

# Follow the Gospels, not the world.

**DAVID SCOTT, A REVOLUTION OF LOVE: THE MEANING OF MOTHER TERESA (CHICAGO: LOYOLA PRESS, 2005)**

In *A Revolution of Love: The Meaning of Mother Teresa* David Scott interprets Mother Teresa's life. For anyone who thinks her life needs no interpretation, this book will undoubtedly change his mind. It is a small masterpiece, delivering a beautifully written powerhouse of a message.

In Mother Teresa's life, Scott has looked for God's message to His Church right now, in the midst of "a century in which the human person had been reduced to a beast of burden, fodder for war, and raw material for economic production." *A Revolution of Love* delivers a very convincing argument that he has found that message.

If the culture war can only be won by Catholics putting on "the mind of Christ," then this book is highly recommended for every Catholic who wants to win that war. Scott's interpretation of Mother Teresa's life seems to deliver marching orders from God Himself.

In a world where too much print churns out too many insipid "inspiring" messages, Scott's compendium of meditations on Mother Teresa's life stands in a rare category. A brilliant priest once advised his students to pick carefully among the many modern books of religious inspiration, and to "stick to the tried-and-true ones, the ones whose authors' names begin with 'S.'" Second to the books written *by* saints, this priest then recommended

books written *about* saints. *A Revolution of Love* ranks as one of the finest books of this type.

The book differs from most biographies of modern saints in that the biographical details are sparse. Scott, like all of Mother Teresa's biographers, found that very little of Mother Teresa's life before her work with the poor, sick and dying could be uncovered. He also found that she revealed very little about her inner self. "In an over-exposed, celebrity-obsessed culture, God raised up a world-famous saint who ducked the limelight and had no appetite for autobiography. . . . She gave us nothing, and we should ask why. She lived in the very times we live in, and yet God sent her as a

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stranger just passing through, her life destined to remain a closed book. If you are inclined to think that God must have His reasons, you might say Mother Teresa's first miracle was living in this day and age and being able to fly beneath the radar, to preserve her zone of personal privacy."

Those who tried to expose her found their efforts fruitless. "Would-be muckrakers stumbled in their own muck," and Scott enumerates other circumstances that mysteriously conspired "to draw an iron curtain of hiddenness around her."

Faced with these limits, Scott declines to do as Mother Teresa's other biographers have done: make "statements about her past that had no basis in the biographical record and could not possibly be verified." Instead, he proceeds like a spiritual investigative reporter, or more accurately, like a literary critic of the New Criticism school: Scott sticks strictly to the text of Mother Teresa's life. He attempts to read "the divine script written for her life" from the few words she left, the many deeds, and the few life circumstances we do know.

Scott writes that just as the relationship between the prophet Hosea and his wife "was meant to dramatize God's undying love for His faithless 'bride' Israel," so also, "we are invited to see a divine template, a deeper religious significance in the

events and experiences in the lives of the saints." When Scott does so, when he interprets Mother Teresa's life circumstances in light of her words and deeds, he does so with clarity and with obvious love of the true faith.

So what is that message? God wants a "revolution of love." "My

revolution comes from God and is made by love," Mother Teresa said. She explained that "when a girl who belongs to a very old caste comes to place herself at the service of the outcasts, we are talking about a revolution, the biggest one. The hardest one of all: the revolution of love."

The revolution begins in each person who gives up the comforts of life in order to love God and to love his brethren in God. "She insisted that when the rich begin to make sacrifices for the poor, to deprive themselves of things they like and once thought they needed, something divine and earthshaking is going on." And as Scott rightly points out, compared to the rest of the world, "all of us in the West" are rich.

Mother Teresa's call, Scott writes, was to fill heaven with the poor, but on the way to doing so, "she intended to change this world, too." Her own words tell us that, "when all recognize that our suffering neighbor is God Himself, and when you draw the consequences from that fact, on that day, there will be no poverty." And: "If everyone could see the image of God in his neighbor, do you think we should still need tanks and generals?"

In a progressively deepening and widening range of thought, Scott shows how the revolution of love would transform the world. He does so by asking questions of the "template" of Mother Teresa's life, and then answering them with her own words and deeds. Why did she, usually so reticent, reveal that she took her religious name after St. Therese, the Little Flower? What is the significance of her caring for the dying? Why did Providence ordain that her home for the dying be attached to the shrine of the Hindu

god, Kali? Why did she name this home *Nirmal Hriday* ("Place of the Immaculate Heart")? Why, "in a time of gulags and concentration camps, ethnic cleansing, suicide bombers and world poverty" did she again and again "single out abortion" as a particular abhorrence to God — her "voice unique in its starkness, dire and brutal in its honesty"? Why did God ordain that her witness to Him would always be associated with India? How do the few details of her early life — a childhood in Albania, the murder of her father, the early influence of the Church, her mother's great solicitude for the poor, the Iron Curtain's imprisonment of her native country — clarify and amplify God's message?

