

MOTHER THERESA OF CALCUTTA

Passages from the book: **Mother of Charity** – written by Lush Gjergji (ed. Velar)



Every man is born in a family, whether it maybe a good, exemplary, mediocre or bad; without any exception, the family surely has its weight, an importance sometimes decisive for the entire life, even if often, we are not aware of this. Everyone has impressed in their hearts the images of the father, mother and brothers.. Another significant weight is the social-cultural environment, religious, educational, intellectual, professional, which particularly marks every individual. For these reasons it is very important to know the social-cultural environment in which Ganhxhe Bojaxhiu has grown-up in.

Therefore, who was Ganhxhe Bojaxhiu? It is the Christian name and last name of Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

The Bojaxhiu family, of Catholic faith, was a very big family of merchants and their business extended up-to Misir in Egypt. A minority remained in Prizren and other various localities, as per example in Skopje. Even if this family was scattered in various regions, they were always united and continued their various religious and cultural traditions. Why was this great big family scattered in various regions? It is believed that the main reason be for business purposes, but also for epidemics or otherwise for the Turkish persecutions. In fact, according to the testimonies handed down, the Turks one night gathered all the Catholic head families for dinner and in this occasion killed them all in the most cruel way possible, in accordance to their customs at that time.

The family of Mother Theresa was composed of Kolë the father, Drane the mother, Lazër the brother who lived and died in Palermo (Italy) on May 1981, Age the eldest sister and Ganhxhe the youngest.

KOLË BOJAXHIU

This is how Lazër describes his father:

"My father was a well-known merchant. Initially he worked and collaborated with the doctor named Sueskalovic, which was a known medical doctor in that time in Skopje and my father really admired him. Probably for this reason many authors have written, that my father was a pharmacist or druggist, because he worked with a doctor and sold medicines. But he was a merchant and an excellent businessman. My father together with a friend were owners of a building contractor firm very strong in Skopje. He achieved in possessing many houses and villas, where we lived in one of them, up on till his death.

We had a very pleasant and serene life. He was a very social man, so that our home was open to all. Latter on, he knew an Italian merchant, a certain Mr. Morten, probably Venetian, very rich, he was occupied in selling various merchandises, such as: foodstuffs, oil, sugar, textiles, leather, practically all items so called "colonial products". My father collaborated with him and began to travel a lot all around Europe. When he would return from his trips he would want all of us together so that he could clearly narrate what he saw, did and projected. He would also bring various things, but best of all it was nice to hear him narrate his adventures during his frequent trips. He often and willingly spoke with Age, my eldest sister, while Drane, my mother, would speak with Ganhxhe and me.

My father was a severe man and pretended much from us. I recall when he would return home at night and wake me up to ask me if I behaved well during the day, and he would interrogate me on my multiplication table, on other school home works and would repeat "Do not forget who you are children of". I remember with great joy my father's generosity.

He would donate food and money without being observed and not boasting himself for this. Sometimes he would send me to bring money, clothing, food and other needs to the poor people of our city. He would always say "You must all be generous with everyone, because God was, and is generous with us and has given us much, everything, therefore, this must be done to all..." An elderly women in her eighties, called Markoni, would often come to our home, were she drank coffee, eau-de-vie and ate with us at lunch or at dinner.

My father would say, "Receive her well and with love, because she is poor and abandoned, she has nobody!"

Even Mother Theresa remembers her father with great pleasure and with vivid recalls, very significant. Here is a detailed story from Mother Theresa:

"My father Kolë would often tell me: "My daughter, do not take or accept a mouthful if it will not be divided among others!". Or: "Egoism is a spiritual disease which renders you slave and does not permit you to live and serve others"".

The Bojaxhiu home was not only materially rich, but was moreover spiritually rich, open to all and especially to poor and needy people. Many citizens of Skopje had experimented the generosity of this home, as it is said even today in certain zones in Albania: "you are generous as the Bojaxhiu family".

This family warmth has found fertile grounds in the heart of the young Ganxhe Bojaxhiu. She conserved and custody in her heart all see saw and heard in her home. These experiences blossomed in her life and good deeds of Mother Theresa.

Lazër again narrates:

"My father often would give me money, food or clothing and would say: "Go to that family. Make sure you're not observed. If you find the door or window open, leave our aids and flee away". I did this often so did Age and Ganxhe. My father wanted to help everyone, but he didn't want to be observed in doing this; it was very clear to him the evangelic passage: "When you make charity, your left side must not know what your right side is doing, so that your charity remains a secret; and your father, that sees the secret, will one day reward you" (Mt 6,3)".

For all these circumstances and for many others, the family of Kolë Bojaxhiu was known and esteemed by everyone. Particularly Kolë was a prestigious man in the city of Skopje. He had many good projects, many progressive ideas: he helped and sustained the church school, the teaching, and the culture. In that period, no one sent their children to school, especially the girls, under the negative Islamic conception, that considered women inferior to men. Well then, Kolë Bojaxhiu even for this matter had clear christian, progressive ideas and he didn't want to be influenced by the traditional environment, so not only did he make Lazër study, but also Age and Ganxhe in such a way to give his example to others.

He was also active in politics and he fought for the right causes of the liberation from the Turks. He was the town-councillor of Skopje and exactly the politics costs his life. One day he went to Belgrad for a very important meeting with other councillors. With him there was also Toma Baldini, secretary of the Italian Consulate of Skopje. He was poisoned. When he returned home he was feeling very badly. His last words to his wife Drane, were: "Do not

worry, everything will go well. Everything is in God's hands.... Drane, I pray you to look over the children...From today they are yours... and of God".

Around 8:30 in the evening he was brought to the hospital. In the morning he was operated, but without success. He died of haemorrhage the next day, as witnessed by Sueskalovic, but no one would have ever dared to say so. It was autumn 1918 and everyone talked and cried, because they felt they had lost the "father of the poor".

