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Mother Teresa as mystic and apostle of the ordinary

John L. Allen Jr. | Mar. 7, 2011

This portrait of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta was done by Kalai Selvam, a 48-year-old Catholic painter based in Chennai, India. (CNS photo/Anto Akkara)

ROME -- In the court of popular opinion, Mother Teresa -- now Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, after her beatification in 2003 -- is regarded as a heroic Saint of the Poor, perhaps the 20th century?s most compelling example of a radical option for the world?s most vulnerable and forgotten people.

While that?s undeniably right, two of the world?s leading experts on Mother Teresa say, it also risks being reductive.

In a March 5 symposium at Rome?s Dominican-run Angelicum University, Missionaries of Charity Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk argued that Mother Teresa was also a great apostle of the ordinary, offering an approach to love focused not on grand events or geopolitical movements but one-to-one human relationships, beginning with those closest to her.

In that sense, Kolodiejchuk argued, her life is not only ?admirable? but highly ?imitable.?

A Canadian-born priest and General Superior of the Missionaries of Charity Fathers, Kolodiejchuk is the postulator for Mother Teresa?s sainthood cause, meaning the official responsible for overseeing the effort.

Dominican Fr. Paul Murrary, meanwhile, argued that on the basis of Mother Teresa?s private writings, published only after her death, she now ranks not only as a friend of the poor, but as one of the great mystics of the Catholic tradition, with an interior life ?comparable in depth and intensity to St. John of the Cross.?

Those private writings were collected as part of the beatification process, and had previously been known only to a handful of spiritual directors and church authorities. They spoke not only of mystical visions and revelations in the 1940s, but an inner darkness stretching over most of the rest of her life and which led her even to question the existence of God.

We now know that Mother Teresa?s spiritual journey, Murray said, ?was not one long unbroken experience of

bliss, with roses of consolation strewn along the way.? Instead, she lived with a sense of ?bewildering rejection and even complete abandonment,? as ?her prayers were not heard and God remained silent.?

Read John Allen's full report: **Mother Teresa as mystic and apostle of the ordinary** [1]

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