
Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?

By Gëzim Alpion

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A new book that asks: Is she a saint or a celebrity?

Review by Gaston Roberge SJ

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A new book on Bl Teresa is out. *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* written by Gëzim Alpion has been published by Routledge in London & New York (284 pages).

Like Mother Teresa, Dr Gëzim Alpion is a teacher. As a teacher/writer he may have given a hint to readers, and more so to reviewers of his book when he wrote:

To research Mother Teresa I had to employ tools I had not used before as a researcher, and more importantly to trespass into fields of knowledge that I have no formal education in. The writer, literary critic and journalist in me had to quarrel and make peace with the sociologist, theologian,

historian, anthropologist, psychologist, cultural studies expert and the political and media analyst whenever they tried to establish their supremacy over each other. My challenge was to let them be and keep them on the team (p. 231).

So, readers and reviewers, you know the challenge in front of you. But not to worry. Alpion provides a gentle pedagogy for dealing with human beings.

Indeed, a human person cannot be reduced to any of the categories Alpion mentions in the quotation above. And, therefore, one cannot hope to encompass the mystery of a person in a book – especially a book – on that person. We commune with persons; we do not fully understand them. Should that sound strange to the reader, I would ask, 'Are you sure you understand yourself? And yet don't you know everything about yourself?' In the last few centuries, we have put such a premium on reason, on understanding, that we have let reality – especially personal reality – slip out of our enquiries. To explain a person is to explain that person away.

That is why Professor David Marsh so rightly wrote in his preface to the book:

I urge you to read this book...[I]t will give you a new and more balanced insight into the identity and impact of one of the most prominent figures of the twentieth century (p. xiii).

Any writer who can give or foster such insight is a peacemaker who facilitates encounters with civilizations. Blessed is he.

After *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* scholarship about Mother Teresa will not be the same. Alpion has covered and assessed the entire literature about Mother Teresa. Where he found it lacking, he humbly formulated the questions yet to be raised and answered. He deals with his subject and with his sources with utmost respect. (A manifestation of Albanian *besa*?)

He approached his subject, the one he calls 'the nun', from every possible point of view, with an astounding erudition – even in those fields where he has had no formal training.

In his unparalleled scholarly book, Alpion has presented a multidimensional portrait of Mother Teresa. And she appears human as she rarely did in any discourse about her.