With the death of Kolë, the business relationship interrupted with Mr. Morten and the activity little by little went subsiding until its full stop, forcing the Bojaxhiu family at a slow and progressive economic decline. With the catastrophic earthquake in 1964 all traces of the Bojaxhiu has been cancelled. Their home was strongly damaged and today in its place there is a big supermarket built by the Japanese. Even the cemetery was severely damaged and the mortal remains of Kolë and of other deceased people were collected and put in a common grave. A great man, generous, patriot, constructor, but above all the great father of the great Mother Theresa of Calcutta, does not have a tomb, an engraving nor a monument of recognition.

Drane Bojaxhiu

Drane was the mother of Ganhxhe, born in Novorile, close to Gjakova (Kosovo) in a noble and rich family.

At the age of about 20, she married Kolë Bojaxhiu, in the most traditional way: by knowledge of the families and not for love. It was a happy, harmonious matrimony, which created a very exemplary family in all senses.

Lazër confided this particular:

"I have never seen my parents quarrel. They were always disposed to talk, discuss and stay close to us. Mother Drane devoted her life to her children. She was occupied with the housewifery, while father Kolë had many work engagements, many responsibilities, but at the same time had trust towards mother Drane and children."

Even Mother Theresa had said:

"I will never forget my mother. Usually, she was very occupied during the day, but when the evening closed on, she had the habit to hurry-up the housework, in order to be ready to welcome my father home. At that time we didn't understand and were seldom laughing and joking about this. Today I cannot do without, as to recall how she was so delicate with my father: whatever would have happened, she was always ready to receive him with a smile on her lips..."

Suddenly after the death of her husband, Kolë, a lot of things had changed. She then had to work, educate and bring forth along the weight of the family. As a good christian, she didn't find any other way as to abandon herself totally in God's hands; trying to be close to her children and make them grow strong and serene even if, in very difficult conditions. She had to work day and night; she would sew bride and other traditional dresses.

Lazër recalls her like this:

"My mother was a strong woman, truly indestructible, and at the same time was gentle, generous and piteous towards the poor. She was very religious. I think that Ganhxhe resembles our mother; in her I always found characteristics that were common to both. My mother knew how to keep the house in order and she would educate us, with few words but

with a lot of action and examples. She never permitted that we be lacking for something. I remember here faith. Every night we'd pray together. During the month of May we would go to the church for rosary and blessing".

Lazër recalls again:

"Every year our mother would bring us to Letnica. Ganxhe and Age would leave a month before or even more. Ganxhe was ailing, she suffered from whooping cough and malaria. In Letnica, she completely recovered. Our mother had great care for us. She would always say: "I will give you everything, ask, pretend, but I will also pretend that all of you be good and example for others".

Even if they were not as rich as before the death of Kolë, the traditional care for the poor, orphans and needy continued in the Bojaxhiu family. Here is the direct testimony of Mother Theresa:

"Many poor of Skopje and nearby localities knew our door. No one ever left our house with empty hands. Everyday we had someone at our table for lunch. The first times, I would ask my mother: Who are these? She would reply: Some are our relatives, others are common people. Growing-up I know that they were poor people without anything and that my mother nourished".

Lazër, instead narrated to me some touching and piteous particulars:

"Lor Gëzuri had abandoned her old mother and our mother would go to her at least once a week to bring her food and to reset the house and sometimes Ganxhe would accompany her. I have still in front of my eyes a certain File, an alcoholic, a really sick woman. She was full of sores. My mother would wash her and medicate her twice a day. She would nourish her as if she were a little girl.

another example:

There was a widow of very bad health with 6 children. This widow worked night and day. Our mother also took care of her. When she didn't have time to go personally, she would send Ganxhe. When this woman died, her children grew-up with us, like as if they were our sisters and brothers".

Drane had a very strong faith: she was like this because she believed what she gave and made to God, is what she did to her fellow men. She also wanted that her children be educated in the same faith, and therefore, sometimes, she would bring them with herself while assisting various ill, poor, abandoned and suffering people, thus in this way, her children would personally know what human suffering was all about and what they could do to help in somehow.

After having visited and helped someone, or in the evening, when she would tell us of her day, and above all we stayed together and prayed; she often would repeat this as a main fundamental of life and work:

"When you do good deeds, do them, as if you would to throw a stone in the ocean depth".

Mother Theresa talked with a lot of fear and with pride of the first time she told to her mother of becoming a nun:

"When I first manifested the desire to donate my chastity to God, my mother opposed, but at the end she said: Alright my girl, go, but be careful to be only of God and of Christ". Not only God, but she would also have condemned me if I didn't worthily follow my calling. One day she asked me: "My girl, did you live only for God?".

At the beginning, my mother was on the contrary of my calling to be a missionary, even if she was a saint woman. She didn't want to lose me. All of us at home prayed together. One day she said to me: I will give you the permission to go in the convent; and what did she do? She closed herself in a room for an entire day and didn't want to see anybody. When I left my home for the missions, she said to me: Put your hand in Christ's hand and look ahead. Look directly at him. Do not even look back. Always ahead".

GANXHE BOJAXHIU



In the Albanian concept, under the Turkish-Islamic influence, the male lies a stop over the female. The woman in the family is only considered as a bag to bring forth a child that God will one day give her. A marriage with only female off-springs is to be considered an unhappy marriage, or worse, a disgrace. Moreover, according to the Koran, the father has the absolute power over his female offspring, even in the matter of matrimony. After his full power over his female offspring, with the marriage, she passes under the power of her husband, where as he pleases may punish or expel her as he wishes, etc., etc.

When Ganxhe Bojaxhiu was born, even with the Turkish dominion and influence, her family accepted her with great love and gratitude, as if she were a gift from God. When she was baptised all the family gathered together around Ganxhe. Most of the people present were poor people coming to celebrate her and to thank the family for all the good deeds received.

Ganxhe was a girl of delicate health and her mother was very preoccupied for this. When she turned seven years old, she was sent to the catholic school near the Sacred Heart Church. In the parish church, she received her first communion and confirmation. She was very intelligent, obedient and was the joy of the entire family.