Reading Scott's interpretation of the facts surrounding all these questions is like reading the explanatory denouement of a suspense novel. It all begins to make sense — powerful, provocative sense.

And like every good suspense novel, *A Revolution of Love* offers that final, astounding clue that

version to the poor. . . . In this letter [to the Archbishop of Calcutta], she made her case for why he should allow her to undertake a new initiative among the poor, describing the Voice she heard on the train and in the days and weeks that followed. . . . In a letter dated December 3, 1947, she revealed that she had been granted mystical visions of Jesus and Mary."

Scott devotes a short chapter to the story of the Voice of Jesus that "kept cajoling her with the refrain: 'Wilt thou refuse to do this for Me?' and to the three mystical visions. This chapter comes in the middle of the book and is the bridge between Sister Teresa, the nun living securely behind the walls of her convent, and Mother Teresa, the "mother of the world's poor."

The Church's recent knowledge of the Voice and the visions granted to Mother Teresa transform all that follows, her words, deeds, and life circumstances, into a truly divine message for all Catholics. The locutions and visions perform the work that authentic private revelations are

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transforms all the other details, reveals the mystery in the full light of day, and leaves everyone astonished: "After Mother Teresa died, officials preparing her sainthood cause discovered a small cache of letters written to her spiritual directors and superiors during her early years. . . . As a result, it is now possible for us to partially reconstruct the high spiritual drama of Mother Teresa's con-

supposed to perform: the message makes us realize, as Mother Teresa realized, that God is really serious about what He wants us to do, right now, today, without fail, without hesitation, the situation is desperate. "It is interesting, now that we can read her private revelations from Jesus, that Jesus said nothing to her about social conditions or injustice — only about saving the

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souls of the poor from the Devil.” The full content of the words and the visions granted to Mother Teresa are equally revealing and powerful.

The contrast of Mother Teresa as visionary to the swindlers that make a good living by having “visions on demand” gives a much-needed lesson for modern Catholics who are so gullible in following false visionaries. For one thing, she kept them secret, and did not want them to be known, even after her death. For another, she received very few, and for a specific, brief period in her life. After that period, as Mother Teresa began to live a life of complete obedience to her extraordinary call, the supernatural manifestations disappeared from her life. Scott also shows the similarity and the connection of her visions to those of the children of Fatima.

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Finally, again through letters found after her death, Scott brings us to Mother Teresa’s greatest trial — the dark night of the soul. “Now we know that in secret her life was a living hell. . . . Mother Teresa lived in a spiritual desert, panicked that God had rejected her, or worse, that He was there in the dark hiding from her. As if by some strange formula, the greater her success and public adulation, the more abandoned, humiliated and desperate she felt. . . . In her dark night, Jesus was claiming Mother Teresa for His own, pledging Himself to His spiritual bride, pruning away her self-love and pride, and purifying her in heart, mind and intention, stripping away all that would keep her from total union with Him.”

Scott finds significance for all Catholics in this dark night, just as he did in the other circumstances of her life. For one thing, the saint of our century, Mother Teresa, endured an agonizingly long dark night: “we would be hard-pressed to find another saint who suffered a darkness so thick or a night so long as Mother Teresa.” As he quotes letters to her spiritual directors about the agony of her dark night, “we can hear all the anguish of her century — the desolation of the poor, the cries of unwanted children, of the atheist, of all those who can’t murmur a prayer or feel to love anymore.” In other words, her dark night expresses the particular horror, the particular ungodliness of our epoch.

The letters that reveal this hidden spiritual drama bring God’s message more urgently to us. “Kept secret during her lifetime,” writes Scott, “these things have been disclosed to us now in the early days of the new millennium so that we might understand more fully the meaning of

Mother Teresa and the revolution of love that God was working in our midst.”

David Scott set out on a very daunting task — to explain the meaning of Mother Teresa, and her place in the eternal workings of God, in the salvation history of mankind. He succeeded, and, as a bonus for his readers, he did so with beautiful, finely honed prose. The book is factual, concise and gripping, and yet also impressionistic in the best sense of the word. Scott evokes a picture of illuminative beauty — Mother Teresa’s life and the astounding abundance of her love for Christ and for his poor — amid the horrid, dark landscape of our modern times.

*A Revolution of Love* is, in fact, primarily a devotional book, one that a Catholic could read during his time of prayer. Because of that, like Mother Teresa’s own words, it could be read repeatedly. I’ve read it twice, and will no doubt read it again. My husband has said the same.

It is a good book to give to Protestants because Scott not only explains very well certain Catholic things — for example, what is sainthood and why saints are so important to Catholics — but also makes Catholicism look like the eminently reasonable religion that it is. Through Mother Teresa God has told His Church once again, “Follow the Gospels, not the world.” I want bishops and priests, the whole Church, and not just an extraordinary, heroic nun and her Missionary Sisters in India, to spread the revolution of love. And for that reason, I want people to read this book.

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**ROSEMARY FIELDING**