

COMBONI MISSION

Spring 2023



Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli - Pages 6 & 7
Missionaries killed in 2022 - Pages 14 & 15

COMBONI MISSION

Spring 2023

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From the Editor

"A new missionary service"

We present some words of introduction from our newly elected Fr. Provincial of the London Province.

My name is Ruben Padilla, from Leon, Mexico. I studied theology at the Missionary Institute of London (MIL) UK, from 1985-1989. I was ordained a priest on September 9, 1989, in the Cathedral of León, Mexico. After ordination I was appointed to work in the UK in 1991 in the field of Vocation promotion/Youth ministry, starting my work in Leeds and ending in Ireland where I completed six years of missionary service. In 1996 I was appointed to the mission of Eritrea, NE Africa, where I worked for 9 consecutive years after which I was called to Rome and asked to do a course on formation at the Gregorian University, at the end of which, I was appointed as formator of Novices in the Novitiate of Mexico where I spent 9 years. In 2015 I returned to the UK to do a sabbatical year at the end of which I was appointed to the London Province to continue with the ministry of vocational promotion and missionary animation from our community in Dublin, Republic of Ireland.

Since the beginning of 2023 my service as a missionary in this part of the world has changed radically as I have been elected and appointed Provincial Superior by the members of the London Province which comprises England, Scotland and Ireland. I do not know whether to thank God or to ask Him to have pity on me, because it is a challenging service, not only in terms of doing, but in terms of being. One needs leadership skills to guide not only by words but mainly by example. That is why I asked God, as King Solomon did, to fill me with his wisdom so that I may know and guide this province according to his will and not mine, as the Virgin Mary said to God, "Lord, let it be done to me that you have said" (Lk. 1:38), that is, to place everything in the hands of his divine will.

I take this opportunity to thank my confreres for the confidence of their vote and ask them to pray for me so that I may be able to give a good service to the Province and to the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries



Fr Ruben thanks the Lord for our many friends and benefactors

(Verona Fathers). I also would like to thank our benefactors and collaborators for their prayers, sacrifices and financial support throughout the year that have allowed us to continue our missionary work in the extension of the Kingdom of God in these Islands. You remind me of the text of Lucas 8:1-13, where he describes how Jesus walked from town-to-town preaching and healing those who came to Him, and among them were many women who did not only follow Jesus but provided him with provisions/goods to continue His mission. The Gospel emphasizes the importance of the role of those who materially helped Jesus and his Apostles by providing what they needed. No doubt they were part of God's plan so that his Son, Jesus could carry out his mission on earth. I hope that your collaboration and support for the Comboni Missionaries in particular, and the Church in general, will continue, so that we can build together a better world of fraternity and solidarity.

Thank you very much, may God reward you with abundant blessings for your generosity and the love for the missions.

*Fraternally,
Fr Ruben Padilla*

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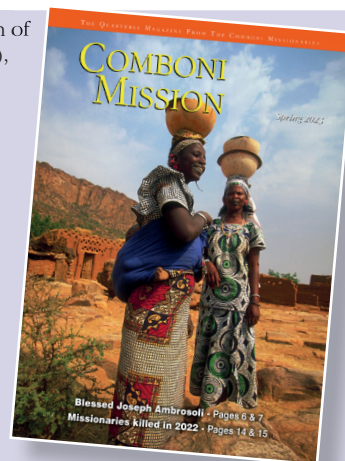
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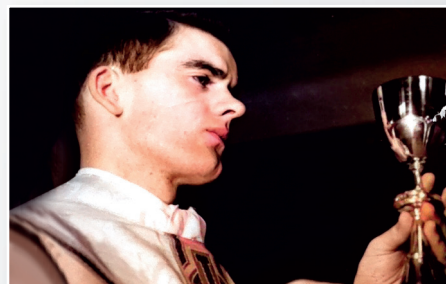
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Getting to know the *Comboni* *Missionaries*



Fr John James Fraser RIP (1934 – 2022)



Fr Fraser celebrating his first Mass.

Fr John James Fraser was born in Dennistoun, Glasgow on Sunday January 7, 1934, the son of Jean (Nee, Hendry) and Matthew Fraser, one of six children, two girls and four boys. Fr John was born into a family of different religious beliefs. He often said that he always respected other people's beliefs and indeed his travels taught him the art of living harmoniously with people.

Fr Fr. John went to school at St. Mungo's Academy in Glasgow before moving on to the Junior Seminary of the Comboni Missionaries in Sunningdale (Berkshire) and then Stillington (North Yorkshire). He then completed his Novitiate and Studies in Philosophy studies at Sunningdale (1951-1956). There he made his First Vows on September 9th, 1953.

From Sunningdale he moved to Rome for his Theological Studies at the Urbaniana University from 1956 to 1960. On September 9th, 1959 he made his Perpetual Vows and was duly ordained a priest at St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome on April 2nd, 1960.

After Ordination, Fr. John was assigned to Uganda to begin his missionary work that was to span many years. Denis Olaka Oper, Chief News Editor at 'Radio Wa' in Lira (Uganda) recalls his commitment and dedication as a missionary priest during his time in Uganda:

"After being ordained priest in April 1960, Fr. John Fraser spent his last months at the Urbaniana University in Rome studying a local Ugandan language, Luo, in preparation for his assignment to Uganda. He came to Uganda in 1960 as a young priest and was sent to the Mission of Kalongo to polish his study of the Luo language. In 1962, he was teaching at Lacor Seminary and Layibi College in Gulu. He often reminisced with nostalgia about being in Uganda for the Independence Day Celebrations on Tuesday 9th October 1962, particularly in view of the fact that it was Prince Edward Duke of Kent, a first cousin of Her Majesty, who represented the Queen on this occasion. As a philosophy student in Sunningdale, John had helped save the life of Prince Edward by pulling him out of his sports car which had overturned on the road outside the Seminary. The Prince was at the time an Officer Cadet in the nearby Royal Military

Academy in Sandhurst.

In 1966 Father John then went to Aduku Parish among the Lango as Parish Priest. The Mother Superior of the Comboni Missionary Convent in the Mission greeted his arrival there with incredulity by apparently asking her fellow Sisters, "Is this the boy that the Bishop has sent as our new Parish Priest?" and walking away without uttering a further word! "To her", Father John would say, "I was evidently far too young to be a Parish Priest".

After three years, he went back to England to be Rector of the Junior Seminary in Mirfield. It was while in Mirfield that he helped raise funds for the building of Lira Cathedral and earned the eternal gratitude of the then Bishop of Lira, Msgr. Caesar Asili. Uganda kept beckoning and Fr. John came back in 1969. His adventurous spirit led him to accept a post teaching at Moroto High School in Central Karamoja. He was often designated the football referee for matches between the Police and the Army. The two sides often apparently ended up shooting at one another in the streets after a match unless there was a stern referee!

He was later sent as Parish Priest to the Mission of Alenga on the banks of the river Nile in Apac District where he spent the next fifteen years, he would say, eating fresh fish every day and looking out over the Nile waters flowing by. He was instrumental in opening the first maize mill and starting the first fishermen's co-operative society in the area.

In 1983 Fr. John was asked to work in Canada and later in the USA in the field of Missionary Animation.

From there he was assigned to Malawi in 1988, where he spent the next six years working in the Mission of Lisungwe.

In 1994 he returned to Canada and was appointed National Director of the Pontifical Missionary Societies, the fundraising arm of Congregation for the Propagation



Fr John in the company of African friends

of the Faith in Rome, for English-speaking Canada. After reading about the atrocities being committed in continuing civil war in the North of Uganda, however, he decided to leave his role as National Director to return there and contribute what he could towards ending the untold suffering and misery being visited upon the Lango and Acholi ethnic groups. Upon his return in 2000 he then opened 'Radio Wa' to boost dialogue in a bid to end the eighteen-year-old conflict.

