

## A Life Less Ordinary

Last Sunday saw the canonisation of Mother Teresa. In 1992, with all the innocence of youth, I wrote to her seeking an interview. Months passed without me hearing anything. Then out of the blue I received a letter with a postmark from India. Munching my cornflakes as I opened the envelope I nearly fell off my chair when I read her invitation to meet her on her upcoming visit to Dublin.

When I got to her sisters' convent a skeletally thin specimen with a cadaverous pallor stared fixedly at the floor just inside the front door. Mother Teresa favoured him with one of her big smiles. She was as concerned about his care as a mother hen with chicks.

Although I was at least a foot taller than Mother Teresa I felt totally dwarfed by her. Whatever this indefinable thing called presence is she had it in abundance.

Although she was a frail, small woman she had the most marvellous eyes which gave her a presence disproportionate to her physique.

At that time this frail Albanian woman had incredible energy. She had this wall of certainty about what her calling was. My enduring memory though is of her compassion.

I wondered what had kept her going all those years: 'God's own image is in every single child, no matter what that child is, disabled or beautiful or ugly – it's God's beautiful image created for greater things – to love and be loved. That is why you and I and all of us must insist to preserve the gift of God, for it is something very beautiful. That little one who is unwanted, what a terrible suffering that is. Today it is the greatest disease, to be unwanted, unloved, just left alone, a throwaway of society. There are thousands, millions of people who die for lack of bread. There are thousands, millions, of human beings who grow weak for lack of a little love because they would like to be recognised, even if just a little. Jesus becomes weak and dies in them. I believe that all of us are called to love until it hurts and that is what keeps me going.'

Her last action was to lift her hand and touch and kiss the crucifix. Her final words were to offer her sufferings along with those of Jesus, and all the while whispering, 'Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I offer myself to you. My God, I thank you, praise you and adore you. Jesus I love you . . .'

Mother Teresa was one of those very few people who were canonised by popular acclaim, even before her death. Amid the dirt and the dying in Calcutta's slums, in the depths of the most appalling poverty for many people she revealed the face of God. Pope John Paul II personally fast-tracked her beatification because 'she made those who had been defeated by life feel the tenderness of God.'

Many elements of her story are familiar, such as winning the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1979, but what is often forgotten is her deep affinity with Ireland. The order she chose to join was an Irish one, the Loreto Sisters, and she began her time as a nun by serving two months as a novice in Rathfarnham in 1928. Her ties with Ireland remained strong. She returned many times, was given the Freedom of Dublin in 1993, and at the height of the 'Troubles' in 1971 sent a group of her sisters armed just with bedrolls and a violin to Belfast to help 'in whatever little way' they could. Even after her death her Irish connections remain as her sisters continue work in each of the four provinces: in Dublin, Blarney, Sligo and Armagh.

My final question to Mother Teresa was if Ireland held a unique place in her affections. With a shy smile and almost a whisper she answered:

'By blood and origin I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world – and to Jesus. The people of the world are my people but I will always have a special place in my heart for Ireland.' In her remarkable life Mother Teresa received many honours. She was the very first person to be nominated for the John 23<sup>rd</sup> Peace Prize in 1971. On 9 December 1979 she arrived in Oslo to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace. One commentator observed: 'Mother Teresa is an extraordinary woman. Very many people feel a great sorrow and a great sense of loss in our world. For the abandoned and the outcasts, the little ones and the forgotten ones, she is a great sign of hope. To the poor she is a faithful and wholehearted friend.'

Like Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi she had the greatest prestige that any leader could carry; the designation of 'peace maker'. The quest for peace brought Mother Teresa to many of the world's trouble spots.

In an interview Mother Teresa was once asked if the taking of life was ever justified, in war, for example. She replied simply by shaking her head. The interviewer probed further and reminded her that the Church teaches us that there can be a just war. Mother Teresa continued to shake her head and said: 'I can't understand it.' The journalist was still not placated and asked: 'Catholics have to believe that teaching?'

Mother Teresa instantly replied: 'Then I am not a Catholic.'

