

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



COLUMBAN VOCATION

From Real Estate
to Missionary
Priesthood

CELEBRATING CHANGEMAKERS

Columban Schools
Competition Winners

SYNODALITY: PARTICIPATION

Making Space
for
Grace

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THREE IMPORTANT HALLMARKS

THE FAR EAST

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THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

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

Royal Poinciana flowers, more commonly known as the Flame Tree, photographed in Hong Kong by Columban missionary Fr Alvaro Martinez.

Although all Columbans may not agree with me, I think our life as Columbans has three important hallmarks.

Community

The first of these is our community life; despite living quite separately, we are a brotherhood. Many of us have lived alone in isolated places for years; the simple fact is that mission sometimes demands it. On the other hand, we Columbans are sometimes referred to as a 'family'. Although a few of us are in fact related to each other in the normal way as brothers or cousins, and some have had sisters who are Columban Sisters, most of us are not held together by a family connection. Many of our relatives have been generous benefactors over the years, supporting Columban mission, not only by giving a son or a brother, but also by backing us financially and in numerous other ways. To say we are a family does say something about the way we live our lives and about the quality of our community life.

Though I have been in a position to meet nearly all Columbans, there may have been a few I have not met face to face. But for every one of them, there are others that I have met on multiple occasions in multiple places. All this meeting and meeting again means we build up a shared history with each other. To know and be known, to accept others and be accepted by them, to respect others' contributions and be respected for what you have accomplished, is all part of the Columban community experience. A shared history means shared stories, some of them funny, some sad, some understated, some exaggerated.

Spirituality

A life of prayer should both sustain and challenge. Columbans follow a variety of spiritual practices and a variety of spiritualities. The first generation of Columbans decided that fairly early in our seminary career we would all do a form of the 'Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius', the Jesuit 30-day retreat. It continues to be an important part of our training. I think the key to the exercises is listening. Certainly, being on mission in a foreign land provides many opportunities for discerning the will of God, not only by listening to the Word of God in the scriptures, but also as revealed in the circumstances of our lives and the lives of the people among whom we are working.

Walking with the Poor

The third hallmark is a commitment to making the struggles of the poor our struggle. Readers of the **Far East** know this commitment takes many forms in many places. Our work in Pakistan, for example, is with some extremely poor tribal people. Even prosperous 'developed' countries like Japan and Korea were poor and struggling from the destruction of war when we first went there and continue to have pockets of poverty today. In Latin America, the Columbans gravitated to the poor areas on the periphery of the great cities of Lima and Santiago and have remained there year in and year out.

These three hallmarks remind us who we are, what we are about and, I hope, where we are going. ●

Fr John Burger

01. Columban missionaries Deacon Elbert Balbastro (centre) and Fr Tomás King (right) with Franciscan Fr Pervaiz (left) and parishioners in the parish of Khipro, Sindh Province in southeastern Pakistan. Photo: Fr Pat Raleigh

Fr John Burger is originally from the Philadelphia area. Ordained in 1973, he spent many years in Japan and Hong Kong and was Regional Director of the Columbans in the US until 2021.





THE WHEEL IS TURNING

Marking 70 years of Columban mission in Fiji, Fr Frank Hoare underlines how young Pacifican Columbans, who are now taking up the missionary flame, can be proud of their missionary inheritance and training.

Western foreign missionaries, beginning with the Marist Fathers, have nourished the Catholic faith in Fiji since 1844. This era is almost finished. There are no Columban seminarians in the US, Australia, Britain and Ireland now.

But we are blessed that the young Church of Fiji, where Columbans have worked for decades, is now a mission-sending Church. Although there are only about 80,000 Catholics in Fiji, there are now nine Pacifican Columban priests, eight seminarians and five lay missionaries on mission in different parts of the world. Those who were the subjects of mission are now the missionaries. The wheel of time is turning full circle.

But before the sands of time obliterate the footsteps of those who went before, it is appropriate to remember the pioneers and those who followed, and celebrate the legacy they left. Theirs is a legacy of diverse mission service and a tradition of relating closely with the people to whom they are sent.

The first group of 13 Columbans who arrived in 1952 were faced with different challenges - climate, geography, underdevelopment, poverty and a still colonised multicultural country. They immersed themselves in the lives of the people, learning Fijian and Hindi at a time when there were no language schools, and adjusting to the style and rhythm of the cultures and the people. This was a key that facilitated their efforts in the various ministries they were given or took on as the need arose.

The Columbans were very impressed by the indigenous Fijian people - their friendliness, ready smile, fine physique and noble appearance, hospitality, politeness, care for guests, their communal life and willingness to take life as it came. Fijian ceremonial and the solemn silence that accompanied it were impressive. Imposing, too, was the Fijian *bure* (house) with massive posts and beams lashed together with strong twine made from coconut hair.

A few of them remarked on the sure-footedness of the local horses which they rode from village to village over mountain passes and slippery mud and rock.

The young missionaries marvelled at the multi-racial congregations in the towns. They were not put off by buses without windows, the dusty bus journeys and the relaxed approach to time. They were surprised at what an essential piece of equipment for school children the cane knife was - for cutting grass, chopping briars and branches and even peeling fingernails.

The Columbans enjoyed the Fijian feasts at Christmas, Easter and communal celebrations, with the mounds of food cooked in earth ovens followed by *meke* (dance) performances. The young missionaries themselves liked to challenge each other to climb a coconut tree or have a horse race on arrival at a village. They also got great fun out of organising a sports day, with small prizes for winners in the villages.

Columban missionary work in Fiji has developed and changed over the years since 1952. The early Columbans established new parishes and schools. They opened and taught in a secondary school. Later they became involved in the education of teachers, catechists, and seminarians for Pacific dioceses.

From early on they were concerned with the evangelisation of non-Christians in Fiji. After the Vatican Council they saw the need to work for justice, peace and safeguarding the environment. Fiji suffered four military coups and Columban missionaries responded to them by working for

reconciliation through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. They encouraged diocesan seminarians and religious to be partners in this work for peace.

The Columbans also empowered the laity to be active Christians in small communities by listening to the Word of God, sharing faith and engaging in works of mercy. In recent decades they invited local young men to join the Society as missionary priests. They also welcomed young lay people to join them for some years on overseas mission.

Young Pacifican Columbans who now take up the missionary flame can be proud of the missionary inheritance and training they have received. They are aware of the Columban tradition - learning language, respecting cultures, making friends with the people to whom they are sent and working with them for the Reign of God by resisting all kinds of oppression. The Pacifican Columbans will add to this tradition the richness of their own gifts as the wheel of time moves on. ●



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Fr Frank Hoare is a Regional Council member and Student Formation educator in Fiji where he has been working since 1973. He wrote a history of the Columban Fathers in Fiji covering the period 1952 until 2017. It is titled, 'The Turning Wheel'.

