

EIR In Memoriam

God bless you, Mother Teresa

by Nina Ogden

The world can be changed, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” As a subject people began to murmur and cry at the sight of Princess Diana, their “queen of hearts,” being excluded from the honors of state by the House of Windsor, Mother Teresa said simply, “I can’t breathe any more,” and died. On Saturday, Sept. 13, India conducted a state funeral with full honors for “The Saint of the Gutters.”

Last year, Pope John Paul II designated the years 1997-99 as a three-year preparation, to heighten the Catholic Church’s spiritual readiness for the Jubilee Year 2000. The year 1997 is called the “Year of Christ and the virtue of faith,” during which people are called to a better imitation of Christ in their daily living.

In one of the last conversations I had with her before she “went home to Jesus,” as her Sisters say, Mother Teresa told me, “Some people think miracles just happen, but you and I know they take very hard work.” How many miracles of the virtue of faith has Mother Teresa worked in the hearts of the poor and frightened throughout the world? How many people has she taken by the hand and taught to pray for perfect love and for His will “to be done on earth as it is in heaven”? I am one of those who cherish the discoveries to which she led me. The world now knows of Mother Teresa’s love for Princess Diana and the lessons she taught her about love for “the poorest of the poor.”

President William Clinton, in his weekly radio address to the nation on Sept. 6, eulogized Mother Teresa and Princess Diana, saying, “Today the world mourns the loss of two remarkable women. Their lives were very different, but ultimately bound together by a common concern for and commitment to the dignity and worth of every human being, especially those too often overlooked, the desperately poor, the abandoned, the sick and the dying.” He said, “Hillary and

Chelsea will never forget visiting her mission in Calcutta, and we will always treasure the time we spent with her and be especially grateful for the home for abandoned babies she and her order opened in Washington, and the chance Hillary had to help in getting it established.”

On June 19, 1995, Will Wertz and I attended the blessing and dedication of the home President Clinton referred to in his remarks. In our report, published in the weekly *New Federalist*, we referred to it as “an extraordinary event . . . which brought together Mother Teresa, Hillary Clinton, James Cardinal Hickey, and D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, based upon a common commitment to the sacredness of human life and the necessity of caring for the poor. Contrary to those in the so-called pro-life movement who have vilified President and Mrs. Clinton as anti-life, this event pointed to a unique collaborative alliance between the Clinton administration and the Catholic Church.”

Surely, as they learned of Mother Teresa’s death, all of the participants in that event recalled waiting in the hot sun for the ceremonies inside the home to be concluded, as the sweet voices of the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity led us in the hymn, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me me.” We sang it over and over again, more and more harmoniously, for over 45 minutes, while we waited, our singing becoming a sweet prayer until Hillary Clinton emerged from the house, holding Mother Teresa by the hand, leading her down the stairs. When Mother Teresa spoke, she stressed that “to kill a baby is to kill Jesus in the heart of the mother. If you know there is a child who is unwanted and unloved, please bring it to me.” She led us in the “St. Francis prayer”: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

When Mrs. Clinton spoke, it was obvious that she had experienced Mother Teresa’s tenacious love for the poor and what her Sisters describe as her “great gift of discernment,”



In Washington, D.C. in June 1995, from left: D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington Mayor Marion Barry, James Cardinal Hickey, Mother Teresa, and First Lady Hillary Clinton. The hymn, "Whatever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me," epitomized the spirit and work of Mother Teresa.

where she met you inside your own soul, and brought to your command the divine spark you hadn't yet found there. The First Lady said to Mother Teresa, "We take great inspiration from your work and from your ceaseless pursuit of what you believe in." Mrs. Clinton continued, "Earlier, on another occasion when I was speaking with Mother, she looked at me and said, 'This is a gift of love, but I've been told I cannot give the gift of peace because I don't give anyone any peace.'" Mrs. Clinton thanked several people who contributed to "bringing this day to fruition," including His Eminence Cardinal Hickey, Mayor Barry, and her own aide, Milanne Vermeer. She also thanked Sister Sylvia of the Missionaries of Charity. (How sad that Sister Sylvia was fatally injured in a car wreck near Front Royal, Virginia, the year after Mrs. Clinton thanked her for her work on the Gift of Love house.)

