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# "Holiness is Not a Luxury of the Pure": Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the Struggle Over Symbols

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**“HOLINESS IS NOT A LUXURY OF THE PURE”:  
BLESSED MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA  
AND THE STRUGGLE OVER SYMBOLS**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Honors Studies in  
Anthropology

By

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“Holiness is not a luxury of the pure” (Mother Teresa 1987).

The quote that forms part of the title for this paper is from an interview with Mother Teresa that appeared in Anne and Jeanette Petrie’s film “Mother Teresa” in 1986. Mother Teresa is referring to the forms of holiness that can appear in unlikely places, such as in the homeless and dying of Calcutta. Just as these forms of holiness are constructed in unexpected and conceivably impure places, so are symbols. Neither holiness, nor symbols are necessarily pure, although their users may want to project them as such.

# Preface

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**October 19, 2003**



*Piazza San Pietro, October 19, 2003 (Collins 2005).*

The season was shifting and the Mediterranean winds were bringing in unpredictable weather. I had just returned from northern Italy, visiting the Veneto area, where it was already cold. Waking up early on Sunday morning I put on layers just in case the day turned out to be colder than anticipated. I was studying in Rome for the semester through the University of Arkansas' Rome Study Center. Early in the week, the Center had posted a bulletin of upcoming events in Rome. I knew the current Pope, John Paul II, was celebrating his 25<sup>th</sup> year of service to the Roman Catholic Church but I didn't know that he was planning to beatify Mother Teresa. This event was posted as free and open to the public and I was excited for the opportunity to attend an event of such ecclesiastic significance.

I boarded the bus, willing to stop at Termini, the main station of Rome, to transfer to the underground metro. I had seen the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the Tiber River. I

wasn't going to the ceremony to be so much a tourist as a participant in a cultural event, as a citizen of Rome and of the world. As I entered the underground of the metro, other people converged into the narrow halls and we entered the trains together. Almost invisible through their action, but made prominent by their clothing, were priests, nuns, and clergy of various ranks and sects from all over the world. Their garb individualized them and created for them both an identity with the Church and with the community they served at home. Priests, nuns, and clergy had always been my companions in local travel throughout the months I spent in Rome, but the period leading up to these celebrations was signaled by an increase in the types (and the appearance) of ecclesiastic members filtering through the streets on a daily basis. They traveled with the same maps and confusion that I had endured with during my first days in Rome, but they also seemed to carry a serene air of comfort with them, as if they knew they were in the religious center of their world, and their status would protect them in this Eternal City.

I stepped into the light from the metro blocks away from *piazza San Pietro* but immediately I became enmeshed in an energized mass of humanity, all moving in the same direction: toward the huge square in Vatican City. There were troupes of people, many bearing home-made shirts emblazoned with crests of regions, countries, dioceses, and church communities; there were individuals, couples, families--all walking toward *piazza San Pietro*, the public space between the outside world and the world of the Catholic Church. Along the edges of the walking masses, men and women shouted out their items for sale: Mother Teresa's image on commemorative scarves, flags with the Vatican seal, Mother Teresa dolls, special rosaries; any conceivable item associated with

Mother Teresa or with the Church was available in cheap imitation for sale to those wishing to commemorate the event with a commodity.

At the gates of the Square I was stopped and asked for a ticket. I had no ticket. I had been told the ceremony was open to all and free. I was nervous. The Vatican guard smiled and said, in well-accented English, something about the ceremony being free and open to all. I was waved through the gates after my bags were scanned, and, ticketless, ushered into the immense square. It looked smaller than I had seen it previously, with only dozens of tourists. It was now packed and as I looked behind me, so was *Via della Conciliazione*, the grand boulevard created by Mussolini to symbolically link the Vatican to Rome with an imposing entrance.

I began to take note of the people gathered around--what they looked like and how they talked. I sketched a few emblems I was unfamiliar with in the notebook I had brought along. One symbol I saw on flags, on shirts, on blankets, on banners, turned out to be, upon later research, the double crested great black bird of Albania. Those who could talk to each other did, and I was approached twice by news parties vying for interviews. I declined both opportunities. But others approached, individuals or members of groups with smiles on their faces. I felt free to chat with them, secure in the feelings of goodwill and in the security measures of the Vatican.

Soon cardinals, dressed in magenta robes, and the stark red of the bishops could be seen filing into their setting in the square, slowly proceeding through the audience to the constructed stage with the altar positioned in front of the entrance to St. Peter's. I would be able to see carefully chosen individuals, scenes, words, speeches, from the huge television screens positioned neatly and evenly through the square and down the *Via*. I



was aware of how carefully orchestrated our movements were; the square was carefully partitioned to allow movement of the clergy through the audience. As the weather warmed I shed some layers of my clothing and wondered if wearing a sleeveless blouse in the square would be considered blasphemous, as it was considered inside the churches of this antique religion. On an unexpectedly temperate and cloudless day, the ceremony and the beatification of Mother Teresa would soon begin.

## Introduction

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### An Order of Meaning<sup>1</sup>

The celebration that transformed Mother Teresa, an international symbol of peace and the poor, from a worldly icon into a Blessed was an extremely powerful event for those of the faith and those interested in the hegemonic use of symbols, momentarily established cohesion, and the formation of identities. A myriad of issues surfaced within and among the words, images, people, and items that circulated in the context of this beatification. A new reality emerged from within the ritualized words and movements of the ceremony; Mother Teresa is now no longer a Missionary of Charity, no longer a nun among others, she is a Blessed, one to be venerated in the Catholic faith and to whom the faithful can direct their prayers. Mother Teresa has always been a symbol to many people, a figure who stands “*ambiguously* for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, [evokes sentiment] and emotions, and [impels] men to action” (Cohen in Turner 1975:145; emphasis in original). Invocation of her name, her deeds, and the poor, her words and her image--all carry a political and social weight that influences many individuals’ realities today.

The beatification of Mother Teresa simultaneously created a history and a new future within which the Roman Catholic Church will continue to operate. It extended the reality of the Church from the past into the present and the future in a novel way that acknowledges the contemporary cultural condition of the world. Fundamentally, this

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<sup>1</sup> “The events [chronicled in history] must not only be registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence” (White 1987:5).

ceremony is communication, “dialogic, polyphonic, and polythematic” (Gellner 1992:297). This thesis examines the ceremony from the more specific perspective of performance theory as it is used in anthropology and folklore studies. The role of technology and the incorporation of Indian cultural elements are also integral parts of this ceremony. They exemplify the progressively more global context of actions, images, and beliefs and these elements will also be examined within this study. Theories of anthropology are increasingly incorporating individuals as “more than constructed objects. Although they may be powerfully positioned by discursive practices, they are also agents involved in co-producing and resisting dominant discourses” (Skinner, et al. 1998:6). This beatification ceremony recognizes Mother Teresa as an individualized symbol, but by beatifying her, the Roman Catholic Church offers this symbol to be used by the faithful to create and contest their own identities within the Church.

The concepts of performance and its uses are integral to the interpretation of the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa. “Performance analysis and event analysis involve symbols as agencies and foci of social mobilization, interaction and styling of behavior” (Turner 1975:150). Beyond this, however, “no less than life is reflected in the performance, and the vehicle for constructing social reality and personal conviction appears more as drama than as rational thought” (Schieffelin 1985:721). In this thesis, I use the definition of performance as put forth by Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs:

Performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. Performance puts the act of speaking on display--objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience. Performance heightens awareness of the act of speaking and licenses

the audience to evaluate skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment (1990:73).

Performance theories approach the emergence and expression of culture and the self through the contexts of social drama (Victor Turner 1974), narrative (Jerome Bruner 1991), and emergent reality (Edward Schieffelin 1985, V.N. Vološinov 1986, M.M. Bakhtin 1986). I use these three fields and their major contributors throughout my thesis. "Symbols are effective because they somehow formulate or 'make sense' of particular, often problematic, cultural, or psychological situations and then reframe, transform, or intensify this 'sense,' leading to a new orientation of the participants to the situation" (Schieffelin 1985:707). I am interested in how Mother Teresa has been formulated as a symbol within the beatification ceremony, and what the specific implications of this symbolism are for those (associated with the Church or not) who invoke her image. The issues presented in this essay, the struggle for directional use of the symbol of Mother Teresa, the interactive and unstable space provided by the Eucharist, the incorporation of Indian culture into a ritual which is practically beyond interpretation, the struggle for codification and interpretation of the ritual and the symbol as it is created-- all these issues demonstrate an effort by the Church to accommodate its growing sphere of constituents as well as revise itself to the expectations of the postmodern world. This event also illustrates the active construction of reality that occurs during the ceremonies and rituals, especially those taking place in a Christian context. These are the major themes that will be examined throughout the essay.

Ever present is the role of the individual within the construction (reconstruction), and use of the ideals presented within this ceremony. "Every ideological product bears the imprint of the individuality of its creator or creators, but even this imprint is just as

social as are all the other properties and attributes of ideological phenomena” (Vološinov 1986:34). The individual as the symbol (Mother Teresa), the owner of the symbol (the Church), user of the symbol (the faithful and any others who invoke the image or name of Mother Teresa), the context of the symbol (both historical, contemporary, and prospective), and the individual in relation to the Other (explicitly India, the secular world, and technology) are all very important in our construction of social reality, and in our interactions with other groups. “What we call ‘the self’ is constituted out of and by difference, and remains contradictory, and that cultural forms are, similarly, . . . never whole, never fully closed or ‘sutured’” (Hall 1996:145). The image of the individual Mother Teresa within the ceremony is constantly reminding the audience(s) of their own role, “for the same things mean, or are made to mean, different things for different people. This is particularly the case when the ‘things’ are shared by the maximum number of people in a given collectivity” (Turner 1975:146). The beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa exemplifies this multiplicity of identities through its pluralistic use of culture (integrating Indian culture into the ritual), its dissemination of the ceremony (broadcast across the world through television), and simply by existing in a multiaccentuated society.

Increasingly the Roman Catholic Church has acknowledged the reality of the global world, where borders and identities are progressively more slippery. Stuart Hall writes, religion “exists historically in a particular formation, anchored very directly in relation to a number of different forces. Nevertheless, it has no necessary, intrinsic, transhistorical, belongingness. Its meaning--political and ideological--comes precisely from its position within a formation” (1996:142). The concept of transnationalism, or globalism, which concerns me here is not that of neo-Imperialistic hegemony, but the

world's witnessing "the undermining of the absolutism of 'the real' of the great discourses of realism, and the familiar realist and rationalistic guarantees, the dominance of certain types of representational form, etc." (Hall 1996:133). As Hall would agree, this has been accomplished through the development of the mass media: Mother Teresa was created as an international symbol because the mass media fell in love with her and she has allowed them to use her image and deeds and to reproduce ideals of love, peace, and humility.

Included in this thesis, alongside the anthropological analysis, is the story and context of the beatification ceremony itself. "The role of context is central in defining the work as a complete, interpretively coherent object" (Hanks 1989:98). It is important to know how and why Mother Teresa became the media "saint" she was, and what the socio-political context is in which the ceremony was enacted. The formulation of the ritual along with these other 'historical' markers help construct the meaning of the ceremony, which in turn is used by those with varying degrees of knowledge about the 'whole picture'. The beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa was an event, a global event, seen by millions who were physically or psychologically present in *Piazza San Pietro* on October 19, 2003. At the time, it was an event, a happening, a chance for me to spend a fine day outdoors people-watching. Soon it turned out to be much more for me, for "it is in 'happenings' that we best see how symbols can be detached from abstracted systems of symbols (Levi-Strauss' 'actors' conscious models') with which they have previously been connected and 'hooked in' to new ad hoc combinations of symbols to constitute legitimate, or undermine programs and protocols for collective action" (Turner 1975:148).

There are a total of seven chapters in this thesis, each examining a specific aspect of the ceremony. It is imperative to start with a contextual basis, and the two chapters following the introduction are provided to do this. Explored within these chapters are the history of saint-making, and of Mother Teresa's life leading up to her apotheosis as a "living saint." A translation of the ceremony and the ritual of beatification based on my experience and upon the program book is also provided so that subsequent reading can be fully understood in context. What you will have before you is as close an approximation as I can give at this time of the words and actions presented within the ceremony itself.

What struck me first about the ceremony were the elements of Indian culture and the presence of the media within the framework of the ceremony. These are examined in chapters three and four. These first four chapters lay the foundation for the theoretical work presented in the last half of this work. Chapters five, six, and seven explore the reality-making of the ceremony through the symbol of Mother Teresa and the struggle that this implies in the realm of the secular and the sacred, as well as the social and the individual spheres. The reality of a pluralistic, multi-accentuated 'world' was ever present in this ceremony, visually interpreted through the mixture of Indian dance and traditional Latin hymns. Within the ceremony were undeniable multiple interpretations and their presence within such a codified, meta-structured, illustration of Church power attests to the power of other, secular forces of deterritorialization and globalism. These issues are examined in chapter seven. This work concludes with a re-examination of the implications of the ceremony in our contemporary world and what this means for the future of the Church's identity and for secular identity.

We must begin by exploring the realm of the before, when Mother Teresa was living her life and when other individuals were being beatified through much different processes than that used by Pope John Paul II for our subject, the venerated “saint of the gutters.”



