

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa, a Roman Catholic nun known for her charitable work and attention to the poor, was born 26 August 1910. The youngest child of Albanian parents Nikola and Drane Bojaxhiu, she was christened Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu and spent her early life in the place of her birth, present-day Skopje, in the Republic of Macedonia. In addition to her unwavering devotion to serve the sick and the poor, Mother Teresa firmly defended traditional Catholic teachings on more controversial issues, such as contraception and abortion. Indeed, her addresses to Western nations rarely excluded straightforward commentary on the social circumstances and disagreements taking place there. Mother Teresa, a renowned humanitarian, defended her religious beliefs regarding life issues and based her life on serving unwanted people in societies around the world until her death in 1997.

From very early in life, Bojaxhiu showed devotion to the Church through service and involvement, and in 1916 received her First Communion and Confirmation. Her father died when she was eight and she and her siblings were raised by her mother, to whom she later attributed much of her early faith and character formation. At the age of eighteen, Bojaxhiu left home to join the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland. Taking the name of Sister Mary Teresa in honor of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, it was during this brief stint in Ireland that she learned to speak English. From 1929 to 1948 Mother Teresa taught at the religious order's St. Mary's School for girls in Calcutta. During this time she finalized her vows to become a Catholic nun in 1937 and rose to the position of principal in 1944.

After a deeply religious experience in 1946, Mother Teresa determined to begin her own religious order specifically to serve the poor, sick, and outcast that surrounded her convent in Calcutta, India. Once granted permission by the Holy See in 1948, Mother Teresa immediately began work on the order that would become the Missionaries of Charity in 1950. Her efforts received much praise and she quickly grew her order with help from her previous students. After less than ten years, she was able to send missionaries to other parts of India, and in 1965 Pope Paul VI encouraged her to begin work in Venezuela and other developing countries. Early attention from the world media, largely initiated by Malcolm Muggeridge's film documentary in 1969 and book in 1971, titled *Something Beautiful for God*, helped Mother Teresa gain a major foothold in the public eye, and news of her efforts and character quickly spread across the globe. Her success sparked worldwide interest and donations and volunteer workers came pouring in. Before long her work inspired the creation of numerous additional groups devoted to similar efforts, and by the time of her death, she had over 4,000 Sisters of Charity serving in 610 locations in 123 countries, not including tens of thousands of additional missionaries and volunteers who also joined ranks to follow her example.

Though popularly accepted for her caring nature and tireless service to the poor, Mother Teresa's religious devotion made some of her beliefs and statements less widely heralded. Her criticism of Western nations, particularly the United States, for liberal abortion laws and widespread contraceptive use continued throughout her lifetime. In 1994, for example, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted her claim that "Roe v. Wade has deformed a great nation. The so-called right to abortion has pitted mothers against their children and women against men [. . .] It has nominally accorded mothers unfettered dominion over the independent lives of their physically dependent sons and daughters." Her strict position on these and other issues earned her a reputation for uncompromising approaches to life issues.

Despite her outspoken criticism, she remained widely admired and received numerous awards during her lifetime, including the first Pope John XXIII Peace Prize in 1971, the Kennedy Prize in 1971, the Nehru Prize in 1972, the Balzan Prize in 1978, the Albert Schweitzer International Prize in 1975, the Bahrat Ratna in 1980, the British Order of Merit in 1983, the United States Presidential Medal

of Freedom from Ronald Reagan in 1985, and, most notably, the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. In lieu of the honorary Nobel banquet, she requested that the funds be donated to the poor she served in India. Shortly after her death on 5 September 1997, her beloved status in the Church earned her the initial step toward canonization, and Pope John Paul II beatified her in 2002.

Sources

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