In President Clinton's radio address, also, it was clear that he had taken a part of Mother Teresa's beautiful soul into his own, when he said, "Anyone who has ever met Mother Teresa could see that within her very small frame, she carried a big heart. Big enough to follow God's will to show compassion and love for all our children, especially the sick and forgotten."

How many, like Bill and Hillary Clinton, have responded to Mother Teresa's spiritual guidance. Her friend and biographer, Eileen Egan, a founder of the Catholic Relief Service, told me of the medals this diminutive general handed out—in anticipation of good service. "When she goes to a new city, where she wants to start a new hospital or AIDS clinic, or orphanage, or leprotorium, she walks about the city until she

sees a house she thinks will do the job," Egan said. "Then she puts a little tin 'miraculous medal' of Mary on the step with a note that says, 'I want your house, Mother Teresa.' And she usually gets it!"

At the end of June 1995, Mother Teresa was in the Bronx for the inauguration of Daily Eucharistic Adoration at St. Anthony of Padua Church. She was dismayed that this beautiful church was locked up before and after every Mass for fear of the drugs and violence in the neighborhood. She insisted to Bishop Garmendia that the church be opened 24-hours a day so that people could worship "and discuss their troubles with Jesus," she told the congregation attending the ceremony. "If someone is killed because they are in the church visiting Jesus, their example will only convince everyone more quickly that the killing will have to end." As I walked with the neighborhood crowd, people were saying, "Everything will be peaceful. Everyone will listen to Mother instead of the drug pushers."

I went to the house of the Missionaries of Charity nearby, one of the first established in the United States after Mother Teresa had been invited by Cardinal Cooke in 1970 to bring the Missionaries of Charity to the archdiocese of New York. Egan, who was with her as she toured the Bronx at that time, remembers Mother Teresa asking Father McPeake, a priest of the archdiocese, if the people in the neighborhood, which resembled a war-torn scene, were hungry. "Is this Calcutta Number Two?" Mother Teresa asked. The priest told her that the way the people looked, with limp and drooping bodies, was due to drugs and not hunger. He asked her, "With all the need in India, why would you have to come here?" Mother

Teresa replied, “We can be a bridge between those who have and those who have less.”

When I entered the house, a Sister showed me a map on which dozens of pins were stuck in every continent, each designating a Missionaries of Charity house. A young couple was brought to the table where Mother Teresa sat. The young woman was crying. “She is crying because we have been married for four years and we have no children,” her husband explained in broken English. “No more crying. It will make you too heavy-hearted,” Mother Teresa insisted. “This is what stops you from having babies. I will pray that you will have babies. If necessary, I will give you some of mine from Calcutta. But I want you to go home and get to work at it. These things take a lot of work, you know.”

I gave Mother Teresa a copy of Lyndon LaRouche’s book, *The Science of Christian Economy*. “There’s something I want you to do,” she told me. She picked up my copy of Pope Paul VI’s Encyclical letter, *Populorum Progressio*, and pointed to the concluding section where I had underlined the words, “development is the new name for peace.” She handed me one of her “miraculous medals.” “I want you to make these the words of your country. I want you to make your country the light of justice and peace in the world, and chase away the ‘structures of sin’ you were talking about.” She handed me two more medals, saying, “Your husband and son will help you.” She gave me another medal saying, “Your Godparents will help you as they use this medal to learn to share with each other, as parents share the love of a child. We will pray for you and your family.” Mother Teresa added, “And we will pray for Helga and Lyndon.” She handed the books and copies of *Fidelio* magazine, which I had brought for her, to one of the Sisters. “They can have these here,” she said. “I already have them in Calcutta.”

Her childhood

Mother Teresa knew the “structures of sin” of British geopolitics from the earliest moments of her childhood. She was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhui in Skopje, in what was then Serbia, on Aug. 26, 1910. Her father, Nikola, was a leading activist in the movement for a free Albania. When Gonxha was nine years old, her father travelled 160 miles to a political dinner in Belgrade to organize the unification of the Province of Kosovo with greater Albania. He was poisoned at the dinner, and returned home only to die. His assets were stolen by his business partner, and his widow Drana had to sell embroidery to feed her children.