01. Archbishop Victor Foley with the first Columban group in Fiji in 1952. On 22nd February that year, Frs Denis Fitzpatrick, Michael Cryan, Martin Dobby, John Doyle, Kevin Fleming, James Gavigan, Gerry Hurley, Patrick J. Kelly, Seamus O'Connor, John J O'Loughlin and Arthur Tierney arrived in Suva. Frs Charles O'Mahony and Fr Rod Hoult had come from Australia and New Zealand a few weeks earlier.

02. Fijian house or *bure*. Image: Fr Frank Hoare

03. Men in formation with the Columbans in Fiji. In 1984, the region of Fiji established its own local formation programme which was greatly helped by the proximity of the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva. Fr Frank Hoare is on the left. Image: Fr Frank Hoare.

03



THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS



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04

The response to Fr Eamon Sheridan's article about his plan to build a women's dormitory in Myanmar's Kachin State to help women with drug and alcohol addiction was phenomenal. The centre is part of a life-giving support programme which the Church offers drug addicts and alcoholics in this troubled country.

When I told people in the Rebirth Rehabilitation Centre that readers of the **Far East** had donated enough money to finish the building of the dormitory for women and not only that, but we also now had the resources to buy a new generator that will power the whole compound during the numerous power cuts - and we can install a much-needed transformer - they were dumbfounded. "Why would people so far away care so much for us?" one person asked. The faith and generosity of the **Far East** readers has been amazing.

Over recent months we have cried together here in the centre as the situation deteriorated and the world seemed to have forgotten, as attention moved to the next disaster. However, your generosity has lifted our spirits and restored our faith in the goodness that is in people. Every evening we pray the rosary together and we always pray for our donors. Once a week we offer Mass for the intentions of our donors.

So, once again, from the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your prayers and support. You are changing the lives of people you may never meet but who will always remember you in their prayers.

Update on the building

Because of the political instability in Myanmar, it was difficult to get funds into the country. Banks were basically closed. We had to suspend the building of the new women's centre for lack of available funds. Thankfully we were able to overcome that and continue construction. Then a third wave of Covid hit us and again we had to suspend the work. We were able to finish by the end of 2021 and by the grace God we welcomed our first women clients at the start of this year. ●

If you would like to support Fr Eamon Sheridan's work, please send a cheque payable to 'Columban Missionaries' to the Columban Mission Office, St Columban's, Widney Manor Road, Solihull B93 9AB or telephone 01564 772 096 or donate online at www.columbans.co.uk. Please mention this article when making your donation.

01. Columban missionary Fr Eamon Sheridan from Ireland in the chapel of the Rebirth Rehabilitation Centre in Myitkyina, Myanmar.
02. The new women's dormitory at the Rebirth Rehabilitation Centre in Myitkyina.
03. Fr Eamon Sheridan with some of the staff and participants on the rehabilitation programme for men at the Rebirth Rehabilitation Centre in Myitkyina.
04. The new residential centre is the first to offer rehabilitation to women battling drug addiction in Myanmar.

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PROCLAIMING MISSION IN A LANGUAGE NOT YOUR OWN!

01

blind lute (biwa) troubadour. These tended to be masters of language and oral tradition, with a privileged entry into the courts of the Daimyo (feudal lords). Lawrence became the voice and companion of Francis. He was the first lay missionary in Japan.

Over the years I have made many language bloopers! In Japanese there are many similar sounding words, some have a long 'u', some a short 'u'. For example, in a catechumenate class the topic was the Sacrament of Matrimony. 'Husband' is 'shujin'. I lengthened the 'u' - 'shu-jin' is a prisoner! Just imagine the mirth! My team teacher (my 'Lawrence') put the record straight.

For five years at the Columban seminary in Australia I helped deacons with their homilies. I invited an actress from the Sydney Catholic Theatre Company, the Genesians, to give some guidelines for public speaking. I heard words from that actress which have influenced my life as a Christian and as a priest. These are her precious words:

"After 30 years of going out to face people on a stage, I still get nervous. I regard this feeling as a prompting by the Holy Spirit to ask for his guidance and help to speak boldly."

I have come to realise that this attitude applies not just to homilies but to my ordinary everyday life. So each morning I pray with the flavour of Psalm 143: "O Lord let your gentle Spirit guide me in paths that are level and smooth. Show me the way I should walk, talk and be. I put my trust in you."

Try it - it works! ●

Fr Barry Cairns was born in New Zealand in 1931. After studying to be a Columban missionary in Australia, he went to Japan in 1956. At 90 years of age he still serves in a small parish in Yokohama City.

Communicating in difficult new languages can result in some bloopers cautions 90-year-old Columban missionary, Fr Barry Cairns.

Did St Francis Xavier have the gift of tongues? I think not! Yes, he could speak his native Basque, Spanish, Portuguese and French. He was a missionary in India, Malaysia and Indonesia (Maluku Islands).

But after Francis arrived in Japan, he tried to learn the language and failed. In a letter to St Ignatius, he wrote how admirable were the Japanese as a people but he thought their language was an invention of the devil!

Francis was misinformed about both the language and Japanese religious culture in Malacca by Anjiro, a Japanese convert. Anjiro was enthusiastically inaccurate and spoke the language with a distinctive local dialect, little understood outside his own area.

So later, Francis found out that he had been proclaiming the Japanese sun-god (Dainichi) - one of many gods. He changed God to 'deusu', a transliteration of the Latin 'Deus'. This change was on the advice of a Japanese onlooker named Ryosai who heard the mangled words of Francis, but was more touched by his courage and patience, despite the scoffing and insults. He received baptism from Francis and was given the baptismal name, Lawrence.

Lawrence Ryosai was an almost totally

02



01. Japanese characters on wood. Image: Shutterstock

02. Portrait of St Francis Xavier in Kobe City Museum, Japan.

KITCHENS IN THE SKY

“Die from Covid or die from hunger. Not much of a choice.”

With Columban support, a religious Sister is helping feed mountain-top shanty town dwellers in Covid-ravaged Peru, reports Columban missionary Fr John Boles.

Sr Isabel Miguelez spells out the stark dilemma facing the poorest members of her parish. San Albino forms part of the parish of *Jesús Resucitado* (the Risen Jesus), located on the northern edge of Peru's capital city, Lima. The parish was founded, and for many years staffed, by the Columban Fathers. How do you resolve this dilemma? How do you feed people hit by a double disaster, especially when they live in such inaccessible upland areas? “Simple,” says Sr Isabel with characteristic understatement. “With our ‘kitchens in the sky.’”

Most of these people survive in the ‘informal economy’, living from hand to mouth on what they can sell on the streets or earn as day labourers. For them, the pandemic was a dual catastrophe. Peru's vaccination programme moved painfully slowly, and so they were the ones most at risk from infection and the ones with the greatest responsibility to self-isolate when necessary. It meant they couldn't go out onto the streets and earn their meagre

living, resulting in hunger for them and their families.

