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SUMMARY OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA (1910-1997)

The Anthropological Basis of the Spirituality of Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) is a dissertation written and submitted to the faculty of theology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Spiritual Theology. The dissertation investigates the foundation of the spirituality of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The central thesis of the work is that Mother Teresa's understanding of the human person (anthropology) is the motive behind the way of life (spirituality) she developed which enabled her to sacrifice herself for others. The dissertation, therefore, seeks to establish the correlation between anthropology and spirituality. The various stages of Mother Teresa's life are brought to light to show how they shaped her way of thinking and life especially her understanding of what it means to be human and her concern for the poorest of the poor. Themes relevant to this dissertation are organized in four separate chapters. Each of the chapters is further divided into titles and subtitles. The whole study begins with a general introduction and ends with a final conclusion that is followed by a bibliography.

The first chapter situates our study in the context of Mother Teresa's background. It examines her family and upbringing and the prevailing geographical, cultural, political, social, economic and religious circumstances of India at the time of Mother Teresa. The chapter reveals the influence Mother Teresa's family, their parish community and the general trends in the Church had on her future life as a religious. Both human and Christian values were inculcated into young Teresa at home. She learned, for instance, to respect and to be charitable to every human person especially the vulnerable from her own parents. The knowledge about missionary work and how to become a missionary was something she got from priests working in their parish. Beyond Mother Teresa's family and parish community, the cosmopolitan nature of

Skopje, her hometown, and Calcutta where she eventually settled as a religious sister gave her an opportunity to live among, and interact with, people of diverse cultural, social, philosophical and religious backgrounds who had visions of the human being shaped by their various backgrounds.

As the background of Mother Teresa and the context of India where she lived and worked have been set in chapter one, chapter two then presents her anthropology as a hermeneutical key to interpreting her spirituality and work. It investigates the doctrine of the human being which underlies her life and work. Influenced by her Christian faith, Mother Teresa subscribes to the anthropological tenet that considers man as a being created in God's image and likeness. This informs every other thing she says about the human person regarding his nature, purpose, relationships and destiny.

The acme of Mother Teresa's anthropology is the conviction that Christ is somehow present in every human being. The inspiration came from Christ himself who declares that whatever is done to the least of his brethren is done onto him (Cf. Mt 25:31-46). To try to understand the human being without Christ is to miss the core of her anthropology; and without this core, Mother Teresa's life and mission are incomprehensible. She understood her vocation as a call to belong to Jesus, and dedicated her life in working for the poor only because she saw Christ in them. Holiness or spiritual maturity in her reckoning thus consists in recognizing Christ in one's neighbours and treating him accordingly. This is done only with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter three is an exposé of the spirituality which Mother Teresa established on the above understanding of the human being. It considers the sources, the goal, and the means of that spirituality. The theological virtues are also examined as the flowering of Mother Teresa's spirituality. Finally, the chapter looks at the characteristics of this spirituality. Drawing from her writings, the chapter establishes that the main goal of Mother Teresa's spirituality is to quench the thirst of Christ through working for, and with, the poorest of the poor. Mother Teresa identified many means in the rich spiritual heritage of the Church by which one can attain this goal. Major ones among them are the sacraments, especially the sacrament of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy

Communion. Mother Teresa advocated for a frequent reception of sacraments like the sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. In addition to sacraments, she identified a life of prayer as indispensable for spiritual growth. For her, prayer is a life of constant and close union with God who is present in much the same way in the streets and slums as he is in the convent. Because her spirituality is meant primarily for consecrated persons, it gives eminent place to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience as means of spiritual growth. In addition to these three, Missionaries of Charity take another vow that they call the “fourth vow” or the vow of charity which consists in wholehearted and free service to the poor. Spiritual direction is also a means to spiritual maturity because through it one comes to know the will of God and live according to it.

Chapter four concentrates on the works of Mother Teresa. It shows that her love and concern for the poor was so great that she abandoned Loreto, against all odds, to serve them in the slums. Assured of the providence of God who had commanded her to take him to the poor, she founded Missionaries of Charity with whom she ministered to the needs of the poor in Calcutta, other parts of India, and the whole world. Their work testifies to the poor of society that they too matter in the eyes of God.

Presupposing that Mother Teresa’s understanding of what it means to be human contributed to her sympathetic attitude towards the poor, this study has explored her anthropological vision and the influence such a vision had on her spirituality. Some of the basic questions asked and answered are: what was Mother Teresa’s background and how did it influence her understanding of the human being? What particular way of life did she adopt for herself and her followers, and how did her conception of man shape this way of life? What did Mother Teresa actually do given her particular understanding of man and her spirituality? It is evident from the study that Christian anthropology is the subtext of all of Mother Teresa’s charitable activities that constitute the hallmark of her spirituality.


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