Her brother Lazër recalls her in this way:

"She was a normal girl, maybe a little secluded and introverted. She had many friends. She always was with them and they were very delighted to stay with her. Right from elementary school we noticed her talent for studying. She was the first of her class, always ready to help others. I remember she has an intimate friend, the daughter of doctor Miljkovic. She was very inclined to poetry, which she wrote and read to her friends. She was very open with them, while with men, she was very shy. However, she was very social and didn't care of what religion, language or nationality a person would be. I have never heard her say no to her parents. Our mother would often say: "Do as Ganxhe does, it doesn't matter if she is much younger than you". She

always wanted order and discipline from us. Every evening at turns, we had to clean the shoes; Age, myself and Ganxhe. Sometimes I prayed Ganxhe to do it for me, and she would reply, ok brother, I'll do that for you!". She never would spy on me – whenever i did something I shouldn't have. For what I know, I believe that our mother felt that Ganxhe had a religious calling. I remember her saying that she couldn't enjoy Ganxhe long enough for two reasons: her delicate health or her donation to God. For this she much loved Ganxhe and when God called, she offered her willingly".

As a young girl Ganxhe, beyond her studies, was very occupied in the parish community; she sang in the choir, she recited in the city theatre and in various parish shows, she would: dance, write poetry, play the mandolin, etc.

The parish, for her, and for the whole family, was considered their second family.

She helped the priest in the catechism. Above all she would show her disposal when translating in Albanian from Serbo-Croatian, in fact, the children, didn't know this language. Together with her sister Age would sing in the church choir.

Here is a direct testimony of her brother, Lazër:

"It was Sunday. G anxhe and Age prepared themselves to go to mass. They invited me to sing with them in the choir. That day both of them had to sing alone: Age as the second voice and G anxhe as soprano. In that occasion I heard them for the first sing together in a duetto. They sang wonderfully as all the congregation proclaimed the two church nightingales with love and sympathy".

Here is a testimony form the musician Lorenc Antoni:

"G anxhe sang beautifully and together with her sister Age sang my first composition, written by me during high school. Its title was "On the hill beside the lake". It was performed in March 1928, at the show for the poor. G anxhe was very punctual for the rehearsals, she would always anticipate her arrival and would always be happy. She would participate at the shows organised by the catholic youth group; sometimes she would recite, sing, and play. I was the person who taught G anxhe how to play the mandolin; she learned very fast and well. She was a person whom everybody would like to stay with. She was born an organiser. G anxhe had grown up in the church courtyard which was only two passes away from her home. G anxhe and her mother were always engaged in various church activities and Lazër made them notice that they were more in the church than at home."

Here is another testimony from Lazër:

"When I left home, G anxhe was more than 13 years old. She was very fond of the missionary work and when they came from far away places, she would encounter and listen to them with great pleasure. One day one of those missionaries said: Every man has his road which he must follow. These words deeply touched the young heart of my sister. The Jesuit which substituted the Albanian priest opened the geographical map where all the positions of the missions were countersigned. I remember, that this fact really affected my sister, because she came home and told me everything and said: "My brother, if you should only know when and how our missionaries work..., what life they lead and how they need our assistance." Everyone was bewildered and astonished that she knew the exact location of the activities, and all the particularities of each missionary."

Lazër affirmed that G anxhe herself made this confidence to him:

"I was still young, around 13 years old and when together with my family for the first time had the desire to be completely of God. I thought of this praying for 6 years! There were times in which I thought I had no vocation. At the end I convinced myself to be called by God."

In 1927, in a whirling of preoccupations and doubts about here vocation, she decided to retreat for reflections for about 2 months in the sanctuary of our Lady of Letnica. She did the same for the next year: the result was a much more radical and everlasting convincement that her destiny was to become a "missionary sister".

The decision was now definite. The written application made to the "Loreto sisters" of Dublin, had a positive response, therefore, everything was ready for her departure.

Mr. Lorenc Antoni on the day of her departure, vividly described and reported on his diary as follows: "...A lot of people came to accompany her: children, youngsters, almost all the

parish, but even all her school friends were present. All the eyes where reverted to her, full of inquiring and inexpressive questions: What shall be of his girl who is going to India, in a foreign land and so far away?

I got up very early. I first went to church and then to the train station. I bought three tickets for Zagabria for Drane, Age and Ganxhe. Everyone was crying at the station, also Ganxhe, even if she said before that she wouldn't. I too was about to cry. Thinking that I was about to lose a relative and a good friend. In the moment of our leave-talking, she strongly grasped my hand. I coldly replied to her, in order to help her overcome this moment. The train departed. Everyone of us from the sidewalk were saying farewell by waving handkerchiefs. She never finished to wave good-bye till we couldn't see her anymore. The sun illuminated her with its rays; she looked like the moon, that slowly vanished in the daylight. The foreseen trip itineraries were: Skopje – Zagabria, Zagabria – Dublin, Dublin – Calcutta. In Dublin there was the mother superior and other sisters of "Loreto" order, even they were destined to Calcutta. They stopped here for 3 months, to learn English and to get better acquainted with the monastery's religious life. As tradition wants, here is where she received her name of: Maria Theresa of little Jesus. Finally on December 1st 1928, mother Theresa and her sisters left on the vessel for Calcutta. It was a long and difficult journey which concluded on January 6 1929, therefore, they were obliged to pass Christmas on the vessel."

It was very impressive her first encounter with the Indian reality; from one of her letters we can have these images: ".... A lot of families lived on the streets, along the city walls even in the crowded spaces. They lived day and night outside on a carpet made of palm leaves, or in many cases, on the naked earth. All of them are completely naked. They had very thin bracelets on their arms and legs and sort of ornaments on their noses and ears. On the forehead they had some significant religious signs. Passing by a street, we have encountered a family who were gathered around their dead love one, wrapped in a red tattered lined and had spreaded yellow flowers over the body and his face was multicoloured striped painted. The whole scenery was horrible. If our people would see such things, they wouldn't certainly moan for their mishaps, but would thank God for such abundance."

