

# MOTHER TERESA OF KOLKATA: A FUTURE SAINT VISITS PITTSBURGH

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*“If you are doing God’s will with great love, you are doing something beautiful to God.” – Mother Teresa*

The recent canonization of Mother Teresa of Kolkata<sup>1</sup> in Rome on September 4, 2016, brought back memories of her two visits to Pittsburgh – in October 1972 and June 1979. The story of her visits to the Steel City can be told in the context of her life and its international impact. Who was this woman that captivated the world for decades and made a deep personal impression on the many people of Pittsburgh with whom she came in contact during her time here?

## Early Years

Mother Teresa was born Anjezë [Agnes] Gonxhe (meaning “rosebud” or “little flower” in Albanian) Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910

into a Kosovar Albanian family living in Skopje, then a part of the vast Ottoman Empire. Kosovo was a province in the Empire. Settlers from neighboring Albania moved eastward into Kosovo between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albanians in Kosovo constituted more than 90% of the population, which was overwhelmingly Muslim. The Balkans were politically unstable, experiencing a series of wars and boundary changes. Young Agnes was successively a subject of the Ottoman Empire (1910-1912), Serbia (1912-1915), Bulgaria (1915-1918), and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia (as of 1918).<sup>2</sup>

The family was devoutly Catholic. The infant, the youngest daughter in the family, was baptized the day after her birth – an event that she later considered to be her “true birthday.” When Anjezë was only eight years old, her father died in 1919. As a result, she became extraordinarily close to her mother – a pious and compassionate woman who instilled in her daughter a deep commitment to charity. The young girl attended a convent-run primary school and a state-run secondary school.

As a child, Anjezë was fascinated by stories of the lives of missionaries and their service in India. Her interest in India had been stimulated by Father Jambrekovic, S.J., pastor of her parish church of the

Sacred Heart in Skopje. A number of Yugoslavian Jesuits, as part of the widespread wave of enthusiasm for the missions in the 1920s, left in 1920 for India to undertake missionary work in the archdiocese of Calcutta in the province of Bengal. They wrote home

about their work among the poor and the sick. The Yugoslav priests in Bengal also wrote with fervor of the work of the Loreto Sisters – the Irish branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – in Bengal. The missionaries’ letters, their occasional return visits to Skopje, and Father Jambrekovic’s enthusiastic support for their work gave a focus to young Anjezë’s develop-



**Mother Teresa with Bishops Vincent M. Leonard, William G. Connare, and John B. McDowell prior to Mass in St. Paul Cathedral (1979)**

Source: *Pittsburgh Catholic*

ing vocation to the religious life. *Katolicke Misije (Catholic Missions)*, a Zagreb periodical that regularly reported Catholic missionary work undertaken by Croatian and Slovene missionaries in India, contributed to the shaping of her vocation. In particular, she was attracted to the work of the Loreto Sisters.

By age 12, Anjezë believed that she should commit herself to a religious life. She often went on pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Black Madonna of Vitina-Letnice.<sup>3</sup> That madonna is a blackened wooden statue more than 400 years old. The feast of the Black Madonna takes place yearly on the feast of the Assumption (August 15) when thousands of Catholics, Orthodox, and Muslims come on pilgrimage from all parts of the Balkans. It was on the feast of the Assumption in 1928 that Anjezë resolved to become a religious sister.

Thus, Anjezë left home in September 1928 at age 18 to join the Sisters of Loreto at Loreto Abbey in Rathfarnham (a suburb of Dublin, Ireland) in order to learn English and to become a missionary. That order had an extensive system of schools in India that educated the very poor. She set off on a long train journey across Europe to Paris where, with the assistance of an interpreter from the Yugoslavian Embassy, she was interviewed by the superior of the Loreto House in Paris. On the strength of that meeting, the young girl was recommended to the Mother General of the order in Ireland.

### The Loreto Sisters

The Loreto Sisters was the popular name for the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which had been established in France in 1609 by an English woman, Venerable Mary Ward (1585-1645). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Coadjutor Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin sought to rebuild the Irish Church after centuries of persecution. He encouraged young Frances Ball to join the Institute in England and to then return to Ireland as Mother Teresa Ball to provide education for young women.<sup>4</sup> He purchased Rathfarnham Hall on the outskirts of Dublin, where the first three sisters settled in 1822. Because there were only three sisters, Mother Teresa Ball suggested that they call the house “Loreto” after the village in Italy to which the Nazareth house of the Holy Family was said to have been miraculously transported. As a result of that decision on their first day in Ireland, the name “Loreto” came to be applied to all future convents founded from Rathfarnham – and the sisters became known as the “Loreto Sisters” despite the fact that their official name remained the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>5</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the order spread from Ireland to other parts of the world, including India, where the Loreto Sisters arrived in Calcutta in 1841. They established an orphanage in the Entally district of Calcutta in 1843 and a convent school at Darjeeling; both institutions would become part of the story of young Anjiezë.<sup>6</sup> English was the language employed by the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland and in teaching school children in India, who spoke Bengali and Hindi. Anjiezë quickly realized that she would have to become multi-lingual in order to be effective in her intended educational ministry. She spent only six weeks at Rathfarnham, during which time she concentrated primarily on learning English. Happily, she had inherited her father’s gift for languages.

