



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

THE FAR EAST

MARCH/APRIL 2024

VOLUME. 106 NO.2
\$0.75 INC. GST & POSTAGE

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THE FAR EAST is devoted to furthering the missionary apostolate of the Church and has been published by the Missionary Society of St Columban since October 15, 1920.

The Society was founded in Ireland in 1918 as a society of secular priests dedicated to the evangelisation of the Chinese people.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$6.00 per year + \$9.00 postage (AUSTRALIA)

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Cover photo: Columban seminarian Lydio Mangao Jr in the slum area of Parola, the Philippines.

St Columbans Mission Property
Association A.B.N. 17 686 524 625

Printed by Doran Printing, Melbourne



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EASTER HOPE

At Easter, we celebrate and adore our God, who refused to leave Jesus buried in the tomb's darkness. Jesus suffered a violent death, but God did not allow Jesus to be the permanent victim of other people's violence. During Easter we remember God's great act of raising Jesus from the dead.

In the first century of Christianity, there were many views about what happened to people when they died. Some people believed that death was just the end. Some people believed the righteous dead would rise at the close of the age. Others believed that the souls of the just went to live with God. Some people believed in reincarnation. When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do people say I am?", they said Jeremiah or one of the prophets back from the dead.

Here is what is fascinating about the accounts of Jesus' resurrection. None of these familiar understandings about what happens after you die is invoked.

The first witnesses of the resurrection believed that Jesus, who had been crucified and buried, was alive again through the power of God. It wasn't his soul that was alive. It was his body that was alive. The event's very novelty gave such power and strength to the first Christian proclamation. The first witnesses claimed that something new and profound had happened for the first time, and nothing would be the same again.

In the time of Jesus, order in society came through violence, through the empire of Rome, its army, and the harsh punishment of those who opposed the empire. The most terrible punishment was the cross. It was always carried out in public to deter others from opposing the empire. It was on one of those Roman crosses that Jesus was put to death.

When the risen Jesus appears to his disciples, we are told they were terrified. They might have been afraid because they saw a dead body risen from the dead or because they thought Jesus was back for vengeance. But the resurrection story is different. After showing his wounds to his disciples, the risen Jesus says to his friends: "Peace be with you." The teacher who taught his disciples to confront violence with forgiveness expressed his own teaching in the most vivid way

possible. The risen Jesus came to bring peace, not vengeance. He confronted violence with forgiveness.

When we look at our world today, suffering and violence continue to disfigure many people. Millions of refugees are fleeing war torn countries seeking safety, shelter and food. They cry out for understanding, support, and welcome.

The challenge of Easter today is to take God's part in protesting against the violence and the suffering in our world. Death is not just something we meet at the end of life. We see death all around us amid life. There is the economic death of people starving to death; the political death of the oppressed people; the social death of those marginalized in society; the death of the unborn child and those on death row; the death of our environment and the extinction of species; the soundless death of the person who says and does nothing.

Having faith in the resurrection challenges us to protest these deaths, act as God would act, and have the courage to stand up against the injustices we see. God acted and raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus did not raise himself. We, too, are called to act and raise ourselves and others from the death of oppression and abuse, from the death of apathy. The truth that God raised Jesus from the dead gives hope and help to all those who want that miracle repeated in the midst of life.

The resurrection didn't just happen once. We experience the resurrection every time we dare to stand up for our principles and our rights, and the rights of others. As Christians, we are hope-filled people. We live with Easter hope that empowers us to make a change for the better – for ourselves, our families, our community, our world, and our earth. This is the true sign that we believe in a God who raised Jesus from the dead.

I wish you and all your loved ones a blessed Lent and a hope-filled Easter.

FR PETER O'NEILL
Regional Director of Oceania



WHEN OUR LADY CHANGED HER MANTLE

“and Mary arose in those days and went in haste ...” Lk 1:39

It was Easter 2012, and I was acting parish priest of the Columban Parish of Ba in Fiji. On the Saturday before Palm Sunday, the Ba River burst its banks, flooding the town and its vicinity. As usual, the village of Votua was also badly affected. Once more, they had to rescue the Blessed Sacrament from the church by boat.

Votua is the only village in Fiji with a chapel named after St Columban. There are two statues in the church, one of Our Lady and one of St Columban. The flood did not harm St Columban, but the statue of Our Lady was destroyed.

When I got to the village on Easter Sunday to celebrate the Easter liturgy with them, the old ladies were very upset. “Our Lady has left us,” they told me.

As was right and fitting, I preached on Jesus and his resurrection during Mass. Before the blessing, I said, “Please do not be worried about Our Lady leaving you. She most certainly has not. She and Jesus will always be with you. But perhaps she has gone to change her clothes.” I have no idea what prompted me to say that.

A few weeks later, the pastor, Columban Fr Paul Tierney, returned and took back his parish. I had a commitment to do cenacles for the Marian Movement in New Zealand. In a parish in Hamilton Diocese, I met an old friend, Edward Gangalo, who always brought his large statue of our Lady of Fatima to the cenacles. He said to me, “I am worried that if anything happens to me, they will just throw out the statue. Do you know anyone who needs a statue of Our Lady?”



Fr Donal McIlraith standing beside Mary's statue.

When I got to the village on Easter Sunday to celebrate the Easter liturgy with them, the old ladies were very upset. “Our Lady has left us,” they told me.

“Do I ever?” I thought to myself. To Edward, I said, “Yes, Edward, I actually know a church in Fiji that needs a nice statue like this, but I am now going to Wellington. I will be leaving for Fiji next weekend from Auckland.”

“No problem,” chimed in a lady at the meeting, “I am going to Auckland and can deliver it to you.”

When I left for Fiji, I had two items of baggage. As the machine was only registered for one, I got the message, “Go to the counter.” At the counter, the lady serving me asked, “What is this?”, pointing to the nicely wrapped statue.

“That is Our Lady,” says I, with my money ready to pay. “We can’t charge for Our Lady,” announced the lady, and I did not argue.

Sometime later, I was sitting in my seat when I suddenly remembered that I had Our Lady’s crown in a small bag and had left it in the waiting area just



Parishioners at St Columban's Church in Fiji, including Catechist Ramoce, together with Columban Fr Donal McIlraith (left) and Deacon Iowane Naio (fourth from right).

outside the plane. I rushed to the attendant by the still-open door and said, "I have left Our Lady's crown in a bag outside." She slipped out of her shoes and raced out. I remember the pilot looking out to see why things were not moving. Then she returned, triumphantly waving the bag. "They had already cleaned up," she said, "but I found it in the bin."

Now, Ba and Votua are about an hour's drive from Nadi where the international planes land. In Nadi, I looked for someone to drive me to Votua, and my friend Ken Pickering came to the rescue.