Radio Wa, meaning 'Our Radio' in Luo, is a community radio station based in Lira that preaches peace and reconciliation among all ethnic groups in Uganda. According to the 'Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF)', the radio station through its 'Karibu' Programme, run by the locally famous DJ Kakaba, directly contributed to the surrender of over one thousand former abducted children and rebel commanders. Fr. John Fraser later opened the first local television station in the North of Uganda dedicated to preaching forgiveness and reconciliation in the country.

At Radio Wa and all of the Catholic Community of Lira Diocese, we remember Fr. John for his humility, patience and

commitment. For him, life meant love, appreciation and service. May God grant him eternal rest.

Fr. John Fraser died unexpectedly at Cumbrae House Care Home on Bankside Terrace in Central Glasgow at around 3:00 a.m., in the early hours of Tuesday 20th December 2022. According to Fr. Javier Alvarado, the Superior of the Community of the Comboni Missionaries in Glasgow, Fr. John had contracted a chest infection over recent days and was attended to by his General Practitioner, Doctor Christopher Ho. However, his condition suddenly deteriorated late on the Monday evening and he died peacefully in his sleep.

At the Requiem Mass on Thursday 12th January 2023 in the Parish Church of St. Philomena in Provanmill (Glasgow), where Fr. John had grown up, and attended by relatives from around Glasgow, Manchester and as far away as Toronto in Canada, friends, Ugandans living in the United Kingdom and many of his confrères, Fr. Javier Alvarado, spoke movingly of Fr. Fraser's life witness:

"We give thanks to God for the extraordinary work that Fr. John achieved in his sixty-two years of priestly ministry as a

Comboni Missionary in Africa, North America and here in the United Kingdom. Through Fr. John's life and ministry God has touched the hearts of so many people through his talents and ability, but perhaps most of all through his cheerfulness, kindness and very obliging nature.

His younger brother, Ronald, recalls that when John left home in his mid-teens for the Junior Seminary in Sunningdale, his parents and siblings were in tears at seeing him go, but he was all smiles and very happy to try his vocation for the priesthood. And he never looked back, he always was happy to be a priest, spoke enthusiastically about his mission experiences in Uganda, Malawi and Canada and kept smiling until the end. Three years ago, Father John was diagnosed with vascular dementia and on the advice of his doctors was admitted to the Cumbrae House Care Home in Central Glasgow. John, or Father Jack as he was affectionately known, brought great joy and happiness to the other residents and to all the members of staff who would invariably begin their work shift by going to his room to greet him. In the dining-room, and despite latterly having difficulties in speaking, his cheery smile and easy-going manner were always a given, and much appreciated by staff and fellow residents alike".

After the Requiem Mass Fr. John was taken to St. Kentigern's Roman Catholic Cemetery in Cadder (Glasgow City) where he was laid to rest with his late father as he himself had requested. His late mother had died and was buried in Toronto where she had been taken in her old age by his two sisters who had both emigrated, married and had families there back in the 1960's. May he rest in eternal peace and rise in glory.



Celebrating the farewell rites

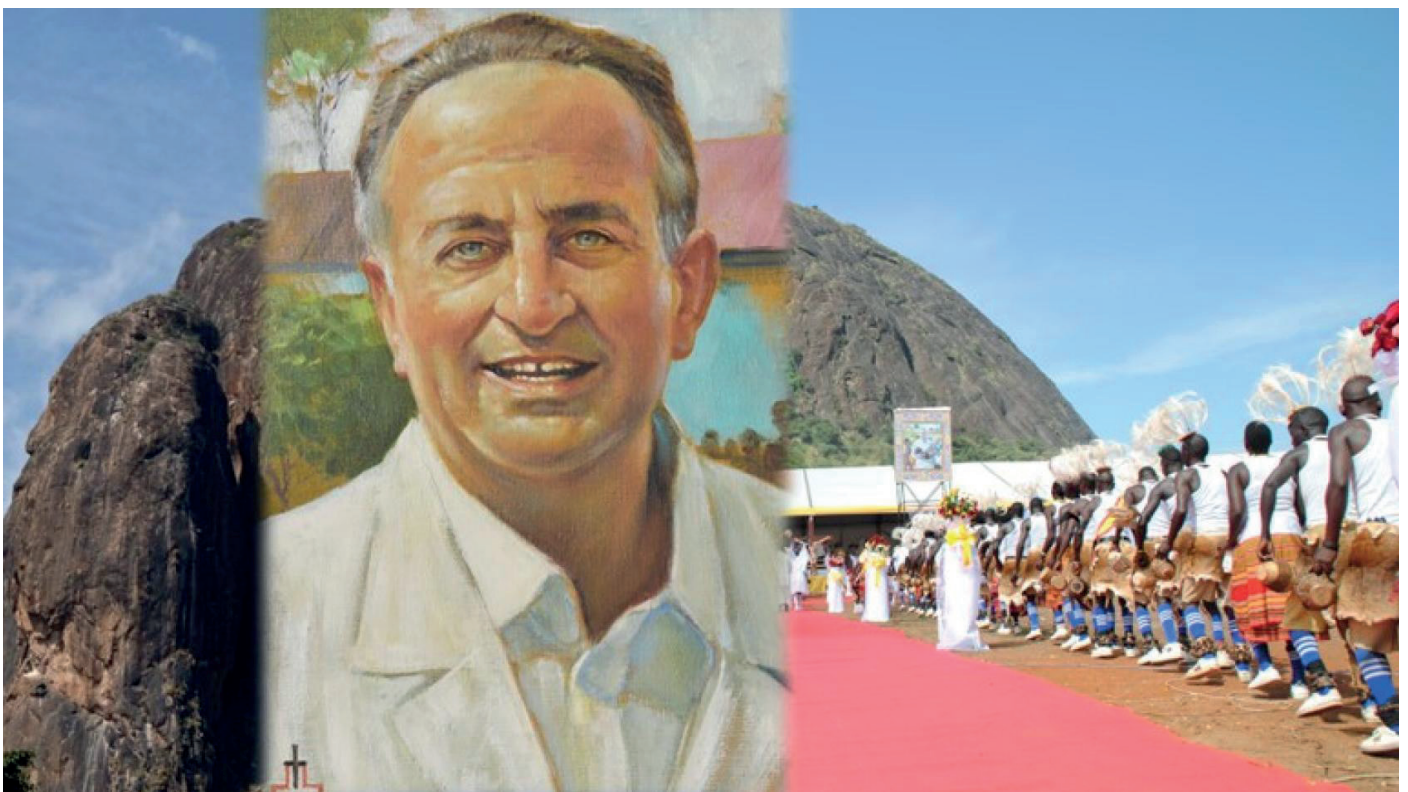
A Witness to the Gospel of Charity

A Life of Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli

Doctor and Priest

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

A Witness to the Gospel of Charity: A Life of Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli by Father Aurelio Boscaini traces the story of Blessed Joseph's life, from his birth in Ronago in Northern Italy on July 25th 1923, to his training as a doctor and surgeon in Milan, to his becoming a Comboni Missionary Priest, to his founding a three-hundred bed General Hospital and adjacent Midwifery School in Kalongo in Northern Uganda, to his untimely death for want of medical treatment in Lira on March 27th 1987 and through the long journey to his being declared 'Blessed' in Kalongo on November 20th 2022.



The Beatification of the Comboni Missionary doctor and priest, Joseph Ambrosoli, is a wonderful blessing not only for the Archdiocese of Gulu in Northern Uganda, where he spent his life as a missionary, but also for Africa, the continent he so deeply loved. It is also a grace for the whole Church throughout the world.

Blessed Joseph was outstanding in

many ways: in his work as a doctor and surgeon; in his selfless dedication to the sick and the injured; in his passionate commitment to pregnant women and those who were nursing infants; and in the holiness of his life. From when he first qualified as a doctor, Joseph described his project of life with the following words: "I must try to re-live in me the Master in the way he cured the sick when they

came to Him ... May they always see Jesus in me". Later in his missionary life, his catchphrase became "God is love and I am His servant for those who are suffering".