# P a r t   O n e:

## *Constructing and Representing<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> “As Nelson Goodman warns, narrative comprises an ensemble of ways of constructing and representing the sequential, diachronic order of human events, of which the sequencing of clauses in spoken or written ‘stories’ is only one device” (Bruner 1991:6).

## Chapter One

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### **The Establishment of Continuity: The History of Mother Teresa**

“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.” These words open Mother Teresa’s official biographies on both her Cause for Canonization website and her profile on the Vatican’s official website.<sup>3</sup> She was known by many throughout the world as the “saint of the gutters,” a term bestowed upon her by a media anxious to have an international symbol for peace and for the poor. Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Macedonia on August 26, 1910. In the 1960’s and for the rest of her life, Agnes became an international figure of peace, the poor, and of the worldwide Catholic faith through her globe trotting and the media’s devotion to her.

Browsing through the many biographies and writings on Mother Teresa, it becomes clear that she was a woman and a symbol much revered by citizens throughout the world. Many of the biographies are written in a very personal manner, some are written by those who have met Mother Teresa. Navin Chawla, a Hindu civil servant and personal friend of Mother Teresa, wrote “it was only natural that over the years Mother Teresa and her community of Sisters became a special part of my family life” (1992: xviii). He writes of her simplicity, her absolute devotion to her god, and of her steadfast desire to be surrounded by and to help the poor. There are, in fact, few writings that

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20031019\\_madre-teresa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre-teresa_en.html) [last accessed April 2, 2005] and <http://www.motherteresacause.info/biografia.htm> [last accessed April 2, 2005].

denounce Mother Teresa or that criticize her without hesitant qualifications. In her beatification homily, Pope John Paul II wrote, “Mother Teresa, an icon of the Good Samaritan, went everywhere to serve Christ in the poorest of the poor” (Vazhakala 2003). She has already achieved media sainthood, as exemplified by her titles bearing “saint” in them. The words, (for example *living saint*, *tool of God*) used to describe Mother Teresa immediately begin to shroud her identity in the sentiment and auspice of holy objects and symbols.

Her life began humbly and typically. She was the daughter of hard working parents, a member of the minority group of Albanian Catholics in a country haunted by the crossroads of culture--geographically positioned between the East and the West and militarily dominated by the Ottoman Empire until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her ethnic identity was Albanian, the city of her birth is today a cultural center of Macedonia, but was part of Yugoslavia and, at the time of her birth, was a part of the Ottoman Empire. Currently both countries, Macedonia and Albania, claim her as emblematic of their own area, as will be examined in Chapter Six.

At the age of eighteen, Agnes left her home for Ireland to become one of the Sisters of Loreto. On March 24, 1931 she took her vows as a Sister and adopted the name Teresa from St. Thérèse of Lisieux, deciding to use the Spanish spelling to avoid confusion with another, Sister Marie-Thérèse. St. Thérèse, a French nun who prayed for missionaries and their success had been recently canonized in 1927. Soon Sister Teresa was sent to teach at St. Mary’s School in Calcutta, arriving in India on January 6, 1929 where she became known as “Bengali Teresa” for her study of Bengali. She served for

twenty years at St. Mary's as a teacher and as a principal before receiving her "inspiration" (Chawla 1992:7-8).



Agnes as a novice of the Sisters of Loreto (Sebba 1998)

Most accounts claim she received her Divine Orders on September 10, 1946 while en route to her annual retreat, other accounts state she was sent to Darjeeling to recover from suspected tuberculosis. Regardless of the cause, "it was in the train I heard the call to give up all and follow him [sic] to the slums and serve him [sic] among the poorest of the poor" (Mother Teresa- the Saint of the Gutters 2000). This call to serve God through the poor, however, was tinged with a deep feeling of distress by Mother Teresa. "Hidden from all eyes, hidden even from those closest to her, was her interior life marked by an experience of a deep, painful and abiding feeling of being separated from God, even rejected by Him, along with an ever-increasing longing for His love. She called her inner experience 'the darkness'" (Mother Teresa of Calcutta {1910-1997}, Biography 2003). For this dark mysticism Mother Teresa is hailed by the Church whose Pope at this time was viewed as very traditional. But to others this dark side denotes fanaticism. The connection Mother Teresa has created, between the deep pain she felt and a personal

longing to achieve closeness to Christ through the poor, is one that is consistently minimized by the secular media. However, this link is acknowledged and duly accepted by the Church (as seen in the Pope's Homily during her beatification ceremony and in her official biographies by the Vatican).

Shortly after her "call within a call," Mother Teresa began seeking permission to break from the Sisters of Loreto and begin her own work. With Rome's permission, she began her work, for "Jesus' thirst for love and for souls took hold of her heart and the desire to satiate His thirst became the driving force of her life" (Mother Teresa of Calcutta {1910-1997}, Biography 2003). Mother Teresa took a short course with the Medical Mission Sisters in Patna, and began walking the slums to be with the sick and the poor. On October 7, 1950 the Missionaries of Charity were officially established in the Archdiocese of Calcutta. In 1952 the *Nirmal Hriday* (Pure Heart) Home for Dying Destitutes, where "homeless people--uncared for and unacceptable at other institutions -- were washed, fed and allowed to die with dignity" (Mother Teresa- the Saint of the Gutters 2003) was established. The Missionaries of Charity slowly extended beyond Calcutta to other parts of India and eventually to every continent in the world. Mother Teresa's cause also swelled beyond the Missionaries of Charity into the Missionaries of Charity Brothers (established in 1963), the contemplative branch of the Sisters (1976), the Contemplative Brothers (1979), and the Missionaries of Charity Fathers (1984). She also organized beyond Catholicism forming the "Co-Workers of Mother Teresa and the Sick and Suffering Co-Workers, people of many faiths and nationalities with whom she shared her spirit of prayer, simplicity, and sacrifice and her apostolate of humble works of love" (Mother Teresa of Calcutta {1910-1997}, Biography 2003).

Awards, too, began to surround Mother Teresa, beginning with the Indian Padmashri Award in 1962 and culminating in the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She even received an honorary U.S. citizenship in 1996. She caught the eye of the media in 1969 when Malcom Muggeridge produced “Something Beautiful for God” in 1969 for the BBC, a film centering on Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. A scene in the courtyard of Mother Teresa’s missionary was filmed regardless of poor lighting, but when processed the segment was well lit. Muggeridge claimed it was a miracle; the cameraperson attributed it to new Kodak film. “[M]odern technology and communications have ensured . . . that rumour and myth can be transmitted with ever greater speed and efficiency to the eyes and ears of the credulous” (Hitchens 1995:26). Thus began Mother Teresa’s transformation into an international media symbol of the poor and of peace.

Through and with the media, she used her image as a pass into impoverished countries, through war and famine, and into the hearts of peace-lovers everywhere while her houses remained in relatively the same condition they were when founded: with pallets for beds, and twice-used needles (Hitchens 1995:40). After visiting her home for the poor in Calcutta, Dr. Robin Fox stated: “Mother Teresa prefers providence to planning; her rules are designed to prevent any drift towards materialism: the sisters must remain on equal terms with the poor . . . . Along with the neglect of diagnosis, the lack of good analgesia marks Mother Teresa’s approach as clearly separate from [the] hospice movement” (Hitchens 1995:38-9). While she has never denied this reality, others (especially the media, the Church, and the general public) have chosen to ignore it. Her

missions and houses are not hospitals, nor even adequately equipped hospices. They are Houses of the Dying.

She gathered these outcasts around her, however, with a specific purpose: she saw Christ and His suffering embodied especially in the poor and the dying, the abandoned, and the forgotten. Because they had taken “a vow of poverty, not efficiency” (Woodward 2003), the nuns were not allowed to shop in bulk, nor were they allowed to accept new or efficient technology in their houses for the poor. They were ordered to “live like the poor they served” (Woodward 2003).

Christopher Hitchens, a columnist for *Vanity Fair* and author of *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Life and Practice*, is one of the few critics of this media star of the Church (in fact Hitchens is almost always the only named critic of Mother Teresa). In this exposé of the complicated life and actions of the “global icon of sainthood,” one of the very few critical examinations available Hitchens compels his readers to judge “Mother Teresa’s reputation by her actions and words rather than the actions and words by her reputation” (Loudon 1996). He deplores her for what he claims is her use of the image of the poor and the destitute for personal gain and professional fame for the Catholic Church, and her arbitrary political activism, and anti-abortion stance in countries both rich and poor.

Whether or not one agrees with Hitchens, Mother Teresa’s actions cannot go without scrutiny. She has knowingly accepted money from embezzlers such as Charles Keating and “corrupt tyrants” such as Jean-Claude Duvalier (deposed leader of Haiti). She has claimed political neutrality but has spoken against abortion and divorce on behalf of various political organizations and accepted money without question from corrupt

governments (Hitchens 1996; Woodward 2003). The council coordinated to research the life of Mother Teresa for the cause of canonization concluded that “Mother Teresa--like Jesus dining with Roman tax collectors--was willing to work with the morally corrupt if that meant they would do something for the poor that would be of spiritual benefit to themselves, too. As for her failure to take a more aggressive stance against institutionalized injustice, the team . . . argued that her mission was to help individuals, not fight for social change” (Woodward 2003). This theory grates against the popular conception of her as a leader of peace movements.

It becomes apparent when examining and cross-examining Mother Teresa’s life that she was an individual who operated in many different contexts and through many different identities. She was a nun, she was a Catholic, she was a media star, she was a proponent of the poor, of peace. Almost every one in the world can identify with some aspect of Mother Teresa’s life. She allowed the media to use her image as it deemed fit, rarely discouraging its representation of her image and her mission. She also allowed the Church to use her image and it is *this* use, as witnessed during her beatification, that interests me. Like Mother Teresa, the beatification ceremony seems opaque at first, a simple ceremony venerating a symbol of the Church and its message. But upon closer inspection the ceremony becomes transparent in certain places, revealing an underlying structure and message that suggests a power struggle over the symbol of Mother Teresa. These gaps reveal the Church’s acknowledgement of and desire to partially control the growing multiplicity of the global world that relate direction to the Church through their faithful. They also show a new Catholic reality emerging within the ceremony.



## Chapter Two

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### **Representing Reality:<sup>4</sup> The History of Saintmaking and the Outline of Ceremony**

#### *The History of the Church and Saintmaking*

One of the most powerful tools of Christianity has been the continuity of “culture” established through its representatives: the saints. Christianity has created what can be considered a tradition which assures legitimacy through historical continuity (Bruner 1991:20). The first saints were martyrs, those who died like Jesus Christ and suffered greatly for it. These individuals were often also confessors and, by their confessional act (confessing to be a Christian) and subsequent death or pain, they became holy: “to be a saint, then, was to die not only for Christ but like him. Or, . . . to be a saint was to have the story of one’s death remembered and told as the story of Jesus” (Woodward 1990:53). And one of the functions of narrativity is to present historical events as an ordered (moral) structure (White 1987:14). Thus, Christians have relived Christ’s death and suffering through real human beings (the individuals the Church has made saints) that stretches into the present. The Church creates this narrative and identity through rituals, and it is ritual and ceremony this thesis is concerned with. Roy Rappaport writes, in “Ritual,” that “Being directly felt emotionally and physically as well as cognitively, [rituals] seem always to be powerfully convincing--not merely as accepted

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<sup>4</sup> “Interest in the social system, which is nothing other than a system of human relationships governed by law, creates the possibility of conceiving the kinds of tensions, conflicts, struggles, and their various kinds of resolutions that we are accustomed to find in any representation of reality presenting itself to us as a history” (White 1987:14).

formally or represented as certain but experienced as absolutely undeniable” (1992:258-259). Through the power of ritual, Mother Teresa’s beatification, and her holiness, becomes religio- and socio-historical fact, regardless of media or research opinion.

The creation of saints has been politically and socially charged since its inception and it is important to understand its evolution through these centuries. As context is one of the most important features to understand the meaning of an event, it is important to investigate the historical and symbolic evolution of saint-making as it enriches the importance of the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa. As form of pagan ancestor worship, the practice of venerating a tomb was widespread in pre-Christian Rome and converted Romans continued this worship after Rome was Christianized. The practice of sanctifying local individuals within the tradition of Christianity was widespread and fundamental long before 767 A.D., when the Council of Nicaea decreed that altars must contain the relics of a saint; the Code of Canon Law defines an altar as a ‘tomb containing the relics of a saint’” (Woodward 1990:59). During this era, the saints’ power lay with their reputations for martyrdom, their legendary lives as exemplars of heroic virtue, and their ability to produce miracles (especially posthumously) (Woodward 1990:62). The cult of the saints, as a practice of ancestor worship retranslated through Christianity, “brought the dead to life, breathed life into legend, and provided every community of Christians with their own heavenly patrons” (Woodward 1990:60). During this time, however, saints and their making was still a local and cult event.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the Popes in Avignon, canonization became subject to law: only the papally recognized, officially canonized were saints, the locally venerated were called “blessed” (Woodward 1990:68). The Church in Rome did this in order to

consolidate its power through the determination of sanctity. “In general, they favored Servants of God who embraced radical forms of poverty, chastity, and obedience--paths of renunciation which distinguished the ‘religious’ life from that of the laity” (Woodward 1990:70). This type of veneration epitomizes the life of Mother Teresa and the words most used to describe her, thus underscoring the importance of her connection with more archaic and traditional views of Catholicism. Further consolidation of power occurred during the pontificate of Urban VIII (1623-1644), when the papacy gained complete control over making saints (Woodward 1990:75).