Our first stop in the village was at senior catechist Ramoce's house, but he was out farming. I proceeded to the church. It was May 1, and several people were in the church preparing a very small statue of Our Lady for the May procession through the village that night. We unpacked Our Lady. I blessed the statue and got a child to add the crown.

As I left the church, catechist Ramoce and some of the menfolk of his family, who were sitting just outside with a bowl of kava for me, thanked me and presented me with an extraordinary gift in Fiji: a whale's tooth. So, Our Lady changed her mantle and sent me a whale's tooth.

"That is Our Lady," says I, with my money ready to pay. "We can't charge for Our Lady," announced the lady, and I did not argue.

FR DONAL MCIIRATH

Columban Fr Donal McIlraith, lives and works in Fiji.

DIVINE BONDS

GOD'S WORK



Columban Fathers and Columban Sisters in Hanyang China 1932.



Columban Sisters watch women weave in China.



Columban Sister and nurse help mum with sick baby.

People's behaviour is usually their response to the historical situations in which they find themselves.

In 1918, Lady Frances Moloney had in mind "some kind of sisterhood". From 1918 to 1920, she was a prime mover in bringing this to reality. Fr John Blowick, co-founder of the Missionary Society of St Columban, referred to her as "the first live spark" of what became the Missionary Sisters of St Columban. He saw her as "the woman sent by God". Together they worked and prayed, and planned and refined the Constitutions of the newly founded Missionary Congregation of Columban Sisters.

The context for Lady Frances Moloney's dreams of "some kind of sisterhood" was born against the backdrop of war. In 1916, Europe was on the march. The 1914 - 1918 war was at its peak. War propaganda was thick in the air, with men urged on to do "great things". Patriotism encouraged them to be willing to sacrifice everything for the love of their country. The challenge was great, and many young men and not-so-young men marched onto the battlefields to fight for the "great cause". Some went proudly and gladly with heads held high and sureness in their steps. But some wondered and reflected on the death and destruction, crippled bodies, and damaged minds. In the end, what would victory mean?

In 1916, China was coming to an awareness of herself. She was keenly aware of her great empire and the vastness of her territories. She was also aware of her potential as a world power. Ireland in 1916 was awakening to the cause of freedom. Revolution was in the air, and the youth of the nation were not asleep. The leaders of the movement were men and women of high ideals - poets, writers, scholars, mystics, and idealists. Their goal was not merely that Ireland should fight for freedom from foreign domination but that she become free to shape her own destiny and to make available to her sons and daughters the heritage of faith and culture that was rightly theirs. They aspired to take their place in the world in a manner worthy of God and country. They were in no doubt as to the greatness of their cause and the dedication it required. They weren't blind to the sacrifices that might be asked of them. Ireland was witnessing a rebirth and like every birth it came by way of suffering. Padraig

Pearse summed up his insight and understanding when he wrote: "I turned my face to the road before me. To the deed I see and the death that will be mine."

In 1916, the Irish Church was experiencing an extraordinary upsurge in missionary zeal, which touched almost every household for many years. New centres of missionary endeavour emerged. Leaders rose who were committed to the cause, challenge, and call of mission. They put their hands to the plough and never looked back. Fr John Blowick was one such who took up the call and challenge of mission. He gave up his professorial chair in Ireland's National Seminary, Maynooth and, in 1920, made his first journey to the Far East when he led the pioneer group of Columban Fathers on mission to China. In 1918 he wrote, *"The work is God's work, not yours or mine. God is behind the whole thing, and He will see it through."*

On 7 February 1922, six young ladies arrived to join the Congregation. On the day after, four more came and on 16 February 1922, two young ladies came from Australia. Now life in the new Congregation could go ahead.

Right from the beginning, the emphasis was on preparation for China. It seemed a distant dream. However, in March 1926 shipping accommodations for a group of Sisters were booked for the autumn. They sailed thirteen thousand miles to Shanghai and couldn't presume they would ever see Ireland again. The Missionary Sisters of St Columban had reached their goal.

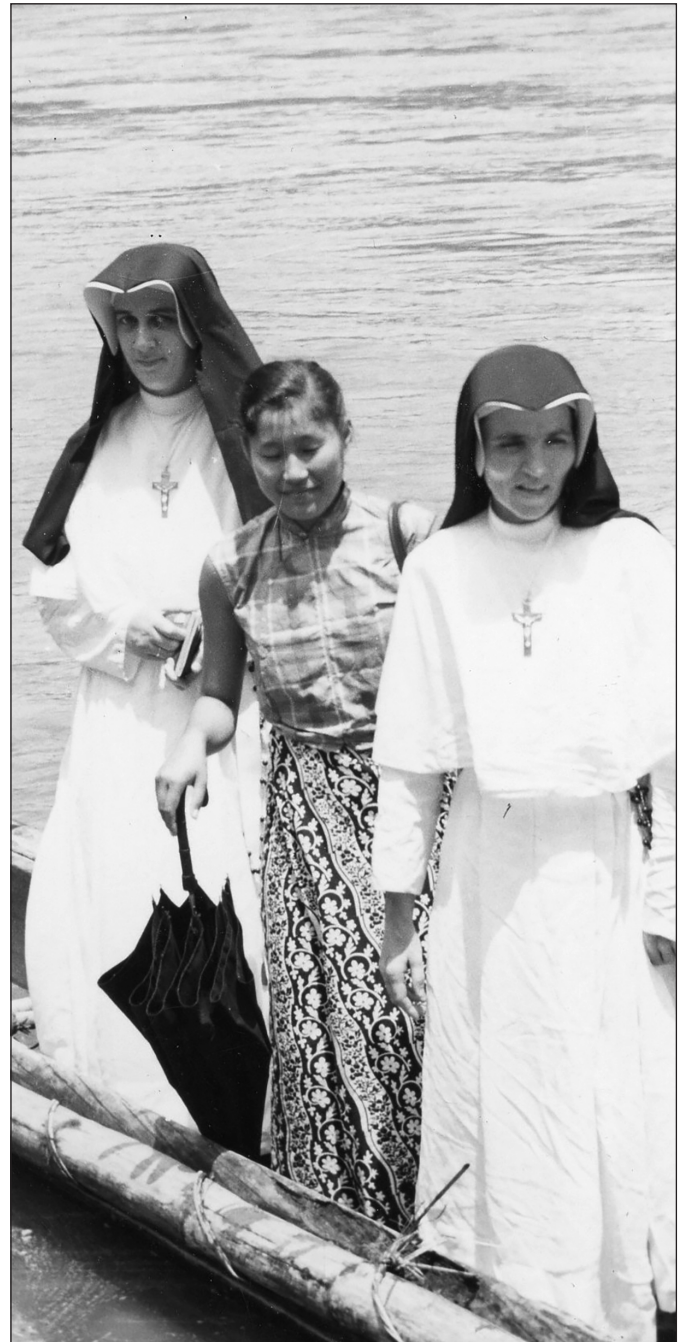
Today, Columban Sisters are back again in China. They are also in Korea, the Philippines, Pakistan, Myanmar, the US, Britain and Ireland. Sisters from Asia have been missioned abroad and are carrying on the work of those first Sisters who left the security of their daily lives to venture into places unknown so that all people could come to know the Living God. They have the same energy and dedication as the Sisters had one hundred years ago.