The family’s activities centered around the parish of the Sacred Heart, which provided spiritual nourishment and cultural enrichment to the Albanian community in Skopje. Both Agnes Gonxha and her sister Age were known for their beautiful voices, and their fellow singers in the Albanian Catholic choir of Skopje called them the nightingales of the choir. At the age of 18, Gonxha confided to her mother and her priest her desire to join an order of missionary sisters serving in

India, and she travelled to join the Loreto Sisters in Dublin, Ireland, to begin her novitiate. Her brother Lazar, who was serving as a lieutenant in the newly formed Albanian Army of King Zog, wrote her there, afraid he would never see her again. She wrote back, saying, “You will serve a king of 2 million people. I will serve the King of the whole world.”

She arrived in Calcutta on Epiphany, in 1929. When she took her lifetime vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in 1937, she took the name of Teresa, after St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who had taken as her motto the words of Christ, “Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Sister Teresa lived behind the enclosed walls of the Loreto Sisters for 19 years as a teacher of geography and other subjects, becoming headmistress of St. Mary’s Entally school in Calcutta.

India, August 1946

When, in the Bronx, I told Mother Teresa that Lyndon LaRouche had been in Calcutta as a soldier in 1946, and had taken some of his first steps of political leadership there, after witnessing the carnage that had ensued when the British tried to crush the Indian independence movement, she laughed her wonderful laugh and said, “God truly works in mysterious ways!”

She recalled “The Day of the Great Killing” in August 1946, when, out of vital necessity, she disobeyed the rules of enclosure of the Loreto Sisters and went out of the convent walls. Direct Action Day had exploded into violence, and all deliveries of food and supplies were halted. “I went out from St. Mary’s,” she said. “I had 300 girls in the boarding school and we had nothing to eat. We were not supposed to go out into the streets, but I went anyway. Then I saw the bodies on the streets, stabbed, beaten, lying in strange positions in their dried blood. Some American soldiers stopped me, and told me I could be raped or killed, that no one should be out on the streets. I told them I had to come out, and take the risk. I had 300 students with nothing to eat. The soldiers drove me back to the school and supplied us with bags of rice.”

One of the Mother Superiors of Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity asked recently, “Is the Lyndon we pray for also the 23-year-old soldier who helped save the life of the young Sister Teresa? Perhaps so. We pray that He who led them along new pathways on the Day of the Great Killing will give them new strength along those paths today.”

Shortly after “The Day of the Great Killing,” Sister Teresa went out of the enclosure forever, to found the Missionaries of Charity among the starving, the sick, and the dying in the slums of Calcutta. Along with the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience professed by all religious sisters, Mother Teresa added a fourth vow, “to give wholehearted and free services to the poorest of the poor.”

The day of a sister in the Missionaries of Charity begins at 4:40 a.m., when she arises from her mat on the floor. As she dresses, she kisses her habit, a rough white cotton sari

with blue edging, and prays that it will be a reminder of “my separation from the world and its vanities. Let the world be nothing to me, and I, nothing to the world. Let it remind me of my baptismal robe and help me to keep my heart pure from sin, just for today.”

While putting on her sandals, she continues, “Of my own free will, dear Jesus, I will follow You wherever You shall go in search of souls, at any cost to myself and out of pure love for You.” As is the Indian custom, the Sisters shed their sandals at the chapel entrance, and go barefoot into the chapel for a half-hour of prayer and meditation. Mass is at 6:00 in the morning. They do not kneel at Mass, but either stand or sit on the floor. Above the altar is a crucifix with the words, “I thirst.” After their breakfast, they do their work for what would be the equivalent of two full work shifts—caring for the sick, the dying, the abandoned, the helpless.

The prayer that the Sister prays before lying down to sleep reflects her joy in the work she has done that day. “Do I realize that I am really rich when I possess the Kingdom, and am I really happy to be poor? Do I make myself available precisely because I am poor and am available for Christ? Do I meet Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor I serve?”

