



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Mother Teresa's ministry truly heroic

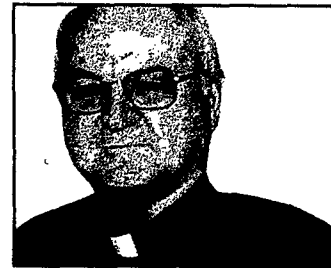
This coming Sunday Pope John Paul II will beatify one of the 20th century's most famous and universally admired individuals, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who died Sept. 5, 1997.

Born in Albania in 1910, she was the foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, a congregation of sisters who minister to the poorest of the poor and to those nearest to death, in the most destitute of circumstances.

She said: "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. ... The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference toward one's neighbor who lives at the roadside, assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease."

Some of her critics in life charged her with indifference to the social and economic structures that create these kinds of situations. Others differed with her views on the role of women in the church and in society. But even those who disagreed with her could not deny the sheer force of her personal example in reaching out to the lowliest, most marginalized members of the human community.

If her ministry to the poor, the sick, the abandoned and the dying is not an example of truly heroic virtue (the central standard for beatifying and canonizing individuals), then the concept



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

has no real meaning.

Saints, in the end, are ordinary persons who have lived their lives in a truly extraordinary way.

Thus, while every Christian is called by baptism to minister to the poor and to the sick, not many of us could fully emulate Mother Teresa's way of doing so. Sainthood figures like her are bar-raisers. They lift the standard of human behavior as measured against the demands of the Gospel itself.

Most of us cannot easily jump over a bar that is higher than a foot off the ground. By contrast, saints are pole-vaulters and record-setters.

The beatification and eventual canonization of Mother Teresa underscore the real meaning and purpose of adding individual women and men to the church's official list of blessed and saints.

It is not to impress and awe the rest of us on the basis of the great and spectacular wonders that these individuals have performed in life or through their intercessory powers in heaven. It

is to inspire us to "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37), within the limits of our abilities and opportunities.

Mother Teresa-type saints do not compel us to go out and purchase one-way tickets to the most poverty-stricken, disease-ridden and violence-torn regions of the world and minister to their most desperate inhabitants for the rest of our lives. But we are called to follow these saints' example, even if on a much smaller scale.

And "example" is the key word here. The Second Vatican Council insisted that saints are not just miracle-workers and intercessors; they are primarily models of the Christian life.

"When we look on the lives of those women and men who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired anew to seek the city which is to come (Hebrews 13:14, 11:10), while at the same time we are taught about the safest path ... to arrive at perfect union with Christ, which is holiness."

Through the lives of the saints, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church continues, "God shows, vividly, to humanity his presence and his face. [God] speaks to us in them and offers us a sign of [the] kingdom, to which we are powerfully attracted, so great a cloud of witnesses are we given (Hebrews 12:1) ... " (n. 50).

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Says wisdom of columnist will be missed

To the editor:

Along with multitudes of others I'm sure, I was flooded with sadness when I scanned the headlines of the Oct. 2 issue of the *Catholic Courier* and saw that Father Albert Shamon was writing his last column. For the last several years I have used his column many times as the cornerstone to the weekly lesson plan I use for teaching fifth-grade Religious Education.

When the *Courier* arrives in the mail each week, Father Shamon's column was where I first turned my attention and would clip out his articles. His innate ability to provide insight and to relate the Sunday Gospel into everyday life situations was uncanny and proved to be better than the written instruction manuals we are given to aid in weekly lesson preparation. In addition to helping with fifth-grade Religious Education, I personally found much benefit from Father Shamon's articles for without them I would never have known the inspiring story behind the writing of "Amazing Grace," for example, as well as countless other "gems."

There will now be a sizeable void in the *Catholic Courier* and I do hope the *Courier* can at some point continue the concept provided by Father Shamon for

all of these years.

To you, Father — "Thank You!" for your wisdom you have shared; your words will be sorely missed.

Jack Norris
 Judd Lane
 Hilton

Saddened by column's end

To the editor:

It is with a heavy heart I write this letter. The news of Father Shamon's ill health and not writing his weekly column was disappointing.

Each week his was the first column I read when receiving the paper. Father Shamon has a great devotion to our Blessed Mother. One year he presented slides of his pilgrimage to Medjugorje at cluster parish St. Anne's/St. Gregory's. We enjoyed seeing them.

I heartily agree with Bishop Clark's column in the October 9 issue of the *Catholic Courier*.

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