

## Info on the US engagements: 25 April to 3 May 2022

- i. Brief biography (available on the attached paperback cover); a longer version is available on
- ii. Editorial blurb (also available on the paperback cover)
- iii. Lecture programme
- iv. Main points covered in three lectures
- v. Confirmed media interview/s
- vi. Select excerpts of quotes from reviews included in the paperback edition of *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* which will be available worldwide from 30 April 2022:  
<https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/mother-teresa-9789354359569/>

As mentioned above, I am attaching the cover of the paperback edition of *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation*. Issued initially in hardback and as an e-Book in 2020, the book has received very good reviews around the world. In August 2020, the book made it to the front cover of *The Tablet* (please see attached issue)

### **i. Brief Biography (also available on the paperback cover)**

Gëzim Alpion is a sociologist at the University of Birmingham, UK. He received a PhD from the University of Durham, UK, in 1997. His main publications include ‘*Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?*’ (Routledge 2007), ‘*If Only the Dead Could Listen*’ (Globic Press 2008), ‘*Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa*’ (Rutledge 2017), and ‘*Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation*’ (Bloomsbury Academic 2020 & 2022). Alpion is considered ‘the most authoritative English-language author’ on St Teresa of Calcutta and ‘the founder of Mother Teresa Studies’.

### **ii. Editorial blurb (available on the attached paperback cover)**

A personality of Mother Teresa’s calibre and global reach does not come about by chance. To provide a well-rounded portrait of this influential figure, this book approaches her in the context of her familial background and ethnic, cultural and spiritual milieus. Her life and work are explored in the light of newly-discovered information about her family, the Albanian nation’s spiritual tradition before and after the advent of Christianity, and the impact of the Vatican and other influential powers on her people since the early Middle Ages.

Focusing on her traumas, ordeals and achievements as a private individual and a public missionary, and her complex spirituality, this book contends that Mother Teresa's life and her nation's history, especially her countrymen's relationship with Roman Catholicism, are interconnected. Unravelling this interconnectedness is essential to understanding how this modern spiritual and humanitarian icon has come to epitomise her ancient nation's cultural and spiritual DNA.

### **iii. Lecture programme**

1. Georgetown University, Washington DC, ‘*Mother Teresa: A Sociological Approach to Spiritual Inspiration and Discouragement*’, 26 April, ICC 462 4:30-6pm <https://catholicstudies.georgetown.edu/events/>
2. Harvard University, ‘*Can Humans Know God? Mother Teresa’s Spiritual Conundrum*’, 27 April, 6-8.30 pm
3. VATRA – Federation, New York, ‘*Mother Teresa and the Illyrian Foundations of Western Civilization*’, 30 April, 3-5 pm

#### iv. Main points covered in three lectures

Drawing on my publications and work in progress, in my lectures I will focus on the following two major themes, which I have been researching since the early 2000s. This is the first time I am sharing my findings on the ‘dark night of the soul’, a topic I have focused on since 2007. As in the past, I will use the lectures in the US to test the ground for some of my ideas with peers, students and the media.

##### a. Using Mother Teresa’s ‘spiritual darkness’ as a case study, I offer a sociological analysis of the phenomenon known as ‘the dark night of the soul’.

Following the publication of Mother Teresa’s private writings in the 2000s, her supporters have interpreted her ‘dark night of the soul’ as additional ‘proof’ of her ‘sainted’ status while her detractors have employed it to further tarnish her image and legacy. The nun’s spiritual crisis is the subject of a growing number of studies in fields such as Theology, Religious Studies, Sociology of Religion, Mental Health, Health Studies, Psychology and Celebrity Studies.

In this talk, Gëzim Alpion argues that while Mother Teresa literature correctly sees her missionary work and spiritual darkness as being interrelated, it has yet to explain this relationship clearly in terms of causality. This causality, he argues, becomes evident if one pays equal attention to Mother Teresa’s personal life and calling, and requires scholars to employ sociological, political and cultural imagination. Exploring the private and the spiritual and establishing their interconnectedness are crucial to explaining her decision to enter the religious life, move to India and attachment to the dying destitute.

