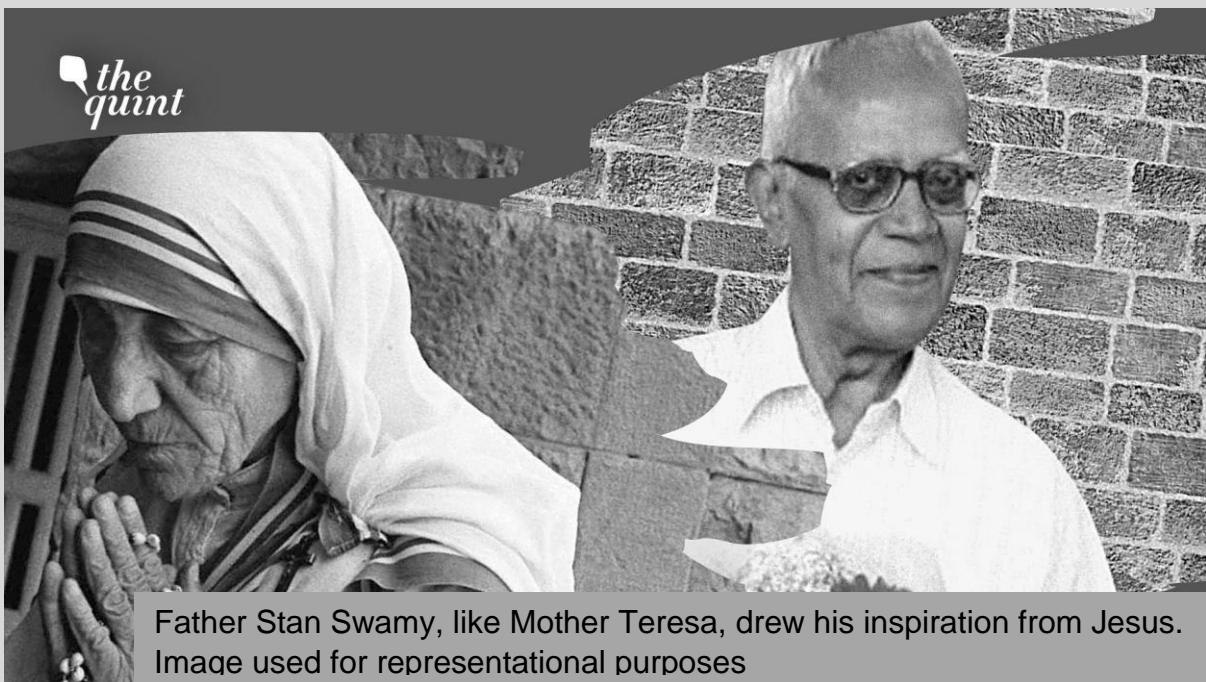


Mother Teresa Strove for Human Dignity, Fr Swamy Did Too – Albeit Differently

While Mother Teresa's work revolved around charity and development, Stan's was a more rights-based approach.

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[Mother Teresa](#) was captivated by the plight of the Indian plurality, particularly of the poor. Her paradigm was to reach out to the most vulnerable with love and concern.

That was her understanding of faith: Jesus was poor, I need to reach out to the poor. But even though the motivation was perhaps faith, the service transcended all religions, all caste groups.

She was not a socio-cultural-political analyst either.

All she cared for was that the poor may have a right to live with dignity. All she was concerned with was how can she enhance that. So she offered love and care to the poor, a peaceful existence for the 'rejected', and for those edging close to the end of their lives — those suffering in sickness — the right to die with dignity.

[Stan Swamy](#), like Mother Teresa, too drew his inspiration from Jesus. But he also combined his faith in Jesus, his faith in the Constitution, the reality of the Adivasis, and other marginalised groups into a human rights paradigm.

How Was Father Stan Swamy's Approach Different From Mother Teresa's?

While Mother Teresa's work revolved around charity and development, Stan's was a more rights-based approach.

Mother Teresa's aim was to help the poor and the marginalised get food, Fr Swamy's aim was to ask why they did not get food in the first place, and to ensure that they had access to the right to food, more than access to just the food.

Mother Teresa's work was more to do with individual needs, Stan's work pertained more to collectives: Dalit collective, Adivasi collective.

Mother Teresa dwelled over what people need in order to survive and she saw that by having food they also had a bit of dignity. Her "works of mercy" are a pertinent aspect of Catholicism. But that is not the end.

Ultimately, the rights enshrined in the Constitution or in various legal provisions — women's rights, transgender rights, Adivasi rights — they must be guaranteed, because those rights are endowed by the laws and will enhance the dignity of people. That was the approach of Stan.

His paradigm of operation was to get into the legal system and file cases when these rights were violated.

Stan was asked to participate in the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) — a programme under which members of the Catholic church, reach out with immediate relief measure whenever there is a disaster — and he did it for two years. But then he said: "No, this is one type of work. But now I am moving to another type."

He consciously left CRS and based on the Constitution, based on the *gram-sabha panchayat* system, decided to accompany the Adivasis in their quest for rights.

Difference Between the State's Treatment of Mother Teresa and of Stan Swamy

When you are working for the poor, the State cannot say no. Because everyone sees the good worth of the work; because nobody is willing to touch a sick person, a person with wounds and heaves; and you are a fine person giving that gentle, human touch.

Some might bring in the religious colour, cast aspersion about a bid for religious conversion, but they will soon realise that she is not talking about conversion, only about human dignity.

With only charity, the State has no problem.

But in Stan's case, the State faces a conflict of interest, because it is the State that is supposed to ensure dignity and rights to all. Only when it fails to do what it has promised, Stan comes into play.

You have the States's ethical prerogative in the Preamble. What does it talk about? Liberty, justice, equality, and fraternity. And Stan also spoke about the same things.

But when you operationalise, where is equality? Where is fraternity? Where is solidarity? Where is the justice to the Adivasis? The same laws that the State has enacted, they are not following it, they are not implementing it. Why don't they do that?

Stan spoke the truth and demanded justice. The state does not want to hear the truth and be questioned, even though the ethical system of the State and the ethical system of Stan are the same. This is because, operationally, this ethical system of the State is not getting materialised.

Natural/Historical Progression

Both Stan Swamy and Mother Teresa believed that everyone is born in the image and likeness of God, that everyone must be protected and that nobody has the right to deny them that protection.

Whether male, female, Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, dignity for each individual was at the core of both Stan and Mother Teresa's faith.

Stan undoubtedly admired Mother Teresa. Her passion and her strength were works of mercy. There was no conflict in their approaches. They were only different due to developments in history.

In the 80s, we were concerned only with charity. Now that understanding has changed. Now, we talk about women's rights, children's rights, Adivasi rights, Dalit rights. Even the Human Rights commission was constituted in 1993. Thus, historically things are developing.

Stan, too, believed that he is doing his bit in his lifetime, and that the good work will continue beyond, and changes will take place.

In the historical process: This world is getting slowly humanised and becoming a better place but with all its challenges and ramifications, and we need to continue that. So he believed his work will continue through others.

Even in his deathbed, he was more concerned about the future than about himself.

In his last phone call with me, Stan said, "Please continue to take forward the work."

"I have done my part, I am going, but others will continue." That was Stan Swamy's faith.

(As told to Mekhala Saran)

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