On December 1, 1928, Anjiezë set sail for India – arriving in Calcutta on January 6, 1929. She was promptly sent to begin her novitiate in Darjeeling – a town in northeastern India, lying 7,000 feet up in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains, near the borders of Bhutan and Nepal, approximately 625 kilometres or 388 miles north of Calcutta.

When she took her first vows as a Sister of Loreto on May 24, 1931, she chose to be named after Thérèse of Lisieux, patron saint of missionaries – but because another sister in the convent already bore that name, Agnes opted for the Spanish spelling, *Teresa*. St. Teresa’s School in Darjeeling was her first teaching assignment. The sisters had established the school in 1846, during the British *Raj*. It had both residential and day schoolers, organized into two divisions: junior school (kindergarten to Class V) and senior school (Class VI to Class XII). The school’s alumni would later include such luminaries as: Vivian Leigh (Oscar-winning film actress), King Birendra of Nepal, Leila Seth (first female Chief Justice of an Indian state), as well as Indian nationalists, princesses, and Bollywood actresses.

Sister Teresa also worked for a brief period helping the nursing staff in a small medical station, which exposed her directly to the suffering poor of India. She was then assigned to teach at Entally (one of the sisters’ six schools in Calcutta), which was dedicated to educating girls from the poorest Bengali families. Sister lacked the

formal qualifications to teach but, in those days, little store was set by formal qualifications.

Sister Teresa learned to speak Bengali and Hindi fluently as she taught history and geography, and sought to alleviate the students’ poverty through education. She took her solemn vows to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience on May 24, 1937, and followed the Loreto custom of taking the title “Mother” – and thereafter was known as Mother Teresa.

While teaching, Mother Teresa visited the poor in the *bustees* (slums) of Calcutta every Sunday. She continued to serve at Loreto Entally (which moved to Loreto Convent Road during World War II) and was appointed headmistress in 1944. While happy in her teaching assignment, Teresa was disturbed by the poverty in Calcutta. The Bengal famine of 1943 and the outbreak of Hindu-Muslim violence in 1946 (the Great Calcutta Killings) further shocked her. In the face of the poverty, hunger, and despair that she had seen – albeit only in a limited way – Mother Teresa began to feel that something more was being asked of her.

### The Call to Establish a New Order

In September 1946, Teresa travelled by train from Calcutta to the Loreto convent in Darjeeling for her annual retreat. On September 10, she received a second call that would forever change her life. She later described this as “the call within the call” – to leave convent school teaching and instead work in the slums of Calcutta to help the city’s poorest and sickest inhabitants – all while living among them. She heard Christ say,

I want Indian Missionaries of Charity—who would be My fire of love amongst the very poor—the sick—the dying—the little street children. . . . You are I know the most incapable person, weak & sinful, but just because you are that I want to use you, for My glory! Wilt thou refuse?<sup>7</sup>

Having taken a vow of obedience, Mother Teresa could not leave the convent for this role unless she received permission. After almost a year and a half of lobbying, on April 12, 1948, Rome granted her an indult of *exclaustration* to leave Loreto to pursue her new calling – under obedience to Calcutta Archbishop Ferdinand Périer, S.J.

In August 1948, her true mission began. Surrendering her Loreto habit for a simple white cotton *sari* decorated with a blue border (the color of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and a small cross at the shoulder, Teresa began her missionary work with the poor. She adopted Indian citizenship, spent a few months receiving basic medical training at Holy Family Hospital in Patna, and then ventured out into the slums. By 1949, she was joined by several young women – laying the foundation of a new religious community to help “the poorest among the poor.”

On October 7, 1950, she received Vatican permission to start a diocesan congregation that would become the Missionaries of Charity. The initial congregation of 13 was comprised mostly of former teachers or pupils. In 1952, Mother Teresa opened her first Home for the Dying in Calcutta. Hospices, orphanages, and leper houses

soon followed. She would become affectionately known as “the saint of the gutter” for her unconditional love for the poor, abandoned, and marginalized.

Pope Paul VI’s bestowal of a Decree of Praise on the Missionaries of Charity in February 1965 prompted Mother Teresa to expand internationally. As she said:

By blood I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

In 1971, she travelled to New York to open a soup kitchen. She would later care for AIDS patients in the same city.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the first convent of the Missionaries of Charity in the United States was opened in New York City.

### Decline and Death

Deteriorating health characterized the final years of Mother Teresa’s life, as she suffered from heart, lung, and kidney problems. Pope John Paul II accepted the resignation of Mother Teresa as Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity in April 1990, for reasons of health. She was 80. The sisters’ Chapter General later that year promptly re-elected her, and she continued to guide the order. Declining health led her to step down as Superior General in March 1997. The untimely death of Princess Diana brought Mother Teresa before the television cameras for the last time, as she spoke lovingly of the princess’s love for the poor. On the eve of Princess Diana’s funeral, Mother Teresa died in Calcutta on September 5, 1997 at age 87. Mother Teresa’s body was reposed in St. Thomas Church in Calcutta. The government of India afforded her the pomp and circumstance of a state funeral in gratitude for her services to the poor of all religions in India.

Eight days after her death, Mother Teresa’s body was borne through the streets of Calcutta on the same gun carriage that had carried the bodies of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, as tens of thousands of people lined the route to catch a final glimpse of Mother Teresa. A state Funeral Mass was held in Netaji Indoor Stadium, attended by numerous world dignitaries.

