



*"Mary Poplin found her first Calcutta in India as she volunteered in Mother Teresa's ministry to the poorest of the poor. She found her second Calcutta in her own university as she returned to recognize that the poorest of the poor are not always those with no material wealth but those with no knowledge of God and nowhere to find it. The story of her transformed spiritual life segues beautifully into the story of her transformed academic life. An exciting book of great wisdom."*

—James W. Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* and *Habits of the Mind*

**In the spring of 1996, I went to Calcutta to work for about two months as a volunteer with Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity.**

One thing Mother Teresa repeatedly said was that her work was religious work, not social work. I found this statement intriguing and wanted to know what she meant. What could those of us who live and work outside a religious order learn from her religious work?

I believe I am not alone in my struggles to understand the truth of her life and work—struggles born of living in a secular age. I can see now that even the church in which I grew up taught more about being a “good humanist” than about living with and for Christ. For the first few years after my return from India, I attempted to write this book in a way I thought would appeal to everyone. Even though I did not personally seek a secular interpretation, I felt that only such a description of her would resonate with our culture and time. After repeatedly starting to write and then laying it aside for long periods, I finally realized: one cannot understand or explain Mother Teresa in secular terms. Indeed that is precisely what she meant when she said, “Our work is not social work; it is religious work.”

In this book I am not trying to convince anyone that Mother Teresa or the Missionaries are perfect. I am certain they have “bad” days (though never a bad hair day). She said herself that the greatest hindrance to their work was that they were not yet saints, not fully able to spread the full love of Christ because of their human weaknesses. Neither is this a biography; others more capable have written those. Since I cannot write about Mother Teresa from a secular point of view without distorting who she was with Christ, I will leave it to the readers of other religious or secular faiths to translate the stories for themselves.

This, then, is the simple story of my brief encounter with Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity and of my struggles then and now to understand—and more importantly, to live—the lessons in our culture and times. It is an ongoing tale of how I listened to God through her life and through the lives of others who graciously served as guides to me. It is the story of how God used her and the Missionaries to cause a crisis in my own life which revealed more clearly my purpose and my calling.

Mother called it “finding your Calcutta.”

Paraphrased from the introduction

*Finding Calcutta: What Mother Teresa Taught Me About Meaningful Work and Service*

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