

# The Emergence of Mother Teresa as a Religious Visionary and the Initial Resistance to Her Charism/a: A Sociological and Public Theology Perspective

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the emergence of Mother Teresa as a religious visionary and the hostile treatment she received at the Loreto order in the late 1940s. Mother Teresa's early career as an 'independent' nun is a useful case study to look afresh at some traditional views on the revolutionary nature of charisma, the initial reception of the 'natural' and charismatic leader, mainly the 'deviant type', and the 'proofs' expected from and provided by the 'bearer of charisma' in modernity. This article contends that approaching Mother Teresa's charism/a from a sociological and public theology perspective reveals both the potential and the need for interdisciplinary research to explore the publicness of religion and engage further the academy with the life, work and legacy of this twentieth century religious leader.

## Keywords

Mother Teresa – Loreto order – post-independence India – charism/a – 'love in action'

## Intersecting Biography and History

The tendency in Mother Teresa scholarship to date is to ignore the private woman behind the public nun. Her admirers and detractors have failed to pay due attention to every stage of her life and work and, equally important, to see them as being interlinked. Such failures have at times given rise to unfounded

and often fanciful interpretations of some of the key decisions she made regarding her religious vocation.<sup>1</sup>

'Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society', Charles Wright Mills contends in his seminal work *The Sociological Imagination*, 'can be understood without understanding both'.<sup>2</sup> While Mother Teresa remains one of the most written about twentieth century personalities, on the whole, the overwhelming hagiographic literature as well as almost all the critical works about her that have appeared since the mid-1990s fail to realize the significance of Mills' call for the intersection of biography and history. Such an intersection, which is at the heart of what Mills calls 'the sociological imagination', is essential for any social study, regardless of its attachment or affinity to any specific discipline, to complete 'its intellectual journey'.<sup>3</sup> Mother Teresa's life enables us to connect, to use Bauman's words, the 'experiences which are lived through as thoroughly personal and subjective' and 'problems fit to be inscribed into the public agenda and become matters of public policy'.<sup>4</sup>

The sociological imagination, I contend in this article, enables scholars from a variety of disciplines to approach Mother Teresa's life, work and legacy also in the context of 'social obligations' and 'public responsibility' that were, from the start, central to Jürgen Moltmann's theology. In the concluding chapter of *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann writes about different interpretations sociologists and theologians offer to Christian obedience and resistance in 'modern, emancipated society'.<sup>5</sup> Mother Teresa's obedience and resistance to her own calling, an issue which will be addressed later in this article, as well as her views on the modern world's spiritual poverty, are areas that invite cross-disciplinary cooperation especially between sociology and public theology.<sup>6</sup>

To pay due attention to Mother Teresa's childhood and teenage years in Skopje (1910–1918), the time she spent as a cloistered Loreto nun (1929–1948)

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1 I identify some of the reasons why Mother Teresa scholarship does not concentrate on the private life of the famous nun in Gëzim Alpion, *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007).

2 Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 6.

4 Zygmunt Bauman, 'Sociological Enlightenment: For Whom, About What?', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17:2 (2000), 71–82 at 78–9.

5 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 305. The book was first published in German in 1965.

6 See Mother Teresa, *Where There Is Love, There Is God: A Path to Closer Union with God and Greater Love for Others*, ed. B. Kolodiejuchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2010), pp. 179–80.

and the long period during which she was the heart and soul of the Missionaries of Charity order (1949–1997) is to understand better what motivated her to join the religious life in the first place, the nature of her charitable activities in India and beyond and, in the context of the main thrust of this article, the source and nature of her charism/a.

This article concentrates mainly on the following publications that have appeared in the wake of her death in 1997: Albert Huart's article 'Mother Teresa: Joy in Darkness'; Joseph Neuner's study 'Mother Teresa's Charism', the edited collection *Come Be My Light*, which includes excerpts from some of the letters, diaries, notes and other documents Mother Teresa wrote between 1929 and 1994; and *Where There Is Love, There Is God*, an anthology of her practical teaching and advice.<sup>7</sup> In this article I also include for the first time information from the interviews I conducted with Mother Teresa's relatives in 2011 and 2013.

These sources reveal that the charismatic Mother Teresa, who is loved by her admirers and loathed by her opponents, did not come into being when she entered the religious life at eighteen. She did not learn about charity for the first time when she put on the nun's habit in Dublin in 1928. Mother Teresa, the charitable nun, was the daughter of two charitable parents. Her mother Drane and her father Nikollë were much loved in Skopje for regularly helping out people in need irrespective of their faith or ethnicity. She witnessed as a child the charitable work of her parents, especially when she visited, with her mother, the houses of the poor, in various parts of Skopje, to bring them food and clothing.

Skopje was also the place where Mother Teresa witnessed for the first time an embodiment of the concept of popularity, or even charisma, as the former is often referred to today, much to the annoyance of some Weber scholars.<sup>8</sup> The first 'charismatic' person Mother Teresa met in her life was her father who, as

7 Albert Huart, 'Mother Teresa: Joy in Darkness', *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections*, 64:9 (2000), 645–59; Joseph Neuner, 'Mother Teresa's Charism', *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections*, 65:3 (2001), 179–92; Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'*, ed. B. Kolodiejuchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007); Teresa, *Where There Is Love, There Is God*.

8 Some Weber scholars take issue with what they consider as commonplace, even banal, appropriation and usage of Weber's notion of charisma; see Christoph R. Hatscher, *Charisma und Res Publica: Max Weber's Herrschaftssoziologie und die Römische Republik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), pp. 19–20; and Stephen P. Turner, 'Charisma Reconsidered', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 3:1 (2003), 5–26 at 6. Rapoport, on the other hand, argues that '[t]hrough Weber charisma has become a common term in our ordinary and academic vocabularies'; see David C. Rapoport, 'Moses, Charisma, and Covenant', *The Western Political Quarterly*, 32:2 (1979), 123–43 at 137.

will be seen shortly in this article, had a lasting impact on her life. Nikollë was an unconventional success story in a town where Albanian Catholics were discriminated against both on the basis of their ethnicity and religion. He helped to build the railway connecting Skopje with Kosova and the city's first theatre. In addition, Nikollë was the only Catholic member of the Skopje City Council. For these reasons he was held in high esteem by his fellow Albanians as well as other communities in Skopje which, in those days, was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious metropolis. That he was so well known and widely respected is clear from the reaction of his fellow citizens when he died unexpectedly at the age of forty-five.<sup>9</sup> All the faiths in the city sent representatives to pay homage to him and all the jewellers closed their shops as a mark of respect on the day of Nikollë's grand funeral.

Mother Teresa's widely-travelled father often told her stories about the places he had been to in the Balkans, Western Europe and Africa. After his death in 1919, Mother Teresa's main sources of information about the world were books and the oral and written accounts of several Balkan Slav priests, who narrated their experiences as missionaries in India either during their talks in Skopje or on the pages of the Croatian magazine *Katolicke misije* (Catholic Missions).<sup>10</sup>

Mother Teresa's narrow world expanded suddenly on 26 September 1928 when she left Skopje to embark on her life-changing journey to Dublin via Zagreb, Paris and London. This journey, however, was not a sight-seeing trip, but part of a journey at the end of which she would join the religious life and, as such, be dead to the world.<sup>11</sup> Her career choice also meant that the odds were against her becoming a famous public figure.