Afterward, in a private ceremony, as soldiers outside fired a last salute, Mother Teresa was buried in a plain stone above-ground tomb on the ground floor of the Motherhouse of the Missionaries of Charity, close to the people she had served. Her tomb became a place of pilgrimage and quiet meditation, despite the persistent noise of passing Kolkata traffic. The tomb is truly a reflection of her life – one must be able to pray and meditate even in the midst of noise and distraction!<sup>10</sup>

At the time of her death, the Missionaries of Charity had over 4,000 sisters, an associated brotherhood of 300 members, and operated 610 missions in 123 countries, including the United States, on all seven continents. In addition, there were thousands of lay volunteers.

Death did not end her work. She has remained in the public spotlight ever since. Her unwavering commitment to the poorest of the

poor made her one of the greatest humanitarians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite having developed a highly effective missionary organization, she held a naively simple conception of her own achievements with respect to the global scale of her charitable activities and the millions of lives she touched.

### Recognition in Her Lifetime

Mother received a number of Indian awards. Her fame outside of India to a great degree stemmed from the 1969 documentary, *Something Beautiful for God*, filmed by Malcolm Muggeridge, and his 1971 book by the same title.<sup>11</sup> He later converted to Catholicism. In that same year, Pope Paul VI awarded her the first Pope John XXIII Peace Prize. She later received the *Pacem in Terris* Award in 1976. Mother Teresa also received the Albert Schweitzer International Prize (1975), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1985), the Congressional Gold Medal (1994), and honorary American citizenship (1996). She was even awarded the Soviet Union’s Gold Medal of the Soviet Peace Committee. She received 124 awards in all.

The high point of Mother Teresa’s earthly awards was her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1979 in Oslo, Norway.<sup>12</sup> The Peace Prize is awarded to the person who in the preceding year “shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”<sup>13</sup> Mother Teresa was recognized for her work in “bringing help to suffering humanity.”

### The First Visit to Pittsburgh – 1972

The National Catholic Stewardship Council<sup>14</sup> scheduled its ninth annual meeting to be held on October 17-19, 1972 at the Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh. Mother Teresa was invited to be the keynote speaker. She was to speak on Tuesday evening at 8 PM on the topic “Human Misery vs. Stewardship.”<sup>15</sup> The Council is an organization of diocesan personnel involved in fundraising or “stewardship” of funds, time, and talent. Matt Mahon, director of fund raising for the Pittsburgh diocese, served as national vice chairman of the organization at that time. More than 100 delegates representing 29 archdioceses and dioceses were to attend the 3-day conference.

As Mother Teresa’s address would take place mid-evening, plans were made for her to stay overnight in Pittsburgh. She politely declined the offer to stay at Rosalia Manor in Oakland and requested instead to reside at the cloistered Passionist Monastery of Our Lady of Sorrows at 2715 Churchview Avenue in the Carrick section of Pittsburgh.<sup>16</sup> She arrived at the Passionist nuns’ convent in the afternoon and granted a rare interview to *Pittsburgh Catholic* reporter



**Newspaper Advertisement of Mother Teresa Speaking in Pittsburgh (June 1979)**

Source: *Pittsburgh Catholic*

Patricia Bartos, who reported the interview in the next issue of the diocesan newspaper:

Mother Teresa slipped into Pittsburgh without the fanfare others sought for her. ...

In the convent's tiny parlor, she answered several questions about her work – though she normally avoids interviews.

In greeting, she bowed low over folded hands and smiled, shaking hands. The generous, ever-present smile, the calm deep-set eyes, gave an indication of the comfort she instilled in the many thousands of poor dying to whom she has ministered.

Speaking quietly with a crisp accent, she told of the work her order, the Missionaries of Charity, undertook. ...

Speaking of the work, which began when Mother Teresa 25 years ago left the order of Sisters of Loreto and set out alone to help the poor in Calcutta and now embraces homes in eight countries, she stated, “the poor are the poor all over the world.”

“We feed the hungry Christ, we clothe the naked Christ, we give homes to the homeless Christ – this is the whole work of every one of us,” she said.

References and praise to God are laced with frequency and ease through her conversation “We depend solely on Divine Providence,” she continued.

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Speaking of the rapid increase in the size of the Missionary of Christ community (presently more than 700 Sisters) while other orders are losing members, she said “plenty of girls want to give their whole lives to Christ. They want a life of poverty to contact with the poor.” She listed the four qualities sought in young girls wishing to join the Missionaries: health of mind, health of body, “plenty of common sense” and most important, a cheerful disposition.

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Mother Teresa's traveling companion [was] Miss Eileen Egan of the Catholic Relief Services and an official of the International Co-Workers of Mother Teresa. ...

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The co-workers, who raise funds to support Mother Teresa's work, now number 500 and their newsletter reaches 2,000 persons.