Father Joseph lived the values of the Gospel and strove to model himself on the life of Christ in serving all, without exception. And notwithstanding his great talents and his reputation as one of the best doctors in



An aerial view of Kalongo Hospital and Mission

Uganda, he remained a simple and humble man. A Witness to the Gospel of Charity: *A Life of Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli* by Father Aurelio Boscaini traces the story of Blessed Joseph's life, from his birth in Ronago in Northern Italy on July 25th 1923, to his training as a doctor and surgeon in Milan, to his becoming a Comboni Missionary Priest, to his founding a three-hundred bed General Hospital and adjacent Midwifery School in Kalongo in Northern Uganda, to his untimely death for want of medical treatment in Lira on March 27th 1987 and through the long journey to his being declared 'Blessed' in Kalongo on November 20th 2022.

I was appointed to Gulu as Archbishop in January 1999, twelve years after the death of Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli, and on pastoral visits around my new Diocese, I heard many first-hand accounts of his great competence, unfailing kindness and genuine holiness. Everyone I met spoke highly of him and I was left in no doubt that '*Ajwaka Madit*' ('The Great Healer'), as people referred to Father Joseph, had been a very special person indeed. When I began to receive petitions from the Faithful of the Diocese to have Father Ambrosoli officially recognised as a Saint in the Church, I agreed to open the 'Cause of Canonisation' which I am delighted to say has now reached the penultimate stage with his recent Beatification. The lengthy Diocesan Enquiry in

Gulu confirmed what I had been led to believe: that Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli not only heard the Good News but also put the Gospel into practice in his daily life in a truly extraordinary way. When, as a Bishop, I ordain a Deacon, handing him the 'Book of the Gospels', I tell him: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach". Blessed Joseph put these words into practice, living the Gospel day after day, often in the most difficult of circumstances, following the example of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

When the Holy Father proclaims an individual 'Blessed', it is not just because of the evident and outstanding sanctity of the person so honoured, it is because he believes that the new Saint has a special relevance to us today. Saint Paul says that Christ is "the love of God made visible": The newly-beatified Saint is a special manifestation to us, here and now, in the world of today, of the love that God has for all his children and how he wishes us, each one of us, to make that love ever more present in our world. As you read through the book, I am sure you will discover that Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli provides an inspiration to all of us to imitate Christ, the God-made-man, ever more faithfully in our ordinary everyday lives. He is a gift, a precious gift, that God gives to his People through the

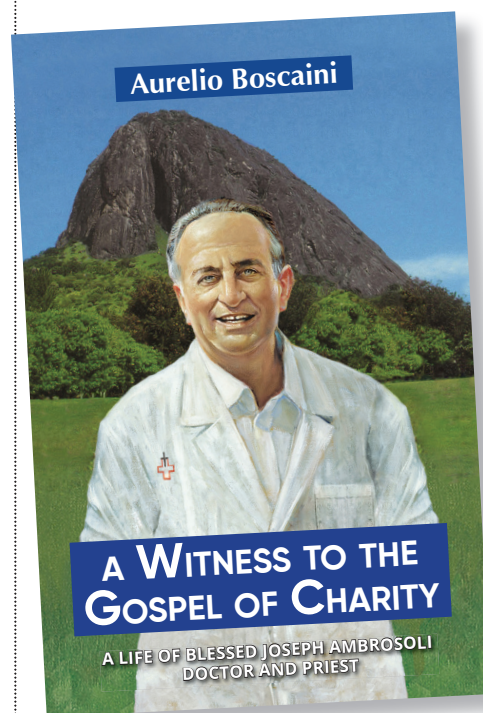


Performing surgery

Church. My heartfelt wish is that all who come to know the life and person of Blessed Joseph through these pages may learn to love, as he loved, for he truly reflected the love of Christ in all that he said and did.

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Padre Giuseppe Ambrosoli –
Un testimone del vangelo della carità
Rome: Missionari Comboniani, 2022



Translated by
Father Martin Devenish mccj
A Witness to the Gospel of Charity –
A Life of Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli
– Doctor and Priest (2023)

Reason to Rejoice!

100 years of Missionary Priesthood

This year 2023, we are congratulating two of our Comboni priests, presently ministering here in the London Province, as they celebrate 50 years in the priesthood! In keeping with our international make-up they are in turn English and Italian: Frs. John Clark and Tiziano Laurenti. To them our prayers and best wishes!

Fr John Clark was ordained 28 April 1973 in his home parish of the Holy Rosary, in Sunderland by Bishop James O'Hagan, a Spiritan priest, from St. Patrick's, Consett. Co. Durham.

He has since plied his trade at the former Junior Seminary at Mirfield, and also whilst waiting for an entry visa to Brazil spent two memorable and eventful years in Belfast working out of the parish of Ballymurphy. Fr. John proved a much loved and popular priest during

that time and continues his longstanding friendships in Belfast. He finally went to Brazil from 80-86 and then was called back to take up vocation ministry in the London Province during the years 86-92. Once again, he saw himself back in Brazil for a short spell from 92-96 and returned once again to the London Province spanning the period 97-03.

After youth work and justice and Peace ministry he went back to Brazil for the period 03-06. This time he ministered in the Amazon region accompanying indigenous groups and lecturing at different Universities in the region. Together with Bro. Antonio Marchi, Sister Maria de Lurdes, both Comboni Missionaries, and with teachers and leaders of local communities supported by the University of Sao Paulo in the

work of creating awareness of the precarious and inhuman conditions in which indigenous tribes lived.

He has since been working in the London Province and at present is in the Carmyle community, Glasgow, engaged in Mission Appeals, Justice and Peace ministry and Retreat giving to Religious and different youth groups.

He will be celebrating his Priestly anniversary at Carmyle, Sunderland and Belfast. Busy schedule ahead!

Fr Laurenti Tiziano was ordained 06 October 1973 by Bishop Domenico Ferrara who had been the Vicar Apostolic of Mupoi in South Sudan.

Fr. Tiziano spent his first years of ordination in Italy from 73-78. Afterwards he went to Malawi for the period 78-91 and then moved to the London Province and our scholasticate at Elstree, London.

He remained there from 91-99 and then went back to Malawi for the period 99-15.

He has since been ministering in the London Province engaged in missionary animation. Fr. Tiziano hopes to celebrate his 50th priestly anniversary at home in Italy and in Malawi.

Fr. Tiziano wishes to send the following words of thanks and prayers to all his friends and benefactors:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and to announce the Lord's year of mercy" Lk 4,18-19.

Every day of our life is God's way of telling us that our purpose in life is yet to be fulfilled. It is, therefore, with great



Fr John Clark



Fr Laurenti Tiziano

sense of fulfilment and with immense gratitude that this year I will be celebrating my 50th anniversary of Priestly Ordination.

I thank the Lord for his faithful, continued and merciful PRESENCE in my life during all these years I spent as a Comboni Missionary Priest.

For 27 years I served the mission in Malawi among the poorest, the refugees and the people in prison. I was also called to dedicate 16 years to training other young Comboni missionaries.

The remaining years I have been visiting local Christian communities preaching about Mission.

I thank the Lord for the Comboni missionary vocation that enabled me to meet so many different peoples and cultures and to be his witness in living out the values of His Kingdom among them. This has been possible because of the PRESENCE of the Lord that has always inspired and confirmed all the deeds of love for others.

I thank my family, the Comboni Mis-

sionaries and all the people, friends and benefactors, who have been close to me all these years and continue to help me overcome the inevitable challenges of missionary life. May the Lord bless them all.

Finally, I ask you all to help me in thanking the Lord for all his graces to me. And may the Lord continue blessing the poor of the world by calling and sending generous and capable missionaries as witnesses of his love and compassion among them.