Alpion’s main contention is that Mother Teresa’s goal as a missionary was not necessarily serving the poor *per se*. Rather, they and her religious community were her ‘helpers’ in her lifelong quest to find an elusive God and getting rid of her spiritual darkness. Adopting a sociological perspective is instrumental in exploring Mother Teresa’s spiritual void as an incurable condition that is better understood in the context of an array of interrelated personal, familial, ethno-spiritual and cultural milieus.

This is the first time in Mother Teresa scholarship that various milieus, that had a crucial impact on her development psychologically and spiritually, are seen both in the context of the complexities of her time and her nation’s spiritual tradition since ancient Illyrian civilization before and in the wake of the advent of monotheistic faiths. Exploring such complex and multifaceted influences, Alpion concludes, are of paramount importance in understanding the longevity and depths of her spiritual aridity, her lifelong

commitment to the sick, the destitute and the dying, and how they enabled her to survive.

**b. Drawing on Mother Teresa’s spirituality and missionary work, I make a case for the triadic (Illyro-Greco-Roman) foundations of European civilization**

Employing the life, missionary work and legacy of Albanian-born Saint Teresa of Calcutta as a case study, over the last twenty years Gëzim Alpion has argued that not only Christianity remains firmly embedded in the Illyrian tradition but that it also constitutes one of the long-ignored links between modern Albanians and their Pelasgo-Illyrian ancestors. Equally important, he contends that Mother Teresa’s ethno-spiritual roots, and her own attitude towards and application of the Christian faith illustrate some perennial features of her nation’s spiritual tradition that can be traced in the ancient Illyrians’ belief systems.

Drawing on his main publications – *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* (Routledge 2007) and *Mother Teresa; The Saint and Her Nation* (Bloomsbury Academic 2020 and 2022) – and work in progress on Mother Teresa’s ‘Dark Night of the Soul’, in this talk Alpion argues that this sainted nun’s understanding and application of Christianity offer new evidence that ancient Illyrian civilisation is at the heart of the triadic composition of ancient European civilization, and that Illyrians played a key role in laying the foundations of ancient Greece and Rome.

Alpion concludes that ancient Illyria paved the way for the emergence of ancient Greek and Roman civilisations just as Mother Teresa’s formative years are vital to understanding the extraordinary religious and humanitarian figure she eventually became. This causality, he advises, requires further cooperation amongst Balkanologists which, in turn, would, hopefully, make scholarship about the region less dependent on ‘freelance’ type specialists.

**v. Confirmed interviews in the US**

1. Voice of America TV, Live Studio Interview at the VoA Headquarters in Washington DC, The interview focuses on the US lectures and the publication of the paperback of ‘*Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* (Bloomsbury 2022)’, 26 April, 11:30-12:00

**vi. Select excerpts of quotes from reviews included in the paperback edition of *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* which will be available worldwide from 30 April 2022**

*Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* is a beautifully written and moving account of the complex set of personal, familial and national relationships that shaped this saintly figure. Gëzim Alpion offers the reader an incredibly well-researched political historiography and genealogy, showing us the foundational importance of Albania and Skopje and of key figures such as grandmother Drane and mother Roza. In this fascinating book, not only does Mother Teresa newly appear as a fully-formed super-individual but the power and importance of sociological inquiry are also refreshingly revealed.

**Sean Redmond**, Professor of Screen and Design  
Deakin University, Australia

This book constitutes one of the rare scholarships capable of delivering the promise of consilience without incurring the usual cost of reductionism. Cultural and ethnic backgrounds, social and political factors, psychological development and trauma, family relationships and so on – how to bring all these to bear upon a spirituality that soars above it all in the timeless dimension of faith and devotion, without explaining the latter away? It takes both great science and art to capture the spirituality of Mother Teresa in the manner of a blooming lotus with roots, mud and all. This is exactly what Gëzim Alpion has accomplished in *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation*.