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As Miss Egan told of the help coming from across the country, the dinner tray arrived. Quietly, Mother Teresa rose, arranged an end-table into a make-shift dinner table, lifted two chairs into place and began setting the table for their brief meal before leaving for her talk.<sup>17</sup>

Pittsburgh Bishop Vincent M. Leonard welcomed the conference attendees with an address on Tuesday night at the hotel. Mother Teresa followed the bishop. Her talk was open to the public without charge, but a free will offering was taken up to be used for her charities.<sup>18</sup>

The Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel ballroom was jammed to capacity for Mother Teresa's address, as more than 600 people joined the 100+

conference delegates. Given the cool fall weather, Mother Teresa's stooped shoulders were covered by a tattered gray woolen sweater over her *sari*. She seemed out of place in the grandeur of a ballroom – and completely amazed at the large assemblage of priests, sisters, and laypeople as she remarked “I didn't know what I was coming in for” as she looked out over the crowd. New York Auxiliary Bishop Edward E. Swanstrom (Episcopal Moderator of the organization and Executive Director of Catholic Relief Services) introduced Mother Teresa and spoke of her as “something beautiful from God.”

The 62-year-old nun then spoke in a gentle voice, without notes, of her belief that the most wretched of the world are “Christ in disguise.” She continued, “We have been entrusted with the love of the poor.” Despite her small stature, her humility filled the room. Not a sound was heard as she delivered her message of love.

Following her talk, a collection was taken which netted \$3,550. In addition, the Stewardship Conference voted to donate \$1,500 to her works. Prior to her talk, the religious sisters of the diocese had presented Mother Teresa with a check for \$3,399.97, which represented proceeds from a day of fast and prayer held earlier in the year during which money normally spent on meals was set aside as an offering to the famed missionary. In addition, many donations were brought or sent to the Diocesan Mission Office amounting to several thousand dollars, to be turned over to the Missionaries of Charity.<sup>19</sup>

### The Second Visit to Pittsburgh – 1979

Just four months before the announcement of her selection for the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa visited Pittsburgh for two days in the summer of 1979 – Tuesday, June 26 and Wednesday June 27. The visit represented the collaboration of both the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and the Mission Office (headed by Fr. John Harvey) of the diocese of Pittsburgh.

The first indication of the impending visit was a front-page black-bordered announcement in the *Pittsburgh Catholic* on June 1, “Mother Teresa to visit.”<sup>20</sup> One week later, a second announcement – accompanied by a large picture of Mother Teresa – appeared on page one of the diocesan newspaper.<sup>21</sup> The paper's third front-page announcement, on June 15, reflected the growing public interest and provided specific details about her arrival and departure. The article opened with the statement: “Mother Teresa's scheduled appearances in Pittsburgh June 26 and 27 have spawned a number of appeals for her to make additional speaking stops for groups here.” Her inability to add to the two originally scheduled stops at Pitt and the cathedral was attributed to the fact that she “will arrive shortly before her Tuesday night talk and leave immediately following her Wednesday program.”<sup>22</sup> No tickets were needed for either event but a free will offering for her work would be accepted at both. The *Pittsburgh Catholic's* final notice before the visit carried the understated title “Mother Teresa Interest Grows” – but candidly admitted that “The missionary Sister's appearance ... continues to create excitement both within the area and in surrounding dioceses.”<sup>23</sup>

Mother's all-too-brief time in Pittsburgh must be viewed against the backdrop of her visit to the United States that month. She had come to attend the profession of one of her sisters at the first American convent of the Missionaries of Charity in Harlem in New

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York City, and to open the second and third American convents of her order in Detroit and in St. Louis – at the request of John Cardinal Dearden of Detroit (former bishop of Pittsburgh) and John Cardinal Carberry of St. Louis.

She began each of her public appearances in Pittsburgh with a prayer, recited in her thickly accented voice,

“Help us to help those in poverty and hunger, our brothers and sisters, yours and mine, that by understanding and love we may give them peace and joy.”<sup>24</sup>

The *Pittsburgh Catholic* presented the spiritual dimension of her visit to the Steel City. The newspaper’s coverage of her days in Pittsburgh appeared in print two days after her departure, with the banner headline “Mother Teresa’s message: ‘Unloved, unwanted our greatest poverty.’”

On Tuesday, she first held a press conference. Hers was not the traditional type, dominated by television news crews that set up elaborate equipment and brusquely turn off their lights and pull the plugs when they’ve decided they’ve heard and seen enough. Asked to introduce herself by describing her work, Mother Teresa grasped a microphone awkwardly and quietly began to tell her story. Her explanation lasted for 15 minutes, yet not one reporter interrupted with a question. No one pulled a plug. The reporters were listening intently.<sup>25</sup> Her humility and simplicity showed through, particularly in her response to a reporter who sought to put her work into his perspective. He asked what effect the world-wide energy situation<sup>26</sup> would have on her work and her ability to provide food for the poor. “I don’t know about such great things,” she responded, acknowledging her lack of formal economic and political training. “I just know God provides.”<sup>27</sup>

On Tuesday, she delivered a talk at 7:30 PM in the David Lawrence Hall at the University of Pittsburgh to an overflow crowd of over 1,000 – students bearing armloads of books, faculty, families with young children, priests, teenagers in jeans, sisters, Indian couples, university officials, Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguiri, and the general public. Students from every school at the university were in attendance. A Millvale Franciscan sister who was pursuing a Master’s degree in social work at the university recorded what happened:

Mother was introduced by Chancellor William J. Posvar amid thunderous applause. As this tiny woman of only four feet and one inch, dressed in her familiar blue-banded white sari, stepped to the microphone, a general laughter erupted from the audience when the microphone was adjusted for a six-foot tall speaker. As she was certainly dwarfed, she glanced upward and waited patiently while it was lowered to her size. This small act endeared her to the audience.<sup>28</sup>

Mother joined in the quiet laughter at the sight of her physical insignificance. At age 69, she showed the effects of a lifetime of unending work and hope. Her face was deeply lined, her folded hands were gnarled, and her spare frame was slightly hunched within her blue-trimmed white sari. Yet her manner, her smile, and her eyes excited people.