Mother Teresa spent about six weeks in Dublin at Loreto Abbey at Rathfarnham, an Irish convent still housing the order of the Sisters of Loreto, before travelling to India. She arrived in Calcutta at the start of 1929. Apart from some carefully selected comments about her efforts to leave the Loreto community in Calcutta, between 1946 and 1948, Mother Teresa's portrait during the

9 For more information on the rise and fall of Nikollë Bojaxhiu, see Alpion, *Mother Teresa*, pp. 157–8.

10 Mother Teresa is known to have read this publication regularly as a teenager.

11 Becoming a nun is traditionally described as being dead to the world. See Marcelle Bernstein, *Nuns* (Glasgow: Collins, 1978), p. 108. Mother Teresa's mother and brother Lazar were initially strongly against her decision to enter the religious life. Lazar went as far as saying to Mother Teresa that in joining an order in India she was burying herself alive in the middle of nowhere; see David Porter, *Mother Teresa: The Early Years* (Oxford and New York: ISIS Large Print, 1986), p. 29.

twenty years she spent as a Loreto nun, like her early life in Skopje, remains largely fragmented.

One can find the main reason why to this day so much about Mother Teresa remains shrouded in mystery in her reluctance to talk about her family and private life, especially the treatment she received at Loreto.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Mother Teresa and a number of her trusted Missionaries of Charity are known to have edited some of the books written by her ghost writers and to have given specific instructions to friendly biographers and hagiographers about what they should and should not include about her personal life in their publications.<sup>13</sup>

### Charism and Charisma

Mother Teresa had her critics when she was alive and their number increased after her death. On the whole, however, the main bulk of the already vast and ever expanding literature about her is essentially of a hagiographic nature. Some of the Jesuit priests who worked closely with her, such as Edward Le Joly and Joseph Neuner, as well as the majority of Mother Teresa's friendly biographers are keen to emphasize that her success and popularity derived from the God-given 'gift of grace', as Weber initially called charisma.

Mother Teresa authors use two terms—'charism' and 'charisma'—at times interchangeably, to highlight what, in their view, is unique about her. 'Charism' is used primarily by Mother Teresa's colleagues, spiritual directors and religious authors. Mother Teresa herself uses this term when she refers to what, in her opinion, is essential about her religious order. She writes to the Archbishop of Calcutta Ferdinand Périer, shortly before his retirement in 1960, that she is 'concerned that his successor might not understand and respect the charism of the Missionaries of Charity as he had'.<sup>14</sup>

12 See Kathryn Spink, *For the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta, her Missionaries of Charity and her Co-Workers* (Godalming: Colour Library International, 1981), pp. 16–18; Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), p. 3; and Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image* (London: Orion, 1997), p. 13.

13 See John Cairns, 'How this Book Came About', in L. Vardey, ed., *A Simple Path* (London: Rider, 1995), pp. 7–12 at pp. 11–12; Spink, *Mother Teresa*, p. vii; Navin Chawla, *Mother Teresa: The Authorized Biography* (London: Vega, 2002), pp. vii, xxii, 192–3 and 197; Aroup Chatterjee, *Mother Teresa: The Final Verdict* (Kolkata: Meteor Books, 2003), p. 31.

14 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 184. Ferdinand Périer was born in Belgium on 22 September 1875 and died in India on 10 November 1968. He was Archbishop of Calcutta from 1924–1960.

During her lifetime, Mother Teresa's charism is cited mainly to explain the success of the Missionaries of Charity order; this tendency continues after her death, as is seen in Huart's article and especially Neuner's study.<sup>15</sup>

Neuner's article is the first study by one of Mother Teresa's most influential spiritual directors purporting to trace the genesis, evolvment and consolidation of her charism during her lifetime, and its continuation after her death. By concentrating mainly on a selection of Mother Teresa's private writings in the 1950s and 1960s, Neuner highlights the inseparable nature of the two dimensions of the nun's and her religious congregation's charism: 'the intimate union with Jesus and the work for the poor'.<sup>16</sup> The main thrust of Neuner's argument is that Mother Teresa's religious congregation was and remains a tremendous success because she set it up from the first with the purpose of winning souls for Jesus.

Both Huart and Neuner employ the concept of 'charism' also to explain Mother Teresa's dark night of the soul, the full extent of which is revealed only after her death. In an attempt to present her spiritual ordeal as 'normal', Huart contends that '[i]t is good traditional teaching that the mystical charism of God's closest friends is meant not primarily for themselves but for the good of the whole Church'.<sup>17</sup> For his part, Neuner argues that, like all 'chosen' individuals, spiritual aridity is a necessary experience for her to come to terms with achievements.

On the whole, those who knew Mother Teresa in person prefer to write of her 'charism', a word which in the past was imbued with an otherworldly aura, rather than 'charisma', for two main reasons. First, their choice reflects their disagreement with the pedestrian denotations and connotations that the term 'charisma' has acquired as a result of the consumerist culture that dominates our lives, as well as of the ubiquity of that social, cultural and media eyesore called 'celebrity' that, as Daniel J. Boorstin remarks in 1962, became the 'new kind of eminence'<sup>18</sup> in the wake of the Graphic Revolution. Secondly, and more importantly, the preference some Mother Teresa authors have for 'charism' reflects their disagreement with attempts to equate the celebrated nun with other celebrities.<sup>19</sup>

15 Huart, 'Mother Teresa'; Neuner, 'Mother Teresa's Charism'.

16 Neuner, 'Mother Teresa's Charism', 181.

17 Huart, 'Mother Teresa', 659.

18 Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America* (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 57.

19 In December 2011 and January 2012, I contacted several individuals who knew Mother Teresa in person to inquire whether 'charism' or 'charisma' is the most suitable term to

Different from Mother Teresa's religious colleagues, most of the biographers and scholars, myself included, who have taken an interest in her, not necessarily for religious motives,<sup>20</sup> use 'charisma' and not 'charism' when referring to her personality, achievements and enduring appeal. Our choice of syntax is mainly motivated by the tendency to approach this iconic twentieth century religious and humanitarian figure primarily, although not exclusively, in the context of the celebrity culture discourse and as a result of her ubiquitous media presence even after her death. Rightly or wrongly, our tendency to obsess over celebrities and the media played, from the start, a seminal role in generating and sustaining the myth about Mother Teresa as a 'living saint';<sup>21</sup> a charismatic figure who was and has apparently remained both earthly and ethereal.

It appears Mother Teresa attracts, invites and welcomes the attention of the media even before she formally sets up the Missionaries of Charity. In the late 1940s a Catholic reporter tells a colleague in Calcutta that 'she's seeking publicity'.<sup>22</sup> While reports about Mother Teresa and her nuns continue to appear in newspapers in Calcutta and across India throughout the 1950s and 1960s, it is mainly towards the late 1960s that she attracts the attention of the world media. The turning point is the interview she gives to the BBC's Malcolm Muggeridge in London in 1968. A year later Muggeridge travelled to Calcutta to film a BBC programme about her; this was followed by the publication in 1971 of Muggeridge's image-making book *Something Beautiful for God*.<sup>23</sup> In December 1975, Mother Teresa became a household name in the United States when her portrait appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine, accompanied by the caption 'Messenger of Love and Hope—Living Saints'; the magazine ran the article 'Saints Among Us: The Work of Mother Teresa'<sup>24</sup> in the same issue. When Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1979 her status as a global media and humanitarian icon was secured.

