

Mother Teresa: Angel of God



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Preface

A TINY, frail nun stood before a distinguished gathering that included the King of Norway, high officials, and an enormous battery of photographers, TV crews, and journalists. It was December 10, 1979, and the Aula Magna (Great Hall) of the University of Oslo hardly looked like a comfortable setting for the slightly-bent, sari-clad nun. Everyone waited for Professor John Sannes, chairperson of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, to make his speech presenting the winner of that year's Peace Prize.

Citing many reasons for the committee's selection, Sannes said "respect for every individual's worth and dignity" was the hallmark of the honoree. "The loneliest, the most wretched, the dying destitute, the abandoned lepers were receiving from her warm compassion, devoid of condescension, based on reverence for Christ in man. Hers was a life of strict poverty, long days and nights of toil, a life that affords little room for joys other than the most precious."

When the prize recipient was invited to make her acceptance speech, she nervously clasped her award and the \$192,000 prize, and stepped forward to the microphone to declare that she was accepting it "in the name of the hungry, of the naked, of

the homeless, and of all who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society.”

Thunderous applause greeted the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, God’s Angel.

Popular Winner

The selection of Mother Teresa as the recipient came as a welcome and refreshing change from the selections preceding her. It was felt that political considerations had influenced the choice of earlier winners. For example, in 1971, German Chancellor Willy Brandt was honored with this award. Critics found this selection terribly flawed and undeserving. In 1973, Henry Kissinger, United States Secretary of State, met with a similar disapproving response. The following year, Anwar al-Sadat and Menachem Begin fared no better.

A sumptuous dinner usually followed the award ceremony. But Mother Teresa convinced the committee to omit the dinner that year, and to use the money that would have been spent to provide an excellent dinner for 15,000 poor people in India. Mother Teresa frequently said that God works miracles for the poor every day. This was another occasion when her trust in the Lord was richly rewarded.

The Young Agnes

The world would be a much better place if everyone smiled more. So smile . . . be joyous that God loves you.

—Mother Teresa

Early Years

She had come a long way from the time and place of her birth: either August 26 or 27, 1910, in the small town of Skopje, the capital of what is now Macedonia. Of the town's population of 25,000, Catholics formed a very small minority. Her father, Nikolas Bojaxhiu, was a building contractor and served as a member of the Town Council. Her mother, Dranfile Bernai, hailed from Venice, Italy. Both parents treasured their three children and provided them with a happy, prayerful home. Named Maria Teresa at birth, Mother Teresa was given the name of Agnes at her baptism. Her sister, Age, was born in 1904, and her brother, Lazar, in 1907.

Many years later, Mother Teresa wrote: "I was always close to my mother. She was a holy and happy person who taught us to love God and our neighbor. We spent many hours in prayer in our parish church of the Sacred Heart, kneeling

before the statue of Our Lady of Letnice, or late at night in our home.”

Her mother and father loved the poor, and on several occasions provided a night’s shelter and a warm meal for the homeless. Agnes was learning a lesson that would mark her later life in faraway Calcutta, India.

Active Parishioner

As a teenager, Agnes became very involved in parish activities. She joined the Sodality of Our Lady and the parish choir, often singing as soloist at Sunday services. During this time of her life, she showed great love for children of the parish and enjoyed giving them religious instruction. Through her pastor, Father Franjo Jambrenkovic, she learned about the Jesuit missionaries from Yugoslavia who had gone to India in 1924. The stories of their experiences filled her with a strong desire to chose India as her field of work as a nun. She eventually heard of the Sisters of Loreto who conducted schools in Bengal.

Call of the Convent

Years later, Mother Teresa wrote: “At eighteen years of age I decided to leave home and become