This is where Sr Isabel – a Carmelite nun from Spain – comes in. Backed by her congregation, the parish and supporters such as the Columbans, she met the local residents and got them to set up a series of kitchen co-operatives (known as *ollas comunes* in Spanish – literally, ‘communal saucepans’). She started them off by donating stoves, gas cylinders, pots and pans. The men carried the stuff up the mountain paths. The women served as cooks. Sr Isabel explained the system as she gave me a guided tour, speaking as we marched single-file up dizzying goat tracks. In each case a committee, normally all-female, is elected. This committee selects a site, sets up the kitchen, buys the food and establishes a cooking rota.

Interested families must register and then they'll receive one meal a day, six days a week. The participants need to cover the cost of the food, but there is no fixed rate. Each Saturday they meet and set the rate

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for the following week, according to current food prices and people's ability to pay. As well as the initial investment, Sr Isabel and her support group guarantee fuel supplies and the maintenance of equipment. She goes round the area every day, visiting the kitchens, inspecting, encouraging, congratulating, cajoling. Her energy and enthusiasm seem endless.

What struck me as I struggled after her was the sheer scale of the challenge. I remembered seeing those same hills years back when the Columbans had the parish, and they were bare. Now they are absolutely covered in flimsy dwellings. According to Sr Isabel, in recent years the population of the parish has exploded, with people flooding in from the countryside in search of a better life in the city. As demand for space increased, land prices soared, and the poor were forced higher and higher up the mountain sides.

The pandemic and ensuing national economic collapse only served to accelerate this process. "It was like watching

bread expanding in the oven," Sr Isabel explained. "Houses just seemed to rise up the hills overnight." When I visited, there were three kitchens in operation, providing a total of 270 meals each day, a veritable lifeline for families that otherwise would have struggled to survive. Nevertheless, as Sr Isabel herself admits, this is only the start. This scheme will need to expand into the future. Even as the pandemic begins to recede, Peru's economic woes will continue, migration up the hills will continue.

Not that this serves to discourage Sr Isabel. Just the opposite. It seems to motivate her even more. Columban benefactors provide the money to support such worthwhile projects, but it is people like Sr Isabel that provide the inspiration. The sort of inspiration that produces miracles like her 'kitchens in the sky'. ●

Fr John Boles is a Columban missionary from England who worked in Peru from 1994 until 2021. He is now Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain.

If you would like to support 'Kitchens in the Sky' in Peru, please send a cheque payable to 'Columban Missionaries' to the Columban Mission Office, St Columban's, Widney Manor Road, Solihull B93 9AB or telephone 01564 772 096 or donate online at www.columbans.co.uk. Please mention this article when making your donation.

01. Sr Isabel Miguelez, overlooking the townscape of San Albino, part of *Jesus Resucitado*/The Risen Jesus parish in Lima.
02. A family outside a typical home in San Albino.
03. According to Sr Isabel, in recent years the population of the parish has exploded, with people flooding in from the countryside in search of a better life in the city. As demand for space increased, land prices soared, and the poor have been forced higher and higher up the mountain sides.
04. Columban Fr John Boles watching women at work in one of the *ollas comunes* kitchens.

PENTECOST'S FLAME TREE

There is a resemblance between the bright red flowers of Royal Poinciana, more commonly known as the Flame Tree, and the tongues of fire through which the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, writes Fr Tim Mulroy.

The morning after Pentecost, as I opened the curtains of my bedroom window, the bright red flowers in the garden next door grabbed my attention. In some mysterious way, they seemed like tongues of fire. As I stood gazing, I asked myself why I hadn't noticed them previously. Perhaps, it was because my mind had become fixated on the large, grey construction site that lay just beyond them. Later that morning, one of my Columban companions commented that those same flowers looked so radiant, while that evening another of my companions set out to capture their beauty with his camera. It was then that it dawned on me that the natural world was also celebrating Pentecost in response to our prayer, "Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth".

During the weeks that followed Pentecost, as I walked through the nearby hills my eyes were drawn repeatedly to other varieties of red flowers. For the Chinese people, the colour red is associated with good fortune and happiness, and the display of red lanterns creates a joyful atmosphere during festivals. In a similar way, those red flowers on the hillsides seemed to hang like lanterns among the trees, proclaiming through their unassuming beauty their festive joy in the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as I stood to observe them, I sensed their silent but insistent invitation to me to share in their delight.





On one occasion, as I looked closely at one of those flowering red lanterns that overhung my path in the forest, I noticed that the petals had expanded to form pods. Upon closer examination, I saw that some of those pods had broken open, revealing neatly arranged seeds inside. As I stood marvelling at the craftsmanship, I realised that the pod held seven seeds. Seven! Yes, here was another sign of the Holy Spirit at work in creation, infusing it with wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and reverence of God. In that moment, I sensed that this simple red pod was in some mysterious way witnessing to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Such a moment of awareness of the presence of God in the surrounding world cannot be manufactured: rather, it is a gift that takes one by surprise. Moreover, only poets are courageous enough to attempt to convey in words such glimpses of the mystical world. In his poem, **God's Grandeur**, Gerard Manley Hopkins seeks to capture the Pentecostal dimension of everything with the opening proclamation, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," and in the concluding explanatory verse, "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." ●

Society Leader, Fr Tim Mulroy, is from Meelick, Swinford, Co Mayo. Prior to his appointment to this leadership role in the Columbans he worked on mission in Japan and in El Paso, Texas. He was also Regional Director in the US.



All images of the Royal Poinciana flowers and Chinese lanterns by Columban missionary Fr Alvaro Martinez.

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ANYONE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE: 21ST CENTURY CHANGEMAKERS COMPETITION RESULTS

Students were invited to write an article or create an image on the topic 'Anyone Can Make a Difference: 21st Century Changemakers' for the 2022 Columban Schools Media Competition.

The competition was run by the Columban and the **Far East** magazine and was open to young people aged 13-18 years of age. The theme was based on a quote from young climate campaigner Greta Thunberg who has said, "No one is too small to make a difference." The entries were judged by leading editors and journalists.

A student from St George's College in Weybridge, **Jessica Saxon**, won this

year's print category while a student from Richard Challoner School, New Malden, **Elijah Gilbert**, won the image category.

Second place in the print category was awarded to **Mahi Sikan** of Thomas More School in Bedford and third place in print went jointly to **Ella Bothwell** of St Richard Gwyn in Flint and **Scarlett Peart-Lapidge** of Bishop Thomas Grant in London.

Second place in the image category was awarded to **Katherine Fawole** of St Paul's Academy in London and third place went jointly to **Oliver Lafite** of Richard Challoner School and **Paulette De Jose** of Holy Cross School in New Malden.