BRAZIL – Indigenous Yanomami:

“The Church is always for life, land, and the rights of persons”



The Church strives to defend the dignity and beauty of indigenous people.

Roraima – In union with the Church of Brazil the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon, as well as the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, reiterated their commitment as allies of the Amazonian communities. They also confirmed that **“our response as Church is the defence and protection of life, land, rights, and the dignity of peoples”** in their January 28 pronouncement.

The two Presidents of CEAMA, Cardinal Pedro Barreto and REPAM Monsignor Rafael Cob Garcia signed the statement. They expressed solidarity and commitment to the Yanomami people, as well as those who are fighting for their lives and

territories. They also recall earlier appeals by REPAM-Brazil and the Northern Region 1 (CNBB) of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference.

The Yanomami Indigenous Land was declared a health emergency by the Brazilian Government on January 20. It is the result of the neglect that indigenous peoples have endured in recent years. The government announced that it would send food and health aid to the area, as well as two field hospitals, one which has just started to function.

Fides has information that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples reported that at least 570 Yanomami children died

as a result of mercury contamination, malnutrition, and hunger in recent years. 99 children aged 1 to 4 have died in the last year. In recent weeks, the number of children admitted to hospital has increased dramatically.

Following the visit by Brazil's new President Lula de Silva to Yanomami territories in Brazil, the Minister for Justice announced that an investigation would be opened into possible genocide. This is because there is evidence of a denial to these populations of medical and food assistance. The investigation will also examine crimes related to the environment. The grave health situation is due to illegal mining activities in the region, clandestine activities that pollute rivers and destroy forests, and misuse of public money, which were all intended to help these populations.

The Bishops of Northern Region 1 of National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), issued a note of solidarity to the indigenous people in the wake of the declaration of a health emergency. They expressed their appreciation for the government's decision and said they were **“dismayed, deeply outraged, after seeing the images showing the skeletal bodies of children, and adults, of Yanomami in the state Roraima, the result the previous federal government's genocidal actions.”**

The bishops expressed their solidarity with Yanomami people, their families who lost children and adults, as well as the indigenous leaders. They are united with missionaries and missionaries of Church of Roraima, Indigenist Missionary Council and CIMI who have long decried the Yanomami land invasion and its tragic results. They support the President, several Ministers and Councillors who visited the region.

This territory, which is inhabited by the Yanomami, is the largest indigenous area in Brazil. It spans over 9 million hectares and is home to 28,000 natives who speak 6 languages. They are grouped in more than 300 communities and isolated groups. (SL) (Agenzia Fides, 30/1/2023)

The Centurion



I have died many deaths
since yesterday.

I am dying to what I once
believed in.

My uniform now disgusts me;
but what can I be,
other than a soldier?

Oh, that I could strip myself
of memory;
and start yesterday again.

I would not have spat
upon his face;
nor punched him with my fists.

I would not have mocked him;
or cast lots for his clothes.

I would not have nailed him
to the cross;

nor enjoyed the gruesome show.

I would not have cursed him
by my gods.

For surely he is the Son of God; and
I should worship the only Father.



Benedict XVI:

“Lord, I love you!”

In a soft but clearly distinguishable voice and comprehensible words, he said his last words in Italian: Signore ti amo! (“lord, I love you!”)

Benedict XVI died on the morning of December 31, 2022 at the Mater Ecclesia Monastery, the residence of the pope emeritus in the Vatican since 2013. Church bells rang out across Germany and other places in mourning for Benedict XVI on the day of his funeral. Tributes from every corner of the globe poured in, while bishops everywhere offered Requiem Masses for his soul.

His successor Pope Francis led the funeral service on January 6, 2023 before 50,000 people. The German pontiff was then laid to rest in the Vatican crypt in the same spot where St. John Paul II and St. John XXIII was previously buried before their canonizations, which is fewer than 100 feet from the tomb of St. Peter the Apostle, the first pope.

“God’s Rottweiler”

Retired Cardinal Joseph Zen believed that the late Benedict XVI will be a “powerful intercessor in heaven” for the suffering Catholics in China. He also remembered him as the Church’s intellectual force and “great defender of the faith.”

Since 1981 the German pontiff has lived in Rome, away from his motherland. As a cardinal charged with enforcing doctrinal purity, Benedict was given the nickname “God’s Rottweiler” after he was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, the oldest among the sacred congregations of the Roman Curia.

This congregation, now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, was created in 1542 by virtue of the decree *Licet ab initio* issued by Pope Paul III. It is the oldest of all Catholic offices in the Vatican, instituted 21 years after Magellan landed and died in the Philippines in 1521. He assumed the Petrine Ministry in 2005.

Controversies and holiness

A January 2022 report on sexual abuse in the diocese of Munich, Germany, blasted Ratzinger’s “inaction” regarding abuse cases during his period as archbishop



Pope Francis prays over the coffin of Pope Benedict XVI (l'Osservatore Romano)

from 1977 to 1982. In reaction to the report, the pope emeritus formally apologized in writing, but did not admit to any administrative failures.

Benedict punished Marcial Maciel, the powerful founder of the Legionaries of Christ, an important Catholic religious order. He publicly criticized Irish bishops for their mishandling of the sexual abuse crisis, but he did not move to open Vatican records to public investigation.

For many survivors of clerical sexual abuse, the German pontiff’s actions were not enough. The sin imputed upon Benedict XVI appeared to be more of omission than commission and for this the late pope was often misunderstood, seemingly a brilliant man at odds with the modern world.

But let me say this, that being misunderstood and being controversial do not mean he did not live a heroic life of virtues. Pius XII, although misunderstood, was declared venerable. John Paul I and John Paul II, who in death were controversial but are now considered holy pontiffs. So is the present Pope Francis, who is often misunderstood. Sanctity does not shield anyone from being misunderstood and controversial, from betrayal, personal attacks, and gossip.

A man of humble heart

At his 2006 lecture at the Regensburg University, the Holy Father, speaking in German, quoted the hotly contested 14th-century passage made by Manuel II Palaiologos. The Holy Father even remarked that the imperial addresses were “in an astoundingly harsh way, to us surprisingly brusque way.” It means that the pope only quoted the emperor’s words in an academic lecture to prove a point, but he himself didn’t approve what he quoted.

Suddenly, the whole Islamic world exploded in anger, with high-profile politicians and religious leaders joining the bandwagon of protests against what they saw as an insulting misrepresentation of Islam.

Mass street protests were mounted in several Islamic countries, with the Majlis-e-Shoora or the Pakistani parliament unanimously calling on the Holy Father to retract “this objectionable statement.” To which Benedict XVI himself wrote a personal and simple note explaining his position:

“I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur’an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion.”

Thereafter, our gentle pope, in his humility and love for reconciliation, offered a sincere apology addressed to all our Muslim brothers and sisters worldwide. And he didn't stop there. Against the better judgment of his advisers, the Holy Father bravely decided to visit Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, to pray in its Blue Mosque in December 2006.

And he didn't stop there too. Two years later, he organized the "First Meeting of the Catholic-Muslim Forum" and met with Muslim scholars and religious leaders in autumn of 2008 in Rome.

He renounced

He abdicated. His death did not come as a surprise, unlike his resignation in 2013. His resignation was like an electric shock for the whole human race when he announced it. Benedict XVI told the assembled cardinals in Latin:

"In today's world, subject to so many rapid changes and shaken by questions of deep relevance for the life of faith, in order to govern the Barque of St Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary, strength which in the last few months, has deteriorated in me to the extent that I have had to recognize my incapacity to adequately fulfil the ministry entrusted to me."

"For this reason, and well aware of the seriousness of this act, with full freedom I declare that I renounce the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Saint Peter..."

With his own words, "I renounce," His Holiness descended from the Chair of Peter for good! The last time a pope resigned voluntarily was in 1294, only after 5 months of being the Vicar of Christ on earth. St. Celestine V, a former Benedictine monk, reigned in 1294, fled Rome, and went back to his hermitage in the hills of central Italy and Apulia.