Nothing or absolutely nothing would escape her eyes and sensible heart. Now the dream has become a reality, a much more cruel and poor reality than what she could have imagined. Already in her description of the first encounter with this reality in Calcutta, there is the bud of a great sister Theresa, of a big heart that observes everything, suffers, prays and thinks: "What can and what must I do in this land of great poverty, pain and suffering?"

Nothing for the moment. After a few days of rest she had to abandon Calcutta and try to forget the various dramatic episodes and in silence and prayer, had to prepare herself for her religious vocation. It was the time of the postulate, which served to verify if the young girls were really suitable and capable of embracing the religious life in the convent, in the community and their totally dedication to God and the church by receiving the religious vows. In this way she got acquainted with the specific activities of the "Sisters of Loreto" congregation, which were dedicated to medicine and school.

The young Maria Theresa started her novitiate at Darjeeling, on May 23 1929. In this occasion she wrote a letter at home saying that she was well and happy.

During the period of her novitiate, she totally and joyfully dedicated her spiritual and internal life, thus, preparing herself well for her future missions. She had much time for prayers, meditation and read a lot about the lives of saints and above all the Bible.

In her second year of novitiate, she also had the possibility together with other sisters to assist and help the sick and poor, thus, practising charity and service towards others.

The teacher and her sisters were very much happy about sister Theresa. This was the valuation of the novitiate: Theresa was very engaged in her spiritual life, in the community

life, always ready to help others; very punctual, joyful and happy. She was, therefore, admitted to her first vows, the temporary ones.

The life of the novitiate is the preparation for the religious mission, for the missionary life and activities. The enthusiasm, love and a great will to do a lot of things, to change the world, which is a classical characteristic of youngsters, must now be verified in life's reality and in daily work.

During the novitiation one learns about things on a "theoretical" level, inside the community. After the general "testing", the "guide" towards life, the vocation, faith and votive practise: for "sister Theresa" we could say was her "flight" towards the service of her fellowmen. The young sister in her period of novitiate had accumulated in her heart and spirit a lot of desires, prospects, good projects of sacrificing and donating herself.

The first work she had after the novitiate was that of a nurse: assist and help the suffering. That kind of work was very heartfelt, because she already had a certain experience back home, in Skopje, where, together with her mother Drane would assist the sick and aged people. In other words this was her realisation.

After a certain period there was a new temptation: the mother superior had differently decided; her work at the hospital must be interrupted; the exact reason is never known, if it to be health or other unknown circumstantial reasons.

Even if sister Theresa was displeased for this, she would obey because this was part of her vows. By means of her superiors God's will has been indicated; sister Theresa is convinced and therefore obeys. That certain "yes" promised to God is once more verified and confirmed.

She left the hospital and re-entered the convent in Calcutta; she thought and prayed always for the sick that more than the necessary cures, they needed love, patience, service and human dignity. Sister Theresa would sometimes ask herself what was the reason for her movement. Rationally she never gave herself an answer, but her faith made her understand that this was "God's will".

She was directed to teaching and she, who really loved to study, accepted this mission with pleasure. She was employed in St. Mary's school, which was a well-known and distinctive school in Calcutta for girls of well-off and rich families.

In 1935 sister Theresa talks about another engagement that was given to her by her superiors, and she surely would have said "its the providence": the school of Saint Theresa.

Of this episode she writes:

"I engaged myself with another work, the school of Saint Theresa which is situated in Calcutta... the same say that this work has been given to me, I went to the school to see what the reality was all about..."

The school was not too far away from our home, therefore, everyday I go to school with an Indian carriage. In this way I arrive sooner than my sooty little ones....

When my little kids saw me for the first time, they looked at each other and they asked themselves if I were a bad spirit or a goddess. They have no half-ways. They adore like a divinity those who are good with them, while they are afraid of those who are ill-disposed like as if they were demons.

I made an effort and got on with it. I moved everything from the class, got some water and a brush and started to scrub the pavement. They stood awhile looking at me, since they

never saw a teacher start the lessons with such a work, because, above all, the cleaning is done by the lower class people. Seeing that I was happy and smiling, the girls started to help me while the boys brought other water. In fact, in two hours, the dirty room was transformed, at least in part in a school class where everything was clean enough. The room was a big hall which formerly served as a chapel and was divided into 5 classes.

When I arrived there were 52 children, now there are 300. I teach also in another school, where there are about another 300 children, but this school does not resemble a school, but a stable.

I also teach in another place, a sort of farmyard. When I saw how these children slept and how they were nourished, my heart tightened-up because it is impossible to find the worst misery! But they were happy. Bless the childhood!

When we got acquainted with each other, we wouldn't stay in our skins for the joy. They started jumping and singing around me, up on till I placed my hand on each little dirty heads. From that day they called me "MA" which means MOTHER: How little renders happy these simple souls!

The mothers had started to bring me their children for the blessing. At first I was astonished for this request, but in the missions we must be ready for everything, even blessings...."

Another description of her encounters with the people:

"Every Sunday I visit the poor in the lower Calcutta. I cannot help them because I do not have anything, but I go to them to make them happy. The last time at least 20 children were waiting for their "MA" with great eager. When they saw me, they started running towards me all jumping on one leg.

In that "pari", that's how this house is called and 12 families live in them. Every family has one room of 2 meters length and 1 ½ meters width. The doors are so narrow, that I have difficulty in passing through. The ceiling is so low that you can not stand up-right and to think that these poor people live in such hovels and have to pay 4 rupia. The worst thing of this is that if they didn't pay they would be thrown out."

She was finishing her novitiation and before getting her perpetual vows a certain period of silence and prayers was foreseen. She was withdrawn from the school and from every other activity. All the children were very displeased and didn't want to lose their "MA" Mother.

After receiving her perpetual vows the mother superior called her and told her: you will return to Calcutta to work in St. Mary's school; the high school were she previously worked for the first time.

When she returned to Calcutta the girls gave her a party, first of all because she returned and secondly for her perpetual vows. Sister Theresa gave herself totally for her new function as a professor and director of the school.