Congratulations to all the winners! We would like to thank every student who took the time and made the effort to enter the competition. The judges paid tribute to the very high standard this year. Thank you also to all our judges for their time and expertise. ●

The full list of winners can be seen here: www.columbancompetition.com

- 01. The winning image in this year's Columban Schools Media Competition by **Elijah Gilbert** from Richard Challoner School, New Malden.
- 02. Second place in the competition was awarded to **Katherine Fawole** of St Paul's Academy in London.
- 03a + 03b. Third place went jointly to **Oliver Lafite** of Richard Challoner School and **Paulette De Jose** of Holy Cross School in New Malden.

THE SISTERHOOD OF INTERSECTIONALITY

This is the winning article in the 2022 Columban Schools Media Competition in Britain. It is by Jessica Saxon, a student of St George's College, Weybridge.

Maybe it was in Malay class when someone had asked me if I was Chinese because my eyes were slender and long. Or perhaps it was in RE when all the boys in my class uproared in rebuttal after I had made the claim that one of my peers was sexist for implying that all women wanted to flash themselves and seek male validation. Or even when a man thrice my age had trapped me in the corner of a restaurant by sitting at the edge of my booth to chat about Harry Potter - he definitely didn't have any other ideas, did he? It was only in 2020 when I had truly grasped the fact that I was going to be targeted for the rest of my life because of my skin colour and gender.

Overwhelmed, I spent a couple of months keeping my thoughts to myself because I didn't want the boys to dislike me. It was until I realised that I was just proving my RE classmate's point: I was seeking approval from the boys in my class despite the fact that they were simply people who were never taught different in a social stratification imbued with patriarchal ideologies. Three months later, I had gone into the pandemic afraid that it would hinder my ability to develop my critical thinking and prevent me from scratching the itch of intrigue that I had silently been fostering in the back of my mind ever since I was a child - I was completely wrong.

I had discovered Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She isn't a feminist but rather someone who explores the institutionalised white superiority within traditional feminism and endeavours to further develop it into a modern movement filled with justice for each individual woman. She strives to recruit girls from a young age to help build a worldwide understanding of intersectional feminism in the hope of shaping Generation Z into people who stand up against expectations made by cis-het white, able-bodied males who lived centuries ago.

In a passionate speech regarding the explicit biases within medicine, Ocasio-Cortez referred to her religious faith, opposing the justification of negligence over people of a different race, gender or sexuality. Referencing to the abuse of power prevalent behind religious freedom in the United States, she states, "The only time religious freedom is invoked is in the name of bigotry and discrimination." In one sentence, Ocasio-Cortez is able to highlight the history of discriminatory-based gaslighting within the American healthcare industry, although touching on a global spectrum. Janice A. Sabin PhD, a professor at the University of Washington who researches the implicit bias in

healthcare told **Today** in an article about the dismissiveness that floods the medical care which black women receive that, "Pain is an area for implicit bias having an impact because it's an extremely subjective area." Ocasio-Cortez acknowledges this and calls attention to its inequitable nature.

She remarks upon the fact that certain 'advocates' have done this before and used religious freedom to account for other horrid events in history. "It's very difficult to sit here and listen to arguments in the long history of this country of using scripture and weaponising and abusing scripture, to justify bigotry. White supremacists have done it, those who justified slavery did it, those who fought against integration did it, and we're seeing it today." I think that her method of speaking out is one of the best. She reflects upon her own personal beliefs to logically manipulate arguments, manifesting the vindication behind her reasoning, whilst also recognising that her counterparts may not agree, repeatedly starting her sentences with "In my faith..." She develops the idea that all people are sacred in their own right and should be treated with the same respect that she wants to be treated with herself.

"There is nothing holy about rejecting medical care of people, no matter who they are, on the grounds of what their identity is. There is nothing holy about turning someone away from a hospital. There's nothing holy about rejecting a child from a family. There's nothing holy about writing discrimination into the law." Ocasio-Cortez carries herself with a certain elegance and speaks with such sincerity, convincing spectators that she is indeed correct. She takes things into her own hands and brings the beatitude (Matthew 5:6) "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled," to another level as she continuously brings women from around the world together to be a part of the sisterhood of intersectionality, leaving no one out.

What elevates the power that Ocasio-Cortez exudes, in my view, is her ability to directly bring forth attention to people who have confronted her in problematic and immature ways. In a speech combating misogyny, Ocasio-Cortez calls out former president of the United States for approaching her with racially motivated remarks, "... the president of the United States last year told me to go home, to another country with the implication that I don't even belong in America."

By doing this, Ocasio-Cortez actively encourages others to rise. She encourages others to speak out against their injustices, in a special language that tells women that their stories are worth telling. She brings awareness to a multitude of socio-economic issues and proves that women do have something to say and that they can say it. She has heavily inspired me - and loads of others alike - and I would be grateful to have even a sliver of her bravery and confidence.

If Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez can overcome every woman's worst nightmare and survive, who says I can't too? ●

PARTICIPATION - MAKING SPACE FOR GRACE

Fr Paul McMahon draws some lessons for the Synodal Pathway from his experience as a counsellor at the Survivors of Trauma Centre in Belfast, a place where traumas can be transformed through making space for Grace.

The theme of the upcoming 16th Synod of Bishops in October 2023 is, 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission'. Reflecting on the theme of participation, I believe it is an invitation to the worldwide Church to 'create the space for Grace', where we can heal, grow and encounter: to give voice to our thoughts through a period of personal reflection, discussion and expression. Here we are encouraged by the words of Jesus, "Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (Mt 18:20).

Just as gardeners don't just observe the pretty flowers in their garden but get their hands dirty examining the soil and give time to nurture their charges, so, we too are called to play our part, to dig deep and examine what we love and appreciate in our Catholic faith. As Pedro Arrupe said, "What you are in love with, what seizes

your imagination, will affect everything."

Any member of a Church will participate to the extent that they feel they belong to that Church and that their contribution will be appreciated. But what can really stop us from participating is not only our own negative experience of Church but even the stories we hear of how others were excluded and not valued. Therefore, let us not be afraid of the difficult topics. A human body, in order to be healed, must first acknowledge its wounds. It is the same with the Church.

I know from counselling that when affected by shame, we can fall into one or more responses. To 'withdraw and deny', to 'blame others', to 'blame oneself' or to 'avoid the issue'. Therefore, to participate well, I would suggest some spring cleaning of our assumptions and presumptions. To create a level ground on which to participate.

For example:

① Name our present feelings about our Church. Do we have enthusiasm, disappointment or apathy? Emotions are like a compass that tell us what direction we are going.

② Gather to our awareness all our assumptions, prejudices and biases.

③ Apply critical judgement. Are they true? Where were they born? Are they helpful?