What Fr Blowick wrote is still relevant: *"The work is God's work. He is behind the whole thing, and He will see it through."*

COLUMBAN SISTERS

The Congregational Leadership Team of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban is based in Ireland.

In 1918, he wrote, "The work is God's work, not yours or mine. God is behind the whole thing, and He will see it through."



Columban Sisters in Burma 1945.

REFLECTION HOLY WEEK – IN MEMORY OF HER



A woman prepares to anoint Jesus, Hill of Grace Sanctuary, Jeju, Korea.

A few days before his crucifixion, having made the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem on foot, Jesus was resting over supper in a friend's home. Then, suddenly, a woman carrying a large jar of perfumed ointment entered the room and approached him. Without hesitation but with great tenderness, she poured it over him, kneeling to rub it into his aching and weary feet. Then, as the fragrance of the ointment filled the entire room, Jesus was prompted to exclaim, "She has performed a beautiful service for me" (Mt. 26:10).

Throughout these past thirty-three years, most Columban lay missionaries have been women. In various mission countries and through various ministries, they have consoled and supported people whose hearts were aching and whose feet had grown weary on life's journey.

In Fatima House in England, Nathalie Marytsch Rojas, a Columban lay missionary from Chile, is a team member that provides a haven and hospitality to poor women who have travelled long and dangerous journeys in the hope of finding asylum in Britain. Similarly, Lee Christina Kyungja Lee, a Korean Columban lay missionary who ministered to vulnerable migrants in Ireland for several years, is now a member of a team caring for refugees and asylum seekers in her home country.

For many years, Columba Eunyael Chang, now a former Columban lay missionary from Korea, walked the long, lonely corridors of San Lazaro hospital and of various prisons in Manila, Philippines, providing solace to patients and prisoners with HIV-AIDS. She also provided emotional support to their families and friends. Another Columban lay missionary, Jao Resari

"Truly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Mt. 26:13).

from the Philippines, continues to minister to people with HIV-AIDS in Taiwan. Moreover, as an artist, Jao uses her love of design and colour to educate others about their silent suffering due to being rejected by their own families and stigmatized by society.

In the Columban parish of Badin in Pakistan, Monaliza Esteban, a lay missionary from the Philippines, ministers to TB patients, the majority of whom are susceptible to various ailments due to malnourishment. On the other hand, in the Columban parish of Barra in the Philippines, Lanieta Tamatawale from Fiji provides encouragement and hope to people with hearing disabilities – and to their families – through the teaching of sign language.

These lay missionary women – and many others – have walked alongside countless people in various mission countries, lent some of them a helping hand to overcome obstacles on their path, and guided others to a place of rest where they poured ointment on their tired and aching hearts. Their dedication is based on their conviction that whatever they do to the least of Jesus' sisters and brothers, they do to Jesus himself. Their courage and commitment, as well as their care and compassion, are like the fragrance of perfumed ointment, reminding those around them that, despite so much turmoil and suffering, the world is still a beautiful place.

Throughout his public ministry, both in his words and actions, Jesus emphasized the humble, caring service to others. However, his disciples were unable to understand or didn't want to accept such teaching. They had hopes they wanted to fulfil and dreams they wanted to achieve, frequently leading to arguments about who among them was the greatest. Such disputes continued until that evening when they gathered around the table with him for the Last Supper. As Jesus looked around at them, conscious that time was quickly running out, he must have wondered what he could do to unlock their minds and open their hearts to his core message.

Then, the fragrant memory of that "beautiful service", that surprising yet thoughtful, caring and humble gesture of which he had been the recipient from an unknown woman just a few days previously, flashed across his mind. With that, "he got up from the meal,

took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (Jn. 13:4-5). When he had finished and returned to the table, lest the true meaning of what he had done be misunderstood, he said to his disciples, "If I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:14).

During Holy Week, as we recall Jesus' caring and humble example at the Last Supper, let us also remember his promise that the gesture of the woman who had washed and anointed his own feet would never be forgotten: "Truly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Mt. 26:13). Looking back on these past thirty-three years of Columban lay mission, similar stories about thoughtful, caring, and humble service by so many women ought also to be treasured.

FR TIM MULROY

Columban Fr Timothy Mulroy, Superior General, St Columbans Mission Society, lives and works in Hong Kong.



Jesus washes the feet of Simon Peter, Hill of Grace Sanctuary, Jeju, Korea.

FROM LISBON TO



The youth ministry team preparing for the celebrations.

It had been a while since the parish youth ministry had prepared for a big event. Arriving back from my home vacation in the Philippines, the youth ministry team decided to hold its own celebration of World Youth Day last August 19.

St Luke's Parish in the Myitkyina diocese, Myanmar, is a new parish, established on 18 October 2021, a few months after the coup. Young people these days yearn for hope and light at a time when many of them do not know what to do or where to go. The youth ministry team got so excited about holding this event that they decided to invite young people from the newly established parishes of Myo Htit Kyi, Njangdung, Palana and Shadau.

With only a few weeks to prepare, they started fundraising. One Saturday, they went house to house to collect garbage for a fee. They also prepared and sold chicken soup, a popular dish during these rainy

days. The night before the event, the venue started to fill up with young people decorating and preparing the venue for the big gathering.

It had been pouring rain day after day every morning. But by God's grace, the sun came out on that day. The day began with the opening Mass led by our parish priest, Fr Bernard. In his homily, he echoed the words of Pope Francis for the young people gathered in Lisbon, Portugal. Pope Francis reminded the young people of the three most important actions: "to shine, to listen, and to be unafraid".

These words resonate so much with the young people of Myanmar. Their world, our world, has been destroyed by a military regime that does not see any value in life or young people. Illegal drugs are allowed to spread, intoxicating a young population already lost and hopeless. Little is invested in young people's education, a common

tactic of authoritarian regimes to keep the population ignorant and blindly following them without question.

Pope Francis said, "Dear young friends, today we too need something of this burst of light so that it can fill us with hope as we face the many failures of each day and the darkness that assails us in life and respond to them with the light of the resurrection of Jesus. For he is the light that never sets, the light that shines even in the dead of night." Events like this are a burst of light for young people in Myanmar - a reminder that they are not alone. The Pope also reminded young people to listen to Jesus. That is the secret to life. Lastly, Pope Francis reminded them that they will encounter difficulties in life but always believe in the words of Jesus: "Do not be afraid."