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apply to her. They all believe that a distinction needs to be made between Mother Teresa and celebrities in general and that one way of doing this is through employing 'charism' and not 'charisma' to distinguish what was unique about her personality and why her order, the Missionaries of Charity, was successful from the start.

20 See Bernstein, *Nuns*, p. 268.

21 Mother Teresa was hailed as a 'living saint' by the media and politicians in India almost from the moment she set up the Missionaries of Charity.

22 Desmond Doig, *Mother Teresa: Her People and Her Work* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 48.

23 Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta* (London: Collins, 1971).

24 Unattributed article, 'Saints Among Us: The Work of Mother Teresa', *TIME Magazine*, 29 December 1975, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,945463,00.html>> [accessed 28 May 2013].

## The Unpopular Sister

In this part of the article the focus is not on Mother Teresa the globally recognized public figure and her charismatic appeal but on the years when she initially emerged as a visionary nun. I contend that the period between 1946 and 1949, before the foundation of the Missionaries of Charity in 1950, merits attention because it reveals that the woman acknowledged as one of the most popular and charismatic individuals in modern times started off as a very unpopular, even hated figure. What is of interest about her initial unpopularity is that it began when she was a member of the Loreto order.

To understand why Mother Teresa decided, in 1946, to leave Loreto, we need to find out why she chose a religious vocation in the first place. The prevailing thinking in Mother Teresa scholarship is that she decided to enter the religious life in 1928 because she wanted to serve Jesus. Equally dominating is the view that she chose to travel as a missionary to India because she wanted to win souls for Jesus by serving the poor of Calcutta. In *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity*, I contend that her father's sudden and mysterious death was quite a traumatic event for Mother Teresa who was nine years old at the time.<sup>25</sup> Under the strain of this tragic loss, Mother Teresa was eager to replace her biological father with a divine father-figure who would never abandon her.<sup>26</sup>

In light of the private writings of Mother Teresa, released for the first time between 2000 and 2010, it appears that her father's death, which was preceded and followed by at least eight more deaths in her extended family, had a deeper and more intricate impact on her spirituality than previously thought.<sup>27</sup> While these bereavements brought her closer to Jesus as never before, and yet, they also signalled the beginning of her loss of faith in God. In my work in progress on Mother Teresa's dark night of the soul, I contend that her decision to go to India was motivated not so much by her desire to

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25 According to Mother Teresa's brother Lazar Bojaxhiu, his father was a staunch supporter of the Albanian national cause and his patriotic activity cost him his life. In an interview, which the Italian magazine *La Gente* ran in December 1979 and January 1980, Lazar made the claim that his father was poisoned by Serb ultra-nationalists after he had attended a meeting in Belgrade.

26 See Alpion, *Mother Teresa*, pp. 157–82.

27 I learned for the first time about the large number of deaths to have afflicted Mother Teresa's extended family as a teenager in Skopje during the interviews with her relatives in 2013.



serve Jesus but by an urgent need to escape death and find God.<sup>28</sup> Mother Teresa's quest for the 'absent' God lasted until she passed away and it was, apparently to the end, inconclusive.

In Mother Teresa's titanic efforts to rid herself of her spiritual darkness, rather than being an end, the poor were the means she employed to overcome her spiritual aridity. Moreover, the poor were not her only 'tools': Mother Teresa employed, for the same purpose, the media, her Missionaries of Charity order, and the Co-Workers organization, which was the most important off-shoot of her religious community, until she disbanded it unexpectedly in 1993, much to the shock of all concerned.

Mother Teresa was always a pragmatic woman and her pragmatism was dictated mainly by the intensity of her trials and tribulations. Further research into the relationship between her spiritual quest and pragmatic spirit will throw more light onto the reasons why, of all the Catholic female orders, she chose to join the Sisters of Loreto in 1928. Likewise, new research will hopefully determine how much Mother Teresa knew, when she made up her mind to enter the religious life, about Mary Ward (1585–1645), the English Catholic nun who founded the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1609, and Frances Teresa Ball (1794–1861), the Irish sister who in 1821 set up the Irish branch of the Institute in Dublin, which later became known as Loreto Abbey.

Given Mother Teresa's inquisitive nature, one can safely say that she chose to join Loreto in the first place and move to India, immediately after spending six weeks at Loreto Abbey, partly because of what she had learnt about the two visionary and rebellious foundresses. She decided to go to India apparently thinking that Ward's and Ball's vision was being kept alive by the Loreto sisters in Calcutta. In view of the nature of Mother Teresa's rebellion, which became apparent especially from September 1946, and the kind of activities she embarked upon immediately after she left Loreto formally on 16 August 1948, one can conclude that she went to India expecting the Loreto sisters in Calcutta to have maintained Ward's charism mainly by implementing her two visionary calls, articulated some three hundred years earlier. That is, Ward believed that nuns should spend less time behind convent walls; she also recommended that sisters should be given more time to serve the needy.

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28 I will shortly submit for publication the first article on Mother Teresa's spiritual darkness.

## Disappointment and Soul-Searching

Mother Teresa did not have to spend a long time in India to realize that she had arrived there with false expectations about Loreto. The sisters of Loreto lived inside the 'cosy confines'<sup>29</sup> of their convents, or 'the palace buildings',<sup>30</sup> as Mother Teresa put it in her journal entry on 16 February 1949, where they enjoyed 'all the beautiful things and comforts'.<sup>31</sup> In short, the Loreto nuns, especially those based at Loreto House, were hardly in touch with the poor of Calcutta.

Like other fellow Loreto sisters assigned to the convent in the Entally district, Mother Teresa could catch a blurred glimpse of the poor 'from the window of the classroom block'<sup>32</sup> of the convent. The Loreto Convent in Entally was situated next to Motijhil, one of the slums of the city, which in those days was home to Muslims, Hindus and Christians. In spite of its proximity to the convent, where she had spent almost twenty years, much to the surprise of her friend Father Julien Henry, by 1948 Mother Teresa still did not know the name of the slum.<sup>33</sup>

Mother Teresa gradually came to resent the fact that, in line with the Catholic missionary tradition in India dating back to the nineteenth century, the Loreto order in Calcutta also had remained essentially an education institution for children from privileged backgrounds. In the words of a former Loreto College student, during the British rule in India 'Loreto House had admitted very few Indians'; by the early 1950s the majority of students were 'the daughters of Calcutta's elite families'.<sup>34</sup> Some Asian royal families also sent their daughters to study at Loreto College.<sup>35</sup> Mother Teresa's belief that Loreto had abandoned the poor was strengthened further when in 1935 she was allowed to leave the compound to teach at St Teresa's school, and observe for the first time a grim reality completely different from the sheltered life at the convent.

We do not know if Mother Teresa raised her misgivings about what she apparently came to see as the failures of Loreto when she was a member of this

29 M. P. K. Kutty, 'Muggeridge, Mother Teresa and her Mission: A Response to Vir Sanghvi', Catholic Bishops' Conference of India News, 14 September 2007.

