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**Mother Teresa of Calcutta**

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## Mother Teresa's Legacy to Lawyers

*C.M.A. McCauliff\* & Paula A. Franzese\*\**

Unlike many people in public life today, Mother Teresa did not bash lawyers. Indeed, she sent the woman she and her community later chose as her successor, Sister Nirmala, to law school and put her in charge of the Missionaries of Charity's legal affairs. Mother Teresa always encouraged people to develop their talents, especially in law or medicine, common callings in the spirit of public service and healing. As Roscoe Pound knew long ago, the law is "no less a public service because it may incidentally be a means of livelihood."<sup>1</sup> Mother had much work for these professionals. She turned everyday work like property closings on a soup kitchen or a shelter into a source of satisfaction for lawyers, because she related our daily work as lawyers to our relationship with God, just as she saw Jesus in the face of the baby or old person dying in the street.

One Norwalk magistrate and lawyer named Commaraswamy expressed that satisfaction in describing herself as "the most reimbursed lawyer in [the] profession," although she "never charged a dime" for her legal services to Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity.<sup>2</sup> How can this be at a time when we continuously hear of lawyers' personal dissatisfaction with their chosen profession?

Mary Ann Glendon recently explained the problem of professional malaise: "In influence, affluence, and prestige, practicing lawyers surpass most other occupational groups; yet there is a high incidence among them of clinical depression, and conservative estimates say one lawyer in six is a problem drinker."<sup>3</sup> Professor Glendon locates some of the discontent in concentration on litigation and moneymaking without properly recognizing peacemaking or pains-

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\* Professor of Law, Seton Hall University School of Law. A.B., Bryn Mawr College; J.D., University of Chicago; Ph.D., University of Toronto.

\*\* Professor of Law, Seton Hall University School of Law. B.A., Barnard College; J.D., Columbia University.

<sup>1</sup> THE LAW FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERN TIMES 5 (1953).

<sup>2</sup> THE CONNECTICUT LAW TRIBUNE 1, American Lawyer Newspapers Group, Inc. Sept. 15, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> MARY ANN GLENDON, A NATION UNDER LAWYERS 15 (Farrar et al. eds., 1994).

taking problem-solution as "the useful services that have always given lawyers in the aggregate their best chance to achieve personal satisfaction while contributing to the well-being of their fellow citizens."<sup>4</sup>

Mother Teresa's life shows us how to transform seemingly mundane tasks into meaningful service by using our legal skills to serve clients and help people who need our services. Her example invites us to take pride in our achievements and derive satisfaction from helping others in our ordinary work as lawyers. Mother Teresa's love and devotion spoke to people of every faith and no faith because her commitment to the love of God was so strong. She told us about her role by saying, "God is the power. Talk to the others . . . . Some are not Christians, talk to them. You will know it when you see it. It is very beautiful."<sup>5</sup>

In every generation, as lawyers we have to renew our traditions of service to others and control the temptation (1) only to make money or (2) to regale with glory only the courtroom warrior and big dealmaker. We must not overlook our principal roles as healers and helpers, unless other venues provide the best way for us to serve as lawyers. There are "growing doubts about the capacity of a lawyer's life to offer fulfillment to the person who takes it up. Disguised by the material well-being of lawyers, it is a spiritual crisis that strikes at the heart of their professional pride."<sup>6</sup> In fact, "[l]ike doctors, lawyers are best employed keeping people out of trouble. The lawyer who wins the case in court is the publicized hero, but the lawyer who draws up the contract so carefully that the parties never wind up in court has performed a far greater service."<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, "after both the weaknesses of the ideal [that lawyers are committed to contributing to social goals] and the bar's faithfulness to it are acknowledged[,] there remains a residuum of the professional vision with significant normative appeal and, though this is far more speculative, social potency."<sup>8</sup> In our duty to realize the potential of this generation of lawyers in personal satisfaction as well as professionalism, we need carefully crafted carrots and sticks,

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 108.

<sup>5</sup> MOTHER TERESA, A SIMPLE PATH xi (Lucinda Vardey ed., 1995).

<sup>6</sup> ANTHONY KRONMAN, THE LOST LAWYER: FAILING IDEALS OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION 2 (1993) (noting the need to revive the "wise counselor"); BENJAMIN SELLS, SOUL OF THE LAW: A PSYCHOLOGY OF LAW AND LAWYERS (1994).

<sup>7</sup> SOL M. LINOWITZ & MARTIN MAYER, THE BETRAYED PROFESSION: LAWYERING AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 189 (1994).