The question of health and mortality came into play. It was a mortal man's desire to be alone with the Immortal God. Unlike dictators, tyrants, and other politicians, a servant leader is forever appalled by earthly power as if it were leprosy. I dug out an old manuscript, the *Martyrologium Romanum*, explains, for our edification, Celestine's desire to resign:

"The desire for humility, for a purer life, for a stainless conscience, the deficiencies of his own physical strength, his ignorance, the perverseness of the people, his longing for the tranquility of his former life."

Popes are supposed to run out the clock and just wait for Father Time to come knocking and die in office. For health reasons, our German pontiff de-

cided in 2013 to abdicate the papacy. The pope emeritus, genuinely a servant leader, just knew that the Throne of Peter was meant not for supremacy but for service.

Pope Francis called it "an example of greatness," that is, Benedict's decision to abdicate the supposedly life-long papacy, a personal example of renouncing power when it's time to renounce it.

Gift of a long life

One lesson I learned without difficulty after I watched the 2019 Netflix film "The Two Popes" was this: There is only one pope. The chronology of events tells that, on the very last day of February in 2013, Pope Benedict met with the College of Cardinals in the morning. And in the afternoon, he was gone.

He flew by helicopter to the papal summer residence of Castel Gandolfo and stayed there for quite a while. The next thing we heard was that he transferred to his permanent retirement home, the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery in the Vatican, on May 2, 2013.

His resignation was indeed a forceful message of detachment and simplicity to the world so thirsty for power, money, and prestige. As a retired pope, Benedict XVI ceased to wear the red papal shoes and continued to wear the white cassock but without the tufted fascia or the pellegrina.

Most of all, Benedict discontinued using his official Fisherman's Ring. So, there has never been a parallel papacy since 2013. We recall that, on February 28, 2013, in his official farewell address to the College of Cardinals, even before the election of the next pontiff, Benedict XVI proclaimed: "In your midst is the next pope. I promise him obedience."

By so declaring, Benedict XVI trusted

that the papacy, a divine institution, is rooted in the apostolic succession, and that the Holy Spirit is at work until the end of the world.

The Netflix 2019 film is historically correct in one particular aspect. Benedict and Francis are "The Two Popes" in succession, which makes the *Annuario Pontificio* equally correct. A total of 266 popes governed the Catholic Church, from St. Peter the Apostle to Francis, one after another, without breaking the Apostolic Succession. The nightmare scenario of a "parallel magisterium" as predicted by canon lawyers and Vatican observers in 2013 never came.

Of the 266 popes in succession, only 12 have reached the age of 85, including Pope Francis. Benedict XVI at 95 is the oldest person in history to have been pope, surpassing Pope Leo XIII, who died at 93.

He was a peaceful and introspective man deeply interested in classical music. His Holiness was an accomplished pianist who played Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart whose "music is by no means just entertainment," according to him, for "it contains the whole tragedy of human existence."

In 2018, Benedict XVI wrote a letter that was published in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, capitalizing the word "Casa" to refer to his heavenly home. "I am on a pilgrimage toward Home," he penned.

Dr. José Mario Bautista Maximiano is the author of 'MCMLXXII: 500-Taong Kristiyano (Claretian, 2021), Volume Two,' that won recently the "Best Book in Ministry" during the 16th Cardinal Sin Catholic Book Awards 2022.



A painting of the late Pope Benedict XVI (l' Osservatore Romano)

Missionaries killed in 2022

Last year, 18 missionaries were killed worldwide: 12 Priests, one Religious Brother, three Sisters, one Seminarian and one lay person. They served communities living in poverty, and children in need, through faith and development projects.

These missionaries are witnesses who, as Pope Francis says, ‘show us Jesus, who conquered evil with mercy’ and embody ‘the essence of mission, to bear witness to Christ, that is, to his life, passion, death and resurrection for the love of the Father and of humanity.’

It was undoubtedly ‘for the love of the Father and of humanity’ that Sr Maria de Coppi spent almost sixty years of her life in Mozambique, and Sr Luisa Dell’Orto worked in Haiti for twenty years, where she arrived after having lived out her vocation in Cameroon and Madagascar.

These missionaries are accompanied by the sacrifice of other men and women, who shared the same spirit and same commitment to proclaiming the Gospel through everyday gestures and actions.

We are all called to witness to Jesus Christ by our words and actions, and in standing up for the truth we may face suffering, even death. This is our Baptismal calling, and the voices of these martyrs call us forward in faith and support us with their prayers.

Pablo Isabel Hernández, lay pastoral worker and leader of the Lenca Indigenous group in western Honduras, was killed on 9 January by unknown men who shot him in the back.

Fr Joseph Tran Ngoc Thanh, 41, a Vietnamese Dominican, was killed on 29 January while listening to confessions in the parish of Dak Môt, a diocese of Kon Tum.

Fr Richard Masivi Kasereka, 34, a Congolese Religious was assassinated on 2 February by armed men as he was returning to his parish, having celebrated the World Day of Consecrated Life in Kanyaboyonga.



Fr Enrique Vasquez, 48, was killed in San Pedro Sula, Honduras on 2 March. He had gone to visit his parents but did not arrive at his destination. He is remembered for his kindness and for his friendship. In his diocese he held the post of Diocesan Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (Missio).

Friar Wilberth Daza Rodas OFM, 42, working in San Antonio, Bolivia, was murdered on 16 April by thieves who entered the church after the Easter vigil.

Fr Joseph Aketeh Bako, 48, Parish Priest in Kaduna, Nigeria, was kidnapped by armed men who attacked the Rectory on the night of 8 March. He died at the hands of his captors, between 18 and 20 April.

Fr Jose Guadalupe Rivas, 58, of the Archdiocese of Tijuana, Mexico, was killed and his body was found on a ranch in Tecate on 16 May.

Fr Michael Mawelera Samson, 62, a Missionary of Africa from Malawi, disappeared on 10 June from the youth centre of the church where he worked in Mbeya, Tanzania. His body was found on the riverbed of the Meta in Sabasaba on the morning of 11 June.

Fr Javier Campos, 79 and **Fr Joaquín Mora**, 80, both Jesuit Priests, were killed by an armed gang on 20 June in the Church of San Francis Xavier in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Sr Luisa Dell'Orto was killed on 25 June in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, most likely the victim of an attempted robbery. For 20 years she had been totally committed to the care of children living on the streets.

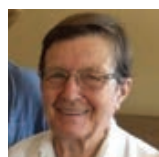
Fr Vitus Borogo, 50, was killed on 25 June at the Prison Farm in Kaduna, Nigeria, during a raid by armed men.



Fr Christopher Odia Ogedebbe, 41, was kidnapped and killed on 26 June while on his way to celebrate Mass at St Michael's Catholic Church, Edo State, Nigeria, where he was Parish Priest.

Fr John Mark Cheitnum was kidnapped on 15 July from the Rectory of Christ the King Church in Kaduna, Nigeria, and was brutally killed on the same day of the kidnapping.

Fr Godefroid Pembele Mandon was shot and killed by armed bandits on the night of 6 August in the parish of St Joseph Mukasa, in Kikwit, located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Sr Maria De Coppi, 84, an Italian Comboni missionary, was killed during an attack on the Chipene mission in northern Mozambique, on the night of 6 September. The attackers destroyed the church, the hospital, and the primary and secondary schools. Sr Maria was shot in the head as she tried to reach the dormitory where the few remaining students were.



Sr Marie-Sylvie Kavuke Vakatsuraki, a doctor, was killed as she was preparing to perform surgery. The assault took place during the night between 19 and 20 October in the village of Maboya, located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Br José Dorian Piña Hernández, 25, a Seminarian of the diocese of Zacatecas, Mexico, was killed on 27 December during an attempted armed robbery.