30 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, pp. 133–4.

31 Ibid., p. 134.

32 Chawla, *Mother Teresa*, p. 34.

33 See Porter, *Mother Teresa*, p. 63.

34 Bharati Mukherjee, 'Mother Teresa: The Saint', *Time*, 14 June 1999, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,991258,00.html>> [accessed 12 January 2012].

35 See Alpion, *Mother Teresa*, p. 197.

order. While she might have shared her views with some of her trusted sisters at the Entally convent, it is unlikely she would have had the opportunity to discuss her concerns with the Loreto superiors who were based at Loreto House in Calcutta, the headquarters of the Sisters of Loreto in India. Throughout her twenty years as a Loreto nun, Mother Teresa was based not at Loreto House but at the Entally convent.

The fact that Mother Teresa was based, from the first, not at Loreto House but at the Entally convent indicates that she was looked down upon by some of the Irish nuns who, it appears, always considered her an 'outsider'. To some of her superiors, Mother Teresa was not European enough, mainly because of her Albanian origin.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the immorality of the racism in this discrimination, it exposes her superiors' ignorance to the fact that the Illyrians, the predecessors of the Albanians, first heard about Christianity through Apostle Paul and that they were amongst the first Europeans to convert to the new faith.<sup>37</sup>

Even so, Mother Teresa never mentioned her discrimination at Loreto in public. Far from it, she always spoke with fondness about the order and the time she spent there, even when her relationship with Loreto turned sour.<sup>38</sup> During her lifetime, the information that she was marginalized and even mistreated at Loreto was very limited. Of particular interest is the account provided by the Indian-American academic Bharati Mukherjee,<sup>39</sup> who enrolled at Loreto College in 1951. As Mukherjee reminisces in 1999, picking up on 'unvoiced opinions of our Loreto nuns', we believed that Mother Teresa 'wasn't as fully European as our Irish nuns' and we 'thought her a freak'.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that Mother Teresa was a topic of discussion among the girls studying at the elitist Loreto College, even three years after she had left the order, indicates how badly her superiors took her departure. Further, one can sense the extent to which Mother Teresa had annoyed her superiors from a rather unconventional source: the spirit of the vitriolic attacks against Mother Teresa is captured with accuracy by the French author Dominique Lapierre in the script he co-wrote for Kevin Connor's film *Mother Teresa: In the Name of God's Poor*, which was released in 1997.<sup>41</sup>

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36 For information on the discrimination Mother Teresa experienced at Loreto, on the basis of her Albanian origin, see Alpion, *Mother Teresa*, pp. 195–9.

37 See (RSV, Rom. 15:19).

38 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 143.

39 Mukherjee, 'Mother Teresa'.

40 Ibid.

41 I am grateful to Gaston Roberge for showing me various scripts of the film *In the Name of God's Poor* during my visit at St Xavier's College, Calcutta, India, in the summer of 2005.

In spite of its biographical nature, *In the Name of God's Poor* is a feature film and not a documentary, from which one can draw correct conclusions about the experiences of Mother Teresa's life that it purports to relay. Given Mother Teresa's close cooperation with Lapierre's writing of the script, and the high regard he had for her and her work, one can conclude that the intimate information in the film about the nun's personal life, especially certain details hinting at the way she was treated at Loreto, came from her or from trusted friends who were familiar with what had happened there.

In one of the scenes of the film a Loreto Mother Superior makes some telling remarks about Mother Teresa in a conversation with Archbishop Périer and Father Van Exem. Both Périer and Van Exem played a major role in Mother Teresa's life in the late 1940s. The meeting is believed to have taken place in Périer's house shortly after Mother Teresa announced that she wanted to leave Loreto. The discussion is obviously of a confidential nature, but not to Mother Teresa. Throughout the time she was trying to convince Périer to allow her to leave Loreto, Van Exem served as a go-between for her and the Archbishop. Van Exem, who was the first to be convinced that Mother Teresa's inspiration came from God,<sup>42</sup> is known to have shared with her, during these testing times, some information that Périer had shared in confidence. Van Exem is rebuked and apologizes for his indiscretion.<sup>43</sup> For these reasons, one can conclude that the remarks made by the Mother Superior in this scene present a fairly accurate picture of the opinion of the leaders of the Loreto order in Calcutta regarding Mother Teresa in the late 1940s.

In the scene the Mother Superior character raises two main objections to Mother Teresa's departure. First, she is keen to stress that '[i]t will upset the entire convent if a nun of Sister Teresa's experience gives up everything and leaves'.<sup>44</sup> The second objection relates to Mother Teresa's application for exclaustation: 'That's the other problem. The Loreto order has always been cloistered, and now a nun comes along and says she heard the voice of God, in a tunnel! . . . Heaven forbid one of the children hears that the headmistress is hearing voices and seeing visions'.<sup>45</sup>

The low opinion that some of the later Loreto children have of Mother Teresa indicates that they were privy to confidential information about the nun who had left the Loreto order at least two years before their enrolment.

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42 See Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, pp. 82 and 90.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

44 *Mother Teresa: In the Name of God's Poor*. Dir. Kevin Connor. The Family Channel and Hallmark Entertainment, 1997 (USA). Film.

45 *Ibid.*

Loreto girls, like Mukherjee, came to think of Mother Teresa as 'a freak' not from the 'unvoiced opinions of our Loreto nuns' but because they heard some of the sisters speaking against her.

Mother Teresa's private writings, which became public ten years after her death, reveal clearly for the first time that, like the Mother Superior in the film, some senior Loreto sisters did take the liberty of making derogatory remarks about Mother Teresa, not only amongst themselves but also to outsiders and leading church figures, including the Archbishop of Calcutta.<sup>46</sup>

Périer admits, more than once, in his private correspondence that Mother Teresa was mistreated at Loreto. He even shares this sentiment, in a letter dated 13 January 1948, with the Loreto Superior General in Dublin, Mother Gertrude Kennedy; although, given his position, he understandably chooses his words very carefully: 'I am aware that Mother M. Teresa . . . in the opinion of a few . . . is not considered very highly, perhaps even not favourably, owing chiefly to her previous education different in many ways from the one imparted in other countries of Europe: she is Yugoslav by nationality'.<sup>47</sup>

Mother Teresa was not assigned to live in and teach at the Entally convent because of the 'different' kind of education she had received in Skopje. The Loreto sisters ran two schools at the Entally convent: St Joseph's, which admitted wealthy Bengali girls, who were taught in English; and St Mary's, where students of middle and poor backgrounds were instructed in Bengali.<sup>48</sup> Mother Teresa was assigned to teach at the latter. Most of the teachers at St Mary's,

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46 See Charlotte Gray, *Mother Teresa: The Nun whose 'Mission of Love' has Helped Millions of the World's Poorest People* (Watford: Exley, 1990), p. 20; Doig, *Mother Teresa*, p. 53; and Edward Le Joly, *We Do it for Jesus: Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), p. 18.

47 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 109.