Issues of how to research the lives of the saints, and a more recently salient issue--what constitutes a miracle--have continually plagued the various stages of saint-making and its officiators. In the last century the process saw a shift of research into academic traditions of research and the process split between two competing theories of saint-making.

The juridical mentality tended to seek similarities among the saints, to work off expected patterns of behavior, to fit fresh candidates for sainthood into the mold of precedent. The historical mentality, on the other hand, was honed on limits. In this perspective, saints were individuals responding by grace to the particular challenges of time and place. They were, in the depths of the Spirit, wholly new creations, initiators in the life of faith, hope, and charity, traditional in the--best--sense that they reinterpreted the meaning of Christ in their own age (Woodward 1990:95).

The Church has experienced the same turmoil of identity that many other groups have experienced in the age of Industrial change and nationalistic expansion. Especially after the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) the laity’s perceptions about acceptable role models were changing. In the Vatican II Council, the Church began to address these reaccentualities of faith, these “breaches” of canonicity, in its narrative structure (Turner

1975; White 1987). Through the symbol of Mother Teresa we see another acknowledgment of breach and reintegration in the Church. As Turner notes, “Symbols are seen as instrumentalities of various forces--physical, moral, economic, political, and so on--operating in isolable, changing fields of social relationships” (1975:145). Turner’s stages of “social dramas” will be applied to this context of the beatification ceremony in Chapter Five.

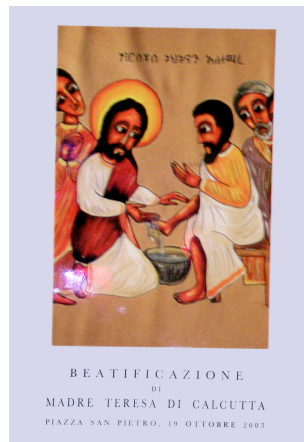
The Second Vatican Council, opened by Pope John XXIII in 1962 and officially closed by Pope Paul VI in 1965, continues to send ideological tremors throughout the Catholic world. “*Ecclesia semper reformanda*, constant renewal of the church in life and teaching according to the gospel, was now the official Catholic view” (Küng 2003:183). It is a postmodern concept, one of constant renewal, and it was followed by a postulated commitment to adapt “to national and local conditions by an emphasis on the local church and the national conferences of bishops” (Küng 2003:183). Freedom of religion and human rights were advanced as major agendas for the Church; these issues have not been addressed as the Second Vatican Council would have hoped. “In Rome and in other areas of the church, personalities still held the reigns of power who showed more interest in preserving that power and the convenient status quo than in serious renewal in the spirit of the gospel and collegiality” (Küng 2003:188).

With the inception of John Paul II’s papacy, the Church saw a new resurgence in traditionalism and reevangelization. Through the symbol of Mother Teresa, there was a seamless blend of the old traditionalist views of a saint and the new Vatican II ideals of human rights. Mother Teresa embodied the “saints of the ordinary” that the Second Vatican Council so espoused (Peter Gumpel in Woodward 1990:105-106). However, she

also cried out against borders, nationalities, and religions, stating that everyone is the same in the eyes of God. She did not serve only Christians, she served all, the “poorest of the poor” (Petrie 1997). Yet, at the same time, she also embodied a mystical “suffering”--of the longing for Christ, a very traditional concept of those worthy of sainthood. Mother Teresa also surrendered her European heritage and chose to represent and be represented by India. The Polish Pope John Paul II was similar to Mother Teresa in terms of heritage and regional identity. K ung writes, “And when he travels, he likes to present new blessed to the local churches, especially to the relatively new churches of Africa and Asia. In this way John Paul II uses the beatification of local figures to bond these young and culturally diverse communities of Catholics to the church universal--and of course to the Holy Father in Rome” (2003:116). Mother Teresa presented herself as an example of the universal principles of Christianity at work in the marginalized spaces in the world. She challenged borders, but she was simultaneously very traditional. Both she and Pope John Paul II had extensively campaigned against abortion and, some would say, women’s rights in general. “This pope has waged an almost spooky battle against modern women who seek a contemporary form of life, prohibiting birth control and abortion (even in the case of incest or rape), divorce, the ordination of women, the modernization of women’s religious orders” (K ung 2003:194). Mother Teresa’s views on abortion never changed; even in her response to systematic rape of 450,000 Hindu women during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, she publicly asserted her rejection of abortion (Mother Teresa 2005).

Mother Teresa offered the Church an opportunity to utilize her dual identities: that of postmodern reality (a *multinational, borderless* woman doing charity for the poor), and

that of an established ideal (humble, mystical, traditional women's roles representative of the Church). However, Mother Teresa has only been beatified, and as such "beatification is no warrant to the faithful that the blessed they are now permitted to venerate is, for certain, with God in heaven" (Woodward 1990:121). For this reason, another miracle must be proven, and when this is done (since the Pope's word is considered God's word) her position becomes intractable. God does not make mistakes. This very large detail mediates the organization and the implementation of the beatification ceremony as a stage of saint-making, not the end of the process. Mother Teresa as a Blessed is a liminal symbol. Officially she is only to be venerated in Calcutta (Woodward 1990). It is important to note these details, and what follows is an outline of the ceremony as based primarily on the program book given to all who attended the ceremony, and secondarily on my own observations.



Program book of beatification ceremony (Author's photo).

### *The Ceremony*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The following is presented mostly in present-tense voice because most of this ceremony is based on the written word of the program book. Each time it is read, it is invoked, enacted again, knowingly or unknowingly by the reader. As such it is fixed in time and present tense. The performance of the ceremony occurred on Sunday October 19, 2003 and is a part of the past.

The ceremony began with several small speeches, excerpted from quotes and speeches made by Mother Teresa in her lifetime given by clergy from around the world. Numerous languages were spoken, including English. In the program book, only a biography was presented in the first section: *Profilo Biografico della Serva di Dio* (Biographical Profile of the Servant of God); the introductory speeches I viewed were left out of the printed version of the ceremony. The major themes of Mother Teresa's message, strong family values, her pro-life stance, and, of course, her care for the poorest of the poor regardless of religion or country, were again emphasized by the speakers. After reading a biography of Mother Teresa and making these small speeches, an introductory hymn (*Tutta la Terra Canti a Dio*) was sung and thus began the opening ceremony for the beatification of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. "Today, World-Wide Missionary Day, the entire Church is invited to deepen and reaffirm its . . . deepest identity, its specific vocation of being placed and sent into the world to bear witness to God's project for humanity" (Milner 2005:40).

Not only is the ceremony presented in the program book codified very formulaically, including hymns, prayers, and chants, but it is also presented in multiple languages. However, most of the ceremony and the ritual is conducted in either Italian or in Latin. The Eucharist and the rite of beatification are both solely conducted in Latin with a parallel translation in Italian. Most of Mother Teresa's words, however, are in English. Her biography as presented in the program book is written in five languages: Italian, English, Spanish, French, and Albanian. As many as nine languages (excluding Latin) are printed in the program book. The rest of the book is peppered with multilingual passages that do not necessarily follow a coherent pattern for interpretation.

The call to charity and proselytizing are the main themes of the ceremony, and of the Church, according to the performance's spoken/written words: "Vatican Council II, in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium*, underscores that the universal vocation to holiness consists of the call, in everyone, to the perfection of charity" (Milner 2005:40). After this general introduction focusing on the importance of missionary work and charity, *I Cieli Narrano*, a *canto* (hymn), signals to the audience and the participants that another stage of preparation for Mother Teresa is about to begin.

In this second section, *Preparazione alla Celebrazione* (Preparation for the Celebration), Mother Teresa is compared to Jesus in four different ways through the examples of her life and deeds. She is first "Sent (forth) like Jesus," and the Pope discusses her dissemination of "the Way, the Truth and the Life" through "the development of means of communication" (alluding to mass media) (Milner 2005:43). Each of these sections includes words "*from the exhortations of Mother Teresa*" so that through her own words, she posthumously proves her worthiness of beatification by being similar to Christ. Each of these sections ends with Mother Teresa's words (in English). The second section is entitled "It is no longer that I live; Christ lives in me"; the third is 'Seeing Jesus in the Poor;' and the last section is, 'Sent to Bring Peace' (Milner 2005:46-53). Each section has a short message from the Pope in it, usually not mentioning Mother Teresa specifically, but highlighting how Jesus provided examples for her behavior. The tableau of the virtues of the "Venerable Servant of God," as Mother Teresa is called throughout most of the ceremony, ends with a hymn ("High and Glorious God") and a prayer. This section therefore establishes the continuity of narrative of the Church from Jesus Christ's actions through those worthy of Veneration



and possible Sainthood. The conclusion itself is in English. As can be deduced by the patterns of language use, this conclusion is composed of Mother Teresa's own words. She speaks of joy, "Joy is a net of love by which we catch souls--because we are full of joy everyone likes us and wants to be in our company to receive the light of Christ" (Tipografia Vaticana 2003:55).

The third section is the *Celebrazione dell'Eucarista* (Celebration of the Eucharist). It is within this ceremony that the beatification ritual for Mother Teresa occurs. It begins with introductory rites, a hymn is sung while "the Holy Father and the fellow Celebrants make their way to the Altar" (Milner 2005:63). The fellow Celebrants foregrounded in this section of the rite include the Archbishop of Calcutta, Monsignor Lucas Sirkar who makes the official petition for Mother Teresa to be given the title of Blessed. It is in his diocese that she will officially be allowed to be venerated, and this is one of the formulas that solidifies the admittance of locality in the Catholic Church.

The "speech" presented in this section is very formulaic and not like the others before. It (originally spoken in Italian) begins:

Brothers and sisters,  
even in our days God brought about new models of holiness.  
Some impose themselves by their radicalness,  
like that offered by Mother Teresa of Calcutta,  
who today we number among the Blessed.  
In her we see the urgency  
of putting ourselves in a posture of service,  
especially towards those who are poor and forgotten,  
the last among the last.  
She also indicates that from holiness comes the capacity  
to announce and testify Christ, without conditions.

Milner 2005:65

After this introduction of the “penitential act” invocations are raised, through the participation of the “congregation” (the audience), and the Holy Father ends with “All powerful Lord have mercy on us, forgive our sins and lead us into life eternal” (Milner 2005:67). All are assumed to say “amen,” and the *Rito della Beatificazione* (Rite of Beatification) is initiated by the Archbishop of Calcutta: “Most Holy Father, the Archbishop of Calcutta humbly asks your Holiness to number among the Beatified the Venerable Servant of God Teresa of Calcutta” (Milner 2005:72). The formula itself is simple and straightforward.

We, sharing the desire of Our Brother Lucas Sirkar, Archbishop of Calcutta, and of many other Brother in the Episcopate and of many faithful, after having had the opinion of the Congregation of the Causes of the Saints, with Our Apostolic Authority concede that the Venerable Servant of God Teresa of Calcutta from now on be called Blessed and that her celebration may be carried out in the places and according to the rules established by the right, every year, on the day of her birth (in)to the heavens, the 5<sup>th</sup> of September. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Congregation:] Amen. Amen. Amen (Milner 2005:72).

The new relics of the Blessed are placed next to the altar and the choir sings “Glory and praise to you, o Lord: in the home of the Saints, crowned in glory and in honor, shines your Servant Teresa and she intercedes for us” (Milner 2005:73). The “Gloria in excelsis” is sung by all present to acclaim “God and Christ in the Lord,” as the Offertory Hymn. From this point on, the ceremony follows the typical organization of a Eucharist, but it also incorporates the bulk of the languages shifts in what follows. Readings from the book of the prophet Isaiah and from the letter to the Hebrews, are included, the first in English, the second in Spanish.

This was the first ceremony at which Pope John Paul II was unable to read the Homily. His words at the reading became their own language, merging into one another, creating new sounds; his spoken Latin was barely comprehensible. An attendant finished the Homily, and read for him from this point on in the ceremony. The beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa marked the end of the Pope's days-long celebration of twenty five years of service, but it also marked the first public display of his frailty and declining health.<sup>6</sup> The crowd explicitly showed support for Pope John Paul II, clapping for him at every pause. Shouts of "*Vive il papa!*" could be heard from various persons in the congregation of the faithful, illustrating the support this Pope had gained throughout the world by his globe-trotting conduct.

"Let us draw near to the throne of grace," begins the Prayer of the Faithful (Milner 2005:88). These words end the codified multinationalism within the program book that began with the biography of Mother Teresa. After the initial Prayer, (to have been said by the Pope), it continues in French, Arabic, Bengali, Albanian, Macedonian, and finishes in Russian. Each section, covering thematically specific material, is in a different language. The subject matter includes Pope John Paul II's service to the Church, the importance of service to those in need, Mother Teresa's contribution (this section is in Bengali), individual nations' service, a plea for the growth of Christianity in general, and a plea specifically to Mary for peace across the world. The Holy Father finally ends this part of the ceremony with a final prayer to the Father (God).