I reminded her that in 1981 when after she returned from a mission to Ethiopia when a terrible drought threatened thousands of lives that she had written to President Ronald Regan. The American president telephoned her on behalf of the American people and promised her that he would rush in the food and medicine she requested.

#### **Would you like more power?**

*I wish I had power. Then I would bring peace to the world. I want nothing from governments. I simply offer my sisters to work among the poor and suffering people. We try to bring love and compassion for the unwanted and the unloved. The work of our sisters reveals to the suffering poor the love of God for them.*

*I won't mix in politics. War is the fruit of politics, and so I don't involve myself, that's all. If I get stuck in politics, I will stop loving. Because I will have to stand by one not by all. This is the difference.*

#### **Soul matters**

*Holiness is not the luxury of a few. It is everyone's duty: yours and mine. Our works of love are nothing but works of peace. Let us do them with greater love and efficiency. Let us radiate the peace of God and so light and extinguish in the world and in the hearts of all people all hatred, and love for power. If you really love that person then it will be easier for you to accept that person and it will be with love and kindness. For that is an opportunity for you to put your love for God in living action.*

*A beautiful thing happened in Calcutta. Two young people came to see me, Hindu people. They gave me a very big amount of money. "How did you get so much money?" I asked them. They answered me, "We got married two days ago. Before our marriage, we decided we would not have a big wedding feast and we would not buy wedding clothes. We decided that we would give the money we saved to you to feed the people." In a rich Hindu family, it is a scandal not to have special wedding clothes and not to have a wedding feast. "Why did you do that?" I asked them. They answered me, "Mother, we love each other so much that we wanted to obtain a special blessing from God by making a sacrifice. We wanted to give each other this special gift." Is that not beautiful? Things like that are happening every day, really beautiful things. We must pull them out. We have to pull out the wonderful things that are happening as well as the bad things.*

#### **Where is the love?**

*A Hindu man was once asked: "What is a Christian?" He responded, "The Christian is someone who gives." Give until it hurts, until you feel the pain. Open your hearts to the love God instills in them. God loves you tenderly. What he gives you is not to be kept under lock and key, but not to be shared. The more you have, the less you will be able to give. The less you have, the more you will know how to share. Let us ask God, when it comes time to ask him for something, to help us to be generous.*

*When I visited China in 1969, one of the Communist party asked me: "Mother Teresa what is a communist to you?" I answered, "A child of God, a brother, a sister of mine." "Well, you think highly of us. But where did you get that idea?" I told him, "From God himself. He said, truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

*In his passion, Jesus taught us to forgive out of love, how to forget out of humility. So let us examine our hearts and see if there is any unforgiven hurt – any unforgotten bitterness. The Spirit pours love, peace, joy into our hearts proportionately to our emptying ourselves of self-indulgence, vanity, anger, and ambition, and our willingness to shoulder the cross of Christ.*

*Let us not use bombs and guns to overcome the world. Let us use love and compassion. Let us preach the peace of Christ as He did. He went about doing good. If everyone could see the image of God in his neighbour, do you think we would need tanks and generals?*

*In order to be Christians, we should resemble Christ, of this I am firmly convinced. Gandhi once said that if Christians lived according to their faith, there would be no more Hindus left in India. People expect us to be consistent with our Christian life but in so many areas we are not and that is why we have conflict.*

### **A good heart**

*We all need to be generous. Once we had a great shortage of sugar in Calcutta. One day, a boy about four years old came to see me with his parents. They brought me a small container of sugar. When they handed it to me, the little one told me: "I have spent three days without eating any sugar. Take it. This is for your children".' Although he could hardly say my name the little one loved with an intense love. We all need to learn from him. Peace and war begin at home. If we truly want peace in the world, let us begin by loving one another in our own families. If we want to spread joy, we need for every family to have joy. God has created us so we do small things with great love. I believe in that great love, that comes, or should come from our heart, should start at home: with my family, my neighbours across the street, those right next door. And this love should then reach everyone.*

*We could do much worse than make the prayer of Saint Francis, before the crucifix which spoke to him and is now venerated in the basilica of St Clare in Assisi, our own:*

*Most high, glorious God,  
Cast your light into the darkness of my heart.  
Give me, Lord, right faith,  
Firm hope,  
Perfect charity  
and profound humility,  
with wisdom and perception,  
so that I may carry out  
what is truly your holy will.  
Amen.*

### **Sorry seems to be the hardest word**

*I once picked up a woman from a garbage dump and she was burning with fever: she was in her last days and her only lament was: "My son did this to me." I begged her to forgive her son. I told her that in a moment of madness when he was not himself, he did something he would regret. I asked her to be a mother to him and forgive him. It took me a*

long time to make her say: "I forgive my son." Just before she died, she was able to say that with real forgiveness.