In that period she had undergone a long illness where many people thought that she was going to die. But instead, she totally recovered and started her work with great eager as before. While sister Theresa's stay in the school, she never forgot her family and above all her mother Drane. She wrote a letter in Tirana, containing the following message:

"I am very displeased for not being with you, but be happy my dearest mother, because your little Ganxhe is happy... Our community is very beautiful, I'm a teacher and I love the work I do. I'm also a director of the entire school and they all like me..."

Her mother replied:

"My dear daughter, do not forget that you went there for the poor. Do you remember our Filja? She is full of sores, but what torments her the most is that she feels all alone. We are doing our best to help her. In fact, the worst thing are not the sores she has, but because she has been forgotten by her relatives..."

On receipt of the letter from her mother Drane, sister Theresa was very happy, but after reading it she stopped smiling... at this point the sisters asked her:

"Has something happened? No, everything is quite well. My mother, brother and sister send their regards to everyone here in the community".

Sister Theresa read and re-read the letter. When she had gone in the streets of Calcutta she saw and experienced the "show" of the misery, which made her suffer a lot, but what could she have done more or better...?

Everyone was very proud of her and when there was a conflict inside the school or college, she was the only person capable with lots of wisdom and love to resolve the problem. She was also satisfied, happy because in the religious life she discovered herself, a lot of satisfaction in praying, meditation, in observing the rules of the community life.

After long reflections and prayers, she has no further doubts; God wants something from her but she didn't understand what still. She would say later on, referring to the struggle in searching God's will:

"I have never doubted of my religious vocation. I felt deep down inside my heart that God was calling me for another vocation, life, work, but I didn't know and understood why and how".

After about 20 years of missionary activity inside the school, an interior voice becoming more and more clear and demanding, almost an order: "You must go out and serve the poor!".

So this is how the adventure of Mother Theresa begins. She for so many years prayed and tried to do something for these people. But teaching, working with the girls and visiting their families, was considered doing very little by her. She made a spiritual reflection retreat, from which she came out determined to give a radical turning to her life. She said the following to the Loreto sisters:

"I have decided to abandon the convent in order to freely serve the poor within the poorest".

After this decision, she made a written request to the General Superior of the "Loreto Sisters" order in Ireland. The mother superior replied as follows:

"If God is calling you, with all my heart I must give you my permission. But do not forget that you will always be in our hearts.... If this is God's will.... You must know that you can count on our friendship, esteem and love of our congregation. If something should happen and you wish to return, we will accept you again very willingly as our sister".

The reply was more than positive, maternal, but at the end the Mother Superior added: "However, for this you must revert to Rome".

For this matter the Bishop came involved, which at the idea of a sister being intersected from the proper congregation, said: NO!

There were many difficulties: the political situation after the liberation of India, the danger to comprise a foreign sister, the community, the Catholic church. Even Rome was absolutely contrary for the foundation of new religious orders, particularly those female and missionaries, because there were many.

After some time, consulting herself with her spiritual father, Mother Theresa and others had identified a probable road: "ex-seclusion". She could live and operate outside the convent and community, but still belonging to the congregation under the Bishop's direct personal guide.

It didn't finish there. There is another great difficulty: her illness. For one year she had a forced rest in Asansol for her illness: a general weakness, or maybe for her old illness malarial-cough or a slow beginning of tuberculosis.

"Aimed" of love and poverty, with sari and cross, she was ready to go out and in. There is a need to change everything, from clothing to housing and of course the way to live and act....

In order to help the people one needs to better prepare himself on a professional point of view. For this reason she went to Patna, where there were the American sisters. She was highly welcomed by them for a nurse course.

She was dressed with a simple sari like all the poor women in Bengala with a small cross on her shoulder a distinguishing sign, meaning that one is "armed" with the love of Christ for the poor amongst the poorest.

There she encountered the superior Mother Dengel, a good and prudent sister. She gave Mother Theresa good practical suggestions and recommendations for the life and work that attended her.

Every beginning is difficult. This is how it was again for Mother Theresa. She returned to Calcutta before Christmas of 1948.

What to do, where to start? Bring the love of God to the miserable people, visit them and to cry out to the whole world that God loves every human being, especially the ones who suffer.

So this is how she begins her first steps of her new life: visit the people, give them her smile, a handshake, a suggestion, a medicine; she gave herself entirely... bring God into their lives.

Everyone was a bit astonished and surprised to see her simply dressed in her sari and the girls that see educated for almost 20 years, friends and families, had great difficulty in recognising her.

Her separation from the community was very painful. She herself admitted and said:

"It was more difficult for me to leave the convent and the community of the "Loreto Sisters" that it was with my family, my native land and to go in the missions... There I was fully happy and content, but couldn't not obey the voice of God to the "call within the call".

During the day time it was easy to go around visit the people, even though she was a white sister, she was looked with suspect and distrust.

During the night dead and tired she would find herself with so many people that lived, died and were born on the streets. These people do not have any form of shelter. The more abandoned districts were such a "show" of human sufferance, that it was unhuman to see

people lying on the streets close to death in the hands of such a cruel “destiny” bringing them in the hell of misery.

She saw the other people who would just pass by, go on with their proper life and not even be bothered nor touched inside their hearts to witness such a cruel reality.

Living and seeing the enormous difficulty of these people, and having the minimum possibility to help them (she once had 5 rupia in her pocket and she gave them all to a beggar), she then reverted herself to God and said the following prayer:

“My God, you are everything for me. Use me when you want... If I cannot help these people in their poverty and disgrace, then let me at least die with them and near them, so that I can testify your love!”.

She then had another temptation that of the “comfort” of the convent, the room, the security of the Order but she decidedly refused praying God in this way:

“My God, you made me leave the convent where I was happy and useful, now guide me as you wish!”.

She remembered the suggestion given to her by her mother Drane: *“My dear daughter, you must always look ahead.... Don’t ever surrender....”*

Free from everybody and everything (she really had nothing), she became part of the poor people, to be their teacher, mother, everything..