The ceremony once again turns back to formula: communion is held, the story of the Mystery of Faith is told, the Lord's Prayer is spoken, and finally the Rite of Peace, the

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease several years prior to this ceremony. The beatification ceremony marked the decline of the Pope's health until his death on April 2, 2005.

handshake and goodwill given to others of the faith, is spread among the congregation. A general feeling of unity and well-being among the participants in the ceremony, whether they felt like members of a congregation or a community coming together to celebrate peace, reverberated at this point in the ceremony, and many looked to the newly unveiled image of Mother Teresa towering above the entrance to St. Peter's with tears in their eyes. The beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa has been placed within a typical church service, though one that served millions of people simultaneously across the world. "Liturgical performance establishes conventions--understandings, rules, norms, in accordance with which behavior is supposed to proceed; it does not control that behavior directly" (Rappaport 1992:254).

The underlying messages presented within this ceremony accentuated the importance of multiplicity (present in the visual and aural elements of Indian dance and dress and in the codified written words of nine different languages). It accentuated the role of technology in the dissemination of the knowledge and participation in the ceremony. Finally, it highlighted the personal realities that blended to help create a new Catholic reality with Mother Teresa as a Blessed. The elements intersected within this "typical" ceremony to make it a very atypical representation of Catholic belief, act, and power and they emphasized its juncture with the rest of the world. "Ritual, political, jural, and 'kinship' symbols should be considered not as constituents, essential parts, of some abstract, atemporal complex, but rather as dynamic systems of signifiers, signified, and changing modes of signification in temporal sociocultural processes" (Turner 1975:149). These elements of the ceremony each exemplify the interactions of individuals and their cultures with one another in a global context through the use of a single symbol. The

symbol of Mother Teresa, albeit complex, operates as a focal point for many ideologies and individuals which often come into conflict with one another.

## Chapter Three

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### **Discourse of Desire:<sup>7</sup> The Indian in the Beatification Ceremony**

Under a cloudless blue sky on that crisp October morning, the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa began. Since I had no expectations of what to look forward to from the ceremony, the Catholic representatives reading the words of Mother Teresa and their anticipated messages about abortion and family values seemed appropriate. However, neither European culture nor Catholic tradition were systematically always the highlights of the ceremony. There were colors and movement, voices and song which merged with the audience, the performers, and the music that into did not correspond to my conception of a Catholic ceremony. Not only were the rainbowed *PACE* (peace) flags being displayed throughout the *piazza*, but members of the clergy and sacred organizations from across the world filtered through the crowds, displaying the colors and designs of regionalism. “Local pride movements throughout the world, even those with separatist political intentions, highlight language and cultural differences not in order to close off the community’s borders but to give the community a more powerful position in the national polity or the world of nations” (Abrahams 1981:308). Symbols of organizations, nations, regions, and individuals were waved supportively toward the speakers.

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<sup>7</sup> “What I have sought to suggest is that this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display a coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (White 1987:24).

The nuns of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity were obvious examples of this increasingly pervasive multiplicity of identities, in their white sari-habits with blue striped accents. Most of them sat in the seats of honor, next to dignitaries, political leaders, and magenta-robed cardinals. There were few pale, European, faces among that group. Several of the clergy that were dispersed in the audience also depicted backgrounds that were not essentially European. Much of this crowd were assembled because of religious duty and honor, unlike myself--there because of an idle interest in Mother Teresa, peace, and something to do on a warm afternoon in Rome. Many had flown several thousands miles from around the world, probably representing every continent, to be in this *piazza*; thousands of unseen people crowded *Via della Conciliazione*, no doubt depicting many facets of the changing global social structure, like those fortunate enough to be in St. Peter's.

I should not have been surprised by the multiplicity of human faces and individualism featured at the beatification ceremony: Mother Teresa had proselytized and organized her missionaries in India, one of the Eastern regions of Asia that most epitomized Europe's Orientalist presumptions. "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 2000:68). Presented in this ceremony in Rome, the heart of the West and Catholicism, were public, popular examples of the interplay between East and West, their regional identities not completely subsumed by the force of the Church. The multivocalities of the participants and audience were physical reminders of the increasingly global identity of humanity and of the Roman Catholic Church.

The audience gathered for Mother Teresa and for the ceremony, made up of so many cultures, was not as novel or as unexpected as another feature of the ceremony. Soon another permeation of the East revealed itself in the rhythmic sounds of sitar music and Indian singing. The clear, harmonious picking of the sitar and delicate warble of the voices vibrated across the breadth of the *piazza* encircled by the white travertine statues of ancient (mostly European) saints. What I later learned to be translated hymns, were being sung in an Indian language while young Indian women in colorful orange, white, and green saris danced and offered incense to the altar established next to Pope John Paul II. The Church, within its own established boundaries, had encompassed some of the most powerful examples of Europe (and the West's) established Other (India) within a prominent ceremony exemplifying the faith and the reality of the Church.



Indian women dance at the beatification ceremony (Sisters of St. Paul 2003).

As Europe becomes more secular, the Church has realized the power and importance of its outlying congregations in areas that are socially and culturally very different from the structure of the Vatican and Western Roman Catholicism. These frontiers have provided the Church in Rome with fervent supporters but they have also explicitly and subversively challenged the Church's concept of identity and unity. The ceremony incorporates and recognizes global cultural forces because the laity have forced



it to do so by their displays of locality. The Church has acquiesced to this new reality and has recognized its use of this reality: each group is exerting its cultural power and influence to change the other with global results.

Within the context of the beatification ceremony, Edward Said's statement, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (2000:68) takes on another dimension of meaning. The Other is no longer fully juxtaposed to but rather partially encompassed as a Catholic "Us" through this ceremony in Rome. The international acclaim and symbolism of Mother Teresa and of the poor she helped (situated very visibly in *Calcutta*), mandated acknowledgment of the Indian element of culture and identity in Mother Teresa and her deeds. The politically and culturally powerful symbolism of Indian Other appropriated by Mother Teresa and the Church undoubtedly strengthened the ability of her cause to achieve international acclaim and for her to become such an exemplary media figure for conservative Catholicism. It offered the Church an opportunity to bridge East and West symbolically, which they did in the beatification ceremony with Mother Teresa. Victor Turner writes in *Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors*, "Religious and legal institutions, among others, only cease to be bundles of dead or cold rules when they are seen as phases in social processes, as dynamic patterns right from the start" (1974:37). The act of integrating Indian dance, dancers, and music into the ceremony of the beatification acknowledged the multiplicity of identities within Christianity, but it also served to "update" the Church for a global audience (most especially, the Church's faithful in non-Western countries).

This incorporation of another perspective (Indian) has served to decenter and recontextualize the performance of the beatification ceremony because it has incorporated other identities and symbols into its performance, setting it apart from other beatifications in the past. In “Poetics and Performances as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life”. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs write, “Because the process is transformational, we must now determine what the recontextualized text brings with it from its earlier context(s) and what emergent form, and meaning it is given as it is recentered” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:75). The expression of identity and belief within a single culture can never be absolutely defined in performances, even strictly regulated ones such as the beatification ceremony, because of the roles of context and audience. “Poetic patterning [performance] extracts discourse from particular speech events and explores its relationship to a diversity of social settings . . . gender and social class [and ethnicity] frequently generate competing perspectives on language and social life” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:61). In the context of the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa nationality, language, and ritual knowledge all combine to change the structure and the outcome of the ceremony, ultimately creating not only an “emergent form” of ritual (Bauman and Briggs 1990) but arguably, a new reality different from any other created through other beatification ceremonies.

The conflict of identity has been a major theme of Mother Teresa’s symbolic life; while she herself is “Eastern” (but not “Oriental”) in terms of European culture (she is ethnically Albanian), she has placed herself in the Oriental East: India. It would be almost impossible for Rome not to acknowledge the historical power and cultural influence of India in the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa. India and Rome, the

East and the West, have been struggling over identity since Christianity took hold in India and Rome became Christian centuries ago. In the 1970s, after the Vatican II Council, a dialogue was established over the problem of Christianity. In India, “along with the gospel message, there came the veneer of a culture that tore the new converts from their roots, giving them new names, new habits and customs, even new languages” (Aguiar 1991:377). After years of struggle, Indian priests developed their own Indian Rite Mass incorporating into the ceremony an ambivalent mixture of Indian culture and other religions such as Hinduism. A package of twelve points in the Indian Rite Mass, including replacing ‘Amen’ with ‘Om’, were accepted by Rome as culturally relevant and as such, non-threatening to the Catholic faith if practiced by Christian Indians.

“Theology, [the Indian Theological Association and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians say], arises from a genuine encounter with God in the actual situation of human suffering” (Aguiar 1991:383). Rome, ignorant of the vibrant cultural uniqueness of Indian identity, often propagated traditional Western values, which represented to the Catholic Indians hegemony, colonialism, and capitalism (Aguiar 1991:383). Therefore, in the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa (whose persona and mission was created around the image of the dying Indian) it would be politically perilous for Rome not to acknowledge the culture of India.

Indeed, this beatification ceremony was not only one of the most widely viewed ceremonies in the history of the Church, but was also a unique example of how the world is influencing the Church and how the Church in *Rome* is reacting to this change, incorporating a new conceptualization of multi-ethnic identity into one of the cornerstone concepts of the faith: saints and their identities as sacred role-makers. Most of the

ceremony was recognizably Western and Christian, but weaving Indian elements of culture within this ceremony changed its message to a more culturally encompassing one. In the transnational reality of identity making, Mother Teresa as an individual refused a single identity and refused to be from either the East or the West. She illustrated that, “there is no Other but multitudes of others who are all others for different reasons, in spite of totalizing narratives” (Trouillot 1991:39). This perhaps shows the Church’s compliance to the pervasiveness and power of globalization and the reality that this ceremony will not only be experienced by those in the physical locality of Rome, but simultaneously by the interested all over the world.

In the twentieth century, along with the incorporation of other cultures into the world of Catholicism, the Vatican has become a media savvy entity, competing for visibility and power with the secular world. Especially after the Vatican II Council, the Church has acknowledged and incorporated the power of the secular world into its schema. “Performances move the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically . . .” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:60). The attention paid to the power of the media is especially exemplified by the stardom of Mother Teresa (to be examined in depth in the next chapter). Globalization has visibly effected the Church and how it operates. Like the other structures of power in the world, the Roman Catholic Church has experienced the trends of globalization which fragment identities and construct hybrid identities. As indicated by the Indianness of the beatification ceremony, the Church is beginning to embrace these hybrid identities by utilizing the indigenous song and dance as officially acceptable communication in a visibly global event. By

incorporating hybrid identities into its ritual and ceremony, the Church simultaneously fits these new constructs into a Western/Christian context, exerting power over these elements to be used in the future for the goals of the Church. The Indian performance features presented in this ceremony are both inclusively and hegemonically inspired.

## Chapter Four

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### Translating Knowing into Telling:<sup>8</sup> Media and the Church

*Sunday October 19, 2003:*

St. Peter's square is filled with currents of movement: jumping, shouting, milling around--all forms of movement are visible between shoulders and over heads, as people move between me and the temporary altar where Pope John Paul II, a small figure in white, sits. It is like a mega-performance, an auditorium music show or a speech made by a politician. There are huge television screens placed at specific intervals within the *piazza* and along *Via della Conciliazione*. The screens not only make the ceremony's details visible to the assembled audience in the *piazza*, but they widen the audience to the boulevard leading to the *piazza* and allow the rest of the world to watch the ceremony from their own homes, their local churches, or the many missions established by Mother Teresa across the world. Televising the event establishes another context, another stage, for the ceremony to be performed on. Cameras are stationed at various points in the *piazza*, among the stuated columns establishing its parameters: in the crowd--next to the Pope. There is a gigantic boom with a camera attached, dramatically sweeping across the audience. It is next to the Egyptian obelisk in the center of the *piazza*, competing for the centered position.

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<sup>8</sup> "Far from being a problem, then narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate knowing into telling" (White 1987:1).



The boom camera pans around the audience (Author's photo).

The colors on these screens are vivid, the image of a speaker interrupted only to show the faces of the bishops, the other Missionaries of Charity, or a single weeping face in the crowd. Details of garb, shuffling of notes, a unique face, all are accessible to me through the screens. By the presence of the cameras I am simultaneously a viewer and a participant regardless of my personal choice. I look to the screens when I cannot see what is going on hundreds of feet in front of me, as is often the case. Others do the same, and many actually set up their chairs or move their bodies so that they are exclusively observing the screen, not the event as it is taking place before them, in so-called real-time. What has previously been a relatively direct ceremony becomes dramatized in the sweep of the camera, the close-up of a statue or the aerial view of the crowd. We watch ourselves just as much as we watch the ceremony.



Audience members watch the ceremony and themselves on screen (Author's photo).

Since the Vatican II Council, the Church has realized and accepted the power of the media, very successfully incorporating it into its mode of communication to the secular and faithful worlds. The press office of the Vatican was established on April 18, 1961 (Heston 1967:26) to acknowledge the necessity of the official Vatican perspective on Church issues that can compete with secular news and popular opinion. Edward Heston writes, “It is no exaggeration that the contribution of the press to the Second Vatican Council was invaluable and even indispensable for the proper dissemination of news from the Council Hall. The world assuredly would not have maintained its consistently kept interest over such a protracted period of time had it not been kept carefully informed on a day-to-day basis” (1967:98). The emergence of the Vatican II ideals was a paradigm shift that reverberates decades later in the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa. While not all of its ideals are followed (Pope John Paul II was unabashedly a conservative and a traditionalist) the importance of the press and the Church’s public (secular) image, as demonstrated by the press surrounding the Vatican II, has been consistently remembered.