### **Emotional moments**

A young man was dying in one of our homes, but for three or four days fought to prolong his life. The Sister there asked him: "Why do you continue this fight?" He answered: "I cannot die without asking forgiveness from my father." When his father arrived, the youth embraced him and asked forgiveness. Two hours later, the young man passed away peacefully.

I never forget what happened to our sisters in Rome, where we work with the shut-ins. They go to the poor people's houses. We clean the house and give them a bath, wash their clothes in the house and so on. The sisters found someone left in terrible condition. They cleaned his room and washed his clothes and gave him a good bath, but he never spoke. After two days he told his sisters, "You have brought God into my life, bring father also." They went to the parish priest and brought the priest. That man who never spoke, only that sentence he said, made his confession. He made his confession after sixty years, and next morning he died. He died at peace.

There are so many religions and each one has its different ways of following God. I follow Christ: Jesus is my God. There is only one God and He is God to all; therefore it is important that everyone is seen as equal before God. I've always said we should help a Hindu become a better Hindu, a Muslim become a better Muslim, a Catholic become a better Catholic.

(Mother Teresa chose to call a form of newsletter she wrote for her sisters *Ek Dil*, a Hindi term, an expression describing the unity among the sisters in their houses all over the globe. *Ek Dil* means one heart.)

Look what God is doing with nothing. People must believe that it is all His, all His. We must allow God to use us, without adding or subtracting anything.

### **The Pipes of Peace**

I pray: 'Oh my God help us, give peace to my children. My God help us.'

I like the words of the Celtic Blessing:

Deep peace of the running waves to you,

Deep peace of the shining stars to you

Deep peace of the prince of peace to you.

### **Imagine**

I, my sisters and our poor are praying for peace. The whole world is praying that they will open your hearts in love to God. In the name of God and in the name of people do not destroy life and peace. Let your names be remembered for the good you have done, the joy you have spread and the love you have shared.

I would ask people to pray for me and my sisters as we try to love and serve the poor because they belong to God and are loved in His eyes so we and our poor are praying for you. We pray that you will love and nourish what God has so lovingly entrusted into your care. I ask people to be aware that:

The fruit of silence is prayer

The fruit of prayer is faith

The fruit of faith is love

The fruit of love is service

The fruit of service is peace.

Pray with me. Together let us say:

Lead me from death to life

From falsehood to truth

Lead me from despair to hope

From fear to truth

Lead me from hate to love

*From war to peace  
Let peace fill our hearts  
Our world our universe  
Peace peace peace.*

*'Then I would ask them to join me in the prayer of peace written by St Francis of Assisi, which we say each day. It is a reminder of how we can create peace in our lives by giving ourselves, with an open and clean heart, to others:*

*Lord, make me a channel of Thy peace that,  
Where there is hatred, I may bring love;  
That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;  
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony;  
That where there is error, I may bring truth;  
That where there is doubt, I may bring faith;  
That where there is despair, I may bring hope;  
That where there are shadows, I may bring light;  
That where there is sadness, I may bring joy.  
Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted,  
To understand than to be understood;  
To love than to be loved.  
For it is by forgetting self that one finds;  
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven;  
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.*

### **The Power of Prayer**

*Prayer makes your heart bigger, until it is capable of containing the gift of God Himself. I believe that politicians spend too little time on their knees. I am convinced that they would be better politicians if they were to do so. There are some people who, in order not to pray, use an excuse the fact that life is so hectic that it prevents them from praying. This cannot be. Prayer does not demand that we interrupt our work, but that we continue working as if it were a prayer. It is not necessary to always be mediating, nor to consciously experience the sensation that we are talking to God, no matter how nice this would be. What matters is being with him, living in him, in his will. To love with a pure heart, to love everybody, is a twenty-four-hour prayer.*

*Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin. Make us, Lord, worthy to serve our brothers and sisters who are scattered all over the world, who die and live alone and poor. Give them today, using our hands, their daily bread. And, using our love, give them peace and happiness.*

*'Love one another as God loves each of you. Jesus came to give us the good news that God loves us and that He wants us to love one another. And when the time comes to die and go home to God we will be welcomed in love.*

*'One of my favourite readings is from Chapter 13 of Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited; it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes. Love never comes to an end".*

*Love is unending because love is undying.*

*Some people are hard to love sometimes. Remember that everybody has something good inside them. Some hide it, some neglect, but it is always there.*

*God has been so good to us: works of love are always a means of becoming closer to God. Look at what Jesus did in His life on earth. Love until it hurts. If it hurts, then it'll be better because of it. We must grow in love and to do this we must go on loving and loving and giving and giving until it hurts – just like Jesus did. All of us need to do ordinary things with extraordinary love: little things like caring for the sick and all the lonely people. We all*

*must give something that will cost us. It is easy to give what you can live without. It is only when we give what we can't live without or don't want to live without that our gift becomes a sacrifice. Any sacrifice is useful if it is done out of love. This giving until it hurts is what I call love in action and what I would like to see most today.*

*I was once walking down the street and a beggar came to me and said: "Mother Teresa, everybody's giving to you, I also want to give to you. Today I got just a few small coins and I want to give them to you." I thought for a second because if I took it he would have nothing to eat tonight, but if I don't take it I will hurt his feelings. So I put out my hands and I took the money. I have never seen such joy on anybody's face as I saw on his, that a beggar, he too, could give to Mother Teresa. It was a big sacrifice for him because it was all he had. It was beautiful. It was such a tiny amount that I could do nothing with it, but as he gave it up and I took it, it became like a fortune because it was given with so much love. So my message to the people is love until it hurts, because in that way we become capable of loving more deeply, more beautifully, more wholly human. God loves people who give joyfully and if you give joyfully, you always give more. A joyful heart is the result of a heart burning with love. Works of love are always works of joy. We don't need to look for happiness: if we have love for others we'll be given it. It is the gift of God.*

### **My peace I leave you**

*Works of love are always works of peace. Whenever you share love with others, you'll notice the peace comes to you and to them. When there is peace, there is God. That is how God touches our lives and shows His love for us by pouring peace and joy into our hearts.*

*It is not enough to say I love God, but I do not love my neighbour. St. John says you are a liar if you say love God and you do not love your neighbour. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbour whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live? And this is very important for us to realize that love, to be true, has to hurt. It hurt Jesus to love us, it hurt him.*

*Keep the joy of loving God in your heart and share this joy with all you meet especially your family. That is the path to peace.*

### **How would you sum up your philosophy?**

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.*

*Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.*

*What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.*

*Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.*

*In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.*

### **Something Beautiful For God**

In her life Mother Teresa left an enduring imprint on the conscience and consciousness of the world because of her compassion and her work for the poor. This tiny Albanian nun, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, with her hands joined in the Indian gesture of greeting, taught the world the meaning of compassion. Her name was synonymous with 'doing good'. Diana, Princess of Wales regarded her a friend and a saint.

Throughout her life, anything worth doing for the poor was worth doing, no matter what the cost. She was conscious of what she called her 'uselessness', her 'emptiness'. While she was so focused on the poor she was equally devoted to the Eucharist and concentrate on adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, prayer,

contemplation and study. She believed in Saint Augustine's idea of 'mingling mercy with misery'.

Mother Teresa did not simply preach compassion, she lived it. She made personal intimate contact in her daily life with the rejected ones, the homeless, prisoners, the sick, the dying, the old, the lonely. Not only did she devote her life to marginalized people, but she inspired others to follow her and most important, by her love and attention to them, she rendered the invisible people of the world visible, she brought the most brutalized, rejected and marginalised people of the world to the centre of the stage. She showed us not only that the rejected ones of society need our love and our help, but that they have a vital role to play in calling the world to justice.

