brother's romper suit, reminding me of the golden brown baby he was (and he now sixty-four years old).

At the bottom of the suitcase lay my mother's brown paper patterns folded neatly in a bundle. She could make anything from these patterns, and did, for all sorts of people. All you had to do was turn up at our house with an idea for an outfit in your head, a few yards of material under your arm, and within days you'd be back for a fitting, standing precariously on a dining room chair and eyeing yourself in the mirror above the mantelpiece.

She would pin and tuck you and ask you to point to that part of your knee where you wanted the hem turned. “Are you sure you want it that long,” she’d caution, “it’s the 60s you know – hems are on the rise?”

She worked best under pressure and we learnt early on not to panic. My Debs dress was cut out on the morning of the dance itself. I had a fitting at lunch time and she was serenely taking up the hem even while the unwitting boy was knocking on the door outside, an orchid in one hand, a box of chocolates in the other.

But it was all hands-on deck when the pressure was on. She’d be at the Singer Sewing machine all day, her feet pedalling like billy-o, the cigarette butts lining up beside her, the thread cuttings building up on the floor, so that weeks later we’d still be pulling them from the dog’s coat, “Oh, silly dog, look what’s got tangled up in your coat.”

The cat, too sophisticated to participate, would watch the action from the kitchen windowsill, wondering, perhaps, if anyone was going to get fed in our house that day.

Stray children would be urged, “Peel a few potatoes, will you, and make a bit of gravy for the chicken while you’re at it!” But she always came up trumps, my mother. People tell me all the time now, “Your mother made my wedding dress. And all my bridesmaids! The fun we had at the fittings.

She was a fantastic dressmaker, your mother!”

And, so, I sat with the remnants of her dressmaking days laid out before me. All our lives were there and, like a box of old photos, they triggered memories I thought I’d long since forgotten. But what to do with them all?

Did this old suitcase of remnants spark joy? Yes, it did! A thousandfold.

Maybe it was time to think about all that clearing out business another day. With resolve, I folded the fabrics back inside the suitcase, closed the lid down, slipped the clasps into place, the right needing that little knack that my mother taught us so well. I tucked the suitcase back into its place at the back of the cupboard where it could stay for as long as it wanted.

Maeve Edwards

Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church

(First broadcast on Sunday Miscellany, 10th March 2024 for Mother’s Day)

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



As we approach the anniversary
of COVID lockdown,
many people are remembering loved ones
who died during COVID.

Restrictions around funeral services at the time
means that people may feel that they have never
properly marked the death of their loved one.

The Unitarian Church on St.Stephen's Green
is happy to facilitate the holding
of Services of Remembrance
for those who have died.

For further information please contact
the Minister revspain@gmail.com