

A Pencil in God's Hand

The Missionaries of Charity launched its first venture outside of India in the small town of Cocorote, Venezuela. The new environment provided many challenges; the sisters were faced with a new language barrier (locals spoke Spanish and native dialects), unfamiliar customs, and treacherous jungle terrain. Led by Sister Nirmala, a Hindu-born convert, the nuns found themselves doing everything from preparing local children for the rituals of First Communion and Confirmation to repairing roofs in the

A Missionary Brother of Charity provides medication to an AIDS patient in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

wake of a tropical storm.



The home in Venezuela would soon be followed by others on every continent but Antarctica.

This enormous growth created an urgent need for more workers. After consulting Father Van Exem, Mother Teresa asked the Archbishop of Calcutta for permission to create a

male order, called the Missionary Brothers of Charity. Since Catholic law would not allow a woman to oversee a male order, she searched far and wide for a suitable leader. In 1966, Father Ian Travers-Ball, an Australian-born Jesuit, stepped forward to head the Missionary Brothers of Charity, changing his name to Brother Andrew in 1968. The Brothers worked primarily with young boys, offering them free meals and vocational training. Some of the boys went to live in various Missionaries of Charity–run homes in and around Calcutta, where they learned skills such as radio repair or farming.

Like the Missionary Sisters of Charity, the new order grew rapidly, though not without some clashes between Brother Andrew and Mother Teresa. Brother Andrew favored a more informal organizational structure, and wanted the brothers to dress not in clerical garb but in T-shirts and jeans, feeling this would make them more accessible. Eventually he left the order,

A Growing Movement

Some of the Missionaries of Charities' first homes were founded in Cocorote, Venezuela, in 1965; Rome, Italy, in 1968; Tabora, Tanzania, in 1968; and Bourke, Australia, in 1969. In the 1970s and 1980s, the order opened new homes every few months, operating well over three hundred during Mother Teresa's lifetime.



and was replaced by Brother Geoff, whose management style was more in line with Mother Teresa's vision.

Mother Teresa also created an organization for lay (unordained) volunteers, borrowing a name Gandhi used for his helpers: Co-Workers. Since the 1950s, many people from all walks of life had helped the Missionaries of Charity in many ways. Doctors, nurses, and dentists often provided free care. There were also a number of British families and officers' wives who had donated time, money, and goods to Mother Teresa's projects while they lived in India. When some of these supporters returned to England, they started new

Mother Teresa was enthusiastically received at the White House by Ronald and Nancy Reagan.



chapters of Co-Workers there. By the 1990s, there were approximately 30,000 volunteer Co-Workers in England, and another 10,000 in other parts of Europe and in the United States. Some of them raised hundreds of thousands of dollars. This money was used to buy bulk supplies such as powdered milk, protein biscuits, and clothing, and to ship them to Missionaries of Charity homes in Africa, Asia, Central America, and South America.

By the late 1960s, Mother Teresa herself had become a more visible figure. Since her first fundraising tour back in 1960, she had appeared on the covers of various Catholic magazines, and word of her work was beginning to reach an international audience. In 1968, the BBC asked noted journalist Malcolm Muggeridge to do a half-hour television interview with a missionary nun. Muggeridge was not enthusiastic at first. He had never heard of Mother Teresa, and found her rather shy and stiff on-camera. "Mother Teresa's answers were perfectly simple and perfectly truthful; so much so that I had some uneasiness about keeping the interview going for the required half hour," he later admitted. "Controversy, the substance of such programmes, does not arise in the case of those who, like Mother Teresa, are blessed with certainties." The footage did not seem in any way extraordinary; there was some question of whether the interview would even be broadcast. But when it aired on the Sunday night series *Meeting Point*, the response from viewers was so overwhelming that the BBC decided to run



it again. Both times, the airings were followed by outpourings of unsolicited donations.

DOCUMENTARY

A documentary is a nonfiction film about real people and events.

Muggeridge became excited, and asked the BBC to send him to India to make a documentary about Mother Teresa and her followers. The BBC agreed, but Mother Teresa was reluctant at first. Eventually, however, she agreed to give Muggeridge and his cameraman full access for a five-day shoot, “if this TV program is going to help people to love God better.” Five days is an absurdly short shooting schedule for a film, but the shoot went without a hitch. Initially, the filmmakers thought they wouldn't be able to film inside Nirmal Hriday, because the only available light, filtering down from high windows, was far too dim. But cameraman Ken Macmillan had a new Kodak film that he wanted to try, so they took some shots anyway. Later, when they reviewed the rushes in London, both men were startled by the clarity and beauty of the Nirmal Hriday footage.

Macmillan said, “You could see every detail. And I said, ‘That’s amazing. That’s extraordinary.’ And I was going to go on to say, you know, three cheers for Kodak. I didn’t get a chance to say that though, because Malcolm, sitting in the front row, spun round and said: ‘It’s divine light! It’s Mother Teresa.’”