She was greeted by two extended standing ovations before she uttered a single word. She spoke of what those present could do for the poor. She said in a gentle voice:

God does not need big things, he needs small things, but done with great love. The work our Sisters are doing is nothing special, nothing special, but we do it with love.<sup>29</sup>

She spoke of the poverty and hunger in India, but insisted that “spiritual poverty is a much greater pain.” She scored the terrible poverty of mothers, afraid of their unborn, who opted for abortion. A family and a nation that permit this evidence great spiritual poverty. In India, she fought abortion through adoption.

She spoke directly to students planning on going into social work: “The poor are great people. Treat them with great dignity, with respect, as a child of God. The greatest injustice is to treat them so poorly.”<sup>30</sup>

Mother Teresa was particularly impressive as she effortlessly fielded questions at the end of her talk. To a woman who inquired whether her efforts really helped to stamp out poverty and hunger, Mother Teresa responded that her sisters had created an awareness and concern for the poor – and more were now sharing the work to help the poor. One man cynically challenged Mother by asking whether the presence of millions of starving people in effect denied the God she believed in. While Diana Saunders of the Catholic Deaf Center signed her words for a number of deaf persons in the audience, Mother Teresa responded by noting,

Divine Providence doesn’t make mistakes. The mistake is, *we* are not sharing. *We* have allowed them to go hungry. We don’t know who is hungry. We are too busy with other things. Sharing is Divine Providence. It is a question of knowing the poor. If we know them we will love them, respect them. If we love them, we will not pass them by.<sup>31</sup>

She explained that her sisters fed 7,000 each morning in Calcutta alone – with no income, no salaries, with trust only in God – and they never had to turn away anyone for lack of food, housing, or medication.

During the question and answer session, young Greek Orthodox Father Polycarpus Rameas of Oakmont smilingly reminded Mother of her philosophy of dealing with each and every person on a one-to-one basis. “Do you really believe that,” he asked, noting that if she did, she would agree to autograph his copy of the book, *Something Beautiful for God*. She laughingly agreed, whereupon he vaulted onto the stage and, after she signed her name, graciously kissed her hand.<sup>32</sup> That moment was preserved for posterity in a picture that subsequently appeared in the *Pittsburgh Catholic*.

As the question-and-answer session drew to an end, people moved forward to grasp her hand, get a snapshot of her, or used the small prayer cards with her picture and her favorite prayer from Cardinal Newman (that had been distributed) to obtain her autograph. People swamped the stage. A reporter noted:

She seemed the most unlikely of autograph givers. Holding the pen carefully to write her “M. Teresa” on each card, she seemed almost shy, and resigned to all the attention.<sup>33</sup>

The Millvale Franciscan noted:

While Mother was still on stage, many sisters took the opportunity to gather there, crowding around her, chatting, laughing, and shaking her hand. . . . Quickly I moved up behind her and fervently placed a kiss on her cheek. She did not move away, but she remained in her usual calmness. For me it was an exhilarating moment! I knew that I had truly kissed a saint!<sup>34</sup>

On Tuesday night, she stayed at Our Lady of Sorrows Monastery, residence of the Passionist Nuns, where she had resided during her previous visit seven years earlier. Father John Harvey, director of the Pittsburgh Diocesan Mission Office, was responsible for driving her to the monastery Tuesday evening and picking her up on Wednesday morning for the trip to the cathedral. Older readers will recall that Pittsburgh and the nation were at that time in the midst of a gasoline crisis, triggered by the Iranian Revolution.<sup>35</sup> Father Harvey was caught in the gasoline crisis. With the needle on his car dashboard indicating less than empty, he nonetheless drove Mother Teresa safely to the monastery Tuesday night.

Although unsuccessful at finding an open gas station late Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning, he returned to the monastery on Wednesday morning. Sitting in the vestibule while waiting for her, Father Henry was worried about having enough gas to get her to the cathedral in Oakland. But he kept reminding himself that, “Mother Teresa in this situation would say, ‘things will work out.’” What happened next is the stuff of legends:

Enroute to the Cathedral, he spotted an empty service station, blocked pumps, and a lone attendant. He pulled in, introduced Mother Teresa, and explained his predicament. Within minutes, his tank was full and they were enroute to the cathedral. “It never would have happened if Mother Teresa hadn’t been in the car,” he says.<sup>36</sup>

That day, she attended a noon Mass at St. Paul Cathedral. More than 2,500 people jammed the church; it was truly standing room only. Mass was offered by Pittsburgh Bishop Vincent M. Leonard, Greensburg Bishop William G. Connare, and Pittsburgh Auxiliary Bishop John B. McDowell. Recognizing the value of her words, Bishop Leonard assured those present that “Any sacrifice you have made to be present for Mother Teresa’s talk will be worthwhile.”<sup>37</sup>

Mother Teresa spoke following the Mass. She urged the cathedral congregation:

Let’s all make one resolution – to find the poor, to find them even in our own families and to love them.

