

## Press Release

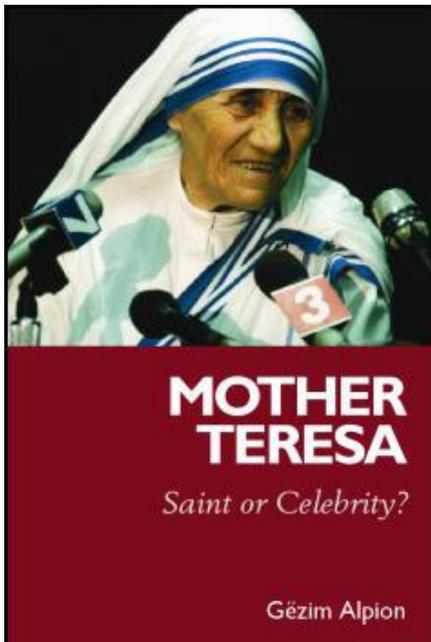
12 October 2007

Announcing the Indian Edition (in English) of Gëzim Alpion's

### ***Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?***

**Did the media use Mother Teresa or did Mother Teresa use the media?**

Published by Routledge India, New Delhi, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-415-39247-1 Price: Rs 325.00



In this 284 page paperback, Albanian-born writer, Gëzim Alpion, redefines our idea of this 20<sup>th</sup> century icon. The intense animosity displayed by theologians and writers against her are contextualized. Beginning with reporter Christopher Hitchens' article, 'The Ghoul of Calcutta', and later physician Dr Aroup Chatterjee, many scathing criticisms have been made about Mother Teresa. While many like Chatterjee dislike her for allegedly perpetuating the idea of a Calcutta as a hell hole of disease and poverty, those in the Catholic Church resent her meteoric rise to the top of the papal charts as well as being part of the media buzz. About this, Alpion writes that Mother Teresa successfully got the Vatican to recognise her

mission as a new order in the shortest time ever. The Missionaries of Charity was the only order in the Catholic setup that did not depend on the Vatican for funds, even from its inception. Mother Teresa was receiving donations from all and sundry, and this can be attributed to the image that was created of her by the Indian Government, the press and, much later, the Vatican.

Alpion reveals how Mother Teresa's image was created by her quiet assent to media attention. While many celebrities have a tough time maintaining their public profile and at the same time protecting their private life, Mother Teresa did not make such a separation. Her mission was her home, and she invited reporters to see her at any time of day. However, she too had parts of her life guarded from public view: her early years

and some of the experiences that led her to decide to leave Albania for a strange land to serve a heavenly father. *New material on the death of Mother Teresa's father reveals that it had an impact on the turn her life took.* According to Al pion, the death of her father and the transferral of dependence to a spiritual father and her adoration of Jesus Christ had a significant bearing on this decision. But information on these early years was quietly filtered and suppressed where necessary. And it was the artful manipulation of the kind of information that Mother Teresa encouraged the media to serve that leaves Al pion commenting on this remarkable woman's skills with the press.

An interesting point that Al pion makes is the cross-over that Mother Teresa made when she took up the Indian garb, apart from Indian citizenship. He writes about how her empathy with non-Christian Indian girls at St Mary's (where she taught girls from poorer families) was partly brought on by the fact that she was never recognised as a European by other European nuns. Later, she set up her mission as a completely indigenous Indian order, and for this reason wooed novices directly from India at a rate that is incomparable to any other Catholic order. Al pion writes that this was a recipe that no missiologist so far had thought of.

In this book, Al pion gives an informed and impartial account of the role the media played in constructing the icon that was Mother Teresa. He offers an interesting insight into cross-cultural interactions and media-celebrity relationships. He explores the significance of Mother Teresa to the mass media, to celebrity culture, to the Church, and to various political and national groups.

**Dr Gëzim Al pion** is an acclaimed academic, writer, playwright, journalist, and a media, political and culture analyst. His books include *Vouchers* (2001), *Foreigner Complex: Essays and Fiction about Egypt* (2002), *If Only the Dead Could Listen* (2008), and *Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa* (2008). At present, he is Lecturer in Sociology and Media Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK.

Gëzim Al pion's *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* was initially published in paperback (£16.99) and hardback (£65.00) by Routledge in London in October 2006 and in New York and Canada in December 2006.

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