

Item #103 (Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

On September 5, 1997, Mother Teresa of Kolkata (Calcutta) died. The author of the present website had many contacts with her and feels that he is thereby obligated to publish an account of one of them. These contacts were in the context of his working with her religious congregation, the Missionaries of Charity. He first made contact with this congregation in November of 1971. Thus, in November of 2021, he celebrated fifty years of working with them. He did so in response to a remark of the Jesuit General in 1971, Very Rev. Pedro Arrupe, that all Jesuits should have regular contact with the poor. Soon after this original contact, the superior of the novices of the M.C.s in Rome asked me, the author of this website, to teach the novices a two-year course in the history of the Catholic Church, beginning with the Acts of the Apostles and going up to the current pope. This I did for 29 successive years, teaching hundreds of M.C. novices. After the first two years I emerged from the darkness of the Rome classroom into the bright June sunshine and who should be waiting for me there but Mother Teresa herself. She asked me if she could use the notes I was using for all of their novitiates (at that time Calcutta, Warsaw (now only Rome), Manila, San Francisco (now Washington, D.C.), Nairobi. I waved the clipboard I was using, covered with my scribbles, and pleaded a lack of time when put in the context of my regular teaching at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, but I suggested that a newly-vowed novice who had just finished my course and had done a degree in history at the University of Oxford be given the assignment. Which was done. And as far as I know still goes on after all these years. So at Mother Teresa's request most of her sisters have studied Swetnam's view of the Catholic Church, a view rooted in his view of the Acts of the Apostles. I have met Mother on dozens of other occasions when she had come from her home-base in Calcutta to receive the vows of her novices and tertians in Rome. At times we were able to talk, at other times we were able only to wave at each other from a distance. After her death I was able to visit her tomb in Calcutta. And I was asked by the authorities of the M.C.s to concelebrate at the Mass of Beatification with John Paul II and a few other bishops and priests in the presence of thousands of faithful in St. Peter's Square. Which I did.

(James Swetnam, S.J., September 10, 2022)