48 Mother Teresa scholarship does not offer a clear picture regarding Mother Teresa's command of spoken and written Bengali language. To clarify this issue, in January 2012 I sought out the opinions of five people who either knew Mother Teresa personally or have written extensively on her. On the basis of their information, I conclude that Mother Teresa had a good practical knowledge of Bengali (though not literary Bengali) that enabled her to teach geography and even be the Principal of St Mary's School, but her written Bengali was not very good. Calcutta born London based physician Aroup Chatterjee is of the opinion that the claim that Mother Teresa taught children in Bengali is a myth. Likewise, Chatterjee holds that Mother Teresa could not have been a head teacher in a Bengali medium school (see A. Chatterjee, 'Mother Teresa's Command of Bengali Language', e-mail, 10 January 2012).

'one of the least exclusive of the six Loreto schools in Calcutta',<sup>49</sup> were of Indian origin.

Mother Teresa hardly spoke any English when she arrived in Dublin in 1928.<sup>50</sup> Over the years, however, she made considerable progress. The letters she writes, in the 1940s, to Father Van Exem, Archbishop Périer and other religious figures, reveal that by then she had a very good command of English grammar, a sophisticated style and a shrewd sense of humour.<sup>51</sup> It is true that she spoke English with an accent throughout her life; her accent alone, however, was hardly sufficient to disqualify her from teaching English at Loreto, since, if that was the case, some Irish nuns also should not have been allowed to teach in English. Brian Kolodiejchuk's conclusion that Mother Teresa was not assigned to teach in English because it was not her first language is yet another attempt to trivialize the issue of Mother Teresa's marginalization at Loreto, this time on contrived linguistic justifications.<sup>52</sup>

This article pays attention to Mother Teresa's treatment at Loreto in Calcutta not to blame this order *per se*. Incidents when nuns are cruel to each other, especially to those who are perceived as vulnerable and outsiders, are not uncommon in religious orders. The main reason for focusing on the treatment that Mother Teresa received at Loreto is to show that her road to global veneration went through a difficult period of humiliation and victimization, especially from September 1946. Mother Teresa, the iconic charismatic figure who attracted global attention from the late 1960s onwards, was a very unpopular nun when she announced that she wanted to leave Loreto.

### The 'Devilish' Nun

Mother Teresa does not incur the hatred of her superiors simply because she expresses the wish to leave the order. Religious orders, both male and female, always lose members, some more often and in greater numbers than others.<sup>53</sup> What annoys the Loreto superiors in Mother Teresa's case is not that she wants

49 Sebba, *Mother Teresa*, p. 35.

50 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 109.

51 I had a chance to look at some of Mother Teresa's unpublished letters in the possession of her relatives during interviews I conducted with them in 2011 and 2013. These letters indicate a very good command of the English language.

52 See Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 371 n. 9.

53 For information on nuns leaving orders see Bernstein, *Nuns*, pp. 81, 100 and 270.

to run away but the reasons she provides as to why she cannot be 'a perfect Loreto nun'.<sup>54</sup>

Some Loreto superiors take issue with Mother Teresa's decision to leave because they initially see it as an affront to their order; which is compounded by the fact that, once she declares her intention to leave Loreto in the autumn of 1946, she makes it clear that she will not return to this order, even if her venture into the unknown is unsuccessful. Mother Teresa tells Father Van Exem that she does not see the point in keeping the door open to Loreto if her new order fails.<sup>55</sup> She is apparently convinced that as a Loreto nun she will not be allowed to implement what she has in mind, and that the Loreto superiors are too set in their ways to introduce long-term changes to the order's education orientation or to improve outreach to the poor. Twenty years as a Loreto nun has convinced her that she will never find in this order what she has been looking for since she arrived in India in 1929; this conviction is the main reason why her earnest message to Archbishop Périer to allow her to leave Loreto is so unequivocal: 'I must go—and go quickly'.<sup>56</sup>

By her own admission, Mother Teresa is a proud person, and as such she is understandably hurt by the treatment she receives at Loreto, especially after September 1946.<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding her decision to leave Loreto, Mother Teresa's quarrel is not with this particular order *per se*, neither is it with narrow-minded and spiteful superiors; indeed, if that had been the case, finding a solution acceptable both to her and Loreto would not have been difficult. She could have simply moved to another order, and in doing so she would have hardly started a new trend; it is not unusual for nuns to leave their original orders if they believe that their spiritual needs are better met in another congregation.

Moving to another order, though, is not an option for Mother Teresa. She is so determined not to join any other order that in January 1948, against Father Van Exem's advice, she seeks the opinion of Mother Gertrude M. Kennedy, the Superior General of the Loreto order in Dublin, to apply to the Vatican for an indult of secularization (such an indult allows a nun to turn into a laywoman).<sup>58</sup> The application is motivated mainly by Mother Teresa's conviction that the

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54 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 97.

55 See Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 108.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 21 and 25.

58 Teresa was advised by the Superior General of the Loreto order in Ireland to apply to the Holy See for an indult of exlaustration, which meant that she could live by her vows when she left Loreto to work in the slums of Calcutta.

other orders in Calcutta are no different from Loreto. Thus, when Périer asks if it will be possible to achieve her end in a congregation already in existence, Mother Teresa replies, without hesitation, in the negative. The proposed move, she writes on 7 June 1947, is not possible for two main reasons:

First, because they are European. When our Indian girls enter these orders—they are made to live their life—eat, sleep, dress like them. In a word, as the people say—they become ‘Mems’. They have no chance of feeling the Holy Poverty. Second—as much as those Sisters try to adapt themselves to the country, they remain foreigners for the people—and then there are their rules—which do not allow them so to say, be one of the people. They have their big schools and hospitals—in all these the souls have to come to them or be brought to them.<sup>59</sup>

Mother Teresa’s choice of the word ‘Mem’, which is short for ‘Memsahib’ and means literally ‘big lady’, is very interesting. During the British Raj, ‘Memsahib’ was used to refer to a married European woman. Kolodiejchuk holds that in using this term Mother Teresa is implying that ‘life in a European order is unlike the simple and poor lifestyle she envisioned for her sisters.’<sup>60</sup> Mother Teresa expresses her direct or indirect criticism of European orders repeatedly in the letters to Father Van Exem and Archbishop Périer throughout the time she is trying hard to secure permission to leave Loreto.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, in accordance with Loreto policy, Mother Teresa’s superiors read her letters before they are sent off to their recipients; and they are understandably furious with the way they are being described by one of their own. Van Exem warns Mother Teresa at the start of 1947 to write to him in the way that her ‘Superior cannot read it.’<sup>62</sup> Mother Teresa fails to follow his advice and, as a result, her situation at Loreto becomes increasingly precarious. In fact, the Loreto superiors become so furious with Mother Teresa and anyone supporting her that, at times, their viciousness verges on the banal and the vulgar. They especially attack Van Exem for being such a steadfast ally of the rebellious nun.

Some sisters of her community had noticed Mother Teresa’s frequent and long conversations in confession with Father Van Exem in the months

59 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 76.