She started with the poor children close to a water tank and began to clean them and taught them about personal hygiene and all the rest.

This is how she remembers the first school:

“I was washing the children that were always very dirty. Many of them were washed for the first time in their lives. I taught them about personal hygiene, good manners, religion and how to read. The soil was my blackboard. All the children were very happy. At the beginning they were only 5 them the number of children started to grow. Those that came to me regularly received a soap as an award for their efforts. At lunch time I’d distribute milk to them. Today in the same place, a modern school is erected with more than 5000 children. There is really God’s help in this.

The people started to become aware that something was happening amongst them. There is an absolute novelty: a white sister who day in and day out is amongst them, helping, loving the children and their families. The best way to conquer the parent’s hearts is the love towards their children.

The students that she had educated for 20 years, above all those students from St. Mary’s of Entail, are the first to observe their teacher and to help her to serve the poor. They are deeply touched and are attracted in being like her for a life totally dedicated to God and their fellowmen.

Mother Theresa found hospitality at the Gomes family. She was given a small poor room. but it was just fine and enough because she had experienced what it meant to live-wait and die in the streets of Calcutta.

The girls asked her how and what would you like to do. She would like to do many things, but in one word we can say: bring the love of Christ to the suffering, relieving their suffering sharing it with them. To be, become and remain the mother of love for everyone. It is useless to talk, explain or try to convince these girls of this great project. There is a need to testify,

demonstrate, touch with heart-love all the poor, the abandoned, the lepers, but also the other people, the rich and healthy, because only all together we can and must do something beautiful for God.

The first great present from heaven is Shabashini Dash a rich and good girl, full of spirit and willingness... Like Mother Theresa she also inner struggled with God for some years and finally had decided: "I will associate myself with Mother Theresa to help her in order to help others!".

It is possible, thought Mother Theresa and she showed her hands, her clothing, her home in order to tell her:

"My sweet daughter, it is not possible to serve and help the poor in this way!?"

But Shabashini is convinced. She tells Mother Theresa: *"I will go home take off these clothes and ornaments and then I'll come!"*.

Mother Theresa replied:

"No not now, come later for Saint Joseph's feast".

The girl replied: *"That will be fine"*, and returned home.

Exactly for Saint Joseph's feast, she returned this time dressed with a simple sari and told Mother Theresa:

"Please do not tell me no, I have definitively come to remain with you!"

Seeing that this girl was decided and after a certain reflection and prayer, Mother Theresa said to her:

"Yes my daughter, remain with me and that God help us in his will".

The reflection and prayer would walk together in the life of Mother Theresa, because only with the prayer, God gave her strength to resist through the end, to totally devote herself and to accept God's ways.

This girl had all the possibilities to become a valid collaborator: she was healthy; she had a very sensible soul towards the poor; she had a spiritual inclination and above all she had a happy spirit and lots, lots of desire to sacrifice herself for her entire life. Respecting Mother Theresa, she took the name of Agnes, which was the second name of Ganhé Bojaxhiu.

Like Shabashini other girls collaborated with Mother Theresa, with so much will and dedication. Therefore this "work" was not considered "hers" but that of God, because "the sign that God loves and supports us is in the vocations"; said Mother Theresa. The vocations continued to arrive and they wanted at all costs to remain with Mother Theresa and to be like her. Its God's love that calls, brings and attracts the young generous souls and also there was the life examples of Mother Theresa which shortly became a provocation and challenge for many girls.

If a white foreign sister was capable of totally donating herself to serve our people, we must and have to do something for her.

In November 1949, Mother Theresa wrote home as follows:

"We are now in 5. Please pray a lot so that our community will grow in sanctity and in number, if this is God's will. There is so much to do!..."

The number was growing, so much that in 1950 they were in 7 and toward the end of the year in 10.

With the first vocations the missionary work could increase and the needs were a lot; the school, the poor, the dying, the lepers... But this had to be done slowly, because the vocations were also a great "risk", even that of working with great enthusiasm and creating new structures.

"The work, the silence, the love in action, yes, but only if it is really fruit of faith and prayer, one must serve God in his fellowmen, otherwise, we simply become social workers like many others and this could be our end," said Mother Theresa.

These girls had to be educated for a religious life, for the vows inspiring them to act but not pushed on by their will but that of God.

This was the beginning of the novitiation. Mother Theresa had already in mind all the rules of the future community: they had to adopt themselves to the requests from the church authorities, to the necessities of the people and of the possibilities of the young girls that God had sent her.

The success was evident, that in 1950 with the recommendations of Monsignor Ferdinand Pereira, Rome approved the constitution of the new religious community. The date was October 7, 1950.

Besides the classical religious vows which all religious congregations have, like: obedience, poverty and chastity, Mother Theresa added another vow: to serve for free and with love, all the poor amongst the poor, Why? Mother Theresa replies:

"The poor are such not because they want to be, but because they are forced in being poor. We instead, want to be poor like them, to testify to them and also to others that God is love. Therefore, poverty is our interior force to serve and love God in the poor".

The two human experiences that were common to most people of Calcutta and surrounding areas that touched Mother Theresa's heart were: sickness and poverty. She personally alone could not do anything for them. There was the need to create basic structures, to awaken the people, the public opinion, because Christ openly in a particular way was on the poor and sick people's side.

Indeed, he identified himself like them, therefore, we needed to discover, serve and love Christ in the poor. It is the logic of the Gospel. The love that must be enlarged and concreted in the works and only then becomes love in action. Mother Theresa loves to repeat this phrase.

As a Loreto sister, she saw great misery among the people, first through her work as a nurse and then particularly through the school, the children and their families.

The poverty is large, larger: *"that this is a huge weight to carry....Only now I can better understand how they suffer in their body and souls when they search for shelter, help and support....".*

Mother Theresa has arrived to a conclusion that might seem a little strange: to help the poor, we need to be poor, make the experience in being poor, try, live, understand poverty. Consequently react with love, for love. It seems absurd that these sisters help the poor people. But its true! It is a "contradiction" of our time that Mother Theresa is a great teacher and testimony. Mother Theresa ate what they ate, slept where they slept and dressed as they dressed,....