What you are doing, I can’t do. What I am doing, you can’t. But together we are doing something beautiful for God.<sup>38</sup>

Mother challenged her audience:

You are saying, with such hunger in India and Africa what is Mother Teresa doing here in the United States, we don’t need her.

But I see here a great hunger, to be recognized, to be wanted, among what you call the shut-ins, the poor, the unborn child. All are hungry for love and no one wants them.<sup>39</sup>

As was the case with her address at Pitt, Mother Teresa’s quiet speaking voice was not dramatic. It was clear and soft, smoothly flowing as she told of the need for the poor to be loved and respected. Yet she held her audiences in such complete interest that her control seemed complete. How did she achieve that result? “[S]he uses the same stories, phrases, voice, in ordinary conversation and the secret of her “control” is the sincerity and commitment to her message.”<sup>40</sup>

Her talk, which began and ended with standing ovations – which she acknowledged with bows over folded hands – concluded with a presentation of red roses by children representing People Concerned for the Unborn Child, in recognition of her efforts to promote the sanctity of life.

In addition to the deep spiritual message conveyed in Mother Teresa’s two talks, she also displayed a gentle humor that captivated Pittsburghers. Her unheralded wit matched the depth of her faith. When a reporter asked how it all began, she responded with a mischievous grin and her punch line: “It all started with Lincoln Continental.” She was referring to Pope Paul VI’s donation to Mother Teresa of the limousine he had been using during his 1964 visit to India. She promptly raffled off the car and used the proceeds to establish her “Town of Peace.”

Famously known for disliking having her picture taken, she commented resignedly in the midst of a hurried series of posed pictures with local people: “Well, we’re all going to get to heaven.” And she repeated an often-told joke about herself: “They say ‘Mother Teresa preaches Natural Family Planning but she does not practice it. Each day she has more and more children.’” And in trying to illustrate to a questioner the value of “small deeds done with great love,” she responded: “We give the hungry man a fish. Once he has eaten, we pass him on the road to somebody else to give him the rod to catch his own fish.”<sup>41</sup>

Mother Teresa’s second visit to Pittsburgh was a whirlwind 26 hours.<sup>42</sup>

### Recognition after Her Death

In 2010, to celebrate the centennial of Mother Teresa’s birth, the Indian government issues a special 5-rupee coin – representing the insignificant sum of money with which she began her missionary work in 1950. Mother Teresa Women’s University was established in India. Indian Railways operates the “Mother Express” in her honor. “Mother Teresa Day” (October 19) is a public holiday in Albania. The Catholic cathedral in Pristina (Republic of Kosovo) is dedicated in her honor – Blessed Mother Teresa Cathedral, soon to be known as Mother St. Teresa Cathedral.<sup>43</sup> In 2013, the United Nations designated the anniversary of her death as the International Day of Charity.



Vatican Stamp issued in Honor of St. Teresa of Calcutta

Source: Vatican City Philatelic Office

### Criticism

But views of Mother Teresa were not uniformly favorable. She had her critics among Indian politicians due to her alleged proselytization and the image of endemic poverty in India resulting from publicity about her work. Secular critics attacked her stance on abortion, contraception, and divorce. On those subjects, Mother Teresa had said in her 1979 Nobel lecture: “But I feel the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a direct war, a direct killing, direct murder by the mother herself.”<sup>44</sup> And in 1995, she publicly advocated for a “No”

vote in the Irish referendum to end the country’s constitutional ban on divorce and remarriage. Others criticized her acceptance of donations from a Haitian dictator and a disgraced American financier.

The most scathing criticism of Mother Teresa surfaced in Christopher Hitchens’ 1994 documentary about her, entitled *Hell’s Angel*, and a tie-in book (*The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*). He asserted that Mother Teresa glorified poverty for her own ends, and justified preservation of beliefs and institutions that perpetuated widespread poverty – in effect arguing that she urged the poor to accept their fate while the rich were portrayed as favored by God. Still others criticized her for not condemning social injustices that kept so many people so poor. The best refutation of such charges appears in the recent book by former Pittsburgher Bill Donohue (president of the Catholic League), entitled *Unmasking Mother Teresa’s Critics*.<sup>45</sup>

### The Canonization Process

Shortly after she died in 1997, Pope John Paul II waived the canonical five-year waiting period and allowed the opening of the canonization process. On December 20, 2002, a decree approved Mother Teresa’s heroic virtues and the miracle attributed to her intercession. On October 19, 2003, Pope John Paul II beatified her as “Mother Teresa of Calcutta.”

After that ceremony, her postulator (Missionary of Charity Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk, C.M.) published a book of her letters, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*.<sup>46</sup> The letters illustrated how, for decades, she experienced what is described as a “dark night of the soul” in Christian spirituality. She thought that God had abandoned her. While some people were shocked, others saw the letters as proof of her steadfast faith in God, which was not based on feelings or signs that he was with her. The book would prove to be a landmark – some think that *Come Be My Light* will eventually rank with St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and Thomas Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain* as an autobiography of spiritual ascent.

