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Trends. Mother Teresa and the War on Poverty

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As with approaches to violence (A Moral Dilemma for the Political Psychologist: Decreasing Criminal Violence as Symptom Substitution or Getting at the Real Problem below), there are two main approaches to combating poverty. One is trying to eradicate the factors leading to poverty, the other improving somehow the lives of the poor.

Mother Teresa staked out an uncompromising position. She often stated that she was not interested in the causes of poverty and--if they became incontrovertibly known--in advocating for their eradication. Instead she stated that she viewed poverty as beautiful and dedicated her life to ministering to the poor. The same position has been taken by her successor as leader of the Missionaries of Charity, Sister Nirmala, who has stated that she will continue to help the poor "without wanting to know the causes of poverty." She has stated "We want the poor to see poverty in the right way--to accept it and believe that the Lord will provide."

So an essential question. Was Mother Teresa and are the fruits of her labor the apotheoses of the Holy Spirit...or the ultimate control agents--witting or unwitting--for political authorities seeking to exploit or even kill it? (See Agarwal. B. (1997.) Gender, environment, and poverty interlinks: Regional variations and temporal shifts in rural India, 1971-1991. *World Development*, 25, 23-52; Cohen, M. (1997.) The dispossessed: Why Indonesia's boom leaves its poor so angry. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 160, 42-47; Crossette, B. (September 13, 1997.) India mourns the modest Mother Teresa with great pomp. *The New York Times*, p. Y5; Crossette, B. (September 14, 1997.) At Mother Teresa's rites, pomp bars the poor. *The New York Times*, pp. Y1; Y6.)