60 Ibid., p. 369 n. 26.

61 See Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, pp. 49, 51, 92 and 94.

62 Ibid., p. 62.



following her retreat in Darjeeling. From this simple fact, suspicion arose concerning the nature of their relationship. Obviously, the sisters had no clue about the reason for these prolonged meetings. Nonetheless, they deemed them inappropriate and brought them to the notice of her religious superiors.<sup>63</sup>

Some of the Loreto nuns are perhaps justified in drawing the wrong conclusion about the nature of Mother Teresa's frequent meetings with Van Exem after she returns to Calcutta from Darjeeling; after all, it is not unheard of for nuns to develop a sexual interest in priests. As Marcelle Bernstein notes in her inspired 1976 book *Nuns*, in the past, convents were always worried about the nuns' behaviour with men highlighting that relationships with all men are banned, even more so if they are religious.<sup>64</sup>

The Loreto superiors, however, have no reason to suspect anything inappropriate in the frequent meetings between Mother Teresa and Van Exem. Mother Teresa informs some of them as soon as she returns to Calcutta that she wants to leave the order and as such they are perfectly aware that she needs to talk matters through with her spiritual director more than anyone else.

Mother Teresa's meetings with Father Van Exam, innocent as they are, offer her enemies at Loreto House an opportunity to spread the rumour that her friendship with the spiritual director is anything but spiritual. As a result of the alleged affair, the examination of her correspondence to Van Exam is deemed 'expedient in the Lord'.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, her influential opponents use the so-called illicit relationship to get rid of her. In early January 1947, she is informed by the provincial of her 'imminent transfer' to the Loreto community in Asansol; a town one hundred and forty miles away from Calcutta.<sup>66</sup>

The slanderous rumours about the 'unhealthy relationship'<sup>67</sup> between Mother Teresa and Van Exam are apparently so widespread that they reach Mother Gertrude Kennedy, who wastes no time in acting. At Archbishop Périer's and her intervention, Mother Teresa is transferred from Asansol back to the Entally convent in July 1947.<sup>68</sup>

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63 Ibid., pp. 54–5.

64 See Bernstein, *Nuns*, p. 127.

65 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 63.

66 See *ibid.*, p. 54.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

68 See *ibid.*, p. 80.

The malicious allegation about the alleged affair must have been quite a thorny and embarrassing issue for the entire Loreto order; so much so that Mother Kennedy felt it necessary to return to it five months after it had apparently been closed. Referring rather diplomatically to the insinuations as ‘uncharitable suggestions and remarks’,<sup>69</sup> Mother Kennedy concludes in her letter to Archbishop Périer of 25 January 1948 that ‘Mother Provincial was mistaken . . . in her estimate of Mother M. Teresa.’<sup>70</sup>

The Loreto superiors’ attacks intensify, however, after Mother Kennedy’s intervention; although now they concentrate not so much on the ‘dubious nature’ of Mother Teresa’s friendship with Father Van Exem as on her state of mind which, as seen from her correspondence, had become a favourite topic of ridicule since the autumn of 1946. As Mother Teresa puts it, she continues to be ‘the laughing stock of so many—especially religious,’<sup>71</sup> who think she is ‘mad’ and a ‘proud fool.’<sup>72</sup>

Mother Teresa understandably finds this treatment hurtful. What upsets her most, however, is that her ‘persecution’<sup>73</sup> does not stop even after she leaves Loreto on 16 August 1948, in spite of her policy not to ‘say anything to anyone’ about the order so that ‘even M. Prov. [Mother Provincial] could not find any such thing to make a remark.’<sup>74</sup> ‘Mother General is afraid that I am a great danger to the Loreto Nuns,’ Mother Teresa writes to Archbishop Périer on 21 June 1950, ‘so she has forbidden everyone to have anything to do with me. Every means has been used not to render any help to me; every time a new comer comes there is anxiety felt at the Entally Convent.’<sup>75</sup> A year later she writes the following note to Périer: ‘I have become something terrible for Loreto. I am well compared to the devil & the work as his work & so on.’<sup>76</sup>

Contrary to several attempts over the years to present Loreto’s hostility against Mother Teresa as a series of unfortunate misunderstandings coming mainly from a break in communication,<sup>77</sup> their sustained animosity results primarily from their resentment of Mother Teresa’s claim that the inspiration she experienced on 10 September 1946 was in essence an encounter with

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69 Ibid., p. 55.

70 Ibid., p. 80.

71 Ibid., pp. 48 and 96.

72 Ibid., pp. 51 and 66.

73 Ibid., p. 143.

74 Ibid., p. 137.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., p. 143.

77 See Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, pp. 109 and 137.

Jesus.<sup>78</sup> Mother Teresa later modifies any claim about her 'paranormal' abilities to the point that she even declares: 'I've never had a vision'.<sup>79</sup>

Notwithstanding Mother Teresa's denial, her original claim about her *tête-à-tête* with Jesus on the way to Darjeeling on 10 September 1946, gave her Loreto opponents a justification to present this 'otherworldly' experience as a simulation. In other words (to paraphrase Jean Baudrillard's definition of simulation), in some of her superiors' opinion, Mother Teresa was feigning to have what she did not have.<sup>80</sup>

Some Loreto superiors apparently continue to demonize Mother Teresa long after she leaves the order officially in 1948. Their main target is to undermine recruitment from the ranks of the Loreto community to her new order. Mother Teresa tells Archbishop Périer on 7 March 1947 that she knows 'the mind of many a girl'<sup>81</sup> who shares her views on what missionary work should involve. On the day she parts company with Loreto and in the months and years that follow, she receives 'encouraging notes and letters'<sup>82</sup> from several Loreto nuns. Mother Teresa must have found quite heartening the words of Sister Gabriella after her departure: 'all the sisters have spoken well about you; not even one has spoken badly about you'<sup>83</sup> (although they both knew that this was not entirely true).

The fact that Mother Teresa was popular with some nuns made it even more imperative for her superiors to intensify the campaign against her. This explains why they took every measure to keep her as far away from Loreto nuns and students as possible. To keep her at bay they refused her request to rent temporarily one of the Loreto buildings for her new order until she found a more suitable place.<sup>84</sup>

The best way the Loreto superiors thought they could undermine Mother Teresa was by tarnishing her spirituality. As Kolodiejchuk notes, their attempt to attribute 'the work of her fledgling congregation to the devil was a direct attack on the divine origin of her call'.<sup>85</sup>

78 Mother Teresa claimed that on 10 September 1946, when she was on her way to the hill station of Darjeeling to recuperate following a spell of ill health, Jesus told her to leave Loreto.

79 Spink, *Mother Teresa*, p. 8.

80 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 3.

81 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 62.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 124; see also pp. 125–6.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Some Loreto superiors apparently saw Mother Teresa's new charism—to serve Jesus by serving the poorest of the poor—as a direct challenge to what their order stood for and their record in Calcutta. In a sense, Mother Teresa's departure from Loreto and her controversial views about the European orders, mentioned earlier, were also an affront to all religious congregations operating in Calcutta at that time. The resentment against Mother Teresa must have been very strong indeed to have lasted for several decades. As Marcelle Bernstein noted when she was researching her study on nuns in the mid-1970s, several superiors from other orders appeared to regard Mother Teresa 'with less than total admiration'.<sup>86</sup>

Mother Teresa receives from Loreto and other orders in Calcutta, in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the kind of iconoclastic reception which Weber tells us is often reserved in traditional societies for charismatic individuals, whether religious or political. When Mother Teresa announced her vision, though, she was on a different footing from some of the 'charismatic leaders' mentioned by Weber, or indeed a number of politicians that have emerged over the last four decades such as Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair or Barack Obama. Notwithstanding their efforts to secure the leadership of their political parties and nations, Thatcher, Blair and Obama emerged as 'revolutionary' and 'charismatic leaders' from a position of power. By the time Blair changed Clause IV in 1995, for instance, he had been for two years at the helm of the British Labour Party.

