


no second thoughts about her sincerity but was aware of the risks of placing too much credence in such experiences should their source prove not to be divine. Knowing Mother Teresa's firm determination to do only God's will, he decided to test the authenticity of the inspirations and counted on her obedience as a confirmation of God's hand in this extraordinary happening.

"He Forbade Me to Even Think About It"

Father Van Exem's first request to Mother Teresa was to stop thinking about the inspiration, to let it rest. In a later letter to her superior general, she wrote:

 [Father Van Exem] put me off—though he saw that it was from God, still he forbade me to even think about it. Often, very often during the four months [between September 1946 and January 1947], I asked him to let me speak to His Grace [the archbishop of Calcutta], [but] each time he refused.¹⁶

The renunciation that he asked of her was quite a drastic way of testing the genuineness of the call, but nothing less would assure him of its divine origin. So in obedience to her spiritual director, Mother Teresa remained silent and in prayer, not knowing what the outcome would be.


By January of 1947, Father Van Exem had no doubt that Mother Teresa's inspiration was from God and that the time had come for her to pursue the realization of the call. Thus he gave her permission to write to the archbishop. In a simple and straightforward letter she told Archbishop Perier what she believed God was asking of her.

"What Went on Between Him and Me"

ST. MARY'S CONVENT

13TH JAN. 47

Your Grace,

 From last Sept. strange thoughts and desires have been filling my heart. They got stronger and clearer during the 8 days retreat I made in Darjeeling. On coming here I told Fr. Van Exem everything—I showed him the few notes I had written during the retreat.—He told me he thought it was God's inspiration—but to pray and remain silent over it. I kept on telling him whatever passed in my soul—in thoughts and desires.—Then yesterday he wrote this "I cannot prevent you from talking or writing to His Grace. You will write to His Grace as a daughter to her father, in perfect trust and sincerity, without any fear or anxiety, telling him how it all went, adding that you talked to me and that now I think I cannot in conscience prevent you from exposing everything to him."

Before I begin I want to tell you that at one word that Your Grace would say I am ready never to consider again any of those strange thoughts which have been coming continually.

During the year very often I have been longing to be all for Jesus and to make other souls—especially Indian, come and love Him fervently—to identify myself with Indian girls completely, and so love Him as He has never been loved before. I thought [it] was one of my many mad desires. I read the life of St. M. Cabrini¹⁷—She did so much for the Americans because she became one of them. Why can't I do for India what she did for Amer? She did not wait for souls to come to her—She went to them with her zealous workers. Why can't I do the same for

Him here? There are so many souls—pure—holy who are longing to give themselves only to God. European orders are too rich for them—They get more than they give.—“*Wouldst thou not help?*”²⁰ How can I? I have been and am very happy as a Loreto Nun.—To leave that what I love and expose myself to new labours and sufferings which will be great, to be the laughing stock of so many—especially religious—to cling and choose deliberately the hard things of an Indian life—to [cling and choose] loneliness and ignominy—uncertainty—and all because Jesus wants it—because something is calling me “to leave all and gather the few—to live His life—to do His work in India.” These thoughts were a cause of much suffering—but the voice kept on saying “*Wilt thou refuse?*” One day at Holy Com[Communion]. I heard the same voice very distinctly—“*I want Indian nuns, Victims of my love, who would be Mary & Martha.*”¹⁹ Who would be so very united to me as to radiate my love on souls. I want free nuns covered with my poverty of the cross²⁰—I want obedient nuns covered with my obedience of the Cross.²¹ I want full of love nuns covered with the Charity of the Cross.²² Wilt thou refuse to do this for me?” On another day, “*You have become my Spouse for my Love—you have come to India for Me. The thirst you had for souls brought you so far—Are you afraid to take one more step for your Spouse—for me—for souls?—Is your generosity grown cold—am I a second to you? You did not die for souls—that is why you don’t care what happens to them.—Your heart was never drowned in sorrow as it was My Mother’s. We both gave our all for souls—and you? You are afraid that you will lose your vocation—you will become secular—you will be wanting in perseverance.—Nay—your vocation is to love and suffer and save souls and by taking this step you will fulfil my Heart’s desire for you—That is your vocation.—You will dress in simple Indian clothes or rather like My Mother dressed—simple and poor.—Your present habit is holy because it*

is my symbol—your sari will become holy because it will be my symbol.” I tried to persuade Our Lord that I would try to become a very fervent holy Loreto Nun, a real Victim here in this vocation—but the answer came very clear again. “*I want Indian Missionary Sisters of Charity—who would be My fire of love amongst the very poor—the sick—the dying—the little street children—The poor I want you to bring to me—and the Sisters that would offer their lives as victims of my love—would bring these souls to Me. You are I know the most uncatchable person, weak & sinful, but just because you are that I want to use you, for my Glory! Wilt thou refuse?*” These words or rather this voice frightened me. The thought of eating, sleeping—living like the Indians filled me with fear. I prayed long—I prayed so much—I asked Our Mother Mary to ask Jesus to remove all this from me. The more I prayed—the clearer grew the voice in my heart and so I prayed that He would do with me whatever He wanted. He asked again and again. Then once more the voice was very clear—“*You have been always saying ‘do with me what ever you wish’—Now I want to act—let me do it—my little Spouse—My own little one.—Do not fear—I shall be with you always.—You will suffer and you suffer now—but if you are my own little Spouse—the Spouse of the Crucified Jesus—you will have to bear these torments on your heart.—Let me act—Refuse me not—Trust me lovingly—trust me blindly.*” “*Little one give me souls—give me the souls of the poor little street children—How it hurts—if you only knew—to see these poor children soiled with sin. I long for the purity of their love.—If you would only answer my call—and bring me these souls—draw them away from the hands of the evil one.—If you only knew how many little ones fall into sin everyday. There are convents with numbers of nuns caring for the rich and able to do people, but for my very poor there is absolutely none. For them I long—them I love—Wilt thou refuse?” Ask His Grace to give me this in thanksgiving of the 25 years of grace I have given him.*”

