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A Voice of Peace: Mother Teresa

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace" (Collopy, 31). Service and love for the destitute were Mother Teresa's methods to bring the world one step closer to peace. The extraordinary nun lived a life of self-sacrifice within the Catholic Church. She sacrificed her health, comfort, family and all worldly goods to dedicate her every breath to improving the lives of the poor in India, Africa, Eastern Europe and the globe. Her spirituality and duty to God strengthened her relentless actions against hate and poverty. This small woman aided all humans in need regardless of their backgrounds and beliefs. She created Houses for the Dying for the homeless and built hundreds of orphanages for lepers and those society did not dare to notice (Spink, 103). This peacemaker's well-being was sacrificed many times to meet the needs of suffering strangers. Mother Teresa's goal of bringing happiness to the destitute through self sacrifice promotes the elements of selflessness and love that are so important to the establishment of peace. She became a voice for peace through her loving care for ignored and suffering individuals. I choose Mother Teresa as a voice of peace because her work concentrated on eradicating poverty, the most deadly act of violence."

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“The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace” (Collopy, 31). Service and love for the destitute were Mother Teresa’s methods to bring the world one step closer to peace. The extraordinary nun lived a life of self-sacrifice within the Catholic Church. She sacrificed her health, comfort, family and all worldly goods to dedicate her every breath to improving the lives of the poor in India, Africa, Eastern Europe and the globe. Her spirituality and duty to God strengthened her relentless actions against hate and poverty. This small woman aided all humans in need regardless of their backgrounds and beliefs. She created Houses for the Dying for the homeless and built hundreds of orphanages for lepers and those society did not dare to notice (Spink, 103). This peacemaker’s well-being was sacrificed many times to meet the needs of suffering strangers. Mother Teresa’s goal of bringing happiness to the destitute through self sacrifice promotes the elements of selflessness and love that are so important to the establishment of peace. She became a voice for peace through her loving care for ignored and suffering individuals. I choose Mother Teresa as a voice of peace because her work concentrated on eradicating poverty, the most deadly act of violence.

Mother Teresa’s early years were dominated by strife and conflict which influenced her to devote her life to peace. The Saint of Calcutta was born Agnes Gonxhe

Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910 in Skopje, Macedonia. She was the youngest of three children of Albanian parents (Spink, 1). Throughout her youth, Agnes experienced the devastation of the Balkan Wars as well as the isolation her family suffered because they were Albanians living in enemy territory. On November 28th, 1912 Albania gained its independence and the Bojaxhiu family held a large celebration in their home. Agnes's father, Nikola Bojaxhiu, made no secret of his commitment to the Albanian nationalist cause. Yet his commitment to the unification of Kosovo with Albania caused his early death. Nikola was poisoned at a conference in Belgrade in 1919 at the age of forty-five. Agnes was only eight years old when her father died. This left her family with no means of financial security. Thus it was largely under her mother's insistence on the value of non-material riches of kindness, generosity and compassion for the poor that the foundations for Agnes's future apostolate were laid. Agnes's mother, Drana took care of the poor in her community. She cared for an elderly alcoholic woman every morning and welcomed the hungry to dine in her house every night. She also took in six orphans as a part of her own family. The hero of the poor credited her mother for establishing her moral duties and her strong sense of community. Agnes's mother advised her, "When you do good, do it quietly, as if you were throwing a stone into the sea" (Spink, 7).

Mother Teresa's acts of kindness began with the individual.

Agnes readily went to church services at a very young age. She was educated first at a convent-run primary school but then went to a state school. She received her religious instructions from her home and her church. In her teens, the young peacemaker became a member of a Sodality youth group in her local parish. A private personal experience with God and her involvement with church activities prompted Agnes's

interest in missionary work (Mother Teresa of Calcutta). She believed it was her duty to aid the weak, the poor and the unfortunate of the world through the grace of her God.

