

# Mother Teresa: A Life of Compassion and Service

**Abstract:** Mother Teresa, known globally as a symbol of charity and human kindness, devoted her life to serving the poorest of the poor. As the founder of the Missionaries of Charity, her work in the slums of Kolkata and beyond redefined the meaning of humanitarian service. Canonized as a saint, her legacy transcends religious boundaries and continues to inspire social service and compassion. This article explores her early life, religious vocation, charitable mission, global recognition, and enduring impact.

## 1. Early Life and Religious Calling

Mother Teresa was born as Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910, in Skopje, then part of the Ottoman Empire (present-day North Macedonia). Raised in a devout Albanian Catholic family, she felt a strong religious calling from a young age.

At 18, she joined the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland, where she took the name Teresa after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. She later moved to India, where she taught at a girls' school in Kolkata (then Calcutta). It was during her years of teaching that she witnessed the overwhelming poverty outside the school walls and felt a profound call to serve the destitute.

## 2. Founding the Missionaries of Charity

In 1946, Mother Teresa experienced what she described as a "call within a call," compelling her to leave her convent and work directly with the poorest people in the streets of Kolkata. With permission from the Vatican, she founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950.

The organization focused on caring for "the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers," and all those who felt unwanted and unloved. Starting with just a few members, the Missionaries of Charity grew into a global network operating in over 130 countries.

## 3. Humanitarian Work and Global Recognition

Mother Teresa's mission expanded rapidly, encompassing hospices, orphanages, schools, and centers for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis. Despite limited resources, her unwavering commitment to the dignity of every human life drew admiration from around the world.

In 1979, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her tireless efforts to alleviate suffering. She declined the ceremonial banquet and requested the prize money be used for the poor, exemplifying her lifelong values of humility and service.

#### **4. Spirituality and Controversies**

While admired by many, Mother Teresa's life and work also drew criticism. Some questioned the quality of medical care in her facilities, while others scrutinized her conservative views on abortion and contraception. Nonetheless, her spiritual conviction and commitment to serving the most marginalized remained steadfast.

Her writings, including *Come Be My Light*, revealed a deep inner spiritual struggle and periods of doubt, underscoring her humanity and profound faith.

#### **5. Canonization and Legacy**

Mother Teresa passed away on September 5, 1997, at the age of 87. She was beatified in 2003 and canonized as Saint Teresa of Calcutta by Pope Francis in 2016. Her feast day is observed on September 5.

Today, the Missionaries of Charity continue her work, offering hope and dignity to the forgotten and the forsaken. Her legacy lives on through the countless lives she touched and through the global movement of selfless service she inspired.

Mother Teresa remains a symbol of compassion, reminding the world that great change often begins with small acts of kindness.

#### **Selected Works and References**

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