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The Missionaries of Charity and Contemporary Theologies of Mission
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Final Report

During my summer, I spent 8 weeks in Kolkata, India working with and observing the Missionaries of Charity sisters. The Missionaries of Charity (MC) run 18 homes serving the poorest of the poor in Kolkata in addition to the Mother House in which Mother Teresa began her work. Working alongside the MCs in a home for girls with mental and physical disabilities, I observed and interviewed not only the sisters, but also the diverse volunteers from all over the world about their perceptions of mission.

Engaging with missionaries and those volunteers experiencing the missionaries (specifically the MCs) for the first time was both edifying and inspiring. The MCs profess vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor. While we had the privilege of attending the MC profession of final vows, even the MC lifestyle - having only two sets of saris, not using a fan or air-conditioning, owning one pair of sandals, taking bucket showers, doing laundry by hand, walking and taking public transportation, sitting on the floor of the chapel - is a manifestation of their mission in itself, and one that is often a very life-changing witness of a transcendent God for the volunteers. I found that regardless of religious tradition (or lack of religious tradition), the volunteers I interacted with always mentioned the big impact that the MC sisters had on them and their experience. Using charity as a vehicle for furthering their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the MCs were constant and inspiring figures in the lives of those around them. And perhaps their lifestyle and operative mission of caring for the poorest of the poor was transforming the poor they served and the diverse volunteers they served alongside to consider deeper questions of faith within themselves in a very distinct way - without necessarily ever pronouncing the word of God.

Throughout my summer experience, I realized the difficulty of asking good questions or questions that would prompt greater discussions. However as time went on, I was blessed to share in some deeper conversations with so many diverse people - whether it was the second superior general to Mother Teresa, the South African volunteer who experienced a conversion to the Catholic Church during her trip, the woman who was once an MC before running away, or the many young people who flock to Kolkata to serve only to find that they are being served and called to live their own life's mission. I am further inspired and convicted that whatever lies ahead after graduation, I am dedicated to living my life always as a mission to serve the poor, to combine my knowledge and experience at the service of love in charity. Moreover, I discovered the beauty of sharing lives and stories with so many people in the midst of genuinely confronting and realizing their own mission. In Kolkata, where so many are stripped of all material comforts, there is a palpable vulnerability yet joy of celebrating life at the deepest core of who you are and who you were created to be. I treasure most these stories and questions, intertwined with my own, and these relationships that continue to inspire and transform me.