As the Kachins love to dance, the Manau was incorporated into the liturgy. The young people carrying their offerings danced their way to the altar.

After the Mass the opening program commenced. A mental health awareness session followed, where

ST LUKE'S

MYANMAR



Youth sharing their voice.



Fr Kurt Zion Pala (right) with a member of the parish youth ministry team.

Pope Francis said, “Dear young friends, today we too need something of this burst of light so that it can fill us with hope as we face the many failures of each day and the darkness that assails us in life and respond to them with the light of the resurrection of Jesus. For he is the light that never sets, the light that shines even in the dead of night.”

young people learned to practise meditation and self-awareness exercises. After a simple lunch of rice, Indian pea soup and a spicy side dish, I recalled Pope Francis' message and explained the meaning of the World Youth Day logo.

The day ended with a very meaningful worship service. Young people processed, carrying first the Bible, then the Cross, then the image of Mother Mary. Then the young people prayed a decade of the Rosary, with one young person carrying a rose and presenting it to Mary. After saying the Rosary, three youth led the group to worship God through songs in Kachin and Burmese.

We hope that this celebration of World Youth Day brought to young people a “burst of light”. Pope Francis left the young people in Lisbon with these words: “Dear young people, I would like to look into the eyes of each of you and say: Do not be afraid. I will tell you something else, also very beautiful: it is no longer I, but Jesus himself who is now looking at you. He knows each of your hearts, each of your lives;

he knows your joys, your sorrows, your successes, and failures. He knows your heart. Today, he says to you, here in Lisbon, at this World Youth Day: ‘Have no fear, take heart, do not be afraid!’”

FR KURT ZION PALA

Columban Fr Kurt Zion Pala has been the assistant parish priest at St Luke's parish since its establishment in 2021. He works with the parish youth ministry team to organize activities for the young people in the parish.



Youth band practice.



The rubbish-strewn mouth of the River Pasig viewed from Parola.

PAROLA – MANILA'S "BEACON OF HOPE"

"This'll be a real eye-opener," Lydio told me, and he wasn't joking. Lydio Mangao Jr is a Columban Filipino seminarian. I was on a visit to our mission in the Philippine capital of Manila, and Lydio had invited me to accompany him on one of his regular visits to the slum area of Parola. I've seen a lot of slums in my time and a lot in the Philippines, but nothing, absolutely nothing, had prepared me for what met me in Parola.

In the local language, "parola" translates as "lighthouse" or "beacon". Metaphorically, it means "beacon of hope", a cruel irony when you see the place. It occupies a patch of swampland, squeezed between the docks that line Manila Bay. For years, it has been a magnet for homeless squatters, and now some 75,000 people are crammed into an area measuring no more than ten acres. They live piled on top of one another - literally, for with space at a premium, the only way to accommodate more residents is to build upwards. Many of the multi-storey shacks perch precariously on flimsy stilts, affording some protection from the twice-daily tidal flooding.

Parola sits close to the mouth of the River Pasig, which winds its way through Metro Manila before dumping the detritus of 15 million people into Manila Bay.

Much of this rubbish gets washed up into Parola itself. Believe it or not, this is a blessing in disguise for many of the local inhabitants. They can scratch a living by foraging amongst the garbage for articles that can be collected and sold at a pittance for recycling.

People also try to make ends meet by hustling around the port for casual jobs and working in town as street sellers, road sweepers, tricycle drivers or market vendors. A favourite "cottage industry" is peeling garlic on behalf of city restaurants. "A family can peel a sack of garlic a day", Lydio told me. A sack of peeled garlic sells at about \$2.00.

Inevitably, Parola has become a hotbed of petty crime, especially drug-related crime. Many of the menfolk sport gang membership marks in the form of tattoos, often applied in Manila City Jail, located conveniently close to Parola, just on the landward side of the settlement. During the tenure of hard-line President Rodrigo Duterte, plain-clothes police were given free rein to patrol areas such as Parola and "take out" suspected drug dealers. Operating with complete immunity, these death squads were not too discriminating in their choice of victims, and each morning bodies of young men were found scattered around the edges of the neighbourhood.

For Lydio, the Columban mission is in his blood. He is from the island of Negros and the son of Lydio Mangao Sr, who was a catechist in the 1970s with legendary Columban human rights activist, Fr Brian Gore.

The present government has discontinued this policy. Nevertheless, Lydio told me how the squatters are still understandably nervous about the presence of strangers. "When you're roaming around, they could mistake you for an intelligence officer".

"Once, I had a rolled-up umbrella, and the people from the parish said I had to open it to show it wasn't a gun in disguise." He described another consequence of the ever-present atmosphere of violence.

"Parents are very protective of their children. They don't always like them going from one part of the settlement to another. I remember how a father sent his son to a neighbouring sector just to buy vegetable oil and the boy got badly beaten up."

The Catholic Church is a rare point of refuge in the midst of this mayhem. Lydio and his fellow Columban seminarians come here on their free days to help with the parish youth ministry. "We try to promote interpersonal activities," explained Lydio. "We get the kids talking, we pray with them, we visit their families and try and team up with their parents."

"The aim is to accompany the youngsters, build their self-esteem, boost their knowledge of God, and give them a sense of community. It's incredible to see what they can do when they get a bit of confidence. Some are really talented. They can sing, they can dance ..."

The seminarians help the parish in other ways as well. One role that caught my attention was that of blessing the dead. Death is a frequent occurrence here, but regular funerals are rare, so a simple blessing from a parish worker usually suffices.

For Lydio, Columban mission is in his blood. He is from the island of Negros and the son of Lydio Mangao Sr who was a catechist in the 1970s with legendary Columban human rights activist, Fr Brian Gore. Lydio Sr and Fr Brian were famously imprisoned by dictator Ferdinand Marcos as part of the "Negros Nine", a case that reverberated around the world and helped speed the collapse of the dictatorship. (In a strange twist of fate, Marcos's son Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos is the current president

of the Philippines, albeit - at least - democratically elected.)

"This Columban heritage inspired me, especially all the emphasis on non-violence. Fr Brian helped me with my college degree course in psychology. My dad carried on working as a parish justice and peace 'animator' until he retired."

Now aged 29, Lydio Jr feels it is beholden on him to carry the baton, to continue the family tradition. The satisfaction he gets from pastoral service in Parola reaffirms his decision.

"At the end of last semester, we'd been praying the Scriptures, and a girl came up and said, 'Older brother, thanks for coming - now I know that prayer is friendship with God'. This made me think that maybe we are doing something right, bringing a little hope here."

Normally, to speak of "hope" in Parola, the so-called "Beacon of Hope", would sound like a sick joke.

But not the way Lydio tells it.