This is what went on between Him and me during the days of much prayer.—Now the whole thing stands clear before my eyes as follows—

“THE CALL”

To be an Indian—to live with them—like them—so as to get at the people's heart. The order would start outside Calcutta—Cossipore—open lonely place or St. John's Sealdah where the Sisters could have a real contemplative life in their noviciate—where they would complete one full year of true interior life—and one in action. The Sisters are to cling to perfect poverty—Poverty of the Cross—nothing but God.—So as not to have riches enter their heart, they would have nothing of the outside—but they will keep up themselves with the labour of their hands—Franciscan poverty²³—Benedict's labour.²⁴

In the order girls of any nationality should be taken—but they must become Indian-minded—dress in simple clothes. A long white long-sleeved habit, light blue sari, and a white veil, sandals—no stockings—a crucifix—girdle²⁵ and rosary.

The Sisters should get a very full knowledge of the interior life—from holy priests who would help them to become so united to God so as to radiate Him when they join the mission field. They should become true Victims—no words—but in every sense of the word, Indian victims for India. Love should be the word, the fire, that will make them live the life to its full. If the nuns are very poor they will be free to love only God—to serve Him only—to be only His. The two years in perfect solitude should make them think of the interior while they will be in the midst of the exterior.

So as to renew and keep up the spirit—the Sisters should spend one day in every week in the house—the Mother house of the city when they are in the mission.

“THE WORK”

The Sisters' work would be to go to the people.—No boarding schools—but plenty of schools—free—up to class II²⁶ only. In each parish two sisters would go—one for the sick and the dying—one for the school. If the number requires the pairs can increase. The Sisters would teach the little ones—help them have pure recreations and so keep them from the street and sin. The school should be only in the very poor places of the parish, to get the children from the streets, to keep them for the poor parents who have to work. The one who will take care of the sick—she will assist the dying—do all the work for the sick—just as much if not more, what a person gets in a hospital—wash them and prepare the place for His coming. At the appointed time the sisters will all meet at the same place from the different parishes and go home—where they would have this complete separation from the world.—This in the cities where the number of the poor is great.—In the villages—the same thing—only there they could leave the said village—once their work of instruction and service ends. To move about with great ease and fast each nun should learn how to ride a bicycle, some how to drive a bus. This is a little too up to date—but souls are dying for want of care—for want of love. These Sisters—these true victims should do the work that is wanting in Christ's Apostolate in India. They should also have a hospital for little children with bad diseases. The Nuns of this order will be Missionaries of Charity or Missionary Sisters of Charity.

God is calling me—unworthy and sinful that I am. I am longing to give all for souls. They will all think me mad—after so many years—to begin a thing which will bring me for the most part only suffering—but He calls me also to join the few to start the work, to fight the devil and deprive him of the thousand little souls which he is destroying every day.

This is rather long—but I have told you everything as I would have told my Mother.—I long to be really only His—to burn myself completely for Him and souls.—I want Him to be loved tenderly by many.—So if you think, if you wish—I am ready to do His Will. Count not my feelings—count not the cost I would have to pay—I am ready—for I have already given my all to Him. And if you think all this a deception—that too I would accept—and sacrifice myself completely.—I am sending this through Fr. Van Exem. I have given him full permission to use anything I have told him which is in connection with me and Him in this work.—My change to Asansol seems to me a part of His plan—there I will have more time to pray and prepare myself for His coming. In this matter I leave myself completely in your hands. Pray for me. That I would become a religious according to His heart.

*Your devoted child in J.C. Jesus Christ,
Mary Teresa.²⁷*

“Will Thou Refuse?”

At the time she wrote this letter, Mother Teresa was already a person of considerable holiness. Still, as self-sacrificing and courageous, as generous and compassionate to the poor as she was, on her own initiative she would never have considered leaving Loreto to found a new religious community. But the inspiration was so compelling that she could fail to heed the “Voice” only at the steep price of being unfaithful to her deepest love.

Initially she found herself intimidated by these extraordinary experiences; troubling thoughts arose in her heart. Questioning her own capacity to meet the demands of this new call, she exposed with absolute honesty her fear, her confusion, her reluctance to embrace

the hardships and suffer the derision of others that were sure to follow. Nor everyone in the Church or city would approve of a European nun living outside the convent walls in a desire to identify with the poor in their local culture and conditions. She grieved as well at the prospect of leaving Loreto, even offering to be “a real victim of [His] love” where she was. In all this, she showed herself to be so ordinary, so real, and even skeptical of her ability to carry out such an important mission.

Yet Mother Teresa, passionately in love with Jesus, could not ignore His “Voice” that kept insisting: “*Will thou refuse?*” This piercing question had a particularly compelling effect on her heart because it echoed the secret vow she had made four years earlier. Jesus’ plea, like no other, had the power of stirring her inmost being. God was honoring the magnanimity of her soul—and His call evoked at one and the same time joy, because she was being taken at her word, and pain because she felt challenged seemingly beyond her capacity.

After the initial struggle, Mother Teresa remained resolute in her conviction that God was calling her to this new life. By the time she wrote to Archbishop Périer in January, she was clear about what she intended to do. She was innovative in her proposals, ready to “burn myself completely for Him and souls,” giving her whole being in response to His call.