Perhaps the heart of Mother Teresa's understanding was the realisation that her work was not an achievement but simply something done for its own sake, something beautiful for God. She reminds us that there's nothing as near as the eternal. The life and passion of a person leaves an imprint on the ether of a place. Mother Teresa left quite an imprint. We need people to fire our imaginative lives with a vision of life's possibilities. Mother Teresa showed us the way of passionate intensity.

In 1971 Malcolm Muggeridge famously wrote, *Something Beautiful for God*. Mother Teresa asked that it should not be a biography of herself. 'The work is God's work', she would say. What was most striking about how counter-cultural her spirituality was. It would never have occurred to Mother Teresa to speak of a Missionaries of Charity spirituality". It would appear that like many institutes of the time she followed an eclectic spirituality taking influences from a variety of sources.

To talk about her faith would be easy - a much more difficult task is to find words to express the sincerity which was evident in everything she said. Her world was amplified to the sound of compassion.

Mother Teresa was universally admired for her compassion which led her to follow Christ into the slums to serve Him among the poorest of the poor. Once she decided, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to do something beautiful for God among the poorest of the poor nothing would stop her. Her following of Jesus led her to bind up the wounds of each person she encountered at the side of the road. She stressed the dignity of every human person made in God's image and redeemed in the Blood of Christ. She saw all of us on a journey from different directions to God. The closer we come to God on the journey, the closer we come to each other. Mother Teresa, through her living out in her life the commandment of love - 'to love as I have loved you' - became Saint Teresa of Calcutta because she identified herself with the Person of Jesus who she encountered every day in her prayer life, in the Eucharist and in the service of the poorest of the poor.

Her practice of placing the miraculous Medal in places where she wished to establish a convent and a home for the poor showed her trust in her heavenly Mother, under whose patronage, as the Immaculate Heart, she had placed her Congregation. Her challenge to us today is to remember that whether we give service or disservice to our brothers and sisters we always do it to Jesus.

### **Why do you talk so much about compassion?**

*To be involved in the service of Jesus to the poor is a sacred trust to which I have been invited by God. "Lord have mercy" we pray every day.*

*As the Dalai Lama pointed out: 'If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.'*

### **Was it important to her to see kindness when she witnessed so much poverty?**

*'Of course. The Dalai Lama says: "My religion is very simple - my religion is kindness".*

*I believe that Celtic prayer that God is to be found with people not in places of stone:*

*Pilgrim, take care your journey's not in vain  
A hazard without profit, without gain,  
The King you seek you'll find in Rome, 'tis true,  
But only if He travels on the way with you.*

**If you could say just one thing to one of the least, the last and the lost what would it be?**

*God loves you.*

**The Master**

*There is a prayer that the Missionaries of Charity pray every day. Cardinal Newman wrote it:*

*Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance wherever I am.*

*Fill my heart with your Spirit and your life.*

*Penetrate my being and take such hold of me that my life becomes a radiation of your own life.*

*Give me your light through me and remain in me in such a way that every soul I come into contact with can feel your presence in me.*

*May people not see me, but see you in me.*

*Remain in me, so that I shine with your light,*

*And may others be illuminated by my light.*

*All light will come from you, Oh Jesus.*

*Not even the smallest ray of light will be mine. You will illuminate others through me.*

*Place on my lips your greatest praise,*

*Illuminating others around me.*

*May I preach you with actions more*

*Than with words, with the example of my actions, with the visible light of the love that comes from you to my heart.*

*Amen.*

**Prayer to Saint Teresa of Calcutta**

Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Jesus called you to 'be His light,' by loving and serving Him wholeheartedly in the poorest of the poor, and so satiating His thirst for love and souls.

Grant that I may also be, like you, a carrier of His light, love and peace to others, radiating His tender mercy to my brothers and sisters who live in darkness and pain.

