
Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?

By Gëzim Alpion

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‘She loved India more than...’

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In this superbly researched work, Gëzim Alpion, an Albanian playwright and essayist, attempts what I see as a wholly unbiased approach. He ignores neither the vitriolic broadsides launched against her by critics such as Christopher Hitchens, Aroup Chatterjee or Germaine Greer, nor the petty faultfinding of ‘insiders’ such as former nun, Susan Shields.

Nevertheless, Alpion insists that Mother Teresa and her work attracted the eye of the public, largely due to the media, for her ascent to fame was meticulously contrived by public relations experts and spokespersons both in the East and in the West. He points out that numerous political, religious, nationalist and business groups made sure she had all the exposure and media immunity needed in order to serve their objectives. She was used by Indian politicians to

evoke love and compassion in the hearts of their countrymen, and by those wishing to remove the caste system. Mother Teresa, in course of time, became aware that she was being thus manipulated, but she did not mind as long as the hype helped her to serve the poorest of the poor.

Even assuming Mother Teresa's saintly nature was a matter of dispute, her commitment to her vocation and to the poor was exemplary. With her lifetime pledge to serve the poorest in a predominantly non-Christian country like India, she succeeded in proving to a money-oriented West that religion can be a means to advance people's material and spiritual wellbeing, and that rather than divide, faith can be used to unite communities. Alphonso asserts that whatever failings she might have had, Mother Teresa loved India as no other country in the world, including her native Albania.

This book is the work of an open and dedicated scholar, who, despite his reverence for the nun, has yet striven to be as unbiased as possible, never letting his emotions get in the way. I would have no hesitation at all in recommending this book to everyone.