[Pope John Paul II] is a man with charisma, who in an impressive way, with an impressive gift for publicity, can satisfy the longing of the masses for a morally trustworthy model of the kind that has become so rare in contemporary society. Amazingly rapidly he has become a media superstar, and for many people in the Catholic Church to begin with he is a kind of living cult figure (Küng 2003:190).

Using the media, Pope John Paul II set about to re-Catholicize the Church and its laity in the wake of the liberalism and acceptance of plurality envisioned by Vatican II (Küng 2003:192). This Pope realized, however, that the secular world has entered into a new phase of existence. By incorporating television into the dissemination of the beatification ceremony, the Church is recognizing the increasing ability of individuals to autonomously imagine their realities through such internationally inclusive media as television and the internet. “For the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media” (Appadurai 1991:199). Mass media plays a decisive role in the deterritorialization and the distinction of hybrid identities, religions, and cultures. Stuart Hall writes, “Ever since the development of modern mass media, and their introduction on a mass scale into cultural production, and their impact on the audiences for cultural products, we have witnessed the undermining of the absolutism of ‘the real’ of the great discourses of realism,” (1996:133).

The visibility and the appearance of Mother Teresa in the media served to create an international and secular symbol of the Roman Catholic Church, of the poor, of piety, and humility through a single stooped nun. Since she first appeared in “Something Beautiful for God” (Muggeridge 1969) she became a moral superstar. Both Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa realized the power of the media and utilized this power to further their own ecumenical agenda. “She is, finally, the emissary of a very determined

and very politicized papacy. Her world travels are not the wanderings of a pilgrim but a campaign which accords with the requirements of power” (Hitchens 1995:14). Mother Teresa is simultaneously imagined as an “emblem for the Catholic Church” and an “icon of the good Samaritan” (Poggioli 2003), a symbolic mediator between the secular and the sacred worlds.

The beatification ceremony used media to further fuse Mother Teresa’s posthumous image into the construct of the Church. The Church has realized that the reality of this ceremony will not only be experienced by those within earshot of the Pope and the speakers, but that it will also be experienced by viewers from around the world, in varying capacities, and the Church exploits this through the incorporation of filming and simultaneous broadcasting. The ceremonies performed by the Vatican have been embraced as global events by the Church, evolving from ritual toward the postmodern mega-genre of spectacle. Spectacle, according to Frank E. Manning, occurs when “visual codes generally have surpassed oral-aural codes in both aesthetic and epistemological importance, a process that probably originated in literacy and has been accelerated by film, T.V., and other visually oriented modern media” (1992:297).

Secular newspapers, radio, and news channels reported on the beatification ceremony as a piece of intellectually stimulating and culturally relevant material; pilgrims from around the world returned home with their own version, but, quite probably, the families they returned to had already seen the “official” version on television. Because of modern technology’s ability to spread an event across the globe as it occurs, the Church has realized its audience is no longer confined by the statues of St. Peter’s, nor even the surrounding streets of Rome that encircle the Vatican.

“Communication is dialogic, polyphonic, and polythematic. Spectacle is a phantasmagoric presentation of a phantasmagoric phenomenon--the modern world’s pluralistic fragmentation . . .[It] encompasses and frames [other genres], situating them in a wider and more general communicative context” (Manning 1992:298-299). The ceremony did this by its use of television broadcasting and allowing vendors to create cheap souvenirs for visitors to take home with them in remembrance.

Mother Teresa as a Blessed has certainly not escaped the attention of the internet either. Her cause for canonization, an official process any beatified must be submitted to before being made a saint, is online at [www.mothersacause.info](http://www.mothersacause.info). On this page one can view her biography and the Homily of His Holiness John Paul II spoken at the beatification ceremony, read and memorize her prayer for canonization in hopes of receiving a miracle, and see her favorite prayers and quotes. On the “links” page there is a site where posters commemorating the beatification ceremony are available for sale, much like a promotional posters of music artists or actresses.



One of the official posters of the beatification ceremony (Missionaries of Charity 2003).

The internet, and the Cause for Canonization website, serves to diffuse the hegemonic control of the Church by offering this information to people outside of the construct of the Church, and opening the process of Canonization to those all over the world, not just residents of Calcutta.

Mother Teresa (as an individual and as a symbol) is ambiguous, reflecting the fragmentation of identity that many experience in today's world. As her television reputation spread (Hitchens 1995:62), she received a long list of secular awards. She was honored with the JFK award in October 1971, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization's medal was adorned with her image in the "Food for All: Holy Year 1975," and she received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1979 (Hitchens 1995:62-63). She is a symbol of peace, as the waving *PACE* flags in St. Peter's announce, she is a symbol of love and humility, a symbol of the poor. She is also a very politicized symbol of an anti-feminist, fundamentalist version of Catholicism (the same version which Pope John Paul II fully supported). Together they (Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II) represent a religious backlash against hard-won women's rights. Mother Teresa stated that "abortion is the 'greatest destroyer of peace'" when receiving the Nobel Peace Prize (Hitchens 2003:1).

Regardless of one's opinion of Mother Teresa as a nun or as an individual, it is undeniable that she has been treated like any other non-entertainment media star. Her image has been assimilated into the iconography of popular culture, and most everyone knows her name and the characterization associated with it. She is already a 'saint' in terms of the media and the secular world. Her image carries a tremendous amount of political and public weight, the media's use of her cannot be ignored by the Church and

their desires to wield the power of her image. Her name, her face, and her ambiguous cause have been mythologized in the popular mind; Mother Teresa is not purely a symbol of the Church, but of poverty, humility, and peace in the secular world.

Regardless of her now official status as Blessed, through the efforts of the secular media, Mother Teresa does and always will represent these concepts of poverty, humility, and peace to many people across national and religious borders. She, like Pope John Paul II, allowed herself to become enmeshed in the popular mind as a symbol of these things and the world has rewarded her for it through medals and honors.

The ambiguity of Mother Teresa as a symbol and as a tool of the Church is further underscored by the controversy of her beatification. Instead of waiting the hence mandatory five years after an individual's death, she was nominated a year after her death in 1997 by the Pope himself. The ambivalence of character and of symbolism represented by Mother Teresa and the use of the beatification ceremony by the Church illustrates the Church's struggle for power and the creation of culture (their own reality), in the global postmodern world. This struggle is apparent through the Church's incorporation of multiculturalism, the subject of the ceremony (Mother Teresa), the timing (at the end of the Pope's protracted twenty-fifth anniversary celebration), and the way in which the ceremony was enacted. This struggle to address the fragmentation and the plurality of the postmodern individual by the Church, and the new emerging reality of its use of ritual codification and imagery through ceremony will be addressed in the upcoming chapters.

# P a r t      T w o :

## *Dialogic Reverberations*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “We repeat, an utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (Bakhtin 1986:94).

## Chapter Five

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### **The Quality of Connectivity: The Metanarrative of the Ceremony**

#### *Metanarrative Established through Ritual*

“The holy bears within it everywhere a sense of intrinsic obligation: it not only encourages devotion, it demands it; it not only induces intellectual assent, it enforces emotional commitment” (Geertz 1973:126). While other religious and cultural systems use symbols that the Catholic Church does, they do not wield these symbols with nearly the same amount of authority that the Church does. By its appropriation of such ubiquitous symbols as the cross, the altar (originally the tomb), and such ideological concepts as death and the resurrection, the Church has created and maintained a narrative of reality and power that has extended over 1,400 years. Jerome Bruner writes, “Yet narratives do accrue, and, as anthropologists insist, the accruals eventually create something variously called a ‘culture’ or ‘history’ or, more loosely, a ‘tradition’” (1991:18). As such, “narrative is centrally concerned with cultural legitimacy” (Bruner 1991:15). The accrual of history helped create the identity into which Agnes Bojaxhiu was born: as a minority ethnic Albanian and as a minority practicing Catholic.

An underlying *metanarrative* of moral reality-making structures both the messages of the Church and that of the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa. “[F]ar from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (White

1987:1). This also directs and shapes the use of Mother Teresa as a symbol and continues to struggle within itself and against the secular world. The Catholic Church is not merely a religion functioning within a culture, it transcends the culture in which it was created. It has created its own cultural identity that struggles amongst (and at times against) all other cultural identities. Clifford Geertz maintains, “[C]ultural patterns [which are made up of symbols] have an intrinsic double aspect: they give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves” (1973:93). It is this double meaning that is apparent in the interaction between the Church and the secular world within the beatification ceremony and Mother Teresa. Those who try to use Mother Teresa as a symbol of meaning for their causes struggle with this symbol and through it, just as Mother Teresa did while alive, for identity and voice in the postmodern era.

The power of the Church is partly held within its ritual, which presents itself as part of a narrative with historical continuity and verisimilitude (Bruner 1991:13). “It is this sense of the ‘really real’ upon which the religious perspective rests and which the symbolic activities of religion as a cultural system are devoted to producing, intensifying, and, so far as possible, rendering inviolable by the discordant revelations of secular experience” (Geertz 1973:112). A text or performance that creates itself as beyond scrutiny maintains the ultimate form of symbolic capital, being able to wield its symbols in a myriad of contexts without question (Hanks 1989:119). This symbolic wealth accompanies the concept and image of Mother Teresa as infallible in the eyes of both the Catholic Church and (much of) the secular world. It also explains why many people are



outraged when they hear any criticism of her works and deeds as in Christopher Hitchens' work (1995) or Anne Sebba's work (1998).

Despite the illusion of unity, the ritual can only work if the participants accept and verify it, and they do not always do so, as "it is through the performative manipulation of ritual frames, aesthetic distance, audience/participant focus, attitude, and commitment to the performance reality that the ritual actually works" (Schieffelin 1985:709). In addition, rituals always occur, as do narratives, within a specific context, "in a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict" (Vološinov 1986:80). These are the themes which must be kept in mind while examining the exchange of power or interpreting a cultural or religious performance such as the beatification of Mother Teresa.

The ritual metaphors used by Christianity help create an authority that is "unfalsifiable, supported by the undeniable, yield[ing] the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, arbitrary, and conventional into the correct, the necessary and the natural" (Rappaport 1992:259). This "beyond scrutiny" aspect of Christianity solidifies it as one of the most powerful institutions in the world. Victor Turner writes, "the danger is, [when analyzing metaphors or archetypes] of course that the more persuasive the root metaphor or archetype, the more chance it has of becoming a self-certifying myth, sealed off from empirical disproof" (1974:29). Historically, the Catholic Church has been mostly successful, sealing off its symbols and metanarrative from outside scrutiny for centuries, notwithstanding the occasional doctrinal schism. By incorporating Indian elements into the beatification ceremony, the Church is encompassing the elements' power and "fixing" these elements into its own metanarrative and attempting to make them inviolable as well.

The beatification ceremony has a several-hundred year precedent of rituals and ideologies, as well as future-oriented goals. It is a persuasive performance, meant to validate and also accrue membership and identity into a set of beliefs that dictate behavior, lifestyle, and, especially, power relations. The Church's audience today is global, multicultural, and from all types of sociological backgrounds. Rappaport writes, "liturgical performance establishes connections—understandings, rules, norms—in accordance with which behavior is supposed to proceed; it does not control that behavior directly," (1992:254) but it can certainly influence it. The beatification ceremony as a ritual operates from within a metanarrative used to validate the power relationships of the Catholic Church in past and present contexts. This metanarrative "index[es] not only features of the ongoing social interaction but also the structure and significance of the narrative and the way it is linked to other events" (Bauman and Briggs 1990:69) such as politics, domestic life, and economics of cultures. In the context of the Catholic religion, this ceremony establishes a link to the highest tier of human power (as personified by Mother Teresa as well as by the Pope) to the everyday world experienced by believers. It does this by providing a symbol of the secular Mother Teresa as peacemaker transformed into the sacred Mother Teresa as Blessed for the use of the masses, helping to remind believers of their duties as Christians. Part of the Church's power lies in the recognizable utilization of metanarratives and metaphors that can be understood by the audience and other members of the Catholic Church who were not present at the ceremony. These people understand the language, the "tools" of the Church. "Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by his conglomerate of [tools]" (Bruner 1991:4). The faithful can now use the symbol of

Mother Teresa in their every day lives and are no doubt familiar with the elements of the ceremony like the Eucharist so as to interpret the message of beatification. In this respect, those who use Mother Teresa as a Blessed did not have to be present at the ceremony.

The Church has created a parallel life for its faithful to lead; one that is sanctioned as morally upright and that can be followed using the collection of symbols provided by the Church, symbols such as Mother Teresa, against the secular frame of the every day world. These symbols, used through ritual, create a sense of Turner's *communitas* and structure (1974) providing a framework of cultural boundaries around reality and emotions. "Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it. . . . their particular power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level, to give to what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import" (Geertz 1973:127).

