

*They're the Orient's Roving Padres*

## THE SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN

by **Faustino Sentos**



The world-famous diocese of Brooklyn, New York, proved unsatisfying to Irish born Father Galvin. There was work to be done there but not the type he wanted that would give an exit to his pent up energies. Father Galvin pondered on this matter and came out with the answer that he knew alone could give him satisfaction — work in the far flung missions of the Far East.

Father Galvin lost no time, packed his belongings and joined the French priests in a place near Shanghai. For five years the ripe field of mission work left little time for anything else. It was work from sunrise to sundown. Often it was work at nights. It was an immense job for only a few priests; more were needed and they had better come soon.

Father Galvin thought as he worked among the slums of Shanghai's backyard. He thought as he prayed. And he knew only one course. He was going to go out of China and seek more priests.

Back again in Ireland Father Galvin called for volunteers among the secular priests for the China Mission.

Convincing wasn't a too difficult task for him. Father Blowick, professor of Maynooth College, was interested and joined the team of Father Galvin. Together they talked about their plans — priests for the missions in the Far East. And as they thought and talked a new plan was born. They worked harder still till they saw the result — the formation of a new Society dedicated to work in the missions. They called themselves the Columban Fathers, the Society taking its name from the Great Irish missionary, St. Columban. With astonishing rapidity Columban houses and seminaries sprang from all parts of the United States and Australia. There are now over 700 members.

In 1920 the first batch of Columban priests landed in China and wedged into the heart of the mainland where the Hu and Yang Tse Kuang rivers meet. They fanned out in the territory once administered by the Italian Vicentian Fathers, until further on, a few years later, they reached Kiangsi Province. But in 1930 the tide of mission work received a set-back. The Superior



of the Columbans and another priest were murdered by the first Communist regime. For a time it looked as if the Catholic Faith in China was headed for defeat.

But the Society still grew on, and there was no stopping this avalanche as its mission work spread on to Korea, to Burma, and the Philippines. On the north the shadow of the 38th parallel fell across the Society's territory. The Communists from north Korea kept a hostile eye at the missionaries, and when the Korean war broke out five Columban priests were killed initially and three others taken prisoners.

Early in the 1920, heavily populated Malate in Manila fell short of priests. A staff was badly needed to administer to large sections of the population which were being neglected. Manila's Archbishop O'Doherty saw the danger and forthwith requested for priests from the Columban Society. In 1929 the first group of Columban Fathers set foot on Philippine soil and established their first mission work in Manila and Lingayen. Nine years later, 1938, when their numbers had swelled considerably Archbishop Hayes handed to the Society the Province of Misamis Occidental. More parishes of Misamis, then administered by the Jesuits, were eventually turned over to them with the recent ordination of nine priests and the appointment of Father Fallen as Superior. Still further expansion of the Society's mission came with the addition of Lanao to the Province of Misamis Occidental

to combine the Prelature of Ozamis. Forty priests are now assigned to that area, and five to Camiguin last January.

#### THE PRELATURE OF OZAMIS

Ozamis City, the seat of the New Prelature of Ozamis, has a long history of Christianity. Before 1700, a small colony of Christians had already settled on what was then Moro territory. It was administered by a Spanish priest, Fr. Ducos, who resided in Iligan. As he had much difficulty in sailing to Ozamis because of Moro pirates he induced the government to build a fort or cottas to protect the Christians. This was built in 1706, and since that time the number of Christians increased. Other towns along the coast were begun about the same time, but the people seem to have clung closely to the coastline. It was not until this century that the hinterland was opened up with the influx of immigrants from Cebu, Bohol, and other islands of the Visayas.

The parish records of Ozamis City date back to 1789, and it is interesting to see the gradual growth of Christianity. From 1840 to 1850 there were a thousand baptisms.

Before the Revolution, the Recollect Fathers labored along this coast and accomplished splendid results. Following the Revolution however, came sad days. There were no priests, and the Aglipayans set up their churches in every town. In many places they tried to take over Church property, but fortunately were



not very successful as they were opposed by the remaining loyal Catholics.

In 1919 the Jesuit fathers returned. Although there was no resident priest in any of the towns, Fr. Gabriel Font, S.J. travelled from town to town, from barrio to barrio, baptizing, officiating at marriages, and preaching. He did heroic work until the American Jesuits took over in 1927. Gradually the number of priests increased, the remaining Catholics were cared for, and many were won back from Aglipayonism.

In 1938 the Columban Fathers took over from the Jesuits, starting with ten priests. They had barely begun to work when the war broke out and they had to take to the hills with their flocks. Although they were constantly troubled by the Japs none of them lost their lives and they were able to return to their parishes after the war. The number of new priests increased with a general influx, first from the U.S. and then from Ireland. High schools were opened in nearly every parish.

In 1938 Lanao was added to the Columban territory. This, of course, is a Moro stronghold but has a large Catholic population all along the northern coast from Iligan to Kapa-tagan and the new EDCOR settlement. The Moro have moved back from the coast and have left the Christians more or less unmolested. The increase in the number of Christians in this area has been remarkable — Kolambugan, which from a

parish having one priest immediately after the war, has now been divided into five parishes each with its own priest.

The total population of the Prelature is given as 550,000. Of these, 300,000 are Moros and nearly all are in the Province of Lanao. There are 21 parishes, 16 Catholic high schools and three Catholic colleges. With the priests are also working the Sisters of St. Columban who have a large college in Ozamis City, the R.V.M. Sisters who have their college in Iligan, and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Oroquieta. This year the Maryknoll Sisters are taking over a high school and college in Oroquieta.

Since the war priests of the Society have begun to work in the Diocese of Bacolod, where there are now 25 priests, and in the Province of Zambales which has about 20.

In Manila a group of Columban Fathers have now been working for many years among the student population. The Archbishop of Manila has entrusted to them the Student Catholic Action. Despite the small number of priests engaged in the work they have reaped remarkable results.

In the few years since the war the Society in the Philippines has increased in number from a mere twenty to approximately one hundred and fifty. They are now staffing forty six parishes in areas where formerly there was acute shortage of priests.