Another original aspect that Mother Theresa discovered and enhanced is the following: the poor people are very spiritually rich, human, because suffering makes them mature, more human and sensible to others.

Mother Theresa says:

"Our people even if very poor, live and above all die happy, they are free. There is happiness in them; they are thankful for everything, very sensible and very good. One day I went and brought some rice to a very poor family. Later on the mother of these 4 children ran away from home. After some time she came back and I asked her "where did you go to?" and she replied: My good mother, near us there is a Muslim family. They are very, very poor and are dying of hunger, so I always went there to bring them some food, rice. Her family was Hindu. See how much generosity and altruism the poor have..."

The poor are the real protagonists of the life and works of Mother Theresa and her sisters, but are also the point of interest indicated to all in the world. Mother Theresa says:

"Every man must have food, medicines; the possibility of curing oneself, but above all love. The biggest injustice that can be made to the poor is not to respect them and to despise them. Only when the rich will begin to divide their wealth amongst the poor, they also shall be happy and serene. God has not created poverty, mankind has. In front of God, everyone is poor!"

THE HOUSE OF THE ABANDONED CHILDREN

Life goes always ahead and so does the story of Mother Theresa and the "Missionary of Charity", over even better, the story of love that God has towards mankind, that this time as protagonists are the abandoned children and orphans.

This was one of the more dramatic problems for the poor population: children were found sometimes near their nearly dead parents, there were even children abandoned dead or in agony.

Mother Theresa "sees" and "recognises" little Jesus in these children: even Jesus was refused by everyone, born in a cave in Bethlehem. The story repeats itself.

She opened a new house, this time for these threatened beings, in danger of life: the "House of the abandoned children". This house was opened in 1955. Many children were already dead others were near to death, but Mother Theresa ordered to bring them equally in the house of the abandoned children and to all the possible things for them. Those that survived and fully recovered had found in Mother Theresa a new mother, house, family, hospitality, love, community till they became adolescent.

They were kept until in condition to work and create their own family. Many of them were adopted from the rich families in various part of the world. In this way the joy was doubled; for these unfortunate children and for the families that have adopted them, but above all, for Mother Theresa, that had become a bridge for new bonds, friendships in order to save and to make happy a lot of children.

A lot of times some sisters would find amongst rubbish, on the street or on sidewalks, even just born children in great danger. One time Mother Theresa found a dying boy, she took him and hugged him with great love and brought him close to her heart, and said:

"Look there is still life in this boy. No man has the right to take the life away of anybody. Life is a gift from God".

This goodwill work towards abandoned children and orphans had more and more progressed either that being of the increased number of children or being that of diversified problems: sick, deaf-mute, blind, physically and mentally disturbed children. In this way various internal branches grown in the house of the abandoned.

THE HOUSE OF THE DYING

Another view of poverty that Mother Theresa looked on was that of the abandoned people dying in the streets. To live and to die in the streets. What destiny, what sadness, what contradiction, what absurdity, what injustice, what shame for all of us!

In Calcutta and surrounding area, as like in various places in India and in many poor countries of the world, it is nearly almost a "normal" daily thing a cruel reality that doesn't "disturb" almost nobody.

Mother Theresa knows, she saw while walking in the streets of Calcutta, going to school. She could not accept this fatality and remain only on a knowing, compassionate basis and nothing else. Their destiny was more and more becoming her destiny. Amongst the poor and sick there many that are dying, these people have never "tasted" life, love, the human cure, the touch, a caress – human contact. Mother Theresa decided to do something for them also.

The work for the dying – began as follows: Mother Theresa was searching for the poor sick people, when on the street she found a dying man that was slightly giving life signs. He was still moving his eyes, his lips that were whispering:

"Help me, I'm dying! I don't have anybody!".

He was trying to move, but he was too weak to do it. This was in 1952.

Lets hear a dramatic story through the voice of Mother Theresa:

"One day I found a dying man in the rubbish, not too far from the Campbell hospital close to our house. I went to pray for him to be received in the hospital. In vain. There was no space for him. We went to the pharmacy to get some medicines, but this poor man was already dead. I was so touched and unhappy. So I therefore said: The people have more care for dogs and cats than that of human beings. Then I went to protest at the city hall authorities...".

This situation didn't stop here. She also went to protest at the hospital and said to the state authorities:

"If you all do not want to care for these people who die in the streets, then find me a place where I can arrange and take care of them....".

They gave her a precise indication, but also complicated and dangerous. In the district of Kalighat, which is like the "Vatican of Rome" for the city of Calcutta, the religious centre for the Hindu: the famous and beautiful temple of the Kali goddess. Around the temple there were many buildings, a commercial complex building, for the holy bath and many other activities. There was also a big building for pilgrims, where after praying and other religious

rituals would stay and rest. The state official together with Mother Theresa went on site and made her see this building, asking her if she would like to take it and use it for the dying.

Mother Theresa immediately accepted with great thankfulness. Within 24 hours this building was full of dying people.

But another difficulty came on: the priests of the Kali goddess and other faithful Hindus, after seeing that their holy place was “violated”, without minding of cast, religion and many other differences, went furious against Mother Theresa.

She instead helped serenely, cleaned, cured, loved, served... Very angry they went to Mother Theresa to ask her why she came there with all these people. After hearing that this place (the house of the dying) was given to her by the state authorities, they harshly protested even with the authorities, thus provoking a serious religious conflict.

An official promised that he would kick-out this “white woman” that didn’t respect their religious tradition. He really did this. He went with much anger to verify on site “the right of violation”. When he entered in the big hall, he found himself in front of something that he never saw: There were about a hundred of women and men lying near to death and Mother Theresa with her sisters, were doing their possible to save them and if that was not possible, at least try to make them die in peace with human dignity!

This official was very touched with what he saw. He called Mother Theresa and told her:

“Wishes, good Mother! You are truly the goddess Kali in person, the angel of consolation. Continue in this way. I wish you all the best and great success. May God help you!”.