<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Gordon & William H. Simon, *The Redemption of Professionalism?*, in LAWYERS' IDEALS/LAWYERS' PRACTICES: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE AMERICAN LEGAL PROFESSION 230, 231 (Robert L. Nelson et al. eds., 1992).

both of which derive from wisdom beyond the realm of law, brought to give life and meaning to the law. If we renew our spiritual vision and put into practice what we see anew, we will still have more to do in helping those around us to re-examine their professional lives. Besides joining bar association ethics committees and professional life committees, we can speak with like-minded colleagues informally wherever we meet them and encourage each other to act in accordance with our values. The tremendous response to Mother Teresa shows us that we are not alone in our workplace and, indeed, we probably already know like-minded people searching for meaning and satisfaction in their work. Furthermore, we can encourage our own clients: "The ideal of the professional as a transmitter of the moral norms enforced in law generally recommends promoting actual compliance so far as it is practically feasible for the lawyer to do so."<sup>9</sup>

Mother Teresa lived something more than professionalism and can give us more than public service alone, worthy and honorable as that is in the secular sense of service to others. The larger message of Mother Teresa is that lawyers, professionals though we are, are first of all human beings and we must relate to our clients as people first. We too, like them, have a spiritual hunger. To be excellent and contented lawyers, we need to look beyond the law. We can only replenish ourselves for our everyday professional work by recognizing and nourishing that spiritual part of our nature. As Mother Teresa said, "There are many in the world dying for a piece of bread but many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is . . . not only a poverty of loneliness, but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God."<sup>10</sup>

Mother Teresa's legacy is so vast that it becomes tempting to think it is simply inaccessible. Yet, she would never have wanted us to think so. Her life and her message stand for the proposition that "[w]e can do no great deeds, only small deeds with great love."<sup>11</sup> Her achievements are a testament to the transformative powers of one healing touch, one kind gesture, one generous impulse, issued one minute, one hour, one day at a time.

This is an extraordinary message for us as lawyers serving clients, communities, and constituencies in crisis. In the midst of so much need, greed, anger, and despair, it is easy to ask, "How can I possibly make a difference?" Mother Teresa challenges us to ask instead,

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 249.

<sup>10</sup> MOTHER TERESA, *supra* note 5, at 79.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 99.

"How can I dare not to?" There is no such thing as living a neutral life. Although it may sometimes seem that we accomplish but a drop in the ocean, Mother Teresa in her great humanity knew that we would sometimes feel that way. Her response to that concern: "What we do *is* but a drop in the ocean, but that ocean would be less without that drop."<sup>12</sup>

Mother Teresa's example is a reminder that our lives are shaped most not by what we take with us, but by what we leave behind. She leaves behind a legacy of brilliant humanitarianism, rooted in the power and integrity of simplicity. Gandhi, a kindred spirit, counseled that in order to make a change we have to be the change. Mother Teresa did just that. She recognized the real depth of love, the richness of service, the subtleties of generosity. She reminded this complicated world that all of us, no matter what we think our differences, are the same in our humanity. The human heart speaks a single language; it is the language of love. No matter our degrees, schooling, or professional contexts, we are here to love. We are here to serve. We are here to ease the pain of all feeling beings.

Finding that spiritual love does not mean our lives will be easy, only that they will not be empty and spiritually lonely. Love calls for great strength as well as for great tenderness at the right moment. Loving and caring for others is hard work, even with God's help. Mother made it clear that loving one another means *pro bono* work and putting ourselves out for the sake of others. Furthermore, Mother stood up for her deeply held beliefs, and in this she is a direct role model for the members of our profession who have always spoken out for those who could not speak themselves. Sadly, love and compassion do not prevent criticism and controversy from entering our lives. Some people wished to impose on Mother a duty to carry out their conceptions of how to help the poor instead of doing it themselves. They let themselves off easily by being satisfied merely to criticize her for what she did when they did nothing for the sick, poor, and dying given to her special care.

Indeed, pure actions often provoke retaliation from those who only react to goodness by trying to stomp it out. At those times in her life, as at all other times, Mother derived her strength from prayer to God. Particularly in times of trouble and difficulty, her message to disheartened lawyers gives courage. To be complete lawyers, we must go beyond our life in the law and bring the strength of our spiritual lives to the professional service of our clients. St. Luke,

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<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 115 (emphasis added).

the Gospel writer and healing doctor, long ago taught us that by patient endurance we will save our physical and spiritual lives. By hewing to the path of service, especially when it is infused with the love and compassion of God, we live the way, the truth, and the life that shows what we are—children of God. The bonds of that kinship cannot be so easily cut by doubt, suffering, and trouble, but are only strengthened when the way is hard. Nor can death itself snuff out the message of meaning and commitment to serving others that Mother Teresa gives to all who join a service profession. By her life of service and commitment, Mother reminds us what one person can do. If we join with her by our own commitment, Mother's message can light our lives of service.

Mother Teresa's life is a testament to the power of instinct, intuition, and surrendering to a higher mission. Her inner voice—what she called the calling—directed her actions. All of us have the same potential to access and be in touch with our own directive instincts. Let us seek the strength to nurture that voice and heed its call. In the noisy clamor and confusion of the day, let us endeavor to keep peace with our souls.

As we learn from Mother Teresa, let us make a promise to give our gifts in service to this world. Let us vow never to allow our partnership with anyone or anything to silence our voices or cause us to prevent others from using theirs. Let us use that vision to transform our working places, to give more to others, and to achieve more personal satisfaction for ourselves. Let us endeavor to see truly with the eyes of compassion and to respond with kindness. When all is said and done, let it be said of us that, like Mother Teresa, we saw and loved.