④ Transformation – what needs to change in my perception and what may need to change in the Church?

It may also be helpful to acknowledge, 'What stage am I at on my personal journey in life?' We know from psychologists like Joan Erikson that as we get older we can lose our positivity, creativity and desire to engage socially. Our age may hold us back from getting involved and participating as we might have done at an earlier age.

But as Joan Erikson advocates, try to nurture 'basic trust' in ourselves and others. So, let's trust in ourselves, trust in our Church and trust in the Holy Spirit. This allows us to move on to a more expanded participation, the 'discussion stage' with others. As we know, thoughts and ideas are the origins of many a good deed but thoughts shared with others have an even greater strength and potential.

Such participation needs to be inclusive of our multicultural society. For our Church community has become enriched by Catholics of varied cultural expressions of faith. But we also need to reach out to those on the fringes of the Church. As we know from Scripture, Jesus' life on earth was bookended by him identifying with those on the margins of his community. Like the shepherds at his birth and the thieves at his crucifixion. He also encouraged the participation of those on the edge, "Go therefore to the ends of the roads and call everyone whom you find to the wedding feast." Mt 22:9 (Aramaic bible).

Having reflected personally and discussed with others, we move now to the 'expression stage' when we put voice to our thoughts by sharing with our respective parishes and dioceses. To bring the ideas we have discussed in the park, the pub or the post office to the priest. To ask our parish priest or parish Sister, "to whom do I write or email? When can we meet? How



can I play my part?"

Just as the mighty oceans are made up of tiny drops of water, so each one of us has a significant part to play by participating in the Church Synod and its implementation afterwards.

A challenge for our Church leaders is how best to encourage participation in preparation for the Synod. Will it be the 'come and see' approach characteristic of the gentle start of the Gospel where all was familiar, or will it be with the vitality, excitement and danger characteristic of Christ's last words to the disciples to go and show, "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

As we prepare for the forthcoming Synod, I find it helpful to see such participation as a personal invitation from Pope Francis, "Will you journey with me?" Any journey takes effort and trust but as the Chinese proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step". ●

Paul McMahon is a Columban Missionary from Belfast. He has worked in Pakistan. A trained psychotherapist and supervisor, he is now based in Belfast, Northern Ireland.



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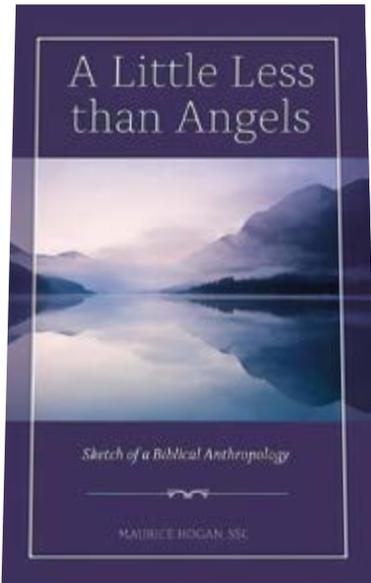
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A LITTLE LESS THAN ANGELS

01



Fr Maurice Hogan explains why he wrote his latest book and argues that a return to the Bible is not a revival of a dead past but a living truth that will provide an antidote to modern illusions of self-salvation.

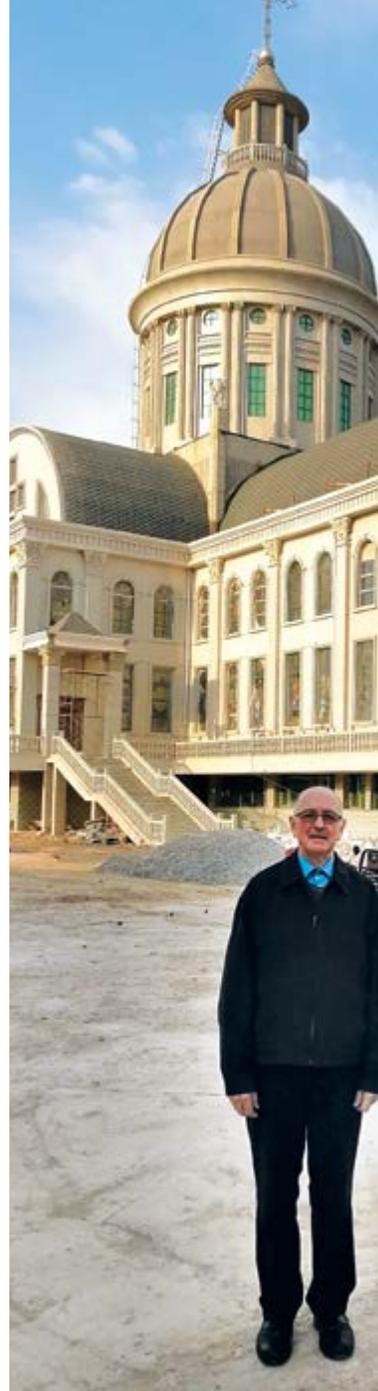
We are fortunate that in our lifetime we enjoy a quality of life which would have been unthinkable just a few generations ago. Thanks to advances in science and technology, we enjoy an abundance of material goods and appreciate the ease of communication that makes the world into a global village. We ought to be the happiest people that ever lived on the face of the earth.

Yet, despite all these stunning developments, we are also in the middle of a cultural decline that is evident in the escalation of violence, random shootings, gross materialism, and hedonism to dull the pain of a meaningless existence. There is a palpable feeling of malaise, aimlessness, depression and rise in suicide rates among the younger generation in the Western world.

These brief considerations are enough to demonstrate that the problems we face today go right to the heart of who and what we are as human beings. For it is gradually becoming obvious that our future may no longer be one of technological, economic, social, and political progress which we took for granted until recently. With the crumbling of organised religion, including Catholicism, we are experiencing a spiritual vacuum and require a broader vision of life to sustain us in the ups and downs of life. We need to open our minds and hearts to the religious dimension of our lived experience by contacting the God of the Bible. We will then be able to recover both our purpose in life and our true dignity as we journey along the road to our final destiny.

How do we get in touch with the biblical God who created the world and is active in it? We encounter God, initially, by paying attention to our experience, since experience has also a spiritual dimension to those who are open to it. For this to happen, though, we must feel a need of God and a desire to communicate with him. Apart from this desire, we may find the biblical message interesting but irrelevant in living our daily lives. Both mind and *heart* must work together to realise that the Word of God is speaking to me, *personally*. We need to ask God for the grace to make "a leap of faith" or trust, since God honours our freedom and will not force us in any way. The heart has its own desires, it seeks truth and happiness, and only God has the capacity of responding to these longings.