'... by looking to the martyrs of yesterday and today, we can learn to live a full life, welcoming the martyrdom of everyday faithfulness to the Gospel and conforming to Christ' – Pope Francis

Please join us giving thanks for the work and witness of these, our sisters and brothers. May they rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

All information is supplied by Fides, the Vatican-based news agency of Missio, and by Vatican News.

MISSION IN REVERSE



The migrant world is coming to us, bringing the message of Good News to share with the overwhelming majority of our Europe populations that do not know this message. Missionaries from non-Western contexts are coming to the West to evangelise us. Their number is on the increase. Some call this missionary work **MISSION IN REVERSE**. The continent of Europe, once the cradle of Christian mission, has become the mission field, indeed the spiritual battlefield.

In the past, European born missionaries were leaving their international airports for places like Lagos, Lahore, Rio de Janeiro and Bombay. Nowadays, Southern born missionaries leave their homelands for Frankfurt, London, Paris and Madrid in their hope of evangelizing Europe. Mission has come full circle back to Europe. For centuries missionaries flooded from Europe to South America, to India, to the Far East and to Africa. Now the shoe is on the other foot. What be-

sides is more striking is the churches in the South constitute an immense spiritual lung for Europe that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope. They can help rejuvenate the Church in Europe which urgently needs the resuscitating breath of the churches of the South to survive and grow in Europe.

A continent that once embraced Christianity, at least culturally, has now become indifferent to her spiritual heritage. For some it is the status quo not to believe in God and to be anti-Christ. Many are faith illiterate and are ignorant of the impact that faith has had on Europe's social history. We are living through an irresistible tsunami of secularization which is eroding the capacity of traditional Catholic cultural values. Christianity has not got the same novelty as it had in its earliest days. We have come to the end of a missionary era that began in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted for 150 years. It is not the ending of mission but only the end of a particular phase in the life of the Church.

TO SEE THE CHURCH AT HOME WITH A MISSIONARY MIND.

Mission has changed and is changing dramatically. How can we respond to the present and future generation whose world is mediated through new technologies and emerging economic changing realities, changing roles? Reality is something that is never static. Realities have been changing at a rapid pace over our lifetimes. In our generation the world has become a more complex

place but still continues to grapple with the challenges of hunger, poverty, and inequality. Both here and outside Europe.

With challenges come opportunities. The Church presently is strongest and most vibrant in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Wherever you look, in Africa, Asia, South America have vanguards of the good news of Jesus Christ. There is no question but that the spectacular growth of the Church in Africa, parts of South and East Asia and Latin America, to be followed quite possibly in Central Asia is a new reality within the history of the Christian faith.

MISSION TODAY AND TOMORROW.

In many people's mind the juggernaut of the missionary of European origin has run its course and is out of steam as we perceive there is a deep spiritual sickness afflicting the rich North. I once heard a missionary of African origin say that when a rabbit reaches old age it survives on the milk of its offspring. Some theorists of religion call our age the post missionary era. It is time for the Church in Europe to consider surviving on the milk of its missionary offspring in a Church that is universal and the Gospel belongs to the world. Europe has become a new focus of mission in the 21st century.

IT WILL TAKE AN UNPRECEDENTED ACT OF HUMILITY BEFORE EUROPE IS PREPARED TO ACCEPT IT NEEDS CHRISTIAN AID FROM THOSE IT ONCE CONVERTED.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES WORLDWIDE
We dedicate ourselves to spreading the Gospel and foster human and Christian development in 40 countries worldwide.

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- Brazil
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- Ireland
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- Spain
- Portugal
- Germany
- Poland
- Austria
- Italy
- Chad
- Benin
- Togo
- Ghana
- D.R. Congo
- Zambia
- South Africa
- Egypt
- Sudan
- Eritrea
- Ethiopia
- Central African Republic
- Kenya
- Uganda
- Malawi
- Mozambique
- China (Macao)
- Taiwan
- Philippines

"Holy and capable, to make common cause with the poorest and most abandoned" (St Daniel Comboni)

Walfrid: A Life of Faith, Community and Football

Courtesy: www.openhousesotland.co.uk

In an age of football superstars, it is heartening to learn of the humble legacy and founding of Celtic football club through the inspiration of Brother Walfrid, a Marist Brother, as a means of overcoming poverty and discrimination and giving a voice to the Irish diaspora in Glasgow. Brother Walfrid not only welcomed the Irish fleeing from famine but gave them support and a sense of belonging. The founding of the club was also a means of providing funds for the 'Poor Children's Dinner Tables' in Glasgow's East End. The club was indeed founded to help the poor and needy!

In his book *'Walfrid: A Life of Faith, Community and Football'*, Dr. Michael Connolly describes how he explored the life and times of Brother Walfrid and his work with impoverished communities in Glasgow and London in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

"My research project on Brother Walfrid began in September 2017 with the aim of producing, for the first time, a complete, birth-to-grave historical bi-



Dr. Michael Connolly in St Mary's Calton

ography of the life of the man most commonly recognised as the founder of Celtic Football Club. Walfrid was one of the most significant Irish refugees who fled to Scotland in the wake of *An Gorta Mor*, the Great Hunger, and he has been widely heralded as the leading figure in the distinctive charitable origins of the world-renowned sporting organisation in 1887. As a Marist Brother, he made a major contribution to the city of Glasgow through education and charitable work within the emerging Irish Catholic community.

I wanted to better understand Walfrid's wider life and enduring legacy, as well as his significance in terms of the religious, social and cultural identities of the multi-generational Irish Catho-

lic diaspora in Scotland and further afield.

For the Marist Brothers, Brother Walfrid is exemplary in terms of his commitment. His life and legacy are looked on with pride within the order. He developed a unique expression of the Marist vocation.

It was an organic synthesis of faith, community and football. These three central themes highlight the strands of Brother Walfrid's legacy which lives on to this day.

Contemporary newspapers, books (academic and non-academic), religious documents, personal letters and interviews helped illuminate each strand. For example, the Glasgow Archdiocesan and Marist archives provided

handwritten letters which contain valuable insight into contemporary figures central to Walfrid's story. The Mitchell Library in Glasgow holds census data and key newspaper collections, such as the Glasgow Catholic Observer and Scottish Sport. There is academic literature on the wider Irish Catholic diaspora, supported by popular histories on Celtic Football Club. Blending diaspora and sports histories helped develop a new interpretation of an historic figure and substantiate the partial portrayals and narratives surrounding Brother Walfrid to date.

Pathway for understanding

The pathway for understanding the life of Brother Walfrid began with An Gorta Mor – the Great Hunger in Irish – and Walfrid's roots in County Sligo. Born in May 1840, the second son of the Kerins family, he was christened Andrew. Having lived through the worst years of successive potato crop failures, a young Andrew Kerins would have witnessed

the harrowing effects of the most tragic episode in the history of Ireland.

The hunger and poverty engendered by 'the famine years' in Ireland followed the thousands of refugees who settled in Glasgow. The massive influx of Irish Catholics to Scotland gave rise to a period of conflict between the Scottish clergy who ran the Church and sections of the Irish laity: 'conflict over politics, and over the governance and identity of the Church in the region', according to the work of Martin J. Mitchell, editor of *New Perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*.

The Marist Brothers arrived in Glasgow from Dundee in 1848 and were initially based in the St Mungo's parish in the Townhead area of the city. They came from continental Europe into an atmosphere of upheaval and native disdain for immigrant Catholicism in post-Reformation Scotland. Catholic education remained outside the jurisdiction of the state until the 1872 Education Act in Scotland, and religious

authorities were forced to fund and train teachers for the early schools. The Marists answered the call of Bishop Murdoch to provide much-needed teaching experience for an embryonic Catholic school system. Their *raison d'être* was education of young people and the Brothers made it their mission to tackle the dual problems of hunger and poverty through the establishment of a network of schools in the East End of the city which surrounds Celtic Park.