Mother Teresa's call for change in the late 1940s, on the other hand, has every chance of failing because as an 'outsider' she does not enjoy traditional or legal-rational authority. Yet, against all odds, she succeeds. Her success is not as a result of her connection with the devil, as some Loreto superiors claimed, but because she has, what Weber's contemporary Karl Jaspers called a 'dämonic power'.<sup>87</sup>

### The Visionary Missionary

Mother Teresa's decision to set up the Missionaries of Charity in 1950 was neither an attempt to put into practice a whim she had on 10 September 1946, nor an act of revenge against Loreto where she had been treated for two decades as a second-class nun. The detailed information she provided to the Archbishop of Calcutta about the reasons why she wanted to leave Loreto, and

86 Bernstein, *Nuns*, p. 270.

87 Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1919).

what she hoped to achieve after her departure, indicates clearly that she had been thinking about her exit for a long time. Her 1942 secret vow, for instance, which became public for the first time only in 2007, is further proof that her announcement in the autumn of 1946 that she wanted to leave Loreto had been a long time coming. As I argue elsewhere, the epiphanic moment she experiences on 10 September 1946, known as her ‘second call’, ‘a call within a call’ and the ‘inspiration day’<sup>88</sup>—as a result of which she decides to serve the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta—becomes less enigmatic if seen in the context of the huge impact the Day of the Great Killing a month earlier had on her.<sup>89</sup> On 16 August 1946 when communal clashes began in Calcutta, Mother Teresa ‘saw the bodies on the street, stabbed, beaten, lying there in strange positions in their dried blood’.<sup>90</sup>

Mother Teresa was a shrewd observer of the challenges her adopted country was going through in the 1940s. She was more in tune than most of her Loreto superiors, especially those based at Loreto House, with the new reality that was emerging because, as mentioned earlier, her students came from less privileged backgrounds, most of her teaching colleagues were Indians, and from 1935 she had the opportunity to leave the Entally compound regularly to teach poor children at St Teresa’s school.

This ‘privileged’ position set her apart also from a large number of nuns belonging to other cloistered orders in Calcutta at that time. Given this, they could be ‘exonerated’ for being slow to understand Mother Teresa’s call for change and even for opposing her. After all, they were not alone in their failure. Father Van Exem, who knew Mother Teresa very well from the early 1940s and thought very highly of her, Archbishop Périer and other church leaders in Calcutta and India also found it difficult at first to understand what she was aiming at. In fact, Périer took a whole year to approve her request to leave Loreto, in spite of the fact that she spent that year bombarding him with letters urging him at every possible moment to let her go. The Vatican also was taken by surprise by Mother Teresa’s request to leave Loreto, especially her ambition to set up a new order. Mother Teresa is so frustrated by what she perceives as the Vatican’s slow response that she remonstrates in her letter to Périer of

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88 Mother Teresa claimed she experienced the ‘first call’ from God to enter the religious life when she was 12 years old.

89 Alpion, *Mother Teresa*, pp. 217–20.

90 Eileen Egan, *Such a Vision of the Street: Mother Teresa—The Spirit and the Work*, Complete and Unabridged (New York: Doubleday, 1986), p. 27.

13 May 1948: 'They [in the Holy See] don't know India. They don't know how much Calcutta needs the Missionaries of Charity'.<sup>91</sup>

Mother Teresa decides to go it alone when, as she puts it on 30 March 1947, 'India is going through days of hatred',<sup>92</sup> because she apparently understands that in the emerging independent India, Christianity would need a new strategy to survive. In spite of its long presence since the days of Apostle Thomas, by the 1940s Christianity was still considered a foreign faith in this predominantly populous Hindu country. More importantly and worryingly for a far-sighted missionary like Mother Teresa, the revival of Hindu nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century did not bode well for the future of Christianity. To make things worse, even some of the founding fathers of the Indian nation, including Mahatma Gandhi, expressed strong reservations about the nature of the activities of Christian missionaries in India, calling openly for their liberties to be curtailed.

Mother Teresa's predicament and early signs of success in the late 1940s and early 1950s can be explained to a certain degree by Max Weber's work on charisma. Weber writes about charisma predominantly as a pre-modern concept, which explains why he tends to address it mainly in a patriarchal context. All the same, Weber's interpretation of charisma and his views on 'natural' leaders are helpful in understanding the circumstances in which Mother Teresa emerges as an extraordinary leader. In the chapter 'Charisma and Its Transformation', included in the second volume of *Economy and Society*, Weber contends that, different from patriarchy, its 'rational counterpart' bureaucracy is oriented towards the satisfaction of 'calculable needs with ordinary, everyday means'.<sup>93</sup> 'All *extraordinary* needs' transcending the sphere of everyday economic routines, continues Weber, historically 'have always been satisfied in an entirely heterogeneous manner: on a *charismatic* basis'.<sup>94</sup> This means that:

the 'natural' leaders in moments of distress—whether physic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, or political—were neither appointed office-holders nor 'professionals' in the present-day sense (i.e., persons performing against compensation a 'profession' based on training and special expertise), but rather the bearers of specific gifts of body and mind that

91 Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, p. 118.

92 Ibid., p. 67.

93 Max Weber, 'Charisma and Its Transformation', in G. Roth and C. Wittich, eds, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 2, trans. E. Fischoff et al. (London: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 1111–57 at p. 1111 (original italics).

94 Ibid.

were considered 'supernatural' (in the sense that not everybody could have access to them).<sup>95</sup>

Mother Teresa believed she had the solutions to the challenges Christianity was facing in India and beyond in the middle of the twentieth century. In a language echoing the preaching of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the thirteenth century in favour of a simple and fully devoted religious life, with her new brand of missionary activity or her 'love in action', as Malcolm Muggeridge puts it,<sup>96</sup> Mother Teresa offers a new 'social contract' between Christianity, this former colonizers' faith, and the poor.

Notwithstanding the opposition from the Loreto superiors, the work that Mother Teresa begins in the slums of Calcutta in the late 1940s wins her admirers from the start. Mother Teresa's new order embodied what, some twenty years later, Jürgen Moltmann would call 'Exodus Church' and 'Exodus community'.<sup>97</sup> These conceptions reflect Moltmann's view of and his intention to focus on 'the reality of Christianity as that of the 'pilgrim people of God'.<sup>98</sup> Moltmann contends that 'Christianity must . . . continually present itself, and does *de facto* present itself, in the weekday obedience and the worldly callings of Christians and in their social roles'.<sup>99</sup>

Like all extraordinary leaders, Mother Teresa was ahead of her time. In taking Jesus out of the walls of the Loreto convent and into the slums of Calcutta, this revolutionary missionary was in fact challenging the Enlightenment rationality that is seen as one of the causes of relegating religion to the private sphere. Mother Teresa was not the first missionary to bring religion into public or initiate the social engagement of the church. She was one of the first religious individuals, however, whose efforts to combine the private and public roles of religion were publicly acknowledged as early as 1949 when the first article about her work appeared in the Calcutta press.<sup>100</sup>

That Mother Teresa combined the private and public roles of religion is also important in explaining the appeal of her brand of missionary work in

95 Ibid., pp. 1111–12.

96 Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, p. 60.