FR JOHN BOLES

Columban Fr John Boles is Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain.

Normally, to speak of "hope" in Parola, the so-called "Beacon of Hope", would sound like a sick joke.

But not the way Lydio tells it.



HIROKO

PART 1

I have spent fifty-odd years in Japan and met all sorts of people: the wonderful, the beautiful, the evil and the ugly, people who stood by me and those who took a grave dislike to me - but all helped shape the priest I am today. One of those wonderful people was Hiroko.

I was never close to her. She kept her distance. When I first met her, she was in her fifties. I had heard that she was married to a non-Catholic Christian and that she had a daughter who did not seem to be around. She was regular enough at Sunday Mass, though at times she would disappear for months.

She had the glorious habit of coming into Mass just as I was starting, sitting down in the back pew and, as I would be imparting the final blessing at the end of Mass, darting out of the church with the speed of a swallow leaving her nest after feeding her young and disappearing into the city air.

That all changed one day, a day that is forever etched in my mind. It was a Monday morning. Hiroko came to morning Mass, as usual, a few minutes late, and sat down in her usual spot. I could not help but notice her for she was wearing huge sunglasses that covered most of her face. "Women and their crazy fashions" said I to myself and went on with the Mass. Hiroko did not receive Holy Communion that morning. That surprised me.

She had the glorious habit of coming into Mass just as I was starting, sitting down in the back pew and, as I would be imparting the final blessing at the end of Mass, darting out of the church with the speed of a swallow leaving her nest after feeding her young and disappearing into the city air.

After Mass, I took off my vestments and returned to the Chapel to say a few prayers. To my amazement, Hiroko was still there. "She probably wants to go to confession," I said to myself, so I approached her and sat down beside her.

Then she poured out her soul and guts to me. "I cannot take it any longer. Last week my husband was as drunk as a skunk again. He beat me, kicked me, spat on me, berated me, and tore some of my hair out. He even tried to choke me to death and told me to get out of his house.

Then he fell into a deep stupor. He still has not come out of it. I was desperate. I rang my older sister at the other end of Japan and told her everything. She told me to take a few belongings and come to her place as her children had all grown and moved out. Plenty of empty rooms, she said. So, I have decided to do as she said. I cannot take it any longer". Then she broke down sobbing.

After a few minutes, she took off her sunglasses and when I saw her two black eyes and facial cuts, I knew that the glasses had nothing to do with fashion. She was covering up her wounds. She told me that whenever she was missing for months, she was waiting for her wounds to heal before appearing in public.

"Hiroko," I said gently to her, "do you remember the first reading of today's Mass?"

"Oh yes, it was so comforting."

The first reading of that morning Mass was that of God appearing to Abram and saying to him, "Leave your country, your family and your house and go to the land I will show to you. I will bless you, and all nations will be blessed because of you."

I said to Hiroko, "This is no coincidence. You came here this morning a broken woman and you heard those words spoken to Abram years ago, and God was speaking today to you as He did to Abram 4,000 years ago.



Then she poured out her soul and guts to me. “I cannot take it any longer. Last week my husband was as drunk as a skunk again. He beat me, kicked me, spat on me, berated me, and tore some of my hair out. He even tried to choke me to death and told me to get out of his house.

He is telling you to leave this your home and go to the land He is preparing for you. This land is your older sister's land. Go in God's name. Be no longer a slave. I order you to go.”

“Yes, I will go. First, I will go to the travel agent and buy a plane ticket and then pack a few belongings and go,” she said and thanked me.

For the next few days, I was filled with peace and a deep gratitude to God that He had chosen me to be the one to lead that broken woman out of slavery to freedom, out of misery to new hope, and from darkness into light. Yes, it was good to be a missionary in Japan, I thought.

That inner holy feeling came to an abrupt end the Friday morning of the same week at morning Mass when Hiroko re-appeared wearing smaller-sized sunglasses. I could hardly wait for Mass to end. She waited around for me.

After devesting, I went down to her and said, “What happened, Hiroko?”

FR JOE BROODER

Columban Fr Joe Brooder lives and works in Japan.

TO BE CONTINUED...

WALKING THE PATH

CHILE

I arrived in Chile in February 2022 and studied Spanish for about five months before being assigned to the parish of San Matias where I am learning missionary work from the parish priest, Fr Genovio Cho. We participate in events for youth in the parish, catechesis and meetings. By participating in the parish liturgy, I am building relationships with the parishioners.

I am learning from my missionary life that the Chileans are very family-oriented. The catechesis of First Communion sees children come with their parents, and the whole family gathers at baptisms. In addition, I have seen families participating in "La Caminata", an event for youth, and I know that these families are also involved in the Mass. It has taught me that faith is a legacy passed down through the generations.

The type of "relationship" in the Chilean church I am experiencing is vitally important. Being a member of a community that has a family atmosphere means that family-like intimacy must be present.

I am now receiving this love. I meet people here who treat me like a son or an uncle. I am learning the love of God through the love of Chileans who accept me as part of their family community. Here, all God's people know they are brothers and sisters. For the remainder of my time in Chile, I want to share such intimacy and love with them.

JOSEPH SEONG YOSEOB

Columban seminarian Joseph Seong Yoseob from Korea has recently completed his First Mission Assignment in Chile.

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FIRST MISSION ASSIGNMENT FROM MY PERSPECTIVE

PERU

As part of their first mission assignment, Columban seminarians Larry Duerme from the Philippines and Lee Jeong-Rak Verano from Korea studied Spanish in Cochabamba, Bolivia. It was an honour for me to accompany them in their preparation for being part of the Columban Mission in Peru.

To be able to accompany them around the city of Cochabamba while they got to know where their classes would be held - and the places and tourist

highlights they liked the most - meant a great deal to me. This experience with the seminarians on their first mission assignment made me remember the early stages of my own priestly and missionary formation. In this way, I was able to act as a mentor for these young men at this stage of their formation program.

The empathy we experienced between us was quite beautiful. They waited anxiously to meet me, as I waited anxiously to meet them. My only mission was to be with them. We had known each other a little beforehand but had not spoken much. During this experience, we spoke a lot. I feel they are very much a part of the Columban family, and I strongly support them. I know they are capable of many things, including being great Columban missionaries.

FR GABRIEL ROJAS

Columban Fr Gabriel Rojas is the vocations director for St Columbans Mission Society, Lima, Peru.



Photo: canva.com/Takahisa145

EMBARKING ON THE JOURNEY

KOREA

On 30 April 2023, the Korean Church organised events to mark Vocation Sunday in many dioceses. It was the first time in four years, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Columbans participated in both the Gwangju and Seoul programs. The format of the events was similar in both places: Mass, lunch, and various programs and concerts - all taking place in the diocesan seminary grounds. While the focus was the diocesan priesthood, religious and missionary groups were also invited to participate. In Gwangju, we were among a group of 13 Congregations, while in Seoul, the Columban priests, sisters, and lay missionaries shared a tent! In fact, we were the only male congregation among the 11 congregations participating in Seoul.