Kerins arrived at the Broomielaw on the banks of the Clyde in 1855, having travelled aboard a coal boat from Sligo harbour with a childhood friend, just 15 years old. Lowland Scotland was strongly Protestant in character and virulent anti-Catholic feeling was commonplace, directed at Irish immigrants on their arrival. Historian Irene Maver describes how Irish Catholic immigrants were housed in the poorest areas of the city, particularly the city's East End. It was here that Brother Walfrid would live and work during his time in Glasgow, playing an active role in what historian Bernard Aspinwall termed a 'Catholic revival' in Scotland brought about by mass Irish immigration.

Kerins was educated in the Marist ethos, whose teaching expertise and charitable charism were central to the establishment of Catholic schools in Scotland. He chose to serve the religious order after attending night classes at St Mungo's parish school and travelled to the novitiate in Beaucamps, France, in 1864.

On his return, Brother Walfrid took his first vows in the presence of the community of Marist Brothers based at Charlotte Street, next to Glasgow Green.

The subsequent decades saw him engaged in community-building work amongst the poor of the East End. He served as headmaster at the Sacred Heart school at Bridgeton and latterly was Brother Superior of the Marist community in Glasgow. It was from this influential position that he was able to unite disparate elements of Glasgow's Irish Catholic community under the banner of Christian charity to establish Celtic Football Club in 1887.

Inspiration

The driving inspiration behind Glasgow's new football club appeared on a



The Great Famine victims



Brother Walfrid, Marist Brother

circular appealing for funds to support Brother Walfrid's 'Poor Children Dinner Tables' scheme which he began in 1885 with the assistance of Brother Dorotheus from Dundee. Dorotheus – born Henry Currie to Irish parents – was Walfrid's right hand man at a time of acute need. By providing hot meals to children from local Catholic schools for the symbolic fee of a penny, Walfrid sought to encourage engagement with education, which he saw as the key to unlocking the chains of poverty. The initiative garnered widespread support from League of the Cross abstainers and clergy, local publicans and shopkeepers alike.

Harnessing growing popular support for football amongst the urban working class by forming Celtic was the means through which funding could be secured for the charitable endeavour. Local St Vincent de Paul Societies were enlisted to help with the fundraising and establishment of Celtic – a sporting standard-bearer which united disparate strands of Glasgow's Irish Catholic community. Brother Walfrid, with the sense of social justice he demonstrated with fundraising efforts in Spitalfields, London, was the figure

at the heart of the community-building in Glasgow. It is, however, through the legacy of Celtic Football Club that he remains a major figure for the Irish Catholic diaspora in Scotland and beyond.

Motto

Walfrid's story is a prism through which the drivers which motivated him – faith, community and football – are brought to life, and provide a closer and more personal understanding of the wider historical context which surrounds them. Conscientiously and dutifully, Walfrid lived out the motto of the Marist Brothers which appears on his statue at Celtic Park - *ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo* ('unknown and invisible in this world').

His was a vocation devoted to the service of others through Catholic education, community-based charity and sport. As an educationalist, humanitarian and advocate for those in need, Walfrid's instinct was to work for the benefit of others, remaining unknown and invisible in this world. By making his experience, motivation and achievements known and visible, my research seeks to illuminate the life of Brother Walfrid in tribute to his service to others."

Dr Michael Connolly recently completed a PhD at the University of Stirling, producing the first academic historical biography of Brother Walfrid. A book based on this research was published by Argyll Publishing in early November, 2022.



Statue of Bro. Walfrid at Celtic Park

'LECTIO DIVINA'

He is Risen!

Introduction

As we listen to the Easter Sunday Gospel of John 20:1-9, we might well wonder how Mary Magdalen and the others who went to the Tomb had forgotten what Jesus had said about being put to death and rising from the dead.

Put yourself in the shoes of Peter and 'the beloved disciple'; their deep sadness at their great friend's death and now this news of an empty tomb and their bewilderment. Is there some sort of hope deep down in their hearts that, despite all the appearances, this might not be the end!

The resurrection! No one saw it happen: it is too big for that. But in the resurrection of Jesus all of creation is risen, and we human beings walk 'in newness of life' as St Paul says. The resurrection is, in the words of pope Benedict, a

cosmic event of love, shattering death.

1. Read:

Read the text of John 20: 1-9 ...

2. Reflect:

Read the Text again and pay attention ...

3. Respond:

Read the text again but this time respond ...

4. Stay with the Word: ...

Read the text a final time ...

5. Take now the word, sentence, or phrase, phrase, into your daily life/activity: ...

Allow it to become part of you ...

Conclude your 'Lectio Divina' with the 'Our Father' ...

Reflection:

Historical nucleus of the Easter Faith. Christ's death is the supreme witness of his charity, but not of his truth. This truth is adequately testified to *only by the Resurrection*. "The faith of Christians," says St. Augustine, "is the resurrection of Christ. It is no great thing to believe that Jesus died; even the pagans believe this, everyone believes it. The truly great thing is to believe that he is risen." Can Christ's resurrection be defined as a historical event, in the common sense of the term, that is, did it "really happen"? There are two facts that offer themselves the certainty that permit us to speak of the Resurrection: *First*, the sudden and inexplicable faith of the disciples, a faith so tenacious as to withstand even the trial of martyrdom; *second*, the

explanation of this faith that has been left by those who had it, that is, the disciples. In the decisive moment, when Jesus was captured and executed, the disciples did not entertain any thoughts about the resurrection. They fled and took Jesus' case to be closed. In the meantime, something had to intervene that in a short time, not only provoked a radical change of their state of soul, but that led them to an entirely different activity and to the founding of the Church. This "something" is the historical nucleus of the *Easter faith*. The oldest testimony to the Resurrection is Paul's: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: That Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the Scriptures; and that he was seen by Cephas, and after that by the eleven. "Then he was seen by more than 500 brethren at once, of whom many are still with us and some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. And last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

Central Message

The core of the testimony remains until now unchanged: The Lord is risen and they saw him alive. To this, a new element is added, perhaps determined by an apologetic preoccupation, and so of minor historical value: The insistence on the fact of the empty tomb. Even for the Gospels, the appearances of the Risen Christ are the decisive facts. The appearances, nevertheless, testify to a new dimension of the Risen Christ, his mode of being "according to the Spirit," which is new and different with respect to his previous mode of existing, "according to the flesh." For example, he cannot be recognized by whoever sees him, but only by those to whom he gives the ability to know him. His corporeality is different from what it was before. It is free from physical laws: It

enters and exits through closed doors; it appears and disappears. The oldest testimony to the Resurrection is Paul's: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: That Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the Scriptures; and that he was seen by Cephas, and after that by the eleven. "Then he was seen by more than 500 brethren at once (1 Corinthians 15:1-11), of whom many are still with us and some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. And last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). These words were written around A.D. 56 or 57. But the core of the text is constituted by an anterior faith that Paul himself says he received from others. It is thus a *testimony of rare historical value*.

Main points

1. The disciples could not have deceived themselves (John 21: 2-3).

They were specific people — fishermen — not at all given to visions (John 21:2-3). They did not believe the first ones; Jesus almost has to overpower their resistance: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe!" They could not even want to deceive others. All of their interests opposed this; they would have been the first to feel themselves deceived by Jesus. If he were not risen, to what purpose would it have been to face persecution and death for him? What material benefit would they have drawn from.

2. Historical research.

Where does the historical research on the Resurrection arrive? We can see it in the words of the disciples of Emmaus: Some disciples went to Jesus' tomb Easter morning and they found that things were as the women had said who had gone there before them, "but they did not see him" (Luke 24:24). History too must take itself to Jesus' tomb and see that things are as the witnesses have said.

However, it does not see the Risen One. It is not enough to observe matters historically. It is necessary to see the Risen Christ, and this is something history cannot do. *Only faith can*.