He went out, touched and angry almost crying and said to the priests of the goddess Kali, the faithful people and journalists.

“Yes I have truly promised that I would have sent this woman away and I maintain my engagement; but listen to me well for what I have to say: before this there is the need that all of your mothers, sisters and yourselves must come and do what these sisters do. In the temple you have a black stone goddess, but inside there is a live goddess!”.

Seeing the goodness, generosity and the extraordinary dedications for the dying, the population little by little accepted this home. The Kali priests also accepted this, trying in all ways with their support and help.

This work began on August 22 1952, when the “missionary of charity” were only 28 sisters and were welcomed guests in the Gomes family.

In 1986 Mother Theresa told of this fact:

“The House of the Pure Heart (this is how the house of dying was called) and for many “Purgatory”; the passage to the Father’s house. Up till today 60.000 among men and women have passed here, about 30.000 have died there in peace others have been saved. Here is a typical example:

I one day found a man in a sewer. All his body was a great sore. The mice had almost “eaten” his body. I brought him to our house for the dying. You know what that man told me? He said. I have lived all my life like an animal in the street. Now I will die like an angel, surrounded with love and care.

I can never forget his words, but above all his serene and smiling face. After three hours he died really like an angel”.

The sisters every morning would go on the streets to search for the dying. At first the people would look on them with spite and with a little fear: then a collaboration and reciprocal help was born. The population itself, if they saw or found someone on the streets, they would bring the person to Mother Theresa or they would indicate where these people were lying.

There are many young boys and girls among these collaborators. The work was very difficult, it required a big faith but also physical strength.

In 1962 Mother Theresa founded the male branch "Missionary of Charity".

Already in 1969 the "Missionary of Charity" had opened 15 houses for the dying, 12 in India and 3 elsewhere. Every year the number of these houses would increase, but the experience in this work, the love and the warm welcome for a serene passage to eternity was also increasing.

Here is another story told by Mother Theresa:

"Myself and some sisters were going to the Eucharistic Congress when all of a sudden I notice two human beings near to death: a woman and a man. I stopped and told the sisters: you all go to the congress, I will instead stay here and assist them. I took them and brought them to our house of the dying. Many were very angry with me because I didn't attend the congress. I simply told them this: I left to go and adore Jesus under the bread form and I found him under a dying form. I stopped and adored and expressed all my love to him..."

This work had a deep human value to Mother Theresa, but above all "Christian" to give a meaning to a life already humanly speaking, failed, desperate, ruined and to recover in "extremis" as Jesus did on the cross with the repented thief. These people that in their life do not now anything but hunger, thirst, pain and life on the street. This work is to demonstrate, testify and make the love of God live amongst them in dramatic moments and to assure them that God waits for them in the eternal glory without any religious or race distinction.

Here is what provokes the meaning of closeness, testimony and love:

One woman was near to death. This woman seeing Mother Theresa serve, love, clean and hug, made a question to her:

"Why are you doing this?"

Mother Theresa replied:

"Because I care for you and because God loves you!"

And she happily said:

"Say that again, because it is the first time in my life that I hear these words".

Mother Theresa remarked:

"She happily died away in peace towards God's home".

Apart from children, the sick, and the dying, she dedicated herself to the lepers, the handicapped and in the last years to people affected with AIDS....

Her life was spent till her last resources toward all who represented "human poverty". But in this poverty Mother Theresa put even other sickness of our industrialised society: drugs, alcoholism, solitude, the lack of faith and Christian values. She was very sensible with the

problem related to abortion, which in many time in public occasions would express her disapproval and thought:

"Today the biggest danger for peace is the abortion, the killing of an unborn human being; in fact, if we can suppress the life given by God, if a mother can be an executioner of her proper child, then what can we say about all the assassins in the world? For this reason homicides are growing more and more".

In her life project, Mother Theresa had to overcome many difficulties: surely the most difficult were envy, defamation, promises not maintained, stupidity, perfidy,... like all those who want to "construct" in society must daily encounter. She however, had founded her force in the Gospel, so that nothing could stop nor frighten her.

In the house of the abandoned children founded by her in Calcutta, a content on a wall can be read in great evidence:

Mankind is irrational, illogical, egocentric;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, LOVE HIM

If you do good deeds, you will be attributed for selfish hidden purposes;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, DO GOOD DEEDS.

If you realise your goals, you will find false and true friends;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, REALISE THEM.

Honesty and sincerity renders you vulnerable;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, BE SINCERE AND HONEST.

All that you have constructed in so many years can be destroyed all at once;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, CONSTRUCT.

If you help people, they will not praise you;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, HELP THEM.

Give the world the best of you and the will surely kick you;

IT DOESN'T MATTER, GIVE THE BEST OF YOURSELF.

Mother Theresa has always tried to find the way to involve many people in order that they do something beautiful for God.

The necessities are many and there is the need to educate the people to do good deeds, to have an open heart towards human suffering and to stay close to the people that need our help.

Therefore, she thought and founded many branches of her congregation:

- "Missionary Sisters of Charity"

- "Missionary Brothers of Charity" (1963) are at present working in various parts of the world with 50 houses and centres, under the guidance of Brother Andrea ex-Jesuit and co-founder of this work;

- The international association "Collaborators of Mother Theresa" which in 1969, pope John Paul I gave his approval and blessing with great gratitude and care. These people help and spiritually/materially support the work of Mother Theresa. It is a laic international association which wants to live in the spirit of Christ as did Mother Theresa. Today they are about 100.000 in all the world, trying to know, love and serve the needy.

- "Missionaries of Charity"

- "Brothers of Words"

Above all in the last periods of her life, she travelled a lot and had encountered very important people. She would sometimes receive visiting cards from many people. She too had a visiting card and would give it to others. The card had written:

The fruit of silence is the prayer,

The fruit of the prayer is the faith,

The fruit of faith is love,

The fruit of love is the service,

The fruit of service is peace.

Mother Theresa.