A Little Less than Angels may serve as a guide, or roadmap, through the contents of the Bible and may lead to a fruitful and prayerful contemplation of the biblical story. In this way, readers are equipped to deepen their faith commitment and spread the Good News of Emmanuel, "God-with-us" with courage and conviction.





A return to the Bible is not a revival of a dead past but a living *truth* that will provide an antidote to modern illusions of self-salvation. In the Old Testament, God intervenes in the life of Abraham to mark a new departure in the history of humanity. Abraham was open and ready to heed God's interior call to let go of his past and put his trust in this God who revealed a new life of hope for the future. Through Moses, Abraham's descendants acquired a community expression of his experience, after their escape from slavery in Egypt, in the solemn agreement at Sinai. The prophets helped deepen and interiorize that experience. The wisdom teachers, in turn, pondered the role of God, the Creator, through his providential care in everyday living.

In the centuries before the coming of Christ, a faithful remnant lived and transmitted a profound religious experience that finds expression in the prayers of the Psalter. Those who prayed the Psalms were full of hope and expectation because their God journeyed with them and guided their steps in daily life: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path" (Ps.119:105), as they awaited the coming of the Saviour-Messiah.

Although Jesus didn't bring world peace, universal prosperity, or a better world, what he announced was the true God already partially unveiled in the Old Testament. He revealed the true God as a loving Father whom Jesus makes accessible to us in person and through whom God's power works quietly in our world as a force that saves. Christians believe that Jesus provides the definitive truth about our origin and destiny and the full truth regarding the human condition as we experience it.

The Christian life may then become a joyful pilgrimage to our destination, one that is lived in a faith that works through charity and abides in hope, for Jesus becomes "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn.14:6). Believers who wish to follow Jesus more closely have the Gospels to guide them through the essential stages of Christian maturity. The Church as a community communicates the Good News of God's saving plan for all humankind at all times and consequently is missionary of its very nature. It witnesses to the hope of fulfilment beyond history as the final destiny of humanity.

The Church becomes the carrier of a new truth in history through the New Testament writers who offered their stories as a true understanding of the real world. Through conversion, repentance, faith, and baptism, it becomes possible to live this new kind of life guided by the Spirit and strengthened by the Eucharist to enable us to live a morality of love. In this way, we live out the full truth of our humanity witnessed to in an extraordinary way by the saints.

That human living requires spiritual foundations is clear from our contemporary wasteland mired in violence, corruption, and hopelessness, the result of a secularism that denies the existence of God. Christianity offers an illumination of our world that is richer and more satisfying, one that encompasses the relational, emotional, imaginative as well as the rational aspects of living. For it is the biblical God who is the origin and destiny of each human being and of the whole universe. ●

Fr Maurice Hogan served a missionary in Japan and Hong Kong and taught Sacred Scripture at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. He is a former Director of World Missions Ireland (Missio Ireland).

A Little Less Than Angels: Sketch of a Biblical Anthropology is published by Veritas (2021).

01. Cover of Fr Maurice Hogan's new book, 'A Little Less Than Angels: Sketch of a Biblical Anthropology'.
02. Fr Maurice with Fr Joseph Zhang Wenxi who completed his new church in Central China in 2019.
03. With some of the staff of Missio Ireland. Formerly known as World Missions Ireland, Fr Maurice was previously national director of the agency which is the official support organisation for overseas mission in the Catholic Church, promoting prayer, solidarity and fundraising for young churches.

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FROM REAL ESTATE TO MISSIONARY

Columban seminarian Verano Lee Jeong-Rak speaks to Sarah Mac Donald about his journey back to faith and his vocation to missionary priesthood.



01

St Verano is not one of those popular saints whose name trips off your tongue. The 6th century French hermit has all but been forgotten by most of the faithful, perhaps with the exception of churchgoers who attend a small church dedicated to his memory outside the Italian town of Pisa. However, when a Korean couple celebrated the arrival of their first-born forty-one years ago on 19th October, they were in no doubt their infant son should be named in honour of the saint on whose feast day he was safely delivered into the world.

Verano Lee Jeong-Rak is a Columban seminarian who is studying to be a missionary priest. He grew up in a Korean family where both his parents had converted to Catholicism and so faith was important in his homelife, for his parents, for Verano himself and for his younger sister.

Verano joined the

Columbans six years ago in 2017. He was not a pious youth destined for the Church. In fact, for many years, Verano had no faith. "I worked in a real estate agency for six years. In the evenings I went to university. I was paying for my studies because my father's company had gone bankrupt." His faith took a knock with the collapse of his father's company, a traumatic event which coincided with his mother's serious illness and his sister losing her eyesight. "With all that, I couldn't believe in God. I felt, 'If you exist, how could all of this happen to my family?'"

"I denied the existence of God until I was 26. My parents continued to ask me to go to church but I always refused. My mother urged me to go to adoration. One day I decided to go. There was nobody else there, so I slept in the church. I had an hour before I had to go to college, and it was a chance to have a rest. After that, I continued to go to the church and would take a nap. But on one occasion, I didn't take a nap, in fact I got curious about the Bible that was there. I opened it and started to read it. Bit by bit, as I continued to go to the church for Holy Hour, I began to talk to God about my life. One day I cried. For a time after that, I cried or talked about my life and emotions to God. That was the time of my conversion - I started to have faith. After that I changed."

"I graduated from university with a degree in social policy, and I decided to become a social welfare officer. I worked in this area for two years, but I felt frustrated

02



because even if I wanted to help people, the law and policy would get in the way. Some people who were in need lost their subsidies under government cutbacks. It was very hard for them; they would ask me why I cut their subsidies. But it wasn't my fault! I felt really sorry for them and wanted to help but was limited by the law."

"Around this time, the desire to be a priest had half formed in my mind, but I also wanted to get married. One holiday, I was on my way home when I had a serious car accident. I was hospitalised for over a month. As I was recovering, I began to think about my life and what was the best path for my future. I felt that my life had a point in the eyes of God and that maybe He was calling me, and it was time to follow Him. When I was fully recovered, I decided to join the seminary."

"My parents were really surprised by my decision and my friends couldn't believe it. But I shared about my faith, and they told me it was my decision, and they would support me. Some of my friends were baptised."

"I joined the diocesan seminary but in my first year I began to feel called to missionary priesthood. A Sister who worked in my home parish when I was young recommended the Columbans. I met a Columban priest over a period of a year and then I decided to join the Society. I had done three years in the diocesan seminary. I feel God guided my choice."

"I have now been six years with the Columbans, and this year is my last year of study. I am waiting for the General Council to decide on my First Mission Assignment. I was assigned to Chile but that was cancelled because of the Covid pandemic."

"I am 41 now and I first came into

contact with the Columbans when I was 34. I am considered a late vocation in Korea. Joining a diocesan seminary when you are over 30 requires the permission of the bishop. But among the Columbans, the age profile is very mixed. The other students include two others who are over forty as well as two who are 23 and 21. An older student has a lot of life experience to offer and that is a good thing, but it can be difficult to adapt or change. So, there are pros and cons to late vocations."