At the age of seventeen, Agnes responded to her first call of a vocation as a Catholic missionary nun. The religious girl had never seen a nun before but she soon joined an Irish order, the Sisters of Loreto. This order was known for its missionary work for the poor in India. After a few months of training in Dublin, Agnes was sent to India, where on May 24, 1931 she took her initial vows as a nun. From 1931 to 1948 Sister Teresa taught geography and catechism at St. Mary's High School in Calcutta. In 1944, she became the principal of St. Mary's, where she soon contracted tuberculosis and was unable to continue teaching. The selfless principal was sent to Darjeeling for rest and recuperation and it was on the train to Darjeeling that she received her second call -- "the call within the call" (Ascension Research). On September 10, 1946, on the long train ride to Darjeeling Sister Teresa had a life-changing encounter with the Living Presence of the Will of God. "I realized that I had the call to take care of the sick and the dying, the hungry, the naked, the homeless - to be God's Love in action to the poorest of the poor. That was the beginning of the Missionaries of Charity." (Ascension Research Center). Mother Teresa did not question the call she had received and quickly asked permission to leave the Loreto congregation and to establish a new order of sisters. She received that permission from Pope Pius XII in 1948 (Collopy, 31). Her goal for peace began by comforting the poor, the untouchables and the dying. The sister was certain that if the unloved received the love they deserved, humanity would be at peace.

The Angel of Calcutta affirmed, "I never judge anyone because it doesn't allow me the time to love them" (Collopy, 31). Mother Teresa's service to peace and humanity

lie in her ability to provide love and warmth to the suffering masses of the world. She did not judge the most hardened of criminals, nor the dirtiest of the poor. She was ready to love all persons from all walks of life. The suffering and poverty Sister Teresa glimpsed outside the convent walls left a deep impression on her. In 1948 she devoted herself to working amongst the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta. She started a school in the slums to teach the children of the poor. The selfless sister also learned medicine and went into the homes of the sick to treat and comfort them. Sister Teresa never worried about her own health and well being amongst the infectious sick. Her love for others transcended her own need for comfort. In 1949 some of her former pupils joined her work amongst the suffering. They found men, women, and children dying on the streets because they had been rejected by local hospitals. The group rented a room so they could care for helpless people otherwise condemned to die in the gutter. Sister Teresa worked to provide the unwanted people in society happiness and comfort during their last days of life. In 1950, the group was established by the Church as a Diocesan Congregation of the Calcutta Diocese. It was known as the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa of Calcutta).

Professor John Sanness, who chaired the committee and gave the speech of presentation for the 1979 Nobel Prize to Mother Teresa, believed that through working for people who were not of her race, religion or nationality, this Nobel Prize winner transcended all barriers. "With her message she is able to reach through to something innate in every human kind--- if for no other purpose than to create a potential, a seed for good...she promotes peace in the most fundamental manner", Sanness concluded, "by her confirmation of the inviolability of human dignity" (Mother Teresa of Calcutta). Mother

Teresa believed in suffering for the poor just like Jesus Christ has suffered for humanity. In 1952 the first Home for the Dying was opened in space made available by the City of Calcutta. The order received permission from Calcutta officials to use a portion of an abandoned temple to gather dying Indian men, women and children off the streets and allow them to spend their time of suffering in a loving environment. The nuns tried to cure the sick and give hope to the dying. The order also found employment for the poor who survived their sickness and supplied them with food and shelter after their departure from the home (Ascension Research Center). In these establishments, homeless people who were rejected from all other institutions were washed, fed and allowed to die with dignity (Ascension Research Center). Mother Teresa accomplished her saintly acts of service as the opportunities came to her in her life. She never had a clear-cut plan on how to help humanity and allow for the prosperity of peace. This kind spirit only knew that she wanted to end poverty and supply the unwanted and the unloved with love and care. Such simple yet noble goals allowed her to set no limit on what she could accomplish for humanity.

Mother Teresa continued to love the poor and the neglected by opening her first orphanage in 1953. The orphanage focused on caring for handicap children, and children of dying mothers. When Pope Paul VI gave Mother Teresa a white Lincoln Continental, she auctioned the car and used the money to create more homes for the poor. In 1957 the order of the Missionaries of Charity established Shanti Nagar or the Town of Peace. This organization was a leper colony built on land granted from the Indian government (Mother Teresa: the Nobel Peace Prize 1979). Mother Teresa's fierce dedication to the poor and sick was evident through her lack of care for her own health. She worked with

infectious Indians on a daily basis yet she never feared for her own life. She knew that her duty was to protect and help these suffering people and nothing was more important.