In December 2013, Pope Francis recognized a second miracle credited to Mother Teresa’s intercession, which set the stage for her

canonization. On March 15, 2016, the Holy See announced that Mother Teresa would be canonized on September 4. Pope Francis had met the future saint more than two decades earlier when he was Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is known to admire her ministry as well as her fearlessness in speaking out on behalf of society’s outcasts. “I would have been afraid to have had her as my superior, since she was so tough,” he once joked.<sup>47</sup>

That date of canonization marked the eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death<sup>48</sup> and took place near the end of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy<sup>49</sup> – the pilgrimage of people like Mother Teresa who are engaged in works of mercy!

### Suggested Readings:

While dozens of biographies of Mother Teresa have been published and the 2016 canonization will trigger issuance of additional works, the authorized study by Kathryn Spink is deemed by many to be the definitive work: *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011). See also: David Scott, *The Love that Made Mother Teresa* (Bedford, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2016).

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Kolkata has always been the name of the city, which is the capital of the state of West Bengal in northeastern India. But the British anglicized the official name to Calcutta, which remained until 2001 when it was changed to Kolkata to match Bengali pronunciation. References to the city in this article will reflect the British name used until 2001, with the Bengali term used thereafter.

<sup>2</sup> Political instability, wars, and boundary changes in that area have continued into the present. Skopje is now the capital of the Republic of Macedonia. The province of Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, but Serbia continues to claim the land as part of its sovereign territory.

<sup>3</sup> Vitina-Letnice was then a sleepy little hamlet in Yugoslavia, populated by ethnic Croatian Catholics – who later fled during the fratricidal wars that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Today the area lies in the southeastern section of the Republic of Kosovo.

<sup>4</sup> The life of Mother Teresa Ball is told in the work by Desmond Forristal, *First Loreto Sister: Mother Teresa Ball 1794-1861* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> The history of the Loreto Sisters in Ireland is detailed at the order’s website: [www.loreto.ie](http://www.loreto.ie).

<sup>6</sup> The history of the Loreto Sisters in India is presented at the website of the order’s India Province: [www.loreto.in](http://www.loreto.in).

<sup>7</sup> Mother Teresa (Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed.), *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light – The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 49.

<sup>8</sup> “Mother Teresa: A Profile,” appearing at the website [www.CNN.com](http://www.CNN.com).

<sup>9</sup> Her work with AIDS patients is detailed in the chapter entitled “A Quiet Storm” in Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 203-211.

<sup>10</sup> Adjacent to the tomb is a museum containing a small exhibition opened in 2005, entitled “Mother Teresa’s Life, Spirit and Message.” The exhibition contains many of her handwritten letters, spiritual exhortations, and her few personal belongings – sari, sandals, and crucifix. The sisters distribute Mother Teresa’s Novena prayer cards, medals, and printed materials at the tomb and the museum – free of cost! Additional information is available at the Motherhouse’s website: [www.motherteresa.org](http://www.motherteresa.org).

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> The recipient is selected annually by the Norwegian Nobel Committee, a