Dear Mother Teresa, you promised to continue from Heaven your mission of showing God's special love for those in need. With confidence, then, I entrust this intention to your care (*state your petition*). Amen



### **Her Last Words**

Mother Teresa's final words were to offer her sufferings along with those of Jesus, and all the while whispering, 'Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I offer myself to you. My God, I thank you, praise you and adore you. Jesus I love you . . .

### **A new challenge**

Mother Teresa also decided to focus on one of the most compelling challenges to our world imaginable. The emergence of any new disease inevitably provokes fear; however, the rapid spread of the disease, the transmissible nature of AIDS and the medical complexity of the disease exacerbated the normal problems and tensions associated with a new disease.

Mother Teresa went to Africa as it was the place with the highest incidence of AIDS. She got the opportunity to engage with the subject in an emotionally significant and humanizing way. The agonising tyranny of the plight of the victims of AIDS inspired Mother Teresa to do something positive.

Her sisters shared an approach to community development in the developing world pioneered by Paolo Freire, whose experiences in South America made him acutely aware of the attitudes of the would-be 'helpers' upon those who were seen to be in need of 'help'. Often there was a conviction about the unassailable worth of some intervention and the benefits it would confer. Freire characterizes this as 'cultural invasion', the starting point is the world of the 'helpers' from which they view and enter the world of those they invade. This is in contrast to 'cultural synthesis' where those who come from another world do not do so as invaders but as partners. This is the road the Missionaries of Charity has chosen. The challenge they face today is to recover the 'listening' character of good missionary activity, to educate in an ongoing conversation, and to find God in the margins and voices previously ignored. The possibility for enrichment in this listening process is enormous. Their lives' work seems to be an attempt to live an old prayer:

*God be in my head and in my understanding;*

*God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;*

*God be in my mouth and in my speaking;*

*God be in my heart, and in my thinking;*

*God be at mine end, and my departing.*

In the intermingling of faith and life they want to be attentive to where God is today. They are searching for a way to live that is authentic and which offers an alternative to an individualistic way of life which is increasingly prevalent in the modern world. In responding to the needs of society they are striving to witness to Christ and to reveal His love to the struggling people.

Mother Teresa's contacts with Ethiopia would bring her into contact with an unlikely Irish man.

### **The Odd Couple**

Having sprang to fame in the 1970s when his band the Boomtown Rats had a string of hits, most famously 'I Don't Like Mondays' Bob Geldof became a global superstar in 1984 when he devised and organised the Band-Aid record 'Let them Know its Christmas' to alleviate the plight of the starving millions in Ethiopia. The following year his fame reached even further dizzy heights when he ran the phenomenally successful Live-Aid concerts. In January 1985 he sat in the departure lounge at Addis Ababa when he saw Mother Teresa. Photographers fell over themselves to grab pictures of this unlikely conversation – particularly given Geldof's penchant for swearing. The media had a field day with the story who dubbed them 'the saint and the sinner'. Although born into a Catholic family and educated by the Holy Ghost Fathers in Ireland's most famous rugby nursery Blackrock College Geldof had long since renounced his Catholicism. In his 1980 hit 'Banana Republic' he had rubbished the influence of priests in Irish society.

In his 1986 autobiography *Is That It?* Geldof recalled his impressions of her. His first thought was how tiny she looked and she was a 'battered, wizened woman'. Somewhat surprisingly he was then very taken by her feet. He noticed that while her habit was clean and well cared for her sandals were simply 'beaten-up pieces of leather from which her feet protruded, gnarled and misshapen as old tree roots'. When Sir Bob bent to kiss her, as it seemed the polite thing to do, he was caught off guard when she bowed her so quickly that he had no option but to kiss 'the top of her wimple'. Geldof admitted to being disturbed by the incident until he discovered that Mother Teresa only let lepers kiss her.

Geldof went on to tell her about when his band had played in India and offered to play a concert for her mission. She declined his offer immediately because she did not need such activities because God would provide.

Geldof went on to illustrate the way in which God would provide. As the television cameras in the departure lounge were rolling, she grabbed the chance to say that she had observed on her way to the airport some palatial old buildings which seemed unoccupied and wanted to know if she could have them as orphanages. A government minister brought in to the discussion tried to kick for touch but unable to say no on live television he eventually conceded that he would try to find her suitable home for an orphanage. Quick as a flash Mother Teresa said: 'Two orphanages'. Through gritted teeth he agreed: 'Two orphanages.'