Mother Teresa gained worldwide acknowledgement for her efforts on behalf of world peace. She received many humanitarian and peace awards for her services amongst the poor in India and later for her services throughout the world. Her first prestigious award was given to her in 1962. Calcutta's hero received the Padma Shri award for distinguished service in India. Mother Teresa also received the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She accepted the award wearing the same one dollar sari she had adopted when she found her order. She received her award in the name of the "unwanted, unloved and uncared for"(Mother Teresa: Angel of Mercy). After she had received the Nobel Piece Prize, Mother Teresa insisted on a departure from the ceremonial banquet and asked that the funds of six thousand dollars be donated to the poor in Calcutta. She claimed that the money would permit her to feed hundreds of sick and destitute Indians for a year. Mother Teresa's work has also received the Nehru Prize for her promotion of international peace and understanding in 1972 and the Balzan Prize and the Templeton and Magsaysay award in 1979. The United States recognized the loving nun's acts of peace by awarding her the Medal of Freedom in 1985. The Medal of Freedom is the highest U.S. civilian award. In 1996 she received the United States Honorary Citizenship. Yet earthly rewards were only important to Mother Teresa if they helped her help the world's poor and suffering people (Mother Teresa: Angel of Mercy).

“Today, nations put too much effort and money into defending their borders. They know very little about the poverty and the suffering that exist in the countries where those bordering on destitution live. If they would only defend these defenseless people with

food, shelter and clothing, I think the world would be a happier place” (Collopy, 31). Mother Teresa’s focus on individuals allowed her to understand the beauty of all nationalities, races and religions. Her goals were simple yet they changed the lives of millions. Her selflessness and dedication to the weak inspired others to seek peace through service. The peacemaker’s strength and faith in the good of humanity allowed her to persuade Israelis and Palestinians guerilla forces to stop shooting long enough for her to rescue 37 mentally challenged children trapped in a hospital in besieged Beirut in 1982 (Mother Teresa: Angel of Mercy). Mother Teresa’s work in the Calcutta's slums illustrated that in order to save people from poverty it was important to empower the poor with self-esteem and with hope that change is possible. Her missionary efforts proved that when confronted with a global challenge such as poverty, small steps were more effective than massive antipoverty programs. It is hard to comprehend how one small woman, in a ragged white cotton sari never bothered with reports and theories on how to end poverty but went out into the world and changed the lives of millions solely by her own unplanned efforts.

Mother Teresa was not a conventional political figure. Politicians accomplish their goals to increase their own wealth and prestige while the nun of Calcutta accomplished her duties to improve the lives of people she did not even know. She sacrificed her own life on several occasions to continue her service with the poor. Yet Mother Teresa had a politician's sense of issues and timing: she knew that even in the modern world, the biggest issue of all was poverty. Her life was dedicated to erasing this humanitarian problem from the hearts of the poor. After her many injuries and sicknesses, the persistent missionary returned to work as soon as she could walk again.

When Mother Teresa had a mild heart attack in Rome in 1983 while visiting Pope John Paul, quickly left the hospital the moment she awoke to continue her service to the poor. Yet in 1989 she experienced a nearly fatal heart attack and a pacemaker was installed. In 1990, the mother of peace announced her intention to resign as head of her order because of her deteriorating health. But during a secret ballot of her sisters, she was re-elected almost unanimously with the only dissenting vote being her own. Mother Teresa did not want any more expensive medical treatments to save her life. She felt that the sicknesses were a sign from God for her to step down from the missionary position. Yet when her order asked her to continue her life of service, she did not hesitate to accept her duties (Spink, 213).