### *Codification as Control*

By organizing grammar and utilizing the ideologies that accompany its vast resources of symbols such as the cross, the dove, etc., the Roman Catholic Church has maintained a continuous narrative and standard of communication through the centuries and formed a message that has seeped into almost every aspect of Christians' lives (and most of today's postmodern secular world). It has done this through the use of written and oral language, relying heavily on the codification and proliferation of this material through missionary work. The program book for the beatification, circulated for free at

the ceremony, is 120 pages long, but limits universal understanding through its use of languages, and choice of what “events” to include in the book. What is or is not translated into this written reality sends a powerful message of membership and the hierarchy within this membership to the audience member who can or cannot understand the spoken word. “The stronger the feeling of hierarchical eminence in another’s utterance, the more sharply defined will its boundaries be, and the less accessible it will be to penetration by retorting and commenting tendencies from outside” (Vološinov 1986:123). Within this language construct, the transmitter of the ritual often fuses with the receiver and also with the message (if understood), providing for the frame of the ceremony or ritual to be “directly felt, emotionally and physically as well as cognitively, [the messages] seem always to be powerfully convincing—not merely as accepted formally or represented as certain but experienced as absolutely undeniable” (Rappaport 1992:258-9).

The beatification ceremony utilized the spoken, written, and chanted/sung word—crossing societal linguistic borders while also simultaneously defining them. This definition of boundaries helped to construct a shared consciousness for those at the ceremony and also created and shaped a hierarchy of status within audience by means of linguistic definitions and knowledge of Catholic ritual. The codification of the words also created an official, transmittable version of the events to take away from the ceremony and to inhibit the spread of “other” versions of the event. Modern television was also used to codify the event from a sacred and secular frame. By doing this the Church hopes that all who have attended the ceremony and participated in the ritual will return “again to the common-sense world, . . . changed. And as [they are] changed, so

also is the common-sense world, for it is now seen as but the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and completes it” (Geertz 1973:122).

Bauman and Briggs write, “control over decentering and recentering is part of the social framework and as such is one of the processes by which texts are endowed with authority, which in turn places formal and functional constraints on how they may be further recentered: An authoritative text, by definition, is one that is maximally protected from compromising transformations” (1990:77). Because the Pope performed the ceremony, because the program was printed and circulated, and because it was performed in Rome, the beatification ceremony is constructed to be almost impervious to reinterpretations and reaccentuations by later groups of interpreters or audiences (but, as will be examined, there *are* gaps in unexpected places, for Mother Teresa is not so easily encapsulated by the singular concept of being a Blessed). The ceremony is, however, sealed in a very tight performative package, sanctioned by the Church and incorporated into a metanarrative tradition as established by hundreds of other beatification ceremonies.

In this respect, the act of beatifying Mother Teresa *officially* freezes her in a time-space that is inhuman and divine, making her face, her name, her deeds, any material related to her, whether produced by the Church or another media source, an officially recognized Church symbol which is very resistant to change. This symbol was made via a ritual process which works by moving, transforming, effecting a change in its participants. In an essay on ritual, Roy A. Rappaport writes that ritual is made up of “ultimate sacred postulates” which are devoid of materiality, unverifiable, unfalsifiable, and unquestionable (1992:257). Transformatively, the ceremony traditionalizes the

symbol of Mother Teresa, illustrating how “the telling and retelling establish[es] how performance is *anchored* in and inseparable from its context and use” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:77-8, emphasis in original). In this case, the access to the telling and retelling of the Blessed Mother Teresa is now limited to a mostly sacred context, officiated by the Church.

### *Gaps in the Narrative*

However powerful the Church is, symbols such as Mother Teresa (already with their own power), operating in a multi-accentuated world, upon leaving the “speaker,” begin to accrue a currency of their own, to be used individually by those who choose to do so, for “no cultural sign, once taken in and given meaning, remains in isolation: it becomes part of the *unity of the verbally constituted consciousness*” (Vološinov 1986:15; emphasis in original). Mother Teresa used the power of her symbolism to her advantage, traveling the world to set up her missionaries, intervening in Middle East political wars (in 1982 she convinced both Israelis and Palestinians in Beirut to agree to a ceasefire long enough to rescue 37 mentally handicapped patients abandoned in a hospital [Petrie 1986]), and generally choosing what path of action and activism she would take on her own. Her life embodied this multivocality, ambiguity and open-endedness, the very attributes that characterize a symbol. She was a living, reflexive person. She illustrated how symbols can be “triggers for social action--and of personal action in the public arena. Their multivocality enables a wide range of groups and individuals to relate to the same signifier-vehicle in a variety of ways” (Turner 1975:155).

This multivocality, and struggle over Mother Teresa, unsettles the Church because it reminds the socio-political entity that “no description is ever complete, and no sequence of textual elements is fully interconnected, without interpretive leaps by a receiver” (Hanks 1989:104). The receivers of the Church’s message are changing. What is becoming apparent, through the analysis of the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa, is that the metanarrative of the Church has become what Turner calls a social drama, where a breach of narrativity has occurred. Through this ceremony the Church struggles with how to address this breach of its manifested reality, both by attempting to solidify Mother Teresa’s image as holy and Catholic, and by allowing multicultural elements of other identities blend into the ritual (and history) of the Church.

Instead of letting Mother Teresa remain the strong secular symbol of peace that she had become, through this ceremony, the Church has attempted to reappropriate her for its own motives and use for as long as the veneration of Blesseds is a common practice among Catholics. Codification and the official creation of Mother Teresa as a Blessed separates her image from the realm of the secular, where she had become an official symbol of peace, culminating in her winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. In this postmodern era of fragmentation, the Church has experienced a lapse in popularity and in power. This reappropriation of such a recent popular image seems an effort by the Church to recover power and popularity from previous eras, as it has become marginalized from mainstream Western society and influence in recent times. The Church has fused some of its most powerful tools of codification, the ritual beatification ceremony, with Mother Teresa in an attempt to control her symbolic power. Their attempts, however, at absolute control through archetypical (and thus supposedly

unfalsifiable) forms of meaning--ritual, the symbol of the Church (all powerful God), and their own incorporation of media politics are not working as well as they have in previous centuries. This struggle of the cultures of secularism versus the culture of religion has always occurred yet, as it is represented and enacted within the beatification ceremony, it is worth analyzing.



## **Understanding is Imbued with Response:<sup>10</sup> Struggle**

Mother Teresa represents not only the best of what is Albanian, Macedonian, Croat, Serb, Vlach, Indian and certainly Catholic but also of human nature. She became a world icon mainly as a result of the almost unprecedented international publicity she received for over four decades. Moreover, she was and remains so popular because she struck a cord with millions of religious and secular people in a century where wars were and still are commonplace. Mother Teresa offered hope to a largely dejected world and optimism for a better future to millions of pessimistic and cynical people.

Gëzim Alpion, "Media, Ethnicity, and Patriotism--the Balkans' 'Unholy War' for the Appropriation of Mother Teresa"

Despite this hope, "in the summer of 2003 an 'unholy war' broke out between the Albanians and the Macedonians over the filiation of a beatified woman" (Alpion 2004:227). Several different ethnicities and nations in Eastern Europe have been struggling over the appropriation and use of Mother Teresa, especially since her beatification. Despite her pan-nationalistic views of human beings, many different groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, are trying to use her symbol as wholly representative of their *own* ideals. Dr. Gëzim Alpion, Research Fellow in Cultural Studies at University of Birmingham, UK, writes about the Macedonian-Albanian fight over Mother Teresa in his article, "Media, Ethnicity and Patriotism--the Balkans 'Unholy War' for the Appropriation of Mother Teresa" (2004). "Mother Teresa is apparently

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<sup>10</sup> "Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker" (Bakhtin 1986:68).

being used by some circles in the region, after her death as much as when she was alive, to further their political, nationalistic, and religious causes” (Alpion 2004:230).

Not long after Mother Teresa’s beatification, the Macedonians attempted to bestow Rome with a statue of Mother Teresa with a Cyrillic inscription reading “Macedonia honours her daughter Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu--Mother Teresa, Skopje 1910-Calcutta 1997”. The Albanian government promptly sent a letter to Rome’s mayor Walter Veltroni deploring the Macedonians’ usurpation of Mother Teresa for their own use and demanding Rome’s refusal of the statue and its inscription (Alpion 2004:228). For unpublicized reasons, the statue’s inscription was rejected, but the event illustrates the volatile power of Mother Teresa throughout the world, as a symbol of both secular and sacred (as well as Eastern and Western) ideals.

Alpion writes, “If Mother Teresa was the West’s unofficial ambassador to Eastern Europe during the cold war, and the Vatican’s irreplaceable envoy to reintroduce officially the Catholic faith to Albania, this religious celebrity also served as an inspiration to the political and religious groups in Albania that were trying to give the final push to the discredited Communist system” (2004:230). In this context, Mother Teresa is emblematic of the ethnic, political, and linguistic identity of a region struggling to assert itself as it is permanently caught geographically and politically between the East and the West. Vološinov writes, “thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign [in our case, symbol] becomes an area of class struggle” (1986:23). In the beatification ceremony, and in the Church in general, we see a national and ethnic struggle.

In the case of Albania, ethnic/secular identity is inescapably tied to sacred identity, which was also important in defining Mother Teresa's identity growing up: "Since the Catholics were a minority, the church was an important focal point for the Bojaxhiu family and gave them a clear sense of cultural and religious identity" (Sebba 1998:12). The Albanian Catholic Church is also very aware of this strong link: "securing the pan-national endorsement of Mother Teresa as a Catholic 'saint' who was also a 'great patriot' is of vital importance because this would also elevate the status and bearing of this institution in the eyes of Albanian Orthodox Christians and Muslims alike" (Alpion 2004:234). This struggle for the use and codification of the secular, patriotic symbol of Mother Teresa illustrates the power available for use *within her* as a symbol and the struggle that ensues within and outside of the Church for the use *of her* symbol.

The rise of secularism in Western Europe also presents problems to the Church, as the latter's constituents are increasingly members of developing countries, and very unfamiliar with Western Europe traditions, iconography, and ideals. Exploring this issue in "Religion and Politics in a Secular Europe," Fetzer and Soper write, "It is also unlikely that the churches will recover the political power and cultural prominence that they once enjoyed; secularization has spurred a separation of religion from the state in Western Europe and politically marginalized the churches" (2002:187). They continue, "religious groups view secularism as a political and ideological threat to their interests. Secularism undermines the social place of religion in society, and also poses a political challenge to the idea that the state should grant religious communities material or political benefits" (Fetzer and Soper 2002:170). Mother Teresa was always a symbol of the Church, as she cared for the "poorest of the poor" in the name of Jesus, but she was also a symbol of the

“Good Samaritan,” a secularized concept of charity. The Church has successfully pulled this identity and symbolism of Mother Teresa into its sacred constructs, but many of the faithful masses have shifted from the West to the Eastern and Southern cultures of the world. This shift provides fundamental structural problems for the Church because the faithful are now centered within secular identities that have historically been objectified as the Church’s Other.

Outward gestures of multiplicity (the Indian elements of the beatification ceremony) are actions (partially) contained within a construct Victor Turner has created to examine how a social power structure manages “social drama”--“units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations” (1974:37). Culture, Turner writes, is always in the process of becoming (24) and, as such, these cultural systems “depend not only for their meaning but also for their existence upon the participation of conscious, volitional human agents and upon men’s continuing and potentially changing relations with one another” (1974:32).

This shift in location of the Church’s constituents from Europe to non-Western countries fractures its metamessage as well as the infallibility of its increasingly ambiguous symbols. For, “it is the fit between sign form and some larger context that determines [the sign’s ultimate] coherence” (Hanks 1989:96). The context and the signs are fitting in different ways than the Church would like, despite its codification and forceful placement of Mother Teresa into a sacred context as a Blessed. The Church recognizes this breach in its cultural system, through the “perpetual construction and reconstruction of the past [that] provide precisely the forms of canonicity that permit us to recognize when a breach has occurred and how it might be interpreted” (Bruner

1991:20). Turner has defined the concept of breaches within social dramas--where previously used metanarratives, or constructions of identity are no longer working to satisfactorily encapsulate the reality of the community within which (and for which) it operates. This breach in the Church, specifically the shift in its constituent base (and local, every day culture) is addressed and an attempt to take “redressive action” (through the incorporation of the Indian elements) occurs within the beatification ceremony.

The Church is very aware of the power of its cultural performances and it organized the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa as a step in the process of reorganizing the Church itself, visually accepting (even if not canonically accepting) the importance of non-European populations and their cultural identities in the reality of the individuals who also call themselves Catholics (and adhere to the overall religious structure). While the confrontation of two different cultures may not overtly manifest itself as Turner’s concept of breach, an “obvious symbol of dissidence” of regular social relations (Turner 1974:38), the tension created between two cultures in a single identity (such as Christianity or a single Christian) is a form of breach, since the role of the individual’s culture does not necessarily corroborate with the role of Christian.

The Church is taking a “redressive action” (Turner 1974) to attempt to re-form a new Catholic identity more accepting of multiplicity. Through the beatification ceremony, the Church is making “the world speak itself and speak itself as a story” (White 1987:2) of its own device, and it is wielding Mother Teresa, Indian hymns, music, and dance, as part of this narrative of identity. The Church is attempting to incorporate elements of the Other and the Other’s power into itself and incorporating it into the “set of principles and

procedures, rather like a prosthetic device, that permits intelligence to be used in certain ways, but not in others” (Bruner 1991:12).