**Dr Louise Sundararajan**, (PhD Harvard)  
Fellow of the American Psychological Association &  
Editor-in-Chief of Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology

Insightful and original, creative and extensively researched, this is a fine book that sheds new light on the life, work and formative Albanian background of Mother Teresa. There is much to learn about the tension between Teresa's private and public life, as well as her traumas and accomplishments in this valuable and rich book.

**Professor Jolyon Mitchell**, FRSA  
New College, The University of Edinburgh

Gëzim Alpion turns into a veritable archaeologist-cum-detective in the construction of the book. The process unravels and pierces the veneer of a monolithic 'religious call' popularly believed in the transformation of Gonxhe Agnes Bojaxhiu. Layers of hitherto unimaginable evidence – political, social and historical – are scooped up that actually encompassed the field and habitus and acted as compelling pushes and pulls for St Teresa of Calcutta since her childhood. This thorough and timely study is a very good read.

**Professor Bonita Aleaz**  
Former Head of the Department of Political Science  
The University of Calcutta, West Bengal, India

Very rarely does one find a work of epic dimensions that covers three generations of a family and spans across many ages in the history of a nation. Gëzim Alpion's text interweaves the Albanian national and cultural unconscious with Mother Teresa's character using the insight of a psychoanalyst, sensitivity of a preacher and authority of an oracle. While making Teresa the most ideal representative of the country's layered and tumultuous history, it also successfully synecdochises Albanian history into a convincing character. The book is a triumph of historical knowledge, sociological understanding and narrative acumen – a *tour de force* so far as life – story writing is concerned.

**Professor Jyotirmaya Tripathy**  
Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai, India

In this fascinating and important book, Gëzim Alpion offers a deep, powerful and at times quite moving insight into the life of Mother Teresa and the formative and critical tensions between her life, her nation and the Roman Catholic church. This is not just a biography. It is a complex exercise in historical exegesis, spiritual biography and cultural analysis. Anyone wishing to understand the multifaceted impact and significance of Mother Teresa will find this book invaluable. If you thought you knew and understood Mother Teresa, this book will make you think again.

**Professor John Swinton**

School of Divinity, History and Philosophy  
King's College, The University of Aberdeen

Even more than two decades after her death, controversy continues to surround the life and times of Mother Teresa, the Albanian-born, Kolkata-based Nobel Prize winning saint. In this comprehensive study by Gëzim Alpion, her Albanian roots are explored in a way never done previously. Dr Alpion, an authority on Mother Teresa, has written a book which will engage and enlighten academic as well as general readers all over the world.

**Daya K. Thussu**

Professor of International Communication  
Hong Kong Baptist University

Few of us are unaware of the remarkable contribution made by Mother Teresa, but who is she really? In his fascinating new book, Gëzim Alpion places the saint into her historical context, exploring the roots of her religious personality in the framework of familial and national history. Using newly available evidence, Alpion brings Mother Teresa into much clearer focus. This comprehensive academic study of the saint establishes Alpion as the leading authority in the field. Alpion has penned what will certainly become the standard guide to Mother Teresa's heritage and her life.

**Bernd J. Fischer**, Professor of History, Indiana University

Gëzim Alpion ... is the leading expert on Mother Teresa, but his new book is as much about Albanian identity and issues of nationalism as about the saint's life and legacy. What interests him is her relationship, or lack of it, to her Albanian roots. The book tells a fascinating story that enriches the history of the modern Balkans.

*Church Times*, London

This is the work of a sociologist, not a theologian. It is not an attempt to 'debunk' the story of a truly remarkable and indeed holy woman but an honest effort to add to its richness.... Alpion has done us a service by drawing our attention to the history of Christianity in a part of the world many of us know little about and which nonetheless was not only home to some of the earliest Christian communities in Europe but also to a truly global saint. Thus, Alpion's work does not only contribute to the study of Mother Teresa but more importantly to a deeper understanding of the history of Christianity in the complex religious and political landscape of South Eastern Europe.