Mother Teresa continued to work with the poor in the slums of world although many other health complications followed. In 1991 the Angel of Mercy suffered pneumonia in Tijuana, Mexico which led to congestive heart failure. She was hospitalized in La Jolla, California but left the hospital as soon as her treatments were concluded. In 1993 she broke three ribs in a fall in Rome and was hospitalized for malaria in August in New Delhi. She underwent surgery to clear a blocked blood vessel in September. Mother Teresa fell and broke her collarbone in April of 1996 and suffered from malarial fever and failure of the left heart ventricle in August. She was treated for a chest infection and recurring heart problems in September and was readmitted to the hospital with chest pains and breathing problems on November 22nd (Mother Teresa: Angel of Mercy) The fragile nun never complained about her health problems; she was only worried that her time in the hospital would be better spent in service to the poor. Her physical well being could always be sacrificed to enhance her spiritual well-being.

Throughout the years the Missionaries of Charity order grew from 12 volunteers to thousands serving the "poorest of the poor" in 450 centers around the world. Mother Teresa created many homes for the dying and the unwanted from Calcutta to New York to Albania. She was one of the first to establish homes for AIDS victims. For more than 50 years, this courageous individual comforted the poor, the dying, and the unwanted around the world. More than forty-two thousands of men, women and children have been taken from the streets of Calcutta and transported to Mother Teresa's Dying Homes. Nineteen thousand of the people have had the opportunity to die in a caring and peaceful environment. Mother Teresa believed that in their last hours at the Dying Homes the poor met human and Divine Love, and felt at peace (Spink, 384).

When the Missionaries of Charity Brothers was founded in 1966, homes for the dying began to open in Rome, Tanzania, and Australia. In 1971 the first home in the United States was established in the South Bronx, New York. The Society of Missionaries has spread all over the world, including the former Soviet Union and former Communist Eastern European countries. This order continues to help the poor in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. They aid the poor and the suffering during natural catastrophes such as floods, epidemics, and famine and sacrifice their lives on a daily basis (Ashby, 183). The order also created houses in North America, Europe and Australia where they take care of the shut-ins, alcoholics, homeless, and AIDS sufferers. By the 1990s there were over one million Co-Workers for the Missionaries of Charity in more than 40 countries. Whether it was in Ethiopia tending to the hungry, in Chernobyl helping radiation victims or in Armenia aiding earthquake victims, Calcutta's "angel of mercy" was there. Beginning in 1980 Mother Teresa created homes for drug addicts,

prostitutes and battered women. In 1991 she returned for the first time to her native Albania and opened a Home for the Dying in Tirana. Mother Teresa's zeal and mercy knew no ethnic, national or religious boundaries (Mother Teresa: Angel of Mercy).

After years of tireless service to the oppressed and the poor, Mother Teresa's failing health forced her to step down as head of her order on March 13th, 1997. Just weeks after celebrating her eighty-seventh birthday, the saint of peace died of cardiac arrest at 9:30 pm in Calcutta, India on September 5, 1997. Her tomb became a place of pilgrimage and prayer for people of all faiths, rich and poor alike. Less than two years after her death, in view of Mother Teresa's reputation of holiness and lifelong dedication to peace and love, the Pope John Paul II permitted the opening of her Cause of Canonization. On December 20th 2002 he approved the decrees of her heroic virtues and miracles. The beautification of Mother Teresa occurred on October, 19th 2003 and this angelic woman became one step closer to sainthood (Ashby, 201).

Throughout her inspiring life, Mother Teresa stressed the need to love the poor, the suffering and the unwanted as a route to peace. "The poor must know that we love them, that they are wanted. They themselves have nothing to give but love. We are concerned with how to get this message of love and compassion across. We are trying to bring peace to the world through our work" (Collopy, 31). The small nun from Macedonia had no theories or complicated plans on how to save the world from poverty, yet her persistent works of love helped more people than a governmental program ever could. Mother Teresa's Homes of the Dying and orphanages allowed the poor to live in dignity. The suffering realized that good existed in the world because the Angel of Mercy exemplified love, goodness and kindness in every action she undertook. Perhaps, French

President Jacques Chirac summed up Mother Teresa's legacy best when he said after her death: "This evening, there is less love, less compassion, less light in the world" (Mother Teresa: Angel of Mercy).

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