- five-person committee appointed by the Norwegian Parliament.
- <sup>13</sup> Excerpt from the Will of Alfred Nobel, appearing at the website of the Nobel Foundation: [www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org).
- <sup>14</sup> The National Council for Diocesan Support Programs was formed in 1962 under the direction of Joseph Cardinal Ritter of St. Louis to address the need for a Catholic theology of resource development and promote sharing of information about financial problems facing the Church. In 1968 the organization was renamed the National Catholic Stewardship Council. In 1999, the name was again changed to International Catholic Stewardship Council. The council began holding annual conferences in cities around the country in 1965.
- <sup>15</sup> "Mother Teresa to Give Keynote Speech Here," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (October 6, 1972), 1. See also "Catholic Stewardship Talks Slated," *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 14, 1972), 12.
- <sup>16</sup> Five nuns from Tarquinia, Italy, established the first American community of Passionist nuns (a contemplative cloistered community of religious women) in Pittsburgh on July 5, 1910. The order's centennial history in Pittsburgh is by Eileen Gimper, *The First Foundation of Passionist Nuns in the United States—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1910-2010* (Pittsburgh: Passionist Sisters, 2010). See also the order's website at [www.passionistnunsppgh.org](http://www.passionistnunsppgh.org)
- <sup>17</sup> Patricia Bartos, "Mother Teresa Tells of her Work in India," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (October 20, 1972), 1, 8. The Co-Workers of Mother Teresa was established in the 1950s to unite laywomen and men across the globe in supporting and expanding the Missionaries' mission of aiding the sick and poor. Pope Paul VI approved the Constitution of the International Association in 1969. The American branch of the Co-Workers was established in 1971, of which Eileen Egan was one of the co-founders. The work of the Co-Workers grew to include not just fundraising, but local prayer groups, newsletters, and active ministry to the poor and sick. Finally, in 1994, Mother Teresa surprised her Co-Workers with a sudden call for dissolution of the international organization and its national affiliates. She was concerned that the Co-Workers were becoming too institutionalized and encouraged her helpers to return to their grassroots origins. So, in 1994, the American Co-workers, alongside its sister organizations across the globe, formally disbanded. The American organization's records are archived at the Catholic University of America.
- <sup>18</sup> "Mother Teresa to Give Keynote Speech Here," loc. cit.
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas O'Neil, "Mother Teresa: 'Something beautiful for God,'" *Pittsburgh Catholic* (October 20, 1972), 1.
- <sup>20</sup> "Mother Teresa to Visit," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 1, 1979), 1. Secular newspapers waited until shortly before the visit to announce Mother Teresa's impending arrival. See, e.g., "Missionary of Love," *The Pittsburgh Press* (June 23, 1979), A-4.
- <sup>21</sup> "Speaking in Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 8, 1979), 1.
- <sup>22</sup> "Mother Teresa Schedule Given," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 15, 1979), 1.
- <sup>23</sup> "Mother Teresa Interest Grows," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 22, 1979), 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Patricia Bartos, "Mother's Teresa's Message: 'Unloved, unwanted our greatest poverty,'" *Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 29, 1979), 1.
- <sup>25</sup> Patricia Bartos, "'I just know God provides,'" *Pittsburgh Catholic* (July 6, 1979), 3.
- <sup>26</sup> This was a reference to the energy crisis of 1979 that occurred in the wake of the Iranian Revolution: the global oil supply decreased, prices skyrocketed, and long lines appeared at American gasoline stations. See "1979 energy crisis" at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).
- <sup>27</sup> Bartos, "'I just know God provides,'" loc. cit.
- <sup>28</sup> Sister Kevin Brand, "Kiss for a Saint" in *In Our Own Voices: Memoirs of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities – Millvale, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities, 2009), 36.
- <sup>29</sup> Bartos, "Mother's Teresa's Message," loc. cit.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> Bartos, "'I just know God provides,'" loc. cit.
- <sup>33</sup> Bartos, "Mother's Teresa's Message," op. cit., 2.
- <sup>34</sup> Brand, "Kiss for a Saint," op. cit., 37.
- <sup>35</sup> The gasoline supply issue dominated national and local news. For example, these local articles filled the first two pages of Pittsburgh's major newspaper just three days before Mother Teresa's visit: (1) "Thursday Gas Shutdown 'Still On,'" (2) "Getting to Work in a Gas Crunch Big Worry Here," (3) "Gas Supply Shorter and So Are Tempers," (4) "Gas in July Expected to Top June," and (5) "Kittanning Man Finds Gas in Other States," *The Pittsburgh Press* (June 23, 1979), 1, 2. On the day of Mother Teresa's arrival in Pittsburgh, the city's largest newspaper trumpeted a bolded all-caps headline: "**GAS DEALERS: CLOSING THURSDAY**," *The Pittsburgh Press* (June 26, 1979), A-1.
- <sup>36</sup> Bartos, "'I just know God provides,'" loc. cit.
- <sup>37</sup> Bartos, "Mother's Teresa's Message," loc. cit.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Bartos, "'I just know God provides,'" loc. cit.
- <sup>41</sup> "Gentle Humor Shows Sister's Great Love," *Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 29, 1979), 3.
- <sup>42</sup> Bartos, "'I just know God provides,'" loc. cit.
- <sup>43</sup> The Cathedral of Blessed Mother Teresa was begun in 2007 and completed in 2010, the hundredth anniversary of the missionary's birth. It is one of the tallest buildings in the city of Pristina, which is the capital of the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo's Catholics number only 66,000 in a Muslim population of over 2 million. The entire country comprises the Apostolic Administration of Prizren (formerly part of the diocese of Skopje in Macedonia), with both bishop and cathedral located in Pristina.
- <sup>44</sup> Mother Teresa, "Nobel Peace Prize Lecture," in Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), Appendix B, 297.
- <sup>45</sup> William A. "Bill" Donohue (b. 1947) is a native of Manhattan. In 1977, he joined the faculty of La Roche College in Pittsburgh, before returning to New York City. He holds a doctorate in Sociology from N.Y.U. In 1993, Donohue became director of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, and under his direction the League has become much more prominent and vocal. The League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. Founded in 1973 by the late Rev. Virgil C. Blum, S.J., it defends the rights of Catholics (lay and religious) to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination. The organization maintains a website at [www.catholicleague.org](http://www.catholicleague.org). Donohue's latest book is *Unmasking Mother Teresa's Critics* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2016).
- <sup>46</sup> Mother Teresa of Calcutta (Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed.), *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light – The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).
- <sup>47</sup> Greg Toppo, "Pope Francis: Mother Teresa to Become a Saint on Sept. 4," *USA Today* (March 15, 2016), appearing at the website: [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com).
- <sup>48</sup> The brevity of time between Mother Teresa's death and canonization stands in sharp contrast to Bede (d. 735) – the English monk and historian called "the father of English history" – who waited the longest for canonization. He was canonized in 1899, only 1,164 years after his death.
- <sup>49</sup> Pope Francis announced the Jubilee on March 13, 2015. The Holy Year was declared in the pope's April 11 bull of indiction, *Misericordiae Vultus* (*The Face of Mercy*) – it was to begin on December 8, 2015 (feast of the Immaculate Conception) and conclude on November 20, 2016 (feast of Christ the King). The former date marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (December 8, 1965). It is the 27<sup>th</sup> Holy Year in history, following the ordinary 2000 Jubilee during Pope St. John Paul II's papacy. A unique feature was the opening of Doors of Mercy at local cathedrals and significant shrines in each diocese throughout the world.