Nuns of Missionaries of Charity watch the ceremony in Calcutta (Mother Teresa's Beatification 2005)

### *The Performativity of the beatification ceremony*

The beatification ceremony is neither mere ritual, nor a Eucharistic service, nor a closed ceremony for Catholics only; it was part of and helped create a cultural system with global weight. The explicit acts of speech, of saying the ritual of beatification, became acts of *doing* (Parker and Sedgwick 1995:16). The pronouncement assumes and creates witnesses, the audience, to verify the act as manifested through words. The ceremony was broadcast throughout the world, and open (free of charge) to those curious who were passing through as well as those who had made the pilgrimage to the site for the occasion. The Vatican recognizes the element of the spectacle, the power of performances and audience participation, and it used these elements to their fullest potential in the beatification of Mother Teresa. The ceremony was simultaneously a worldwide and a local act; a secular and a sacred event. It incorporated elements of spectacle, with vendors hawking Mother Teresa scarves and haphazardly manufactured dolls, with the musical “*Madre Teresa*” performed in conjunction with the events, and other smaller events surrounding the day of beatification. Through the orchestration of

the ceremony, the Church recognized the inherent ambivalence of Mother Teresa as “a person or thing put on display that evokes responses ranging from admiration through curiosity and contempt” (Manning 1992:291).



Cardinals walk past *Via della Conciliazione*, along a passage created through the crowd and guarded by Roman police (Author's photo).

The multivocality within the ceremony, created by the multinational participants and the spectator, was and is, undeniable. These voices, like mine, still recreate the ceremony and reaccentuate its momentarily established voice and message. These voices, the people who made up the audience and received the message, were at the crux of another site of power struggle for the Church, because once the apotheosis of Mother Teresa through the performativity of speechifying was complete, the Eucharist began. The spoken ritual act invoked “the presumption, but *only* the presumption, of a consensus between speaker and witnesses, . . . the consensual nature of both . . . valuations, and of [the] authority” (Parker and Sedgwick 1995:9, emphasis in original). With the enactment of this very specific ceremony, holding within it the very short beatification ritual, the Church set up another boundary: the believers and the non-believers. The ceremony, from the Eucharist on, became a realm to be used exclusively by the faithful. “Where for ‘visitors’ religious performances can, in the nature of the case, only be presentations of a

particular religious perspective, and thus aesthetically appreciated or scientifically dissected, for participants they are in addition enactments, materializations, realizations of it--not only models of what they believe, but also models *for* the believing of it. In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it” (Geertz 1973:114; emphasis in original). The audience was forced to participate in specific ways and sometimes this caused a conflict of identity for individuals within the audience. It was from this point on that Mother Teresa became no longer fully accessible as a symbol of secular peace. And everyone present in the ceremony was implicated in this act, for “the performance is objectively (and socially) validated by the participants when they share its action and intensity no matter what each person may individually think about it” (Schieffelin 1985:722).

Equally, the codification of the ceremony within the program book provided another space of use and authority that rejected certain audiences. The ceremony as it was performed was available for global interpretation, but the ceremony as a past event, codified in the program book, can only be locally interpreted. “The more information required (the less complete the text), the more global the interpretation. Conversely, the more determinate (and hence totalized) the literal meaning of the text, the more local is its concretization in a given interpretation” (Hanks 1989:110). This conflict of identities present within the ceremony itself make it clear that this ceremony illustrates the increasing breakdown of the Church’s previous metanarratives, and that the stress the postmodern world is putting on the Catholic system is forcing it to recreate itself. Michel Trouillot writes of postmodernism that “it remains inseparable from the



acknowledgement of an ongoing collapse of metanarratives in a world where reason and reality have become fundamentally destabilized [Lyotard 1979, 1986]” (1991:20).

It is this multiplicity that makes the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa such a pertinent example of the forces of postmodernism on ancient socio-political structures; it is also an example of how the Church is attempting to re-form itself to fit postmodern constructions of reality and identity. While the Church must have addressed the subsequent phase of Turner’s social dramas (crisis, and redressive action), reintegration, the final phase, is what the beatification ceremony was. Instead of whole ideologies competing for dominance within the Church, accentualities of different cultures were accepted into a main frame of communication for the Church. “The scope and range of the field will have altered; the number of its parts will be different; and their magnitude will be different. More importantly, the nature and intensity of the relations between parts, and the structure of the total field, will have changed” (Turner 1974:42).

### **Inextricably Interwoven:<sup>11</sup> Multiplicity within the Ceremony**

The beatification itself included quotations from Mother Teresa, but also hymns and, more importantly, the taking of the Eucharist. This ritual within a ceremony transformed the performance from a passive ritual-watching event to an active ritual experience, a strategy used by the Church as a reminder to all the nonbelievers in the audience that they have the opportunity to convert and help fulfill and strengthen the mission of Mother Teresa as well as accrue cultural and authoritative benefits from the institution of the Church. They can become, like Mother Teresa, part of the reality of the Church and can participate in its metanarrative. The holy space of the *piazza* was activated by switching the frame of performance through the Eucharist. The act served to solidify the ideologies and sense of belonging felt by Catholics (and possibly other Christian sects) from all the different cultures into a *congregation* of individuals who, together, affirmed the same goals and ideologies. Those not participating were symbolically ostracized from the Mass even though their presence was acknowledged and welcomed. In the opening greeting of the ceremony, Pope John Paul II stated, “I offer warm greetings to the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from India and the United States,” and continued to greet those from Macedonia, Albania, Italy, Europe and “the whole world” (John Paul II 2003a).

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<sup>11</sup> “Verbal intercourse is inextricably interwoven with communication of other types, all stemming from the common ground of production communication.” (Vološinov 1986:95).

“If symbols, . . . are strategies for encompassing situations, then we need to give more attention to how people define situations and how they go about coming to terms with them” (Geertz 1973:141). As the speeches ended and I began to realize that what was happening in Latin and Italian was a Mass, I began to feel insecure about my motives for entering into this cultural performance. I had come because I appreciated Mother Teresa’s transnational acts of peace and goodwill. I appreciated her insistence on acknowledging and accepting the poor into the structure of humanity. I was not in St. Peter’s to go to church or affirm a spiritual identity. There was a period in my life when I did believe in the tenets of Christianity, but I do not (and did not then) believe in them. As the white umbrellas of the officials giving out the wafer representing the transformed flesh of Jesus moved closer to me I quickly reassessed my position in the ceremony as a tourist, a spectator, a non-believer, and an anthropology student. I looked around at those who eagerly waited for the umbrellas to close in on their position. As a non-Christian, and especially a non-Catholic, I was thrust into a decision of whether or not to participate in this ritual within the ceremony. I was suddenly faced with the possibility of being an outsider from the ceremony and the audience if I did not participate.



The procession of the Eucharist winds through the audience (Sisters of St. Paul 2003)

The umbrellas were parallel to my position in the crowd, mere feet away. I rushed into the collected faithful and thrust out my hands in the position I had been taught as a young girl. In a conflicted act and a realization of the power of ritual and of my religious pact/past (as a member of the Episcopal Church), I participated in the Eucharist. At this point, the multiplicity of meanings embedded in the ceremony were being enacted within me and I became a participant rather than an observer by deciding to take the Eucharist. I chose to do this because I felt, in this context, I was symbolically accepting and validating Mother Teresa's beatification by taking communion. By merely coming to the ceremony, making the effort to be present in St. Peter's, I had already accepted and validated the event, in a more passive way. I also decided that if I did not participate I would not be able to observe the reaction of the faithful as they participated in a huge ceremony that was simultaneously like and unlike every other Mass enacted previous to this day.

At this point in the ceremony, many audience members may have experienced conflicting identities, especially those watching on television or situated outside St. Peter's square, bereft of the Eucharistic invitation regardless of their faith. Bauman and Briggs summarize the importance of audiences in performance:

Audience evaluation of the communicative competence of performers forms a crucial dimension of performance. Particularly in ritual and political discourse, this concern with form and function is often extended to assessments of how (and even if) formal patterning becomes imbued with functional significance (Bauman and Briggs 1990:66).

During the interpretive framing of the ceremony, the interactions of myself and the other participants or observers very obviously shifted into different forms (taking or not taking communion, singing the hymns, etc.). Our divergent actions proved that this

event, like other performances, had an ongoing contextualization that “involves an active process of negotiation in which participants reflexively examine the discourse as it is emerging, embedding assessments of its structure and significance in the speech itself” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:69). The contextualization of the ceremony is contained within several discourses: the media, the students/academics who report the event to others (such as I am doing in this work), attendants who recount their experience to family and friends, and the Vatican’s representation of the event, among others. This discursive recontextualization (also called “entextualization”) will continue to accrue over several years even if, as previously explained, the Vatican attempts to limit the reinterpretation of the event through codification efforts. And Bauman and Briggs acknowledge this, writing that “even when audience members say or do practically nothing at the time of the performance, their role becomes active when they serve as speakers in subsequent entextualizations of the topic at hand [e.g. in reports, challenges, refutations, enactments of consequences, and the like]” (1990:70). Within this paper, I am recontextualizing (encontextualizing) the event to suit cultural analysis.

“We inevitably take the teller’s intentions into account and do so in terms of our background knowledge (and, indeed, in the light of our presuppositions about the teller’s background knowledge)” (Bruner 1991:17). Each individual was present at the ceremony for slightly or very different reasons, each with varying knowledge of what to expect. I was completely shocked when I realized that suddenly I was forced to make a decision about whether or not to participate in the Mass. Others patiently and unwaveringly lined up to take Communion, as they had expected to do. I was unfamiliar with the faces and names that presented the words of Mother Teresa, but they were members of clergy from

around the world, their faces familiar to some but not others. Wendy Schuman, writing for *www.Beliefnet.com*, recognized the organized plurality of the event: “Invited dignitaries filled the square with color--purple and red of the cardinals and bishops, the brilliant hues of religious orders from around the world, and the simple white and blue habits of the nuns of Mother Teresa’s order, the Missionaries of Charity” (2003).

I was reminded, after taking the Eucharist, that performances “are occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others” (MacAloon 1984:1). I was certainly changed after this day, following the crowds back through the throng of the streets, into the metro, and finally back to my Roman apartment with a new fascination for the way people define themselves and their lives through symbols and elaborate rituals.

The plurality of the people present in St. Peter’s square and in the surrounding streets on that bright Sunday afternoon reflects the reality of our global lives today. In Rome, I lived in a neighborhood teeming with young Roman school children. But every morning, winding through the daily market, I was presented with faces from Africa, India, and the Middle East as well as the wizened faces of stooped Italian elderly. “To plot only ‘places of birth’ and degrees of nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them” (Malkki 1992:44). I was not only living with Romans, but with citizens of the world. They belong(ed) to no fixed identity, daily creating their own through “the landscapes of group identity--the ethnoscares--around the world [that] are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups [including Roman Catholics] are no

longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous (Appadurai 1991:191).



Flags of identity are waved across the *piazza* (Author's photo).

Countries, nationalities and political identities, including the Catholic Church, are experiencing a fluidity of their borders as people shift between identities and geographical spaces with increasing frequency. Arjun Appadurai has codified this movement his terms of ethnoscares, and in the concept of deterritorialization. “It [deterritorialization] applies not only to obvious examples such as transnational corporations and money markets, but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities” (Appadurai 1991:192). This deterritorialization is partly due to the increasingly heard voices of the “developing” countries, like India. “While speaking of the world of our time, let us not deceive ourselves. The majority of human beings belong to the so called third world, a world composed of people undergoing profound changes, but who for the most part are weighed down by wretched poverty” (Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of Delhi quoted in Aguiar 1991:377).

Institutions such as the Catholic Church have spread for hundreds of years into these countries providing establishments of stability and hope for many of the starving inhabitants. However, at least in India, “along with the gospel message, there came the veneer of a culture that tore the new converts from their roots, giving them new names, new habits and customs, even new languages. Their liturgy was the Latin liturgy, their churches were built in pseudo-Gothic or Baroque styles, their religious art, paintings and music were cheap importations from the West” (Aguilar 1991:377). The individuals upon whom this identity was imposed began to reassert their previous cultural identities and tie them into the new Christian concepts of identity as is exemplified in the Indian Rite Mass discussed in Chapter Four. “[I]ndividuals may add personal meaning to a symbol’s public meaning, . . . [s]uch initially private ‘construction’ may become part of public hermeneutic or standardized interpretation if the exegete has sufficient power, authority, or prestige to make his views ‘stick’” (Turner 1975:154).

This happened with the Indian Rite Mass that was acknowledged during the Vatican II Council as illustration of the new focus on pluralism within the Catholic Church--while many of the twelve points of the Indian Rite Mass approved by Rome are not put into daily practice, they are still acceptable as official symbols of the Church (while simultaneously being symbols of Hindu faith). Turner reminds us that “symbols are multivocal, manipulable, and ambiguous precisely because they are *initially located* in systems, classified or arranged in a regular, orderly form” (1975:146; emphasis in original). Once they are coded by an establishment they can be decoded by individuals. During the Vatican II Council, the Church recognized this and tried to incorporate this reality into its schema of power and control in order to maintain its established reality.