"I spent my spiritual year in the Philippines; the poverty was shocking at times. I helped with the ministry to the people living in the slum cemetery in Manila. It is hard to explain how difficult their life is. So very shocking. They live and sleep in the cemetery. They built their homes on the tombs. Life is very tough - having to wash in a public place. But even though they are very poor, these people are very generous. They want to share what they have."

Sitting in Dalgan Park, after completing his English language course, Verano tells the **Far East** that many Columban priests "have been a big inspiration". His visit to Ireland was "a dream" he had long harboured since reading '**The Red Lacquered Gate**' about the Society's "noble" co-founders, Bishop Edward Galvin and Fr John Blowick. "After reading about the history of the Columbans, I really wanted to come to Ireland and look around Dalgan Park. It is really beautiful. The most symbolic place for me is the cemetery where you can see the history of all the Columban members, from the two founders, who are both buried in Dalgan, to the most recently deceased. This life is not easy - living in another country as a missionary. But it is inspiring." ●



01. Columban seminarian Verano Lee Jeong-Rak from Korea. Image: Columban Mission Images
02. Visiting Ireland was "a dream" which Verano long harboured. A visit to the chapel in Dalgan Park provided him with an opportunity to see its statue of the Society's patron, St Columbanus. Image: Columban Mission Images
03. Verano Lee Jeong-Rak with Fr Padraig O'Donovan, Vocations Director for the Columbans in Ireland. Image: Columban Mission Images

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Missionary Society of St Columban, Widney Manor Road, Knowle, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB.

GIVING HONOUR

01

Every day in our lives we meet people of various ages from different backgrounds. Many of them we don't know but some of them we get to know and interact with. Sometimes certain people, whether we know then personally or not, have an impact on our life.

I will never forget a neighbour I had in Korea back in 2003. Her name is now blurred from my memory, but her face and what she did for me found a permanent place in my heart. I was new to the area, and the only foreigner residing there at that time.

The apartment I lived in was located midway between the basement and the ground floor; while my neighbour's room was located at the back of mine. It was wintertime. On the first morning just after my arrival, at around 6am, while I was still in bed, somebody knocked hard on my door. It was a knock that seemed urgent, but later I realised it was meant to wake me up. I opened the door. And there she stood. Without uttering a word, she beckoned me and invited me to have breakfast with her. It was still dark and cold outside so I put on some warm clothes and followed her.

It was dark in her room. There was only a small night light plugged into the socket. We sat on the floor eating boiled cabbage, boiled potato and kimchi for breakfast, just the two of us. No words were spoken, except when I said 'thank you' in appreciation for what she had done. Her gestures of generosity, thoughtfulness and kindness will forever be etched in my heart with gratitude. Here was a simple old woman, with almost nothing in her room, sharing with me all she had, welcoming a stranger with love. She had shown me what mission is really all about.

There are many people who, by their works, words and by simply being, have given voice to

those who have nothing - especially the poor, those on the margins, and creation itself. They inspire those who are in need. They give hope to peoples and nations and inspire many to continue to share the love and goodness of God by working for justice, peace, dignity of life and integrity of creation. My neighbour shared with me the goodness of God and gave dignity to the stranger she saw in me.

We honour these people who have given so much from what they have. Others have been abused or ill-treated for the sake of the Gospel, while some have been killed for standing up for what they believed in. There are also those who generously and selflessly help out in whatever way they can so that the mission Jesus started will continue to flourish.

It is my hope and prayer that the efforts and lives of these courageous people will not fade into oblivion but will spark a light in our troubled times and awaken our consciousness to the great work of loving life in all its forms amidst all the world's difficulties and challenges. And that we do this with joy and gratitude to God who is love and life itself. ●

Arlene Villahermosa

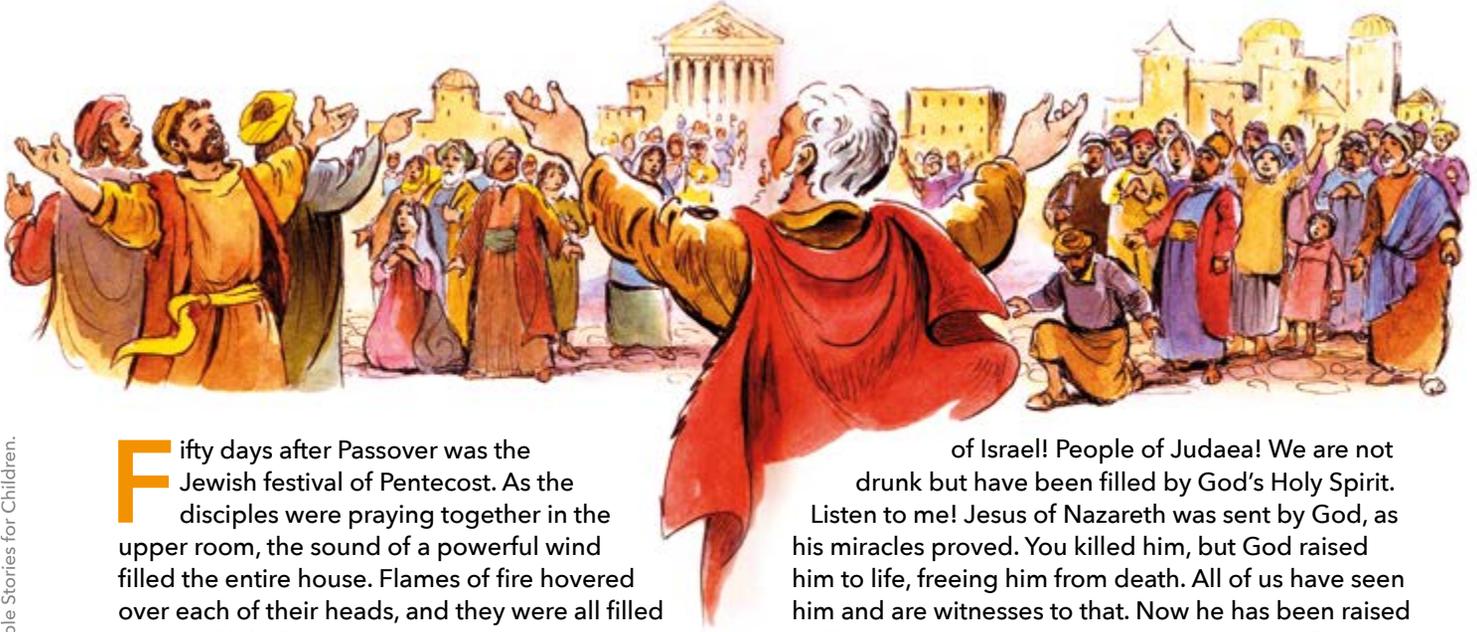
Columban Lay missionary Arlene Villahermosa lives and works in the Philippines.

