

## Mother Teresa Leona

Jim Elliff

**James, the youth:** If a person shows all the outward signs of being a Christian, should we assume the person *is* truly a Christian?

**The elderly but wiser Mr. Brockton:** Not at all. The evidence for being a Christian will undoubtedly be seen in every true Christian, but the appearance of the evidence may deceive you. You must start at the starting place in your observations and be careful not to mistake the effect for the means.

**James:** But suppose the lifestyle is commendable and perhaps remarkable? And, in addition, suppose the person claims to be a Christian?

**Brockton:** My story will explain.

At one end of New York City was a rescue mission. In the mission came all the usual people, mostly men. As part of this rescue mission a clinic was set up for the medical care of these indigents. Several churches participated in caring for these men in a variety of ways.

One notable church member, Mrs. Ludlow, considered the mission, and particularly the medical clinic of the mission, her domain. She was service-minded as few were in the Church. It was Leona Ludlow's job to garner support for the work, as well as to supervise the others who would participate from the church.

Leona was an imposing personality, to say the least. Refusing Leona was like refusing the Pope—almost unattainable. Every few weeks she made an announcement in the Martha class about the needs of the down and out. At times there was a tear in her eye and a quiver in her voice. She genuinely wanted to see these pitiable folks at the clinic have adequate medical care. And the more she helped people, the more robustly she spoke up for them. "She's a Mother Teresa," they would say.

She gave her money too, of which there was a sizable sum. Leona was husbandless. But her deceased mate had left her an immense amount of wealth. Much of it she gave away to the cause. In class, she would



sometimes take her offering envelope and mark it for everyone to see as an illustration to the class on how to give. She believed in the power of influence.

On Monday of last week, Leona, along with an entourage of three stiff but semi-willing class members dressed in plain work clothes (after all, this is dirty business) marched into the clinic ready for action. Leona introduced her team and right away put them to work.

All was going well-enough, until Row A1 (at least that's the way they wrote his name down), an emaciated alcoholic, became too much for one of the ladies who was responsible for the waiting room. He was pale and disheveled, smelling like cigarettes, dirty sidewalks, and BO. Today he was complaining of a severe stomachache, and he held his stomach to prove it, rocking back and forth in the chair.

When Leona's fearful helper came to her, concerned that this patient needed special attention she was "not suitable to give," it was "Leona to the rescue."

A telling moment ensued that would soon become the talk of the church. Just as Leona sat down in front of the man and began to discuss matters, the man emitted a fountain on Leona, vomiting days of booze, rescue mission food, and hamburger parts dug out of the trash. The smell was more than one could bear, and the coverage was exceptionally broad, splattering from Leona's chin to her shoes, with no little bit down her blouse.

Leona rose, focused her mental energies, and asked the man to sit as quietly as possible as she ran off to the bathroom. She didn't say that with an open mouth, but sort of through her teeth, trying to avoid getting any of the despicable remains into her oral cavity. Before cleaning herself, she promptly took the plastic ice cream container in which were sponges, and spilling out the sponges, ran the bucket over to the man, tennis shoes squeaking on the linoleum as she ran.

Nobody else would do a thing, partly because they were stunned and partly because they did not want to touch the mess. But Leona with amazing self-possession and exceptional duty washed herself to the best of her ability, and then took the sponges and cleaner and began the disgusting work of sanitizing the place. It took a good while. All of the time the emaciated man

*A Brockton Dialogue*

stared at this wonder of a woman, as did, as you might imagine, everybody else.

Finally he asked in a reserved and slurred voice, "Why do you do this for me?"

"Because of Jesus. He taught us to serve and to do what is not pleasant with love," she answered.

"I am Arabic and Muslim," said the man. Sure enough, he looked so, when you stared a moment or two. "Will you go to heaven?" he asked.

"Yes," stated Leona unhesitatingly.

"Why?" said the man.

"Because I've given my life to serving people for Christ."

"Must I work for Christ to go to heaven?"

"No," said the woman. "It is enough being a Muslim. Just be a good, servant-minded Muslim and God will be pleased."

"I will," said the man.

"You must," said the woman.

**James, the youth:** I see. She completely misunderstood how a person becomes a Christian. Christianity is a matter, not of earning points by doing kind things, but of grace, God's free gift of salvation given separate from our works. Christ's substitutionary death is the only hope for any man. She did not acknowledge this distinction so indispensable to true Christianity.

**Brockton:** Leona believed that there were many ways to God, and that charitable works are the ticket to arriving in heaven. She mistook morality and service, essential *effects* of Christianity, for the *means* of becoming a Christian. This mistake is fatal both to her and to the man. She did not help the man beyond the moment, for she had nothing of substance that she could tell him.

**James:** But you would not say that this was a bad deed?

**Brockton:** It was not a saving deed and contained no merit before God. It did not earn her anything. Worse, it was an insulting deed to God, because it was held up in her mind as sufficient to please the One who is impeccably holy and has refused to be impressed with the deeds of evil men and women. It says, "I reject the way you offered, through Christ's death in the sinner's place, and prefer my way, through my deeds."

As far as man is concerned, we should be happy that such common grace exists to allow and even promote such deeds, for our society is helped by them. But the deed is not saving, and is highly insulting before God. Of course, good deeds *are* the legitimate *effect* of being converted.

**Youth:** I see. You must start at the starting place in your observations.

**Brockton:** You must, certainly. But you will be as maligned as Jesus and Paul for seeing it this way.