Huge crowds, literally in the thousands, visited both places - young and old, and the young people were mostly parish Sunday school students. Columban benefactors came, also. In both places, the Columbans emphasised participative events. In Seoul, the students had an opportunity to experience Peruvian Culture; the tent was shared by the Columban Sisters and lay missionaries. The sisters and lay missionaries gave an experience of Filipino Culture and had an ecological event where students could plant a seedling in a jar and take it home with them.

In Gwangju, the people enjoyed the missionary voyage experience. Young students could imagine themselves sailing to Columban Missions as they pushed a kazu (a musical instrument that looks like a boat) around the big world map showing the Columban mission countries. To help them choose which country they wanted to visit, they could view the seven large posters showing mission life and work in seven of the countries where Columbans work. Each poster also highlighted one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

My mixed assessment of the events: "It was the first Vocation Sunday event since I took on the role of vocation promoter. I found it to be very much a diocesan event. In both Gwangju and Seoul, only a small number of religious and missionary groups participated. We must do better than this! The meeting of the different congregations with the students was fleeting. We need to do more, but the question is: what should we do? For many people, there is still the



Fr Ku Hwa Lucano (second from right) helps to coordinate the vocation activities.

perception that the Columbans are "foreigners"! So, how do we establish contact with the people today? I have not received any feedback, queries, or calls from the people after the event. But it was good to see many young people present. It was a good Columban promotion and mission awareness."

FR KU HWA LUCANO

Columban Fr Ku Hwa Lucano is the vocations coordinator for St Columbans Mission Society, Seoul, Korea.

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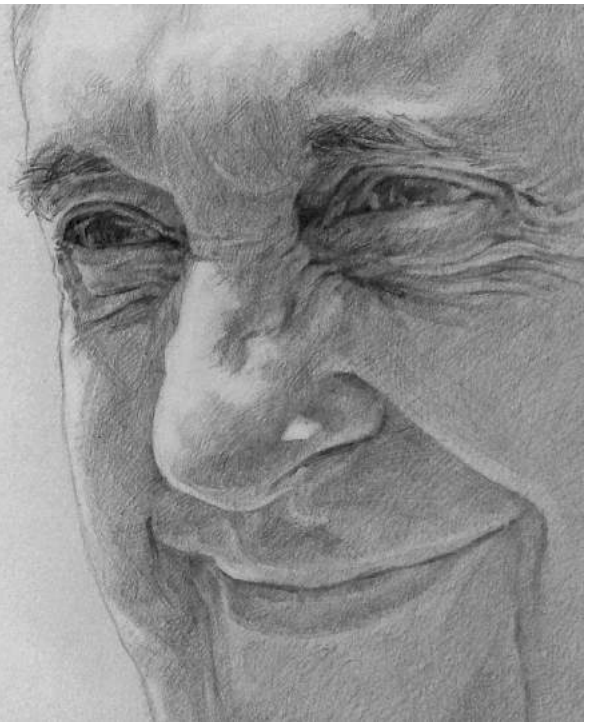
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THE 800TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FRANCISCANS

Pope Francis and St Francis on the “periphery” of inter-religious dialogue



When Archbishop David Moxon, director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, invited me to give a presentation at the Centre, he suggested the topic: “The Francis Effect: A Close Walk with Pope Francis and His Inspiration, Francis of Assisi”.

My own patron, St Columban, gives us the vision to be pilgrims for Christ, *peregrinari pro Christo*, and I suppose another translation of *peregrinari* is to “wander”. So, I hope you will forgive me if I have wandered too far from the charted path Archbishop David gave me and wilfully led elsewhere under the topic: “Pope Francis and St Francis and the ‘periphery’ of inter-religious dialogue”.

Since I came to Rome in 2011, the Anglican Centre in Rome has been where my heart is at home. Missionary activity without a commitment to and engagement in ecumenism is a dead duck.

It seems to me that considering “Pope Francis and St Francis and the ‘periphery’ of inter-religious dialogue” takes on special relevance in the immediately “now” context of the massive people movement taking place in Europe from both Africa (through Italy) and Syria and other Middle Eastern countries (especially through Greece and beyond). I am at the same time concerned that issues in inter-religious dialogue are being seen majorly in terms of Islam and Muslims with the result that the wellsprings

of devotion and holiness manifested by Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs and other believers are being marginalised and even, can we say, peripheralized.

For example, an article in the June 2015 issue of the Australian Journal of Mission Studies savaged St Francis of Assisi. St Francis, as you may know, joined the boats carrying the 5th Crusade in 1219 and got himself to Damietta on a missionary journey to convert Sultan Malik al Kamil. Before this, in 2012, he had set off on a missionary journey to Syria but didn’t get very far as he was shipwrecked on the other side of the Adriatic.

Afterwards, in 1213, he tried to go to Morocco but became desperately ill while travelling south through Spain. We find this urge of the heart of St Francis towards Muslims manifested in the Rule that he wrote in 1223 at Fonte Colombo near Rieti with a sense of desperation to ensure his vision for his brothers when he appealed to them to go among Muslims in a peaceful way.

However, this article I have referred to claims that Francis compromised himself by travelling in the boats connected with the 5th Crusade: “His intentions were good but his association with the 5th Crusade conveyed a contrary message.” Leaving aside the fact that Ryanair wasn’t about at the time and that the only way to get to Egypt 800 hundred years ago

Portrait: BogdanSolomenco (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Papa_Francesco_designed_by_Bogdan_Solomenco.jpg), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>

was to get on one of the many boats sailing back and forward with the Crusaders, it is more helpful to see what Sultan Malik thought about Francis's arrival at his court.

Francis was a dishevelled, unkempt man like the many dervishes and malangs that must have infested Malik's court at Damietta. Orthodox Christians, in the pay of the Sultan, would have been there as well. So, Francis's appearance was not that of a Christian coming to the court but "an odd man from the West" appearing suddenly on the Sultan's doorstep. According to the Fioretti di San Francesco, the Sultan and his advisors prepared a trap for Francis, much like what happened in Iran after the fall of the Shah when crosses were painted on the floors at the entrances to public buildings so that people would walk on them in derision.

When Francis was invited to meet the Sultan (and he was invited, not dragged in as a prisoner), carpets were laid at the entrance with crosses woven into them. Francis strolled happily forward, looking towards the Sultan without worrying where his feet fell. Mocked for walking on the cross, his sacred sign, Francis is reported to have cheerily said: "We have the True Cross. You have the crosses of the two thieves, and that is what I am walking on." I can imagine the applause that must have come at Francis's quick-witted and sensible repartee. He may have thrown off the clothes of his father when he chose Lady Poverty, but he still had the sharp wit and capacity for happy banter in which he was educated by his mother.

