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MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



A COVID-19 WEDDING

Fr John McEvoy on a Fijian couple's celebration

LET'S CREATE A WORLD WITHOUT RACISM

Columban Schools Media winners

ROBOTS, ETHICS AND THE FUTURE OF JOBS

Fr Seán McDonagh's prophetic warning

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THE FAR EAST

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To promote an awareness of the missionary dimension of the Church among readers; to report on the work of Columban priests, Sisters and lay missionaries; and to seek spiritual and material support for missionaries.

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Front Cover

Groom Jonathan Kunau and his bride, Hilda Vukikomoala, on their wedding day in Fiji. Pic: Fr John McEvoy.



HOW LIFE HAS CHANGED

I had just arrived in the Philippines shortly after ordination. It was 1973 and something unprecedented was happening back home in Ireland. Limerick had made it to the All-Ireland hurling final! Desperate to find out news of how the match went I got my shortwave transistor radio all set up in the presbytery. For younger generations this might not mean much, but for those of us who existed before the internet and mobile phones, we've experienced the radio (particularly when in a remote location overseas) as an absolute lifeline.

Because of the climate, we had Mass at 6am. The sports round-up was due on the BBC World service at 6.45am Philippines time. After Mass, I rushed to the radio and got reception just as the announcer was saying, "In this edition we'll be hearing all the latest from golf, athletics etc as well as a report from Dublin on the All-Ireland final between Limerick and Kilkenny."

Waiting with bated breath, it felt like the sports round-up was the longest in the BBC's history! Then the announcer said, "We're crossing live to Dublin" ... at which point the crackly transmission became ever cracklier and faded into oblivion. No amount of twiddling the dial or hammering the transistor would bring back the voice that could tell me what I desperately wanted to find out.

My heart truly sank and I could only resort to the serenity prayer: grant us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed; courage to change that which can be changed and the wisdom to know the one from the other.

It was TEN days before I heard the result of the match! And yes, Limerick won the final - for the first time in over thirty years. The local Filipino people looked bemused by my whoops of delight on the day I learned the good news.

In the fourteen years that I was missioned in the Philippines, I was able to go to Manila once a year to make a phone call home. The difficulty of communicating in those days was something we took for granted. Laughable now in the era of instant communication.

After a few years in Ireland, I returned to the Philippines in 2000 for another eighteen years. At that point I hadn't acquired a mobile phone and what really surprised me on my return was that everyone there had one. I nearly fell over with shock on seeing one of the street sellers outside the cathedral, struggling to make a living by selling candles, pulling out his mobile phone after the crowds had gone inside.

The revolution in communications has happened in such a short space of time. For that reason, Fr Seán McDonagh's new book, *Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs* (see pages 4-5) raises some serious questions about the speed of technology and our future direction. ●

Fr Daniel O'Malley

Fr Daniel O'Malley was ordained in 1972. After many years in the Philippines, he now lives and works in Britain.

Image: Shutterstock

ROBOTS, ETHICS AND THE FUTURE OF JOBS

Columban missionary Fr Seán McDonagh is renowned for his leadership on climate change and care for the earth. His latest book explores the rise of Artificial Intelligence and surveillance capitalism. To give you a sense of its prophetic insights, we are reproducing a review by Denis Blackledge SJ.

This is a timely, challenging, stimulating, knowledgeable, and, yes, frightening volume by a well-known author who knows his stuff as an environmental theologian. Moreover, he writes in a style which is crisp and clear, and ends all his eleven chapters with a brief summary conclusion.

The book deals with the awesome rise and staggering advance of Artificial Intelligence [AI] over the past four decades or so, and into our present pandemic era. The impact of AI is all-embracing. How it is regulated, and how institutions provide suitable ethical policies to cope with it, are key issues for our present and future generations. And the Catholic Church in general has not yet wakened up to the vast practical impact of AI, not least on the availability of jobs worldwide.

The author, who was instrumental in helping the Philippine Bishops to write the first-ever ecological pastoral letter, **'What is happening to our beautiful land?'**, in 1988, systematically highlights how AI has speeded up, and how it has impacted on jobs, algorithms, 3D printing, robots and drones, the future of farming, caring for children, the elderly and those with special needs. He clarifies how AI has changed retail, hospitality, banking, finance and call centres. He focuses

on self-driven cars and trucks, and how robots are currently used in warfare.

All with stark simplicity and clarity. He

Robots Ethics and the Future of Jobs

Seán McDonagh

concentrates on how to create a Universal Basic Income (UBI) defined by Seán Ward in 2016 as: "A substantial, unconditional and tax-free payment from the exchequer to all citizens on an individual basis, financed by a flat tax on all income. It would replace tax credits and tax allowances for those in paid employment, and welfare payments for those who are not in paid employment".

His final chapter reminds the reader of what Catholic Social Teaching has to say about work, seen not as a commodity but as crucial and central to an individual's self-worth. Pope St John Paul II and our current Pope Francis have written extensively on the creative value of human work. On the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1 May 2020, Pope Francis prayed that no-one would be lacking a job and "That all would be paid justly and may enjoy the dignity of work and the beauty of rest". Sadly, with the advance of AI, only 40-50% of workers will have paid employment. So Catholic Social Teaching will need to be revisited and revised.

McDonagh believes that, "Preparing for and responding to the social impacts of AI and automation will be the defining challenge of the next decade, and that the Catholic Church and all religions will need to take this issue on board, as a central pastoral focus of their work at local,



AN EXTRACT FROM ROBOTS, ETHICS AND THE FUTURE OF JOBS:

Biases against the Poor, People of Colour and Women

The lack of women in important positions in AI was demonstrated by a survey undertaken by the World Economic Forum and LinkedIn in 2018. It showed that women held only 22 per cent of jobs in the AI workforce. The data also pointed out that women with AI skills are employed in data analytics, research, information management and teaching, whereas men are employed in more lucrative and more powerful roles, such as software engineers or as chief executives.

Ivana Bartoletti, a privacy and data-protection professional who chairs the Fabian Women's Network, is adamant that young women must query the outcomes of decisions made by algorithms and that,

furthermore, they must demand transparency in all the processes that lead to the creation of algorithms; otherwise she believes women will be sidelined.

Bartoletti points out that women lose out on another front because the jobs that are about to be automated through the use of AI technology affect women more than men. For example, in Britain, 73 per cent of cashiers in shops are women, and 97 per cent of these are expected to lose their jobs to automation. Bartoletti believes that it is time for women, not only to investigate what AI means for them, but also to make sure that, 'in the public discourse, women frame and lead the debate about the governance of AI, so that it becomes a force for the common good and not the ultimate expression of masculine control'.

01. Cover of 'Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs' by Fr Seán McDonagh.

02. Fr Seán McDonagh celebrated his golden jubilee of ordination in 2019. He is pictured here with Fr Peter O'Neill (right) and Fr Bernard Mulkerins (left in green stole). Photo: Columban Mission Images.

Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs by Fr Seán McDonagh is published by Messenger Publications, Pbk, 184 Pages, (2021). www.messenger.ie

national and global level". He reckons that groups should be formed in every parish and diocese to address this issue. And most of the people dealing with this issue will be lay people, not clergy.

If this does not wake you up, goodness knows what will. This is required reading for all those who take their faith seriously,

and with adult responsibility. This book needs to be widely available, read, and its contents put into practice and earthed. Otherwise, humanity is in danger of becoming just another digital app. ●

Denis Blackledge SJ

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Catholic South West

'...this important book... deals with complex ideas ...in refreshingly simple language...I would highly recommend it.'

Brendan Hoban, Western People

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