Our first talk

On Aug. 26, I sent Mother Teresa a note for her 87th birthday. I reminded her that the first time I had ever spoken to her, we had discussed the encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*. I quoted from the end of the encyclical, saying that this quote reminded me of her vocation, “. . . Let them not cease to impress upon men of all ranks the principles of Christian living as found in the Gospel; by all means in their power, let them strive for the well-being of people; and especially let them aim both to preserve in themselves and to arouse in others, in the highest as well in the lowest, the mistress and queen of the virtues, Charity . . . which is in epitome the law of the Gospel, and which, always ready to sacrifice itself for the benefit of others, is man’s surest antidote against the insolence of the world and immoderate love of self; the divine office and features of this virtue being described by the Apostle Paul in these words: ‘Charity is patient, is kind, . . . is not self-seeking . . . bears all things . . . endures all things.’ ”

It was in this spirit, on Aug. 22, 1994, that I asked Mother Teresa to join in the effort to oppose the United Nations Conference on Population to be held in Cairo, Egypt later that year. The Schiller Institute had published a full-page ad in the *Washington Post*, and was to publish it in Cairo on the day of the conference. The ad (titled “Stop the UN’s Killer Conference!”) quoted Pope John Paul II’s “grave concern” about Cairo and his warning that “what is at stake is the very future of humanity.” The ad also quoted Lyndon LaRouche’s warning: “If the Cairo Conference were to succeed, the family as we know it around the world, would be dead as a protected institution. You cannot be for the family, and tolerate the

Cairo Conference.”

Mother Teresa replied to my request with the following statement: “I have prayed over this and this is what I want you to do. I want you to make hundreds of copies of my speech and I want you to give one to every delegate at the conference. I want one to go into the hands of each of these delegates. We will let them pray and think. We will let them pray over it and make meditation and think. Thought is prayer expressed in human terms. If they do this fully and sincerely, any bad or misguided judgment they might have had will disappear. Make as many copies as you need to, to get it into the hands of all the delegates from all the countries of the world who will be in Cairo. Use that statement that I made at the prayer breakfast in your country. It fully expresses what I have prayed over on this subject. Put this statement in your paper and write on it that I asked you, Nina, to do this so that there will be no misunderstanding. Say that I asked you to do this and that I asked God to bless you in your effort.”

The Schiller Institute printed and distributed 5,000 copies of her statement at the Cairo Conference. Many delegates, upon receiving her statement, told us that they had been bribed and hoodwinked into coming to the conference.

Our readers may recall, with humble pride, that one of the last public acts of Mother Teresa’s life was her response to the Schiller Institute’s request that she intervene at the eleventh-hour to try to save Joseph Roger O’Dell from execution in the Commonwealth of Virginia. On July 22, 1997, she spoke to me on the phone from Calcutta, and made the following statement, which I tape-recorded, and which I was to hand-deliver to Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and Virginia Gov. George Allen: “I come before you today to appeal for the life of a man—Joseph Roger O’Dell. I do not know what he has done to be condemned to death. All I know is that he, too, is a child of God, created for better things—to love and to be loved.

“I pray that Joseph is at peace with God; that he has said sorry to God and to whomever he has hurt. Let us not take away his life. Let us bring hope into his life and all our lives. Jesus, Who loves each one of us with mercy and compassion, works miracles of compassion.

“To you, dear Joseph, I say: Trust in God’s tender love for you, and accept whatever God gives and give whatever God takes with a big smile. Let us pray.—Mother Teresa.”

Dear Mother, Pope John Paul II said that you were “a glowing example of how the love of God can be transformed into love of one’s neighbor.” We are smiling in memory of you. God bless you, Mother Teresa.

Note: The author would like to thank Eileen Egan, a founder of the Catholic Relief Service and an Ambassador of Peace of Pax Christi, for some of the biographical material. She is the author of the excellent biography Such a Vision of the Street, Mother Teresa—The Spirit and the Work (New York: Doubleday, 1985). She was a long time friend of Mother Teresa and is a beautiful soul in her own right.