*The Pastoral Review*, London

The book offers ... a detailed history of the Albanian nation—something that has fallen off the radar of world historians. Indian readers are barely aware of Mother’s Albanian roots because Mother never reminded us of her roots. But this book forcefully establishes Mother’s Albanian identity and persuades its readers to view Mother in a very different light. Gëzim Alpion steers clear of journalistic sensationalization or hagiographic deification. His academic objectivity and arguments based on irrefutable evidence deserve applause, and the book deserves a close reading between the lines by Mother’s admirers and critics alike.

*Eastern Review*, Calcutta

Alpion argues that we can understand Mother Teresa through the study of a special ‘DNA’, so called ‘sociological fossil’, [which] compelled [her]towards spirituality. [The book] casts Teresa as a vehicle through which psycho-social events play out. [Here] she’s and motivated by a ‘fossilised’ psychosocial desire to protect her family honour and heritage. Serious scholars and casual readers alike will find much to ponder in ... a book that at the very least enriches our understanding of one of the 20th century’s most enduring figures.

*Spiked Magazine*, London

Others have written about her good deeds and her spirituality; Alpion examines her Albanian identity. This angle is almost always forgotten.... Alpion has dug deep into her family history and discovered that it is blood-stained and nationalistic.... This dark background was ‘character-forming’. Alpion believes that her childhood experiences prepared Mother Teresa for her vocation in the Missionaries of Charity. All this new information suggests that Mother Teresa was well-prepared for what Catholic mystics call ‘the dark night of the soul’, in which she was shaken by doubts about God’s existence and his loving Providence throughout her long years as a nun. No one ever doubted that Gonxhe Bojaxhiu was a remarkable woman. This scrupulously researched study shows that she was even more remarkable than we thought. As Alpion concludes, ‘Mother Teresa’s life, ministry and legacy show the need to include “women” in Thomas Carlyle’s contention that “the history of the world is but the Biography of great men”.’

*MercatorNet*, Sydney

Living in Darjeeling, a place connected to Mother Teresa’s ‘call within the call’, I find Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation fascinating reading. In the present work Gëzim Alpion, probably the most authoritative Mother Teresa scholar, argues that Mother Teresa’s life and her nation’s history, especially her compatriots’ relationship with Catholicism, are interconnected. [This] is the first time that any Mother Teresa scholar attempts to interpret her traumas, ordeals and achievements as a person and as a missionary by exploring the hitherto ignored influence of her ethnocultural and spiritual heritage.... The author needs to be lauded as most of the information and analyses recorded in this part appear for the first time in Mother Teresa scholarship. [He] also busts the myth endorsed by Malcolm Muggeridge in 1971 that legends do not have biographies by providing a wealth of information indicating that no one’s life is void of biographies.

*Matters India*, New Delhi

Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation is a ‘very comprehensive’ and ‘quality addition’ to books on the nun’s life. ‘Dr Gëzim Alpion undoubtedly is the most authentic scholar on Mother Teresa’s life and work. Most of the details are original and never explored or narrated by any other author.’

*The Daily Patriot*, Islamabad

The subtitle of this book [The Saint and Her Nation] encapsulates the very novelty of this latest effort by Gëzim Alpion to probe into the complexity of Mother Teresa’s personality. Rejecting the tabula rasa approach, Alpion argues that a personality of Mother Teresa’s stature is not and cannot be an accident. Instead, for Alpion, she is the product of a complex chain of personal, intranational, national and international circumstances, many, if not most, surrounding her people of origin, the Albanians. Combined with her introverted personality, poetic imagination and church upbringing, her nation’s and family’s misfortunes during the second decade of the twentieth century (the first decade of her life) paved the way towards her decision to enter the religious life. Besides offering a pleasant read, the book is a testimony of new academic levels reached by the author. His meticulous efforts to bolster his claims with public documents related to Mother Teresa as well as new documents and facts deserve commendation and emulation from anyone in this discipline.

*Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (Routledge)

In *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation*, Gëzim Alpion offers an assiduously researched analysis, not only of Mother Teresa’s life, but of the powerful influences upon her life and work, rooted in her Albanian beginnings. Alpion has written a book that is academic in nature, not a light summer beach read. The extraordinary and extensive presentation of this history tells me that this book would well serve a university level history, religion, or political science class. Intergenerational trauma is an important topic currently being researched, with its effects on successive generations studied. Because Alpion has provided such a well-researched history of Albania throughout many centuries of time, we can subsequently well imagine how deeply embedded in the being of the Albanian people the history of trauma may be. Alpion offers a remarkable analysis of Mother Teresa’s life as affected by the circumstances of her time in Albania, as well as the impact of multiple deaths in her transformation. *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* intelligently and insightfully explores how this woman became the saint we know and the forces that shaped her in her life. I am inspired to learn more about her.

*Death Studies* (Routledge)

Since the publication of his first academic study on Mother Teresa in 2004, Alpion has continuously highlighted the need to root this complex figure into her indigenous background. Initially, he explored this theme, as never before in Mother Teresa literature, in the 2007 Routledge book *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* Alpion [now contends that] Mother Teresa is the latest illustrious Albanian-born spiritual personality to have served and enriched the Christian faith with exemplary devotion since its inception, a devotion which began in her native Skopje, one of the most ancient centres of Christianity in Europe. One of the most important sources he used to write *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* was the information from Filomena, Mother Teresa’s cousin and adopted sister who he discovered by chance when he went to Australia to give a talk in 2011.

This new book by Gëzim Alpion takes over the difficult task of unpacking the complex relationship of Mother Teresa with her nation of origin, the Albanians, their efforts to establish their nation-state, and the very Albanian state. Applying the Illyrian–Albanian spiritual tradition and its extraordinary apostolic heritage as the background of the complex spirituality of Mother Teresa puts the author in a cultural archaeology track, which highlights the spiritual idiosyncrasies that the Albanian ethnicity offered to the young Gonxhe Agnes Bojaxhiu (her Albanian maiden name). That spiritual tradition has been enriched during centuries and conversions from paganism to Christianity and later, for many Albanians, to Islam. Whereas Mother Teresa’s spirituality has perplexed researchers all along, Alpion explains her otherwise unique spirituality, as exemplified by her deep attachment to Jesus Christ rather than God, as a reflection of such national spiritual heritage.

*Journal of Church and State* (Oxford University Press)

Gëzim Alpion is one of the most renowned Mother Teresa writers and scholars in English. Applying a sociological perspective, over the last two decades he has succeeded in turning Mother Teresa into a credible academic topic. This is his mission also in this monograph. The saint epitomises the soul of her nation and personifies a universal form of altruism characteristic of Albanian high-flyers who, it seems, are more inclined to help others than their fellow compatriots.

*ANGLISTICUM: Journal of the Institute of English Language and American Studies*, Tetova

Gëzim Alpion ... has dedicated a good chunk of his academic career to probing, highlighting and disentangling the extremely complex personality of Gonxhe Agnes Bojaxhiu. I consider Alpion’s dedication to be a sacrifice from his side that has paid off. He is today probably the world’s best-known author on Bojaxhiu, and one cannot research on such a topic without extensively referring to his work. With its complex argument, this study presented Alpion with several daunting epistemological and methodological challenges. While essentially a sociological study, as in other research enterprises, in this monograph Alpion performs interchangeably as a theologian, historian, anthropologist, psychologist, political scientist, cultural studies expert and media analyst. I have always been fascinated with Alpion’s work on Mother Teresa because he has persistently maintained emotional and spiritual distance from his subject, making him necessarily and reasonably objective in studying the difficult topic of Mother Teresa’s personality and spirituality. In this new book, Alpion nicely combines his expertise in sociology of religion, nationalism, fame, race, media, film and great literature style. This most recent book is a culmination of such efforts.

*Kosovo 2.0 Magazine*, Prishtina