

Author reveals private letters, unseen view of spiritual psyche of Mother Teresa

"A Revolution of Love: The Meaning of Mother Teresa," by David Scott (Loyola Press, \$19).

Reviewed by MIKE AQUILINA

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta was one of the most familiar faces of the 20th century.

Yet, few people knew the real Mother Teresa, according to a new book by a Pittsburgh writer that is gaining national attention and generating new interest in one of the most beloved Catholic figures of all time.

David Scott's "A Revolution of Love: The Meaning of Mother Teresa" is the first study to appear since her beatification in October 2003.

And it is the first to make use of previously undisclosed letters Mother Teresa sent to her spiritual directors and superiors beginning in the mid-1940s.

These letters, which Mother Teresa had asked be destroyed, detail dramatic private revelations she received from Jesus and Mary and the painful struggles of her spiritual life.

"She felt that if people knew about these visions and her spiritual troubles they would focus too much on her and forget about Jesus," Scott told the Pittsburgh Catholic recently. "But these letters give us the first real insights into her soul and the purpose of her mission."

The portrait that emerges in Scott's book reads like a high-stakes spiritual drama.

We learn that Mother Teresa spent almost two decades in Calcutta before she showed any obvious concern for the poor. During this period she led a comfortable life as a teacher and later principal of a private girls' school that catered to India's privileged classes.

When she suddenly announced she was quitting to serve the poor, it was so out of character that her friends thought she had lost her mind, Scott reports.

She had heard a personal call from Jesus. From her letters, we now know that, beginning on a train ride in 1946 and continuing for weeks afterward, she received almost daily visions and locutions from Jesus.

But the letters also reveal that while her fame grew worldwide, culminating in her award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, her private life was in turmoil.

Following her initial revelations, she never again heard the voice of Jesus. The more public acclaim she received, the more she felt completely abandoned by God.

"I am told God lives in me — and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul," she wrote in one of the newly disclosed letters.

In another, she expressed anxiety that she might be losing her faith: "I feel life refusing God. Pray for me that I may not turn a Judas to Jesus in this painful darkness."

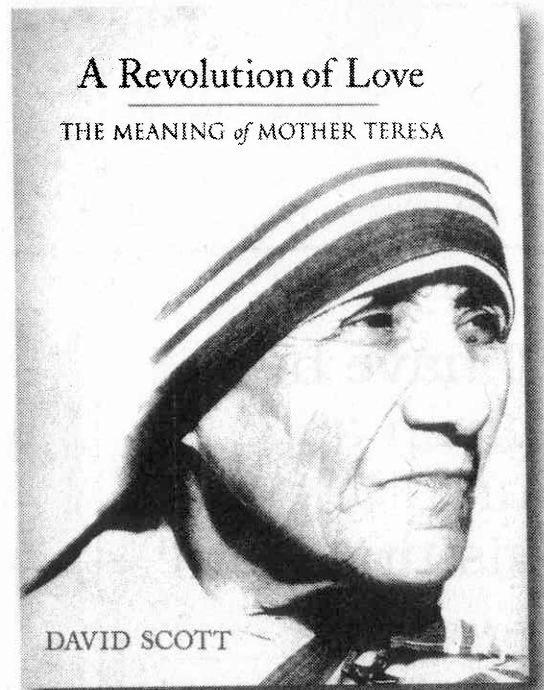
Scott's book is earning early praise from such diverse quarters as Publisher's Weekly, theologians and spiritual writers such as Dr. Scott Hahn. Scott is being credited with writing perhaps the first clear-eyed look at the complexities of this 20th-century saint.

"What we see with Mother Teresa is an ordinary woman trying to live a holy life in unholy circumstances," said Scott, a parishioner at SS. John and Paul in Franklin Park whose five children attend Aquinas Academy.

"She lived in an extreme setting — the squalor and despair of Calcutta. But her struggles were really those we all face in our families and in our work — trying to find God and keep the faith in a world where that gets harder and harder to do."

Scott believes that Mother Teresa's "ordinariness" is what explains her attractiveness to so many people — including thousands of Pittsburghers who treasure the memory of her visit to St. Paul Cathedral in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood in 1979, not long after winning the Nobel Prize.

"She said that sainthood and holiness was not only within our reach —



it was what we were made for," Scott explained.

"She showed us that just as Jesus comes to us in the appearance of ordinary bread and wine, he comes to us in the ordinary, humble events of our daily lives. That means that every moment we have a chance to show and prove our love for God."

Scott's book is available at area bookstores or from the author's Web site — www.DavidScottWritings.com.

Aquilina is the author of numerous books on Catholic life, history and culture. His most recent book is the "How-To Book of Catholic Devotions."