01. Arlene with other Columban lay missionaries in Korea.

02. At a rally promoting justice, peace and integrity of creation in the Philippines.

02

PENTECOST



Fifty days after Passover was the Jewish festival of Pentecost. As the disciples were praying together in the upper room, the sound of a powerful wind filled the entire house. Flames of fire hovered over each of their heads, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately they began to speak in foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech and courage to praise God and proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

They all rushed down to the temple square, where everyone was gathered for the festival, and began to preach. There were people from many different regions, from as far away as Egypt and Rome. Yet they all heard the disciples and were able to understand what they were saying.

Peter addressed the crowd in a loud voice: "Men

of Israel! People of Judaea! We are not drunk but have been filled by God's Holy Spirit. Listen to me! Jesus of Nazareth was sent by God, as his miracles proved. You killed him, but God raised him to life, freeing him from death. All of us have seen him and are witnesses to that. Now he has been raised to God's right hand, in heaven: the promised Saviour whom you crucified!"

The crowds were very upset at Peter's words. "What should we do?" they asked.

You must be sorry for the things you have done wrong," said Peter, "and be baptised - every one of you - in the name of Jesus. Then you, too, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is God's promise to you and your children!"

That day about three thousands came to believe in the Good News and were baptised. ●

Read also: Acts 2:1-47

BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER
99

1 In Acts ch.8, Philip was on the road to which town when he met the Ethiopian eunuch?

2 In 1 Samuel ch.28, where did Saul go to find a fortune-teller or medium?

3 In Jeremiah ch.39, as Zedekiah tried to escape, where was he caught?

4 In Acts ch.10, to which city did Peter travel to meet the Roman centurion Cornelius?

5 In Nehemiah ch.1, who came down to visit Nehemiah in the city of Susa?

6 In Genesis ch.37, where was Joseph taken by the Ishmaelite traders?

£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!

Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 99, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 30th June 2022.

Bible Quiz N° 97 Winners: Josephine Giblin, Oxford • Magdalen Glynn, Liverpool • Imelda Ogatis, Milton Keynes.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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WORD SEARCH

Match these words with their correct spaces. They can be found straight across or down:

- BICYCLE
- MOUNTAIN
- WATERFALL
- VAN
- GUITAR
- BACKPACK
- TENT
- BOAT
- CAMPER
- FOREST
- ROD
- LANTERN
- MAT
- TENT
- COMPASS
- BACKPACK
- FIRE

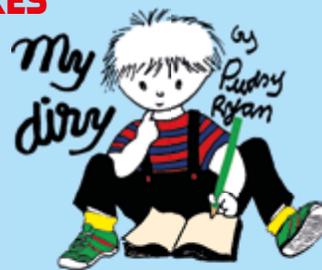


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PUDSY'S DIRTY - FIND THE 10 SPELLING MISTAKES

I dunno why Ms Flinn has to be telling us to work harder becoss soon we'll be having our holidays. Mebbe we shud have our hols first then do all that hard work. And we have plenty to do anyway because we hafta be training for football and everything. Our boots must be shining like new pins and that means we'll be polishing and shining until we can see our faces on them. Guess what our daddy's unkil Fr John was telling us when he came home from the missions that the kids out in that place not only have no football boots or even any shoes at all and them that does have any

wear them around their necks. And we said why do they do that and he said so that they wo'nt get dirty. And I was thinking if we could only do that too wouldn't we save an aful lot of time for doing lots of other things like ... I don't know exactly, But my fren Bump said look at all the essays we could be doing and learning all them hard words to get the spelling right. And we started laffing so much we thought we'd never stop. And that's when Ms Flinn said isn't it great that some of us can be so happy at their work or something like that... except I thought she looked a bit cross...



Help Puddy correct his spelling to win a £15 voucher.

Rewrite the story and send to Puddy's Dirty, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands B93 9AB, before 30th June 2022.

HA! HA!

1. Why don't mummies go on summer holiday?
2. Where do sheep go on holidays?
3. How do we know that the ocean is friendly?
4. What part of the fish weighs the most?
5. Why did the robot go on holiday?
6. Where do ghosts like to go on holidays?

1. They're afraid to relax and unwind!
2. The Baa-hamas!
3. It waves!
4. The scales.
5. He needed to recharge his batteries.
6. Lake Erie.

COMPETITION WINNERS

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2022

<p>Grace Ibbotson Manchester</p> <p>Emily Doust Haughton</p> <p>1</p> <p>Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under</p>	<p>Lydia Mears Bristol</p> <p>Hannah Jackson Whitley Bay</p> <p>1</p> <p>Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over</p>	<p>Liam Cambridge</p> <p>1</p> <p>Puddy's Dirty</p>
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Beloved Blackbirds

By Elizabeth McArdle



It is true. We all love blackbirds. How can we not fall in love with these beautiful birds as we listen to their mellow, flute-like song which heralds the arrival of summertime.

Blackbirds are equally at home in town parks, your garden or in secluded woodland. Feeding on insects and earthworms, they search through the leaf litter for whatever yummy morsels they might find. They like nothing better than to peck their way through an apple, so an apple a day will keep blackbirds in your garden. If you wish to feed blackbirds, be careful what you feed them as they are soft-beaked birds and eating hard seeds or seeds with tough husks can damage their delicate beaks.

While the male blackbird lives up to his name, confusingly, females are a mottled brown with duller legs and beak. The male's jet-black plumage with yellow beak and legs, readily distinguish him from any species of crow. While a crow is a black bird, it is not a blackbird.

Nor is a blackbird a crow. Figure that out!

Blackbirds are great builders, and their nests are snug cradles of grass and twigs glued together with mud. Long ago, our ancestors built their houses from similar materials such as mud and straw and they proved to be warm, sturdy homes. In the blackbird's nest, four to five exquisite light blue eggs are laid. The beloved chicks will spend around eleven to seventeen days there, being fed by both parents with tasty green caterpillars and earthworms. After about sixteen days they fledge, and off they go.

All of nature is a miracle and as we celebrate the return of summer, let us also celebrate every part of God's creation down to the tiniest creature. The enchanting song of the blackbird will draw us closer to God which in turn will inspire us to appreciate and respect the wonder of it all. ●



Image: Shutterstock

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For Further Information:

Fr Padraig O'Donovan,
St Columban's, Dalgan Park,
Navan, Co Meath, C15 AY2Y

telephone: (046) 902 1525

email: padraigssc@gmail.com

website: www.columbans.ie



IN GRATITUDE

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people."

Colossians 1:3-4



During the pandemic, Columban Missionaries prayed online with our supporters in all of our missions