Geldof remarked that the instant he met Mother Teresa she struck him as 'being the living embodiment of moral good'. He went on to comment that there was nothing 'otherworldly or divine about her'. His considered verdict was: 'The way she spoke to the journalists showed her to be as deft a manipulator of media as any high-powered American PR expert. She does a sort of "Oh dear, I'm just a frail old lady" schtick. She was outrageously brilliant. There was no false modesty about her and there was a certainty of purpose which left her little patience. But she was totally selfless; every moment her aim seemed to be, how can I see this or that situation to help others?'

### **Try hard**

For Mother Teresa herself when I asked her about the work of aid agencies she argued that what is attempted is what matters. Nothing is ever lost:

'Often I think God is absent from my life and my work. I wonder if I am doing any good at all. At times I feel the only thing I can do is show mercy. St Vincent de Paul told us to always turn our eyes from the study of your own sin to the contemplation of God's mercy and asked us to devote much more thought to his great love for

them than their unworthiness towards Him. We need to focus on His strength rather than our weakness. When we do this and surrender ourselves to God's love in the hope that He will make you what He requires you to be and that He will bless all the Irish aid workers do even when they too feel they are going through dark days.' When I asked if she would like development agencies to help her more in work Mother Teresa shook her head firmly: 'God does not expect people to do my work for me. God wants them to do their work with a good heart as well as they can.'

### **The Lord's My Shepherd**

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. Other people talked about the 'option for the poor' However, does this phrase not suggest a form of spiritual imperialism? Are we sure the poor really want us? Have we ever asked them? The problem with this phrase is that it suggests we should be the voice of the voiceless rather than helping the voiceless to find their own voice. Mother Teresa shows us that it now time for us to take the option with the poor.

From the outset she publicly aligned herself with the poor and the outcasts. Like Jesus she formulated an alternative model of society. This Christ exalted on the Cross, healed the broken, fed the multitudes, and significantly removed social stigmas (leprosy) and reintegrated outcasts like prostitutes and tax-collectors into society. The Church which Jesus called for and Mother Teresa tried to replicate, therefore, was a radical presence which empowered all people to have a meaningful life. A Christianity which is audible without being visible is a counter-sacrament. She sought to show that if Christianity is to retain its credibility it must forge a new alliance with the poor and marginalised. It must be bold enough to be baptised in the Jordan of the real state of people's experiences and climb the cross of poverty and social exclusion. Accordingly, Mother Teresa had her own very particular understanding of Jesus:

'He is:

The Word made flesh.

The Bread of life.

The Way to be Walked.

The Joy to be shared.

The Peace to be given.

The Leper – to wash his wounds.

The Beggar – to give him a smile.

The Drunkard – to listen to him.

The Mentally ill – to protect him.

The Little one – to embrace him.

The Blind – to lead him.

The Dumb – to speak for him.

The Crippled – to walk with him.

The drug addict – to befriend him.

The Prostitute – to remove from danger and befriend her.

The Prisoner – to be visited.

The Old – to be served.'

### **I and Thou**

Mother Teresa told me that her understanding of Christ was forged on the basis of her own relationship with Him:

'To me, Jesus is my God.

Jesus is my Spouse.

Jesus is my Life.

Jesus is my only Love.  
Jesus is my all in all.  
Jesus is my everything.'

Mother Teresa was not fazed when I asked her what it was like to be called 'mother of the world'.

'I am just a pencil in the hands of the Lord. It is His work. We are called upon not to be successful but to be faithful. Holiness is for everyone. It is not for the special few but the simple duty of all. I have nothing myself. I think God is wanting to show His greatness by using nothingness. When I speak I speak in the name of Christ. Without Him I could do nothing.

'In the slums, I see Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor – in the broken bodies, in the children, in the dying. That is why his work becomes possible. I honestly believe that God is much closer to us than I ever would have thought possible. Not a day goes by without something extraordinary happening. Always in our work we are motivated by the thought: "There but for the grace of God go we."'