
Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?

By Gëzim Alpion

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Mother Teresa did not hail from peasant class, says Albanian-born scholar

C. M. Paul

KOLKATA, West Bengal (SAR NEWS) — In an effort to debunk media propagation that Mother Teresa's 'peasant class' background helped her reach the pinnacle of fame, an Albanian-born research scholar claimed that it was actually the first 18 years of her life in native Skopje (Albania) that moulded her – eventually catapulting her to the realm of celebrities.

'Her biographers have totally neglected the first 18 years of her life in her native Shkup (Skopje) which is now the capital of Macedonia,' insisted Dr Gëzim Alpion, lecturer in Film and Media Studies of the Department of Sociology, the University of Birmingham, one of the top five research universities in the United Kingdom.

Dr Alpion was presenting a lecture on 'Mother Teresa and the Media' at St Xavier's College Kolkata, July 1.

Explaining how Mother Teresa became a media icon, Dr Alpion said, 'Mother Teresa's Balkan qualities of stubborn patriotism and strict religious upbringing, coupled with discipline in cultural and literary pursuits of the first 18 years of her life made her remarkable.'

He reminded the audience of Mother Teresa's compliment to the media persons: 'Even journalists can do the work of God.'

After showing the discovery of Mother Teresa by the Indian, American and British media, Dr Alpion highlighted how Mother Teresa's 'fame' or 'celebrity status' differed from that of other famous people – especially from the media celebrities.

Forty-three-year-old Dr Alpion has taken upon himself the task of highlighting the formative impact of Mother's Albanian parents and Skopje's multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious community had on her as a child and as a young woman.

'These profound religious, cultural and ethnic characteristics in Mother Teresa's upbringing helped her,' claims Dr Alpion, 'to break free from a religious order that did not consider her "European enough".'

Alpion also touched upon Mother Teresa's relationship with BBC journalist Malcolm Muggeridge whose 1968 interview, 1969 documentary shot in Calcutta, and the 1971 book, *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, made the Albanian-born Roman Catholic nun one of the most famous persons in the world in the last quarter of the 20th century.

In the second lecture, Dr Alpion showed how 'the media and the impact of Mother Teresa's Albanian roots on her ministry among the poor'. Even though Mother Teresa remained in the limelight of world media for over 40 years, 'we still do not have a "complete" biography of the nun', he said.

Dr Alpion is a versatile and prolific academic, writer, playwright, reviewer, journalist, and a media, political and culture analyst. His new book, *Mother Teresa, the Media and Sainthood [Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?]*, which has already attracted much attention, will be published by this year-end.