3. The angel who appeared to the women Easter morning (Luke 24:5).

The angel said to them: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). I must confess [Card Cantalamessa. Pontifical Household Preacher] that at the end of these reflections I feel that this rebuke is also directed at me. It is as if the angel were to say to me: "Why do you waste time seeking among dead human and historical arguments, the one who is alive and at work in the Church and in the world? Go instead and tell his brothers that he is risen." If the historical character of the Resurrection — that is, its objective, and not only subjective, character— is denied, the birth of the Church and of the faith become an even more inexplicable mystery than the Resurrection itself. *Again, only by faith we know that Jesus is risen*.

Some questions to help in our reflection

1. Is the Risen Lord a light in your life?
2. The Risen Jesus can light up the darkness existing in the war in Ukraine and other countries around the world. Do you believe it?
3. How can you share your faith in the Risen Lord?



Fr. Manuel Casillas-
Author of this Divina Lectio

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Thank you once again for your most welcome letters. It reminds us that some people do read our missionary magazine! Reading today is becoming less and less a daily pleasure.

To encourage you all our readers: to let us know your thoughts and opinions, I will post here my address so that your comments come directly to our office!

**Editor, Verona Fathers - Email: jdcomboni@gmail.com
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Dear All

I want to thank you for the very beautiful and interesting magazine sent to me – it is so informative and I thank God for the wonderful work the Comboni missionaries perform throughout the world.

I enclose a donation to help further your work in mission countries and thank you again for your prayers.
God Bless

*M. Morgan
Penylan, Cardiff*

Dear Editor

I write to let you know how much I have to thank Fr. Sean Dempsey and our Prayer Group 'New Wine Prayer Group' for all the marvellous work carried out to help and promote in the mission work of Fr. Sean in Uganda. Fr. Sean has always been friends with my family and this friendship continues.

We have held Church gate collections at Cavan Cathedral and other churches where our members reside and recently,



Fr. Sean celebrating in a community in Uganda

we raised the grand total of 4,750 Euros. All this to help the missions in Uganda. We are happy to be involved in such a great mission.

*Margaret Blessington
Cavan*

Dear Friends,

The Catholic Church in South Sudan awaits the visit of Pope Francis with great joy. In his speeches and with many gestures, the Pope repeatedly made clear that he suffers with the poor, the weak, the marginalized and the oppressed of this world. He wants a Church that serves the poor actively and, through her evangelizing work, becomes a sign of God's coming kingdom where justice and peace will reign. It has meaning that the Pope goes to the periphery of the globalized world to encourage believers who survive in extremely difficult circumstances. Most Catholics today live in the global south of the world, in developing and underdeveloped nations. Almost half of the population in South Sudan is Catholic, about one third are Protestant. The country is one of the poorest in Africa. It is a failed state from a political point of view. Three out of four citizens (75%) are illiterate because the education system is dysfunctional. Counting the wars since 1955 (1955-1972; 1983-2005; 2013-2023), four generations of South Sudanese know nothing but conflict and displacement. It is estimated that up to three million people have been killed in conflict since 1955. Currently, about four million people, one third of the entire population, are displaced from their home regions, either within South Sudan or to the neighboring countries.

The former wars from 1955 to 2005

were against the Islamic-fundamentalist regime of Sudan which, eventually, led to independence of South Sudan in 2011. During this half a century long period, and in emancipation from Islam, the Christian faith spread to all 64 ethnic groups. The Catholic Church has a history of almost 150 years in this country, but the first 100 years were a slow beginning in only specific regions of South Sudan. In the last 50 years, Christianity became the predominant religion, and the Catholics are in the majority. All the more tragic is the latest civil war which began in 2013. It shows that clan identity and ethnic affiliation still are the two basic building blocks of society, not the Christian faith. In former times, clans and tribes survived by being loyal within one's group and hostile towards others

The Pope is not a miracle worker. We know that his visit will not solve any of the causes of conflict, of killing and of corruption in South Sudan. For the protocol, the politicians will commit themselves in friendly speeches to peace and reconciliation, only to continue their strategic power games after the Pope's departure. The elites of this country are not ready for reconciliation and for building up a prosperous country. They got used to siphoning off Dollars from international donor money which is supposed to help the population.

Although I do not expect a short-term effect, I believe that the pontificate of Pope Francis has a positive impact on the universal Church and also inspires Catholics in South Sudan to follow Jesus Christ whole-heartedly and to be witnesses of God's mercy.

*Fr Gregor Schmidt mcc,
Provincial Superior, South Sudan*

Vocation Story: Father Luke

“I listened to the inner voice”



Father Luke Anatole Welemu, a Malawian missionary dialogues with us about his vocation journey.

I am the last born in a family of three brothers and two sisters. I come from Dedza district located in the Central Region of Malawi. My siblings and I grew up and did our basic education in Dedza. I am privileged to have come from a staunch Catholic family. Thanks to my parents, at a young age, I assimilated the gospel values. Sadly, early last year, my beloved father died. I believe that he is resting in peace and continues to pray for us.

During childhood, I thought that passing through the minor seminary was a prerequisite for the priesthood. Similarly, aspirants for priesthood had to look and possess exceptional qualities. Consequently, as an ordinary village boy, I disqualified myself. Yet, nobody was surprised when my brothers joined the minor seminary. But later left to follow other paths in life.

My two brothers did well in the minor seminary. However, after completing senior school, they left the seminary for other vocations and studies. In retrospect,

I think it was God's will. Apparently, my brothers' exit from the seminary ended the dream of having a priest in our family. The most qualified for the priesthood had chosen other ways of serving God.

Initially, my first dream was to study Agriculture. One day, an expert came to our secondary school for a career's talk. He motivated and convinced us that he was making a lot of money through farming. He made me see sense in Agriculture. My second dream was to study Mass Media and Communications.

My third dream which materialised was to become a priest. I imagined myself being with the faithful, gathered in small Christian communities, sharing the word of God and preaching to them on Sundays about the life of Saints and Angels in heaven. The feeling was awesome. Yes, this could be me, a priest of God.

Meantime, it was not clear to me yet whether I was to become a diocesan or a missionary priest. Clarity came when I

found a promotional leaflet of the Comboni Missionaries. It described the works of Comboni Missionaries and the life of St. Daniel Comboni. The motto on the leaflet was, "Save Africa with Africa". The motto hooked me. I wanted to know more about this congregation.

I wrote an application letter to the Vocations Director. Almost immediately, he replied positively. Accordingly, between 2008 and 2009, I attended a series of "Come and See" meetings. Thereafter, in October 2009, I was admitted to the Postulancy of Balaka where I did my Philosophical and Religious studies until June 2012. After Balaka, I was sent to Namugongo for Novitiate training in Uganda. There for two years, I deepened my understanding of the Comboni Institute and assimilated further the Kingdom values. At the end of it on 1st May 2014, I took the vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity.

Thereafter, I was sent to Naples, Italy, to study Theology. I spent four years there. In 2018, upon completion I returned to Malawi for my missionary service. It is a service required now in our institute before one is ordained a deacon. The following year I was ordained a deacon. The climax of my vocation journey was the priesthood ordination on 27th June 2020 at St. Kizito Minor Seminary in Dedza Diocese.

Close to 150 people attended my priesthood ordination. It was during the Covid-19 period. Gatherings were restricted. Nonetheless, I was elated. What I needed was a bishop to ordain me and become a priest. That is what I am today, Fr. Luke Anatole Welemu, Comboni Missionary. Currently, I am serving as an assistant priest at Lirangwe Parish in the Archdiocese of Blantyre, Malawi. I am also pursuing a bachelor's degree in Education at the Catholic University of Malawi.



He came to wipe our sins away
He did not come to rub them in
And make us live with deep chagrin
For there's no debt he did not pay

He'll never leave us go astray
Defining us by how we sin
He came to wipe our sins away
He did not come to rub them in

To live new life He is the way
All sorrow's destined for the bin
He's with us through the thick and thin
To evil we're no longer prey
He came to wipe our sins away

By Fr. David Bohnsack, mccj



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