

**Response of the Postulator of St. Teresa of Calcutta, Fr Brian Kolodiejchuk, MC,
on the movie “Mother Teresa and Me.”**

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A new film on Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa and Me*, is garnering coverage in the Catholic press. I would like to make some comments on how Mother Teresa is portrayed in the film and clear up some misconceptions about what she called her “darkness.”

On the website of the film, writer/director Kamal Musale, states:

Most people know the myth of Mother Teresa but few had an idea of who was the real Teresa, and that includes many who were closely associated with her. A handful of confessors knew that she had lost her faith, but that fact is still largely unknown today. Through extensive research, I have been able to develop a character more true to life, of a woman who lost her lover, her husband, her intimate soul mate, and never recovered from it. She is that way very human, and through this experience of abandonment, she experiences some of the emotions that most of us can identify with. ... During [an] approximately 12-year period, Teresa goes through a complete change, from the intensity of her epiphany to the disillusionment and the realization that her connection with God is lost.

There are several crucial errors in these statements which require correction. Unfortunately, the producers of the film appear unaware of Mother Teresa’s own interpretation of her darkness, or the significance it had for her life and vocation. As her own writings attest, one of the most profound things about Mother Teresa is that she never “lost her faith,” even amid desolation and uncertainty. Her personal letters speak of her “unbroken union [with God]” during her darkness and observe that “my mind and heart is habitually with God.” She describes the “doubt” in which she lived “for the rest of her life” as instead a trial of faith—an experience well-known in the Catholic mystical tradition.

As the postulator for the cause of Mother Teresa’s beatification and canonization, I was responsible for the publication of Mother Teresa’s personal correspondence that revealed her darkness to the world. At the time she wrote them, Mother Teresa expected these letters to be destroyed. However, I, along with several people in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, understood that, contrary to showing a *loss* of faith, these writings illustrated the *depth* of that faith, and her confidence that Christ would not abandon her. She even states that, “I will hear His voice”, and “I know this is only feelings – for my will is steadfast bound to Jesus.”

In addition to the film’s portrayal of her darkness, I am also concerned about the film’s portrayal of Mother Teresa’s character. I don’t believe those who knew Mother personally or spent the most time with her would recognize her on-screen depiction. “A frustrated and loss-driven middle-aged woman” is a far cry from our experiences of a loving, radiant, joy-filled saint. It is also far from the legacy that Mother Teresa herself aspired to, which was to be an “apostle of joy”, and to offer “a hearty ‘yes’ to God and a smile for all.”

The stated pro-life message of the film is also ambiguous. The character of Kavita, a young woman who finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, struggles with the idea of abortion. At the end the film, Kavita says that she’ll be alright, but what that means is open-ended. The audience is left to wonder whether she will keep her unborn child or not. Mother Teresa, however, would be unambiguous. “And if you do not want the child, give it to me. I want it.

It would take an extraordinary actress to fittingly portray Mother Teresa. Unlike earlier saints, one of the challenges faced by artists today is that many people alive still remember her, and so fictionalized depictions of Mother Teresa can evoke strong emotional responses. Based on my own close relationship with Mother Teresa, my role as her postulator, and my familiarity with the experiences of those who testified during her canonization process, this film does not accurately capture the woman who captured the world with her steadfast, joyful love of God and neighbor; one of the most loved and admired women of the 20th century. We still must wait for a non-documentary film that adequately portrays the “real and relatable” Saint Mother Teresa, since a misrepresentation is unjust to her and to those who wish to know her in all her beauty and fullness.