We know nothing more except that the Sultan set Francis on his way, moved no doubt by his encounter with this strangely holy man. It seems to me that not only has the author of the article I have referred to mistaken history but has, more seriously, misread the hearts of both Francis and Sultan Malik.

Francis lived on the margins of society in Italy and struggled to remain on the ecclesiastical periphery where he would not be overwhelmed by the world of popes and cardinals and the demands on him to write a "sensible" Rule. He travelled to a far periphery in Syria to meet the Sultan. The periphery for Francis was not simply a geographic measurement to be travelled. He had what I want to call an "inner periphery", which impelled him and enabled him to move imaginatively



St Francis of Assisi

well beyond. I think St Paul was impelled by this "inner periphery" when he said *Caritas Christi urget nos*, "the love of Christ impels us" beyond the beyond.

I see Pope Francis summoning us to walk back both imaginatively and re-creatively where we have plodded in the past and, at the same time, to be impelled creatively and happily by our own personal inner periphery to live and move and have our being in the context of the religious, political, social, and economic peripheries of our world.

Our unlimited "inner periphery" enables us to stretch beyond, to imagine beyond, to think of the possibilities rather than the obstacles, from the perspective of *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (For the greater glory of God) without a preoccupation with where I stand in the pecking order. I think it is a sort of "partially realised immortality", as a movement into the limitlessness of God. Pope Francis encourages us to have a religious imagination that engages our inner periphery so that we may keep seeking God in all things.

For many people, the challenge and distant margin of fruitful inter-religious dialogue (some prefer to say interfaith dialogue) sit out there on the intellectual or faith periphery as unachievable. Often the reference point is that because there is so much religious-based terrorism, then we need to have religious dialogue to back the fires and cool the tensions and be seen to

be doing something or other. Violence in the name of God has penetrated the streets of London, Paris, Melbourne, and Sydney, without speaking of the awful bestialities being committed in Syria, Nigeria, and Sahel Africa and elsewhere. The response to this is not a knee-jerk “let’s dialogue” or throwing money at committees to de-radicalise youth. As Pope Francis said in 2014 while in Jerusalem and Pope Benedict said in 2009 at Regensburg, there must be a rallying cry for solidarity between men and women of goodwill against the violence of fundamentalism, to name the evil, and to embrace one another in the heart: “May no one abuse the name of God through violence.” The issue, of course, at the heart of fundamentalist-based violence is not religion but atheism, which denies the divine reality of God and elevates a humanly constructed control model to which God is expected to conform.

This is why I am speaking about the periphery of religious dialogue with all believers and not just Muslims because they happen to be “in the news”. This sort of periphery is not an unachievable but an expanded religious imagination that enables our hearts to dialogue, a dialogue that is more primary than the activity of our minds. Sixty years ago, *Nostra Aetate* from Vatican II, the document on other faiths, called us to have the religious imagination to be able to recognize truth and holiness in other religions. This was part of the breakthrough language at Vatican II, and I feel it is a language still waiting to break through now 60 years later.

There is a wonderful Urdu proverb that seems to have been made to describe the dialogue of believers: *dil se dil tak rah hoti hai* - or *the surest road is the one that runs from one heart to another*. Cardinal Newman had a similar motto: *cor ad cor loquitur* - or *heart speaks to heart*. For St Francis, it didn’t matter what he was or wasn’t standing on when he came to meet the Sultan. I like to think that the only people during that encounter in Damietta in 1219 who knew what was going on were Francis and the Sultan through their encounter in the heart. The rest of them, with their games, just did not matter.

In his first message in January 2014 for the World Day of Peace, *Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*, Pope Francis spoke repeatedly about fraternity. It has been his constant message ever since.

Pope Francis has called us to communion in our hearts. He has appealed to us to build bridges. “Fraternity”, “communion”, “bridges”: I think that taking these from Pope Francis and joining them to the call of *Nostra Aetate* to recognise truth and holiness in the hearts of believers can nurture in us the religious imagination needed for dialogue. Pope Francis shows us that what enables us to use our religious imagination in dialogue is a commitment to compassion and a readiness to be pilgrims who are explorers who are not self-sufficient and who cannot afford to be superior.

FR ROBERT MCCULLOCH

Columban Fr Robert McCulloch is Rector of Collegio San Colombano in Rome.



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Ten reflections on Pope Francis'
The Joy of the Gospel (Apostolic
Exhortation, 'Evangelii Gaudium').
Written by Columban Fr Noel Connolly.

Ten reflections on Pope Francis
inviting us to live with uncertainty,
without clear answers. Written by
Columban Fr Noel Connolly.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a halt. Up until then, nobody thought it would be possible to stop people from travelling, working, organizing, attending events etc. It was worse still, at the global level. Well, this virus, with a mass of 0.1 mg, did indeed plunge the world into chaos.

During the pandemic, almost all pastoral ministries stopped. Regular meetings, conventions and seminars were abruptly called off. It left people in a state of anxiety and chaos. What do we do now? Suddenly, we were faced with the most important question: what is essential to life? It's not just about what, but more importantly, who is essential. Suddenly, the farmers came to the top of the list, followed by the health workers, service providers etc.

One ministry that I am involved in most of my time is the *Laudato Si' Movement Pilipinas*. We used to gather regularly with partner organisations to plan activities promoting the Pope's encyclical in the context of the climate emergency. This was greatly affected by the pandemic. The pandemic forced us to rethink new ways of engaging with people and issues.

We started gathering online using the Zoom platform to connect and pray together for the Earth and the Global Health Crisis. What we thought was just a brief test of gathering online became a regular online meeting every Friday. The pandemic hastened and sharpened people's ability to adapt to the new platforms of engaging with others online or through virtual events. From the regular prayer for the frontliners, the meeting became a platform to organise online events to celebrate major events of the year like the *Laudato Si' Week* and the Season of Creation.

During the Season of Creation (September 1 to October 4), we were able to have a daily reflection organised by different groups/sectors around the country until the second Sunday of October (the Indigenous People's Sunday). Looking back, I still wonder how we were able to manage it.

The pandemic years were indeed a time of great chaos and uncertainty. Yet it also provided the momentum to re-think and explore new ways of doing things. The online platform enabled us to connect with groups/organisations in remote areas around the country seemingly unreachable before. The limits of physical distancing did not quell the human desire to engage and connect. It was in the online platform and during the pandemic, that the struggles of different sectors, from fisher folks, farmers, women, and the indigenous people were brought to the fore.