RUSHES

Rushes, or dailies, are pieces of film that have been shot but not yet edited together.

In no time at all, the story of this photographic miracle was picked up by the popular press, and Mother

Teresa had become a media star. Muggeridge's documentary, *Something Beautiful for God*, was followed by a book of the same name, and both were enormously popular. The title came from a letter that Mother Teresa sent Muggeridge shortly after the shoot: "I can't tell you how big a sacrifice it was to accept the making of a film—but I am glad now that I did so because it has brought us all closer to God.

In your own way try to make the world conscious that it is never too late to do something beautiful for God."

Producer and director Peter Chafer, though not a religious man, declared

Mother Teresa "one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met . . . very practical and running a very tight ship. I think she's awfully good at being a nun."

In time, Mother Teresa would be the subject of several other films, including a 1986 documentary by Emmy Award winners Ann and Jeanette Petrie, and a far more controversial 1994 television film, *Hell's Angel* by Tariq Ali.



The footage of Mother Teresa showed her relaxed and laughing as she spoke about her mission.



With this high visibility came an increase in volunteers, donations, and honors for Mother Teresa. She had already won several major awards in India, always spending the prize money on the Missionaries of Charity's new projects. In 1971, she was awarded the first Pope John XXIII Peace Prize, which came with a check for 10,000 British pounds. During this time, she was also moving her operations into needy neighborhoods in prosperous cities such as London and New York, saying that she was astonished when Westerners wrote checks to help the poor in India, but seemed not to notice the poor and suffering in their own backyards.

Still, Mother Teresa continued to do things in her own way, maintaining that God would provide for her workers as well as for those they served. Many were amazed when she refused an offer from New York's Cardinal Terence Cooke to pay \$500 a month to each Sister of Charity working in Harlem, asking him, "Do you think, Your Eminence, that God is going to become bankrupt in New York?"

Mother Teresa had always insisted that her followers live in the same poverty as the people they served. When she considered buildings that were donated too elegant, she had them systematically stripped of such luxuries as carpeting, comfortable mattresses, and even water heaters and radiators. Some people scoffed at the notion of nuns going out of their way to deny themselves comfort, feeling the poor they served would have been glad to be given such things. Years later, the order's refusal to accept a legally

mandated handicapped-access elevator even prevented a new home from opening in New York. Former Missionary Sister of Charity Susan Shields remembers, “Mother would not allow an elevator. The city offered to pay for the elevator. Its offer was refused. After all the negotiations and plans, the project for the poor was abandoned because an elevator for the handicapped was unacceptable.”

The 1970s also saw one of the Missionaries of Charities’ few failures, as a home they opened in violence-ridden Belfast, Ireland, was forced to shut down within 18 months.

Mother Teresa comforts a young polio victim in Manila, capital of the Philippines.

“It is easy to love the people far away. It is not always easy to love those close to us.”

— Mother Teresa



The Iron Curtain

The “Iron Curtain” was the name given by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to the symbolic, physical, and military boundaries between Communist-led and Western European countries after World War II. Though the term most often referred to political divisions, there were numerous boundary fences between Communist and democratic nations. The most famous physical barrier, the concrete Berlin Wall which divided the city between East and West Germany, was demolished in 1989.



The Sisters’ hasty retreat was never fully explained.

This was also a period of personal tragedy for Mother Teresa. She and Lazar had not forgotten their family, trapped behind the Iron Curtain in Albania. Drana’s health was poor, and she had written an emotional letter to Lazar, saying her only wish was to see him and his family, and her daughter Gonxha, before she died. Both Lazar and Mother Teresa made efforts to bring Drana and Aga to Italy, but the Albanian government again refused to let them leave. Mother Teresa then looked into

traveling to Albania herself, but learned that she might not be allowed to leave the country again if she did. In 1972, she received word that her mother had died. A year later, Aga was dead as well. These private losses weighed heavily on Mother Teresa’s spirits, though she continued to work with seemingly tireless energy.

*“It will come only when
Jesus thinks it is time.”*

—Mother Teresa on the Nobel Peace Prize

of an article entitled “Saints Among Us.” The suggestion that Mother Teresa was a living saint had already been raised many times, but now it reached millions of readers. Her name was put forward—not once but three times—for the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. One of her early champions was Malcolm Muggeridge, who lobbied the Norwegian committee on her behalf starting in 1972. She was nominated again by impressive teams of supporters in 1975 and 1977. When the 1977 prize went to a different candidate, Mother Teresa said, “I had a good laugh over the Nobel Prize. It will come only when Jesus thinks it is time.”

Throughout all this publicity, Mother Teresa tried to divert the attention from herself to the poor she served, and above all to God, calling herself “a little pencil in God’s hands.” Maybe so, but that pencil was making quite an imprint on the world.

In December 1975, *Time* magazine ran a cover story on Mother Teresa, as part

Time magazine chose an image of Mother Teresa for a 1975 cover story on “living saints.”