The Catholic Indians who challenged Rome with their demands illustrated the increasing reality of non-Europeans from non-Western countries as participants in First World socio-political structures. “Minorities of all kinds can and do voice their cultural claims, not on the basis of explicit theories of culture but in the name of historical authenticity. They enter the debate not as academics--or not only as academics--but as situated individuals with rights to historicity” (Trouillot 1991:19).

Mother Teresa successfully linked the Church to the Third World while simultaneously erasing those boundaries. Within her beatification ceremony the Church tried to acknowledge the pluralism that Mother Teresa lived--and to codify it, as it had done with the Indian Rite Mass--through the use of Indian song, dance, and image. As has been examined throughout this work, once a symbol has been defined, it becomes useful to the public, regardless of the intentions of the definers.

In essence, meaning belongs to a word [or symbol] in its position between speakers; that is, meaning is realized only in the process of the active, responsive understanding. Meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker or in the soul of the listener. Meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex (Vološinov 1986:102-103).

Mother Teresa herself claimed multiple identities, although all others were subsumed by her identity as a nun working to collect souls for God. Converted peoples of the New World and the East have merged traditional religion with Christianity to create a new context of ideologies that overlap and integrate into Church sanctioned symbols. The life of Mother Teresa serves as an example of the intertextuality of such symbols and ideologies that has become the Church spread over the globe, woven through hundreds of different cultures. Mother Teresa, born in Albania, moved to India

in 1928 and became an international symbol for Calcutta, where she based her Missionaries of Charity work--she identified with India so much that she was given a state funeral and buried at her first House in Calcutta.

Mother Teresa became a symbol of the Church but she also symbolized the permanently entangled relationship that Western, colonial Christianity has with its colonized Eastern and New World counterparts. She was embraced by India as a positive symbol of this fusion and, as such, embodied multiple identities and ideologies within her actions and the symbol of her physical body even while focusing her life on the orthodox messages of the Church. While anthropologist Rachel Meyer specifically examines indigenous resistance in India, her analysis of intertextuality can also be applied to Mother Teresa and the ceremony of the beatification. She writes of Indian women and their resistance that the identity “constructs itself as diffuse and does not delineate itself rigidly in opposition to its subject. . . . [this] reveals a transient, restless self, a multiply positioned subject, which oscillates between speaking as self and speaking as ‘one’s other,’ so there is ultimately no clear distinction between the two” (Meyer 2000:145). Christianity has become a layered intertextual entity despite its codification and ritualization of ideals that have been propagated for centuries. The ambiguity one can experience within such a codified and ritualized event such as the taking of the Eucharist illustrates this struggle between the multiplicity and univocality of the message of Christianity.

However, these outward gestures (the Indianness present in the beatification ceremony) of multiplicity and the Church’s acknowledgment of the validity of the competing power structure of the secular world are still actions (partially) contained

within Victor Turner's social drama (1974:37). The Church has experienced the trend of globalization to fragment identities and construct hybrid identities just as the rest of the world has experienced it. It, like so many other institutions, is realizing that, "the social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being" (Turner 1974:24) and that "the degree to which an experience is perceptible, distinct, and formulated is directly proportional to the degree to which it is socially oriented" (Vološinov 1986:87).

### Phantasmic Fragments<sup>12</sup>



After the beatification is complete, Blessed Mother Teresa's image is unfurled (Author's image).

Fundamentally, both the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa and the individual Mother Teresa are examples of an emergent reality forming within the cultural structure of the Catholic Church. But this ceremony also illustrates how the world is changing and what the Church is doing to try to manage this change. The Church used its own rituals and ceremonies to incorporate the Other into its metanarrative, imagining a new identity that will correspond to its increasingly non-Western faithful. "In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world" (Geertz 1973:112). Through Mother Teresa the Church has merged the living world, a world of plurality and oppositional

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<sup>12</sup> "Picture how such a space, once inhabited and held onto with fierceness of necessity and choice, in-fills with the desire of remembered loss, how real becomes a resistant surface scanned by wishes and regrets, an absent presence detectable only in its effects and disclosed only by a desire, a collection of phantasmic fragments through which things appear obliquely yet powerfully as what they are and what they can be" (Stewart 1996:51).

views into its imagined world, that of religious tolerance and contemporary examples of Christ through the Blesseds and the Saints.

In Mother Teresa the Church “found” (and helped to create) an individual who represented certain ideals of belief, those of unswerving faith, peace, family values, and proselytizing, within a global, multicultural context. Vološinov writes about the creation of signs (which encompasses the concept of symbols): “a sign is a particular material thing, but meaning is not a thing and cannot be isolated from the sign as if it were a piece of reality existing on its own apart from the sign. Therefore, if experience does have meaning, if it is susceptible to being understood and interpreted, then it must have its existence in the material of actual, real signs” (1986:28). By merit of being a symbol, Mother Teresa as a Blessed is open to interpretation and reinterpretation as those who utilize her within their daily lives. The secular world, also, has not completely abandoned Mother Teresa as an icon of their own ideals. Former U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar said Mother Teresa was “the United Nations. She [was] peace in the world” (Mother Teresa 2005).

However, as the ceremony was enacted, on October 19, 2003, the use of Indian cultural elements served to remind all present that we are all part of the same world, all touched by the Roman Catholic Church in some way. “Those public activities which bring such different cultures together to celebrate eliminate (at least for the time of the event) such class and cultural disparities, and substitute for them the festive world, in which celebration provides most of the mode and the structure of relationships” (Abrahams 1981:306-307). But, while the Church is erasing individual cultures to create a temporarily encompassing singular culture, it is showcasing its power to do just that.

“[M]etatextual regulation of language is a matter of social privilege, control, dispute, convention, and ideology” (Hanks 1989:109). The Church is sending a message to *all* who are witness to such an event, during and after its performance, that the Catholic Church, especially the Vatican in Rome, has the power to encompass all cultures and make them one even if that unity is ephemeral and superficial.

This ceremony, and even the codified, highly formulaic rituals within it, reflect historical processes and help to “fit” Catholicism back into the contemporary secular reality. “Rituals, [Turner] writes, are reflexive to the degree that they directly ‘reflect back on other contexts of meaning . . . in the social and cultural world out of which ritual emerges’” (Turner quoted in MacAloon 1984:12). In contemporary societies, regardless of nationality or region, identities are beginning to form independently from their geographic and cultural roots. Malkki notes, “identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-constructed, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, and so on. It is a creolized aggregate composed through bricolage” (1992:71). Ultimately the Other that the West has created to control and from which to juxtapose itself does not exist.

This cultural modernization is being used by other groups as well. Major organizations around the world are encountering the same problems that the Church has encountered, and each are attempting to take “redressive action” (Turner 1974) that best fits their own metanarratives. For Native Americans, the intertribal powwow creatively defines their multiple tribal identities while asserting their singular identity as American Indians. Barre Toelken examines the emergent properties of powwows in “Ethnic Selection and Intensification in the Native American Powwow. “[S]pecific tribal identity

is being reassessed by many Native Americans and being replaced by a powerful synthesis of related traditions that can articulate Indianness” (Toelken 1991:140). Just as the Church has realized within the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa, so the powwow is recognizing the inherent fluctuating nature of symbols and identities, that “an idea may be phrased in a number of ways, and indeed it may survive more successfully if it [is] susceptible . . . [to] continuous reassessment and retranslation into newer and more functional modes of expression” (Toelken 1991:138). Both Native American powwows and the Catholic beatification ceremony are rituals designed to reintegrate new ideas into their metanarrative of reality and culture; these spaces provide both cultures “with a dynamic arena in which the potentially conflictive elements of contemporary life are mediated in an ethnically rich (and therefore meaningful) environment” (Toelken 1991:153).

Mother Teresa, as a person, reflected multiple constructs of identity through her life and by her choices of movement through and within identities. For, “the ideological sign must immerse itself in the element of inner, subjective sign; it must ring with subjective tones in order to remain a living sign and not be relegated to the honorary status of an incomprehensible museum piece” (Vološinov 1986:39). As a global organization, the Church encompasses multiple conflicting identities which it sometimes finds hard to encompass, even using Mother Teresa.

Through Mother Teresa’s beatification, the Church creates a new identity for her, one that ecumenically subsumes her other identities as Albanian, Indian, peacemaker and creates her as a Blessed--comparable to Jesus Christ. Over centuries, these subsumed identities may fall out of the collective mind of those who venerate her, but currently,

these identities are still powerful and still relate her to her invokers. She continues, however, to reflect the identities of those who will invoke her, even as a Blessed--for “only concrete individuals, linked to one another in ‘social situations,’ ‘social dramas,’ ‘cultural performances,’ or other social processual units, by rules of law or custom, or by interest or mere liking, can manipulate [symbols] creatively” (Turner 1975:150).

It is relevant to quote Bakhtin at length about the multiplicity of interpretation that can be created through discussion of a single symbol, or person.

Both whole utterances and individual words can retain their alien expression, but they can also be re-accentuated (ironically, indignantly, reverently, and so forth). Others’ utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation. They can be referred to as though the interlocutor were already well aware of them; they can be silently presupposed; or one’s responsive action to them can be reflected only in the expression of one’s own speech--in the selection of language means and intonations that are determined not by the topic of one’s own speech but by others’ utterances concerning the same topic (1986:91).

This ability to reaccentuate through use of language and speech serves as a reminder that knowledge of any cultural boundaries or symbols, and their subsequent use is contained within individuals and how they choose to disseminate this knowledge. One must “question not only the universality of knowledge from one domain to another, but the universal translatability of knowledge from one culture to another. For in this dispensation, knowledge is never ‘point-of-viewless’” (Bruner 1991:3).

Individuals make up cultures, and cultures denote “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz 1973:89). We all develop and live



within structures of cultures which are represented by symbols. The ways in which we are using these symbols to represent and define ourselves are rapidly changing in this global world. “The loosening of the bonds between people, wealth, and territories fundamentally alters the basis of cultural reproduction” (Appadurai 1991:193). This applies to the cultural reproduction of the Roman Catholic Church as well. The individuals who compose the narrative of Catholicism are always biased in some way, for “every narrative, however seemingly ‘full,’ is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out” (White 1987:10). I have based this work on two main sources of information about the ceremony itself: the program book I received at the ceremony and my memory of the ceremony (reinforced by a few pages of notes hastily jotted down during the event). Undoubtedly, there are other versions of this event. My interpretation through mostly anthropological sources limits my understanding and knowledge of the event and the event and ceremony can be recontextualized in as many ways as there were participants, viewers, believers, who have some knowledge of the event, however small.

Religious systems function under the same conglomerates of symbols that other cultures do, symbols ultimately created and used by individuals. Geertz writes that religion “is a cluster of sacred symbols, woven into some sort of ordered whole, . . . [f]or those who are committed to it, such a religious system seems to mediate genuine knowledge, knowledge of the essential conditions in terms of which life must, of necessity, be lived” (1973:129) and that “the force of a religion in supporting social value rests, then, on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients” (1973:131).

In these formations of reality through the appropriation and definition of symbols, rests the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa, and indeed, all beatification ceremonies before and to come. The Church simultaneously creates and reaffirms itself through this single ritual within a ceremony. The underlying message is the same as it has always been, and will continue to be for as long as the ritual is performed with the codified words and basic structure: to be Christ-like is to be Venerable and Godlike; to be Venerable and Godlike reaffirms identity with the Church and the Catholic faith. These messages are being sent regardless of the performative package incorporating visual multiplicity. “[W]e may call these full blown ceremonies ‘cultural performances’ and note that they represent not only the point at which the dispositional and conceptual aspects of religious life converge for the believer, but also the point at which the interaction between them can be most readily examined by the detached observer” (Geertz 1973:113). This detached observer can be anyone with knowledge or experience of the event whatsoever. Whether or not they choose to utilize this knowledge, and these symbols, for their own movement through, within, or against their reality or their identities is unknowable to all but the individual.

The beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa helped to physically unify its audience into a mass congregation of humanity, but it cannot dictate the perspective from which each individual views the ceremony, its symbols and messages. Indeed, the television screens were illuminated with a multitude of visual scenes created through the camera--very different perceptions of the event than if one simply looked through bodies towards the speck of the Pope in the distance. This even created a struggle for space

within the square to locate the center of the event--was it the “real” event, or the one portrayed on the giant screens spaced through the square down *Via della Conciliazione*?



Through the shoulders of those looking at the screens one can see the Pope's televised face (Author's photo).

Mother Teresa is a complex symbol of the Church's message, of peace, and of the hybridization of identities that is increasingly occurring through globalization. She is a symbol which the secular and sacred worlds struggle to appropriate and control. While the Church has now recovered her as a fixed, sacred symbol, until her physical life fades from the generations of those who experienced her deeds, the secular meaning of Mother Teresa will always be present and felt. Kathleen Stewart writes that the gaps in culture embed “the mythic in the ordinary and [gather] the past and future into the present” (1996:205). The constructed dichotomies of mythic and ordinary, past and present, secular and sacred are more permeable than the Church implies and they can be manipulated by any audience experiencing the rituals of the Church, coming from multiple contexts. “No cultural sign, once taken in and given meaning, remains in isolation: it becomes part of the unity of the verbally constituted consciousness” (Vološinov 1986:15). With the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa begins the process of creating her as a symbol and reaccentuating her life to become mythical and

legendary. It does not matter whether or not she will be declared a saint, she will be forever be the Venerable Servant of God, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta.

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