During the three years of the pandemic, in an apparent state of chaos and uncertainty, we were surprised at how we reached and engaged with more people compared to the years since the 2016 foundation of *Global Catholic Climate Movement Pilipinas* (now the *Laudato Si' Movement Pilipinas*). It was in that chaos and uncertainty that the spirit of creativity gave birth to new ways of looking at reality and ways of doing ministry.

JOHN DIN

Columban lay missionary John Din lives and works in the Philippines.



John Din holding a Globe, during the walk for life.

THE CONTEXTS OF MISSION — HOW DO WE VIEW THE PRESENT?

In my last article, I took up the challenge of how to view World Mission today. We began by adopting the **historical perspective**, which helps us learn from the past to understand how missionaries interpreted the Bible as texts that speak to the present in carrying out the work of mission in today's world.

Let us move on to another way of viewing World Mission. It is called the **contextualisation perspective**. Approaches that adopt this perspective relate the role of mission to the socio-political contexts of the modern world. In adopting this perspective, missionaries conduct analyses of the ancient worlds behind the biblical texts and the processes by which those texts have been appropriated by Christians living within the modern world.

Although I distinguish between “cultural” and “contextual” approaches to mission, there is considerable overlap and cross-fertilisation. In their defining book *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models* (1989), David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen claimed that the above initial analysis opens avenues for transposing biblical texts onto the peoples of the recipient culture.

While it recognises that there must be some initial preparation for mission, the **liberation perspective** also claims that mission begins with the experience of living with and listening to the victims of social injustice. Such experience usually arouses a sense of outrage, prompting expressions of protest at the causes of injustice, leading to an analysis of society from the perspective of social outcasts. Paulo Friere provides the best summary of this type of analysis: “I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to

be that of *domination*. This implies that the object to be achieved is liberation” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1972). In Gustavo Gutierrez’s ground-breaking contribution to this approach to theology, *A Theology of Liberation* (1973/1988, p. xviii), Gutierrez recalls “that the name and reality of ‘liberation theology’ came into existence at Chombote, Peru, in July 1968, only a few months before Medellin”.

As in any human enterprise, but especially for mission, there is always a starting point. At a personal level, mission begins with one’s own cultural and religious background, followed by a formation period when one decides to take up cross-cultural mission.

Unlike those contextualisation approaches that supply a ready-made message to apply to whatever mission context one may enter, liberation approaches imply that the foreign missionary is attempting to study the socio-political life of the mission context in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Such analysis should also help expose the biases of one’s own background.

Only then, in dialogue with people who are struggling against the structures of socio-political domination, can the missionary discover how their knowledge of the Scriptures can contribute to an action-reflection process that is liberating to both the poor who refuse to submit to the power of domination and the missionary who discovers anew the power of faith, as expressed through reading the Bible in the context of that struggle.

FR TOM ROUSE

Columban Fr Tom Rouse lives and works in New Zealand.

MISSION INTENTIONS

POPE FRANCIS

March - For new martyrs: Let us pray that those who risk their lives for the Gospel in various parts of the world might imbue the Church with their courage and missionary drive.

April - For the roles of women: Let us pray that the dignity and worth of women be recognised in every culture, and for an end to the discrimination they face in various parts of the world.

COLUMBAN ACTIVITIES Crossword puzzle

SCAN QR CODE to read the March - April 2024 Columban Calendar Art Guides and complete the crossword puzzle below.

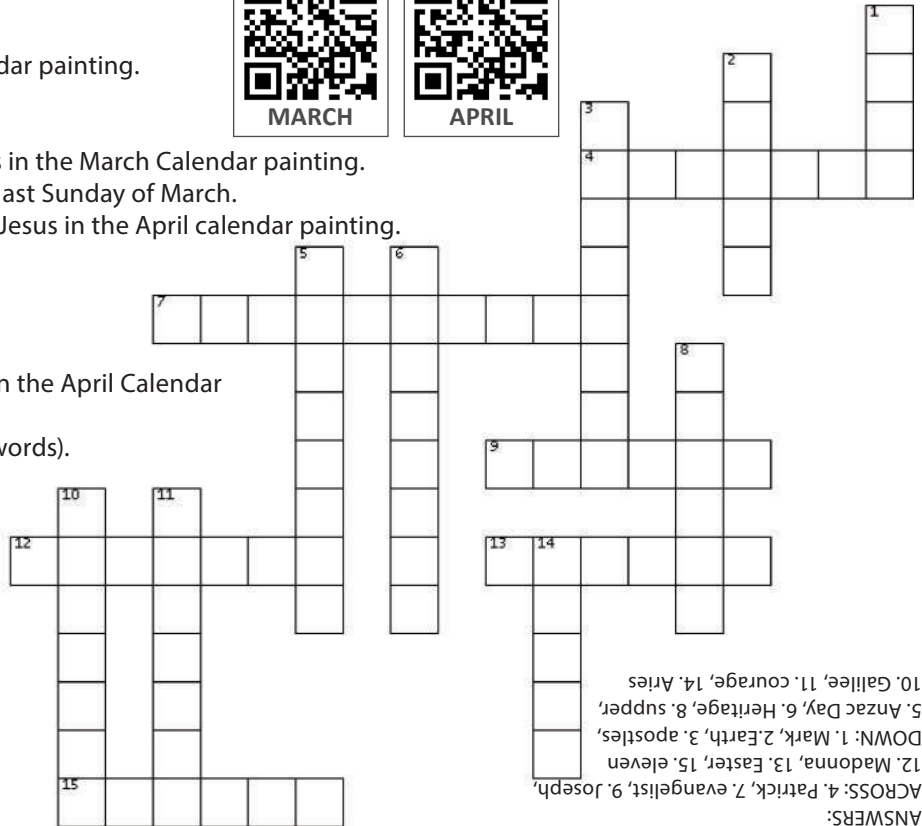


ACROSS

4. The name of the saint in the March Calendar painting.
7. Another name for a Gospel author.
9. His feast day is on March 19.
12. The title of the woman holding the cross in the March Calendar painting.
13. The liturgical season that begins on the last Sunday of March.
15. The number of people standing around Jesus in the April calendar painting.

DOWN

1. His feast day is on April 26.
2. April 22 is World Day.
3. The title of those standing around Jesus in the April Calendar painting.
5. April 25 is a special day in Australia (two words).
6. April 18 is World Day.
8. Thursday of Holy Week commemorates the last meal of Jesus.
10. Jesus is standing on the shore of a lake in the April Calendar painting.
11. A special trait of those born between March 21 and April 19.
14. The star sign of those born between March 21 and April 19.



ANSWERS:
ACROSS: 4. Patrick, 7. evangelist, 9. Joseph, 12. Madonna, 13. Easter, 15. eleven
DOWN: 1. Mark, 2. Earth, 3. apostles, 5. Anzac Day, 6. Heritage, 8. supper, 10. Galilee, 11. courage, 14. Aries



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