97 For interpretations of Moltmann's notions of 'Exodus church' and 'Exodus community', see Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 304; and Scott R. Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society: Public Theology and Social Theory in the Work of Jürgen Moltmann* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 3.

98 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 304.

99 Ibid., pp. 304–305.

100 Doig, *Mother Teresa*, p. 48.

India and beyond. Reporters and politicians paid attention to Mother Teresa and her order, from its inception, because they were impressed with her courage to challenge social taboos. For instance, the leaders of post-independence India, irrespective of their religion and political orientation—Hindu, Muslim, communist, nationalist—saw Mother Teresa as someone they could work with to implement their progressive programmes aimed at addressing acute social problems.

Mother Teresa herself benefits from, what is known as, ‘the Nehruvian secularism’,<sup>101</sup> when implementing her brand of missionary work. In view of the personal interest Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, takes in Mother Teresa’s work, one can argue that she also plays a role in shaping his liberal vision. Like many Indian leaders of his time and after him, Nehru follows with interest Mother Teresa’s activity. In 1960 Nehru attends the inauguration of the Missionaries of Charity children’s home in Delhi. When Mother Teresa offers to explain to him what her sisters do, Nehru replies: ‘No, Mother, you need not tell me about your work. I know about it. That is why I have come’.<sup>102</sup>

Like all revolutionary leaders, Mother Teresa courageously finds partners among ‘traditional foes’; in this respect the close cooperation with the communist Government of West Bengal, especially her friendship with the Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, is of particular interest. The Missionaries of Charity and the Indian Marxists shared a common goal: helping the poor. The partnership works because Mother Teresa stays away from ideological and political controversies. On their part, the Left Front Government maintains ‘cooperation and support for her public work and a conscious distancing from the religious aspects of her work’.<sup>103</sup> In this respect, one can argue that Basu’s communist government adopts a Neo-Marxist approach to religion; unlike traditional Marxism, Neo-Marxism acknowledges that religion can bring about social change.

Another aspect of Mother Teresa’s work, which makes her at the same time both popular and controversial, is the attention she pays to the rich. Although Mother Teresa took issue with the Loreto order’s tendency to educate primarily girls from privileged backgrounds, she did not resent the rich *per se*. Her

101 For information on the Nehruvian secularism see Gnana Patrick, ‘Public Theology in the Indian Context: A Note on Certain Aspects its Prospects and Challenges’, <<http://www.fiuc.org/cms/COCTI/ACTESPUNE/Gnana%20Patrick.pdf>> [accessed 26 June 2013].

102 Spink, *Mother Teresa*, p. 77.

103 Kalyan Chaudhuri and Parvathi Menon, ‘For the Poorest of the Poor: People the World over Mourn the Death of Mother Teresa’, *Frontline*, vol. 14, no. 19, 20 September to 3 October 1997.



attitude in this matter should be seen in the context of her belief that in the new India, Christianity should cater for the poor as well. Her work in the slums strikes a chord with middle-class Indians who are amongst her most staunch supporters.

'Oppression always has two sides,' Moltmann writes in 2000:

On the one side stands the master, on the other side lies the slave. On the one side is the arrogant self-elevation of the exploiter, on the other the suffering of his victim. Oppression destroys humanity on both sides. The oppressor acts inhumanely, the victim is dehumanized. The evil the perpetrator commits robs him of his humanity, the suffering he inflicts dehumanises the victim'.<sup>104</sup>

Mother Teresa was not in the business of offering absolution but she obviously hoped that the masters, the exploiters, the oppressors, and the evil perpetrators she encountered in her life would repent. As far as Mother Teresa is concerned, we are all children of God. She obviously thinks she is obliged to take care of the poor without ignoring the rich.

Mother Teresa detractors like Christopher Hitchens and Aroup Chatterjee interpret Mother Teresa's 'friendship' with controversial figures like 'Baby Doc' Duvalier, Charles Keating and Robert Maxwell as 'proof' of her 'duplicity' and 'complicity' with shady people from the world of politics and business. Yet, Mother Teresa's 'company' with and her decision to 'side with' dictators and fraudsters, as well as some of her contentious calls for forgiveness, become less controversial if seen from the perspective of Moltmann's 'liberating theology' which postulates that the oppressed and the oppressors are in need of reconciliation and 'reciprocal liberations'.<sup>105</sup> For Moltmann, recognizing the need for liberation on both sides amounts to a self-liberation, a 'conversion', which ultimately means 'striking out a new direction towards the future of one's own humanity'.<sup>106</sup>

Mother Teresa's inclusive Christianity, her decision to wear a sari and her open-minded attitude towards other faiths baffled some Christians, and even made her enemies in the church, both in India and Rome.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless,

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104 Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2000), p. 185. Moltmann is using 'he' in the generic sense here and could equally have used 'she'.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

107 See Teresa, *Where There Is Love*, p. 188.

the Holy See did not take long to recognize the benefits of her efforts to liberate Christianity from, to use a phrase from James Haire, the 'Latin Captivity'.<sup>108</sup> After all, she started using the media effectively some fifteen years before the publication of Pope Paul VI's Encyclical Letter '*Inter Mirifica*' on 4 December 1963.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Mother Teresa started her own *mission ad gentes* almost thirty years before this became the focal point of John Paul II's pontificate.

Mother Teresa's charisma has apparently stood the test of time. Different from a large number of modern-day celebrities whose popularity derives from and is dependent on constant media exposure, Mother Teresa's charisma endures because it is revolutionary without being threatening. While Mother Teresa was first and foremost a religious figure, she was able to articulate her unorthodox vision from the start in a kind of language that did not raise alarm bells for the Roman Catholic Church, followers of other faiths, the irreligious or the political establishment in India and worldwide. Above all, the main reason for both the longevity and enduring appeal of Mother Teresa's charisma is that, from the first, it was conveyed and perceived as a genuine attempt to raise our consciousness about the sacredness of life and human dignity.

In our discordant world, Mother Teresa's charisma has become synonymous with enduring hope, the epitome of Moltmann's conception of an eschatological Christianity; this is not a feat that every revolutionary charismatic leader, religious or otherwise, can match.

A number of scholars argue that 'reflexive modernity' is a climate conducive to the public possibility of religion in our time.<sup>110</sup> By employing a sociological and public theology perspective, in this article I have endeavoured to show that, with her faith in action, the charismatic Mother Teresa paved the way for public religion today.

108 James Haire, 'Public Theology: A Purely Western Issue? Public Theology in the Praxis of the Church in Asia', <[http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc07-03/09\\_jameshaire48.pdf](http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc07-03/09_jameshaire48.pdf)> [accessed 3 June 2013].

109 Pope Paul VI, 'Decree on the Media of Social Communication: *Inter Mirifica*', 4 December 1963, <[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19631204\\_inter-mirifica\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html)> [accessed 1 June 2013].

110 See Patrick, 'Public Theology'; Simon Speck, 'Ulrich Beck's 'Reflecting Faith': Individualization, Religion and the Desecularization of Reflexive Modernity', *Sociology*, 47:1 (2013), 157-72.